

TEACHERS' NOTES

SMART OVENS FOR LONELY PEOPLE

by Elizabeth Tan

ISBN: 9781922267207 (digital) 9781922267191 (print)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS:

English; Humanities and Social Sciences (Civics and Citizenship; Economics and Business)

VALUES: Empathy, Tolerance, Self-Determination, Authenticity, Kindness

Notes by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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- Relationships between Animals and Humans

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PLOT SUMMARIES

Conspiracies memes and therapies of various efficacy underpin this beguiling short-story collection from Elizabeth Tan.

In the titular story a cat-shaped oven tells a depressed woman she doesn't have to be sorry anymore. A Yourtopia Bespoke Terraria employee becomes paranoid about the mounting coincidences in her life. Four girls gather to celebrate their underwear in 'Happy Smiling Underwear Girls Party' a hilarious take-down of saccharine advertisements.

With her trademark wit and slicing social commentary Elizabeth Tan's short stories are as funny as they are insightful. This collection cements her role as one of Australia's most inventive writers.

Tan has an acerbic wit informed by incisive analysis of popular culture.

Short Story Titles include:

Night of the Fish (p 1)



Key Quote:

'Grown-ups had a way of doing that—flattening their fears with concrete, building something neat and pretty on top, as if life really were a picnic.' (p 2)

This is a perfect microstory. Brief and concise, it explores the theme of an inexplicable suburban happening when a slippery slide escapes the children's play park, and the fear that engenders amongst local residents.

Narrative Person: First person singular.

Our Sleeping Lungs Opened to the Cold (p 3)



Key Quote:

'At first we wondered: What was it about us that disturbed the clients so thoroughly? But then Opal refracted the question: What was it about us that they so loved to begin with.' (p 7)

This is an eerie story about large marine organisms kept in a restaurant tank and visited by an aquarist whose introduction of fish to the tank has disastrous consequences. For the sedative fed to the eight organisms has been gradually reduced and they set about consuming the fish with gruesome abandon. (p 5) Human intervention in nature is one theme here as is exploitative marketing.

Narrative Person: First person plural.

A Girl is Sitting on a Unicorn in the Middle of a Shopping Centre (p 11)



Key Quote:

'She is using her listening ears. The unicorn says that it doesn't know how it can go on. The unicorn says that it wants to die.' (p 13)

A small child is sitting on a unicorn in a shopping mall where consumerism is rampant. But the small child notices nothing except the unicorn and what it is saying to her. For the unicorn just wants to stop, and the girl understands that. This is a moral fable about the things we waste our attention on and the things that really matter.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

Pang & Co. Genuine Scribe Era Stationery Pty Ltd (p 17)



Key Quote:

'And I was puzzled. I felt responsible and then I felt arrogant for feeling responsible. And the whole while, I just felt like I wasn't feeling enough, or feeling the wrong things.' (p 26)

Ira has inherited her father's expensive and exquisite stationery business, and her equally expensive and exquisite partner Kit is a technological addict. Their encounter one evening with a homeless man who later suicides, brings home to them both that their different working worlds are equally privileged and cocooned from reality. How we confront reality is the subject of this, another moral fable.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle (Sing Your Heart Out) (p 29)



Key Quote:

'I do not mean to make it sound like Eighteen Bells is an unhappy place. I think it is more accurate to say that most people are simply unhappy—here and everywhere—and don't actually realise it.' (p 31)

Pikelet works nights at the Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle and regales the reader with the details of her life in a giant lagomorph body. (Born in the Year of the Rabbit she is actually a rabbit!) This story explores the vacuous nature of popular culture taken to its inevitable extreme and the fact that such meaningless activity reflects the deep unhappiness of the society which generates it.

Narrative Person: First person singular.

Smart Ovens for Lonely People (p 39)



Key Quote:

'I found that I could be both desperately lonely and profoundly happy; I could always be both.' (p 54)

Shu is recovering from a broken relationship with Adam and has survived a suicide attempt. She has been prescribed a smart oven to alleviate her loneliness. The Neko Oven verbally responds to Shu's requests and dictates recipes to her, and listens to her solitary ramblings but can't offer advice: 'That is not my function.' When Shu recites her mantra, 'Those same damn bottles going out and those same damn bottles coming back.' (p 45) Neko Oven tries to empathise. This is a gentle parody of psychological treatments and the fact that only the person in question can really engender their own recovery.

Narrative Person: First person singular.

