

The Gift of the Magi

by O Henry

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

Describing the flat

1 1i; 2d; 3h; 4a; 5f; 6b; 7e; 8g; 9j; 10c; 11k

Talking about money and the lack of it

1 a, d

2 b, e

3 c, f

Main themes

2, 3 Student's own answers

Post-reading exercises

Understanding the story

- 1 By being very careful how much she spent on food.
- 2 To confirm the amount; perhaps she hoped she had made a mistake and there would be more than she first thought.
- 3 To buy her husband a Christmas present.
- 4 She wanted to buy a good present but had managed to save very little money.
- 5 Della's husband.
- 6 We know that when Jim arrives home, he is always *greatly hugged* by his wife.
- 7 She had an idea and wanted to look at her hair.
- 8 Jim's gold watch and Della's hair.
- 9 She had decided to sell her hair.
- 10 Not completely: she *faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet*.
- 11 \$20
- 12 The shop advertised *Hair Goods of All Kinds*; it would probably be used to make wigs and hair pieces.

- 13 She went to various stores.
- 14 She bought a platinum fob watch chain.
- 15 Because it was *simple and chaste in design* and, like Jim, represented *quietness and value*.
- 16 He used an old leather strap for his watch and didn't like it to be seen.
- 17 To make it look better.
- 18 Not really, but she felt that she had no choice.
- 19 Yes, she was.
- 20 He stared fixedly at Della.
- 21 (Suggested answer) Probably because he was trying to come to terms with her new short hairstyle and he realised his present was no use.
- 22 A set of tortoise shell hair combs.
- 23 She screamed with joy.
- 24 She had always admired and wanted the combs.
- 25 She cried hysterically; the combs were no longer any use to her.
- 26 She wanted to give Jim his present.
- 27 He sat down on the couch, smiled, and told Della he had sold his watch to buy her combs.
- 28 That people like Della and Jim are the *wisest* people of all when giving and receiving gifts.

Language study

Grammar

Past perfect

- 2 *had been saving*: This suggests that Della has been obsessed for a long time with saving money for Jim's present.
- had been*: This tells us that Jim's watch is treasured because it has been in the family for a long time.
- had ... craved and yearned*: These verbs emphasise the great longing that Della has had to own the combs.
- had not ... seen*: Della's former distress changes to happiness when she remembers that Jim hasn't seen his present. This shows how she puts his happiness before hers.

Past perfect simple

- 3 Examples: had been; had ... craved and yearned; had not ... seen

Past perfect continuous

- 4 Example: had been saving
- 5
- 1 Della had been planning for Christmas for a long time.
 - 2 Jim had had the same idea as Della.
 - 3 She had sold her hair to buy him a watch chain.
 - 4 He had bought her the hair combs she loved so much with the money he got when he sold his watch.
 - 5 They had both wanted to give the other a wonderful surprise.
 - 6 They had both been looking forward to this moment with excitement.
 - 7 They had both been disappointed – not by their gifts, but by the fact that the gifts they had so carefully chosen were no longer of any use.
- 6 Student's own answer

Past perfect inversion in conditional sentences

- 7 Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft ...
Had King Solomon been the janitor ...
- 8
- 1 Had Della not cut her hair, she could have used the combs.
 - 2 If she had saved more money, she wouldn't have cut her hair.
 - 3 If Jim's salary had not been cut from \$30 to \$20, he wouldn't have sold his watch.
 - 4 Had they not bought each other any presents at all that Christmas, would they have been happier?
 - 5 Had Jim not sold his watch, he would have been happy to use the chain.
 - 6 If Della had known that Jim was going to buy the combs, would she have cut her hair?

Inversion after fronting

- 9
- 1 Her old brown jacket went on; her old brown hat went on. (The emphasis is on the clothes rather than the movement.)
 - 2 Della ran one flight up. (The emphasis is on Della running rather than how far she ran.)
 - 3 The brown cascade rippled down. (The emphasis is on the hair rather than the movement it made.)
 - 4 They took twenty-one dollars from her for it. (Less emphasis on the amount of money.)
 - 5 Jim seemed to wake quickly out of his trance. (Less emphasis on the speed with which Jim wakes.)

Literary analysis**Plot**

- 1 g, c, d, f, b, a, e
- 2 Jim sold his watch and then bought the combs. He did this before Della sold her hair, or at least before he knew she had sold her hair. We don't know exactly when he sold his watch. It is not relevant, since Della knows nothing about it.

- 3 The surprise is the nature of Jim's present. Student's own answer
- 4 The gift of the magi was adoration of the baby Jesus. Their material gifts – gold, incense and myrrh were symbols of this. Della and Jim's most important gift is their love for each other.

Characters

- 5 Jim's father and grandfather and Madame Sofronie. We know nothing about the first two except that they handed down the gold watch to Jim. We know a little more about Madame Sofronie. Her conversation with Della shows how desperate the girl is to sell her hair.
- 6 (Suggested answers)

Emotional: She cries at several points in the story.

Impulsive: She decides to sell her beautiful hair.

Loving: She adores Jim; he is the *lord* of the house. She spends hours *planning something nice* for him.

- 7 Quiet, serious. Jim is thin and exhausted from work. But as he flops onto the sofa, he is smiling. He is not angry or horrified at Della and he explains very clearly that no change in her hair would make him love her less.
He does not make a fuss when he sees his present even though they now have very little money left.
- 8 She is *large, too white, chilly* – not a very sympathetic character. She lifts Della's hair *with a practised hand* and offers \$20. There is no kindness in her attitude, just commercial interest.
- 9 They put each other first. Jim knows how much Della longs for the combs and he wants to make her happy. Della sacrifices her dearest possession – her hair – to buy a watch chain, so that Jim can be proud to take out his watch.
- 10 They are foolish to spend so much on presents when they have very little money. They are children in their youth and optimism.

Narration

- 11 (Suggested answer) knowing, all-seeing, sympathetic, gently critical, moralising
- 12 Neither would have included the references to Biblical characters or thought about themselves in a grand or self-important way. They would probably say that they loved their partner and wanted to make them happy.
- 13 It is as if we are seeing something special and intimate, as if we are being 'let in' on a secret.
- 14 This may or may not appeal to the contemporary reader. O Henry is showing us that important things happen to apparently unimportant people – but he doesn't want us to miss the message.
- 15 He is saying that you do not have to be grand or rich to be wise, and you do not need to be important to have the greatest gift of all, which is love.

Style

- 16** The penny is a small coin, worth very little. But pennies are very important in this young couple's lives.
- 17** He refers to: *the shabby little couch, a furnished flat at \$8 per week, mendicancy, the letterbox and bell don't work; income was shrunk to \$20.*
- 18** It emphasises the fact that nothing works or is in good condition.
- 19**
- 1 gray: the author is emphasising the dullness and poverty of the couple's lives.
 - 2 old, brown: Della's clothes are old and dark-coloured, probably for practical reasons. There isn't much colour in her life.
 - 3 they ... wisest: O Henry wants us to identify Della and Jim with the Magi in their wisdom and love. The words have a Biblical ring.
- 20** She is compared to a butterfly or a bird – she is light, delicate and moves quickly because she is happy and excited.
- 21** He compares it to a *cascade of brown waters*. This suggests it is long, wavy, thick and shiny. It makes Della's sacrifice seem even greater.
- 22** She wants to get it over with quickly. She doesn't want to think about it too much. She tells Madame Sofronie to give her the money quickly. We are not told how she feels as her hair is being cut. The author moves straight into a description of Della at the shops. He, like Della, does not want to reflect on her painful sacrifice.
- 23** Student's own answer

Example: The conversation between Jim and Della. The effect is one of tension followed by reconciliation.

