Who is the REAL you?

At first, it might seem silly to wonder who you really are. But do you act the same around your teachers as you do around your friends? And do your grandparents perceive the same person your friends see? We all have different sides to ourselves. In the story you are about to read, a young woman discovers a side of her mother she never knew existed.

QUICKWRITE Think of three or four people who know you in different ways—for example, your best friend, a teacher, a parent, and an enemy. What adjectives would each person use to describe you? How would you describe yourself? Jot down your thoughts about whether anyone perceives the real you.
LITERARY ANALYSIS: STYLE
Each of us has a unique style, or way of dressing, acting, and speaking. In literature, style is a writer’s way of expressing himself or herself. Style does not refer to what is said, but rather how it is said. Writers show style through the choices they make about the following things:

• Word choice and imagery—descriptive words and phrases that appeal to the senses. Notice Edwidge Danticat’s descriptions.
• Presentation—the way the story appears on the page. Notice Danticat’s use of line spacing, italics, and typographical symbols.
• Sentence structure. Notice Danticat’s purposeful use of sentence fragments.

READING SKILL: IDENTIFY SEQUENCE
Sequence is the order in which events occur in a story. To help yourself keep track of the order, look for signal words and phrases, such as today, that morning, as, now, an hour later, then, and before.

In the story you are about to read, the narrator relates present-day events while reflecting on conversations and incidents from the past. Keep track of the sequence of present-day events by recording them in a sequence chart like the one shown.

The narrator sees her mother walking down the street. → →

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT
The following boldfaced words help Danticat show how people sometimes don’t really understand each other. To see how many words you know, restate each sentence, using a different word or phrase for the boldfaced word.

1. Pablo can mesmerize people with his charm, so they forget he isn’t reliable.
2. Jenny’s only offense is that she brags too much.
3. My pursuit of the truth only left me more confused.
4. I contemplate joining the game, but no one expects me to, so I don’t.
5. I doubt that the feisty Emily will surrender easily.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
Today, walking down the street, I see my mother. She is strolling with a happy gait, her body thrust toward the don’t walk sign and the yellow taxicabs that make forty-five-degree turns on the corner of Madison and Fifty-seventh Street.

I have never seen her in this kind of neighborhood, peering into Chanel and Tiffany’s and gawking at the jewels glowing in the Bulgari windows. My mother never shops outside of Brooklyn. She has never seen the advertising office where I work. She is afraid to take the subway, where you may meet those young black militant street preachers who curse black women for straightening their hair.

Yet, here she is, my mother, who I left at home that morning in her bathrobe, with pieces of newspapers twisted like rollers in her hair. My mother, who accuses me of random offenses as I dash out of the house.

Would you get up and give an old lady like me your subway seat? In this state of mind, I bet you don’t even give up your seat to a pregnant lady.

My mother, who is often right about that. Sometimes I get up and give my seat. Other times, I don’t. It all depends on how pregnant the woman is and whether or not she is with her . . . husband and whether or not he is sitting down.

As my mother stands in front of Carnegie Hall, one taxi driver yells to another, “What do you think this is, a dance floor?”

My mother waits patiently for this dispute to be settled before crossing the street.

In Haiti when you get hit by a car, the owner of the car gets out and kicks you for getting blood on his bumper.

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1. **Chanel** (sha-nel’); **Tiffany’s**; **Bulgari** (bùl-gā’-rē): very expensive shops that sell luxury goods such as designer clothing, perfume, glassware, and jewelry.

2. **Carnegie Hall** (kär’-na-gē hōl): a famous concert hall in New York City.

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The Promenade, Fifth Avenue (1986), Bill Jacklin. Oil on canvas, 243.6 cm × 182.7 cm. Private collection. © Bill Jacklin/Bridgeman Art Library.
My mother who laughs when she says this and shows a large gap in her mouth where she lost three more molars to the dentist last week. My mother, who at fifty-nine, says dentures are okay.

> You can take them out when they bother you. I’ll like them. I’ll like them fine.

Will it feel empty when Papa kisses you?

> Oh no, he doesn’t kiss me that way anymore.

My mother, who watches the lottery drawing every night on channel 11 without ever having played the numbers.

> A third of that money is all I would need. We would pay the mortgage, and your father could stop driving that taxicab all over Brooklyn.

I follow my mother, mesmerized by the many possibilities of her journey. Even in a flowered dress, she is lost in a sea of pinstripes and gray suits, high heels and elegant short skirts, . . . sneakers, dashing from building to building.

My mother, who won’t go out to dinner with anyone.

> If they want to eat with me, let them come to my house, even if I boil water and give it to them.

My mother, who talks to herself when she peels the skin off poultry.

> Fat, you know, and cholesterol. Fat and cholesterol killed your aunt Hermine.

