

## 'DEAD MEN'S PATH'

In this story Michael Obi takes over as new headmaster at a school that needs helping to progress. He is keen to succeed, full of ideas but also arrogant and intolerant. He doesn't really think about anything other than his job and has little time for the rest of his staff who don't share his enthusiasm.

His wife enjoys the idea of being married to a person of such a high status and looks to be admired by all. She says "We shall have such beautiful gardens and everything will be just modern." For the couple, 'modern' was what they wanted and 'old' was to be got rid of.

Consequently, Obi came into conflict with the local community as he spotted an old woman hobble through the school, across the flower beds. She was following a traditional path that connected the village with the burial ground. Obi shut the path off with barbed wire.

The village priest went to see Obi saying that the village depended upon the path as 'it is the path of children coming in to be born.' Michael Obi said it was his purpose to 'eradicate such beliefs as that,' (eradicate means to root out) and refused the compromise of the Priest who said, 'Let the hawk perch and let the eagle perch' meaning let everyone have his place.

Two days later a young woman died in child birth and on the night the school premises were attacked. A visiting inspector made a note that problems arose because of the 'misguided zeal' of the new headmaster.

Several themes are explored here –

- the difference in cultures – the new, western culture of Michael Obi v the traditional pagan culture
- young v old
- the arrogance of youth, the importance of tradition
- learning how to move forward without forgetting the past
- the impact of European ways of life upon African culture

Look at:- how Obi is described – lines 4-19

35-40

45-51

- how Obi treats the other staff lines 57-67
- how Obi insults the priest lines 101-102

Michael Obi's one desire is to be successful and to have the Government Education Officer think well of him. What is ironic about the ending?

## 'Snapshots of a Wedding'

Another story that deals with a clash between traditional behaviour/customs and modern, European influenced ways.

The story explores the choice wealthy young farmer Kegoletile makes when choosing a wife. The story starts early on the day of the marriage to the now heavily pregnant Neo but looks at how Kegoletile had to choose between Mathata and Neo.

Neo is intelligent – she has O levels and can look forward to getting a good, western style job, like secretary. The pregnancy had ensured Kegoletile would marry her but he's also made another girl, Mathata, pregnant. She is uneducated, could only be a housemaid but is very pretty and always happy. Neo, however is disliked by everyone, even her own family, because of her arrogance and because of the way she looks down her nose at everyone.

Kegoletile spends a lot of time with Mathata, buys her gifts and has promised to provide money for the baby when it's born. Neo, on the other hand, learns an unpleasant lesson when she visits her aunt one day. Look at what the aunt says lines 105-110. It wipes the superior smile off her face and causes Neo to make sure she falls pregnant.

So the wedding day arrives, full of tradition with an ox to sacrifice, lots of ululating and buttocks shaking. Even so look at what one of the friends say lines 23-32 about the lack of tradition. The response is 'If the times are changing, we keep up with them.' Throughout all the ceremonies conducted by the aunts on both sides, Neo sits unmoved. The formality of the ceremony is seen through lines 158-167. Neo is sitting on the traditional mat wrapped in traditional coverings when two ululating women who are shaking their buttocks collide and fall over. Everyone breaks out laughing and the formality of the old tradition is broken. At the end Neo's aunt pounds the ground by the side of her and calls upon her to 'be a good wife.' Here the author shows that the old world is accepting the new and the new is warming to the old – they are learning to live together.

Themes – new culture v old culture and traditions  
the influences of European ways in helping to beat the poverty trap  
how do we choose our life partners?  
the arrogance of youth  
the demand for respect by the old  
learning to move forward without forgetting the past  
the impact of European ways of life upon African culture

Look at descriptions of Neo lines 35-60  
99-119

Look at the description of Mathata lines 73-84

Look at the description of Kegoletile lines 84-98

The opening is a powerful one, projecting us into a mystical world of 'shimmering waves,' 'fluid forms' and ululating which 'rose and swelled over

the air like water bubbling rapidly and melodiously over the stones of a clear, sparkling stream.'

The ending is also powerful as the aunt who is described as 'of majestic, regal bearing' shows her desire for everything to go well in the wedding and the verbs used 'dropped to her knees,' 'clenched her fists,' 'pounded the ground' indicating the depth of emotion.

