

Nadia the Willful

Short Story by Sue Alexander

Can MEMORIES Keep the past alive?

COMMON CORE

RL 2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details. **RL 3** Describe how the characters change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

Memories are how we hold on to people we have known, places we have been, and things we have done. As time goes by, those memories can fade unless we find ways to keep them fresh. In “Nadia the Willful,” a character takes action to make sure that a precious memory will last.

QUICKWRITE Think about a happy or important occasion you want to remember. It might be a wedding, a birthday, or a day spent with friends. Write down some ideas about how you can preserve this memory.

Keeping Memories Alive

1. Take photos
2. Make a scrapbook



● TEXT ANALYSIS: CONFLICT AND THEME

Most stories are built around a **conflict**, a struggle between opposing forces. The struggle might be with someone else, with nature, or even within the character, such as overcoming a fear. Writers often use the actions of their characters to communicate theme. To see how conflict relates to a story's theme, ask yourself the following questions:

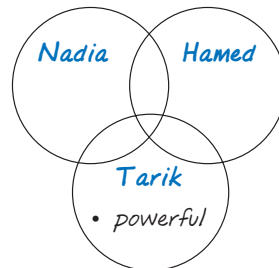
- What conflicts does the character face?
- How does the character respond to these conflicts?
- How are the conflicts resolved?

As you read “Nadia the Willful,” notice these conflicts and what they help you infer about the story's theme.

■ READING SKILL: COMPARE AND CONTRAST CHARACTERS

Comparing and contrasting characters can help you better understand a story. For example, in “Nadia the Willful,” Nadia shares some traits with her family and members of her community. Other parts of Nadia's personality are unique.

As you read the story, use a graphic organizer like the one shown to record similarities and differences between Nadia, Tarik, and Hamed.



▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Sue Alexander uses the following words to help tell how one family deals with sorrow. To see how many words you know, rewrite each sentence using a different word or phrase in place of the boldfaced vocabulary word.

WORD LIST banish clan console graciousness

1. Nadia lives in a close-knit family **clan**.
2. Her father's **graciousness** fades away in his sorrow.
3. She wants someone to **console** her after her brother's death.
4. Nadia does not want her father to **banish** anyone.



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

Sue Alexander

1933–2008

Writing from Life

Sue Alexander wrote “Nadia the Willful” to express her sadness about the death of her own brother. She was afraid that if she set the story in the present day, it would be too painful to write. She knew that it “would have to take place somewhere far away, preferably in another culture.” The story took about four months to write, except for the first paragraph, which took much longer. Alexander says, “I must have rewritten it 50 times before I found the right words for that paragraph.”

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

The Sahara Desert

The Sahara, which is the setting for this story, is the largest desert in the world. It is located in northern Africa and covers about 3.5 million square miles—an area about as large as the United States. It is sometimes called “the sea without water.” Food and water are scarce, sandstorms are common, and temperatures can reach 130° Fahrenheit during the day. Despite its harsh climate, the Sahara supports approximately 2.5 million people, as well as many different kinds of plants and animals.



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NADIA

the Willful



Sue Alexander

In the land of the drifting sands where the Bedouin move their tents to follow the fertile grasses, there lived a girl whose stubbornness and flashing temper caused her to be known throughout the desert as Nadia the Willful.

Nadia's father, the sheik¹ Tarik, whose kindness and **graciousness** caused his name to be praised in every tent, did not know what to do with his willful daughter.

Only Hamed, the eldest of Nadia's six brothers and Tarik's favorite son, could calm Nadia's temper when it flashed.

10 "Oh, angry one," he would say, "shall we see how long you can stay that way?" And he would laugh and tease and pull at her dark hair until she laughed back. Then she would follow Hamed wherever he led. **A**

One day before dawn, Hamed mounted his father's great white stallion and rode to the west to seek new grazing ground for the sheep. Nadia stood with her father at the edge of the oasis² and watched him go.

Hamed did not return.

Analyze Visuals ►

What can you **infer** about the girl in this image?

graciousness
(grā'shəs-nəs) *n.* the condition of being pleasant, courteous, and generous

A COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Reread lines 8–12. What do you learn about the personalities of Nadia and Hamed?

1. **sheik** (shēk): a leader of an Arab family or village.

2. **oasis**: a fertile or green spot in a desert or wasteland, made so by the presence of water.



Nadia rode behind her father as he traveled across the desert from oasis to oasis, seeking Hamed.

20 Shepherds told them of seeing a great white stallion fleeing before the pillars of wind that stirred the sand. And they said that the horse carried no rider.

Passing merchants, their camels laden with spices and sweets for the bazaar,³ told of the emptiness of the desert they had crossed.