Mounting Sexual Tension Between Two Long-Time Friends; Tom Knows that Ant Is a Spy but Ant Doesn't (p 57)



Key Quote:

'A password can be a seed or a sailcloth or an explosion. A password is a portal. I am waiting on the edge of your perimeter. I am stepping into the insufficient light. I am calling out to you, the watchman.' (p 73)

Thomas Lark and Anton Chu are best friends and lovers. But when Anton discovers a pair of matching Glock pistols and leather briefcases secreted in his apartment by Tom he demands to know why. Tom reveals a complex secret he has harboured for twelve years, since they were recruited in secondary school, that Anton is a spy and Tom his handler, and that they are to be sent on an unknown mission when they receive a password neither has yet been given. This story is about the mysteries which any person carries in their nature, and is a metaphor for the trust we must also preserve for a loved one. It's also about the adult and organisational manipulation of children at their most vulnerable. It is an intriguing mind game of a story.

Narrative Person: Third person including first person dialogue.

.PPTX (p 77)



Key Quote:

'Pippa is ready to become extinct. She is ready for the roof to collapse, for everybody to survive except for her. She is ready to die unloved, covered in the golden dust of crushed Cheetos. She is ready for her loneliness to enter eternity.' (p 78)

This microstory is about Pippa who lives in a sharehouse but feels invisible there which makes her privy to everyone's secrets. It is a delicately crafted, moving account of emotions.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

Ron Swanson's Stencilled 'Stache (p 9)



Key Quote:

'It was not a consequence of the inevitable habituation to sensory triggers that requires ASMR fans to seek more and more videos; rather, it was an immediate and abrupt cessation of all effect.' (p 82)

Yrma, the narrator, is caught in *The Shiverers*, a ASMR documentary, which amasses fans and then loses them due to the propensity for people steeped in video culture to constantly seek new forms of stimulation. But when she delivers the titular mantra she becomes the most sought-after speaker on the planet. The delivery of this mantra was prompted by a piece of graffiti wall art in which: 'The artist had captured Ron Swanson's croissant shaped moustache and his aggressive side-part and the twin parentheses of his brows and eye bags: a sturdy face pitted by disdain for skim milk, landscape paintings, and government interference in the private decisions of taxpayers and the free market.' (p 79)

This story is in four parts headed 1. Autonomous 2. Sensory 3. Meridian 4. Response. It is a parody of the seemingly innocuous reality TV viewing which people do and the dangerous effects of such viewing habits. An agent called Allan McKenzie delivers a series of elaborate messages asking Yrma to stop delivering his mantra as it acts as a trigger on him, requesting that he go back to an unspecified place or role. Then two other mysterious people waylay Yrma and deliver her to a Greenwich park where a Mountbatten-Windsor child's birthday is being celebrated, explaining that her mantras are actually codes they have planted in his consciousness. They demand that she deliver the line: 'John Johnson's fended stash.' to the assembled crowd and cameras. But when she does, the agents are clearly distressed and another agent whisks her away, and confesses that they are from Big ASMR. This convoluted plot is a parody of popular culture which ends enigmatically.

Narrative Person: First person singular.

Washing Day (p 101)



Key Quote:

'What if, today, it is finally available to her to do so—to make herself into the necessary shape, to be the perfect fit.' (p 113)

Kate laments the loss of her favourite dress on the unforgettable day when everyone's washing simply disappeared. This is a metaphorical exploration of body image, the role of fashion in a woman's life, and the imagination. The children's play-acting with a cardboard box washing machine is symbolic of the latter.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

Yes! Yes! Yes You Are! Yes You Are! (p 115)



Key Quote:

'I'm thinking about something Boots once said: the only way any animal can win is to make more animals. It's the thing your oppressors are always most afraid of—that there will be more of you than there are of them—and that's all the more reason to do it.' (p 118)

A group of cats are reminded that a full moon will be rising in three nights time, and Philip Glass advises O Fortuna, Dumpling, Tybalt and Kupo that they can't wait for Boots any longer as she's probably gone to the whitecoats. Two new cats have moved into the neighbourhood and Tybalt and O Fortuna go to investigate, and meet Mr Fluffy Man and Her Majesty the Queen, whom they invite to join them on the night of the full moon. For on this night the cats gather at the local pool and confront a monster of the deep; they exercise all their powers and express the frustration invested in their lives as domestic pets which have been tagged and left wombless. In a searingly violent scene they share their common felineness until they have to return to their homes again. This is a powerful story about the inequality in animal/human relationships.

Narrative Person: Third person.

