The View from Downstairs
by John Peters (p. 37)

Cultural Background
In this story the narrator refers to several aspects of American culture. “Jingle Bells” is a song commonly heard during Christmas time; his friends’ irreverent version of the song is also well-known among children. Disney movies are usually created for children. The Joker and The Penguin are villains in the Batman comic/television/movie series. “Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover” is the title of a Paul Simon song. “Chicken” is slang for coward.

Before Students Read: Writing
Ask students to answer questions on the Student’s Page (Part A) and to share their answers with another student. Then ask for volunteers to share their answers with the whole class. This activity takes advantage of students’ prior knowledge of the story theme, which in turn aids comprehension.

Grammar Review (on Student’s Page)
Besides possessive pronouns, there are two other important ways of indicating possession in English. For singular nouns we can add an ’s; for plural nouns we add s’.

For Example: President Clinton’s family (singular); the teachers’ room (plural).

The second way inverts the order of the words and inserts the word of.

For Example: the family of President Clinton; the room of the teachers.

After Students Read: Writing
1. Ask students to review their responses to the prereading questions in Part A on the Student’s Page. After having read the story, are their predictions correct? What does the title really mean?
2. This story is a study in contrasts. Jason, the narrator, often refers to differences between his friends and himself. Ask your students to create a grid or chart to graphically show these distinctions:

Example: What Jason does/thinks:
He hums the music to “Jingle Bells.”

What his friends do/think:
Vinnie sings a mocking version of the song “Jingle Bells” to make fun of Jason.

For Conversation
Here are some questions to start a class discussion.
1. At the beginning of the story, where are the four boys headed? From where have they come?
2. Jay chooses to remain “downstairs” with Nicole even though the other couples go “upstairs.” Why? What clues to Jay’s personality help you answer this question?
3. This story contains another story—Jay’s recounting of his first trip with his brother to the Abigail Place Forest Preserve. In each story, Jay fails to complete his journey through the park. In specific terms, describe the events that cause him to flee the park on his first visit, and to flee again at the end of this story. What does the park represent for Jay? What keeps him from walking through it even after he learns that Santa and the Easter Bunny will not be there to judge him?
Part A: Before You Read
Please respond to the following questions:
1. What do you think the title “The View from Downstairs” means?
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
2. Is it possible to belong to a group which does not share your views or values? Explain.
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Part B: Grammar Review
Besides possessive pronouns, there are two other important ways of **indicating possession** in English. For singular nouns we can add an ‘s; for plural nouns we add s’.

**Example:** President Clinton’s family (singular); the teachers’ room (plural).

The second way inverts the order of the words and inserts the word **of**.

**Examples:** the family of President Clinton; the room of the teachers.

**Directions:** Find seven more examples of possession in the story and write them as they appear in the story. Then rewrite the phrases using the alternate wording.

**Example:** Possessive Nouns in story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive Nouns in story</th>
<th>Alternate version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex’s girlfriend (p. 38)</td>
<td>the girlfriend of Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the group’s pace (p. 41)</td>
<td>the pace of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my dad’s favorite TV character (p. 43)</td>
<td>the favorite TV character of my dad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________

2. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________

3. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________

4. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________

5. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________

6. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________

7. _____________________________________________ _____________________________________________


Part C: Vocabulary

Based on the way each word below is used in the story, write what you think the word means. Then look up the same word in your dictionary and copy the definition that comes closest to the way the word is used in the story. Finally, write a sentence of your own using the word. Use a separate sheet of paper.

Example: phony (p. 39)
A. Your definition: false
B. Dictionary definition: not genuine
C. Your new sentence: The police arrested him for printing phony money.

1. inspiring (p. 37)
2. switch (p. 37)
3. sophomores (p. 38)
4. disappeared (p. 38)
5. luxury (p. 39)
6. necessities (p. 39)
7. monotony (p. 39)
8. hilarious (p. 39)
9. celebrity (p. 40)
10. suspicious (p. 43)

Part D: Reading Check

After reviewing the story, please answer the following questions.

1. How does Jason feel when Nicole asks him why they haven’t talked about going upstairs? ______________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. How are Jason and Nicole similar? _________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Why does Jason accept a cigarette from Lance? _____________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. According to Jason, his friends have one thing on their minds. What is it? ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________