

## Lesson 7



# BRUCE AND THE SPIDER

from FIFTY FAMOUS STORIES RETOLD by James Baldwin

[Prologue] There was once a king of Scotland whose name was Robert Bruce. He had need to be both brave and wise, for the times in which he lived were wild and rude. The King of England was at war with him, and had led a great army into Scotland to drive him out of the land.

[Beginning] Battle after battle had been fought. Six times had Bruce led his brave little army against his foes; and six times had his men been beaten, and driven into flight. At last his army was scattered, and he was forced to hide himself in the woods and in lonely places among the mountains.

One rainy day, Bruce lay on the ground under a rude shed, listening to the patter of the drops on the roof above him. He was tired and sick at heart, and ready to give up all hope. It seemed to him that there was no use for him to try to do anything more.

As he lay thinking, he saw a spider over his head, making ready to weave her web. He watched her as she toiled slowly and with great care. Six times she tried to throw her frail thread from one beam to another, and six times it fell short.

“Poor thing!” said Bruce: “you, too, know what it is to fail.”

But the spider did not lose hope with the sixth failure. With still more care, she made ready to try for the seventh time. Bruce almost forgot his own troubles as he watched her swing herself out upon the slender line. Would she fail again? No! The thread was carried safely to the beam, and fastened there.

“I, too, will try a seventh time!” cried Bruce.

He arose and called his men together. He told them of his plans, and sent them out with messages of cheer to his disheartened people. Soon there was an army of brave Scotchmen around him. Another

battle was fought, and the King of England was glad to go back into his own country. [End]

[Epilogue] I have heard it said, that, after that day, no one by the name of Bruce would ever hurt a spider. The lesson which the little creature had taught the king was never forgotten.




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## Lesson 7.1

### Prose & Poetry

#### LITERARY ELEMENTS

## 3 Observe the Invention and Arrangement

### ♦ Lyrical Elements

- Describes
- Senses
- Comparisons

### ♦ Narrative Elements

- **Setting** Scotland, early fourteenth century. (Battle of Bannockburn was June 24, 1314.)
- **Characters** Robert the Bruce and a spider
- **Conflict** Bruce is discouraged because his army is defeated and scattered. A spider is spinning her web, attempting to attach thread to a beam just out of reach.
- **Resolution** Spider is successful on her seventh attempt; Bruce is encouraged to try again by her determination.

## 4 Investigate the Context

### ♦ Identify the poem's Literary Genre

- **Genre by literary period** – early 20th century American retelling of a story from fourteenth century Scotland

- **Genre by poetic/narrative category** – Treat as non-fiction, with possible fictional details: Robert Bruce is considered a national hero in Scotland, as is George Washington in the United States. This story is a part of the “mythology” of the Scottish nation, very much like the American story of George Washington and his hatchet. The word “mythology” does not imply that any of these stories are necessarily false. By “mythology,” we are referring to the accepted narrative of a particular nation which helps to shape and express its values. This is related to Tolkien’s idea that myth is often the best way to convey truth that would not otherwise be expressed. (*The Inklings*, by Humphrey Carpenter, relates a conversation about this between Tolkien and his then-athiest friend, C.S. Lewis.)

## 5 Connect the Thoughts

- ◆ The Crow and the Pitcher,” Aesop (perseverance); George Washington “myths” – cherry tree incident, penny across the river
- ◆ “’Tis a lesson you should heed: Try, try again. If at first you don’t succeed, Try, try again.” —folk proverb popularized by William Hickson, 1836; “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” —Thomas Edison

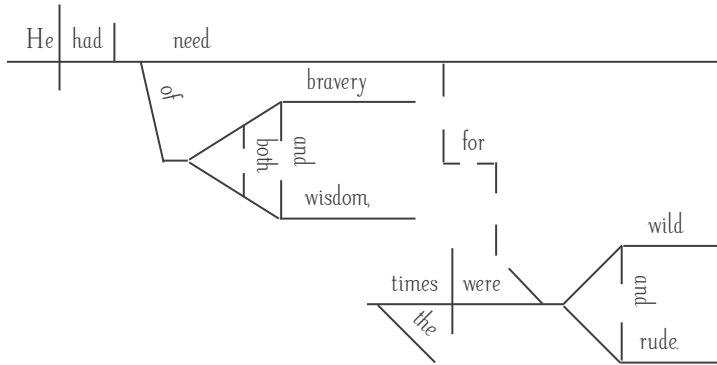
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### Lesson 7.2

## Language Logic

### SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING AND PARSING

He had need (of both bravery and wisdom), for the times were wild and rude.



