

Pancakes

Short Story by Joan Bauer

Are you a **PERFECTIONIST?**

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL 3 Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text and interact with other characters. **RL 4** Determine the figurative meaning of phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning.

The main character in “Pancakes” is a perfectionist—she needs everything to be perfect in order to be happy. Would you describe yourself this way? Take this true-false quiz to find out. If you answer “true” to three or more statements, you are flirting with perfectionism.

DISCUSS After you take the quiz, form a small group with two to four of your classmates to discuss the pros and cons of perfectionism. Is striving for perfection ever helpful or necessary? When might it be difficult to cope with this trait?

quiz HOW PERFECT IS TOO PERFECT?

Answer the following questions to discover if a perfectionist lurks within you.

1. I won't even attempt to do something unless I know that I will be able to do it without a mistake.

TRUE FALSE

2. I am so competitive that my best friends won't play sports with me.

TRUE FALSE

3. I know what I will be wearing every day for the next week.

TRUE FALSE

4. I won't eat food unless it's prepared exactly the way I like it.

TRUE FALSE

5. I can't sleep if my bookshelf is not correctly categorized and in alphabetical order.

TRUE FALSE

● TEXT ANALYSIS: FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

“Pancakes” is told from a **first-person point of view**. Jill, the narrator, is a character in the story, and she describes events as she herself experiences them. You will see the other characters and the actions in the story through Jill’s eyes and learn exactly what she thinks and how she feels. As you read “Pancakes,” look for comments that reveal Jill’s feelings about her life and help explain the causes of her perfectionism.

Review: **Character Traits**

● READING SKILL: DRAW CONCLUSIONS

After reading a story, you often add up the details you’ve read about and develop your own ideas about what they mean. This process is called **drawing conclusions**. A conclusion is a logical judgment that a reader makes. In order to be logical, your conclusions must be based on

- strong evidence from the text
- your own experience and knowledge

As you read “Pancakes,” use a chart like the one shown to record important details about Jill’s thoughts, actions, and relationships. Tell what these details reveal about Jill.

Details About Jill	My Thoughts
She refers to her mother as “Ms. Subtlety” after her mother tapes an article on perfectionism to Jill’s mirror.	Jill is being sarcastic. She might feel her mother is picking on her.

After reading, you can use the information you’ve gathered to draw conclusions about Jill’s perfectionism.

Review: **Predict**

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Joan Bauer makes use of the following boldfaced words to tell this amusing story. Try to figure out the meaning of each word from the context of the phrase given.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. mustard and other condiments | 4. ill-behaved and crass |
| 2. a degenerate with no morals | 5. steel yourself against insults |
| 3. the benign climate of Hawaii | 6. rabid with anger |

Joan Bauer

born 1951

Comic Relief

From a very young age, Joan Bauer knew she wanted to have a career making people laugh. She remembers having an early fascination with things that were funny—especially the stories told to her by her grandmother, whom she calls her greatest creative influence. Bauer often crafts characters who share the same anxieties she felt as a teenager—apprehension about her parents’ divorce, worry about her appearance—and chronicles the relief and inspiration that humor can bring to adverse situations. Describing her motivation to write, Bauer says, “I want to create stories that link life’s struggles with laughter.”

Accidents and Accolades

Bauer’s first novel, *Squashed*, began as a screenplay. When she suffered severe injuries in a car accident, however, she found herself unable to meet the tight schedule the film industry demanded. During her long recovery, she turned her screenplay into a prize-winning novel. “The humor in that story kept me going,” Bauer explains.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Writing from Experience

Like Jill in “Pancakes,” Bauer, as a teenager, waited tables in a pancake restaurant. She vividly remembers the Sunday morning when she was the only waitress on duty, frantically trying to attend to all her customers. The memory still haunts her: “I remember the sheer terror of dozens of hungry people looking to me and me alone for breakfast. To this day, whenever I walk into a pancake house, I hyperventilate.”

