

Achieving the Desired Outcome

Ryan looked up from his annotated copy of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, put one hand over his chest, and proclaimed in his most dramatic voice, "A car, a car, my kingdom for a car!"

Alyssa grinned. "That's not exactly how Shakespeare wrote it. I believe he was seeking a horse."

"Same idea: both are means of transportation," Ryan said while doodling a car in the margin of his English notebook.

Alyssa laughed. She wanted a car nearly as much as Ryan did. In the spring, they would take their driving test, but what was the point of having a license without a car? "At least we have reliable bus service," she said, which earned a gentle punch to the shoulder from her twin.

"Here's how our sixteenth-century pal would respond to that suggestion. The bus, fair lady, is 'a thing devised by the enemy,' Act 5, Scene 3."

But Alyssa wasn't listening; instead, her attention was focused on some distant point out the window. "I wonder . . ."

"What do you wonder?" Whenever Alyssa said, "I wonder," a clever scheme was sure to follow.

She crossed her arms and rubbed her chin, but kept her thoughts to herself.

"Alyssa!" Ryan exclaimed. "'True hope is swift, and flies with swallow's wings,' Act 5, Scene 2. Don't leave me in suspense; you have a solution, don't you?"

"I'll tell you later, but right now I have to make a phone call." Alyssa insisted on privacy for the call. It was heartless to raise Ryan's hopes only to have them dashed down again, and there was no guarantee that her call would result in success. Alyssa clicked on her phone's contact list and selected Aunt Azalea's business number. Her aunt's voice on the answering machine proclaimed, "Azalea's Auto Emporium, where expert mechanics turn junky clunkers into classy coaches." Aunt Azalea was fond of adjectives, and whenever possible she added alliteration to her advertising slogans. She believed "the more modifiers the better," a philosophy that Alyssa's English teacher, Mr. Sims, vehemently discouraged. Whenever Alyssa used an adverb or adjective in a paper, Mr. Sims wrote a note in the margin, "Use precise language whenever possible. Modifiers are a crutch chosen by those with inadequate vocabularies. Getting to the point in the fewest words possible saves everyone time." It was a viewpoint that Alyssa chose not to share with her aunt.

When her aunt picked up the phone, Alyssa explained that she and Ryan were hoping to earn money to buy a car, "nothing fancy," she added, hoping that Aunt Azalea would understand that this was a basic transportation need and not a luxury. She explained that they were willing to work hard for the money. "A job at the auto shop would be perfect since we'd learn how to take care of a car at the same time that we would be earning the money to buy one—again, nothing extravagant but something to get us to school and band rehearsals and such."

Aunt Azalea hesitated only a moment before saying, "As it turns out, I could use the help."

A deal was struck: the twins would work all day Saturday at the shop and after school on Tuesdays as long as they kept their grades up and continued to play in the school band. "I don't want to be responsible for depriving the world of a great flutist," she said, "or the world's loudest drummer."

Later, Alyssa recounted the conversation. It wasn't hard to agree to Aunt Azalea's terms, but the twins weren't about to reveal that nothing would deter them from their studies or instruments; they wanted to give the impression that her negotiations had been tough. She warned them that they would be restricted to routine and menial tasks, "nothing complicated, but work that needs to be completed."

And that's exactly what they did on the first Saturday when reporting for duty. Alyssa swept the floors while Ryan collected the trash, dumping it in the large bin in the back alley. Once those tasks were accomplished, Aunt Azalea requested they sort various auto parts into the appropriate bins and take inventory of the automotive supplies.

"I had no idea that there were so many kinds of plastic repair resins," Alyssa said.

"Or automobile fuses, air hoses, or a hundred different kinds of washers. Forget about the miscellaneous screws, fasteners, and cotter pins," Ryan added. "Did you know that she has fifty-nine different cotter pins on her inventory list? Who needs that many kinds of cotter pins?"

