

Lesson 17

ANCHOR TEXT



✓ TARGET SKILL

Story Structure Examine details about characters, setting, and plot.

✓ GENRE

Science fiction is writing based on scientific ideas and often set in the future. As you read, look for:

- ▶ technology of the future
- ▶ unrealistic events
- ▶ characters that may or may not be like real people

COMMON
CORE

RL.5.5 explain how chapters, scenes, or stanzas fit together to provide the overall structure; **RL.5.6** describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described; **RL.5.10** read and comprehend literature



MEET THE AUTHOR

Lensey Namioka

Lensey Namioka was only nine years old when she and her family moved to the United States from China, and although she adored spending time reading stories, she found learning the complexities of the English language difficult. Solving math problems came much more easily to her, so she majored in mathematics in college and became a math teacher. However, she never stopped reading, and eventually her love of stories led her to become a successful writer, too. Ms. Namioka has written books for children and for young adults, as well as several articles and popular short stories such as "LAFF."



MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR

Hiromitsu Yokota

Hiromitsu Yokota has created illustrations for numerous books, magazines, and calendars. He likes to infuse his work with details and feelings from everyday life and experiences.

Mr. Yokota uses digital technology to create his illustrations because it allows him to manipulate color and light while producing pictures that appear to have been drawn by hand. He attended college in Tokyo and earned a degree in fine arts, and is a member of the Society of Illustrators.



LAFFFF

from **Best Shorts**

by **Lensey Namioka**

selection illustrated by **Hiromitsu Yokota**

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES


Did you know that science fiction writers have been thrilling audiences with stories about time travel for well over a century? One of the best-known novels about time travel is H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. This novel features a main character who builds an incredible time machine and uses it to explore and interact with periods and people far into the future—and it was written way back in 1888!

Readers throughout the world have had a long-standing love affair with science fiction because it stimulates their imaginations and weaves together elements of fantasy, science, adventure, mystery, and drama. Several popular science fiction authors have seen their work adapted into movies or television series that involve the creation of elaborate sets and futuristic inventions, and while translating a writer's vision of time travel to film or screen can be difficult and expensive, the payoff is that fans of the book get to see the future or past brought to life in whole new ways.

Despite the countless depictions of time travel in literature, film, and television, there is no evidence that it has ever happened or could happen; it is a testament to the talents of science fiction authors that they are able to write such believable stories about a future no one has yet experienced. Perhaps some of the inventions, environments, and ideas in those stories will be realized someday, though. Imagine that!

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What role does imagination play in the invention process?



In movies, geniuses have frizzy white hair, right? They wear thick glasses and have names like Dr. Zweistein.

Peter Lu didn't have frizzy white hair. He had straight hair, as black as licorice. He didn't wear thick glasses, either, since his vision was normal.

Peter's family, like ours, had immigrated from China, but they had settled here first. When we moved into a house just two doors down from the Lus, they gave us some good advice on how to get along in America.

I went to the same school as Peter, and we walked to the school bus together every morning. Like many Chinese parents, mine made sure that I worked very hard in school. **1**

In spite of all I could do, my grades were nothing compared to Peter's. He was at the top in all his classes. We walked to the school bus without talking because I was a little scared of him. Besides, he was always deep in thought.

Peter didn't have any friends. Most of the kids thought he was a nerd because they saw his head always buried in books. I didn't think he even tried to join the rest of us or cared what the others thought of him. **2**

Then he surprised us all. As I went down the block trick-or-treating, dressed as a zucchini in my green sweats, I heard a strange, deep voice behind me say, "How do you do."

I yelped and turned around. Peter was wearing a long, black Chinese gown with slits in the sides. On his head he had a little round cap, and down each side of his mouth drooped a thin, long mustache.

"I am Dr. Lu Manchú, the mad scientist," he announced, putting his hands in his sleeves and bowing.

He smiled when he saw me staring at his costume. It was a scary smile, somehow.

