2023 INSIDE STORIES

Bad Dreams and Other Stories by Tessa Hadley

Teaching notes
prepared by Jan May

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VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

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Introduction

It is fitting that Tessa Hadley rates Alice Munro as one of her most inspirational authors. Many teachers will already be familiar with the Nobel Prize winning Munro and her ability to move seamlessly between the short story and novel genres. Hadley is a similarly flexible wordsmith with the ability to create settings, characters and complexities in her stories that immediately invite the reader to dive beneath her depictions of British families and explore the dangers that lurk beneath, ready to possibly change lives forever.

> Like Alice Munro, to whom she has more than once been compared, Hadley has the gift of making small canvases inexhaustibly new. She sees unsentimentally the subtle gestures that alter people's lives forever; and charts, too, the instances when those gestures change nothing at all. (Messud, 2017)

Tessa Hadley's first novel was published when she was forty-six years old, and she is still a prolific writer in her mid-sixties. As a child she was an avid reader and by nine years old was unknowingly emulating the Brontë sisters and others before her by creating her own little story books. She has now authored eight novels including *Accidents in the Home*, which was longlisted for *The Guardian* First Book Award, *Everything Will Be All Right* and *The Master Bedroom,* plus three short story collections, *Sunstroke, Married Love* and *Bad Dreams.*

Bad Dreams won the 2018 Edge Hill Short Story Prize whilst the titular story was one of the four finalists for the BBC National Short Story in 2014 alongside other literary luminaries, Zadie Smith, Rose Tremaine and the winner, Lionel Shriver. Hadley attended the University of Cambridge, completing a BA and a teaching qualification. Her teaching career was short-lived due to marriage, motherhood and moving to Wales for her husband's job lecturing at Cardiff University. She pursued her love of writing fiction during those years but none of her stories were accepted by publishers. Success ultimately came for Hadley after she completed an MA in creative writing and a PhD on Henry James at Bath Spa University where she is now a Professor of Creative Writing. Her first novel *Accidents in the Home* was published in 2002 but Hadley also became well-known because of the regular appearance of her stories in *The New Yorker* and other magazines. Seven of the ten stories included in *Bad Dreams* were first published in *The New Yorker.*

The short stories are very British. Suffragettes, boarding schools, Oxford University, London and other English cities, country estates, local history, children's books, and a collection of homes covering a range of British architecture. The overseas references include an expat Londoner, now resident in Philadelphia, returning to her home country for work; a family that holidays in the south of France; a London woman heading to the United States for business reasons; and an old South African man with a dubious past now residing in a small English village. Hadley embeds a strong sense of different class structures and values in her stories assisted by them being set in both the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. The rich live in different areas to the working class, they vote for different political parties, and send their children to different schools.

A striking feature of each short story is the setting. The intricacy of Hadley's detail, as she invites readers into different homes and landscapes, is astonishing. The reader feels as if they could reach out and touch the items Hadley zooms in on; the cushions, jewellery boxes, photographs, and even kitchen cupboards. This minutiae of daily life brings stories alive and helps create a sense of place for each character – sometimes comfortable and sometimes distinctively awkward.

The exploration of the lives of ordinary people also means that Hadley does touch on issues that may be sensitive for some students. A fifteen-year-old loses her virginity in the first short story and several other stories contain sexual references of which teachers should be aware. That being said, the collection provides enormous scope for creative writing, close analysis, fabulous class discussion, and accessible ideas, issues and themes for analytical essay writing.

Ways into the text

- Discuss with students the theme of 'bad experiences' and how these might impact children, adolescents, and adults. Some of these bad experiences could be quite minor whilst others could be long-lasting. A glance at news items could generate ideas as could some of the dilemmas that students know or have observed in their own lives or families.
- Read reviews of Tessa Hadley's work, watch the YouTube discussion at the Queens Park Book Festival and listen to the BBC4 podcast. (See **References**)
- Create a chart of the opening line of each story. Discuss the potential tensions set up in each of them. Discuss why they are immediately captivating, for example, 'When my marriage fell apart one summer, I had to get out of the little flat in Kentish Town, where I had been first happy and then sad.' Use this example to suggest to students which words are the most suggestive of what might happen in the story.
- Create a display of images/photographs/maps that match the settings in the stories. Look for clues in architectural styles, naming of places, social class.
- Allocate a different story to a group of students and ask them to read, analyse and deliver their interpretation to the class. This could include a PowerPoint presentation with some 'snips' of several key passages. It is also an opportunity for the context, plot, characters, and key themes to be uncovered. Students can make a note of the narrative perspective, voice, key images/symbolism/motifs, and provide a list of key quotes.
- Create a shared class Google doc based on different themes in the collections. Ask students to add suggestions from each of the stories.
- Decide on the most likeable/dislikeable or the weakest/strongest character in each story and debate the findings. Ask students to justify their point of view.
- Get students to complete a CSI (Colour/Symbol/Image) for a key character within each story. Use this link for a template: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/color-symbol-image
- Explore some of the other thinking routines suggested for literary study and create another activity: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines
- Watch the YouTube interview including Tessa Hadley speaking at the Queen's Park Book Festival. This is recommended if students are using the stories for creative writing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9u2lVTz4Ro

Structure of the text

This section includes a summary, with some analysis and questions that invite students to further explore the features, themes, values and possible interpretations of the individual stories and the collection *Bad Dreams* as a whole. The title story 'Bad Dreams' foreshadows the type of unsettling experiences of Hadley's characters. The young girl's dream disrupts the certainty of her world and in a surprising twist, lead to her mother's outlook on her marriage changing as well. As Hadley suggests through the collection, everyone, whatever their age, gender, or socio-economic situation, has dreams and aspirations that sometimes end well, but not always. The stories work through family quarrels, new motherhood, lack of fulfilment, old age, secrets of the past, betrayal, sexual encounters, activism, illness and death, childhood, marriages, and parenthood. Each can be complicated and mysterious.

'An Abduction'

The startling and strange opening line poses immediate questions. Can you call it an abduction if no one knows the event took place? Hadley gradually reveals the events of the day leading to Jane's 'abduction' to provide a context for her behaviour as she journeys towards womanhood. Jane is home in Surrey during her boarding school's summer holidays. It's the 1960s, an era when children needed to largely create their own entertainment. Whilst her younger sister abides by Jane's mother's edict that it's a 'crime to stay indoors while the sun shone' (p. 2), and her older Oxford bound brother is exempted because of his studies, Jane wishes for rain and the opportunity to curl up and read *Chalet School*. She hates the thought of reading outside with a 'root nudging her back' or 'stinging ants inside her shorts' (p. 2) yet later in the story we see a different Jane willingly putting up with new, unfamiliar discomforts. Her mother, always formally referred to as Mrs Allsop, is depicted as attractive, well-dressed and confident, qualities admired by Jane, who tries to look similarly 'sultry' in her mother's clothes but fails with her lack of bust and waist.

Urged by her mother to head outdoors or seek out friends, Jane responds reluctantly thinking she would rather focus on her teenage self, experimenting with make-up instead of playing wholesome, childish games. She's aware that other girls are ahead of her 'in the fated trek towards adulthood' (p. 4) as Hadley's reference to 'coy' biology lessons infers Jane's increasing sexual awareness. As she heads off to play Jokari near the road by herself, selfishly ruining her sister's mock tea party with friends on the way, their retorts about her ugliness remind Jane of the time she was referred to as the 'plain one' (p. 5). So, it is this mindset, and an accidental ball smashing against her father's car eliciting further insult. that envelops Jane. Hadley's imagery, 'The wings of her spirit, which had been beginning to soar, faltered and flung her to earth ...' (p. 6), conveys Jane's pain and we are encouraged to empathise with her as Hadley's narrative perspective zooms out to tell us that her father only vaguely thinks about her. As he departs, noticing the expensive convertible, Mr Allsop thinks he wouldn't want his kids near that car and is glad his son is a 'drip'. Hadley observes that had he ever known of Jane's abduction, he would likely have recalled 'these visiting aliens' (p. 7).

Shifting to the perspective of the youths in the car, it's revealed they are Oxford students. The car belongs to Nigel's parents who are holidaying in France. The initial descriptions of the boys establish a sense of danger as does the sentence bluntly declaring their mission; 'They were out looking for girls.' (p. 7). After a drunk, stoned day, and re-energised by a swim and the sun, the boys decide girls need to be found to 'crown' their day. Initially saying 'she'll do ... when they saw Jane, loud enough for her to hear' (p. 8), the sunshine reveals new angles to her physical features as Hadley works her descriptive lens through Jane's body – her eyes, hair, lips, and skin. Daniel, the driver, already noted by Jane as the best looking, invites her for a ride. The story takes an unexpected twist as on the way back to Nigel's house; Jane 'was an accomplice in an episode of shoplifting' (p. 9). She is disoriented by this new experience of crime but her acceptance of, and success in the challenge heightens Jane's awareness of a change within her. She even enjoys the strange new physical sensation of skin contact with Daniel. The boys praise her theft of alcohol in the local shop as Jane struggles to feel any remorse for what she has just done, concentrating on her recognition of the masculinity of the three boys. She drinks in Daniel's looks, waiting for his hand to jostle her thigh as he changes gears. She tells them she doesn't drink but 'might start' (p. 12) hinting further at her new self-awareness and desire for new experiences.