- 24** By using capitals, the author highlights the importance of these objects. The combs have become something of an obsession with Della and the watch is Jim's pride and joy. The story seems to be about these objects but the author eventually uses them to show the secondary importance of material things to the young couple.
- 25** Although Jim is earning less money, the affection between himself and Della is as strong as ever. This prepares us for his reaction when he finds that his present is useless and again when Della gives him the watch chain.
- 26** Student's own answer

The story is sentimental and O Henry certainly moralises. There is humour, mainly in the knowing comments of the author and in the irony of events. It may be overly moralistic for some readers. It is however, witty, and tells a satisfying story with great economy.

The Lost Phoebe

by Theodore Dreiser

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

Words for describing old age and neglect

- 1 1d; 2e; 3f; 4g; 5c; 6b; 7a; 8i; 9h
- 2 1 leaks; 2 faded; 3 musty; 4 worm-eaten; 5 antiquated; 6 spongy; 7 decrepit; 8 lime-stained; 9 gnarled

Henry

- 3 1c; 2d; 3e; 4b; 5a

Spoken language

- 4 Student's own answer
- 5 1 aren't, haven't; 2 You aren't inclined to leave my things alone any more;
3 yuh, y'; 4 get, always, somewhere
- 6 I can manage by myself ... I can cook a little.

Post-reading exercises

Understanding the story

- 1 In the country, about three miles from a small town.
- 2 The house is made of wood. It is in bad condition. Henry's grandfather owned part of the house. Henry built the newer part.
- 3 Old-fashioned and broken-down.
- 4 Henry and Phoebe lived together in the house after their marriage, forty-eight years ago. Henry has lived in the house since childhood.
- 5 They have four surviving children, out of a total of seven (three died). They moved away to live elsewhere.
- 6 They live a life of routine, dictated by the seasons. They look after their crops and animals, go to market, chop wood and make the occasional visit.
- 7 He is 70.
- 8 He thinks that she doesn't take enough care of his things, that she puts them in different places so that he can't find them.
- 9 She threatens to leave Henry. Henry *knew his wife would never leave him in any circumstances*.

- 10 She is 64.
- 11 He doesn't want to leave his home; living alone *did not trouble him in the least*.
- 12 He wants to stay near Phoebe. He is too old and set in his ways to contemplate change.
- 13 It becomes dirty and damp. The roof leaks.
- 14 He sees Phoebe leaning over the table. He is shocked and thrilled that his wife has come back.
- 15 He tells himself that Phoebe has come back to comfort him because he is lonely. He decides to wait for her every night and make it clear to her that he needs her.
- 16 He asks Farmer Dodge if he has seen Phoebe. Dodge is amazed and tells Henry that Phoebe is dead. He then goes off to tell the *authorities*.
- 17 He asks Mrs Race if Phoebe is in her house. She invites him in and tells him she will find Phoebe for him.
- 18 He decides to visit the Murrays'; he thinks Phoebe may be with them.
- 19 It's a horrible place and Henry seems harmless. At first, he goes back home every night.
- 20 For several years.
- 21 He takes with him a few utensils for cooking so that he does not have to go back home.
- 22 He stands at the crossroads, closes his eyes and turns round three times. Then he calls for Phoebe and throws his cane straight in front of him.
- 23 It is the *seventh year* of his search.
- 24 He sees a light dancing among the trees which takes the form of Phoebe.
- 25 He falls down, then starts running again and loses his hat. He runs to the edge of the cliff.
- 26 They find Henry's body.

Language study

Vocabulary

The use of simile and metaphor

- 1 *like a dusty, bony skeleton* (simile)
fasten themselves like lichens (simile); *fasten themselves ... on the stones of circumstance and weather their days to a crumbling conclusion* (metaphor)
All the rest of life is a far-off, clamorous phantasmagoria (metaphor); *flickering like Northern lights in the night* (simile); *sounding as faintly as cow bells tinkling in the distance* (simile)
a very umbrella of a woman (metaphor)
little wisps of mist ... that ... flicker like small white cypresses of fog (simile)
The ... moon was a large silver disk (metaphor)

- 2 the old wooden loom
the 'simple natures' of Henry and Phoebe
life in the outside world
Phoebe
the mist
the moon

Compound adjectives

- 3 the clock
- 4 probably grey
- 5 it refers to the house
- 6 covered with green lichen
- 7 a with a long pendulum
b with two weights, with a double weight
c with a high back
- 8 2 He sat down on the low-backed sofa.
3 The old cups were tea-stained.
4 The baby's ears were shell-like.
5 The old man's face was weather-beaten.
6 Henry was well-known in the area.

Grammar

Multiple-clause sentences

- 9 The rag carpet was a weak, faded, lead-and-pink-colored affair.
It underlay all these sturdy examples of enduring furniture.
It had been woven by Phoebe Ann's own hands.
She was then fifteen years younger than she was when she died.
- 10 His hat was gone. His lungs were breathless. His reason was quite astray. He came to the edge of the cliff. He saw her below among a silvery bed of apple-trees. They were now blooming in the spring.

The use of preposition + *which*

- 11 The moon shone through the east windows, throwing the pattern of the panes on the wooden floor, and making the old furniture stand out dimly in the room. He was accustomed to the old furniture.
The slope that slowly led up to it from the opposite side was covered by a rank growth of beech, hickory, and ash. A number of wagon tracks threaded through it, crossing at various angles.

- 12
- 1 The bridge under which we rode was from the 18th century.
 - 2 The address to which I sent the letter is the wrong one.
 - 3 The different countries through which we travelled were very interesting.
 - 4 The enemy territory over which the plane flew was full of danger.
 - 5 The environmental group to which I belong is very influential.
 - 6 The old farmhouse at which we stopped had a *Vacancies* sign in the window.

Literary analysis

Plot

- 1 g, j, f, d, i, a, e, c, h, b
- 2 The plot is quite simple. Student's own answer

Character

- 3 (Suggested answers)
 - independent:** He wants to live on his own after Phoebe dies.
 - dependent:** He has been with Phoebe all his life and has come to depend on her company.
 - loving:** *Old Henry Reifsneider and his wife Phoebe were a loving couple* [page 42]
 - hard-working:** Living on the land means that certain routines must be followed that involve hard, physical work.
 - proud:** Henry refuses offers of help from his neighbours and children and insists that he can manage by himself.
 - sceptical:** *he had scarcely ever believed in spirits* [page 47]
 - religious:** *honest, moderately Christian* [page 45]

Adjectives: Student's own answer

- 4 Probably form a mixture of old age, loneliness and grief. Student's own answer
- 5 Phoebe is hard-working like Henry. She knows him well and reprimands him when he starts complaining. They have the same outlook and values. They mostly live together in harmony and look after each other.
- 6 Farmer Dodge is an unsentimental character. He is concerned about Henry but his eagerness to contact the *authorities* show that he is rather self-important. Mrs Race is also concerned but she is kinder. She seems to understand why Henry is so affected and pretends to believe him when he says Phoebe has left him. The impression is of a community where people are basically kind and keep an eye on each other without intruding.

