

Stories from English 30-2

“Streetcar Named Desire” by Tennessee Williams

Blanche Dubois – lost the family property – Belle Reve after family members died – husband kills himself after she discovered him with a gay lover – she never really gets past that – becomes obsessed with young men and eventually loses her job after being caught in a hotel room with a male student – lived in a world of make-believe

Stanley – married to Blanche’s sister Stella – resented Blanche’s presence in his home – Blanche believed Stella married below her – calls him a Pollack – Stanley’s very controlling and mean when he gets drunk – reveals Blanche’s background to a potential husband, Mitch, and to Stella – attacks Blanche when left alone with her after Stella goes to the hospital to deliver a baby

Stella – happy with her life with Stanley – likes his overt masculinity – is excited by it – willing to help Blanche in the beginning but when Mitch breaks off his relationship with Blanche, Stella decides she can’t help her anymore

Night by Eliezer Wiesel

Main characters

Elie

His father

Synopsis – Elie, a twelve year old boy, is very religious until he is sent to Auschwitz with the other Jews from Sighet. He and his father escape execution at the first selection by lying about their ages and occupations however, he is forever separated from his mother. Elie witnesses much cruelty and death which includes the hanging of a young child which causes him to reject his God. He is moved to a work camp in Buna where his foot requires an operation. With the approach of the Russian army, the prisoners are evacuated on foot to Buschenwald where Elie is freed. Unfortunately, his father dies of a stomach illness.

“**The Pianist**” by Roman Polanski **Writing credits** Wladyslaw Szpilman
(book) Ronald Harwood

Wladyslaw Szpilman played by Adrian Brody - A Jew caught in Warsaw, Poland after the invasion by the Germans in 1939.

Wladyslaw is forced to survive on his own in a Jewish ghetto after his family is taken to a concentration camp. His life is also saved by a Jewish guard just before he is to be put on a train headed for Nazi death camps. We are led to believe that it is his gift with music that causes the guard to save his life to the exclusion of the rest of his family. He later escapes the ghetto and is stowed away in apartments by member of the Polish music society. In one of these apartments, he nearly dies of starvation. Toward the end of his ordeal, he is saved by a German officer who discovers Szpilman’s virtuoso ability to

play the piano. The story climaxes with the liberation of Warsaw by Russian troops who almost shoot him because he is wearing one of the German officer's winter coats.

Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer

Main Characters

Chris McCandless – young man searching for greater meaning by challenging himself with the unknown by going into the wild

Jon Krakauer – writer – was also a young man who also was searching for greater meaning by climbing solo an unclimbed face of the “Devil’s Thumb”

In April 1992 a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a moose hunter. How McCandless came to die is the unforgettable story of *Into the Wild*.

Immediately after graduating from college in 1991, McCandless had roamed through the West and Southwest on a vision quest like those made by his heroes Jack London and John Muir. In the Mojave Desert he abandoned his car, stripped it of its license plates, and burned all of his cash. He would give himself a new name, Alexander Supertramp, and, unencumbered by money and belongings, he would be free to wallow in the raw, unfiltered experiences that nature presented. Craving a blank spot on the map, McCandless simply threw the maps away. Leaving behind his desperate parents and sister, he vanished into the wild.

When McCandless's innocent mistakes turn out to be irreversible and fatal, he becomes the stuff of tabloid headlines and is dismissed for his naiveté, pretensions, and hubris. He is said to have had a death wish but wanting to die is a very different thing from being compelled to look over the edge.

“On the Rainy River” by Tim O'Brien

Tim O'Brien
Elroy Berdahl

In the summer of 1968, Tim is drafted into the army to fight in the Vietnam War. He does not believe this is fair because he is educated and he doesn't believe the Americans should be fighting over there. His family and neighbours think that to serve in the army is the right thing to do. He's in a quandary. Does he follow his own conscience and escape to Canada or do what others expect him to do? He heads north and stops at the Rainy River right on the border of Canada. Elroy Berdahl runs a motel on the river and Tim stays with him for a few days. He hopes Elroy can provide an answer to his dilemma but is given only silence. Tim returns to the U.S. and joins the infantry in Vietnam. He says his story is the confession of a coward.