Jane absorbs the modernity and sense of privilege exuded by Nigel's house and establishes her perspective on each of the boys. Nigel is torn between bravado and responsibility; Paddy is the cleverest

and more detached whilst Daniel exerts power over the other two. Jane also intuitively draws on her observations of her mother, knowing 'it was her role to fill in the awkward silences'. She feels 'transplanted out of her familiar world' (p. 13) and now is moving in a different skin. (This idea of metamorphosis, whether temporary or permanent, links to other stories in the collection.) Jane chooses not to parade her femininity in the kitchen leaving the boys to make sandwiches and responds with expected answers to their questions about her religious and political beliefs – beliefs not of any consequence to her until this unexpected adventure into the unknown. Hadley's deliberate use of brackets conveys extra information about Daniel's use of drugs at Oxford straight to the reader and bypasses Jane's awareness. These insights into Daniel's mind allow Hadley to cleverly manipulate the narrative perspective and reveal important details. Jane's blushing reaction to the boys' swearing, Nigel's mocking 'Bo Peep' remark, and Daniel's suggestion of nude swimming reinforce her naivety; however, Jane surprises the reader as she starts to pull off her dress feeling she's 'capable of almost anything' (p. 16) after the barley wine she's consumed. Just in time, a girl arrives who tells Jane she can borrow a swimsuit. This is Fiona, the eighteen-year-old sister of Nigel, who has unexpectedly arrived home from France. Fiona's worldliness contrasts with Jane's innocence although Jane can recognise that Fiona's 'yawning', 'stretching', 'pretending' and 'showing off' is for Daniel's benefit. (p. 17) As Jane swims laps of the rubbish-filled pool, she accepts defeat in her quest for Daniel's attention and loses herself in the rhythm of her strokes having decided to ask for assistance to return home. She's unaware of being watched by Daniel who feels drawn by her 'acutely responsive, open to anything' manner. (p. 18). Perfectly aware of Fiona's manoeuvrings, learned from a past history with her, he turns his attentions instead to Jane, creating an excuse to stay alone with her whilst the others head to the village pub.

Jane is accepting of the sexual encounter that will ensue and through another shift in time, Hadley uses Fiona's sharp-eyed discoveries to reveal the loss of Jane's virginity. As Jane rings her mother from a public phone, she is conscious of her new self, her knowledge of Daniel's nakedness and now his physical presence on the other side of the glass as she invents an excuse for overnight absence from home. Despite Jane's thoughts about whether she'd ever see her home again – 'It seemed unlikely.' – the reader's apprehension is appeased through Jane's fatalistic willingness to embrace what lies ahead. The labelling of 'Jane's shoplifted wine and her whisky' (p. 22) make her superficially part of the group wiling away the evening on the terrace. As the boys mess around with needles and methedrine, Daniel's remark 'Not for nice girls' (p. 22) to Jane, once again separates her from their world. Fiona angrily removes herself inside to clean whilst the boys, from Jane's view, jostle and compete with philosophy and poetry. Nigel can't match himself with Paddy and particularly Daniel whose approval he wants. Filled with desire for Daniel to touch her again, Jane is disappointed when he turns his back on her in bed and falls asleep. She is painfully hurt to discover him the next morning naked and asleep with Fiona in the beautiful master bedroom. Jane insists the unsympathetic Nigel drive her home, a home she now sees through new eyes. Hadley addresses the future, telling the reader that Jane never saw Nigel's house again or any of the boys, but perhaps Fiona once at a party – and then returns to Jane at home. There's a sense of relief that her period comes early although the inference is that possible pregnancy had not occurred to her. Mrs Allsop is now a picture of maternalism bringing her daughter aspirin, tea with sugar and hot water bottles. This child-like reversion of Jane, reading her *Chalet School* books on a rainy day, could not be more different than yesterday's incursion into the blurry boundaries of adulthood.

Hadley invites the reader on one last leap in time to follow a divorced, mid-fifties Jane to an appointment with a counsellor. She has never revealed the events of that summer's day and has followed a path of conservatism rather like her own mother. Her early initiation into sex has been compartmentalised away in her brain - until now. Misjudged by the counsellor as lacking imagination, Jane surprisingly catches her interest by embarking on a description of a summer day beside a pool. The addition of the epilogue about the now successful Daniel and his complete lack of memory of Jane acts as a reminder of the starting line of the story. Even the perpetrator of the 'abduction' has forgotten what Jane has not – the 'extraordinary offer of herself without reserve...' (p. 28). Whilst he has lived a life of experience and happiness, Jane feels she has been 'on the wrong side of a barrier cutting her off from the real life she was meant to be living.' (p. 27).

Suggested classroom activities

- Look up the *Chalet School* series. Why has Hadley chosen this literary illusion? Discuss the other literary works, as well as music, referred to in the story.
- Select a range of the sentences with which Hadley opens new paragraphs and consider their effect. An example would be 'The morning of the abduction ...'.
- What is the 'family code'? (p. 3)
- How are sibling relationships depicted in the story?
- Contrast the setting of Jane's home and Nigel's house. In what ways do they present different views and values? Are there any similarities?
- Create a table of the key characters and add in words and phrases used by Hadley to create a physical and behavioural sense of each.
- Do you feel sympathy for Jane at the end of the story? Why or why not? How do you feel about Daniel?
- Discuss whether an abduction did take place. Has Jane been held back in life because of what happened?

'The Stain'

This story takes the reader into a smallish English village where on the surface the normality of daily life continues. However, as suggested by the title, there's something not quite right; a dark history concealed, and secrets kept close to the chest. Much of the power – and the piquing of reader curiosity – is derived from Hadley's authorial decision to not name 'the old man' or reveal specific details of his past. It is left to Marina, ironically his cleaner, to learn of the unspecified sins of his unclean past, affecting her life as well as that of his family.

The story's opening establishes the tension of an old man, not incapacitated but just unused to looking after himself, needing someone to keep an eye on him. Why unused to looking after himself? Why is the daughter creating this job? Marina, her son Liam at school during the day, 'needed the money' (p. 31). Aspects of Marina's character are quickly revealed. She walks, with a long stride, in her pink Puffa jacket bent forward as if oblivious or shy. However, Marina is well-known in the village, worked in the drycleaners before marriage and in other little jobs. Others see her as 'reliable and thoughtful, an oddball ... just the right choice for handling a difficult old man.' (p. 32). This description of both Marina and the old man before the narrative perspective zooms in to closely observe their interactions sets up our curiosity about events that will (or will not) unfold.

Marina has already developed a fantasy relationship with the old man's house in her childhood, passing it every day as a child and imagining what it would be like to live in such a large house. Hadley subtly alludes to the narrowness of Marina's life here; she has not experienced the world outside her village. The first references to South Africa are made. Gary, her husband, warns that she is working for a family used to being waited on hand and foot by black servants whilst the old man's daughter, Wendy, never wants to return to her birth country because of the violence. Marina is non-intrusive, waiting for the old man to talk first. He likes to sit and watch her work, always asking courteously whether she minds. The interior of the house is neglected and uninviting, but Marina cleans with determination, highlighted by vocabulary choices such as 'scouring' and 'scrubbing ... stubborn greasy dirt.' (p. 32). She is curious. The family are wealthy; Wendy lives in a luxurious home whilst her father chooses to live in the unrenovated house with only a few possessions brought from South Africa. His tanned skin makes Marina wonder if he was a farmer whilst his physical ailments and lack of friends elicit her sympathy as she imagines how hard it must be for a once vigorous man to accept a now 'diminished' life with 'no one to command except her.' (p. 33).

The old man's painstaking repair of the vacuum cleaner for Marina who has been closely monitoring his expressions, likes and dislikes, marks the next step in the short story. She brings him one of her son's unmade Airfix models, a caring gesture although the old man needs her assistance to assemble the plane. He reveals he had a pilot's license but when Marina suggests writing his memoir, he responds: 'Better not. Better to keep it all up here where it's safe.' (p. 35). What is 'it' and what are the 'business interests' that he works on in his office? Gradually, he divulges more information about the weather, landscape, and animals in South Africa as he starts to help Marina in small ways. She discovers that if asked in the right way, he doesn't mind working; for example, shelling the peas grown in the vegetable patch tended by Wendy in the backyard.

The old man's mood is variable. Marina decides he's depressed due to boredom and prone to sulks. He snarls on the phone – supposedly discussing his investments – and pushes Marina's hand away in irritation. Apologetically, he offers to buy her a new washing machine to 'make up for it' (p. 36), an offer she laughingly refuses. More about Wendy is revealed; her expensive car, her two dogs, upsetting staff at her gift shop and her financially lucrative divorce. Yet she does all her father's shopping, gardening and takes him to appointments – surprising because the

narrative reveals: 'After all those years apart, father and daughter were almost strangers to each other.' (p. 37). The reader can only guess at this point about their difficult relationship and the brother still in South Africa but rumoured to have been in jail for deception.

Time passes and Marina has settled into her job at the big house, now feeling a degree of tenderness for the old man. He accompanies her to church, and she takes Liam to play in the garden whilst she works. Wendy observes that her father never played like he does with Liam when his own children were young. She has noticed a change in him too, his garrulousness and most surprisingly, his growing religiousness. Wendy's character is further expanded. She keeps herself from Marina 'behind a preoccupied, worldly surface, always hurrying somewhere' (p. 38) although behind her façade of fancy gardening equipment lies a gifted gardener. Wendy tells Marina that her father took up her grandparents' farm in the Cape to keep him busy after he retired. Hadley embeds an inference of suspicion from Wendy into this exchange: 'Is that what he told you?' (p. 38). The reader wonders what Wendy's own version of events would be.

