

Short Story Examination Day

Examination Day
Henry Slesar

The Jordans never spoke of the exam, not until their son, Dickie, was twelve years old. It was on his birthday that Mrs Jordan first mentioned the subject in his presence, and the anxious manner of her speech caused her husband to answer sharply.

"Forget about it," he said. "He'll do alright."

They were at the breakfast table, and the boy looked up from his plate curiously. He was an alert-eyed youngster, with flat blond hair and a quick, nervous manner. He didn't understand what the sudden tension was about, but he did know that today was his birthday, and he wanted harmony above all. Somewhere in the apartment there were wrapped, ribboned packages waiting to be opened, and in the tiny wall-kitchen, something warm and sweet was being prepared in the automatic stove. He wanted the day to be happy, and the moistness of his mother's eyes, the scowl on his father's face, spoiled the mood of fluttering expectation with which he had greeted the morning.

"What exam?" he asked.

His mother looked at the tablecloth. It's just a sort of Government intelligence test they give children at the age of twelve. You'll be getting it next week. It's nothing to worry about."

"You mean a test like in school?"

"Something like that," his father said, getting up from the table. "Go read your comic books, Dickie."

The boy rose and wandered towards that part of the room that had been 'his' corner since infancy. He fingered the topmost comic of the stack, but seemed uninterested in the colourful squares of fast-paced action. He wandered towards the window, and peered gloomily at the veil of mist that shrouded the glass.

"Why did it have to rain today?" he said. "Why couldn't it rain tomorrow?"

His father, now slumped into an armchair with the Government newspaper, rattled the sheets in vexation. "Because it just did, that's all. Rain makes the grass grow."

"Why, Dad?"

"Because it does, that's all."

Dickie puckered his brow. "What makes it green, though? The grass?"

"Nobody knows," his father snapped, then immediately regretted his abruptness.

Later in the day, it was birthday time again. His mother beamed as she handed over the gaily -coloured packages, and even his father managed a grin and a ruffle-of-the-hair. He kissed his mother and shook hands gravely with his father. Then the birthday cake was brought forth, and the ceremonies concluded.

"Dad," he said, "how far away is the sun?"

"Five thousand miles," his father said.

Dickie sat at the breakfast table and again saw the moisture in his mother's eyes. He didn't connect her tears with the exam until his father suddenly brought the subject to light again.

"Well, Dickie," he said, with a manly frown, "you've got an appointment today."

"I know, Dad. I hope—"

"Now it's nothing to worry about. Thousands of children take this test every day. The Government wants to know how smart you are, Dickie. That's all there is to it."

"I get good marks in school," he said hesitantly.

"This is different. This is— a special kind of test. They give you this stuff to drink, you see, and then you go into a room where there's a sort of machine—"

"What stuff to drink?" Dickie said.

"It's nothing. It tastes like peppermint. It's just to make sure you answer the questions truthfully. Not that the Government thinks you won't tell the truth, but this stuff makes sure."

Dickie's face showed puzzlement, and a touch of fright. He looked at his mother, and she composed her face into a misty smile.

"Everything will be alright," she said.

"Of course it will," his father agreed. "You're a good boy, Dickie; you'll make out fine. Then we'll come home and celebrate. All right?"

"Yes, sir," Dickie said.

They entered the Government Educational Building fifteen minutes before the appointed hour. They crossed the marble floors of the great pillared lobby, passed beneath an

Short Story Examination Day is not merely a day marked in the academic calendar; it represents a rite of passage for students, a culmination of hard work, creativity, and critical thinking. This day serves as a platform for students to showcase their narrative skills, an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings through the art of storytelling. As educators and students prepare for this significant event, it becomes essential to understand its implications, processes, and the various elements that contribute to crafting an exceptional short story.

Understanding the Concept of Examination Day

The Purpose of Short Story Examination Day

Short Story Examination Day is designed to evaluate students' comprehension of narrative techniques, character development, plot creation, and thematic exploration. It serves several key purposes:

1. **Assessment of Literary Skills:** This day is primarily about gauging a student's grasp of literary

concepts and their ability to implement these in their narratives.

2. Encouragement of Creativity: By allowing students to create their own stories, it fosters creative thinking and originality.

3. Development of Critical Thinking: Students are required to analyze their work and the works of others, honing their ability to critique literature critically.

4. Preparation for Future Writing: This experience can guide students in their future writing endeavors, whether in academia or creative fields.

Setting the Stage

Preparation for Short Story Examination Day often begins weeks in advance. Teachers may introduce students to various short story formats and genres, allowing them to explore a wide range of styles. This preparation phase includes:

- Workshops: Conducting writing workshops where students can brainstorm ideas and receive feedback from peers and instructors.
- Reading Assignments: Assigning classic and contemporary short stories to familiarize students with different narrative techniques and styles.
- Writing Prompts: Providing prompts to inspire creativity and help students overcome writer's block.

The Structure of a Short Story

To excel on Short Story Examination Day, students must understand the fundamental structure of a short story. This typically includes the following elements:

1. Characters

Characters are the heart of any narrative. Students must create believable characters with distinct personalities, motivations, and arcs.

- Protagonist: The main character who drives the story forward.
- Antagonist: The character or force that opposes the protagonist, creating conflict.
- Supporting Characters: Additional characters that enrich the story and contribute to character development.

