

1. WHAT IS A STORY?

Different uses of the word 'story'

- In pairs, discuss the questions below.
 - When and how do people use the word 'story' in the different ways listed below?
 - Which of the examples do you use in your everyday life?
 - Can you sort the listed phrases into two or three broad categories?
 - What do English teachers tend to mean when they talk about stories?

Made up story	The inside story	Story of my life	Story time
Fairy story	Love story	Life story	Usual story
True story	Newspaper story	Hard luck story	Tall story
Sob story	Story telling	Ghost story	Short story
The real story	Likely story	Same old story	Story book

Your definition

- On a strip of paper, or a Post-it note, write down your own definition of 'story'.
- Share different definitions round your class and discuss any key similarities and differences. Write your own definition on a new strip of paper or Post-it note if the discussion has given you new ideas about what you think a story is.
- Display your different definitions on your classroom wall to refer to when you are doing further work on stories.

Different types of story

All of the examples on pages 16-17 can be called stories in one way or another.

- In small groups, read each in turn. Discuss in what ways each might be called a story. (You might refer to some of the ways the word is used from the previous activity.)
- Imagine you are English teachers. Choose one that you think you could teach to a class studying stories. Feed back to your class two or three reasons for your group's decision.

From story to short story

Story F (and possibly E) are the only ones from the examples in the 'Different types of story' activity likely to be found in an anthology of fictional stories. Story F is a very short piece of literary fiction by famous Czech writer, Franz Kafka.

- In pairs, discuss the ways this story is different to the other examples. Think carefully about:
 - the writer's choice of words
 - the tone of voice
 - the structure
 - the action
 - any message the story might have.

Six word short stories

One of the examples in the 'Different types of story' task is only six words long. Believe it or not, it is recognised as a genuine short story (and is generally thought to have been written by a very famous American writer, Ernest Hemingway, though that has never been verified). It belongs to the genre of six-word short stories.

The examples of six-word short stories on page 18 are all by well-known writers.

- In small groups complete a copy of the table on page 18. It requires you to think carefully about how six-word short stories work.
- When you have finished, choose the story your group likes best and explain why to the rest of the class.
- Working individually, write a six-word story of your own.
- Return to your groups, read out your six-word stories to each other and discuss how well they work as stories. Choose one to feed back to the rest of the class.

Why do we tell stories?

- In small groups, think of three to five answers to the question: why do we tell stories?
- Share your group's best response with the rest of the class. Discuss the different responses.
- Read the statements on page 19 about stories and short stories, some of which come from famous writers.
- Choose the statement you like best and explain your choice to the rest of the class.

Conclusions

- Complete this sentence starter: 'A great short story ...'
- Display the sentences from everyone in your class alongside the definitions of the word 'story' from the activity 'Your definition' on page 14.
- Use the statements to help you think about the strengths of the different short stories you read in this collection. You might, for example, look at the list every time you finish a different story.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF STORY

A

Main road walks to the entrance of a club and asks to be let in. Bouncer takes one look and refuses. 'Why won't you let me in?' says main road. 'Because you're a main road,' says bouncer. 'Everyone knows main roads can't go into clubs.' Country lane then comes to the entrance and asks to be let in. One look and bouncer refuses again. 'Why won't you let me in?' says country lane. 'You're a country lane,' says bouncer. 'Everyone knows country lanes can't go into clubs.' Next thin piece of pink road comes to the entrance and asks to be let in. 'Certainly,' says bouncer, and opens the door to let it through. Main road and country lane see this and are furious. 'Why does it get to go in and not us?' they say. 'Oooh!' says bouncer, drawing in breath. 'You don't want to mess around with thin pieces of pink road – they're all cycle paths!'

B

The world's biggest dog put his owner in a spin yesterday when his head got stuck in a washing machine. Hamlet, a six foot tall Great Dane, was trapped up to his neck in the Whirlpool machine for over three hours before fire officers cut him free. Said Linda Berryman, who bought Hamlet when he was a small puppy, 'He's always getting stuck. His body might be big but he doesn't seem to have the brain to match.'

C



D

My big sister's always liked showing off so when the crew digging up the road outside our house went home and left the key in the ignition of their digger she boasted that she was going to give it a drive. She turned the ignition and the machine growled into life. It bumped up and down as she sat grinning like she'd just done the most daring thing ever. After a minute or so she turned the key to 'off'. Only it didn't turn off. The engine kept on running. That's when the smile went off her face, as she started pulling random levers. The arm of the digger began crashing up and down, then the whole thing lurched forwards. It wasn't going very fast, but it was definitely heading for traffic. It was so slow it would have taken about ten minutes to get there, but it would have caused a pile-up when it happened. So she jumped off and ran inside to get mum. She was so embarrassed when she had to say what she'd done. Mum rushed outside, jumped into the digger, reached under the seat, and pulled a red lever. The machine juddered to a halt. That's when mum told us about the time she used to work on a construction site.

E

For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.

F

When you go walking by night up a street and a man, visible a long way off – for the street mounts uphill and there is a full moon – comes running towards you, well, you don't catch hold of him, not even if he is a feeble and ragged creature, not even if someone chases, yelling, at his heels, but you let him run on.

For it is night, and you can't help it if the street goes uphill before you in the moonlight, and besides, these two have maybe started that chase to amuse themselves, or perhaps they are both chasing a third, perhaps the first is an innocent man and the second wants to murder him and you would become an accessory, perhaps they don't know anything about each other and are merely running separately home to bed, perhaps they are night birds, perhaps the first man is armed.

And anyhow, haven't you a right to be tired, haven't you been drinking a lot of wine? You're thankful that the second man is now long out of sight.

The sources of these 'stories' can be found on page 6.

SIX-WORD SHORT STORIES BY FAMOUS WRITERS

Six-word short story	Possible genre	What could be happening beyond these lines?
See that shadow? (It's not yours.) Jim Crace	Thriller	A mysterious attacker has tracked down her victim after trailing him for several hours: she is about to pounce!
Oh, that? It's nothing. Not contagious. Augusten Burroughs		
'The Earth? We ate it yesterday.' Yann Martel		
Corpse parts missing. Doctor buys yacht. Margaret Atwood		
Bob's last message: Bermuda Triangle, Baloney. Elmore Leonard		
We kissed. She melted. Mop please! James Patrick Kelly		
They awaited sunrise. It never came. A.S. Byatt		
Found true love. Married someone else. Dave Eggers		
Tick tock tick tock tick tick Neal Stephenson		
Served the pie, watched him die. Maggie O' Farrell		
Eyeballed me, killed him. Slight exaggeration. Irvine Welsh		
With bloody hands, I say goodbye. Frank Miller		

WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?

After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.

Philip Pullman

Stories are a way of escaping from the problems of real life.

We owe it to each other to tell stories.

Neil Gaiman

We tell stories to find out about lives different from our own.

Stories are a different kind of true.

Emma Donoghue

Stories are a way for people to think about life's important issues.

Stories help us to explore emotions in a safe environment.

Stories show us the different possible ways to use language.

Stories are entertaining and fun to read.