ENGLISH 11
SHORT STORY QUESTIONS

“Miss Brill” by K. Mansfield pg 57-63

Responding Personally

3. Generally, readers tend to identify with characters in stories, usually the protagonist. Do you, at any point, find yourself identifying with Miss Brill? With one of the “other people”? At what point in the story did this occur? If you did not identify with one of the characters, why might that be?

4. Have you ever used your imagination to embellish the significance of your own role in an incident or event in which you were involved? Describe your memory of the incident as it actually occurred. What has your imagination done to modify that memory, however slightly? Is it natural that people's memories act selectively? What purpose does a “selective memory” serve?

Responding Critically/ Analytically

5. Is the relative sparseness of dialogue in the story thematically appropriate? What purpose does such a stylistic choice serve? What is ironic about little bit of dialogue- the overhead conversation- that does take place?

6. a) Review the protagonist's observations about some of the elderly “other people” in the park:
   - Those who “sat on the benches in the green chairs”
   - The “ermine toque”
   - The “funny old man”
   How does she regard all these people in general?

   b) As a point of comparison, how do the boy and the girl at the end regard Miss Brill?

   c)What does the writer appear to be suggesting?
7. What motivates the protagonist's interpretations of the people and the events that she encounters? Can the story's resolution, then, and the **pathos** that accompanies it, be expected? Is there a tragic dignity of any kind in Miss Brill's closing actions? Explain. [**Pathos**: represents an appeal to the audience's emotions]

8. Examine the symbolism in the story. Comment on the significance of each of the following:

- The name of the title character (look up “brill” in the dictionary)
- The season of the year
- Her fur (looking up “whiting” in the dictionary)
- The box in which the white fur is kept
- The park setting

How do these symbols develop the meaning of the main theme of the story?

**“Behind the Headlines” by Vidyut Aklujkar pg. 137-145**

**Pre-Reading**

1. A dilemma is a situation in which a person must make a choice between two mutually unsatisfactory alternatives. Have you ever found yourself facing a dilemma? Write about your dilemma.

   - In what difficult positions did you find yourself?
   - What were your choices?
   - Which did you choose? Why?
   - Did it turn out to be the better choice? Explain.

2. How should a person react when dealing with others whose behaviours are clearly unbefitting the sense of human dignity one individual is expected to show another? Would your response change if the circumstances of the interaction were between immediate family members? In what way?
Responding Personally

3. At what point in the reading did you first begin to feel uncomfortable? What made you feel that way? Why do you believe you had that feeling?

4. At one point the speaker says, “An onlooker would not have been able to accuse him of mistreating her.” The implication is that someone with knowledge of her home situation would have been able. Relate a situation from your past when you were mistreated by another, but in a way that was not made obvious to others, and therefore went largely unnoticed. How was your situation similar to Lakshmi’s? Why would frustration and eventually anger, be an expected outcome of such a situation?

Responding Critically/Analytically

5. The story begins by providing the reader with only sketchy information, and then gradually filling in the gaps with additional bits as required.

   a) What is the resulting effect on the reader? How does such a narrative process suit the writer's purpose?

   b) What is your very initial impression of Lakshmi? Who, or what, does she appear to be?

6. The story reveals the motivation that lies behind a major life decision the protagonist will be making. It does so by focusing in large measure on a description of the actions of the secondary character, her husband. Identify several different passages that, taken together, present those traits of the husband's personality that will ultimately become the protagonist's motivation to leave.

7. The imagery the writer chooses is highly visual in its simplicity.

   a) Explain, for example, why the following simile is effective: “Even at home, his newspaper and news hours covered Lakshmi's life like a shroud.”

   b) Find a second such visual metaphor. Share both it and your understanding of it with class.

   c) Notice the images that blend together a figurative with a literal description: “The world would rush into her bedroom before she even had a chance to wash her mouth.” What makes the blending of the figurative with literal effective?

   d) Find a second such blended description. Share it with the class.

8. The final few paragraphs of the story contain a series of ironies. Lakshmi thinks of the people
she assists at the Crisis Centre: “She has entered into many lives that were down in the pits, due to childhood abuse, adult frustrations, and the miseries and loneliness of old age.” Explain the irony of her situation. Find another, similar, example of such irony. Identify a specific sentence or phrase from elsewhere in the story that points to the irony.

9. Lakshmi’s decision that concludes the story occurs somewhat abruptly. Is it to abrupt?
   a) Is the surprise achieved fairly? Has the writer foreshadowed her actions in such a way that, while perhaps unexpected, they are still in keeping with her character? With a partner, locate several other passages that you feel have tried to prepare the reader for transpires.
   b) What is the symbolic significance of her parting indignity of simply dropping the house keys in the mailbox? Discuss, and share your thoughts with your classmates.

“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson pg. 43-53

Pre-Reading

1. Lotteries are generally established to serve some community purpose. Describe a particular lottery that you know of and explain the way in which the greater community benefits from the running of this lottery.

2. What is the purpose of tradition and ritual in people's lives, and in the life of a community? Why are traditions maintained? For what reasons might they be changed, or abandoned? What is the difference between ritual and tradition?

Responding Personally

3. With a partner, describe your feelings about the ending. How is it shocking and different from what you expected?

Responding Critically/Analytically

5. a) What is the first point in the story at which you sense something is quite not right? What specifically generates that feeling?
b) Make a list of clues that foreshadow the outcome of the lottery.

c) The writer makes an initial mention of stones- “Bobby Martin has already stuffed his pockets full of stones....”- but then not again until the end of the story. What might have been her purpose in doing this? How effective is this?

