

BEFORE YOU READ

What exactly is a OUIJA BOARD?

It is pronounced as wee-ja, wee-je. It is known as spirit board or a talking board. It is a **feat** board marked with letters, numbers and other symbols supposedly used to communicate with spirits. It uses a movable indicator to indicate the spirits' message by spelling it out on the board. It is a very popular game among some sections because it gives an imaginary thrill of communicating with spirits.

SUMMARY

The writer, Mr Hallock, was told by his employer Mr Jenkins to write a ghost story. He told Mr Hallock to write a very horrifying story with supernatural elements because the public liked these kind of stories. The writer agreed to this proposal for no one else printed his stuff. He was surprised how he could have written the earlier ghost stories for he was not a specialist in this genre. Whenever he had decided to write a ghost story, surprisingly the plot had appeared from nowhere.

The writer sat down to pen the story, though no idea occurred to him. In fact his mind was wandering towards his wife's shopping trips and other unghostly things. The writer loudly said, "This writing business is delightful, isn't it?" and to his surprise a voice at the other end of the room said, "Yes it is." The writer was surprised to see a figure taking shape gradually. It was a woman, tall and angular, with enormous fishy eyes, wearing spectacles. She came and stood before the writer. The writer wished to know why that woman had come. She gave a very surprising answer that the writer had only called her to help him in writing a story. Moreover she said that the ghosts were going on strike so the writer should stop bothering her for another plot. She elaborated that all the other stories that had been a hit had come from her only. The ghost explained that she had been a writer in the earlier birth but now she had collected other ghosts like her and set up a 'Writers' Inspiration Bureau'. Now they extended help to a writer who had no ideas. The writer disagreed with the ghost's views for he had never seen her before so how could she have inspired him. She explained that she had sat on the writer's shoulder and had given him the plots. But now they were all fed up for being pulled out of beds at all times and had decided to go on strike. The ghost wanted the writer to call all his friends and stop using the Ouija board. The conversation of the writer and the ghostly figure was interrupted by the arrival of the writer's wife who is surprised to see her husband

sitting in the dark and talking loudly to himself. However, she was going gaga over a recent purchase she had made. On the writer's query she revealed that she had bought a Ouija board to help the writer to write the stories. She said that she wanted to make story writing easy for the writer from now onwards. The writer tried his best to dissuade his wife from keeping the ouija board but she refused to listen. The writer thought that he would reason with his wife later.

Next day the writer set out for his job. He worked as an accountant for a lumber company and could not give up his job and take to full-time story-writing due to financial problems. On reaching back home he was told by his cook to get ready and come down as his wife had invited some guests. When he came down eventually, he was surprised to see that their parlour was full of women belonging to his wife's book club. They were sitting in two's and between two friends there was a Ouija board. Immediately his wife appeared and she wanted the writer to be a partner of Mrs Hinkle, who was without any other friend.

Miss Hinkle took the writer's fingers and started moving them on the Ouija board. Surprisingly the words spelt on the board were 'TRAITOR.' Mrs. Hinkle wanted the board to clarify as to who was a traitor. The Ouija board spelled out that it was Mr Hallock. On enquiring what was the identity of the speaker, the board revealed that it was someone with the name of Helen.

This fact created a furore in the entire room and the ladies along with the writer's wife gathered around the writer and looked at him accusingly. All the Ouija boards signalled towards the writer. The writer could not answer. He fled the scene and went to sleep. Next morning, he noticed a slip of paper with the message that his wife was leaving him for good and her lawyer would communicate with him. The writer was shocked and surprised at this development. Meanwhile Helen, the ghost, reappeared and told the writer that she had been sent to ensure that his wife was going to get rid of that Ouija board. The writer

was very angry and he retorted that the ghost had made the writer lose his wife, his home and his happiness. The writer's wife Lavinia entered and told the writer that she was moving out. The writer was trying to shield and cover Helen, when his wife remarked that he was behaving very strangely. The Cook barged in and announced that she was not going to serve in a place where there were Ouija boards and activities relating to curses and charms. Lavinia was in no mood to be pacified. She sprang quickly to see who was standing behind her husband. Helen did not disappear this time and boldly announced to Lavinia that she indeed was Helen. Lavinia felt very miserable to create such a ruckus and accuse her husband of infidelity. The writer felt inspired and realised that he had indeed hit upon an excellent plot for a ghost story.

सारांश

श्री हैलौक को उसके अधिकारी ने एक प्रेतात्मा की कहानी लिखने को कहा। उन्होंने हैलौक को एक बहुत ही डरावनी, अलौकिक घटनाओं से भरपूर कहानी लिखने को कहा क्योंकि जनता को ऐसी ही कहानियाँ अच्छी लगती हैं। लेखक ऐसी कहानी लिखने को तैयार हो गया क्योंकि कोई और पत्रिका उनकी कहानियाँ नहीं छापती थी। लेखक को आश्चर्य हो रहा था कि उस भूतों की कहानियाँ पहले कैसे लिखी क्योंकि उसे इस विषय में कहानी लिखने का अभ्यास नहीं था। जब भी वह भूत या प्रेतात्मा की कहानी लिखने बैठता, कहानी का कथानक अपने आप कहीं से प्रकट हो जाता था।

