

The Ghost in the Courthouse Statue

by Bill Bailey

Table of Contents

BEFORE READING

	Standards	Page
A. Author	2, 4	
B. Setting	1, 2, 4	
C. Felix LaBauve	2, 4	
D. W.C. Handy	1, 2, 4	

DURING READING

A. Chapter by Chapter		
Vocabulary	2	
Questions	1, 2, 3, 4	
Extending the Story	1, 2, 3, 4	

AFTER READING

A. Extending the Story Further	1, 2, 3, 4	
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Common Core State Standards

Standard 1	Oral Expression and Listening
Standard 2	Reading for All Purposes
Standard 3	Writing and Composition
Standard 4	Research and Reasoning

Before Reading

Author

Bill Bailey, author of The Ghost in the Courthouse Statue, is past editor & publisher of the DeSoto Times newspaper in Hernando, Mississippi. He is educational services manager for *The Commercial Appeal's* Newspaper in Education program.

Setting

The setting for this story is based on the history of a real town, Hernando, Mississippi. Hernando is the county seat of DeSoto County, just south of Memphis, Tennessee. A long time ago, from 1832 to 1836, the town of Hernando was named Jefferson, the same as the town in this story.

Hernando once had a grand, beautiful French castle-styled courthouse that had a tall bell tower with clocks on all four sides. However, it burned down in 1940 and was replaced by the courthouse that stands in the center of the town square today. Jazz musicians like W.C. Handy once played in a gazebo, or bandstand, on the courthouse lawn, as is stated in the first chapter. However, most of the dancing was on the main floor of the courthouse.

Felix LaBauve

Felix LaBauve was a colorful early settler and founding father of Hernando, who provided the architectural plans for the “French Castle” courthouse and started the town’s first newspaper. The newspaper’s name and ownership have changed many times through the years, and it continues today as the DeSoto Times-Tribune, the oldest existing business in the county. However, there is no statue of Felix LaBauve on the town square in front of the courthouse. LaBauve does have a tall monument, but no statue, in a Hernando cemetery, and the Felix LaBauve Home where he once lived has been restored.

Regarding the shoot-out with the Matlock brothers, a different DeSoto Countian was involved in that incident in 1845 – Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was later a Civil War general. However, LaBauve did get fined \$5 for knife-fighting in 1837.

Regarding Felix LaBauve’s ghost, some claim to have heard him in an old newspaper office on the square, and others say they’ve heard ghosts in the courthouse. The reader can be the judge on that one.

This tribute to Felix LaBauve was written in May of 2011 by the Community Editor, Robert Lee Long, and printed in the DeSoto Times Tribune.

<http://www.desototimes.com/articles/2011/05/18/opinion/editorials/doc4dd44beab18a0465506630.txt>

This is a picture of the LaBauve House today:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/centerstagestudios/3155805228/>

W.C. Handy

Hear “Ole Miss Rag” by W.C. Handy recorded by his Orchestra of Memphis in 1917 at this YouTube site. W.C. Handy is mentioned in Chapter 1.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4ETfaTOhps&feature=related>

During Reading

Chapter One

Donnie eggs-on French ghost

Vocabulary

gestured	“The great man gestured with an outstretched hand like he was making a grand speech.” (<i>v. motioned</i>)
roamed revenge	“Others said his spirit roamed the halls of the old courthouse, seeking revenge . (<i>v. wander aimlessly</i>) (<i>n. the desire to get even with somebody</i>)
legend	“ Legend has it that all four clocks stopped at 5 o’clock, the time of his death in 1879...” (<i>n. a story that has been passed down for generations</i>)
gazebo	“The coolest thing on the town square, other than the courthouse and the statue, was a bandstand – some called it a gazebo – with its small round columns and pointy roof.” (<i>n. use context</i>)

Questions

1. What is Donnie looking for as he inspects the statue and why is he doing this?
2. Using Donnie’s own words, what do you think Donnie’s life is like? Is he a happy kid?
3. Who or what is Humpty? Why does Donnie like make believe friends better than real ones?
4. Write down a pun (a play on words) or a phrase that Donnie uses that has “egg” in it.
5. What is Donnie’s trick to get Felix to talk to him?
6. What would you like to see happen in the next chapter?

