

# *Words Aptly Spoken®* SHORT STORIES



An  
introduction  
to short  
story  
classics

THIRD  
EDITION



*Words Aptly Spoken®*  
SHORT STORIES

*an introduction to short story classics*

THIRD EDITION

compiled and edited by Jen Greenholt



Jen Greenholt, *Words Aptly Spoken®* Series

*Short Stories, An Introduction to Short Story Classics*

First edition published 2005. Second edition published 2011. Third edition published 2014.

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Published by Classical Conversations, Inc.

P.O. Box 909

West End, NC 27376

[www.ClassicalConversations.com](http://www.ClassicalConversations.com) | [www.ClassicalConversationsBooks.com](http://www.ClassicalConversationsBooks.com)

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Cover design by Classical Conversations. Image: Hand-colored lithograph by Serge Goursat, *Caricature of man with hands tucked in his pants standing outside theatre* (sic), 1893. Courtesy Library of Congress, reproduction number LC-USZC4-1268.

Printed in the United States of America.

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ISBN: 978-0-9904720-3-2

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## *A Note for Parents: Tools for the Journey*

If you have ever heard Shakespeare performed before a live audience and marveled at the ease with which the words flowed from the actors' lips; if you have ever envied people who can call on Milton, Dickens, Joyce, and Lewis to lend eloquence to their argument; if you have skimmed a list of the hundred greatest novels of all time and winced as you remembered struggling to finish *The Grapes of Wrath* in high school—you may think that the great conversations of literature are forever closed to you.

The good news is, they're not! Whether you are a student or a parent, a child or an adult, you have the capability to train yourself not only to read great literature but also to share its beauty, truth, and joy with others.

Although most people learn to read as children, the art of deliberately engaging with the content and ideas of a novel or short story requires ongoing practice. The *Words Aptly Spoken* series is based on the classical model of education, which breaks learning into three natural stages: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> In the grammar stage, you learn the vocabulary of a subject. In the dialectic stage, you learn to develop logical arguments and analyze others' ideas. In the rhetoric stage, you explore the consequences of ideas as you form and express your own. This guide will help you as you begin to apply the classical model to the study of literature.

### *Why Short Stories?*

As a parent or adult, you might be asking, "But why short stories? Aren't they inferior to novels? How hard can it be to read a short story, or write one? How much can you really say in a thousand words?" The short answer? A lot.

For developing readers and writers, however, short stories have a very specific advantage over longer books: they are short. It sounds obvious, but it's actually important. Because the stories in this collection are short in length, you can easily read them multiple times. Whereas you might need a week to complete a 400-page novel, you might be able to read a four-page story twice in a single hour. As a result, you can pick out different pieces of the story each time and focus on the details.

For short stories as well as long novels, one of the characteristics of a classic is that you can read it over and over again. The first time, you read to find out what happens. The second time, you might notice which events move the plot forward. The third time, you might see how the characters grow and change. The fourth time, you might pick out individual descriptive words that create a specific mood in a scene. The fifth time might reveal similarities between this story and others you have read.

### *How to Use This Book: Training for Readers*

Despite popular belief, reading is not wholly instinctive. Because comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking require practice, each story in this collection comes with a set of questions designed to give structure and guidance to your reading. Treat these questions

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<sup>1</sup> See Dorothy Sayers's essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning."

as tools not only for reading but also for writing, leading discussion, and sharing your ideas with others.

**Review Questions** pull out the **grammar** for each selection: What is it about? (Theme) What is the scope or time frame? (Focus) Who is it about? (Characters) Where does it take place? (Setting) What happens? (Plot) and so on. For readers of all ages, repeatedly asking these questions will generate good reading habits; eventually, as you read, your brain will automatically take note of this information and store it for future use.

**Thought Questions** are an exercise in **dialectic** thinking, taking the basic elements from the review questions and encouraging you to analyze that information in light of other knowledge. As you become more familiar with the building blocks of a story, you should begin to ask questions of your own. What does this mean for me? How should I respond to this argument? You can use the Thought Questions as a jump-start for your own thinking process, as training tools for leading discussion, or as topics for essays and book reports.

