

UNTERRICHTS MATERIALIEN

Englisch S. K. II



Changed priorities ahead – “Loose Change” by Andrea Levy”
Die Erzählung wird mit analytischen und kreativen Aufgaben untersucht

Themenkreis „Short stories, fables and fairy tales“

Changed priorities ahead: the short story “Loose Change” by Andrea Levy

by Dr. Bernd Klewitz

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Kompetenzprofil

- Niveaustufe: B2/C1 (Europäischer Referenzrahmen)
- Kompetenzbereiche: Writing, speaking, reading, language
- Aufgabenformate: Working with the text, working with the videos, using the herringbone technique, language and style, character analysis, discussion, research, creative writing
- Medien: Zeitungsartikel, Sachtexte, Bilder, Videos, Rollenkarten, Essay
- Schüblerleifende Aspekte: Gesellschaft, Geschichte, Politik, Ethik

Changed priorities ahead: the short story "Loose Change" by Andrea Levy

Set in the London National Portrait Gallery, the short story "Loose Change" by Andrea Levy recounts a meeting between two strangers. The unnamed first-person narrator is the grandchild of one of the early post-war immigrants and considers herself an established citizen of London. Finding herself in need of some small change, she asks the people around her for help. A young woman called Laylor is the only person who doesn't turn her back on her. In a conversation with Laylor, the narrator learns that the girl is a refugee from Uzbekistan who is forced to sleep rough in the streets of London. Initially, the narrator feels sympathy for Laylor and considers helping her and even inviting her to her home. She is reminded of the negative experiences of her Caribbean grandmother, who also arrived in London with the help of a stranger. But her sympathy for Laylor changes into aversion, as she is repelled by her outward appearance and her behaviour during their encounter. In a twist of the story, the narrator abruptly leaves Laylor and abandons her original plan to help her.

Short stories as a genre

As compared to the novel, the great advantage of the short story is brevity and its focus on the events during a short period of time. In a quickly sketched situation the short story comes to the point more or less immediately. It leaves it up to the reader to add further details, to continue the story after it has finished or to begin it before it has begun. This space enhances the imagination and invites creative interpretation.

All of this certainly applies to the plot in "Loose Change" confronting us with the limited perspective of a first-person narrator, whose attitudes may or may not be shared by the reader. The author almost inevitably is part of this process. Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer put it in an interview: "I love to write [short] stories. It's such a wonderful form, like poetry, because it's so distilled. [...] To me a short story is like an egg: When the beginning comes to

me, I have the end. It's complete. It's got its white and it's got its yolk and it's got its shell containing it" (*BookPage* interview by Alden Mudge, December 2007). To identify and understand more about the shell, the white and the yolk of the short story presented here is the overall objective of this unit.

About the author

Andrea Levy was born in East London in 1956 and spent her childhood and youth in this part of the city. The daughter of Jamaican parents is the author of several novels which are both critical of society and focus on the "Black experience" in Britain. In her first three novels she explored the problems of Black Britons, looking closely at Britain and its changing population as well as considering the connection between British history and that of the Caribbean. In 1948, Levy's father sailed from Jamaica to England on the SS Empire Windrush and her mother joined him sometime later.

The Windrush experience

The SS Empire Windrush carried immigrants to England for the first time in 1948. [...] Many people came to England, and by 1956 there were over 40,000 immigrants that had come to this country. Year by year, up to 700 West Indians came. This had a great impact on Britain. The population increased whilst many white Britons looked at these new arrivals in disgust. Loads thought the newcomers were stealing their jobs, as these people would work for a lesser price. These jobs were available; many British workers had been killed in the world wars. Also there was a housing issue: many houses had been bombed in the world wars. The fact that many white landlords wouldn't rent a single room to the black population didn't help the problem.

Source: <http://dwjs.wikibooks.com/The+SS+Empire+Windrush> © cc by sa 3.0

Andrea Levy drew on these experiences in her novels: Her first one – the semi-autobiographical *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994) – is about a Jamaican family in London during the 1960s. Her second novel – *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) – is set ten years later and features two sisters living on a council estate. Her third book – *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) – tells the story of a young Black woman visiting Jamaica after a nervous breakdown to discover her own personal history.

