

Grade 7: Unit 4

Short Stories: Introduction

Purpose: Why This Unit?

In this unit, scholars will read and analyze four excellent short stories as a class: “2 B R 0 2 B” by Kurt Vonnegut, “The Possibility of Evil” by Shirley Jackson, “Rip Van Winkle” by Washington Irving, and “The Sniper” by Liam O’Flaherty. They will then take all they have learned about short stories to independently analyze “Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl and “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut. 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 any of your scholars who are still reading below grade level, as measured by the Fountas & Pinnell Reading Assessment, to a Level Z.

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 stories. 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 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.

“2 B R 0 2 B” by Kurt Vonnegut

Topic	Theme
Logic vs. Emotion	When decisions are made purely on the basis of logic, humans lose their capacity for empathy.
The Illusion of Perfection	No society is perfect. In dystopian society, government regulations create a smoothly functioning world at the expense of basic human freedoms.
Population Control	Population control is desirable for the health of the planet, but cannot be achieved without strict impositions on the freedom of individuals.

“The Possibility of Evil” by Shirley Jackson

Topic	Theme
Appearance vs. Reality	Individuals can maintain facades that do not match their true emotions and opinions.
Hypocrisy	People who are blind to their own faults often act hypocritically.

“Rip Van Winkle” by Washington Irving

Topic	Theme
Storytelling, History, and Truth	Storytelling blurs the line between fact and fiction. Stories are a powerful — though at times untrustworthy — vehicle for relating history.

“The Sniper” by Liam O’Flaherty

Topic	Theme
The Violence and Pain of War	Brutal violence and pain — both physical and psychological — are at the core of warfare.
Respect for Human Life	Although individuals may feel remorse after killing, warfare ultimately challenges respect for human life.