Short Stories



Life is full of choices...

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Pub Steak out 

The policeman had the bar under surveillance a few minutes before closing time, so he could see who comes out drunk.

The first one out the door at 2:00 o'clock weaved down the sidewalk, then fell on the curb. Sluggishly got up, then tried his keys in five cars before finding his own car.

Once inside his car, he fumbled with his keys for 2 or 3 minutes.

Meanwhile, all the club patrons had gotten into their cars and driven away, leaving this one fellow quite alone in the parking lot.

Finally, he got his car started and began to very slowly drive away.

Immediately, the police car was behind him with lights flashing.

The policeman asked the man to take a breathalyser test, to which he readily agreed.

When the reading was 0.0%, the policeman said, "How can this be?"

To which the man replied, "Because tonight, I'm the designated decoy."

Activity 1

1. Who is the protagonist of this short story?
2. Try to establish his/her age, family background, social class and status, and occupation.
3. At what point in this story is the tension highest?
4. Is that point the dramatic climax?
5. How is the tension produced, and is it appropriate?
6. Does the story as a whole seem to be high-tension or low-tension?
7. What are her/his dominant traits or desires?

Why Does a Writer Write a Short Story?
When a writer creates a short story s/he has several possible purposes available. These can be to:

* entertain the reader by telling a "good yarn."
* make the reader ask questions like why? For what reason? How did it happen?
* take a position on an issue by conveying an opinion.
* make the reader feel sad or happy, angry or pleased, sympathetic or opposed, amused or disgusted...

WHAT IS IN A SHORT STORY?
A short story is made up of several aspects. These are:

1. PLOT

The action that takes place in the story.  It is a series of connected happenings and their result.  In order to have a result, we must have an initial event, or conflict.

Stages of a Plot

* Introduction of characters
* The situation:  Initial conflict
* The generating circumstances, which create a
* Rising action – heightened anticipation for the reader
* Climax - highest point of anticipation - “make or break” for the main character.
* Falling action and Conclusion.   These two are also known as a denouement.

Short stories usually have properties like the following:

* Dramatic conflict.  Usually the basis of the story.  Source of the problems which may or may not be overcome in the climax.
* Foreshadowing.  May be used to leave clues in the story to lure readers to try to predict the ending.
* Repetition.  At the least, it helps drive home a point. It can also be used to create other literary devices.
* Suspense. Draws readers to the work.

2. SETTING

The background against which the incidents of the story take place.  Not merely a place, it includes the place where, the time when, and social conditions under which the story moves along.

* This can include atmosphere , the tone and feeling of a story, i.e. gloomy, cheery, etc.

In one form or another, setting is essential to the story.

3. CHARACTERS

There must be living beings in the story that think or act in order to keep the story going.

* They must seem like living and feeling individuals in order for us to feel strongly about them
* The worst thing that could happen for a writer is that the reader feels indifferent toward the characters.
* If the reader doesn’t care for the characters, there is no inclination to keep reading.

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| --- |
| FOUR METHODS OF PRESENTING A CHARACTER i. Actions or thoughts of the character ii. Conversations the character engages in iii. Conversations of other characters about a third character iv. Author’s own opinion.  This might be overt, or may be implied. |

4. THEME

The total meaning of the story.  IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE TIED UP IN A SIMPLE MORAL.

* In many cases, stories are packages that allow readers to see the outcomes of certain behaviours.
* Without a theme, the story lacks meaning or purpose.
* Sometimes the theme is stated, sometimes it is only implied.
* In some stories, the theme may be a direct refutation of a traditional theme.

The whole story is given tone by the way the writer chooses to tell the story. (Tone is the attitude a writer takes towards a subject or character: serious, humorous, sarcastic, ironic, satirical, tongue-in-cheek, solemn, objective).

A short story has "rules" have been "set" since the first short stories began to appear in popular magazines in the nineteenth century.

Short Story should:

1. Be complete by itself.
2. Be able to be read in one a short time.
3. Have every word used for important effect.
4. Have a good opening sentence that is developed throughout the work.
5. End at its climax.
6. Have no more characters than those necessary for the action.

What to Study in a Short Story

Activity 2: Choose the answers from the given table to complete the terms and explanations.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Terms | Explanation |
|  | Slice of Life - a story in which the main idea(s) is illustrated by ordinary event(s) in the life of a character.Twist in the Tale - a strongly plot-driven story in which a key revelation or surprise is withheld until the end. |
| Short Story Subjects |  |
| Author’s background |  |
| Title |  |
| Viewpoint |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | How a story is written. The way the author has used language (vocabulary, grammar) and figures of speech (e.g. similes, metaphors, personification) and the way the author has organized the plot. |
| Structure | How the story is organized. It could be chronological (in the order of the events as they happen). It could use flashbacks (we are briefly shown some events in the past which help us to understand what is happening now) |
| Tone |  |
|  | The use of figures of speech to create images of characters/ setting/ theme. |
| Plot |  |
| Characters |  |
|  | The place, the time and the social background of the text. |
|  | The main idea or message of the text that the author is trying to make you understand.  |
| Reaction from reader |  |

Answers

|  |
| --- |
| The mood or atmosphere the author has used for the story. It could be, for example: humorous (funny), sad, hopeless, negative, positive. |
| The name of the short story |
| Setting |
| How you feel when you read the text – influenced by your own age, sex, background, experience and reading preferences. |
| Imagery |
| What actually happens in the story. |
| Examples: romance, horror, science fiction, thriller, detective, war, adventure, comedy, tragedy, historical, fantasy, moral, human interest, medical, humorous, juvenile, political comment. Stories often fit into more than one category, e.g. a humorous science fiction |
| Who is telling the story? From whose point of view is the story told? It could be an ‘eye of god’ or external narrative (an all-seeing narrator who is not one of the characters in the story – the narrator uses names of the characters and ‘he’ and ‘she’ when talking about the characters), a third person narrative (the narrator focuses on one character more than the others – uses the character’s name and ‘he’ or ‘she’) and a first person narrative (where one of the characters tells the story – the narrator is called ‘I’). |
| The people in the story. There are main characters and minor characters. |
| Short Story Types |
| Theme |
| Style |
| Author’s experiences |

