

CLASS : IX

Subject: English

Date: 28/05/20

Topic: Short Story 5

Time limit : 60 mins

Worksheet No. : 12

A Face in the Dark – Ruskin Bond

[Read the story carefully. Copy the notes neatly and correctly. Keep the pages ready in a file to be submitted on the opening day.]

About the author

One of the most beloved Indian writers in English, Ruskin Bond has deeply influenced a generation of readers through his simple style and his ability to touch the readers through words. His short stories bear a distinct balance of emotion, intelligence and wisdom which instantly charms the reader. Some of the famous works of Ruskin Bond are ‘The Room on the Roof’, ‘A Flight of Pigeons’ and ‘Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra’.

‘**A Face in the Dark**’ is an interesting suspense story by Ruskin Bond where the author brilliantly exploits the elements of fear and darkness to capture the reader’s imagination. Dealing with the themes of fear, darkness and the supernatural, ‘**A Face**

in the Dark' has a quick-paced plot which draws the reader in before leaving an unforgettable impression by keeping the climax right till the very end of the story.

Watch the following link to understand the story clearly.

<https://youtu.be/ffXcUmd2Rwo>

The story line

The story "A Face in the Dark" by Ruskin Bond is set in Simla, a town in Himachal Pradesh, India where an Anglo-Indian teacher, Mr. Oliver, teaches in a reputed English public school which is regarded as the "Eton of the East". He is a bachelor and goes to the market some three miles away in the evening and returns to school at night regularly. He takes the short cut way through the pine forest.

On the day of the story, when he is returning late at night, the strong wind is making an eerie sound through the pine trees and the batteries of his torch is running down. Suddenly, he comes across a boy who is crying silently with his head hung down, sitting on a rock. Following a number of questions from the teacher, when the boy finally looks up, Mr. Oliver sees that the boy has no eyes, ears, nose or mouth on his face. "It was just a round smooth head – with a school cap on top of it!"

Panicked by the horrific scene, Mr. Oliver runs down the path calling for help. He finally stops when he sees the watchman swinging a lantern on his way. Oliver tells the watchman what he has seen. But soon after, he finds out in the light of the lantern that the watchman too has no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. Then the wind blows the lamp out.

Now read the Story carefully.

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A Face in the Dark

—Ruskin Bond

Mr. Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher, was returning to his school late one night, on the outskirts of the hill-station of Simla. From before Kipling's time, the school had been run on English public school lines; and the boys, most of them from wealthy Indian families, wore blazers, caps and ties. *Life* magazine, in a feature on India, had once called it the 'Eton of the East'. Mr Oliver had been teaching in the school for several years.

The Simla Bazaar, with its cinemas and restaurants, was about three miles from the school; and Mr Oliver, a bachelor, usually strolled into the town in the evening, returning after dark, when he would take a short cut through the pine forest.

When there was a strong wind, the pine trees made sad, eerie sounds that kept most people to the main road. But Mr Oliver was not a nervous or imaginative man. He carried a torch, and its gleam—the batteries were running down—moved fitfully down the narrow forest path. When its flickering light fell in the figure of a boy, who was sitting alone on a rock, Mr Oliver stopped. Boys were not supposed to be out after dark.

'What are you doing out here, boy?' asked Mr Oliver sharply, moving closer so that he could recognize the miscreant. But even as he approached the boy, Mr Oliver sensed that something was wrong. The boy appeared to be crying. His head hung down, he held his face in his hands, and his body shook convulsively. It was a strange, soundless weeping, and Mr Oliver felt distinctly uneasy.

'Well, what's the matter?' he asked, his anger giving way to concern. 'What are you crying for?' The boy would not answer or look up. His body continued to be racked with silent sobbing. 'Come on, boy, you shouldn't be out here at this hour. Tell me the trouble. Look up!' The boy looked up. He took his hands from his face and looked up at his teacher. The light from Mr Oliver's torch fell on the boy's face—if you could call it a face.

It had no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. It was just a round smooth head—with a school cap on top of it! And that's where the story should end. But for Mr Oliver it did not end here.

The torch fell from his trembling hand. He turned and scrambled down the path, running blindly through the trees and calling for help. He was still running towards the school buildings when he saw a lantern swinging in the middle of the path. Mr Oliver stumbled up to the watchman, gasping for breath. 'What is it, Sahib?' asked the watchman. 'Has there been an accident? Why are you running?'

'I saw something—something horrible—a boy weeping in the forest—and he had no face!'

'No face, Sahib?'

'No eyes, nose, mouth—nothing!'

'Do you mean it was like this, Sahib?' asked the watchman, and raised the lamp to his own face. The watchman had no eyes, no ears, no features at all—not even an eyebrow! And that's when the wind blew the lamp out.

* * * *

Word meanings:

- Strolled – Walked in a slow relaxed manner
- Eerie – Strange and frightening
- Fitfully – For a short period
- Flickering – A light shining in an unsteady manner.
- Miscreant – A person who has done some mischief.
- Convulsively – Moving suddenly
- Sobbing – Crying with sudden sharp breaths
- Scrambled – Moved with urgency or panic
- Stumbled – Bumped into something / somebody accidentally
- Gasping – Breathing suddenly and loudly with mouth open because of surprise, shock or pain

A FACE IN THE DARK

Ruskin Bond



Characters

- Mr. Oliver
- A watchman
- A faceless boy (Oh boy!)

