

As english short stories summary



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

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These notes are intended to give some background information on each
author and/or story as an aid to further research and to stimulate discussion
in the classroom. They are intended only as a starting point and are no
substitute for the teacher's and student's own study and exploration of the
texts. Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) The Fall of the House of Usher This is one
of the most famous gothic stories from one of the masters of the genre and
contains many of the traditional elements of the genre, including horror,
death, medievalism, an ancient building and signs of great psychological
disturbance. The mood of oppressive melancholy is established at the
opening of the story and here readers may note an acknowledgement of the
appeal of gothic fiction: while there is fear and horror, the shudder is 'thrilling'
and the 'sentiment' is 'half-pleasurable'. At the centre of the story
are mysteries, about the psychological state of Usher himself and about his
sister's illness and death.

The story only offers hints and suggestions; there is an ‘oppressive secret’, while the sister, buried in a strangely secure vault, returns as if risen from the dead to claim her brother. In archetypal gothic fashion, a raging storm of extreme violence mirrors the destruction of the family and its ancestral home. Horror stories and horror films continue to have wide popular appeal and it is worth considering why this is so, and in what ways this story fulfils the appeal of the horror story. Why are Usher’s and his sister’s maladies never identified? What does Madeline’s escape from the vault suggest?

Wider reading Other gothic tales by Poe include *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*. *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill Compare with *The Door in the Wall* by HG Wells *The Hollow of the Three Hills* by Nathaniel Hawthorne *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman Online Biographical material and a searchable list of works can be found at: <http://www.online-literature.com/poe/> Stephen Crane (1871-1900) *The Open Boat* This story is based on Crane’s own experience, when as a war correspondent, the boat he was travelling on to Cuba sank.

He and others spent a number of days drifting in a small boat before reaching land. The story explores the fortitude of men in a shared plight and their companionship in the face of danger. The narrative style is factual and plain, perhaps mirroring the honest practicality of the men in the boat whose story is being narrated. It engenders an admiration of the skilled seamanship and calm demonstrated by the seamen. The drama in the story comes from the waves; the seamen converse, swap roles and encourage each other under the guidance of the captain.

When they eventually reach shore, death comes to one of them, who is ‘ randomly’ chosen. Without obviously aiming for pathos, Crane achieves it with the oiler’s death. The story, like the seamen, betrays ‘ no hurried words, no pallor, no plain agitation’, but achieves a real sense of loss at its conclusion. Wider reading The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane Typhoon by Joseph Conrad Compare with The Fall of the House of Usher by Edgar Allen Poe How it Happened by Arthur Conan Doyle Real Time by Amit Chaudhuri Online Biographical material and a searchable list of works can be found at: <http://www.nline-literature.com/crane/> HG Wells (1866-1946) The Door in the Wall As well as famous novels such as The War of the Worlds and The Time Machine, HG Wells wrote numerous short stories, many of which show the author’s interest in fantasy and the improbable, but a feature of the stories is the way in which Wells creates a sense of truthfulness in his narratives. This was demonstrated when a radio broadcast of an adaptation of The War of the Worlds in 1938 caused panic in New York, and can also be seen in the narrator’s concern with the truth of the story at the beginning of The Door in the Wall.

Here the narrator is retelling the story of someone else, who in turn tells it to him with ‘ such direct simplicity of conviction’. This creates a tension which remains throughout the story, which on the one hand is ‘ frankly incredible’ while we are assured that ‘ it was a true story’. The temporary childhood escape into the paradisiacal garden is evoked with nostalgic longing, but remains inexplicable. The character’s final death leaves questions for the reader; it is either another inexplicable event, or some kind of solution to the mystery.

Wider reading Try either of the novels listed above, or other short stories by Wells, such as *The Country of the Blind* or *The Diamond Maker*. Compare with *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allen Poe *The Signalman* by Charles Dickens *The Moving Finger* by Edith Wharton Online Wells' biography and a searchable list of works can be found at: <http://www.online-literature.com/wellshg/> An account of the New York panic can be found at:

<http://history1900s.about.com/od/1930s/a/warofworlds.htm> Maurice Shadbolt (1932-1985) *The People Before*

Maurice Shadbolt is one of the towering figures of New Zealand literature, winning numerous awards and accolades for his work, much of which examines the history of the country through narrative. The central characters in this story are carving out a farming existence on the land, and the importance of land ownership to the family is made apparent in a number of phrases in the story. The narrator tells us that 'my father took on that farm', he refers to the importance of 'Land of your own,' which becomes 'your own little kingdom'.

