

Foundations of Literary Argument

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Rationale: This group of lessons is to help students learn how to close read, develop a supportable claim from evidence, and provide a clear and compelling analysis of the evidence, in order to write a coherent and effective argument. Depending on the age, level, and experience of your students, it can take from 5-8 class periods, but I have found it very effective if done early in the year and as a foundation for all that comes after. I've never regretted the time it has taken and have done it with middle and high school students.

The activities using the picture mysteries were adopted/adapted from the book *Teaching Argument Writing, Grades 6-12: Supporting Claims with Relevant Evidence and Clear Reasoning* by George Hillocks, Jr. Publisher: Heinemann, 2011. The picture mysteries were taken from Lawrence Treat's Picture Mystery books: *Crime And Puzzlement*. Publisher: David R. Godine, 2003. *The Clue Armchair Detective*. Publisher: Ballantine Books, 1987.

Context: Prior to these activities, students have been introduced to the vocabulary of **argument**, **claim**, **evidence**, **warrant**, **analysis**. Though the term **warrant** is not usually used in literary argument, I find that when they are learning how to make an argument, it is helpful.

Objectives (Students will be able to . . .):

- Examine a text for relevant evidence using close reading skills.
- Create and defend a valid interpretation of the evidence.
- Write a clear analysis of evidence.
- Write a coherent and effective literary argument.

Activity 1

1. Show "Slip or Trip" picture (attachment) and read description.
2. Introduce the activity: "We are investigators . . ."
3. Class Discussion about what is shown in the picture that supports or works against Queenie's statement of the evidence:
4. Leading Questions:
 - Do you think Queenie is telling the truth?
 - Can we believe what Queenie says?
 - Is what you see in the picture consistent with what Queenie says? What do you think?
 - How many of you think ____ is important evidence? → *write down as evidence*
 - Someone explain why that is important evidence? → *help develop rule/warrant*
 - Can we make that into a general rule? "When . . ., then . . ." (*help them put it into 3rd person if needed*)
 - *Create an analysis statement: Therefore, . . .*
 - Summarize what we know (evidence, rules and analysis)
 - What can we conclude from the evidence and rule? (that Queenie might be lying)
 - Who has another piece of evidence? What else do you see that leads you to think Queenie might be lying? → *add to chart*
 - Who can make up a rule? → *add to chart*
 - **WARNING:** don't try to guess what happened → focus only on whether what Queenie said happened could have happened

5. After the class has done two or three together (or as many as are needed for students to get the process), put into groups to continue work (or you can continue as a whole class, depending on level and response of students). Give group copy of graphic organizer.

Activity 2

1. When group work is complete, review status of evidence, rules, and conclusions and add any new work generated in group discussions.
2. Teach Writing a Report (argument)
 - If we were really investigators, to whom would we write the report? (tie in idea of audience → formal writing)
 - What is our purpose in writing?
 - What would we need to explain? (list as outline)
 - i. Background:
 1. When we arrived
 2. What we found
 3. What Queenie said
 4. What the autopsy said
 - ii. Argument:
 1. Whether the evidence supports Queenie's statement and what our conclusion and/or recommendation is (THE CLAIM)
 2. Our explanation of the evidence supporting our conclusion & recommendation (EVIDENCE/WARRANTS/ANALYSIS)
 3. Conclusion (SUMMARY of CLAIM)
3. Begin writing report on overhead/screen, etc. Do together as much as is necessary for the students to understand the process, then put them into their groups to finish. They should write out their conclusion (claim) and then the evidence and rules to support it (at least 5).
4. Collect the reports and evaluate student understanding.

Activity 3

1. Have students complete a study and report of another picture mystery **entirely in groups**. I use the "The Lunchroom Murder." Their reports should contain:
 - Needed background
 - Scene (what they found)
 - Statements (what they were told)
 - Outside reports
 - Create the argument.
 - Claim
 - Evidence, Warrants, and Analysis
 - Conclusion
2. Collect reports and evaluate.

