

The Lady in White

Aim

- To introduce students to the story through the topics of ghosts and urban myths.

1 Ask students to read Extract 1 and tell you what kind of feeling they get from it (e.g. anxiety, uncertainty, fear, suspense). Ask them what kind of story they think it comes from. Ask them where John is and the facts of what happens.

Answers: the extract comes from a ghost story; John is in his car, watching a woman dressed in white get closer to him in his mirrors.

2 Ask students to look at Extract 1 again and decide how the author builds the tension in it. They can discuss their ideas in groups of four. Then call back ideas from the whole class.

Possible points: Students might consider the slow sequence of the woman's movements; the fact that John can only see parts of the woman in two mirrors, and not her face, and therefore her expression; John's own physical state and feelings; the use of the word 'suddenly' as well as the use of short sentences.

Ask students to think of as many adjectives and phrases as they can to describe the mood of the text and John's feelings and physical state; tell them to make their suggestions as dramatic and extreme as possible (if necessary teach some relevant vocabulary, e.g. creepy, spine-chilling, sinister, hair-raising, bloodcurdling; gives you goose bumps / the shivers / the creeps; makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck / your flesh crawl / your blood run cold, etc.). Ask students to work in pairs to rewrite Extract 1 to reflect a heightened sense of fear and tension.

3 Tell students that Extract 1 comes from *The Lady in White* and ask them to relate what they have just read to the title and the genre of the story.

Answer: It's a ghost story and the lady in white could be the ghost; ghosts are often white.

Ask students to get into pairs to tell each other what they think about ghosts, whether they believe in them and if so what they think they are. Call back ideas from the whole class. Then invite students to tell any ghost stories they know (from books or films, as well as 'real' ones) to the rest of the class.

4 Ask students if they know what an urban myth is.

Suggested answer: It is a story which is possibly true, which people tell all over the world, and which is told as hearsay. For example, a person may begin the story by saying something like 'My father heard it from his boss, who heard it from a friend of his boss's uncle ...' The story involves something unusual or strange, often macabre.

If you know any urban myths, tell the students one as an example. (You can easily find examples on the Internet.) Then ask students to get into groups of four and tell each other some urban myths. They should decide within the group which is the best, and the whole class should listen to them.

5 Tell students that the protagonist of the story, John, is happily married with a young son. However, John is concerned because his wife has been behaving strangely recently, especially with regard to their son; she has also been having strange dreams. John is a successful TV producer, and he and his assistant Jenny want to make a series on urban myths. Jenny's research finds that three men in different parts of the UK reported the same phenomenon. Ask them to read the Urban Myth Summary to find out about it. Ask them what kind of story this is, and what they would have done in this situation. Ask them if they can think of an explanation for what happened.

6 Tell students that when he hears this story, John reacts strangely and tells Jenny that it's 'my story'. He drives to the same village near Brighton without speaking, although Jenny never told him the name of it. When they get there he tells her a story. Ask students to read Extract 2 and say how it is similar to the urban myth.

Answer: Rachel and John met in the same place, Rachel was wearing a white dress.

7 Given what they have read (the Urban Myth and John's story) and what they know about the ghost story genre, ask students to work in groups of four to try and decide what might happen in *The Lady in White*.

Ask them to write a few paragraphs outlining the plot, with some details of who does what, and when, where and why.

The Lady in White

Extract 1

A woman in white was standing just behind the car, not moving. He could only see part of her body. He could not see her legs, he could not see her head or face. Because of where she was standing he could only see part of her in the rear-view mirror. He did not want to turn around and look at her. He was afraid. He looked into the side mirror and could see a little more. Yes, a woman. It was definitely a woman. But he could still not see the head, nor the face. He felt even colder inside now. His stomach suddenly felt very empty. His hands felt as if they were stuck to the steering-wheel. He could not move and she did not move. And then suddenly she took a step forward and John watched her disappear from the rear-view mirror. He looked at the side mirror and she took another step forward.

Urban Myth Summary

This is the story they heard from several people in different parts of Britain:

A man is driving near Brighton at night in dry conditions. As he drives out of a village he sees a woman dressed in white clothes standing at the side of the road. She puts her hand out, the driver stops to give her a lift. As they start driving she starts crying. She calms down and tells the driver that they had a problem with their car, and that she's going to a garage for help; she says the car was where he stopped to pick her up, but he didn't see one. She is shaking and cold, and he realises she's soaking wet. She says it's because of the rain, but it's completely dry. Then as he gets to a bend in the road she starts screaming that the car is out of control, and puts her hands on the steering wheel and starts pulling it. The driver hits her arm to make her stop because it's dangerous. The car almost crashes and stops. He asks why she did this, but then sees she has blood running down her face. She then gets out and runs back down the road. He gets out of the car and follows her, she goes round a bend, and then disappears. He drives back to the village where he had picked her up but there is no lady in white and no car.

Extract 2

'This is where I first met Rachel . . . my wife. She was hitch-hiking. She was standing right there. I was driving back to London. I stopped my car . . . I gave her a lift. She was wearing a white dress' . . .

Jenny did not know what to say. What did this all mean? What did it mean that Rachel and John had met at the same place where the three men had met the mysterious hitch-hiker?