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Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Pancakes

JOAN BAUER

The last thing I wanted to see taped to my bathroom mirror at five-thirty in the morning was a newspaper article entitled “Are You a Perfectionist?” But there it was, courtesy of my mother, Ms. Subtlety herself. I was instantly irritated because Allen Feinman had accused me of perfectionism when he broke up with me last month. The term he used was “**rabid** perfectionism,” which I felt was a bit much—but then Allen Feinman had no grip on reality whatsoever. He was rabidly unaware, if the truth be known, like a **benign** space creature visiting Earth with no interest in going native. I tore the article off the mirror; this left tape smudges. Dirty mirrors drove me crazy. I grabbed
10 the bottle of Windex from the closet and cleaned off the gook until the mirror shined, freed of yellow journalism.¹

I glowered at the six telltale perfectionist signs in the now crumpled article.

1. Do you have a driving need to control your environment?
2. Do you have a driving need to control the environment of others?
3. Are you miserable when things are out of place?
4. Are your expectations of yourself and others rarely met?
5. Do you believe if something is to be done right, only you are the one to do it?
6. Do you often worry about your performance when it is less
20 than perfect?

Number six had particular sting, for it was that very thing that Allen Feinman had accused me of the day he asked for his green and black lumberjack shirt back, a truly spectacular shirt that looked a lot more spectacular on me than it did on him because it brought out the intensity of my short black hair and my mysterious brown eyes. He had accused me
of numbers one through five as well, but on this last fateful day he said, “The problem with you, Jill, is that if the least little thing goes wrong, you

Analyze Visuals ▶

What qualities of this photograph convey the fast-paced atmosphere of a busy restaurant? Explain how these qualities work together to convey a specific **mood**, or feeling.

rabid (răb'īd) *adj.*
uncontrollable; fanatical

benign (bĭ-nĭn') *adj.* good;
kindly

A DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Reread lines 21–25 to draw a conclusion about the narrator’s sense of self. Do you think Jill has a strong or a weak self-image? Record your answer in your chart.

1. **yellow journalism:** journalism that exploits or exaggerates the news to create sensations and attract readers.



can't handle it. Everything has to follow this impossible path to perfection. Someday, and I hope it's soon for your sake, you're going to have to settle for sub-par performance and realize that you're imperfect like the rest of us." He stormed off like an angry prophet who had just delivered a curse, muttering that if I was like this at seventeen, imagine what I would be like at thirty.

"Good riddance," I shouted. "I hope you find a messy, inconsiderate girlfriend who can never find her purse or her car keys, who has no sense of time, no aptitude for *planning*, and that you spend the rest of your adolescent years on your hands and knees looking for your contacts!"

I padded down the hall to my bedroom. It was Sunday morning. I was due at my waitress job at the Ye Olde Pancake House in forty-five minutes. I sat on my white down quilt, saw the chocolate smudge, quick got up and brushed the smudge with my spot remover kit that I kept in my top dresser drawer, being careful to brush the nap against the grain. I put the kit back in the drawer, refluffed my two white pillows, plucked a dead leaf off my philodendron plant, and remembered my second to last fight with Allen when he went completely ballistic at my selfless offer to alphabetize his CD collection with a color-coded cross-reference guide by subject, title, and artist. **B**

Males.

I put on my Ye Olde Pancake House waitress uniform that I had ironed and starched the night before: blue, long-sleeved ankle-length dress, white apron, white-and-blue flowered bonnet. I could have done without the bonnet, but when you're going for the ye olde look, you have to sacrifice style. I was lucky to have this job. I got it one week after my parents and I moved to town, got hired *because* I am a person of order who knows there is a right way and a wrong way to do things. I replaced a waitress who was a complete disorganized slob. As Howard Halloran, the owner of the Ye Olde Pancake House, said to me, "Jill, if you're half as organized and competent as you look, I will die happy." I smoothed back my short clipped hair, flicked a sesame seed off my just-manicured nail, and told him that I was. **C**

"I have a system for everything," I assured him. "Menu first, bring water when you come back to take the order, call it in, bring coffee immediately to follow. Don't ever let customers wait." Then I mentioned my keen knack for alphabetizing **condiments**, which was always a bonus, particularly when things got busy, and how a restaurant storage closet should be properly organized to take full advantage of the space.

