***The Secret Life of Walter Mitty***

First published in 1939, this story is one of James Thurber's most well-known and beloved stories. *NOTE: This story has been slightly modified for classroom use.*

**Mitty:** We're going through!

**Narrator:** The Commander's voice was like thin ice breaking. He wore his full-dress uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down rakishly over one cold gray eye.

**Berg:** We can't make it, sir. It's spoiling for a hurricane, if you ask me.

**Mitty:** I'm not asking you, Lieutenant Berg. Throw on the power lights! Rev her up to 8,500! We're going through!

**Narrator:** The pounding of the cylinders increased: *ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa*. The Commander stared at the ice forming on the pilot window. He walked over and twisted a row of complicated dials.

**Mitty:** Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!

**Berg:** Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!

**Mitty:** Full strength in No. 3 turret!

**Berg:** Full strength in No. 3 turret!

**Narrator:** The crew, bending to their various tasks in the huge, hurtling eight-engined Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned.

**Crewman:** The old man will get us through. The Old Man ain't afraid of anything….

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**Mrs. Mitty:** Not so fast! You're driving too fast! What are you driving so fast for?

**Mitty:** (dreamily) Hmm?

**Narrator:** He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd.

**Mrs. Mitty:** You were up to fifty-five. You know I don't like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five!

**Narrator:** Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the roaring of the SN202 through the worst storm in twenty years of Navy flying fading in the remote, intimate airways of his mind.

**Mrs. Mitty:** You're tensed up again. It's one of your days. I wish you'd let Dr. Renshaw look you over.

**Narrator:**  Walter Mitty stopped the car in front of the building where his wife went to have her hair done.

**Mrs. Mitty:** Remember to get those overshoes while I'm having my hair done.

**Mitty:** I don't need overshoes.

**Narrator:** She put her mirror back into her bag.

**Mrs. Mitty:** We've been all through that. You're not a young man any longer.

**Narrator:** As she climbed out of the car, Mitty raced the engine a little.

**Mrs. Mitty:** Why don't you wear your gloves? Have you lost your gloves?

**Narrator:** Walter Mitty reached in a pocket and brought out the gloves. He put them on, but after she had turned and gone into the building and he had driven on to a red light, he took them off again.

**Cop:** Pick it up, brother!

**Narrator:** A cop snapped at him as the light changed, and Mitty hastily pulled on his gloves and lurched ahead. He drove around the streets aimlessly for a time, and then he drove past the hospital on his way to the parking lot.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**Pretty Nurse:** It's the millionaire banker, Wellington McMillan.

**Dr. Mitty:** Yes? Who has the case?

**Nurse:** Dr. Renshaw and Dr. Benbow, but there are two specialists here, Dr. Remington from New York and Mr. Pritchard-Mitford from London. He flew over.

**Narrator:** A door opened down a long, cool corridor and Dr. Renshaw came out. He looked distraught and haggard.

**Dr. Renshaw:** Hello, Mitty. We're having the devil's own time with McMillan, the millionaire banker and close personal friend of Roosevelt. Obstreosis of the ductal tract. Tertiary. Wish you'd take a look at him.

**Dr. Mitty:** Glad to.

**Narrator:** In the operating room there were whispered introductions.

**Dr. Mitford:** I've read your book on streptothricosis, Mitty. A brilliant performance, sir.

**Dr. Mitty:** Thank you. You are very kind.

**Narrator:** A huge, complicated machine, connected to the operating table, with many tubes and wires, began at this moment to go pocketa-pocketa-pocketa.

**Intern:** The new anesthetizer is giving way! There is no one in the East who knows how to fix it!

**Dr. Mitty:** Quiet, man!

**Narrator:** He sprang to the machine, which was going *pocketa-pocketa-queep-pocketa-queep.* He began delicately fingering a row of glistening dials.

**Dr. Mitty:** Give me a fountain pen!

**Narrator:** Someone handed him a fountain pen. He pulled a faulty piston out of the machine and inserted the pen in its place.

**Dr. Mitty:** That will hold for ten minutes. Get on with the operation.

**Narrator 3:** A nurse hurried over and whispered to Renshaw, and Mitty saw the man turn pale.

**Dr. Renshaw:** Coreopsis has set in. If you would take over, Mitty?

**Narrator:** Mitty looked at him and at the grave, uncertain faces of the two great specialists.

**Dr. Mitty:** If you wish.

**Narrator:** They slipped a white gown on him; he adjusted a mask and drew on thin gloves; nurses handed him shining . . .

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**Parking Attendant:** Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!