लेखक जब लिखने बैठा, तो कोई भी योजना उसे समझ में न आई। वास्तव में उसका दिमाग पत्नी की खरीदारी और खर्चों के पीछे घूम रहा था, भूत-प्रेतों के साथ नहीं। लेखक ने स्वयं से जोर से कहा, 'यह लेखन क्रिया प्रसन्नता देने वाली है, है न?' और एक चौंकानेवाली आवाज़ कमरे के दूसरे छोर से उस तक आई, "हाँ, है!" आश्चर्यचकित लेखक ने एक लम्बी, दुबली-पतली बड़ी मछली जैसी आँखों वाली, ऐनक पहने महिला को धीरे-धीरे अपने सामने प्रकट होते देखा। वह महिला, लेखक के सामने आकर खड़ी हो गई। लेखक ने यह जानने की इच्छा प्रकट की कि वह क्यों आई हैं। महिला ने एक अजीब उत्तर दिया कि लेखक के बुलाने पर ही वह आई है, कहानी लिखने में उसकी सहायता करने के लिए। उस महिला ने यह भी कहा कि सारी प्रेतात्माएँ तंग आकर हड़ताल पर जाने वाली हैं, इसलिए कहानी के कथानक के लिए लेखक उनको परेशान न करें। महिला ने यह भी जोर देकर कहा कि अब तक जितनी भूतों की कहानियाँ सफल हुई हैं वह सब उसने लिखाई हैं। इस महिला भूत ने लेखक को बताया कि अपने पूर्व जन्म में वह एक लेखक थीं और और अब उन्होंने एक 'लेखकों को प्रेरणा देने वाला' कार्यालय खोला है। अब जिन लेखकों के पास कोई मूल विचार नहीं होते वह उनकी सहायता करती हैं। लेखक ने उसकी बात का खंडन करते हुए कहा कि जब वह उससे कभी पहले नहीं मिला तो वह उसको प्रेरणा कैसे दे सकती हैं। महिला ने कहा कि वह सदैव

लेखक के कंधे पर बैठी रहती थी और उनको नया कथानक देती थी। पर अब सब प्रेतात्माएँ तंग आ चुकी हैं क्योंकि उन्हें समय-असमय जगाया जाता है; इसलिए अब वे सब हड़ताल करने वाली हैं। महिला ने लेखक से कहा कि वह अपने सभी मित्रों को फोन करे और कहे कि उनमें से कोई अब वीजा बोर्ड प्रयोग नहीं करें।

जब लेखक प्रेतात्मा से बात कर रहा था तभी लेखक की पत्नी वहाँ आई और यह देखकर हैरान रह गई कि लेखक अँधेरे में बैठे हुए अपने आप से जोर-जोर से बातें कर रहा है। पर इस समय, पत्नी का ध्यान एक नई खरीदारी पर था और वह उसके ऊपर लट्टू थी। लेखक के पूछने पर उसने बताया कि वह एक वीजा वीजे बोर्ड है जो लेखक को कहानी लिखने में सहायता करेगा। वह अपने पति का कहानी लिखना एक आसान कार्य बनाना चाहती हैं। लेखक के बहुत मना करने पर भी वह बोर्ड ले आती हैं और अपने पति की बात नहीं मानती! पति ने सोचा कि वह बाद में अपनी पत्नी को मना लेगा।

दूसरे दिन लेखक अपने काम के लिए निकल गया। वह एक लकड़ी की कम्पनी में मुनीम था। वह यह काम इसलिए करता था क्योंकि वह कहानी लिख कर अपना खर्चा नहीं चला सकता था। दूसरा काम करना अनिवार्य था। जब वह काम से घर लौटा तो उसे जल्दी से कपड़े बदलकर नीचे आने को कहा गया। उसकी पत्नी ने कुछ मेहमान बुलाये थे। जब वह नीचे आया तो वह हैरान रह गया, उसका घर उसकी पत्नी के "महिला क्लब" की महिलाओं से भरा हुआ था। वहाँ दो-दो महिलाएँ एक वीजा वीजे बोर्ड बीच में रखकर बैठी हुई थीं। उसकी पत्नी ने उसे श्रीमती हिन्कल का पार्टनर बनने को कहा क्योंकि उनके साथ कोई दूसरी महिला नहीं थीं।

श्रीमती हिन्कल ने लेखक की उँगली पकड़ी और उसे वीजा वीजे बोर्ड पर घुमाना शुरू किया। बोर्ड पर "विश्वासघाती" शब्द लिखकर आया। श्रीमती हिन्कल ने पूछा – कौन विश्वासघाती है? वीजा वीजे बोर्ड ने लेखक हैलौक का नाम लिखा। जब यह पूछा गया कि लिखने वाला कौन है तो बोर्ड ने लिखा – हेलेन।

