**Twisted Tales: Teacher Booklet**

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**Teaching Notes:** Page 1

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* Different Types of Plot Twists
* Big Questions
* Approaches to Teaching

**Story Notes**

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**Teaching Notes**

**Plot Twists**

Plot twists are narrative devices that introduce unexpected and significant developments in a story, often by altering the direction or meaning of the plot. While many stories, both in literature and other forms of storytelling, share common elements, plot twists intentionally disrupt reader expectations.

**Different Types of Plot Twists**

1. **Character Identity Twist:** This twist involves the revelation that a character is not who they initially appeared to be. This could include secrets about their past, hidden motivations or even a completely different identity.
2. **False Protagonist Twist:** The character initially presented as the protagonist is revealed to be a secondary character, while another character emerges as the true protagonist to challenge earlier assumptions.
3. **Foreshadowed Twist:** Foreshadowed twists are hinted at throughout the story, preparing readers for an unexpected revelation later on. Clues and symbols foreshadow the twist without entirely giving away the surprise.
4. **Deus ex Machina Twist:** This type of twist involves the sudden and unexpected intervention of a divine or supernatural force to resolve a seemingly unsolvable problem or conflict.
5. **Unreliable Narrator Twist:** The narrator’s credibility is called into question as readers discover discrepancies between their perspective and the actual events of the story.
6. **Moral or Philosophical Twist**: A revelation challenges the reader’s ethical or philosophical assumptions, forcing them to reconsider their beliefs or values.

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| **Big Questions**   1. How does the plot twist change the direction of the narrative? 2. What clues are given before the plot twist is revealed? 3. How does the plot twist influence the development of the characters? 4. To what extent does the plot twist introduce moral or ethical dilemmas? 5. To what extent does the plot twist reflect concerns of the time? 6. How does the plot twist disrupt the expectations of the reader? |

**Approaches to Teaching**

* Identify unfamiliar words beforehand and explicitly define them (particularly in stories like *Tell-Tale Heart*)
* Provide an overview of important (and potentially unfamiliar) cultural references and contextual factors
* Provide clear guidance on the ‘fundamentals’ of each story: plot, characterisation and themes
* Support students to notice features and ideas within and across the stories
* Encourage students to reflect on the stories by posing the Big Questions (above)
* Most importantly of all: give students time to acquire and apply their knowledge

***Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe (1843)**

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**Summary**

An unnamed narrator confesses to murdering an old man who possesses an eye that he finds particularly disturbing. The narrator’s increasing guilt and paranoia, driven by the sound of the victim’s heartbeat, culminate in a confession that reveals a particularly troubled mind.

**Context**

* **Background information on Poe** (his life and struggles, contributions to the gothic genre)
* **Literary tradition** (the concept of psychological horror, the macabre, the supernatural)
* **The nineteenth century** (the Romantic movement, anxieties connected to religion and industrialisation)

**Themes**

* **Guilt and conscience**
* **Madness and obsession**
* **The power of fear**
* **The nature of evil**

**Style**

* **Perspective** (the narrator’s mental state, the way he perceives and recounts events, his unreliability)
* **Symbolism** (the old man’s eye, the lantern, the heartbeat)
* **Repetition** (the narrator’s fixation on particular details to draw attention to his psychological deterioration)
* **Foreshadowing** (subtle hints that contribute to the overall sense of foreboding)
* **Setting** (how the confined space contributes to the psychological intensity of events)
* **Tone** (the shift from a calm exposition to intense paranoia and guilt)

**Vocabulary**

1. Madness
2. Obsession
3. Guilt
4. Dread
5. Irrationality

***The Story of an Hour*, by Kate Chopin (1894)**

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**Summary**

Louise Mallard, a woman with a heart condition, receives news of her husband’s death in a railroad accident. After experiencing a range of emotions, including a sense of newfound freedom from the constraints of her marriage, she starts to envision a future of independence. However, she is soon told that her husband is actually alive and well.

**Context**

* **Gender roles and expectations** (patriarchy, expectations around marriage, public and private spheres)
* **Women’s rights** (suffrage movement, the quest for basic rights and equality)
* **Emotional** **constraints** (expectations around grief, emotional consequences of repressed thoughts)

**Themes**

* **Freedom and independence**
* **Repression and self-expression**
* **The constraints of marriage**
* **Individuality and identity**

**Style**

* **Symbolism** (the open window, the season of spring)
* **Contrasts** (winter and spring, the open and closed door, grief and joy, expectation and reality)

**Vocabulary**

1. Grief
2. Joy
3. Expectation
4. Freedom
5. Conflict

***After Twenty Years*, by O Henry (1906)**

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**Summary**

Two old friends, Bob and Jimmy, plan to reunite after two decades apart. However, on the night they are due to meet, a surprising revelation unfolds: Jimmy, now a police officer, is there to arrest Bob, who has become a criminal. Bob remains unaware of Jimmy’s intention until it’s too late.