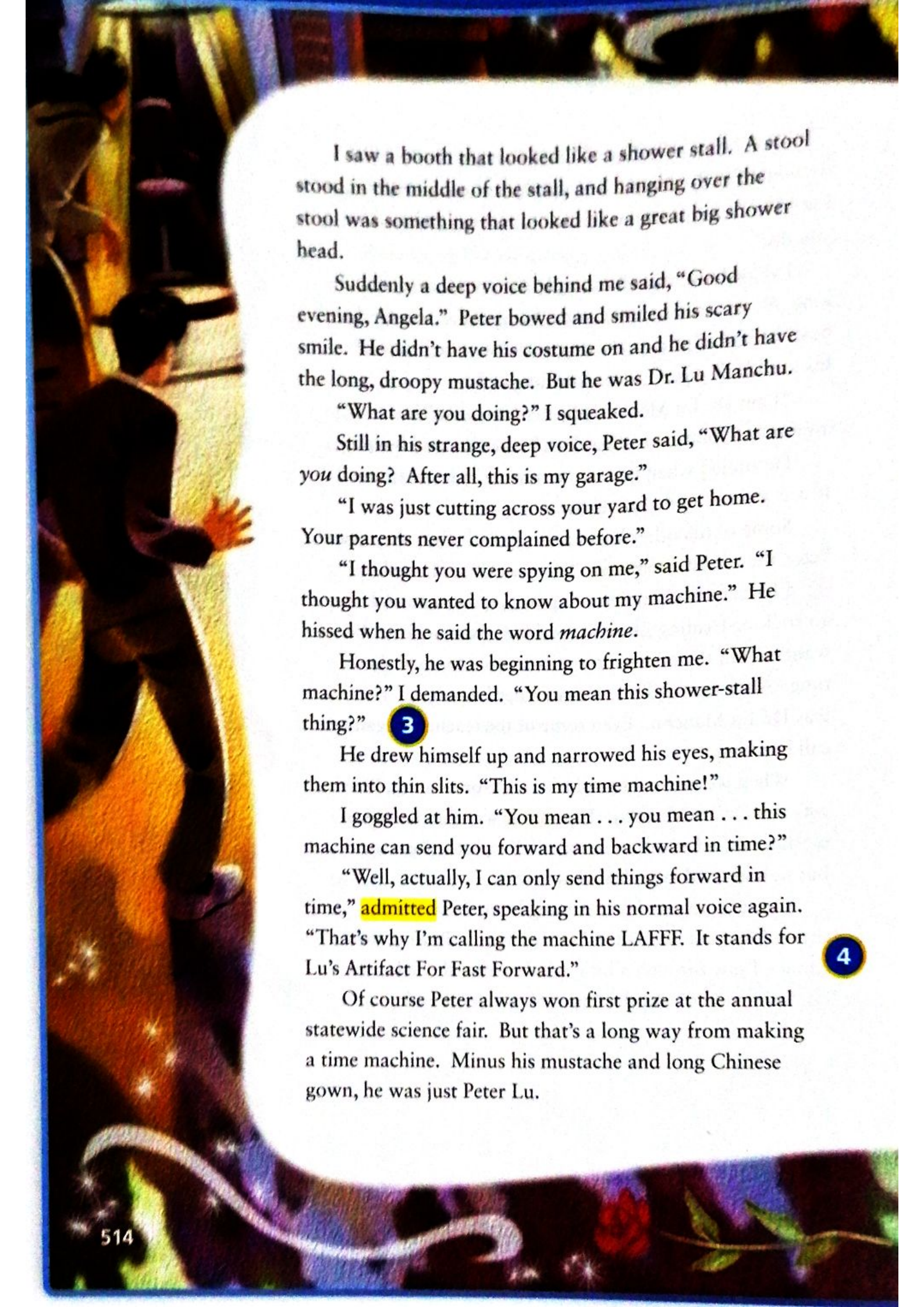
Some of the other kids came up, and when they saw Peter, they were **impressed**. "Hey, neat!" said one boy.

I hadn't expected Peter to put on a costume and go trick-or-treating like a normal kid. So maybe he did want to join the others after all—at least some of the time. After that night he wasn't a nerd anymore. He was Dr. Lu Manchú. Even some of the teachers began to call him that.

When we became too old for trick-or-treating, Peter was still Dr. Lu Manchú. The **rumor** was that he was working on a fantastic machine in his parents' garage. But nobody had any idea what it was.

One evening, as I was coming home from a baby-sitting job, I cut across the Lus' backyard. Passing their garage, I saw through a little window that the light was on. My curiosity got the better of me, and I peeked in.





I saw a booth that looked like a shower stall. A stool stood in the middle of the stall, and hanging over the stool was something that looked like a great big shower head.

Suddenly a deep voice behind me said, "Good evening, Angela." Peter bowed and smiled his scary smile. He didn't have his costume on and he didn't have the long, droopy mustache. But he was Dr. Lu Manchu.

"What are you doing?" I squeaked.

Still in his strange, deep voice, Peter said, "What are you doing? After all, this is my garage."

"I was just cutting across your yard to get home. Your parents never complained before."

"I thought you were spying on me," said Peter. "I thought you wanted to know about my machine." He hissed when he said the word *machine*.

Honestly, he was beginning to frighten me. "What machine?" I demanded. "You mean this shower-stall thing?"

3

He drew himself up and narrowed his eyes, making them into thin slits. "This is my time machine!"

I goggled at him. "You mean . . . you mean . . . this machine can send you forward and backward in time?"

"Well, actually, I can only send things forward in time," admitted Peter, speaking in his normal voice again. "That's why I'm calling the machine LAFFF. It stands for Lu's Artifact For Fast Forward."

4

Of course Peter always won first prize at the annual statewide science fair. But that's a long way from making a time machine. Minus his mustache and long Chinese gown, he was just Peter Lu.

