

Reading around Carver's *Short Cuts* – critical extract A

1. Read your extract.
2. Talk about whether it:
 - a. Gives you any fresh knowledge/information that's useful in reading the story
 - b. Confirms your interpretation of the story
 - c. Adds to or develops your interpretation of the story
 - d. Challenges your interpretation of the story.
3. Highlight one or two short phrases which you might use in an essay to use to develop your argument or viewpoint.
4. Write a paragraph in which you incorporate the quotation into an exploration of an aspect of the story.

It is possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things – a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earrings – with immense, even startling power.

What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things.

Carver on Carver: 'A Storyteller's Shoptalk', *New York Times*, Feb 15 1981.

Reading around Carver *Short Cuts* – critical extract B

1. Read your extract.
2. Talk about whether it:
 - a. Gives you any fresh knowledge/information that's useful in reading the story
 - b. Confirms your interpretation of the story
 - c. Adds to or develops your interpretation of the story
 - d. Challenges your interpretation of the story.
3. Highlight one or two short phrases which you might use in an essay to use to develop your argument or viewpoint.
4. Write a paragraph in which you incorporate the quotation into an exploration of an aspect of the story.

Where Hemingway's purified style was meant to imply volumes of unspoken knowledge, like the seven-eighths of an ice-berg underwater, Carver's method suggests that the other seven-eighths either isn't there or isn't knowable...As in a relentless close-up, we hear and see exactly what these people do, but why they do it – or whether anything intelligible goes through their minds as they do it- We cannot confidently explain.

**Dean Flower, review of Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*,
The Hudson Review, 29 (1976).**

Reading around Carver's *Short Cuts* – critical extract C

1. Read your extract.
2. Talk about whether it:
 - a. Gives you any fresh knowledge/information that's useful in reading the story
 - b. Confirms your interpretation of the story
 - c. Adds to or develops your interpretation of the story
 - d. Challenges your interpretation of the story.
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4. Write a paragraph in which you incorporate the quotation into an exploration of an aspect of the story.

Dirty Realism

It is not a fiction devoted to making the large historical statement.

It is instead a fiction of a different scope – devoted to the local details, the nuances, the little disturbances in language and gesture – and it is entirely appropriate that its primary form is the short story and that it is so conspicuously part of the American short story revival. But these are strange stories: unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people who watch day-time television, read cheap romances or listen to country and western music. They are waitresses in roadside cafes, cashiers in supermarkets, construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys. They play bingo, eat cheeseburgers, hunt deer and stay in cheap hotels. They drink a lot and are often in trouble: for stealing a car, breaking a window, pickpocketing a wallet. They are from Kentucky or Alabama or Oregon, but, mainly, they could just about be from anywhere: drifters in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism.

This is a curious, dirty realism about the belly-side of contemporary life...

Bill Buford, 'Editorial' in *Granta 8: Dirty Realism: New Writing from America* (Cambridge, 1983).

Reading around Carver's *Short Cuts* – critical extract D

1. Read your extract.
2. Talk about whether it:
 - a. Gives you any fresh knowledge/information that's useful in reading the story
 - b. Confirms your interpretation of the story
 - c. Adds to or develops your interpretation of the story
 - d. Challenges your interpretation of the story.
3. Highlight one or two short phrases which you might use in an essay to use to develop your argument or viewpoint.
4. Write a paragraph in which you incorporate the quotation into an exploration of an aspect of the story.

One aspect of what Carver seemed to say to us - even to someone who had never been inside a lumber mill or a trailer park - was that literature could be fashioned out of strict observation of real life, wherever and however it was lived, even if it was lived with a bottle of Heinz ketchup on the table and the television set droning. This was news at a time when academic metafiction was the regnant mode. His example reinvigorated realism as well as the short-story form.

Jay McInerney, 'A Still, Small Voice', *New York Times*, Aug 6 1989.

Reading around Carver's *Short Cuts* – critical extract E

1. Read your extract.
2. Talk about whether it:
 - a. Gives you any fresh knowledge/information that's useful in reading the story
 - b. Confirms your interpretation of the story
 - c. Adds to or develops your interpretation of the story
 - d. Challenges your interpretation of the story.
3. Highlight one or two short phrases which you might use in an essay to use to develop your argument or viewpoint.
4. Write a paragraph in which you incorporate the quotation into an exploration of an aspect of the story.

Carver's people end up being deserted by common satisfactions, and the stories are moral tales, really, explaining why decent men and women, dealt crummy circumstances in a plentiful world, behave badly in their intimate battles with selfishness. Written in an accessible vernacular, resonant with cryptic petulance and loud silences, the stories speak the language of everyday profundity.

Bruce Webber, 'A chronicler of blue collar despair', *New York Times*, 24 Jun 1984.