

Short Story: The Decision

Level: A2-B1

She had made up her mind.

Not that she minded the consequences. She had got used to them anyway.

Her Maths and Biology teacher had told her something about her future. "Bright and promising," that is what they had said.

They had not been patronising. She had actually been surprised by their kindness, their soliciting tones, their soothing voices.

They had told her that she was clever; that she was talented; that she would make it to Chancellor College, only if she wanted to.

She just had to work harder, do her homework all the time and never be late for classes as she did, at least once a fortnight.

It was hard to believe them.

She knew that she wasn't doing enough to get good grades. She knew that she wasn't doing enough to wake up earlier so that she could arrive at school on time. She knew that she wasn't doing enough to make her parents happy. She knew that she wasn't doing enough to keep herself out of trouble.

The truth was she hated going to school. She didn't understand why she had to go to school. She didn't see the ultimate goal, the ultimate reason why she had to work so hard, getting bad grades all the time and continuing to go to the same place that made her feel so bad. They said that it was for her own sake, for her future. Did she want to become a cleaner or a housewife, they would ask. She thought there was nothing bad about those occupations as long as the people doing them had enough food and were happy.

She felt that school was a total waste of time and resources. This was a place where teachers always shouted at you and nothing good came out of it. This was a place where teachers always pointed out your mistakes; one didn't actually want to do any good. This was a place where teachers punished you, and kept on punishing you, even though you never changed, or at least they never got the changes that they desired in you. This was also a place where no one really protected you from those punishments. If a teacher decided to punish you for as long as he wanted, then you were in real trouble. To her, this place did not seem safe at all.

Mrs Ngwenya and Mr Moyo had not even mentioned her punishments. As if they didn't know!

She was known for getting at least one punishment every week. Teachers were always racking their brains to find ways of finally making her do what they wanted. She had already swept the whole school yard. Mr Gama, the Chichewa teacher, had once made her uproot a whole mango tree stump. The year before, she had cleaned the windows of all the Form 2 level (that wasn't funny). She had even been asked to stand up during English lessons for a whole term (a whole term!). That was ridiculous.

Each time a teacher asked her to come in front of the class during a lesson, her classmates would start laughing. A few would pity her. A lone voice would protest but the teachers never swayed from whatever decision they had taken.

She remembered about Mrs Ngwenya's impromptu meeting and her relief when she went out of the small room. No punishment! Nothing. She remembered about being stressed during that week, thinking that the whole story was a joke. In the past, no teacher had let her go so easily.

All what had remained from that meeting were their words. Kind words, not hurtful words. Uplifting words, not demeaning words. Inspiring words, not hateful words.

She had thought about those words for days, day and night. Those words had followed her wherever she had gone. She had not been able to run away from them. They had been like a cloak of graceful redemption thrown above her head, covering her eyes, her whole face, but letting her see anyway. They had been like a blanket of protection, enveloping her and keeping her safe and nurtured.

Those beautiful words had gone straight to the very depths of her heart and their light had spread out to the rest of her being.

She had felt loved.

She wanted to hear more of those words.

It was her Geography teacher who noticed the change.

"Tadala, well done, you have done your homework on time."

"Thank you," she replied. She had learned not to take kind words for granted.

"Keep it up! If you do that during this whole term and continue, you will surely go to Chancellor College." This was even before the homework had been corrected!

It was her History teacher, Mr Manjonjo, who almost ruined everything.

"Why didn't you write the title of the essay in red as I asked? This is nonsense! Why can't you do as I say?" He crumpled the essay and threw it into the bin. "Write it properly next time."

"That was wrong," she told him.

"What? Am I hearing you right? What did you just say?"

"What you did was wrong."

"Who are you to say that? Have you lost your mind?"

"No, I haven't sir. What you just did was wrong."

"What did I do?"

"You threw away a whole week's work just because I did not write the title in red. That was really wrong."

"It doesn't matter. You're always getting into trouble anyway."

"No Sir, from now on I won't."

"We'll see."

"So what are you going to do about my essay?"

"What essay?"

"The one you just threw away."

Mr Manjonjo turned away and started writing on the blackboard.

She knew that he would never crumple any of her work again.

Reading Comprehension

1. GENERAL COMPREHENSION

- a. What is the title of the short story:.....
- b. What does the title mean?:.....
- c. Who is the narrator?:.....
- d. How old can she be?:.....
- e. Where does the story take place?:.....
- f. Name at least three main characters in the story and describe them:.....
.....
.....
- g. Name four school subjects that are mentioned:.....
- h. What is the story about?:.....
.....
- i. What is your opinion about this story?:.....
.....

2. DETAILED COMPREHENSION

- a. **VOCABULARY:** What do the following words or expressions mean: i) patronising ii) soliciting tone iii) soothing iv) lone voice v) impromptu meeting vi) uplifting vii)to take kind words for granted viii) ruin everything ix) a whole week’s work x) crumple
- b. **TRUE or FALSE:** Say if the following sentences are TRUE or FALSE. Justify your answer
 - i. The narrator loves going to school:.....
.....
 - ii. The narrator loves being in trouble at school:.....
.....
 - iii. The narrator sees no reason why she should go to school:.....
.....
 - iv. All her classmates are helpful:.....
.....
 - v. The narrator is hardworking. She does not understand why her teachers keep on punishing her:
.....
 - vi. Mrs Ngwenya says hurtful things to her:.....
.....
 - vii. The narrator is surprised when the two teachers do not mention the word “punishment”:
.....

WRITE FULL ANSWERS FOR THESE QUESTIONS

- c. What is the narrator’s general attitude towards school?.....
.....
.....
- d. Name four consequences of her behaviour at school:.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
- e. What event makes her change her mind about school?:.....
.....
.....
- f. What is the importance of this event for her?:.....
.....
.....
- g. How does she behave towards her teachers after this event?:.....
.....
.....
- h. Explain the Geography teacher’s attitude towards the narrator:.....
.....
.....
- i. Explain Mr Manjonjo’s attitude towards the narrator?:.....
.....
.....
- j. What do you think of the narrator’s attitude towards Mr Manjonjo?:.....
.....
.....

3. WRITING:

- I. Imagine the future of the narrator. What will happen to her in ten years’ time? Will she fulfill her dreams of going to Chancellor College? Write at least 100 to 150 words
- II. Imagine what would happen if the narrator let Mr Manjonjo, the History teacher, crumple her homework all the time? What would be the consequences of such behaviour? Write at least 100 to 150 words.

POINTS YOU HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO

Correct subject	Teacher’s Notes:
Correct structure (paragraphs)	
Presentation (neatness, pictures, illustrations, etc)	
Punctuation (full stops, commas, question marks, etc)	
Grammar (correct tenses, synbtax, etc)	
Vocabulary (simple, elaborate, varied, etc)	
Originality (interesting, unusual, etc)	