Would You Rather (p 131)



Key Quote:

'What did it look like? A hole in the memory of the sky, a tongue stumbling over a forgotten word. A pencil tethered to a cardboard booth, hovering over two checkboxes—twin portals, humming with loss.' (p 133)

A strange blip in the atmosphere begins to suck things into a hole in the sky, but only certain things such as bicycles, square-shaped cushions, guinea-pigs, and 'Then went the cheese-and-chives flavoured potato crisps, then Bratz dolls. Then lamingtons. Then beanies with pompoms.' (p 131) Jennifer and Freya Green, two young sisters are responsible, as their game 'would you rather' has had tangible results. But in the end this spare and deeply moving microstory is about grief and loss, specifically of their mother, and how they choose to confront that grief.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

Excision in F-Sharp Minor (p 135)



Key Quote:

'Perhaps this is another thing you might like to consider excising.' (p 144)

Nora and Heidi are living together, when Heidi announces that her sister Nora shouldn't be around the kids, Aaron and Megan, anymore. Megan's birthday party had precipitated the crisis and Dave their father's presence annoyed Nora. Excision is a losing of parts. Structured in a reverse chronology of scenes variously described as a day before, a few hours before, a week before, the story winds backwards to Nora's own excision of her grief in losing her partner Gwen. A complex unspooling of narrative which plays with scientific experimentation in psychology testing in an intriguing manner.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

Happy Smiling Underwear Girls Party (p 149)



Key Quote:

'I represent a demographic that wields modest-to-considerable Buying Power and my Non-Threatening Otherness makes me One Of The Girls and I am so so grateful to be One Of The Girls so I wear my not-as-festive underwear obediently and laugh at Verity's jokes.' (p 150-1)

This story parodies the parties where women gather to view and buy products with an exaggerated party in which each girl wears distinctive underwear in hilarious fashion.

The chaotic scene with the girls (Jessica, Verity, Amber and the narrator) wreaking havoc in the room is a suggestive climax to the vacuous thoughts of this Kim Kardashian-influenced quartet. Lip service to acknowledging diversity also ironically underlies the thematic action.

Narrative Person: First person singular.

Disobeying (p 157)



Key Quote:

'And a strange sort of love will unfurl itself: not a motherly love, but a writerly conviction that this particular moment cannot be faithfully replicated, that any description will fail, but an attempt must nonetheless be made.' (p 171)

Harper Wen-Fox is enduring time on a signing table next to bestselling Jackson Holloway. This is an astute analysis of literary festivals, awards and writing life. But it morphs into an exquisite tale which traverses family, accidents of fate and the messiness of life. A writer's inspiration lies at the heart of this superlative narrative.

Narrative Person: Third person subjective.

This is Not a Treehouse (p 173)



Key Quote:

'Maybe there was a time when we were safe. We were part of a secret club with only two members, and we didn't need a treehouse. It makes me wonder what it means, that you're building whatever it is you're building.' (p 176)

A narrator is quizzing their partner about why they are suddenly building a huge treehouse in the back garden and what this denotes. The narrator reflects on the close bond they used to share and posits that the treehouse may present a new stage in their relationship. The narrator recalls how they met in a counselling session and that a mean note written during that session was forever afterward a source of distrust between them. Could either of them ever have been cruel enough to pen it? The story circles around the closeness and trust which develops between partners and the cracks which appear in that edifice as time passes. This is a sensitive exploration of that conundrum, and how we reconcile honesty and secrets in any relationship.

Narrative Person: First person addressed to another character.

Shirt Dresses That Look a Little Too Much Like Shirts So That it Looks Like You Forgot To Put on Pants (Love Will Save the Day) (p 187)



Key Quote:

'The girls in the office are dressing pointedly, with calculation, gleefully transgressing the shirt/dress boundary at every opportunity, calibrating to offend. We feel very attacked by this. We feel targeted. We feel victimised.' (p 191)

An office manager begins by reflecting on the need for staff training for women to moderate their standard of wearing short dresses in the office. He refers to ducks being programmed to perform in the nearby Hyde Park and then on a pigeon delivered to the office which has been programmed to deliver aphorisms and to act as a perfect office assistant. He reflects on the organisation's plan 'to acquire a company that specialises in engineering meet-cutes, which is called Me-Q'(p 189) which later fails, as does the training meeting which results in protests against perceived sexism. This clever story is structured as a steadily escalating satire of office management politics which ends enigmatically.

Narrative Person: First person plural.

The Meal Channel (p 197)



Key Quote:

‘When the Meal Channel was first created,’ I said to DapperBro, ‘it seemed like such a bizarre idea.’ (p 203)

This is a disturbing story referencing the popularity of cooking shows but in a futuristic scenario where people watch others eating and go without meals as payment. The narrator’s date with Dapperbro has been arranged online and they discuss their meals in an air of unreality which is highlighted by Dapperbro’s story about people eating feathers for nourishment. This story takes place in a dystopian twilight world of unknown origin.

Narrative Person: First person.

Lola Metronome and Calliope St Laurent Having a Picnic at the End of Civilisation as We Know It (p 207)



Key Quote:

‘The world belongs to these burnished vessels— clouds, balloons—they turn to amber in the fading daylight, Elizabeth Tan 214 and the slant of the rain animates their forms in quick fresh brushstrokes. They do not intend to build, or recreate, or colonise. They fly above the smouldering skyscrapers, the capsized bridges and train tunnels, all the crumpled castles of humanity.’ (pp 213–4)

Two friends are enjoying a glass of wine and a picnic on a hill as the world comes to an end. They reminisce and reflect on ‘the things we never did’ (pp 210–211). The story juxtaposes a picnic and balloons flying festively overhead before bursting into destructive missiles, with the end of the world. Petty concerns are reduced like homes to rubble. This is a masterful piece of storytelling in a cryptic end-of-the-world narrative which stays with the reader after its denouement.

