

Grade 5: **Unit 4**

Short Stories: **Introduction**

Purpose: Why This Unit?

In this unit, scholars will read and analyze four excellent short stories as a class: “All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury, “The Catbird Seat” by James Thurber, “Will” by Adam Rex, and “The Strangers that Came to Town” by Ambrose Flack. They will then take all they have learned about short stories to independently analyze “Charles” by Shirley Jackson and “The Fun They Had” by Isaac Asimov. Throughout the unit, you will help your scholars love and deeply understand the power of short stories.

Your job, though, is first and foremost that of a reading teacher. You must ensure that your scholars enlist the basic tools of great readers — envisioning, reading with fluency, engaging in word attack, and, of course, using plot, setting, and character development — to understand these stories’ provocative ideas. You must know your scholars’ Fountas & Pinnell levels and ensure that they are swiftly growing as readers. You must ensure that your scholars are reading and writing at home and that your scholars’ parents are invested in their learning.

You are also a teacher of writing. You must ensure that your scholars are deeply invested in improving their writing and that they give you their best work. Always set sky-high expectations and settle only for scholars’ best effort. It is your responsibility to dramatically improve your scholars’ writing capacities. You will need to study the Top 5 Writing Tactics and ensure that scholars know how to be critics of their own writing.

In particular, you are responsible for the following outcomes:

- First and foremost, you must get 100% of your scholars independently reading at least four books per month.
- You are responsible for 100% of your scholars completing nightly literacy homework that will develop them as readers and writers.
- You are responsible for getting minimally 90% of your scholars on or above grade level in reading, as measured by Fountas & Pinnell Reading Assessment.

You will not achieve 100% without setting clear expectations for your scholars AND their parents, and driving relentlessly toward these goals. If you hold scholars and parents accountable and are an absolute stickler at the beginning, you will make it easier for yourself and frankly for your scholars and their parents. The worst thing you can do as a teacher is let scholars slide and then get tough. You will breed resentment and distrust, whereas clear expectations and utter consistency breed trust and respect.

Themes

In order to successfully teach this unit, you must be intellectually prepared at the highest level. This means reading and studying each story before launching the unit, and understanding the major themes that the authors communicate. By the time your scholars finish reading the short stories in this unit, they should be able to articulate and explain these themes.

The table below outlines the major topics and themes highlighted in the short stories. Note that you should NOT review these with scholars before they begin reading the book. Rather, scholars will uncover themes organically through their reading. As a teacher of reading, your job is to facilitate rich conversations about the meaning of each chapter. You will do this by posing the discussion questions provided in each seminar. As scholars read the texts, you will press them to analyze how the authors use events in the stories to communicate the major themes.

While there is not one correct thematic statement for each major topic discussed in these short stories, there are accurate (evidence-based) and inaccurate (non-evidence-based) interpretations of what the authors are arguing. Therefore, we have provided exemplar thematic statements in the tables below.

“All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury

Topic	Theme
Empathy and Understanding	Without empathy, people cannot truly understand another person’s perspective or experience.
Bullying	Children may bully another who is different from them, but this can lead to remorse and regret.

“The Catbird Seat” by James Thurber

Topic	Theme
The Power of Reputation	A person’s reputation affects how others perceive their actions. Reputations are built from routine behaviors and character traits.

“Will” by Adam Rex

Topic	Theme
Heroism	One does not need superpowers to be a hero.
The Power of Intelligence	Intelligence and quick wit will triumph over physical force.

“The Strangers that Came to Town” by Ambrose Flack

Topic	Theme
Humility	Acting with humility means never thinking you are better or more important than other people because of money, stature, or background. Humility is crucial to getting along with people from different backgrounds.
Acceptance	People, regardless of their culture, money or background, deserve acceptance and respect.