

# The Scholarship Jacket

Short Story by Marta Salinas

## What stands in the way of your DREAMS?

You may dream to be a star on the basketball court, to run for class president, or to take piano lessons. Whatever it is, hard work and luck can help you make your dream come true. However, you may also find some things will stand in your way.

**LIST IT** With a small group of classmates, discuss your dream for the future. Add your dream to the list on the left. Then, think about what might get in your way as you work to make your dream come true. Finally, write down one or two ways to overcome each obstacle.

### Dreams

1. take piano lessons

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Overcoming obstacles

1. No time to practice—

set aside half an hour

each day to practice.

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Text Analysis: First-Person Point of View

When you listen to a friend talk, you can learn a great deal about him or her. Your friend's personality, experiences, and opinions all come through. The same is true when you read a story told from one character's point of view. When a story is told from the **first-person point of view**, the narrator is a character in the story.

#### First-Person Point of View



#### The Narrator

- is a character in the story
- uses the pronouns *I* and *me* to refer to himself or herself
- describes his or her own thoughts, feelings, and impressions
- does not know what other characters are thinking and feeling

As you read “The Scholarship Jacket,” notice how the information you receive is limited to what the narrator sees, hears, thinks, and feels.

## Reading Skill: Make Inferences

One way to get the most out of what you read is to make logical guesses, or **inferences**, about things that are not directly stated. Good inferences are based a combination of details in the story and on your own knowledge and experiences. As you read “The Scholarship Jacket,” write down your inferences in a chart like the one below.

Details from the Text	My Experiences	Inference
Martha didn't play sports because of cost.	My school team couldn't raise enough money to go to the playoffs.	Sports in school can be too expensive for everyone.

## Vocabulary in Context

Note: Words are listed in the order in which they appear in the story.

**agile** (äj'əl) *adj.* quick and light in movement

*Agile people are usually good athletes.*

**despair** (dĩ-spâr') *v.* to lose hope

*Martha tried not to despair over the bad news.*

**eavesdrop** (ēvz'dröp') *v.* to listen secretly to a private conversation of others

*She could not help but eavesdrop on her teachers' conversations.*

**falsify** (fôl'sə-fī') *v.* to make false by adding to or changing

*Don't falsify records to hide the truth.*

**dismay** (dĩs-mā') *n.* distress cause by trouble or something unexpected

*The cost of the jacket caused Martha's dismay.*

**vile** (vīl) *adj.* disgusting; unpleasant

*She was sickened by his vile comments.*

## Vocabulary Practice

Review the vocabulary words and think about their meanings. Predict the kinds of experiences you think the main character of this story will face.

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**SET A PURPOSE  
FOR READING**

Read this story to find out who wins the scholarship jacket.

# The Scholarship Jacket

Short Story by

**MARTA SALINAS**



**BACKGROUND** The main character of “The Scholarship Jacket” is a Mexican-American girl who lives in Texas. In 1731, *Tejanos*, or Texas Mexicans, established a ranch community in what was then Northeastern Mexico. More than 100 years later they joined forces with immigrants from the United States to gain their independence from Mexico. In 1845, Texas became a part of the United States. Today over seven million Mexican Americans live in Texas.

**A FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW**

Circle the narrator’s description of the scholarship jacket in the first paragraph. Underline the explanation of how a student wins the jacket.

The small Texas school that I went to had a tradition carried out every year during the eighth-grade graduation: a beautiful gold and green jacket (the school colors) was awarded to the class valedictorian, the student who had maintained the highest grades for eight years. The scholarship jacket had a big gold S on the left front side and your name written in gold letters on the pocket. **A**

My oldest sister, Rosie, had won the jacket a few years back, and I fully expected to also. I was fourteen and in  
10 the eighth grade. I had been a straight A student since the first grade and this last year had looked forward very much to owning that jacket. My father was a farm laborer who couldn’t earn enough money to feed eight children, so when I was six I was given to my grandparents to raise.



We couldn't participate in sports at school because there were registration fees, uniform costs, and trips out of town; so, even though our family was quite **agile** and athletic there would never be a school sports jacket for us. This one, the scholarship jacket, was our only chance. **B**

20 In May, close to graduation, spring fever had struck as usual with a vengeance.<sup>1</sup> No one paid any attention in class; instead we stared out the windows and at each other, wanting to speed up the last few weeks of school. I **despaired** every time I looked in the mirror. Pencil thin, not a curve anywhere. I was called “beanpole” and “string bean,” and I knew that’s what I looked like. A flat chest, no hips, and a brain; that’s what I had. That really wasn’t much for a fourteen-year-old to work with, I thought, as I absent-mindedly wandered from my history

30 class to the gym. Another hour of sweating in basketball and displaying my toothpick legs was coming up. Then I remembered my P.E. shorts were still in a bag under my desk where I’d forgotten them. I had to walk all the way back and get them. Coach Thompson was a real bear if someone wasn’t dressed for P.E. She had said I was a good forward and even tried to talk Grandma into letting me join the team once. Of course Grandma said no.

