

Name: _____ Class: _____

Casey at the Bat

By Ernest Lawrence Thayer
1888

Ernest Lawrence Thayer (1863-1940) was an American writer and poet, best known for the following poem, which is considered a classic in sports-related literature. As you read, take notes on how the author develops the mood of the poem.

[1] The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine¹
that day:
The score stood four to two, with but one inning
more to play,
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows
did the same,
A pall-like² silence fell upon the patrons of the
game.



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[5] A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The
rest
Clung to the hope which springs eternal in the
human breast;
They thought, "If only Casey could but get a
whack at that—
We'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat."

But Flynn preceded³ Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
[10] And the former was a hoodoo,⁴ while the latter was a cake,⁵
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
And Blake, the much despised,⁶ tore the cover off the ball;
[15] And when the dust had lifted, and men saw what had occurred,
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

1. The "Mudville Nine" refers to a fictional baseball team in a town called Mudville.
2. relating to a gloom or dreary fog
3. **Precede (verb):** to come before
4. The term "hoodoo" is meant to imply that this player was a jinx, or bad luck. Originally the poem referred to Flynn as a "lulu," or unskilled player.
5. The term "cake" is meant to imply that this player was also of weak or questionable skill, possibly more concerned with appearances than practice.
6. Here, the accent above the e is called a "grave accent" and is used to signify that the poet intends for the vowel to be pronounced, so as to maintain a certain meter.

Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty⁷ yell;
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
[20] For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile lit Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed⁸ his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

[25] Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then while the writhing⁹ pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
[30] And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty¹⁰ grandeur¹¹ there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;
[35] "Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage¹² shone;
He stilled the rising tumult;¹³ he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the dun¹⁴ sphere flew;
[40] But Casey still ignored it and the umpire said, "Strike two!"

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered "Fraud!"
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

[45] The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate,
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate;
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

7. **Lusty** (*adjective*): hearty, full of vigor

8. to remove (an article of clothing)

9. **Writhe** (*verb*): to twist or squirm

10. **Haughty** (*adjective*): arrogantly superior; smug or self-important

11. **Grandeur** (*noun*): splendor and magnificence, especially of appearance or style

12. **Visage** (*noun*): a person's facial expression

13. **Tumult** (*noun*): a loud clamor or noise, especially one caused by a large mass of people

14. of a dull grayish-brown color

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land the sun is shining bright,
[50] The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following best states a theme in the text?
 - A. It is difficult to fail when you try your hardest.
 - B. Too much pride can lead to failure.
 - C. Fame is not worth the responsibilities it comes with.
 - D. Athletes have more fame and power than they deserve.

2. PART A: What does the term “patrons” most likely mean in line 4?
 - A. spectators
 - B. businessmen
 - C. players
 - D. murderers

3. PART B: Which phrase from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. “but one inning more to play” (Line 2)
 - B. “Cooney died at first” (Line 3)
 - C. “A straggling few got up to go” (Line 5)
 - D. “We’d put up even money now” (Line 8)

4. How does the figurative language in stanza 5 contribute to the mood of the poem?
 - A. The similes used in the stanza which describe Casey’s physical appearance create an excited mood.
 - B. The metaphor of the mountain reveals Casey’s immense size and creates a fearful mood.
 - C. The personification of the crowd’s intense reaction creates a terrifying mood.
 - D. The hyperbole describing the crowd’s excited reaction creates a mood of anticipation.

5. How do stanzas 12-13 contribute to the theme of the poem?