Narrative Person: Third person.

You Put the U in Utopia (or, The Last Neko Atsume Player in the World) (p 215)



Key Quote:

‘It is a shock when you realise that the you you present to the world is a corrupted version of the you inside your head. A doppelgänger.’ (p 232)

The narrator works for Yourtopia Bespoke Terraria, a company which customises terrariums for clients for a range of purposes including mini-terrariums as wedding favours. She is the last known player of a video game called *Neko Atsume*. This is one of what he calls her harmless habits. She has just begun dating Bernice and has fallen out of favour with their boss, Sienna. The technicians trialing intelligent lichen summon Mika to tell her the trials have failed. They attempt to bribe her into taking the fall for this failed experiment by promising to have the makers of *Neko Atsume* update the game Mika spends so much time playing. This ludicrous scenario is like all the stories in this collection a thinly veiled satire of contemporary society and its obsessions. It is about authenticity and falsity; love and distrust; utopia and dystopia.

Narrative Person: First person singular.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Tan is a writer and sessional academic who lives in Boorloo/Perth. She is the author of two books: the novel-in-stories *Rubik* (Brio, 2017) and the short story collection *Smart Ovens for Lonely People* (Brio, 2020). *Smart Ovens* was longlisted for the 2021 Stella Prize and the 2021 Colin Roderick Award, shortlisted for the 2021 USQ Steele Rudd Award for a Short Story Collection, and the winner of the 2020 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction.

WRITING STYLE

Title and Blurb

The book's title and cover might lead your students to form some perceptions of what the stories are likely to be about.



Activity:

Discuss the perceptions they formed before, and then how they changed after reading the stories. Then design a new cover and write a blurb for the book.

Structure

Opening and closing sentences to stories provide a structure and entice the reader to enter the world being created.

Opening:

'They didn't know that we had changed.' ('Our Sleeping Lungs Opened to the Cold' p 3)

'After that day at the overpass I was assigned an oven.' ('Smart Ovens for Lonely People' p 39)

Closing:

'Brodie star-wipes to slide four of 320.' ('PPTX' p 78)

'They fly above the smouldering skyscrapers, the capsized bridges and train tunnels, all the crumpled castles of humanity.' ('Lola Metronome and Calliope St Laurent Having a Picnic at the End of Civilisation as We Know It' p 214)



Discussion Point:

Examine the opening and closing sentence to each of these stories and discuss their meaning and effectiveness.

Genre



Discussion Point:

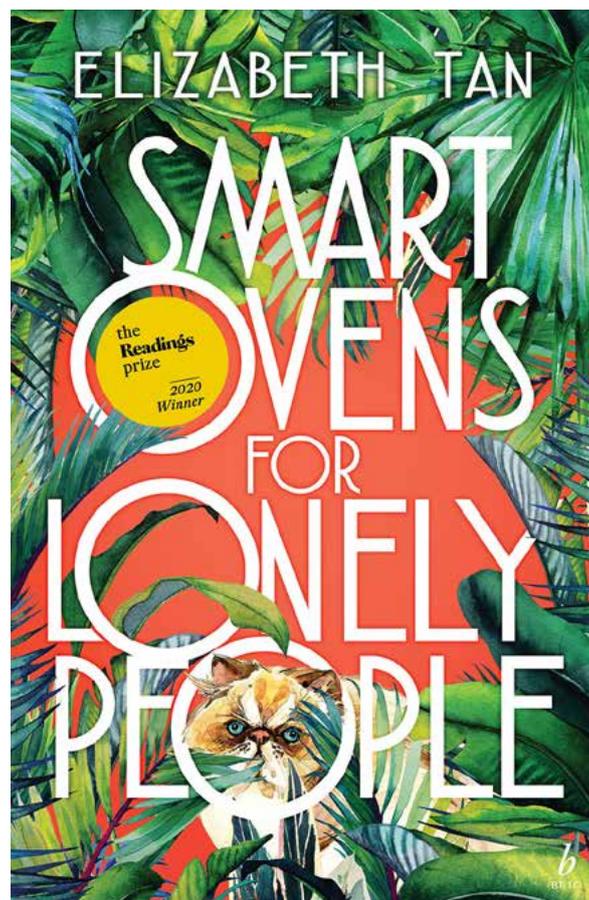
Short stories are a form of writing based on conventions. Discuss one of these stories in terms of those conventions.

