

The Doughnuts

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Written and illustrated by Robert McCloskey

READING TIP

Look for clues about setting

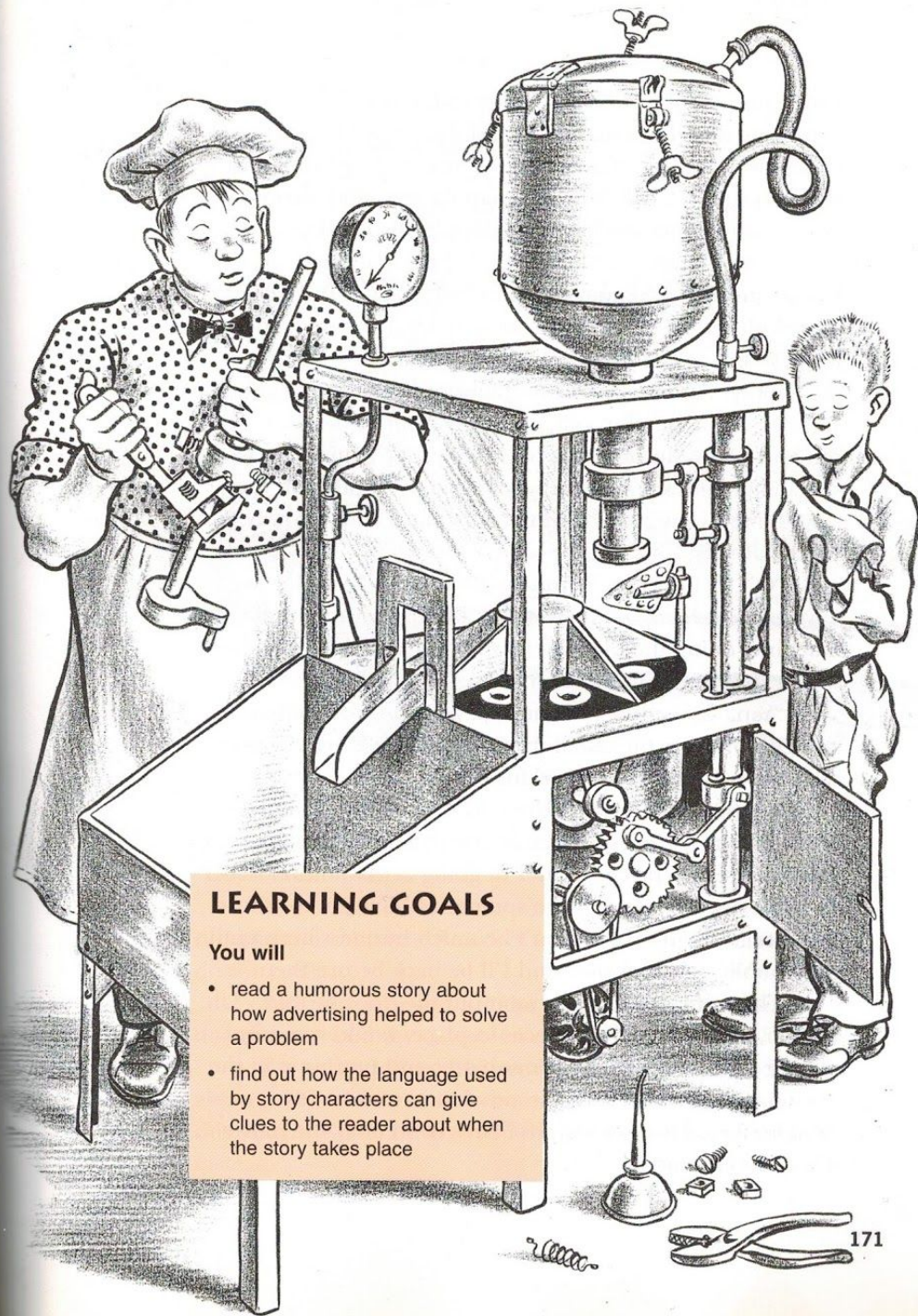
The setting for a story is about both place and time. Writers do not always tell you exactly when a story takes place, but sometimes the language used by the characters can give you clues to the time period of the story. As you read, try to figure out when this story might have taken place.