Gary warns Marina that some old men get funny ideas as Hadley heightens a sense of unease with the increasingly dependent relationship between the old man and Marina. She assures her husband that nothing wrong ever happened although the narrative focus questions her inability to see what others might see. Her decision not to reveal to Gary that the old man had tried some physical contact (although he was abashed when reproached) shows some awareness of boundaries but Marina appeases herself by reflecting on the difficulties of being deprived of physical contact in old age. Also not revealed to Gary, who is struggling to gain enough work in the recession, is the old man's efforts to give her extra money each week. She refuses to accept it despite the old man's determined emotional manipulation. Marina 'knows where to draw the line.' (p. 40). Other small details of his past are revealed; his regret at putting career before family and admission of paying for prostitutes after his wife's death. Marina doesn't want to know what Wendy does not and stops the old man talking. He calls Marina 'beautiful and graceful' (p. 42), words that secretly gratify her in a shameful way. His stories of travel make her aware of the limits and timidity of her own life, but instinct warns her that the old man is holding 'something back, some knowledge or intimation ...' (p. 42).

'Then he wanted to give her the house.' (p. 42). Hadley's dramatic revelation allows further insights into the key protagonists and the reaction of the village that somehow embraces the story as a 'half-secret'. What will Wendy think about her father giving away her valuable inheritance, a house maybe worth a million pounds, to his cleaning lady? Marina is aware of this scrutiny but doesn't want the house anyway; she sees it as a fantasy, refusing the old man's pressure to accept. The expected confrontation with Wendy who accuses them of scheming behind her back, results in Marina quitting. An apology from Wendy ensues but Marina is hesitant: 'But you'll always think I'm after his money ...' (p. 43). She will only go back if he 'stops trying to give me stuff' (p. 43).

The daily routine resumes. The old man initially treats Marina like glass but falls back into his previous habits of peremptory intimacy which she rejects. Marina absorbs herself into the house and its increasing familiarity, even thinking of it as hers 'not forever but for the moment' (p. 44). She observes him preferring her plain cooking over Wendy's rich food and proudly thinks of herself as a good nurse, revealing that she had nursed her own ill father. The old man's ninetieth birthday party arrives for which Wendy has prepared a BBQ reminiscent of the South African tradition of cooking outdoors on a 'metal potjie'. He looks forward to the occasion, ordering in expensive wine. The guests at the party are Wendy's family and friends but Gary and Liam are also invited. Gary is a reluctant guest but enjoys himself as Marina observes how the old man charms her husband, his mood lifted by alcohol and being surrounded by his daughter and two expensively attired grandsons. The party ends uncomfortably for Marina. Her husband and son have left but the old man pressures her to stay, making a speech in which he praises 'his treasure' Marina in an odd, sentimental way that seems deliberately directed at his family.

Anthony pursues Marina in his car after she rejects his offer of a lift home but in the end succumbs to his demanding tone, worried that people might overhear. Exuding masculine power through his expensive car, locked doors, manner of speech and refusal to take her straight home, the reader's initial fear of physical violence towards Marina subsides when Anthony says: 'Don't worry. I haven't got any designs on your virtue.' (p. 50). Instead he wants to warn her about his grandfather. Anthony tells of the old man's involvement in the South African Defence Force and the 'murky' accusations that followed. Given an amnesty, he retired to the farm. His grandson claims he cannot condemn his grandfather as he wasn't there but thinks him 'just a sad old man' (p. 51). Marina later thinks about an internet search to find some of the stories but chooses not to. Anthony's words have shaken her to the core; a memory of a shocking

discovery of a dead animal's carcass is reawakened as is the understanding that 'you couldn't undo the knowledge of the thing with the same calm ease with which you had taken it in.' (p. 52). Marina's realisation of her innocence and the old man's manipulation and flattery disgust her. She had been too ignorant to recognise his strategic courting of her. Unable to go to work, or confide in Gary, and knowing the old man is expecting her, Marina heads to Wendy's house. Astonishingly, Wendy claims that she had a premonition that Marina would bring news of her father's death, unaware of the real reason Marina had sought her out – to quit the job. In fact, as they discover at his house, the old man has died but he has exerted one last grasp of power by leaving the house to Marina in his will, thus ignoring her wishes. Her refusal of the house, and even an offer of money, creates trouble with Gary who thinks about Liam's education. 'But once Marina got an idea into her head there was no changing it.' (p. 55). Her husband accepts this. Wendy renovates the house beautifully from top to bottom and moves in, assumably erasing all traces (or stains?) of her father as well as the old interiors with which Marina had become so familiar.

Suggested classroom activities

- How does Hadley utilise the interior and exterior of the house in the story?
- Discuss Wendy's inability to show affection towards her father. What about her sense of responsibility towards him?
- 'Money changes things, if you've got it. You can change anything.' (p. 41) How does Hadley explore this idea in the short story?
- Discuss the symbolism of the soiled sheets in relation to the story's title.
- Discuss the birthday party dynamics and the old man's speech. What is his intention in making this speech?
- Is Marina's refusal of the house a result of a strengthened awareness of her moral compass?
- Discuss why the old man remains unnamed as do his past actions in South Africa.
- Hadley creates a careful juxtaposition between Marina and Wendy. Explore how and why she does this.

'Deeds Not Words'

This story is set in a time quite different to the fifties, sixties and later decades explored in the rest of the collection. Hadley takes the reader back to the era of the suffragettes protesting in the streets of London just before the outbreak of WWI, allowing her to depict the choices made by two very different female teachers at a girls' boarding school. It is a story rich with literary allusions and backgrounded by real historical events. The third person omniscient narrative is largely focused on Edith Carew, a Latin teacher, but starts and ends with a focus on Laura Mulhouse, another teacher at the school.

'All the girls at St Clements loved Miss Mulhouse.' (p. 57) – once again, a succinctly written opening sentence which is enriched by the immediate revelation that some had loved her 'even before' she broke shop windows in Oxford Street and was arrested as a suffragette. A popular teacher whose arrest makes her even more popular? This does not sound like a typical English boarding school story as read by Jane in 'The Abduction'. Hadley creates brushstrokes with her word choices as if painting a portrait of Miss Mulhouse: 'graceful and earnest and angularly thin'; 'very soft hair'; 'large interesting pale eyes'; 'lids languidly heavy' and 'smouldering' (p. 57). Once her arrest is discovered by the girls, loving Miss Mulhouse becomes a cult-like requisite as they decorate in WSPU colours and pictures of the Pankhursts. Even the discovery of her first name is exciting. Some girls, with the aid of one's brother, compose and print angry posters bearing suffragette slogans. They are curious as to whether the headmistress and staff have noticed, knowing some teachers did sympathise with the cause.

Hadley shifts the narrative in the direction of Edith Carew, who approved of women getting the vote in principle 'but was too sceptical to be an enthusiast for any political cause.' (p. 38). She has her own views about Laura Mulhouse thinking her to be high-minded, over-indignant and guilty of encouraging certain susceptible students to worship her. She and Mr Briers privately call Laura the Lady of Shalott – the story now moving to Edith's enthusiastic cause which is 'drowning in her love affair' (p. 59) with Fitzsimmon Briers, the French teacher. At thirty-four, Edith had expected to be married by now and feels humiliated at confessing to her lover that he is her first experience of 'intimate relations' (p. 59). He has won Edith over with his humour, intellect, and appreciation of her, sparking an intense alteration that she imagines 'must be leaving actual marks on her body …' (p. 59). Unfortunately, Fitz is married with a child; his wife, according to gossip as

he will not talk about her to Edith, has supposedly had a nervous breakdown. By creating this plot dilemma, Hadley is inviting her reader to think further about the social values of the time; not just women wanting to vote but those having affairs outside of marriage. The question of contraception in this era is answered by Hadley when Fritz assures Edith, he 'knew what he was doing' (p. 60) as they make illicit love in the French office, more a cupboard in the attic, surrounded by books, including rather interestingly, works of Racine and Hugo. The use of alliteration, 'skins were slick with sweat', adds to the intensity of their sexual passion. But Edith, despite her love for Fitz, is haunted by the potential dangers of their relationship.

The narrative returns to Miss Mulhouse, although keeps the perspective from the view of Edith who also reflects Fitz's thinking. There has been a hunger strike in the prison including Miss Mulhouse who is being force-fed. This news heightens passion among the girls, and the headmistress, not completely willingly, allows them to hold meetings which some staff attend as well. 'Crazes have swept the school before ...' (p. 61) remembers Edith: automatic writing, wearing crosses, Corelli novels and holy water. Fitz agrees with her view that force-feeding is barbaric but says Laura had gone to Oxford Street intent on suffering and dismisses her as a martyr. The behaviour of the girls becomes fiercer. Two seniors are suspended because of rumours they planned to invade the local racecourse. (Look up Emily Davison, a teacher and suffragette, who did invade a racecourse in 1913.) The consequences of this suspension flow through to Edith and Fitz who find the French cupboard door daubed with slogans: 'End this outrage now!'; 'Stop the torture of women!' (p. 61). Ironically, Edith's first instinct is to question if the girls know about their affair. Fitz knows though; it is about the suffragettes. He tells Edith not to stay as there was bound to be uproar so 'sick with her disappointment ...' (p. 61) she heads back to her lodgings. Her self-pity stays with her as she thinks: 'I might as well be dead.' (p. 62). Hadley also inserts Edith's encounter with a minor character; 'a big-bosomed, gushing girl' wearing her WSPU badge whom she considers 'a dolt' (p. 62) and a female undeserving of the vote, Ursula, asks Edith to sign her petition but gets pushed away. The school governors suspend the headmistress and certain teachers after word gets around about classroom riots, lack of discipline and some boarders hang up sheets painted with the WSPU slogan, 'Deeds Not Words'. The police arrive after a threat to jump out of windows and some parents take their daughters off to safety. School holidays start as does WWI and news comes that the Pankhurst campaign is abandoning its Paris office for the duration of the war.

The final phase of the story takes place on a September evening. A shift in time is further indicated by Fitz now dressed in military uniform, his hair shorn close, and the boarders back to normality, working on their latest cause which is knitting socks for soldiers. (This idea of events being soon forgotten is also highlighted by Hadley in several other stories.) Edith is raging at Fitz: 'How can you give yourself to this beastly war?' (p. 64). She argues that he had not previously held militarist opinions and should be hating the idea of death and pain. He retaliates, arguing that he can't teach French to girls whilst other men are giving their lives. Touching him emotionally now becomes Edith's goal; Fitz gleams in anger when she asks what his wife thinks, dismissing her question. She now realises that she has no place in 'this sacred scene' (p. 64) of Fitz departing for war. The reality is more like a picture postcard of him being waved off by wife and child. Edith knows so little about him, not even whether his child is a boy or girl. She feels contaminated now, under Fitz's power because the affair means she has 'forfeited the white flower of a blameless life' (p. 64). She is not the sort of woman men go to war for. The school returns to a form of normality with the headmistress and other teachers reinstated although no one speaks about the events of the previous term. Edith meets Laura Mulhouse, returned after spending the summer recuperating with her mother. She notices the change in Laura; Hadley's physical description of her now the opposite of the description in the introductory paragraph of the story. Edith visualises the process of force-feeding from what she has read; the tubes, pain, indignity and vomiting that have led to the changed appearance of Laura. The story concludes with Edith aligning herself with Laura: 'Both of them were broken ... In their shame, they could hardly bear to look at each other.' (p. 65).

Suggested classroom activities

- Explore how Hadley parallels Edith's story with socio-political events of the time.
- Discuss the ways in which Hadley uses physical appearance in the story.
- How does Hadley invite the reader to think about Edith?
- Discuss what sort of man Fitz might be. Is he like men in other stories?
- In what ways does Hadley show how quickly things can change? How does she critique activism?
- This story's setting is a school rather than a house. Is setting important to events in 'Deeds Not Words'?
- What is suggested about the power and agency of women (and schoolgirls) in the story?

‘One Saturday Morning’

Three important elements of the story are introduced in the succinct opening line: ‘Carrie was alone in the house.’ (p. 67). The name of the key character, the fact that she is alone, and in the setting of a house. It’s a Saturday morning in the mid-1960s; Carrie is practising piano whilst her brother is playing outside with friends. Already Hadley has differentiated between the siblings; one passively alone inside the family home and the other energetically engaging with his peers. Through Carrie’s perspective, the interior detail is brought alive as the story shifts in between various rooms of the house. The third-person narrator zooms in on small details of colour, fabric and style which has the effect of familiarising the reader with the aesthetics and layout.

Carrie’s mother is the homemaker whilst her father is a teacher explaining why they can only afford ‘a dilapidated Georgian terraced house’ (p. 68). The parents are shopping for a dinner party they are hosting that evening and Carrie has been instructed to catch up on her piano exercises, now a tedious chore rather than the hopefulness she had originally brought to lessons. At ten years of age, Carrie is on that precarious cusp of adolescence. She reflects that the piano was not the answer ‘she’d hoped for, to what was unsolved in herself.’ (p. 69). This, plus an ‘uncomfortable thing’ that had happened at her piano teacher’s house, is affecting her concentration. Carrie has lost a letter, written as part of a series to her friend Susan, ‘full of rude words and innuendo half learned from the playground and half invented.’ (p. 69). The letters are their response to being teased by a fat boy in their class, an ‘enemy’ because he had asked if they ‘were wearing itchy knickers’ (p. 70). Just enough content is provided to highlight that these are children starting to become aware of their sexuality but in an immature and naïve way. However, Carrie knows enough to feel deeply upset at the thought of her piano teacher finding and reading the letter.

The ringing of the doorbell breaks into Carrie’s solitude. She’s nervous upon seeing the shape of a man peering through the glass door and filled with dread at the thought of engaging in conversation with a stranger. The man is Dom Smith, a friend of her parents who has moved to another city. Carrie thinks her parents would be disappointed to miss seeing him and tells Dom he can wait as they will soon be home. Not knowing how to entertain or converse with this huge and rumpled man, Carrie flees upstairs leaving Dom alone. His restless pacing about the house makes her curious as she listens from the safety of the playroom. Carrie knows ‘her cowardice was crucifying’ (p. 73) and feels guiltily responsible for Dom’s restlessness. She also finds it strange that an adult can be reduced to the same listlessness of a child, ‘waiting for something that didn’t come.’ (p. 74). However, when Dom starts playing the piano in a manner so opposite to Carrie’s bumbling exercises, she cannot help herself, creeping out to listen and ‘feeling the music for once as if it were inside her.’ (p. 74). She is in awe realising why she is limited to the narrow scope of children’s music.

At the very moment Dom stops playing, Carrie’s parents arrive home. Their responses to the visitor are interpreted through Carrie’s perspective who imagines her father welcoming the male company whilst her mother is rearranging the dinner party plans in her head. Carrie’s demeanour is completely changed now her parents are home; she feels a sense of achievement in bringing Dom into the house. Over coffee, Dom makes a revelation that drastically changes the mood in the kitchen; his wife, Helen, died in the spring and his mother-in-law is helping to look after the children. Hadley makes interesting use of the narrative perspective at this point suggesting that the narrator is reflecting on events long past – ‘In those days, news didn’t travel so fast’ (p. 77) – and then dropping in the information that Carrie’s parents did not see Dom again for a long time.

Carrie creeps back upstairs to avoid the ‘stricken, changed voices.’ (p. 77). Her ten-year-old mind grapples with the concept of death. She regrets letting Dom into the house now that the atmosphere has darkened in a way she doesn’t fully comprehend. Her mother’s tears and father’s clumsy efforts to respond affect Carrie, who the reader is told takes everything to heart. Although she has some memories of Helen, Carrie wishes she had not heard of her death. It is a selfish, self-protective wish but understandable for a child processing the idea of death for the first time. Little snippets of a family trip to the woods with Dom and Helen and their children come back to Carrie. All she wants now is for Dom to leave and ‘for the whole ordinary process of living to start into motion again.’ (p. 79).

Hadley breaks this story into two parts, the second set in the evening as Carrie’s parents host their dinner party. The house is alive with food smells, jazz music, drinking and table tennis. Carrie, supposed to be asleep in the attic, is watching unseen from her parents’ bedroom window whilst her brother, Paul, is absorbed in writing his weather report. The lost letter, cause of much angst earlier in the day, has been found. Carrie tears it into fragments, glad that it hasn’t been seen by the piano teacher. Hadley’s use of words such as ‘the stupid letter’, ‘little private cry of pain’ and ‘wiped clean of the taint’ convey Carrie’s realisation of the

inappropriateness and possible consequences of her and Susan's game. However, the death of Helen still weighs on her mind, and she is thankful Dom hasn't come to ruin the dinner party bringing 'his weight of sadness' (p. 81). Glad her mother has managed to still bring the party to fruition on time, Carrie turns her attention to the objects on her mother's dressing table, fingering her way through each item.

The story makes another shift as Carrie sees Dom on the balcony below: 'So he had turned up after all.' (p. 83). What follows is an observation that greatly affects Carrie. Her mother, a little tipsy, steps onto the balcony, her uncertainty with Dom evident to her young daughter spying from above. 'Dom, I don't know what to say ...' (p. 83) aligns with Carrie's inability to converse with Dom that morning. Dom's act of grabbing her mother, burying his face in her neck, and trying to kiss her hair and ears takes both mother and daughter by surprise. He is pushed away and told 'I'm so sorry ... but I can't.' (p. 84). Witnessing this scene is an epiphany for Carrie. She knows intuitively that it is a scene she can never joke about and realises now the difference between what is funny and what is shaming. Carrie heads to her brother's room to annoy him and soon their mother is at the door, seemingly not in a hurry to get back to her guests. It occurs to Carrie 'that her mother was afraid of Dom Smith, too', not wanting to return to him 'waiting with his loss and his hunger for consolation.' (p. 85). An insect that has flown in the window distracts all three. They watch as its body 'curled and uncurled lasciviously' (p. 85), fascinated by the precariousness of the creature. Carrie breathes in the smells of her mother as 'their happiness in that moment ... squeezed Carrie's chest like a tight band.' (p. 85). She is already moving on from what she has seen. Perhaps what she saw on the balcony was only in her imagination. Carrie understands her vision of what consolation might be is beyond the reach of children.

Suggested classroom activities

- Reread the passage where Carrie listens to Dom playing the piano. Discuss the vocabulary choices that convey the power of his music on Carrie. What might Dom's piano-playing reflect that is beyond Carrie's understanding?
- Discuss Hadley's use of the insect at the end of the story.
- How does the story explore the intersection between the child/adult world?
- Find clues in the story that show how it is constructed in retrospect from the perspective of our present.
- Discuss how an awareness of death might first intrude into a child's life. The story 'Bad Dreams' could also be brought into the discussion.
- Is it only children who suffer from shyness or feel fearful and alienated in this and others of the stories? Find examples.
- In what ways is Carrie starting to view the world in a new way by the end of the story?

