Questions

**Short Story Series**

**About Short Stories**

Short stories date back to oral storytelling traditions. The precursors of short stories were legends, mythic tales, folk tales, fairy tales, fables and anecdotes found in ancient literature across the world.

Short stories were not generally regarded as a distinct literary form before the 19th century. Since the emergence of modern literature in the 19th century, a short story has generally been defined as a piece of prose fiction that can be read in one sitting. It usually deals with only a few characters and focuses on a self-contained event or a few connected incidents, with the intent of evoking a "single effect" or mood. The form encourages economy of setting, concise narrative and selection of salient and evocative details.

Reading English short stories can increase our cultural knowledge. The five stories selected in this series are works of famous English, American and Russian writers. The stories are tasters that guide readers into their larger body of work.

* **The Three Questions by Leo Tolstoy**
* **The Haunted House by Virginia Woolf**
* **Witches’ Loaves by O. Henry**
* **The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde**
* **About Barbers by Mark Twain**

**The Three Questions**

*Leo Tolstoy*

Leo Tolstoy (9 September, 1820 – 20 November, 1910) was a Russian writer who is regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times. He is best known for the novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but he also wrote dozens of inspiring, thought-provoking short stories, such as “The Three Questions”.

Read the story from the link below and answer the following questions:



https://qrgo.page.link/6iUPt

1. Which of the following is NOT what the king wanted to know?
2. the best time to do something
3. the easiest way to do something
4. the right people to attend to
5. the most important thing to do
6. Why did the king want to find out the answers to the three questions?
7. The learned men told the king to find the answers.
8. The king wanted to get a great reward.
9. The king wanted to succeed in everything he did.
10. The king wanted to please his councillors.
11. Why did the king decide to see the hermit?
12. The hermit was famous for being wise.
13. The king wanted to leave his bodyguard behind.
14. The king got confused about the different answers to the three questions he heard.
15. The king wanted to hide from his enemy.
16. (i) and (ii)
17. (i) and (iii)
18. (ii) and (iii)
19. (ii) and (iv)
20. Which of the following is NOT true about the bearded man?
21. He was wounded by the king’s bodyguard.
22. He initially planned to kill the king but made peace with him at last.
23. He was thankful to the king for saving his life.
24. He used to be the king’s faithful slave but the king executed his brother.
25. Put the events in the correct order based on the story.
26. The king helped the hermit with digging, seeing that he was tired and weak.
27. A wounded man appeared and the king and hermit cared for him together.
28. The hermit greeted the king and went on digging the ground in front of his hut.
29. The king got the answers to his three questions.
30. The king forgave the bearded man and befriended him.
31. (iii) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (v) 🡺 (iv)
32. (iii) 🡺(iv) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (v) 🡺 (ii)
33. (iii) 🡺 (ii) 🡺(i) 🡺 (iv) 🡺 (v)
34. (iii) 🡺 (iv) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (v) 🡺 (i)
35. Complete the following table with the hermit’s answers to the three questions:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Questions | Answers |
|  | The most important time |  |
|  | The most important man/necessary person |  |
|  | The most important affair/business |  |

1. Which of the following adjectives does not describe the king?
2. compassionate
3. forgiving
4. open-minded
5. proud
6. Which of the following is the theme of the story?
7. revenge
8. kindness
9. power
10. survival
11. “The Three Questions” is often described as an allegory. Which of the following is the most appropriate definition of an allegory?
12. a story that reveals a hidden meaning or moral
13. a story that tends to personify animals and objects
14. a story that is short and clearly structured
15. a story that shows the conflict between individual and society
16. Which of the following events is the climax (i.e. the most exciting part/a major turning point) of the story?
17. Different people gave the king diverse answers to his questions.
18. The king dressed as a commoner to see the hermit.
19. The king encountered the bearded man and cared for him
20. The king got the answers to his three questions from the hermit.

**Extension: Think and Share**

1. If you were the king, would you be satisfied with the hermit’s answers and give him the reward? Why or why not?
2. Of the three answers, which one do you agree with the most? Explain with an example from your personal experience.