WORD	PART OF SPEECH	DEFINE	CLASSIFY	PROPERTIES	FUNCTION
He	pronoun	stands in for <i>Bruce</i>	personal	3rd singular masculine	subject of principal clause
had need	verb	action	transitive	3rd singular past	main verb of 1st principal clause
wisdom	noun	idea	common	3rd singular neuter (or feminine)	OP of
times	noun	idea	common	3rd plural neuter	subject of 2nd principal clause

## Eloquent Expression

### COPIA OF WORDS: NOUN CLASS

*Answers will vary:* 1. Edward I of England opposed Robert Bruce of Scotland during the Scottish War for Independence. 2. The brave army fought the Battle of Bannockburn, and the enemy (king, leader, etc) returned to England.

## COPIA OF WORDS: NOUN AND PRONOUN PROPERTY – NUMBER

*Answers will vary:* 3. Bruce led his men against his foe (the enemy); now they were hiding in a wood (in the forest). 4. The spiders carry their threads and fasten them on the beams overhead.

## COPIA OF WORDS: NOUN AND PRONOUN SWITCH

*Answers will vary:* 5. He was at war with Robert Bruce, and had led them into Scotland. 6. Bruce watched the spider as she toiled. Six times she tried to throw it.

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### Lesson 7.3

## Prose & Poetry

### NARRATIVE PLOT ANALYSIS

This is only a guide to how a student might apply Theon’s Six to a narrative. There are no “right” answers. Please work with your students, and allow them to give you the reasons for their answers. Only correct them if absolutely necessary (for example, if they did not do a complete job).

#### Person

Robert the Bruce – defeated, separated from scattered army, tired, sick at heart, ready to give up hope; Spider – careful and patient

#### Action

Bruce watched the spider spin her web, and make six unsuccessful attempts to attach it to a beam. She was successful on the seventh try, which gave him hope to try again with his own army.

#### Place

mountains of Scotland, under a rude shed

Time

after sixth defeat of his army by the King of England.

Manner

Bruce – watched in discouragement at first, in hope at the end; Spider – weaved slowly and with great care

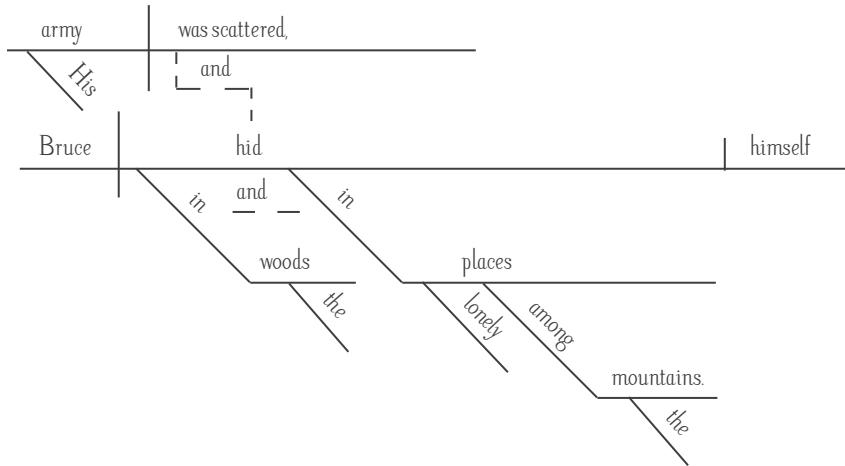
Cause

Bruce – watching because of the rain and his dejection; Spider – because of instinct

## Language Logic

### SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING AND PARSING

His army was scattered, and Bruce hid himself (in the woods) and (in lonely places) (among the mountains.)



