

*Does what you wear
really matter?*

The Hockey Sweate

Short Story by Roch Carrier

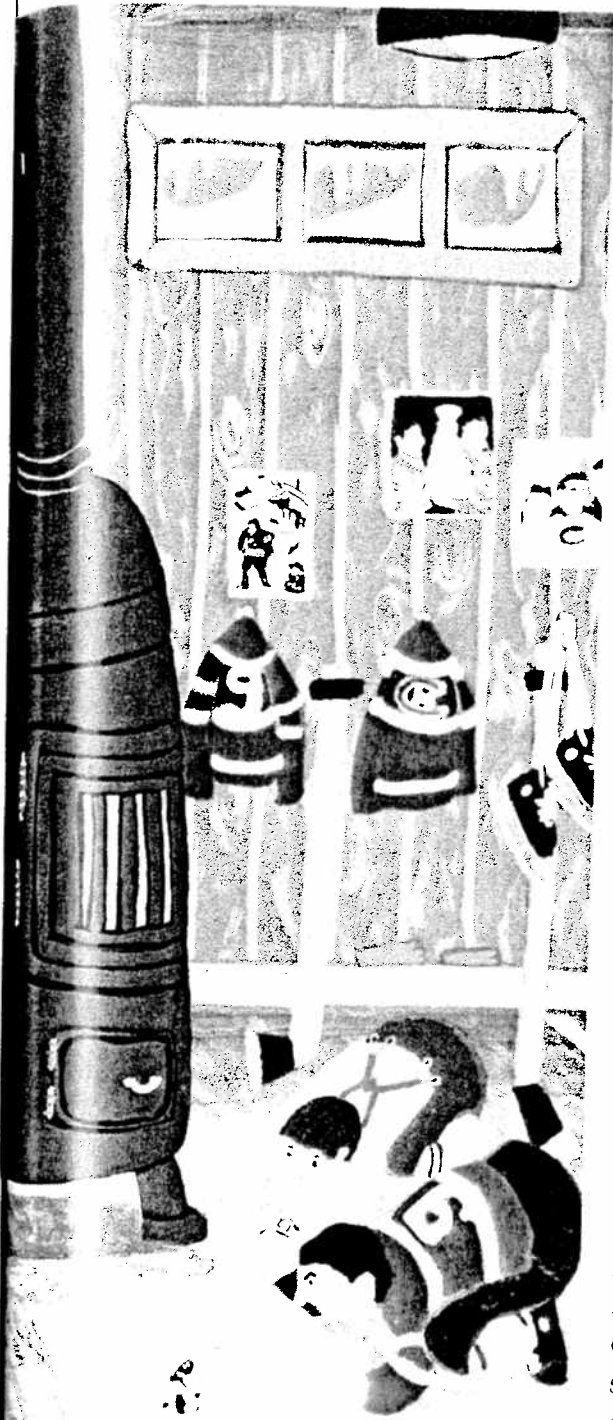
Translated by Sheila Fischman

The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places—the school, the church, and the skating rink—but our real life was on the skating rink. Real battles were won on the skating rink. Real strength appeared on the skating rink. The real leaders showed themselves on the skating rink. School was a sort of punishment. Parents always want to punish children and school is their most natural way of punishing us. However, school was also a quiet place where we could prepare for the next hockey game, lay out our next strategies. As for church, we found there the tranquillity of God; there we forgot school and dreamed about the next hockey game. Through our daydreams it might happen that we would recite a prayer; we would ask God to help us play as well as Maurice Richard.

We all wore the same uniform as he, the red, white, and blue uniform of the Montreal Canadiens, the best hockey team in the world; we all combed our hair in the same style as Maurice Richard, and to keep it in place we used a sort of glue—a great deal of glue. We laced our skates like Maurice Richard, we taped our sticks like Maurice Richard. We cut all his pictures out of the papers. Truly, we knew everything about him.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Identify features of good beginnings and endings.
- Analyse sentence variety.



On the ice, when the referee blew his whistle the two teams would rush at the puck; we were five Maurice Richards taking it away from five other Maurice Richards; we were ten players, all of us wearing, with the same blazing enthusiasm, the uniform of the Montreal Canadiens. On our backs, we all wore the famous number 9.

One day, my Montreal Canadiens sweater had become too small; then it got torn and had holes in it. My mother said, "If you wear that old sweater, people are going to think we're poor!" Then she did what she did whenever we needed new clothes. She started to leaf through the catalogue the Eaton company sent us in the mail every year. My mother was proud. She didn't want to buy our clothes at the general store; the only things that were good enough for us were the latest styles from Eaton's catalogue: My mother didn't like the order forms included with the catalogue; they were written in English and she didn't understand a word of it. To order my hockey sweater, she did as she usually did; she took out her writing paper and wrote in her gentle schoolteacher's hand: "Cher Monsieur Eaton, Would you be kind enough to send me a Canadiens' sweater for my son who is ten years old and a little too tall for his age and Docteur Robitaille thinks he's a little

too thin? I'm sending you three dollars and please send me what's left if there's anything left. I hope your wrapping will be better than last time."

