Crossroads: A Sad Vaudeville
by Carlos Solórzano, pages 53–68

Responding and Writing
At a station where the trains never stop, a young man waits for a woman he expects to be “the special one” for him. The woman still longs for love despite her age. When the young man sees “the mask of old age” that is her face, he apologizes for the “wild dream” that she might have been the woman he came to meet. The moment when they might have connected is lost forever.

Vocabulary
brusque abrupt; curt
entreatingly pleadingly; persuasively
imploringly beseechingly; begging urgently

Read and Think Critically
1. One of the themes of this play is the conflict between conformity and freedom. Cite speeches or stage directions that illustrate this theme. Answers will vary. Stage directions that have the trains going mechanically in the same direction (top of page 54, for example) reinforce the conformity side, since when one of the men forming the train jumps off, it disappears. At the bottom of page 54, Flagman and Man disagree on whether all women look alike or not, with Flagman stressing conformity. Both the young man and the old woman find their efforts to make a deep connection with another person thwarted by conventional attitudes about age. However, the woman seems to have achieved some inner freedom, saying, “Now I’m the woman I always wanted to be.”

2. **LITERARY LENS: DRAMATIC IRONY** Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows more than one or more of the characters. Identify an example of dramatic irony in the play. What purpose do you think it serves? Answers will vary. As students identify examples, ask them to share their reactions to the irony. One example is the woman’s question: “Shall I tell him that I’m that woman he’s waiting for?” The revelation builds suspense about what the young man will do at this crossroads of his life and heightens the poignancy of his failure to recognize the woman he has longed for.

3. Do you agree with the woman when she says, “. . . there is but one moment to recognize one another, to extend our hands. One mustn’t let it pass by”? Explain your answer. Answers will vary. While the man has failed to recognize the woman he seeks and the woman gives up hope that they will be able to connect, she also suggests that he continue to wait. Perhaps his search will be futile, but according to the flagman, all the trains will eventually meet.

4. The characters in this play do not communicate with one another successfully. Identify a passage of dialogue that illustrates a lack of communication and interpret what the playwright’s intentions might be. Answers will vary. Accept any answer students can support from the text.

5. **Use a Literary Reference** While in France Solórzano was influenced by the literary and philosophical movements known as surrealism and existentialism. Use a literary reference to research the literary techniques of one of these movements. Then identify passages in the play where Solórzano employs the techniques. Answers will vary. Existential influence might be seen in the focus on the self-directing choices people make: “. . . there is but one moment to recognize one another, to extend our hands. One mustn’t let it pass by.” Surrealist influence might be identified in the juxtaposition of the robotic Flagman and trains with the searching characters.

Literary Traditions
The subtitle A Sad Vaudeville suggests that Solórzano is playing with theatrical conventions, since a vaudeville show presents light entertainment with unrelated comic skits, songs, and stunts. In such a show, the young man and the old woman might find a happy ending. In Solórzano’s universe, their desperate search for connection confronts them with life’s absurdity.

Writing a Dramatic Scene
Have students form pairs and brainstorm a scene between two people who are having trouble communicating about a decision they must make. After identifying the characters, the setting, and the event, have each student write the dialogue between the characters, and then have the students share their scenes with each other. Discuss the differences.