"You're hired," Howard Halloran said reverently, and put me in charge of opening and setting up the restaurant on Saturday and Sunday mornings, which is when nine-tenths of all pancakes in the universe are consumed and you don't want some systemless person at the helm. You want a waitress of grit with a strategic battle plan that never wavers. Sunday morning in a pancake house is war.

I tied my white apron in a perfect bow across my back, tiptoed past my parents' bedroom, taking care not to wake them, even though my mother had taken an insensitive potshot at me without provocation.

It's not like my life had been all that perfect.

B CHARACTER TRAITS

Both the narrator's mother and her former boyfriend have accused her of perfectionism. In what ways do Jill's own actions and emotions illustrate this character trait?

C GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 47–57.

Bauer's use of the **precise adjectives** *short*, *clipped*, and *just-manicured* provide insight into Jill's personality.

condiment (kɒn'də-mənt)
n. a sauce, relish, or spice used to season food

Did I ask to move three times in eighteen months because my father kept getting transferred? Did I ask to attend three high schools since sophomore year? Did I complain about being unfairly uprooted?

Well . . . I did complain a little. . . .

Didn't I figure out a way to handle the pressure? When my very roots were being yanked from familiar soil, I became orderly and organized. I did things in the new towns so that people would like me and want to hire me, would
80 want to be my friends. I baked world-class cookies for high school bake sales, even if it meant staying up till three A.M.; I joined clubs and volunteered for the grunge jobs that no one wanted; I always turned in a spectacular performance and people counted on me to do it. I made everything look easy. People looked up to me, or down, depending—I'm five four. And I sure didn't feel like defending all that success before dawn! **D**

I tiptoed out the back door to my white car (ancient, yet spotless) and headed for work.

Syrup, I tried explaining to Hugo, the busboy, must be poured slowly from the huge cans into the plastic pourers on the tables because if you pour it fast, you
90 can't control the flow and you get syrup everywhere, which never really cleans up. It leaves a sticky residue that always comes back to haunt you. Syrup, I told him, is our enemy, but like Allen Feinman, Hugo was a male without vision. He couldn't anticipate disaster, couldn't cope with forethought and prevention; he let life rule him rather than the other way around, which was why *I* personally filled the syrup containers on Sunday mornings—maple, strawberry, boysenberry, and pecan. **E**

I had just filled the last containers and was putting them on the tables in horizontal rows. I had lined up the juice glasses and coffee mugs for optimal efficiency, which some people who shall remain nameless would call
100 perfectionism, but when the place gets busy, trust me, you want everything at your fingertips or you'll lose control. I never lose control. Hugo had set the back tables and I followed him, straightening the silverware. You'd think he'd been born in a barn. Andy Pappas, the cook, was making the special hash browns with onion and green pepper that people loved.

I **steeled** myself for the hungry Sunday morning mob that would descend in two hours. I always mentally prepared for situations that I knew were going to be stressful—it helped me handle them right. I could see me, Shirl, and Lucy, the other waitresses, serving the crowd, handling the cash register. Usually Howard Halloran took the money, but he was taking a long-needed
110 weekend off since his wife said if he didn't she would sell the place out from under him. I could see myself watching my station like a hawk, keeping the coffee brewing, getting the pancakes delivered hot to the tables. Do it fast, do it right—that was my specialty.

It was seven o'clock. Shirl and Lucy were late, but I knew that Lucy's baby was sick and Shirl was picking her up, so I didn't worry. They'd been late before. I myself was never late. I unlocked the front door, and a few customers

D POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 72–85. How, if at all, do the thoughts and feelings of the **narrator** change your perception of her? Explain your answer.

E POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 88–96. Think about the way Jill's point of view affects your impression of Hugo. How might this passage be different if Hugo were the narrator?

steel (stēl) v. to make hard or strong

came straggling in with their Sunday newspapers, settling into the booths. Nothing I couldn't handle. Things didn't start getting crazy until around eight-thirty. I had my system.

