

hook
and
eye

the
study
companion

This study companion belongs to:

Fill in this form with your personal particulars:

Full Name:

Date of Birth:

Nationality:

Ethnicity/Dialect Group:

Gender:

Age:

Name of Primary School:

Name of Secondary School:

Spoken and Written Languages:

What do you like about yourself?

What do you dislike about yourself?

Describe yourself in five adjectives:

Who do you admire most and why?

What is your ambition?

What do you do on weekends?

Favourite subject:

Favourite sport:

Favourite song:

Favourite artiste:

Favourite book/author:

Favourite movie/drama:

Your worst fear:

Your greatest joy:

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Foreword

The new Literature Syllabus launched in 2018 is different from previous versions in many ways. One of the most prominent developments is its emphasis on the role of Literature in imbuing empathy in our students. While the critical appreciation of texts is kept intact, this new lens requires Literature teachers to help students see their world from a new perspective that is foreign and unfamiliar to their day to day experiences.

Hook and Eye: Stories from the Margins is a meaningfully curated anthology of short stories that serves to fulfill this vision of what Literature could do for our students. Philip Holden is no stranger to the local Literature scene. His expertise as an academic and a writer has made this selection of stories a judicious and discerning one. He draws our attention to marginalised communities within our society to raise our awareness of the unspoken schisms that divide us. In focusing on the Other, these intensely intimate stories resonate with larger national concerns and provoke discussion on issues of difference, deviance and discrimination. As we were writing this Companion, we felt strongly that as teachers, the anthology was made for the classroom; reading the stories made us want to teach them. On a personal level, the stories touched us deeply and gave us insight into the sense of displacement, alienation and loneliness of individuals whose voices we rarely hear. We believe that the characters and their predicaments will allow students to empathise with the real struggles of the people around them.

This Study Companion seeks to highlight aspects and significant elements of each of the eleven stories in the collection. The respective authors and teachers from various schools and of different levels of experience were consulted in the designing of this Companion. We found that their feedback was crucial in ensuring that the Companion stays true to each author's intention and meets the needs of the literature classroom and of anyone who would like to explore the stories further. Nevertheless, the Companion is not intended to be a Teachers' Guide or a Students' Workbook, neither does it attempt to predict what will be tested in the examinations. We have refrained from proposing classroom activities, pedagogical methodology or suggested websites and references as we believe these should be left to the teacher to decide on based on their student profile and learning objectives. Furthermore, the relevance of resources are not timeless, and it would be unwise in the long run to prescribe them. The Companion does not provide a synopsis or an analysis of the stories, and there are no model answers at the back of this book. Instead, the reader will be prompted to consider possible readings of the text.

We hope the production of this Companion promotes the decision to offer this text for the O-Levels. More importantly, we hope this book will underscore the rich narratives that Singapore Literature has to offer.

Dennis Yeo
Rachel Teo Zhen Li

How to Use This Book

The Companion is arranged according to a perceived level of familiarity and difficulty.

Each chapter begins with a **Before Reading the Story** segment that has short pre-reading questions that draw upon prior knowledge and personal experience to provide a context or background for the story.

You are then encouraged to note down your impressions of the story in a **Quick Response** segment.

This is followed by the **After Reading the Story** segment where post-reading questions help to consolidate ideas that may have arisen from the story.

Each story is used as a pretext to foreground a **Literary Focus** to teach a particular literary technique or an aspect of the short story. Literary terms are set in bold for easy reference.

Each story is then analysed using thematic concerns or literary concepts that are pertinent to the message of the story or your understanding the story. You should try to work through the questions in sequence as they are designed to gradually build a clearer grasp of key concepts in the stories as you work through them. The questions are intentionally open-ended in order to allow for a variety of responses, so do not feel that there is a need to give a right answer. Read a question, give it some thought, jot down what you think and then move to the next question. Instead of merely making a mental note, penning it down commits you to your personal opinion and crystalises your ideas. Rather than thinking of this exercise as a series of questions you have to answer, think of it as a trail of clues that will hopefully give you greater clarity of each story.