Literary Features

Activity 3

Learn the names and explanations of some figures of speech, sound devices and vocabulary and grammatical devices used in short stories.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Explanation | Example |
| Simile |  | Tim eats like a horse |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Metaphor | Describing something by comparing it to something else which has the same qualities but without using the words ‘as’ or ‘like’ |  |
|  | A type of metaphor where human characteristics are given to an inanimate object | A car screamed at her heels |
|  | Casual or informal language | Young fulla, screwball |
| Repetition | Repetition of the same word or phrase  |  |
| Choice of vocabulary  |  | A man in a fish shop swung his cleaver and cut off the huge, gaping head of the scaly, grey fish.  |
| Idioms | Phrases or sayings that are commonly used in a language to express certain ideas |  |
| Minor sentences |  | Even an old man like him, but not what you would call properly old.  |
|  | A sentence with one clause – usually just one subject and one verb | He turned.  |
| Onomatopoeia  | A word which suggests its meaning by the sound it makes |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Alliteration |  | A lovely lady looked lovingly at me |
| Assonance | Repetition of vowel sounds in a group of words |  |
| Swearing |  | Damn bitch |
| Direct speech  |  | - Pera, no, mum pleaded.- He needs a lesson, Uncle Pera answered. |

Answers

|  |
| --- |
| Let’s go to the pub. Let’s go to a party. Let’s just go somewhere. |
| Colloquial language |
| His words stabbed at my heart |
| An incomplete sentence which cannot stand on it’s own (may be missing a subject or a verb) |
| Simple sentences |
| Personification |
| Sometimes the author may use simple (childlike) vocabulary or highly descriptive vocabulary. Adjectives, adverbs and verbs help to describe something or someone vividly |
| Describing something by comparing it to something else which has the same qualities by using ‘as’ or ‘like’ |
| Rough language, usually used in anger |
| My father’s car is a jaguar |
| Early bird catches the worm(=If you get up early you will be able to achieve more) |
| What the characters actually say – usually within speech marks, but sometimes there are none |
| Splash, rattle, crash, boom |
| Repetition of initial consonant sounds |

**Short Story 1: Appointment with Love** by S.I. Kishor

Six minutes to six, said the clock over the information booth in New York's Grand Central Station. The tall, young army lieutenant lifted his sunburned face and narrowed his eyes to note the exact time. His heart was pounding with a beat that shocked him. In six minutes he would see the woman he had never seen, yet whose written words had sustained him unfailingly.

Lieutenant Blandford remembered one day in particular, the worst of the fighting, when his plane had been caught in the midst of a pack of enemy planes. In one of his letters, he had confessed to her that he often felt fear, and only a few days before this battle, he had received her answer:

"Of course you fear…all brave men do. Next time you doubt yourself, I want you to hear my voice reciting to you: 'Yea, though I walk among the shadow of the valley of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'"

He had remembered and it had renewed his strength.

Now he was going to hear her real voice. Four minutes to six. A girl passed close to him and Lieutenant Blandford started. She was wearing a flower, but it was not the little red rose they had agreed upon. Besides, this girl was only about 18, and Hollis Meynell had told him she was 30.

"What of it?" he had answered. "I'm 32!" He was 29.

His mind went back to the book he had read in the training camp. "Of Human Bondage," it was, and throughout the book were notes in a woman's writing. He had never believed that a woman could see into a man's heart so tenderly, so understandingly. Her name was on the bookplate: Hollis Meynell. He had gotten hold of a New York City telephone book and found her address.

He had written; she had answered.

Next day he had been shipped out, but they had gone on writing. For 13 months she had faithfully replied. When his letters did not arrive, she wrote him anyway, and now he believed he loved her and she loved him.

But she had refused all his pleas to send him her photograph. She had explained: "If your feeling for me has any reality, what I look like won't matter. Suppose I'm beautiful. I'd always be haunted that you had been taking a chance on just that, and that kind of love would disgust me. Suppose I'm plain (and you must admit that this is more likely), then I'd always fear that you were only going on writing because you were lonely and had no one else. No, don't ask for my picture. When you come to New York, you shall see me and then you shall make your decision."

One minute to six…he pulled hard on a cigarette. Then Lieutenant Blandford's heart leaped. A young woman was coming toward him. Her figure was long and slim; her blond hair lay back in curls from her delicate ears. Her eyes were blue as flowers; her lips and chin had a gentle firmness. In her pale green suit, she was like springtime come alive. He started toward her, forgetting to notice that she was wearing no rose, and as he moved, a small provocative smile curved her lips.

"Going my way, soldier?" she murmured. He made one step closer to her. Then he saw Hollis Meynell. She was standing almost directly behind the girl, a woman well past 40, her graying hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump; her feet were filled into low-heeled shoes. But she wore a red rose on her rumpled coat. The girl in the green suit was walking away.

Blandford felt as if he was being split in two, so keen was his desire to follow the girl, yet so deep his longing for the woman whose spirit had companioned and upheld his own; and there she stood. He could see that her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible; her gray eyes had a warm twinkle.

\* \* \*

Before you read any further make your own ending to the story, also to reason why you ended it that way.

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Lieutenant Blandford did not hesitate. His fingers gripped the worn copy of "Of Human Bondage" which was to identify him to her. This would not be love, but it would be something precious, a friendship for which he had been and must ever be grateful. He squared his shoulders, saluted, and held the book out toward the woman, although while he spoke he felt the bitterness of his disappointment.

"I'm Lieutenant Blandford, and you - you are Ms. Meynell. I'm so glad you could meet me. May - may I take you out to dinner?"

The woman's face broadened in a tolerant smile. "I don't know what this is all about, son," she answered. "That young lady in the green suit, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said that if you asked to go out with you, I should tell you she's waiting for you in that restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of a test."