सारे कमरे में शोर मच गया। लेखक की पत्नी सहित सभी महिलाओं ने लेखक को घेर लिया और उसको दोषी व्यक्ति की तरह देखने लगी। इस समय सबके सब वीजा वीजे बोर्ड लेखक को अपराधी बता रहे थे। लेखक को कोई उत्तर नहीं सूझा और वह वहाँ से भाग निकला और जाकर सो गया। जब वह सुबह उठा तो उसे अपनी पत्नी का संदेश मिला कि वह उसे हमेशा के लिए छोड़ रही है और अब वह अपने वकील के द्वारा ही उससे बात करेगी। लेखक इस नई घटना से पूर्णतः अर्चभित रह गया। उसी समय, हेलेन की प्रेतात्मा उसके सामने आयी और उसने लेखक से कहा कि वह यह देखने आई है कि उसकी पत्नी ने वीजा वीजे बोर्ड फेंक दे। लेखक ने क्रोधित होकर कहा कि प्रेतात्मा के कारण उसने अपनी पत्नी, अपना घर, अपनी खुशी सब खो दी है।

उसी समय उसकी पत्नी लवीनिया आई और लेखक से कहा कि वह घर छोड़कर जा रही है। लेखक हेलेन को छुपाने की कोशिश कर

रहा था जब उसकी पत्नी ने कहा कि वह बहुत ही अजीब व्यवहार कर रहे हैं। इतने में, उनकी कुक (खाना बनाने वाली) धड़धड़ाती हुई आई और कहा कि वह कि वह ऐसे घर में काम नहीं करेगी जहाँ वीजा वीजे बोर्ड प्रयोग में लाए जाते हैं और प्रेतात्माओं को बुलाया जाता है। लवीनिया भी मानने को तैयार नहीं थी। उसने लपककर यह देखने की कोशिश की कि कौन उसके पति के पीछे खड़ा है? हेलेन इस बार अन्तर्धान नहीं हुई और उसने निडर होकर लवीनिया को बताया कि वह वास्तव में हेलेन है। लवीनिया बहुत दुखी होती है कि उसने इतना बड़ा हंगामा किया और अपने पति को दाम्पत्य जीवन में विश्वासघाती कहा।

लेखक इस घटना से बहुत ही प्रेरित होता है और उसे यह अनुभूति होती है कि एक अति सुन्दर भूतों की कहानी का कथानक उसे मिल गया।

WORD-MEANINGS

- **Proposition** : proposal
- **uncanny** : strange
- **pestering** : forcing
- **sarcastically** : in a hurting manner
- **imbecility** : weak intellect
- **plaid** : long

- woollen cloth ● **gaping** : staring
- **purgatory** : a place of spiritual cleansing
- **paradise** : heaven
- **patronisingly** : in a protective manner
- **demobilise** : send away
- **evaporate** : disappear
- **vestige** : remainder
- **affliction** : trouble
- **hysterics** : uncontrollable emotions
- **Napoleon** : Emperor of France, whose military endeavour and sheer personality dominated Europe for a long time
- **Helen of Troy** : She was the daughter of Zeus, wife of Menelaus, her abduction by Paris led to the Trojan war.
- **huffily** : irritably
- **churning** : moving
- **flirtatious** : behave in an enticing manner
- **tugging** : pulling, moving
- **plagued** : troubled
- **twitch** : quiver
- **spasm** : sudden muscle contraction
- **elapsed** : passed
- **semblance** : resemblance, look like
- **gurgled** : made a sound like water
- **prickle** : like thorns
- **gait** : walk
- **protruding** : stick out
- **unaccustomed** : not used to
- **agility** : active movement
- **phantom** : ghost
- **contraptions** : strange machine
- **lithely** : flexibly
- **apparition** : ghost, spirit
- **ferverently** : impassionately

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

Q.1. Given below is a list of words related to ghost and ghost stories with their jumbled up meanings against them. Match the words/expressions with their correct meanings:

Ans.	Apparition	a supernatural appearance of a person or thing, a ghost, spectre or phantom.
	Poltergeist	German word, meaning “noisy ghost”— a troublesome spirit that announces its presence with unexplainable sounds and the creation of disorder.
	Clairvoyance	the supposed power to see objects or events that cannot be perceived by the senses.
	Crystal Ball	a globe of quartz crystal in which images, believed to portend the future, are supposedly visible to fortune tellers
	Eerie	so mysterious, strange, or unexpected as to send a chill up the spine
	Medium	a person through whom the spirits of the dead are alleged to be able to contact the living
	Transmigration	to pass into another body after death: going from one state of existence or place to another.
	Psychic	capable of extraordinary mental processes, such as extrasensory perception and mental telepathy
	Ouija Board	a spelling board device intended to communicate with and through the spirit world, obtaining answers to questions
	Exorcist	a conjurer who expels evil spirits by conjuration
	Premonition	a feeling of anticipation of or anxiety over a future event
	Paranormal	beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation
	Tarot Card	a set of 22 playing cards bearing allegorical representations, used for fortune telling
	Vampire	a reanimated corpse that is believed to rise from the grave at night to suck the blood of sleeping people

5. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) *What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write? Why?*

Ans. The narrator is requested by Jenkins to write ghost stories with supernatural elements. The public demanded such horrors and thrills and these kind of stories were a sure hit with the people.

(b) *Does the narrator like writing ghost stories? Support your answer with evidence from the text.*

Ans. The writer did not specialise in ghost stories. In fact he was surprised how the plot and other details occurred to him. The first story he had ever written had been a ghost story and it made him popular. So he starts liking the idea of writing ghost stories and says, "This writing business is delightful."

