

## UNIT 5

# The Blanket

*Floyd Dell (1887-1969)*

### Students Learning Outcomes:

**On the completion of this unit, the students will be able to:**

- recognize that the theme of a text is carried in a thesis statement.
- analyze the order of arranging paragraphs.
- distinguish between what is clearly stated and what is implied.
- read silently with comprehension and extract main idea and supporting details.
- identify universal themes present in literature across all cultures.
- read text to:
  - make connections between characters, events, motives and causes of conflicts in text across cultures.
  - distinguish between flexible and inflexible characters.
  - describe how a character changes over the course of story.
  - express justification for change in character.
- identify and use adjective phrases and clauses.

### Pre-reading:

- Some people send their parents to old houses, why?
- What does Islam say about the parents?

Dealing with old people in modern society has become a serious problem; sometimes they are rejected even by their own relatives. As a result, elderly people are sent to special homes for the aged where they can continue living for the rest of their lives with others of their age.

Petey hadn't really believed that Dad would be doing it – sending Granddad away. "Away" was what they called it. Not until now could he believe it of Dad.

But there was the blanket that Dad had bought for him, and in the morning he would be going away. And this was the last evening that they would have together. Dad was off, seeing the girl that he was going to marry. He would not be back till late, and they could sit up and talk.

It was a fine September night, with a silver moon riding high over the valley. When they had washed up the supper dishes, they went out on the porch of the hut, the old man and the little boy, taking their chairs.

"I'll get my fiddle", said the old man, "and play you some of the old tunes." But instead of the fiddle, he brought out the blanket. It was a double blanket, red, with black stripes.

"Now isn't that a fine blanket?" said the old man, smoothing it over his knees.

"And isn't your father a kind man to give the old fellow a blanket like that to go away with? It cost something, it did – look at its wool! And it will certainly keep me warm these cold nights to come. There will be few blankets there equal to this!"

It was like Granddads to say that. He was trying to make it easier. He'd pretended all along it was he that wanted to go away to that great brick building – the government place where he'd be with so many other old fellows having the best of everything. But Petey hadn't believed Dad would really do it, until this night when he brought home the blanket.

"Oh, yes, it's a fine blanket," said Petey, and got up and went into the hut. He wasn't the kind to cry, and besides, he was too old for that, being eleven. He had just come in to fetch Granddad's fiddle.

The blanket slid to the floor as the old man took the fiddle and stood up. It was the last night they'd be having together. There wasn't any need to say "Play all the old tunes." Granddad tuned up for a minute and then said, "This is one you'd like to remember."

The silver moon was high overhead, and there was a gentle breeze playing down the valley. He could never hear Granddad play this again. It was a good thing Dad was moving into that new house, away from here. Petey would not want to sit here on the old porch on fine evenings, with Granddad gone.

The tune changed. "Here's something merrier." Petey sat and stared out over the valley. Dad would marry that girl. Yes, that girl who had kissed him and slobbered over him, saying she'd try to be a good mother to him, and all. His chair creaked as he involuntarily gave his body a painful twist.

The tune stopped suddenly, and Granddad said, "It's a poor tune, except to be dancing to." And then, "it's a fine girl your father is going to marry. He'll feel young again, with a pretty wife like that. And what would an old fellow like me do around the house, getting in the way, an old nuisance, what with my talk of aches and pains! And then there'll be babies coming, and I'd not want to be there to hear them crying all hours. It's best that I take myself off like I'm doing. One more tune or two, and then we'll go to bed to get some sleep against the morning when I'll pack up my fine blanket and take my leave. Listen to this, will you? It's a bit sad, but a fine tune for a night like this."

They didn't hear the two people coming down the valley path, Dad and the pretty girl with the hard, bright face like a china doll's. But they heard her laugh, right by the porch, and the tune stopped on a wrong, high, startled note. Dad didn't say anything, but the girl came forward and spoke to Granddad prettily. "I won't see you leave in the morning; so I came over to say goodbye."

"It's kind of you", said Granddad, with his eyes cast down; and then, seeing the blanket at his feet, he stopped to pick it up.

"And will you look at this?" he said in embarrassment. "The fine blanket my son has given me to go away with!"

"Yes", she said, "it's a fine blanket." She felt the wool, and repeated in surprise, "A fine blanket – I'll say it is!" She turned to Dad and said coldly, "It cost something that."

He cleared his throat, and said defensively, "I wanted him to have the best—"

The girl stood there, still intent on the blanket, "it's double too", she said reproachfully to Dad.

"Yes," said Granddad, "it's double – a fine blanket for an old fellow to go away with."