Narration

- 7 It gives us a vivid idea of Henry and Phoebe's life and how it has changed.

The physical decline of the house and its inhabitants prepares us for Henry's further deterioration after Phoebe's death.

- 8 The first dialogue reveals Henry's *crankiness* and also, perhaps, his failing mental state: he imagines that Phoebe is interfering with his things.
- Phoebe threatens to leave Henry but he knows she is joking. Phoebe keeps Henry in check [page 44] but he is happy for her to do so. The neighbours have the same speech patterns as Henry and Phoebe. They are all from the same farming class and speak in a direct, colloquial way. They know each other and are comfortable with each other socially.
- 9 Dreiser describes the process of hallucination and madness. Before that, he enlists our sympathy by describing the details of Henry and Phoebe's hard but loving lives. He doesn't openly moralise; instead he 'shows' us certain truths about human relationships, loneliness and grief.
- 10 Dreiser is sympathetic towards his characters. His description of Henry's decline is very moving. His actions leave a *trail of amazement, sympathy and pity in his wake* [page 53].
- 11 Perhaps it criticises the poverty in which Henry and Phoebe live. There is a reference to *tax-eaten* property, implying that the government is taking away any surplus money through taxation. On the other hand, the people who live in the neighbourhood are generally sympathetic to Henry and try to help him. The local asylum is criticised as a place which *because of the poverty of the district, was of staggering aberration*. The local people agree that it is not the place for Henry. It is hard to say what would have happened to Henry today; the state would be expected to intervene earlier but people in general might not be so sympathetic.

Atmosphere

- 12 He shows how Henry and Phoebe's world has gradually shrunk. We learn about the deaths of some of their children and how the others live far away. The nearest neighbours are a mile away and over the years, visitors have become few and far between. Contact with the outside world is minimal and the couple have come to rely on each other for everything.
- 13 Before Phoebe's death, the world of the couple is one of routine dictated by the changing seasons. Life is getting harder but it is bearable because they have each other. When Phoebe dies, Henry gradually retreats into his own world. He does less and less and spends more time brooding. Gradually, his imagination becomes stronger than reality.
- 14 The conversations between Henry, Phoebe, Farmer Dodge and Mrs Race have a certain humour, because of the vitality of their language (*You're as restless as a chicken* [page 44]; *Lawsy me! ... Yuh pore man! So you're clean out'n your mind now* [page 51]).
- 15 The story is moving because it describes very convincingly the deterioration of a man who has lost his 'anchor' in life – his loving wife.
- 16 In a way, it is a ghost story. The dead Phoebe becomes more real to Henry as his madness grows. He 'sees' her clearly and his search for her becomes more desperate. It is her ghost, or spirit which he is pursuing when he finally meets his own death.
- 17 It is sad because Henry meets a violent death. It is happy because his years of suffering are over and he dies believing that he has found Phoebe.

Style

(Suggested answers)

- 18 Examples: The description of Henry's house and furniture; Phoebe and Henry's daily lives; the descriptions of Henry and Phoebe; the scene where Henry first 'sees' Phoebe after her death; Henry's final night in the woods.
- 19 The dialogue brings the characters to life; it shows us that they are practical, down-to-earth people with hard but limited lives. This contrasts with the unearthly world that Henry increasingly inhabits. The dialogue comes as something of a relief after the rather long passages of narrative.
- 20 It establishes a more direct and intimate connection with the reader. Dreiser assumes that there are certain things about the world that the sympathetic reader will understand.

The Baby Party

by F Scott Fitzgerald

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

Verbs to describe action or movement

- 1b; 2d; 3i; 4g; 5h; 6j; 7a; 8e; 9c; 10f
- 2 squirm; broke away/broke loose; rushed; knocked; grabbed/seized; bumped; rounded; grabbed; tugged; broke away/broke loose
- 3 1e; 2d; 3g; 4h; 5a; 6c; 7b; 8f
- 4 1 slipped; 2 tossed; 3 rolled; 4 staggered; 5 limping; 6 strained; 7 rolling; 8 threshed, swung

Words to describe noise

- 5 1d; 2c; 3a; 4b; 5f; 6e
 - 6 1 yell; 2 drowned out; 3 muttered; 4 wailed; 5 gasp; 6 burst out
- 7, 8 Student's own answers

Post-reading exercises

- 1 In an office in the city. In the suburbs.
- 2 His wife telephones the office.
- 3 He is 38. He has had to fight poverty and ill-health. His life is better but he is disillusioned.
- 4 He loves her but she irritates him sometimes. This makes him feel ashamed.
- 5 The party is at the Markeys' house, next door.
- 6 December, after Christmas (*a defunct Christmas tree* [page 78])
- 7 He hears loud, angry voices and his wife sobbing.
- 8 The party starts at 4.30 and Edith thinks that her child will make more of an impact if she arrives late when all the other children are looking untidy.
- 9 Four girls, nine boys and Ede.
- 10 Because their husbands travel to work together and are quite friendly with each other.
- 11 They run into the dining room, around the table, and try to go through the kitchen door.
- 12 After the children have had cake and ice cream.

- 13 Four, including Ede and Billy.
- 14 She takes Billy's teddy bear. When he tries to take it back, she pushes him to the floor. He cries because Ede pushes him again and he hits his head on the bare floor where there is no carpet.
- 15 Because Ede's laughter is infectious.
- 16 Edith can't stop laughing along with her child and Mrs Markey is furious because they are laughing when her child is hurt. Edith thinks Mrs Markey is overreacting.
- 17 She calls her a *brat*. Edith makes things worse by telling Mrs Markey what she really thinks of her and her child.
- 18 John is angry because the Markeys have insulted his wife and child and now they are turning them out of the house. Joe is angry because Edith called his wife *common*.
- 19 Because Joe has warned him that he can't *get away with* his behaviour and John knows they will have to fight.
- 20 On the sidewalk and then on the grass next to it. They hear a man's footsteps approaching.
- 21 John asks Markey if he wants to go into his house to wash himself. The men shake hands and Markey puts his arm round John's shoulders. They agree that there is *no harm done* and say goodnight.
- 22 He thinks it was equal: *At least, I beat him as much as he beat me.*
- 23 He tells her not to call people common and to go back home if there is any trouble.
- 24 They are looking at Ede in bed, asleep.
- 25 He tells her to apologise for what she said at the party.
- 26 He wants to hold his daughter and reflect on why he fought so *savagely* with Joe Markey.

