

## LITERARY ANALYSIS: SYMBOL

A symbol is a person, place, object, or activity that represents something beyond itself. Flags, for example, often serve as symbols of national heritage and patriotism. In literature, a symbol takes its meaning from its context. In "Two Friends," for example, the bleak landscape might be said to symbolize the loss of vitality in France. To identify other symbols in the selection, use these strategies as you read:

- Note what is described at length or repeated.
- Note words that suggest broad ideas about humanity.

Review: Setting

## READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTER

Skilled readers make inferences, or logical guesses, about characters on the basis of story details and their own knowledge. Sometimes called "reading between the lines," making inferences allows readers to build a more complete understanding of the characters and the entire story.

As you read the selection, pay attention to the details that Maupassant uses to describe the two friends and the Prussian soldiers. Record your inferences about these characters in an organizer like the one shown.

Character Details	+	My Experiences	=	My Inferences
Morrisot fishes every Sunday from early morning until dark.	+	Fishing requires calm, patience, and an enjoyment of the outdoors.	=	Morrisot probably demonstrates all these qualities.

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

To see how many vocabulary words you already know, substitute a different word or phrase for each boldfaced term.

1. She sat in her room **dejectedly** after she lost the race.
2. **Fanatical** followers of the band waited hours for tickets.
3. This relaxing vacation has **rejuvenated** my spirits!
4. Why the **pensive** look on your face?
5. The clown's **eccentric** costume made the children laugh.
6. This **atrocious** should not go unpunished.
7. This large tree will **afford** some nice shade for our picnic.
8. The child remained **unperturbed** during the storm.

## Author Online

**Learning from a Master** In 1867, at the age of 17, Guy de Maupassant (gē' də mō-pă-săn') met Gustave Flaubert, a family friend and one of France's most respected novelists. Flaubert served as Maupassant's mentor, offering him advice, including the following message:



Guy de Maupassant  
1850–1893

"Whatever you want to say, there is only one word to express it, only one verb to give it movement, only one adjective to qualify it." Maupassant went on to become a celebrated author in his own right.

**On Fire!** Although Maupassant wrote several novels, his specialty was the short story, a form he helped popularize. From 1880 to 1890, Maupassant enjoyed his most prolific years as an author, remarkably producing 300 stories. His best works are often characterized by precise language and realistic portrayals of everyday life.



### MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more on Guy de Maupassant, visit the Literature Center at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).

## Background

**The Franco-Prussian War** For most of the 1800s, Germany was a collection of separate German-speaking states. Among these, the northern state of Prussia emerged as the most powerful. Under the leadership of the Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the German states began to unite. In July 1870, fearing a unified Germany, Emperor Napoleon III of France began what was later called the Franco-Prussian War. "Two Friends" takes place in 1871, while Paris is under siege, or attack, by the Prussian army. The story reflects Maupassant's firsthand experiences of the war, in which he fought briefly as a young French soldier.

# Two Friends

Guy de Maupassant

Paris was under siege, in the grip of famine, at its last gasp. There were few sparrows on the rooftops now, and even the sewers were losing some of their inhabitants. The fact is that people were eating anything they could get their hands on.

One bright January morning Monsieur Morissot<sup>1</sup> was strolling **dejectedly** along one of the outer boulevards, with an empty stomach and his hands in the pockets of his old army trousers. He was a watchmaker by trade and a man who liked to make the most of his leisure. Suddenly, he came upon one of his close friends, and he stopped short. It was Monsieur Sauvage,<sup>2</sup> whom he had  
10 got to know on fishing expeditions.

Every Sunday before the war it was Morissot's custom to set off at the crack of dawn with his bamboo rod in his hand and a tin box slung over his back. He would catch the Argenteuil train and get off at Colombes, from where he would walk to the island of Marante. The minute he reached this land of his dreams he would start to fish—and he would go on fishing till it got dark.

