

# Short Stories For Junior High

Uncle Charlie

Written in 40 minutes for an assessment task that required students to 'explore how discovery emerges from careful planning'

Mr Walsh liked expostulations. The school was "uncongenial", the ecology (or lack of it) was a "tribe", Charlie was "your last uncle" and the will-making, in Mr Walsh's business-sounding office, was "dealing with affairs." It took less than fifteen minutes to deal with Charlie's affairs, but it was extended by so many expostulations that I made a mental note never to see Walsh for directions. I suppose that's the job, though, sending grieving relatives on a lavender-scented Somewhere Else while he exploits money matters.

I was leaving when he put a small key in my hand. "The last bit of your late uncle's affairs," he said, cheerfully. "It was lucky we caught it. The nurses said he was trying to push it down the toilet. We did get a bit...disappointed in the end." He smiled sadly at the corner of the rug. I wondered if he possessed that look, or if it came with the office. It was an office built for sad, or grave, scenes. Nobody goes to a solicitor when they're happy, though, do they?

I fiddled my fingers around the key. "A safety deposit box?"

He beamed regally, as if Charlie and I got together regularly to discuss the delights of secure storage. "It's in the bank on the High Street," he said. "You write down the address if you have trouble."

"No, no. He just never mentioned it, that was all." I shook his hand purposefully and walked into the little vestibule to meet the sagged waiting man. I had found in a week and a day a desk full of books about Hypocrite art and Zulu's war. "Thank you so much, Mr Walsh. You've been terribly helpful in all of this."

He passed my shoulder - spoke a last few sentences a foot shorter than me. "Not at all, Miss Brown. Your uncle was a good client. A good man, too, I might say." I gathered that regularly was a name much to be desired in Mr Walsh's books.

I'm not a miser. I've never had anyone to cry over, which sounds well-paying, but is just a statement of fact. Charlie was a good man - not in the way Walsh means, but he was good to me. A good sport, a pal. A jester, in the absence of all other family. He was actually a great uncle, but since there was no one else, a gentleman didn't matter much. Nobody in my family has many children, if they have any at all. Short lives and childhood, that was. I wasn't even sure of where in England we originally came from.

My parents, who died in a car accident in my extreme infancy, were both only children. I was an only child. An only, barely orphan, dropped in the lap of my grandfather's brother Charles, like a peacocks. Charles had money of his own - spoke when I was fully grown - and spent it on art and collecting. He had no wife, no children, and a large house in Oxfordshire which was shut up for most of the year. He promptly consigned me to nannies (three but silly women), boarding school (three but silly, sporty, women) and finally university (where, as a not particularly nice but clever woman I had enough friends to make up for my parentless life). Charlie kept me very comfortable with plenty of money, comically dirty postcards from his travels, and advice about literature and history which frequently turned out to be both factually accurate and fairly sane.

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Short stories for junior high students serve as an essential tool for developing literacy skills, enhancing imagination, and fostering a love for reading. In a world where distractions abound, short stories can captivate young minds, offering them a world of adventure, emotion, and insight in a format that is both accessible and engaging. With the right selection, educators and parents can spark discussions, inspire creative writing, and deepen understanding of complex themes. This article explores the significance, benefits, and recommendations for short stories suitable for junior high students.

## The Importance of Short Stories in Junior High Education

Short stories play a pivotal role in a junior high curriculum. Here are some key reasons why they are vital:

### 1. Encouraging Reading Engagement

At the junior high level, students often experience a decline in reading motivation. Short stories can reignite their interest by providing:

- Quick, digestible narratives
- Varied genres that cater to diverse interests

- Opportunities to explore complex themes without the commitment of a full-length novel

## **2. Developing Critical Thinking Skills**

Analyzing short stories prompts students to think critically and engage with the text on multiple levels. They learn to:

- Identify themes and motifs
- Examine character development and motivations
- Discuss plot structure and literary devices

## **3. Enhancing Writing Skills**

Reading short stories not only improves comprehension but also serves as a model for effective writing. Students can learn:

- Different narrative styles and voices
- The importance of concise language
- How to build tension and resolve conflicts succinctly

## **Benefits of Reading Short Stories**

The advantages of incorporating short stories into junior high education extend beyond mere engagement. Here are some notable benefits:

### **1. Accessibility**

Short stories are often more manageable for struggling readers. They offer:

