

Fifth Form Justice

...is served



CONNECT

Do you panic before a test or an examination? Tell the class how you feel before an examination. Share with them an unforgettable experience you have had during examinations.

REFLECT

If you were to find a draft question paper in your classroom dustbin, what would you do with it? Give reasons for your answer.

IMAGINE

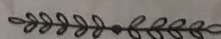
Draw a caricature of a student who is nervous before a test and also describe her/his feelings.

BEFORE YOU READ



Angela Brazil (1868–1947) was an English writer popularly known for her school stories. She was born in Preston, Lancashire, UK. She was highly interested in sketching. *A Terrible Tomboy*, her first children's novel, was published in 1904. She published around 60 children's novels which mostly revolve around girls' school stories. Most of her stories have girls at the centre. *The Fortunes of Philippa* (1906), *The Nicest Girl in the School* (1909), *A Fourth Form Friendship* (1912), *The School by the Sea* (1914), *The Luckiest Girl in the School* (1916) and *The Jolliest School of All* (1922) are some of her published works.

Fifth Form Justice is a chapter from the novel, *Monitress Merle*, which was published in 1922. The novel revolves around the story of the two Ramsays girls—Merle and Mavis. In *Fifth Form Justice*, the two sisters are shown struggling to prove themselves against the allegations of cheating in an examination.



READ

The examinations at the end of the school term were due. Mavis and Merle had missed much on account of the **mumps**, and when they attempted some revision, they were **absolutely horrified at the amount that had to be done. They did their best and studied till their heads ached.** On the evening before the first examination, they were sitting in their father's, Dr Ramsay's, study revising several rather rusty subjects, when Clive walked in.

'Hello, kid! You're not allowed in here! We're working!' warned Merle. **Her young cousin grinned.**

'I know! And you've got to stop it. I've been sent to tell you to shut those books up at once!'

'Did Mother say so?'

'She did. She says you've done enough and you'll only **muddle** yourselves if you go on any longer.'

mumps: a disease that causes fever and swelling in the salivary glands, especially in children

oracle: a person or a thing who or which makes predictions

occult: relating to the supernatural

'We shan't pass!' sighed Mavis.

'Yes, you will! Listen to the **oracle** and he'll give you a tip or two. A little bird told him you should look up Celtic words in the English language, the life and works of William Cowper and the products of Java and Borneo!'

Merle giggled.

'How clever you are all of a sudden! What do you know about our exam subjects?'

Clive winked solemnly, first with one eye and then with another.

'Perhaps I'm in communication with the **occult!**' he remarked.

'Don't people go to fortune tellers and astrologers when they want to learn about their future? I'm



your wizard tonight.'

'All right. Tell us our fortunes.'

'I'll do a little fortune telling if you like!' Clive seized a glass paperweight and, staring at it, pretended to throw himself into a state of **abstraction**. 'I see an examination-room!' he declared. 'I see rows of desks and girls writing at them. There are lists of questions. I am peeping over their shoulders and they are puzzling about the products of Java and Borneo, the life and works of William Cowper and the Celtic words in the English language. You and Mavis are scribbling ahead for all you're worth.'

'A very pretty picture, I'm sure! Can't you tell us some more?'

'Alas! No.'

'And it's your bedtime!' said Mavis. 'I expect you were on your way upstairs when you came in here. Confess!'

'There's no hurry. I'll stay and tell yours too if you like.'

'No, thanks. This will do for both of us. Is Mother in the drawing-room? Come along, Merle, we won't work any more tonight.'

'Oh, I must just look up—what was it—the products of Java and Borneo, William Cowper and Celtic words. There's luck in them! Just for five minutes! Get off to bed, you kid, and leave me to work.'

Rather reluctantly, Mavis fell in with

her sister's humour and reopened her textbooks.

'Clive's only fooling!' she said.

'I know. And so am I! Here we are—Celtic words in use in the English language. You can squint over my shoulder if you like.'