Language study

Grammar

Adverbs of manner

- 1 1 shrewdly, sensationally; 2 closely; 3 with inscrutable eyes; 4 impatiently; 5 forcibly, casually; 6 with a note of reproof in his voice; 7 curiously; 8 irrepressibly
- 2 said, jovially
 said, emphatically
 whispered, perfunctorily
 cried, rantically
 exclaimed, brokenly
 objected, hurriedly
 demanded, abruptly
 burst out, violently

- 3 1 'I must be getting old,' said John thoughtfully.
- 2 'Baby parties are rough affairs,' he said grimly.
- 3 (Suddenly) Joe (suddenly) asked John (suddenly) if he wanted to go into the house.
- 4 (Thickly) Markey cried (thickly) that he wouldn't go on with the fight.
- 5 (Quickly) Mrs Markey (quickly) picked Billy up (quickly) from the sofa.
- 6 'Please go home!' she broke out angrily.
- 7 (Proudly) Edith looked (proudly) at her little girl in her new pink dress.
- 8 All the children were (continually) in motion (continually) running (continually) to and from their mothers (continually).
- 9 (Lightly) John (lightly) passed his hand (lightly) over his child's head (lightly).
- 10 He sat in the darkness (slowly) rocking to and fro (slowly).

Present participles in adverbial clauses

- 4 (Suggested answer) Becoming more expensive every day, petrol is no longer affordable.
- 5 2 Making his way up the steps, he whistled cheerfully.
- 3 Taking the toy from the little boy, she ignored his protests.
- 4 Taking off his jacket, John punched Joe on the nose.
- 5 Keeping my eye on the clock, I dialled Susan's number.
- 6 Crying 'I don't want to go!', the child hit out at his father.
- 7 Sweating profusely, he dragged the heavy box along the floor.
- 8 Barking loudly, the dogs made a lot of noise as they ran round the garden.

Literary analysis

Plot

- 1 They tell us about John Andros, his life, his character and his relationship with his child, who is the catalyst for the drama which takes place later.
- 2 He has left the office early and is walking up the hill to the Markeys' house. He is in a good mood and looking forward to seeing his child with all the other children at the party.
- 3 Edith is in tears because she has been told to leave. She is in the hall, collecting her coat.
- 4 Little Ede pushes Billy and he cries. Ede then laughs and her mother joins in. Mrs Markey is angry; she calls Ede a brat and tells Edith to leave. Edith then insults Mrs Markey and her child. Joe Markey tells her to control herself. Mrs Markey tells her husband to put Edith out of the house.
- 5 He focuses on Edith and Mrs Markey. Between them, they allow the situation to get out of control which in turn provokes the fight between the men.
- 6 It is a question of *honour*. John has to defend his wife who is upset. He is also defending his daughter whom he feels has been badly treated. Joe and his family have been repeatedly called *common* by Edith, and his wife and child have been upset in their own home.

- 7 Edith behaves irresponsibly by laughing with her daughter and then insulting the Markeys. Mrs Markey also reacts badly, but as the hostess she can be excused for expecting better behaviour from her guests.
- 8 John has fought for his family but especially out of love for his daughter; he is fiercely protective of her vulnerability and innocence.

Character

- 9 Age: 38
 Work: In an office in the city.
 Health: He has suffered from bad health in the past.
 Financial position: He has been poor; now, he seems quite prosperous with a house in the suburbs and a maid.
 Personality: He can be short-tempered (with his wife and child) and violent (he initiates the fight with Joe). But he can be gentle (with his child) and has a sense of humour (*He smiled grimly. 'I guess these baby parties are pretty rough affairs.'*)
 Mood before the party: He is in *good humor*. Things are going better than at any other time in his life.
- 10 He is interested in her *as a definite piece of youth*. We know that when he feels old, he is comforted by *the thought of life continuing through his child*.
- 11 He feels irritated with her. Then he feels ashamed of himself.
- 12 Edith is a mother, proud of her child. She is competitive and wants her child to be the best. She is something of a snob and maybe rather immature. John is the dominant partner: Edith pretends to be friends with the Markeys for his sake and also obeys him *meekly* when he tells her to apologise to them.
- 13 She thinks she is *common*. It is not clear why. Mrs Markey probably thinks the same about Edith. She calls Ede a *brat* but Edith is even more rude about Billy and his family.
- 14 He is described as handsome and jovial. He tries to calm things down when Billy is crying. He loses his temper only after repeated insults from Edith. He seems genuinely fond of John as we see from his reaction after the fight. It is likely that they will continue to be friends.
- 15 (Suggested answer) Edith will give an unwilling apology to Mrs Markey and perhaps Joe has persuaded his wife to do the same which is why they have come round to the house. The women don't like each other but might make the effort to be civil to each other for the sake of social convention. John and Joe will remain friends by seeing each other without their wives.

Narration

- 16 It is important, especially the dialogue which precedes the fight between John and Joe. Fitzgerald uses dialogue to show the increasing anger of the protagonists and how this results in an explosion of physical violence. The dialogue between the men after the fight shows how they *forgive* each other for the harm they have inflicted. The dialogue between John and his wife establishes John's dominant position in the relationship.

- 17 The person at the centre of the story – John – is a typical Fitzgerald ‘hero’ – comparatively young, sensitive, and with a difficult past. We know that John broods about his own mortality and gets angry with himself and his bad temper. The story contains elements of both ‘sweetness’ – which are usually connected with the description of Ede and the other children – and ‘bitterness’ – which is expressed in the argument between Edith and Mrs Markey and the fight between John and Joe.
- 18 The fight is important because it shows the violence underlying apparently ordinary suburban lives. The final episode where the Markeys visit their neighbours is also important because it reveals more of John’s character and leads up to the final episode (also important) where John cradles his daughter.
- 19 The pushing episode between Ede and Billy is finely observed. The part of the fight where John and Joe hide from a passer-by is amusing because it makes them look (and feel) like children. Some of the dialogue is ironically amusing, for example when Edith tells John that she is relieved she bought steak and not veal for dinner and so can treat his swollen eye.
- 20 Examples: *Little Ede looks perfectly darling ... So grown-up – I can’t believe it* [page 79]. Mrs Markey doesn’t say much but Edith wonders if she is indirectly criticising her child. *You’re a darling ...* [page 80] Edith’s conversation is the prelude to little Ede attempting to take Billy’s teddy bear. Again, innocent remarks have unforeseen consequences. *I’ll be damned ...* [page 87] Joe’s comment marks the end of his fight with John.
- 21 He identifies mostly with John. John is at the centre of the story. We learn more about him than about his wife or the Markeys. We can sympathise with him when he hears his wife crying at the party: his friend is putting his wife and child out of the house. We know how John feels about his wife and child (his *intense love affair* with Edith was *interrupted* when little Ede was born); we know less about Joe’s feelings.
- 22 Fitzgerald writes convincingly about competitive mothers and their children. He tells us enough about John to enlist our sympathy so we can identify with his anger and frustration. It is interesting that we are not told what happens between Ede and the Markeys at the end of the story. We must imagine what is said. In any case, Fitzgerald wants us to focus on John and his relationship with his daughter – the thing that gives most meaning to his life.

