

# Sentence Explication

*A River Runs Through It*

Norman Maclean

*“My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him all good things--trout as well as eternal salvation-- come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.”*

*“My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him **all good things**--trout as well as eternal salvation-- **come by grace** and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.”*

*I've pointed out the subject and verb, not as direct single words but rather as phrases. That is important because this sentence is focused and effective because of its phrases. There is something biblical about the key words in both of these **“good”** and **“grace”**. The word good reminds me of Genesis where God creates and then sees the things of his creation as “good”.*

*“My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. **To him** all good things--trout as well as eternal salvation-- come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.”*

*I've highlighted “To him” only because Maclean uses it to open up this sentence. It is the **transition** he uses to connect the previous sentence which I have also provided. In many ways I would classify this as a clarifier because it is used to separate the father's thinking from the narrator's. At this point in the story, the narrator is still young and dependent upon the lessons his father, the elder, teaches. It's as if the idea has not quite been internalized by the narrator--it's an idea that is important but still being considered.*

*“My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him all good things--**trout as well as eternal salvation**-- come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.”*

*This one of my favorite writer’s techniques, the use of dashes to set off clarifying material. The dash, because it is an unusual, seldom used mark of punctuation, creates immediate visual importance. That means emphasis. I also like, in particular the words chosen by Maclean here. They speak to scale **trout** and **eternal salvation**. The first is small and insignificant, an object-- solid, palpable, understandable-- tiny in its environment. The other is a grand and elusive and impossible to wrap one’s head about completely. The contrast between the two is emphasized for the reader by the use of the dashes.*

*“My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him all good things--trout as well as eternal salvation-- **come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.**”*

*The final piece of the sentence to consider is the close: **come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.** The use of three (an echo of the trinity?) as well as the use of repetition help to emphasize the process or steps one needs to achieve salvation, at least in the mind of the narrator through the lessons of his father. He is also using mathematics in a way by having two positives followed by a negative. The **“art does not come easy”** is by far the key and most powerful part of the entire sentence, and it stands out through the negative verb. It is also important to note that the two principle concepts the artist wants us to consider are **grace** and **art**.*