Activity 4

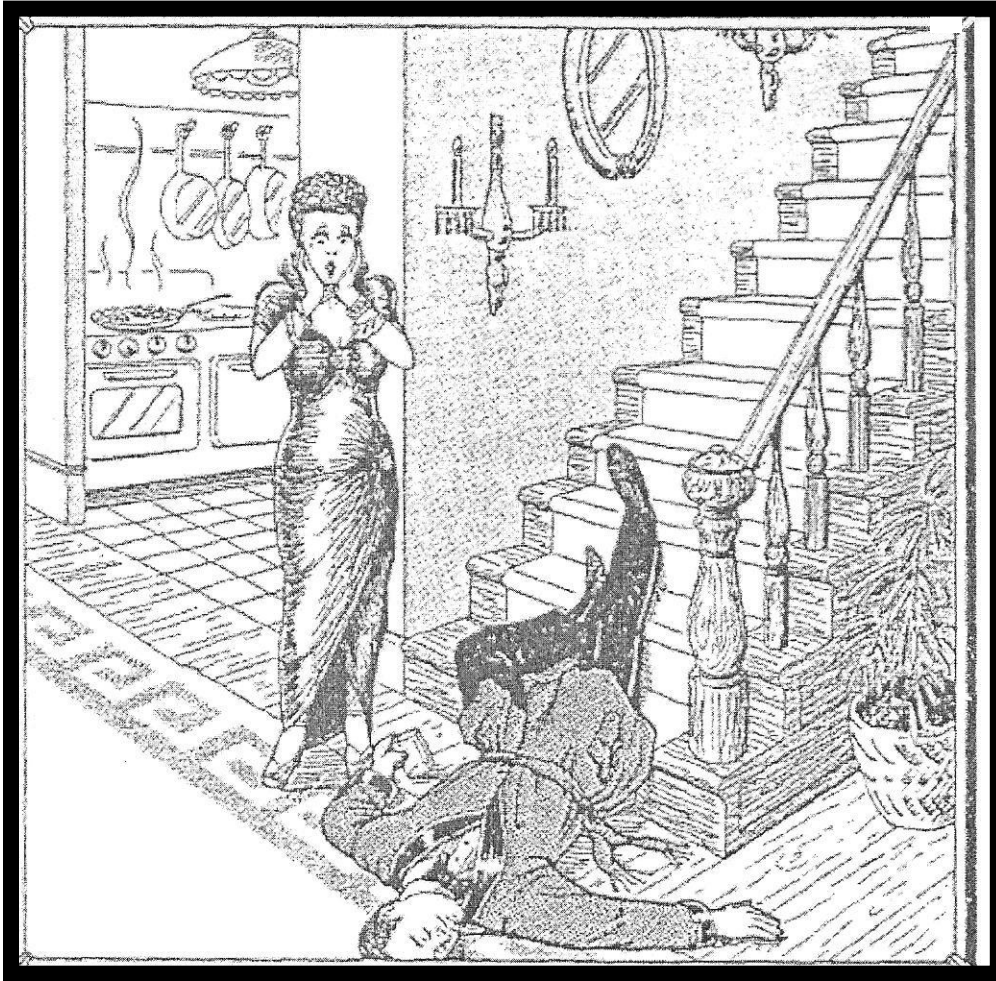
1. Have students complete a study and report of another picture mystery **as individuals**. I use the "The Case of the Dead Musician."