"I don't believe it!" I said. "I bet LAFFF is only good for a laugh."

"Okay, Angela. I'll show you!" hissed Peter.

He sat down on the stool and twisted a dial. I heard some *bleeps*, *cheeps*, and *gurgles*. Peter disappeared.

He must have done it with mirrors. I looked around the garage. I peeked under the tool bench. There was no sign of him.

"Okay, I give up," I told him. "It's a good trick, Peter. You can come out now."

5

Bleep, *cheep*, and *gurgle* went the machine, and there was Peter sitting on the stool. He held a red rose in his hand. "What do you think of that?"

I blinked. "So you **produced** a flower. Maybe you had it under the stool."

"Roses bloom in June, right?" he demanded.

That was true. And this was December.

"I sent myself forward in time to June when the flowers were blooming," said Peter. "And I picked the rose from our yard. Convinced, Angela?"

It was too hard to swallow. "You said you couldn't send things back in time," I objected. "So how did you bring the rose back?"

But even as I spoke I saw that his hands were empty. The rose was gone.


"That's one of the problems with the machine," said Peter. "When I send myself forward, I can't seem to stay there for long. I snap back to my own time after only a minute. Anything I bring with me snaps back to its own time, too. So my rose has gone back to this June."

6

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Literary Devices When authors use words, such as *buzz* or *clang*, that sound like the noises they describe, it is called **onomatopoeia**. Where has the author used onomatopoeia on this page, and what does it add to the story?





I was finally convinced, and I began to see possibilities. "Wow, just think: If I don't want to do the dishes, I can send myself forward to the time when the dishes are already done."

"That won't do you much good," said Peter. "You'd soon pop back to the time when the dishes were still dirty."

Too bad. "There must be something your machine is good for," I said. Then I had another idea. "Hey, you can bring me back a piece of fudge from the future, and I can eat it twice: once now, and again in the future."

"Yes, but the fudge wouldn't stay in your stomach," said Peter. "It would go back to the future."

"That's even better!" I said. "I can enjoy eating the fudge over and over again without getting fat!"

It was late, and I had to go home before my parents started to worry. Before I left, Peter said, "Look, Angela, there's still a lot of work to do on LAFFE. Please don't tell anybody about the machine until I've got it right."

A few days later I asked him how he was doing.

"I can stay in the future time a bit longer now," he said. "Once I got it up to four minutes."

"Is that enough time to bring me back some fudge from the future?" I asked.

"We don't keep many sweets around the house," he said. "But I'll see what I can do."

A few minutes later, he came back with a spring roll for me. "My mother was frying these in the kitchen, and I snatched one while she wasn't looking."

I bit into the hot, crunchy spring roll, but before I finished chewing, it disappeared. The taste of soy sauce, green onions, and bean sprouts stayed a little longer in my mouth, though.

It was fun to play around with LAFFE, but it wasn't really useful. I didn't know what a great help it would turn out to be. **8**

Every year our school held a writing contest, and the winning story for each grade got printed in our school magazine. I wanted desperately to win. I worked awfully hard in school, but my parents still thought I could do better.

Winning the writing contest would show my parents that I was really good in something. I love writing stories, and I have lots of ideas. But when I actually write them down, my stories never turn out as good as I thought. I just can't seem to find the right words, because English isn't my first language.

I got an honorable mention last year, but it wasn't the same as winning and showing my parents my name, Angela Tang, printed in the school magazine.