Extending the Story

1. This story was written by Bill Baily, a past editor and publisher of the DeSoto Times newspaper in Hernando, Mississippi. If you were a reporter, what questions would you ask him in an interview?
2. Keep adding to this list of interview questions as the story continues.

Chapter Two

Spooky incident rocks bullies

Vocabulary

orneriest	“A gang of the orneriest kids you ever saw, whose main goal in life was to make my life awful...” (<i>adj. irritable</i>)
overactive	“She had really been on my case lately about my ‘ overactive imagination’ and my ‘pretend friends.’” (<i>adj. unusually busy</i>)
backfired	“It backfired on them.” (<i>v. to have an effect opposite to the one intended</i>)

Questions

1. Identify an example of verbal bullying and an example of physical bullying in the story. Is one worse than another?
2. Why do you think the boys in the story pick on Donnie? How does this bullying make Donnie feel?
3. Did Donnie do anything that might have provoked the boys? What could he have done differently?
4. Do you believe the statue saved Donnie from the rock? What else could have happened?
5. Do you agree with Donnie’s mom that he has an overactive imagination? What does she think of Humpty?
6. Do you think Donnie’s mom did the right thing? What could she have done differently?
7. What other information do you learn in this chapter about Donnie and his family?

Extending the Story

1. There are many similes (a comparison using “like” or “as”) used in this chapter. Find 3.
2. Summarize the story so far.
3. To stand up to a bully takes courage. The newspaper is filled with stories of courage demonstrated by soldiers, policemen, and firemen. But every day citizens also show courage and are featured in the news. Find just such a story. Summarize it and explain why you think the people involved are being courageous.

Chapter Three

Hold the presses! New editor in town

Vocabulary

- ventriloquist “As the man got closer, his eyes darted from Humpty to me. ‘**Ventriloquist?**’ he asked.” (*n. a person who performs the art of producing vocal sounds that appear to come from another source*)
- angle “That’s a strange **angle**, I thought.” (*n. a position from which somebody can look at something*)
- pompous “What a **pompous** blowhard!” (*adj. arrogant, self-important*)
- approach “I’ve got a new **approach**.” (*n. method, tactic*)
- despised “If there was one thing she **despised**, it was a cocky ladies man.” (*v. hated*)

Questions

1. Describe the new editor of the paper. What did he mean when he said, “I must be on ‘The Andy Griffith Show!’?”
2. What does Donnie think of the news editor?
3. How is Donnieland different from the real world? When you daydream, what do you think about?
4. Do you believe in ghosts? How does the ghost show himself in this chapter? Keep a class list of all the ways the ghost makes himself real to Donnie.
5. Did Jake Passmore make a good first impression with Holly Hutchison? Why or why not?
6. What do you think the editor’s “new approach” will be?

Extending the Story

1. Action verbs are words that tell what a character is doing. Strong verbs are a writer’s best tool. Make a list of the strong verbs in this story.
2. Reporters use strong verbs too. Use an article from the news to prove this point.
3. Create a word wall of strong verbs. Use these words in your own writing.

Chapter Four

The ride of my life begins

Vocabulary

- swagger “...I was glad to see Mom’s biggest enemy, Sheriff Matlock...with his lopsided **swagger**...” (*n. an arrogant way of walking*)
- descendant “Sheriff Matlock is a **descendant** of William Matlock – one of the ornery outlaw brothers who gunned down Felix LaBauve...”
(*n. somebody related to one that lived in the past*)
- kickbacks “He (Mr. Elder) and Mom had worked together on stories about how the sheriff got illegal **kickbacks** of money from every juke joint and bingo parlor in the county.”
(*n. a sum of money paid to gain favors*)
- watchdog “He can tell you won’t be a **watchdog** for the public, like George Elder was.”
(*n. a guard against illegal practices*)

Questions

1. Why does Donnie want his mom and Jake to get along? What has Jake given Donnie that his dad was unable to give him?
2. How would you describe Sheriff Matlock? How do the sheriff and Mom get along?
3. How are Donnie and Felix similar? If your life story were like Felix’s, what kind of adult do you think you would turn out to be?
4. What new story was Mr. Elder working on when he died?
5. What are some of the news stories in which Jake is interested? How does the sheriff react to this? How does Mom react to this news?
6. Why would Jake want Donnie and Humpty at the newspaper staff meeting?