One Friday night in November Homer overheard his mother talking on the telephone to Aunt Agnes over in Centerburg. "I'll stop by with the car in about half an hour and we can go to the meeting together," she said, because tonight was the night the Ladies' Club was meeting to discuss plans for a box social and to knit and sew for the Red Cross.

"I think I'll come along and keep Uncle Ulysses company while you and Aunt Agnes are at the meeting," said Homer.

So after Homer had combed his hair and his mother had looked to see if she had her knitting instructions and the right size needles, they started for town.

Homer's Uncle Ulysses and Aunt Agnes have a very up and coming lunch room over in Centerburg, just across from the court house on the town square. Uncle Ulysses is a man with advanced ideas and a weakness for labor saving devices. He equipped the lunch room with automatic toasters,



LEARNING GOALS

You will

- read a humorous story about how advertising helped to solve a problem
- find out how the language used by story characters can give clues to the reader about when the story takes place

automatic coffee maker, automatic dish washer, and an automatic doughnut maker. All just the latest thing in labor saving devices. Aunt Agnes would throw up her hands and sigh every time Uncle Ulysses bought a new labor saving device. Sometimes she became unkindly disposed toward him for days and days. She was of the opinion that Uncle Ulysses just frittered away his spare time over at the barber shop with the sheriff and the boys, so, what was the good of a labor saving device that gave you more time to fritter?

When Homer and his mother got to Centerburg they stopped at the lunch room, and after Aunt Agnes had come out and said, "My, how that boy does grow!" which was what she always said, she went off with Homer's mother in the car. Homer went into the lunch room and said, "Howdy, Uncle Ulysses!"

"Oh, hello, Homer. You're just in time," said Uncle Ulysses. "I've been going over this automatic doughnut machine, oiling the machinery and cleaning the works ... wonderful things, these labor saving devices."

"Yep," agreed Homer, and he picked up a cloth and started polishing the metal trimmings while Uncle Ulysses tinkered with the inside workings.

"Opfwo-oof!!" sighed Uncle Ulysses and, "Look here, Homer, you've got a mechanical mind. See if you can find where these two pieces fit in. I'm going across to the barber shop for a spell, 'cause there's somethin' I've got to talk to the sheriff about. There won't be much business here until the double feature is over and I'll be back before then."

Then as Uncle Ulysses went out the door he said, "Uh, Homer, after you get the pieces in place, would you mind mixing up a batch of doughnut batter and putting it in the machine? You could turn the switch and make a few doughnuts to have on hand for the crowd after the movie ... if you don't mind."




“O.K.,” said Homer, “I’ll take care of everything.”

A few minutes later a customer came in and said,
“Good evening, Bud.”

Homer looked up from putting the last piece in the doughnut machine and said, “Good evening, Sir, what can I do for you?”

“Well, young feller, I’d like a cup o’ coffee and some doughnuts,” said the customer.

“I’m sorry, Mister, but we won’t have any doughnuts for about half an hour, until I can mix some dough and start this machine. I could give you some very fine sugar rolls instead.”



“Well, Bud, I’m in no real hurry so I’ll just have a cup o’ coffee and wait around a bit for the doughnuts. Fresh doughnuts are always worth waiting for is what I always say.”

“O.K.,” said Homer, and he drew a cup of coffee from Uncle Ulysses’ super automatic coffee maker.

“Nice place you’ve got here,” said the customer.

“Oh, yes,” replied Homer, “this is a very up and coming lunch room with all the latest improvements.”

“Yes,” said the stranger, “must be a good business. I’m in business too. A traveling man in outdoor advertising. I’m a sandwich man, Mr. Gabby’s my name.”

“My name is Homer. I’m glad to meet you, Mr. Gabby. It must be a fine profession, traveling and advertising sandwiches.”

“Oh, no,” said Mr. Gabby, “I don’t advertise sandwiches, I just wear any kind of an ad, one sign on front and one sign on behind, this way.... Like a sandwich. Ya know what I mean?”