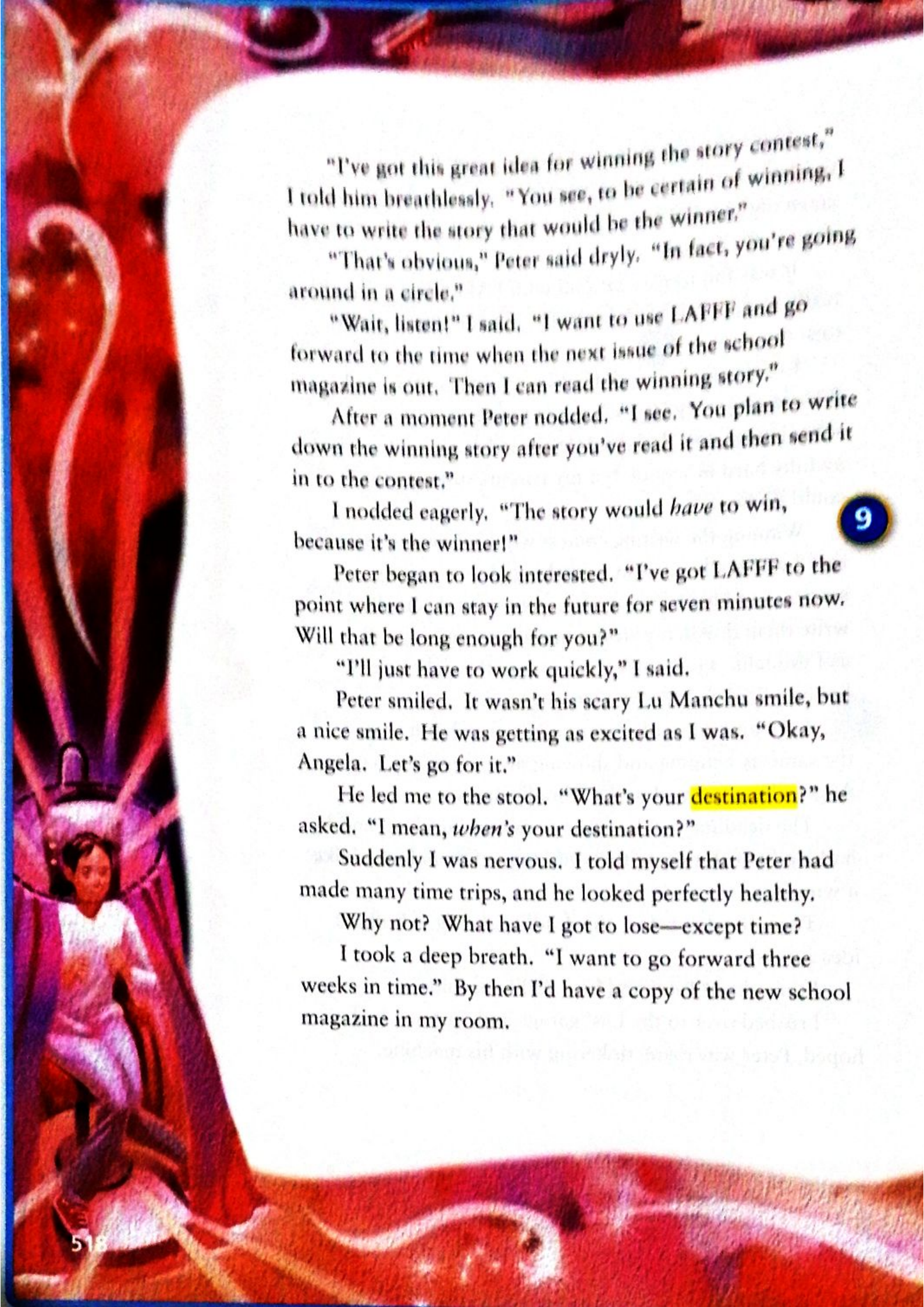
The deadline for the contest was getting close, and I had a pile of stories written, but none of them looked like a winner.

Then, the day before the deadline, *boing*, a brilliant idea hit me.

I thought of Peter and his LAFFE machine.

I rushed over to the Lus' garage and, just as I had hoped, Peter was there, tinkering with his machine.





"I've got this great idea for winning the story contest," I told him breathlessly. "You see, to be certain of winning, I have to write the story that would be the winner."

"That's obvious," Peter said dryly. "In fact, you're going around in a circle."

"Wait, listen!" I said. "I want to use LAFFF and go forward to the time when the next issue of the school magazine is out. Then I can read the winning story."

After a moment Peter nodded. "I see. You plan to write down the winning story after you've read it and then send it in to the contest."

I nodded eagerly. "The story would *have* to win, because it's the winner!"

Peter began to look interested. "I've got LAFFF to the point where I can stay in the future for seven minutes now. Will that be long enough for you?"

"I'll just have to work quickly," I said.

Peter smiled. It wasn't his scary Lu Manchu smile, but a nice smile. He was getting as excited as I was. "Okay, Angela. Let's go for it."

He led me to the stool. "What's your **destination**?" he asked. "I mean, *when's* your destination?"

Suddenly I was nervous. I told myself that Peter had made many time trips, and he looked perfectly healthy.

Why not? What have I got to lose—except time?

I took a deep breath. "I want to go forward three weeks in time." By then I'd have a copy of the new school magazine in my room.

"Ready, Angela?" asked Peter.

"As ready as I'll ever be," I whispered.

Bleep, cheep, and gurgle. Suddenly Peter disappeared. What went wrong? Did Peter get sent by mistake, instead of me?

Then I realized what had happened. Three weeks later in time Peter might be somewhere else. No wonder I couldn't see him.

There was no time to be lost. Rushing out of Peter's garage, I ran over to our house and entered through the back door.

Mother was in the kitchen. When she saw me, she stared.

"Angela! I thought you were upstairs taking a shower!"

"Sorry!" I panted. "No time to talk!"

