

How I Met Myself

Aims

- To encourage discussion on the topic of ghosts.
- To look at elements of a ghost story.

- 1 Start a class discussion on ghosts. Ask students what they think ghosts are, whether they believe in them. Ask if they've seen any films with ghosts in or know any ghost stories – try and get them to tell some stories.
- 2 Ask students to read the Blurb (next page). How does it help them understand the title of the book? (Because the man who runs into John Taylor seems to be him.) Why does John think this? (Because the man's face and mouth are his.)
- 3 Ask students if they know what a 'doppelgänger' is. Elicit suggestions, then ask them to read Extract 1. Discuss the idea with the class – do they think it is possible or not?
- 4 Tell students that the man runs off, and John follows him and sees him go down into a basement bar. Ask them to read Extract 2. Ask them why John is puzzled by what he sees. (Because there should have been two sets of footprints in the new snow – those of the man who knocked him over and his own, but there are only his.) Ask them why there are only his footprints. (The man who knocked John over is a ghost.) Tell them that when John goes into the bar the man isn't there.
- 5 Read Extract 3. Ask students how the dream is different from what actually happened to John. (It is turned round, so that John is the man running out of the door.) Tell them that John then has the dream regularly – this is called a recurring dream – and it usually indicates that the person who has it is very upset.
- 6 Tell students that John and his Hungarian wife Andrea visit the houses where the man ran out of and where the bar is and talk to the housekeepers, but they find that no one who looks like John lives in either house. John then says something very strange. Read Extract 4. What does John think about the person who knocked him over? (That it may be him in a previous life.) Why does Andrea find it difficult to believe? (Because this seems impossible in the 'normal' world.)
- 7 Put students into groups of four. Photocopy the four texts (a–d) in Read and Order and give one of the texts to each student. Ask the students to work out the correct order without showing each other their texts.
Answer: 1 c, 2 a, 3 d, 4 b
- 8 Ask students to use the information they have about John Taylor and discuss why they think the doppelgänger keeps appearing to him (they can re-read Extract 1 to get some ideas). What do they think is going to happen in the story?
- 9 Ask students to read Extract 5. Make sure that they understand that Zsolt's bar is the bar where John Taylor saw the doppelgänger run into the two previous years. Does the note give students any clues about what might happen, based on what happened to János Szabó and his wife and daughter?
Answer: Something might happen to Andrea and Kati on 18 January in the same cellar bar where János Szabó's wife and daughter were killed on that date in the war.
- 10 To conclude you might ask students if they think there will be a happy ending. To prompt their thoughts, emphasise that people believe that the doppelgänger comes to give a warning so maybe he is helping John Taylor to avoid the same fate that befell him.
- 11 Ask students to discuss the doppelgänger in the story and decide if they think this kind of thing is really possible.

How I Met Myself

Blurb

One icy winter's evening in Budapest, a man runs straight into John Taylor as he walks home through the narrow streets. John falls over in the snow and looks up at the man's face.

'I felt very afraid. Because what I saw was me. My face stroking down at me. My mouth saying sorry.'

Who is the man, and how will John's life change?

Extract 1

DOPPELGÄNGER: *A German word which is used in English. It means something like 'double-walker' or 'double-goer' – a ghostly double of a living person, who comes to give messages about danger or offer advice. It can only be seen by its 'owner'.* (This was why there were no footprints, and why Zsolt had seen nothing in the bar, I thought.)

However, it can sometimes be seen by somebody close if it has an important message. It is usually thought to bring bad luck, and is often believed to show that there will soon be a serious problem or a death.

Extract 2

I looked at my footprints – the dark marks my feet had made in the new snow. My footprints . . . But only my footprints! Where were his? I looked back along the street. There were only my footprints. My mind was running round and round in circles trying to understand what was happening.

Extract 3

That night I had a strange dream. In my dream, I heard the noise of a door shutting loudly. I was running out of a building and I ran into someone. A man. He fell down. I turned to say sorry. I saw that it was me lying on the ground. I woke up feeling afraid and cold in the dark, although the bedroom was nice and warm

Extract 4

'There is one important thing about all of this, Andrea,' I said when we seemed to have talked about it all. 'And I know it sounds very strange, but I don't think this person just looked like me. I think it *was* me.'

I'd said this to her before when I'd told her the first time, and she'd laughed and said it was impossible. But I had a feeling deep inside me that I was right.

'But, John,' she asked, 'how could that be?'

'I don't know, love,' I replied. 'I just feel it. So perhaps we shouldn't be looking for someone who lives in these buildings now. Perhaps we should be looking for someone who, well . . . er . . . someone who's dead. And who I am now.'

Read and Order

a

By half past six we were standing opposite number 7 Felka utca. It was evening by now, and the street was as dark as usual.

'Where do you think we should wait?' asked Andrea.

'You stay on this side of the road,' I answered. 'When it's time, I'll go and stand outside the door. You watch and listen carefully.'

b

The next day I was walking home from work. Of course, I was asking myself if I should go and meet my doppelgänger, János Szabó, for the third time on 18 January.

As I went along a street I saw some men putting up a new sign on an old shop. There was the owner's name in red, and below it the word *Szabó* in green. In the window there were suits, jackets and trousers.

Szabó. Tailor. The tailor's was getting a new sign. '*Szabó*,' I thought. Then I said 'János Szabó' out loud. Then I thought, 'János the tailor. John the tailor. John Taylor.' I stopped in the street. János Szabó was John Taylor! My doppelgänger and I shared a name. John Taylor was the English for János Szabó.

c

Then suddenly, a new idea came into my head: it was the date that was important! It all seemed so clear! It was not surprising that I'd never met myself again on all those evenings I'd waited in Felka utca! I needed to be there on 18 January. Next Sunday evening.

d

I thought it about carefully, again and again. Some things were true facts. A man called János Szabó had lived at number 7 Felka utca. On 18 January 1945 his wife and daughter had been killed in the cellar that was now Zsolt's bar in Gergely utca. Other things were difficult to understand: I had been outside the Felka utca building twice on the anniversary of the date – 18 January – and I had met the man. He looked the same as me. What did it all mean?

Extract 5

[This is the note John Taylor found on his living room table on 18 January, just before he met his doppelgänger for the third time.]

Dear John,

Zsolt phoned. His mother's ill and I offered to look after the bar while he takes her to the doctor's. I couldn't get Petra to look after Kati, so I've taken her with me. Won't be long, I hope. See you later.

Love,

Andrea (and Kati) xxx