Atmosphere

- 23 John decides to walk from the station. The weather, although it is winter, is described in positive terms: *crisp December twilight, the moon was out, shining with proud brilliance on the thin, sugary snow*. He walks faster and his *happiness increased*. He fills his lungs with the cold air and anticipates with pleasure the sight of little Ede and the other babies.
- 24 Fitzgerald uses phrases such as *sterner sport* to describe the children’s activities. He uses a wide variety of verbs to describe their movements: *ran, rounded, essayed, broke loose, rushing, squirmed*.
- 25 Little Ede realises that she can make her mother laugh, so she laughs again to see if it has the same effect. After that, the exchanges between Edith and Mrs Markey become more and more heated and Fitzgerald emphasises this through his use of words and phrases such as *her own temper rising, cried ... frantically, her face contracting with indignation, livid with rage, etc.*
- 26 The fact the fight is largely silent makes it seem both absurd and sinister. It is as if the men are ashamed of what they are doing. It certainly gives the impression that they don’t want the neighbours to hear and this is confirmed when they stop fighting on hearing footsteps approaching. The fight is quite violent and both men are hurt, but at the end they are concerned about each other. Neither wants to lose the fight but nor do they want to stop being friends.

- 27 A mood of calm and reconciliation. The baby – supposedly the cause of all the trouble – is happily unaware of all the conflict and sleeps peacefully.

Style

- 28 Examples: *He liked to take her on his lap and examine minutely her fragrant, downy scalp and her eyes with their irises of morning blue* [page 76].

... the moon was out, shining with proud brilliance on the thin, sugary snow that lay over the lawns [page 77].

- 29 *... essayed the kitchen door, rescued by an expeditionary force* [page 79].

You Were Perfectly Fine

by Dorothy Parker

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

Exclamations

1 a) man; b) woman; c) woman; d) woman; e) woman; f) man

Expressions

2 1i); 2k); 3h); 4g); 5c); 6j); 7a); 8b); 9e); 10f); 11d)

US English

3 1 finished; 2 excellent; 3 angry; 4 joking; 5 tie; 6 pavement; 7 suppose; 8 go and make; 9 go and join

Main themes

4, 5 Student's own answers

Post-reading exercises

Understanding the story

- 1 He feels ill: he eases himself carefully into the chair and then puts his face on the cool material of the chair to comfort himself.
- 2 She feels fine: she is *clear-eyed*, sits *light and erect* and *smiles brightly*.
- 3 Four o'clock in the afternoon. He kept trying to get out of bed but couldn't make it.
- 4 He wants to know if he behaved badly.
- 5 The young man, Peter, paid too much attention to Elinor, Jim Pierson's wife or girlfriend.
- 6 Peter poured clam-juice down her back.
- 7 For *about an hour*. He was a *little worried* but he *didn't really mind*.
- 8 Every time the waiter offered Peter something, he gave it back to him, saying he was his long-lost brother.
- 9 He provoked an old man because he didn't like his necktie. He was taken out of the hotel before the old man became really angry.
- 10 Peter slipped on the ice and fell down.
- 11 They went round and round the park. In the taxi, Peter told the girl how he felt about her.

- 12 She thinks it was the most important thing that has ever happened in their lives. She also thinks they should keep it to themselves.
- 13 He feels he is going to *collapse* because of the girl's revelations.
- 14 (Suggested answer) Terrible. He has got himself into a difficult situation.

Language study

Grammar

Ellipsis

- 1 Aren't you feeling so well today?
Do you know what time I got up?
It was a pretty long ride, was it?
- 2 1 Have you seen Sandra?
2 There's nobody at home, I'm afraid.
3 Does anybody want more food?
4 Will you be here tomorrow?
5 Has your father got a car?
6 Is Dora coming to the party?

Fronting in informal speech

- 3 Peter is speaking.
I am corking.
I must have been Society's Pet.
- 4 2 Great concert, that was!
3 Furious with me, they were.
4 My favourite singer, he is.
5 Awful, that must have been.
6 Terrible, she's feeling.

The use of *get*

- 5 This isn't my head I'm wearing now.
But people ... managed to calm him down.
She only became a little tiny bit annoyed.
I don't have a care in the world.
But we took you out, before he became really mad.

- 6 1 I don't think he got my letter.
- 2 She'll come and get you from the airport.
- 3 I realised later that I hadn't got the joke.
- 4 Tom has finally got his car fixed.
- 5 When are you going to get your hair cut?
- 6 Get her to stop singing in the shower, will you?

Literary analysis

Plot

- 1 Jim was going to hit Peter but people held him back in his chair.
The maitre d'hotel said they would close the hotel again if the noise continued.
Peter kept giving his food back to the waiter.
Peter provoked an old man and his friends took him outside.
Peter fell down on the sidewalk.
Peter and the girl took a taxi round the park. He told the young woman how he felt about her. He seems to remember very little.
- 2 (Suggested answer) The moment in the taxi when Peter told the girl about his feelings for her.
- 3 (Suggested answer) She is suggesting they keep their relationship secret. Perhaps she knows that Peter regrets saying what he did. Or perhaps he never said anything and she wants to use the power she now has over him to make him commit himself to her.
- 4 (Suggested answer) Perhaps the girl will continue her relentless pursuit of Peter. He will either allow himself to be 'caught' or try and escape from the relationship, depending on how he really feels about the girl.

Character

(Suggested answers)

- 5 The young man is pale, he moves carefully and he can't stop saying, *Oh, dear*. He is obviously in distress. The girl is clear-eyed, sits up straight and smiles brightly. She feels well and is in control.
- 6 She is determined to 'get her man' and appears bright and manipulative. She is very solicitous towards Peter and never reproaches him about his drinking. In fact, she offers him another drink at the start of their conversation. She cleverly tells Peter how badly he behaved while at the same time telling him that he was funny and charming. Having told him in detail about his behaviour, she then tells him how 'serious' he became in the taxi and hints that she will be extremely upset if he doesn't remember. This is a kind of blackmail. Perhaps she has no name because the writer wants us to see her as a 'type' of girl rather than a real individual.
- 7 Peter has probably been drunk before. There is a reference on page 104 to previous noisy parties: the maitre d'hotel *was afraid they'd close the place again ...*

- 8 Other characters mentioned are Jim Pierson, Elinor, other people in the restaurant, the maitre d'hotel, the waiter, and the old man that Peter took a dislike to. Jim and Elinor were at the same table as Peter and the girl. All the characters are used by the girl to show Peter how he behaved and to make him feel increasingly ashamed.

Narration

(Suggested answers)

- 9 It is obvious that Peter remembers very little of the night before. He is the victim of his own weakness. The girl 'tests' his memory by describing his behaviour in the restaurant. As he can't remember much about that, she then feels free to tell him how he revealed his feelings for her in the taxi. She is not explicit about what happened or what was said, so maybe not much happened at all.
- 10 The way Peter reacts to the girl's words suggests that he knows he behaved badly. He certainly believes he is capable of such behaviour. He asks if he was *very terrible* and if people are angry with him. His monosyllabic reaction to what happened in the taxi – *Yes. Great.* – suggest he is not very enthusiastic about the girl.
- 11 It is nearly all direct speech. This forces us to draw conclusions and make judgements based on the characters' words. We are given no 'help' from the author to understand or interpret events.
- 12 Jim and Elinor are probably annoyed with Peter, but may have experienced similar evenings before. The other people in the hotel will have been angry with the noise and singing – if, in fact, it all took place as the girl describes. The maitre d' probably needs the regular custom of the young people but at the same time he will not want to offend his other guests.

