About the authors

All the writers in this book were of British or American nationality, and came from a range of very different backgrounds.

**Herbert Ernest Bates** (1905–74) was a British writer. He set many of his novels and short stories in the rural Midlands of England. He invented an idyllic way of life and drew happy portraits of country characters and their simple ways. He also wrote about his wartime experiences in the air force.

**William Somerset Maugham** (1874–1965) was born at the British Embassy in Paris. He studied philosophy in Germany and medicine in London, and then settled in Paris in 1898 to begin his career as a writer. Some of his short stories are considered among the finest in the English language. He is praised for his narrative skill and sharp unromantic observation.

**William Saroyan** (1908–81), an Armenian born in California, was a self-taught writer with a gift for creating atmosphere in his stories. He wrote about the tragedy and comedy of everyday life in the Armenian community, emphasizing the individuality of ordinary folk.

**David Herbert Lawrence** (1885–1930) was the first British writer from a genuinely working class background. His father was a coal-miner and his mother a teacher. Despite ill health, he travelled widely and wrote continuously during his short life. He wrote with a direct and fresh style about human relationships, and was often in trouble with the law for his clear descriptions of sex.

**O’Henry**, pen name of W.S. Porter, (1862–1910) was born in North Carolina in America and did not begin writing until he found himself in prison for fraud at the age of thirty-five. After three years in prison absorbing stories from the other prisoners, he settled in New York and became a full-time writer. He is particularly known for his sharp openings and fast narrative style.

**Hector Hugh Munro**, also known as Saki (1870–1916) was born in Burma but brought up in Devon by two unmarried aunts. This was not a happy childhood and often features in his stories. He wrote apparently light-hearted stories with a darker side. He particularly enjoyed ending his stories with an unexpected twist. He was killed fighting in the First World War.

**Mark Twain** (1835–1910) was a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi and then a reporter in San Francisco before becoming a writer. His humour and sharp observation make him just as popular today as he was in his own time. He is particularly famous for writing *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

**Francis Marion Crawford** (1854–1909) was an American born into a very wealthy family in Italy. He enjoyed a glamorous lifestyle and visited exotic locations in many lands, about which he wrote. For a time he was America’s most successful novelist.

**Stephen Leacock** (1869–1944) was a Canadian humorist. He was a full-time political economist and a part-time writer. His stories belong to the American humorist tradition of Mark Twain.

**Summary**

There is one overall theme that concerns all the stories—they are all about people coping in different ways with the world around them. The stories focus on a wide range of people, from Armenians living in California, to a gravedigger in the English countryside.

**Silas the Good**, H.E. Bates

Old Uncle Silas was working as a gravedigger. One spring afternoon he fell asleep in a grave, his bottle of beer filled with iced tea in his hands. A passing lady became furious at the sight of man drinking on holy ground. With a cup of tea, flattering words, and stories about having become a good man in spite of a difficult life—and the alcohol in the tea which the lady didn’t notice—uncle Silas softened her, and she was later seen on the train, talkative and excited, with flowers and a strong smell, happy to have met a good man.
**British and American Short Stories**

**Mabel, W. Somerset Maugham**
At a club in a village on his way to Pagan, the narrator is told the story of George, a local man. George had met Mabel in England and they had agreed to marry in six months; but difficulties had made it seven years. On the day she was coming, George felt that he couldn’t marry a woman he practically didn’t remember, so he wrote a letter for her and left. His escape led him across Asia, but wherever he arrived there was news that Mabel was following him. When he finally felt safe, Mabel arrived and said how relieved she was to see he had not changed, as it would have otherwise been difficult to tell him she would not marry him. After five minutes they were married. Now Mabel is on a trip and George misses her.

**The Barber’s Uncle, William Saroyan**
A boy of eleven decides to have his hair cut when a bird tries to nest in it. The barber, a wise man who shares the boy’s love for the contemplation of the paradoxical nature of the world and man, tells him the story of his uncle Misak. Misak lived on fighting people until he lost his strength and, at the age of forty, poor and lonely, travelled the world and joined a touring show in which he put his head in a tiger’s mouth. Eventually, the tiger bit his head off. The boy leaves the barber’s shop with a bad haircut and a deep reflection on the loneliness of man and the contradictory nature of reality.

