

## **Grade 8:** **Unit 4**

# **Short Stories:** **Introduction**

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### **Purpose: Why This Unit?**

In this unit, scholars will read and analyze four excellent short stories as a class: “A Sound of Thunder” by Ray Bradbury, “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl, “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell, and “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes. They will then take all they have learned about short stories to independently analyze “Superman and Me” by Sherman Alexie and “The Pedestrian” by Ray Bradbury. 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.

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## 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 table below.

## “A Sound of Thunder” by Ray Bradbury

Topic	Theme
<b>The Relationship Between Man and Nature</b>	Man should not attempt to interfere with nature; if he does, it can lead to disastrous consequences.
<b>Hubris</b>	A man’s excessive pride can be his downfall.

## “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl

Topic	Theme
<b>Appearance vs. Reality</b>	Individuals can deceive others by maintaining facades that do not match their true intentions.
<b>The Danger of Innocence</b>	Innocence and naiveté blind individuals to signs of danger, making them vulnerable to deception.

## “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell

Topic	Theme
<b>Reason vs. Instinct</b>	Humans do not always make decisions purely on the basis of reason. They— just like animals— are often driven by instinct, especially in dangerous situations.
<b>The Ethics of War</b>	Man’s involvement in war can numb him to violence, making him lose respect for the value of human life. As such, war is unethical.

## “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes

Topic	Theme
<b>The Relationship between Intelligence and Happiness</b>	Intelligence allows people to notice the intricacies of the world around them, leading to both pleasure and pain. Therefore, increased intelligence does not necessarily lead to increased happiness.
<b>Tampering with Nature</b>	Despite science and technology, human beings cannot control nature. Man’s attempts at tampering with nature can cause more harm than good.