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CONTENTS

THE SHORT STORY

PREVIEW: THE SHORT STORY *1*

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Plot, Character and Setting*** *2*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle . . . . . .The Red-Headed League. 2
Dorothy Canfield Fisher. . . . . .The Bedquilt 21
Juanita Platero, Siyowin Miller . . . . .Chee's Daughter 29
Willa Cather . . . . . .The Sentimentality of William Tavener 40
Max Apple . . . . . .Bridging. 45
Walter Van Tilburg Clark . . . . . .Why Don't You Look Where You're Going?. 53
Stephen Vincent Benét. . . . . .By the Waters of Babylon. 59

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Point of View and Tone*** *69*

Edgar Allan Poe . . . . . .The Cask of Amontillado 69
Edith Wharton . . . . . .April Showers 76
Anton Chekhov . . . . . .The Woman Who Had No Prejudices. 83

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Theme*** *87*

William Saroyan. . . . . .The Shepherd's Daughter. 87
Doris Lessing . . . . . .Through the Tunnel. 91
Italo Calvino . . . . . .The Enchanted Garden 100
Mark Twain . . . . . .Luck 104

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Symbolism*** *109*

John Galsworthy . . . . . .Quality 109
Toshio Mori . . . . . .Abalone, Abalone, Abalone 115
Katherine Mansfield . . . . . .The Doll's House 118

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Irony*** *124*

O. Henry . . . . . .Mammon and the Archer 124
Saki . . . . . .The Open Window 130

LITERARY FOCUS: ***The Total Effect*** *134*

MODEL FOR ACTIVE READING

Leslie Norris . . . . . .Shaving 135

Ambrose Bierce . . . . . An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge 142
Heinrich Böll . . . . . .The Laugher 151
Sarah Orne Jewett . . . . . .The Hiltons' Holiday 155
James Purdy . . . . . .Home by Dark 168

ACTIVE READING: Significant Detail *174*

REVIEW: THE SHORT STORY *175*

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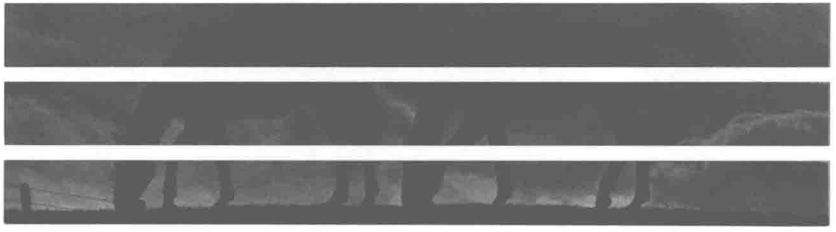

PREVIEW: POETRY *177*

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Speaker and Tone*** *178*

William Stafford . . . . . .Fifteen 180
Sylvia Plath . . . . . .Mirror 182
James Wright . . . . . .A Blessing 185
Gwendolyn Brooks . . . . . .The Bean Eaters 187

LITERARY FOCUS: ***The Sound of Poetry*** *189*

Emily Dickinson . . . . . .I Like to See It Lap the Miles 191
Robert Burns . . . . . .My Heart's in the Highlands 193
William Shakespeare . . . . . .Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow 195
William Carlos Williams . . . . . .Winter Trees 197
Alexander Pope . . . . . .Sound and Sense 199

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Imagery, Figurative Language*** *201*

Alfred, Lord Tennyson . . . . . .The Eagle 204
Walt Whitman . . . . . .Cavalry Crossing a Ford 206

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Claude McKay . . . . . Spring in New Hampshire 207
Amy Lowell . . . . . Solitaire 208
Karl Shapiro . . . . . Manhole Covers 210
Vachel Lindsay . . . . . An Indian Summer Day on the Prairie 212
Emily Dickinson . . . . . It Sifts from Leaden Sieves 214
Robert Frost . . . . . A Hillside Thaw 216
Robert Browning . . . . . My Star 218
Gabriela Mistral . . . . . Serenity/Suavidades 220
Teresa Palomo Acosta . . . . . Two Sentences for Gabriela Mistral 221

