

Tillie Olsen, “I Stand Here Ironing,” p. 202

“There were all those acts of love”

1. Who is the narrator in this story?
What is the point of view (first person, limited omniscient narrator, omniscient narrator, interior monologue)?
2. Who does the narrator seem to be addressing? (That is, who is the “you” in the first sentence of the short story?)
3. How old was the mother when she gave birth to Emily, her daughter?
4. What situation was the young mother in?
5. In what ways does the mother try to follow the advice of experts?

What are the results of following the advice of experts?
6. What has been the relationship between the woman’s daughters, Emily and Susan?
Why?
7. The mother reviews the many hardships her daughter Emily suffered: lack of a father’s presence in her early years, a mother distracted by work and poverty and then by other children in the home, sibling rivalry, unpopularity at school, childhood diseases that separated her from her family. How have these hardships affected Emily?
8. What talent has Emily discovered she has?
9. How does the mother decide to respond to the request to go to the school to discuss her daughter? What justifies her response?
10. What do you think the iron and ironing board symbolize in this story?