Unit 4/Week 5

Title: The Gymnast

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.4; W.5.2, W.5.4, W.5.9; SL.5.1; L.5.1, L.5.2

Teacher Instructions

**Before Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers, about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Through the act of retelling his story, Gary Soto is able to show that the right motivation is essential when striving to change or improve oneself.

Synopsis

Gary Soto writes an autobiography about a time when he was eleven years old, wanting to be a gymnast like his cousin. He thinks it is important that he *look* like a gymnast. He tries unsuccessfully to teach himself and after several humorous, yet failed attempts, he gives up the idea of becoming an Olympic gymnast.

1. Read entire main selection text, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the main selection text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire main selection text independently.
2. Teacher reads the main selection text aloud with students following along. (Depending on how complex the text is and the amount of support needed by students, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.)
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions and returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e.: whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| Based on the evidence, why was Gary Soto feeling jealous? | The author states that Gary’s mom was “yapping” about his cousin Isaac who was taking gymnastics and “how proud she was of him.” Gary had also watched his share of Wide World of Sports and knew that people admired an athlete who could somersault without hurting himself. |
| Reread the last sentence in the first paragraph.  What do you learn about Gary from what he says? | Gary is spending some time alone playing, a “solitary game of Chinese checkers.” Gary is interested in gymnastics, but doesn’t know how to do it as he “spent a few minutes rolling around the backyard until I was dizzy and itchy with grass.” He was doing these things alone. |
| What did Gary observe about his cousin?  What do these observations say about Gary’s feelings towards Isaac? | Gary watched his cousin “dressed in gymnastic shorts and top do spindly cartwheels and back flips in his backyard. While doing his cartwheels, Isaac instructed Gary by saying, “This is the correct way.” “He breathed in the grassy air, leaped, and came up smiling the straightest teeth in the world.” In the front yard, Isaac “did a back flip and looked out the side of his eyes to see if any of the passengers were looking.” From these observations Gary probably felt envious of his cousin’s ability and the attention that he received. |
| What evidence does the author provide that explains why Gary envies Isaac’s cloth gymnast shoes? | In the story, Gary writes that he liked the way the shoes looked, “slim, black, and cool.” They seemed special, something he could never slip onto his feet. |
| Based on the reading on page 499, what else motivates Gary to want to become a gymnast? | From the reading, Gary says, he “liked the tape as well and tried to paste it around my wrists.”  “I asked him again if I could wear his shoes.”  “The shoes were loose, but I liked them. I went to the front yard with my wrists dripping tape and my hands as white as gloves. I smiled shyly and thought I looked neat.” |
| Give evidence from what we have read so far to support the idea that Gary did not have the right motivation to become a gymnast. | He was jealous because of his mother’s admiration of Isaac. He wanted to be like the athletes on the TV show, Wide World of Sports, who are admired for their abilities. After observing his cousin, Gary borrowed his cousin’s shoes, tape and powder to imitate what he saw his cousin doing. Gary wanted to look cool and look the part of a gymnast. It is as if the clothing would give him the skills of a gymnast. |
| What items did Gary use to make himself *look like* a gymnast? | In the story, Gary found a pair of old vinyl slippers in the closet. He found circle bandages in the medicine cabinet, which he circled around his wrist. He dipped his hand in flour to keep them dry. |
| How do we know that the shoes were too small for Gary? | Gary pushed his feet into the shoes, tugging and wincing because they were too small, “but he forced them on anyway.” |
| What evidence does the author give that he was unsuccessful as a gymnast? | He finally, after much hesitation, did a backflip that “nearly cost him his life” when he landed on his head. He crawled to the shade, “stars of pain pulsating in his shoulder and his neck.” Note that the author uses figurative language (exaggeration and alliteration). |
| What words, phrases, or sentences help you know that Gary wanted to be left alone? Why did he want to be alone? | When Gary’s brother stared at him and asked him why he was wearing slippers, Gary didn’t answer him. His brother asked him about the flour on his hands and Gary told him to leave him alone. He was embarrassed by what he was doing. |
| What is going wrong with Gary’s plan to be a gymnast? | The vinyl slippers he wore were too small and caused his feet to throb. Instead of receiving admiration from other people, he was asked questions such as, “Why are you wearing slippers?” “Why is there flour on your hands?” It caused him great pain every time he tried to do a backflip. |
| How much time did he spend on appearance? On learning gymnastics? | Gary took more time with his appearance than with learning how to do gymnastics. He took the time to assemble what he needed: slippers, tape, and flour, but there is no evidence in the story that he took any lessons that would show him the correct way to do a backflip without hurting himself. |
| At the end of the story, Gary Soto states, “I ate a plum and pictured my cousin, who was probably cartwheeling to the audience of one sleeping dog.” Why this abrupt end to his desire to become a gymnast? What does he realize about himself? | After dinner, Gary went outside, stuffed his feet into the slippers and did cartwheels by the dizzy dozens. After a while they were easy, and then he tried a backflip. He landed on his neck again and this time saw an orange burst behind his eyes. He realizes that his motivation to become a gymnast was for the attention he thought he would receive, not for his skill. |

Vocabulary

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|  | **KEY WORDS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING** | **WORDS WORTH KNOWING** |
| **TEACHER PROVIDES DEFINITION**  not enough contextual clues provided in the text | gymnastics  limelight  vinyl | jealous  disdain  nutrients  envied  skidded  hesitation |
| **STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING**  sufficient context clues are provided in the text | gymnast  somersault  cartwheels  back flip  yap | bandages  wincing  slippers  throbbing  summery |

Culminating Task

* Re-Read, Think, Discuss, Write
* *Eleven-year-old Gary Soto was motivated to become a gymnast, just like his cousin.* *Using details from the story, explain why Gary’s reasons for wanting to be a gymnast did not help him achieve his goal.*
  + Sample Answer:

Gary Soto’s motivation to become a gymnast like his cousin Isaac was that he wanted to be admired by other people. Gary’s mother said about Isaac, “She was proud of him.” Gary stated that he was jealous of the athletes on Wide World of Sports because “people admired an athlete who could somersault without hurting himself”. Gary noticed that some passengers in cars watched Isaac as he did gymnastics exercises on the front lawn. Gary was also motivated to become a gymnast because he liked the equipment used by gymnasts and felt that just wearing the shoes, tape, and powder like Isaac would make him an admired gymnast. For example, he “found a pair of old vinyl slippers.” Gary says he, “looked for tape to wrap his wrists, but could only find circle bandages.” Finally, Gary tells us, “I dipped my hands in flour to keep them dry.” He became frustrated by the constant questions asked by other people, such as “Why I was wearing slippers?” or “Why I had white powder on my hands?” Gary eventually ends up giving up because he was unable to do a backflip without causing himself pain, “I landed on my neck again, this time I saw an orange burst behind my eyes.” He realized that his initial idea about being an admired gymnast was not going to happen, because being an admired gymnast requires a lot of hard work, not just the right clothing.

Additional Tasks

* Imagine that this selection was written from the point of view of Gary Soto’s cousin Isaac. Rewrite one paragraph from the story, including thoughts and feelings that you imagine Isaac may have had.
  + Sample Answer:

That Saturday, my cousin, Gary came to my house to watch me as I practiced my gymnastic exercises. Gary sat under an aluminum arbor, eating a plum. I enjoy people watching me as I do my gymnastics, but I think Gary thinks that gymnastics is easier than it is. As I did cartwheels and back flips, I instructed him on the correct way to do them. I could tell that he and the other people that passed by were impressed.

Note to Teacher

* A class discussion about what motivates people to act and the sharing of examples will be helpful before students attempt the culminating writing task.