120 I took orders, walked quickly to the kitchen window. "Four over easy on eight with sausage," I said crisply. "Side of cakes." That was restaurant-speak for four plates of two eggs over easy with sausage and pancakes on the side. Andy tossed his spatula in the air, went to work. The man had total focus. He could have two dozen eggs cooking in front of him and he knew when to flip each one. **F**

A young family came in with three small children; gave them the big table by the window. Got them kid seats, took their order.

"Number three."

That was my waitress number. Andy called the number over the loudspeaker when my order was ready and I went and picked it up. A nice time-efficient
130 system. I walked quickly to the counter (running made the customers nervous), grabbed the eggs, sausage, and pancakes, carried them four up on my left arm to table six, smiled professionally. Everything all right here, folks? Everyone nodded happily and dug in. Everything was always merry and pleasant at the Ye Olde Pancake House. That's why people came. Merry people left big tips.

I checked the ye old wall clock. Seven forty-seven. Still no Shirl or Lucy. They'd never been this late. Allen Feinman had been more than an hour late plenty of times. Allen Feinman didn't care about time—his or anyone else's. I didn't understand the grave problems he had at first; I was so caught up in him—this cute, brainy, funny guy who really seemed to want a shot
140 of discipline. I put in my usual extra effort into the relationship—baked his favorite cookies (cappuccino chip), packed romantic picnics (French bread, brie,² and strawberries), thought about unusual things to do in Coldwater, Michigan, which was quite a challenge, but I went to the library and came up with a list of ten possible side trips around town that we could do for free.

"You're just so *organized*," he would say, which I thought was a true compliment. Later on, I realized, coming from him, it was the darkest insult.

Andy was flipping pancakes on the grill. I scanned my customers to make sure everyone was cared for, turned to dash into
150 the bathroom quickly when a screech of tires sounded in the parking lot. I looked out the window. A lump caught in my throat.

A large tour bus pulled to a grinding halt.

I watched in horror as an army of round, middle-aged women stepped from the bus and headed toward the restaurant like hungry lionesses stalking prey.

It was natural selection—I was as good as dead.

160 "Number three."

2. **brie** (brē): a soft French cheese.

F DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Think about Jill's description of Andy. Does he seem like someone Jill would admire? Cite thorough evidence to support your conclusion.

Analyze Visuals ▼

As you examine the photograph below, think about why the photographer chose to take such an extreme close-up of the clock. What effect does this create?



I looked at Andy, who raised his face to heaven.

“Call them,” I shrieked. “Call Shirl and Lucy! Tell them to get here!”

Andy reached for the phone.

I turned to the front door as the tour bus women poured in. They were all wearing sweatshirts that read MICHIGAN WOMEN FOR A CLEANER ENVIRONMENT. “A table for sixty-six,” said a woman, laughing.

My lungs collapsed. Sixty-six hungry environmentalists. I pointed to a stack of menus, remembering my personal Waitress Rule Number One: Never let a customer know you’re out of control.

170 “Sit anywhere,” I cooed. “I’ll be right with you.” **G**

“If you wrote the menu on a blackboard you wouldn’t waste paper,” one said.

“Number three.” I raced back to the kitchen. Pancakes for table eight. I layered the plates on my left arm, plopped butter balls from the ye olde butter urn on the pancakes. Andy said he’d tried Shirl and Lucy and no one answered. At least they were on their way. I raced to table eight. The little girl took one look at her chocolate chip pancakes and burst into tears.

“They’re not the little ones,” she sobbed.

180 “Oh, now, precious,” said her father, “I’m sure this nice young lady doesn’t want you to be disappointed.”

I looked at the environmentalists who needed coffee. Life is tough, kid.

“Tell the waitress what you want, precious.”

Precious looked at me, loving the control. She scrunched up her dimples, dabbed her tears, and said, “I want the teeny weeny ones, pwease.”