**Context**

* **Literary modernism** (emphasis on the ‘ordinary’ individual, urban anonymity, increasing sense of isolation)

**Themes**

* **Friendship and loyalty**
* **Trust and betrayal**
* **Time and change**

**Style**

* **Symbolism** (the doorway, the darkness, references to time, references to weather)
* **Urban realism** (vivid and authentic portrayal of New York)
* **Dialogue** (use of the vernacular)

**Vocabulary**

1. Friendship
2. Loyalty
3. Divergence
4. Commitment
5. Betrayal

***Ruthless*, by William De Mille (1945)**

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**Summary**

Driven by an obsession to protect his belongings, Judson Webb prepares a lethal concoction to punish the thief who he believes has stolen his whisky. However, fate intervenes, and he becomes the victim of his own plan when he inadvertently drinks it himself.

**Context**

* **Justice and morality** (debates around the ethics, law enforcement and personal responsibility in the C20th)

**Themes**

* **Justice and retribution**
* **Power and control**

**Style**

* **Symbolism** (the locked closet, the poisoned whisky)
* **Dialogue** (colloquial, conversational)

**Vocabulary**

1. Justice
2. Revenge
3. Ruthlessness
4. Consequence
5. Obsession

***Charles*, by Shirley Jackson (1948)**

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**Summary**

Laurie, a young boy, returns home from kindergarten each day with tales of a mischievous classmate called Charles. As they listen with great surprise and increasing concern, Laurie’s parents look forward to being able to meet Charles’s parents and, indeed, Charles himself. That is, however, until they discover that he doesn’t exist at all.

**Context**

* **Social norms and expectations around parenting** (concept of the nuclear family, attitudes towards discipline)
* **Psychological perspectives** (projection, role-playing, Charles as a vehicle to express Laurie’s impulses)

**Themes**

* **Parenting and parenthood**
* **Social expectations and peer-influences**
* **Communication and miscommunication**
* **Parental concern and obligation**

**Style**

* **Foreshadowing** (The increasingly dramatic nature of Laurie’s stories)
* **Humour** (Charles as a caricature, shifts in tone, the differing reactions of Laurie’s parents)
* **Dialogue** (colloquial, conversational)

**Vocabulary**

1. Identity
2. Deception
3. Rebellion
4. Perception
5. Disruption

***Lamb to the Slaughter*, by Roald Dahl (1953)**

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**Summary**

Mary Maloney, a devoted housewife, is told by her husband one evening that he plans to leave her. In a moment of shock and rage, she hits him over the head with a frozen leg of lamb. To avoid being caught, she then cooks the murder weapon and serves it to the unsuspecting police officers who have arrived to investigate.

**Context**

* **Social norms and expectations around marriage** (the concepts of housewife and breadwinner, domestic ideals)
* **Justice and morality** (debates around the ethics of betrayal and revenge)

**Themes**

* **Revenge and justice**
* **Gender roles and expectations**
* **Deception and betrayal**

**Style**

* **Foreshadowing** (the title, the initial air of expectancy, her husband’s brusque conversation)
* **Perspective** (limited third-person, insight into Mary’s motivations and inner-conflicts)

**Vocabulary**

1. Betrayal
2. Manipulation
3. Disbelief
4. Denial
5. Revenge

***Examination Day*, by Henry Slesar (1958)**

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**Summary**

Dickie Jordan, a twelve-year-old schoolboy, is due to take a mandatory intelligence test administered by the government for all students of the same age. When the day arrives, Dickie duly completes the test and performs well. Too well, in fact, and he is unceremoniously eliminated as a consequence.

**Context**

* **Literary tradition** (dystopian fiction, anxieties about the role of technology in society)
* **Cold War era** (McCarthyism, fears of government control and surveillance, suspicions about non-conformity)
* **Education system** (the increasing prevalence of standardised testing, concerns about student wellbeing)

**Themes**

* **Conformity and obedience**
* **Totalitarianism and control**
* **Education and Independence**

**Style**

* **Foreshadowing** (the unwelcoming appearance of the government building, the drink, the superficial reassurances)

**Vocabulary**

1. Conformity
2. Control
3. Authority
4. Individuality
5. Surveillance

***He-y, Come On Ou-t!*,by Shinichi Hoshi (1971)**

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**Summary**

After a strong typhoon, a group of villagers discover a mysterious hole nearby. Attempts to investigate the hole’s depth are strangely inconclusive and, eventually, it is turned into a convenient disposal site for rubbish and all sorts of other hazardous materials. However, one day, a mysterious voice is heard from the other side of it.

**Context**

* **Environmental concerns** (waste management, pollution, social attitudes towards progress and convenience)
* **Capitalist ventures** (capitalist exploitation, industrialisation and urbanisation)

**Themes**

* **Human nature and greed**
* **Consumerism and the environment**
* **Social indifference and denial**

**Style**

* **Symbolism** (the hole as a symbol for the unknown and human curiosity, the consequences of exploitation)
* **Satire** (human nature, greed, the pursuit of progress)

**Vocabulary**

1. Exploitation
2. Curiosity
3. Consequences
4. Responsibility
5. Ignorance