Each chapter ends with an **Eye On The World** section where you are encouraged to extend, develop and connect issues and values that the story introduces to broader perspectives regarding culture and society.

Studying the Short Story

Studying a short story is different from a novel. Unlike a novel, you can read a short story in one sitting. There are fewer characters and there is usually a single plotline. Given its length, the novel can afford to spend more time on detailed descriptions, extended dialogue and complex sub-plots. Short stories are more complex and concentrated, often leaving gaps for the reader to fill and may even end abruptly. Do not be surprised if the story ends with more questions than answers. This open-endedness welcomes divergent ways of reading the text and motivations of the characters, which make the short story more challenging and exciting to interpret. Instead of focusing on one narrative, studying an anthology of short stories will allow the reader to encounter a variety of narratives written by different authors in their own individual styles, centered around a common theme.

How Should You Study A Short Story?

You do not have to read the short stories in order. Begin with the titles that you like or the stories that look simpler (or shorter!).

As you read each story for the first time, it is useful to immediately scribble down your thoughts and ideas. In fact, you should always be ready to annotate a Literature text. It is especially important to capture your intuitive impressions of the text on your first reading as it is often your most authentic response to its effects. Draw symbols or write simple comments in the margins to track your emotional responses and thoughts as you read. Some ways you may do this are shown below:

✓	I like this.
*	This is important.
?	I don't understand this. What's happening?
!	Woah! I didn't expect that!
→	This connects to (or contradicts) something I read earlier.
♥	This is my favourite part.
☹ ☺	This made me sad or happy or angry.

You should also look out for the use of literary techniques that you have learned and be sensitive to phrases that stand out to you. The important thing is for you to indicate how the story makes you feel at various points. You can also write down your predictions of what is going to happen as you read and what made you think this. Make the text yours.

When you read the short story for a second time, be more aware of how the story presents itself and affects you. Why does the author choose to begin the story like this? How is the reader introduced to the setting and the characters? Are there hints in the story of what is going to happen? What does the ending reveal about the author's attitude towards the themes in the story? How does the story make you feel?

Otherness

Since the stories capture the voices of the marginalised, we need to first discuss the idea of Otherness and its relevance to the anthology. Let us begin with this quote from Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (1991): “Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend”. The Other is that which is different and deviant. Consequently, the Other is discriminated against because it is not the accepted norm.

Difference

The most fundamental state of Otherness is to be different. An apple is an apple because it is not a pear or a pencil. This difference is crucial in any act of definition. You derive your identity because you are different from others. In the same way, other people derive their identity because they are different from you. Therefore, your identity—who you are and are not—is dependent on the existence of others. Likewise, because we belong to social groups based on our gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, occupation, religion, belonging to a certain group sets us apart from people who belong to other groups.

Fill in the table below to understand how social groups contribute to your identity.

Social Group	I am...	I am not...
Gender		
Nationality		
Ethnicity		
Age		
Occupation		
Religion		
Name other social group you belong to:		

Deviance

Being different may result in one being seen to be deviant; to be outside or on the margins of what is seen to be normal. Every community or culture has a norm. Deviance is differing from this norm or from the accepted standards of society. An individual is deviant when his or her behavior or attitude breaches the rule, etiquette, custom or morality of what is deemed to be socially appropriate. This makes one an Outsider whose non-conformity is thus often perceived to be negative or abnormal, as it diverges from what is socially allowed or approved.

This norm is usually established by the dominant group. For instance, if masculinity is perceived to be the dominant norm, femininity is the Other, as it diverges from the norm. It must be noted that the norm is not decided by the majority, but by the prevailing perception of that particular culture. We are socialised to think that this norm is “natural” so we take it for granted and do not question it.