And it was here, every Sunday, that he met a tubby, jolly little man by the name of Sauvage. He was a haberdasher<sup>3</sup> from the Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, and as **fanatical** an angler<sup>4</sup> as Morissot himself. They often spent half the day sitting side by side, rod in hand, with their feet dangling over  
20 the water. And they had become firm friends.

There were some days when they hardly spoke to each other. On other occasions they would chat all the time. But they understood each other perfectly without needing to exchange any words, because their tastes were so alike and their feelings identical. **A**

**ANALYZE VISUALS**  
What details suggest that the two main figures in the painting are close friends?

**dejectedly** (dĭ-jĕk'tĭd-lē)  
*adv.* in a disheartened, depressed way

**fanatical** (fə-năt'ĭ-kəl) *adj.*  
extremely enthusiastic

**A MAKE INFERENCES**  
Reread lines 16–24. What can you infer about Morissot and Sauvage from the details of their friendship?

1. **Monsieur Morissot** (mə-syœ' mō-rĕ-sō').

2. **Sauvage** (sō-văzh').

3. **haberdasher**: one who sells men's clothing, such as shirts, hats, and gloves.

4. **angler**: a fisherman.

Detail of *At the Inn of Mother Anthony* (1866),  
Pierre Auguste Renoir. Oil on canvas. National  
Museum, Stockholm, Sweden. Photo ©  
The Bridgeman Art Library



On spring mornings at about ten o'clock, when the **rejuvenated** sun sent floating over the river that light mist which moves along with the current, warming the backs of the two enthusiastic fishermen with the welcome glow of a new season, Morissot would say to his neighbor:

"Ah! It's grand here, isn't it?"

30 And Monsieur Sauvage would reply:

"There's nothing I like better."

This simple exchange of words was all that was needed for them to understand each other and confirm their mutual appreciation.

In the autumn towards the close of day, when the sky was blood-red and the water reflected strange shapes of scarlet clouds which reddened the whole river, and the glowing sun set the distant horizon ablaze, making the two friends look as though they were on fire, and touching with gold the russet leaves which were already trembling with a wintry shudder, Monsieur Sauvage would turn to Morissot with a smile and say:

40 "What a marvelous sight!"

And Morissot, equally taken up with the wonder of it all, but not taking his eyes off his float, would answer:

"It's better than walking down the boulevards, eh?" **B**

As soon as the two friends had recognized each other, they shook hands warmly, feeling quite emotional over the fact that they had come across each other in such different circumstances. Monsieur Sauvage gave a sigh and remarked:

"What a lot has happened since we last met!"

Morissot, in mournful tones, lamented:

50 "And what awful weather we've been having! This is the first fine day of the year."

And, indeed, the sky was a cloudless blue, brilliant with light.

They started to walk on together side by side, **pensive** and melancholy. Then Morissot said:

"And what about those fishing trips, eh? *There's* something worth remembering!"

"When shall we be able to get back to it?" mused Monsieur Sauvage.

They went into a little café and drank a glass of absinthe.<sup>5</sup> Then they resumed their stroll along the boulevards.

60 Morissot suddenly stopped and said:

"What about another glass of the green stuff, eh?"

"Just as you wish," consented Monsieur Sauvage, and they went into a second bar.

When they came out they both felt very fuzzy, as people do when they drink alcohol on an empty stomach. The weather was very mild. A gentle breeze caressed their faces. **C**

**rejuvenated**  
(rĭ-jōō'və-nā'tīd) *adj.*  
made new or young  
again **rejuvenate** *v.*

**B SYMBOL**

Reread lines 25-43. Notice that the men's fishing trips are described at length and in vivid detail. What might these experiences symbolize?

**pensive** (pĕn'sīv)  
*adj.* thoughtful in a wistful, sad way

**C MAKE INFERENCES**

What inferences can you make so far about how the war has affected the two men?

5. **absinthe**: a syrupy green alcoholic beverage that has a licorice flavor.

Monsieur Sauvage, who felt even more fuddled<sup>6</sup> in this warm air, stopped and said:

“What about it, then? Shall we go?”