(c) *What makes Helen, the ghost and other co-ghosts organize, 'The Writers' Inspiration Bureau'?*

Ans. Helen had been a writer in her other life. In her present state, she had been working as a reader on a magazine. When she became a ghost, she found others, like her, who had suffered and they formed a Writers' Inspiration Bureau. Now they searched for a writer who was without ideas with a mind susceptible enough to accept these ideas.

(d) *Why had Helen, the ghost been helping the narrator write ghost stories? Why was she going on strike? What condition she places for providing continued help?*

[C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]

Ans. Helen had helped the narrator because he was keen to write ghost stories but had no ideas and his mind was impressionable. But now the ghosts were fed up of being called too often from their beds. They had given up haunting and had taken up answering questions on the Ouija board but people had started pestering them too often. Helen promised to help the narrator if he would get his friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board.

(e) *How does the ghost undermine the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories?*

Ans. The narrator refused to believe that Helen had helped him to write all the earlier stories. He protested and said that he had never summoned her. But Helen said that she had come on her own, sat on his shoulder when he was thinking hard and provided him good plots.

(f) *Why does John want the ghost to disappear before his wife appears on the scene? What impression of his wife's character do you form from his words? [C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]*

Ans. Lavinia, John's wife, is a jealous lady. John does not want Helen to be seen by his wife for fear of complications in his married life. His wife is over sensitive and the sight of a ghost in her house will affect her badly. Lavinia is basically a lady, who is a spendthrift and socialite, spending her time in parties and friends.

(g) *Why does the narrator hesitate to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during Ouija Board party? [C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]*

Ans. Helen, the ghost, had asked the narrator to exert his influence in getting all his friends to stop using the Ouija board. Helen had told the narrator that all the ghosts were fed up of being summoned by the Ouija board players, at all hours and now they were going on strike. Helen had promised to help the narrator in his story, if he did the needful. So he was reluctant to get involved in something which he had been strongly forbidden to do.

(h) *What message does the ghost convey to the group that had assembled in the narrator's house? What is their reaction to the message?*

Ans. The ghost conveys to Miss Hinkle that Mr Hallock is a traitor and a woman by the name of Helen was calling for him. Immediately all the women along with the narrator's wife gather around him and start staring at him accusingly. They behave as if he has been very sly, keeping relations with another woman, behind his wife's back.

(i) *Do you agree with narrator calling the assembly of women 'manipulators'. Give reasons.*

Ans. The narrator's state of mind, or his problem, was not known to either his wife or the other women. So psychologically he felt that they were trying to trap him or malign him needlessly. What the women were saying had been indicated on the Ouija board, they were just finding the connection so the narrator is not justified in calling them 'manipulators' for they were not doing it deliberately. It is intrinsic to women's nature to see more than what really exists so they cannot be blamed for this.

(j) *Why is John's wife angry? What does she decide to do? [C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]*

Ans. John's wife blames her husband of infidelity, carrying on with Helen behind her back. She decides to leave him and go to back to her grand mother. Rest of the details will be chalked out by the lawyer.

(k) *Why does John wish he were dead?*

Ans. John's marital life had reached a dead end. He hated being accused of deceiving his wife, whereas no such thing had ever happened. His wife had threatened to quit and he hated all the accusations that had been hurled at him.

- (l) *When confronted by Lavinia about his flirtations over the Ouija Board, John insists that “The affair was quite over-board, I assure you.” Bring out the pun in this statement.*

Ans. John’s answer was quite intelligent and double-edged, the real meaning only he knew. His affair was rightly over-board, since it was over the Ouija Board all the problem had begun. Helen, the ghost had forced him to influence his friends to do away with the boards and she was the one who had maligned him in front of his wife and her friends.

- (m) *John’s apprehensions about his wife’s reaction to her encounter with the ghost are unfounded. Justify.*

Ans. John believed that his wife was a sensitive little woman who was too scared of even a mouse. A real heart attack would happen to her if she saw a ghost in her living room. But his doubts were unfounded. Lavinia did not tremble for a moment and patiently observed and listened to Helen, the ghost. She never swooned and there was a satisfied smile on her face instead.

6. Answer the following questions in detail :

- (a) *After her reconciliation with her husband, John Hallock, Lavinia writes a letter to her friend expressing how her relationship with him had almost been on the verge of breaking and what saved it. Write her letter.*

Ans. Post Street
10 September, 20 xx
Dear Anne,

I am extremely sorry for not responding earlier. My life had taken a strong turn and I was left grappling with some apprehensions. Believe me, you were uppermost in my mind but I wanted to sort out my domestic problems and then write to you with a clear frame of mind.

Last month I underwent a very bad phase of my life. You know how proud I am of John and his creative abilities. I have always appreciated his skill in churning out excellent stories along with being a considerate husband. He has always supported me in my endeavours, but sometimes even honesty is also put to test. Once

during the Book Club game with my friends, the Ouija board hinted that John was having an affair with someone called Helen. I was dumb founded and I threatened to quit. You know, I am impatient I can never tolerate infidelity. I had packed my suitcase and was on the verge of deserting John, when I discovered to my surprise, it was an apparition, a ghost, named Helen who was haunting him. Who would believe that ghosts are found in today’s world? Nevertheless I’m happy that I discovered the truth eventually. Now all is well and there is no reason to worry.