**The Haunted House**

*Virginia Woolf*

Virginia Woolf (25 January, 1882 – 28 March, 1941) was an important modernist writer of the 20th century. She was also a pioneer in the use of stream of consciousness, a narrative technique that captures characters’ flow of thoughts. Woolf was a novelist, short story writer, essayist and a critic and her works were widely translated. Her most notable works include *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The short story “The Haunted House” first appeared in Woolf’s short-story collection *Monday or Tuesday* (1921).

Read the story from the link below and answer the following questions:



https://qrgo.page.link/eCGrJ

1. Who is the narrator of the short story?
2. an independent third person
3. the husband/wife of the living couple
4. the ghost wife
5. the ghost husband
6. Where was the story set?
7. the farm
8. the drawing room
9. the bedroom
10. the couple’s house
11. Which of the following is NOT a moment when the narrator could feel the presence of the ghosts?
12. waking from sleep
13. having dinner
14. reading a book
15. sleeping
16. Why did the ghost couple linger around the house?
17. to regain the house they had lost
18. to take revenge on the living couple
19. to find their fond and loving memories
20. to re-unite with each other
21. (i) and (ii)
22. (ii) and (iv)
23. (iii) and (iv)
24. (i) and (iv)
25. Which of the following does not describe the mood/atmosphere of the story?
26. horrifying
27. dreamy
28. uncanny
29. light-hearted
30. Identify the themes of the story.
31. love
32. loss
33. commitment
34. justice
35. (i) & (ii)
36. (i) & (iv)
37. (i), (ii) & (iii)
38. all of the above
39. Match the following figures of speech/literary devices with the right examples from the story. In one example, more than one literary device is used.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. simile | 1. metaphor | 1. personification |
| 1. repetition | 1. alliteration | 1. parallelism |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Sentence from the Story | Figure of Speech  (Write the letter only) |
|  | Death was the glass; death was between us. |  |
|  | The candle burns stiff and still. |  |
|  | The doors go shutting far in the distance, gently knocking like the pulse of a heart. |  |
|  | The wind drives straightly; the flame stoops slightly. |  |
|  | * “Safe, safe, safe,” the pulse of the house beats softly. * “Safe, safe, safe,” the pulse of the house beats gladly. * “Safe, safe, safe,” the heart of the house beats proudly. * “Safe, safe, safe,” the pulse of the house beats wildly. |  |

1. Line breaks and length of sentences are stylistic features that help to convey meaning and achieve effects in a literary text. Read the following excerpt:

|  |
| --- |
| “Here we slept,” she says. And he adds, “kisses without number.”  “Waking in the morning—” “Silver between the trees—” “Upstairs—” “In the garden—” “When summer came—” “In winter snowtime—” The doors go shutting far in the distance, gently knocking like the pulse of a heart.  Nearer they come, cease at the doorway. The wind falls, the rain slides silver down the glass. Our eyes darken, we hear no steps beside us; we see no lady spread her ghostly cloak. His hands shield the lantern. “Look,” he breathes. “Sound asleep. Love upon their lips.”  Stooping, holding their silver lamp above us, long they look and deeply. Long they pause. The wind drives straightly; the flame stoops slightly. Wild beams of moonlight cross both floor and wall, and, meeting, stain the faces bent; the faces pondering; the faces that search the sleepers and seek their hidden joy. |

1. Which of the following describe the sentences in the excerpt in terms of length and line breaks?
2. long and connected
3. short and connected
4. long and fragmented
5. short and fragmented
6. What effects/purposes can the above features achieve? You can choose more than one answer.
7. to create a suspenseful and mysterious mood
8. to slow down the story
9. to impart a dreamlike quality similar to the state of semi-consciousness
10. to reflect the characters’ random thoughts and spontaneous flow of ideas
11. to maintain a formal style and an objective tone
12. (i), (ii) & (iii)
13. (i), (iii) & (iv)
14. (i), (iii) & (v)
15. (iii) & (iv)

**Extension: Think and Share**

1. How would you describe the relationship of the ghostly couple? Support your answer with evidence from the story.
2. Would you consider “The Haunted House” a ghost story? Why or why not?
3. How does the writer portray the house as a living thing? What is the purpose of animating the house?