“Oh, I see. That must be fun, and you travel too?” asked Homer as he got out the flour and the baking powder.

“Yeah, I ride the rails between jobs, on freight trains, ya know what I mean?”

“Yes, but isn’t that dangerous?” asked Homer.

“Of course there’s a certain amount a risk, but you take any method a travel these days, it’s all dangerous. Ya know what I mean? Now take airplanes for instance....”

Just then a large shiny black car stopped in front of the lunch room and a chauffeur helped a lady out of the rear door. They both came inside and the lady smiled at Homer and said, “We’ve stopped for a light snack. Some doughnuts and coffee would be simply marvelous.”

Then Homer said, “I’m sorry, Ma’m, but the doughnuts won’t be ready until I make this batter and start Uncle Ulysses’ doughnut machine.”



"Well now aren't you a clever young man to know how to make *doughnuts*!"

"Well," blushed Homer, "I've really never done it before but I've got a receipt to follow."

"Now, young man, you simply must allow me to help. You know, I haven't made doughnuts for years, but I know the best receipt for doughnuts. It's marvelous, and we really must use it."

"But, Ma'm...." said Homer.

"Now just *wait* till you taste these doughnuts," said the lady. "Do you have an apron?" she asked as she took off her fur coat and her rings and her jewelry and rolled up her sleeves. "Charles," she said to the chauffeur, "hand me that

baking powder, that's right, and, young man, we'll need some nutmeg."

So Homer and the chauffeur stood by and handed things and cracked the eggs while the lady mixed and stirred. Mr. Gabby sat on his stool, sipped his coffee, and looked on with great interest.

"There!" said the lady when all of the ingredients were mixed. "Just *wait* till you taste these doughnuts!"

"It looks like an awful lot of batter," said Homer as he stood on a chair and poured it into the doughnut machine with the help of the chauffeur. "It's about *ten* times as much as Uncle Ulysses ever makes."

"But wait till you taste them!" said the lady with an eager look and a smile.

Homer got down from the chair and pushed a button on the machine marked "*Start*." Rings of batter started dropping into the hot fat. After a ring of batter was cooked on one side, an automatic gadget turned it over and the other side would cook. Then another automatic gadget gave the doughnut a little push and it rolled neatly down a little chute, all ready to eat.

"That's a simply *fascinating* machine," said the lady as she waited for the first doughnut to roll out.

"Here, young man, *you* must have the first one. Now isn't that just *too* delicious!? Isn't it simply marvelous?"

"Yes, Ma'm, it's very good," replied Homer as the lady handed doughnuts to Charles and to Mr. Gabby and asked if they didn't think they were simply divine doughnuts.

"It's an old family receipt!" said the lady with pride.

Homer poured some coffee for the lady and her chauffeur and for Mr. Gabby, and a glass of milk for himself. Then they all sat down at the lunch counter to enjoy another few doughnuts apiece.

"I'm so glad you enjoy my doughnuts," said the lady. "But now, Charles, we really must be going. If you will just take this apron, Homer, and put two dozen doughnuts in a bag to take along, we'll be on our way. And, Charles, don't forget to pay the young man." She rolled down her sleeves and put on her jewelry, then Charles managed to get her into her big fur coat.

"Good night, young man, I haven't had so much fun in years. I *really* haven't!" said the lady as she went out the door and into the big shiny car.

"Those are sure good doughnuts," said Mr. Gabby as the car moved off.

"You bet!" said Homer. Then he and Mr. Gabby stood and watched the automatic doughnut machine make doughnuts.

After a few dozen more doughnuts had rolled down the little chute, Homer said, "I guess that's about enough doughnuts to sell to the after theater customers. I'd better turn the machine off for a while."

Homer pushed the button marked "*Stop*" and there was a little click, but nothing happened. The rings of batter kept right on dropping into the hot fat, and an automatic gadget kept right on turning them over, and another automatic gadget kept right on giving them a little push, and the doughnuts kept right on rolling down the little chute, all ready to eat.