The name 'Neo' comes from the Greek prefix that means 'new' – is that significant?

The third story in the anthology also deals with the topic of a clash of cultures. In 'The Train From Rhodesia' we see a young couple, on what is probably their honeymoon, going on a sight seeing trip. They are white and wealthy. The place they visit in the story is a tiny stop in the middle of nowhere inhabited by black, mainly impoverished, natives.

The story explores the fragile relationship between the majority of the indigenous South African population who are poor, have no developed existence and so will remain poor, and the white population who have settled there, become wealthy but also have introduced some possibility of development.

The train is a symbol of the white development. It represents engineering, technology, transport, structure, systems – all the things needed for a country and a people to become developed and wealthy. It bring wealthy people into that place and they distribute their wealth by paying for little souvenirs and such like but at the same time it keeps the wealth separate from the people there. The white people are cocooned inside the shell of the train, behind the windows and only reach out to exchange and barter for goods. Then, the train takes them away again.

If the train didn't go there, would those people still be carving animals to survive or would they be working the fields or doing other sorts of things? Does the train help to keep them alive by creating this tourist trade? Who is exploiting whom?

The separateness of the train and its passengers is shown by the first short paragraph (one and a half lines) which describes its approach but which is then followed by a break in the text. The train is on a single straight track – implying it's not a major communication route but purely for this purpose.

Look at lines 3-20 and identify how the writer brings over the poverty of the population. How does he show the Stationmaster and his family to be better off? They are linked to the train and so are more wealthy.

Line 21 is a single sentence of two words 'They waited' showing how important the train was to the area and the fact that its arrival was the only thing of significance to them.

Look at lines 22-26. How does the writer personify the train?

The third section of the story deals with the young woman caught up in the excitement of looking at souvenirs of bargaining – there is a crush of ‘artists’ all trying to sell their products. Although the system seems fairly soulless, the writer gives the impression that the carvings aren’t mass produced for the tourist market as she says ‘the artist had delight in the lion.’ Those without things to sell, beg. The dogs lie under the dining car, hoping.

Inside, the travellers are protected from the squalor of the ‘real world’ – “the faces, behind glass, drinking beer.”

The newly wed husband is intent on buying a gift for his wife but the trader wants too much and in the situation the woman thinks about what these items might mean outside of their context ‘Away from the unreality of the past few weeks’ and it makes her realise of her husband ‘he was for good now.’

As the train leaves, the artists are desperate to sell and suddenly the lion souvenir can be had at a cut down price. ‘With laughter and triumph’ the young husband gives it to his bride and brags about the cut down price. ‘But how could you?’ is her response. ‘If you wanted it, why didn’t you pay for it?’ ‘It’s a beautiful piece of work.’ She throws the lion onto the seat and he can’t understand. She feels devalued. The memory has been devalued, the man has been cheated – their first big row. There is a hint that their marriage may not be smooth – there are problems ahead. At the end of the story a final paragraph describes the snake-like train leaving saying it has ‘cast the station like a skin.’

Look at lines 165-185. What do we learn about the young woman here?  
About their relationship?

Pick out all the references to the Stationmaster and his family. How do they differ from the others? Why?

Rhodesia is now known as Zimbabwe.

Themes -     clash of cultures  
                  the influence of European culture  
                  poverty  
                  marriage  
                  disappointment

### **‘The Gold-Legged Frog’**

This story portrays a picture of people trapped in absolute poverty. Set in Thailand, Asia, we see a family living in a community dependent upon the seasons. The rainy season provides the means of growing their main food source. During the dry season they have to scratch a living waiting for the rains to return. It is a very precarious life style and death is never very far away.

The opening of the story helps us to realise just how bad the conditions are. Look at lines 1 – 19 and pick out the ways the writer brings over the harshness of the place and the weather. Look at the emotive vocabulary used – ‘blistered, burning, torture’.

On line 20 we are taken back in time to the events of earlier in the day ‘That very morning’ and we are told how he and two young sons were looking for frogs to add to their rice (this shows the extent of their poverty). In the background the village drums are drumming calling them to a meeting but just at that moment they see a fully grown gold legged frog and so it seems their luck is in. However, as he tries to fetch the frog from a hole in the ground, Naks’s son is bitten by a snake.

