

Read the following story. Then answer the questions that follow.

Priscilla and the Wimps

by Richard Peck

Listen, there was a time when you couldn't even go to the *rest room* around this school without a pass. And I'm not talking about those little pink tickets made out by some teacher. I'm talking about a pass that could cost anywhere up to a buck, sold by Monk Klutter.

5 Not that Mighty Monk ever touched money, not in public. The gang he ran, which ran the school for him, was his collection agency. They were Klutter's Kobras, a name spelled out in nail heads on six well-known black plastic windbreakers.

Monk's threads were more . . . subtle. A pile-lined suede battle jacket with lizard-skin flaps over tailored Levis and a pair of ostrich-skin boots, brass-toed and suitable for kicking people around. One of his Kobras did nothing all day but walk a half step behind Monk, carrying a fitted bag with Monk's gym shoes, a roll of rest-room passes, a cashbox, and a switchblade that Monk gave himself manicures with at lunch over at the Kobras' table.

Speaking of lunch, there were a few cases of advanced malnutrition among the newer kids. The ones who were a little slow in handing over a cut of their lunch money and were therefore barred from the cafeteria. Monk ran a tight ship.

15 I admit it. I'm five foot five, and when the Kobras slithered by, with or without Monk, I shrank. And I admit this, too: I paid up on a regular basis. And I might add: so would you.

This school was old Monk's Garden of Eden. Unfortunately for him, there was a serpent in it. The reason Monk didn't recognize trouble when it was staring him in the face is that the serpent in the Kobras' Eden was a girl.

20 Practically every guy in school could show you his scars. Fang marks from Kobras, you might say. And they were all highly visible in the shower room: lumps, lacerations, blue bruises, you name it. But girls usually got off with a warning.

Except there was this one girl named Priscilla Roseberry. Picture a girl named Priscilla Roseberry, and you'll be light years off. Priscilla was, hands down, the largest student in our particular institution of learning. I'm not talking fat. I'm talking big. Even beautiful, in a bionic way. Priscilla wasn't inclined toward organized crime. Otherwise, she could have put together a gang that would turn Klutter's Kobras into garter snakes.

Priscilla was basically a loner except she had one friend. A little guy named Melvin Detweiler. You talk about *The Odd Couple*. Melvin's one of the smallest guys above midget status ever seen. A really nice guy, but, you know — little. They even had lockers next to each other, in the same bank as mine. I don't know what they had going. I'm not saying this was a romance. After all, people deserve their privacy.

Priscilla was sort of above everything, if you'll pardon a pun. And very calm, as only the very big can be. If there was anybody who didn't notice Klutter's Kobras, it was Priscilla.

35 Until one winter day after school when we were all grabbing our coats out of our lockers. And hurrying, since Klutter's Kobras made sweeps of the halls for after-school shakedowns.

Anyway, up to Melvin's locker swaggers one of the Kobras. Never mind his name. Gang members don't need names. They've got group identity. He reaches down and grabs little Melvin by the neck and slams his head against his locker door. The sound of skull against steel rippled all the way down the locker row, speeding the crowds on their way.

40 "Okay, let's see your pass," snarls the Kobra.

"A pass for what this time?" Melvin asks, probably still dazed.

"Let's call it a pass for very short people," says the Kobra, "a dwarf tax." He wheezes a little Kobra chuckle at his own wittiness. And already he's reaching for Melvin's wallet with the hand that isn't circling Melvin's windpipe. All this time, of course, Melvin and the Kobra are standing in Priscilla's big shadow.

45 She's taking her time shoving her books into her locker and pulling on a very large-size coat. Then, quicker than the eye, she brings the side of her enormous hand down in a chop that breaks the Kobra's hold on Melvin's throat. You could hear a pin drop in that hallway. Nobody'd ever laid a finger on a Kobra, let alone a hand the size of Priscilla's.

50 Then Priscilla, who hardly ever says anything to anybody except to Melvin, says to the Kobra, "Who's your leader, wimp?"