- Shorter lengths that reduce intimidation
- Simple language that builds confidence
- A variety of themes that can address different maturity levels

### **2. Cultural Awareness**

Through diverse stories, students gain insight into different cultures, perspectives, and experiences. This exposure can:

- Foster empathy and understanding
- Encourage discussions about societal issues

- Broaden students' worldview

### **3. Flexibility in Curriculum**

Short stories can be easily integrated into various subjects, such as:

- Language arts: Analyzing literary elements
- Social studies: Exploring historical contexts
- Science: Considering speculative fiction and moral dilemmas

## **Recommended Short Stories for Junior High Students**

Selecting appropriate short stories for junior high students is crucial for maximizing the benefits discussed. Here's a list of recommended stories that cater to various themes and interests:

### **1. "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson**

A classic tale that explores themes of tradition and conformity, "The Lottery" provokes discussions about societal norms and moral choices.

### **2. "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry**

This heartwarming story about love and sacrifice teaches valuable lessons about selflessness and the true meaning of giving.

### **3. "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe**

A gripping psychological thriller, this story delves into themes of guilt and madness, making it an excellent choice for discussions about mental health and morality.

### **4. "Thank You, Ma'am" by Langston Hughes**

This story highlights themes of kindness and redemption, showcasing the impact of compassion on both the giver and the receiver.

## 5. "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell

A suspenseful adventure that raises questions about morality, survival, and the nature of humanity, perfect for engaging students in ethical discussions.

## How to Incorporate Short Stories into the Curriculum

Integrating short stories into the junior high curriculum requires thoughtful planning. Here are some effective strategies:

### 1. Reading Circles

Organize students into small groups to read and discuss selected stories. This encourages collaboration and allows for diverse perspectives.

### 2. Thematic Units

Create units around specific themes, such as friendship, identity, or courage. Select a range of short stories that exemplify these themes, allowing students to draw connections.

### 3. Writing Prompts

Use short stories as springboards for creative writing. After reading a story, prompt students to write their own narratives inspired by the themes or characters they encountered.

### 4. Class Discussions

Facilitate discussions that delve into the deeper meanings of the stories. Encourage students to express their opinions and interpretations, fostering critical thinking skills.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, **short stories for junior high** students are invaluable resources that nurture a love of reading, enhance critical thinking, and

improve writing skills. By selecting a diverse range of stories and incorporating them into the curriculum through engaging activities, educators and parents can create a rich literary environment that inspires young minds. The world of short stories offers countless opportunities for exploration, discussion, and creativity, making it an essential component of junior high education. Whether through classic tales or contemporary narratives, the magic of short stories can unlock the potential of every student.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are some popular short stories for junior high students?**

Some popular short stories for junior high students include 'The Lottery' by Shirley Jackson, 'The Tell-Tale Heart' by Edgar Allan Poe, 'Thank You, Ma'am' by Langston Hughes, and 'The Gift of the Magi' by O. Henry.

### **How can short stories benefit junior high students?**

Short stories can enhance reading comprehension, stimulate critical thinking, and encourage creativity, making them an excellent resource for engaging junior high students.

### **What themes are commonly found in short stories for this age group?**

Common themes include friendship, identity, coming-of-age, family dynamics, courage, and social issues, which resonate well with junior high students.

### **Are there any short story collections specifically for junior high students?**

Yes, collections like 'The Best American Short Stories' series and 'The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway' often feature stories suitable for junior high readers.

### **How can teachers incorporate short stories into their curriculum?**

Teachers can use short stories for reading assignments, group discussions, creative writing prompts, and as a springboard for exploring related themes in other subjects.

### **What should students look for when analyzing a short story?**

Students should focus on character development, plot structure, themes,

narrative style, and the author's purpose to gain a deeper understanding of the story.

## **Are there any online resources for finding short stories for junior high?**

Yes, websites like Storybird, CommonLit, and the American Literature website offer a variety of short stories suitable for junior high students.

## **How can parents encourage their junior high children to read short stories?**

Parents can encourage reading by providing access to a variety of stories, discussing themes, and even reading together to foster a love for literature.

## **What role do short stories play in developing writing skills for junior high students?**

Reading short stories helps students understand narrative structure, character development, and style, which are crucial for improving their own writing skills.

## **Can short stories be used to address social issues in junior high classrooms?**

Absolutely! Short stories can introduce and provoke discussions on social issues such as bullying, diversity, and mental health, making them relevant educational tools.

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