Notice how, as he carries his dying son home, the other brings the dead snake – even though it bit his son it is a meal that can’t be refused. The only help available for his son is primitive help – another sign of their life style.

Nak then gets the news he has to go to the town to the district office so he can get the ‘many children money’ – a hand-out for families with five or more children – he just has five. Here is his problem – his child is dying and he is being told he has to go to town. There is a lot of pressure on him. The money, 200 baht, more than he’s ever had before. He may go to jail if he refuses. The village chief says, “You go. Don’t go against the government. We’re subjects”.

With the threat of being put in jail for life – the rest of his family could die as a consequence – Nak reluctantly goes to town.

Look at lines 96 – 129 how is the character of the Deputy District Officer brought over? Why is he described as having a ‘fat face’? How is Nak treated at the office?

Look at the ending on page 28 – as Nak arrives home, his neighbours tell him how lucky he is as he got the money just before his son died, otherwise he wouldn’t have been given the 200 baht. Do you think he feels lucky? What is the IRONY of the ending?

Themes –     the ordinary men v government  
                  how FATE treats ordinary people  
                  how fragile life is in some countries  
                  the role of/problems being a parent

**‘Two kinds’** also deals with the problems of being a parent and the sacrifices parents make to ensure their children have a better life. Unlike the previous story, there is no harmony in the family. The mother’s desire to get a better life for her child leads to major conflict between them.

The mother came originally from Asia – China – and life was fragile there – as she had lost her whole family including twin baby girls. She has moved to

America to rebuild, has a new husband, new daughter and a belief that in America you can be what you want to be – the American Dream.

They live in America and enjoy all the advantages but the mother wants to retain the Chinese family traditions and the ways the children respect their parents. But the daughter is essentially American with all the freedom that go with it and this is where the clashes lie.

The mother tries all sorts of schemes to make her daughter successful – a Chinese Shirley Temple. At first the girl likes the idea as she wants to be a star, a princess but she wants this to happen. – She doesn't want the hard work that goes with it.

The next scheme is she'll be a 'mastermind' style character. In spite of all the testing the girl doesn't succeed. "After seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside of me began to die.". The disappointment and resentment come to a peak as the girl sits looking at the mirror, unhappy with the ordinary girl she sees "Such a sad, ugly girl". Then she discovers her "prodigy side" a girl who is "angry, powerful" and she makes the decision "I won't be what I'm not".

By not bothering in the tests, the girl gradually forces her mother to give up until one day they see a Chinese girl playing the piano on a tv show. The next scheme starts – piano lessons. The mother has to do cleaning work to pay for the lessons from Mr Chong, two hours a day.

"Why don't you like me the way I am? I am not a genius!"

My mother slapped me. "Who ask you be genius? Only ask you be your best. For you sake. So ungrateful". I heard her mutter in Chinese.

This indicates the clash of cultures in the mother. She still is Chinese – speaks Chinese better than American – but wants her daughter to have the benefits of being American whilst remaining Chinese at heart.

Jing – mei (the girl) soon realises that Old Chong is deaf and so she doesn't really have to try at her practices. Notice she has a Chinese name. The conflict increases as Jing – mei's mother and her aunty argue over whose daughter is more talented. Her cousin Waverly Jong (note the American first name) is a chess champion. Jing Mei's mother brags:- "If we ask Jing-mei wash dish, she hear nothing but music. It's like you can't stop this natural talent." It is at this point that Jing-mei decides to put a stop to her mothers "foolish pride".

The big test is a talent contest in which Jing-mei will play and all the family will attend. The superficial girl gets caught up in the dream of being a star and actually thinks if she practices her curtseys and her smiles, she will be a star.-

The talent show is a disaster "And I started to play. It was so beautiful. I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that at first I didn't worry how I would sound. So it was a surprise to me when I hit the first wrong note". Things go rapidly down hill and in spite of Old Chong shouting "Bravo" she sees her

mother's "stricken face". Her mother and father are ashamed and she has to put up with the bragging of her aunt and her cousin Waverly. It was the disappointment of her mother she found hardest to cope with especially as she said nothing.

