Unit 1

Title: The Monkey’s Paw by W. W. Jacobs[[1]](#footnote-1)

Suggested Time: 4 - 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.4; W.8.1, W.8.3, W.8.4, W.8.9; SL.8.1; L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.4, L.8.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

One should use caution when interfering with the powerful forces of fate or destiny; the end results can be completely different than what one actually desires.

Synopsis

Using the supernatural powers of “The Monkey’s Paw”, the Whites make a wish for money, receive the money after their son is involved in a fatal accident, wish for his return, and finally wish for his disappearance.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| What does it mean that Mr. White was “amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it?” | Amiable is friendly, pleasing, and sociable. Mr. White was playfully trying to prevent his son from seeing his poor move on the chess board. |
| What does Mr. White mean by, “I should hardly think that he’d come tonight”? | The Whites are expecting a visitor, but because of their location and the weather, Mr. White believes it is unlikely the visitor will “come tonight.” Mrs. White states, “That’s the worst of living so far out…of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway’s a bog, and the road’s a torrent.” |
| Explain what the sergeant major means when he states, “it’s just a bit of what you might call magic.” | “It had a spell put on it by an old fakir”. “He wanted to show that fate ruled people’s lives….each have three wishes from it”. |
| Why does the sergeant major say, “Better let it burn”? | The sergeant-major alludes to his own and others’ bad experiences with the paw. He responded quietly and gravely when asked if he had been granted his wishes. His blotchy face whitened, and he threw the monkey’s paw into the fire. The sergeant-major doesn’t know what the first two wishes of the previous owner were, but the third wish was for death. He doesn’t know whether he would take advantage of three more wishes if that opportunity would arise again. |
| How does Herbert’s attitude toward the paw shift after his experience with the fire? Cite specific evidence in the text that indicates where the shift occurs. | Herbert sarcastically says that he expects that they will find the money in the bed, but should expect something horrible watching them “pocket their ill-gotten gains.” However, after seeing a horrible monkey-like image in the fire, he tries to douse the image with water and actually shivers. His reaction of fear and disgust contrasts with his earlier attitude of disbelief. |
| Identify an example of foreshadowing in the story and explain what this instance foreshadows. | “The first man has three wishes,” was the reply: “I don’t know what the first two were, but the third was for death.” The sergeant-major’s comment indicates that the previous owner’s wishes were so sinister that death was seen as the only possible escape and was actually his final wish. Knowing this, students can foreshadow a sinister fate befalling the Whites should they wish on the paw. |
| Why did Mrs. White go “scurrying to the door at the postman’s knock”? | Because Mrs. White scurries to the door when she hears the postman’s knock, the reader can conclude that she believes in the supernatural power of the monkey’s paw. She believes the postman is there to deliver the £200. Ironically, the postman is there to deliver a bill. |
| What does the author mean by the “sinister meaning of the assurance” and the “awful confirmation of her fears”? How do the words “sinister” and “awful” contribute to the tone of the text? | The use of sinister indicates an omen or something evil. By using the word sinister, the author brings up the foreshadowing from previous pages when the White’s learned the fate of the previous owner of the monkey’s paw. The “awful confirmation” tells the reader that Mrs. White’s worst possible fear has come to fruition. Including these phrases |
| What is the “horrible fear” that Mr. White experiences? | By ordering Mr. White to wish their son alive again, Mrs. White has apparently either not considered or chosen to disregard the possible consequences of seeing her mutilated and decomposing son. This increases the tension between husband and wife because Mr. White is aware of the condition of their son’s body and is astutely aware of the evil which may now accompany Herbert. This is Mr. White’s “horrible fear.” |
| Why does Mr. White say, “Don’t let it in”? What is Mrs. White’s response? | White’s horrible fear is of his son returning in a mutilated state (as evidenced by his use of “it” instead of “him”). Mrs. White cries, “You’re afraid of your own son.” |
| What is Mr. White’s “third and last wish”? Cite evidence from the text to support your response. | One can infer the final wish was for his son to return to the grave. While the text does not specifically state Mr. White’s final wish, the fact that the moment he found the paw on the floor, he “frantically breathed his third and last wish and the knocking ceased suddenly,” implies that the father’s last wish was for his son to return to where he now belongs. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | surveying, amiably, torrent, intercept, proffered  offhandedly, absent-mindedly, fumbling, conscious, regarded, presumptuous  enthralled, doggedly, pitch, business, installment, regarded, keenly  retire, struck, coloring, marred, wardrobe, gains  betokened  inaudible  wistfully  quivering, groped  resounded, reverberated | installment  prosaic, frivolous, attribute, resolution  courting, wistfully  senseless, resignation  feverishly  suspended, reverberated |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | torrent, intercept  absent-mindedly, presumptuous  talisman  maligned  bibulous  broach  pulsating | hospitable, condoling  offhandedly  dubiously, credulity  courting |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*The fakir “wanted to show that fate ruled people’s lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow”. Write an essay arguing who is most responsible (Sergeant-Major Morris, Herbert White, Mrs. White, or Mr. White) for the sorrows that resulted from wishing on the monkey’s paw. Support your claims with valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!
3. *While the Culminating Writing Task asks students to select one character to write about, this chart includes a sampling of evidence from all four characters. The sample answer will briefly address only one of the characters.*

