

HOME LEARNING

English Home Learning Pack 13 – Year 10

Spoken Language

For this week's speaking and listening activity, you will be discussing Death. Have a discussion with a friend or family member using the following questions and information to guide your discussion.

- What do you know about the literary figure of Death?
- By what other name is Death known?
- What does the character do to people?
- How is death usually depicted? What features or items could you describe?

Reading

Appointment in Samarra by John O'Hara

A merchant of Baghdad was working in his garden one day, when he saw his favourite servant coming towards him. The servant's face was white, his hands were trembling, and his legs seemed scarcely to belong to him.

The merchant hurried to help. He led the poor man to a seat in the shade, fetched him water to drink from the fountain, then sat down beside him.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you ill?" The servant shook his head.

"What is it then? Tell me when you're ready."

At last the servant was able to speak. "Master," he said, "this morning you sent me down to the market to buy food for supper tonight."

The merchant nodded. "So I did. Was it in the market place that something frightened you?"

The man shuddered. "I saw Death standing there. She looked at me and stared so hard! Master, lend me a horse so that I can ride, far, far away, to a place where Death will not find me."

The merchant was fond of his servant, so he didn't argue. He said, "Take the best horse from my stable and ride to where you will. Stay there as long as you want. But where will you go?"

"I have a cousin who lives in Samarra," said the servant. "I'll go there. That's far enough away."

So, the merchant led the servant to the stable, and helped him saddle up his finest horse — for the man's hands were trembling far too much for him to be able to manage it on his own. He gave his servant food and money for the journey, and sent him on his way, galloping down the road to Samarra, where Death would not find him.

Then the merchant went down to the market place and found Death still standing there, among the scurrying crowds. He noticed that no one looked at her directly, and they all made a space around her as they hurried by.

The merchant was a wise man, and not afraid to meet Death face-to-face. He went straight up to her and asked: "Why did you terrify my servant so, when he came here this morning?"

Death smiled. "Did I frighten him?" she asked. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to stare. But I was just so surprised to see him here in Baghdad, when I am supposed to meet him tonight in Samarra.

Questions:

1. In what city is the story set?
2. What was the merchant doing at the start of the story?
3. Describe the relationship between the merchant and servant.
4. How is the servant described upon his return?
5. What was the merchant's first thought about what was wrong with his servant?
6. What was the servant doing for his master?
7. What did the man see in the market?
8. What does the servant want to do and why?
9. Why was the servant unable to prepare the horse himself?
10. What did the merchant do once the servant had left?
11. Explain the twist in your own words and explain why it is effective.

Writing

For your writing task, write a diary entry from the perspective of the servant. Explain what happened during his day and how it ended.

Remember to use the key features of a diary entry which are as follows:

- Follow a diary style (starting "Dear Diary...")
- Include the events in chronological order (the order in which they happened)
- Write in the first person (imagining you are the servant)
- Write in the past tense
- Include self-reflection (your thoughts and feelings)