

# Visiting Time

## Characterisation

### The Narrator

I had it all worked out. I'll tell you the truth, I've never been a liar. I'm six-foot six on the left. On the right I'm six-foot four. Broke my leg in a motorbike accident in the sixties, riding pillion. I walk on the slant but I have the advantage of height, which is handy when you're planning on killing a man.

pillion: a motorbike passenger

1. What type of information are you given about the narrator in the paragraph above?

1.1. Physical \_\_\_\_\_

1.2. Psychological \_\_\_\_\_

2. What possible reasons can you think of why he would want to kill a man?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

3.

I never told my wife. I try to keep her in the dark, like if there's a programme on TV about murder, I'll tear the page from the *Radio Times*.

Before I entered the prison, I went to church across the road and said a small prayer

There's things flashing through my brain, all the traumas, like how when I was a kid my best mate was killed by a lion.

**Read the three extracts above.** Then decide which adjectives below you would choose to characterise the narrator. Explain your choice. Can you add any adjectives of your own?

VIOLENT	KIND	HORRIBLE	AGGRESSIVE	SYMPATHETIC
CONSIDERATE			SENSIBLE	INDIFFERENT
CONCERNED		SELF-CONSCIOUS		INSENSITIVE
FEARFUL	LOVING		RUTHLESS	

4.

The brain can only take so much and then it goes crash. All the teachers told us, honesty is the best policy, crime don't pay, and all about the coming of the second prophet. They was all lies; I wish I could sue 'em. If I'd brought up my kids the way the Krays brought up theirs, perhaps we'd be rich. Instead of that, you remain nobody and John ends up getting murdered and John's nothing, but the murderer's likely to come out and be found a respectable job and everything that goes with it.

Krays: Infamous London criminals (1960s)

No I'm sorry, no I forgive you, no call for the protest either way. I feel a huge weight lift off me, like I've jumped ten feet in the air or won a race. 'I've come to let you know we exist, Valerie and me,' I say soaring.

**Look through the two extracts above and copy the phrases/sentences which match the feelings and attitudes indicated below, on the right.**

_____	<b>Regret</b>
_____	<b>Relief</b>
_____	<b>Disappointment</b>
_____	<b>Anger</b>
_____	<b>Revenge</b>
_____	<b>Revolt</b>

5.

I never laid a finger, but in a way my hand's still round his throat. I went in there to kill a man, and to my way of thinking that's what I did: He won't rest in peace. If that's been done properly, telling him how it's been for Valerie and me, then he's gonna wake up in a bit of a sweat now and then, and turn to find me lying there beside him.

**Explain how the narrator's closing words, above, can be said to reveal a totally different man from that in the first lines of the story.**

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## Characterisation

### The Narrator and his Family

**A. Read the following extract and answer the questions:**

...and that's where I was working right up to when we lost Johnny.

1. Who do you think Johnny is?
2. What possible circumstances can explain the *loss* that is referred to in the text?

**B. Now, read the following passage attentively, then fill in the chart below**

“(...) Then the police came. Valerie collapsed in the kitchen, chipped two tiles. She's got asthma and they had to call an ambulance. Jane, our daughter started screaming and ran upstairs. Our son Peter, who's eight years old, was asleep. I had to go and wake him up. I didn't know what to say to him. I half lied. I said would he go to the hospital with his mum. I said John was there and he was unwell.”

**The narrator and his family**

	What you know	What you don't know	What you would like to know
Valerie			
Jane			
Peter			

3. **The different elements of the family reacted in different ways towards John's death.** In your opinion, what is the narrator's reaction?

# Visiting Time

## Characterisation

### Luke Slater, Murderer

1.

I had it all worked out. I'm six foot on the left...

At this moment, the narrator sets eyes on the murderer, and he gives away his personal impression of the murderer. Read the following passage, and note down all the words/phrases the narrator uses to characterise the murderer.

I had it all worked out. I'm six-foot six on the left, on the right I'm six-foot four. It was smaller by four inches. I could knock it out in a matter of minutes. There's two pressure points in your throat that if you have a go at with enough force you can kill a man before there's time to pull you off, or at least do it brain damage. When I entered the governor's office, the murderer sat back, mister clever and it looked pretty smart, scrubbed shirt and navy blue jumper and short-cut hair and I tell you on the quick who it looked like, you ever seen that O'Sullivan, the very fast snooker player? It looked close to him - and his father was a murderer too, funny enough.

See what I mean, all the stupidity of life? The things you think of. I can be sitting there talking and my wife will say, Do you want a tea or coffee, simple as that. And I have to say, Hang on hang on hang on, what was that again? And she says it three or four times and I'm trying to sort the words out, because inside I'm thinking, 'John is dead.'

I blinked. The light was one of them bright ones, fluorescent, which cut shadows in its face. It was pushed back in its chair, one leg on its knee, small and cocky like. It's not much to look at, narrow shouldered and smirking while it waits for me to say something. I don't say nothing. Its neck's where I'm looking. I'm looking so hard I think I can see its pulse. There's a thud in my wrists and this beat in its neck and I'm still undecided, which way to go? It stops smirking. It shifts in its chair. Suddenly I see my calculations are wrong, I could do its windpipe in half the time or hammer its head on the wall, which is pale and glossy green, like was used in the hospitals. I feel enormous, like a giant, and the bigger I feel, the smaller it looks until I see that it's nothing really, nothing at all, just a badly sewn boy of no fixed identity. I can feel its heart fluttering, its breath sucking in and out and I think, Yeah: at the end of the day that's all it comes down to, the blood going round. I see that it doesn't take much to kill a man. This much we both know.

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2. What had life been like for the murderer before the murder, and what will the consequences of his actions be? Use quotes from the text.