"I do," Aunt Azalea said, materializing from nowhere. "A mechanic never knows when a certain kind of screw, fastener, or pin is required. This is precise work, and if we used an inappropriate part on an engine, we could be responsible for its malfunction, and a malfunctioning engine can result in an accident. Don't underestimate the importance of our work."

"We didn't mean . . ." Ryan said.

"I know you didn't, but I want you to understand the value of the service we provide. Now, let's get back to it."

For three weeks, the twins continued to sort, organize, and inventory supplies. "I hope we learn something valuable about cars," Ryan said, "so that when we get one—if we ever do—we'll know how to make repairs on it."

Finally, the day arrived when Aunt Azalea let the twins work on a car, and even though it was only to wash the windshield, vacuum the upholstery, and put air in the tires, it felt like a promotion. The next week, Ryan and Alyssa helped Axel, one of Aunt Azalea's mechanics, pull a dent out of a car door. They used a special kind of plunger, and when they were done, the door looked like new. And then Axel allowed the twins to repair a smaller dent in the back body panel on his own car.

The following week Javier, another mechanic, gave Alyssa and Ryan a lesson on removing scratches. He showed the twins how to distinguish a scratch from a mark. "Marks can often be easily cleaned with an aerosol tar or adhesive remover. Tougher scratches require acetone or lacquer thinner on a soft rag, and if the mark is still there, then you will need to use some elbow grease or use a polishing compound." The twins spent the day working on various scratches, utilizing all the methods that Javier had shown them with varying degrees of success.

The next week, the twins received a lesson on changing the engine oil, a routine but necessary maintenance task for any vehicle. They helped perform two complete oil changes, and then they did a third on their own. They went home greasy, hot, and smelling of automobile oil, but deeply satisfied.

In the coming weeks, the twins learned how to replace air filters, brake pads, and various kinds of hoses and batteries. They learned how to determine when tires needed replacing and how to do the job. Finally, Aunt Azalea requested that they watch Axel rebuild an engine. "You won't be doing this any time soon," she said, "but it's a rare pleasure to watch a master mechanic like Axel at work." Alyssa was surprised to find that the work fascinated her, and in later conversation, Ryan compared it to doing a complex science experiment. "You need appropriate equipment, knowledge of the components, and the expertise to make it all work together to achieve the desired outcome."

The next time the twins arrived at the auto shop, they noticed that someone had delivered a particularly dilapidated vehicle: it had scratches, torn upholstery, a cracked windshield, and four flat tires. Was that a cobweb across the back window? The trunk did not close properly, and when Ryan looked under the hood, he noticed that none of the hoses were connected, the battery was missing, and a layer of oil coated everything.

"What a wreck," Alyssa said. "It looks like it belongs in a giant trash compactor."

"It's salvageable, though," Aunt Azalea said, sneaking up behind the twins, "assuming someone is willing to put in the effort to rehabilitate it. What do you say? Are you up to the challenge?"

"You mean you want us to restore this car, to fix whatever needs fixing and make it road worthy?"

Aunt Azalea nodded and told the twins that the owner was unwilling to give up on the vehicle. "The owner is convinced that it can be rebuilt but is unwilling to pay what it would cost to have Axel or Javier do the job. Do you two want to give it a try?"

The twins tried to act nonchalant but were too excited to fake it, and so they grabbed Aunt Azalea and hugged so hard that she begged for mercy. "I guess that means you accept the challenge," she said, smoothing down her coveralls and readjusting her safety glasses. She nodded toward the broken-down jalopy, which the twins took as a go-ahead, but then she stopped them for a few additional instructions. "Decide what needs to be done, but check with me before you begin the work," she cautioned. "I expect this to be done correctly. Safety is more important than appearance, as I've said numerous times before, so if we have to sacrifice beauty for safety, that's exactly what we'll do."