WORD	PART OF SPEECH	DEFINE	CLASSIFY	PROPERTIES	FUNCTION
His	pronoun	stands in for <i>Bruce</i>	personal	3rd singular masculine	modifies <i>army</i> – shows possession
was scattered	verb	action	intransitive	3rd singular past	main verb of 1st principal clause
Bruce	noun	person	proper	3rd singular masculine	subject of 2nd principal clause
himself	pronoun	stands in for <i>Bruce</i>	personal	3rd singular masculine	DO <i>hid</i>
mountains	noun	place	common	3rd plural neuter	OP <i>among</i>

## Eloquent Expression

### COPIA OF WORDS: NOUN PROPERTY – PERSON

*Answers will vary:* 1. I had led the army against my foes, but now I was hiding in the woods. You had led the army against your foes, but now you were hiding in the woods. 2. You, too, will try a seventh time! He, too, will try a seventh time

### COPIA OF WORDS: VERB PROPERTY – TENSE

*Answers will vary:* 3. The king of England opposes the king of Scotland in the war. The king of England will oppose the king of Scotland in the war. The king of England has opposed the king of Scotland in the war. The king of England had opposed the king of Scotland in the war. The king of England will have opposed the king of Scotland in the war. 4. Six times the spider tries to throw her thread. Six times the spider will try to throw

her thread. Six times the spider has tried to throw her thread. Six times the spider had tried to throw her thread. Six times the spider will have tried to throw her thread.

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Lesson 7.4

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## Eloquent Expression

### COPIA OF WORDS: APPOSITIVES

*Answers will vary:* 3. Robert Bruce, the King of Scotland, had need to be both brave and wise. 4. The King of England, Edward I, was glad to go back into his own country, England.

### COPIA OF WORDS: POSSESSIVES

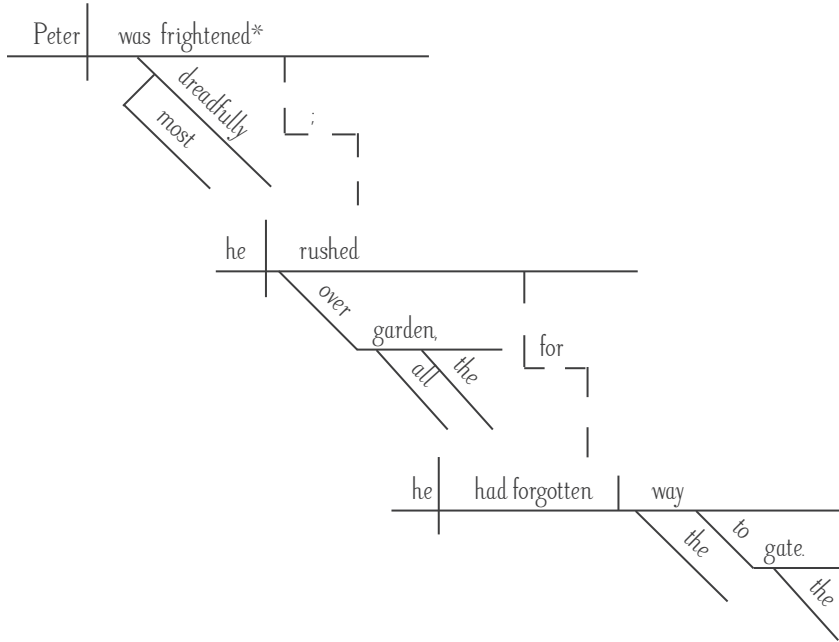
*Answers will vary:* 1. Six times the thread of the spider fell short, but the seventh, her effort succeeded. 2. The spider's lesson was never forgotten by the family of Bruce.



# Eloquent Expression

## LITERARY IMITATION

Peter was most dreadfully frightened; he rushed all (over the garden), for he had forgotten the way (to the gate.)



*\*You could also reasonably call was a linking verb and frightened a predicate adjective. Generally compound verbs in English are diagrammed together as the verb phrase, so if students makes this argument, they should be commended for good critical thinking!*