

Grade 6: **Unit 4**

Short Stories: **Introduction**

Purpose: Why This Unit?

In this unit, scholars will read and analyze four excellent short stories as a class: “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe, “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury, “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, and “The Monkey’s Paw” by W. W. Jacobs. They will then take all they have learned about short stories to independently analyze “Names/Nombres” by Julia Alvarez and “Thank you Ma’am” by Langston Hughes. 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 the 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 short story. You will do this by posing the discussion questions provided in each seminar. As scholars read the text, you will press them to analyze how the authors use events in the short stories to communicate the major themes.

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

“The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe

Topic	Theme
Cleverness vs. Madness	Men cross the line from cleverness to madness when they use their intelligence for evil or destructive purposes.
Guilt	A guilty conscience can affect how we think and behave. It can make us anxious and has the power to drive us mad.

“There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury

Topic	Theme
Advancements in Technology	Advancements in technology can both improve and worsen the quality of human life.
The Relationship between Man and Technology	When technology overpowers man, the consequences can be disastrous.

“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson

Topic	Theme
Tradition	People follow tradition because it is commonly accepted by their peers, even if it offers no benefit to the individual.
Conformity	People will perform cruel or violent acts to remain accepted and included in their society.

“The Monkey’s Paw” by W. W. Jacobs

Topic	Theme
Greed	Greed leads to unhappiness because you are always left wanting more. It can hinder your common sense about what you really want or need.