

Class 10th | English



Literature Reader

A Shady Plot

Lecture 2

THEME

- we should believe in our hard work rather than in any supernatural elements for our success



CHARACTER SKETCH

John Hallock

- Bookkeeper for a lumber company ✓
- simple, honest, and hardworking man ✓
- intimidated by his wife ✓
- competent writer of ghost stories ✓

Lavinia Hallock

- domineering and extravagant woman ✓
- obsessed with the latest trends ✓
- suspicious of her husband. ✓
- enjoys Ouija boards and organizes Ouija board parties ✓
- extravagant spending ✓

Helen

- *Physical Desc.*
- part of a group of ghosts - run the "Writers' Inspiration Bureau" to help other writers find inspiration
- exhausted by the Ouija board craze
- inspire John's stories

QUESTIONS

Horror

1. What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write? Why?

ANS. Jenkins wants the narrator to write ghost stories or stories on supernatural elements because the public likes such stories and also because he thinks that John is good at writing such stories as his ghosts are very realistic and scary.

QUESTIONS

2. Does the narrator like writing ghost stories?

Support your answer with evidence from the story.

ANS. The narrator likes to write ghost stories but probably not every time. He himself says that he could not contradict Jenkins because his magazine had been the only one to print his stuff. Thus, we can say that he has no choice but to give in to Jenkins' demand to write ghost stories.

QUESTIONS

3. What makes Helen, the ghost, and her other co-ghosts organise 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau'?

ANS. When Helen was alive, she used to write and later on she became a reader in a magazine. She remembers those days as the most terrible ones as they used to read horribly written stories.

When she became a ghost after her death, she planned to do something for all those who have suffered in the same way. It was this inspiration that led her and her co-ghosts to organise 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau'.

Imp.

QUESTIONS

- 4.** Why had Helen, the ghost, been helping the narrator write ghost stories? Why was she going on strike? What condition did she place for providing continued help?

ANS. Helen, the ghost, helped the narrator to write ghost stories because he did not have ideas to write a story.

She was going on strike because she and her other co-ghosts were always occupied because of the Ouija Boards. They had to sit at a desk and answer questions which was tiring. She said she would help the narrator further only if he would stop all his friends and acquaintances from using the Ouija Board.

QUESTIONS

5. How does the ghost undermine the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories?

ANS. The ghost undermines the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories by telling him that it was she who helped him write ghost stories. She added that she would continue to help him only if he stops his friends and acquaintances from using the Ouija Board.

QUESTIONS

9. Why did John's wife want to go to her grandmother's house?

ANS. Lavinia was furious with John. She thought that John was having a clandestine (secret) affair, after the Ouija Board announced that a woman named Helen was calling her husband a traitor. She was deeply hurt due to his supposed infidelity and wanted to leave him. As a result, she which she wanted to go back to her grandmother's house.

QUESTIONS

10. What problems did Helen, the ghost, cause in John Hallock's life ?

ANS. The ghost of Helen disrupted Hallock's relationship with his wife. Lavinia suspected Hallock of having a secret affair with a woman named Helen. She also called Hallock 'traitor' on the Ouija Board. Thinking that her husband had been a traitor, Lavinia became hysterical and decided to get separated from Hallock for his betrayal of her trust.

QUESTIONS

11. How did Lavinia react on seeing the ghost of Helen of Troy? Why was it contrary to what Hallock expected ?

ANS. Lavinia reacted quite normally and was not worried on seeing the ghost inside John's room. In fact she was relieved to see a ghost and not a real woman. John, on the contrary, had feared that she would faint or become hysterical on seeing a real ghost in front of her.

QUESTIONS

Pen picture

12. What impression do you form about Lavinia?

Or What kind of woman is Lavinia?

ANS. Lavinia is a jealous, possessive and sensitive woman who is subject to hysterics. She is also impulsive and takes decisions without considering the overall scenario. She is also extravagant and spends a lot of money on the latest fashions and trends.

QUESTIONS

13. Comment on Elsie Brown's writing style in the story 'A Shady Plot'.

ANS. Elsie Brown's writing style in the story is characterised by its light and humorous tone. The story is written from the first person point of view of the protagonist, John Hallock.

