**Short Story Openings**

Read the following openings to various short stories. Then do the tasks that follow.

A "Get away! Get away! Get out of here!"

She came at us, swinging something. It struck the side of the shed – there was a metallic sound – and then her screaming again.

"--out of here—I’ll kill—"

The others were ahead of me. I ran, whimpering with fear.

*The Giant Woman*, Joyce Carol Oates

B Inside the car it was quiet, the noise of the engine even and subdued, the air just the right temperature, the windows tight-fitting. The boy sat on the back seat, a box of chocolates, unopened, beside him, and a comic, folded. The trim Sussex landscape flowed past the windows: cows, white-fenced fields, highly-priced period houses.

*Next Term We’ll Mash You*, Penelope Lively

C My mother was making me a dress. All through the month of November I would come home from school and find her in the kitchen, surrounded by cut-up red velvet and scraps of tissue-paper pattern. She worked at an old treadle machine pushed up against the window to get the light, and also to let her look out, past the stubble fields and bare vegetable garden, to see who went by on the road. There was seldom anybody to see.

*Red Dress – 1946*, Alice Munro

D A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees.

*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, Ambrose Bierce

E Dr Khanna was easily the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the University of Wisconsin. Personally, he considered himself to be the finest of all physicists, immigrant or native. He was also among the dozen or so best-dressed men on the campus.

*The Only American From Our Village*, Arun Joshi

F One day Miss Smith asked James what a baby horse was called and James couldn’t remember. He blinked and shook his head. He knew, he explained, but he just couldn’t remember. Miss Smith said:

"Well, well, James Machen doesn’t know what a baby horse is called."

She said it very loudly so that everyone in the classroom heard. James became very confused. He blinked and said:

"Pony, Miss Smith?"

"Pony! James Machen says a baby horse is a pony! Hands up everyone who knows what a baby horse is."

All the right arms in the room, except James’s and Miss Smith’s, shot upwards. Miss Smith smiled at James.

*Miss Smith*, William Trevor

G Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the ground floor and helped him off with his overcoat than the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest. It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also. But Miss Kate and Miss Julia had thought of that and had converted the bathroom upstairs into a ladies' dressing-room. Miss Kate and Miss Julia were there, gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come.

*The Dead*, James Joyce

H A telegram arrived out of the blue. Come for the weekend, Hubert’s message read, and I remember the excitement I felt because I valued his friendship more than anyone else’s. I had no money for the train journey and had to raise the matter with my father. "It’s hard to come by these days," my father said, giving me only what he could easily spare. I increased it playing rummy with McCaddy the courthouse clerk, who had a passion for the game.

*Family Sins*, William Trevor

I Now that the boys are grown up and Rob is dead, Lois has moved to a condominium apartment in one of the newer waterfront developments. She is relieved not to have to worry about the lawn, or about the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic …

*Death by Landscape*, Margaret Attwood

**Tasks**

1. Which story is about:

* 1. a man being hanged?
	2. a fierce old woman who dislikes children?
	3. a sarcastic, bullying schoolteacher?
	4. a widow living by herself?
	5. a young boy on a car journey?
	6. a vain Indian scientist who works at an American university?
	7. a woman’s memories of her mother?
	8. a visit to a good friend?
	9. a big house party?

2. Which stories begin with a description of the setting (place, time, weather etc.)?

3. Which stories begin with dialogue?

4. Which stories begin in the middle of an event (in medias res)?

5. Which stories begin with a description of a person?

6. Which story (or stories) makes you most curious to read on? Why?

7. In which stories is the narrator a character? Is it a 1st person or 3rd person narrator?

8. Which stories are told by a 3rd person narrator? Is the narrator an omniscient, a personal/limited or an objective 3rd person narrator?

9. What is the most common verb tense used in the stories? (Which story uses the present tense? Does it do anything to the text?)

10. Look at the opening of story F. What do we learn about Miss Smith’s character in this brief excerpt? How do we learn this?