Appointment with Love

1. From the title can you predict the genre (type) of story it will be? Where are you likely to find this type of story?

2. What is the story about?

3. What is the joke she plays, why?

4. How did they fall in love?

5. Why do you think the story was written? What effect/ feeling & message is the writer trying to create for the reader? What is the theme (hidden message/ meaning) of the story?

6. What is an appointment? Can an appointment be made for love? With love?

7. What is the difference in meaning with love & for love? How would a different title hold different meanings?

8. What is the opening hook? How does it catch your attention?

9. Where is the suspense/ surprise in the story ie when do you become curious of what will happen? Does this feeling happen more than once? What are the other suspenseful moments?

10. Re write the dialogue, without the quotation marks, all from his perspective. How does this change the feel of the story?

11. How many characters are there? What are their roles in the story?

12. What is the method of characterisation? How are the characters revealed to the reader? From what/ whose point of view is the story written?

13. Would the story work in other settings? Brainstorm some other settings, what are meanings given by other settings? Would other settings give the same sense of urgency/ suspense/ rush?

**Short Story 2: Closed For Business Ilan Ossendryver**

 **B**efore the villagers rise from their beds to begin their day and long before the hummingbirds have taken flight, darting from bush to bush in search of worms, Joseph is already walking the natural path that eventually leads to the front gate of his bakery.

Darkness still covers the early morning as he makes his way along the uphill winding path that overlooks his tiny village. Somewhere halfway - only he knows where - he’d sit himself down on a large rock that has been worn down over the centuries into the shape of a chair. There he’d take a sip of water, staring at the same time at the horizon to watch the change. In minutes the day would come. The sky would unfold, giving way to a pastel coloured painting, wet brightly as the sun pops up from behind the blackened hills. Joseph would stare in amazement. Then, just as abruptly, he would close his eyes as the sun whisks upwards, allowing its strength to fall on his face.

As though from a thousand flashlights, the streaks of rays would cut through the low-lying clouds, giving Africa its first light. And every time this happened, even when the sky was clear, Joseph always concluded that Africa was arising: the clouds that made misty overtures would be gently pushed out of the valley, letting in the sunlight as the dew sparkled like wealth and dripped off leaves to form dozens of little, silver trickles of streams, gurgling away. Now the mountain showed its true colour, a rich vibrant green, with the deep blue of the Indian Ocean now quite visible on the horizon.

Slapping his thighs in approval, he’d pick up his lunch and continue to the bakery.

At the entrance, Joseph would take one more look at his world, knowing that once inside he would not come out until his quota of bread had been baked. Below him, he could see the dense valleys, walled to the top with trees and other subtropical vegetation, the path he had taken, sandwiched between neat patches of banana trees and squared clumps of sugar cane. From where he stood, tiny puffs of smoke could be seen from freshly lit fires by the women of his village far below. The children would be playing freely. Then his eyes would swing upwards towards the distance where lay the “White city”; its buildings and smoke smudging the days’ creation.

It was time to work.

Today was Friday. Joseph knew that he would work twice as hard because the hotel in the “White city” ordered double the amount of bread to satisfy the guests that came as far as Johannesburg, 700 miles away. Fifty-five loaves of bread to be exact, to be delivered by noon sharp, at fifteen cents a loaf. The price never changed. Only the quality of the bread improved, though the same recipe was always used; passed down from father to son for many a generation.

Inside the bakery the air felt thick with the rich smell of baking bread that lingered on after Joseph had finished they day’s work. It seemed over the years, if not centuries, that the white walls had managed to suck into its cracks all the sweet smells, sealing them in shut.

Joseph would start by digging out the mielie cobs which he had placed a foot into the ground to dry out. Along with them, he’d grab a huge bunch of sugar cane sticks. Together, this would be his coal for the fire to heat the clay handmade oven. Once the construction was completed and set alight, he’d make his way over to a nearby fresh spring to fetch water.

Seeing the fire well ablaze, he’d break into a broad smile. The construction of the coal meant that the heat would last for hours, enough to make the fifty-five loaves of bread and more than enough to feed the families of his village.

Placed underneath the wooden table, overnight stood a container of water filled with tiny shoots of sugar cane. Joseph would add to this the exact amount of yeast, mixing it together until

diluted. The container would then be placed on the window sill for six minutes to allow fermentation. To prevent overheating, the container would be covered with layers of wild banana leaf.

Next, with precision Joseph would scoop eighteen handfuls of flour to which salt would be added and placed into a corner of the table that had been accurately chiseled out to form a bowl-like indent. The eggs came next previously beaten and mixed with olive oil: not too much though because he knew of the overpowering strength of this oil; and then the yeast mixture with its sweet base would be added.

Vigorously, he’d agitate the mixture into the flour, his hands a blur of motion. The dough now would be placed onto the table ready for kneading until smooth and then placed in a sunny part of the bakery. In the hour or so it took to rise, the bakery would undergo a cleansing and preparation for the next round of baking. Once in a while he’d peak to make sure that the dough was fine.

Seldom did he make mistakes.

Time passed quickly now as Joseph fashioned the dough into half-moon shapes. The loaves were soon removed from the oven, well before the noon deadline demanded by the hotel in the “White city.”

Sitting patiently outside the bakery, the children of the village waited. They had come to help Joseph carry the bread six miles to the hotel whose view overlooked the neatly crashing waves that rushed up the clean beach, used by White bathers only

The door opened.

“Ten loaves for you….Three for you….Wait until you are older, then you carry more.” The procession would march off, in fine line, in playful spirit, behind their leader Joseph.

They’d pass through the village handing out the excess bread to the waiting women who would scurry off in all directions to feed their families. The procession would continue down the natural path to the main road that led to the city. By midday, they’d gathered at the back entrance of the hotel waiting for the owner to inspect the bread - as if the bread ever needed inspection. But Joseph knew the sales ritual all too well. He had gone through it for many years, like his father and uncles.

“Joseph, boy!” Pik Vaan, the owner of the Holiday Heights, a two star hotel, blurted out in a stern but friendly tone.

“The bread better be bloody good otherwise I’m not taking it,” he said, breaking off a piece and chewing on it. Joseph, his hat held to his breast waited for the answer and payment.