However, I blame myself for all this ruckus. I never gave him chance to explain, nor did I show faith in him. I should have remained unflinching in my trust. So the famous quote proved true in my case “Jealousy, thy name is woman”. I have learnt my lesson now.

Please write to me about yourself also.

Your friend,
Lavinia.

- (b) *Discuss the significance of the title of the lesson, “A Shady Plot.”*

Ans. The title ‘A Shady Plot’ is most appropriate because most of the situations and characters remain unclear and foggy. At first instance the writer is plagued by doubts regarding the plot of the story. He tries really hard and it appears he is chasing the shadows in search of a ghost story. The appearance of the ghost is open to interpretation. Is it there, or is it not there? There is doubt regarding the existence of Helen, she is spooky and gives rise to apprehensions. The existence of Helen is questionable, no one else will believe it, it is beyond the realm of reality. Moreover, doubts are cast over John’s character, his honesty is questioned, his relationship with Helen is hidden, concealed and he alone knows it. The appearance of Helen upsets John’s life. His wife and cook threaten to quit and shadows of divorce looms large over his relationship with his wife. The plot for a new story remained “unclear” for a long time. It is only in the end, that John can visualise an excellent plot in its perfection. Moreover, the ghost and apparitions are always believed to remain concealed, relegated to shady and dark areas. The appearance of Helen from darkness and retreat to darkness highlights the relevance of the title.

7. The narrator and his wife reveal something about their character in their words and actions. We also learn about them from what other people say. Can you pick out the words that describe them from the box given below? Also, pick out lines and instances from the story to illustrate your choice.

shy	arrogant	loyal	clever	over-confident	manipulative
protective	self-disparaging	suspicious	sceptical	jealous	fearless
firm	shrewd	strong	gullible	sly	creative
loves novelty and thrills					

Ans.

Person	Extract from story	What it tells us about the character
John Hallock	1. ... in the end things had always come my way somehow I'd always been able to dig one (plot) up for him, so I'd begun to get a bit cocky as to my ability (to write stories).	over-confident
	2. "But my ghosts aren't a bit like you ——".	sceptical
	3. "We scout around until we find a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression."	gullible
	4. "I've got the bulliest plot for a ghost story	creative
	5. Why, that sensitive little woman couldn't bear to have mouse say boo at her and what would she say to a ghost in her own living room	protective
Lavinia Hallock	1. "I bought the loveliest things this afternoon. Everybody's wild over them"	loves novelty and thrills
	2. She had the alarming tendency to take every new fad that came along and work it to death.	Spendthrift
	3. John, you are hiding somebody in here who it is ?	suspicious
	4. "It is bad enough to have you first over the Ouija board with that hussy"	jealous
	5. Buys the Ouija Board but says it is for John's research	manipulative
	6. Does not flinch when she meets the ghost but talks to her casually.	strong

8. Gladolia, the narrator's cook, is an African. The language she speaks is different from that of the others. This is known as Dialect. A dialect consists of words or phrases that reflect the regional variety of a language. An author often uses a regional dialect to make the dialogue more authentic. Initially a dialogue may seem a little difficult to understand. However, as you continue reading, the language will become more comprehensible.

Working in groups, write what Gladolia's words mean as shown.

Ans.

Column A	Column B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Misto Hallock ● de Missus ● shot'inks you's lost! ● she done 'phone you dis mawnin' ● fo'de lawd's sake ● not to stop to argify now ● I's gwinet' quit. ● I don't like no hoodoos. ● I'se done ef' displace ● I is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mister Hallock ● The Mrs (Mistress) ● She thinks you are lost ● She did phone you this morning ● For the Lords' sake ● Not to stop to argue now ● I am going to quit ● I don't like hoodoos ● I'd have left this place ● I am

9. Now complete the following story by using the appropriate phrases in the blanks given below:

Ans. I was alone in a place that bore a deserted look like that of a graveyard. I increased the pace of my footsteps as I walked through the dark forest. I felt someone walking behind me. I turned immediately and spotted the contour of a figure in the form of a spirit. It smiled at me wickedly. I started shaking with fear and perspiring profusely when I felt its skeletal hand upon my neck. I woke up with a start, relieved that it was only nightmare.

This was not the first time I had one. It had all started when I watched the horrendous horror film with a eerie ghost character that had a scary ghost of a smile on its face. It had been almost a month. The strange thing was that I saw a similar face at the station the next morning. That was uncanny.

I was to attend a dinner at my friend's at Northanger Abbey that night. I had decided to narrate my experience to the group that would assemble there although I knew there was no proof so that they would be convinced.

After everyone had finished pouring their drinks to themselves, I cleared my throat and started narrating my

spooky experience. However, every one of the group started accusing me of being horrifying and held me responsible for spoiling the spirit of revelry. I gave up the ghost and sat quietly waiting for the party to be over. Back at home, the fears returned. I knew I had to talk about my experience to somebody to feel better. I have now decided to write and publish my experience under pseudonym. Only then can I breathe in peace.

