### Wider CONTEXTS LOVE

**What We Talk About When We Talk About Love**

**Raymond Carver:**

**Pre-reading**

4. **Vocabulary**

a. Word class. Fill in the gaps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>minimalist</td>
<td></td>
<td>terror</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>realistic</td>
<td></td>
<td>menace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frustrated</td>
<td></td>
<td>compassionate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threatening</td>
<td></td>
<td>empty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxious</td>
<td></td>
<td>lonely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un/</td>
<td>emotion</td>
<td>isolated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bewildered</td>
<td></td>
<td>failed</td>
<td>relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confused</td>
<td></td>
<td>hostile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>optimistic</td>
<td></td>
<td>un/able</td>
<td>in/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tense</td>
<td></td>
<td>aimless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un/</td>
<td>communication</td>
<td>intimate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desperate</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>simple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING CHECK

Student A reads out the nouns to student B, and student B, without looking at the task, has to name the corresponding adjectives. Then Student B reads out the adjectives to student A, and student A, without looking at the task, has to name the nouns.

b. Match word and explanation

Write the matching word above the definition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inarticulate</td>
<td>to have a sense of not belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to feel alienated</td>
<td>lacking excitement or variety, dull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frustrated</td>
<td>good at expressing one’s ideas and feelings clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humdrum</td>
<td>relating to marriage or to the relationship between a husband and wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terse (about style)</td>
<td>occurs often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eloquent</td>
<td>discouraged, not satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marital (problems)</td>
<td>using few words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recurrent (theme)</td>
<td>unable to express one’s ideas or feelings clearly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING CHECK

Student A reads out the explanations to student B, and student B, without looking at the task, has to name the words. Then student B reads out the words to student A, and student A, without looking at the task, has to come up with the explanations.

c. Match synonyms/near synonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inarticulate</th>
<th>Worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unexceptional</td>
<td>Strained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehensive</td>
<td>Caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotonous</td>
<td>Eloquent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Uncommunicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate</td>
<td>Uneventful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapped</td>
<td>Lonely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Take turns asking each other for synonyms to words in the right and left columns.
2. Individually: Cover the task and write down all the words you can remember.
3. Together: Compare lists. Look at the task and circle all the words you had forgotten.
d. Match antonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>relaxed</th>
<th>extraordinary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eloquent</td>
<td>monotonous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unexceptional</td>
<td>confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>introvert</td>
<td>outgoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exciting</td>
<td>irrational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insecure</td>
<td>tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reticent</td>
<td>extrovert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rational</td>
<td>inarticulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bewildered</td>
<td>content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miserable</td>
<td>relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tense</td>
<td>self-confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Which of the above words would you use to describe the characters in “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”? What characteristics do they share, and in what ways are they different from each other?

2. Add words of your own where needed.
LEARNING CHECK

No study aids.

1. Vocabulary on Carver’s style and Carver’s characters.
   a. On your own: Write down three adjectives that characterize Carver’s style.
   b. Write down eight adjectives that characterize Carver’s characters and the lives they lead.

2. Vocabulary quiz
   Choose the 10 words you find most relevant from the pre-reading tasks for this short story and with your group work out a challenging quiz to get the whole class to remember them.

3. Bluff your way through Carver
   At a dinner party you happen to be sitting beside a literature professor who specializes in American literature 1780-1980. This professor is responsible for the distribution of grants to a course at Yale which you desperately want to attend. Talk for two full minutes about Carver’s literature so that you get the scholarship. You may use Overall questions task 3 as your crib sheet.

TEXT-RELATED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Written assignment: an email on Carver’s work.
   Write an email from Yale where you are a student. The addressee is a friend of yours who won a scholarship to Harvard. In the email explain why (s)he should definitely (not) dive into Carver’s short stories. Write 400 words of which at least 10 should derive from the pre-reading vocabulary tasks for this text. Write these 10 words in bold.

2. Written assignment: translation
   Translate this text into English. You may use the pre- and while-reading tasks as inspiration.

Raymond Carver er en af nutidens mest anerkendte amerikanske novelleforfattere. Han beskriver i sine fortællinger personer fra arbejderklassen og den lavere middelklasse. Disse personer er ikke særligt veltalende. Faktisk har de har ofte svært ved at udtrykke sig, de er frustrerede, forvirrede og lever ofte i mislykkede forhold. De er typisk ude af stand til at indgå tætte relationer med andre mennesker. Gennemgående temaer i novellerne er ægteskabsproblemer, fremmedgørelse, arbejdsløshed og alkohol, og tonen er præget af håbløshed. Fra Hemingway har Carver overtaget ’isbjergsteknikken’; en knap, minimalistisk fortællemåde, hvor kun en mindre del, nemlig toppen af isbjerget, afsløres for læseren, der selv må slutte sig til, hvad der i virkeligheden sker.
WIDER CONTEXTS

1. Class discussion

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a) The language (and pictures) of advertisements and pop culture make it hard for anybody to know what love really means.
b) In the 20th and 21st centuries, love is in an odd and battered condition.
c) Serial monogamy has replaced lifelong monogamy.
d) Love is a socially constructed reality.
e) Love is an absolute.
f) The true meaning of love remains elusive.

