

## *Nine Stories* by J.D. Salinger

Reading Guide by Janet Somerville

### ELEMENTS OF SHORT FICTION

#### 1) Setting

The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting. There are several aspects of a story's setting to consider when examining how setting contributes to a story. Some aspects of setting include:

**Time, Place, Weather Conditions, Social Conditions, Mood or Atmosphere.**

#### 2) Plot

The plot is how the author arranges events to develop his basic idea; it is the sequence of events in a story or play. The plot is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. There are five essential parts of plot:

- a) **Introduction** - The beginning of the story where the characters and the setting is revealed.
- b) **Rising Action** - This is where the events in the story become complicated and the conflict in the story is revealed (events between the introduction and climax).
- c) **Climax** - This is the highest point of interest and the turning point of the story. The reader wonders what will happen next; will the conflict be resolved or not?
- d) **Falling action** - The events and complications begin to resolve themselves. The reader knows what has happened next and if the conflict was resolved or not (events between climax and denouement).
- e) **Denouement** - This is the final outcome or untangling of events in the story.

#### 3) Conflict

Conflict is essential to plot. Without conflict there is no plot. It is the opposition of forces which ties one incident to another and makes the plot move. There are two *types* of conflict:

- 1) **External** - A struggle with a force outside one's self.
- 2) **Internal** - A struggle within one's self; a person must make some decision, overcome pain, quiet their temper, resist an urge, etc.

There are four *kinds* of conflict:

- 1) **Man vs. Man** (physical) - The leading character struggles with his physical strength against other men, forces of nature, or animals.
- 2) **Man vs. Circumstances** (classical) - The leading character struggles against fate, or the circumstances of life facing him/her.
- 3) **Man vs. Society** (social) - The leading character struggles against ideas, practices, or customs of other people.
- 4) **Man vs. Himself/Herself** (psychological) - The leading character struggles with

himself/herself; with his/her own soul, ideas of right or wrong, physical limitations, choices, etc.

#### 4) Character

There are two meanings for the word character:

**a. Persons in a work of fiction - Antagonist and Protagonist** Short stories use few characters. One character is clearly central to the story with all major events having some importance to this character - he/she is the PROTAGONIST. The opposer of the main character is called the ANTAGONIST.

**b. The Characteristics of a Person** - In order for a story to seem real to the reader its characters must seem real. Characterization is the information the author gives the reader about the characters themselves. The author may reveal a character in several ways: a) his/her physical appearance b) what he/she says, thinks, feels and dreams c) what he/she does or does not do d) what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her.

*Characters are...*

1. **Individual** - round, many sided and complex personalities.
2. **Developing** - dynamic, many sided personalities that change, for better or worse, by the end of the story.
3. **Static** - Stereotype, have one or two characteristics that never change and are emphasized e.g. brilliant detective, drunk, scrooge, cruel stepmother, etc.

#### 5) Point of View

**Stream of Consciousness** - The story is told so that the reader feels as if they are inside the head of one character and knows all their thoughts and reactions.

**First Person** - The story is told by the protagonist or one of the characters who interacts closely with the protagonist or other characters (using pronouns I, me, we, etc). The reader sees the story through this person's eyes as he/she experiences it and only knows what he/she knows or feels.

**Omniscient**- The author can narrate the story using the omniscient point of view. He can move from character to character, event to event, having free access to the thoughts, feelings and motivations of his characters and he introduces information where and when he chooses.

#### 6) Theme

The theme in a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the author's underlying meaning or main idea that he is trying to convey. The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature.

## “For Esmé with Love and Squalor”

### Historical Background

- “Blitz” in London 1944
- children evacuated to safer areas of the English countryside
- development of warfare—unmanned bombs: “Doodlebugs”

List characteristics evident about each of the children.

Charles	Esmé

### READING FOR MEANING

Why is Esmé being secretive when she first meets the American soldier?

How does the experience of war force children to grow up quickly?

What evidence is there that the soldier is “shell-shocked?”

## **CREATIVE WRITING**

Write the letter the soldier may have written in response to Esmé's correspondence dated June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

(250-300 words)

Be sure to refer specifically to the contents of Esme's letter and remember that the soldier does not have all of his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact.

**“Just Before the War with the Eskimos”  
READING FOR DETAIL QUIZ**

**/8 marks**

Name the sport Ginnie and Selena regularly play.

\_\_\_\_\_

Instead of tomato juice, what does Ginnie imagine Selena’s family serves?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why is Ginnie irritated with Selena?

\_\_\_\_\_

What part of the body has Selena’s brother Franklin injured?

\_\_\_\_\_

How did he injure it?

\_\_\_\_\_

What kind of sandwich does he offer Ginnie?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is “Joan the snob?”

\_\_\_\_\_

In what kind of factory did Selena’s brother work during the war?