LITERARY FOCUS: **Types of Poetry** 222

Narrative Poetry
Edgar Allan Poe . . . . . Eldorado 224
George Gordon, Lord Byron . . . . . The Destruction of Sennacherib 226
Robert Frost . . . . . The Tuft of Flowers 228
Lyric Poetry
William Wordsworth . . . . . My Heart Leaps Up 231
Samuel Allen . . . . . To Satch 232
Mari Evans . . . . . If There Be Sorrow 233
Dramatic Poetry
Frank Horne . . . . . To James 234

LITERARY FOCUS: **Patterns in Poetry** 236

William Shakespeare . . . . . Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day? 238
Elinor Wylie . . . . . Puritan Sonnet 240
Maxine Kumin . . . . . 400-Meter Freestyle 242
Lawrence Ferlinghetti . . . . . Constantly risking absurdity 245

LITERARY FOCUS: **The Total Effect** 247

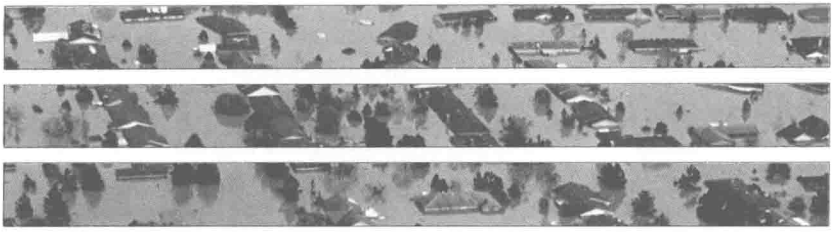
MODEL FOR ACTIVE READING
Ted Hughes . . . . . Wind 250

Philip Booth . . . . . First Lesson 252
Richard Wilbur . . . . . Boy at the Window 254
Edna St. Vincent Millay . . . . . The Fawn 256
May Swenson . . . . . By Morning 258

ACTIVE READING: Hearing a Poem 260

REVIEW: POETRY 261

NONFICTION



PREVIEW: NONFICTION *263*

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Biography, Autobiography*** *264*

Banesh Hoffmann . . . . . .My Friend, Albert Einstein 265
Mark Mathabane . . . . . *from* Kaffir Boy 271
Isaac Bashevis Singer . . . . . .Shosha 278
Dylan Thomas . . . . . .A Child's Christmas in Wales 282

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Essay*** *290*

Narrative Essay
Charles Lindbergh . . . . . *from* The Spirit of St. Louis 291
Hanson W. Baldwin . . . . . .R.M.S. *Titanic* 297
Rudolfo A. Anaya . . . . . .A Chicano in China 310
Descriptive Essay
Annie Dillard . . . . . .Flood 314
Mark Twain . . . . . .Two Views of the River 321
Persuasive Essay
John Dos Passos . . . . . .The American Cause 324
Martin Luther King, Jr. . . . . .I Have a Dream 327
Expository Essay
Isaac Asimov . . . . . .The Eureka Phenomenon 333
Bruce Catton . . . . . .Grant and Lee at Appomattox 340

LITERARY FOCUS: ***The Total Effect*** *346*

MODEL FOR ACTIVE READING
Helen Keller . . . . . .The Most Important Day 347

ACTIVE READING: Making Inferences *350*

REVIEW: NONFICTION *351*

DRAMA

PREVIEW: DRAMA *353*

LITERARY FOCUS: ***The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*** *355*

Charles Dickens . . . . . *from* The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby 360
Dramatization by David Edgar

LITERARY FOCUS: ***Cyrano de Bergerac*** *384*

Edmond Rostand . . . . . Cyrano de Bergerac 386
Translation by Lowell Bair
(abridged)

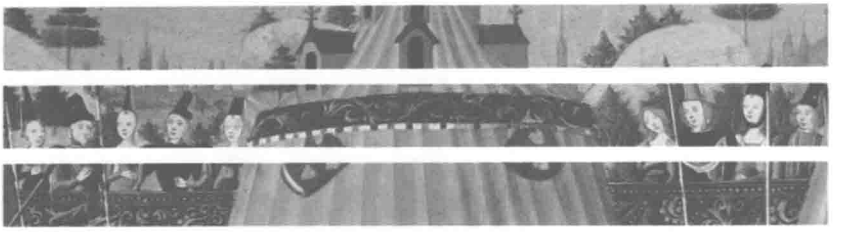
LITERARY FOCUS: ***Julius Caesar*** *461*

