Normally, he goes clean-shaven into the world, but the promise of a Saturday liquid with sunshine draws him first from his study to the backyard, from there to his front lawn. The smell of burning leaves stirs the memories of childhood car rides, narrow lanes adrift with yellow leaves, girls on plodding horses, unattended stands piled high with pumpkins, onions, or beets so that each one was, in its own way, a still life. Always, there were salmon tins glinting with silver, set above hand-painted signs instructing purchasers to deposit twenty-five or fifty cents. This act of faith containing all the stories he has read in childhood about the North – cabins left unlocked, filled with supplies for hapless wayfarers – wakes in him a desire to temporarily abandon the twice-cut yards and hundred-year-old oaks.

- How is the first word in the story important?
- Who is the protagonist? What sort of neighbourhood does he live in?
- Why does he leave home? What is his motivation or goal?
He does not hurry for he has no destination. He meanders, instead, through the neat suburban labyrinth of cul-de-sacs, bays and circles, losing and finding himself endlessly. Becoming lost is made all the easier because the houses repeat themselves with superficial variations. There grows within him, however, a vague unease with symmetry, with nothing left to chance, no ragged edges, no unkempt vacant lots, no houses rendered unique by necessity and indifference.

- Does he know where he is going? Why does he get lost?
- What note of tension is introduced in this paragraph? Which words create mood?
Group Members:

3 The houses all face the sun. They have no artificial divisions. There is room enough for everyone. Now, as he passes grey stone gates, the yards are all proscribed by stiff picket fences and, quickly, a certain untidiness creeps in: a fragment of glass, a chocolate bar wrapper, a plastic horse, cracked sidewalks with ridges of stiff grass. Although he has on blue jeans – matching pants and jacket made in Paris – he is driving a grey Mercedes Benz. Gangs of young men follow the car with their unblinking eyes. The young men stand and lean in tired, watchful knots close to phone booths and seedy-looking grocery stores.

- Describe the new setting. How does this neighbourhood and its people contrast with his own neighbourhood and himself?
- What does the reader learn about his social status? What are other people’s reactions to him in this section?
Group Members:

4  Their slick hair glistens. Their leather jackets gleam with studs. Eagles, tigers, wolves and serpents ride their backs.
   - Whose hair “glistens”? What is the reader’s impression of the people described?
   - What mood is created by the images in this paragraph? Are any of the images symbolic or stereotypical?
Group Members:

5 He passes a ten-foot wire fence enclosing a playground bare of equipment and pounded flat. The gate is double locked, the fence cut and rolled into a cone. Three boys throw stones at pigeons. Paper clogs the fence like drifted snow. The school is covered with heavy screens. Its yellow brick is pock-marked, chipped.

- What impressions are created by the writer’s description of the playground and the school?
- So far in the story, what have all of the reader’s impressions been based on?
The houses are squat, as though they have been taller and have, slowly, sunk into the ground. Each has a band of dirt around the bottom. The blue glow of television sets lights the windows. On the front steps of a red-roofed house, a man sits. He wears black pants, a tartan vest, a brown snap-rimmed hat. Beside him is a suitcase.

- What does the first sentence suggest about the neighbourhood? Why is the man sitting on the step? Why might this man be mentioned?
- Make a list of the colours used in the story so far and speculate on possible associations.
Fences here are little more than fragments. Cars jam the narrow streets and he worries that he might strike the unkempt children who dart back and forth like startled fish. Street lights come on. He takes them as a signal to return the way he came, but it has been a reckless, haphazard path. Retracing it is impossible. He is overtaken by sudden guilt. He has left no message for his wife.

- How does the protagonist feel at this point?
- Why is he nervous? Does he have any reason to be?
Group Members:

8 There have been no trees or drifting leaves, no stands covered in produce, no salmon tins, but time has run away with him. His wife, he realizes, will have returned from bridge, his children gathered for supper. He also knows that, at first, they have explained his absence on a neighbour’s hospitality and gin. However, by the time he can return, annoyance will have blossomed into alarm. His safe return will, he knows from childhood and years of being locked in domestic grief, degenerate to recriminations and apology.

- How does this paragraph tie in with an earlier one in the story? What is learned about the man’s family’s attitude toward him?
- Look up the word “recriminations,” and then describe his marriage.
Faced with this, he decides to call the next time he sees a store or phone booth. So intent is he upon the future that he dangerously ignores the present and does not notice the police car, concealed in the shadows of a side street, nose out and follow him.

- In what sense is he unaware of the present? Why is he being followed by the police?
Ahead, there is a small store with windows covered in hand painted signs and vertical metal bars. On the edge of the light, three young men and a girl slouch. One of them has a beard and, in spite of the advancing darkness, wears sunglasses. He has on a fringed leather vest. His companions wear leather jackets. Their peaked caps make their heads seem flat, their foreheads nonexistent. The girl is better looking than she should be for such companions. She is long legged and wears a white turtle-necked sweater that accentuates her breasts.

- Why are there bars on the windows? What are the four people like? How can the reader tell?
- What is the protagonist’s attitude towards the girl? What does this reveal about his character?
In spite of his car, he hopes his day old beard which he strokes upward with the heel of his hand, will, when combined with his clothes, provide immunity. He slips his wallet into his shirt pocket, does up the metal buttons on his jacket and slips a ten dollar bill into his back pocket. Recalling a television show, he decides that if he is accosted, he will say that the ten is all he’s got, that he stole the car, and ask them if they know a buyer.

- What kind of “immunity” is he thinking about? Why does he put his wallet in his shirt pocket? Why is he prepared to tell a false story?
He eases out of the car, edges nervously along the fender and past the grille. The store window illuminates the sidewalk like a stage. Beyond the light, everything is obscured by darkness. He is so intent upon the three men and the girl that he does not notice the police car drift against the curb, nor the officer who is advancing with a pistol in his hand.

- In what sense is the man on “a stage”?
- Why does the police man have a gun in his hand?
When the officer, who is inexperienced, who is nervous because of the neighbourhood, who is suspicious because of the car and because he has been trained to see an unshaven man in blue jeans as a potential thief and not as a probable owner, orders him to halt, he is surprised. When he turns part way around and recognizes the uniform, he does not feel fear but relief. Instinctively relaxing, certain of his safety, in the last voluntary movement of his life, he reaches his hand not in the air as he was ordered to, but toward his wallet for his identity.

- In this context, what is likely the policeman’s view of the protagonist? Is there any foreshadowing that the officer would view the protagonist this way?
- What is ironic about the protagonist’s reaction to seeing the police officer?
Group Members:

13 When the officer, who is inexperienced, who is nervous because of the neighbourhood, who is suspicious because of the car and because he has been trained to see an unshaven man in blue jeans as a potential thief and not as a probable owner, orders him to halt, he is surprised. When he turns part way around and recognizes the uniform, he does not feel fear but relief. Instinctively relaxing, certain of his safety, in the last voluntary movement of his life, he reaches his hand not in the air as he was ordered to, but toward his wallet for his identity.

- What do the words “last voluntary movement of his life” suggest? What will probably happen next?
- What are some of the meanings of the last sentence?
- Why is the story written in the present tense? Was this a good choice on the writer’s part?