Two days later the conflict comes to a head as Jing-mei decides "I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China".

Look at lines 315 – 347. How does the writer bring over the conflict between the two? What brought an end to it?

After that Jing-mei fails her mother in many ways – not getting top grades – dropping out of college. She realises:-  
"For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me."

The two are reconciled when her mother gives her the piano for her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday but her mother still believes she could have been a genius however there is no longer any anger.

Some months after her mother's death she has the piano tuned and she re-finds music books she recognises. Two of the pieces 'Pleading Child' and 'Perfectly Contented' and she realises they constitute two halves of the same song. Perhaps the two tunes represent the position she finally found herself in and that it took time to get to where she wanted to be.

Issues:-       Parent child relationships  
                  Clash of cultures  
                  'Genius' is not a miracle – it requires a lot of hard work  
                  You can't necessarily be anything you want to be  
                  The important thing is to be yourself

**'The Tall Woman and Her Short Husband'** also is set against the backdrop of Chinese culture but there is no American side to this story. A little background knowledge of Communist China led by Mao Zedung and his Cultural Revolution helps you to understand the central section but it's not essential. The story could be easily transferred to any part of the world as it mainly looks at how people in society treat those who they feel don't fit in. The title itself indicates that people feel that a couple who are so different in height (with the woman being much taller than the man) just aren't normal.

Look at lines 1 – 19. How does the writer engage with the audience with the opening to his story?

The main story itself opens with descriptions of the couple and people's reactions to them. It is fairly light hearted and as yet their abnormality is a source of amusement rather than anything else. The woman has 'a face like an unvarnished ping-pong bat' the man has fingers 'like pudgy little meatballs'. These humorous similes make us laugh at the couple but not in a

hurtful way. The people where they live, Unity Mansions, laugh at them but not nastily. The children call after them, but they are just children.

The couple are inseparable, a team, symbolised by when they go out in the rain – Mrs Tall always holds the umbrella and if anything drops, Mr Short picks it up.

The problems for them are created by a nosey parker who lives in their flats, the wife of the tailor; she is desperate to know why the two married because she thinks it isn't natural. She decides they married because one or both must have a physical deficiency, especially as they haven't got a child. That theory is ruined when Mrs Tall becomes pregnant. She carries on digging until she finds out that both Mr Short and Mrs Tall work at the ministry of Chemical Industry. Mr Short is a chief engineer with a large salary. Mrs Tall is a lab assistant and earns a lot less. The tailor's wife decides she married him for money and status and everybody believes her:- "When they discussed the good luck of the tall woman who looked like a horse, they often voiced resentment – especially the tailor's wife".

Part 3 deals with how the couple are treated during Mao's Cultural Revolution. China was in a very difficult economic position, very poor and not developing. Meo was worried that some people in the country wanted to move away from Communism and to be more like Europe and America. He encouraged groups of young people called the 'Red Guards' to find out 'traitors' and to expose anyone who wasn't truly Communist. They concentrated on intellectuals – scientists, teachers, students, etc. and imprisoned them. Obviously this wasn't a sensible move as they were the very people able to move China forward and with them in prison, the country became even poorer. In the end they were mainly released and things became more stable.

This is what happens to Mr Short – he is a scientist – more wealthy than most and so they maintain he is selling secrets to the West.

Look at lines 129 – 190 and note the ways in which Mr Short and his wife are badly treated. The whole stupidity of the meeting and of the accusations against the two is made clear when the tailor's wife screeches "Why did you marry him?" This identifies that power has been given to people without the intelligence to use it. Mr Short and Mrs Tall retain their dignity – Look at lines 187 – 190, 206 – 208.

All but the tailor's wife realise that things have gone too far and after the meeting they feel guilty (lines 247 – 250)

In Part 4 Mr Short eventually returns after his spell in prison. Look at lines 267 – 271 to see how he has changed. Both of them have changed but they try to pick up their lives once again and life settles down. When Mrs Tall has a stroke the strength of their relationship is made clear. Look at lines 293 – 304 where we see them working together and gaining the respect of the community.