Point of View and Narrative Perspective

These stories are written in a variety of narrative voices and tenses listed above under **Plot Summaries**, for example:

'Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle (Sing Your Heart Out)' is written in second person and is a satire of a possible future world.

'Mounting Sexual Tension Between Two Long-time Friends; Tom Knows That Ant is a Spy but Ant Doesn't' is told in third person but largely consists of dialogue between Ant and Tom.



'This Is Not a Treehouse' is told in first person addressed to another person.

'Shirt Dresses That Look a Little Too Much Like Shirts so That It Looks Like You Forgot To Put on Pants (Love Will Save the Day)' is told in first person plural.

'You Put the U in Utopia (or, The Last Neko Atsume Player in the World)' is told in first person singular.



Discussion Point:

How might each of these narratives have differed if they had been written from another perspective?

Similes, Metaphors and Other Literary Devices

The writer makes use of poetic literary devices in each story, for example:

'We toppled into the storm, still clutching together in our octet, into the rain's brutal percussion; the streets were slick and dark like the aquarist's diving suit, the moon a shucked oyster.' ('Our Sleeping Lungs Opened to the Cold' p 8)

'His voice creaked like the broken spine of a Bible.' ('Smart Ovens for Lonely People' p 51)

'Then someone starts calling for Dumpling and we have to disperse, melting over the trees and fences, everywhere smelling of children and smoke, the vibrations of school buses, the sunny paths dotted with parents escorting their babies safely home.' ('Yes! Yes! Yes You Are! Yes You Are!' p 115–6)

'Mr Fluffy Man has one of those maws that looks like the curly part of an alto clef turned on its side.' ('Yes! Yes! Yes You Are! Yes You Are!' p 123)

'And then? All the cushions—but only the square-shaped ones—tumbling skyward like Scrabble tiles returning themselves to the bag.' ('Would You Rather' pp 131–2) This story also ends with the most poignant metaphorical explanation for the power of these two sisters to spirit things into the sky: 'What did it look like? A hole in the memory of the sky, a tongue stumbling over a forgotten word. A pencil tethered to a cardboard booth, hovering over two checkboxes—twin portals, humming with loss. Daughter, daughter, father: eyes closed, heads bowed in prayer. Hands joined, as if to come before the Lord as a single category of thing—that must, as one, either float to the sky or hold to the earth.' ('Would You Rather' p 133)

'she will peel open her eyes like reluctant mussels' ('Disobeying' p 170)



Activity:

Analyse these passages and others in various short stories as examples of such usage of devices.



Discussion Point:

The story titles are intriguingly quirky, and often obtuse. Discuss the relationship between each title and the story which follows it.

Humour



Discussion Point:

Discuss the various humorous strategies available to a writer such as satire, irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, bathos, and black humour. For example,

Sarcasm: ‘He keeps his spectacles and sunglasses in separate cases. If he were stranded on a deserted island he would either vaporise or create a sustainable economy in two weeks.’ (‘Pang & Co. Genuine Scribe Era Stationery Pty Ltd’ p 18)

Black Humour: ‘Like I said, my family doesn’t live here anymore. They moved to New Zealand following the Year of Seven Different Prime Ministers. My mother said that this country is cursed, falling apart (literally—the Sydney Opera House had just collapsed for the third time when my parents made the decision to move).’ (‘Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle (Sing Your Heart Out)’ p 33)

Irony: ‘she is attractive in a tasteful way, like a flight attendant crossed with a funeral director.’ (‘Shirt Dresses That Look a Little Too Much Like Shirts So That It Looks Like You Forgot to Put on Pants (Love Will Save the Day)’ p 190)

Hyperbolic Humour: ‘What does Sienna know, and what does she want me to know, and what does she want me to know that she wants me to know?’ (‘You Put the U in Utopia (or, The Last Neko Atsume Player in the World’ p 232)

Conflict and Suspense



Discussion Point:

What forms of conflict feature in these stories?



Discussion Point:

What contributes to suspense in these stories?

Characterisation

Main Characters:



Discussion Point:

Choose a story and analyse the characters who appear in that story. How does the writer convey information about the character(s)?



Discussion Point:

Which of the characters most intrigued you?

KEY STUDY TOPICS AND THEMES

Loneliness and Isolation



Key Quote:

'Pippa is ready to become extinct. She is ready for the roof to collapse, for everybody to survive except for her. She is ready to die unloved, covered in the golden dust of crushed Cheetos. She is ready for her loneliness to enter eternity. Brodie star-wipes to slide four of 320.' ('PPTX' p 78)



Discussion Point:

There is a sense that in each story loneliness or isolation is explored. Do you agree with this statement?



Discussion Point:

Choose a story and discuss how the theme of isolation is expressed in that story.