2. Literary context: other works of art by the same author: Short Cuts.

In groups (each group reads one story), read the following short stories by Raymond Carver (they are all in the collection called Short Cuts) “Neighbors”, “They’re Not Your Husband”, “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”, “So Much Water So Close to Home”, “A Small Good Thing”, and “Jerry and Molly and Sam”. Use the “How to read a short story” section in the toolbox on p. 319 as the basis for your interpretation and analysis. Make a presentation of your analysis and interpretation for the class (5-10 minutes).

3. Other works of art: the film Short Cuts and the article “Compassion from Carver, Male Swagger from Altman”.

Watch Altman’s film Short Cuts which is based on a number of short stories by Raymond Carver. If you have read the stories mentioned above, compare what you see with what you read.

If you have read the stories mentioned above AND watched the film Short Cuts, then find the article “Compassion from Carver, Male Swagger from Altman” from The New York Times on the internet. Read the text and discuss whether you agree with the statements expressed in the text.
4. Literary Context: other work by a different author: Ernest Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants”

Find “Hills Like White Elephants” in e.g. Eva Rosenvold’s *Passwords*, Systime 2005 or on the internet and determine which stylistic features the novel shares with Carver’s short story.

**Ernest Hemingway: Hills Like White Elephants (1927)**

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was an American author and journalist. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. Many of his works are classics of American literature. He published seven novels, including *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929 about WW1, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940 about the Spanish Civil War (made into a film) and *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1951 (also made into a film). Among his short stories, the Nick Adams stories including “Indian Camp” are particularly well known. His style is characterized by economy and understatement best known as “the iceberg technique”.

**Gloser**

- bamboo bead bambusperle
- Ebro flod i Nordspanien
- absinthe absint; stærk, alkoholisk drik
- dos cervezas (Spanish) to øl
- Reales spansk valuta
- felt pad ølbrik af filt
- licorice lakrids

**Pre-reading**

1. Spend three minutes reflecting on the symbolic function of railway stations. Jot down notes and use them as you read the text.
2. Prediction: How does a person feel who says, “Will you please, please, please, please, please, please, please stop talking”? What kind of situation could lead to this remark?
3. Read the text aloud this way: Divide the class into three groups. Read the story aloud so that one group reads ‘the American’, one group reads ‘the girl’, and the last group reads the narrative text. Discuss the effect. (It may be best to leave out all the “(s)he said”). You may want to add sound effects to enhance the content of the characters’ remarks.
4. When everybody has finished reading, try to write down five words that you can remember from the text.
While-reading

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

1. Where does the story take place? When?
2. Who are the characters?
3. What is the woman’s and the man’s relationship like now, and what was it like before?
4. Is there a main character? If so, who is it, and how can you tell this from the text?
5. What operation are the two people talking about?
6. How risky is it, physically/ psychologically?
7. What are they really discussing?
8. What attitude does each character have to the situation? i.e. what does he want, what does she want? Are they discussing the same thing?
9. What happens after “I feel fine”?
10. The iceberg technique: a writing technique where the author only reveals about an eighth of the text and leaves it to the reader to deduce the rest. Hemingway is famous for using this minimalist approach.

“If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story.”

Ernest Hemingway

a) Individually: Draw an iceberg in your notebook, and write keywords around it:
What does he say? What does she say?

What does he really mean? What does she really mean?

b) Compare notes in groups and pairs.

OVERALL QUESTIONS

A Language

In groups: Each group chooses one set of tasks and makes a presentation to the class in which they answer the relevant questions. Choose PowerPoint or make a podcast as you please, and make sure that you create a coherent presentation:

1.

a. A gambit is a word or phrase which helps us to express what we are trying to say, e.g. to introduce a topic, to link what we have to say to what somebody has said, to agree, to disagree, to respond. “You won’t believe this, but ...”, “By the way, have you ...” “I’d like to know ...” “To return to the topic ...”, “Where was I? ...” “Be careful not to ...” Through what conversational gambits do the characters communicate their desires?
b. Are there any specifically “male” or specifically “female” expressions? If yes, what do they tell us about the characters?

2.

a. What does the conversation reveal to you about the characters?
b. How can you tell that they have reached a point of crisis?
c. What is the relationship between the setting of the story and the characters’ conversation?

3.

a. Look at the descriptive passages of the text. What mood do they suggest?
b. Where is the turning point of the story?
c. Is there an epiphany, that is, a moment when one of the characters has a specific understanding or realization of truth or insight? If yes, where is it and what becomes clear to whom?

4. Consider the symbolic value of these images/expressions:

- “Across on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.”
- From “We could have all this” to “But they haven’t taken it away” – what is IT?
- The train and the station
- The curtain
- The hills and the white elephants

5.

B Narrative technique:

1. Hemingway once suggested that he wants to tell the reader as little as possible directly in a story, yet he wants to reveal the characters’ motives and their conflict, in short the iceberg technique mentioned in task 5. Where would you have liked more information?

2. What is the narrative point of view? Whose side is the narrator taking? On whose side are you, and what is it that Hemingway does that makes you side with that particular person?

3. What is the significance of the title? In French, the story is known as “Paradis Perdu”, i.e. “Paradise Lost” – what does this add to your understanding of the text?

4. Is Hemingway’s style: sparse, succinct, suggestive, efficient, minimalist, terse, ambiguous?
   Pay particular attention to sentence structure and word classes. Find examples to prove your point.

5. How would you interpret the title of the story?

6. What do you think is the theme?

LEARNING CHECK

1. Literary terminology: Explain in ONE sentence what the iceberg technique is.