

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Kids' Table

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Anita Celli has written for Highlights. In this short story, a boy doesn't want to sit at the kids' table for Thanksgiving. As you read, take notes on when James feels grown up.

- [1] James was exhausted.¹ Twenty-two people, including seven kids under age six, were crowded into his family's house for Thanksgiving.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" called a little voice.

Oh no! Three-year-old Cara had found James's hiding spot, behind the sofa in the basement.

They weren't playing hide-and-seek. James was just trying to catch his breath. All day, he'd been grabbed and thumped by little cousins who thought he was a climbing gym. Cara now leaped onto James. He stood up and shifted Cara onto his back. She squealed and held tightly to his neck as he trudged² up the steps with her. James emerged in the kitchen where his mother, grandmother, an aunt, and two uncles were getting dinner ready.



"I want a piggyback too!" by Craig Stapley is used with permission.

- [5] "OK, time to let go. You're choking me," James gasped as he set Cara on the floor.

Suddenly, Mario, Dana, Kyle, Sean, Franny, and Lisa stormed into the kitchen, shouting. "I want a piggyback, too!" "No, it's my turn!"

James backed up against the refrigerator and shot a pleading look toward his mother.

"OK, kiddos," said Mom, taking the hint, "go wash your hands. It's almost time for dinner, and Jimmy needs to help me."

"Awww," whined the seven kids. Mom shooed them out. Aunt Brenda followed to make sure they found the bathroom.

- [10] "No rest for the main attraction, eh?" Mom ruffled James's hair. James ducked. He hated being treated like a little kid. He was almost as tall as his mom, after all. Mom handed him a stack of plastic plates. "Here, take these to the kids' table."

1. **Exhausted (adjective):** very tired
2. **Trudge (verb):** to walk slowly and with heavy steps

The kids' table. He'd forgotten that he would be eating with the babies, separate from the adults. He hoped the kids would be too hungry to bother him. As soon as he set down the last plate, the band of munchkins³ charged back into the room.

Fortunately, Aunt Brenda saved him. "No, it's not time to play with Jimmy! Find a chair and sit down."

James sighed and started, looking for an empty chair when his mom patted his shoulder. "Maybe you'd like to sit with the adults this year," she said. "I saved you a place next to Dad."

It was Thanksgiving, but to James it suddenly felt like his birthday. The adults' table! No squealing, no soda spilled on his lap, no grubby⁴ fingers stealing his corn bread. James sat next to his father, too happy to speak.

- [15] As the adults passed around the steaming dishes, James looked over at the little kids. They were unusually quiet, just picking at their food. The conversation around James centered on electric bills, how to repair a roof, and what to do with leftovers. He took a piece of turkey and peeked back at the kids' table, just in time to see Sean steal Cara's juice.

"Hey!" She grabbed it back.

"I don't have anything to drink!" Sean wailed.

"That's enough juice!" Aunt Brenda scolded.⁵

"Eat your turkey."

- [20] James' plate was full. He glanced at the kids, glad to be away from their silliness, and saw Sean poke Cara. Cara poked him back, and Sean started to cry. Before he realized what he was doing, James grabbed his plate, jumped up, and strode to the kids' table. "Hey!"

The children looked at James, surprised and excited. "Did you hear about the giant squirrel that pounded on the door this morning?" James asked.

They stared at him, wide-eyed.

"It was as big as a dog and demanded that we hand over Aunt Brenda's special walnut stuffing," James said."

"Did you give it to him?" asked Sean. All the kids hoped so. Aunt Brenda was wonderful, but her walnut stuffing? They wouldn't go near it.

- [25] "I almost got the pan to the door, but Aunt Brenda made me put it back," James said. He pulled over a chair and sat down.

"Awww," the children cried.

3. a child or short person

4. **Grubby** (*adjective*): dirty

5. **Scold** (*verb*): to speak to someone angrily because you don't approve of their behavior

But one by one, they picked up their forks and began to eat. James continued, "I told him to come back later, that I was sure we'd have a lot left over."

"I can hear you, you know," called Aunt Brenda.

"We were just saying how the squirrel... " James pretended to explain, then clamped a hand over his mouth. He winked at the kids before continuing loudly, "I mean, we love your stuffing, Auntie Brenda."

[30] The children giggled and ate. Some of them even tried the walnut stuffing. A few of them discovered that they liked it!

James wasn't sure how he'd ended up back at the kids' table. He'd just felt needed somehow. Mom walked by and ruffled his hair. This time, it made him feel grown up.

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Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. PART A: Which sentence best describes the theme of the short story?
 - A. Acting like an adult means caring for those that are younger than them.
 - B. Kids often want to become adults too soon in life.
 - C. While kids want to be adults, adults wish they could be kids again.
 - D. It's important for adults to set good examples for kids.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "All day, he'd been grabbed and thumped by little cousins who thought he was a climbing gym." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "Mom ruffled James's hair. James ducked. He hated being treated like a little kid. He was almost as tall as his mom, after all." (Paragraph 10)
 - C. "'Maybe you'd like to sit with the adults this year,' she said. 'I saved you a place next to Dad.'" (Paragraph 13)
 - D. "Cara poked him back, and Sean started to cry. Before he realized what he was doing, James grabbed his plate, jumped up, and strode to the kids' table." (Paragraph 20)

3. Which of the following describes what motivates James to go to the kids' table?
 - A. He sees that the kids are not getting along and wants to help.
 - B. He wants to get away from the boring talk at the adult table.
 - C. He can see that the kids miss him and want him at their table.
 - D. He decides to help his mom out by distracting the kids.

4. How does paragraph 15 contribute to the story?
 - A. It stresses the differences between the kids' table and the adults' table.
 - B. It shows how much more fun the kids' table is than the adults' table.
 - C. It reveals that James misses sitting at the kids' table.
 - D. It shows that James doesn't belong at the adults' table or the kids' table.

5. Why is it important to the story that James decides to eat at the kids' table?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the short story, James doesn't want to sit at the kids' table. What does it mean to him to be allowed to sit at the adults' table? Do you have a kids' table and adult's table during some meals? What table do you sit at and how does it make you feel?
2. James feels grown up the second time his mother ruffles his hair. Why do you think this is? When do you think someone is grown up? Do you consider yourself grown up? Why or why not?