Atmosphere

(Suggested answers)

- 13 We know from the beginning of the story that Peter feels hung-over and suspects he behaved badly the night before. The girl, on the other hand, is bright-eyed and determined to take advantage of the situation. Her gradual revelation of the night's events and Peter's reactions provide the humour. He is ironic about his behaviour using phrases such as *my overwhelming success with the waiter; Society's Pet, I must have been; So I sang. That must have been a treat.*
- 14 The main characters are well-off financially and move in circles where people eat out frequently and drink a lot of alcohol. There is no mention of how they earn their living. Peter and the girl are probably in her apartment and again, there is no shortage of alcohol.
- 15 The humour of the situation depends to a certain extent on how far the reader is ready to tolerate Peter's heavy drinking. Some people may think he deserves all he gets and that if he has told the girl he loves her, it is his own fault.

Style

- 16 Peter: *pale, eased himself carefully into the low chair, rolled his head to one side; the cool chintz comforted his cheek and temple; 'Oh dear, oh dear...'*

The girl: *clear-eyed; sitting light and erect; smiled brightly.*

- 17 The girl speaks the most. Peter asks the most questions because he is trying to find out what happened the night before.

- 18 She wants us to interpret events through the characters' words without giving us clues as to what we should think.
- 19 Examples: *'Everybody thought you were terribly funny. Of course, Jim Pierson was a little stuffy, there, for a minute ...'*
'Everybody was crazy about you. The maitre d'hotel was a little worried ... but he really didn't mind.'
'There was that nasty stretch of ice on the sidewalk, and you did sit down awfully hard, you poor dear. But good heavens, that might have happened to anybody.'
The girl is apparently trying to make Peter feel better but in fact is making him feel worse.
- 20 Student's own answer

The Romantic

by Patricia Highsmith

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

Vocabulary connected with romantic relationships

1 steady, married, engaged, affair, pick her up, have a drink, play it cool, stood her up

Main themes

2, 3, 4 Student's own answers

Post-reading exercises

- 1 23. Her mother was ill and she went out to work to help with finances.
- 2 After an illness that lasted five years.
- 3 Very limited. There have been few boyfriends or parties.
- 4 She hopes for a different life – livelier and with more friends. This doesn't happen.
- 5 She is a secretary-typist at an agency that handles office space. She can meet men when she works at the reception desk.
- 6 He died of a heart attack when Isabel was 19. She misses him. She then had to look after her mother by herself.
- 7 She met a young man and talked to him for a few minutes. He did not ask her out as she hoped.
- 8 She invited Harriet and her fiancé and asked Harriet to also invite the young man. He did not turn up.
- 9 Romantic novels.
- 10 A client at the agency where Isabel works. She imagines him to be like one of the heroes in the romantic novels she reads.
- 11 He invites her to eat at the Brewery, a bar restaurant. They arrange to meet at 6.30.
- 12 Isabel sits at the bar, drinking by herself until five minutes to eight.
- 13 He tells Isabel that he was *stuck in a meeting* and couldn't leave to phone her.
- 14 Eva is a good friend of Isabel's mother. She brings Isabel a casserole that she has made.
- 15 She says she has extra work to do for the office.
- 16 She throws away some of her mother's old things and rearranges the furniture in the living room. In the evening, she goes out by herself to a bar.

- 17 Twice a week. They make her feel happier.
- 18 A client who has been at the office. He invites Isabel to go to a fish restaurant.
- 19 She goes to the restaurant but doesn't go inside. After a while, she decides to go home.
- 20 She tells herself that she prefers her own dates, since these are fantasy dates which she controls.

Language study

Grammar

Discourse markers

- 1 as it happened; 2 Anyway; 3 yet; 4 (as) for; 5 as it were; 6 Besides; 7 of course; 8 However

Vocabulary

Formal and informal vocabulary

- 2 1 embarked; 2 eccentric; 3 throwing out; 4 thereby; 5 escort; 6 beauty; 7 halitosis; 8 summoned; 9 occupied; 10 bearing

The use of *rather*

- 3 Incorrect sentences: 3, 7, 8

Clichés

- 4 1 She felt very happy
2 The perfect man for you; the person you want to spend your life with.
3 The man who comes and 'rescues' you from normal life and takes you into a world of romance.
- 5 1 Life is not always very pleasant.
2 You can't always obtain everything you want in life.
3 Be ambitious; have high aspirations.
4 Things are not as terrible as they seem
5 If you wait long enough, you will recover from even the most painful experiences.
6 My husband/wife.
7 Home is the best place to be.
8 Don't delay doing something; do it while you can.

Literary analysis

Plot

1 1e; 2b; 3g; 4h; 5c; 6i; 7d; 8a; 9f

(Suggested answers)

- 2 We don't know how badly Isabel is affected by her parents' deaths. Her father's death may have affected her more, as we know she misses him. Her relationship with her mother is more ambivalent. She is shocked at being stood up by Dudley Hall and it is this event which leads her to start her fantasy dates.
- 3 It is probably an accumulation of things: Isabel's loneliness, her parents' deaths, her addiction to romantic novels, pressure from her young friends, her failure to find a boyfriend, and finally Dudley Hall's rejection.
- 4 She wants to give an idea of the sort of place that Isabel has been tied to for so many years. It is old-fashioned and sombre and makes Isabel's life seem rather prison-like. Now, the things in the apartment have become Isabel's only company, since very few people go there. There is also a connection between some of the furniture and Isabel's mother (for example, her use of the word *settle*) which suggests that there were difficulties in the relationship between mother and daughter.
- 5 They are not harmless because they take Isabel further and further from reality and deeper into isolation. She is not relating to people but to her own fantasies.
- 6 There is no true love in Isabel's life, only the stories which she makes up in her head and partly acts out.
- 7 There are details which place the story in the time it was written, but the basic idea of someone going slowly mad as a result of loneliness and fear cannot be described as old-fashioned.

Character

8 (Suggested answers)

beautiful: *Isabel considered herself not a knock-out ... but not bad looking either* [page 121]. This describes someone who is attractive but not beautiful.

imaginative: Isabel spends a lot of time imagining what other people are doing (e.g. when she is waiting for Dudley) or imagining what will happen next (e.g. when she goes to meet Wilbur). A lot of her imaginings are shaped by what she reads.

hard-working: Isabel has looked after her sick mother and worked without a break since she left school. At work, she seems polite and efficient.

optimistic: Isabel's optimism is based on fantasy, so comes across as being very misguided.

polite: Isabel is polite to other people: she says it is *nice* of Eva to invite her and *nice* again of Wilbur to ask her out, even though she doesn't want to go. She is also polite when Dudley telephones with his rather weak excuses.

damaged: It seems likely that Isabel is emotionally damaged by the life she has led so far.

lonely: Isabel lives alone and does things by herself (e.g. she walks in the park, goes to the Metropolitan Museum).

unlucky: Isabel has lost both her parents at a young age and close together. She doesn't seem to have much luck with men either.

afraid: If Isabel is afraid, she keeps it hidden from the outside world. But she is afraid of real social contact (e.g. with Eva's family, or with Wilbur). In her head, she has an idea of how things should be. She is afraid of losing control.

brave: Isabel is brave in front of her colleagues and copes with her own loneliness by retreating into fantasy.

cynical: Isabel is not cynical. If she were, she would not have been so shocked by Dudley's rejection.