“Ja it’s lekker man, tastes good. I don’t know how you do it. But Joseph, listen here, listen carefully you hear? I don’t want your bread no more. A baker from Bloemfontein moved into town and from now on we are going to buy from him. So look after yourself, Joseph.”

The door to the back entrance to the hotel closed, leaving Joseph staring at it blankly, confused, holding his payment tightly in his fist. His eyes glistened softly, but red with hurt, the children chasing one another, waiting for their elder to lead them home again.

All that had become part of tradition suddenly became a closed book, the dismantling of a gentleman’s agreement, He had feared this, that a White baker would come to town, but not this soon. After all, he knew he was Black and the entrance for him was at the back of the hotel; his most important customer whose regular orders of bread helped him buy the the few odds and ends that the members of his village needed so badly.

Joseph ordered the children home, instructing them to say he’d be back late in the night. Joseph walked to the front of the hotel, painted fresh pink with the outside beams and window panes in a

strong blue. Up the stairs he climbed onto the verandah that looked into the dining room, where guests were seated at lunch.

He watched in silence as they spoke, some cutting into his bread and stroking each slice with a generous amount of butter, stroking every corner of his bread until evenly overly thick.

He watched as they ate, some with their eyes closed, others reaching for seconds.

At one table at the back of the dining room stood the owner, one hand on the shoulder of a guest.

Both were laughing. Then by chance he looked up to where Joseph stood, stared back and then turned away. Joseph turned away. It had been the first time that he had ever seen his bread eaten by someone other than the people of his village.

The town was small with not that may streets and had only one main street. The townsfolk knew Joseph well, greeted him as he went. He stopped outside the new bakery, bright, clean with its shelves stuffed full of freshly baked bread and cake. The owner was chatting away with some of his customers while one son packed the bread, the other working the till.

Joseph stepped inside, into a world of difference, but one he knew so well. What struck him was the aroma that seemed to escape at every opportunity rather than stay in. Everything, the counter, the oven, the glass cabinets, all sterile, reminding him of a hospital he had once visited.

“What do you want?’ The owner asked rudely. Joseph turned, reached out for a loaf of bread and placed it on the counter. Quickly like the automation of the bakery itself, the son working the till thunderously ordered Joseph never to touch the shelves again.

“Kaffir boy, you want bread, you knock on the door and I’ll think about giving it to you there. Give me thirty cents and get out.” Without a packet, he left. Everything outside remained the same. “Howzit Joseph….Hey, how’s the village?”

Across the street from the gleaming bakery, Joseph sat in silence. Tearing a piece from the loaf, he ate and the tears came to his eyes, the first time since his father had died nearly five years back. And he cried, remembering his father’s words to him, “My son, the bakery at the top of the hill is now yours. Teach it to your children so that they may teach their children and so they may sustain the life of our village.” With those words, Joseph saw his father die beside him.

For weeks he sat idle, sometimes staring up the hill. There was no need to wake up before the sunrise, to enjoy the glory of watching the African awakening. It had once given him strength but that seemed unimportant to him now. Mostly he could be found lying in his hut, occasionally coming out to help fetch wood for the fire his wife made every morning. The villagers were worried about him.

Joseph was in a deep sleep when a sudden commotion outside his hut woke him.

“Where is Joseph the baker?” boomed a voice, one he immediately recognized as that of the hotel manager in the “White city.” I want to speak to him now!” Half asleep Joseph stumbled outside to greet the visitor. This was the first time a White had ever set foot in the village.

“Look Joseph, my guests are complaining about the bread we buy from the new baker in town. They prefer yours. I have decided that I shall only buy from you and I have even told the new baker that I don’t want his bread. Friday, noon, fifty five loaves of bread and don’t be late.” The hotel owner smiled as he walked off.

There was dance and song in the village. Joseph rubbed his eyes. “Today is Thursday. Friday will be hard work.”

That night the sky was clear, the stars bright, the moon full giving depth to the valley , illuminating the ocean faraway. The village was peacefully asleep as the smoke drifted downwards towards the bottom of the valley, passing its way through the village.

Then the screaming began.

“The bakery is on fire….The bakery is on fire….Joseph, come quick!”

Like a leopard about to catch its prey, Joseph shot up that path, passing his rock, cutting his feet, panting out of breath, running towards the gleam of red, his bakery now crumpled, caved in and burning fiercely; dying. The wooden table on which he worked had fallen at an angle, black in colour.

The seal of aroma had escaped from the walls. In its place the stinking smell of burnt bread left in the oven for days, blackened to a powder, now rotting the air. Joseph sat down in front of the gate, while the villagers encircled him. A cloud covered the moon and a light drizzle began to fall as the villager, exhausted, knowing that nothing could be done, turned back and headed for home, leaving Joseph behind.

At noon the next day, the backdoor entrance of the hotel opened. Joseph’s wife stood there.

“Master,Bass, something bad happened. The Gods took bakery away by fire. Joseph has not made bread.

Mr. Pik Vaan the hotel owner, stood silent. In all his years of running the hotel, it was the first time that a delivery had not been made.

“Come sit inside, Elsie.” He ushered her into the hotel lobby where she sat, watching the guests, her head sometimes bowed in embarrassment.

The new bakery was thriving, customers coming and going. Mr. Vaan walked in. “Goeie more Meneer Vaan, I see your hotel needs our bread today,” laughed the owner, his sons joining in.

“Do you know that Joseph from the nearby village had his bakery burn down last night?”

The son working the till laughed even louder. “It was easy to burn that Kaffir’s bakery down. You think we want Kaffir competition? No way. Mr. Vaan you know the people this city wants our bread and not the bread made by dirty black hands. “ The silence was icy, and some customers began to walkout, followed by the rest, none of whom took their orders.

Mr. Vaan boomed out to the people that happened to pass by, to notify everyone in the town to a meeting urgently at the hotel. Within an hour, the people of the town had gathered most not knowing what for.

