

# The Ironing Man

## Aims

- To introduce students to graded readers.
- To encourage a transfer of literary reading skills from learner language to second language.

- 1 Ask students what kind of fiction they most like to read e.g. horror, romance. In pairs ask them to think of as many different genres as they can. (If the class aren't great readers, ask them what kind of films they watch).
- 2 Write the different genres on the board. If not all genres have been covered, elicit/supply further suggestions. (Make sure 'comedy' is on the board).  
**Suggested answers:** adventure, thriller, murder mystery, science fiction, horror, comedy, ghost story, fantasy, detective story, romance.
- 3 Ask students how they decide if they want to read a book or not. Elicit that they can look at the front cover, read the small description of the story on the back cover (the 'blurb'), read the first page of the book, etc. Hold up a copy of *The Ironing Man* and ask students what kind of story they think it will be. Ask students what they think about the title and elicit what 'ironing' is (you can do a quick mime if students are not sure). What do they think an 'ironing man' is?
- 4 Tell students they are going to read the blurb of *The Ironing Man* (on the handout opposite) and decide what genre they think it is and if they think they'll like the story.
- 5 Ask for feedback but don't tell students the genre yet. Ask students to discuss the following prediction questions (you can either read these out or put them on the board while the students are discussing the first questions):  
a Who are Tom and Marina? How old do you think they are? Are they happy?  
b Who do you think the 'ironing man' is? How will he change their lives? (It doesn't matter if students can't answer this, the point is to get them thinking).
- 6 Tell students they are going to read some extracts from *The Ironing Man* that will tell them a bit more about the characters of Tom and Marina (See optional extras 1). Ask students to read extracts 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and then write a list of adjectives with their partner describing each character. They can use their dictionaries if necessary. (You might want to write a selection of adjectives on the board for students to choose from.)  
**Suggested answers:** Tom: Organised, ambitious, uninteresting, old, boring, serious, hard-working, unimaginative, intelligent, professional, etc. Marina: fun, passionate, young, disorganised, lazy, wild, etc.
- 7 Ask students what genre the story is and give them the answer (comedy). Get feedback about the characters of Tom and Marina. Do they think Tom and Marina make a good couple? Ask students which character they think they are most similar to. Do they know anyone who has a similar character to Tom or Marina?
- 8 Tell students to find out what their partner's ambitions and hopes for the future are. Tell students to look back at extract 3 and decide if Marina is right or wrong to want more from life. What do students think is the meaning of the butterfly in this paragraph?
- 9 Ask the students to read the summary sentences for each chapter and reconstruct the story with their partner. You might want to pre-teach 'massage' and 'masseur'. Get pairs to check their answers with other pairs and go through quickly as a class.  
**Answers:** 6, 9, 5, 3, 10, 2, 8, 4, 1, 7  
Ask pairs to discuss: Do you think Tom has realised he loves Marina too late? How do you think the story will end? Do you like the story? Why/Why not? Encourage class discussion.

## Optional extras

- 1 Stage 5 of the lesson plan could be made more interactive: give half of the class extracts 2, 3 and the first half of 1. Give the other half of the class extracts 4, 5 and the second half of 1. Ask students to work in pairs with someone who read the same extracts and write down adjectives to describe the character they have read about. Ask them to think about what kind of person their character is married to. Next ask students to work with someone who read different extracts and find out what kind of person their character is married to. Ask them to read each other's extracts. Ask students to discuss what kind of marriage they think Tom and Marina have.
- 2 **Role-play:** In pairs ask students to act out various scenes either within the book's scope or otherwise. For example, you could get one student to be Marina and one to be Tom and act out a typical conversation when Tom returns from work; if students want to be more imaginative they could act out how Tom and Marina first met or how they might pack for a holiday.
- 3 Focus on one extract. Take out any group of words (e.g. verbs) and get students to gap fill from a selection on the board; look at the pronouns in an extract and get students to say exactly who they refer to; get students to make and extend word maps from topics in the extracts e.g. clothes, housework, the office, etc.
- 4 8 above is designed to encourage discussion about what students think constitutes a 'good life'. You can get similar discussions from the other extracts. For example, Extract 4: Is it better to be organised or wild? Extract 1: Do clothes express something about your character? Do you judge people by what they wear? (You could bring in different magazine pictures and ask pairs to write a list of personality adjectives for each.)
- 5 **Creative writing task** (homework): Choose either Marina or Tom and write a letter telling the other you are leaving them. Try to make the letter funny.