Other adjectives: vulnerable, independent, pleasant

- 9 She sees herself as someone who is not unattractive and who does all the right things to attract the opposite sex. She is not totally confident, however. When the girls at the office say she dresses in an old-fashioned way or is *too serious*, she listens to them. They know Isabel is not very worldly and hasn't had much experience with men.
- 10 Dudley Hall is tall and handsome. The way in which he invites Isabel out and his later phone call, show him to be a rather insensitive person who is perhaps used to getting his own way. Wilbur Miller isn't tall or handsome, but seems like a more genuine person than Dudley (*he had an openness and informality ... unlike most New Yorkers*). She doesn't keep her date because she prefers her fantasy dates to the real thing.
- 11 Isabel's father is described as *modest* and hard-working: he does extra hours at work in order to pay for his wife's care. We know he is affectionate towards Isabel. Isabel's relationship with her mother is not so clear. The opening paragraph of the story tells us that Isabel feels her life will change for the better with her mother gone; we also learn that her mother was old-fashioned in her tastes regarding home furnishings: *the nutty little "settles" as her mother had called them* [page 118]. It isn't clear whether Isabel misses her mother, but she is mentioned largely in the context of the apartment and its old furniture [page 129].
- 12 Eva would probably be the most sympathetic, since we know she is concerned about Isabel. The girls at work are not unkind, but they probably regard Isabel as a little strange.
- 13 Isabel's obsessions are the same as the other young women's: boyfriends, her appearance, and marriage. She tries to be like them but she has been more sheltered and restricted in her home life. She has also suffered a lot of pain.
- 14 She seems to be saying that we can never really know what a person is like. Someone can appear to be 'normal' on the surface but be capable of extraordinary behaviour.

Narration

(Suggested answers)

- 15 On the surface, this is a story about a young girl who loves romantic novels and is looking for Mr Right. We are given details of Isabel's apartment, her job, and her social life. Her conversation is polite and she seems pleasant. Nothing is out of the ordinary. However, Isabel is traumatised and isolated and it takes just one incident to unbalance her and change her life.
- 16 Two examples are when Isabel is waiting for Dudley and she looks at her watch: *A painful shock went through her and she almost shuddered* [page 126]. This is preceded by Isabel's happy anticipation and a description of the sights and sounds of the bar. Another dramatic moment is when the telephone conversation between Dudley and Isabel ends suddenly, leaving Isabel in shock [page 127]. A mixture of dialogue and description highlights the difference between what Isabel says and what she actually feels.

- 17 Highsmith wants to tell us about Isabel without explaining her motives. This creates more suspense because we are not sure what is going to happen next. Isabel acts from a variety of motives. The things that happen to her combine with her personality and cause a reaction. Highsmith shows us what happens and does not draw conclusions or moralise.
- 18 People are walking with their children and pets. Isabel's eyes are drawn to the children learning to walk, *their hands held by their fathers and mothers* [page 127]. This emphasises Isabel's isolation and the fact that she has lost her parents.
- 19 *Dudley Hall; Isabel didn't say a word* [page 123]. Short sentences often say something important. In this example, Isabel is overwhelmed by Dudley but typically says nothing.
Isabel missed her father; Isabel read a lot; Isabel didn't go. The first two sentences are vital clues to Isabel's behaviour. The last sentence is important because it marks Isabel's retreat into fantasy.

Atmosphere

- 20 Isabel is a young girl who is very vulnerable but appears normal to other people. Even her fantasy dates are 'harmless', at least to other people. If we saw Isabel in a bar we wouldn't think there was anything wrong with her. Highsmith makes the reader feel that, given certain circumstances, almost anyone could behave like this.
- 21 Isabel's flat: full of old-fashioned furniture; not small but with a claustrophobic feel.
The office: large, with a reception desk and several offices; run by men; all the girls are typists or secretaries; the boss seems kind if condescending.
The Brewery: quite smart, good food, soft music; Isabel is so comfortable there, she forgets about time; the other bars she visits are similar.
The park: sunny, lots of trees, full of families; a lonely place for Isabel.
- 22 Isabel's inner monologue is influenced by her reading and is full of heightened emotion. She feels a *pang* when she sees Dudley. She wonders if someone could be Mr Right, she feels *in the clouds* etc. Her inner world is much more turbulent than her conversations suggest. She is polite and controlled: when Eva asks her if she is lonely, she tells her firmly that she isn't. She does not confide in anyone.
- 23 Student's own answer

Style

- 24 a 'Nice?' Eva **frowned**.
b Another, one of many, odd usage of her mother's.
- 25 (Suggested answers)
- a Highsmith describes Isabel's thought processes moving from one thing to another: she thinks of different reasons for Dudley's lateness and develops them in her imagination; she imagines what he will say when he arrives. She observes the décor of the bar', checks her appearance and thinks about what might happen after the date.
- b As it gets later, she admits to herself that he might not want to see her, though she is reluctant to admit this: *Up to then, she had been able to believe he was just a little late ... Isabel realized that he might not be arriving ... Isabel imagined a broken leg ... a mugging... She knew these possibilities were most unlikely* [page 126]. However, after the phone call, and despite evidence to the contrary, Isabel convinces herself that Dudley had intended to meet her and had really been unable to escape from the meeting: *Dudley had meant to keep [the date], she was sure ... Isabel believed that he had been tied up* [page 127]. Fantasy has taken over from imagination.

- 26 Isabel does not laugh about the bedpans with Eva, but her mother's death is recent and perhaps it is too soon to view anything connected with her illness as humorous. The remarks about personal hygiene are perhaps the nearest Highsmith gets to humour: *She had, of course, checked herself for as long as she could remember for the usual faults, body odour or bad breath, or hair on the legs. Very important, those little matters* [page 121].
- 27 When Isabel has spent an hour waiting for Dudley, she looks at her watch: *A painful shock went through her, making her almost shudder* [page 127]. At the end of her phone call with Dudley: *They hung up, leaving Isabel with a sense of shock, not knowing how the last few seconds had passed...* [page 127]. The word *shock* shows how strongly Isabel has been affected.

Full Circle

by Edith Wharton

Pre-reading exercises

Key vocabulary

Geoffrey Betton's apartment

- 1 1 apartment; 2 breakfast tray; 3 cigarette-box; 4 dressing-room; 5 luncheon; 6 valet; 7 porcelain; 8 correspondence

Upper class speech

- 2 1d; 2c; 3f; 4b; 5e; 6g; 7i; 8a; 9j; 10h
- 3 a) the deuce; b) my dear fellow; c) awfully jolly; d) capitally; e) By George; f) the devil; g) chap; h) twaddle; i) poor devil; j) bosh

Feelings and attitudes

- 4 1 conduct; 2 yearnings; 3 rancour; 4 magnanimity; 5 joy; 6 composure

Main themes

Fame and fortune

- 5 (Suggested answers)
- a He really enjoys his wealth and the luxury it brings.
 - b The recognition and the praise.
 - c Yes, he can be patronising and self-centred.
 - d Yes, they tend to treat him with more respect and deference.

