

Socratic Seminar

“The Secret Life of Walter Mitty”

by James Thurber, pp. 708–711

The final lines of the story are, “Then, with the faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last.”

Based on your understanding of the text, and using your QNTs and the text itself, posit your answer to this question—is the ending of the story humorous or tragic? Why?

Remember:

Dialogue	Debate
In a dialogue, we work together toward shared understanding.	In a debate, two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
In dialogue, we listen to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground.	In debate, we listen to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
In a dialogue, we enlarge and possibly change a participant's point of view.	In a debate, we defend assumptions as truth.
In a dialogue, we create an open-minded attitude: it is okay to be wrong, and it is okay to change.	In a debate, we foster a close-minded attitude; we have to be right.
In dialogue, we offer our best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it.	In debate, we offer our best thinking and defend it against attack to try to prove that it is right.
In a dialogue, we need to temporarily suspend our beliefs to be able to hear the other side clearly, without prejudging.	In a debate, we have to wholeheartedly stand by our beliefs.
In dialogue, we search for strengths in all positions.	In debate, we search for weaknesses in the other position that we can use to win.
In a dialogue, we respect all the other participants and try not to alienate or offend anyone.	In a debate, by rebutting we may sound like we are belittling or insulting other participants, though this should not ever be our aim.
In a dialogue, we assume that all of our classmates have pieces of answers and that, by cooperating, we can gain a greater understanding.	In a debate, we assume there is a single right answer, and that some group in the room already has it. Generally, we believe the group with the right answer is our own.
In a dialogue, we may never reach a conclusion. There may be no defined “end.”	In a debate, there must be a conclusion. There is generally a winner declared.