My mother, who makes jam with dried grapefruit peel and then puts in cinnamon bark that I always think is cockroaches in the jam. My mother, whom I have always bought household appliances for, on her birthday. A nice rice cooker, a blender.

I trail the red orchids in her dress and the heavy faux leather bag on her shoulders. Realizing the ferocious pace of my pursuit, I stop against a wall to rest. My mother keeps on walking as though she owns the sidewalk under her feet.

As she heads toward the Plaza Hotel, a bicycle messenger swings so close to her that I want to dash forward and rescue her, but she stands dead in her tracks and lets him ride around her and then goes on.

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3. **pinstripes**: fabrics with very thin stripes, usually used to make business suits.
4. **faux** (fō): artificial but meant to look genuine.
5. **Plaza Hotel**: a world-renowned hotel located near Central Park in New York City.
6. **dead in her tracks**: perfectly still.
My mother stops at a corner hot-dog stand and asks for something. The vendor hands her a can of soda that she slips into her bag. She stops by another vendor selling sundresses for seven dollars each. I can tell that she is looking at an African print dress, **contemplating** my size. I think to myself, Please Ma, don't buy it. It would be just another thing I would bury in the garage or give to Goodwill.

Why should we give to Goodwill when there are so many people back home who need clothes? We save our clothes for the relatives in Haiti.

Twenty years we have been saving all kinds of things for the relatives in Haiti. I need the place in the garage for an exercise bike.

**You are pretty enough to be a stewardess. Only dogs like bones.**

This mother of mine, she stops at another hot-dog vendor's and buys a frankfurter that she eats on the street. I never knew that she ate frankfurters. With her blood pressure, she shouldn't eat anything with sodium. She has to be careful with her heart, this day woman.

*I cannot just swallow salt. Salt is heavier than a hundred bags of shame.*

She is slowing her pace, and now I am too close. If she turns around, she might see me. I let her walk into the park before I start to follow again.

My mother walks toward the sandbox in the middle of the park. There a woman is waiting with a child. The woman is wearing a leotard with biker's shorts and has small weights in her hands. The woman kisses the child good-bye and **surrenders** him to my mother, then she bolts off, running on the cemented stretches in the park.

The child given to my mother has frizzy blond hair. His hand slips into hers easily, like he's known her for a long time. When he raises his face to look at my mother, it is as though he is looking at the sky.

My mother gives this child the soda that she bought from the vendor on the street corner. The child’s face lights up as she puts ... a straw in the can for him. This seems to be a conspiracy just between the two of them.

My mother and the child sit and watch the other children play in the sandbox. The child pulls out a comic book from a knapsack with Big Bird on the back. My mother peers into his comic book. My mother, who taught herself to read as a little girl in Haiti from the books that her brothers brought home from school. My mother, who has now lost six of her seven sisters in Ville Rose and has never had the strength to return for their funerals.

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7. **sodium** (sō’dē-əm): salt.
8. **day woman**: a woman who is employed as a housekeeper or babysitter but does not live in her employer’s home.
Many graves to kiss when I go back. Many graves to kiss.

She throws away the empty soda can when the child is done with it. I wait and watch from a corner until the woman in the leotard and biker’s shorts returns, sweaty and breathless, an hour later. My mother gives the woman back her child and strolls farther into the park.

I turn around and start to walk out of the park before my mother can see me. My lunch hour is long since gone. I have to hurry back to work. I walk through a cluster of joggers, then race to a Sweden Tours bus. I stand behind the bus and take a peek at my mother in the park. She is standing in a circle, chatting with a group of women who are taking other people’s children on an afternoon outing. They look like a Third World Parent-Teacher Association meeting.

I quickly jump into a cab heading back to the office. Would Ma have said hello had she been the one to see me first?

As the cab races away from the park, it occurs to me that perhaps one day I would chase an old woman down a street by mistake and that old woman would be somebody else’s mother, who I would have mistaken for mine.

Day women come out when nobody expects them.

Tonight on the subway, I will get up and give my seat to a pregnant woman or a lady about Ma’s age.

My mother, who stuffs thimbles in her mouth and then blows up her cheeks like Dizzy Gillespie while sewing yet another Raggedy Ann doll that she names Suzette after me.

I will have all these little Suzettes in case you never have any babies, which looks more and more like it is going to happen.

My mother, who sews lace collars on my company softball T-shirts when she does my laundry.

Why, you can’t look like a lady playing softball?

My mother, who never went to any of my Parent-Teacher Association meetings when I was in school.

You’re so good anyway. What are they going to tell me? I don’t want to make you ashamed of this day woman. Shame is heavier than a hundred bags of salt.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  What does the narrator’s mother do for a living?
2. **Clarify**  Why is the narrator, Suzette, surprised to see her mother?
3. **Clarify**  Why doesn’t Suzette go up to greet her mother?