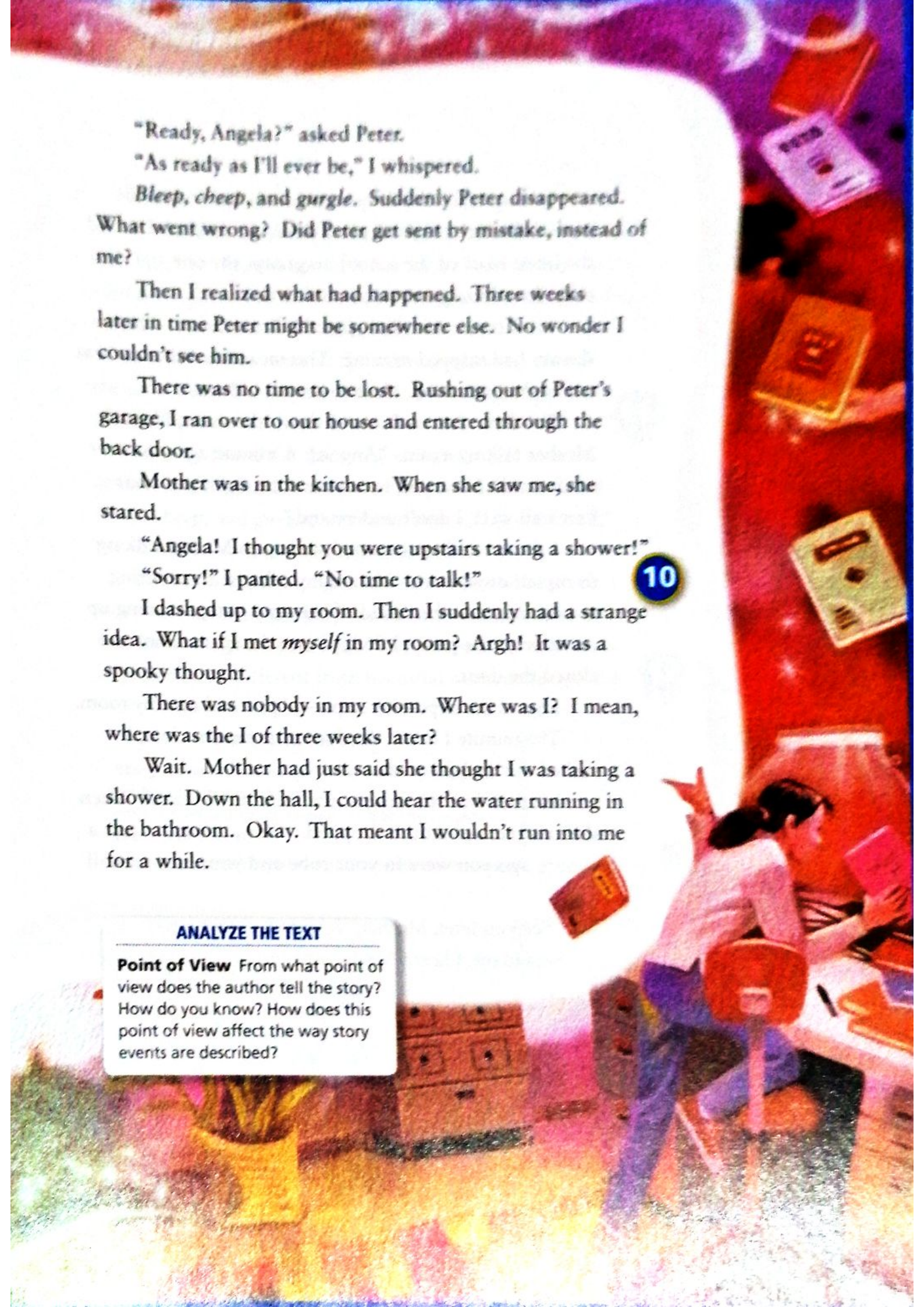
I dashed up to my room. Then I suddenly had a strange idea. What if I met *myself* in my room? Argh! It was a spooky thought.