Brown's writing style is concise and clear, with a good use of dialogue and description to create vivid scenes and characters. She uses irony and satire to poke fun at the publishing industry and its practices. Overall, her writing style effectively conveys the story's humour and underlying message, making it an enjoyable and thought provoking read.

QUESTIONS

14. How does the lesson 'A Shady Plot' remind us that man has no right to invoke the supernatural through Oulja Boards, Tarot cards, etc to solve his problems, and that one should face life boldly and overcome difficulties using wit and intelligence?

ANS. The world of the supernatural is something meant to be beyond the reach of humans. However, man, in his quest for the unknown, has explored this forbidden realm and has devised various means to communicate with supernatural beings. There are innumerable people who claim to use Ouija Boards, Tarot cards, planchette, etc. and invoke the help of supernatural elements.

QUESTIONS

The lesson 'A Shady Plot' too deals with this fact as one of its major themes. Though the story shows a ghost willingly offering help to a writer, this ghost does object to the use of Ouija Boards for any such communication or invocation. We see the turmoil that the narrator and his wife experience when she brings home an Ouija Board and throws an Ouija Board party. This is a reminder that man should not try to mess with the forbidden land of the spirits and rely upon his own wit and intelligence to solve his problems.

QUESTIONS

H/W

15. When the Ouija Board showed the name of John Hallock, Lavinia thought he was guilty of infidelity. Was Lavinia justified at the stance that she took? Give reasons for your answer.

ANS. Even a hint of doubt can be enough to make a person suspicious. The same was the case with Lavinia. When she learned that the Ouija Board was announcing the name of John Hallock, she became jealous and suspicious. This made her believe that John was having an affair with another woman. She decided to leave him and file for a divorce, which was an irrational decision. As a result, the Ouija Board was not referring to infidelity.

QUESTIONS

It was simply reminding him that he had broken the promise which he had made to the ghost of Helen by participating in the Ouija Board party instead of discouraging the use of the Ouija Board. Thus, Lavinia was not justified in her stance. She could have easily confronted John with her conclusions and asked him for an explanation. She should have tried to find out what was actually the truth before taking such an extreme step.

QUESTIONS

16. The story, 'A Shady Plot' triggers the age old debate on superstitions and the supernatural. Is it good to believe in superstitions? What impact does it have on human health? How can one get rid of superstitions?

ANS. The story, 'A Shady Plot' triggers the age old debate on superstitions and the supernatural. It questions whether ghosts do exist and whether supernatural events happen and whether spirits like Helen control our lives. No, it is not good to believe in superstitions.

Superstitions can lead to unnecessary troubles and misunderstandings. Just as in the case of Lavinia, who believed the message given by the Ouija Board and suspected her husband of having an affair with a woman named Helen. It is when she threw away the Ouija Board did all the misunderstandings get cleared and their life went back to normal.

QUESTIONS

Superstitions can affect one's mental health adversely. One forgets to think rationally and practically. Superstitions exploit one's innocence and ignorance and ruin one's domestic life. Thus, one should get rid of such superstitious beliefs and instead conquer such fears by having knowledge about the world around.

QUESTIONS

17. The story of 'A Shady Plot' is woven around the theme of conjuring up the spirits of dead people in order to know the unknown. Do you think it is moral to conjure up spirits and expect them to solve our problems?

ANS. The world of the supernatural is something that is supposed to be beyond the reach of humans. Man, in his quest of the unknown, has time and again explored this forbidden realm. He has devised various means to communicate with supernatural beings. There are innumerable people, who claim to use Ouija Boards, Tarot cards, etc. and invoke the help of supernatural elements. However, sometimes such communication or invocation can have a negative impact as well. Supernatural forces are much stronger than humans and, if disturbed, can create havoc resulting into a loss of life.

QUESTIONS

Thus, it is immoral to conjure up spirits and disturb them. In the story, the ghost of Helen raises a strong objection to the use of Ouija Boards. Man should, thus, not encroach upon the forbidden land of the spirits and rely upon his own wit and intelligence to solve his problems.

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