You may not be able to answer the questions after just one reading, and because these stories are short, you should take time to read each story at least twice. The first time should be for general enjoyment and to get a feel for the author's writing style. The next reading should look a little deeper at the underlying issues the author confronts.

A word of caution: don't merely "look up" the answers to the questions and skim the rest of the story. Once established, this habit will make it harder for you to read and understand more difficult books. After all, self-respecting Olympic runners know that they would be at a severe disadvantage in the actual games if they secretly completed only half of their daily training regimen. In the same way, the results you achieve as a reader will reflect the quality and consistency of your training.

This book was designed to complement any learning situation. Homeschool families may choose to complete the book at home or in a community environment. Students can complete Review Questions on their own, while the Thought Questions from each story can be used to jump-start discussion among peers or family. Writing Practice exercises can be completed alone or in a group. Private or public school teachers may turn this collection into an English class. Review Questions may be assigned as homework, while Thought Questions can be used for classroom discussion.

### ***How to Use This Book: Training for Writers***

Another important part of your training as a reader is learning to think about literature from the perspective of a writer. For this reason, *Short Stories* is divided into sections dealing with different elements of a good story: plot, characters, point of view, and so on. Each section begins with a short overview of the topic and suggested questions to keep in mind as you read one or more stories that demonstrate different approaches to that topic.

Each section ends with writing practice exercises that will help you to develop your creativity and begin to think like a short story writer. All of the exercises can be completed in the book or copied to a blank page so that the book can be reused.

Students in any environment can practice **rhetoric** by applying the writing skills discussed in this book and developing a story of their own as they read and complete the exercises. For example, after reading the section on characters, students choose the



characters for their story. Next, after reading the section on setting, they design a setting for the story. While studying point of view, dialogue, and style, they write multiple drafts and refine each element in turn. By the time they finish the book, they have a completed short story. Students are encouraged to copy the charts and graphs on a separate piece of paper so they have plenty of space to write and so the book can be used by more than one student.

### *The Journey in Perspective*

One of the most important things to remember as you start—or resume—this journey is that it doesn't happen overnight. The art of leading and sharing in conversations about classical literature takes a lifetime to refine. You must begin with the fundamentals: learning to read closely, taking notes, and developing the vocabulary to structure your ideas (grammar). You must practice: adding new techniques, revising old ones, and comparing the results (dialectic). And then you will be ready to start all over again as you share the joy of the journey with others around you (rhetoric). Let's get started!

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## *“The Selfish Giant”*

Oscar Wilde



Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was an English writer and poet born in Dublin, Ireland. His father was a famous surgeon and his mother a gifted poet. Wilde, who was classically educated, received a scholarship to Oxford. He was a brilliant student and won many academic and literary awards. Literary acclaim allowed Wilde the opportunity to lecture across the United States. Wilde’s many short stories have been called masterpieces. His love of beauty and art, and its fleeting quality, are a prevalent theme in many of his stories, plays, and poems. “The Selfish Giant” was written as an allegory of Christian redemption.

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant’s garden.

It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. “How happy we are here!” they cried to each other.

One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

“My own garden is my own garden,” said the Giant; “anyone can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself.” So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board.

TRESPASSERS

WILL BE

PROSECUTED

He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high wall when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside.

“How happy we were there,” they said to each other.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still Winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep. The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. "Spring has forgotten this garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. "This is a delightful spot," he said. "We must ask the Hail on a visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still Winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up! little boy," said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the little boy was too tiny.

And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

### Review Questions

1. Why is Mr. Button upset when he first meets his baby son?
2. In what ways did Mr. Button continue to treat his son like a baby and then a child? Why?
3. What name did Mr. Button initially want to give Benjamin? Who is this named figure?
4. Besides being born an old man, what other amazing discovery did Benjamin make about himself as the years went by?
5. How old did Hildegard think Benjamin was when they first met? Why did she like older men?