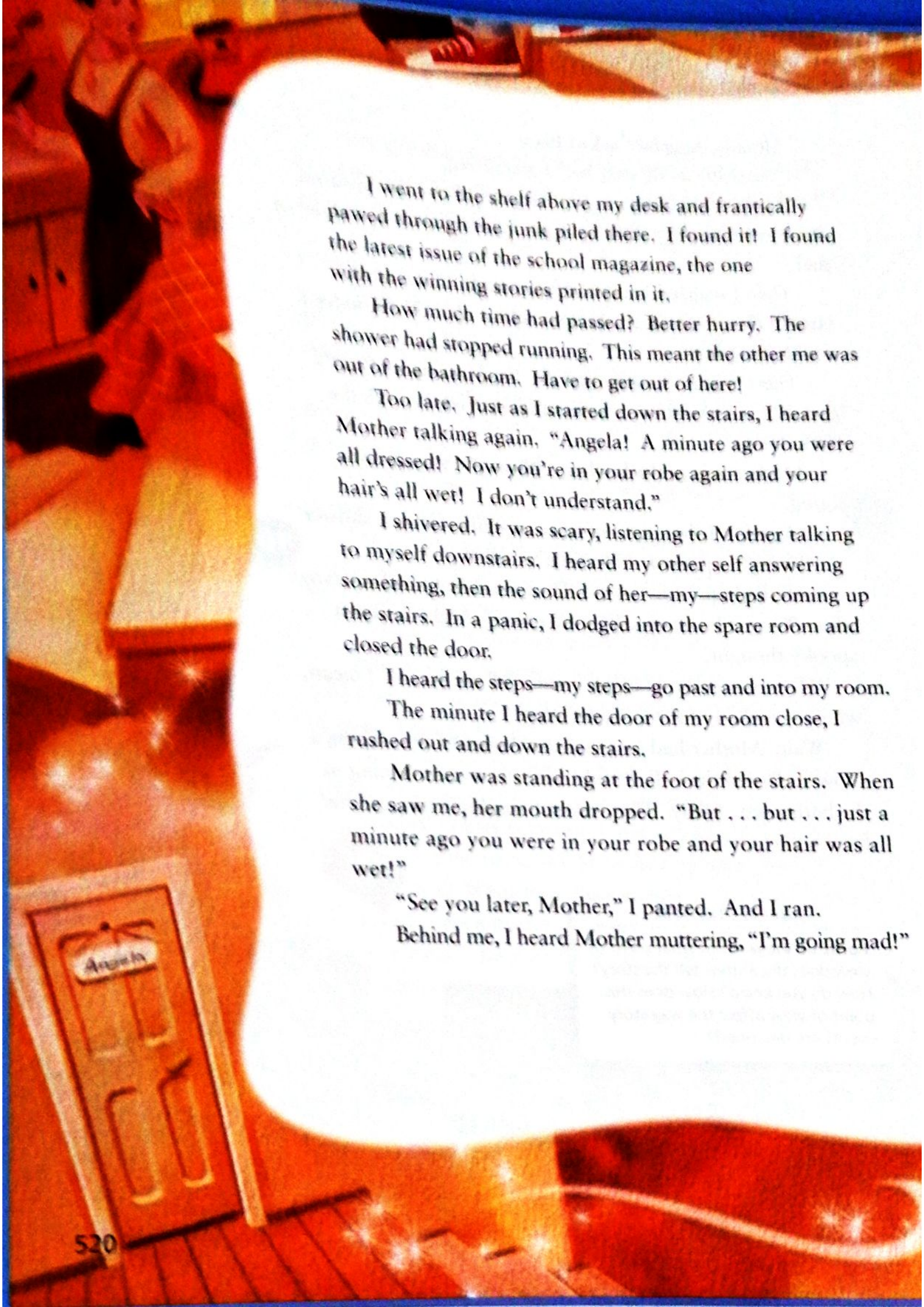
There was nobody in my room. Where was I? I mean, where was the I of three weeks later?

Wait. Mother had just said she thought I was taking a shower. Down the hall, I could hear the water running in the bathroom. Okay. That meant I wouldn't run into me for a while.

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Point of View From what point of view does the author tell the story? How do you know? How does this point of view affect the way story events are described?





I went to the shelf above my desk and frantically pawed through the junk piled there. I found it! I found the latest issue of the school magazine, the one with the winning stories printed in it.

How much time had passed? Better hurry. The shower had stopped running. This meant the other me was out of the bathroom. Have to get out of here!

Too late. Just as I started down the stairs, I heard Mother talking again, "Angela! A minute ago you were all dressed! Now you're in your robe again and your hair's all wet! I don't understand."

I shivered. It was scary, listening to Mother talking to myself downstairs. I heard my other self answering something, then the sound of her—my—steps coming up the stairs. In a panic, I dodged into the spare room and closed the door.

I heard the steps—my steps—go past and into my room.

The minute I heard the door of my room close, I rushed out and down the stairs.

Mother was standing at the foot of the stairs. When she saw me, her mouth dropped. "But . . . but . . . just a minute ago you were in your robe and your hair was all wet!"

"See you later, Mother," I panted. And I ran.

Behind me, I heard Mother muttering, "I'm going mad!"

I didn't stop and try to explain. I might go mad, too.

It would be great if I could just keep the magazine with me. But, like the spring roll, it would get carried back to its own time after a few minutes. So the next best thing was to read the magazine as fast as I could.

It was hard to run and flip through the magazine at the same time. But I made it back to Peter's garage and plopped down on the stool.

At last I found the story: the story that had won the contest in our grade. I started to read. Suddenly I heard *bleep, cheep, and gurgle*, and Peter loomed up in front of me. I was back in my **original** time again.