\_\_\_\_\_

**BONUS**

What physical condition prevented Franklin from serving during WW II?

\_\_\_\_\_

**“Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes”**  
**READING FOR DETAIL QUIZ**

**/6marks**

1. Where is Lee at the opening of the story?
2. Who phones him?
3. How does Arthur feel about his wife?
4. Where does the title of the story come from?
5. Who is Joanie?
6. What does Arthur say his wife’s eyes look like?

**“Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut”**

**READING FOR DETAIL QUIZ**

**/5 marks**

*Just the facts, Jack.*

1. Where did Mary Jane and Eloise originally meet?
2. What was the bond between them?
3. What is Eloise’s daughter’s name?
4. Who is Jimmy Jimmereeno?
5. What does “Uncle Wiggily” refer to?

BONUS: Why does Eloise drag her daughter to the middle of the bed? (refuses to condone her belief in imaginary friends)

## “Teddy”

### NOTES

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#### **Influence of Buddhism**

- everything is impermanent (nothing lasts forever)
- what we perceive will disappear in time
- belief in reincarnation—rinpochetts (religious figures)
- unemotionalism
- spurns materialism

#### **Historical Context**

- 1950s newly Communist China struggles for control of Buddhist Tibet
- 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in his teens (he was identified as a reincarnated religious leader when he was 6 years old)

Teddy and his father Mr. McArdle are character foils for each other. His father is interested in material possessions and brands such as the Gladstone luggage and the Leica camera.

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#### **FORESHADOWING**

- a) “It will either happen today or on February 14, 1958 when I am sixteen. It is ridiculous to mention even.” (182)
- b) “I could fracture my skull and die instantaneously.” (193)



**“Teddy”  
READING FOR DETAIL QUIZ**

**/10 marks**

Name the two objects Mr. McArdle is upset about.

\_\_\_\_\_

What is Teddy’s sister’s name?

\_\_\_\_\_

With what is she building up on the Sports’ Deck?

\_\_\_\_\_

What does Teddy see being dumped out the porthole?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is Bob Nicholson?

\_\_\_\_\_

To what is Teddy referring when he writes in his journal “It is ridiculous to mention even?”

\_\_\_\_\_

**IDENTIFY THE SPEAKER**

a) “I hate you. I hate everybody in this ocean.” \_\_\_\_\_

b) “There’ll be a small tasteful funeral and everybody’s going to ask who that attractive woman is in the red dress...flirting with the organist.” \_\_\_\_\_

c) “I mean it’s very hard to meditate and live a spiritual life in America. People think you’re a freak if you try to.” \_\_\_\_\_

**BONUS**

What is the last word in the story? \_\_\_\_\_

***“The Laughing Man”***

Having read the story, comment on Salinger's use of hyperbole in the "fantasy" storyline--how the shock value is actually effective--think of other "freak" stories you may have heard--e.g. human gives birth to chimpanzee baby, etc... (you know, front page of THE STAR or THE ENQUIRER)

Make a list of the strategies "the Chief" uses to tell the tale.

Comment on how Salinger manages to find closure to the story itself using the image of the mask. Consider the notion of masks on a broader level...why are they useful?

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**WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

**Write a 250 word installment to "The Laughing Man" that occurs before he drops dead and pulls off his mask (p.73)**

**“Nine Stories” Compare and Contrast Brainstorm Sheet**

**Story Title #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Story Title #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Points of Comparison:  
(Include three useful quotations)**

**Points of Contrast:  
(Include three useful quotations):**

## PLANNING A VIDEO SCRIPT

Select ONE of the stories we read from Salinger's collection:

- A Perfect Day for Bananafish
- Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut
- Just Before the War with the Eskimos
- The Laughing Man
- For Esme with Love and Squalor
- Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes
- Teddy

*A video script uses words to explain what will be happening in a video. Use a chart like the one below to develop a video script for a scene from the story of your choice in Salinger's collection.*

Due date:

e.g.

<b>SCENE 1</b>	<b>What viewers see (use closeup shots as well as long shots)</b>	<b>What viewers hear (consider natural noises as well as a music soundtrack)</b>
Shot 1		
Shot 2		
Shot 3		
Shot 4		

You will probably have 8-10 shots for the scene you adapt.

Small Group Work  
*Nine Stories*

Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut
Just Before the War with the Eskimos
Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes
Down at the Dinghy
Teddy

For your assigned story, you must be prepared to discuss each of the following elements of short fiction:

- setting
- plot
- conflict
- character development
- point of view
- theme/symbol

Also, please select 3 short passages that appeal to you and be prepared to explain why.

You will provide a HANDOUT that includes all of the above. The HANDOUT must fit on one page—you may use both sides. Be sure to include the title of your story as well as all of the names of the boys in your group.