I was almost back at my classroom door when I heard voices raised in anger as if in some sort of argument.

40 I stopped. I didn’t mean to **eavesdrop**, I just hesitated, not knowing what to do. I needed those shorts and I was going to be late, but I didn’t want to interrupt an argument between my teachers. I recognized the voices: Mr. Schmidt, my history teacher, and Mr. Boone, my math teacher. They seemed to be arguing about me. I couldn’t believe it. I still remember the feeling of shock that rooted me flat against the wall as if I were trying to blend in with the graffiti written there.

**agile** (äj’əl) *adj.* quick and light in movement

**B FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW**

Reread lines 8–19. Underline three things the narrator has told you about herself so far.

**despair** (dĭ-spär’) *v.* to lose hope

**eavesdrop** (ēvz’dröp’) *v.* to listen secretly to a private conversation of others

1. **with a vengeance** (vĕn’jəns): to an extreme degree.



Monitor Your Comprehension

falsify (fôl'sə-fī') v. to make false by adding to or changing

PAUSE & REFLECT

Reread lines 48–55. Underline the reasons why Mr. Schmidt thinks Martha should have the jacket. Circle Mr. Boone's reasons for giving the jacket to Joann. Who deserves to win the scholarship jacket? Explain.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of horizontal blue lines.

“I refuse to do it! I don’t care who her father is, her grades don’t even begin to compare to Martha’s. I won’t lie or falsify records. Martha has a straight A-plus average and you know it.” That was Mr. Schmidt and he sounded very angry. Mr. Boone’s voice sounded calm and quiet.

“Look. Joann’s father is not only on the Board, he owns the only store in town: we could say it was a close tie and—”

PAUSE & REFLECT

The pounding in my ears drowned out the rest of the words, only a word here and there filtered through. “. . . Martha is Mexican . . . resign . . . won’t do it . . . .” Mr. Schmidt came rushing out and luckily for me went down the opposite way toward the auditorium, so he didn’t see me. Shaking, I waited a few minutes and then went in and grabbed my bag and fled from the room. Mr. Boone looked up when I came in but didn’t say anything. To this day I don’t remember if I got in trouble in P.E. for being late or how I made it through the rest of the afternoon. I went home very sad and cried into my pillow that night so Grandmother wouldn’t hear me. It seemed a cruel coincidence that I had overheard that conversation.

The next day when the principal called me into his office I knew what it would be about. He looked uncomfortable and unhappy. I decided I wasn’t going to make it any easier for him, so I looked him straight in the eyes. He looked away and fidgeted with the papers on his desk.

“Martha,” he said, “there’s been a change in policy this year regarding the scholarship jacket. As you know, it has always been free.” He cleared his throat and continued. “This year the Board has decided to charge fifteen dollars, which still won’t cover the complete cost of the jacket.”



### Monitor Your Comprehension

I stared at him in shock, and a small sound of **dismay** escaped my throat. I hadn't expected this. He still avoided looking in my eyes. **C**

"So if you are unable to pay the fifteen dollars for the jacket it will be given to the next one in line." I didn't need to ask who that was.

Standing with all the dignity I could muster, I said, "I'll speak to my grandfather about it, sir, and let you know **90** tomorrow." I cried on the walk home from the bus stop. The dirt road was a quarter mile from the highway, so by the time I got home, my eyes were red and puffy.

"Where's Grandpa?" I asked Grandma, looking down at the floor so she wouldn't ask me why I'd been crying. She was sewing on a quilt as usual and didn't look up.

"I think he's out back working in the bean field."

I went outside and looked out at the fields. There he was. I could see him walking between the rows, his body bent over the little plants, hoe in hand. I walked slowly **100** out to him, trying to think how I could best ask him for the money. There was a cool breeze blowing and a sweet smell of mesquite<sup>2</sup> fruit in the air, but I didn't appreciate it. I kicked at a dirt clod. I wanted that jacket so much. It was more than just being a valedictorian and giving a little thank you speech for the jacket on graduation night. It represented eight years of hard work and expectation. I knew I had to be honest with Grandpa; it was my only chance. He saw my shadow and looked up.