"That's funny," said Homer, "I'm sure that's the right button!" He pushed it again but the automatic doughnut maker kept right on making doughnuts.

"Well I guess I must have put one of those pieces in backwards," said Homer.

"Then it might stop if you pushed the button marked '*Start*,'" said Mr. Gabby.

Homer did, and the doughnuts still kept rolling down the little chute, just as regular as a clock can tick.



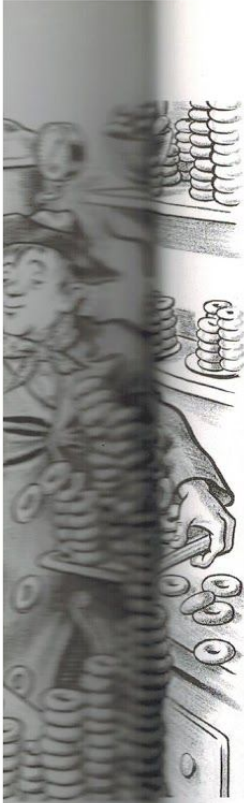
"I guess we could sell a few more doughnuts," said Homer, "but I'd better telephone Uncle Ulysses over at the barber shop." Homer gave the number and while he waited for someone to answer, he counted thirty-seven doughnuts roll down the little chute.

Finally someone answered, "Hello! This is the sarber bhop, I mean the barber shop."

"Oh, hello, sheriff. This is Homer. Could I speak to Uncle Ulysses?"

"Well, he's playing pinochle right now," said the sheriff. "Anythin' I can tell 'im?"

"Yes," said Homer. "I pushed the button marked *Stop* on the doughnut machine but the rings of batter



keep right on dropping into the hot fat, and an automatic gadget keeps right on turning them over, and another automatic gadget keeps giving them a little push, and the doughnuts keep right on rolling down the little chute! It won't stop!"

"O.K. Wold the hire, I mean, hold the wire and I'll tell 'im." Then Homer looked over his shoulder and counted another twenty-one doughnuts roll down the little chute, all ready to eat. Then the sheriff said, "He'll be right over... Just gotta finish this hand."

"That's good," said Homer. "G'by, sheriff."

The window was full of doughnuts by now so Homer and Mr. Gabby had to hustle around and start stacking them on plates and trays and lining them up on the counter.

"Sure are a lot of doughnuts!" said Homer.

"You bet!" said Mr. Gabby. "I lost count at twelve hundred and two and that was quite a while back."

People had begun to gather outside the lunch room window, and someone was saying, "There are almost as many doughnuts as there are people in Centerburg, and I wonder how in tarnation Ulysses thinks he can sell all of 'em!"

Every once in a while somebody would come inside and buy some, but while somebody bought two to eat and a dozen to take home, the machine made three dozen more.

By the time Uncle Ulysses and the sheriff arrived and pushed through the crowd, the lunch room was a calamity of doughnuts! Doughnuts in the window, doughnuts piled high on the shelves, doughnuts stacked on plates, doughnuts lined up twelve deep all along the counter, and doughnuts still rolling down the little chute, just as regular as a clock can tick.

"Hello, sheriff, hello, Uncle Ulysses, we're having a little trouble here," said Homer.

"Well, I'll be dunked!!" said Uncle Ulysses.

“Derned ef you won’t be when Aggy gits home,” said the sheriff.

“Mighty fine doughnuts though. What’ll you do with ’em all, Ulysses?” said the sheriff.

Uncle Ulysses groaned and said, “What will Aggy say? We’ll never sell ’em all.”

Then Mr. Gabby, who hadn’t said anything for a long time, stopped piling doughnuts and said, “What you need is an advertising man. Ya know what I mean? You got the doughnuts, ya gotta create a market Understand?... It’s balancing the demand with the supply.... That sort of thing.”

“Yep!” said Homer. “Mr. Gabby’s right. We have to enlarge our market. He’s an advertising sandwich man, so if we hire him, he can walk up and down in front of the theater and get the customers.”

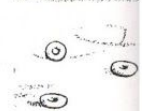
“You’re hired, Mr. Gabby!” said Uncle Ulysses.