The suggestions of the history of the land come through the discovery of the greenstone adzes and attitudes to the land are brought to the fore with the visit of the Maori group. Although Shadbolt characterises Tom Taikaka as pleasant, courteous and patient, there is the constant underlying acknowledgement of the Europeans' displacing of the Maori from their land. Jim's attempt at restoring the greenstone to Tom is symbolic of an attempt at restitution, and the reader is left to interpret Tom's reluctant refusal.

The return of the Maori elder to the land in death, and his disappearance, is another indication of his unity with the landscape and again demonstrates the different attitudes to land held by the Maoris and the Europeans, attitudes which remain polarised in the brothers at the end of the story.

Wider reading Strangers and Journeys or The Lovelock Version by Maurice Shadbolt Playing Waterloo by Peter Hawes Compare with Journey by Patricia Grace Her First Ball by Katherine Mansfield The Enemy by VS Naipaul Online Biographical information and a critical review of Shadbolt's work is available at: <http://www.ookcouncil.org.nz/writers/shadboltm.html> This newspaper obituary is also interesting: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article497710>.

RK Narayan (1906-2001) A Horse and Two Goats Narayan has written numerous novels and short stories, many of them set in Malgudi, a fictional but typical small Indian town. His characters are invariably ordinary people finding their route through Indian life. Although A Horse and Two Goats makes no reference to Malgudi itself, it is typical of these stories, as Muni tries to live and ease the burden of his poverty.

The story is narrated with the non-judgemental understanding and gentle humour typical of Narayan's writing. The narration emphasises the insignificance of the village, and by implication the insignificance of its central character, who is coping with poverty and domestic struggle and seeks to ease his way by deceit and invention. The big deceit of the story, though, happens through misunderstanding and without Muni's volition, Narayan creating comedy through the two parallel lines of attempted dialogue between Muni and the American tourist.

Within the comedy, though, Narayan shows the different values of the two, the American's dialogue concerned with acquisition and possessions, while Muni is concerned with history and spirituality. Wider reading *The Guide* (novel) and *Malgudi Days* (short stories) by RK Narayan Kanthapura by Raja Rao Compare with *Games at Twilight* by Anita Desai *Of White Hairs and Cricket* by Rohinton Mistry Online Information about RK Narayan is available at: [http://www. eng. fju. edu. tw/worldlit/india/narayan. html](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/worldlit/india/narayan.html) Patricia Grace (1937-) *Journey*

Patricia Grace's first novel, *Mutuwhenua*, was significant in being the first novel published by a woman Maori writer, and she has become an important figure in Maori writing in English in New Zealand. *Journey* shows her interest in the Maoris' traditional claims on land. The rather dislocated narrative, with limited punctuation and no speech markings, creates the effect of creating the old man's perspective, although the narrative is written in the third person. This old man's perspective, with its old Maori wisdom, is shown to be out of balance with 'these young people', the 'cars and railways', the new housing and the growth of the city.

His journey into the city makes him feel more and more alienated, and this is accentuated when the narrative is interspersed with the interview dialogue. The official and the old man cannot make each other understand. There is no comprehension on either side of the other's view of how land should be used, and the story ends with frustration, violence and disillusion. In this story, Grace suggests that traditional Maori governance of land has no place in modern government and planning. Wider reading

Mutuwhenua (novel) or The Dream Sleepers and Other Stories (short stories) by Patricia Grace Playing Waterloo by Peter Hawes The Bone People by Keri Hulme Compare with The People Before by Maurice Shadbolt To Da-duh, In Memoriam by Paule Marshall Online Biographical and other information about Patricia Grace is available at: <http://www.artsfoundation.org.nz/patricia.html> Paule Marshall (1929-) To Da-Duh, In Memoriam The narrator in this story remembers her visit from New York to her mother's home country, which to her is the 'alien sight and sounds of Barbados'.