Setting the scene and meeting the characters

Working with the videos

1. **The Caribbean experience:** Watch the two video clips from the BBC drama *Small Island* (2009).
 - a) Describe the experiences of the Jamaican people shown in the two video clips.
 - b) Describe the relationship between Hortense and Queenie in her attempt to help out.

- Post War Blues

www.youtube.com/watch?v=j31n41muhcg&index=4&list=PLO-wxIy9sHyYrtydLbuVLIIm8qt2gA

- What are chips?

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHHmLWQUPrk&list=PLO-wxIy9sHyYrtydLbuVLIIm8qt2gA&index=5 (0:00-2:10)

INFO *Small Island*

The 2-part BBC drama series *Small Island* is based on Andrea Levy's fourth novel, and was filmed with Benedict Cumberbatch in one of the leading roles in 2009. It is set in London after World War II. There are four main characters: Hortense and Gilbert are a Jamaican couple renting a room in Queenie and Bernard's London house, facing much hostility from the white neighbourhood.

2. **Glamour and poverty in London:** Watch the trailer to the movie *Notting Hill* (1999).

Outline the impressions you get in this video clip of the glamorous lifestyle in London and an impossible love story.

Notting Hill: Trailer

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig_88q9M3SU&pbjreload=10

6. Examine the characters more closely by completing the following tasks:
- Describe Laylor's outward appearance.
 - Examine the narrator's reaction when Laylor's brother appears. What does she make of him?
 - Explain why the narrator worries about the women on the next table.
 - Describe what the narrator thinks will happen if she invites Laylor to her home.
7. There is a stunning resemblance between the artist Frida Kahlo and the girl Laylor in "Loose Change". Apart from their outward appearance, both seem to share a love of the arts.

- Research some facts about Frida Kahlo's life and her political commitments. A starting point is provided on this website.

[www.fridakahlofans.com/
chronologyenglish.html](http://www.fridakahlofans.com/chronologyenglish.html)



- Using think-pair-share, compare Frida Kahlo with Laylor from "Loose Change", considering their similarities and differences.

Plot and language of the story

Who?

First-person narrator of Caribbean descent;
18-year-old girl Laylor from Tashkent;
Laylor's younger brother;
two ladies in the Gallery café

When?

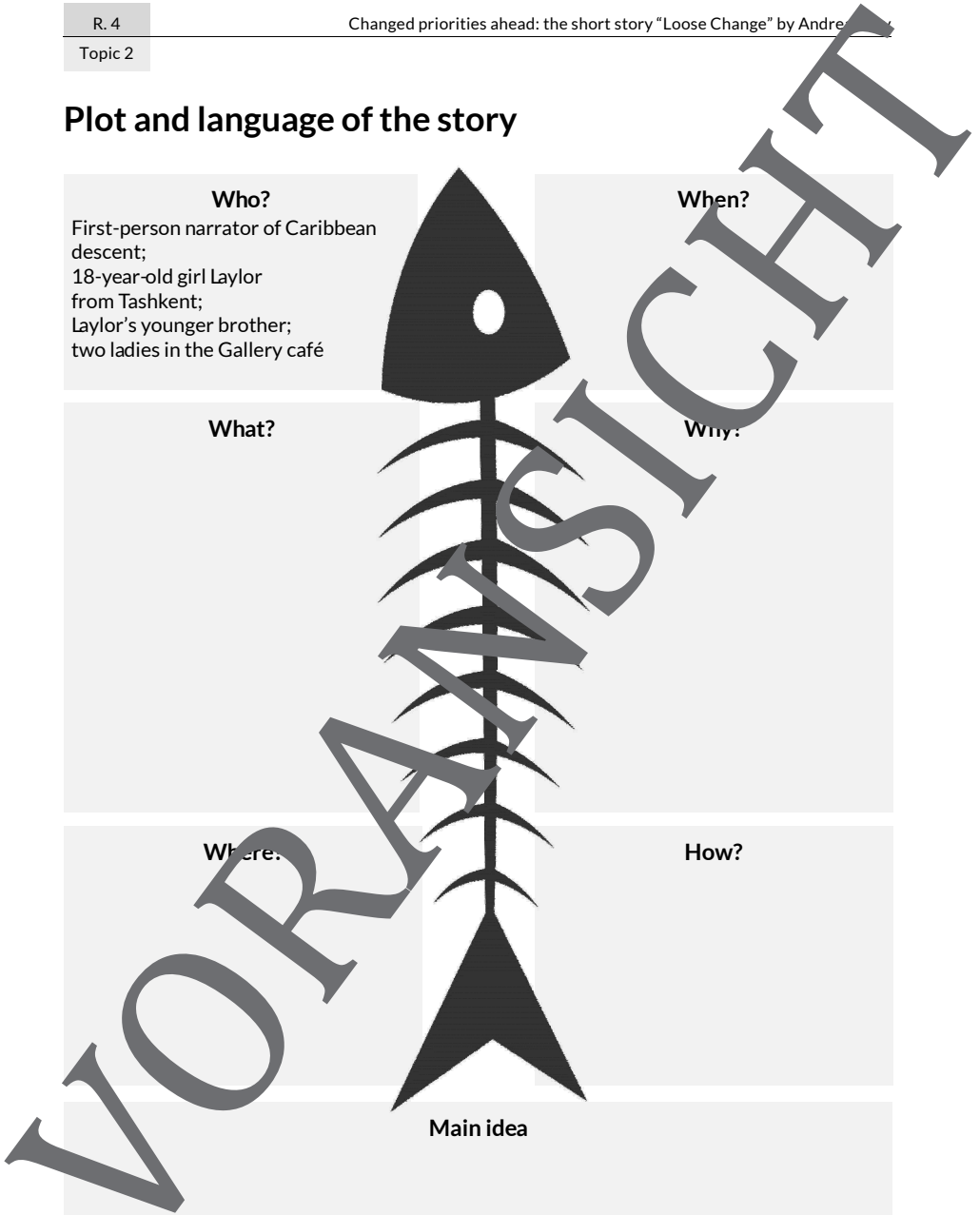
What?