Tribesmen, strangers, everyone whom Tarik asked, sighed and gazed into the desert, saying, “Such is the will of Allah.”⁴

At last Tarik knew in his heart that his favorite son, Hamed, had been claimed, as other Bedouin before him, by the drifting sands. And he told Nadia what he knew—that Hamed was dead.

30 Nadia screamed and wept and stamped the sand, crying, “Not even Allah will take Hamed from me!” until her father could bear no more and sternly bade her to silence.

Nadia’s grief knew no bounds. She walked blindly through the oasis, neither seeing nor hearing those who would **console** her. And Tarik was silent. For days he sat inside his tent, speaking not at all and barely tasting the meals set before him. **B**

Then, on the seventh day, Tarik came out of his tent. He called all his people to him, and when they were assembled, he spoke. “From this day forward,” he said, “let no one utter Hamed’s name. Punishment shall be swift for those who would remind me of what I have lost.”

40 Hamed’s mother wept at the decree. The people of the **clan** looked at one another uneasily. All could see the hardness that had settled on the sheik’s face and the coldness in his eyes, and so they said nothing. But they obeyed.

Nadia, too, did as her father decreed, though each day held something to remind her of Hamed. As she passed her brothers at play, she remembered games Hamed had taught her. As she walked by the women weaving patches for the tents and heard them talking and laughing, she remembered tales Hamed had told her and how they had made her laugh. And as she watched the shepherds with their flock, she remembered the 50 little black lamb Hamed had loved.

Each memory brought Hamed’s name to Nadia’s lips, but she stilled the sound. And each time that she did so, her unhappiness grew until, finally, she could no longer contain it. She wept and raged at anyone and anything that crossed her path. Soon everyone at the oasis fled at her approach. And she was more lonely than she had ever been before. **C**

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



The Bedouin are a tribe of people who live in the deserts of Africa and the Middle East. They are nomads, or wanderers, who live in tents and move from place to place seeking pasture for their livestock.

console (kən-sōl') *v.* to ease someone’s sorrow; to comfort

B COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Note the similarities and differences between how Nadia and Tarik react to Hamed’s death.

clan (klān) *n.* a family group; a group united by common interests or qualities

C CONFLICT AND THEME

Reread lines 51–55. What conflict does Tarik’s decree cause for Nadia?

3. **bazaar** (bə-zār'): in Middle Eastern countries, an outdoor market of small shops.

4. **Allah** (āl'ə): the name for God in the Islamic religion.



One day, as Nadia passed the place where her brothers were playing, she stopped to watch them. They were playing one of the games that Hamed had taught her. But they were playing it wrong.

Without thinking, Nadia called out to them. “That is not the way!

60 Hamed said that first you jump this way and then you jump back!”

Her brothers stopped their game and looked around in fear. Had Tarik heard Nadia say Hamed’s name? But the sheik was nowhere to be seen.

“Teach us, Nadia, as our brother taught you,” said her smallest brother.

And so she did. Then she told them of other games and how Hamed had taught her to play them. And as she spoke of Hamed, she felt an easing of the hurt within her. ◆

So she went on speaking of him.

She went to where the women sat at their loom⁵ and spoke of Hamed.

◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT

Reread lines 64–66.

Although the author could have combined the sentences in this paragraph, she chose not to. This is part of her unique style. Why else do you think the author has chosen not to combine sentences that share the same subject?

5. **loom**: a tool used for making thread or yarn into cloth by weaving strands together at right angles.

She told them tales that Hamed had told her. And she told how he had
70 made her laugh as he was telling them.

At first the women were afraid to listen to the willful girl and covered their ears, but after a time, they listened and laughed with her.

“Remember your father’s promise of punishment!” Nadia’s mother warned when she heard Nadia speaking of Hamed. “Cease, I implore you!”

Nadia knew that her mother had reason to be afraid, for Tarik, in his grief and bitterness, had grown quick-tempered and sharp of tongue. But she did not know how to tell her mother that speaking of Hamed eased the pain she felt, and so she said only, “I will speak of my brother! I will!” And she ran away from the sound of her mother’s voice. **D**

80 She went to where the shepherds tended the flock and spoke of Hamed. The shepherds ran from her in fear and hid behind the sheep. But Nadia went on speaking. She told of Hamed’s love for the little black lamb and how he had taught it to leap at his whistle. Soon the shepherds left off their hiding and came to listen. Then they told their own stories of Hamed and the little black lamb.

COMMON CORE RL.2

D CONFLICT AND THEME

Writers often use conflict to **imply**, or hint at a story’s theme.

Reread lines 69–79.

How has Nadia changed her response to Tarik’s order?



The more Nadia spoke of Hamed, the clearer his face became in her mind. She could see his smile and the light in his eyes. She could hear his voice. And the clearer Hamed's voice and face became, the less Nadia hurt inside and the less her temper flashed. At last, she was filled with peace.