In part 5 Mrs Tall dies and soon after Mr Short is 'rehabilitated' – his job and pay are returned to him. Still the ridiculous tailor's wife tries to plot and scheme. She tries to get Mr Short to marry her niece but the picture in the gatehouse of Mrs Tall reminds her of the strength of the couple's love and she doesn't pursue the match.

Look at lines 331 – 334, the end, why does the writer close the story in this way?

Themes:- marriage  
social injustice  
prejudice  
strength against adversity

### **'Pieces of Silver'**

This is set in the West Indies which were once part of the empires of European countries – like Africa. As a consequence we see the native population as they adapt modern, western/European attitudes and ways of life (just like in 'Dead Men's Path' 'Train From Rhodesia' 'Snapshots of a Wedding'). The school system described in the early part of the story is very much a copy of English schools in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Look at lines 1 – 107. Note all the ways in which the school copies the English system. Also note all the ways that the school is different because of where it is (for example the pupils all go barefoot). Education is incredibly important to them as it is a way out of poverty and schools and school teachers are held in high respect. We can see this through the collection for the retiring headteacher. They think he should be given something special even though the pupils are mainly very poor.

The school system is cruel and harsh – look at lines 55 – 107 – and explore how the writer brings over the cruelty of the acting headmaster, Mr Chase. He is described as being 'stout and pompous' why?

Look at lines 108 – 171. Pick out at least seven points showing how the writer gives us the impression of poverty in the Dovecote house.

The bond between Clem and his sister Eveline is very strong. Eveline is resourceful and intelligent – the two seem to be far more mentally astute than their parents. Perhaps this is the result of the education they have received. Their parents' heavy dialect shows how they are tied to their poverty and lower class status: "The lad'll have money what I's got to sweat blood for, just to gi to that Megahey". Whilst Clem does use dialect to speak to them he and Eveline are also able to converse in more standard English.

Eveline comes up with the scheme to earn the money for Megahey's retirement present by singing for people – just like carol singing. So she sings whilst Clem plays accompaniment on the comb and paper. They were quite

successful and the largest sum of money came from their last house which belonged to Megahey – the very man they were collecting for.

Next day at school Clem was able to pay not just his contribution but also the contributions of all the other boys who had no money. That way, Mr Chase couldn't enjoy the cruel humiliation of the boys. The big IRONY at the end of the story is that Megahey gives money to his own retirement present.

The story, inspite of moments of cruelty and descriptions of poverty, is very positive and quite light hearted. The underdog triumphs over the bully and there is a sense of humour throughout. Even the very poor Dovecotes can make jokes and the readers enjoy the joke at the end of the story.

Themes:-  
injustice  
education  
poverty  
parents and children  
teachers and students  
European influence

The 'Red Ball' is also set in the West Indies and shows the influence of European/developed world cultures on the local, slave rooted population. The title refers to a cricket ball – a strong symbol of 'Englishness' but also a symbol of a way for West Indian men to beat poverty. By adopting that game and by becoming famous for it they can rise out of poverty.

Just like 'Pieces of Silver' the main character is a young boy – perhaps a little younger than Clam. In order to give him a better life and to earn more money his parents have moved from the very rural Tunapuna to the capital city, Port of Spain. His father is to be a labourer on an American Air Force Base but the move leaves Bolan friendless and feeling lost, isolated. He spends his evenings in Woodford Square marvelling at the fountains and the statues and watching other boys play cricket.

The other boys eventually tempt him into playing – but on his terms. He won't let them call him 'Thinny Boney' or 'Matchstick foot' but they have to call him by his name, Bolan. The nicknames indicate how thin he is – a sign of poverty, as is the fact his shirt is held together by a pin. When he joins in, though, his real skill is seen as he's an expert fast bowler and soon becomes very popular.

Look at lines 49-72 to find out about Bolan's school and his life back in Tunapuna.

Explore lines 116-210 to find out about Bolan's school and his life back in Tunapuna.

Explore lines 116-210 and note down all you find out about where he lives and about his family. Notice the dialect his father uses. Bolan doesn't speak

like that and so already we can see the impact of education. His father seems a bit of a brute and calls him 'boy.' His mother seems more protective.

The family have money problems. Rent has just gone up and so far they've only save eight shillings. Look at lines 170-176 – does his father resent him?