Then everybody pitched in to paint the signs and to get Mr. Gabby sandwiched between. They painted “SALE ON DOUGHNUTS” in big letters on the window too.

Meanwhile the rings of batter kept right on dropping into the hot fat, and an automatic gadget kept right on turning them over, and another automatic gadget kept right on giving them a little push, and the doughnuts kept right on rolling down the little chute, just as regular as a clock can tick.

“I certainly hope this advertising works,” said Uncle Ulysses, wagging his head. “Aggy’ll certainly throw a fit if it don’t.”

The sheriff went outside to keep order, because there was quite a crowd by now—all looking at the doughnuts and guessing how many thousand there were, and watching new ones roll down the little chute, just as regular as a clock can tick. Homer and Uncle Ulysses kept stacking doughnuts. Once in a while somebody bought a few, but not very often.

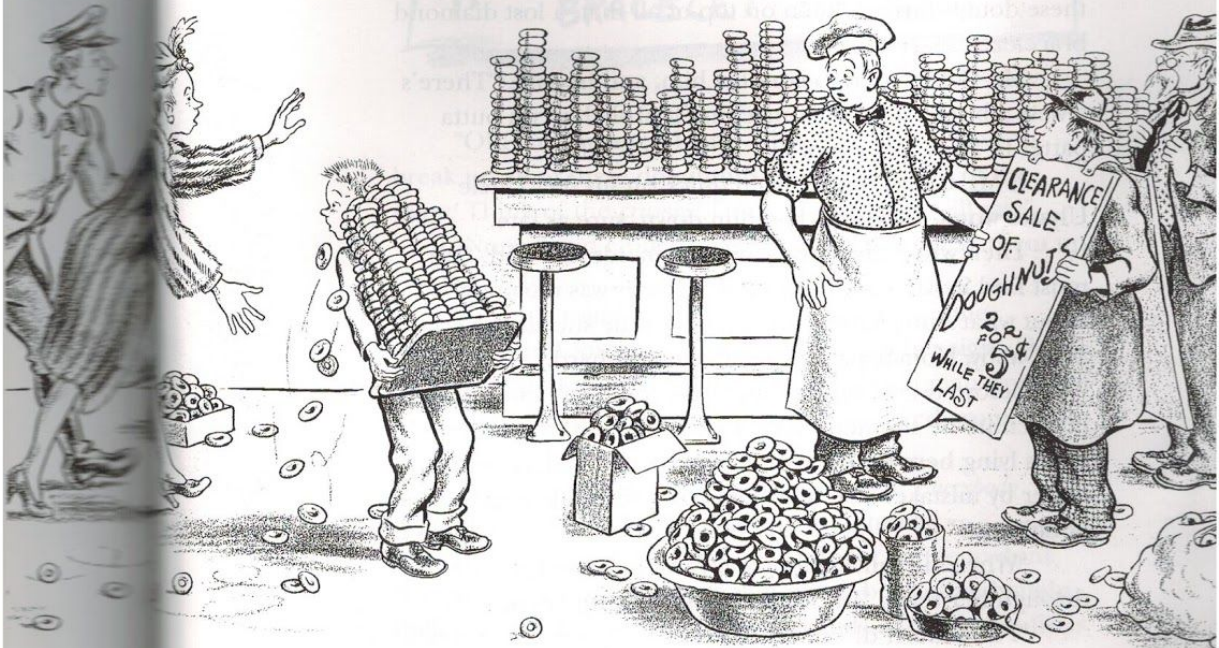



Then Mr. Gabby came back and said, "Say, you know there's not much use o' me advertisin' at the theater. The show's all over, and besides almost everybody in town is out front watching that machine make doughnuts!"

"Zeus!" said Uncle Ulysses. "We must get rid of these doughnuts before Aggy gets here!"

"Looks like you will have ta hire a truck ta waul 'em ahay, I mean haul 'em away!!" said the sheriff who had just come in. Just then there was a noise and a shoving out front and the lady from the shiny black car and her chauffeur came pushing through the crowd and into the lunch room.