90 But her mother was still afraid for her willful daughter. Again and again she sought to quiet Nadia so that Tarik's bitterness would not be turned against her. And again and again Nadia tossed her head and went on speaking of Hamed.

Soon, all who listened could see Hamed's face clearly before them.

One day, the youngest shepherd came to Nadia's tent, calling, "Come, Nadia! See Hamed's black lamb; it has grown so big and strong!"

But it was not Nadia who came out of the tent.

It was Tarik.

On the sheik's face was a look more fierce than that of a desert hawk,
100 and when he spoke, his words were as sharp as a scimitar.⁶

"I have forbidden my son's name to be said. And I promised punishment to whoever disobeyed my command. So shall it be. Before the sun sets and the moon casts its first shadow on the sand, you will be gone from this oasis—never to return."

"No!" cried Nadia, hearing her father's words.

"I have spoken!" roared the sheik. "It shall be done!" **E**

Trembling, the shepherd went to gather his possessions.

And the rest of the clan looked at one another uneasily and muttered among themselves.

110 In the hours that followed, fear of being **banished** to the desert made everyone turn away from Nadia as she tried to tell them of Hamed and the things he had done and said.

And the less she was listened to, the less she was able to recall Hamed's face and voice. And the less she recalled, the more her temper raged within her, destroying the peace she had found. **F**

By evening, she could stand it no longer. She went to where her father sat, staring into the desert, and stood before him.

"You will not rob me of my brother Hamed!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I will not let you!"

120 Tarik looked at her, his eyes colder than the desert night.

But before he could utter a word, Nadia spoke again. "Can you recall Hamed's face? Can you still hear his voice?"

Tarik started in surprise, and his answer seemed to come unbidden to his lips. "No, I cannot! Day after day I have sat in this spot where I last

Language Coach

Pronouncing *mb*

When you say the word *lamb* (line 96), the *b* is silent. This is true of any word that ends in *mb*. When the letters *mb* are in the middle of a word, such as *crumble*, you hear the sounds of both letters. Try pronouncing the following words aloud: *bombard*, *comb*, *combine*.

E COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Reread lines 101–106. Note Tarik's attitude in this passage. In what way does Tarik's response remind you of Nadia?

banish (băn'îsh) v. to send away; to exile

F CONFLICT AND THEME

What effect does the shepherd's punishment have on the clan and on Nadia?

6. **scimitar** (sîm'î-tər): an Asian sword with a curved cutting edge.


saw Hamed, trying to remember the look, the sound, the happiness that was my beloved son—but I cannot.”

And he wept.

Nadia’s tone became gentle. “There is a way, honored father,” she said. “Listen.”

130 And she began to speak of Hamed. She told of walks she and Hamed had taken and of talks they had had. She told how he had taught her games, told her tales, and calmed her when she was angry. She told many things that she remembered, some happy and some sad.

And when she was done with the telling, she said gently, “Can you not recall him now, Father? Can you not see his face? Can you not hear his voice?”


Tarik nodded through his tears, and for the first time since Hamed had been gone, he smiled. 

140 “Now you see,” Nadia said, her tone more gentle than the softest of the desert breezes, “there is a way that Hamed can be with us still.”

The sheik pondered what Nadia had said. After a long time, he spoke, and the sharpness was gone from his voice.

“Tell my people to come before me, Nadia,” he said. “I have something to say to them.”

When all were assembled, Tarik said, “From this day forward, let my daughter Nadia be known not as willful, but as wise. And let her name be praised in every tent, for she has given me back my beloved son.”

150 And so it was. The shepherd returned to his flock, kindness and graciousness returned to the oasis, and Nadia’s name was praised in every tent. And Hamed lived again—in the hearts of all who remembered him. 

G COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Reread lines 130–138.

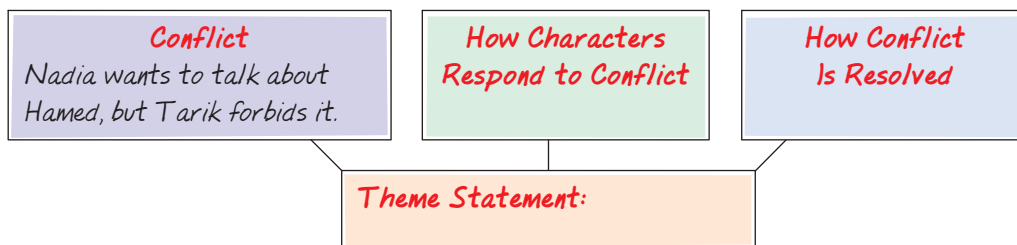
Does this passage show more of Nadia and Tarik’s similarities or their differences? Explain.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** What is Hamed doing when he disappears?
2. **Clarify** Why does Tarik forbid his people to talk about Hamed?
3. **Summarize** What happens to make Tarik send the shepherd away?