The money is the source of conflict as they have saved so little but Bolan takes it to buy a new cricket ball and to treat his new friends. He wants to be one of them. He wants respect and status but his father deals with him in a violent way – Look at how the writer brings over the violence (lines 256-285).

The ending offers a positive conclusion. His experiences in Woodford Square and reality become mixed in a dream but he remembers a figure like his father saying "I didn't know, boy .... Is for you we doin' all this ... only you. We love you like nothing else in the whole whole world.... Must always remember that." It would be hard for his brutish father to admit he might be wrong but he does and he expresses his love for Bolan. The elliptic dots show him searching for the right words and the repetition of 'whole' shows how much he feels about Bolan.

His father's violence comes out of a sense of the boy's ingratitude – they have tried to do so much for him and he has thrown it back into their faces. But then the mother makes him understand how Bolan is feeling.

Themes – parent/child relationship  
the decisions parents make to improve their children's  
lives and the impact  
poverty – trying to escape from it  
education  
European influences

**'THE YOUNG COUPLE'** explores the problems that may be encountered when people cross cultures to marry. Cathy and Naraian meet in England and marry and then go back to his home country, India.

At first the situation is idyllic – look at lines 6-37. How does the writer make their lifestyle seem attractive?

They meet Naraian's friends in restaurants and discuss politics and the state of the country. Already we see the influence of the family and the culture. Cathy and Naraian's behaviour to her changes when he's out with them (lines 66-81).

The family love having Cathy as a daughter-in-law but see her as a possession. Soon their influence becomes suffocating. Look at lines 93-152. How can we see them trying to take over?

Arguments happen frequently as Naraian refuses to take jobs organised by the family. He is fighting against "the tyranny of family domination." Cathy

can't get a job as the only jobs she is capable of doing in India would be shameful to her new family.

Look at lines 195-232. How does Cathy fill her time? How does this bring her into conflict with the family?

This conflict extends as she finds Naraian doesn't stick up for her and she feels let down. The loving couple now fight between themselves. Look at lines 244-327. Make notes on how and why they come into conflict.

Cathy becomes pregnant and soon the family take over her life – providing a cook, a cleaner and then a job for Naraian – he has finally given into them.

“She couldn't shut out the sense of this large, well-fed family with Naraian and herself trapped in the middle of them.” This creates more conflict between the couple. Look at lines 425-502. Make notes on the way that Cathy and Naraian eventually become totally controlled by the family.

Themes: - clash of cultures  
parents and children  
independence  
marriage

**'LEELA'S FRIEND'** is also set in India and also set in a wealthy part of society. The girl in the title is the spoilt daughter of Mr & Mrs Sivasanker. Her wealthy parents haven't got the time to look after her and so they employ a young man called 'Sidda' to amuse her. When 5year old Leela sees him she says “I like him. Don't send him away. Let us keep him in our house” as if Sidda is a possession. Sidda is given food and a tiny wage to do household work and to look after Leela.

Sidda opens her imagination with stories about the moon and about God. Leela in turn tries to teach Sidda how to write.

Look at lines 58-84. Make notes on how their friendship develops.

Things go wrong when a chain of Leela's goes missing. Sidda is questioned, the police mentioned and Sidda disappears. Look at lines 102-123 – how are we able to see the gap between Leela and her mother?

Leela doesn't care about the chain but Sidda is caught by the police. He claims innocence but, because he has been in jail before, they do not believe him. This is also because he is poor and uneducated.

Eventually the chain turns up where she last left it. Even so, they won't have Sidda back because he is a criminal. It doesn't matter that he had been so good for their daughter.

Themes - parents and children  
injustice

social class  
trust  
poverty  
the importance of imagination.

The story '**GAMES AT TWILIGHT**' is also set in India and has children as the main focus, although they seem to be older than Leela.

At the opening we see a group of children constrained by the climate and their parents (who want to protect them from the heat). They are bursting with energy and desperate to get out to play. Look at lines 19-31. How does the writer bring over the intensity of the heat? What imagery does she use?

When the children are able to play they are seen to be ordinary children, argumentative. Mira plays the role of mother and tries to keep the peace. They play hide and seek, Raghu is it – he protests – the rules set out by their parents are forgotten and they race throughout the garden.