The five minutes lengthened out till Mrs Ramsay came herself and put a finish to the preparation.

'It's silly to overdo it. You'll only have headaches tomorrow and be able to remember nothing. Come along to the drawing-room.'

'Yes, Mummie darling, I'm just strapping up my books. There, I'll leave them here on the hall table. I promise you, I won't take them upstairs. Hello! Here's my jersey! I was hunting for it everywhere after tea and couldn't find it. It feels wet! How funny! Has anybody been out in it?'

'Give it to Alice and ask her to put it by the kitchen fire to dry.'

Merle marched into school the next morning, joking about her fortune. She told the girls what the oracle had said and how she had ground up those particular bits of information.

'I'm sporting enough to give you the tip!' she laughed.

abstraction: deep thought without paying attention to surroundings

'Clive was only making fun and **ragging** us!' qualified Mavis. 'He's a silly boy.'

There was no time for any more last looks, however. The bell was ringing for call-over and all books had to be put away. In the Fifth Form room, Miss Mitchell dealt round typewritten sheets of questions and the agony began. The English Language and Literature paper was not nearly so bad as Mavis and Merle had expected and curiously enough, there were questions both on William Cowper and Celtic words. It was such a coincidence that Merle could not help looking at Mavis and smiling. They were both well prepared and wrote away at full speed, almost enjoying themselves and worked steadily till Miss Mitchell said, 'Pens down.'

After eleven o'clock came the examination on geography. When she saw the first question, 'Describe the products of Java and Borneo,' Merle gave such a chuckle that many eyes were cast in her direction. Miss Mitchell glared a warning. Again, Mavis and Merle found



ragging: teasing

shrugged: moved the shoulders to show indifference

themselves well prepared and scribbled continuously till the bell rang.

'How did you get on?' said Merle to Muriel, as they walked downstairs from their classroom.

'I say! Wasn't it funny about my fortune? Why, we had the exact questions! I never heard of anything so queer in my life!'

'Very queer!' answered Muriel, with restraint in her voice. She was looking at Iva, who **shrugged** her shoulders significantly.

'Some people have all the luck!' remarked Sybil.

'Well, it was lucky, for it was pure guessing by Clive.'

'How did he know what exams you were going to have?'

'Oh, he's heard us talking about them, of course.'

'I wish I had a cousin who could guess the questions beforehand.'



'We'd all get Honours on those lines.'

When Mavis and Merle returned to school after lunch, they each found a little note laid upon their desks marked 'Urgent'.

'You are requested to attend an important meeting to be held in the boarders' sitting-room at the hostel immediately after four.'

There was no signature, but the writing was Iva's. The Ramsays were much mystified. As daygirls, they had nothing to do with the hostel and could only go there by special invitation. When afternoon school was over, they asked some of the boarders the meaning of the letter.

Nobody would explain.

'You'll find out when you get there,' was Nesta's cryptic reply.

Puzzled, and considerably distressed at a certain offensive attitude exhibited by Sybil and others, Mavis and Merle walked across the garden to the hostel. Iva had cleared all the younger girls out of the boarders' sitting-room and was waiting in company with Nesta, Muriel, Aubrey, Edith and Kitty. As soon as the Ramsays and Sybil came in, Sybil closed the door. Iva settled herself and looked somewhat embarrassed, as if not knowing quite how to begin. She fidgeted for a moment with her pencil and cleared her throat. 'We're all here,' she said at last, 'except Fay who couldn't stay. What we've met for is to

ask Mavis and Merle to explain how they got to know some of the examination questions beforehand. It seems queer to us, to say the least of it!

The Ramsays, overwhelmed with amazement at such a palpable insinuation, turned wrathfully red.

'Why, we've told you! Clive guessed!' gasped Merle.

'Bunkum! How could he?'

'Very convenient guessing, I'm sure!'

'It's no use telling us such utter fibs!'