William Shakespeare . . . . . Julius Caesar 470

ACTIVE READING: Dramatic Voices *571*

REVIEW: DRAMA *573*

THE KING ARTHUR LEGEND



PREVIEW: THE KING ARTHUR LEGEND *575*

Thomas Malory . . . . . *from* Le Morte d'Arthur 583
Modern Idiom by Keith Baines

Arthur Becomes King
The Tale of Sir Launcelot
The Death of Arthur

ACTIVE READING: Recognizing Patterns *607*

REVIEW: THE KING ARTHUR LEGEND *609*

THE NOVEL

PREVIEW: THE NOVEL *611*

LITERARY FOCUS: ***The Pearl*** *613*

John Steinbeck . . . . . .The Pearl 615

LITERARY FOCUS: ***A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*** *663*

Mark Twain . . . . . .A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court 666
(abridged)

ACTIVE READING: Reading as Participation *736*

REVIEW: THE NOVEL *737*

STUDENT'S RESOURCES

LESSONS IN ACTIVE LEARNING 738

SPEAKING AND LISTENING HANDBOOK

Lesson 1: A Persuasive Speech About Literature 740
Lesson 2: An Informal Discussion About Literature 742
Lesson 3: Oral Interpretation of a Speech 744
Lesson 4: A Press Conference 746

THINKING SKILLS HANDBOOK

Lesson 1: Logical Reasoning 748
Lesson 2: Evaluation 750
Lesson 3: Representation 752
Lesson 4: Problem Solving 754
Lesson 5: Inductive Inquiry 756
Lesson 6: Synthesis 758

READING AND STUDY SKILLS HANDBOOK

Lesson 1: Distinguishing Fact from Opinion 760
Lesson 2: Making Inferences 762
Lesson 3: Studying for a Test 764
Lesson 4: Summarizing 766

WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE HANDBOOK

Lesson 1: Writing Literary Analysis 768
Lesson 2: Writing About Plot 770
Lesson 3: Writing About Character 772
Lesson 4: Writing About Setting 774
Lesson 5: Writing About Point of View 776
Lesson 6: Writing About Tone 778
Lesson 7: Writing About Theme 780
Lesson 8: Writing About a Symbol 782
Lesson 9: Writing About Irony 784
Lesson 10: Writing About Nonfiction 786
Lesson 11: Writing About Poetry 788
Lesson 12: Writing About the Total Effect 790

LITERARY TERMS HANDBOOK 792

GLOSSARY 801
VOCABULARY REVIEW 810
INDEX OF TITLES BY THEME 811
INDEX OF SKILLS 812
INDEX OF AUTHORS AND TITLES 815

PREVIEW: THE SHORT STORY

The story. . . must spring from an impression or perception. . . pressing enough to have made the writer write. . . . It should magnetize the imagination and give pleasure. . . .

—Elizabeth Bowen

We read stories for a number of reasons. We read stories for the pleasure of recognizing familiar experiences and feelings; we read stories to escape into unfamiliar places and times. Most of all, we read stories because they stimulate our imaginations. By increasing our capacity to imagine, they make our lives larger.

All these reasons come into play as we read fiction because stories themselves are so very different. Some are full of action and adventure. Others, more subdued, look closely at the small moments that illuminate ordinary lives. Some stories reassure us with familiar truths; others startle us with new ideas. However, every good story is made up of the same basic elements—events, persons, places, images, and ideas. Every author combines these raw materials for a particular purpose: to communicate his or her "pressing" perception of the world, to show us something we have never seen in quite the same way before.

The stories on the following pages are arranged so that we can examine each of the elements that make up a story: plot, character, setting, point of view, theme, symbol, and irony. In the final group of stories, we will look at how these elements come together in each work to produce a total effect, the author's special vision of life. Once you have learned what an author does in writing a story, you will be able to read any story with greater satisfaction and to discover the pressing perception that made its author write.

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