Deceit and self-deceit

- 6 (Suggested answers)
- a Betton deceives Vyse and Vyse deceives Betton.
 - b Betton because of his sense of pride, and Vyse because he needs the job.
 - c Student's own answer

Self-esteem

- 7 (Suggested answers)
- a Vyse
 - b This is open to interpretation. Both Betton and Vyse have problems with self-esteem, but both can also be arrogant about their writing abilities.
 - c Betton

Post-reading exercises

Understanding the story

Part I

- 1 In bed.
- 2 He had prepared his morning bath, lit a fire, put his cigarette box at his side and opened the window.
- 3 The noises of the busy street outside.
- 4 He doesn't like them. They remind him of the busy day he has ahead of him.
- 5 He used to go to work in an office, now he works from home.
- 6 He wrote a successful novel.
- 7 His readers.
- 8 To tell him what they thought of his book.
- 9 He enjoyed receiving them.
- 10 The recognition and the praise.
- 11 Being asked to sign photographs and autographs and attend public events.
- 12 Because he enjoyed the attention and the fame.
- 13 He isn't looking forward to reading and answering the readers' letters.
- 14 An old friend he hasn't seen in some time.
- 15 To apply for the job as secretary.
- 16 He had offered to show his novel to a publisher.
- 17 He kept forgetting to do it.
- 18 He might have become a successful, famous novelist.
- 19 Yes.
- 20 Not really, except that he looked poorer and had less hair.
- 21 He had got fatter.
- 22 Answer the letters from his readers.
- 23 Because he is such a good writer and is probably looking for something better.
- 24 Because he needs the money.
- 25 Because of the kind of thing his readers write in their letters.

Part II

- 26 20.
- 27 For a ride.
- 28 To make sure he was writing the right kind of thing in his replies.
- 29 Some small changes to the tone.
- 30 Yes.
- 31 Because he wanted to read them, to see what his readers were saying about him.
- 32 Because he didn't have to answer them himself.
- 33 That Vyse isn't showing him the less interesting letters.
- 34 Because fewer letters are arriving than he had expected.
- 35 Because his second novel is not as successful as his first one.
- 36 He doesn't want Vyse to read the negative comments and criticisms. He doesn't want Vyse to know his novel is a failure.
- 37 Because he didn't help him with his novel when they were younger.
- 38 Because he wants to fire him.
- 39 Because he has no clothes to wear for dinner.
- 40 That he is poor.
- 41 Because things might have been different if he had helped Vyse with his first novel.

Part III

- 42 Because he thinks that sooner or later they will stop arriving completely.
- 43 Because it would be like telling him that his novel was a failure.
- 44 To start writing letters to himself.
- 45 Because more letters have started to arrive.
- 46 Because he thinks they are funny. They seem very short to him, considering that they were written by women.
- 47 One of the women who wrote the short letters.
- 48 Because he liked the way she wrote.
- 49 It was sent back to him.
- 50 Because the handwriting is the same and the same phrases are used again and again.

51 He says he thinks Strett, the valet, may have written them.

52 He laughs.

Part IV

53 He is disappointed.

54 Uncomfortable. He doesn't want to lose his job.

55 That some readers read more slowly and more carefully.

56 They are of a better quality.

57 Because he is jealous and thinks that Vyse may start writing to his readers in his own name.

58 Because he praises his book and his writing.

59 Because he thinks she understands him and he is attracted to her.

60 That it was impossible.

61 Maybe he thought she was just shy.

62 Because his father was ill.

63 Because he could read his letters without showing them to Vyse.

64 He went to the library to open his mail.

65 A letter from the Dead Letter Office.

66 That Vyse has been writing the letters.

67 That she might have gone away.

68 Of writing the letters.

69 He thinks that Vyse wrote the letters because he felt sorry for Betton. He could see that the novel was a failure and that Betton was disappointed so he wrote the letters to make him feel better.

70 He laughs.

71 He needs the job and the money.

Language study

Vocabulary

Quantity described in terms of water or rain

- 1 Student's own answer
- 2 1 deluge; 2 swamped; 3 flooded; 4 shower; 5 gush; 6 submerge

Praise and recognition described in terms of food and eating

- 3 1 appetite; 2 craving; 3 gulp; 4 hunger; 5 palate; 6 savour
- 4 1 We have yet to experience the sweet smell of success.
2 The public's appetite for celebrity gossip seems insatiable.
3 The senator talked about America's hunger for leadership.
4 He craved for the attention of the older children.
- 5 He found the criticism hard to swallow.
- 6 People are hungry for news.
- 7 Even at a young age he had a taste for books.
- 8 After 16 years in prison, it was their first taste of freedom.

Student's own answer

Formal language

- 5 1 handwriting; 2 show you, examples; 3 want; 4 told, be back, work; 5 time, chose, come; 6 understood, help
- 7 (Suggested answers)
 - 1 Betton began to wonder if Vyse were choosing to keep back the letters he thought were least important.
 - 2 The secretary, who had suddenly found out about his father's illness, asked to take two weeks off work.
 - 3 It said nothing, however indirectly, about his request.
 - 4 It was the worst part of his situation that his first success had made him continue with this foolishness.
 - 5 For ten days he enjoyed the secret pleasure of being the first person to read his letters.

Idiomatic expressions

- 8 1 drive at something; 2 dread the sight of; 3 an eye for an eye; 4 at the mercy of something; 5 put someone on their guard; 6 see straight through something; 7 strike a note/the right note; 8 stone/stoney broke
- 9 1 strike, note; 2 stone/stoney broke; 3 driving at; 4 an eye for an eye; 5 dreaded the sight; 6 at the mercy; 7 saw straight through; 8 put him on his guard

Literary analysis

Plot

1 h, f, g, i, a, b, d, e, c, j, k

2, 3, 4, 5 Student's own answers

Character

6 Betton, Vyse and Strett. Betton and Vyse were at university together. Betton became a famous writer, Vyse failed to make a living through his writing. Strett is Betton's valet and one of the symbols of his success. Betton is the main character.

7 Betton: affable, furious, high-coloured, stout, well-fed

Vyse: calm, hard-up, pale, shabby, truculent, starved, thin

Strett: devoted, watchful

affable/truculent; calm/furious; high-coloured/pale; stout/thin; well-fed/starved

Student's own answer

8, 9, 10, 11 Student's own answers

Narration

12 An anonymous third-person narrator who does not introduce him/herself. Student's own answer

13 No. The narrator mainly reports Betton's point of view. The narrator does not report the thoughts and feelings of the other characters.

14 Betton. Betton is socially superior to the others. He is in charge and he is also the centre of attention. The story revolves around him.

15, 16 Student's own answers

Style

17 *languidly, sensuous joy, renovating*

The words convey a sense of luxury.

18 1 the sounds from the street; orchestral music; complexity and pleasure; that it has changed recently

2 Betton's free time; a pack of hunting dogs; stress and worry; that he has a busy schedule

3 the bathroom; a temple, a sacred place of worship; peace and purity; that he enjoys this bathtime luxury

4 as 3

19, 20 Student's own answers

21 Betton. Vyse. Because he has become a famous writer and Vyse hasn't. Uncomfortable and possibly patronised, but he needs the job. Student's own answer

22 Student's own answer