

The Perfect High

by Shel Silverstein

Downloaded from: <http://allpoetry.com/The-Perfect-High>

There once was a boy named Gimmesome Roy. He was nothing like me or you.
'Cause laying back and getting high was all he cared to do.
As a kid, he sat in the cellar, sniffing airplane glue.
And then he smoked bananas — which was then the thing to do.
He tried aspirin in Coca-Cola, breathed helium on the sly,
And his life was just one endless search to find that perfect high.
But grass just made him want to lay back and eat chocolate-chip pizza all night,
And the great things he wrote while he was stoned looked like shit in the morning light.
And speed just made him rap all day, reds just laid him back,
And Cocaine Rose was sweet to his nose, but the price nearly broke his back.
He tried PCP and THC, but they didn't quite do the trick,
And poppers nearly blew his heart and mushrooms made him sick.
Acid made him see the light, but he couldn't remember it long.
And hashish was just a little too weak, and smack was a lot too strong,
And Quaaludes made him stumble, and booze just made him cry,
Till he heard of a cat named Baba Fats who knew of the perfect high.

Now, Baba Fats was a hermit cat who lived up in Nepal,
High on a craggy mountaintop, up a sheer and icy wall.
"But hell," says Roy, "I'm a healthy boy, and I'll crawl or climb or fly,
But I'll find that guru who'll give me the clue as to what's the perfect high."
So out and off goes Gimmesome Roy to the land that knows no time,
Up a trail no man could conquer to a cliff no man could climb.
For fourteen years he tries that cliff, then back down again he slides
Then sits — and cries — and climbs again, pursuing the perfect high.
He's grinding his teeth, he's coughing blood, he's aching and shaking and weak,
As starving and sore and bleeding and tore, he reaches the mountain peak.
And his eyes blink red like a snow-blind wolf, and he snarls the snarl of a rat,
As there in perfect repose and wearing no clothes — sits the godlike Baba Fats.

"What's happening, Fats?" says Roy with joy, "I've come to state my biz.
I hear you're hip to the perfect trip. Please tell me what it is.
For you can see," says Roy to he, "that I'm about to die,
So for my last ride, Fats, how can I achieve the perfect high?"
"Well, dog my cats!" says Baba Fats. "Here's one more burnt-out soul,
Who's looking for some alchemist to turn his trip to gold.
But you won't find it in no dealer's stash, or on no druggist's shelf.
Son, if you would seek the perfect high — find it in yourself."

"Why, you jive motherfucker!" screamed Gimmesome Roy, "I've climbed through rain and sleet,
I've lost three fingers off my hands and four toes off my feet!
I've braved the lair of the polar bear and tasted the maggot's kiss.
Now, you tell me the high is in myself. What kind of shit is this?
My ears 'fore they froze off," says Roy, "had heard all kind of crap,
But I didn't climb for fourteen years to listen to that sophomore rap."

Note to teachers

The Perfect High is a creative poem that provides insight into the human experience with substance use. Shel Silverstein offers readers a way to explore the inner workings of the individual and other possible ways of exploring a perfect high. Please keep in mind there are words that could be considered offensive. You may want to take time to discuss the use of language in relation to the themes described in the poem.



And I didn't crawl up here to hear that the high is on the natch,
So you tell me where the real stuff is or I'll kill your guru ass!"

"Ok, OK," says Baba Fats, "you're forcing it out of me.
There is a land beyond the sun that's known as Zaboli.
A wretched land of stone and sand where snakes and buzzards scream,
And in this devil's garden blooms the mystic Tzu-Tzu tree.
And every ten years it blooms one flower as white as the Key West sky,
And he who eats of the Tzu-Tzu flower will know the perfect high.
For the rush comes on like a tidal wave and it hits like the blazing sun.
And the high, it lasts a lifetime and the down don't ever come.
But the Zaboli land is ruled by a giant who stands twelve cubits high.
With eyes of red in his hundred heads, he waits for the passers-by.
And you must slay the red-eyed giant, and swim the River of Slime,
Where the mucous beasts, they wait to feast on those who journey by.
And if you survive the giant and the beasts and swim that slimy sea,
There's a blood-drinking witch who sharpens her teeth as she guards that Tzu-Tzu tree."
"To hell with your witches and giants," laughs Roy. "To hell with the beasts of the sea.
As long as the Tzu-Tzu flower blooms, some hope still blooms for me."
And with tears of joy in his snow-blind eye, Roy hands the guru a five,
Then back down the icy mountain he crawls, pursuing that perfect high.

"Well, that is that," says Baba Fats, sitting back down on his stone,
Facing another thousand years of talking to God alone.
"It seems, Lord", says Fats, "it's always the same, old men or bright-eyed youth,
It's always easier to sell them some shit than it is to give them the truth."

Instructional strategies

1. Invite student to read "The Perfect High" ([handout](#) or [online](#)) and, in small groups, explore what Baba Fats meant when he said "Son, if you would seek the perfect high—find it in yourself."
 - a. What does he mean by the word "high"? What is your understanding of "the perfect high"?
 - b. What are some other ways of experiencing that "high"? Can we get high by dancing, or listening to music? How about laughing? Or running?
 - c. Have you ever done something that made you experience the "perfect high"?
 - d. Why do you think Gimmiesome Roy was angry with the answer Baba Fats gave him?
2. Invite student to read "The Perfect High" and explore reasons why Baba Fats said "It's always easier to sell them some shit than it is to give them the truth." Note that Silverstein may be drawing attention to notions of truth and the nature of knowledge (how we can know something). Baba Fats questions the idea that knowledge is simply information – having a specific answer to a question does not mean you know something or have the truth. The following questions are aimed at getting students to think about whether the truth is simply information or more about the journey, process or quest – the knowledge we gain through reflection, thinking and exploring ourselves.
 - a. What do you think Baba Fats means by "the truth"?
 - b. Who would you go to in order to find out the truth? Why do you think that person knows the truth?
 - c. If something is written in a science book, does that make it true? Do you think science can give us all the right answers, or the answers to everything?

- d. What does it mean when we say we “know” something? Do we need to have clear answers in order to have knowledge? Are there questions that do not have specific answers or that have multiple right answers?
3. Following one or more of the above strategies, invite students to write a short journal entry. They might record what they learned or found interesting from the previous discussion. Or they could write down one BIG question they still have.

Drug Literacy

Big ideas

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies
- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples’ principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions
- Learning involves patience and time
- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity

English Language Arts 9

Big ideas

- Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy
- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and the world
- Questioning what we hear, read and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens



Competencies

- Access information and ideas for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources and evaluate their relevance, accuracy, and reliability.
- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- Recognize and appreciate how different forms, structures, and features of texts reflect different purposes, audiences, and messages
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- Recognize how language constructs personal, social, and cultural identity
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking
- Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences