

# Carapace

## Pre-reading

### Characterisation

Before you read the story, answer these questions about it. Work in small groups and use your answers to build a simple narrative. Be prepared to share your ideas with others in the class.

1. The narrator of the story has a boyfriend called Vijay. What does he look like?

2. How, and where, did the narrator and Vijay first meet?

3. What does Vijay do for a job?

4. Where do they live?

5. Who is Mr Anura Perera and why might he be seen as a threat to the narrator?



6. What does the narrator's mother think of Anura Perera? What does she want to happen between him and her daughter?

7. What does the narrator want for her future? Is it likely?

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### Characterisation

#### The Narrator and Vijay

1. The narrator is a young woman whose family are trying to arrange her marriage for her. They want her to marry a man called Anura Perera, who she has never met. However, she has a boyfriend called Vijay. In the following conversation she is trying to tell Vijay what is happening. Complete the dialogue by putting the best answer (Vijay's reactions and replies) into the blank lines.

Anura Perera is coming over tonight. *Amma* - my mother - says I ought to take him seriously. I told Vijay about it.

☞

Do you know who Anura Perera is?

☞

He's coming to see me because he is interested in me and he has serious intentions. He lives in Australia!

☞

Yes! I said. Anura Perera has a dollar job, a Sydney house, and an Australian ticket.

☞

That wasn't what I had come to tell him at all.

#### Vijays reactions and replies

☞ So what are you saying? Vijay laughed. You are going to marry this prick with a foreign job?

☞ Is that what you've come to tell me?

☞ He shook his head, no. Then he laughed, So he's looking for a Lankan wife?

☞ So?

☞ Vijay grinned and said nothing. That's the way with Vijay.

Now answer these questions:

1. Can you describe Vijay's attitude to the news the narrator is bringing?
2. 'That wasn't what I had come to tell him.' What do you think she had come to tell him? (*Keep this question in mind as you look at the next dialogue*)

2. Now look at this second dialogue. Here all the lines except the first are mixed up. Try to work out the most logical order, bearing in mind that some are questions and others possible answers.

**What are we going to do? I asked. I wanted to know what he really felt for me.**

About us, I said. What are we going to do?

But you like movies, he said.

About what?

He said, There's an American film at the Majestic.

I told him we've got to sort things out. Going to the pictures won't solve anything.

He comes straight out with what he thinks. But I must have looked worried; he leaned forward. What is it you want to know then? he asked, touching my hand.

*Now answer these questions:*

1. When she says 'about us', what precisely is she referring to?
2. Look at your answer to question 1. Is she talking about short or long term effects?
3. Is Vijay talking about short term or long term effects?
4. How do you think a) she feels and b) he feels after dialogues 1 and 2?
5. Now look at question 2 of the previous dialogue. What is your answer now?

3. *Now look at some descriptions of Vijay. Complete the text by adding words from the box. You should use a dictionary to look up the words in the box before attempting the exercise.*

Only the next day I discovered he is the cook at the Beach Hut. He is older than me; tall and long and always smiling. He has such a \_\_\_\_\_ of hair and is so \_\_\_\_\_. He never eats! He says he likes to see his food eaten by other people. To watch his customers, his friends, grow \_\_\_\_\_ and happy. He says there is nothing he likes better than to \_\_\_\_\_ his pan of squid in front of the ocean. His face is big and square like a \_\_\_\_\_ box stretched over with skin; his lips barely keep his teeth in and he always seems about to \_\_\_\_\_ into a laugh. And when he does the whole sea seems to \_\_\_\_\_ up. The beach is so lovely with him.

bony	stir	crease	burst	skinny	mop	fat
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*Now answer these questions:*

1. Why is Vijay so skinny?
2. What is Vijay's job?
3. How attractive is he to look at? Why?
4. What does the narrator think about him?

4. Here is one more description of Vijay. Read it and answer the questions which follow.

It is so easy for him. He doesn't see anything. There are no problems, no hang-ups. He's not like the other guys around here, always trying something on. He comes straight out with what he thinks. But I must have looked worried; he leaned forward. What is it you want to know then? he asked, touching my hand. He has such a light touch. His fingernails are like sea-shells, slightly pink, with little half-moons peeping out. When he touches my hand with his fingers I feel tremendous and I want to go on like this for ever, just drinking coffee together and looking at the sea.

1. According to the narrator, why is Vijay unique?
2. Can you connect the title of the story 'Carapace' with the final sentence of this extract?



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### Characterisation

#### The narrator and her mother

**In societies where these practices are common, who usually organises the arranged marriages?**

1. What other example of traditional behaviour does the mother (*Amma*) show in the following excerpt?

*Amma* has been having palpitations; I know she has been rushing around all over the place arranging everything, her breasts heaving with excitement. She is so anxious, but it's no accident that this first meeting is happening tonight; she would have consulted her astrologer. She wouldn't have taken any risks! It must be the most auspicious day of the month.

2. In the following excerpt about *Amma*, the narrator is imagining what her mother will say to Anura Perera, the man she is supposed to marry, when they meet that evening.

What she wants to say is . . . Good evening Mr Perera, so pleased to meet you. Do come and take my daughter away; transform her world with your brilliance - and your nice fat bank account. Give her a modern house, a big car, fancy clothes, shoes she can afford to throwaway after every party. Give her expensive things, and by-the-by your unswerving respect, and all will be well. She will be an asset to your career, a pearl in your crown. Just take her Mr Perera, please take her to Australia away from here, and don't forget her mother . . .  
*Anura.*"

What:

- a) will *Amma's* daughter get if she marries Mr Perera?
- b) will Mr Perera get if he marries *Amma's* daughter?
- c) will *Amma* get from the arrangement?

3. **What do you think the narrator thinks about this world her mother is trying to create for her?** Write here a single sentence – as if written by the narrator – to say what you think she feels.

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

Now read what she has to say. How does it differ from your idea?

When *Amma* talks to me I see a whole new world. I don't think Vijay could even imagine it. He would just laugh.

4. **Discussion:** The narrator is obviously 'pulled' in two directions – by her feelings for Vijay and her respect for her mother. Look at the following extract, which is an admission by the narrator, and decide what you think she wants from Vijay and her mother.

I suppose I should make a fuss and ask her: Do I have a choice in all this? But I don't want to choose. I hate choosing

