

Read with a Purpose Read “The Open Window” to discover how a family story affects a nervous visitor.

The Open Window

by **Saki**

Literary Focus

Characterization The author, Saki, directly characterizes the young lady when he writes that she is “a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen.” *Self-possessed* means “composed” or “in control of one’s feelings or actions.” Once you know this information, you can look for ways that her actions support this characterization.

Literary Focus

Characterization Through his sister’s words, we learn that Framton has a nervous personality and tends to isolate himself and mope around.

“My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel,” said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; “in the meantime you must try and put up with me.”

Framton Nuttel endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much toward helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

“I know how it will be,” his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; “you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice.”

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

“Do you know many of the people round here?” asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

“Hardly a soul,” said Framton. “My sister was staying here, at the rectory,¹ you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here.”

1. **rectory:** house in which the minister of a parish lives.



Analyzing Visuals

Viewing and Interpreting After reading the story, describe how this girl reminds you of Vera.

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

“Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?” pursued the self-possessed young lady.

“Only her name and address,” admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An undefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

“Her great tragedy happened just three years ago,” said the child; “that would be since your sister’s time.”

“Her tragedy?” asked Framton; somehow, in this restful country spot, tragedies seemed out of place.

“You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon,” said the niece, indicating a large French window² that opened onto a lawn.

2. **French window:** pair of doors that have glass panes from top to bottom and open in the middle.

Reading Focus

Making Inferences You can infer from his “tone of distinct regret” that Framton isn’t thrilled about having to meet new people.

Reading Focus

Making Connections The character of the aunt may remind you of other characters from television, movies, or books. Many stories have a character who wants something so badly that he or she has lost touch with reality.

Literary Focus

Characterization Notice Vera's and Framton's reactions to the creepy story of the missing family members. Vera shudders, and Framton is uncomfortable.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton, "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favorite snipe-shooting³ ground, they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back someday, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing, 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window——"

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you menfolk, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton, it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk onto a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the

3. **snipe-shooting:** A snipe is a kind of bird that lives in swampy areas.

open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

“The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise,” announced Framton, who labored under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one’s ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. “On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement,” he continued.

“No?” said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Framton was saying.

“Here they are at last!” she cried. “Just in time for tea, and don’t they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!”

Framton shivered slightly and turned toward the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn toward the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: “I said, Bertie, why do you bound?”

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

“Here we are, my dear,” said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window, “fairly muddy, but most of it’s dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?”

“A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel,” said Mrs. Sappleton; “could only talk about his illnesses and dashed off without a word of goodbye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost.”

Reading Focus

Making Judgments Using the information Saki gives us, we can make the judgment that Framton is a bit of a bore, going on and on about his health.

Reading Focus

Making Judgments Now that we know more about the situation, it is time to adjust our judgment about Mrs. Sappleton.

Reading Model

Literary Focus

Motivation The author tells us in the last sentence why Vera has been making up stories. *Romance*, here, doesn't refer to a love affair. Instead, it refers to a story that has adventurous, mysterious, or heroic characters and plot.

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges⁴ by a pack of pariah dogs⁵ and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her specialty.

4. **Ganges** (GAN jeez): river in northern India and Bangladesh.

5. **pariah** (puh RY uh) **dogs**: wild dogs.

Read with a Purpose How does Framton Nuttel react to what happens after Vera tells her story? Do you feel sorry for him? Why or why not?

MEET THE WRITER

Saki
(1870–1916)

Mischief and Mayhem

Saki is the pen name of Hector Hugh Munro. He was born in Burma (now called Myanmar) in Southeast Asia, where his father, a Scottish military officer, was posted. Later, in England, Saki's mother died, and he and his siblings were raised by their grandmother and two aunts.

Although living with his strict and often-bickering aunts was an unpleasant experience, it helped Saki develop the mischievous sense of humor that later made his writing famous.

Saki is well-known for his funny yet often creepy stories. It has been said that when we read his stories, "our laughter is only a note or two short of a scream of fear."

Think About the Writer What elements of Saki's humor do you see in "The Open Window"?

Hector Hugh Munro "Saki", 1912 (1912)
by E. O. Hoppé.

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Into Action: Character Flowchart

Practice analyzing a character by completing a flowchart like the one below for either Framton Nuttel or for Vera. Then, write a character description that is two or three sentences long.

Character Details from Text:

My Inference:

My Connection:

My Judgment:

Talk About . . .

1. Discuss Vera's character with a partner. Is she cruel, or basically harmless? Support your opinion with details from the text. Try to use each Academic Vocabulary word listed at the right at least once in your discussion.

Write About . . .

2. What can you tell about Vera and Framton from the way they interact?
3. In what way is Vera's story a critical factor of Saki's tale?
4. Think about Framton's response when the hunters return home. How might his response to this incident have kept Vera from getting into trouble?

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

In Collection 2, you will read several stories with interesting characters. The Writing Focus activities on the Preparing to Read pages will help you focus on the ways an author can reveal a character's personality. On the Applying Your Skills pages, you will have an opportunity to try an author's techniques out for yourself.

Academic Vocabulary for Collection 2

Talking and Writing About Stories

Academic Vocabulary is the language you use to write and talk about literature. Use the following words to discuss the characters in this collection. These words are underlined throughout the collection.

incident (IHN suh duhnt) *n.*: event or occurrence. *What did the character's behavior during the scary incident reveal about her?*

factor (FAK tuhr) *n.*: something that has an influence on something else. *Factors to consider when analyzing a character are his or her appearance, actions, and relationships.*

interact (ihn tuhr AKT) *v.*: behave toward one another. *Characters reveal their personalities when they interact.*

response (rih SPAHNS) *n.*: reply or reaction. *To learn more about a character, observe his or her response to a stressful event.*

Your Turn



Copy these Academic Vocabulary words into your *Reader/Writer Notebook*, and try to use them as you answer questions about the stories in the collection.