70 “Go where?”

“Fishing!”

“But where can we go?”

“To our island, of course. The French frontline is near Colombes. I know the colonel in command—fellow called Dumoulin. I’m sure we’d have no trouble in getting through.”

Morissot began to quiver with excitement.

“Right!” he said. “I’m your man!”

And the two friends separated and went off to get their fishing tackle.

80 An hour later they were striding down the main road together. They reached the villa in which the colonel had set up his headquarters. When he heard their request, he smiled at their **eccentric** enthusiasm but gave them permission. They set off once again, armed with an official pass.

They soon crossed the frontline, then went through Colombes, which had been evacuated, and now found themselves on the fringe of the area of vineyards which rise in terraces above the Seine. It was about eleven o’clock.

On the opposite bank they could see the village of Argenteuil, which looked deserted and dead. The hills of Orgemont and Sannois dominated the horizon, and the great plain which stretches as far as Nanterre was empty, completely empty, with nothing to be seen but its leafless cherry trees and gray earth.

90 Pointing towards the high ground Monsieur Sauvage muttered:

“The Prussians are up there.”

And as the two friends gazed at the deserted countryside, they felt almost paralyzed by the sense of uneasiness which was creeping through them.

The Prussians! They had never so much as set eyes on them, but for four months now they had been aware of their presence on the outskirts of Paris, occupying part of France, looting, committing **atrocities**, reducing people to starvation . . . the invisible yet all-powerful Prussians. As they thought of them, a kind of superstitious dread was added to their natural hatred for this unknown, victorious race.

100 “What if we should happen to run into some of them?” said Morissot nervously.

Monsieur Sauvage gave the sort of reply which showed that cheerful Parisian banter survived in spite of everything.

“Oh, we’ll just offer them some nice fish to fry!”

Even so, they were so worried by the silence of the surrounding countryside that they hesitated about going any further.

It was Monsieur Sauvage who finally made up his mind.

“Come on!” he said. “We’ll go on—but we must keep a sharp lookout!” **D**

**eccentric** (ĭk-sĕn’třĭk) *adj.*  
strange; peculiar

**atrocitiy** (ə-trŏs’ĭ-tĕ) *n.* a  
very cruel or brutal act

**D MAKE INFERENCES**  
What does the men’s decision to continue their fishing trip reveal about their personalities and view of the world?

6. **fuddled**: drunk and confused.

And they scrambled down the slope of one of the vineyards, bent double,  
110 crawling on their hands and knees, taking advantage of the cover **afforded** by  
the vines, keeping their eyes wide open and their ears on the alert.

All that now separated them from the riverbank was a strip of open ground.  
They ran across it, and as soon as they reached the river, they crouched  
amongst the dry rushes.

Morissot pressed his ear to the ground to see if he could detect the sound of  
marching feet. He could hear nothing. They were alone, completely alone.

They told each other there was nothing to worry about, and started to fish.  
Opposite them the deserted island of Marante concealed them from the  
120 other bank. The little building which once housed the restaurant was closed  
and shuttered, and looked as though it had been abandoned for years.

