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Stories

Worksheet 1: Analysis of a narrative

Here is a retelling of a very famous story. At the end are questions, requiring you to use the 'Stories' lesson as a guide. Can you complete the questions?

The Key

Once upon a time, there was an exceedingly wealthy man. His name was Mr Black. He owned a castle, a mansion in town and huge estates. And he was looking for a wife. But since he was rather ugly, with staring eyes and a big beard, no young woman was interested. Besides, he had had several wives, and no one knew what had become of them.

It happened that he had a pretty young neighbour, whose name was Eloise. They were a noble family, but poor.

In order to get acquainted, he invited her, together with her mother and younger sister, to come and stay at his castle. For a week, they had picnics and dinners and rode around his beautiful estate in his golden coach. Servants looked after their every need, and they were delighted.

'What do you think of Mr Black now?' asked the mother. For she was eager to see her daughter marry well.

'Why, he is quite nice,' replied the daughter. 'I think it is unfair of people to say how horrible he is. I think he is lovely!'

Within weeks, Eloise had become his wife.

All went well for a time. Then one day, Mr Black informed his wife that he had to go away on a long trip for business.

'Amuse yourself while I am gone,' he said, smiling. 'Invite anyone you like. And don't worry about me.'

Eloise curtsied. For she was still in awe of her husband.

'Here are the keys to the castle,' said he. 'These ones open the storerooms, and here is the key to my treasure.' And he handed her the ring of keys.

'And this little one?' asked Eloise, for she had spotted a tiny key.

'Ah, my dear,' said her husband, 'Not that one, please. It opens the red door at

When at last she returned with the key, he said, in a rage,

'Why is there blood on this key?'

'I scarcely know,' said Eloise, nearly fainting with fright.

'Alas, I know,' he growled. 'You disobeyed me. Now you must take your place with my other wives!'

'Please, sir, no!' she cried, clasping his feet.

'You must die, madame,' he replied, mercilessly.

'Then let me at least say my prayers,' she pleaded.

'Very well. You have half an hour.'

Eloise went upstairs and locked herself in her room in the tower. She looked out. Her brother had promised to visit her that day. Maybe they would be in time. But there was no sign of anyone on the road.

'Madame, I am waiting!' called Mr Black, and he sharpened his sword. 'Oh, where are they?' In the distance was a cloud of dust. But it was only a shepherd and his flock.

'The time has come!' called Mr Black, advancing up the stairs.

'One more minute...' she cried, sobbing. She looked again. A farmer went past with his horse. Otherwise the road was empty. 'Oh, mercy...'

'Now I am coming to get you,' roared Mr Black. And advancing to the door of her chamber, he knocked loudly. 'LET ME IN!'

'I beg you, please...'

He broke down the door, and strode in.

'Now you must die!' He raised his sword high and grabbed her.

At this very moment, there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs. In rushed her brother and his friend. They drew their swords.

'Unhand her!' they cried.

He dropped her, and made to escape. But they were faster. Soon he lay dead on the floor, his evil deeds finally at an end.

It was found that Mr Black had no heirs. Thus Eloise became mistress of all his wealth. She married her brother's friend, and her family came to live in comfort with her. And they all lived happily ever after.

the bottom of the staircase. Do not use it, my love, or I shall be very angry with you.'

Eloise looked down and blushed, and promised to obey his instructions.

Mr Black kissed her, and went away.

Soon she had invited her family and friends to come and stay. Together, they ate and drank and had a wonderful time.

But as time passed, Eloise grew bored. Together with her friends she had explored all the rooms in the castle, and roamed throughout the grounds. Alone, she found she had nothing to do. And her thoughts went increasingly to the strange little key.

One day, she could restrain herself no more.

She tiptoed down the stairs and stood in front of the red door.

'Should I?' she whispered to herself. 'Why ever not? I am his wife!'

And with that, she turned the key in the lock.

Inside the room, all was dark. But as her eyes became accustomed to the gloom...

'OH NO!'

On hooks along the walls were six bodies.

'His wives... The ones who were never seen again.'

Horrified, she locked the door and rushed upstairs. But when she looked at the key, she found that it had blood on it. She washed it, but the blood would not go away.

That night, Mr Black returned from his travels.

'Here I am, my dear,' he said. 'Did you miss me?'

'Welcome back,' she said, trying to conceal the tremble in her voice.

The next day, Mr Black asked for his keys. She brought them.

'And what of the little key?' For he could see that it was missing.

'I forgot that one,' she said, in a tiny voice.

'Then get it!'

ANALYSE 'THE KEY'

1. Who are the two main characters?

2. What hint of a future problem is there in the first paragraph?

3. What solution (apparently) to a problem does Eloise find in marrying Mr Black?

4. What challenge confronts Eloise when Mr Black announces his departure?

5. How does she deal to that challenge?

6. What does Eloise discover about the true nature of Mr Black's character, and how is it different from the concept of him that she previously had?

7. What problem is caused by Eloise's disobedience of Mr Black's instruction?

8. How does she try to avoid the consequences of her action?

9. How does the suspense and tension of the narrative escalate after the return of Mr Black?

10. What does the ending of the story offer by way of a moral?

NOTE: You may have noticed that this story is a simplified retelling of *Bluebeard*, a famous traditional European folk tale. It first appeared in Charles Perrault's 1704 book *Tales of Times gone By*, which also contained the classic fairy stories *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*.