'Experience'

The casualness of the phrase 'When my marriage fell apart one summer ...' (p. 87) immediately evokes a sense of narrative distance. Time has passed since Laura 'had' to get out of the flat she had shared with her husband in a suburb of London. Once she had been happy there but then sad; some of the reasons for these feelings become evident later in this first-person narrative. It is a time of transition for Laura as she re-arranges the practicalities of her present situation. A friend of a friend finds her a temporary house-sitting role for Hana who is headed to the USA for an extended visit.

The three storey London townhouse is personified as 'intimidating', 'big-boned and gushing' with a 'curvaceous strong jaw' (p. 87), an apt description for a setting that will have a profound effect on Laura and her future choices in life. Staying in Hana's home sounds idyllic for Laura. When they meet, she is told to make herself at home; use the Wi-Fi and computer, sleep in Hana's room, eat whatever is in the freezer. There's even a cleaner twice a week. Laura is twenty-eight, now on her own after six years of marriage but feels very inexperienced in life when she first meets Hana. Hadley brings her descriptive magic once again to the interiors, contents, and owner of this overwhelmingly (for Laura) opulent and artistic home. It is not entirely clear how Hana makes her money but there are hints of art dealing and the film business. Laura thinks of her own scant possessions, a couple of boxes containing 'things [she'd] salvaged from [her] marriage' (p. 89) that she quickly hides away. She would have preferred to leave with nothing, 'shedding it all behind me as cleanly as a skin.' (p. 89).

Clues are embedded that Laura's husband was controlling and self-absorbed. He has calculated the worth of jointly bought possessions and given her some money for them, an inference of his economic power in the relationship. This will only last for a limited time: 'When the money runs out ... I'll start looking for work.' (p. 90). Laura adapts to Hana's home; even the lack of privacy to the outside world in a house without curtains. Hana lives a life in contrast

to Laura's past sheltered existence; she is always flamboyantly on display. Laura spends her days eating Hana's food, enjoying new taste sensations, exploring from room to room and becoming powerfully immersed in the life led by her host. Her days are filled examining every aspect of Hana's life. The constant use of 'I' reinforces the growing feeling that Laura is edging towards reidentifying herself as Hana.

The story shifts to Laura's discovery of a locked attic at the top of the house. She accidentally finds the key; 'a long iron key, like something in a novel or pantomime' (p. 90). This key, and the simile used by Hadley, are important to reflect upon when the story ends. The narrative perspective fast forwards in time as Laura admits: 'I feel ashamed of this now, needless to say' (p. 91), hinting at tensions created by her 'slipping inside Hana's privacy' and her assumption back then that her action 'wouldn't count as a real intrusion' (p. 91). There's a quick tone of self-defence as Laura claims she only meant to take a quick look. Returning to the setting of the attic, the narrative zooms in to provide a detailed list of what Laura sees as she steps into this inner world of Hana. Once again, she defends herself, claiming 'I just poked around at first; I wasn't really reading anything.' (p. 92). But the startling sums of money Laura sees on business papers, the porn DVDs and sexy underwear shock her.

The discovery of a diary yielding Hana's record of her relationship with a man called Julian is avidly devoured by Laura. What she reads is another realm of experience, full of sex, happiness, hints of fear and moodiness. The 'garish and ruthless and exaggerated' (p. 93) life revealed in the diary makes Laura dwell on her own naivety; she had been like a child-bride in a dull marriage. The reader learns that her husband announced his desire to separate, that he didn't love her anymore and he would keep the flat as Laura could not afford the rent by herself. It starts to make sense to the reader that an older, more experienced, and independent Laura is narrating this episode of her younger self. The narrative style and voice enable us to distinguish between innocence and experience as Laura works her way towards an understanding of moral boundaries.

The story makes its next plot advancement: 'And then one morning, when I was still in my pyjamas because I didn't have anything else to get dressed for, the door phone buzzed in the kitchen.' (p. 95). It is Julian. Laura thinks Julian looks nothing like the man she imagined when reading Hana's diary. He has turned up, accompanied by one of his children whom Laura immediately judges as not likeable, to find his camping gear stored somewhere in the house. This presents a moral dilemma as she knows exactly where it is in the attic plus the key is sitting right in her dressing gown pocket. Julian becomes increasingly irritated as he is unable to find his things, telling Laura that he is leaving his wife. The camping trip with his kids is important as it is a way to show that moving out doesn't affect his love for them. Julian rings Hana to find out where the key to the locked attic is; strangely, Laura enjoys secretly holding it back from him, liking the 'feeling [of] its weight against my leg.' (p. 97). However, she concocts a strategy to 'find' the key, Julian locates his gear and leaves.

That afternoon he rings the landline, this time asking Laura her name and wanting to store stuff in Hana's attic. She doesn't believe Julian when he says Hana does not mind and suspects he's trying to outmanoeuvre his wife. His expected return at 6pm has Laura 'frightened and excited, as I had an assignation with a lover.' (p. 99). This admission, through her nuanced simile, signals a heightening in the plot's tension. Laura undertakes a makeover, washing her hair with Hana's shampoo, using Hana's perfume, wearing Hana's bathrobe and then somewhat extraordinarily, combing through Hana's wardrobe for clothes, belt, and jewellery. She feels 'replete with new knowledge' (p. 99) as she examines herself in Hana's mirror. By now, the reader understands this transformation is linked to what Laura has read in the diary. Julian finally arrives, telling Laura he will only need use of the attic for a week or two. He laughs with disbelief when she asks if Hana is the reason he is leaving his wife. Julian recognises the distinctive necklace Laura is wearing as Hana's: 'She gave it to me, I lied.' (p. 101). At this point, he takes notice of Laura for the first time and accepts a glass of wine.

'What are you doing here in Hana-land?' (p. 102), asks Julian. Laura knows he is now seeing her differently, feeling a commonality that they are both escaping marriages. She exaggerates the dullness of her husband, deliberately implying she has fallen out of love. Laura's disguise, and the wine, give her confidence as she and Julian converse. He proffers his views on marriage: 'If the thing's dead, he said – then the kindest thing is to walk away from it' otherwise you are 'prolonging agony' (p. 102). These words invite the reader to consider whether this is exactly what Laura's husband has concluded as well. Links can also be made to discussions of marriage and love in other stories in the collection. Laura suddenly becomes unwell, nearly falling over and reveals to Julian that she has run out of money to buy food after eating her way through

the contents of Hana's freezer. Something about her situation touches Julian who now shifts into caring mode, heading out to buy ingredients: 'Not that frozen shit Hana eats. I'm going to cook real food.' (p. 103). Laura is still thinking about a possible seduction, ready to submit herself to Julian's desires, when Hana phones to find out what happened that afternoon and whether he had talked of her. Truth is stretched once more as Hana claims: 'Luckily I bailed out pretty quickly' (p. 104) of her relationship with Julian. However, her reaction, upon hearing he is cooking dinner, is described by Laura as 'a bruised, long moment' (p. 104) on the phone, suggesting otherwise. Laura attempts to paint it as a friendly good turn as she helped find the attic key but does not mention the boxes now stored in Hana's attic, or that Julian has left his wife.

Julian cooks a healthy, tasty meal closely observed by Laura who is starting to see him differently from her secret knowledge acquired from the diary. She's fixated, thinking she would die if he left without anything happening. Her desire 'wasn't in my body but wedged in my mind, persistent and burrowing.' (p. 106). Laura craves this new sexual experience: 'I wanted to cross the threshold and be initiated into real life.' She sees her innocence as a weakness, admitting to Julian that she has been spending too much time alone. He is intrigued by the change in Laura who earlier that day had been 'as hostile as a little fox ...' (p. 107) .The feel of Julian's hand on her leg now arouses bodily desire within Laura but, at the moment of possibility, the phone rings. It is Hana of course. She has rung around friends and found out the truth of Julian's marriage breakup. She warns Laura that he will take advantage of her vulnerability; '... watch out for him. Julian's a snake.' (p. 107). Laura denies her vulnerability, but Hana's tone clearly establishes her irritation at the thought of Julian in her home, as well as her intuition that something has changed in her absence. Hana's phone call has changed the dynamic between Laura and Julian. He must literally disengage himself from the clinging, crying Laura to make his departure.

Instead of the expected wave of humiliation, Laura's reactions may not be quite what the reader expected. She bolts the door and settles on the 'hard, bleak, grey, satisfactory freedom' (p. 109). It is a relief for her to let go of the yearning she had experienced for Julian. Usefully, he has left her a 50-pound note. Laura commences extracting herself from 'Hana-land' by changing back into her own clothes and retrieving her own box of possessions. Holding a pebble, picked up on a beach as a teenager, brings her consolation. She never finds out when Julian collected his stuff, but Laura has other elements of her life to concentrate on now. The very next day, she starts looking for a job, quickly picking up work as a receptionist and finding a room to live in a share house. One consequence she believes of her evening with Julian is that she now comes across as older and more experienced: 'People seem to take me more seriously – as if I'd been initiated into something after all.' (p. 110). Hana, when she visits Laura, is sure that something had happened with Julian. She wants to know but all Laura confesses is the storage of the boxes in the attic. She does not mention reading Hana's diary although perceives Hana is watching her closely: '... her watchfulness had respect and even fear in it, as if I were the one with the secrets.' (p. 111).