Extending the Story

1. As Donnie’s mom said, one role of the newspaper is to be a watchdog for the public. What does this mean? Find an article in the news that you believe fits this purpose. What is it about? What information does it provide to the public that couldn’t be found anywhere else?

Chapter Five

New sheriff in town

Vocabulary

- suspicious “Sarah Betty Buntin...looked alert – and **suspicious** of Jake.”
(adj. tending to believe that something is wrong)
- paranormal “One of my best stories at The **Paranormal** Press...”
(adj. unable to be explained or understood in terms of scientific knowledge)
- drivel “Not the **drivel** you’ve been running,” Jake answered. “All those town board meetings you usually cover. Forget em.” *(n. silly or inaccurate nonsense)*
- credibility “What about our **credibility** as journalists?”
(n. a willingness to accept something as true)
- overrated “Honest is **overrated** when it comes to catching bad guys,” Jake said.
(adj. something considered as greater than it really is)

Questions

1. Why do you think Donnie uses an audio recorder at the meeting?
2. What kind of stories does The Paranormal Press print and what kind of stories does Jake want his reporters to find?
3. How does Jake’s staff react to his ideas? Act out the different staff reactions in this chapter.
4. Jake shows a different side of his thinking when it is just Donnie and Donnie’s mom with him in his office. Explain.
5. How are Jake’s goals and Donnie’s mom’s goals really the same? Which approach do you think is better?
6. What do you predict could happen next?

Extending the Story

1. How important is it that the news has “credibility?”
2. Choose a front page story from the news and imagine how citizens could be affected if there was no trust in the accuracy of the story.

Chapter Six

Miracle turnip discovered in Jefferson

Vocabulary

- cosmic “Great **Cosmic** Turnip gives warning?” he shouted. “Predicts **catastrophe!** Read all about it in The Jefferson Times!” (*adj. relating to the whole universe*) (*n. a terrible disaster*)
- doctored “You **doctored** that thing with your computer.”
(*v. to change something in order to deceive or fool*)
- hovered “The turnip rose and **hovered** about ten feet in the air.” (*v. floated in the air*)

Questions

1. How does Jake turn the turnip story into a “cosmic” event? Did it sell any newspapers at first?
2. Did Jake “doctor” the turnip with his computer?
3. How does Donnie try to keep the turnip story from being boring?
4. How does Felix LaBauve, the statue, take part in the turnip story? Why does he get involved?
5. How will the community react to “a flying monster-faced turnip?” What will the front page of The Jefferson Times look like in the morning?

Extending the Story

1. George Elder, the former editor and Jake’s uncle, always printed Billy Wayne Hatcher stories in the past. In the news this is called a feature story – not hard news but personal interest types of stories. Find a similar feature story in today news.
2. Why do readers find these stories interesting? What is interesting about the story you discovered?

Chapter Seven

Talking turnip saves the day

Vocabulary

- woe “**Woe** to ze crooked public officials of Jefferson.” (*n. misfortune; used as a threat to indicate that somebody is going to regret something or be punished in some way*)
- levitation “My **levitation** and ventriloquism technique ees good. No?” (*n. ability to rise in the air*)
- stunts “I knew he would expect more crazy **stunts** like these.”
(*n. dangerous feats or something silly or unusual done to attract attention*)
- phenomena “I’ve been reading a blog about unexplained **phenomena** like this,” Price said.
(*n. something that is out of the ordinary and excites people’s interest and curiosity*)

Questions

1. What is the warning that the Great Cosmic Turnip delivers?
2. How do the people in the crowd react? How does Jake react?
3. Identify all the puns in this chapter that involve Humpty and eggs.
4. Who is responsible for the “levitation”? Humpty, Donnie, or someone else?
5. What is Ed Price’s hunch about the talking turnip? What does this show about him?
6. Why does Jake make Donnie assistant editor? What is his first official duty?
7. Predict how you think this “stunt” will go over with the public.

Extending the Story

1. Ed Price, “who always has to know everything going on in town” reads “a blog about unexplained phenomena” like the cosmic turnip. A blog blends the words web and log to create a new type of web news. View this You Tube presentation for a visual definition of a blog: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN2I1pWXiXI>
2. Create a class blog or individual blogs of your own. What news would you like to share?
3. Check out the local newspaper on line and find the blogs written by reporters in your area.

