



INDIAN SCHOOL DARSAIT DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



Subject : English

Topic: **A SHADY PLOT**

Worksheet No. :19

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Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow :

Marks

1. *"I am going back to my grandmother. My lawyer will communicate with you later?"* 4
 - (a) Who speaks the above lines?
Ans: Lavinia speaks the above lines.
 - (b) Why is she going back to her grandmother?
Ans: She decides to go to her grandmother as she suspected that her husband John Hallock had an affair with a ghost Helen of Troy.
 - (c) What effect does the above extract have on the listener?
Ans: John Hallock is devastated as his marriage was in trouble.
 - (d) Explain – "My lawyer will communicate with you later".
Ans: Lavinia was planning to divorce John Hallock , so she said that her lawyer would meet him in regard to it.

2. *"Well, I was not in a position to contradict Jenkins."* 4
 - (a) Why was the narrator not in a position to contradict Jenkins ?
Ans: The narrator was not in a position to contradict Jenkins because his magazine had been the only one to print his stories.
 - (b) Who was Jenkins ?
Ans: He was the publisher of the magazine.
 - (c) What had Jenkins asked the narrator to do ?
Ans: Jenkins wanted him to write a ghost story.
 - (d) What does 'contradict' refer to?
Ans: To deny or disagree.

3. *"I sat staring at it and presently noticed something just taking shape. It was exactly like watching one of these moving picture cartoons being put together."* 4
 - (a) What was the narrator staring it?
Ans: The narrator John Hallock was staring at the shadow that started taking a definite shape.
 - (b) How was the figure taking shape?
Ans: The shape was like one of these moving picture cartoons being put together.
 - (c) Who was gradually taking a definite shape part by part?
Ans: Helen's ghost was gradually taking a definite shape.
 - (d) What does 'cartoons' refer to?
Ans: Animated picture.

4. *"..... I just came to tell you stop bothering us for assistance; You ain't going to get it. We are going on strike!"*
 - (a) Who is the speaker of these lines?
Ans: The ghost, Helen.
 - (b) Who does 'you' refer to ?
Ans: John the narrator is referred to as you here.

(c) What does the speaker threaten to do ?

Ans: They threaten to go on strike.

(d) What does 'assistance' refer to?

Ans: The act of helping or supporting someone.

5. *"I had hardly seated myself at the desk when there came a tap at the door and a white slip of paper slid under it. I unfolded it and read :"*

(a) Who is 'I' ?

Ans: John Hallock

(b) Who had written the slip of paper ?

Ans: His wife, Lavinia

(c) What was written on it ?

Ans: She was going away – would seek a divorce.

(d) What does 'unfolded' refer to?

Ans: To open.

6. *"You're to exert your influence. Get all your friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board and then we'll start helping you to write".*

(a) Who is the speaker and of what help is she talking about?

Ans. Helen is the speaker. She is talking about to help John to write a ghost story.

(b) Why does she want to stop his friends and acquaintances to stop using Ouija board?

Ans. She says so because people trouble the ghosts by calling them through Ouija board.

(c) What do you mean by 'exert'?

Ans. It means to strongly apply.

(d) How would the speaker help?

Ans: The speaker would help John to write a story.

7. *"This writing business is delightful, isn't it? I said sarcastically at last, out loud, too. You see, I had reached the stage of imbecility when I was talking to myself."*

(a) What does the narrator mean by writing business?

Ans: By writing business, the narrator means writing ghost stories for the magazine.

(b) Which word has the narrator used sarcastically?

Ans: The narrator used the word 'delightful' sarcastically.

(c) What does the word 'imbecility' mean here?

Ans: The word 'imbecility' means here stupidity.

(d) Who is referred to as 'I' here?

Ans: The narrator John Hallock.

Short answer questions(30-40 words):

a. Why was the writer getting over confident about his ability of writing ghost stories? 2

Ans : Mr. Hallock, the writer had always managed to write good ghost stories, though he was not a specialist in these kind of stories. Such stories were greatly in public demand. He was confident that somehow or the other, a good plot always appeared from somewhere and he was able to write a good story.

b. Watching the ghost taking shape was 'Like watching of the moving picture cartoons put together.' How?

Ans : Helen, the ghost, appeared in parts. First, a hand took shape, then some other body

part, so on and so forth. The process in which the final apparition appeared in the end, was a matter of surprise. The ghost always took shape in bits and pieces like a cartoon in a moving picture.