Otherness, however, is contextual because social norms differ between cultures, social contexts or circumstances. One can be a member of the dominant group in one context but be subordinate in another. For instance, a Chinese who is at home in Hong Kong will feel like an outsider in India. We can thus experience different types of Otherness when we move between social contexts.

I am the norm when...	I am the Other when...
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Discrimination

An Us vs Them mentality is created when social groups create their identities by differentiating themselves from others. Belonging to any group comes with the privilege of being a member of the norm or the stigma of being the Other. Fear, prejudice and discrimination are the common reactions to the deviance of the Other. By asserting our identity, we privilege ourselves, and ostracise or reject others. This is further aggravated by our inability or unwillingness to understand the Other, leading to the Other being subjected to oppression and exploitation.

Who are the Others in your life? How do you feel about people who are different from you?

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Why is it important for us to have empathy for others? What is the consequence of a lack of empathy for others?

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.....

What have I learned about the Other? What else do I want to know or understand about the Other?

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Margarine and the Syrian Refugee Project

Koh Choon Hwee

Before Reading the Story

1. How do you feel when you learn about others who are less fortunate than you?

.....

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2. (a) Do you think Singaporeans are accepting of those who are different?
Explain how so?

.....

.....

(b) Do you think Singapore is an inclusive society? Why or why not?

.....

.....

3. (a) If you had to do a school project to research on a minority group in our society (e.g. senior citizens), which group would you pick?

.....

.....

(b) What three things would you like to know about the group you have chosen?

(i)

.....

(ii)

.....

(iii)

.....

4. (a) How do you think those who are less fortunate than you feel about you?

.....
.....

(b) Why?

.....
.....

A Quick Response

5. Did you like the story? Why or why not?

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.....

6. How did the story make you feel towards the characters in the story?

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.....

7. (a) Who do you think is marginalised in the story?

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.....

(b) Why do you think so?

.....
.....

After Reading the Story

8. (a) Who is telling the story?

.....
.....

(b) What is she like?

.....

.....

9. In what ways is Marjorie made to appear different from the others?

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.....

10. How does your impression of Marjorie change?

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11. How does Nabilah feel about the narrator? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

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12. Do you agree with Nabilah or the narrator about Marjorie at the end of the story? Why or why not?

.....

.....

13. Do you like Marjorie? Why or why not?

.....

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Literary Focus: First-Person Narrative Voice

14. The story is written in the **first-person narrative voice**. What does this mean? Google the literary technique.

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Let us take a close look at an example.

I bent over my notebook and pretended to copy notes ... I noticed that her well-worn sneakers had the faded outline of an embroidered pattern on the side. I remembered seeing this brand in an online store before; they didn't have any branches in Singapore. I felt self-conscious of my clunky shoes, with their thick, ungainly soles. (42–43)

To understand the effect of the first-person narrative, we can compare this to the **third-person narrative**. Let us call the main character or protagonist Cady.

Cady bent over her notebook and pretended to copy notes ... She noticed that Marjorie's well-worn sneakers had the faded outline of an embroidered pattern on the side. She remembered seeing this brand in an online store before; they didn't have any branches in Singapore. She felt self-conscious of her clunky shoes, with their thick, ungainly soles.

15. How is the effect of the narrative perspective in this passage different from the original?

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.....

There is a technique called the **second-person narrative** and it would be written this way:

You are bent over your notebook and pretending to copy notes ... You notice that her well-worn sneakers had the faded outline of an embroidered pattern on the side. You remember seeing this brand in an online store before; they didn't have any branches in Singapore. You feel self-conscious of your clunky shoes, with their thick, ungainly soles.

16. How is the perspective of the second-person narrator different from that of the third-person narrator?

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17. Why do you think the author chose to write this story from the first-person point-of-view, and not the second or third?

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The Narrator

The narrator acts as a mouthpiece for the author to help us navigate the world of Marjorie and the world of the narrator and Nabilah.