Chapter Eight

Space alien gets healthy greeting

Vocabulary

- barrage “Jake yanked me higher, as a **barrage** of eggs, tomatoes, squash, lemons, oranges, and strawberry jelly splattered the saucer...” (*n. a rapid attacking flow of something*)
- tormentors “I glanced below and saw my school **tormentors** staring in amazement to discover it was me.” (*n. someone who causes physical pain or anxiety*)
- mimicked “Several **mimicked** my metallic space alien voice, with comments like, ‘May the force be with you!’” (*v. imitated*)

Questions

1. Describe the space alien stunt that Jake and Donnie create.
2. What is Jake trying to accomplish? Does it work?
3. The title of Chapter 8 is also a play on words. Explain.
4. How does order return to the courthouse area?
5. How do Donnie’s school “tormentors” react when they discover he is the space alien?
6. How could Felix make things better in the next chapter?

Extending the Story

1. Mardvark from the galaxy Zenos says he comes in peace to speak to President Obama. Search the news for the real issues in which President Obama is involved. Identify the problems the president has to handle in a day, in a week.
2. Put each of these issues into a category deciding if it is international in nature, national, state, or perhaps personal.
3. An act of kindness occurs at the end of this chapter. Who is responsible and why did they do it? Search the news for other random acts of kindness. How do these stories affect a reader?

Chapter Nine

Donnie meets eze great Felix LaBauve

Vocabulary

- ludicrous “And did I not earn you \$300 by sending my spirit into theese **ludicrous** egg puppet?”
(*adj. ridiculous, absurd*)
- impertinent “That rock would have smashed your **impertinent** leetle face...”
(*adj. rude, disrespectful*)
- impersonate “...Jake had gotten someone to pretend to be Felix LaBauve, just like he got me to
impersonate an alien.” (*v. to pretend to be somebody else*)
- annihilation “Prepare yourself...for **annihilation!**” (*n. total destruction*)

Questions

1. Does everyone think the space alien stunt was harmless?
2. Describe the conversation Donnie and Felix share.
3. Why did Felix become involved with Jake and Donnie? Why did he stop?
4. What are ghost rules?
5. List all the American idioms Felix uses in this chapter. Does he use them all correctly?
6. Why does the ghost become “hacked off” with Donnie? Could Felix’s last action in this chapter be considered “meddling?”
7. What surprises do you think the reader will discover in the next chapter?

Extending the Story

1. President Obama tackles many problems as leader of the United States. France, the ancestral home of Felix LaBauve, also faces many challenges. For the next week, read the news closely for problems facing the French people.
2. Do the French people and the American people have any problems in common?

Chapter Ten

Donnie and Felix join forces

Vocabulary

bamboozled “You have been **bamboozled**,” he said. “I think Americans these days call eet ‘punked.’” (*adj. fooled, swindled*)

irreverence “Though perhaps your **irreverence** ees not all bad. Eet shows ze fighting spirit.” (*n. disrespect*)

despicable “Your **despicable** sheriff has called a meeting with his leetle posse for tonight.” (*adj. fully deserving of contempt and shame*)

phobia “It’s my rat **phobia**!” (*n. fear*)

Questions

1. How did Donnie survive Felix’s attack?
2. How would you describe the conversation that follows between Felix and Donnie? What does this tell you about Felix LaBauve?
3. Why does Felix need Donnie’s help? Does he need Humpty?
4. What is the “deadly leetle secret” that Felix discovers?
5. What does Donnie notice when he uses his powers of observation?
6. Is there a way for Donnie to avoid being detected in the tree?

Extending the Story

1. Four different terms are used to describe Clint’s face hair. Find and list them.
2. Choose a photograph in the news. Use your powers of observation and describe this person or situation in detail. Be sure your word choice is clear and specific.