Text Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** Reread lines 145–147. What does Tarik mean when he says that Nadia “has given me back my beloved son”?
5. **Compare and Contrast Characters** Look again at the graphic organizer you filled in as you read. Think about Nadia’s and Tarik’s personalities, attitudes, reactions, and roles in the story. Are they more similar or more different? Support your conclusions with examples from the story.
6. **Analyze Conflict and Theme** Recall that conflict often helps express a story’s implicit theme. Use a chart like the one shown to explore the conflict in “Nadia the Willful.” Then write a theme statement for the story.



7. **Evaluate Theme** A theme is more than just the author’s opinion. It should also express an idea about human nature. Does Sue Alexander’s message about memories work well as a theme? Explain why or why not.

Extension and Challenge

8. **Speaking and Listening** Nadia found that the best way to keep her brother’s memory alive was to tell stories about him. With a partner, create your own memorable stories. Take turns interviewing each other about interesting parts of your lives. Then choose two stories to share with the class.
9. **SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** Modern life threatens the traditional lifestyle of the nomadic Bedouin. Research how the Bedouin way of life has changed over time. What traditions have they been able to keep?

Can MEMORIES keep the past alive?

What memories do you cherish? Why are they special to you?



RL 2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details. **RL 3** Describe how the characters change as the plot moves toward a resolution. **W 7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question.

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the letter of the word or phrase that means about the same as each boldfaced vocabulary word.

- 1. member of the **clan**: (a) neighborhood, (b) troop, (c) club, (d) family
- 2. **console** the sad child: (a) punish, (b) comfort, (c) praise, (d) tease
- 3. the host’s **graciousness**: (a) idea, (b) kindness, (c) schedule, (d) memory
- 4. **banish** the traitor: (a) force out, (b) catch, (c) trick, (d) ignore



ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

- attitude
- communicate
- context
- illustrate
- implicit

Write a paragraph in which you state whether you agree or disagree with Nadia’s decision to defy Tarik’s order never to speak Hamed’s name. Do you think she was justified in disobeying her father? Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: NOUN-FORMING SUFFIXES

Suffixes are word parts that are added to the ends of words to form new words. Many common suffixes change adjectives or verbs into nouns. For example, the noun-forming suffix *-ness* can be added to the adjective *gracious* to form the noun *graciousness*. See the chart at the right for other noun-forming suffixes and their meanings.

When you read words with these suffixes, use their base words to figure out their meanings. Remember that when a suffix is added sometimes a final *e* is dropped from the base word, or a final letter is changed. For instance, *y* may change to *i*.

PRACTICE Identify the base word and noun-forming suffix in each boldfaced word. Then write a definition of the word.

- 1. People in charge of **security** in an airport seldom stand out from the crowd.
- 2. The coach told me not to worry if the **accuracy** of my fastball was a little off.
- 3. The principal made an **announcement** about the school’s new lunchroom policy.
- 4. Jack’s **outrageousness** caused the teacher to punish our whole class.
- 5. Their **partnership** lasted for many years.



L 4b Use common affixes as clues to the meaning of a word.

Suffixes	Meanings
-cy	state of; quality of being
-dom	
-ity	
-ment	
-ness	
-ship	

Interactive Vocabulary

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Language

◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Combine Sentences

If your sentences seem choppy or repetitious, you may want to try combining them. Look for two sentences that have the same subject or **predicate** (what the subject does). If the sentences share a subject, delete the subject from the second sentence. Then insert a word such as *and*, *or*, or *but* to combine the two predicates. If the sentences share a predicate, delete the predicate from the second sentence. Then combine the two subjects.

Original: Hamed made me happy. Hamed calmed my temper.

Revised: Hamed made me happy and calmed my temper. (Use *and* to form one sentence with two predicates.)

PRACTICE Combine the sentences in each item.

1. “Nadia the Willful” discusses the topic of grief. “Nadia the Willful” demonstrates the power of memory.
2. Nadia cried when Hamed died. Her mother cried when Hamed died.
3. Nadia often behaves stubbornly. Nadia treats people nicely sometimes.
4. She traveled in the desert. Tarik traveled in the desert.

For more help with compound subjects and predicates, see page R60 in the *Grammar Handbook*.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Broaden your understanding of “Nadia the Willful” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Short Constructed Response: Analysis

Hamed’s death begins a long chain of events that results in changes for the entire clan. In **one paragraph**, explain the effect that each event after Hamed’s death has on the members of his clan.

REVISING TIP

Review your response. Can you combine any sentences? If so, revise your writing.



L 3a Vary sentence patterns for style. **W 2** Write informative/explanatory texts to convey ideas.

Interactive
Revision



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