2. Setting

The setting encompasses the time and place where the story unfolds. It establishes the mood and context, influencing the characters' behavior and decisions.

- Physical Setting: Describes the location, such as a bustling city, a quiet village, or a fantastical realm.

- Temporal Setting: Establishes when the story takes place, which can affect the plot and character interactions.

3. Plot

The plot is the sequence of events that make up the story. Students should aim to create a compelling narrative arc with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

- Exposition: Introduces characters, setting, and conflict.
- Rising Action: Develops the conflict through a series of events.
- Climax: The turning point where the conflict reaches its peak.
- Falling Action: The aftermath of the climax, leading toward resolution.
- Resolution: The conclusion that resolves the conflict and ties up loose ends.

4. Theme

The theme is the underlying message or central idea of the story. It reflects the writer's insights about life, society, or human nature.

- Universal Themes: Love, loss, friendship, and identity are common themes that resonate across cultures and time periods.
- Specific Themes: Themes that might be unique to the writer's personal experiences or cultural background.

Strategies for Success on Examination Day

Students can employ various strategies to enhance their chances of success on Short Story Examination Day:

1. Planning and Outlining

Before writing, students should take the time to outline their stories. This includes:

- Brainstorming Ideas: Jotting down potential ideas and themes.
- Creating Character Profiles: Developing detailed backgrounds for main characters.
- Plot Mapping: Sketching a rough outline of the plot to ensure a coherent narrative structure.

2. Drafting the Story

Once the outline is in place, students can begin drafting their stories. Key considerations during this phase include:

- Writing Style: Choosing a voice and tone that reflect the story's mood.
- Dialogue: Crafting realistic dialogue that reveals character and advances the plot.
- Descriptive Language: Using vivid imagery to create a strong sense of place and atmosphere.

3. Revising and Editing

Revision is a crucial step in the writing process. Students should focus on:

- Content Review: Evaluating whether the plot makes sense and the characters are well-developed.
- Grammar and Mechanics: Checking for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.
- Peer Feedback: Sharing drafts with peers for constructive criticism and fresh perspectives.

Common Challenges Faced by Students

Even with thorough preparation, students may encounter several challenges on Short Story Examination Day:

1. Writer's Block

Many students struggle with writer's block, which can be frustrating. To combat this, they can:

- Free Writing: Spend a few minutes writing anything that comes to mind without worrying about quality.
- Changing Perspectives: Trying to write from a different character's point of view.

2. Time Management

With a limited timeframe, managing time effectively is crucial. Students can:

- Set Mini-Deadlines: Allocate specific times for brainstorming, drafting, and editing.
- Prioritize Key Elements: Focus on the core components of the story before refining details.

3. Balancing Creativity and Structure

While creativity is essential, a well-structured story is equally important. Students should strive to:

- Follow the Outline: Use the outline as a roadmap but allow for flexibility if new ideas arise during writing.
- Stay Focused on the Theme: Ensure that all elements of the story align with the central theme.

The Role of Teachers and Educators

Teachers play a vital role in preparing students for Short Story Examination Day. Their responsibilities include:

- Providing Guidance: Offering advice on narrative techniques and story structure.
- Encouraging Exploration: Fostering an environment where students feel comfortable experimenting with their writing.
- Evaluating Fairly: Implementing assessment criteria that fairly evaluate creativity, originality, and technical skill.

Conclusion

Short Story Examination Day is more than just an assessment; it's an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in the world of storytelling and express their unique voices. By mastering the elements of character, setting, plot, and theme, and employing effective writing strategies, students can navigate this day with confidence. As they pen their narratives, they not only showcase their literary prowess but also engage in a timeless tradition that connects them with the rich tapestry of human experience through storytelling. Ultimately, the skills and insights gained from this experience will serve them well, not just in their academic endeavors, but also in their personal growth and creative pursuits.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Examination Day'?

The main theme of 'Examination Day' is the fear of government control and the consequences of intelligence in a dystopian society.

Who is the author of 'Examination Day'?

The author of 'Examination Day' is Henry Slesar.

What is the significance of the examination in the story?

The examination serves as a plot device to illustrate the oppressive measures taken by the government to suppress intelligence among its citizens, particularly children.

How does the protagonist, young Ricardo, feel about the examination?

Young Ricardo feels anxious and confused about the examination, as he is unaware of its true implications and the dangers associated with being considered 'too intelligent.'

What is the setting of 'Examination Day'?

The setting of 'Examination Day' is a futuristic society where the government monitors and controls the intelligence of its citizens.

What is the outcome of the examination for Ricardo?

The outcome of the examination for Ricardo is tragic; he is revealed to have exceptional intelligence and is consequently executed by the government.

What message does 'Examination Day' convey about conformity?

The story conveys a cautionary message about the dangers of conformity and the suppression of individuality, warning against a society that punishes those who excel.

How does Slesar use irony in 'Examination Day'?

Slesar uses irony by presenting the examination as a standard educational assessment, while its true purpose is to eliminate those who are too intelligent, highlighting the absurdity of the government's fear.

What can readers learn from the ending of 'Examination Day'?

Readers can learn about the harsh realities of authoritarian regimes and the importance of protecting individual rights and freedoms, as the ending serves as a stark reminder of the cost of societal control.

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