April 5, 1953

# Threads of Innocence

By EUDORA WELTY

J. D. Salinger's writing is original, first rate, serious and beautiful. Here are nine of his stories, and one further reason that they are so interesting, and so powerful seen all together, is that they are paradoxes. From the outside, they are often very funny; inside, they are about heartbreak, and convey it; they can do this because they are pure. The whole nine have an enchanting ease about them, a deceptively loose-appearing texture, a freshness and liveliness which might bid fair to disarm the reader, as he begins, say, the remarkable "For Esme with Love and Squalor." Nothing could be further from what Mr. Salinger is about to do to him.

**NINE STORIES**  
By J. D. Salinger.

The stories concern children a good deal of the time, but they are God's children. Mr. Salinger's work deals with innocence, and starts with innocence: from there it can penetrate a full range of relationships, follow the spirit's private adventure, inquire into grave problems gravely--into life and death and human vulnerability and into the occasional mystical experience where age does not, after a point, any longer apply. Mr. Salinger's world urban, suburban, family, mostly of the Eastern seaboard is never a clue to the way he will treat it: he seems to write without preconception of shackling things.

He has the equipment of a born writer to begin with-- his sensitive eye, his incredibly good ear, and something I can think of no word for but grace. There is not a trace of sentimentality about his work, although it is full of children that are bound to be adored. He pronounces no judgements, he is simply gifted with having them, and with having them passionately.

The material of these stories is quite different, again, from his subject. Death, war, the flaws in human relationships, the crazy inability to make plain to others what is most transparent and plain to ourselves and nearest our hearts; the lack or loss of a way to offer our passionate feeling belief, in their full generosity; the ruthless cruelty of conventional social judgements and behavior; the persistent longing-- reaching sometimes to fantasy-- to return to some state of purity and grace; these subjects lie somewhere near the core of J. D. Salinger's work.

They all pertain to the lack of something in the world, and it might he said that what Mr. Salinger has written about so far is the absence of love. Owing to that absence comes the spoilation of innocence, or else the triumph in death of innocence over the outrage and corruption that lie in wait for it.

The feeling may arise from these warm, uneven stories (no writer worth his salt is even, or can be) that Mr. Salinger has never, here, *directly* touched upon

what he has the most to say about: love. Love averts itself in pity, laughter, or a gesture or vision of finality possibly too easy or simple in stories that are neither easy nor simple in any degree.

Mr. Salinger is a very serious artist, and it is likely that what he has to say will find many forms as time goes by--interesting forms, too. His novel, "The Catcher in the Rye," was good and extremely moving, although--for this reader--all its virtues can be had in a short story by the same author, where they are somehow more at home.

What this reader loves about Mr. Salinger's stories is that they honor what is unique and precious in each person on earth. Their author has the courage--it is more like the earned right and privilege--to experiment at the risk of not being understood. Best of all, he has a loving heart.

April 9, 1953

## Books of The Times

By CHARLES POORE

s J. D. Salinger bucking to be a prose Chas Addams? His second book, "Nine Stories," is rich--over-rich, I think--in small monsters and large shadows of the macabre and the malign. It fits right into the current revival of super-natural literature. But it is somehow disappointing, coming

**NINE STORIES**  
By J. D. Salinger.



from the man who wrote the outstanding first novel of 1951, "The Catcher in the Rye." That's the penalty Salinger has to pay for being such a good author. He can write rings around most of the others in his generation. (He was born in 1919). The result is that when he comes along with a book that would make the reputation of any one of a dozen gifted young fogies we complain because it's not better than "The Catcher in the Rye." For "Nine Stories" can best be criticized in terms of what we expect of Salinger. Perhaps it's unfair to ask him to be excellent all the time. Nevertheless, the business of playing tunes on the nerves of his characters can become fairly monotonous. And while Chas Addams in his magnificent cartoons has managed to create a whole world of galvanic nightmare, Mr. Salinger seems to be content, for the time being, at any rate, to adapt his manner to the exploration of disjointed, uneasy little dreams.

The scream at the end of the story called "Teddy," for example, is certainly bad art. Up to that point we have been reading a miraculously effective narrative of the unbelievable, the story of a monstrously successful little genius. The scream leaves us with nothing but a regulation chiller. "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" also sacrifices a wonderfully subtle beginning and middle for another bang! bang! ending. "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" gives the duly expected unexpected depth to standard-brand shallowness, and "Pretty

"Mouth and Green My Eyes" is completely successful with a doubly tricked ending.

"Just Before the War With the Eskimos" reminds us again how much more truly Salinger writes about adolescence than Tarkington ever did. "The Laughing Man" uses Chas Addams trappings lavishly. "Down at the Dinghy" solves more problems than it raises. "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" goes on too long, but it's good most of the way.

"For Esme--With Love and Squalor" is still the best short story that has come out of World War II. Now all we ask is that Mr. Salinger put away his Halloween tricks and write as good a novel of World War II. He can do it. Make no mistake about that.