Chapter Eleven

Donnie discovers poisonous secret

Vocabulary

- crosshairs “It wouldn’t surprise me if he’s got us in his **crosshairs**...”
(n. a pair of fine lines used in focusing and aiming a rifle)
- plundering “I felt these outlaws had terrorized Jefferson for long enough, with their **plundering** and keeling.” *(v. to rob or steal goods)*
- vermin “Since I did not rid ze town of these **vermin**, his offspring have **perpetrated** many crimes...” *(n. an offensive term for someone or something that is extremely unpleasant)*
- heir “I can only rid ze town of a Matlock **heir** through the help of my own **heir**.”
(n. somebody who holds the right to receive property, position, or title of somebody else when that person dies)

Questions

1. Clint admits “we killed old you-know-who.” Who does he mean? How did they do it?
2. Who else is in their “crosshairs?”
3. What is the “unfinished business” to which Felix refers?
4. Why does Felix need Donnie’s help?
5. Do you think Donnie has the courage to help Felix with his plan? Has Donnie shown courage before?
6. What do you think the plan could involve?

Extending the Story

1. Felix LaBauve mentioned he had written an editorial calling the Matlock brothers “lily-livered blackguards.” Editorials are a part of the news today as well. Find the editorial section of the news. What are the topics under discussion?
2. Choose one opinion piece. Highlight those statements that are facts as stated in the editorial. Underline those statements that are opinions.

Chapter Twelve

“Mr. Elder’s ghost” cries for revenge

Vocabulary

sarcastically “Speak to us, oh great spirit,” a woman hollered out **sarcastically** at me.”
(*adv. mockingly*)

déjà vu “Felix isn’t this what you French folks call ‘**déjà vu**’?”
(*n. a feeling of having experienced something before*)

understatement “That’s an **understatement**,” said Jake.
(*n. a statement that underrepresents or underreports something*)

fabrication “Eet ees no **fabrication**. Eet ees ze truth.” (*n. made up story*)

expose “You wanted to **expose** ze bad guys.” (*v. reveal somebody’s wrongdoing*)

Questions

1. How does the crowd on the courthouse lawn react to Donnie’s ghost? How do the food throwers react and the three bullies from school react?
2. How does the term déjà vu apply to Donnie’s experience in the sheet and with Monty McGarrity?
3. What does Felix mean when he says, “I got ze front of you?”
4. Folks were heard to describe Donnie’s ghost as a “cross between Frankenstein and Voldemort.” Draw what you think the folks saw.
5. Why was Mr. Elder poisoned? What crime was he trying to expose? Does Jake believe it?
6. At the end of chapter, what does Donnie wonder about Jake? What do you think Jake will do?

Extending the Story

1. Write the story that Mr. Elder was never able to print. Use a strong lead to begin your story containing the 5 W’s and How. Then continue the story with as much detail as you can. Include interview statements with all the important characters in the story.

Chapter Thirteen

Sheriff plans killer party

Vocabulary

squabbling “Cut the **squabbling**,” barked Sheriff Matlock, standing up behind his desk.
(*n. bickering, arguing*)

incident “What I’m trying to say is that it’s time those folks had an **incident**.”
(*n. a violent event*)

flickering “I saw that he had started to fade in and out. He was **flickering**.”
(*v. to shine unsteadily*)

intestinal fortitude “My belly?” I asked...”
“C’est ca! **Intestinal fortitude**,” he answered. (*n. guts, courage*)

Questions

1. What does the title of this chapter predict?
2. Jake has agreed to be the bait for Felix. What does it mean that he is “showing his true colors?”
3. What does the Sheriff’s squabbling with his posse show about all of them?
4. How does the Sheriff plan to silence Jake Passmore, Holly, and Donnie?
5. What is causing Felix to flicker?
6. Do you think Donnie has the “guts to pull it off”?
7. How can a kid like Donnie take on the sheriff’s posse all by himself? What will happen next?

Extending the Story

1. In this chapter Sheriff Matlock “rolled the newspaper he’d been holding into a tight cylinder...and thwacked Clint...” Want to be more creative in using old newspapers and have some fun? See this website for ideas ranging from snowflakes to seedling pots.
<http://www.elizabethabernathy.com/2011/02/14-things-to-make-with-old-newspaper.html>

Chapter Fourteen

Visitors get strange tour

Vocabulary

- version “You might say this was our local version of the imaginary swamp creature.”
(n. account of something)
- scuttled “I scuttled up the hall to the front office.” *(v. to move with short fast steps)*
- caterwaulin’ “They musta’ hid when they heard your caterwaulin’,” said the sheriff.”
(n. yowl, loud howling noise)

Questions

1. Retell Donnie’s We-Moat sighting for Jake. Don’t forget the voice.
2. What does Donnie hope to accomplish with this phone call?
3. What did Sheriff Matlock mean when he growled, “The fleas come with the dog?”
4. How does Donnie have the office rigged to slow down the sheriff and his posse?
5. How do you know the sheriff and his posse have fallen for Donnie’s tricks?
6. Predict how Donnie will use the “three thin strings” in the last paragraph of this chapter.