6. a) Find examples of description and dialogue that create a congenial mood in the reader. Why does the writer start the story this way?

b) At what point does the story's atmosphere change? Which details or comments begin to make the reader more nervous or uncertain?

7. In small groups discuss the following:
   - Tessie's initial opinion about the lottery and how they later changed
   - Old Man Warner's views and his reasons
   - the views implicit in the choices of the other villages

8. Examine the symbolism in the story. Comment on the significance of each of the following:
   a) the lottery date
   b) the childish attitudes
   c) the names and roles of Summers and Graves
   d) The purposeful mispronunciation of Delacroix
   e) the shabbiness of the black box
   f) the treatment of the box the rest of the year
   g) the substitution of paper for wood chips
   h) the change to the ritual chant and salute
   i) the way in which the winner is determined
   j) the stoning finale

   How do these symbols reflect the main theme of the story?

9. The story uses what has been called an objective point of view. Based on how the story has
been written, how would you define such a narrative point of view? How does it affect the way a reader experiences the story? What would have been the effect of using another point of view? Discuss the writer's choice.

“The Jade Peony” by Wayson Choy pg. 109-118

Pre-Reading

1. You may have known one or more of your grandparents well. If that is the case, tell about her or him. Relate an incident from this grandparent's life that is indicative of either the kind of person she or he is or was, or the special relationship the two of you had, or both. Share your grandparent's “story.”

2. Family superstitions are relatively common, though not often shared in public. Does your family now, or has it in the past, observed and superstitious beliefs or customs? If so, and if possible, research their origins, and share the information with classmates.

Responding Personally

4. What is it between the young narrator and his grandmother that makes this relationship special? Is it only that he, at his age, is a “captive audience”? Or is there something more? What does each offer that the other needs?

Responding Critically/Analytically

5. The “marvellous” world of the grandmother's past is presented in juxtaposition to the “scientific, logical world” of the younger generation.

a) Identify the family's feelings as it is caught between the burden of cultural tradition and the demands of societal assimilation.

b) Identify some of the particular words and images used by the young Sek-Lung that clearly identify him as a narrator sympathetic to the grandmother's situation.

c) Why does the writer employ such dramatic contrast in words and images?

6. The story begins and ends with the grandmother's death. As well, death references recur throughout the story.
a) In which situations do the most abundant references to death appear? What seems to be the writer's purpose?

b) What is the significance of the grandmother's references to her mysterious “juggler”? What is the impact of his “presence” on the young Sek-Lung?

7. Like the jade peony of the title, the writer's use of language is both delicate and beautiful. Examine the words and images the writer uses to describe the materials the grandmother selects from which to fabricate her wind chimes. Compile a list of varied nouns and adjectives used in these descriptions. What is the writer attempting to do through his use of such language?

8. Consider the many and varied references to colour in the story. What observations can you make about the writer's use of colour and symbolism?

9. The writer inserts mild humour into the story. Find one or two such examples. Why is gentle humour appropriate in a story such as this?

“The Destructors” by Graham Greene pg. 364-380

Responding Personally

3. At the conclusion of your reading, what were your immediate thoughts regarding, first, the joke itself, and second, the ultimate effect of the joke on Mr. Thomas? Were you laughing? At the same time, did you empathize at all with him? Share your thoughts in writing.

4. Have older members of your family- such as grandparents or perhaps older friends or acquaintances whom you know-ever been harassed by a group of adolescents? Tell what happened. With whom did your sympathies lie? Could you ever see yourself being at least somewhat sympathetic to both sides involved? Explain why or why not.

Responding Critically/Analytically

5. Trevor is the character most central to the action of the story. It is his vision that the group actualizes. Yet, for all the importance of his imagination, the reader never gains access to his thoughts in the same way the reader is shown the thinking of Blackie, Mr. Thomas, the gang, and even the lorry driver. Why is this so? What is the writer's purpose in excluding only Trevor's limited omniscient point of view?

6. Explain the irony in each of the following passages.
a) When the gang members disperse to steal free bus rides, “The operation was to be carried out in pairs to avoid cheating.”

b) AS the boys finalize their plan of vandalism, Mike reminds them, “I've got to go to church.”

c) Trevor finds Mr. Thomas' savings and is asked, “What are you going to do?” He replies, “We aren't thieves.”

d) When Mr. Thomas returns early, Trevor protests in fury, “But why? He told me.....It isn't fair.”

e) When Mr. Thomas is locked in the loo, the boys give him a blanket and food for the night. “Penny buns- we've buttered them, and sausage rolls. We don't want you to starve, Mr. Thomas.”

What is the writer's purpose in such repeated and consistent characterization of the boys? What truth is the writer trying to establish? Why do you think he has selected irony as his vehicle of choice?

7. What is the post-World War II setting of London so important to the story?
   - The evidence of destruction throughout the city
   - the reference to Trevor's parents
   - the “timelessness” of the architect's constructions
   - the double reference, at critical points in the story, to a man in “a top hat”?

How does the story reach beyond just the actions of the boys?

8. As the boys' work continues, the writer describes the continuing efforts of those he calls “the destroyers.” He states, “They worked with the seriousness of the creators- and destruction after all is a form of creation.”

a) In a small group discuss the truth of this statement.

b) Why is the title of the story “The Destructors” rather than “The Destroyers”? 