Activity 5

1. Now apply the process to a short work of literature of an ambiguous nature. I usually use “The Lady or the Tiger?” by Frank Stockton. I use this piece because 1) the ending provides a clear mystery that must be solved, which ties in nicely to what we were doing previously; 2) the evidence can lead to more than one solution (though I think one is highly more probable) and provides the students for an opportunity to debate based on the evidence; and 3) I love seeing the students’ reactions when they are left on a cliff-hanger. At first, they hate it, but it turns out to be one of their most memorable stories.
2. Process:
 - Before they read, discuss the following:
 - The value of closely looking for clues within the reading and re-reading as necessary to fully collect all the evidence the writer has provided.
 - The importance of using the evidence as a springboard for an interpretation and not start with a pre-conceived interpretation and then go looking for the evidence to only support an opinion.
 - Read the work aloud (as a class or in groups).
 - After reading, explain that they are going to use their skills and the process used to determine the outcome of the story and begin guiding them through the same process. Depending on how quickly and well they apply the previous process to the new context of literature, work as a whole class until they are ready to complete the process in groups. Once in groups, students should continue to discuss the evidence and make a case for one interpretation or the other, but each student should keep their own notes. They may disagree with each other.
 - After students have an opportunity to discuss and take notes, have them write the arguments. You can have them write one as a group OR as an individual.
 - EXTENSION: If I have them write the analysis of “The Lady or the Tiger?” as a group, than I often have them rewrite the ending of the story as creative writing assignment, trying to match Stockton’s style as closely as possible. Before I have them write, we spend some time discussing style, tone, and the language used to create both.

After working through this process, I have students apply it to more short fiction, until the process of close reading, evidence gathering, analysis and basic argumentation becomes comfortable.

“Slip or Trip?”



At five-foot six and a hundred and ten pounds, Queenie Volupides was a sight to behold and to clasp. When she tore out of the house after a tiff with her husband, Arthur, she went to the country club where there was a party going on.

She left the club shortly before one in the morning and invited a few friends to follow her home and have one more drink. They got to the Volupides house about ten minutes after Queenie, who met them at the door and said, “Something terrible happened. Arthur slipped and fell on the stairs. He was coming down for another drink—he still had the glass in his hand—and I think he’s dead. Oh, my God—what shall I do?”

The autopsy conducted later concluded that Arthur had died from a wound on the head and confirmed that he’d been drunk.

Evidence (Facts/Data/Observations)	Warrant (As a rule . . .)	Analysis (Therefore . . .)
Claim (Conclusion)		

Period _____ Pod # _____

“Slip or Trip”

Your pod is an investigative team that must determine what may have happened. You can either agree or disagree with Queenie’s version.

1. Do you think Queenie is telling the truth?
2. Find all the evidence you can that indicates whether or not Queenie is telling the truth. Make a list of all the evidence. Evidence includes concrete, observable information; personal testimony; written documents; and material objects and their condition or appearance.
3. Next explain how each piece of evidence supports your claim that Queenie is or is not telling the truth. Each explanation will be a generally accepted rule, which may begin with a phrase such as, “As a rule, . . .”, “Generally,” or “Usually”. If other members of your pod disagree with you, find evidence that will convince them.
4. Finally, create an analysis statement which connects the evidence with the warrant. Start with a word or phrase such as, “Therefore,” “Thus,” “This shows that . . .”.
5. Be prepared to explain why your evidence supports your case. Eventually you will write a report to convince the others in the class that your analysis makes the most sense.

Evidence (Facts/Data/Observations)	Warrant (As a rule . . .)	Analysis (Therefore, . . .)

Evidence (Facts/Data/Observations)	Warrant (As a rule . . .)	Analysis (Therefore, . . .)
Claim/Conclusion		

Activity 2

Now, finish the report on a sheet of notebook paper.

1. Write out your claim. Do you think Queenie is telling the truth?
2. Write out the evidence (at least 5), the warrants, and the analysis that support your claim.
3. Summarize your conclusion at the end.

“The Lunchroom Murder”



On an otherwise uneventful Thursday afternoon police heard a shot inside Ernie's Lunchroom, rushed in, and found the scene shown above.

They identified the body as that of a prominent racketeer named Fannin. Ernie, who is both the owner and only employee, had only one fact to tell: the murderer had leaned against the wall while firing at point-blank range. The imprint of his hand is in clear view. The cash register had just been rung up at \$8.75.