**The Rocking-Horse Winner, D.H. Lawrence**
Paul, a little boy, hears from his mother that they are an unlucky family. In his house, he permanently hears the echo of the need for more money. He decides that he won’t be unlucky and asks his rocking-horse about the winners in horse races, which he learns about from the gardener – a secret he shares with his uncle. Paul gathers a large amount of money for his mother, but it doesn’t seem to be enough, and getting more becomes an obsession that leads him to a brain fever that eventually kills him. His mother is left with 80,000 pounds and no son.

**Springtime on the Menu, O. Henry**
Sarah, a copy-typist, types the menus for a restaurant in exchange for daily meals. Spring has come, which she has been waiting because Walter, a young farmer she met the summer before, promised her they would marry when it came. But the weather is still cold, and Walter has not written in two weeks. Sarah types the menus daydreaming of a day on the farm, when Walter put dandelions on

 her hair. She cries as she sees a dish of dandelions on the menu, and she mistypes its name: ‘Dearest Walter with hard-boiled egg’. This mistake, together with a problem in her W key, enables Walter to find her when he goes to the restaurant by chance. She had moved and Walter had not been able to find her.

**The Open Window, H.H. Munro (Saki)**
Having moved to the countryside in search of a cure for his nerves, and carrying a letter of introduction from his sister, Mr Nuttell visits the Sappletons. Vera, a fifteen-year-old girl, explains to him that the window is open because three years before Mrs Sappleton’s husband and brothers left through it and never returned. They sank in a bog and their bodies were never found, so her aunt is still waiting for them. Mrs Sappleton comes down and explains that the window is open because her husband and brothers are about to return. When Mr Nuttell sees them coming, he runs off without a word. Vera explains to the family that he was probably afraid of the dog, as he had been attacked by dogs in cemetery in India and had had to spend the night in a grave. Vera had a great imagination.

**The Income-Tax Man, Mark Twain**
The narrator receives a visitor in his shop and, unwilling to show his ignorance about what he does, tries to trick him into speaking about his business by boasting about how much money he has made during the year. He is shocked to find that his visitor is an income tax assessor, and sees a rich man who helps him fill in his forms so as not to pay what he should according to what he told the assessor. He manages not to pay at the cost of his self-respect.

**The Upper Berth, F. Marion Crawford**
At a party, Brisbane, an old sailor, tells a story about a ghost on board the Kamtschatka. He had been assigned the lower berth in cabin 105 and noticed everybody was nervous about it. On the first night, he found the window open, and heard the man who shared the cabin with him ran away. The following morning he was told that the man had disappeared. The same had happened to three other men who had travelled in that cabin before. Brisbane soon found that the window would open during the night and was determined to find out what happened. He stayed in the cabin during the night with the Captain, and they found there was a strange damp creature in the upper berth. They fought it out, and the cabin was locked to passengers. Neither he nor the Captain travelled in the Kamtschatka again.
**British and American Short Stories**

**My Bank Account, Stephen Leacock**

The narrator has an irrational fear of banks but, having received a raise in his salary, decides that he needs to open an account. When he gets into the bank, his nerves lead him into asking to see the manager alone, saying he would open a very large account, walking into the safe and writing a cheque for the whole amount he had deposited. He leaves the bank with his 56 dollars in his pocket, and decides to keep his savings in a sock.

**Discussion activities**

**Silas The Good, pages 1–5**

**Before reading**

1. **Guess:** Tell students: These words are related to Silas’s work. What do you think he does? Spade; churchyard; dead; tombstone. Students guess and then check.

**After reading**

2. **Pair work:** In pairs, students make a list of other words that could be added to the list of clues in activity 1.

3. **Discuss:** Ask students: What is the difference, for Uncle Silas, between a woman and a female? Does being seen as a woman or a female depend on the looks or the attitude? Do you think all women are sometimes seen as women and sometimes as females depending on their different roles?

4. **Discussion:** Tell students: This story is about a meeting between two people with different ideas about the world. Do you think this meeting will have a positive effect on the woman? Why/why not?

5. **Write:** Tell students: Think of what happens in your mind when you think. Stream of consciousness is the name of a way of writing that tries to express the feelings, thoughts, ideas and memories in the mind. To imitate thought, it uses practically no punctuation and takes the form of an interior voice. Ask students to write a paragraph with the woman’s thoughts as she walked away. Students then share their paragraphs and compare their ideas to their discussion in Activity 5.

6. **Artwork:** In groups, students change the ending of the story; then they make a cartoon that shows what happened. The other groups ‘read’ the endings from the pictures and the class discusses how the whole story changes with a different ending.