Consumerism



Key Quote:

'It's Monday and Myer is having the greatest stocktake sale of all time, and there's a giant backlit poster of Miranda Kerr smiling indulgently with a wrist of pearls, and the shopping centre is flooded with daylight and hope.' ('A girl is sitting on a unicorn in the middle of a shopping centre', p 11)



Discussion Point:

Many aspects of our capitalistic society are parodied in these stories, from manipulative advertising, cynical branding, obsession with appearance, to genetic experimentation. Discuss any theme explored in these stories in relation to that text.

Imagination



Key Quote:

Kate let herself recede into the background of their play. She watched the washing machine become another thing, and another thing, and another thing, the children's imaginations as agile as their bodies. A washing machine can be a ticket booth. A time travel machine. An aeroplane. A hovercraft. A bank vault. An aquarium. An escape pod. A doomsday weapon. A teleportation device.' ('Washing Day' pp 112–113)



Discussion Point:

Imagination lies at the heart of each story as the author conjures up extreme scenarios which are unreal, based on reality. Some employ magical realism; some black humour; and various other imaginative devices. Discuss this theme in relation to any of these stories.

Relationships Between Animals and Humans



Key Quote:

'The sister says: For two days and two nights we have not seen the sky. We have not touched our noses to the grass. And yet, we recognise it: the smell of death. You do not need to ask us, for we know. Our whiskers know, our teeth know. We know! the brother chimes.' ('Yes! Yes! Yes you are! Yes you Are' p 124)



Discussion Point:

The impenetrable mystery of how much animals intuit and how much they are misunderstood by humans forms one of the strands in this intriguing story. It is reminiscent of Shaun Tan's *Tales from the Inner City* as it weaves a web of narrative unease which is palpable ...



Discussion Point:

Which stories were most focused on this theme? What did they have to say about this theme?



KEY QUOTES

Choose one of the *Key Quotes* above and discuss in relation to the themes which have been outlined above. Then write an essay on how this quote relates to the overall themes in this collection.

FURTHER READING

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS BY WRITERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Andersen, Hans Christian *Hans Christian Andersen's Complete Fairy Tales* Leather-bound Classics, 2014.

Carmody, Isobelle *Green Monkey Dreams* Allen & Unwin, 1996.

Carmody, Isobelle *Metro Winds* Allen & Unwin, 2012

Christoperson, Jane Garlil *Kakadu Calling: Stories for Kids* Magabala Books, 2007.

Dahl, Roald *The Roald Dahl Treasury* Ill. by Quentin Blake. Penguin, 2016.

Gaiman, Neil *M is for Magic* HarperCollins, 2007.

Gleitzman, Morris *Funny Stories: And Other Funny Stories* Puffin, 2018.

Griffiths, Andy *Treehouse Tales Too Silly To Be Told ... Until Now!* Ill. by Terry Denton. Pan Macmillan, 2022.

Howker, Janni *The Nature of the Beast* Walker Books, 1985.

Jeffers, Oliver *Once Upon and Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters* Philomel Books, 2014.

Jennings, Paul *Unreal! The Ultimate Collection 30 Stories in 30 Years* Penguin Group Australia, 2015.

Lanagan, Margot *Black Juice* Allen & Unwin, 2006.

Lanagan, Margot *Yellowcake* Allen & Unwin, 2011.

Lanagan, Margot *Red Spikes* Allen & Unwin, 2006.

Lanagan, Margot *White Time* Allen & Unwin, 2006.

Mark, Jan *The One That Got Away: Thirty Stories from Thirty Years* Roffo Court Press, 2020.

Needle, Jan *A Sense of Shame and Other Stories* Deutsch, 1980.

Needle, Jan *A Pitiful Place and Other Stories* Methuen, 1985.

Scieszka, Jon *The Stinky-Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales* Ill. by Lane Smith. Viking, 1992.

Shipstead, Maggie *You Have a Friend in 10A* Doubleday, 2022.

Spratt, R.A. *Shockingly Good Stories* Puffin, 2021.

Tan, Shaun *Tales from Outer Suburbia* Allen & Unwin, 2008.

Tan, Shaun *Tales from the Inner City* Allen & Unwin, 2018.

Walliams, David *The World's Worst Children* Ill. by Tony Ross. HarperCollins, 2016.

Wilde, Oscar *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* Ill. by Lars Bo. Penguin Random House Children's UK, 2016.

SHORT STORY ANTHOLOGIES BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

A Lot of Stuff Happens by Adrian Beck, Andrew Daddo, Will Kostakis, Oliver Phommavanh Puffin, 2019.

Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean edited by Kirsty Murray, Payal Dhar and Anita Roy. Allen & Unwin, 2015. (Young Adult)

Flying Lessons and Other Stories edited by Ellen Oh. RHUS Children's Books, 2018.

Housden, Ellie *Step into Stories: 20 Short stories with Activities for Secondary Students* Farr Books, 2016.

