

Identifying Scene vs. Summary

In the following excerpt from *Oh, Beautiful: An America Family in the 20th Century* by John Paul Godges (shared with permission) take a yellow highlighter and identify the scene.

Part One: Newcomers

1. The Great War

They longed for a better life but had only one option left. With eyes restless from their journey, Nicola Di Gregorio and Vincenzo Marzola beheld a vast and clamorous freight train as it slowed to nearly a stall in an eastern Pennsylvania field in July 1902. Snaking toward them, the mass of railcars jostled and groaned like a great body willing to neither join nor die.

Nicola pointed to one of the boxcars crawling in their direction from about 200 yards off. The door in middle of the boxcar had been slid wide open, leaving maximum room for error. "I go first," Nicola instructed in Italian as he sidled toward the oncoming car. He then hollered above the din: "You stay there. Watch how I do it. Then I'll help you."

Vincenzo nodded, making a quick sign of the cross.

Nicola's wary brown eyes tried to gauge the right moment. His heart pounding, he took several deep breaths and bent his knees in anticipation. As the boxcar rumbled within 20 yards of him, he raced through the field toward the moving target of the open door, aiming to intersect it at a right angle. When he came within a yard of the door, he sprang from the earth, hurled himself through the opening, and landed on his abdomen onto the platform, using momentum to roll the rest of this body inside. "Hurry!" he stood up and shouted.

Vincenzo followed suit. He raced toward the moving target, leapt of the ground, dove through the opening, and landed on his abdomen. But momentum failed to propel him further, leaving his legs to dangle over the edge of the boxcar, between its grinding wheels.

Nicola grabbed the wrists of Vincenzo and lurched backwards, dragging him the rest of the way inside. Nicola then knelt on one knee to catch his breath.

They made it. Grinning at each other, they laughed and sighed in relief.

But there were already two other hobos in the boxcar. They had left the door open for ventilation. They were there first, and they didn't want anyone else there, as indicated by the cold glances thrown at the newcomers.

The train picked up steam, the horn wailing in the distance.

Nicola and Vincenzo moved toward the corner of the boxcar opposite the other hobos and sat down. Nicola uttered something in Italian, unintelligible to the others.

The earlier arrivals mumbled something to each other, too. They stood up, strutted across the platform, and confronted the newcomers, towering over them. "Get your greasy asses outta here, you damn dirty dagos!" one of the native hobos cursed.

"Okay, okay," Nicola put up his hands. "We go," he spoke in English. "At the next station."

"Get out *now*!" the other native shouted.

"Cantcha understand?" he jeered.

Nicola arose to face the men. But before he could find his equilibrium, they shoved him to within a foot of the open door. "Now!" they yelled above the accelerating chugs of the locomotive.

Nicola regained his footing. "We go at the next station," he held his ground.

Vincenzo stood up to intervene, but the jerking train knocked him to the floor, where he heard a bloodcurdling scream. By the time he looked up, Nicola was gone.

"Musta stumbled," one of the standing hobos muttered to the other.

Vincenzo ran toward the open door, bracing himself against the inside edge, and caught a glimpse of something that caused him to recoil in horror. Nicola, having slipped or been shoved sideways off the surging beast as if he were excess skin being shed: had struck his head on a rail and been decapitated by the charging wheels, his skull crushed beneath the bowels of the train and his body ejected away from the tracks.

Nicola was a 43-year-old peasant farmer when he arrived in America from Italy aboard the SS. Patria on April 21, 1902. He had left his wife, Angelade Mergiota, and their seven children in the isolated Abruzzi village of Farindola. He and Vincenzo had traveled together from the village, hoping to find better work in America and to bring the earnings home to their families. The two men, both in their forties, had originally been accompanied by two other men from the village, both in their twenties.

There was so much excitement and promise at the start, as the four men rested their sea-weary eyes upon the uplifting gaze of the Statue of Liberty and disembarked at Ellis Island that spring day, each holding \$10 and innumerable dreams. None of the four had ever been to America, and none was joining a relative. The final destination for all of them was supposed to be New York. Filled with hope upon sight of the great city, they knew that all they needed to do was to ride the ferry from Ellis Island across the Hudson River, arrive among the impressive

buildings on the other side, and hunt for work in Little Italy, which awaited them smack in the middle of Lower Manhattan. Little Italy would be the launch pad of their American dreams.

Within two months, however, the dreams turned to nightmares for Nicola and Vincenzo. Like most Italian migrants of their day, they were illiterate and mostly unskilled. But unlike most Italian migrants of their day, Nicola and Vincenzo were also considered to be old. Their younger companions, in contrast, could also read and write in Italian. The four men discovered that there were many opportunities in Little Italy for men from Italy who were illiterate and in their forties. Nicola also tried but failed to find work as a butcher in New York City's meatpacking district.

By the end of June 1902, Nicola and Vincenzo found themselves, penniless. Resigned to the disappointment of New York City, they decided to try their luck in Philadelphia, where others Farindola had settled. The two younger men gave Nicola and Vincenzo money for food, but they still didn't have enough money for the train. And so in early July 1902, ten weeks after their arrival in America, Nicola and Vincenzo were riding the rails on their way to Philadelphia, still looking for work.

What is the Setting?

Who are main characters in the scene?

What is the action in the scene?

What is the conflict in the scene?

What is the goal of the scene?