### Thought Questions

1. Trace the development of the relationship of Benjamin with his father, starting from Benjamin's birth.
2. When Benjamin appears to be in his thirties, he becomes uneasy about the fact that he is continuing to get steadily younger. The narrator says “His destiny seemed to him awful, incredible.” What happens at the end of Benjamin's life? Would you describe it as “awful”?
3. Is this story a comedy or a tragedy?
4. Benjamin enters certain experiences—kindergarten, college, and the army—two times. List the two different experiences for each event.
5. Even though the story spans seventy years or so, what keeps the story focused?

# STORY FOCUS

## EXERCISES

Think about writing with focus as taking a picture of the Grand Canyon with a small, disposable camera. You can't possibly fit the whole scene into the viewfinder. If you try, you'll end up with a picture that contains little bits of everything but a complete picture of nothing. Instead, you have to pick the part of the scene that is the most important to you.

In the example of the Grand Canyon, your focus could be a particularly steep drop-off, or a raft floating down the river, or a rock shaped like a mountain goat. These narrower subjects allow you to capture a scene that is self-contained. (Hint: focusing on one aspect of a book is also a valuable skill that you will use when you write essays about literature.)

Writing a focused short story is not always the same as writing a story about a single moment in time. In this section, you have read one story that tells of a brief moment in time, one story that focuses on a single character, and one story that focuses on a single aspect of a character's life. As you re-read the stories in this section, look at the way each author maintains his or her focus. How much of each story is devoted to narration? to description? to dialogue? What is the time frame of each story? Does the author tell you what happens in every minute of it? If not, how does he or she show the passage of time?

### Writing Practice 1

Pretend you were going to write a short story based on one of the following novels. (If you haven't read some of them, you can substitute other books that you have read.)

Pick a focus for your short story. It could be a particular scene or event from the book, a character, a certain setting, or even an object in the story. Go back to the questions at the beginning of this section, and think about how you would answer them in relation to your chosen story focus. Try to make these familiar stories new and interesting by changing the focus.

- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
- *The Bronze Bow*
- *Black Beauty*
- *The Hobbit*
- *The Secret Garden*



## WAS: Short Stories Titles

"The Lion and the Mouse," Aesop  
"The Good Samaritan," Luke 10: 25–37  
"God Lives," Hans Christian Andersen  
"The Teapot," Hans Christian Andersen  
"The Bet," Anton Chekhov  
"The Selfish Giant," Oscar Wilde  
"Little Girls Wiser than Men," Leo Tolstoy  
"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," Rudyard Kipling  
"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," F. Scott Fitzgerald  
"The Mansion," Henry Van Dyke  
"Araby," James Joyce  
"The Schoolboy's Story," Charles Dickens  
"The Red-Headed League," Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
"That Spot," Jack London  
"The Celestial Railroad," Nathaniel Hawthorne  
"A White Heron," Sarah Orne Jewett  
"A Man and the Snake," Ambrose Bierce  
"The Cop and the Anthem," O. Henry  
"The Necklace," Henri Guy de Maupassant  
"The Hammer of God," G. K. Chesterton  
"The Tell-Tale Heart," Edgar Allan Poe  
"The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Mark Twain  
"The Bird on Its Journey," Beatrice Harraden  
"The Nightingale and the Rose," Oscar Wilde  
"A King in Disguise," Matteo Mandello  
"The Startling Painting," Fyodor Dostoevsky  
"The Last Lesson," Alphonse Daudet

# Classical Conversations®

## MULTIMEDIA

Classical Conversations exists to equip parents in their journey of home-centered education.

We do this by sponsoring local communities led by experienced homeschool parent tutors who model classical learning for students and mentor parents in the method of classical education.

We also provide curriculum materials through our online bookstore to equip families at every level of learning, from K4 through high school. All of this provides a framework for what we believe is one of the best and most challenging educations students can receive.

To learn more about Classical Conversations, or to find a community near you, please visit our website, [www.ClassicalConversations.com](http://www.ClassicalConversations.com).



ISBN 978-0-9904720-3-2 \$19.99  
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