Extending the Story

1. Sheriff Matlock and his posse are poor examples of people in law enforcement. Find positive examples in the news of how our police departments and court systems keep us all safe.

Chapter Fifteen

A tough old bird bites back

Vocabulary

- smirked “The sheriff **smirked**, proud of the trap he’d set.”
(v. a smile that expresses feelings of superiority or self-satisfaction)
- grotesque “...and Ol’ Bag a’ Bones’ teeth clacked open and shut, as his **grotesque** skull appeared to speak.” *(adj. misshapen in a strange or disturbing way)*
- jurisdiction “But you know, crime inside the city is my **jurisdiction**.”
(n. area where legal authority extends)

Questions

1. What is the trap Sheriff Matlock tried to set?
2. How do Donnie’s stuffed animals come to his aid in stopping the sheriff and his posse?
3. Who is the man sitting in the tall swivel chair? How do you know the posse is fooled by this trick?
4. How does the sheriff try to explain his behavior to Police Chief Banks? Does it work?
5. Donnie yells from the roof in his own voice trying to get Chief Banks to see the truth. Would a policeman take the word of a kid against three grown-ups?
6. What do you think Felix is referring to when he says, “You can do these, Donnie. You have practiced a long time – for just these moment!”
7. What would you like to see happen in the last chapter of this story?

Extending the Story

1. George Elder was a good man who lost his life trying to make his town better. Write an obituary for George Elder that Holly Hutchison might have written to honor her boss. To guide your writing, use a death notice previously written in your newspaper.

Chapter Sixteen

Town abuzz about Donnie's 'powers'

Vocabulary

- erupted “The posse **erupted** into a frenzy of name-calling and shoving before the police pulled them apart and handcuffed all three of them.” (*v. burst out*)
- ratted “Too bad you all just **ratted** each other out.” (*v. told on each other*)
- shellshocked “I’ll never forget the **shellshocked** look on his face...” (*adj. stunned*)
- accusations “...the posse’s **accusations** and finger-pointing led to more evidence against them.” (*n. a claim that somebody has done something wrong or illegal*)
- trespassing “The jury found them guilty of murder as well as...**trespassing** on private property.” (*v. to enter somebody else’s land unlawfully*)
- taunted “The kids who had **taunted** me just a few days ago came by to chat.” (*v. ridiculed, teased*)

Questions

1. How did Donnie use his mind, his guts, and the skills he’d been practicing to set up the climax of the story?
2. Who really supplied the evidence against the posse? What does this show about the posse?
3. What were all the charges the posse had to answer to? What was the punishment?
4. How do the bullies treat Donnie now that he’s the town hero?
5. How does the author suggest a possible change in Jake’s relationship with Holly?
6. What magical things happen to the courthouse tower?
7. What does Felix mean when he says this is a “salute from me to you, Donnie?”
8. What might happen if Donnie used his “powers” in a new adventure?

Extending the Story

1. Write the story Jake put on the front page of The Jefferson Times including the haunted office and Donnie’s powers. What would be the headline?
2. Write an editorial about the dangers of bullying, including cyber-bullying. Include some suggestions for overcoming this problem.

After Reading

Extending the Story Further

1. Create a story map of The Ghost in the Courthouse Statue. The following website provides many story map templates which can help the teacher differentiate this way of organizing a story and increasing student comprehension. <http://literature.pppst.com/storymaps.html>
2. Does your community have artwork such as statues to honor city leaders? Using the history of your own town, create a legend about one of the founding fathers or founding mothers. Research the history, then embellish the story a little to create a piece of historical fiction, just like Bill Bailey, the author of this story.
3. Invite a city historian to your school and ask him/her to share their most interesting stories.
4. Invite the editor of your local news media to your school. Create a list of questions ahead of time to use as the foundation of an interview. Make sure to ask the editor if his style is closer to Jake Passmore or George Elder. Then write the story as a feature for your local news or your school newspaper about this visit.