Suggested classroom activities

- In what ways is Laura's husband similar/different from Julian? Collect specific evidence.
- Reread the paragraph at the bottom of p. 93 that runs into p. 94. Discuss the writing style and narrative voice created by Hadley. Consider stylistic elements such as tone, sentence length and repetition.
- Discuss how Hadley creates the idea of 'Hana-land' in the story. Also, is Hana's house being used as a metaphor?
- Collect vocabulary, phrases and inferences from the narrative that help shape the reader's impression of Julian.
- How does the story explore secrets?
- Hadley, in a *New Yorker* interview about this story, suggests that Laura, despite her naïve innocence, narrates the story in such a way that her experience is retold with sceptical irony. Do you agree?
- Discuss why Laura can quickly make changes in her life after her encounter with Julian; her journey from hibernation to moving forward.

'Bad Dreams'

The succinct opening line, 'A child woke up in the dark' (p. 113), is an experience with which every reader can associate; the gradual breaking through from the bad dream to full consciousness and the reassurance of what is familiar. Once again, this is a story told from the third person perspective with the characters left unnamed. What is different about 'Bad Dreams' is that Hadley divides the story into three sections: as we firstly follow the thoughts and actions of 'the child'; then shift to 'the child's mother'; and finally pull back to view both mother and daughter, as well as glimpses of the husband and brother.

The child's fear is palpable as she awakens from a bad dream, feeling a strong dread that something awful has happened whilst she has been asleep. As she fights the strangeness, Hadley provides meticulous detail about the bedroom interior and reveals a younger brother is asleep in the lower bunk. She remembers the thing that happened in her dream; she dreamt of reading her favourite book *Swallows and Amazons* but finding a new section, an epilogue, that she had never seen before. The girl is an advanced reader, knowing what prologues and epilogues are, but flounders to understand she has authored this shocking ending on her own. She has read all the series, acted out the stories with friends and adored these six children who spend their summers adventuring in perfect freedom 'pushing across the threshold of safety into a thrilling unknown.' (p. 115). Appallingly, to the child, she has written the deaths or illnesses of five of the children, only allowing Susan, her least favourite, to live 'to a ripe old age'. (p. 116). These imagined deaths 'tore jaggedly into the tissue that the book had woven' (p. 116) for the girl. She knows it is a dream but can't dislodge the taint of it from her mind. Holding back from calling her mother as she cannot bear to say the words aloud, the child gets out of bed and walks through the house.

Hadley's description of the house's interior deliberately shifts the child into the edge of the adult world. She notices her mother's sewing machine, her parents' wedding photo, lifts the lid of the gramophone to smell the records we sense she is not allowed to touch and runs her hands over pages on her father's desk, unable to read his grown-up writing. The child knows her father, a teacher, is writing a book called *Leviathan*. She sometimes feels 'a pang of fear' (p. 119) for her father whereas her mother 'was capable; she was the whole world.' (p. 119). The child is cognisant that her parents have their own adult concerns and a shared past beyond her reach. It is as though she has just realised that what happens in the present will quickly become the past, unable to be returned to again. Her eyes become aware of the chairs in the lounge room and a sudden urge 'to disrupt this world of her home' (p. 120) overwhelms her. She pushes all the chairs over, making little noise, until the 'room looked as if a hurricane had blown through it' (p. 120). Feeling shocked, and gratified at her handiwork, the child thinks of how her parents might find it funny, just as she would find her decision to never tell them funny too.

Hadley uses a line break of asterisks to move over to the mother's perspective. She wakes early, wondering if her little boy has cried out. Hearing nothing but fully awake, she remembers her husband coming to bed late and snuggling up to him. Her own dream is remembered; 'she had seemed to fit against the shape of him as sweetly as a nut into its shell ...' (p. 121) but awake, the mother now reflects on more negative thoughts – her resentment of the upstairs neighbours and her impatience to move from this basement apartment. As she moves through the house, the sandwich left uneaten by her husband evokes anger. Whilst he seems to prefer his work to her, it is revealed the mother once had dreams of being a painter instead of a housewife who works as a dressmaker to earn extra money for the family. Just as she thinks about the bacon she has bought her husband, managed by saving some of the housekeeping money, she sees the loungeroom. At first, she suspects an intruder but takes in the 'odd specificity of the chaos.' (p. 123). It is only the chairs; the windows are all tightly closed and the cash from her husband's extra job is where it should be.

The mother can think of only one explanation; her husband has done it. 'Her imagination danced with affront and dismay' (p. 124) as she thought about his moodiness and her knowledge that anger is buried in him. She concludes he must be frustrated at his studies, her homemaking or simply, her. The idea of a joke is dismissed and feeling she now has new insight into her husband's character, starts to see a future in which her husband is her enemy. Hadley provides rich detail as the mother's imagination and feelings unfold, in many ways like her daughter's experience a few hours previously. This is new territory. The mother quietly and calmly puts the chairs back in place, straightens the rug and ensures the room looks serene; 'The joke of its serenity erupted inside her like bubbles of soundless laughter' (p. 125) a similar thought to her daughter's likening of the chaos to a joke that might be funny. The mother decides she will never acknowledge what her

husband has done but he will know that she knows. She heads back to bed and more sleep, waking up refreshed and blessed despite her discovery during the night.

The final stage of the narrative pulls back to a view of the morning events in the kitchen. 'The young wife' (Note the shift from 'the mother') is frying bacon for her husband who is preoccupied packing his bag for work. Before he sits to eat, he puts his arms around his wife and kisses her; she responds as she always does, tilting her head 'to give herself to him' (p. 126). When she seeks her daughter, the child is immersed in her favourite book, the same book she always read. Despite the child's insistence that she needs to read it all over again from the beginning, the mother 'took the book away and chivvied her along.' (p. 126).

Suggested classroom activities

- Why does Hadley name the characters in *Swallows and Amazons* but not the characters in her short story?
- Discuss what is learnt about the importance of reading fiction as a child. Also, make links with other stories in the collections where characters immerse themselves in reading – both children and adults.
- Reread the daughter's words on p. 120 and the mother's almost exact repetition of them on p. 125. Discuss Hadley's reasons for this stylistic choice.
- Why does the child want to read *Swallows and Amazons* all over again?
- Discuss Hadley's depiction of the marriage in this story. Are there similarities or differences to other marriages in the collection?
- In what ways is the setting important?

'Flight'

Claire lives in Philadelphia and returns to her homeland, England, for a business meeting. The night before departure, she goes to bed with a man she does not know well or even like; an encounter she labels a drunken mistake, berating herself for being stupid. Claire is still recovering on her plane flight, her hand shaking as she sticks with just tonic water. Hadley cleverly sets up clues about Claire's expensive clothes and accessories by using a flight attendant who gushes over her handbag and coat. Not in the mood for female solidarity over greed for material things, Claire cuts off the attendant's conversation. This 'little display of her own power struck Claire bitterly' (p. 128) as she reflects on observations of her British snootiness by colleagues. An efficiently organised person, Claire had allocated the first day in London for shopping but needs to sleep off her hangover and 'bruised raw fatigue' (p. 128) of the lovemaking. This opening sequence establishes certain characteristics of Claire's personality and values that can be tracked through the several days of this third-person narrative.

Claire has carefully selected a hotel near Liverpool Street Station for its convenience to the train lines needed for her business commitments; however, she has decided to add a personal journey to see her niece's new baby. This decision allows a key plot revelation; Claire has not spoken to her sister Susan, the baby's grandmother, for several years. She thinks this might be the 'time to dispel the shadows' (p. 129) that are affecting extended family relationships. Her travel schedule has room to fit in a train journey north to go home and surprise the family, hopefully achieving a reconciliation after failed past attempts. These failed efforts are not expanded upon as Claire focuses her attention on searching for presents for baby Calum and other family members whilst she is in London. The shopping expedition reveals Claire's expensive tastes as she chooses a pricey fine cream wool shawl for the baby. Her thoughts, whilst buying a present for each, reveal the identity of each of the yet to be met characters: Amy the niece; Ben, her boyfriend and father of Calum; and nephew Ryan who is Susan's youngest child. They all live in the three-bedroom terrace where Claire and Susan grew up, a far cry from the life now led in the US by the protagonist. As she continues shopping, money doesn't seem an issue for Claire as she purchases a silk paisley scarf for her sister and a false fur tippet for herself; this tippet 'had just the touch of stylish irony she'd been in search of.' (p. 131).

Work commitments out of the way, Claire arrives in Leeds. She has not let anyone know she is coming, a clear signal to the reader of Hadley's authorial decision to use the unannounced visit to trigger further plot tensions. Leaving her suitcase at the station, carrying just the presents and a change of clothes 'in case she was invited to stay' (p. 132), Claire gets the taxi to drop her at the end of the street. In contrast to all the changes she observed in London, this streetscape of childhood is familiar and unaltered. The homes are red-brick Victorian working-class with front doors opening directly to the street. Her mind's return to the past, as if she could be simply returning from school or university to this familiarity, is abruptly returned to the present when Amy opens the front door to her aunt. All Claire is initially aware of is the shocking pink painted hall; 'Nothing was the same.' (p. 132).