'They're not fibs! How dare you say so!' flamed Merle.

'It's the absolute truth!' endorsed Mavis.

'Do you stick to that?'

'Of course, we do.'



Brainstorm

Why do you think Mavis and Merle have been invited to the Principal's office?

palpable: easily noticeable; obvious

insinuation: the act of suggesting indirectly that something unpleasant is true

fibs: lies

'Then I shall have to call on Sybil to tell us something she saw yesterday.'

Sybil, who was red, nervous and even more uncomfortable than Iva, rose from her seat to make her accusation.

'I was in the garden yesterday after school and I saw Merle come back, hurry among the bushes and climb in at the study window. I waited and she came out again and scooted off as if she didn't want to meet anybody.'

'O-o-oh! You didn't see me! I wasn't there! Was I, Mavis?'

'Most certainly not. You were at home all the time. I can prove that!'

'I think the thing proves itself!' said Iva.

'First of all, you're seen by a witness entering the study, where, no doubt, the exam papers were spread out on the table and then, you come to school primed with the questions. There isn't a shadow of doubt.'

'Wait a minute!' said Mavis, rising with a very white face. 'To begin with, you've got to prove that it was Merle. One witness isn't enough.'

'Catie and Peggie saw her down the drive. They told me so.'

'What time was it?'

'About five o'clock.'

'She was practising at home then. I can bring witnesses to prove that. Besides, if she had really seen the questions, do

you think she'd have been silly enough to tell them to you before the exam?'

The girls looked puzzled at that, but Nesta murmured that Merle was silly enough for anything.

'As she's one of the **monitresses**, we thought we ought to give her a chance to clear herself before we told Miss Mitchell,' said Iva.

'She can clear herself and she will. It's not fair to condemn her like this. You must give her time to bring her own witnesses. I ask you all, is it like Merle to do such a thing?'

'Well, no, it certainly isn't like either of you. That's what's surprised us so much.'

'You feel you can't be sure of anybody,' added Aubrey.

The boarders' tea-gong, sounding at that moment, brought the meeting to an unsatisfactory conclusion. The Ramsays hurried home, bubbling over with indignation, to pour their woes into Mother's sympathetic ear and were highly put out to find the drawing-room full of callers.

'We'll sit in the summer-house, only I must have my jersey,' declared Merle, catching up the garment in question from its peg in the hall and pulling it on.

primed: prepared
monitresses: a girl in charge of the class

'I want some place where I can explode. This is just the beastliest thing that's ever happened to me in all my life.'

'I can't understand it!' puzzled Mavis, with her forehead in wrinkles.

Merle was stumping along the path with her hands in the pockets of her jersey.

'Why should they accuse me, of all people in the world, of climbing in through the study window?

'Sybil must have been dreaming. She's an idiot of a girl. She'd imagine anything from a ghost to a burglar. What are we going to do about it? I wish to goodness they would tell Miss Mitchell! I'd rather she knew. I've a jolly good mind to go and tell her myself. Then I should have first innings and she'd hear our side of it. Hello! There's Clive.'

It was that lively young gentleman who came walking along the garden wall and took a flying leap on the path, just avoiding one of the best flower-beds.

'There's a whole tribe of ladies in the drawing-room!' he volunteered. 'I carried my tea into the summer-house! Have you bunked too? I don't blame you. You're looking down in the mouth, both of you! Exams gone wrong this afternoon? Shall I tell your fortunes again?'

'Your precious fortune has got us into a great deal of trouble,' answered Merle. 'How did you manage to guess those questions? They were actually in our papers!'

Clive pulled his face into a variety of **grimaces**.

'You young wretch!' cried Merle, chasing him down the path as he fled. She took her hands from her pockets to catch hold of him, and as she did so, out flew a penknife on to the grass. Clive pounced upon it immediately and picked it up.

'I've been looking for this everywhere!' he declared.

'How did it get inside my pocket?' asked Merle. 'I never put it there!'