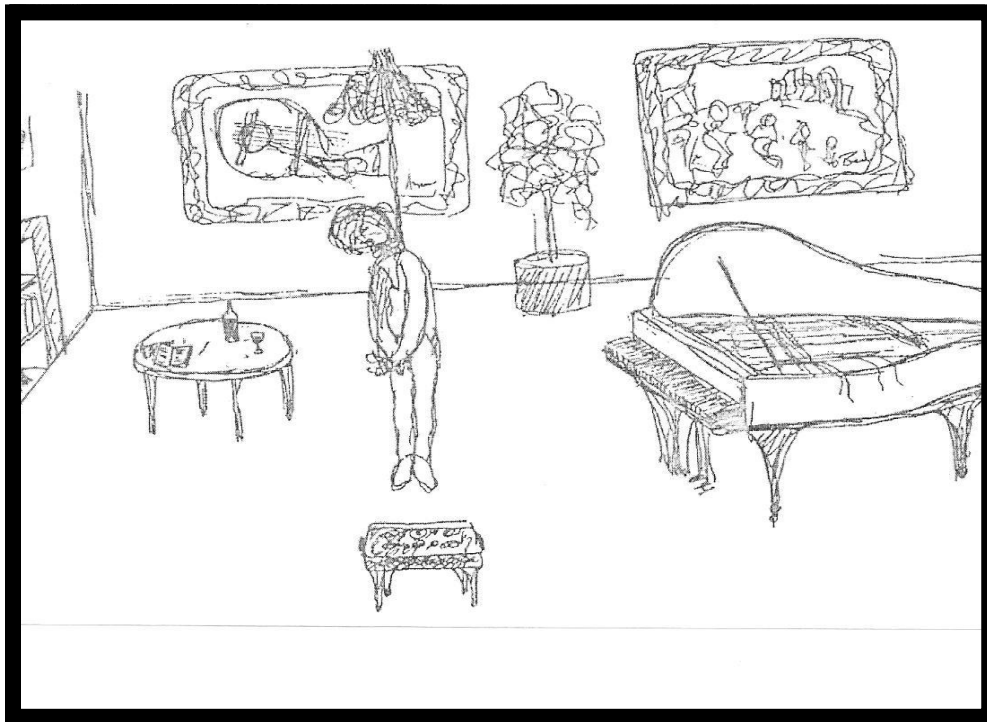
This is a difficult case. Your investigative team must attempt to determine which of the people in the lunchroom killed Fannin. You will have to observe the details carefully. There is enough evidence to help you explain most of what happened. In working out the solution, consider the following questions:

1. Did customers B, C, and D know each other? What are the evidence/ warrants/analysis?
2. How do the three customers differ in their habits or ways of doing things? What is the evidence? What is the warrant? What is the analysis?
3. Which set of footprints are Ernie's? What is the evidence? Warrant? Analysis?
4. To whom do the set of footprints marked X belong? How do you know?
5. With what hand did the shooter fire the gun? What is the evidence? Warrant? Analysis?
6. Who killed Fannin? How do you know? Outline all the evidence, warrants, and analysis necessary to support this claim.

“The Case of the Dead Musician”

Anton Karazai had amassed a great fortune in his seventy years as a world-famous pianist, performing for presidents and parliaments, kings and queens, in all the greatest cities’ concert halls and children’s hospitals. Anyone who watched Mr. Karazai perform understood immediately that he loved his music above and beyond anything else. Music—playing the piano—was his life.

Yesterday evening, May 16, 2006, however, Mr. Karazai’s only son and sole heir phoned the police and reported that his father had hanged himself from the chandelier in the piano room at his estate. When the police arrived, they took several pictures of the scene. One of those pictures appears below.