Amy has only seen her aunt on Skype or Facebook but recognises her. Her shock is evident: 'What are you doing here?' (p. 133). Claire says she's come to see the baby and asks if she can come into the house. Her eyes take in Amy's weight gain and other aspects of this new mother's appearance. Claire's observation that Amy's breasts are 'swollen and shapeless' (p. 133) under her t-shirt and that she's still wearing yesterday's makeup seems hypercritical but serves Hadley's purpose of allowing the reader to visualise exactly what Amy looks like in Claire's eyes. However, Amy still seems to have a sense of humour, complaining the baby is driving her nuts, doesn't sleep and tells her aunt to take him back to America. Claire recalls the younger Amy who was clever at school but disappointed her mother by leaving at sixteen to work at Topshop – 'and now this.' (p. 134). There is judgement at play here. The narrative voice suggests Claire's disapproval of Amy's life choices and particularly becoming a young, unmarried mother.

Once inside her old home, Claire notices every detail about the interior as well as the house's occupants. Whilst some aspects are the same, for example, the kitchen, other rooms have been repurposed and redecorated. She observes the Ikea sofa, wonders what the central heating is costing Susan and takes in every aspect of Ben's appearance as he watches *Family Guy* amidst a room full of baby things, with Calum asleep on his naked chest. Claire's impression is that the couple are quite happy in their cocoon 'as if they were playing house ...' (p. 134). Ben is confident handling the baby but when he passes Calum to Claire, she anxiously holds the baby, not at all practised in such responsibility. She is disturbed by Calum's helplessness and rather insincerely tells his parents how beautiful he is. As Claire sits with them, drinking tea and later the champagne she has brought with her, snippets of information about Susan and her family are recalled. Ben is observed closely as Claire sees why Amy is attracted to him and why Susan did not like him at first. His past is dodgy; drugs and selling stolen car parts on eBay. At the same time, Hadley allows the reader to form their own judgement of Ben – as well as Amy – noting the easy closeness between the couple and their genuine adoration of their son despite the newness of parenthood.

Claire works hard to charm the couple thinking it is just like being at work and cultivating relationships with clients. She hands out her gifts at just the right time, not wanting to be seen throwing money around. Amy says the shawl will be perfect for Calum's christening, an event wanted by Susan, a revelation that surprises Claire who thought her sister was against the church. Claire's reaction makes Amy grow evasive: 'Maybe she used to be' (p. 138), implying that life for the family is different now. Amy tells Claire that her mother's views changed after 'Nanny' died whilst Ben reveals that Susan works too hard as a carer for the aged and disabled. This talk about Susan 'turning her into some kind of saint' (p. 139) makes Claire uneasy. They make Susan sound like their own mother; just the sort of woman Susan and Claire did not want to become like when they were teenagers. Ryan arrives home acting as if there had never been a 'dreadful falling-out' (p. 140) between his mother and Claire. He and Ben like their T-shirts whilst Amy is happy with her perfume. Amy, Ben, and Ryan comfortably joke and swear together, and Claire feels warmly about how good they are with Calum. She thinks of middle-class friends who fuss about baby books, seeking the right advice and resent their loss of freedom. Claire sees them as growing 'nagging and crabbed' (p. 140) as they become controlled by children they lug to ballet and violin lessons. She suddenly asks for another cuddle feeling Ben's fingers 'faintly flirting and caressing' (p. 141) as he tucks in Calum's chuck cloth on her shoulder. Claire wonders if the champagne has gone to her head but her observation leaves an uncomfortable feeling with the reader.

Susan's arrival home precipitates the plot tension. Her voice is heard singing out from the front door 'Who's Nanny's little darling?' (p. 141). She is home from a long day at work and looking forward to seeing her grandson. 'Then she saw that Claire was there.' (p. 142) a sight that shuts down her smiles. The reader now learns what has caused the rift between the sisters. After Susan's husband left, she and her four children moved back into the parents' home. They

were proud to own their home having worked hard to pay off the mortgage. Susan nursed both parents to the ends of their lives whilst Claire had been studying and working in London. The house was left equally to both daughters. Susan, who had never paid rent to her parents, assumed she could go on living there but Claire wanted her share to help buy a London flat and suggested Susan take out a mortgage to buy her half. This eventuated, but Susan stopped speaking to her sister. Back in the present of the story, Susan goes upstairs and locks herself in her room. Claire offers to leave but Amy tells her to stay: 'I don't know why she's being such a cow.' (p. 143), whilst Ryan thinks his mother should just get over it. Claire tells them she offered to pay back the money, but Susan refused. The opportunity is provided to see events from Susan's point of view; a sister who headed off to study leaving her to nurse their parents then demanding her share of the property. She knows Susan sees 'something monstrous in Claire's selfishness' (p. 143) but feels she behaved reasonably. She needed a home too and had worked hard to get on in life. However, looking back, Claire does see how she could have been perceived as 'something manic' in 'insisting on her rights' when both sisters were 'raw from the loss of their mother.' (p. 143).

The efforts to persuade Susan out of her room continue through the evening. Each of them tries different strategies with no luck. Claire thinks it's as though Susan has seized this moment to be excessive and unreasonable in return for all the years she cared for others, putting herself last. In between these fruitless efforts, Claire maintains her entertainment of Susan's family, giving Ben money to go and buy more alcohol and encouraging discussion of their future plans. When Amy invites her to stay the night, Claire accepts and sleeps on the pull-out sofa, firstly finishing off a cryptic crossword started by Susan in a magazine. Her other action is to take Susan's work bag from the hall, carefully lay the silk scarf, wrapped in tissue paper, at the bottom and put everything back in place. Awaking in the morning, Claire sees that Susan's work bag and coat are gone. It's only 6am but she calculates it is best if she left too: 'She was keen now to return to her own world.' (p. 150). She thinks ahead to the hotel booked in London, dinner that night with friends and dealing with the work colleague she had slept with – dropping in a mention that he was married with children. (A common theme in this collection.) Claire is now ashamed of how she flirted with him 'believing herself in charge of what could happen ...' (p. 150). Back in London, she has a sudden suspicion and searches through her bag, finding at the bottom the silk scarf, untouched in its tissue paper. She laughs at the knowledge that Susan has outwitted her. About to throw out the scarf, Claire changes her mind and wraps it around her own neck, liking its subtle and cool touch. For a moment, she feels 'a stabbing sorrow for everything she'd lost and left behind' (p. 152) but she knows from experience that old skins can be shed whilst sorrow can be pushed down and buried.

Suggested classroom activities

- Discuss how Hadley presents Claire as a judgemental and self-absorbed character. Consider the narrative perspective, use of voice, vocabulary choices, motifs, and setting.
- What was the relationship like between Susan and Claire as teenagers?
- Discuss the significance of the cryptic crossword and the silk scarf.
- Is Claire a manipulator?
- Discuss how Susan and her family might feel after Claire's visit.
- How does this story encourage the reader to think about what makes a valuable, fulfilling life?

'Under the Sign of the Moon'

This story once again takes the reader into a world of train journeys, encounters with strangers and family relationships. The third person narrative is told from the perspective of Greta, a London woman suffering from cancer, visiting her daughter Kate, in Liverpool. The opening line, 'The train paused at a red light on its way into the station, waiting for a platform to clear.' (p. 153), foreshadows that something is about to happen as the carriage becomes unexpectedly quiet and still. Greta, who has been reading, admires the striking sedimentary layers and arched recesses of old engineering structures through the train window. Her thoughts are interrupted by the man opposite who proceeds to volunteer the history of the rail cutting. (Look up the Olive Mount cutting. It does have a fascinating history.) Unsure whether to believe him, Greta returns to her book without speaking. Her health issues are revealed: 'Since her illness began ... she had immersed herself in books almost fanatically ...' (p. 154), choosing only fiction to distract herself from what is happening within her body.

Hadley takes the reader back to the start of the train journey from Euston. This man has attempted to make conversation with Greta from the beginning. At first, she is friendly, telling him about her visit to her daughter in Liverpool, but is also surprised that someone of her daughter's age would want to converse with an 'almost sixty' woman. He is astonished to find out Kate lives in the same suburb in which he was born, delighted at the coincidence. His eagerness to talk acts as a warning to Greta who would much rather quietly read than converse; however, his persistence in talking about Liverpool gives her a chance to absorb detail about the young man's physical appearance and manner of speech. Only providing selective information, Greta replies from time to time on the train journey noticing that he does not seem offended when she returns to her book. His offer to buy her a coffee is rejected. If she were younger, Greta thinks he could have been chatting her up but her gynaecological problems (is it ovarian cancer?) are 'barring her definitively from the world of sexual attraction.' (p. 158). She knows that part of her life is over.

Upon arriving at Liverpool Station, Greta is disappointed at her daughter's failure to greet her, surprised at the surge of emotion she feels as she imagines being enfolded in a welcoming embrace. Her relationship with Kate has not been very tactile but Greta hopes 'surely they would embrace now after everything that had happened.' (p. 158). A text message indicates her daughter has been held up, so Greta finds the station café to buy a coffee whilst she waits. Inside, sits the young man with a coffee, and quite unusually for a young person thinks Greta, there's no evidence of a mobile phone. He shows genuine pleasure at seeing her, asking her to sit with him and this time she allows him to buy her coffee. He looks needy, and Greta, recognising her own neediness, thinks they may as well keep each other company. The young man talks about his visit to Liverpool to see elderly relatives, rather fitting considering his quaint and dated manner. She wonders if he is gay when her enquiry about girlfriends makes him blush. A key revelation is that his mother, with whom he was living, has died six months previously and he now works for an uncle. Greta, when she hears the story about his mother's misdiagnosis and fall whilst shopping, recognises that the story has been told many times before, suggesting the young man is still assuaging his grief by staying with 'safe familiar phrases' (p. 162) that keep his mother as a close presence in his mind.