**Witches’ Loaves**

*O. Henry*

O. Henry is the pen name of William Sydney Porter (11 September, 1862 – 5 June, 1910). He was an American short story writer whose stories are known for their surprise endings, wit and humour. Most of O. Henry’s stories are set in his own time (i.e. the early 20th century) and home city (i.e. New York) with ordinary people as the main characters. Some of his most famous stories are “The Gift of Magi”, “The Last Leaf”, “The Ransom of Red Chief”, “A Retrieved Reformation”, “After Twenty Years” and “Witches’ Loaves”.

Read the story from the link below and answer the following questions: 

https://qrgo.page.link/vrtFh

1. Who is the protagonist of the story?
2. Miss Martha Meacham
3. the artist
4. the young man
5. a witch
6. Which of the following is NOT true about Miss Martha Meacham?
7. She was a middle-aged woman.
8. She was married.
9. She owned a bakery.
10. She felt a romantic attraction to the artist.
11. Which of the following descriptions of the artist are true?
12. He wore glasses.
13. He had a strong German accent.
14. He was too poor to afford good food.
15. He liked to buy two loaves of stale bread from Miss Martha Meacham’s bakery.
16. He was a genius with two thousand dollars in the bank.
17. (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv)
18. (i), (ii) and (iv)
19. (ii), (iv) and (v)
20. (i), (ii), (iv) and (v)
21. Which of the following is NOT what Miss Martha Meacham did to catch the artist’s attention?
22. She put a painting in her bakery.
23. She started to wear fancy clothes.
24. She made some skincare product for herself to look younger.
25. She praised him for his good manners.
26. According to Miss Martha Meacham, why did the artist buy stale bread all the time?
27. He liked the sour taste of stale bread.
28. He wanted to save money.
29. He needed the stale bread for his drawing.
30. He bought the bread for another architectural draftsman.
31. Put the events in the correct order based on the story.
32. The artist returned to the shop to confront Miss Martha Meacham.
33. Miss Martha Meacham observed that the artist got thinner and took pity on him.
34. An artist often came to Miss Martha Meacham’s bakery to buy two loaves of stale bread.
35. The artist’s co-worker told Miss Martha Meacham the reason why the artist bought stale bread.
36. Miss Martha Meacham secretly put fresh butter into the artist’s bread.
37. (iii) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (v) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (iv)
38. (iii) 🡺(iv) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (v) 🡺 (i)
39. (iii) 🡺 (v) 🡺(iv) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (ii)
40. (iii) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (iv) 🡺 (v)
41. What conclusion can you draw about Blumberger at the end of the story?
42. He bought stale bread because he needed an excuse to see Miss Martha Meacham.
43. He was insulted by Miss Martha Meacham’s pity on him.
44. He was upset that his drawing was ruined.
45. He could not get along well with the young man.
46. Why did Miss Martha Meacham take off the blue-dotted silk waist and throw out the quince seed and borax mixture in the end?
47. She was ready to wash up and close the shop.
48. The silk waist was dirty and the mixture was stale.
49. She knew Blumberger preferred her previous look.
50. She was disappointed that her romance was over.
51. Which of the following adjectives does not describe Miss Martha Meacham?
52. compassionate
53. caring
54. wise
55. lonely
56. Which sentence best describes the message and moral of the story?
57. One small mistake can destroy the work of a genius.
58. Desire can cloud one’s judgement.
59. Never poke your nose into others’ business.
60. Every cloud has a silver lining.
61. Writers often build complex and vivid characters by providing details of their appearance, action, thought and speech, so as to show their personality traits. Identify what the following excerpts describe. Write the letter in the space provided. There may be more than one focus in each excerpt.