The boy went suddenly into the hut. He was looking for something. He could hear that girl criticizing Dad, and Dad becoming angry in his slow way. And now she was suddenly going away angrily. As Petey came out, she turned and called out, "All the same, he doesn't need a double blanket!" And she ran up the valley path.

Dad looked after her uncertainly.

"Oh, she's right," said the boy coldly. "Here, Dad, and he held out a pair of scissors. Cut the blanket in two."

Both of them stared at the boy surprised. "Cut it in two, I tell you Dad!" he cried out. "And keep one half!"

"That's not a bad idea", said Granddad gently. "I don't need so much of a blanket."

"Yes", said the boy harshly. "A single blanket's enough for an old man when he's sent away. We'll save the other half, Dad; it will come in handy later."

"Now, what do you mean by that?" asked Dad.

"I mean", said the boy slowly, "that I'll give it to you, Dad – when you're old and I send you away."

There was silence, and then Dad went over to Granddad and stood before him, not speaking. But Granddad understood for he put out his hand and laid it on Dad's shoulder. Petey was watching them. And he heard Granddad whisper, "It's all right, son – I know you didn't mean it."

But it didn't matter – because they were all three crying together.

### About the Writer

*Floyd Dell (1887-1969)*

was one of the central figures of the Chicago literary renaissance and Greenwich Village bohemianism of the early twentieth century. He was a pivotal American writer whose advocacy of feminism, socialism, psychoanalysis, and progressive education shocked the American bourgeoisie. His novels, plays, essays, and bohemian life came to epitomize the Greenwich Village avant-garde of the 1910's and 1920's. Managing editor of radical magazine, 'The Masses', Dell was twice put on trial for publishing subversive literature. Dell has been called "one of the most flamboyant, versatile and influential American men of letters of the first third of the twentieth century. Both as an editor and a critic, Dell's influence is alive in the work of many major American writers.



### Reading and Thinking Skills

#### 1. Answer the following questions.

- i) What does the phrase, "Sending Granddad away" mean?
- ii) Who is Petey?
- iii) Does Petey love his Granddad?
- iv) Why was the Dad sending Granddad away?
- v) Who had brought the blanket and why?
- vi) Why was the granddad pretending to go to the old house happily?
- vii) What did Petey want to do with the blanket?
- viii) Why did Petey want to cut the blanket into two equal pieces?
- ix) Was Petey successful to teach a lesson to his Dad?
- x) Why did Petey's Dad change his decision?

#### 2. Choose the correct answer.

- i) Dad was sending:
  - a) Petey away.
  - b) the girls away.
  - c) the Granddad away.
  - d) none away.

- ii) Dad had brought:
- a) a car.
  - b) a blanket.
  - c) a table.
  - d) a bed sheet.
- iii) Petey was sad that:
- a) Dad was going away.
  - b) Granddad was going away.
  - c) the girl was going away.
  - d) he was going away.
- iv) Petey didn't believe that:
- a) Granddad was sending Dad away.
  - b) Dad was sending Petey away.
  - c) Dad was sending Granddad away.
  - d) Dad was not sending Granddad away.
- v) Petey wanted to cut the blanket into two pieces because:
- a) he hated the blanket.
  - b) he wanted to destroy the blanket.
  - c) he wanted to teach a lesson to his Dad.
  - d) he wanted to teach a lesson to the girl.

**3. Mark the sentences as true or false.**

- i) Petey was happy that Granddad was going away. ☐
  - ii) Granddad was not willing to go away. ☐
  - iii) Dad wanted to send Granddad to another city. ☐
  - iv) Dad had brought a blanket for Granddad. ☐
  - v) Petey told the Granddad that Dad wanted to marry the pretty girl. ☐
  - vi) Petey wanted to cut the blanket into three pieces. ☐
  - vii) Petey said that he wanted to give one piece of blanket to the Dad when he would send him away to the old house. ☐
- ☐

- viii) Petey taught a lesson to the Dad.
- ix) The Dad changed his decision.
- x) The Granddad did not forgive Dad.

☐  
☐  
☐

### Critical Thinking

How can we stop people sending their parents to old houses?

#### Main idea and supporting details

- The main idea of a paragraph or a longer part of a reading is the most important thing that the writer wants the readers to understand.
- Supporting details are pieces of information that show that the main idea is true.

**Example:** The weather outside was terrible. The temperature was  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The wind was blowing very hard and it was snowing. I did not want to go out.

| Main Idea                 | Supporting Details                   |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| The weather was terrible. | $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ , windy, snowy |

#### Activity

- 1) Read the story "The Blanket" and look for the main idea of each long paragraph. You can sometimes find the main idea in the first or last sentence of a paragraph.
- 2) Write the main ideas and supporting details in your notebooks.

