

# The ideal family: interpretation essay sample

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The story under study was written by Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), a British novelist and short-story writer, closely associated with D. H. Lawrence and something of a rival of Virginia Woolf. Mansfield's creative years were burdened with loneliness, illness, jealousy, alienation – all this reflected in her work with the bitter depiction of marital and family relationships of her middle-class characters, as well as subtle changes in human behavior. Our task is now to see whether or not this story, “ The Ideal Family,” is an exception. To begin with, I'd like to attract your attention to the title. At first sight, it's quite clear in meaning, as the story itself is indeed about a family that everyone considered to be an exemplary one: so happy and united it seemed. But, as a matter of fact, this prosperity was apparent, and the family with so many problems as the one spoken about can only ironically be called “ ideal.” In this respect, the title is closely related to the major theme of the story, which can be formulated as an opposition of semblance and real facts, following that “ all is not gold that glitters,” as the famous proverb warns. At this point, I'd like to introduce you the plot itself.

In “ The Ideal Family” we're told about an episode from the life of Mr. Neave, a formerly successful businessman, who is now about to retire. The old gentleman is dissatisfied with life: his only son Harold, who is going to become his successor in business, is spoiled and unworthy of this position, while his wife Charlotte and their daughters are only concerned about fashion and entertainment. Mr. Neave, who has worked hard to afford them the luxury they have now, feels abandoned and neglected. However, his adult children are so smart and attractive, and his wife Charlotte seems to be such a remarkable woman, that their family is thought to be “ an ideal one.”

As we can see, the text can easily be divided into several logical parts.

Exposition comes with the description of Mr. Neave's feelings about spring and the current situation in his life; this is followed by a conflict, when the old man thinks about his depraved son and his daughters' carelessness. The episode describing the way the family treated the hero when he returned home from work can be referred to suspense, and climax takes place when Mr. Neave is left alone in the music room. Finally, the gentleman has to break his reflection and come to dinner - that's the denouement of the story.

This text mostly consists of narration, but there're large pieces of description here as well, introduced to display the hero's thoughts and emotions together with the setting of the story. Besides, there's also a dialogue between the main characters, which helps us better understand what kind of people the members of this family are. As for the narration, it's carried from the 3rd person, or from the so-called " God's view," usually used to create the sense of impartiality; but here so much reported inner speech (Well, well! H'm, h'm! Strange! Enjoying himself! My treasure! Perhaps so..."), so many parentheses (" No business - not even asuccessful, established, big paying concern.., " whatever she said - even if it was only " Jam, please, father" ..., " their hydrangeas—famous in the town") and rhetorical questions (" Where had he been?", " Who was he?", " But if that were true, why didn't Charlotte or the girls stop him?

Why was he all alone, climbing up and down? Where was Harold?"), that we are presented the whole situation from Mr. Neave's point of view, as he's in the centre of the author's attention. Actually the old man is a round and dynamic character, very old little withered man, generous and dignified, but <https://assignbuster.com/the-ideal-family-interpretation-essay-sample/>

ignored and completely tired out, which results in his inner tragedy. Nothing of this can be said about the members of his family, who are described rather one-sidedly. This concerns, for instance, Harold Neave, "too handsome, too handsome by far," who was made "a young god" of, what made him haughty, conceited and self-seeking, so that he has "only to look and to smile," and thus achieves everything. His sisters are in fact no better than him: smart, good-looking and rather carefree and small-minded, they are totally indifferent to their father's hardships. All this is described in a very imaginative formal language, abundant of various stylistic means, so typical of Katherine Mansfield's prose.

Thus, I'd like to pay your attention to the way the hero's feelings are opposed to the atmosphere around him, expressed by a number of epithets: a passer-by will see "a fine mild evening" and "the golden light" of the sun, feel "warm, eager and restless spring" coming, and hear "the soft churr of the mower", while to Mr. Neave, the sun is "curiously cold," the air is "heavy and solid." The old man's bitterness is increased by the fact that "he couldn't meet" this spring, "he couldn't square up once more and stride off, he hadn't the energy, he hadn't the heart to stand this gaiety any longer"; for this purpose repetitions and parallel constructions are used. Here in the text one may also find a great number of similes ("He stumped along, lifting his knees high as if he were walking through air", "solid like water", "she breathed as though she had come running through the dark", "a cry like a sob", "it rang out as though she were on the stage") and groups of synonyms ("His life's work was slipping away, dissolving, disappearing" "

the dark porch... drooped sorrowful, mournful”) to increase figurativeness of the language, so that we could imagine the characters and the situations.

To sum it all up, I'd like to add some words concerning my impression. First of all, I should say that, unfortunately, such situations, when elderly people are abandoned and even despised by their children, take place every time and everywhere even nowadays; so the problem raised by Katherine Mansfield is still topical. In addition, this work is one more demonstration that one should never believe reputations, as every family has a skeleton in its cupboard.