Themes

- The paranormal side of existence
- Scope of Darkness in human experience
- Fear of the unknown

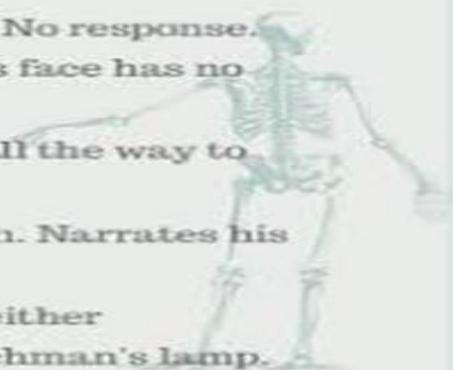
Setting

- A pine forest, Simla



Plot Line

- Description of the school and the Simla baazar.
- Mr. Oliver is walking through the pine forest.
- He encounters a strange boy who is sobbing with his face hidden.
- Inquires what the matter is. No response.
- The boy finally looks up. His face has no features.
- Oliver runs like a madman all the way to school
- Is accosted by the watchman. Narrates his Experience
- The watchman has no face either
- The wind blows out the watchman's lamp.



Supernatural Element:

Ruskin Bond's short story "A Face in the Dark", originally published in 2004, is very short and simple in terms of the plot and the language used. But the author has made a **simple plot** and , look extraordinary by giving it a **supernatural** touch. The supernatural atmosphere is created by the elements like eerie sounds of the pine trees, batteries of the torch running down, flickering light, silent sobbing, lantern swinging in the middle of the path etc. All these things prepare us for some mysterious or uncanny happenings.

The story can be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be that he had a fascination for darkness in his sub-conscious mind. So, as a consequence of a **momentary excitement**, he was almost at a loss to particularize the individuality of persons.

Another plausible interpretation is that over the years, Mr. Oliver got tired nurturing the students and the **individuality** of each and every student has **overlapped** with the other, making him haunted by the sameness in every individual.

Again, it may refer to the **psychological disturbance** of Mr. Oliver, created by his loneliness. He is a bachelor and spends a lot of time alone. So this interpretation has some merit too.

But going by **the title** of the story "A Face in the Dark", it may also mean that a face in the dark is always blurred. On a metaphorical level, it signifies that we find every single person just the same when we don't really have a closer look at them.

Figures of speech used in the story:

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the beginning or stressed syllables of nearby words. Alliteration is used in the following instances:
When its flickering light fell in the figure of a boy ... (repetition of 'f' sound)
His head hung down, he held his face in his hands ... (repetition of 'h' sound) etc.

Metaphor: Metaphor is an indirect comparison between two things where there is a point of similarity. When the author compares the English school where Mr. Oliver teaches with the Eton college of England in '[Eton of the East](#)', it's a metaphor.

Allusion: An allusion is a figure of speech where an indirect reference is made and it is left to the readers or audience to make the direct connection.

When in an imaginary plot of the story, the narrator makes a reference to Kipling in the sentence, "From before Kipling's time, the school had been run on English public

school lines”, the readers would make the connection with Rudyard Kipling, the great poet, but the narrator here doesn’t make it clear who this Kipling is. This is an allusion.

Oxymoron: Oxymoron is using two terms together, that normally contradict each other.

“Silent sobbing” is an example of oxymoron in the story. Sobbing generally means noisy cry with convulsive gaps. So placing the two contradictory words ‘silent’ and ‘sobbing’ side by side the author has used an oxymoron here.

Other literary devices used in this story are [third person narrative technique](#) and [climax](#)

Character sketch of Mr. Oliver

From the context of the story we can say that Mr. Oliver is a **man of knowledge** and skills to secure the position of a teacher in a school which had been called “[Eton of the East](#)“. He also seems to be **professional** and able at his business and that is why he has been teaching there ‘for several years’. Oliver is also a **realistic** man as the narrator mentions —

Oliver was not a nervous or imaginative man.

Mr. Oliver is found taking the usually lonely path through the pine forest while returning to the school compound from the Simla bazaar even late at night. This supports the narrator’s comment that he is **not nervous**. He is seemingly **courageous** enough to take that lonely way while other people are afraid of the eerie sound made by the wind through the pine forest. We also find Mr. Oliver’s **common sense** in carrying a torch with him.

From the few words that Oliver utters in the story we find Mr. Oliver as **a man of discipline**. He does not like the boy being out at that evening as it is against the rule of the school. His **responsible** nature makes him show concern for the boy and ask him why he was crying and sitting alone there at night.

Moral

Ruskin Bond wants people to develop a sense of patience and calm when dealing with people of diverse appearances, behaviours, beliefs etc. Such understanding will help us to look deeper into them and develop a mutual understanding.

Only if we can allow room for understanding we will discover that we are all the same deep inside, at our core. The story also explains that isolation and disconnected living is unhealthy when it comes to human beings and their society.