

THE day my son Laurie started kindergarten, he gave up his little-boy clothes. He started wearing blue jeans with a belt. I watched him go off that first morning with the older girl next door. He looked as though he were going off to a fight. He came home the same way at lunchtime. "Isn't anybody here?" he yelled. At the table, he knocked over his little sister's milk. "How was school today?" I asked. "Did you learn anything?"

"I didn't learn nothing," he said. "*Anything*," I said. "Didn't learn *anything*." "But the teacher spanked a boy," Laurie said. "For being fresh." "What did he do?" I asked. "Who was it?" Laurie thought. "It was Charles," he said. "The teacher spanked him and made him stand in the corner. He was really fresh." "What did he do?" I asked. But Laurie slid off his chair, took a cookie, and left. The next day, Laurie sat down for lunch. "Well," he said, "Charles was bad again today." He grinned. "Today Charles hit the teacher," he said. "Good heavens," I said. "I suppose he got spanked again?"

"He sure did," Laurie said. "Why did Charles hit the teacher?" I asked. "Because she tried to make him color with red crayons. Charles wanted to color with green crayons. So, he hit the teacher. She spanked him and said nobody play with Charles. But everybody did."

On Saturday, I talked to my husband about it. "Do you think kindergarten is too disturbing for Laurie?" I asked him. "This Charles boy sounds like a bad influence." "It will be all right," my husband said, "There are bound to be people like Charles in the world. He might as well meet them now as later." On Monday, Laurie came home late.

"Charles!" he shouted, as he ran up to the house. "Charles was bad again!" I let him in and helped him take off his coat. "You know what Charles did?" he said. "Charles yelled so much that the teacher came in from first grade. She said our teacher had to keep Charles quiet. And so Charles had to stay after school. Laurie said, noticing his father. "Hi Pop, you old dust mop." "What does this Charles look like? My husband asked. "What's his last name?"

"He's bigger than me," Laurie said. "And he doesn't wear a jacket." I could hardly wait for the first Parent-Teachers meeting. I wanted very much to meet Charles' mother. The meeting was still a week away. On Tuesday, Laurie said, "Our teacher had a friend come to see her in school today." My husband and I said together, "Was it Charles' mother?" "Naaah," Laurie said. "Charles was fresh to the teacher's friend. They wouldn't let him do exercises."

"Fresh again?" I said. "He kicked the teacher's friend," Laurie said. "The teacher's friend told Charles to touch his toes. And Charles kicked him." "What do you think they'll do about Charles?" my husband asked. "I don't know," Laurie said. "Throw him out of school, I guess." Wednesday and Thursday were routine. Charles yelled during story-time. He hit a boy in the stomach and made him cry. On Friday, Charles stayed after school again. All the other children stayed to watch him. On Monday of the third week, Laurie came home with another report. "You know what Charles did today?" he asked. "He told a girl to say a word, and she said it. The teacher washed her mouth out with soap, and Charles laughed." "What word?" his father asked. "It's so bad, I'll have to whisper it to you," Laurie said. He whispered into my husband's ear. "Charles told the little girl to say *that*?" he said, his eyes widening. "She said it *twice*," Laurie said. "Charles told her to say it *twice*." "What happened to Charles?" my husband asked. "Nothing," Laurie said. "He was passing out the crayons." The next day, Charles said the evil word himself three or four times. He got his mouth washed out with soap each time. He also threw chalk. My husband came to the door that night as I was leaving for the Parent-Teachers meeting. "Invite her over after the meeting," he said. "I want to get a look at the mother of that kid." "I hope she's there," I said. "She'll be there, my husband said. "How could they hold a Parent-Teachers meeting without Charles' mother?"