All CER titles are also available on cassette. You can read the first chapter of each at [www.cambridge.org/elt/readers](http://www.cambridge.org/elt/readers)

## Blurb

### The Ironing Man

Colin Campbell

While Tom is at work in London, his wife Marina is left bored and alone in the small village where they live. She wishes for someone to do the housework for her and a strange thing happens. Her wish comes true, the Ironing Man enters her life, and everything begins to change for both Marina and Tom.

## About Tom and Marina

### Extract 1

He (Tom) had a lot of shirts and they were all the same. They were all white with a thin blue stripe. All his suits were dark grey and all his jackets were dark blue. All his shoes were black except the ones he used for walking, which were brown. This way of doing things made life easier, as Tom once explained to Marina:

'I get up in the morning, I put on a shirt, I put on a suit, I put on my shoes, and I don't have to think about what I'm doing. I don't have to make decisions about what I am going to wear, because I always wear the same things. It's quick, it's easy and I save so much time.'

Tom was very pleased with this way of getting dressed. He never said anything openly about it, but he really thought Marina should do the same thing. He thought she wasted time. Every day when Marina got up she first had to think about how she was feeling and then decide what blouses and skirts and colours and materials matched those feelings. She wanted her clothes to say something about her and about how she was feeling that day. It took her a long time to get dressed. What a waste of time! But Tom took three minutes to get dressed, every day. Three minutes.

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Photocopiable

## About Marina

### Extract 2

She hated housework but she loved Tom. She did not want to leave him.

Tom and Marina had been married now for almost three years. The first two and a half years in London. Wonderful London. Fun London. Things-to-do and people-to-meet London. TOO-FAR-AWAY-LONDON!! They now lived in a small village called Felton, near Cambridge. They had lived here, in the middle of nowhere land, for ninety-two days and (looking at the clock) four hours, thirty-eight minutes.

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### Extract 3

What did the butterfly think of her, living in this house, living between these four walls? Did he know about the straight lines that people lived along?

School → university → job;  
family → friends → boyfriends → husband  
→ children;  
room → flat → house → bigger house  
→ bigger house with garden.

Did the butterfly ask itself why she did not fly like him, here and there and up and down and backwards and forwards, moving where it wanted, when it wanted? Marina looked at the butterfly and asked herself the same questions.

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## About Tom

### Extract 4

He enjoyed making lists. Things to do at work. Things to do at home. Things to read. He even made lists of other lists he would like to make when he had more time ...

... He made lists of places they could visit. He made lists of restaurants they could stop at on the way to those places. He made lists of things they could eat at those restaurants. Lists of friends they could invite to their house for dinner. This last list was very short. They had no friends in the village.

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Every day Tom makes a list of the good and bad things that have happened that day. Here is one example:

### Extract 5

Good

- 1 Found a good place to park the car
- 2 Finished my report
- 3 Gave my report to the boss  
BEFORE BRIAN DID!!!
- 4 Boss laughed at my joke  
(It was a joke that Tom's nephew told him,  
but it was one of the ten year old's more  
adult jokes.)
- 5 Showed the boss how to use the new  
photocopier
- 6 Got a new phone with three lines
- 7 Boss left office before me and said 'working late,  
Tom. Good man' (with a smile!)

What a day! What a day!  
He looked at the bad column.

Bad

- 1 Marina??????????

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## Summary Sentences

- 6 While Tom is at work, Marina sits at home thinking how nice it would be for someone to massage her neck for her.
- 9 Marina meets the ironing man once more at an art gallery and makes a final wish: that her relationship with Tom will improve.
- The next day, on his way to work, Tom calls a private detective and asks him to watch Marina.
- The wish comes true immediately and a young handsome man comes to her house to help her with the ironing.
- While Marina is at the art gallery, the private detective who followed Tracy and her boyfriend tells Tom that Marina is seeing another man. Tom realises how much he loves Marina. But is he too late?
- 2 One day, alone in the house, she makes a wish that someone will come and help her with the ironing.
- When she has finished the massage, Tracy's boyfriend arrives and she drives off in the car with him. The private detective is watching. He thinks Tracy is Marina and follows them.
- When Tom gets home from work that night she tells him all about the 'ironing man'. Tom is not happy about this 'ironing man' and thinks Marina might be seeing another man.
- Marina and Tom have moved away from London to a quiet village. Marina is bored. She hates the loneliness and she hates all the housework she has to do.
- At that moment the doorbell rings and a young woman is at the door. She explains that she is Tracy, a masseuse, and has come to give Marina a surprise massage. She tells Marina that the 'ironing man' sent her.