Other Worlds: 10 Amazing Fantasy Stories and more edited by John Scieszka. HarperCollins, 2013.

Short a collection of interesting short stories and other stuff from some surprising and intelligent people edited by Lily Wilkinson. Black Dog Books, 2008.

Tales from the Tower Volume 1 The Wilful Eye edited by Carmody, Isobelle and Nan McNab. Allen & Unwin, 2011.

Tales from the Tower Volume 2 The Wicked Wood edited by Isobelle Carmody and Nan McNab. Allen & Unwin, 2011.

The Great War: Stories Inspired by Objects From the First World War 1914–1918 Walker Books, 2014.

The Hero Next Door: A We Need Diverse Books Anthology edited by Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich. RHUS Children's Books, 2021.

Together, Apart edited by Erin A. Craig, Auriane Desombre, Erin Hahn and Bill Konigsburg. Random House US, 2021.

ADULT FICTION

Several titles marked below are published for adults so that teachers are advised to consider content before employing them in the classroom. These titles might be used selectively in conjunction with these **Teachers' Notes**.

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS BY CONTEMPORARY WRITERS FOR ADULTS

Adelaide, Debra *Zebra: And Other Stories* Pan Macmillan, 2019.

Aman, Claire *Bird Country* Text Publishing, 2017.

Astley, Thea *Collected Stories* UQP, 1997.

Atwood, Margaret *Good Bones* Bloomsbury, 1992.

Atwood, Margaret *Stone Mattress: Nine Wicked Tales* Knopf Doubleday, 2015.

Atwood, Margaret *Old Babes in the Wood* Penguin Random House, 2023.

Birch, Tony *Common People* UQP, 2017.

Carter, Angela *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories* Vintage Classics, 1996.

Carter, Angela *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* Vintage, 1995.

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Earls, Nick *Welcome to Normal* Random House Australia, 2012.

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Garner, Helen *Stories: the Collected Short Fiction* Text Publishing, 2017.

Halligan, Marion *Collected Stories* UQP, 1997.

Hitchcock, Karen *Little White Slips* Pan Macmillan, 2009.

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Keret, Etgar *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God* Penguin Publishing Group, 2001.

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Le, Nam *The Boat* Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

Liu, Ken *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* Gallery/Saga Press, 2016.

Lively, Penelope *The Purple Swamp-hen & Other Stories* Penguin, 2017.

Malouf, David *Dream Stuff: Stories* Vintage, 2000.

Munro, Alice *Dear Life* Douglas Gibson Books, 2012.

Murakami, Haruki *First Person Singular* Harvill Secker, 2021.

Murakami, Haruki *Men Without Women* Vintage Arrow, 2018, 2014.

Oates, Joyce Carol *Will You Always Love me? and other Stories* Plume, 1997.

O'Reilly, Paddy *Peripheral Vision* UQP, 2015.

Perlman, Eliot *The Reasons I Won't Be Coming* Random House Australia, 2011.

Salinger, J.D. *Franny and Zooey* Penguin, 2010, 1961.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis *Collected Stories* Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1983.

Thomas, Audrey *Local Customs* Dundurn, 2014.

Winton, Tim *The Turning* Picador, 2004.

See also: 'Twenty Must-Read Collections for Short Story Month' *Penguin Random House* <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/the-read-down/must-read-collections-for-short-story-month/#>

SHORT STORY ANTHOLOGIES BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS FOR ADULTS

Birthday Stories edited by Haruki Murakami. Vintage Arrow, 2006, 2002.

Broken Stars: Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction in Translation edited by Ken Liu. Tor Books, 2019.

First Nations Stories Then and Now edited by Ellen van Neerven. UQP, 2021.

Reader, I married him: stories inspired by Jane Eyre edited by Tracy Chevalier. The Borough Press, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2016.

The Art of the Story edited by Daniel Halpern. Penguin Books, 2000.

The Best American Short Stories edited by Anthony Doerr. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

The Best Asian Short Stories 2020 edited by Zafar Anjum. Kitaab, 2020.

Unlimited Futures edited by Rafeif Ismail and Ellen van Neerven. Fremantle Press, 2022.

Where there's smoke: outstanding short stories by Australian men. Black Inc, 2015.

See also: '13 great 2021 short story collections by Asian authors' by Patricia Thang *Bookriot* March 16, 2021 <https://bookriot.com/2021-short-story-collections-by-asian-authors/>

CLASSIC WRITERS OF SHORT STORIES FOR ADULTS

Ray Bradbury, Anton Chekhov, Honoré de Balzac, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Nikolai Gogol, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ernest Hemingway, Henry James, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Henry Lawson, Katherine Mansfield, Gabriel García Márquez, Somerset Maugham, Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Walter Scott, Ivan Turgenev. See also: 'Edgar Allan Poe: Free Short Stories'

<http://www.free-short-stories.org.uk/edgar-allen-poe-free-short-stories.htm>

FURTHER NON-FICTION RESOURCES FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

INTERNET RESOURCES

'David Malouf on Short Story Writing' *ABC Education* 20 January 2022 [Film: 3 mins 16 secs.]

