“Checkouts”
By Cynthia Rylant
Published September 1, 1990

By Rosie Sabatino, Victoria Morrison, and Jessica Wong
About Cynthia Rylant

- Grew up in a large coal-mining family in West Virginia
- Never planned to be a writer
- Born in 1954–present
- First book she painted was called *Dog Heaven*
- Her surroundings (people and feelings) influenced her works
- *A Fine White Dust* was a Newbery Honor winner in 1987
Other Works Written By Cynthia Rylant

- *Missing May* was published in 1992. This book won a Newbery Medal in 1993. The story follows a young girl who was taken in by her uncle and aunt after her mother’s death.

- *The Islander* was published in 1998. This book accompanies a young boy who meets a mermaid and tries to figure out her existence.

- One of Cynthia Rylant’s best stories ever written was called *Dog Heaven*. The story creates a life for dogs who have died and gone to Heaven. This story comforts any grieving dog-lover.
Setting

- Takes place after moving from place of childhood to Cincinnati, Ohio
- Supermarket in town where she shopped for her family
- Lived in a beautiful house -> Part of wealthy family
- Bag boy clumsy with tattered shoes -> Poor
Characters and Characterization

The Girl: (protagonist, round, dynamic) The author conveyed the girl as easily falling for people, yet hard to get. A quote that accurately depicts her as hard to get is, “... She spotted him as soon as she came into the store, but she kept her eyes strictly in front of her as she pulled out a cart and wheeled it toward the produce...” (Rylant). When the girl saw the boy again in the market she didn't go in his line, but waited for him to make his move on her. Rylant also portrayed the girl as falling in love easily. The girl fell in love with the boy for the small little things like his hair, the way he walks, and when he dropped her mayonnaise from being nervous around her.
Bag Boy: (protagonist, flat, static) The author conveyed that the boy was shy and reluctant of opportunities given to him. A quote that shows the boy's shyness is, “... she looked at him and smiled, and he could respond only by busting her jar of mayonnaise on the floor...” (Rylant). Rylant showed the boy being reluctant to opportunities by making him see the girl come into the store again and not even try to get her attention, rather than smiling or waving at her.
In the exposition, the protagonist is presented as a young girl who was forced by her parents to move from her home to Cincinnati, Ohio. As a source of peace, she goes grocery shopping and immediately falls in love with the bag boy who drops her jar of mayonnaise. Over the course of the next few weeks, she would think constantly about him. He’d be thinking about her too. For the next few weeks, the two would look for each other in the store. After four long weeks, they’d see each other again, only she’d ignore him and go into a different checkout aisle because she was waiting for him to make the first move. Later that week, an attractive young man would ask her out and she’d agree. The bag boy was bored of his job and got a new one at a bookstore where there were many interesting girls. The boy and girl later saw each other at the movies, each with different dates, and smiled and moved on.
Freytag’s Pyramid

- Exposition
- Rising Action
- Climax
- Falling Action
- Resolution

Plot
Inciting Incident

The main character goes to the bag boy’s checkout lane to check out her food, and the two fall in love when the bag boy drops her jar of mayo.
Rising Action

- For four weeks, she and the bag boy never see each other, because her shopping time and his shift time never coincided.

- The girl had been having daydreams about the bag boy so every time she shopped, she scanned the checkout lanes for the bag boy.

- The bag boy had also been thinking about the girl. Every shift he had, he would also look for the girl.
Climax

One day, the girl went grocery shopping at the same time the boy had his shift. When the girl checked out, she didn’t go to the bag boy’s lane. After the girl left, the bag boy didn’t stop her and say “hello”.

The girl regretted not checking out at the bag boy’s lane.
The bag boy regretted not stopping the girl and starting a conversation.
The girl started dating a nice boy that moved in the next week.
The boy switched jobs to work at a bookstore where he found a nice girl to date.
Denouement

One night, the bag boy and the girl see each other at the movies, each with significant others. They smile at each other, but as if they were strangers on a bus. Even though they had loved each other once before, they didn’t show it in the brief exchange between the two of them.
The short story is written in third person omniscient, from the point of view of an almighty narrator. This adds to the story because you can see how both the girl and the bag boy react to love, whether they were falling in love or out of love. It also allows you to learn what lesson the narrator was trying to convey when explaining why the girl avoided the bag boy. The narrator begins, “It is odd how we sometimes deny ourselves the very pleasure we have longed for and which is finally within our reach.” (Rylant). Rylant is explaining the odd phenomenon in which children pretend to not want something even when they do. Then they get frustrated “when no one tries harder to give them” what they want.
This short story was full of situational irony. Throughout the story it was indicated that the boy and the girl would get together, but they never did in the end. A quote that supports this is, “...glancing toward the other, each smiled slightly, then looked away, as strangers on public buses...” (Rylant). Since they never talked, they never got together as expected in the beginning. Another quote that indicated this is, “And when finally they did meet up again, neither offered a clue to the other that he, or she, had been the object of obsessive thought for weeks...” (Rylant). This is ironic because they both had been obsessing over each other for weeks, yet neither of them knew.
The theme of this short story is if one never takes initiative to get what one wants, then it will result in a loss of what they want. This is shown when the boy and the girl wanted to talk to each other, yet neither of them gave any hints that they liked each other. Rylant was trying to show how when one never goes and chases after what they really want, they will never have it. For example, the boy and the girl fell in love, but they never talked because neither of them took initiative to get what they wanted— which was to get together.
Symbol

One symbol in this short story is the mayonnaise jar. The mayonnaise jar being dropped was the main turning point, when the girl started to like the bagboy. The mayonnaise symbolized the outcome of the bagboy liking the girl, resulting in dropping it.
Rating: Two out of Three stars.

Positive Feedback: The story was well written in the third person omniscient point of view. The absence of names in the story allows the reader to have a personal connection with the story because they can relate to the story in any way they can (meaning they can imagine themselves as the characters or someone they know).

Negative Feedback: The main conflict wasn’t defined well in the story. While the story was entertaining, the plot didn’t have an intense climax or well-defined conflict.
Responsibility Chart

Jessica Wong (Captain)
Title Page/1 pt/15 min
Setting/5 pts/15 min
Plot Diagram/10 pts/40 min
P.O.V./10 pts/20 min
Images/5 pts/30 min

Rosie Sabatino (Monitor)
Biography/5 pts/10 min
Characters/5 pts/20 min
Technique/10 pts/15 min
Symbol/10 pts/15 min
Theme/10 pts/10 min

Victoria Morrison (Editor)
Other Works/5 pts/10 min
Summary/5 pts/20 min
Rating/5 pts/10 min
Citations/9 pts/5 min
Images/5 pts/5 min
Respons. Chart/10 pts/10 min

*Everyone is a reporter!
Citations


http://www.cynthiarylant.com/