18. Why do you think the author does not give the narrator a name?

.....

.....

19. Unlike Marjorie and Nabilah then, we do not know the narrator's ethnicity or her socio-economic status. What do you think is the reason for this?

.....

.....

The narrator is Nabilah's friend but as the story progresses, she is caught between her allegiance to Nabilah and her curious fascination with Marjorie. "I didn't report that incident to the teacher. I didn't even tell Nabilah" (44). This inclination towards Marjorie reveals a growing empathy to protect Marjorie.

20. What role does the narrator play in the relationship between Nabilah and Marjorie?

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21. (a) Going back to class from the toilet, the narrator chances upon Marjorie staring at a frog. Why do you think Marjorie was so interested in the frog?

.....

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(b) The word "katak" means "frog". The glossary tells us that there is a Malay proverb "katak di bawah tempu-rung" that means "frog under a (coconut) shell" (185). Later, in front of the portrait of Marjorie's mother, the narrator says, "I felt like the frog" (51). How are the narrator and the frog similar?

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Critical Analysis

Two Worlds

Look at the first paragraph of the story. Highlight the words "they" or "them" in yellow whenever they appear. Now highlight the words "us" in green. There is clearly a distinction between "they" (the Syrians) and "us" ("the lucky people in the lucky countries" (41)). The paragraph concludes with "I wonder if Marjorie thinks about us anymore" (41) which suggests that she is not one of "us" either.

22. (a) We first meet Marjorie as an outsider entering a new class. What was your first impression of Marjorie?

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.....

(b) Was her behavior what you would expect from someone who is being introduced to the class?

.....

.....

(c) Would you want to be her friend?

.....

.....

23. What signs are there that Marjorie is "rich"?

.....

.....

24. (a) Why do you think the teacher told her class to show Marjorie that "Bukit Katak Secondary is *just as good* as Farquhar Girls'" (42)?

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(b) How do you think the schools are different?

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25. Were you surprised when it was revealed that Marjorie's father was from a school like Bukit Katak Secondary School? Why?

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The idea of two worlds is most evident when the girls visit each other's house. Nabilah and the narrator are outsiders in a world which is normal to Marjorie. Likewise, Marjorie is unfamiliar with living in a HDB flat. Let us do a contrast of both households.

26.	Marjorie's house	Nabilah's house	Your observations
(a)	"her long driveway ... her three-storeyed mansion" (51)	"four-room flat" (52)	
(b)	"two computers" (48)	"Auntie was sitting at the computer writing emails" (52)	
(c)	"Her maid could also cook us lunch and dinner" (48)	"Nabilah's house smelled of her mother's delicious lemak ayam cili padi" (52)	
(d)	"whatever we wanted to eat" (48)	"Margarine had never had lemak ayam before" (52)	

(e)	"she had a driver who could drive us home" (48)	"Auntie came over and gave Margarine a hug" (52)	
(f)	"the walls were so high, that I couldn't even look into her neighbours' house" (49)	"I ... knew the old grandma who lived right next to her" (51)	
(g)	"punched in the security code to close the gates" (49)	"We were on the fourth floor, so we could hear everything that was happening downstairs" (53)	
(h)	"warded off an excited golden retriever" (49)	"Nabilah's brother, sprawled on the sofa" (52)	
(i)	"waved at some sensor to activate the air-conditioning" (49)	"Some old board games lay, collecting dust, on the top shelf" (53)	
(j)	"mess of coiffured greenery" (51)	"her potted plants lined up on one side of the narrow corridor" (51–52)	
(k)	"many other formidable mansions, but saw hardly any humans" (51)	"We walked to a nearby park ... Some old people were exercising on the grass ..." (53)	

Do a similar contrast with the families of Jo and Nabilah in the following table:

27.	Jo's Family	Nabilah's family	Your observation
(a)			
(b)			