He waited for me to speak. I cleared my throat **110** nervously and clasped my hands behind my back so he wouldn't see them shaking. "Grandpa, I have a big favor to ask you," I said in Spanish, the only language he knew. He still waited silently. I tried again. "Grandpa, this

**dismay** (dĭs-mā) *n.* distress caused by trouble or something unexpected

What causes Martha **dismay**?

### **C** MAKE INFERENCES

Why does the principal avoid looking at Martha?

2. **sweet smell of mesquite** (mĕ-skĕt'): Mesquite, a small tree or shrub native to hot, dry regions of North America, has small flowers and large super-rich pods that give off a sweet smell.



Monitor Your Comprehension

PAUSE & REFLECT

Pause at line 122. What are your own thoughts about Martha as she takes her problem to her grandfather?

Handwriting lines for the reflection prompt.

MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 123–137. Why won't Martha's grandfather pay for the jacket? What does it mean when she says she understands that the jacket is "not a matter of money" (line 129)?

Handwriting lines for the inference prompt.

year the principal said the scholarship jacket is not going to be free. It's going to cost fifteen dollars, and I have to take the money in tomorrow, otherwise it'll be given to someone else." The last words came out in an eager rush. Grandpa straightened up tiredly and leaned his chin on the hoe handle. He looked out over the field that was filled with the tiny green bean plants. I waited, desperately hoping he'd say I could have the money. PAUSE & REFLECT

He turned to me and asked quietly, "What does a scholarship jacket mean?" I answered quickly; maybe there was a chance. "It means you've earned it by having the highest grades for eight years and that's why they're giving it to you." Too late I realized the significance of my words. Grandpa knew that I understood it was not a matter of money. It wasn't that. He went back to hoeing the weeds that sprang up between the delicate little bean plants. It was a time-consuming job; sometimes the small shoots were right next to each other. Finally he spoke again as I turned to leave, crying. "Then if you pay for it, Marta, it's not a scholarship jacket, is it? Tell your principal I will not pay the fifteen dollars."

I walked back to the house and locked myself in the bathroom for a long time. I was angry with Grandfather even though I knew he was right, and I was angry with the Board, whoever they were. Why did they have to change the rules just when it was my turn to win the jacket? Those were the days of belief and innocence.

It was a very sad and withdrawn girl who dragged into the principal's office the next day. This time he did look me in the eyes.



Monitor Your Comprehension

“What did your grandfather say?”

I sat very straight in my chair.

“He said to tell you he won’t pay the fifteen dollars.”

150 The principal muttered something I couldn’t understand under his breath and walked over to the window. He stood looking out at something outside. He looked bigger than usual when he stood up; he was a tall, gaunt man with gray hair, and I watched the back of his head while I waited for him to speak. **E**

“Why?” he finally asked. “Your grandfather has the money. He owns a two-hundred acre ranch.”

I looked at him, forcing my eyes to stay dry. “I know, sir, but he said if I had to pay for it, then it wouldn’t be a scholarship jacket.” I stood up to leave. “I guess you’ll just have to give it to Joann.” I hadn’t meant to say that, it had just slipped out. I was almost to the door when he stopped me.

“Martha—wait.”

I turned and looked at him, waiting. What did he want now? I could feel my heart pounding loudly in my chest and see my blouse fluttering where my breasts should have been. Something bitter and vile tasting was coming up in my mouth; I was afraid I was going to be sick. I didn’t need any sympathy speeches. He sighed loudly and went back to his big desk. He watched me, biting his lip.

“Okay. We’ll make an exception in your case. I’ll tell the Board, you’ll get your jacket.” **F**

I could hardly believe my ears. I spoke in a trembling rush. “Oh, thank you, sir!” Suddenly I felt great. I didn’t know about adrenalin<sup>3</sup> in those days, but I knew something was pumping through me, making me feel as tall as the sky. I wanted to yell, jump, run the mile, do something. I ran out so I could cry in the hall where there was no one to see me.

3. **adrenalin** (ə-drĕn’ə-lĭn): a hormone that speeds up the heartbeat and increases bodily energy. The body produces adrenalin when a person experiences emotions such as excitement or fear.

**E FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW**

Reread lines 150–155. How does the first-person point of view limit your understanding of what the principal is thinking?

Four horizontal lines for writing.

**vile** (vīl) *adj.* disgusting; unpleasant

**F MAKE INFERENCES**

Why do you think the principal changed his mind?

**Details from the Story**  
Three horizontal lines for writing.



**My Experience**  
Three horizontal lines for writing.



**Inference**  
Three horizontal lines for writing.





Monitor Your Comprehension

**G MAKE INFERENCES**

Circle the phrase “making an exception” in line 194. The word *exception* means “an exclusion or a leaving out.” In your own words, explain what the principal is doing for Martha.