11. Do you think a story has an atmosphere? Complete the following blanks to make up your ghost story by choosing the correct options.

A Ghost Story

She opened the cemetery-gate (secret door/ spaceship's hatch/ door of the cottage/ cemetery gate/ door of the castle/ cockpit) silently (brashly/ loudly/ silently/ stupidly/ fearfully/ joyously). Standing in front of her was a terrifying (terrifying/ handsome/smelly/ anonymous/ tiny/ huge/ bossy) apparition (policeman/ spy) apparition/ which/ prince/ wizard) with a rod (wand/ rose/ rod/ knife/ scythe/ coded message) in his/ her (its) her ghoulish (ghoulish/ bony/ beautiful/ fair/ manly/ gloved/ magical) hand.

REFERENCE TO CONTEXT – MCQs

Read the following extracts and choose the correct option.

1. "Curious how that idea for a plot had come to me out of nowhere after I had closed inspiration for months!"
 - (i) The writer believed that he was
 - (a) a good story writer
 - (b) lacked imagination needed for ghost stories
 - (c) was not a good ghost story-writer
 - (d) lacked the ability to write stories
 - (ii) The writer found it 'curious' that
 - (a) his stories were published
 - (b) no one read his stories
 - (c) the plot would suddenly appear out of nowhere
 - (d) why he was not writing stories full time.
 - (iii) The writer kept choosing plots because
 - (a) he was not given any encouragement

- (b) he was paid less so he lost the desire
- (c) writing ghost stories was not instinctive
- (d) he had no interest in such stories

Answers : (i) (b) (ii) (c) (iii) (c)

2. "I just come to tell you to stop bothering us for assistance, we're going on strike."
 - (i) Identify 'I'.
 - (a) The writer (b) Miss Hinkle
 - (c) His wife (d) The ghost, Helen
 - (ii) The speaker is fed up because
 - (a) people mocked them
 - (b) people called them at all times for help
 - (c) people maltreated them
 - (d) people screamed at seeing them
 - (iii) The speaker threatened to go on strike because now they had decided
 - (a) to sit at one place and answer questions
 - (b) to haunt

- (c) to frighten more people
- (d) to appear at all times

Answers : (i) (d) (ii) (b) (iii) (a)

3. *“You’re to exert your influence then we’ll start helping you to write.”*

- (i) Identify the speaker.
 - (a) Helen the ghost (b) the writer
 - (c) the wife (d) the cook
- (ii) The listener was expected to persuade people not to
 - (a) call the ghosts
 - (b) use the Ouija board
 - (c) trouble the ghosts
 - (d) chant magic spells
- (iii) The promise made by the speakers is
 - (a) not to haunt
 - (b) not to frighten his wife
 - (c) not to appear in the writer’s house
 - (d) help him write the stories

Answers : (i) (a) (ii) (b) (iii) (d)

4. *“Lavinia dear, do you know anyone with the name of Helen?”*

- (i) Who is Lavinia?
 - (a) writer’s friend (b) his wife
 - (c) cook (d) a neighbour
- (ii) The above incident takes place at the writer’s
 - (a) wife’s kitty parties
 - (b) in his garden
 - (c) wife’s card parties
 - (d) wife’s Book Club meetings
- (iii) The above reveals _____ of the speaker
 - (a) mockery (b) appreciation
 - (c) suspicion (d) dislike

Answers : (i) (b) (ii) (d) (iii) (c)

5. *“So I went home and sat down before my desk and sucked at the end of my pencil and waited, but nothing happened. Pretty soon my mind began to wander off on other things.”*

[C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]

- (i) The author was coming back

- (a) from office
- (b) from an official meet
- (c) from a party
- (d) after a meeting with Jenkins

- (ii) What was the author waiting for to happen?
 - (a) for an encounter with God
 - (b) for the result of his magic mantra
 - (c) for the result of invocation to ghosts
 - (d) for an idea of a plot to write a ghost story
- (iii) Where did the author’s mind began to wander?
 - (a) to think about his new job
 - (b) to think about his last story
 - (c) about the new house he had bought
 - (d) on the material things like his wife’s shopping and how he was going to cure her alarming tendency to take every new fad that came along.

Answers : (i) (d) (ii) (d) (iii) (d)

6. *“But what have I got to do with this?” She gave me a pitying look and rose. “You’re to exert your influence. Get all your friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board, and then we’ll start helping you to write.”* [C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]

- (i) Who is ‘she’ in the above passage?
 - (a) Helen
 - (b) Lavinia
 - (c) Gladolia
 - (d) Mrs William Augustus
- (ii) ‘You are to exert your influence for
 - (a) co-operating with her
 - (b) providing all help to her
 - (c) helping the ghosts to fight their problem
 - (d) stopping the use of Ouija board
- (iii) Before disintegrating, the narrator was told
 - (a) not to forget the strike
 - (b) to help them
 - (c) to stop talking to a ghost
 - (d) to exert his influence to help them

Answers : (i) (a) (ii) (d) (iii) (d)

REFERENCE TO CONTEXT – NON-MCQs

Read the following extracts and answer the questions.

1. *“It was like watching one of these moving picture cartoons being put together.”*

(a) Explain ‘It’.