"Oh, gracious!" she gasped, ignoring the doughnuts, "I've lost my diamond bracelet, and I know I left it here on the counter," she said, pointing to a place where the doughnuts were piled in stacks of two dozen.





“Yes, Ma’m, I guess you forgot it when you helped make the batter,” said Homer.

Then they moved all the doughnuts around and looked for the diamond bracelet, but they couldn’t find it anywhere. Meanwhile the doughnuts kept rolling down the little chute, just as regular as a clock can tick.

After they had looked all around the sheriff cast a suspicious eye on Mr. Gabby, but Homer said, “He’s all right, sheriff, he didn’t take it. He’s a friend of mine.”

Then the lady said, “I’ll offer a reward of one hundred dollars for that bracelet! It really *must* be found ... it *really* must!”

“Now don’t you worry, lady,” said the sheriff. “I’ll get your bracelet back!”

“Zeus! This is terrible!” said Uncle Ulysses. “First all of these doughnuts and then on top of all that, a lost diamond bracelet....”

Mr. Gabby tried to comfort him, and he said, “There’s always a bright side. That machine’ll probably run outta batter in an hour or two.”

If Mr. Gabby hadn’t been quick on his feet Uncle Ulysses would have knocked him down, sure as fate.

Then while the lady wrung her hands and said, “We must find it, we *must!*” and Uncle Ulysses was moaning about what Aunt Agnes would say, and the sheriff was eyeing Mr. Gabby, Homer sat down and thought hard.

Before twenty more doughnuts could roll down the little chute he shouted, “SAY! I know where the bracelet is! It was lying here on the counter and got mixed up in the batter by mistake! The bracelet is cooked inside one of these doughnuts!”

“Why ... I really believe you’re right,” said the lady through her tears. “Isn’t that *amazing*? Simply *amazing!*”

“I’ll be durn’d!” said the sheriff.

FRESH DOUGHNUTS
2 FOR 5¢
WHILE THEY LAST
\$ 100.00 PRIZE
FOR FINDING
A BRACELET
INSIDE A DOUGHNUT
P.S. YOU HAVE TO GIVE THE
BRACELET BACK

“OhH-h!” moaned Uncle Ulysses. “Now we have to break up all of these doughnuts to find it. Think of the *pieces!* Think of the *crumbs!* Think of what Aggy will say!”

“Nope,” said Homer. “We won’t have to break them up. I’ve got a plan.”

So Homer and the advertising man took some cardboard and some paint and printed another sign. They put this sign in the window, and the sandwich man wore two more signs that said the same thing and walked around in the crowd out front.

THEN ... The doughnuts began to sell! *Everybody* wanted to buy doughnuts, *dozens* of doughnuts!

And that’s not all. Everybody bought coffee to dunk the doughnuts in too. Those that didn’t buy coffee bought milk or soda. It kept Homer and the lady and the chauffeur

and Uncle Ulysses and the sheriff busy waiting on the people who wanted to buy doughnuts.

When all but the last couple of hundred doughnuts had been sold, Rupert Black shouted, "I GAWT IT!!" and sure enough ... there was the diamond bracelet inside of his doughnut!

Then Rupert went home with a hundred dollars, the citizens of Centerburg went home full of doughnuts, the lady and her chauffeur drove off with the diamond bracelet, and Homer went home with his mother when she stopped by with Aunt Aggy.



As Homer went out of the door he heard Mr. Gabby say, "Neatest trick of merchandising I ever seen," and Aunt Aggy was looking sceptical while Uncle Ulysses was saying, "The rings of batter kept right on dropping into the hot fat, and the automatic gadget kept right on turning them over, and the other automatic gadget kept right on giving them a little push, and the doughnuts kept right on rolling down the little chute just as regular as a clock can tick—they just kept right on a comin', an' a comin', an' a comin', an' a comin'."

AFTER YOU READ

Use modern language and expressions

Write down a list of the words or expressions that helped you to identify the time period when this story might have taken place. If you wanted to change the story to take place today, how would you change these words or expressions?