“Joseph, the baker from the village p on the hill has supplied this town and my hotel with his bread for many years. Last night, Joseph’s bakery was destroyed by fire, deliberately burnt to the ground by our newcomers, the Botha’s to avoid competition, especially from a Black. My friends, as you all know, the people of the village and our town have always maintained an excellent relationship. We must keep it that way.

The meeting went on for another two hours with many people having something to say.

On top of the hill, by the gate, sat Joseph, cold as he had not moved all night. Behind him a noise grew louder and louder until it was upon him. To his utter amazement, he saw coming up the hill hundreds of Whites, from the town, old and young, men and women, some of the guests whom he had seen eating his bread, carrying buckets, spades, cement and bricks. By nightfall, a new bakery stood.

That Friday at noon, Joseph knocked on the backdoor of the hotel. Mr. Vaan appeared smiling.

“Joseph, boy, the bread better be good and tasty, you hear. I’m counting on you, you hear?” he said, pinching off a piece from the loaf and placing it into his mouth. “Bloody good. Just as always. How do you do it?”

From now on, payment on your bread will be thirty five cents a loaf. Friday by noon and don’t be late, we have new guests.

Joseph smiled and his followers as always, took to their line. They marched down the street passing the new bakery. On the door it read, “Closed for Business.”

Quickly Joseph slipped thirty five cents under the door and continued home.

1. What is the main message of this story?
2. Quote a phrase to prove that Joseph starts his day early in the morning.
3. Why does Joseph sit down on a rock before he reaches the bakery?
4. Why does Joseph take a last look at nature before he enters the bakery?
5. Why does the hotel in the “White City” need double the amount of bread on a Friday?
6. Why did the price of the bread never change across the generations?
7. Prove that Joseph used traditional African methods to prepare the oven in his bakery.
8. Why does the author of the story give us such a vivid description of the process Joseph undertakes to prepare the dough for his bread?
9. Quote three words to prove that Olive oil could be too strong in the dough when used excessively.
10. Which phrase tells us that Joseph was skilled in preparing the dough?
11. What caused the fire in Joseph’s bakery? Give your opinion on this incident.
12. Write a paragraph of 10 – 15 lines giving your opinion on Apartheid.

Short Story 3: "Lamb to the Slaughter"

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight-hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey.  Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come him from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come.  There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did.  The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil.  Her skin -for this was her sixth month with child-had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to

listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock.  She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

“Hullo darling,” she said.

“Hullo darling,” he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closer.  Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her, this was always a blissful time of day.  She knew he didn’t want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house.  She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel-almost as a sunbather feels the sun-that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together.  She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides.  She loved intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.
“Tired darling?”
“Yes,” he said.  “I’m tired,”  And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing.  He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it left.. She wasn’t really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back

against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm.  He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

“I’ll get it!” she cried, jumping up.

“Sit down,” he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

“Darling, shall I get your slippers?”

“No.”

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

“I think it’s a shame,” she said, “that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long.”

He didn’t answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; bet each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

“Darling,” she said.  “Would you like me to get you some cheese?  I haven’t made any supper because it’s Thursday.”

“No,” he said.

“If you’re too tired to eat out,” she went on, “it’s still not too late.  There’s plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.”

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

“Anyway,” she went on, “I’ll get you some cheese and crackers first.”

“I don’t want it,” he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face.  “But you must eat!  I’ll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.”

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

“Sit down,” he said.  “Just for a minute, sit down.”

It wasn’t till then that she began to get frightened.

“Go on,” he said.  “Sit down.”

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes.  He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

“Listen,” he said.  “I’ve got something to tell you.”

“What is it, darling?  What’s the matter?”

He had now become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow.  She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

“This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid,” he said.  “But I’ve thought about it a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is tell you right away.  I hope you won’t blame me too much.”

And he told her.  It didn’t take long, four or five minutes at most, and she say very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

“So there it is,” he added.  “And I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, bet there simply wasn’t any other way.  Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re looked after.  But there needn’t really be any fuss.  I hope not anyway.  It wouldn’t be very good for my job.”

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all.  It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn’t even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing.  Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn’t been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

“I’ll get the supper,” she managed to whisper, and this time he didn’t stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn’t feel her feet touching the floor.  She couldn’t feel anything at all- except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit.  Everything was automatic now-down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met.  She lifted it out, and looked at it.  It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper.  She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end

of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

“For God’s sake,” he said, hearing her, but not turning round.  “Don’t make supper for me.  I’m going out.”

At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying.  Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of he shock.  She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself.  So I’ve killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden.  She began thinking very fast.  As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be.  That was fine.  It made no difference to her.  In fact, it would be a relief.  On the other hand, what about the child?  What were the laws about murderers with unborn children?  Did they kill then both-mother and child?  Or did they wait until the tenth month?  What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn’t know.  And she certainly wasn’t prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved t inside.  Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom.  She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lops and face.  She tried a smile.  It came out rather peculiar.  She tried again.

“Hullo Sam,” she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

“I want some potatoes please, Sam.  Yes, and I think a can of peas.”

That was better.  Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now.  She rehearsed it several times more.  Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn’t six o’clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

“Hullo Sam,” she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

“Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney.  How’re you?”

“I want some potatoes please, Sam.  Yes, and I think a can of peas.”

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

“Patrick’s decided he’s tired and doesn’t want to eat out tonight,” she told him.  “We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he’s caught me without any vegetables in the house.”

“Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?”

“No, I’ve got meat, thanks.  I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t know much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I’m taking a chance on it this time.  You think it’ll be all right?”

“Personally,” the grocer said, “I don’t believe it makes any difference.  You want these Idaho potatoes?”

“Oh yes, that’ll be fine.  Two of those.”

“Anything else?” The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly.

 “How about afterwards?  What you going to give him for afterwards?”

“Well-what would you suggest, Sam?”

The man glanced around his shop.  “How about a nice big slice of cheesecake?  I know he likes that.”

“Perfect,” she said.  “He loves it.”

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, “Thank you, Sam.  Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Mrs. Maloney.  And thank you.”