This practically blows the Kobra away. First he's chopped by a girl, and now she's acting like she doesn't know Monk Klutter, the Head Honcho of the World. He's so amazed, he tells her, "Monk Klutter."

55 "Never heard of him," Priscilla mentions. "Send him to see me." The Kobra just backs away from her like the whole situation is too big for him, which it is.

Pretty soon Monk himself slides up. He jerks his head once, and his Kobras slither off down the hall. He's going to handle this interesting case personally. "Who is it around here doesn't know Monk Klutter?"

60 He's standing inches from Priscilla, but since he'd have to look up at her, he doesn't. "Never heard of him," says Priscilla.

Monk's not happy with this answer, but by now he's spotted Melvin, who's grown smaller in spite of himself. Monk breaks his own rule by reaching for Melvin with his own hands. "Kid," he says, "you're going to have to educate your girl friend."

65 His hands never quite make it to Melvin. In a move of pure poetry Priscilla has Monk in a hammerlock. His neck's popping like gunfire, and his head's bowed under the immense weight of her forearm. His suede jacket's peeling back, showing pile.

70 Priscilla's behind him in another easy motion. And with a single mighty thrust forward, frog-marches Monk into her own locker. It's incredible. His ostrich-skin boots click once in the air. And suddenly he's gone, neatly wedged into the locker, a perfect fit. Priscilla bangs the door shut, twirls the lock, and strolls out of school. Melvin goes with her, of course, trotting along below her shoulder. The last stragglers leave quietly.

Well, this is where fate, an even bigger force than Priscilla, steps in. It snows all that night, a blizzard. The whole town ices up. And school closes for a week.

Describe the following characters in three or four sentences. Tell how each one is important to the telling of the story. Besides describing the characters accurately, punctuation, sentence structure, capitalization, and word choice also count.

1. Monk Klutter
2. Priscilla Roseberry
3. Melvin Detweiler
4. the narrator

Answer the following questions in one or two sentences. Remember when answering these questions that sentence structure, word choice, capitalization, and punctuation, also count.

5. What does the narrator mean when he tells us in line 13 that some people were slow in handing over a cut of their lunch money?
6. In lines 13 & 14, what does it mean that some students were barred from the cafeteria?
7. What does it mean in line 14 when the narrator says that Monk ran a tight ship?
8. What does the narrator mean when he says in lines 23 & 24: "Picture a girl named Priscilla Roseberry, and you'll be light years off."?
9. In line 28, we are told that Priscilla is a loner. What does it mean to be a loner?

10. In lines 30 & 31, the narrator, speaking about Priscilla and Melvin Detweiler, says: "I don't know what they had going. I'm not saying this was a romance. After all, people deserve their privacy." What is he trying to say? What is he implying?
11. What does it mean when we are told in line 35 that Monk Klutter's gang made sweeps of the halls for after school shakedowns?
12. Towards the end of the story, one of the Kobras grabs Melvin by the throat. Then, in line 46 Priscilla brings her hand down in a chop that breaks the Kobra's hold on Melvin's neck. Describe what happened.
13. What does it mean in line 47 when we're told that you could hear a pin drop?
14. Describe what happened in line 65 when Priscilla put Monk in a hammerlock.

Answer the following questions in two or three sentences. Remember when answering these questions that capitalization, word choice, punctuation, and sentence structure also count.

15. What do lines 15 & 16 reveal about the narrator? How do you think he feels about this? Why does he say: "And I might add: so would you."?
16. Would you consider this story an example of realistic fiction? Give at least two reasons for your answer.
17. Does the ending of his story seem plausible to you? Give at least two reasons for your answer.

Answer the following questions in paragraph form (five or more sentences; more than sixty words). Besides answering the questions correctly, capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, and word choice also count.

18. Explain the title. Why do you think the author chose "Priscilla and the Wimps" as the title of this story?
19. When the narrator mentions the Garden of Eden in line 17, he is making a literary allusion. Briefly retell the story of the Garden of Eden. How does knowing about the Garden of Eden help you in understanding the story "Priscilla and the Wimps"?
20. Retell the story "Priscilla and the Wimps". Imagine your audience is someone who has not read the story.