Lined writing area for student response.

At the end of the day, Mr. Schmidt winked at me and said, “I hear you’re getting the scholarship jacket this year.”

His face looked as happy and innocent as a baby’s, but I knew better. Without answering I gave him a quick hug and ran to the bus. I cried on the walk home again, but this time because I was so happy. I couldn’t wait to tell Grandpa and ran straight to the field. I joined him in the row where he was working, and without saying anything I crouched down and started pulling up the  
190 weeds with my hands. Grandpa worked alongside me for a few minutes, and he didn’t ask what had happened. After I had a little pile of weeds between the rows, I stood up and faced him.

“The principal said he’s making an exception for me, Grandpa, and I’m getting the jacket after all. That’s after I told him what you said.” **G**

Grandpa didn’t say anything; he just gave me a pat on the shoulder and a smile. He pulled out the crumpled red handkerchief that he always carried in his back pocket and  
200 wiped the sweat off his forehead.

“Better go see if your grandmother needs any help with supper.”

I gave him a big grin. He didn’t fool me. I skipped and ran back to the house whistling some silly tune.

### Text Analysis: First-Person Point of View

A first-person narrator is a character in the story he or she tells. Identify the narrator of “The Scholarship Jacket” in the top box. Then, give three details from the story that reveal the narrator’s thoughts and feelings.

<b>Narrator</b>		
<b>Narrator’s Thoughts or Feelings</b>	<b>Narrator’s Thoughts or Feelings</b>	<b>Narrator’s Thoughts or Feelings</b>

Think for a moment about how “The Scholarship Jacket” would differ if it were told by another person in the story. Pick one story character, such as the principal or the grandfather, and explain how the story would be different if it were told by that character.

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### Reading Skill: Make Inferences

Make an inference about each character in the story based on the detail provided.

<b>Martha</b>	<b>Detail:</b> “I guess you’ll just have to give it Joann.” (lines 160–161)
<i>My Inference:</i> _____ _____	
<b>Mr. Schmidt</b>	<b>Detail:</b> “I won’t lie or falsify records.” (lines 49–50)
<i>My Inference:</i> _____ _____	
<b>The Grandfather</b>	<b>Detail:</b> He just gave me a pat on the shoulder and a smile. (lines 197–198)
<i>My Inference:</i> _____ _____	

## What stands in the way of your DREAMS?

Review the methods you devised for overcoming an obstacle on page 104. What was surprising about the way Martha faced her obstacle?

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### Vocabulary Practice

Circle the term that is most closely related to the boldfaced vocabulary word.

1. **agile:** (a) sharp, (b) quick, (c) healthy
2. **vile:** (a) disgusting, (b) risky, (c) unhealthy
3. **eavesdrop:** (a) listen, (b) confront, (c) observe
4. **despair:** (a) decry, (b) decide, (c) abandon
5. **falsify:** (a) lie, (b) connect, (c) announce
6. **dismay:** (a) flatness, (b) greatness, (c) sadness

## Academic Vocabulary in Writing

analyze

aware

develop

react

respond

**Analyze** Martha’s relationship with her grandfather. Consider the times when Martha speaks to him and the way he **responds** to her questions and concerns. How can you tell Martha respects her grandfather? Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response. Definitions of these words are on page 63.

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### Assessment Practice

**DIRECTIONS** Use “The Scholarship Jacket” to answer questions 1–6.

- Lines 48–55 are important to the story because they show that Martha —
  - doesn’t deserve the jacket
  - might not receive the jacket
  - is not interested in the jacket
  - cannot afford to pay for the jacket
- Which of the following phrases helps the reader know that Martha is upset with what the principal tells her?
  - I decided I wasn’t going to make it easier for him.*
  - I hadn’t expected this.*
  - I didn’t need to ask who that was.*
  - I cried on the walk home from the bus stop.*
- In lines 121–122, the author writes “I waited, desperately hoping he’d say I could have the money” to help the reader understand that Martha —
  - believes the principal’s decision is unfair
  - is afraid of her grandfather
  - will pay for the jacket if she has to
  - does not want to work hard
- Grandpa won’t pay for the jacket because he doesn’t —
  - have the money to spend
  - believe the jacket should be bought
  - like the principal
  - want Martha to have it
- How does the principal change by the end of the story?
  - He comes to like Martha’s grandfather.
  - He confronts Martha’s teachers.
  - He decides to give Martha the jacket.
  - He finds out that Martha is a good student.
- By telling this story from the first-person point of view, the author helps the reader better understand the narrator’s —
  - desire to win the jacket
  - difficulties in getting good grades
  - wish to leave school
  - inability to play basketball