Complete the evidence chart for each character. Using the completed chart, decide which *one* character you will write

about. Use evidence from the text in your response, including direct quotes and page numbers.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| **Sergeant-Major Morris**  “He took something out of his pocket and proffered it.”  “Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud…”  He accepted “a trifle” from Mr. White for the paw. | Sergeant-Major Morris did not have to take the monkey’s paw from his pocket, nor did he have to teach the Whites how to make a formal wish using the “magical” paw. By doing both, he piqued the curiosity of the superstitious family, thereby assuming responsibility for the ensuing “sorrows.”  His final act of accepting money from Mr. White for the monkey’s paw cements his responsibility for the grief throughout the rest of the story. |
| **Herbert White**  “Likely,” said Herbert, with pretended horror. “Why we’re going to be rich, and famous and happy. Wish to be an emperor, Father, to begin with; then you can’t be bossed around.”  “Well, I don’t see the money….and I bet I never shall.”  “I expect you’ll see the cash….ill-gotten gains.” | By making a mockery of the magical powers of the monkey’s paw, Herbert brought grief to his own family. His death and his parents’ reaction to it created shock, grief, and desperation by wishing on the paw. |
| **Mrs. White**  Curiosity – “Monkey’s Paw?”  “And what is there special about it?”  “And did you really have three wishes granted?”  “And has anybody else wished?”  “No….we’ll have one more…..wish our boy alive again.”  “Wish!”  “You’re afraid of your own son…Herbert; I’m coming.” | Mrs. White’s repeated questions illustrate how her curiosity immerses her further and further into the world of the mystique of the paw. She becomes assertive when she orders her husband to make another wish to “wish our boy alive again,” and when she repeatedly orders Mr. White to “wish!”  She exhibits the desperation and fierceness of a mother protecting her young when she berates her husband for his fear and calls out to what she believes is her son. Between the curiosity and assertiveness Mrs. White exhibits throughout the story, had she not involved herself in these ways, her greatest sorrow may not have come to pass. |
| **Mr. White**  “White…stooped down and snatched it off.”  “…give it to me.”  “I don’t know what to wish for….It seems to me I’ve got all I want.”  “I wish for two hundred pounds.” | Mr. White must accept responsibility for the death of his son for several reasons. He snatched the monkey’s paw from the fire, told Sergeant-Major Morris to give him the paw. When he is ready to wish, he realizes there is nothing he needs to wish for, but makes a fatal mistake of wishing for £200. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer:

While Mrs. White does not initially appear to be an assertive character in W.W. Jacob’s short story, “The Monkey’s Paw,” her actions throughout the narrative prove that she did indeed interfere with fate and was definitely responsible for the sorrows that befell her family. Her curiosity led to the family being even more curious. Had she brushed the mystic of the paw off as insignificant, perhaps her husband would not have pursued the mystery.

Mrs. White peppers Sergeant-Major Morris with questions such as “Monkey’s Paw?,” “what is there special about it?,” “did you really have three wishes granted?,” “and has anybody else wished?” Her insatiable curiosity probably influences her husband to actually wish upon the paw. With every curious question Mr. White also became more curious. As a result Herbert reacted with off-handed remarks which almost seemed to be a challenge to prove the paw had no mysterious value. Had Mrs. White not been so curious perhaps Herbert would have ignored the paw completely and just enjoyed the stories.

Once the Whites receive the news of their son’s tragic death, and the company’s ironic compensation of £200, Mrs. White becomes overwhelmed with grief and shrieks. After a week of sleepless nights, Mrs. White realizes that there are two remaining wishes on the paw. Her insistence, for her husband to “Wish!” for their son to return from the dead is evidence that she has taken the role of interfering with fate at any cost. Had she been more practical and accepted her son’s death as a coincidence she would never have acted on her thought to wish him back to life. She blatantly berates her husband, which she had not previously done, when she shouts, “You’re afraid of your own son!.”

Mrs. White is responsible for the sorrows that befall her family in this story. Mrs. White instigated the continued curiosity with her questions. She then showed she believed in the power of the paw when she allowed the man from Herbert’s company in to the house, assuming he was someone who was going to provide them with the £200 for which they had wished. Finally, her most selfish and damning act was in wishing her dead son alive. Had she not interfered with fate to begin with, and had she not wished her son alive in the end, the horrors of that final night would have never happened.

Additional Tasks

* *“The Monkey’s Paw” illustrates that no good can come from testing fate. The conclusion of this story is open to individual interpretation. Students will continue the story from the point of the door opening. The continuation will serve as a new conclusion to the story and should be written in the same tone of “The Monkey’s Paw”.*

Answer: Students will determine what the third wish is and write a new conclusion to the story. Students should use descriptive language in the new conclusion.

Note to Teacher

* While asking students to make predictions is not a focus of the text-dependent questions, teachers may encourage and guide students to make predictions throughout the first reading of “The Monkey’s Paw”.

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**“The Monkey’s Paw”**

1. What does it mean that Mr. White was “amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it?”
2. What does Mr. White mean by, “I should hardly think that he’d come tonight”?
3. Explain what the sergeant major means when he states, “it’s just a bit of what you might call magic.”
4. Why does the sergeant major say, “Better let it burn”?
5. How does Herbert’s attitude toward the paw shift after his experience with the fire? Cite specific evidence in the text that indicates where the shift occurs.
6. Identify an example of foreshadowing in the story and explain what this instance foreshadows.
7. Why did Mrs. White go “scurrying to the door at the postman’s knock”?
8. What does the author mean by the “sinister meaning of the assurance” and the “awful confirmation of her fears”? How do the words “sinister” and “awful” contribute to the tone of the text?
9. What is the “horrible fear” that Mr. White experiences?
10. Why does Mr. White say, “Don’t let it in”? What is Mrs. White’s response?
11. What is Mr. White’s “third and last wish”? Cite evidence from the text to support your response.

1. *This story is a “duplicate.” (It is found in other anthologies, as well.) This particular revision was completed by a teacher who uses a different anthology than you, so the page numbers have been removed. This may require you to make some adjustments/add page numbers to some of the questions.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)