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/david-malouf-on-short-story-writing/13721924>

'How to Write a Short Story: the Short Story Checklist' By Rosemary Tantra Bensko and Sean Glatch

Writers.com June 21, 2022

<https://writers.com/how-to-write-a-short-story>

'Humor' *Literary Devices*

<https://literarydevices.net/humor/>

'Literary Devices and Terms' *Literary Devices*

<https://literarydevices.net/>

'Short story hooks with Paul Jennings curriculum' *Writelike*

<https://writelike.org/curriculum/lesson/1187>

'Short Story Writing for Students and Teachers' *Literacy Ideas for teachers and students*

<https://literacyideas.com/how-to-write-a-short-story/>

'What is Short Story Writing?' *twinkl*

<https://www.twinkl.com.au/teaching-wiki/short-story-writing>

'Writing a short story – where do you start?' by Lynne Bryan *National Centre for Writing*

https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/article/writing-a-short-story-where-do-you-start/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIkYDd_pK8_AIVTg9yCh0EjAKTEAMYAiAAEgI2Bfd_BwE

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Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. She is President of IBBY Australia and Deputy-Chair of the Australian Children's Laureate Foundation. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.

WORKSHEET – FURTHER ACTIVITIES & QUESTIONS

1. Read some of Elizabeth Tan's other works. Investigate information about, and reviews of her work online.
2. What other short story collections have you read? [Use the **Further Reading** list above as a start in compiling a reading list.]
3. Research short story writing and the strategies employed by published short story writers.
4. Create a book trailer promoting this collection.
5. 'Night of the Fish' describes a slippery slide escaping its moorings in a suburban park and how unsettling that is for the people in the neighborhood. Compare this story to any event in your own local area which has had similarly disorienting effects on the neighbours.
6. The stories 'Our Sleeping Lungs Opened to the Cold' and 'Yes! Yes! Yes You Are! Yes You Are!' are reminiscent of the stories about human and animal relationships included in Shaun Tan's *Tales from the Inner City*. Compare these stories to his.
7. How would you describe the meaning behind the story 'A Girl is Sitting on a Unicorn in the Middle of a Shopping Centre'?
8. The death of a homeless man in 'Pang & Co. Genuine Scribe Era Stationery Pty Ltd' reminds the protagonist that her life is privileged. What does the quality stationery she sells represent in this story?
9. 'Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle (Sing Your Heart Out)' is about vacuous popular culture. What other ideas are explored in this story?
10. Write a poem as if written by Shu about her lost love, Adam ('Smart Ovens for Lonely People').
11. In 'Mounting Sexual Tension Between Two Long-Time Friends; Tom Knows that Ant Is a Spy but Ant Doesn't' the complex plot is really about the nature of relationships and how we never really know someone even if they are a close friend, but that trust is also important. Discuss the themes contained in this story.
12. 'PPTX' is a delicate story about emotions. How would you describe Pippa?
13. 'Ron Swanson's Stencilled 'Stache' is about a catchline which goes 'viral' and the dangers concomitant with such social media. Compare to any instance of this in reality.
14. 'Washing Day' is an intriguing story. Create a comic panel version of this tale.
15. Discuss the theme of grief in the story 'Would You Rather'.
16. 'Excision in F-Sharp Minor' works on a fragmented timeline in an intriguing manner. Discuss the structure of this story.
17. 'Happy Smiling Underwear Girls Party' is a parody of contemporary girl culture and Kim Kardashian-influenced behaviour. Does this story relate to people in your world?
18. 'Disobeying' is about both the failings and the triumphs of a writer's life; for despite the passing pursuit of fame, the essence of being a writer is the ability to record moments of true joy, and insights into those we love or care for. Discuss.
19. 'This is Not a Treehouse' is about how we reconcile honesty and secrets in any relationship. Discuss.
20. 'What does 'Shirt Dresses That Look a Little Too Much Like Shirts So That it Looks Like You Forgot To Put on Pants (Love Will Save the Day)' say about office politics?
21. 'The Meal Channel' is a satire of reality television's obsession with cooking shows. What does it suggest about such entertainment?
22. 'Lola Metronome and Calliope St Laurent Having a Picnic at the End of Civilization as We Know It' is a powerful dystopian story about the end of the world. Discuss how the writer's use of literary device enhances the meaning of this story.
23. Discuss the concept of authenticity contrasted to the falsity of much contemporary production as it is explored in 'You Put the U in Utopia (or, The Last Neko Atsume Player in the World)'.
24. Which story did you enjoy most and why?