

# A white heron essay



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The journey of moving from childhood to adulthood and the experiences that affect a person's level of innocence include many difficult eye-opening and often uncomfortable situations. In her story, "A White Heron," by Sarah Jewett, a young nine-year-old girl leaves her large family in the city to live on a farm in the woods alone with her grandmother. Sylvia is very isolated on the farm, but has daily routines and responsibilities. She seems to be happy and content with her simple, quiet life and the natural world around her.

Through her relationships with a cow, a hunter and a tree, things begin to change for Sylvia and her passage from innocence to experience begins. Sylvia does not have any playmates living on the farm but does have her cow, Mistress Moolly, a "provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that" which she seems to treat as her best friend. Sylvia tends to her daily and they have a familiar routine together – they wander and walk through the woods, playing hide-n-seek.

The cow is stubborn and sometimes a challenge, yet Sylvia is patient and kind to the cow and obviously cares very much for her and feels a strong sense of responsibility for her. Her grandmother has entrusted Sylvia with this job and Sylvia takes this seriously. The friendship between Sylvia and the cow shows that she might not have many things in her life but what she does have, she is able to be content. The cow is also valuable to the family because she gives milk, so not only does the cow need Sylvia to care for her, Sylvia and her grandmother need the cow – it is a very mutual kind of relationship.

Life on the farm is good for Sylvia, “ it seemed as if she never had been alive before she came to live at the farm”. One evening while walking through the woods on her way home to her grandmother’s house, she hears “ a clear whistle not very far away. ” She knows it is not a bird’s whistle, but it sounds like that of a boy. Scared and a little stunned, she really does not know what to do. When Sylvia encounters the young male stranger, a Hunter, he asks her to lead him to her home for food and a place to stay for the night before he goes on his hunt for his main prize, the rare White Heron.

Sylvia is not sure what to do about this situation, “ she was more alarmed than before. Would not her grandmother consider her much to blame? ” Sylvia’s afraid she is going to get in trouble for bringing this stranger home. Sylvia’s grandmother warmly welcomes the hunter and offers him food and a place to sleep. This helps Sylvia to trust and accept the handsome stranger. The Hunter ‘ s interest in Sylvia is peaked when he learns that she “ knows all about birds” - but his interests are not so innocent.

The Hunter promises money to anyone who will lead him to the White Heron and this is a very tempting offer for Sylvia, as they are very poor. Sylvia has the idea that she has to fulfill the hunter’s wishes, of trying to decide if showing him where the white heron lives. To Sylvia, he is kind and considerate and, “ she had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman’s heart asleep in the child, was vaguely filled by the dream of love. ” Infatuated with the Hunter and the promise of money, Sylvia decides she is going to lead him to the Heron’s nest.

This predicament prompts Sylvia in her pursuit of growth and discovery of the secret of where the White Heron lives and also everything yet unseen and not yet experienced. For Sylvia, the Hunter represents an instance of “peer pressure’ or the challenge of not doing the right thing in order to do what other’s want you to do. This is the challenge that young Sylvia is faced with in relation to the Hunter. There are two trees on the farm where Sylvia lives with her grandmother. One tree, a large white oak is like a reliable friend to her.

She climbs and plays in it frequently; it is a safe and familiar place. In this tree, like home, she feels safe, comfortable and protected. The other tree, she knows of, but is not so familiar with. It is a place she wonders about. The other tree represents the “ unknowns” of the world for Sylvia. She wants to be brave and climb it, “ Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it. ” This is like the situation of moving from her comfortable home in the city to an unfamiliar place.

Sylvia is ready to explore beyond what is familiar to a world that is new and unknown . She wants to climb out of her safe surroundings to see what it is like on the other side. She finally, “ made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin. ” Childhood is a time of change, going from innocence to experience. Through experience in childhood, children explore, learn, take risks and through these, gain knowledge and learn who they want to be in relation to the world.

Sylvia’s experience with the cow, the hunter and the tree all play important roles in her life. Living on the farm, Sylvia has learned to love, respect,

appreciate and preserve the natural world. When tempted by the lure and distraction of physical attraction and money, she is human and tempted, yet someone able to see the bigger picture and able to stay true to her pure moral beliefs and do what is best in her heart and for the world around her rather than jeopardize that for selfish reasons or to please others.