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Characterization**  How does Edwidge Danticat bring the mother’s character to life? Using a character map like the one shown, record details from the story that describe the mother’s appearance, beliefs and values, and actions.

5. **Examine Sequence**  Review the sequence chart you made while reading. Under each square, note what Suzette seems to feel about her mother at that point in the story. In what way does Suzette’s perception of her mother change from the beginning to the end of the story?

6. **Draw Conclusions**  In the beginning of the story Suzette admits that she might not give up her seat on a bus to an older or pregnant woman. Yet by the story’s end, she changes her mind. What do you think causes this change?

7. **Make Judgments**  Reread lines 114–115. Do you think Suzette is ashamed of her mother? Why or why not? Support your answer with examples.

8. **Define an Author’s Style**  Choose a passage from the story that you think is a good example of Danticat’s style. You may wish to look for a passage that demonstrates Danticat’s unique sentence structures, imagery, and way of formatting text, as well as her use of repetition. Copy down the passage. Then identify the important literary devices and other elements in it that are characteristic of Danticat’s style.

Extension and Challenge

9. **Readers’ Circle**  Should Suzette have approached her mother, and if so, what should she have said? Why do you think the mother never told Suzette about her trips to Manhattan? Discuss these questions with a small group.

**Who is the REAL you?**

Describe a situation or relationship in which you act or talk differently than you usually do at home. What is different about your behavior or way of speaking?
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

Choose the letter of the word or phrase that means the same, or nearly the same, as the boldfaced word or phrase.

1. **contemplate** a decision: (a) disregard, (b) consider, (c) ignore, (d) avoid
2. **mesmerize** an audience: (a) fascinate, (b) bore, (c) puzzle, (d) disappoint
3. **pursuit** of a criminal: (a) arrest, (b) imprisonment, (c) chasing, (d) pardon
4. **surrender** her valuables: (a) purchase, (b) give up, (c) hide, (d) hold
5. **a minor offense**: (a) wrongdoing, (b) injury, (c) argument, (d) accomplishment

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING**

- achieve  • income  • individual  • strategy  • trend

What do you think you would learn if you followed an **individual** you knew for a day? Write a paragraph explaining your answer. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your paragraph.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: MULTIPLE-MEANING WORDS**

Many English words have more than one meaning. For example, you might know that **offense** is a term used in sports that means “those players whose primary responsibility it is to score.” But you might not be familiar with its meaning in this selection: “a violation of a moral or social code.”

If a word does not make sense to you, look at the words around it for clues to other possible meanings. For example:

*My mother, who accuses me of random offenses as I dash out of the house.*

Would the mother be more likely to accuse the narrator of a sports-related move, or of a moral or social mistake? Based on the context of the sentence, you can conclude that the second definition is correct. For further help with multiple-meaning words, check a dictionary.

**PRACTICE** Define the boldfaced words. Identify context clues that helped you understand the meaning of each.

1. The bus stops suddenly, and the motion **jerks** me out of a deep sleep.
2. Although we were tired, Michael and I decided to play one more **round** of chess.
3. Please **book** me a seat on the next plane to Washington, D.C.
4. I think we need to **table** this issue for now. Let’s put it aside until next week.
5. These new circumstances open a **window** of opportunity for us.
Conventions in Writing

◆ **GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Use Appositive Phrases**

An **appositive** is a noun or pronoun that identifies or renames another noun or pronoun. An **appositive phrase** is made up of an appositive and its modifiers. You can make your writing more concise by using an appositive or appositive phrase to combine two sentences into one.

**Original:** The mother works in Manhattan. She is a native of Haiti.

**Revised:** The mother, a native of Haiti, works in Manhattan. (A native of Haiti is an appositive phrase that adds extra, nonessential information about the mother.)

Place commas before and after an appositive phrase when it adds extra, nonessential information about the noun or pronoun that precedes it, as in the example above.

**PRACTICE** In each item, combine the two sentences by changing the second sentence to an appositive phrase.

1. Suzette works in Manhattan. She is a resident of Brooklyn.
2. Suzette doesn’t give her subway seat to older passengers. She is the narrator.
3. The mother babysits children. She is a day woman.
4. The mother waits to cross the street. She is a patient woman.

For more help with appositive phrases, see page R61 in the *Grammar Handbook*.

**READING-WRITING CONNECTION**

Get to know the characters in “New York Day Women” better by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

**WRITING PROMPT**

Short Response: Write a Character Sketch

What do you learn about Suzette as she pursues her mother? Make inferences about her age, appearance, occupation, and personality. Then write a **one-paragraph character sketch** of her.

**REVISING TIP**

Review your character sketch to look for sentences you can combine by using an appositive or an appositive phrase.