At the meeting, I looked over the faces of all the other mothers. None of them looked unhappy enough to be the mother of Charles. No one stood up and apologized for the way her son had been acting. No one mentioned Charles. After the meeting, I found Laurie's teacher. "I've been wanting to meet you," I said. "I'm Laurie's mother." Oh, yes," she said. "We're all so interested in Laurie." "He certainly likes kindergarten," I said. "He talks about it all the time." "He's had some trouble getting used to school," she said. "But I think he'll be all right." "Laurie usually fits in quickly," I said. "I suppose his trouble might be from Charles' influence." "Charles?" the teacher said. "Yes," I said, laughing. "You must have your hands full with Charles." "Charles?" she said. "We don't have any Charles in kindergarten."

By Shirley Jackson

Level: First Year First Term Literary Texts Exam (answer key)

I. Answer each question in 1–2 sentences: (7 Points)

1. How does the narrator describe Laurie's change of character? **He went through three main changes: Physical change (clothes, the way he talks, walks), Disrespectful Manners (insolent behavior), The "Charles" Influence (Laurie as being obsessed with Charles's influence).**
2. Provide two specific examples of Laurie's behavior at home that mirror the "bad" behavior he attributes to Charles at school. **Verbal Disrespect and Shouting (reports that Charles yelled so loudly that the class was disrupted, Laurie himself returns home and shouts "raucously" for attention), Physical Disruptiveness (Charles hits people or make a mess. At home, Laurie mirrors this by knocking over his baby sister's milk)**
3. From which Point of View is the story told? how does this specific perspective contribute to the story's final twist? **first-person point of view: Limited Awareness (the reader only knows what she knows. She is a naïve unreliable narrator), Physical Separation (The first-person perspective keeps the reader at home with the mother. Since she never actually enters the classroom until the very end)**
4. Provide 3 examples of irony from the story of *Charles*? **The parents wonder what kind of household could produce such a "bad" child, ironically unaware that *they* are the parents of the child they are criticizing. Charles doesn't exist; Laurie has created the persona to act out his own rebellious impulses, the father asks if "Charles" is teaching Laurie bad behavior when it is himself acting badly.**
5. Analyze why Laurie's parents are so eager to believe in the existence of Charles despite the growing evidence that their own son is the one misbehaving: **because of confirmation bias and parental denial. Laurie is a "sweet-voiced" child accepting that he is "Charles" would mean his parents failed. By believing in Charles, they can blame an outside influence for Laurie's bad behavior at home rather than facing the reality of his changing character.**

II. Read the text then fill in the table: (4 Points)

Symbol	Interpretation
Green color	Symbolizes Individualism and Rebellion and Laurie's own desires and his growing sense of agency. By insisting on green, he is asserting his own will over the teacher's.
Red color	represents the teacher's instructions and the pressure for Laurie to conform to the school's expectations.

III. Provide detailed responses based on your interpretation of the text (4 points)

1. Argue how Charles serves as a psychological projection for Laurie. Why does Laurie *need* Charles to exist in his mind? **Laurie uses Charles as a psychological projection to externalize his own rebellious impulses and anxieties while adjusting to the social pressures of kindergarten. By attributing his misbehavior to a fictional "bad boy," Laurie can experiment with a new, independent identity at school without losing his status as a "sweet" and innocent child in his parents' eyes.**
2. Analyze one moment where the parents ignore clear signs about the real identity of Charles? What does this tell you about the parents? **When Laurie starts staying late for school, he tells his parents he has to stay because "Charles" was being punished and the whole class stayed to watch him which is a massive red flag because it is highly unusual. The parents ignore the most logical explanation: Laurie is staying late because he is the one being punished. This reveals complete lack of skepticism and naivety which highlights that the parents aren't just being tricked; they are active participants in the lie**

IV. Write an essay in which you discuss how the story of Charles explores the idea of identity. How does Laurie manage his identity differently at the dinner table versus in the classroom? (5 points)

Focus on The Physical Shift, Alter Ego, Testing authority and social boundaries, Direct conflict with the teacher and Subtle defiance of the father.