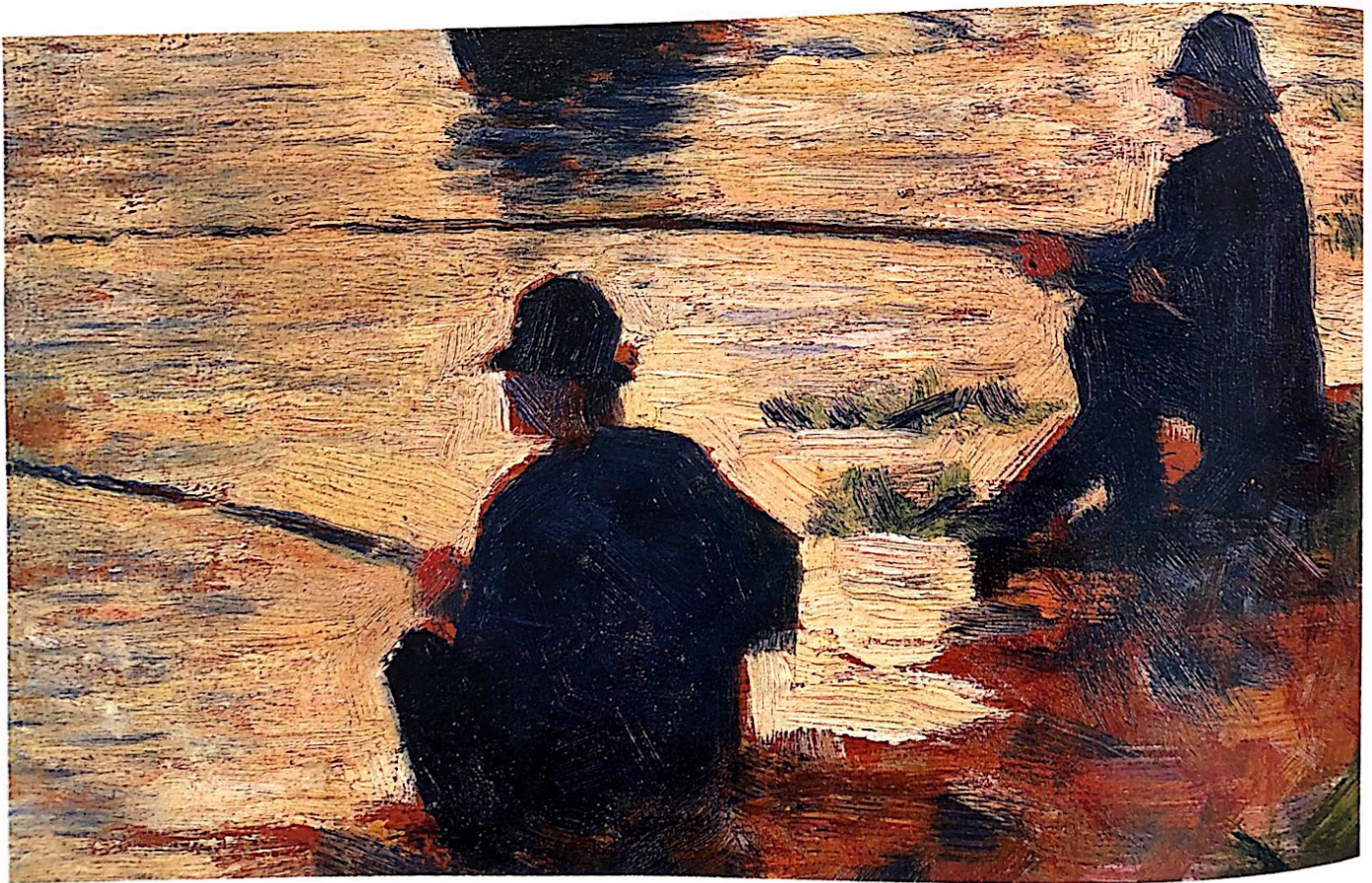
It was Monsieur Sauvage who caught the first fish—a gudgeon. Morissot  
caught the second, and then, almost without a pause, they jerked up their rods  
time after time to find a little silvery creature wriggling away on the hook. This  
really was a miraculous draft of fishes. **E**

They carefully placed each fish into a fine-meshed net which was suspended  
in the water at their feet. And as they did so they were overcome by a  
delightful sense of joy, the kind of joy you only experience when you resume  
something you really love after being deprived of it for a long time.

**afford** (ə-fôrd') v.  
to provide or offer

**E SYMBOL**

A gudgeon is both a small fish used as bait and a person who is easily tricked. On the basis of this information, whom or what might the gudgeon symbolize?