### Universal themes in literature

Universal themes are ways to connect ideas across all disciplines. A universal theme is an idea that applies to anyone regardless of cultural differences, or geographic location. **For example:**

- i) Abuse of power
- ii) Corruption

- iii) Freedom
- iv) Parent-child relationship

### Activity

Work in groups of five to ten. Re-read the story "The Blanket", identify its theme and discuss how its theme is universal. Write down the main points and present it in the class.

## Writing Skills

### Research Report

**Write down a research report of at least three paragraphs focusing the following points:**

- i) After reading the story, "The Blanket", identify its characters.
- ii) Identify the character who is flexible i.e changes his behaviour as the story develops.
- iii) What are the motives that change the character?

## Grammar

### Adjective Phrases

An adjective phrase is a group of words that describes a noun or pronoun in a sentence. The adjective phrase can be placed before or after the noun or pronoun in the sentence.

#### Examples:

- The movie was not too terribly long.
- A person smarter than me needs to figure this out.
- The final exams were unbelievably difficult.
- This pie is very delicious and extremely expensive.
- Everyone was extremely delighted when the winner was announced.

### Activity

**Underline the adjective phrases in the following sentences.**

- i) Faster than a speeding bullet, superman was finished in no time.
- ii) Students, upset about the rising cost of tuition, staged a rally.
- iii) That complex has quite small but cheap apartments.
- iv) The highly emotive actor gave a wonderful performance.
- v) Eating out is usually not very healthy.
- vi) The extremely tired kitten fell asleep by her food dish.
- vii) A dog covered in mud makes a mess in a car.
- viii) Cowboys riding into the sunset were in the final scenes of many movies.
- ix) The man covered in sweat took a well-deserved break.
- x) The music from next door was annoyingly loud.

## Adjective Clause

An adjective clause is a dependent clause that, like an adjective, modifies a noun or pronoun. Adjective clauses begin with words such as *that*, *when*, *where*, *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which* and *why*.

An essential (or restrictive) adjective clause provides information that is necessary for identifying the word it modifies. A nonessential (or nonrestrictive) adjective clause provides additional information about the word it modifies, but the word's meaning is already clear. Nonessential clauses are always set off with commas.

**Note:-** When deciding whether to include the word *that* or *which* in an adjective clause, remember to use *that* for essential clauses and *which* for nonessential clauses.

## Essential Clause

The art class **that Samina takes** focuses on design. (*That Samina takes* is an essential adjective clause. It contains the subject *Samina* and the verb *takes*. The clause modifies the noun *class*, providing necessary information about it.)

## Examples

- i) We are going to the beach **that I like the best**.  
(that I like the best is an adjective clause. It contains the subject I and the verb like. The clause modifies the noun beach.)
- ii) Mr. Naseem is the teacher **who helped me with my math problems**.  
(who helped me with my math problems is an adjective clause. It contains the subject who and the verb helped. The clause modifies the noun teacher.)
- iii) The bad weather is the reason **why I decided to drive instead of walk**.  
(why I decided to drive instead of walk is an adjective clause. It contains the subject I and the verb decided. The clause modifies the noun reason.)
- iv) Maria is the person **whose family owns a horse ranch**.  
(whose family owns a horse ranch is an adjective clause. It contains the subject family and the verb owns. The clause modifies the noun person.)
- v) This is the park **where we can walk in the evening**.  
(where we can walk in the evening is an adjective clause. It contains the subject we and the verb phrase can walk. The clause modifies the noun park.)
- vi) Do you remember the time **when we almost missed the train?**  
(when we almost missed the train is an adjective clause. It contains the subject we and the verb missed. The clause modifies the noun time.)
- vii) Faheem went to the studio **where he takes glassblowing lessons**.  
(where he takes glassblowing lessons is an adjective clause. It contains the subject he and the verb takes. The clause modifies the noun studio.)
- viii) Monday is the day **when I have my doctor's appointment**.  
(when I have my doctor's appointment is an adjective clause. It contains the subject I and the verb have. The clause modifies the noun day.)

## Nonessential Clause

The house on the left, **which belongs to Javed**, is up for sale.

(*which belongs to Javed* is a nonessential adjective clause. It contains the subject *which* and the verb *belongs*. The clause modifies the noun *house*, providing additional, nonessential information about it.)

### Examples:

- i) Hameed, who teaches English language, is my best friend.
- ii) Quetta, which is capital of Balochistan, is a small city.
- iii) Tiger, which runs very fast, is a dangerous animal.

### Activity

Re-read the unit “The Blanket”, and identify the sentences that contain adjective clauses. Note down at least ten adjective clauses from them.