The police noted that Karazai had been hanged by a cord taken from the set of drapes in the corner window of the room and that his feet hung about two feet above the stool beneath him. They also noted that several pieces of steel wire had been ripped from the piano.

The coroner’s report confirmed that Mr. Karazai died from asphyxiation. Inspection of his neck revealed a single, thin, skin-breaking line with a small amount of blood across the Adam’s apple.

Since it is too small to read in the picture, here is Mr. Karazai's last journal entry in its entirety:

May 16, 2006. Have been sad for weeks now. My strength diminishes every day. It is even difficult for me to play the piano. Sometimes, even piano fails to cheer me. Sometimes my failing ability makes me angry. Yesterday I actually kicked my piano! But my ninety-year-old legs could hardly hurt a little bird. Only my son remains, my only son and the sole heir to all that I have earned and collected over this incredible but lonely life. I wonder if he knows what he will be getting when I die. Perhaps. But perhaps not. I will try to play something simple to cheer me before I retire for the evening—perhaps something from Debussy's "Children's Corner," a wonderful collection of happy, beautiful melodies.

The Assignment

You are the investigator reading the reports above and inspecting the picture of the scene. Mr. Karazai's son claims that his father hanged himself. What do you think is the truth? From the evidence available, make a case for what you think really happened. If you believe that other evidence is necessary, make a recommendation about what other evidence might need to be collected. Before you begin to write your report, list the evidence, warrants, and analysis you will use in making your case.

Checklist for Revisions

- Have you described what was found at the scene and what the autopsy revealed?
- Have you reported what the son stated?
- Have you stated your claim?
- Have you incorporated at least three pieces of evidence?
- Have you provided the warrants and analysis that explain why the evidence is important to your claim?
- Have you made a recommendation about what should happen next or what more evidence is needed?

The Lady, or the Tiger?

Frank R. Stockton

In the very olden time there lived a semi-barbaric king, whose ideas, though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid, and untrammelled, as became the half of him which was barbaric. He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing, and, when he and himself agreed upon anything, the thing was done. When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, his nature was bland and genial; but, whenever there was a little hitch, and some of his orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight and crush down uneven places.

Among the borrowed notions by which his barbarism had become semified was that of the public arena, in which, by exhibitions of manly and beastly valor, the minds of his subjects were refined and cultured.

But even here the exuberant and barbaric fancy asserted itself. The arena of the king was built, not to give the people an opportunity of hearing the rhapsodies of dying gladiators, nor to enable them to view the inevitable conclusion of a conflict between religious opinions and hungry jaws, but for purposes far better adapted to widen and develop the mental energies of the people. This vast amphitheater, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic justice, in which crime was punished, or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance.

When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena, a structure which well deserved its name, for, although its form and plan were borrowed from afar, its purpose emanated solely from the brain of this man, who, every barleycorn a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy, and who ingrafted on every adopted form of human thought and action the rich growth of his barbaric idealism.

When all the people had assembled in the galleries, and the king, surrounded by his court, sat high up on his throne of royal state on one side of the arena, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the accused subject stepped out into the amphitheater. Directly opposite him, on the other side of the inclosed space, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial to walk directly to these doors and open one of them. He could open either door he pleased; he was subject to no guidance or influence but that of the aforementioned impartial and incorruptible chance. If he opened the one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured, which immediately sprang upon him and tore him to pieces as a punishment for his guilt. The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided, doleful iron bells were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so dire a fate.

But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that his majesty could select among his fair subjects, and to this lady he was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection; the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward. The exercises, as in the other instance, took place immediately, and in the arena. Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an epithalamic measure, advanced to where the pair stood, side by side, and the wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnized. Then the gay brass bells rang forth their merry peals, the people shouted glad hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led his bride to his home.

This was the king's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady; he opened either he pleased, without

having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other. The decisions of this tribunal were not only fair, they were positively determinate: the accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty, and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgments of the king's arena.