Line fishermen, study for *La Grand Jatte* (1883), Georges Seurat. Oil on canvas, 16 cm × 25 cm. Musée d'Art Moderne, Troyes, France.  
Photo © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

A kindly sun was shedding its warmth across their backs. They were so absorbed that they no longer heard, or thought, or paid the least attention to the outside world. What did anything matter now? They were fishing!

But suddenly, the bank beneath them shook with a dull rumble which seemed to come from underground.

The distant cannon were starting to fire again.

Morissot turned his head, and above the bank, over to the left, he saw the great bulk of Mont Valérien. On the mountainside was a white plume of smoke, showing where the gunpowder had just bellowed out.

Almost immediately another jet of smoke spurted from the fort on the summit, and a few seconds later the rumble of another detonation reached their ears.

Other cannon shots followed, and every now and then the mountain spat out its deadly breath, exhaled its clouds of milky vapor, which rose slowly into the calm sky above. **F**

"There they go again!" said Monsieur Sauvage with a shrug of his shoulders.

Morissot, who was anxiously watching the feather on his float as it bobbed up and down, was suddenly filled with the anger of a peace-loving man for these maniacs who indulge in fighting.

"They've got to be really stupid," he growled, "to go on killing each other like that!"

"They're worse than animals," said Monsieur Sauvage.

Morissot, who had just caught another fish, called out:

"And it'll never be any different so long as we have governments!"

"Oh, no," disagreed Monsieur Sauvage. "The Republic<sup>7</sup> would never have declared war . . ."

"Look!" interrupted Morissot. "Under kings you have war against other countries. Under republican governments you have civil war."

And they began to argue, in a calm and friendly way, sorting out all the world's great political problems with the commonsense approach of mild and reasonable men. On one point they were in absolute agreement: mankind would never be free. And as they talked, Mont Valérien went thundering on without respite, demolishing French homes with its cannonades,<sup>8</sup> pounding lives to dust, crushing human beings to pulp, putting an end to so many dreams, to so many long-awaited joys, so much long-expected happiness, tearing into the hearts of all those wives and daughters and mothers with pain and suffering that would never be eased.

"Such is life," said Monsieur Sauvage.

"Better to call it death," laughed Morissot. **G**

But at that moment they both gave a start, scared by the feeling that somebody had been walking just behind them. They looked round and saw standing above them four men, four tall, bearded men, armed to the teeth,

### **F** SETTING

Compare and contrast this fishing trip with earlier ones described in the story. How has the setting changed?

### **G** MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 157–166. Why is the argument between Morissot and Sauvage ironic?

7. **the Republic:** the Second Republic of France (1848–1852), which was France's first truly representative government.

8. **cannonades:** numerous firings of cannons.

170 dressed like liveried<sup>9</sup> footmen, with flat military caps on their heads—and rifles which they were pointing straight at the two friends.

The fishing rods dropped from their hands and went floating down the river.

In a matter of seconds they were seized, tied up, hustled along, thrown into a boat and carried across to the island. **H**

Behind the building which they had thought deserted they saw a group of about twenty German soldiers.

A sort of hairy giant who was sitting astride a chair and smoking a large clay pipe asked them in excellent French:

180 “Well, messieurs, did the fishing go well?”

One of the soldiers placed at the officer’s feet the net full of fish which he had been careful to bring along. The Prussian smiled and said:

“Well, well! I can see you didn’t do badly at all! . . . But I have to deal with a very different matter. Now, listen to me carefully, and don’t get alarmed . . . As far as I am concerned you are a couple of spies sent out here to keep an eye on me. I’ve caught you and I’ve every right to shoot you. You were obviously pretending to fish as a cover for your real purposes. It’s too bad for you that you’ve fallen into my hands. But war is war . . . Now, since you’ve come out here past your own lines, you’re bound to have a password so you can get back.

190 Just give me that password and I’ll spare your lives.” **I**

The two friends, ghastly pale, stood there side by side with their hands trembling. They said nothing.

“Nobody will ever get to know about it,” continued the officer. “You will go back without any trouble, and the secret will go with you . . . If you refuse to cooperate, you’ll die—straight away. So take your choice!”

