

Reading Comprehension

Text 1: Mr Fonseca: a very special teacher

The narrator recalls his sea voyage to England as a child.

His name was Mr Fonseca and he was travelling to England to be a teacher, I would visit him every few days. He knew passages from all kinds of books he could recite by heart, and he sat at his desk all day wondering about them, thinking what he could say about them. I knew scarcely a thing about the world of literature, but he welcomed me with unusual and interesting stories, stopping abruptly in mid-tale and saying that someday I should find out what happened after that. ‘You will like it I think. Perhaps he will find the eagle.’ Or, ‘They will escape the maze with the help of someone they are about to meet...’ Often, during the night, while stalking the adult world with Ramadhin and Cassius, I’d attempt to add to the bare bones of an adventure Mr Fonseca had left unfinished. [...]

I tried to coax him up on deck a few times, but his porthole and what he could see through it seemed enough nature for him. With his books [. . .] as well as a few family photographs, he had no need to leave his time capsule. I would visit that smoky room if the day was dull, and he would at some point begin reading to me. It was the anonymity of the stories and the poems that went deepest into me. And the curl of a rhyme was something new. I had not thought to believe he was actually quoting something written with care, in some far country, centuries earlier. He had lived in Colombo¹ all his life, and his manner and accent were a product of the island, but at the same time he had this wide-ranging knowledge of books. He’d sing a song from the Azores or recite lines from an Irish play.

I brought Cassius and Ramadhin to meet him. He had become curious about them, and he made me tell him of our adventures on the ship. He beguiled² them as well, especially Ramadhin. Mr Fonseca seemed to draw forth an assurance or a calming quality from the books he read. [...] Mr. Fonseca would not be a wealthy man. And it would be a spare life³ he would be certain to lead as a schoolteacher in some urban location. But he had a serenity that came with the choice of the life he wanted to live. And this serenity and certainty I have seen only among those who have the armour of books close by.

Michael Ondaatje, *The Cat’s Table*, 2011.

1. Colombo = capital of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon).

2. beguiled = charmed.

3. a spare life = a simple life.

Text 2: Fridays at the cinema

Together they focused on the film.

Pembe watched *The Kid* with wide-open eyes, the look of surprise on her countenance deepening with each scene. When Chaplin found an abandoned baby in a rubbish bin, and raised him like his own son, she smiled with appreciation. When the child flung stones at the neighbours' windows so that the tramp—disguised as a glazier—could fix them and earn some money, she chuckled. When social services took the boy away, her eyes welled up with tears. And, finally, as father and son were reunited, her face lit up with contentment, and a trace of something that Elias took to be melancholy. So absorbed did she seem in the film that he felt a twinge of resentment. What a funny thing it was to be jealous of Charlie Chaplin.

Elias observed her as she unpinned her hair, and then pinned it back. He caught a whiff of jasmine and rose, a heady, charming mixture. Only minutes before the film came to an end, he found the nerve to reach out for her fingers, feeling like a teenager on his first date. To his relief, she didn't move her hand away. They sat still—two sculptures carved out of the dark, both scared of making a move that would disrupt the tenderness of the moment.

When the lights came back on, it took them a few seconds to grow accustomed to real life. Quickly, he took out a notepad and wrote down the name of another cinema in another part of the town. "Next week, same day, same time, will you come?"

"Yes", she faltered.

Before he'd found a chance to say anything else, Pembe leaped to her feet and headed towards the exit, running away from him and everything that had taken place between them, or would have taken place, had they been different people. She held in her palm the name of the place they were to meet next time, grasping it tightly, as if it were the key to a magic world, a key she would use right now were it in her power to decide.

And so it began. They started to meet every Friday at the same time, and occasionally on other afternoons. They frequented the Phoenix more than any other place, but they also met at several other cinemas, all far-away from their home, all unpopular. [. . .] In time he found out more things about her, pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that he would complete only long after she had gone. [. . .]

Slowly he was beginning to make sense of the situation. This unfathomable, almost enigmatic attraction that he felt for her, a woman so alien to the life he had led, was like a childhood memory coming back.

Elif Shafak, *Honour*, 2012.

Text 1:

1- Pick out three of Mr Fonseca’s activities during the voyage. Say what they have in common.

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2- Which four adjectives best correspond to Mr Fonseca’s personality? Justify each with a quotation from the text.

kind – selfish – captivating – pedantic – serene – knowledgeable – boring – self-centred

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3- Why does the narrator visit Mr Fonseca? Choose the two statements that are correct and justify with a quotation for each.

1. They know the same authors.

2. Mr Fonseca is teaching him to read.

3. Mr Fonseca’s stories fascinate him.

4. Mr Fonseca is interested in the narrator’s life.

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4- Say whether the following statement is **right** or **wrong**.

“Mr Fonseca’s goal is likely to have a prestigious career.” Justify your answer with two quotations.

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Text 2:

5- What do the two characters do together? Where and Why?

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6- “Together they focused on the film.” (l. 1) Explain briefly why this sentence is not **equally** true for both characters.

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7- “to his relief, she didn’t move her hand away.”
“Pembe leaped to her feet and headed towards the exit, running from him ...”

Explain in a few words the change in the woman’s attitude.

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8- What does Elias like about Pembe? Choose the two statements that are correct and justify your choice with quotations from the text.

1. She is attractive.
2. She is assertive.
3. She is different from him.
4. She is funny.

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9- “... they also met at several other cinemas, all far-away from their homes, all unpopular.” Why do you think they choose places that are distant from their homes? Answer briefly in your own words.

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Both texts

10- What do the characters’ relationships have in common in both documents? Give three elements.

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11- Show how in both documents each of the characters has something to offer the other(s).

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12- In each document what differences or obstacles could keep the characters apart?

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Writing:

Choose ONE of the following topics: A (1 +2) OR B (300 words)

- A- 1. Pembe writes in her diary about her special relationship with Elias. Imagine the entry. (150 words)
2. How can differences between people enrich their relationships? (150 words)
- B- Art brings people together. Discuss. (300 words)