



A SIMPLE ACT

## Comparing Texts

In this lesson, you will read and compare “A Simple Act” and an excerpt from *An Invisible Thread*. First you will complete the first-read and close-read activities for “A Simple Act.”



from AN INVISIBLE THREAD

### About the Author

**Tyler Jackson** (b. 1981) was raised in England but has traveled extensively, writing about many of the places he has lived. Jackson has survived a hurricane in North Carolina and a flood in Texas, and says, “People pull together in a disaster, but it’s remarkable to see the small acts of kindness that usually go unreported.”

## A Simple Act

### Concept Vocabulary

You will encounter the following words as you read “A Simple Act.”

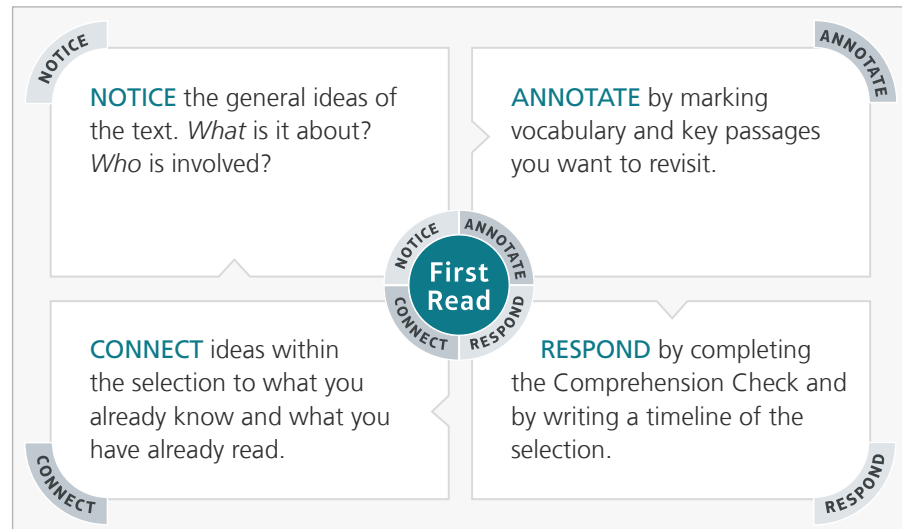
Before reading, rate how familiar you are with each word. Indicate how well you know it on a scale of 1 (do not know it) to 5 (know it very well).

WORD	YOUR RANKING
connects	
influence	
encouraged	
bond	

After completing your first read, come back to the concept vocabulary and review your rankings. Mark changes to your original rankings as needed.

### First Read NONFICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete the close-read notes after your first read.



### STANDARDS

**Reading Informational Text**  
By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.



# A Simple Act

Tyler Jackson

## BACKGROUND

In a big city like New York, thousands of strangers from many different backgrounds cross paths every day. But they rarely stop on the street to get to know each other. When people from very different places make the effort to connect, unexpected friendships can form.

- 1 **I**t was the first day of September in 1986, and the morning rain had given way to bright sunshine. A successful advertising executive made her way across 56th street toward Broadway, on the west side of Manhattan. A young boy—all of eleven years old and dressed in scruffy clothes—asked for some change for something to eat. Laura Schroff lowered her head and walked on; Manhattan was full of panhandlers, and she hardly even noticed them any more.

## NOTES

## NOTES

**connects** (kuh NEHKTS) *v.*  
joins together

**influence** (IHN floo uhns) *v.*  
affect someone in an  
important way

**encouraged** (ehn KUR ihjd) *v.*  
inspired; offered support to

**bond** (BAHND) *n.* uniting  
connection; link

## CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** Mark the  
questions included in  
paragraph 4.

**QUESTION:** Why might  
the author have included  
these questions?

**CONCLUDE:** What effect  
do these questions have  
on Laura?

- 2 But something drew Laura back to the boy. She still doesn't know what it was, but she calls it an "invisible thread." There's an old Chinese proverb that says that an invisible thread **connects** two people who are destined to meet and **influence** each other. Laura believes she felt that thread. She turned back from the middle of the street and took the boy to lunch.
- 3 The boy lived in a single room in a welfare hotel with his mother and numerous other relatives. It was only two blocks away from Laura's home, but it might as well have been a different planet. As they talked over their lunch, Laura learned about the boy's life. She herself had not had an easy childhood, but what she heard shocked her, and before she left, she told him to phone her if he was ever hungry. When she didn't hear from him after several days, she returned to the spot they had met—and there he was, in the same clothes and too-tight sneakers. They arranged to meet again the next Monday.
- 4 Every Monday, Laura Schroff and Maurice Mazyck had dinner together. Some Mondays they ate at Laura's home, and Maurice discovered a life he had only seen on television. Gradually, Laura became the young boy's first role model. She **encouraged** him to have dreams about his future, and got involved in his education. Maurice's teacher was perhaps the only other person who believed in him, and she made Laura take a long hard look at what she was doing. Was she helping Maurice just as a way of helping herself? Could she commit to being there for Maurice even when she didn't feel like it? What kind of damage might it cause Maurice if she were to abandon him after becoming so important to him? Laura thought it through, and came to a decision.
- 5 The two continued sharing dinner every Monday, and a close **bond** formed between them. Laura introduced Maurice to new places, new ideas, and new possibilities. And Maurice became almost like the child Laura had always wanted. One day, she offered to make lunch for Maurice and leave it with her doorman for him to pick up on his way to school. He asked her if she could put the lunch in a brown paper bag, because then the other kids would know that someone cared about him.
- 6 Maurice had never left the city until Laura took him to visit her sister's family on Long Island. Her memory of their trip is a favorite one. She had expected Maurice to be amazed by the huge

front lawn and even larger backyard. But what amazed him the most was the large dining room table where they all sat down and talked and ate together. He declared that he wanted a table like that when he had a family of his own. Only months earlier, Maurice had seriously doubted that he would live to be an adult.

- 7 Laura and Maurice's relationship lasted, and in 1997 a magazine published an article, less than one page long, about it. Laura's friends suggested that she write a book telling the whole story. It was 10 years before she began writing—and another three years before she found a co-writer and started seriously getting down to business. The result of their work, *An Invisible Thread*, reached number one on the *New York Times* best sellers list.
- 8 Today, Maurice works in construction. He is the first person in his family to earn a paycheck. He has a family of his own, and his children are all very fond of their "Aunt Laurie." If you were to visit the family's apartment, you might notice that there is no couch in the living room. But there is a huge dining room table.
- 9 The writer Ernest Hemingway said, "The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them." Over the years, Laura discovered the truth of that statement. She feels that Maurice has given her one of the greatest gifts she has ever had. He repaid her trust by giving her life more meaning than her success at work ever did. He taught her to be grateful for what she has, and for the chance to share it. 🍀

## Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read.

1. How did Laura Schroff and Maurice Mazyck meet?
2. What does the old Chinese proverb say connects two people who are destined to meet and influence each other?
3. What weekly ritual do Laura and Maurice begin after their first meeting?
4. What was Maurice's favorite part of the visit to Laura's sister?
5. Describe Maurice's adult life, professionally and personally.

## Comprehension Check

6. How did Laura share the story of her relationship with Maurice with an audience?

7.  **Notebook** Write a timeline of key events in “A Simple Act.”

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