“Teeny weeny ones coming up,” I chirped, and raced to Andy. “Chocolate silver dollars for the brat on eight,” I snarled. “Make them perfect, or someone dies.”

“You’re very attractive when you get busy,” Andy said laughing.

“Shut up.”

190 The phone rang. I lunged for it. It was Lucy calling from the hospital. Her baby had a bronchial infection,³ needed medicine. She couldn’t come in, but Shirl was on her way, she should be pulling onto the interstate now.

“Are you all right there, Jill?”

“Of course,” I lied. “Take care of that baby. That’s the most important thing.”

“You’re terrific,” she said, and hung up.

200 I’m terrific, I told myself. I can handle this because, as a terrific person, I have an organized system that always works. I grabbed two coffee pots and raced to the tour group, smiling. Always smile. Poured coffee. They’d only get water if they asked. We’re so glad you came to see us this morning. Yes, we have many tours pass through, usually we have more waitresses, though. It’s a safe bet that any restaurant on this earth has more waitresses than the Ye Olde Pancake House does at this moment. **H**

G DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Consider the difference between what Jill is thinking and what she actually says. What does this indicate about her character? Explain how you came to this conclusion.

H PREDICT

Will Jill be able to handle the crisis at the pancake house? Make a prediction about what will happen as Jill struggles to cope with the teeming crowd of hungry customers.

3. **bronchial infection:** an infection of the bronchial tubes—the tubes that connect the windpipe to the lungs.

I took their orders like a shotgunner shooting clay pigeons.

Pull!

Pigs in a blanket.

Steak and fried eggs.

Buttermilk pancakes.

Betsy Ross (buttermilks with strawberry and blueberry compote).

210 Colonial Corn Cakes (Allen Feinman’s favorite).

A round-faced woman looked at me, grinning. “Everything looks so good.” She sighed. “What do you recommend?”

I recommend that you eat someplace else, ma’am, because I do not have time for this. I looked toward the front of the restaurant; six large men were waiting to be seated. Hugo was pouring syrup quickly into pourers to torture me, sloshing it everywhere. I said, “Everything’s great here, ma’am. I’ll give you a few seconds to decide.” I turned to the woman in the next booth. The round-faced woman grabbed my arm. I don’t like being touched by customers.

220 “Just a minute. Well . . . it all looks so good.”

“Number three.” I glared in Andy’s direction. “And number three again.”

A cook can make or break you.

The round-faced woman decided on buttermilk pancakes, a daring choice. ❶ I ran to the kitchen window. “Hit me,” Andy said.

“I’d love to. You’re only getting this once. Buttermilks on twelve. Pigs on four, Betsy’s on three. Colonials on seven.” I threw the rest of the orders at him.

“You have very small handwriting,” he said. “That’s often the sign of low self-esteem.”

230 I put my hand down in one of Hugo’s syrup spills, pushed back my bangs with it; felt syrup soak my scalp.

Andy said, “You’re only one person, Jill.”

I scanned the restaurant—juice glasses askew, hungry people waiting at dirty tables. I could do anything if I worked hard enough. Shirl would be here any minute.

“Waitress, we’re out of syrup!” A man held his empty syrup container up. I looked under the counter for the extra maple syrup containers I had cleverly filled, started toward the man, tripped over an environmentalist’s foot, which sent the syrup container flying, caught midair, but upside down by a 240 trucker who watched dumbly as syrup oozed onto the floor in a great, sticky glop. I lunged for the syrup container, slid on the spill, felt sugared muck coat my exposed flesh.

“Hugo!” I screamed, pointing at the disaster. “Hot water!”

“Number three.”

I moved in a daze as more and more people came. Got the tour bus groups fed and out. Had they mentioned separate checks, one woman asked?

Nooooooooo . . .

COMMON CORE RL 4

Language Coach

Multiple Meanings *Pull* normally means “the opposite of *push*.” In clay-pigeon shooting, its meaning is different. At the command “Pull!” a clay disk launches into the air. Reread lines 204–205. What does this use of *pull* say about how the narrator takes orders?