'Clive!' exclaimed Mavis, with a sudden flash of **intuition**. 'Did you wear Merle's jersey yesterday? I remember she found it wet. I verily believe you dressed up in her clothes and went to school.'

For answer, Clive burst into fits of laughter.

'Oh, it was topping!' he hinned. 'I stuck on her skirt and jersey and **tam o'shanter** and took in everybody. I walked down the street and up the drive to the school door. I prowled round the garden. There was a window open, so in I went and found exam questions all over the table. I thought I'd rag you about them!'

grimaces: a facial expression of disgust

intuition: a strong feeling or belief

tam o'shanter: a Scottish cap

'You atrocious imp! Look here! You don't know what a scrape you've got us into. You'll just have to own up and get us out of it again, that's all!' the girls exclaimed.

It was a long time before the girls could get Clive to see the serious side of his escapade and realise what an exceedingly grave charge had been brought against their honour. In the end, by dint of scolding, entreaty, **coercion** and even bribery, they succeeded in persuading their cousin to come along with them to Miss Mitchell and tell her the whole story.

'I'm extremely glad to know,' she said, looking hard at Clive. 'The fact is I was deceived myself. He's very like you, Merle! I happened to see him climbing out of the window and I certainly thought I recognised you. I've felt upset all day about it. I couldn't understand your doing such a thing.'

'Will you explain to the boarders, please! I hate them to think me a sneak.'

'I'll make that all right.'



'And about those exam questions— Mavis and I wouldn't have dreamt of looking them up beforehand and I don't suppose we should have known

them. Wouldn't it be fairer just to cross them off in our papers and not count them? We'd much rather you did.'

'Yes, it's the only thing to be done.'

Clive, much subdued, blurted out a kind of apology before he left, which Miss Mitchell accepted with dignity.

The Fifth Form, when they heard the true facts of the story, repented their hasty court of justice and made handsome amends.



coercion: the act of using force to control



CONSOLIDATE

A1. Answer these questions.

1. What were Mavis and Merle doing when the story opened? Why?
2. Who was Clive? How did he help Mavis and Merle?
3. Did Mavis and Merle keep the information a secret?
4. What did their classmates think? What action did they take?
5. How was the mystery solved? What did Clive do to clear their names?

A2. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *Clive's only fooling!*
 - a. Who said this? Who was Clive?
 - b. Was Clive actually fooling them?
2. *I saw Merle come back, hurry among the bushes and climb in at the study window.*
 - a. Who said this?
 - b. Who was the speaker addressing?
 - c. Was the speaker correct?
3. *How did you manage to guess those questions? They were actually in our papers!*
 - a. Who said this?
 - b. Who had managed to guess the questions in the exam papers?
 - c. Was it a guess, a premonition or a prank?
4. *You atrocious imp! Look here! You don't know what a scrape you've got us into.*
 - a. Who said this? Who was the 'imp'?
 - b. Who has been referred to as 'us' here?
 - c. What scrape did the 'imp' get them into?

A3. Think and answer.

What action did Merle suggest should be taken about their answer papers? Was she correct? Would you have done the same?

A4. Learn Interesting Terms

Suspense is a literary device used in a story to keep readers hooked to it. It gives a feeling that something dangerous and risky might happen. In *Fifth Form Justice*, Mavis and Merle find a little note lying upon their desks. The note has no signature, but the writing looks like Iva's. This scene creates an atmosphere of suspense in the story.

Suspense

Now, find out stories that use suspense as a major literary device.

CREATE

B. Read these sentences.

- Mavis is **funny**.
- Merle is **funnier** than Mavis.
- Clive is the **funniest** among the three.

In these sentences, the highlighted words show the different degrees of adjectives.

Degrees of adjectives help us make a comparison between two or more things, places or persons.



Word World



big



bigger



biggest

There are three degrees of adjectives.

Positive

Comparative

Superlative