Why?

Where?

How?

Main idea



4. The author uses a number of stylistic devices in "Loose Change". Find examples for the language devices in the table and analyse their meaning and context.

Language devices	Examples	Meaning and context
allusions (expressions designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly)	<i>"She had ... such a solid jaw line that she looked to have taken a gentle whack from Tom and Jerry's cartoon frying pan"</i> (p. 43, ll. 10-13)	Humorous way to describe Taylor's face as funny but outstanding
idioms (expressions with a figurative meaning that is clear to a native speaker)		
similes (figures of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind)		
repetitions (repeating something that has already been said or written)		
rhetorical questions (questions asked in order to create a dramatic effect or to make a point rather than to get an answer)		
symbols (represent or stand for something else, especially material objects representing something abstract)		

The Windrush generation

London is the place for me

London that lovely city

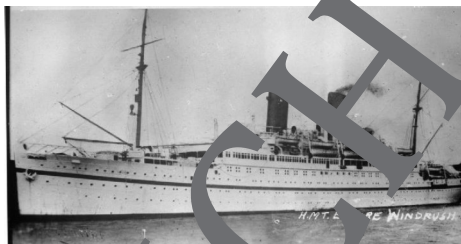
You can go to France or America

India, Asia or Africa

5 *But you must come back to London City...*

Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts),

Calypso singer and composer, 1948



The passenger ship SS Empire Windrush

On 21 June 1948, 492 West Indians arrived at Tilbury Docks, Essex on the SS Empire Windrush. The event prompted debates in Parliament about the immigrants being allowed to settle in the country, and the ship's arrival marked an important moment in modern British history. 'As we got closer to England,' recalled Sam King, one of the passengers and ex-RAF officer, 'there was great apprehension on the part of those who knew that there was a national debate in Britain as to whether the boat would be allowed to dock.'

15 Finding work

A significant number of ex-servicemen were onboard. Some of them were returning to jobs in the RAF, and others were hoping to find work – there were few or no prospects of employment in the West Indies at this time. They knew that there was work in Britain because the country needed rebuilding after the war. The other settlers had either been to Britain before, but were confident that they could find jobs and make a good living. Three weeks after arriving, it was reported that: 76 had gone to work in foundries², 15 on the railways, 15 as labourers, 15 as farm workers and 10 as electricians. The others have gone into a wide variety of jobs, including clerical work at the post office, coach building and plumbing. Those who did not find work immediately did not have to wait for long. In fact, in some industries the demand for labour was so strong that Black workers were recruited in their home countries. The National Health Service welcomed West Indian nurses, and London Transport recruited bus and tram drivers and bus conductors. A labour exchange (employment office)

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