COMMON CORE RL 4

❶ SARCASM

Sarcasm is a cutting, often ironic remark. Jill uses sarcasm when she refers to the woman’s order as “a daring choice.” She actually means the opposite—that it is *not* daring to order the buttermilk pancakes. Ordinarily, a sarcastic remark is intended to wound the recipient. Rather than speaking it aloud, Jill keeps the potentially offensive remark to herself. Given the context of the story so far, why do you think she does this?

Made coffee. More coffee. Told everyone I was the only waitress here, if they were in a hurry, they might want to go someplace else. But no one left. They just kept coming, storming through the restaurant like Cossacks.⁴ People were grabbing my arm as I ran by.

“What’s your name, babe?” asked a lecherous man.

“Miss,” I snarled.

“Number three.”

260 “I had a life when I woke up this morning! Everything was in place!”

Buckwheats on table three.

The man looked at them. . . . He said, “You call these buckwheats?

Buckwheats are supposed to be enormous and hearty.” I’m the fall guy for everything that happens in the restaurant. It’s my tip that’s floating down the river waving bye-bye. I embraced my personal Waitress Rule Number Two: The customer is always right, even if they’re dead wrong. I said, “That’s the way we do them here, sir,” and he said he can’t eat them, he can’t look at them, he’ll have the buttermilks, not knowing the trouble he’s caused me. Andy gets sensitive if someone sends the food back—he’s an artist, can’t handle criticism. You have to lie to him or he slows down. I raced back to the kitchen.

270 “The man’s a **degenerate**,” I said to Andy. “He wouldn’t know a world-class buckwheat if it jumped in his lap. He doesn’t deserve to be in the presence of your cooking.”

The phone rang. I lunged for it. It’s Shirl calling from someone’s car phone on the interstate with impossible news. A trailer truck had jackknifed, spilling soda cans everywhere. There was a five-mile backup. She’d be hours getting to work.

“Are you all right?” Shirl asked.

280 I looked at the line of cars pulling into the parking lot, the tables bulging with hungry customers, the coffee cups raised in anticipation of being filled, the line at the cash register. I heard a woman say how the restaurant had gone downhill, and the people were looking at me like I was their breakfast savior, like I had all the power and knowing, like I could single-handedly make sure they were happy and fed. And I was ashamed that I couldn’t do it, but no one could. 1

Not even me!

I tore off my ye olde bonnet. “I’m trapped in a pancake house!” I shrieked into the phone, and, like in all sci-fi stories, the connection went dead.

“Number three.”

290 I limped toward him, a shadow of my former self.

“We’re out of sausage,” Andy said solemnly.



degenerate (dĭ-jĕn'ər-ĭt)
n. a corrupt or vicious person

1 POINT OF VIEW
Reread lines 280–285. Consider how learning Jill’s thoughts contributes to your understanding of her character. How would your reaction to Jill be different if you didn’t know what Jill was thinking and feeling?

4. **Cossacks:** a people of southern Russia, known as fierce cavalymen.

“Good. It’s one less thing to carry.” I stood on the counter, put my head back, and screamed, “We’re out of sausage and it’s not my fault!”

A man at a back table hollered that he needed ketchup for his eggs. I reached down in the K section under the counter. Nothing under K. I got on my knees, hands shaking, rifling through jams, jellies, lingonberries. *Hugo!* I shrieked.

He ran up to me.

“Ketchup, Hugo! Wake up! The sky is falling!”

He pointed to the C section. “Catsup,” he said meekly.

300 I was falling down a dark, disorderly tunnel. There was no end in sight. Coffee grounds were in my eyebrows, my hands smelled like used tea bags. I was exhausted, syrup encrusted, I’d had to go to the bathroom for three hours. People were going to get their own coffee—the ultimate defeat for any waitress. I looked at my haggard reflection in the coffee urn. The only consolation was that I wouldn’t live till noon.

“Waitress!”