Monsieur Eaton was quick to answer my mother's letter. Two weeks later we received the sweater. That day I had one of the greatest disappointments of my life! I would even say that on that day I experienced a very great sorrow. Instead of the red, white, and blue Montreal Canadiens sweater, Monsieur Eaton had sent us a blue and white sweater with a maple leaf on the front—the sweater of the Toronto Maple Leafs. I'd always worn the red, white, and blue Montreal Canadiens sweater; all my friends wore the red, white, and blue sweater; never had anyone in my village ever worn the Toronto sweater, never had we even seen a Toronto Maple Leafs sweater. Besides, the Toronto team was regularly trounced by the triumphant Canadiens. With tears in my eyes, I found the strength to say, "I'll never wear that uniform."

"My boy, first you're going to try it on! If you make up your mind about things before you try, my boy, you won't go very far in this life."

My mother had pulled the blue and white Toronto Maple Leafs sweater over my shoulders and already my arms were inside the sleeves. She pulled the sweater down and carefully smoothed all the creases in the abominable maple leaf on which, right in the middle of my chest, were written the words "Toronto Maple Leafs." I wept.

"I'll never wear it."

"Why not? This sweater fits you...like a glove."

"Maurice Richard would never put it on his back."

"You aren't Maurice Richard. Anyway, it isn't what's on your back that counts, it's what you've got inside your head."

"You'll never put it in my head to wear a Toronto Maple Leafs sweater."

My mother sighed in despair and explained to me.

"If you don't keep this sweater which fits you perfectly I'll have to write to Monsieur Eaton and explain that you don't want to wear the Toronto sweater. Monsieur Eaton's an *Anglais*; he'll be insulted because he likes the Maple Leafs. And if he's insulted do you think he'll be in a hurry to answer us? Spring will be here and you won't

have played a single game, just because you didn't want to wear that perfectly nice blue sweater."

So I was obliged to wear the Maple Leafs sweater. When I arrived on the rink, all the Maurice Richards in red, white, and blue came up, one by one, to take a look. When the referee blew his whistle I went to take my usual position. The captain came and warned me I'd be better to stay on the forward line. A few minutes later the second line was called; I jumped onto the ice. The Maple Leafs sweater weighed on my shoulders like a mountain. The captain came and told me to wait; he'd need me later, on defence. By the third period I still hadn't played; one of the defencemen was hit in the nose with a stick and it was bleeding. I jumped on the ice; my moment had come! The referee blew his whistle; he gave me a penalty. He claimed I'd jumped on the ice when there were already five players. That was too much! It was unfair! It was persecution! It was because of my blue sweater! I struck my stick against the ice so hard it broke. Relieved, I bent down to pick up the debris. As I straightened up I saw the young vicar, on skates, before me. "My child," he said, "just because you're wearing a new Toronto Maple Leafs sweater unlike the others, it doesn't mean you're going to make the laws around here. A proper young man doesn't lose his temper. Now take off your skates and go to the church and ask God to forgive you."

Wearing my Maple Leafs sweater I went to the church, where I prayed to God; I asked him to send, as quickly as possible, moths that would eat up my Toronto Maple Leafs sweater.

1. RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- a. How does the boy in the story feel about Maurice Richard? Have you ever felt that way about someone? Explain why or why not.
- b. How does the boy feel about his new hockey sweater when it arrives? Have you ever had a similar experience? Describe what happened.
- c. If you were the boy, would your mother's words have convinced you to wear the hockey sweater? Why or why not? What would you have said in response? With a partner, role-play that conversation.
- d. In your opinion, what are the three funniest moments in the story? Why did they amuse you?

2. STORY CRAFT BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

In small groups, read the opening paragraph of the story. Do you think Roch Carrier manages to grab his readers' attention? Discuss why the paragraph is or is not an effective opening. Now read the last paragraph of the story and discuss whether it provides a good ending. As a group, talk about some good beginnings and endings you remember from other stories you have read. Together, create a list of ideas about beginnings and endings. Use these headings: "The Qualities of a Good Beginning Are..." and "The Qualities of a Good Ending Are..." Share your list with the class.

3. WRITING MEMORIES FROM LIFE

"The Hockey Sweater" rings true because it seems to be based on a real childhood memory. If you were writing a story based on your own experience, what story would you tell? Think of a vivid memory from your life, funny or not. Make some notes that you could use to develop your memory into a story. First, summarize your memory in a few sentences, and then describe what kind of story you would write (sad, humorous, exciting, and so on). In point form, record some details you could include in your story (for example, personal feelings, sights and sounds, lines of dialogue). Finally, draft a strong beginning that would hook a reader's attention.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Reread the preparation you have done. Did you select a memory that you would like to write about that a reader would find interesting? In your opening, what techniques did you use to hook the reader?

4. LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS SENTENCE VARIETY

In "The Hockey Sweater," Roch Carrier uses a wide variety of sentences. With a partner, choose one of the longer paragraphs in the story. Together, investigate the ways in which the sentences differ from one another, considering factors such as length and complexity. Jot down any questions you have about the way the author uses punctuation. Present your observations and questions to the class.