I feel a huge weight lift off me, like I've jumped ten feet in the air or won a race. 'I've come to let you know we exist, Valerie and me,' I say, soaring. He does a shrug. 'Mr Garrison,' he says, 'you don't understand, I've had it hard too.' He fiddles with the hem of his shirt. 'My life wasn't easy neither.' I let that one settle, then I tell him how I sometimes imagine John is in Australia, how every year I sign his name on it Christmas card and give it to my wife and each thing I say pushes him back in his chair. I'm landing them on him one after another. He says feebly, 'It ain't over for me either, like how am I going to find a job when I get out?' He shifts and his eyes flit about. He tries to get one over by saying about some bloodstains the police never found.-I said, You've killed my son and I've shaken your hand. I said, Do you really think there's anything else you can do to see me blow my lid? After that we sit in silence. Then he pushes his chin out and says, 'I'm sorry, Mr Garrison,' like he's wheedling to his father. I say, 'It's too late for that.' When I shake his hand at the end of the visit I feel the small bones of his fingers chafe against each other. His eyes are round and frightened.

Before	After

3. Look at the information you gathered on the table above. Is there any reason why the boy should have done what he did?

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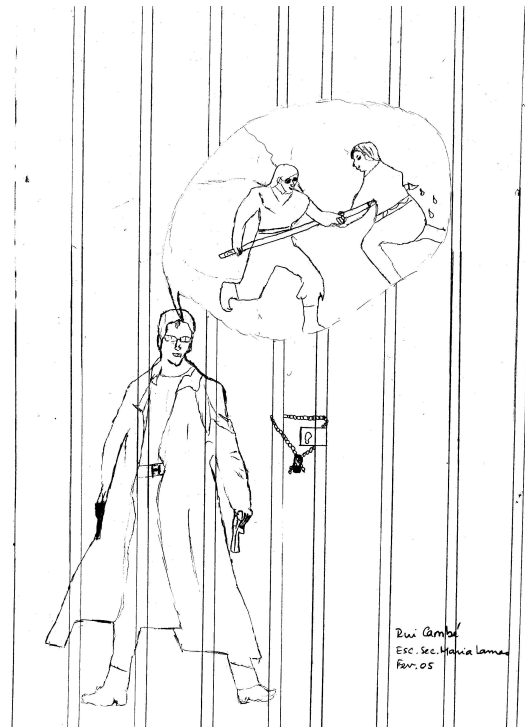
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by Rui Cambé, ES Maria Lamas, Torres Novas

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## Characterisation

### The narrator and Luke Slater

1. a) Read this excerpt from the story which gives a description of Luke Slater.

When I entered the governor’s office, the murderer sat back, mister clever and it looked pretty smart, scrubbed shirt and navy blue jumper and short-cut hair .....

Now, the following excerpts present some descriptions of the narrator and Luke Slater who continues to be referred to as “it”.

I had it all worked out. I’ll tell you the truth, I’ve never been a liar. I’m six-foot six on the left. On the right I’m six-foot four. Broke my leg in a motorbike accident in the sixties, riding pillion. I walk on the slant but I have the advantage of height, which is handy when you’re planning on killing a man.  
As I saw it, if I went into the prison and I knew roughly how tall I was, and if I could get my hands in the correct position, get my thumbs fast enough under its chin, I could break its neck.

Before I entered the prison, I went to a church across the road and said a small prayer

All the teachers told us, honesty is the best policy, crime don’t pay, .....They was all lies

Now fill in the table:

	Narrator	Murderer/Luke Slater
Physical Description		
Psychological Description		

**b) The use of the pronoun “it” referring to Luke Slater reveals the narrator’s feelings towards this character.**

Do you agree with this statement? Why?/why not?

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**2. In one or two sentences write, in your own words, the physical and psychological description of the narrator. Do the same for Luke Slater.**

The narrator \_\_\_\_\_

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Luke Slater \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. Taking into account what happened to the narrator’s friend when he was a child:**

There’s things flashing through my brain, all the traumas, like how when I was kid my best mate was killed by a lion. It sounds funny, but it ain’t so funny. The teachers said we could off around the zoo, so we went to the lion enclosure. We came up the wooden steps and the chicken wire that keep kids away was all open, Alan, Jony and Tony got through the wire, but I couldn’t get through, I was too big, so they told me to sit there and look after the luggage. I sat on the school bags and watched them through the fence. The boys swung on ropes that lifted the that opened a sheet into the lion’s den. Tony crawled through. I’ll never forget. He died in hospital. We were ten years old. There’s one loss.

**and what later happened to his own son:**

While this was going on, our son tried to defend his friends. He stepped forward and was stabbed directly in the heart. And he staggered over to a lady who was sitting in a car waiting for a friend and asked her to help me, please help me and told her he'd been stabbed and fell to the ground.

**decide how well he accepted his losses. Did he have enough reason to kill Luke Slater? Why? / Why not?**

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**4. After reading the following extracts, comment on how John's murder is perceived by the narrator and by Luke Slater.**

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See what I mean, all the stupidity of life? The things you think of. I can be sitting there talking and my wife will say, Do you want a tea or coffee, simple as that. And I have to say, Hang on hang on hang on, what was that again? And she says it three or four times and I'm trying to sort the words out, because inside I'm thinking, 'John is dead.'

He does a shrug. 'Mr Garrison,' he says, 'you don't understand, I've had it hard too.' He fiddles with the hem of his shirt. 'My life wasn't easy neither.' I let that one settle, then I tell him how I sometimes imagine John is in Australia, how every year I sign his name on it Christmas card and give it to my wife and each thing I say pushes him back in his chair. I'm landing them on him one after another. He says feebly, 'It ain't over for me either, like how am I going to find a job when I get out?' He shifts and his eyes flit about. He tries to get one over by saying about some bloodstains the police never found