I raced down the aisle to table twelve, seeing the hunted look in my customer’s eyes. I wanted to be perfect for every one of you. I wanted you all to like me. I’m sorry I’m not better, not faster. Please don’t hate me, I’m only one
310 person, not even a particularly tall person.

“I’m sorry,” I said to a table of eight, “but I simply can’t do everything!”

I felt a ripple of **crass** laughter in the air. I turned. Allen Feinman had walked in with his parents. **K**

No. . . . Anything but this.

Our eyes met. I could hear the taunts at school, the never-ending retelling of this, my ultimate nightmare.

“Can I help, Jill?” He rolled up his shirtsleeves. Allen Feinman was offering to help.

I grabbed his arm. “Can you work the register?”

320 “Of course.” Allen organized the people into a line, made change, smiled. He had such a nice smile. Thanked everyone for their patience, got names on lists.

Mrs. Feinman took off her jacket and asked, “Can I make coffee, dear?”

“Mrs. Feinman, you don’t have to—”

“We’ve always been so fond of you, Jill.”

I slapped a bag of decaf in her sainted hands. Mr. Feinman poured himself a cup of coffee and went back to wait in the car.

We whipped that place into shape. All I needed was a little backup. My pockets were bulging with tips, and when Shirl raced in at eleven forty-five, I pushed a little girl aside who’d been waiting patiently by the bathroom door
330 and I lunged toward the toilet stall. Life is tough, kid.

By one-thirty the crowds had cleared. Lucy called—her baby was home and doing better. Allen Feinman and I were sitting at a back table eating pancakes. He said he’d missed me. I said I’d missed him, too. Hugo was speed-pouring boysenberry syrup, spilling everywhere—but somehow it didn’t matter anymore. It was good enough.

And that, I realized happily, was fine by me. 

crass (krās) *adj.* crude; unrefined

K PREDICT

Predict what might happen with the arrival of Allen. Give reasons for your prediction.

COMMON CORE RL 4

Language Coach

Idioms An **idiom** is an expression that cannot be understood literally. Given the context of the story leading up to line 327, what do you think “we whipped that place into shape” means?

Comprehension

- 1. Recall** List two reasons why Jill is upset at the beginning of the story.
- 2. Summarize** What crisis does Jill face in this story, and how is her crisis resolved?
- 3. Clarify** What does Jill fear will happen when Allen Feinman shows up at the restaurant? Why does Allen’s behavior surprise her?

Text Analysis

- 4. Draw Conclusions** Review the chart you made as you read. What drives Jill to constantly strive for perfection? Cite evidence to support your conclusion.
- 5. Analyze Character** A **static character** is a character who changes very little, if at all, during the course of a story. A **dynamic character** is a character who changes significantly as a result of his or her experiences. In a chart like the one shown, list the character traits Jill exhibits at the beginning of the story and those she shows signs of as the story ends. Would you describe Jill as a static character or a dynamic character? Cite strong and thorough evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 6. Analyze Point of View** With a **first-person narrator**, you see the story unfold through one character’s eyes. Would a **third-person omniscient narrator**—a narrator who sees into the minds of all the characters in a story—have presented a more accurate picture of the events? Support your opinion.
- 7. Evaluate Character Traits** “Pancakes” clearly points out the downside of perfectionism, but it suggests that this trait can be a positive force as well. Citing evidence from the story, decide whether perfectionism is an asset or a fault. Then compare your answer with the ideas you had about perfectionism before you read the story.

<i>Jill's Traits at Beginning of Story</i>	<i>Jill's Traits at End of Story</i>
<p>1. Critical of others</p> <p>2. Meticulous</p>	

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. **RL 3** Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text and interact with other characters.

Text Criticism

- 8. Author’s Style** In an essay titled “Humor, Seriously,” Joan Bauer explains that her technique for creating humorous characters involves “layering nutty traits over serious personalities and situations.” How effective is Bauer at developing a quirky character who confronts real-life problems in a humorous way? Cite specific dialogue and descriptions from “Pancakes” to explain your opinion.

