

Jeanette Walls, THE GLASS CASTLE

"I never believed in Santa Claus. None of us kids did. Mom and Dad refused to let us. They couldn't afford expensive presents and they didn't want us to think we weren't as good as other kids who, on Christmas morning, found all sorts of fancy toys under the tree that were supposedly left by Santa Claus. Dad had lost his job at the plant, and when Christmas came that year, we had no money at all. On Christmas Eve, Dad took each one of us kids out into the desert night one by one.

"Pick out your favorite star", Dad said.

"I like that one!" I said.

Dad grinned, "that's Venus", he said. He explained to me that planets glowed because reflected light was constant and stars twinkled because their light pulsed.

"I like it anyway" I said.

"What the hell," Dad said. "It's Christmas. You can have a planet if you want."
And he gave me Venus.

Venus didn't have any moons or satellites or even a magnetic field, but it did have an atmosphere sort of similar to Earth's, except it was super hot-about 500 degrees or more. "So," Dad said, "when the sun starts to burn out and Earth turns cold, everyone might want to move to Venus to get warm. And they'll have to get permission from your descendants first.

We laughed about all the kids who believed in the Santa myth and got nothing for Christmas but a bunch of cheap plastic toys. "Years from now, when all the junk they got is broken and long forgotten," Dad said, "you'll still have your stars."

1. What questions do you have about this passage?
2. Briefly summarize this passage.
3. What was Dad trying to accomplish by giving his kids a star? Was it a good idea?
4. Here is another quote from the same book: "*Those shining stars, he liked to point out, were one of the special treats for people like us who lived out in the wilderness. Rich city folks, he'd say, lived in fancy apartments, but their air was so polluted they couldn't even see the stars. We'd have to be out of our minds to want to trade places with any of them.*" Does this quote reflect the same philosophy and purpose as the earlier passage?

Tony Morrison SONG OF SOLOMON

"You think because he doesn't love you that you are worthless. You think that because he doesn't want you anymore that he is right — that his judgement and opinion of you are correct. If he throws you out, then you are garbage. You think he belongs to you because you want to belong to him. Don't. It's a bad word, 'belong.' Especially when you put it with somebody you love. Love shouldn't be like that. Did you ever see the way the clouds love a mountain? They circle all around it; sometimes you can't even see the mountain for the clouds. But you know what? You go up top and what do you see? His head. The clouds never cover the head. His head pokes through, because the clouds let him; they don't wrap him up. They let him keep his head up high, free, with nothing to hide him or bind him. You can't own a human being. You can't lose what you don't own. Suppose you did own him. Could you really love somebody who was absolutely nobody without you? You really want somebody like that? Somebody who falls apart when you walk out the door? You don't, do you? And neither does he. You're turning over your whole life to him. Your whole life, girl. And if it means so little to you that you can just give it away, hand it to him, then why

should it mean any more to him? He can't value you more than you value yourself." – Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon

1. What questions do you have about this passage?
2. Briefly summarize the passage.
3. Both of the passages above are giving advice. Which one do you like the most? Which do you agree with the most?

A TOEFL Reading Passage

The Creators of Grammar

No student of a foreign language needs to be told that grammar is complex. By changing word sequences and by adding a range of auxiliary verbs and suffixes, we are able to communicate tiny variations in meaning. We can turn a statement into a question, state whether an action has taken place or is soon to take place, and perform many other word tricks to convey subtle differences in meaning. Nor is this complexity inherent to the English language. All languages, even those of so-called 'primitive' tribes have clever grammatical components. The Cherokee pronoun system, for example, can distinguish between 'you and I', 'several other people and I' and 'you, another person and I'. In English, all these meanings are summed up in the one, crude pronoun 'we'. Grammar is universal and plays a part in every language, no matter how widespread it is. So the question which has baffled many linguists is - who created grammar?

At first, it would appear that this question is impossible to answer. To find out how grammar is created, someone needs to be present at the time of a language's creation, documenting its emergence. Many historical linguists are able to trace modern complex languages back to earlier languages, but in order to answer the question of how complex languages are actually formed, the researcher needs to observe how languages are started from scratch. Amazingly, however, this is possible.

Some of the most recent languages evolved due to the Atlantic slave trade. At that time, slaves from a number of different ethnicities were forced to work together under colonizer's rule. Since they had no opportunity to learn each other's languages, they developed a make-shift language called a pidgin. Pidgins are strings of words copied from the language of the landowner. They have little in the way of grammar, and in many cases it is difficult for a listener to deduce when an event happened, and who did what to whom. Speakers need to use circumlocution in order to make their meaning understood. Interestingly, however, all it takes for a pidgin to become a complex language is for a group of children to be exposed to it at the time when they learn their mother tongue. Slave children did not simply copy the strings of words uttered by their elders, they adapted their words to create a new, expressive language. Complex grammar systems which emerge from pidgins are termed creoles, and they are invented by children.

Some linguists believe that many of the world's most established languages were creoles at first. The English past tense –ed ending may have evolved from the verb 'do'. 'It ended' may once have been 'It end-did'. Therefore it would appear that even the most widespread languages were partly created by children. Children appear to have innate grammatical machinery in their brains, which springs to life when they are first trying to make sense of the world around them. Their minds can serve to create logical, complex structures, even when there is no grammar present for them to copy.

1. What words did you have to look up? Are there other words you are confused about?
2. Briefly summarize this passage.
3. Are there any sentences you didn't understand?