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she’d become frantic with grief and horror.  Mind you, she wasn’t expecting to find anything.  She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That’s the way, she told herself.  Do everything right and natural.  Keep things absolutely natural and there’ll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

“Patrick!” she called.  “How are you, darling?”

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock.  All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out.  It was easy.  No acting was necessary.

A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone.  She know the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, “Quick!  Come quick!  Patrick’s dead!”

“Who’s speaking?”

“Mrs. Maloney.  Mrs. Patrick Maloney.”

“You mean Patrick Maloney’s dead?”

“I think so,” she sobbed.  “He’s lying on the floor and I think he’s dead.”

“Be right over,” the man said.

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policeman walked in.  She know them both-she know nearly all the man at that precinct-and she fell right into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O’Malley, kneeling by the body.

“Is he dead?” she cried.

“I’m afraid he is.  What happened?”

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor.  While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man’s head.  He showed it to O’Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house.  First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she know by name.  Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who know about fingerprints.  There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions.  But they always treated her kindly.  She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn’t wanted to go out for supper.  She told how she’d put the meat in the oven-”it’s there now, cooking”- and how she’d slopped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

Which grocer?” one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases-”...acted quite normal...very cheerful...wanted to give him a good supper…peas...cheesecake...impossible that she...”

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher.  Then the fingerprint man went away.  The two detectives remained, and so did the two policeman.  They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn’t rather go somewhere else, to her sister’s house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

No, she said.  She didn’t feel she could move even a yard at the moment.  Would they mind awfully of she stayed just where she was until she felt better.  She didn’t feel too good at the moment, she really didn’t.

Then hadn’t she better lie down on the bed?  Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said.  She’d like to stay right where she was, in this chair.  A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house.  Occasionally on of the detectives asked her another question.  Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke at her gently as he passed by.  Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal.  They were looking for the weapon.  The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may have thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

“It’s the old story,” he said.  “Get the weapon, and you’ve got the man.”

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her.  Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could’ve been used as the weapon?  Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing-a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase.

They didn’t have any heavy metal vases, she said.

“Or a big spanner?”

She didn’t think they had a big spanner.  But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on.  She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house.  She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw a flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains.  It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle.  The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

“Jack,” she said, the next tome Sergeant Noonan went by.  “Would you mind giving me a drink?”

“Sure I’ll give you a drink.  You mean this whiskey?”

“Yes please.  But just a small one.  It might make me feel better.”

He handed her the glass.

“Why don’t you have one yourself,” she said.  “You must be awfully tired.  Please do.  You’ve been very good to me.”

“Well,” he answered.  “It’s not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going.”

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey.  They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her.

Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, come out quickly and said, “Look, Mrs. Maloney.  You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside.”

“Oh dear me!” she cried.  “So it is!”

“I better turn it off for you, hadn’t I?”

“Will you do that, Jack.  Thank you so much.”

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes.  “Jack Noonan,” she said.

“Yes?”

“Would you do me a small favor-you and these others?”

“We can try, Mrs. Maloney.”

“Well,” she said.  “Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick’s too, and helping to catch the man who killed him.  You must be terrible hungry by now because it’s long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality.  Why don’t you eat up that lamb that’s in the oven.  It’ll be cooked just right by now.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Sergeant Noonan said.

“Please,” she begged.  “Please eat it.  Personally I couldn’t tough a thing, certainly not what’s been in the house when he was here.  But it’s all right for you.  It’d be a favor to me if you’d eat it up.  Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.”

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves.  The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

“Have some more, Charlie?”

“No.  Better not finish it.”

“She wants us to finish it. She said so.  Be doing her a favor.”

“Okay then.  Give me some more.”

“That’s the hell of a big club the gut must’ve used to hit poor Patrick,” one of them was saying.  “The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer.”

“That’s why it ought to be easy to find.”

“Exactly what I say.”

“Whoever done it, they’re not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.”

One of them belched.

“Personally, I think it’s right here on the premises.”

“Probably right under our very noses.  What you think, Jack?”

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

Activity 6

1. Jigsaw

The following excerpts all come from the short story. They are jumbled up. Try to arrange them in the correct order.

* "For God's sake," he said, hearing her, but not turning round, "don't make supper for me. I'm going out."
* "Tired, darling?"
"Yes," he said. "I'm tired."
* "It's the old story," he said. "Get the weapon and you've got the man."
* "This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said.
* When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tyres on the gravel outside...
* "Personally, I think it's right here on the premises."
* All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out.
* "Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead!"
* Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name.

2. The Perfect Murder

What would be the ingredients of the "perfect murder"?

Put the following ideas into order of importance. (Add ideas of your own if you want to.)

a) It should be easy to arrange.
b) It should leave no clues.
c) There should be no noise.
d) It should look like suicide.
e) It should take place in a lonely, isolated place.
f) It should be cheap.
g) No violence should be necessary.
h) It should look like an accident.
i) It should be quick.
j) The murderer should have a good alibi.

3. Vocabulary

Find the following words in the story and try to work out their meaning. Join them to the definitions on the right. The first one has been done to get you started!

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Word | Answer | Definition | Letter |
| anxiety | F | confused, not understanding | A |
| tranquil |   | a heavy stick with a knob at one end, for hitting someone  | B |
| punctually |   | extremely happy | C |
| blissful |   | a very strong feeling which guides someone | D |
| amber |   | in the building | E |
| bewildered |   | feeling worried | F |
| instinct |   | comforting someone who is sad, cheering them up | G |
| club |   | annoyed, irrittated | H |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| peculiar |   | turned from liquid to solid | I |
| frantic |   | being kind to visitors | J |
| grief |   | on time, not late | K |
| congealed |   | mad, wild | L |
| on the premises |   | calm, peaceful | M |
| exasperated |   | extreme sadness after someone dies or goes away  | N |
| consoling |   | strange, unusual | O |
| hospitality |   | an orange-yellow colour | P |

Short Story 4: The Sniper by Liam O’Flaherty

The long June twilight faded into night. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey. Around the beleaguered Four Courts the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city, machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.

On a rooftop near O'Connell Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders was slung a pair of field glasses. His face was the face of a student, thin and ascetic, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the fanatic. They were deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to looking at death.