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| --- | --- |
| 1. appearance | 1. speech |
| 1. action | 1. thought |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Excerpt from the Story | Focus of description (Write the letter only) |
|  | He was a middle-aged man, wearing spectacles and a brown beard trimmed to a careful point. |  |
|  | She thought he began to look thinner and discouraged. Her heart ached to add something good to eat to his meagre purchase, but her courage failed at the act. She did not dare affront him. She knew the pride of artists. |  |
|  | With a bread knife Miss Martha made a deep slash in each of the stale loaves, inserted a generous quantity of butter, and pressed the loaves tight again. |  |
|  | His face was very red, his hat was on the back of his head, his hair was wildly rumpled. He clinched his two fists and shook them ferociously at Miss Martha. |  |
|  | "You haf shpoilt me," he cried, his blue eyes blazing behind his spectacles. "I vill tell you. You vas von meddingsome old cat!" |  |
|  | Miss Martha went into the back room. She took off the blue-dotted silk waist and put on the old brown serge she used to wear. Then she poured the quince seed and borax mixture out of the window into the ash can. |  |

**Extension: Think and Share**

1. Why do you think the title of the story is “Witches’ Loaves”? Can you give the story another title?
2. The story is largely about making false assumptions about other people. Can you share one incident in your life where false assumptions lead to a conflict or misunderstanding?

**The Happy Prince**

*Oscar Wilde*

Oscar Wilde (16 October, 1854 – 30 November, 1900) was an Anglo-Irish playwright, novelist, poet and critic. He is regarded as one of the greatest writers of the Victorian period. In his lifetime he wrote nine plays, one novel, and numerous poems, short stories, and essays. Wilde believed in “art for art’s sake”, which means the aesthetic values of writing should come before its moral values. He is best remembered for his plays *The Importance of Being Honest* and *An Ideal Husband* and his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but he also wrote some famous short stories such as “The Happy Prince,” “The Selfish Giant” and “The Nightingale and the Rose”.

Read the story from the link below and answer the following questions:



https://qrgo.page.link/1Vzwd

1. Who is the main character of the story?
2. the Happy Prince
3. the Swallow
4. a beautiful girl
5. God
6. Who is the narrator (i.e. teller) of the story?
7. the Swallow
8. the Happy Prince
9. God
10. a third person
11. Why was the Swallow wet under the statue at night time?
12. The Swallow cried because he was cold and hungry.
13. The Swallow was drenched because of the sudden rain.
14. The Happy Prince shed tears of sadness on the Swallow.
15. The Swallow missed his friends in Egypt.
16. Which of the following descriptions of the Swallow are true?
17. The Swallow wanted to go to Egypt at first.
18. The Swallow comforted a sick boy.
19. A seaman promised to take the Swallow to Egypt.
20. The Swallow developed a deep friendship with the Happy Prince.
21. The Swallow told the Happy Prince stories about the strange lands and his city.
22. (i), (ii), (iv) and (v)
23. (i), (ii), (iii) and (v)
24. (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv)
25. (i), (iv) and (v)
26. Which of the following persons did not receive a jewel from the Happy Prince?
27. the seamstress with an ill son
28. the beautiful girl with a lover
29. the young playwright
30. the little match-girl
31. Why did the bird choose to stay with the Happy Prince till his death?
32. The seaman refused to take him to Egypt.
33. He needed the shelter and protection from the Happy Prince.
34. His friends in Egypt abandoned him.
35. He took pity on the blind Happy Prince.
36. Put the events in the correct order based on the story.
37. The bird told the Happy Prince the suffering of men and women in the city.
38. The workmen pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince.
39. An important man in the city commented that the Happy Prince looked like a beggar.
40. The Happy Prince became blind.
41. The Happy Prince decided to pull off his layer of fine gold to help the poor.
42. (iv) 🡺 (iii) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (v) 🡺 (ii)
43. (i) 🡺(v) 🡺 (iv) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (iii)
44. (iv) 🡺 (i) 🡺(v) 🡺 (iii) 🡺 (ii)
45. (v) 🡺 (iv) 🡺 (i) 🡺 (ii) 🡺 (iii)
46. Which of the following adjectives does not describe the Happy Prince?
47. greedy
48. selfless
49. compassionate
50. benevolent
51. What is the theme of the story?
52. death
53. poverty
54. sacrifice
55. power
56. Which of the following proverbs best summarises the message of this story?
57. Birds of a feather flock together.
58. It’s better to give than to receive.
59. Money does not grow on trees.
60. What goes around comes around.
61. Powerful **adjectives** and **similes** are often used to portray the setting and characters in a story to appeal to our five senses (i.e. sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). Read the following excerpts:

Excerpt One

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| --- |
| At noon the yellow lions come down to the water’s edge to drink. They have eyes like green beryls, and their roar is louder than the roar of the cataract.” “Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “far away across the city I see a young man in a garret. He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in a tumbler by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. |

Excerpt Two

|  |
| --- |
| Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice. |

1. List all the adjectives.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Excerpt One** | **Excerpt Two** |
|  |  |

1. Identify two similes from each excerpt.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Excerpt One** | **Excerpt Two** |
|  |  |

1. State which senses (i.e. sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) the description can appeal to.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Excerpt One** | **Excerpt Two** |
|  |  |

**Extension: Think and Share**

1. If you were the little bird, would you stay with the Happy Prince until you die?
2. What is the purpose of mentioning the Town Councillors at the beginning and towards the end of the story?
3. Could you share an incident in your life when you truly feel that it is better to give than to receive?

**About Barbers**

*Mark Twain*

Mark Twain is the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (30 November, 1835 – 21 April, 1910), who was a talented American writer with a great sense of humour. William Faulkner, another well-known American author, regarded Mark Twain as “the father of American literature”. Mark Twain is known for his satirical and humorist writing style. His most notable works are the two novels *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, as well as a number of short stories such as “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”, “The Dog’s Tale” and “The Five Boons of Life”.

Read the story from the link below and answer the following questions:



https://qrgo.page.link/dR5mE

1. Where is the short story set?
2. a barber’s shop
3. Jones Street
4. Smith’s Hair Glorifier
5. a funeral
6. From which point of view is the story told?
7. first person
8. second person
9. third person
10. none of the above
11. “When I saw that No. 2 was gaining on No. 1 my interest grew to solicitude. When No. 1 stopped a moment to make change on a bath ticket for a new-comer, and lost ground in the race, my solicitude rose to anxiety.”

Which of the following best describes the mood change of the speaker in the extract above?

1. The speaker was feeling increasingly lonely.
2. The speaker was losing his temper and patience.
3. The speaker was getting uneasy and desperate.
4. The speaker was becoming calmer and more patient.
5. “I stayed out fifteen minutes” – why did “I” leave the shop for fifteen minutes?
6. He wanted to buy a snack.
7. He was bored waiting for his turn.
8. He wanted to join a lucky draw.
9. He wanted to avoid being served by the “worst” barber.
10. Which of the following feelings did the narrator have towards Barber No. 2 in the course of the story?
11. impatience
12. respect
13. anger
14. sympathy

A. (i) and (iii)

B. (ii) and (iv)

C. (i), (iii) and (iv)

D. (ii), (iii) and (iv)

1. Which of the following is the most suitable theme of the story?
2. friendship
3. prejudice
4. survival
5. aging
6. Match the following stages of plot development with the relevant events from the story:
7. exposition B. rising action C. climax D. resolution

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Event from the story | Stage of plot development  (Write the letter only) |
|  | “I” unwillingly had his hair and beard trimmed by the barber he least preferred. |  |
|  | “I” decided to put away hatred and attend the barber’s funeral. |  |
|  | “I” entered the barber’s shop to find the barber he preferred taken by another customer. |  |
|  | “I” heard that the barber he disliked died of apoplexy. |  |

1. Many people think this story ends with **a plot twist**. What is the best explanation of the term based on this story?
2. A surprise ending that changes the readers’ perception of the preceding events.
3. A foreshadowed resolution that the readers are expecting.
4. A piece of false or withheld information that misleads the readers.
5. A new conflict that appears towards the end of the story.
6. Which of the following adjectives best describes the character of the speaker?
7. caring
8. self-centred
9. sensible
10. cunning

**Extension: Think and Share**

1. Would you like to make friends with the narrator in the story? Why or why not?
2. How do you deal with people whom you can’t stand? Share your tips and advice with your peers.