**Mabel, pages 6–10**

**Before reading**

7. **Guess:** Ask students: How do you expect a man to react when he suddenly realizes he is about to marry a woman he has not seen in years? And a woman?

**After reading**

8. **Role play:** Students role play the conversation between George and Mabel after she has had her bath.

9. **Research:** Students find in a map or the Internet whether George was travelling north or south as he moved from town to town. They make a map with his itinerary.

10. **Write:** Tell students to imagine that George answered each of the telegrams Mabel sent to him, making a different excuse on each occasion. Students write the telegrams and the class votes for the best excuses.

11. **Group work:** In groups, students decide where George would have travelled if the story had been set in their continent/country. Then groups narrate George’s escape to the class.

12. **Write:** In pairs or groups, students rewrite the ending so that Mabel does find George changed and decides not to marry him. They include Mabel’s words and George’s reaction. Then they discuss how the story changes.
**British and American Short Stories**

**The Barber’s Uncle**, pages 11–17

**Before reading**

13 **Discuss**: Tell students: A line in this story says: ‘That’s the way with the world. Always telling you what to do.’ Do you think the world would be different if people looked more at what they do and not so much at what others do?

**After reading**

14 **Role play**: In pairs, students take the roles of Miss Gamma and the narrator. Miss Gamma explains to the boy why he needs a haircut and the boy answers why he thinks he doesn’t.

15 **Debate**: Divide the class into two groups and have them debate the following: From the story, you can see that A: money is important in life; B: money is not important in life.

16 **Write**: In groups, students write an epitaph for Uncle Misák, beginning ‘Here lies a man who …’

17 **Pair work**: In pairs, students discuss what the narrator did when he grew up. They share their stories with the class and explain why they chose that future for the boy.

18 **Write**: Students write a short story for children in which the bird that tried to nest in the narrator’s head tells his story to other birds.

19 **Discuss**: Ask students: Do you think that people who adapt to the standards and expectations of the society they live in are not so lonely as those who do not? Or is loneliness an unavoidable part of human life for everybody?

20 **Artwork**: Students design a cover for a book starting with this story. The cover must reflect the idea that everything is beautiful and ugly, happy and sad, good and evil at the same time.

**The Rocking-Horse Winner**, pages 18–34

**After reading**

21 **Research**: Students look for information about the meaning and origin of the expression ‘keep up with the Joneses’. Then they discuss whether they think Paul’s mother is trying to keep up with the Joneses or fighting against her feeling of personal failure?

22 **Discuss**: Ask students how they think the following events affect Paul: his mother tells him that his father is unlucky and she is unlucky too, for having married him (page 20) / his uncle tells him not to stop before he gets where he wants to go (page 22).

23 **Read carefully**: Tell students to re-read carefully the last paragraph of the story and to imagine that Paul’s uncle remains silent, but later writes a letter to his sister telling her what he thinks of what has happened. Students write the letter.

24 **Role play**: Students take the roles of Paul’s sisters as adults, and role play a conversation they have about the whisper they heard at home.

25 **Research**: Students search the Internet for information about the ‘Derby’ and share it with the class.

26 **Discuss**: In groups, students discuss what Paul’s uncle means when he says ‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’ (page 29)

27 **Role play**: Students role play a conversation between Paul’s mother and father after Paul’s death. Ask students to think about the arguments each may use to blame the other.

28 **Discuss**: Students work in groups. Tell them: Paul would not have died if his relationship with his mother had been different. Ask them: Do you agree? Groups share their ideas.

**Springtime on the Menu**, pages 35–39

**After reading**

29 **Write, game**: In groups, students write as many reasons why Sarah was crying over the menu to add to the fourth paragraph on page 35 as they can in two minutes. The group that writes the longest list wins.

30 **Pair work**: In pairs, students find the advice on writing stories that the author gives the reader. Then they discuss whether they do what the author says they should not do when they write stories in class.

31 **Write**: Tell students that this is a fragment of ‘In the Good Summertime’ by Ren Shields: ‘There’s a time each year / That we always hold dear, / Good old summer time; / With the birds and the trees’es / And sweet scented breezes, / Good old summer time.’ Ask them to re-write lines 3 to 5 for different seasons, for example: ‘Good old spring time, / With dandelions on your hair, / And plenty of time to spare, / Good old spring time.’ The class votes for the best lines.

32 **Role play**: Students imagine that the waiter did not want to give Walter Sarah’s address because he didn’t know him. They role play their conversation.

33 **Artwork**: Students imagine a film is made based on this story. They make a poster to publicize it.