- c. What surprising revelation is made by the ghost? Why did the writer not believe her?
Ans : The writer was greatly surprised to discover that all the good plots of ghost stories had been supplied to him by the ghost Helen. The writer disbelieved her because he had never really seen her before. But the ghost said that she had sat on his shoulders and suggested the plots for his stories.
- d. Why is the ghost fed up of the Ouija Board fanatics?
Ans : The ghosts are now fed up of being called again and again for answers and queries. They were pulled out of beds at odd times, so they were very tired. The Ouija Board crazy fans would keep asking questions, so this irritated the ghosts and proved to be tiresome and troublesome.
- e. What reasons are given by Lavinia for not getting rid of the Ouija Board?
Ans : Lavinia felt that the Ouija board was procured at bargain price. Moreover, she felt that it would help her husband in writing ghost stories. It would also provide an interesting activity for her book-club meetings.
- f. Helen the ghost says, “I’m too tired to materialise.” What does she imply by the above statement?
Ans : Helen was too tired because she had to work overtime the earlier night answering all the questions of Lavinia’s friends. She took longer than before to appear in her full shape because she couldn’t be expected to retain all her faculties after answering all the Ouija Board fanatics of Lavinia’s book-club, all the night.
- g. Why did Lavinia decide to leave her husband and what made her change her mind?
The narrator had become suspicious of her husband, and believed he was involved with some woman, called Helen. Unable to tolerate the infidelity of her husband, she decided to leave him. But when she confronted Helen and came to know that she was only a ghost, Lavinia felt miserable to have created such a disturbance accusing her husband of unfaithfulness. All this made Lavinia change her mind.
- h. How did Lavinia react after facing Helen?
Ans : The writer had always thought that Lavinia was weak-hearted and she might faint at the sight of the ghost. But nothing like this happened. The interaction proved positive and Lavinia stood boldly and confidently before the ghost.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-120 words)

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1. **What is the central idea of the story, ‘A Shady Plot’?**

Ans. The story is about a writer’s struggle to find inspiration for his ghost stories. He needs a plot, a storyline and the inspiration is hidden. As the events unfold, the readers realise that the ghosts have been providing him with ideas and plot lines. The story then moves forward to a point where the writer’s wife suspects him of having an affair with a lady. The story reaches its finale when Lavinia comes face to face with the ghost (the lady) and maintains her calm. The plot of the story is fascinating and has unexpected twists and turns. The author surprises the reader a number of times and much humour arises out of the situations. Because of the shady nature of the plot, the story manages to

hold the interest of the reader. The title of the story is quite apt and compliments the story beautifully. It does not reveal the plot or give an indication but helps the author to keep the surprise element. It also directs the reader's expectation in a positive manner.

2. Describe the salient features of Helen, the ghost highlighting her job and role in the story. How did she influence John and Lavinia in different ways?

Ans: Helen, the ghost was long and angular. She had enormous fishy eyes. She wore big bone-rimmed spectacles and put her hair in a tight wad at the back of her head. When John saw her for the first time, she looked so solid that for a moment he believed she was real. She appeared in sections. First an arm came out, then a sleeve, then a leg and at last, she was standing complete there.

Helen, the ghost demoralized John's ability as a story writer. She declared that all his plots and creative inspiration came from spirits like her. She claimed to be a writer in 'the other world.' However, she had no ideas and direction. With many others like her she organised the Writer's Inspiration Bureau. They scouted around until they found a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression. But Helen declared that John would not get any creative inspiration or plot from them. They were on strike. The reasons for their strike was the troubles they suffered from 'those Ouija board fanatics.' They were always manipulating on their Ouija board's talking to spirits. Spirits like Helen were always busy in answering their questions on Ouija boards. They had no time for rest or fun. Helen, the ghost asked John to persuade his wife, friends and acquaintances to stop using Ouija boards. Only then they (spirits) would start helping him in writing.

Helen really brought John and Lavinia's married life on the brink of break-up. Lavinia suspected John of flirting with Helen on the Ouija board. She threatened to go back to her grandmother. John thought the end of his domestic bliss and peace was over. However, the encounter of Helen and Lavinia saved the situation. Lavinia didn't think that an owl-eyed unattractive Helen could pose any danger to her.