The twins began taking inventory of the car's problems. By the time they were done inspecting the dilapidated vehicle and making a list of areas needing attention, they had gone through one pad of paper and had begun on another. They devoted much of the day to creating a proposal, and then they conferred with Aunt Azalea. She assured them that the engine, while in need of cleaning, was reliable, and that the car's frame was in good condition. She checked their list of repairs and made comments in the margins, which reminded the twins of the way Mr. Sims graded English essays. "I suppose literary essays and repairing a car are not all that different," Ryan said. "In both

cases, you're starting with something that someone else made—a work of literature or a car—and then learning everything you can about it."

Alyssa looked at the car and began laughing. "You're suggesting that William Shakespeare's *Richard III* has something in common with a 1995 Chevrolet?"

"*Richard III* is nothing unless someone performs it," Ryan reasoned, "and that car is fairly useless until someone drives it. I realize that Mr. Sims might not agree, but a play needs an audience that seeks to discover its meaning, and this car needs someone to make it useful again."

For the next several weeks—and with Aunt Azalea's help—the twins reconditioned the broken-down jalopy. They cleaned it inside and out, repaired its scratches and bumps, replaced broken hoses and wiring, and filled the tires with air. They searched through accumulated auto parts until they found an old radio, an antenna, and seat covers to replace the ones that were damaged or missing. They even managed to find a replacement seat belt for the rear backseat and matching hubcaps for all four wheels. It took longer than the twins expected, but they enjoyed the work so much that time seemed unimportant.

"Isn't the owner anxious to get the car back?" Ryan asked at one point.

"That's not your problem," Aunt Azalea said, "just leave it to me." The twins consulted with Aunt Azalea, Axel, and Javier whenever problems arose, but they realized that they needed help less and less as the project continued. A number of months later, the car was looking much better, but the body remained lackluster no matter how hard they tried to polish and buff it. "We'll have to paint it," Aunt Azalea declared, "but what color?"

"I like the original blue," Ryan said, "especially since we are refurbishing the car and returning it to factory condition." Alyssa agreed, and so did Aunt Azalea, who scheduled the paint job for the next Saturday.

"Perfect!" the twins declared in unison when they saw the finished paint job.

"I'm so glad you agree," Aunt Azalea said. "I wasn't sure you could handle this project, but your willingness to learn and to ask for help when you needed it impressed me! Your determination and your hard work really paid off. The car is yours."

Alyssa gasped. "Ours?"

Ryan laughed. "Ours?"

"You earned it; I paid you a meager wage, and you never complained. You created something out of nothing when you brought this old heap back to life, and now it has many more miles left in it."

The twins grabbed Aunt Azalea in a hug. They didn't leave Axel or Javier out either, giving thanks to the master mechanics who had been so generous with their time and expertise.

"Go on, pass that driving test, and get this car out of my shop. It's taking up valuable space."

"Yes, ma'am, you can count on us," the twins said, but before they left, they took a few minutes to sit in their new car and imagine the roads ahead.

60. What is the meaning of dilapidated as it is used in the passage?

- (A) in great disrepair
- (B) somewhat disguised
- (C) filled with disbelief
- (D) very discouraged

61. Read the sentences from the passage.

“ ‘I expect this to be done correctly. Safety is more important than appearance, as I’ve said numerous times before, so if we have to sacrifice beauty for safety, that’s exactly what we’ll do.’ ”

What conclusion can be made about Aunt Azalea from the sentences?

- (A) She is carefree.
- (B) She is demanding.
- (C) She is understanding.
- (D) She is selfish.

62. Which word **best** describes both Alyssa and Ryan?

- (A) mischievous
- (B) impatient
- (C) responsible
- (D) humorous

63. Which statement **best** identifies “Achieving the Desired Outcome” as fiction rather than literary nonfiction?

- (A) Dialogue is used to express the thoughts of individuals.
- (B) Imaginary characters are used to convey a theme.
- (C) Some details are used to reveal the events that take place.
- (D) Imagery is used to describe the setting.

64. What is most likely the author’s purpose in writing the passage?

- (A) to persuade readers to learn how to fix cars
- (B) to demonstrate to readers how families can get along
- (C) to describe to readers how an automobile repair shop should operate
- (D) to entertain readers with a story about how the characters earned a special gift