They stood there motionless, keeping their mouths firmly shut.

The Prussian, who was still quite calm, pointed in the direction of the river and said:

200 “Just think! In five minutes you’ll be at the bottom of that river. In five minutes! You must have families. Think of them!”

The rumbling of the cannon was still coming from Mont Valérien.

The two fishermen simply stood there, refusing to speak. The German now gave some orders in his own language. Then he moved his chair some distance away from the prisoners. Twelve men marched up and formed a line twenty yards from them with their rifles at their sides.

“I’ll give you one minute to make up your minds,” called the officer. “And not two seconds more.”

Then he jumped to his feet, went up to the two Frenchmen, took Morissot by the arm, and led him to one side. Then he said to him in a very low voice:

210 “Quick! Just let me have that password! Your friend won’t know you’ve told me. I’ll make it look as though I’ve taken pity on you both.”

**H** **GRAMMAR AND STYLE**  
Reread lines 174–175.  
By using a **compound predicate**, Maupassant is able to describe a series of actions in one concise sentence.

**I** **MAKE INFERENCES**  
What can you infer about the Prussian soldiers from their actions toward the fishermen?

9. liveried: uniformed.



Morissot said nothing.

The Prussian then dragged Monsieur Sauvage to one side and made the same proposition to him.

Monsieur Sauvage said nothing. **J**

So they were pushed together again, side by side.

It was then that Morissot happened to glance down at the net full of gudgeon which was lying in the grass a few yards away.

220 A ray of sunlight fell on the heap of glittering fish, which were still quivering with life. As he looked at them he felt a momentary weakness. In spite of his efforts to hold them back, tears filled his eyes. **K**

"Farewell, Monsieur Sauvage," he mumbled.

And Monsieur Sauvage replied:

"Farewell, Monsieur Morissot."

They shook hands, trembling uncontrollably from head to foot.

"Fire!" shouted the officer.

Twelve shots rang out simultaneously.

**J MAKE INFERENCES**

Why do Morissot and Sauvage refuse to offer the Prussian officer a password?

**K SYMBOL**

Reread lines 216–221. How does this description contribute to your understanding of the fish as a symbol in the story?



Detail of *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (1867), Édouard Manet. Oil on canvas, 77 $\frac{1}{8}$ " × 102 $\frac{1}{4}$ ".  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Gair Macomber (30.444).

Monsieur Sauvage fell like a log onto his face. Morissot, who was taller, swayed, spun round, then collapsed on top of his friend, with his face staring  
230 up at the sky and the blood welling from where his coat had been burst open across his chest.

The German shouted out more orders. His men went off and came back with some lengths of rope and a few heavy stones which they fastened to the feet of the two bodies. Then they carried them to the riverbank.

All the time Mont Valérien continued to rumble, and now it was capped by a great mountain of smoke.

Two soldiers got hold of Morissot by the head and feet. Two others lifted up Monsieur Sauvage in the same way. The two bodies were swung violently backwards and forwards, then thrown with great force. They curved through  
240 the air, then plunged upright into the river, with the stones dragging them down, feet first.

The water spurted up, bubbled, swirled round, then grew calm again, with little waves rippling across to break against the bank. There was just a small amount of blood discoloring the surface.

The officer, still quite **unperturbed**, said, half aloud:

“Well, now it’s the fishes’ turn.”

As he was going back towards the building, he noticed the net full of gudgeon lying in the grass. He picked it up, looked at the fish, then smiled, and called out:

250 “Wilhelm!”

A soldier came running up. He was wearing a white apron. The Prussian officer threw across to him the catch made by the two executed fishermen, and gave another order:

“Fry me these little creatures—straight away, while they’re still alive. They’ll be delicious!”

Then he lit his pipe again. ☞

**unperturbed**  
(ŭn'pər-tŭrbd') *adj.* calm  
and serene; untroubled

*Translated by Arnold Kellett*