The story hinges on the relationship formed between the young girl and her grandmother, Da-duh of the title. While the Caribbean is unfamiliar to the young girl, who sees it as 'some dangerous place', Da-duh wants to show off its qualities, and a competition is established between the girl and the grandmother, between youth and age, between modernity and tradition and between New York and Barbados, which culminates in the girl's assertion of the height of the Empire State Building, which dwarfs all that Da-duh shows her.

The young girl's triumph, however, is tempered at the end of the story by 'the shadow' of Da-duh's death. Wider reading This story is taken from Merle and Other Stories by Paule Marshall. Compare with Journey by Patricia Grace Online Information about Paule Marshall is available at: http://www.answers.com/topic/paule_marshall Rohinton Mistry (1952-) Of White Hairs and Cricket This story's concern with age and mortality is reflected in the structure, beginning with the removal of the narrator's father's white hairs and moving to what seems to be his friend's father's terminal illness.

In the space of the story the narrator has his own recognition of mortality and emerges from boyhood into the adult world. He moves from considering distasteful his task of removing his father's white hairs to a full awareness of the process of ageing which he 'is powerless to stop'. There are other signs of this process throughout the story: the loss of the childhood cricket matches, the increasing frailty of Mamaiji, the father's vain hope of a new job. It is the encounter with the friend Viraf, Dr Sidhwa and the glimpse of Viraf's father which gives the narrator his epiphanic moment.

Wider reading This story is taken from the collection *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories*. You could also try the novel *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry. *Malgudi Days* by RK Narayan *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy Compare with *A Horse and Two Goats* by RK Narayan *To Da-duh, In Memoriam* by Paule Marshall *The Enemy* by VS Naipaul *Games at Twilight* by Anita Desai Online Biographical material is available at: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth73> Ahdaf Soueif (1950-)

Sandpiper The narrator in this story is unwilling to disturb even 'one grain of sand', and this reflects her passivity as her relationship with her husband breaks down under cultural pressures. The relationship with him is carefully charted, almost historically, but it is significant that he is never named, and a sense of loss grows at the centre of the narrative. The narrative structure includes disconcerting juxtapositions between memory and the present to show the narrator's state of mind.

The narrative describes a love between the two formed elsewhere; it is the return to the husband's country which creates the cultural and family

pressures on the relationship, including the loss of female independence, work and identity, which cause the couple to drift apart. Such concerns of conflicting cultural pressures are perhaps a natural concern of an author born and educated in Egypt, before continuing education in England. She now divides her time between Cairo and London. Wider reading This story is taken from a collection of short stories by Ahdaf Soueif, also called Sandpiper.

The Map of Love is a novel which deals with a love affair between an Egyptian and an English woman. The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy Compare with To Da-duh, In Memoriam by Paule Marshall The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman Five-Twenty by Patrick White Online Biographical information about Ahdaf Soueif is available at: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth227> Adam Thorpe (1956-) Tyres The narrative of Tyres is set against the tension of German-occupied France during the Second World War, where relationships are strained, little can be openly communicated and suspicion is rife.

The brutality of war suddenly intervenes in the middle of the story with the killing of the suspected members of the French Resistance movement (the Maquis) and the villagers forced to view the bodies, their 'guts...literally looped and dripping almost to the floor', before the hanging of the ringleader from the village bridge. Set against this is the gradually developing love affair between the young lad learning to maintain vehicles in his father's garage and the girl who cycles past each day.

The young man's narration leads the reader gradually to his final act of involvement with the resistance against the Germans and its effects; ill-luck seems to be the cause of guilt, and the final revelation of the age of the narrator shows how long that guilt and fidelity has lasted. In this story, Thorpe sets ordinariness – working on cars, changing tyres, a developing relationship – against extraordinariness – the Second World War and German occupation – to create a small poignant story of war.

Wider reading This story comes from Adam Thorpe's short story collection Shifts. His novel Ulverton is a collection of very different narratives which piece together the long history of an English village. Compare with To Dahduh, In Memoriam By Paule Marshall The Moving Finger by Edith Wharton The Taste of Watermelon by Borden Deal Online Biographical information and a review of Adam Thorpe's work is available at: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth95>