Ans. The apparition taking shape is referred to as ‘It’.

(b) What is like watching a cartoon movie?

Ans. The figure of the ghost taking full shape.

(c) What effect does it have on the ‘narrator’?

Ans. The narrator is shocked and surprised.

2. *“We’re been called out of beds a little too often in recent years and now we’re through.”*

(a) Who have been called constantly?

Ans. The ghosts like Helen.

(b) What is unnatural about their being called?

Ans. People generally do not summon ghosts, so it is unnatural.

(c) What is the person’s complaint?

Ans. The ghost is fed up of being troubled at all odd hours.

3. *“It’s so cheap! I got it at a bargain sale.”*

(a) What has been bought cheap?

Ans. The Ouija board.

(b) Do you think the narrator would be happy with this news? Why/Why not?

Ans. He was shocked and got worried at the news.

(c) Who had asked the narrator to avoid its use?

Ans. The ghost Helen had threatened the narrator not to use the Ouija board.

4. *“Someone has been trying to communicate with John through Ouija someone with the name of Helen.”*

(a) Who is Helen? What was her relation with

John?

Ans. Helen is the ghost and she had helped John with good plots for his stories.

(b) What is Ouija Board? What is its purpose?

Ans. A Ouija Board is a talking board in which the ghosts answer the questions asked by people.

(c) How can one communicate through the Ouija?

Ans. The people ask questions and the ghosts answer them.

5. *“John, there is not a bit of use trying to deceive me. What is it you are trying to conceal from me?”*

(a) Why was John trying to deceive the speaker?

Ans. John did not wish to frighten his wife by letting her see the ghost.

(b) Whom was he trying to conceal?

Ans. He was trying to hide Helen, the ghost.

(c) What was John afraid of?

Ans. John thought that his wife would faint at the sight of the ghost.

6. *“I sat staring at it and presently noticed something just taking shape. It was exactly like watching one of these moving picture cartoons being put together.”*

[C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]

(a) What was the narrator staring at?

Ans. The narrator was staring at the woman standing before him.

(b) How was the figure talking shape?

Ans. The figure was taking shape gradually.

(c) Who was gradually taking a definite shape part by part?

Ans. A ghost, called Helen, was gradually taking a definite shape.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Why was the writer getting over confident about his ability of writing ghost stories?

Ans : Mr Hallock, the writer had always managed to write good ghost stories, though he was not a specialist in these kind of stories. Such stories were greatly in public demand. He was confident that somehow or the other, a good plot always appeared from somewhere and he was able to write a good story.

2. Watching the ghost taking shape was ‘Like watching of the moving picture cartoons put together.’ how?

Ans : Helen, the ghost, appeared in parts. First, a hand took shape, then some other body part, so on and so forth. The process in which the final apparition appeared in the end, was a matter of surprise. The ghost always took shape in bits and pieces like a cartoon in a moving picture.

3. What surprising revelation is made by the ghost? Why did the writer not believe her?

Ans : The writer was greatly surprised to discover that all the good plots of ghost stories had been supplied to him by the ghost Helen. The writer disbelieved her because he had never really seen her before. But the ghost said that she had sat on his shoulders and suggested the plots for his stories.

4. Why is the ghost fed up of the Ouija Board fanatics?

Ans : The ghosts are now fed up of being called again and again for answers and queries. They were pulled out of beds at odd times, so they were very tired. The Ouija Board crazy fans would keep asking questions, so this irritated the ghosts and proved to be tiresome and troublesome.

5. What reasons are given by Lavinia for not getting rid of the Ouija Board?

Ans : Lavinia felt that the Ouija board was procured at bargain price. Moreover, she felt that it would help her husband in writing ghost stories. It would also provide an interesting activity for her book-club meetings.

6. Why was the narrator shocked to see the activities of his wife's Book Club?

Ans : The narrator was in for a great shock to see that all the ladies of his wife's book-club were sitting near a Ouija Board. Helen, the ghost, had threatened the narrator that he must exert all his force to dissuade people from using the Ouija Board and keep calling ghosts now and then for their problems. So to see so many ladies using the board was a painful sight for him.

7. What controversy or furore was caused in the parlour by the name of 'Helen'?

Ans : The narrator was forced to be a partner in the Ouija board game and to his horror he discovered that he was called a 'traitor' by the ghost. When Miss Hinkle wished to know the details, it was revealed on the Ouija Board that the person, who had called the narrator, a traitor, was someone with the name 'Helen.' This name created controversy since the narrator's wife did not know anyone with that name.

8. Helen the ghost says, "I'm too tired to materialise." What does she imply by the above statement?

Ans : Helen was too tired because she had to work overtime the earlier night answering all the questions of Lavinia's friends. She took longer than before to appear in

her full shape because she couldn't be expected to retain all her faculties after answering all the Ouija Board fanatics of Lavinia's book-club, all the night.

9. Why did Helen pay a visit to the narrator again?

Ans : Helen paid a visit to the narrator because she had been sent to ensure that the narrator's wife should get rid of the Ouija Board. She had come to threaten the writer and if he did not pay any heed then she would not help the narrator and suggest new plots for his stories.

