

"Ex-Basketball Player" by John Updike

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Block: \_\_\_\_\_

Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,  
Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut  
off  
Before it has a chance to go two blocks,  
At Colonel McComsky Plaza. Berth's Garage  
Is on the corner facing west, and there,  
Most days, you'll find Flick Webb, who helps  
Berth out.

Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—  
Five on a side, the old bubble-head style.  
Their rubber elbows hanging loose and low.  
One's nostrils are two S's, and his eyes  
A head at all—more of a football type.

Once Flick played for the high-school team,  
the Wizards.  
He was good; in fact, the best. In '46  
He bucketed<sup>1</sup> three hundred ninety points.  
A county record still. The ball loved Flick.  
I saw him rack up<sup>2</sup> thirty-eight or forty  
In one home game. His hands were like wild  
birds.

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,  
Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,  
As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,  
But most of us remember anyway.  
His hands are fine and nervous on the lug  
wrench.  
It makes no difference to the lug wrench,  
though.

Off work, he hangs around Mae's  
luncheonette.  
Grease-gray and kind of coiled, he plays  
pinball,  
Smokes those thin cigars, nurses lemon  
phosphates.<sup>3</sup>  
Flick seldom says a word to Mae, just nods  
Beyond her face toward bright applauding  
tiers  
Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> bucketed: Scored.

<sup>2</sup> rack up: Accumulate.

<sup>3</sup> lemon phosphates: Carbonated water flavored with lemon syrup.

<sup>4</sup> Necco...Beads: Packaged candy.

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Directions: Answer the following questions using RES—RESTATE the question, give an EXAMPLE from the poem if possible, and write in complete SENTENCES.

1. What type of poem is this?
  - a. Narrative because it tells a story.
  - b. Dramatic because it tells a story but looks like a script with all dialogue.
  - c. Lyric because it shares the speaker's thoughts and feelings.
  - d. None of the above
2. Is there a rhyme scheme in this poem?

3. Write the words from stanza five that are examples of imagery.
4. Write the simile used in stanza three.
5. Write the allusions (references to something famous) used in stanza five.
6. Write three examples of personification from stanza two.
7. Write one example of personification from stanza three.
8. How does Flick Webb earn his living?
9. What had Flick done in the past?
10. What kind of attitude does the narrator have about how Flick's life turned out? This illustrates the tone of the poem.
  - a. happy
  - b. grief-stricken
  - c. angry
  - d. disappointed
11. What is the theme you learned from this poem?
12. What is the meter or rhythm of this poem? (Hint: it's iambic \_\_\_\_\_ meter)
13. For the first line of the poem that is typed below, mark its unstressed (U) and stressed (/) syllables above the line.

Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,