

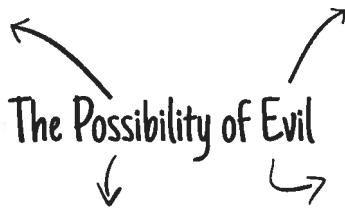


THE POSSIBILITY OF EVIL

by Shirley Jackson

BEFORE READING:

Mind-map below any thoughts or questions you have about the TITLE. Think about what each of the words might mean.



infatuated *adjective*
| inspired with an intense but short-lived passion or admiration.

indulgently *adverb*
| acting in an overly generous or lenient manner

rapt *adjective*
| completely fascinated by what one is seeing or hearing

appropriation *noun*
| a sum of money or total of assets devoted to a special purpose

degraded *adjective*
| treated or regarded with contempt or disrespect

reprehensible *adjective*
| deserving criticism or condemnation

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

While reading, annotate closely, making a particular note of the following:

- Anything which illustrates something of the main character's actions, thoughts, personality, or character traits.

Can you be judgmental?

judgmental

I make a lot of negative evaluations of other people. Disagree → Agree
 1 2 3 4 5

I jump to conclusions, often believing the worst in people. Disagree → Agree
 1 2 3 4 5

I form opinions of people quickly, and struggle to change them. Disagree → Agree
 1 2 3 4 5

BEFORE READING: Spend time thinking about each of the statements below, & decide if you agree or disagree.

then give a reason for your opinion.

Statement	Agree / Disagree	Reason
People are inherently good.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	
We all hide our true identities from those around us.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	
When we see evil in society, it is our responsibility to do something about it.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	

Read through the vocabulary definitions above; pick one you weren't familiar with before, and use it in your own sentence:

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AFTER READING

Having read the story, finish the following sentences:

At first I thought _____

But now I realize _____

Identify what changed your thinking:

how she felt / what she thought

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Mind-map the significance of the protagonist's name:

Miss Adela Strangeworth



THE LETTERS A single word to describe them: _____

What is the significance of the paper they are written on?

What might have been in the letter to Linda's father?

A quotation to explain why she writes them:

How do people find out about her letters?

the setting List key words from the story which relate to the setting.

IRONY

Definition of **SITUATIONAL IRONY**

"Miss Strangeworth sighed and turned away. There was so much **EVIL** in people. Even in a charming little town like this one, there was still so much evil in people."

Explain why the above quotation is ironic:

A quotation about Miss Strangeworth's roses:

SYMBOLISM

How does she feel about her roses?

- Humble Proud
- Protective Irritated
- Indifferent Discontented

(check all that apply)

How does this compare to her relationship with the town?

The Roses

Is what happens to Miss Strangeworth at the end of the story justified and appropriate?

Rank each of the following in terms of how prominent and significant they are as core 'messages' of the story. (1-most / 4-least)

- A single individual can be extremely influential in a community.
- Do not be deceived by appearances; people aren't always who they seem.
- Pride can cloud a person's judgment, causing them to do harmful things.
- Even good intentions can have negative consequences.

THEMES

On the one hand, YES because _____

On the other hand, NO because _____

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QUICK QUIZ

Read each question and answer carefully, and then choose the best answer, circling your selection.

Shirley Jackson

1. What is the narrative perspective of the story?

- A) First-person
- B) Second-person
- C) Third-person limited
- D) Third-person omniscient

2. How does Miss Strangeworth feel about her town?

- A) She longs to escape it.
- B) She is disillusioned by it.
- C) She feels extremely possessive of it.
- D) She feels a sense of generosity towards it.

3. At the very start of the story, how is the protagonist characterized?

- A) As an amusing character.
- B) As a frail and delicate elderly lady.
- C) As an interfering busy-body.
- D) As a well-respected member of the town.

4. How does she feel about the fact she has never left her town?

- A) She is extremely proud of this fact.
- B) She is ashamed of herself.
- C) She feels conflicted.
- D) She displays regret about this.

5. What is Miss Strangeworth's attitude towards her roses?

- A) She wants the town to benefit from them.
- B) She sees them as a burden she has to bear.
- C) She hopes that their beauty will rid the evil in the town.
- D) She is highly protective of them.

6. How does she respond to Helen Crane's worries?

- A) She is dismissive and rude.
- B) She tries to reassure her.
- C) She listens patiently.
- D) She is nasty and unkind.

7. Which of the following best describes how Miss Strangeworth feels about her home?

- A) She feels confined in it and enjoys being out.
- B) It is the only place she really feels safe.
- C) She looks forward to returning to it when she is out.
- D) She takes pride in it, but prefers to be out in town.

8. Why doesn't Miss Strangeworth write her letters on her fancy notepad?

- A) She doesn't wish to waste that precious paper on the townspeople.
- B) She wants the origin of the letters to be unidentifiable.
- C) She doesn't have enough of it.
- D) She is embarrassed by how elaborate it is.

9. Why does Miss Strangeworth write her letters?

- A) She is extremely bored.
- B) She is a mischievous woman.
- C) She longs to be nasty.
- D) She feels that it is her duty.

10. How does she feel about writing these letters?

- A) She takes pleasure in writing them.
- B) She doesn't enjoy it, but feels a sense of obligation.
- C) She is indifferent to it.
- D) She wishes that she didn't have to write them.

11. What is the climax in the story?

- A) The protagonist drops one of her letters and it is picked up.
- B) Miss Strangeworth writes nasty letters to people in the town.
- C) Miss Strangeworth wakes up to find her roses destroyed.
- D) The protagonist had a nap.

12. Which type of character is Miss Strangeworth?

- A) Antagonist
- B) Round character
- C) Minor character
- D) Titular character

13. The ending of the story is paradoxical.

- A) True
- B) False

14. What is Miss Strangeworth's view of humanity?

- A) All humans are evil and need cleansing.
- B) There is complexity in everyone.
- C) Sometimes people do evil things, but they are inherently good.
- D) People are all liars and cheats.

15. Miss Strangeworth's home-life is characterized as:

- A) luxurious
- B) orderly
- C) exciting
- D) chaotic

16. The title of this short story contains:

- A) a metaphor
- B) foreshadowing
- C) irony
- D) personification

17. How does Miss Strangeworth respond to the letter she receives at the end of the story?

- A) She is shocked and surprised.
- B) She feels it validates her beliefs about humanity.
- C) She is horrified by what people think of her.
- D) She feels excluded from the town.

characterization *noun*
 the process by which the writer reveals
 the personality and features of a
 character in a story

KEY FOCUS: Characterization

Spend time thinking about how Shirley Jackson has **created the character** of Adela Strangeworth through the **methods of characterization** listed below, finding examples of each.



Tool	Example (find a direct quotation from the text)
Direct comment from the narrator about the character	
Physical appearance of the character	
Character's thoughts, actions, and speech	
Other characters' reactions to / thoughts about the character	

Miss Strangeworth

INDIRECT *characterization*

Often we learn about a character through what we **INFER** about them. For each of the following traits, explain how we know this about the protagonist's personality.

Miss Adela Strangeworth is...

HABITUAL	We can infer this from...	Quotation as evidence
SELF-RIGHTEOUS	We can infer this from...	Quotation as evidence
NAIVE	We can infer this from...	Quotation as evidence

Literary Analysis **WRITING**

practice

How does Jackson illustrate the fact that Miss Strangeworth is a proud woman?

- You should:
- Make a distinct **claim** answering the question.
 - Explain your claim with **embedded direct evidence** from the text.
 - Provide **analysis** as to why this aspect of her character is important in terms of the deeper themes of the story.