The institution was a very popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody slaughter or a hilarious wedding. This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion which it could not otherwise have attained. Thus, the masses were entertained and pleased, and the thinking part of the community could bring no charge of unfairness against this plan, for did not the accused person have the whole matter in his own hands?

This semi-barbaric king had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own. As is usual in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and was loved by him above all humanity. Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom, and she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong. This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the king happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate nor waver in regard to his duty in the premises. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the king's arena. This, of course, was an especially important occasion, and his majesty, as well as all the people, was greatly interested in the workings and development of this trial. Never before had such a case occurred; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of the king. In after years such things became commonplace enough, but then they were in no slight degree novel and startling.

The tiger-cages of the kingdom were searched for the most savage and relentless beasts, from which the fiercest monster might be selected for the arena; and the ranks of maiden youth and beauty throughout the land were carefully surveyed by competent judges in order that the young man might have a fitting bride in case fate did not determine for him a different destiny. Of course, everybody knew that the deed with which the accused was charged had been done. He had loved the princess, and neither he, she, nor any one else, thought of denying the fact; but the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal, in which he took such great delight and satisfaction. No matter how the affair turned out, the youth would be disposed of, and the king would take an aesthetic pleasure in watching the course of events, which would determine whether or not the young man had done wrong in allowing himself to love the princess.

The appointed day arrived. From far and near the people gathered, and thronged the great galleries of the arena, and crowds, unable to gain admittance, massed themselves against its outside walls. The king and his court were in their places, opposite the twin doors, those fateful portals, so terrible in their similarity.

All was ready. The signal was given. A door beneath the royal party opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. Tall, beautiful, fair, his appearance was greeted with a low hum of admiration and anxiety. Half the audience had not known so grand a youth had lived among them. No wonder the princess loved him! What a terrible thing for him to be there!

As the youth advanced into the arena he turned, as the custom was, to bow to the king, but he did not think at all of that royal personage. His eyes were fixed upon the princess, who sat to the right of her father. Had it not been for the moiety of barbarism in her nature it is probable that lady would not have been there, but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so terribly interested. From the moment that the decree had gone forth that her lover should decide his fate in the king's arena, she had thought of nothing, night or day, but this great event and the various subjects connected with it. Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done,--she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms, that lay behind those doors, stood the cage of the tiger, with its open front, and in which waited the lady. Through these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside, it was impossible that any noise

or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them. But gold, and the power of a woman's will, had brought the secret to the princess.

And not only did she know in which room stood the lady ready to emerge, all blushing and radiant, should her door be opened, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth, should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him; and the princess hated her. Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived, and even returned. Now and then she had seen them talking together; it was but for a moment or two, but much can be said in a brief space; it may have been on most unimportant topics, but how could she know that? The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess; and, with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eye met hers as she sat there, paler and whiter than any one in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her, he saw, by that power of quick perception which is given to those whose souls are one, that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she had made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the king. The only hope for the youth in which there was any element of certainty was based upon the success of the princess in discovering this mystery; and the moment he looked upon her, he saw she had succeeded, as in his soul he knew she would succeed.

Then it was that his quick and anxious glance asked the question: "Which?" It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash; it must be answered in another.

Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet before her. She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the man in the arena.

He turned, and with a firm and rapid step he walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovably upon that man. Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the door on the right, and opened it.

Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady ?

The more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him?

How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered her face with her hands as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger!

But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door! How in her grievous reveries had she gnashed her teeth, and torn her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady! How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him rush to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph; when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled with the joy of recovered life; when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells; when she had seen the priest, with his joyous followers, advance to the couple, and make them man and wife before her very eyes; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned!

Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semi-barbaric futurity?

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood!

Her decision had been indicated in an instant, but it had been made after days and nights of anguished deliberation. She had known she would be asked, she had decided what she would answer, and, without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right.

The question of her decision is one not to be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it. And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door,--the lady, or the tiger?