“The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst

The Scarlet Ibis is a story of two brothers, the narrator, "Brother" and his younger sibling "Doodle". Doodle is born a very sickly child who isn't expected to live. Brother wanted someone who could run and jump and play with him, but instead he got the fragile Doodle; this makes him angry. Determined to make Doodle into the brother he wants, Brother pushes him constantly, past the point of physical endurance; he is often cruel to him, even making him touch the coffin that was originally built for him as a baby. Doodle does learn a lot from Brother, but this comes at a high price.

One day, a big red bird appears in the garden, looking sick and tired. The boy's father identifies it as a Scarlet ibis, a tropical bird that must have been blown off course because of a recent storm. When the bird suddenly dies, Doodle decides to bury it. Afterwards, the boys go down to Horsehead Landing and on the way back Brother has Doodle practice rowing. A sudden rainstorm comes, and when they reach the riverbank Doodle is tired and frightened. Brother leaves Doodle behind in the pouring rain, angry that he can't finish "training" Doodle before school starts. He soon returns for Doodle, only to find that he has died with blood flowing out of his mouth, staining his throat red. He had died like the Scarlet Ibis. Brother cries with regret for what he had done.

“Tsotsi” written and directed by Gavin Hood

In Johannesburg, the small time criminal Tsotsi is a teenager without feelings, hardened by his tough life. After killing a man with his gang in a robbery; hitting the gangster Boston of his gang; humiliating a crippled beggar along one night, Tsotsi hijacks a car and under the despair of a woman, he shoots her in the stomach. While driving the car, Tsotsi finds that there is a baby on the back seat and the woman was a desperate mother. He brings the baby to his house in the slum and becomes attached to him. For six days, the baby changes his behavior, arousing and developing the sense of empathy and humanity in the cold blood killer.

“Crash” by Paul Haggis

Graham (Don Cheadle) –a detective, has a brother who’s a street criminal and the prodigal son or more loved son of his mother – Discovers his brother’s body by the side of the road and now must face his own

Ria – Graham’s Hispanic partner – He makes disparaging remarks about her culture

Rick – the L.A. district attorney

Jean – his wife who expresses a lot of fear and hatred toward people of other races – must come to terms with this when only her Hispanic maid comes to her rescue when she gets hurt

Anthony – African American carjacker – hates white people – ends up carjacking another African American’s car

Cameron – Well to do African American television producer who watches while his wife, Christine is molested by Officer Ryan

Christine – wife to Cameron – saved by the same officer who defiled her.

Officer Ryan – has developed a hatred toward black people after his father lost his janitorial business to African American businesses who benefited from a preferred hiring policy established by the city of Los Angeles – Saves Christine from a burning car risking his own life at the same time

Officer Hansen – is outraged by Officer Ryan’s behaviour toward Christine and chooses to ride alone rather than with this racist man – ends up killing Peter when he innocently reaches to pull his Saint Christopher revealing some deep seated fear in Officer Hansen

Peter – Graham’s brother killed by Officer Hansen

Daniel – Hard working locksmith whose Hispanic looks lead many of his customers to distrust him – his daughter is almost shot by Farhad who blames Daniel for not replacing the lock on the door to his shop – the door should have been replaced.

The immigrants smuggled into the L.A. grateful to be there.

Shawshank Redemption by Stephen King

Main Characters

Andy – wrongly accused of the murder of his wife and boyfriend and sent to prison

Red – gets stuff for the prisoners

Brook Hatlen – librarian – cannot stand to live outside the prison walls.

Andy is a man who likes to keep to himself. For this reason, he is not trusted by the other inmates and, particularly Red, until they get to know him better. Red gets to know him when he asks for a rock hammer and a picture of Rita Hayworth. The head of the guards discovers one of Andy’s hidden talents when Andy tells him how to evade taxes placed on an inheritance. The warden discovers his talent as an accountant and uses him to “cook the books” and swindle money from the prison. For this reason, the warden kills the Tommy, another prisoner, who had proof of Andy’s innocence. Eventually, Andy is able to tunnel through the wall of the prison and out with the help of his rock hammer. He escapes to Mexico with the “warden’s” money where Red meets after serving his sentence.