10. Lavinia entered the narrator's room with a solid finality. What was her purpose?

Ans : Lavinia had become suspicious of the narrator that he was involved with some woman called 'Helen'. So she had come to tell her husband that she was leaving him and moving out. She could not tolerate the infidelity of her husband.

11. Why was the narrator unable to conceal Helen behind his back before his wife?

Ans : Lavinia refused to stand on one side, she jumped quickly to see who was standing behind her husband. She was already suspicious and noticed that her husband was trying to conceal someone behind his back. Even Helen did not disappear so both the women confronted each other for first time.

12. How did Lavinia react after facing Helen?

Ans : The writer had always thought that Lavinia was weak-hearted and she might faint at the sight of the ghost. But nothing like this happened. The interaction proved positive and Lavinia stood boldly and confidently before the ghost.

13. Why did the narrator have a strong urge to pen down his new story?

Ans : The narrator had undergone a great experience. It was scary, interesting, revealing and an excellent plot for any ghost story. A ghost story based on this kind of story was going to be a sure hit.

14. How did narrator react to the appearance of the ghost? [C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]

Ans : One day the narrator was asked by his employer to write a horrifying ghost story with supernatural elements because the public liked such stories. As he sat down to pen down the story, he started muttering questions to himself and surprisingly someone in the room answered them. The writer was greatly surprised to see a figure taking shape gradually. It was a woman, tall and angular, with

fishy eyes, wearing spectacles. The writer was dumbstruck on seeing a ghost standing before his eyes.

15. Why did Lavinia decide to leave her husband and what made her change her mind?

[C.B.S.E. 2012 (T-2)]

Ans : The narrator had become suspicious of her

husband, and believed he was involved with some woman, called Helen. Unable to tolerate the infidelity of her husband, she decided to leave him. But when she confronted Helen and came to know that she was only a ghost, Lavinia felt miserable to have created such a ruckus accusing her husband of infidelity. All this made Lavinia change her mind.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. John had become a nervous wreck. It had been a hard journey back to normalcy and marital bliss. He writes a diary entry expressing these feelings. Write this for him.

Ans : Dear Diary,

What a harrowing and emotional nightmare I have gone through! On God! These days will always remain permanently etched in my memory. Imagine a ghost helping you with the stories and thus causing your marriage to break. How I was saved at the last minute, is a marvel. Those days, when Helen had threatened me and then Lavinia refused to give up the Ouija board; I was accused of infidelity, I could neither sleep nor walk out. I wish I had confided in my wife before. Thank God! Everything is now as normal as before. But this traumatic period of time, I will never forget. All is well that ends well.

John Hallock.

2. John's new ghost story is a hit and proves to be a best seller. Jenkins throws a party in his honour and John is asked to give a speech regarding the success of his work and the inspiration behind it. Prepare the speech of him.

Ans : Dear friends,

I am deeply obliged for your best wishes and support for my success. Believe me friends, I am not an expert in ghost stories but somehow a good plot occurs out of the blue and becomes the solid ground of my stories. I know, you find my stories very fascinating and thrilling as most ghost stories are. Well, stories can only work if there is someone to inspire or guide you. Even I have an angel sitting on my shoulders to steer the course of my stories. I hope it continues this way.

Thanks.

3. Helen, the ghost had close encounters with human beings like John. She goes back to her world and mulls over this experience she had on earth. She writes a diary entry regarding the behaviour of human beings and the fickleness of their relationships. Write this diary entry for her.

Ans : Dear Diary,

This was my first opportunity to have close encounters with human beings for a long stretch of time. Basically we stay out of bounds but now I was forced to materialise in person and threaten John, as there was no other option. I know John is basically a good guy, vulnerable and kind but his wife is too dominating. He is so scared of her and she started doubting her husband at the mention of a mere word 'Helen'. John was trying to hide me, not to distress her but, look how she behaved. These human beings have fickle relationships, despite all. I think we are better off for we keep our relationships intact

Helen

4. Do you believe 'A Shady Plot' qualifies as a good ghost story?

Ans : Yes, this is a very good story with the most interesting storyline and plot. The plot has been inspired from a real life experience which makes it authentic. It has suspense, it is scary with ghosts walking in and out, but the best part is the humour. The story is not the stereotype one, it is funny and hilarious. It is very interesting to know that even ghosts get fed up of haunting and they are dragged out of their beds at all hours. This story is full of surprises and that is the best quality of a ghost story.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

1. Discuss the qualities of a ghost with your friends.

- | Write them down.
- | Read aloud in the class.



2. Imagine that an alien has landed near your house from Mars. It was little frightened in the beginning but you try your best to relax him. Conduct an interview with this alien asking atleast 10 questions that would be of interest to you. Imagine the answers and write down the complete question-answer session.



3. Answer the following questions briefly.

- (a) Do you believe in ghosts?
- (b) Do you think all ‘newly dead’ people become ghosts?
- (c) Are all ghosts scary?
- (d) Have you actually seen a ghost?
- (e) Do you think ghosts appear only at night?
- (f) Does your family believe in ghosts?



4. Compose a poem on the activities of a “Friendly Ghost.”

5. Find some words or expressions that would express our reactions to the world of ghosts?

Clue – haunted