Are you a PERFECTIONIST?

In what activities are you most likely to seek perfection?

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Write the word from the list that best completes each sentence.

1. Allen Feinman may have been critical of Jill’s attitude, but that did not make him a _____.
2. He did not have a _____ temper, nor was he outrageous in other ways.
3. Jill had to _____ herself against panic when she saw Allen walking into the restaurant.
4. Perhaps it was a bit _____ when he snickered at her plight.
5. Seeing each _____ lined up precisely would have made him laugh.
6. Still, the way he and his mother helped Jill out of a jam was quite _____.

WORD LIST

benign
condiment
crass
degenerate
rabid
steel

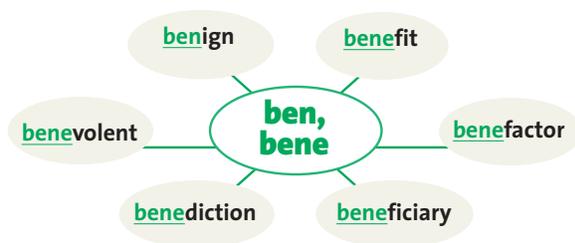
ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• complex • device • evaluate • interact • perspective

Do you think Jill is a **complex** character? Write a paragraph explaining why Jill is or is not a complex character. Be sure to cite examples of Jill’s thoughts, words, or actions to support your explanation. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN WORD ROOT *ben*

The vocabulary word *benign* contains the Latin root *ben*, which means “well.” This root and the related form *bene* are found in a number of English words. To understand the meaning of words with *ben*, use context clues as well as your knowledge of the root.



PRACTICE Write the word from the word web that best completes each sentence. Use context clues to help you or, if necessary, consult a dictionary.

1. One _____ of a good night’s sleep is feeling rested in the morning.
2. The minister offered a _____ at the end of the prayer service.
3. He assured us that his intentions were entirely _____.
4. There was only one _____ listed in Grandma’s will.
5. Jennifer’s _____ offered to pay her way through college.
6. Most charities involve themselves in _____ works.

COMMON CORE

L.4c Consult reference material to determine or clarify a word’s meaning or etymology.

Interactive Vocabulary



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KEYWORD: HML9-220

Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Add Supporting Details

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 212. Joan Bauer uses **precise adjectives** to convey important physical details that support her characterization of Jill’s personality. Here are some helpful adjective hints:

1. **Replace vague adjectives with more precise ones.** Some adjectives, such as *nice*, are too general. Instead, use adjectives that say exactly what you mean.
2. **Avoid using too many adjectives.** Too many adjectives can result in overwriting. Choose adjectives carefully, and you will need only a few.

Here are some additional examples of Bauer’s use of precise adjectives:

... *He went completely ballistic at my selfless offer to alphabetize his CD collection with a color-coded cross-reference guide.* ... (lines 43–45)

I was exhausted, syrup-encrusted. ... (line 302)

Notice how the revisions in blue improve the precision of this first draft. You can revise your response to the prompt below by using similar techniques.

STUDENT MODEL

Jill and Andy both have ~~good~~^{excellent} attitudes toward their jobs. They are both ~~hard~~^{diligent}, ~~fast~~^{careful} workers. Jill makes ~~preparations~~^{alphabetical} for Sunday’s crowd by arranging all of the condiments neatly in order. Andy fries his hash browns ahead of time, so that when customers walk in, they are greeted with ~~a nice~~^{an enticing} aroma.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Demonstrate your understanding of the characters in “Pancakes” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Extended Constructed Response: Comparison
Referring to details in the story, write **three to five paragraphs** comparing Jill’s and Andy’s attitudes toward their work at the restaurant. Make sure to include examples of Jill’s **perfectionism**.

REVISING TIP

Review your response. Did you use precise adjectives to convey the physical details of Jill and Andy’s characters?

COMMON CORE

L3 Apply knowledge of language to make effective choices for meaning or style. **W4** Produce explanatory writing in which the style is appropriate to the task and purpose.

Interactive Revision **THINK central**
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