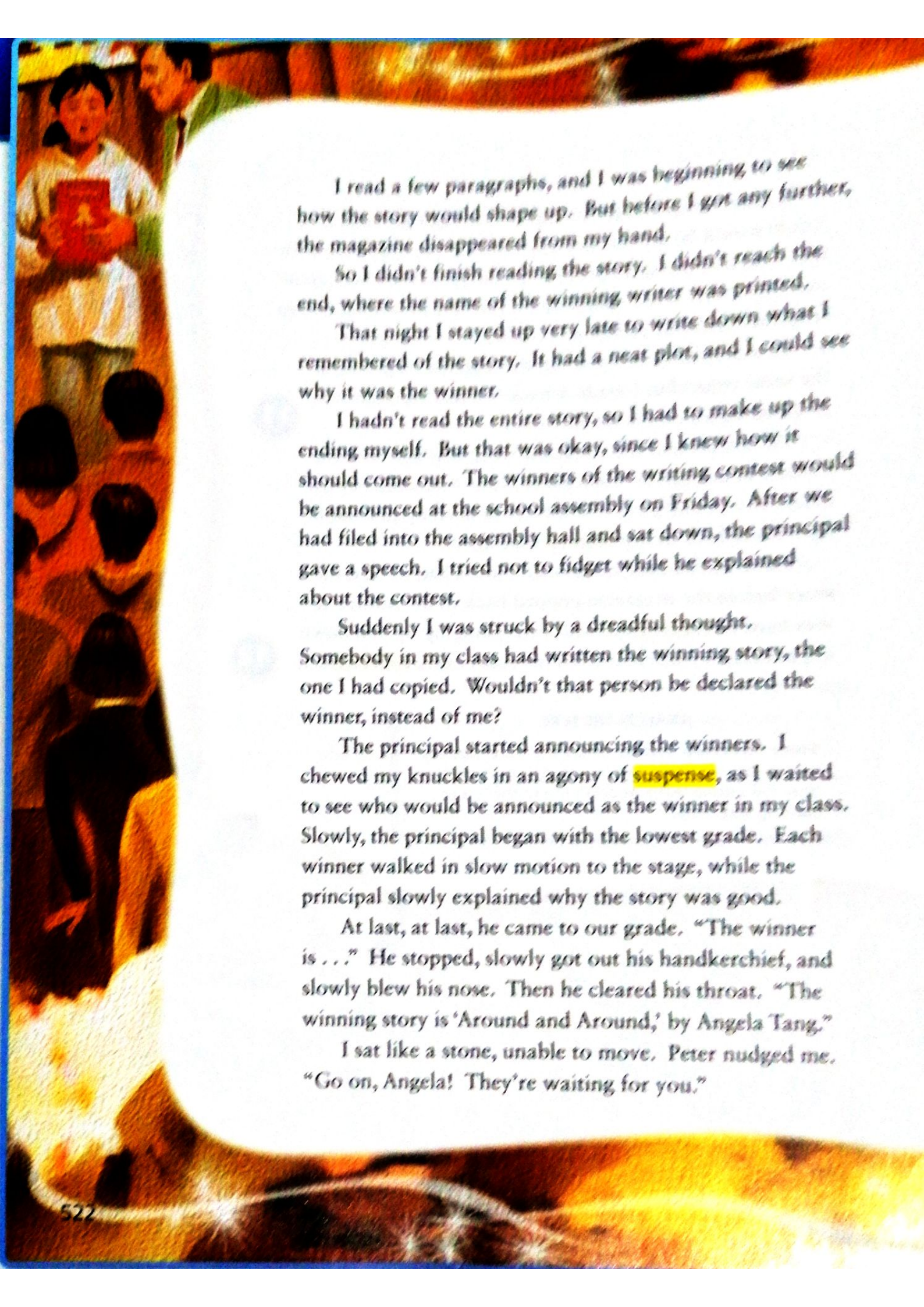
But I still had the magazine! Now I had to read the story before the magazine popped back to the future. It was hard to **concentrate** with Peter jumping up and down impatiently, so different from his usual calm, **collected** self.

11

12

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Story Structure Setting, where the story happens, is often an important part of a story's structure. How does the setting make Angela's trip to the future exciting and funny?

An illustration on the left side of the page shows a school assembly. In the foreground, the back of a girl's head and shoulders are visible as she looks towards the front. Behind her, several other students are seated, their heads and shoulders visible. In the background, a boy in a white shirt and a girl in a white shirt are standing. The boy is holding a red book or folder. The scene is set in a large hall with a wooden floor and a large, ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

I read a few paragraphs, and I was beginning to see how the story would shape up. But before I got any further, the magazine disappeared from my hand.

So I didn't finish reading the story. I didn't reach the end, where the name of the winning writer was printed.

That night I stayed up very late to write down what I remembered of the story. It had a neat plot, and I could see why it was the winner.

I hadn't read the entire story, so I had to make up the ending myself. But that was okay, since I knew how it should come out. The winners of the writing contest would be announced at the school assembly on Friday. After we had filed into the assembly hall and sat down, the principal gave a speech. I tried not to fidget while he explained about the contest.

