

 Prestwick House

Instant Short Story Pack



Each pack contains:

- Objectives
- Full Text of Story
- Student Questions
- Activities and Graphic Organizers
- Teacher Answer Guide

The Fly

BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2, 5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, 3, 5, 6



Objectives:

After completing the activities in this packet, the student will be able to:

- determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text (RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2),
- analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how the action is ordered (RL.11-12.3),
- analyze how an author's choice of where to begin or end a story contributes to its overall structure and meaning (RL.9-10.5; 11-12.5), and
- analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (RL.11-12.6).

Time:

1-2 class periods

Materials:

✓ 1 copy of each handout per student:

- **Handout #1** (3 pages) – Purpose-setting and Motivational Activities
- **Handout #2** (6 pages) – Text of Story
- **Handout #3** (2 pages) – Student Questions
- **Handout #4** (11 pages) – Activities and Graphic Organizers

✓ Teacher Answer Guide

Procedure:

1. Reproduce all handouts.
2. Distribute **Handouts #1** and **#2**.
 - Allow students to read the short biography of Mansfield (approximately 10 minutes).
 - Read and discuss the information about Mansfield's work and ideas (approximately 20 minutes).
 - Assign the story to be read for homework OR
 - Allow students to read the story in class and perform the two **As you read...** activities.
3. Distribute **Handout #3**.
4. Give students time to read the questions (approximately 5 minutes).
5. Review with students what each question is asking for and what type of information is required for a thorough answer (e.g., references to prior knowledge, quotations from the story, additional reading or research, etc.).
6. Distribute **Handout #4**.
7. Walk the class through Question 1, demonstrating that in order to address a complex issue, it is often helpful to divide it into smaller subtopics. Students can then use the ideas generated by each subtopic to build a complete and thoughtful answer to the full question.
8. Have students answer the questions.

Katherine Mansfield

The Fly

Katherine Mansfield wrote the “The Fly” in Paris while undergoing experimental treatment for tuberculosis. It was first published on March 18, 1922, in *The Nation and Athenaeum*, a liberal British newspaper more commonly called simply *The Nation*. “The Fly” was to be Mansfield’s last completed short story, as she died less than a year after its publication. Mansfield’s husband, John Murry, included the story in *The Doves’ Nest and Other Stories*, a collection of his late wife’s stories that he edited and published in 1923.

While the story was slow to gain critical attention, it has come to be considered one of Mansfield’s finest short stories. In her own lifetime, she was considered a realist, a naturalist, and a modernist. “The Fly” certainly contains elements of all three. There is nothing “decorative” or unessential in Mansfield’s depiction of a simple conversation between two old friends. The Boss is both the victim and agent of the indifferent and uncontrollable forces that determine fate. The depth and richness of the story are to be found in the Boss’s inner turmoil—and by extension the fly’s—rather than in any external conflict. In fact, one reason the story seems so simple is that there is no external conflict involving any of the human characters.

Do not be distracted by the story’s deceptively simple plot, structure, and cast of characters. Almost a hundred years after its first publication, “The Fly” still puzzles critics who argue whether Woodifield or the Boss—or the fly—is the main character, whether the boss is a sympathetic character, and whether Mansfield intended the fly’s struggle to survive to mirror her own futile battle with tuberculosis.

When you read the story, don’t simply do it to understand the plot. The words shouldn’t just pass by your eyes as the events unfold. Instead, allow the puzzling aspects of “The Fly” to slowly reveal themselves. Be aware of the essential irony of the Boss’s self-pity as he absent-mindedly tortures the fly. Stop and consider how the end of the story makes you *feel* before you start to worry about what it *means*.

Katherine Mansfield

The Fly

Lexile Measure: 780L

“Y’ARE VERY SNUG in here,” piped old Mr. Woodifield, and he peered out of the great, green-leather armchair by his friend the boss’s desk as a baby peers out of its pram. His talk was over; it was time for him to be off. But he did not want to go. Since he had retired, since his...stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the house every day of the week except Tuesday. On Tuesday he was dressed and brushed and allowed to cut back to the City for the day. Though what he did there the wife and girls couldn’t imagine. Made a nuisance of himself to his friends, they supposed....Well, perhaps so. All the same, we cling to our last pleasures as the tree clings to its last leaves. So there sat old Woodifield, smoking a cigar and staring almost greedily at the boss, who rolled in his office chair, stout, rosy, five years older than he, and still going strong, still at the helm. It did one good to see him.

Wistfully, admiringly, the old voice added, “It’s snug in here, upon my word!”

“Yes, it’s comfortable enough,” agreed the boss, and he flipped the *Financial Times* with a paper-knife. As a matter of fact he was proud of his room; he liked to have it admired, especially by old Woodifield. It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there in the midst of it in full view of that frail old figure in the muffler.

“I’ve had it done up lately,” he explained, as he had explained for the past—how many!—weeks. “New carpet,” and he pointed to the bright red carpet with a pattern of large white rings. “New furniture,” and he nodded towards the massive bookcase and the table with legs like twisted treacle. “Electric heating!” He waved

Katherine Mansfield

The Fly

STUDENT QUESTIONS:

1. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2) Since its publication, the numerous and varied interpretations of “The Fly” have included reading the story as
- an examination of the inevitability of death and humanity’s unwillingness to accept it;
 - an indictment of the horror of war (specifically, World War I);
 - an examination of existential despair especially in the wake of World War I;
 - an illustration of Time as the healer of all human sorrow;
 - a character study of the boss, a bully whose grief is nothing more than self-pity;
 - an examination of the naturalist view of an indifferent Universe.

Propose two possible themes for the story—either from the list above or your own insight—and provide direct reference and textual support to trace their development over the course of the entire story.

Explain how your themes interact and contribute to the overall meaning of the story.

2. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5; 11-12.5) What does Mansfield achieve by giving the central conflict and all of the narrative action to the fly? How does the story of Woodifield’s visit to the boss alter the significance of the incident with the fly?
3. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3) Consider the following details and propose a likely reason for Mansfield’s settling on each in the development of her character and story arcs. To what overall impression do they lead?
- Woodifield is five years younger than the boss.
 - Woodifield almost forgets to tell the boss about “the girls” seeing the son’s grave.
 - The Woodifield girls were “delighted” with the grave and the cemetery.
 - Woodifield immediately follows his report about the grave with the anecdote about the pot of jam.
 - The boss decides to look at the photograph of the son when he realizes that he does not feel the way he wanted to.
 - The boss discovers the trapped fly when he gets up to look at the photograph of the son.
 - After the incident with the fly, the boss cannot remember what he had been thinking about prior to discovering the fly—i.e., the loss of his son and that the nature of his grief seems to have changed.

Question 1 continued:

STEP 1: Rather than randomly choose two possible themes to discuss, examine all of the examples provided and determine which you understand the most clearly and are best able to discuss in detail. The following chart will help you identify the best themes for you to discuss.

Proposed Theme	Summary/Explanation of Theme	Textual Support
the inevitability of death and humanity's unwillingness to accept it		
the horror of war (specifically, World War I)		
existential despair especially in the wake of World War I		
Time as the healer of all human sorrow		
a character study of the boss, a bully whose grief is nothing more than self-pity		
the naturalist view of an indifferent Universe		