He was eating a sandwich hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the sandwich, and, taking a flask of whiskey from his pocket, he took a short drought. Then he returned the flask to his pocket. He paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a smoke. It was dangerous. The flash might be seen in the darkness, and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk.

Placing a cigarette between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly and put out the light. Almost immediately, a bullet flattened itself against the parapet of the roof. The sniper

took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the parapet. There was a flash and a bullet whizzed over his head. He dropped immediately. He had seen the flash. It came from the opposite side of the street.

He rolled over the roof to a chimney stack in the rear, and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the parapet. There was nothing to be seen--just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. His enemy was under cover.

Just then an armoured car came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street. It stopped on the opposite side of the street, fifty yards ahead. The sniper could hear the dull panting of the motor. His heart beat faster. It was an enemy car. He wanted to fire, but he knew it was useless. His bullets would never pierce the steel that covered the gray monster.

Then round the corner of a side street came an old woman, her head covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. An informer.

The turret opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted toward the side street. The sniper fired again. The woman whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

Suddenly from the opposite roof a shot rang out and the sniper dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the rifle up. He couldn't lift it. His forearm was dead. "I'm hit," he muttered.

Dropping flat onto the roof, he crawled back to the parapet. With his left hand he felt the injured right forearm. The blood was oozing through the sleeve of his coat. There was no pain--just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.

Quickly he drew his knife from his pocket, opened it on the breastwork of the parapet, and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the bullet had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The bullet had lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. He bent the arm below the wound. the arm bent back easily. He ground his teeth to overcome the pain.

Then taking out his field dressing, he ripped open the packet with his knife. He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound. A paroxysm of pain swept through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the ends with his teeth.

Then he lay still against the parapet, and, closing his eyes, he made an effort of will to overcome the pain.

In the street beneath all was still. The armored car had retired speedily over the bridge, with the machine gunner's head hanging lifeless over the turret. The woman's corpse lay still in the gutter.

The sniper lay still for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. Morning must not find him wounded on the roof. The enemy on the opposite roof covered his escape. He must kill that enemy and he could not use his rifle. He had only a revolver to do it. Then he thought of a plan.

Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report, and a bullet pierced the centre of the cap. The sniper slanted the

rifle forward. The cap clipped down into the street. Then catching the rifle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments he let the rifle drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him.

Crawling quickly to his feet, he peered up at the corner of the roof. His ruse had succeeded. The other sniper, seeing the cap and rifle fall, thought that he had killed his man. He was now standing before a row of chimney pots, looking across, with his head clearly silhouetted against the western sky.

The Republican sniper smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the parapet. The distance was about fifty yards--a hard shot in the dim light, and his right arm was paining him like a thousand devils. He took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips

together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and fired. He was almost deafened with the report and his arm shook with the recoil.

Then when the smoke cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then clattered on the pavement.

Then the dying man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

The sniper looked at his enemy falling and he shuddered. The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse. The sweat stood out in beads on his forehead. Weakened by his wound and the long summer day of fasting and watching on the roof, he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered, he began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand, and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with a concussion and the bullet whizzed past the sniper's head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it a drought. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirit. He decided to leave the roof now and look for his company commander, to report. Everywhere around was quiet. There was not much danger in going through the streets. He picked up his revolver and put it in his pocket. Then he crawled down through the skylight to the house underneath.

When the sniper reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed. He decided that he was a good shot, whoever he was. He wondered did he know him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army. He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into O'Connell Street. In the upper part of the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.

The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.

Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

Level 1

True or false – give a reason for your choice

1. The sniper is an experienced soldier / fighter.
2. The sniper was wounded above his right elbow.
3. The bullet was lodged in his arm.
4. The old woman worked for the rebels.
5. His enemy forced him to drop his rifle
6. The sniper deceived his enemy into thinking he was dead.
7. He killed his enemy with a pistol.
8. There were three dead people in the street.
9. He had been on the rooftop for more than twelve hours.
10. The enemy gunman shot four bullets at the sniper while he was on the roof.

Level 2

True or false – find all the information you can to prove or disprove the statements below.

1. The sniper and his enemy used to be in the same company before the revolution.
2. The sniper’s vigil on the rooftop was part of a planned operation.
3. The sniper was innovative and ruthless.
4. The action took place in the darkness of night.

Level 3

Would the author agree or disagree with the following statements? Argue for or against from the text. Write at least 4 – 5 lines.

1. There are no winners in a civil war.
2. Necessity is the mother of invention.
3. Death is part of a soldier’s life.

Short Story 5: **Examination Day**

The Jordans never spoke of the exam, not until their son, Dickie, was twelve years old. It was on his birthday that Mrs Jordan first mentioned the subject in his presence, and the anxious manner of her speech caused her husband to answer sharply.

‘Forget about it,’ he said. ‘He’ll do all right.’

They were at breakfast table, and the boy looked up from his plate curiously. He was an alert-eyed youngster with flat blond hair and a quick, nervous manner. He didn’t understand what the sudden tension was about, but he did know that today was his birthday, and he wanted harmony above all. Somewhere in the little apartment there were wrapped, beribboned packages waiting to be opened, and in the tiny wall-kitchen something warm and sweet was being prepared in the automatic stove. He wanted the day to be happy, and the moistness of his mother’s eyes, the scowl on his father’s face, spoiled the mood of fluttering expectation with which he had greeted the morning.

‘What exam?’ he asked.

His mother looked at the tablecloth. ‘It’s just a sort of Government Intelligence test they give children at the age of twelve. You’ll be taking it next week. It’s nothing to worry about.’

‘You mean a test like in school?’

‘Something like that,’ his father said, getting up from the table. ‘Go and read your comics, Dickie.’ The boy rose and wandered towards that part of the living room which had been ‘his’ corner since infancy. He fingered the topmost comic of the stack, but seemed uninterested in the colour­ful squares of fast-paced action. He wandered towards the window, and peered gloomily at the veil of mist that shrouded the glass.

