

# Best American Short Stories 2009

## Study Guide

1. What does the narrator of “The Idiot President” mean by, “I would rather have been poor anywhere else in the world than rich here?” How is the narrator’s sickness metaphorical as well as literal?
2. In “Yurt,” what is the effect of the author referring to the teachers as “Ms.” And “Mr.”? In her contributor’s note, the author mentions borrowing details of this story from a friend. If you were this friend, how would you feel about this story? What do you think about fiction writers using their own lives as material for their work?
3. Did the end of “Rubiaux Rising” resonate with you? Did you want the story to continue, or were you satisfied? Why or why not?
4. In “Beyond the Pale,” why does Gerda Belzner lie to the narrator about driving her husband to Florida? Why does the narrator chose to name his child after Zalman Belzner in the end?
5. Describe the characterization of the narrator in “A Shadow Table.” How do we learn about her? In what ways is she a modern, as well as historical, character?
6. Describe the differences between Chinese and American journalism as dramatized in “NowTrends.” What are the pros and cons for journalists in both places?
7. “The Farms” is written with a matter-of-fact, childlike tone. What is the effect of this? How do race and class figure into this story?
8. How would “Sagittarius” differ if Sebastian were 100% human? In what ways are his condition metaphorical?
9. Describe the voice and tone of “Hurricanes Anonymous.” How does it reflect Nonc’s personality? Is Nonc a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
10. In “The Anniversary Trip,” why does Monica want to leave Martin? Why does she tell his mother, Elizabeth, before she tells him? Why isn’t Elizabeth upset by the news?
11. In “A Man Like Him,” why is Teacher Fei so disturbed by the blogger’s story?
12. What purpose does the dream serve in “The Briefcase”?
13. What does wildlife represent in “Magic Words”?

14. In "One Dog Year," why does John D. Rockefeller agree so readily to the ride in the airplane? Why does he remember saving the candy as a child just as the engine starts? What is the significance of this memory?
15. Describe the structure of "Modulation." Why is each section titled the way that it is?
16. In her note, Annie Proulx writes, "[The Old Cowboy Songs] was offered as an antidote to the mythological Founding-of-the-Big-Happy-Ranch story." Describe this sort of story, and how hers subverts it.
17. What specifically causes Jesse to shove the ranger and run into the woods in "Into the Gorge"? What is he running from?
18. What is the effect of the present tense in "Ostrakon"? What might the hole in Katya's ceiling represent?
19. In "The Peripatetic Coffin," what are the narrator's true motivations in agreeing to work aboard the Hunley? Do you think he is aware of them?
20. Describe the mood in "Muzungu." What is the importance of dolls in this story? What do they represent?