



Reading Literature:

Fiction, Poetry, and Exercises
Based on the Common Core
State Standards

Level
9



Prestwick House



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INTRODUCTION

The Open Window

“The Open Window” is arguably Saki’s most popular short story. It first appeared in print in 1911 in the *Westminster Gazette*. He republished the story in his 1914 collection *Beasts and Super-beasts*. The story was immediately popular despite the fact that—or maybe because—it is not a short story in the classic sense of plot, character, theme, rising action, climax, and so on. It is a skillfully-crafted joke with multiple levels of irony. Not only does the Nuttel fall victim to the story’s joke; the reader does as well. Even as we laugh at Nuttel for his gullibility, we must admit that we, too, have been duped by Saki’s storytelling.

It remains one of Saki’s most anthologized and best-remembered stories.

Saki

Saki is the pen name for Hector Hugh Munro, who published under the name H. H. Munro. Munro was born on December 18, 1870, in Akyab, Burma (now known as Myanmar), then still part of the British Empire. His father was an Inspector-General for the Burmese Police, and his mother was the daughter of a Rear Admiral in the British Royal Navy.

Munro’s mother died in 1872, and his father sent the children to England where they were brought up in the home of their grandmother and aunts. In 1893, Munro joined the Indian Imperial Police, following in his father’s footsteps. He was posted to Burma, where he had been born. When he contracted malaria soon after, however, he left and returned to England.

Munro was 43 years old when The Great War (WWI) broke out in Europe. He was offered an officer’s commission but turned it down and joined as an ordinary soldier. In November 1916, while fighting in France, Munro was killed by a German sniper. Several sources claim that his last words were “Put that bloody cigarette out!”

Most of Saki’s stories are lighthearted criticisms of the often illogical and hypocritical behaviors of Edwardian England. Critics consider him a master short story teller, and he is often compared to O. Henry and Dorothy Parker. Though best known for his short stories, Munro also wrote plays, histories, and novels. His final works, written in the years immediately prior to World War I, were “fantasies” somewhat critical of British politics and the policies of the Empire. *The Westminster Alice* is a parody of *Alice in Wonderland*, set in the houses of Parliament, and *When William Came*, subtitled *A Story of London Under the Hohenzollerns*, a fantasy about a future German invasion of Britain.

they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you menfolk, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Frampton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic, he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

20 "The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Frampton, who laboured under the **tolerably** widespread **delusion** that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and **infirmities**, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Frampton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddied up to the eyes!"

Frampton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey **sympathetic** comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with a dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Frampton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window, they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung

Tolerably: reasonably

Delusion: a false belief, especially one that is held despite strong evidence to refute it

Infirmity: an illness

Sympathetic: a sense of having something in common; sharing common ideas or feelings

The girl's look both delays the revelation of the punch line and intensifies the payoff.

over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

25 Frampton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white **mackintosh**, coming in through the window, "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of goodbye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the **Ganges** by a pack of **pariah dogs**, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

Mackintosh: a type of raincoat popular with hunters and fishermen

Ganges: a river sacred to the Hindu religion

Pariah dog: a breed of non-domesticated dog that lives primarily in India

Romance: a fantastic or wildly imaginative tale; fantasy

Saki's stories often end abruptly with a single-sentence punch line.

a pacing mare, with a colt at her heels, setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee,—or the Lord knows where!

25 When he entered the house, the conquest of his heart was complete. It was one of those spacious farmhouses, with high-ridged but lowly sloping roofs, built in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers; the low projecting eaves forming a **piazza** along the front, capable of being closed up in bad weather. Under this were hung flails, harness, various utensils of **husbandry**, and nets for fishing in the neighboring river. Benches were built along the sides for summer use; and a great spinning-wheel at one end, and a churn at the other, showed the various uses to which this important porch might be devoted. From this piazza the wondering Ichabod entered the hall, which formed the centre of the mansion, and the place of usual residence. Here rows of **resplendent** pewter, ranged on a long dresser, dazzled his eyes. In one corner stood a huge bag of wool, ready to be spun; in another, a quantity of **linsey-woolsey** just from the loom; ears of Indian corn, and strings of dried apples and peaches, hung in gay **festoons** along the walls, mingled with the gaud of red peppers; and a door left ajar gave him a peep into the best parlor, where the claw-footed chairs and dark mahogany tables shone like mirrors; andirons, with their accompanying shovel and tongs, glistened from their covert of asparagus tops; mock-oranges and conch-shells decorated the mantelpiece; strings of various-colored birds eggs were suspended above it; a great ostrich egg was hung from the centre of the room, and a corner cupboard, knowingly left open, displayed immense treasures of old silver and well-mended china.

