

READING ACTIVITY

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KATHERINE MANSFIELD Short Stories

Read the excerpt from the short story *The Singing Lesson* and then do the activities below.



Miss Meadows walked down the cold corridors that led to the music hall carrying a little baton and feeling as if there was a sharp knife buried deep in her heart. Girls of all ages, with pink cheeks and happy faces, were running to school on a beautiful autumn morning. From the classrooms came the cheerful sound of young voices. Then a bell rang and a voice called, 'Muriel!'

The science teacher stopped Miss Meadows.

'Good morning,' she cried in her sweet, false voice. 'Isn't it cold? It seems like winter.'

Miss Meadows, still feeling the knife in her heart, stared in hatred at the science teacher. Everything about her was sweet and pale—like honey. You almost expected to see a bee caught in her yellow hair.

'It is quite cold,' said Miss Meadows, with no friendliness in her voice.

The science teacher smiled her sweet smile.

'You look frozen,' she said. Her blue eyes opened wide and there was an insulting light in them. 'Has she noticed anything about me?' thought Miss Meadows.

'Oh, it's not that bad,' said Miss Meadows, moving on down the corridor. Classes four, five and six were sitting in the music hall and the noise was deafening. Mary Beazley, who played the piano and was Miss Meadows' favourite pupil, was standing near it. When she saw Miss Meadows arriving, she gave a loud warning, 'Shush! Girls!' Miss Meadows walked to the music stand and put it in front of her. Then she tapped her baton twice on the music stand for silence.

'Silence, please!' She looked at no one in particular; she could see the sea of coloured blouses, pink faces and open music books. She knew perfectly what they were thinking. 'Miss Meadows has got a problem.' Well, let them think it! What could the thoughts of those girls possibly matter to someone whose heart was broken by such a letter as she had received!

...'I feel more and more strongly that our marriage would be a mistake. It's not that I don't love you. I love you as much as it is possible for me to love any woman. But I have come to the conclusion that I am not a man who can get



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married, and the idea of doing so fills me with but (disgust) regret...

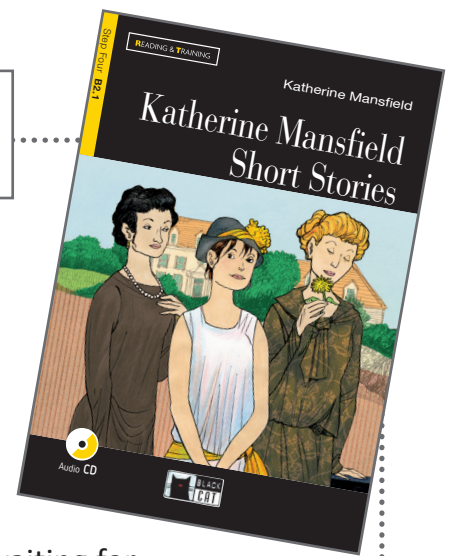
and the word “disgust” was rubbed out, but not completely, and “regret” was written over the top.

Basil!

Miss Meadows walked to the piano. Mary Beazley, who was waiting for this moment, bent forward as she whispered, ‘Good morning, Miss Meadows,’ and gave her teacher a beautiful yellow flower. She had given her music teacher a flower for over a term and a half. It was as much a part of the music lesson as opening the piano. But this morning, instead of taking the flower and putting it in her belt and saying, ‘Thank you, Mary. How very nice! Turn to page thirty-two,’ Miss Meadows ignored the flower, and with an icy voice she said, ‘Page fourteen, please.’

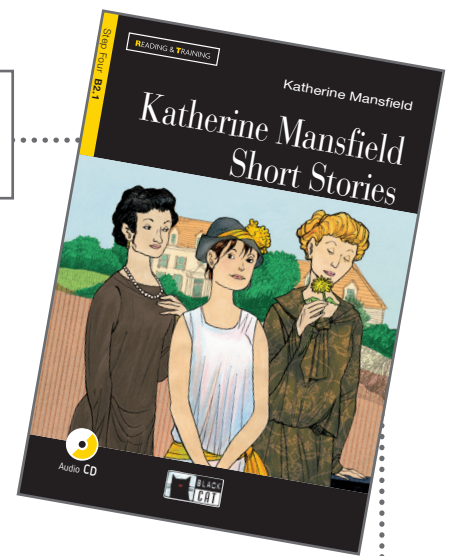
What a terrible moment! Mary blushed until there were tears in her eyes, but Miss Meadows had gone back to the music stand. Her voice could be heard through the music hall.

(From Part One)



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ACTIVITIES

1. Choose the correct answer – a, b or c.

1. What was Miss Meadows's job?

- a. She was a science teacher.
- b. She was a singer.
- c. She was a music teacher.

2. Which was the season at the time of the story?

- a. autumn
- b. spring
- c. winter

3. What did Miss Meadows feel in her heart?

- a. She felt sadness.
- b. She felt a knife.
- c. She felt hatred.

4. Who played the piano?

- a. Basil
- b. Mary Beazley
- c. Muriel

5. Why was Miss Meadows upset?

- a. She received a letter from her parents.
- b. She received a letter from the science teacher.
- c. She received a letter from her boyfriend.

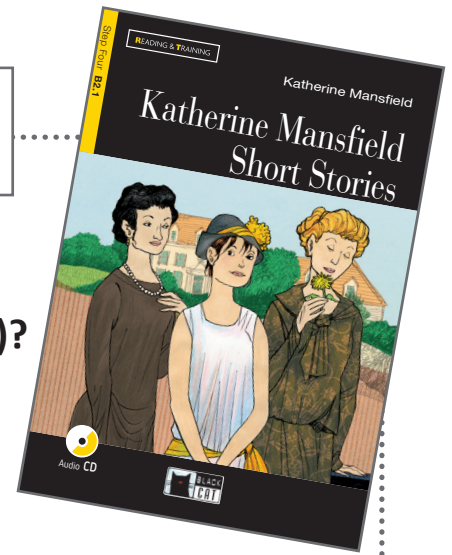
6. How did Mary Beazley feel before the music lesson?

- a. She blushed and had tears in her eyes.
- b. She was happy and ready to play the piano.
- c. She didn't want to sing.



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2. Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)?

Correct the false ones.

1. Miss Meadows ran down the corridor carrying a knife. T F

2. Miss Meadows didn't like the science teacher. T F

3. The science teacher had blue eyes and dark brown hair. T F

4. Mary Beazley warned the girls to be quiet before the music lesson. T F

5. Miss Meadows received a marriage proposal from Basil. T F

6. Miss Meadows took the yellow flower and put it in her belt. T F

7. The music lesson began on page fourteen. T F