Suddenly I was struck by a dreadful thought. Somebody in my class had written the winning story, the one I had copied. Wouldn't that person be declared the winner, instead of me?

The principal started announcing the winners. I chewed my knuckles in an agony of **suspense**, as I waited to see who would be announced as the winner in my class. Slowly, the principal began with the lowest grade. Each winner walked in slow motion to the stage, while the principal slowly explained why the story was good.

At last, at last, he came to our grade. "The winner is . . ." He stopped, slowly got out his handkerchief, and slowly blew his nose. Then he cleared his throat. "The winning story is 'Around and Around,' by Angela Tang."

I sat like a stone, unable to move. Peter nudged me. "Go on, Angela! They're waiting for you."

I got up and walked up to the stage in a daze. The principal's voice seemed to be coming from far, far away as he told the audience that I had written a science fiction story about time travel.

The winners each got a notebook bound in imitation leather for writing more stories. Inside the cover of the notebook was a ballpoint pen. But the best prize was having my story in the school magazine with my name printed at the end.

Then why didn't I feel good about winning?

After assembly, the kids in our class crowded around to congratulate me. Peter formally shook my hand. "Good work, Angela," he said and winked at me. That didn't make me feel any better. I hadn't won the contest fairly. Instead of writing the story myself, I had copied it from the school magazine.

13

That meant someone in our class—one of the kids here—had actually written the story. Who was it?

My heart was knocking against my ribs as I stood there and waited for someone to complain that I had stolen his story.

Nobody did.

As we were riding the school bus home, Peter looked at me. "You don't seem very happy about winning the contest, Angela."

"No, I'm not," I mumbled. "I feel just awful."

"Tell you what," suggested Peter. "Come over to my house and we'll discuss it."

"What is there to discuss?" I asked glumly. "I won the contest because I cheated."



"Come on over, anyway. My mother bought a fresh package of humbow in Chinatown."

I couldn't turn down that invitation. Humbow, a roll stuffed with barbecued pork, is my favorite snack.

Peter's mother came into the kitchen while we were munching, and he told her about the contest.

Mrs. Lu looked pleased. "I'm very glad, Angela. You have a terrific imagination, and you deserve to win."

"I like Angela's stories," said Peter. "They're original."

It was the first **compliment** he had ever paid me, and I felt my face turning red.

14

After Mrs. Lu left us, Peter and I each had another humbow. But I was still miserable. "I wish I had never started this. I feel like such a jerk."

Peter looked at me, and I swear he was enjoying himself. "If you stole another student's story, why didn't that person complain?"

"I don't know!" I wailed.

"Think!" said Peter. "You're smart, Angela. Come on, figure it out."

Me, smart? I was so overcome to hear myself called smart by a genius like Peter that I just stared at him.

He had to repeat himself. "Figure it out, Angela!"

I tried to concentrate. Why was Peter looking so amused?

The light finally dawned. "Got it," I said slowly.

"I'm the one who wrote the story."

15

"The winning story is your own, Angela, because that's the one that won."

My head began to go around and around. "But where did the original idea for the story come from?"

"What made the plot so good?" asked Peter. His voice sounded unsteady.

"Well, in my story, my character used a time machine to go forward in time . . ."

"Okay, whose idea was it to use a time machine?"

"It was mine," I said slowly. I remembered the moment when the idea had hit me with a *boing*.

"So you s-stole f-from yourself!" sputtered Peter. He started to roar with laughter. I had never seen him break down like that. At this rate, he might wind up being human.

When he could talk again, he asked me to read my story to him.

I began. "In movies, geniuses have frizzy white hair, right? They wear thick glasses and have names like Dr. Zweistein . . ."

16

COUNT ON CREATIVITY!

The main character in Lensey Namioka's short story "LAFFF" goes to extreme measures to ensure that she takes home top honors in a writing competition and sees her story published in the school magazine. Winning the contest is a thrill, especially when she realizes she has learned a lesson much more valuable than a contest prize: the story was in her all along, and she needed only to believe in her own creative ability. This lesson is one that even the most celebrated professional authors have to continuously reinforce within themselves. Writing an imaginative story or a work of science fiction can feel particularly risky, and writers often question whether audiences will continue to find their scenes and settings interesting, or whether people will be eager to follow story characters on journeys that may seem extraordinary or at times even bizarre. Often the most challenging aspect of the writing process is coming to trust one's own instincts, talents, and ideas.

As you write your own plays and stories, remember that readers find it enjoyable to be transported into the world an author constructs in a story, even when (or, in some cases, especially when!) that world is utterly unlike their own. Although inventing a whole new world or new kind of character can be intimidating in the planning stages, have faith that others out there share your interests, and work to help readers visualize what you see in your mind. Vivid language and descriptions, relatable details, and fully formed characters and ideas—and a writer's confidence in his or her own original vision—can ensure that readers will find even the most far-fetched story irresistible.