From the moment Ichabod laid his eyes upon these regions of delight, the peace of his mind was at an end, and his only study was how to gain the affections of the peerless daughter of Van Tassel. In this enterprise, however, he had more real difficulties than generally fell to the lot of a knight-errant of yore, who seldom had anything

Piazza: a roofed open area

Husbandry: the cultivation of plants and animals

Resplendent: splendid; shining with splendor or beauty

Linsey-woolsey: a coarse fabric blending linen and wool

Festoons: garlands of flowers, leaves, fabric, etc., draped in curves between two points; swags



INTRODUCTION

Sonnet 73

This sonnet is the seventy-third in a sequence of 154 sonnets by William Shakespeare. The “sonnet sequence” was a Renaissance tradition first developed in Italy. Each sequence is a collection of sonnets that reads like a single work. Unlike stanzas of a poem, each sonnet in a sequence stands on its own and also contributes to the overall arc of the sequence.

Shakespeare’s sequence explores themes like the passing of time, the loss of beauty, the pain of loving another person, and the certainty of death.

Most Renaissance sonnet sequences explored romantic and courtly love. The poet is almost always a man, and the object almost always a woman who is unattainable. In typical sequences, this Love Object is married or of a higher social status than the poet. The poet must, therefore, worship his Love Object from afar and long for an opportunity to attract her attention and maybe even someday win her love.

Shakespeare’s sequence is unique in that more than three quarters of the sonnets (1-126) are addressed to a man. Scholars are still debating whether Shakespeare was declaring his love for this unnamed youth, whether this “love” was a non-romantic admiration or friendly affection, whether the “love” and the “youth” are metaphors, or whether the speaker’s declarations of love for this youth are really a parody of the Renaissance romantic love sequence.

Sonnets 127-152 are addressed to a female love object commonly referred to as Shakespeare’s “Dark Lady.” The “love” expressed in these poems is more erotic than in the “fair youth” sonnets, and the poet expresses regret that the Object has this type of power over him. The nickname “Dark Lady” refers to the facts that the identity of the woman is not known (if she ever even really existed) and several of the poems make it clear that she had dark hair and skin.

The last two sonnets are based on a fifth-century Greek poem about the inextinguishable power of love.

William Shakespeare

Surprisingly little is known of the life of England’s most famous poet. There is no written record of his birth, but he was baptized in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-on-Avon on April 26, 1564. As most infants were baptized within a few days of birth, most scholars estimate William Shakespeare’s date of birth to be April 23rd. He most likely received the typical grammar school education of the time and was married at the age of 18 (November 1582) to 26-year-old Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a local farmer. Six months later (May 26, 1583), their daughter Susannah was born. Two years later (1585) twins Hamnet and Judith were born, and William Shakespeare virtually disappeared from all written public record for a few years.

His name reappears in 1592 when he'd already begun to build a reputation as an actor and playwright in London. One of the earliest mentions of him appears in a famous public attack:

...there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country

—Robert Greene, *Groats-Worth of Wit*

Greene is clearly offended by the idea of a man with only a grammar school education who presumes to do work suitable for university graduates.

Shakespeare, nevertheless, enjoyed a career that spanned more than two decades during which he wrote no fewer than 37 plays, 154 sonnets, and four longer poems. He won the direct patronage of the reigning monarch (James I) and owned a share in the theater where many of his plays were performed.

He died a wealthy man and a “gentleman” with a registered coat of arms, on April 23, 1616. The date of his death is, coincidentally, the date most scholars assign to his birth. He is buried near the altar of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-on-Avon.

Objectives

When you have finished studying this poem, you will be able to:

- cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text,
- provide an objective summary of the text,
- determine a theme or central idea of a text,
- analyze in detail the development of the theme or central idea of a text over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details,
- determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings,
- analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning, and
- analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.