

# Ullswater

## Pre-Reading

### Characterisation

#### Victor, Senaka and Ranjit

Victor is the narrator of the story. He is visiting Ranjit, his nephew in England. They are at the pub, having a conversation about Senaka, who is Ranjit's father and Victor's brother. During the conversation, Victor talks about when he and Ranjit's father were younger.

Read the description first and try to fill in the blanks choosing the correct word from the box provided below.

afford	as	books	back	children	could	days	different	
examining	for	full	him	it	infatuation	library	near	of
ran	repulsed	struggle	think	this	the	tiny	was	were

When we were 1 he was the one who always seemed to be 2 the world bit by bit; searching as it were, 3 something that would redeem it. Maybe, it was because 4 our mother: she was so ill – so distant- although I 5 her problems really started only after his birth.

He 6 a great reader, your father; he read everything he 7 lay his hands on. The second-hand bookshop on Junction Road 8 our house was heaven for him. Those days it 9 a pay-as-you-read library service. You could buy a dozen 10 for a rupee and after reading sell them 11 for fifty cents, or something, a week later. In 12 way most of England's literature passed through his hands. 13 he grew older the number of books he could 14 to keep also grew and he began his own 15, which he stacked up in precarious columns in his 16 room . From these books he learned about England in extraordinary detail. 17 became the country of his dreams rich, fertile, 18 of a kind of tubby valour.

I was 20, I was older than him: I was appalled at his 19 with England: as an earnest young man I told 21 England was an occupying power that had to be 22. A blight on the spirit of freedom. In those 23 I was equally dismayed by our political leadership: at 24 time it seemed so uninspired. I wished we 25 in India where there was so much more of a 26. Some fight, some idealism.

Now listen to the extract and see if you were right. (audio extract: [ullswater seneka](#))

Now read the passage and answer the questions:

When we were children he was the one who always seemed to be examining the world bit by bit; searching, as it were, for something that would redeem it. Maybe, it was because of our mother: she was so ill – so distant- although I think her problems really started only after his birth.

He was a great reader, your father; he read everything he could lay his hands on. The second-hand bookshop on Junction Road near our house was heaven for him. Those days it ran a pay-as-you-read library service. You could buy a dozen books for a rupee and after reading sell them back for fifty cents, or something, a week later. In this way most of England's literature passed through his hands. As he grew older the number of books he could afford to keep also grew and he began his own library, which he stacked up in precarious columns in his tiny room. From these books he learned about England in extraordinary detail. It became the country of his dreams rich, fertile, full of a kind of tubby valour.

I was different, I was older than him: I was appalled at his infatuation with England: as an earnest young man I told him England was an occupying power that had to be repulsed. A blight on the spirit of freedom. In those days I was equally dismayed by our political leadership: at the time it seemed so uninspired. I wished we were in India where there was so much more of a struggle. Some fight, some idealism.

1. What did Senaka like doing?
2. Can you explain what “a pay- as- you- read library service” was?
3. Which country did Senaka dream of and why?
4. Why was the narrator different from Senaka?
5. Who was the elder of the two brothers?
6. What did the narrator think about England?
7. Why do you think Victor says: “As an earnest young man...” using that particular adjective “earnest”?
8. “A blight on the spirit of freedom”. Try to explain this sentence using your own words.

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#### Senaka and Victor's ideas on life

Victor and Senaka are brothers, but they have different ideas about life. Read the descriptions below. Which adjectives would you use to describe Victor and Senaka's personalities?

What are their opinions about the following:

love	politics	Books and poetry	England
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Victor, describing Senaka

He became such a conservative – that was the thing. It was as if, having found your mother, nothing else mattered to him. While people like me ran around vainly trying to shape a new society, he preferred to sit in his garden and watch his flowers grow, or read his books of faraway places in the light of a yellow desk lamp and dream of another world. I really couldn't understand it at the time.

I was appalled at his infatuation with England

Victor, talking about the love match between Sonia and Senaka.

...I can't say I understand how these things happen. I could never let go of myself like that; I always thought you should find yourself first before you embraced someone else, a stranger.

Victor, talking about the political climate of the day

While I measured each day's news against our goal of self-government he compared new verse, fresh as apples from England, to the Lake Poets he'd committed to memory.

Then came the war...For me it was heady stuff, but when he and I met it was as if nothing were happening in the world. Even when they dropped the atom bomb he said nothing.

I wished we were in India where there was so much more of a struggle.

Think about yourself and the people in your family.  
Who do you get on well with? Why? What things do you do together?

Is there anybody in your family who is very different? In what way?

Tell your partner.

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#### Sonia, Senaka and Victor

During the story, we find out that Senaka's wife, Sonia, left him. She wrote a letter to Victor to inform him that she had left her husband and to suggest that he should help Senaka who was in trouble. So Victor decided to meet Senaka.

Read what they thought of each other at the meeting.

This is what Victor says about his brother:

...I wanted to renew our frayed family ties.....He was my brother and I had done nothing for him. It was not right.....I came to help. What are we if we don't help each other?....

But when they meet, this is what Senaka says to his brother:

...You always thought I was bloody useless.....A lackey. A sponge.....You hated me for intruding, for being born, for being me. For not being one of you. You thought it was all my bloody fault .....What the hell do you want? Why did you come?

What can you say about their relationship?

Why do you think Senaka's reaction to Victor's visit is so harsh?