34 **Group work**: In groups, students choose the music for the following scenes in the film in activity 39: Sarah is cold in her room, looking through the window; Sarah remembers her walk with Walter with dandelions on her hair; Sarah hears Walter’s voice in her hall. They explain their choices to the class.

35 **Pair work**: In pairs, students make a list of dishes that include flowers and another ingredient for Sarah’s menu. Then the class chooses the most original.

**The Open Window**, pages 40–43

**Before reading**

36 **Pair work**: Students work in pairs. Tell them: In this story, a man’s sister’s acquaintance’s niece tells the man a story about the man’s sister’s acquaintance’s husband and two brothers. Ask them: How many characters are there in the story? Students make a list of characters and then check.
British and American Short Stories

After reading
37 Role play: Students work in groups of five or six. Tell them to imagine that Framton Nuttel does not run out of the house. He stays in the room with Vera, Mrs Sappleton, Mr Sappleton and one or two of the brothers. He says, ‘Vera told me that you were dead.’ Students take parts and continue the conversation.

38 Write: In pairs, students re-write the ending of the story. They continue from ‘I expect it was the dog; he told me he had a terrible fear of dogs …’ and write a different version of the reason why Nuttel was afraid of dogs. The class votes for the best story.

39 Research: Students search the Internet for information about the characteristics of a bog and explain why they are dangerous. They prepare brief presentations for the class.

40 Write: Students write the article that a newspaper would have published if the story told by Mrs Sappleton’s niece had been true.

41 Discuss: Tell students: Mr Nuttel believed that illnesses were an appropriate topic for a conversation with somebody you do not know very well. Ask them: Which topics do you think are appropriate?

The Income-Tax Man, pages 44–48

Before reading
42 Guess: Tell students: Some people think that it is better to be the owner of your silence than a slave of your words. What do you think this means? Read the title of the story. What words may the narrator be a slave of?

After reading
43 Role play: Tell students to imagine that the narrator knew who his visitor was and have them role play the conversation they would have had in that case.

44 Write, research: Students write some of the fourteen questions in the form that the narrator found in the envelope. Then they search the Internet for income tax forms and compare them to what the narrator describes and to their own forms.

45 Read carefully and group work: Divide the class into two groups. Ask them these questions: a) What does the author think about the education of children? b) What does he think about ‘the men of moral value, of high business standards, of great social standing?’ Groups discuss their answers and explain to the class where in the text they found their answers.

46 Debate: Divide the class into two groups and have them debate the following issue: Income tax has to be high and the money collected must be used to provide health services, food and shelter to poorer people. Groups take opposite positions and debate it.

47 Write: Tell students to imagine they are journalists and write an opinion article in which they discuss how they think people who lie in their income-tax statements should be punished.

48 Pair work: In pairs, students discuss how they think the narrator would tell this story to his grandchildren and what he would tell them he learned from the experience. Pairs share their ideas.

The Upper Berth, pages 49–65

Before reading
49 Guess: Tell students: On board the Kamtschatka there is a doctor, the captain, a steward and a sailor. One of them is called Robert. Who is he if the opposite of these statements is true? Brisbane is not an old sailor. / Robert doesn’t know the captain of the ship. / The doctor doesn’t invite Brisbane to his cabin.

After reading
50 Read carefully and write: In groups, students read the description of the ghostly creature on page 65 and write a description of a different creature. Groups share their texts and the class votes on the most frightening ghost.

51 Role play: Students imagine that a team of sailors rescues the man that shares the cabin with Brisbane from the water. They role play their conversation with the man.

52 Write: Students write an entry in the Captain’s log explaining why cabin 105 has to remain closed.

53 Artwork: Students imagine a film director wants to make a film based on the ghost of the Kamtschatka. They choose the name and make a poster for it.

54 Pair work: Students read the bottom of page 52, where Brisbane says he goes to sleep thinking of complaints to be made the next day, and choosing the most powerful words in the language. What would he say the following day?

My Bank Account, pages 66–69

Before reading
55 Guess: Have students look up the word ‘phobia’ in their dictionaries. Tell them to read the title of the story and discuss what the character in this story may have a phobia of.

After reading
56 Discuss: Students discuss if phobias are a common disorder today, and what kinds of phobias seem to be the most common.

57 Group work and write: In groups, students seem to be waiting for a detective. They add one or two paragraphs to the story explaining what had happened at the bank.

58 Research: Students search the Internet for information about the Pinkerton Detective Agency and prepare a brief presentation for the class.