‘Why did it have to rain today?’ he said. ‘Why couldn’t it rain tomorrow?’

His father, now slumped into an armchair with the Gov­ernment newspaper rattled the sheets in vexation. ‘Because it just did, that’s all. Rain makes the grass grow.’

‘Why, Dad?’

‘Because it does, that’s all.’

Dickie puckered his brow. ‘What makes it green, though? The grass?’

‘Nobody knows,’ his father snapped, then immediately regretted his abruptness.

Later in the day, it was birthday time again. His mother beamed as she handed over the gaily-coloured packages, and even his father managed a grin and a rumple-of-the-­hair. He kissed his

mother and shook hands gravely with his father. Then the birthday cake was brought forth, and the ceremonies concluded.

An hour later, seated by the window, he watched the sun force its way between the clouds.

‘Dad,’ he said, ‘how far away is the sun?’

‘Five thousand miles,’ his father said.

Dickie sat at the breakfast table and again saw moisture in his mother’s eyes. He didn’t connect her tears with the exam until his father suddenly brought the subject to light again.

‘Well, Dickie,’ he said, with a manly frown, ‘you’ve got an appointment today.’

‘I know Dad. 1 hope –’

‘Now, it’s nothing to worry about. Thousands of children take this test every day.

The Government wants to know how smart you are, Dickie. That’s all there is to it.’

‘I get good marks in school,’ he said hesitantly.

‘This is different. This is a - special kind of test. They give you this stuff to drink, you see, and then you go into a room where there’s a sort of machine –‘

‘What stuff to drink?’ Dickie said.

‘It’s nothing. It tastes like peppermint. It’s just to make sure you answer the questions truthfully. Not that the Gov­ernment thinks you won’t tell the truth, but it makes sure.’

Dickie’s face showed puzzlement, and a touch of fright. He looked at his mother, and she composed her face into a misty smile.

‘Everything will be all right,’ she said.

‘Of course it will,’ his father agreed. ‘You’re a good boy, Dickie; you’ll make out fine. Then we’ll come home and celebrate. All right?’

‘Yes sir,’ Dickie said.

They entered the Government Educational Building fifteen minutes before the appointed hour. They crossed the mar­ble floors of the great pillared lobby, passed beneath an archway and entered an automatic lift that brought them to the fourth floor.

There was a young man wearing an insignia-less tunic, seated at a polished desk in front of

Room 404. He held a clipboard in his hand, and he checked the list down to the Js and permitted the Jordan’s to enter.

The room was as cold and official as a courtroom, with long benches flanking metal tables. There were several fathers and sons already there, and a thin-lipped woman with cropped black hair was passing out sheets of paper.

Mr Jordan filled out the form, and returned it to the clerk. Then he told Dickie: ‘It won’t be long now. When they call your name, you just go through the doorway at the end of the room.’ He indicated the portal with his finger.

A concealed loudspeaker crackled and called off the first name. Dickie saw a boy leave his father’s side reluctantly and walk slowly towards the door.

At five minutes to eleven, they called the name of Jordan.

‘Good luck, son,’ his father said, without looking at him. ‘I’ll call for you when the test is over.’

Dickie walked to the door and turned the knob. The room inside was dim, and he could barely make out the features of the grey-tunicked attendant who greeted him.

‘Sit down,’ the man said softly. He indicated a high stool beside his desk. ‘Your name’s Richard Jordan?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Your classification number is 600-115. Drink this, Richard.’

He lifted a plastic cup from the desk and handed it to the boy. The liquid inside had the consistency of buttermilk, tasted only vaguely of the promised peppermint. Dickie downed it, and handed the man the empty cup.

He sat in silence, feeling drowsy, while the man wrote busily on a sheet of paper. Then the attendant looked at his watch, and rose to stand only inches from Dickie’s face. He unclipped a penlike object from the pocket of his tunic, and flashed a tiny light into the boy’s eyes.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘Come with me, Richard.’

He led Dickie to the end of the room, where a single wooden armchair faced a multi-dialled computing machine. There was a microphone on the left arm of the chair, and when the boy sat down, he found its pinpoint head conve­niently at his mouth.

‘Now just relax, Richard. You’ll be asked some ques­tions, and you think them over carefully. Then give your answers into the microphone. The machine will take care of the rest.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I’ll leave you alone now. Whenever you want to start, just say “ready” into the microphone.’

‘Yes, sir.’
The man squeezed his shoulder, and left.

Dickie said, ‘Ready.
Lights appeared on the machine, and a mechanism whirred. A voice said: ‘Complete this sequence. One, four, seven, ten . .

Mr and Mrs Jordan were in the living room, not speaking, not even speculating.
It was almost four o’clock when the telephone rang. The woman tried to reach it first, but her husband was quicker.
‘Mr Jordan?’

The voice was clipped: a brisk, official voice.
‘Yes, speaking.’

‘This is the Government Educational Service. Your son, Richard M Jordan, Classification 600-115 has completed the Government examination. We regret to inform you that his intelligence quotient is above the Government regula­tion, according to Rule 84 Section 5 of the New Code.’
Across the room, the woman cried out, knowing nothing except the emotion she read on her husband’s face.
‘You may specify by telephone,’ the voice droned on, ‘whether you wish his body interred by the Government, or would you prefer a private burial place? The fee for Gov­ernment burial is ten dollars.’

# Examination Day – Henry Slesar

This story is set in the future and the setting is vital to the story.

1. Describe the setting with as much detail as you can.
2. Why is the setting so important?

The story has a surprise ending. Find as many details as you can that:

1. hint that it is better to do badly in the test.
2. suggest that Dickie might be quite intelligent.
3. What sort of a society do the Jordans live in?
4. What are the authors thoughts about this society and how do you know?
5. Apart from the idea that the society in the story does not want intelligent people, what other information are we given about the society?
6. This story contains irony. Explain what irony is and describe the ironies within the story. Focus on the dialogue.
7. Think of as many reasons both for and against having intelligent people in society. List them and give a conclusion based on these reasons.

Examination Day

**Irony**



**Intelligence**

