

TEXT	<i>THE THIRD MISS SYMONS</i>
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THEMES	All in the Mind (Unit 3), Telling Stories (Unit 7), We are Family (Unit 11)
VOCABULARY	Family relationships, feelings, personality.
WRITING	Students write about family events in their country.
SPEAKING	Students discuss which activities are best done alone or with others.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Flora MacDonald Mayor (1872–1932) was an English writer and actor. She also published under the pseudonym of Mary Strafford. Educated at Newnham College, Cambridge, she became a highly respected writer and thinker and was admired by contemporaries such as John Masefield and MR James. Her novel *The Rector's Daughter* (1924) has been described as one of the neglected masterpieces of 20th century British fiction.

WARMER

Ask students to work in pairs and describe the picture. They should think about the relationship between the boy and the girl, what they are doing and how they feel. Ask them if they think the age difference is important and open up the discussion to asking them whether brothers and sisters usually get on with older and younger siblings.

ABOUT YOU

You might want to teach the word *siblings* and explain that it is very useful when we want to talk about brothers and sisters, as it can refer to both. The questions focus on experiences of being in large and small families and invite students to reflect on relationships between siblings and age differences in families. If you prefer a more generalized discussion, ask students how they think family life is different around the world – is the idea of family more important in some cultures than others? What about the attitude to older relatives? Some of the ideas discussed might be used in the writing activity.

1 The others have a close sibling or are happy being alone whereas Henrietta doesn't, and isn't. She also seems different in character (her temper) and physically (she grew quickly, unlike her sisters). She is different in the way that she feels alone and neglected.

2 **Suggested answers**

1 Probably because they didn't feel a need to – they all have their close friends and interests, which don't really include her. The fact that she is a bit 'different' (as explored in the gist reading question) could mean they are not comfortable when she's around. We might also speculate that in a fairly large family, it's easy for people to think it's somebody else's responsibility to be nice to someone.

- 2 Ask for suggestions – it's an interesting observation that she prefers to be in an 'inferior' position, this could be something positive – that she wants to learn, she wants an example or role-model, or it could be negative – that she lacks self-confidence and wants someone to guide her.
- 3 Perhaps because she suddenly felt close to him and wanted to strengthen that feeling by telling him a secret.
- 4 The fact he's a chatterbox suggests he might, but as he's not very interested in Henrietta, maybe he'll forget all about their conversation – something important to her might mean nothing to him and would be consistent with the lack of attention paid to Henrietta.

VOCABULARY

3

Answers

- 1 superior
- 2 grumbling
- 3 inferior
- 4 admitted

4

Answers

- 1 It took Terry a long time to fit in at the new school.
- 2 The novel is about imaginary people.
- 3 Our team resolved to win the league last year.
- 4 My friend Alain is such a chatterbox.

WRITING

5 It might be a good idea to brainstorm ideas and suggestions with the whole class. Make sure students are thinking about general traditions rather than specific family ones – e.g. a public holiday where people meet up with their family, rather than the fact a family goes on a picnic to celebrate someone's birthday. Point out that the letter / email format is fairly informal in terms of opening and signing off, but that the content is a neutral register. It is sometimes the case that students try and write in what they think is an 'informal' register when the writing task is actually expository.

SPEAKING

6 With this kind of activity, it is important that students make their own evaluation of the task before discussing their ideas in a group, otherwise there is a tendency to defer to the stronger or more assertive participants. Ensure everyone is participating when you are monitoring the groups. Clarify that the general discussion leads to the group agreeing on the three best activities to do together and alone.

MIXED ABILITY

In the speaking activity, you can begin by asking students to spend three or four minutes preparing what they are going to say about ONE of the topics. Stronger students don't really need this, but weaker students can gain confidence by having some ideas and notes they can talk about. This means that everyone gets to speak initially and fosters participation in the more open-ended discussion that follows.