

Best American Short Stories 2008

Study Guide

1. In “Admiral,” what economic and social ramifications of cloning are revealed? Based on your reading of this story, describe how else cloning might affect our class system. In what other ways might it transform society?
2. Why do you think the author chose to write “The Year of Silence” in short sections? Translate the Morse code message at the end of the story, using the chart on page 328. What does this translated segment mean to you?
3. Describe the setting and mood of “Galatea.” Clouds and snow are used frequently as imagery. What is their effect?
4. Juxtaposition plays an important role in “Man and Wife.” What characters and situations are juxtaposed, and how does this give the story its power? Were you surprised by the ending? Why or why not?
5. In her contributor’s note, Danielle Evans writes, “I wanted to explore the possibilities of a character who sees what’s coming and heads toward it anyway.” What do you think she means by this? In what way does Erica both control and surrender to fate?
6. What is the primary obstacle to Orion’s happiness in “Closely Held”? What does Molly’s father, Carl, represent to him?
7. In what ways are the brothers in “May We Be Forgiven” actually similar? How many of the narrator’s actions are accidental, and which are premeditated? Do you think that Claire is having an affair? Why or why not?
8. What does the desk represent for the narrator of “From the Desk of Daniel Varsky”? How does what she knows of Varsky’s life affect her decisions, especially her choice to stop writing poetry?
9. In what ways is “The King of Sentences” a coming-of-age story? How is innocence defined in this story? At what point does the narrator begin to lose his innocence?

10. Memory plays an important role in many of these stories. How does Aaron inherit his parents' memory in "The Worst You Ever Feel"? How do other characters inherit memory in other stories?
11. Describe the professional and emotional dynamics in Edison's lab in "The Wizard of West Orange." In what way is the haptograph used metaphorically?
12. What is the role of luck in "Nawabdin Electrician"? What is the role of free will? Why won't Nawab forgive the thief in the end?
13. Describe the tone of "Child's Play." Does it reflect the narrator's personality? How so? Does it reflect her training as an anthropologist? In what ways?
14. What constitutes rebellion in "Buying Lenin"? Describe the narrator's relationship with his grandfather and how it does or does not change throughout the story.
15. In Salman Rushdie's introduction, he refers to Karen Russell, the author of "Vampires in the Lemon Grove," as "the true heir to the ferocious British fabulist Angela Carter." What is fabulism? Could this story have been written realistically? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
16. In the story "Puppy," what does the puppy represent to Marie? What does it represent to Callie? In what ways are these two families different? And similar?
17. What role does money play in "Quality of Life"? What does it represent for Mr. Fulger and for Lyndsey? If Mr. Fulger did not give Lyndsey money, how would their relationship be different?
18. In his contributor's note, Bradford Tice writes, "I wanted to see what would happen if two young men of faith, both given this monumental vision, set their sights on two very different goals." Describe Case and Joseph in "Missionaries." What are their different goals? Are the young men and their goals similar in any way?
19. How are the characters revealed in "Straightaway"? Describe the voice in this story. What is the effect of the author's choice to use no quotation marks?
20. What is the role of guilt in "Bible"? What about religion? What most motivates Maureen, and why?