**Narrator:** Walter Mitty jammed on the brakes.

**Parking Attendant:** Wrong lane, Mac!"

**Mitty:** Oops! Yeah.

**Narrator:** He began cautiously to back out of the lane marked "Exit Only."

**Parking Attendant:** Let her sit there. I'll put her away.

**Narrator:** Mitty got out of the car.

**Parking Attendant:** Hey, better leave the key.

**Mitty:** Oh….yes.

**Narrator**: Mitty handed the man the ignition key. The attendant vaulted into the car, backed it up with insolent skill, and put it where it belonged. *They're so cocky*, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street; *they think they know everything*. Once he had tried to take his chains off, outside New Milford, and he had got them wound around the axles. A man had had to come out in a wrecking car and unwind them, a young, grinning mechanic. Since then Mrs. Mitty always made him drive to the garage to have the chains taken off. The next time, he thought, *I'll wear my right arm in a sling*; *they won't grin at me then. I'll have my right arm in a sling and they'll see I couldn't possibly take the chains off myself.* He kicked at the slush on the sidewalk. *Overshoes,* he thought to himself, and he began looking for a shoe store. When he came out into the street again, with the overshoes in a box under his arm, Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get. She had told him twice, before they set out from their house for Waterbury. In a way he hated these weekly trips to town—he was always getting something wrong. *Kleenex*, he thought, *razor blades*? No. *Toothpaste, toothbrush, bicarbonate*? He gave it up. But she would remember it. "Where's the what's-its-name," she would ask. "Don't tell me you forgot the what's-its-name." A newsboy went by shouting something about the Waterbury trial….

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**District Attorney:** Perhaps this will refresh your memory.

**Narrator:** The District Attorney suddenly thrust a heavy automatic at the quiet figure on the witness stand.

**District Attorney:** Have you ever seen this before?

**Narrator:** Walter Mitty took the gun and examined it expertly.

**Mitty:** This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80.

**Narrator:** An excited buzz ran around the courtroom. The Judge rapped for order.

**District Attorney:** You are a crack shot with any sort of firearms, I believe?

**Mitty’s Attorney:** Objection! We have shown that the defendant could not have fired the shot. We have shown that he wore his right arm in a sling on the night of the fourteenth of July.

**Narrator:** Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled.

**Mitty:** (arrogantly) With any known make of gun, I could have killed Gregory Fitzhurst at three hundred feet with my left hand.

**Narrator:** Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. A woman's scream rose above the bedlam and suddenly a lovely, dark-haired girl fainted and fell into Walter Mitty's arms. The District Attorney tried to savagely push her away. Without rising from his chair, Mitty let the man have it on the point of the chin.

**Mitty:** You miserable dog!

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**Mitty:** Puppy biscuit!

**Narrator:** He stopped walking and the buildings of Waterbury rose up out of the misty courtroom and surrounded him again. A woman who was passing laughed and said to her companion….

**Woman:** He said puppy biscuit! That man said 'puppy biscuit' to himself.

**Narrator:** Walter Mitty hurried on. He went into a grocery store, not the first one he came to but a smaller one farther up the street. He told the clerk…

**Mitty:** I want some biscuits for small, young dogs.

**Clerk:** Any special brand, sir?

**Narrator:** The greatest pistol shot in the world thought a moment.

**Mitty:** It says 'Puppies Bark for It' on the box.

**Narrator:** His wife would be through at the hairdresser's in fifteen minutes, Mitty saw in looking at his watch, unless they had trouble drying her hair; sometimes they had trouble drying it. She didn't like to get to the hotel first; she would want him to be there waiting for her as usual. He found a big leather chair in the lobby, facing a window, and he put the overshoes and the puppy biscuits on the floor beside it. He picked up an old copy of *Liberty* and sank down into the chair. "Can Germany Conquer the World Through the Air?" Walter Mitty looked at the pictures of bombing planes and of ruined streets….

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**Sergeant:** The cannonading has got the wind up in young Raleigh, sir.

**Mitty:** Get him to bed with the others. I'll fly alone.

**Sergeant:** But you can't, sir. It takes two men to handle that bomber and the Germans are pounding the air. Von Richtman's circus is between here and our destination.

**Mitty:** Somebody's got to bomb that ammunition dump. I'm going over.

**Narrator:** He poured a drink for the sergeant and one for himself. War thundered and whined around the dugout and battered at the door. There was a rending of wood and splinters flew through the room.

**Mitty:** (ducking) A bit of a near thing. We only live once, Sergeant!

**Narrator:** Captain Mitty then stood up and strapped on his huge Webley-Vickers automatic. The pounding of the cannon increased; there was the rat-tat-tatting of machine guns, and from somewhere came the menacing *pocketa-pocketa-pocketa* of the new flame-throwers. Walter Mitty walked to the door of the dugout humming a tune, then turned and waved to the sergeant.

**Mitty:** Cheerio!

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
**Narrator:** Something struck his shoulder.

**Mrs. Mitty:** I've been looking all over this hotel for you. Why do you have to hide in this old chair? How did you expect me to find you?

**Mitty:** (gloomy and confused) I was…

**Mrs. Mitty:** What? Did you get the what's-its-name? The puppy biscuit? What's in that box?

**Mitty:** Overshoes.

**Mrs. Mitty:** Couldn't you have put them on in the store?

**Mitty:** I was thinking. Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?

**Mrs. Mitty:** I'm going to take your temperature when I get you home.

**Narrator:** They went out through the revolving doors that made a faintly derisive whistling sound when you pushed them. It was two blocks to the parking lot. At the drugstore on the corner she said…

**Mrs. Mitty:** Wait here for me. I forgot something. I won't be a minute.

**Narrator:** She was more than a minute. It began to rain, rain with sleet in it. He stood up against the wall of the drugstore. . . . He put his shoulders back and his heels together.

**Mitty:** (scornfully) Throw away the handkerchief!

**Narrator:** Then, with that 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.