The main focus of the story is Ravi – Look at lines 83-92. How does the writer give the impression that Rain is quite young and scared? He is determined to prove himself by winning this game, by out-witting Raghu with his “long, hefty, hairy footballer legs.” And so he chooses to hide in a shed which he entered via a gap “only just large enough for rats, dogs and possibly, Rain to slip through.” Notice how he is linked to worthless animals in this list. The shed is a frightening prospect but he dares it in order to win. Look at lines 116-126 and pick out the phrases that show Rain’s enjoyment at being able to put one over on the threatening Raghu.

Rain imagines the horrible creatures that might live in the shed “The shed smelt of rats, ant hills, dust and spider webs.” “Snakes!” He’s scared of the things in there, the spider on his neck, his legs are trembling from being bent up, things are so bad he feels like going out to be caught. But he hangs on “What fun if they were all found and caught – he alone left unconquered! He had never known that sensation.” “to be winner in a circle of older, bigger, luckier children – that would be thrilling beyond imagination.” He is excited by the thought of being the winner – the centre of attention.

Look at lines 188-213 and make notes on how his happiness suddenly turns to fear – fear that he hasn’t won because they’ve changed the game without him. Lines 214-219 try to bring over his desperation as he charges out of his hiding place and as he screams the winning word – “his voice broke with rage and pity at the disgrace of it all and he felt himself flooded with tears and misery.”

The children are amazed by his behaviour “his wild animal howling.” His mother tries to calm him down “Don’t be a baby” – the wrong choice of words! He throws himself in fury at the others shouting “I won, I won, I won.” Look at lines 234-245, list all the things they have done since the first game stopped.

This shows how much time has passed and why they have forgotten Rain...  
"he had disappeared from their minds. Clear."

The NEW GAME is a funeral game but he won't join in "He had wanted victory and triumph – not a funeral." He lies down on the grass .... "no longer crying, silenced by a terrible sense of his insignificance."

Themes - childhood  
children's desire for status  
disappointment  
injustice

The final story is "**THE WINTER OAK**" which also features a young child as one of the main characters. However, this time it is set in Russia. We get another picture of a school. It is ordered and purposeful without the harshness of 'Pieces of Silver' and 'Redball.' The young teacher, Anna Vasilevna, seems to be in her second year of teaching. She remembers her nervous first year but now has so much confidence that she can even pass judgement on other, older teachers who she doesn't feel can control the classes. Look at lines 17-47. How are we given hints of Anna's newly developed confidence?

She is teaching the class parts of speech when Savushkin arrives – late again. The class soon become enthusiastic in naming nouns but they are all fairly mundane until Savushkin says 'winter oak' – the others laugh but he says it again as if "The words were torn out of his soul." Anna Vasilevna won't accept his answer as it doesn't fit into the plan of her lesson and she becomes frustrated with him thinking "A difficult boy." She calls him back to question his lateness and decides she must visit his mother and he offers to take her his 'short' way through the forest. Look at lines 134-153. How is the forest made to seem such an attractive place?

Savushkin teaches her about the elk, the springs, and their roles are swapped. He has become the teacher in this magical world, she is the student:- "Anna Vasilevna bit her tongue. Clearly here in the forest she had better keep quiet." In lines 206-216 how does the writer make the winter oak seem so special?

Savushkin reveals all the life that is protected by the winter oak – it seems to be the very heart of the forest. It makes this clear on lines 244-247.

By the time Anna Vasilevna looks at her watch she realises that she is too late to see Savushkin's mother. Just as the forest makes Savushkin late every day, so it has captivated her. She returns to being school teacher and tells him in future he must go by the road to school. Immediately she realises the mistake she has made – "could one have shown one's incompetence more clearly?"

More importantly she realises how dry her language lessons have been and that Savushkin's answer of 'winter oak' had real passion behind it. She changes her mind and tells Savushkin he can go to school through the forest.

As she leaves, Savushkin remains to watch to see her safe. She realises that the winter oak is not the most amazing thing in the forest “but the small human being in worn felt boots, a mysterious and wonderful future citizen.”

Themes - childhood  
education – do we only learn in school?  
teacher/student relationships  
we never stop learning