Kate finally arrives and although Greta feels some guilt at abandoning the young man mid-sentence, she does. Kate's attire is the opposite to his; 'out there' rather than meek and old-fashioned. Greta's dream of a welcoming embrace doesn't eventuate as her daughter submits to her mother's kisses rather than returning them. But just as mother and daughter are leaving, the young man astonishes Greta by saying he could meet her again if she wants, telling her a specific time and place. Hadley's dropping in of this possibility creates deliberate curiosity and foreshadowing of what may happen in the following pages.

The narrative reels back in time to Liverpool in the 1970s before Kate's birth. Greta is then known as Margaret or Maggie and lives with Kate's father, Ian. He never becomes her legal husband but they devise their own wedding ceremony including the vow: 'Under the sign of the moon and the eye of the goddess ... With my body I thee worship.' (p. 163). Ian is depicted as a controlling personality who could be loving one minute and the next in a dark mood. He is remembered as having 'a way of inciting other people to behave extravagantly' (p. 164) and wants them biddable and compliant to his needs. Greta recalls her miserable wedding night when Ian took acid for the first time. She was too scared to try but stays with the group to watch out for them. When Ian wants to consummate their 'marriage' in front of others, she refuses, incurring his wrath and harsh, insulting words. She knows Ian has been raised in a problematic family and despises the bourgeois values of her own family. It is difficult for Greta who possesses her own feminist views to be treated in this way, as

it is shocking when she discovers that Ian slept with another girl on their wedding night. He manages to manipulate the blame back onto her. We learn that Greta sometimes tells her second husband (the real husband) stories about Ian which outrage Graham who is depicted as a kind, thoughtful man. These stories aren't altogether truthful which suggests Greta's emotional neediness in relating them. Ian died when Kate was nine, so she now thinks of Graham as her dad.

The story returns to the setting of Kate and Greta at the flat. Greta interprets her daughter's chatter as a way of avoiding any discussion of her mother's illness. Kate and her partner Boyd are at university. They are not particularly financially well off, but the new sofa reminds Greta of Kate's 'sense of entitlement to material things ...' (p. 169). Her daughter asks about the 'creepy guy' at the station, having observed them merrily chatting. Greta, 'practised at presenting a face wiped clean of knowledge' (p. 169), claims there were no empty tables but cannot fool the observant Kate. When Kate finally asks about her mother's health and prognosis from the doctors, Greta replies that they don't want to see her for three months but does not relay the news that anything could happen in that time. Her mortality is something Greta does not want to discuss. They drink tea and eat organic cakes (from a place Boyd approves of). Kate's remark that her mother is looking horribly thin in a way that does not suit her, strikes the reader as cruel when all Greta wants is some affection. The theme of relationships is furthered upon Boyd's arrival home. Kate, who had never submitted to anyone before, pays anxious attention to his opinions and judgements which in Greta's eyes are very strict; no alcohol, only jazz and no flying on planes because of climate change. Are there subtle reminders of Ian here? Greta recalls what the young man on the train had told her about the rail cutting and Boyd searches on the internet for confirmation that it is the oldest in Britain.

Greta finds herself dreaming about Palm House in Sefton Park, the place suggested for meeting the young man. Kate ends up needing to work on the Thursday, so Greta decides to go to the park, taking a long time to make herself presentable, thinking that her daughter's youthful good looks redeem her own. She heads to the coffee place labelled by Kate as 'hippie' and 'just your kind of thing' (p. 176). Greta quite enjoys being away from Graham and takes the opportunity to indulge in some cheap wine she knows he would refuse to drink. It makes her 'heady and transforming' as well as 'liberated and exhilarated' (p. 176). She remembers Palm House, but it is past the appointed time. Right in this moment of thought, Greta looks out the café window and sees him walking past. Jolted by a pang of guilt for his loneliness, Greta attracts his attention by banging on the window. The young man looks out of place with his white coat, briefcase and tie but is delighted to see her. His name is finally revealed as they introduce each other properly. He is Mitchell and once again he is excited by coincidences upon learning her full name is Margaret, the same as his mother. Greta explains about the name change and surprisingly Mitchell remarks: 'But I suppose Kate's father was the love of your life.' (p. 179). He believes that certain individuals are fated to be together although Greta is uncertain of the genuineness of Mitchell's thoughts, thinking of him as a 'chameleon'. But then is everything she says the truth? Conversations are only on the surface; real lives are hidden 'underground beneath it.' (p. 180). Mitchell has brought her a present, a well-read paperback. This gesture triggers a sudden reaction in Greta. She does not want it. She hardly knows him. But Mitchell thrusts the book at her, accidentally knocking over his Coke which spills onto her skirt. It is not just Coke after all; it's mixed with alcohol. Something completely unexpected happens. He suddenly drops his head into her lap 'face down between her thighs' (p. 181). Greta's urgent response is for him to get off her and stop making a spectacle of himself. He clumsily leaves as Greta remains, feeling embarrassed and humiliated in front of other customers. The story concludes with Greta opening the book Mitchell has left behind. Written on the flyleaf is 'To Margaret ... With Love.' (p. 182). For a moment Greta believes that it really was fated that Mitchell had written the name in the book before knowing it.

Suggested classroom activities

- Discuss this quote on p. 161. 'It was easy to assume that families like this didn't exist anymore: submissive, frugal, unpolitical, tribal.' Does it remind you of any similar (or different) families depicted in Hadley's collection of short stories?
- How are Graham, Ian, Boyd, and Mitchell depicted as different types of men?
- What ideas about maternal love are explored in the story?
- Activism is an idea explored by Hadley in the story. Can links be made to any other stories in the collection?
- In what ways does Hadley embed a sense of the past? Page 177 will be useful to reread.
- Why does Greta invite Mitchell into the café?
- Discuss the ending of the story. Why is the dedication in the book so important?

'Her Share of Sorrow'

This story is excellent to read in tandem with 'Bad Dreams' and 'One Saturday Morning' as all offer insights into young girls, their acquisition of new knowledge and experiences, and their subsequent reactions. Ruby, whose mother Dalia 'used to be a dancer before she had her children' (p. 183) and retrained as a psychotherapist, doesn't mirror her mother's appearance. She is plump, stubby and turns pink in the sun whilst Dalia still carries herself like a ballet dancer. We learn that Ruby often tells lies, being seen by others outside the family as a changeling. This idea of Ruby as a misfit is expanded upon as the reader learns more about the other members of her family. Her father Adrian and brother Nico are both beautiful and distinguished like Dalia – and very thin. Ruby is the odd one out with her 'greedy eating at the supper table.' (p. 184). She raids the cupboards for food, steals money for sweets and rails against the house rules about computer usage. Ruby complains of boredom whilst Dalia says she is uninterested in anything, listing all the things her daughter cannot do. She callously adds 'Not that she's got any friends' (p. 184), a comment her husband feels is unfair. Ruby does have friends but her mother labels them as hopeless. Whereas Nico is a gifted cellist, Ruby cannot even play the recorder.

The family head to the South of France for a three-week holiday when Ruby is ten. The house in which they stay belongs to the Williams family, and although lacking Wi-Fi, offers the opportunity for plenty of holiday-type activities. Whilst her father and brother go for bike rides and her mother unwinds in the sun with a book, Ruby is 'scowling' and 'stomping' around with nothing to do (p. 186). She doesn't want anything to do with the Williams family, rejecting her mother's suggestion to look for treasures in the outhouses. Dalia falls asleep, later finding Ruby in the attic. Ruby says she's fine but Dalia notices; 'There was something peculiar about Ruby's voice, prim and slippery and secretive ...' (p. 186) which halts Dalia from opening the door. Ruby spends all day in the attic only emerging for food. The others play chess, read, and make music although when Adrian peeks into the attic, he reports back that Ruby is immersed in her book. Dalia immediately points out that she did not bring any books, heightening the air of mystery. Ruby's act of locking the attic door and hiding the key is also suspicious. Dalia briefly wonders if her daughter is reading something inappropriate but enjoys the peace without Ruby.

Ruby is reading a novel titled *East Lynne* (it's real so look it up). She has found a pile of Treasury Classics and despairingly opens one in her search to relieve her boredom. Books have not appealed before, judged 'too drearily like her own real-life childish routines ...' (p. 188). However, this novel transports her into another world even though much of it is beyond her comprehension. The grandeur of the language intoxicates Ruby but when little William dies, she is astonished and grief-stricken, believing that children always got better in books. (This reminds the reader of the child's dreamt epilogue to *Swallows and Amazons* in 'Bad Dreams'.) By the end of the holiday, Ruby has reached a third book but cannot bear the thought of stealing it and desecrating the collection. Her parents and brother still have no idea of what she has been reading.

Upon arriving home, Ruby feels bereft and exiled from the part of herself that had been immersed in another world in France. Her heart is not in other holiday activities and the mention of *Shaun the Sheep* highlights the divide between childish fun and the adult fiction she craves, despite not fully understanding it. Ruby has a vision of possibility; she needs a notebook to write her own story. Nico continues to put her down, but her parents are delighted that Ruby is quiet and occupied in her room. They simply assume she is reading. Finally, she announces to her family that she is writing a novel. Although her father beams and Dalia responds with real warmth, as soon as her mother suggests showing it to her teacher, Ruby regrets her revelation. Writing, and the creative power it brings, provides new emotions. Nothing 'could ever match the power and importance Ruby felt when she was making things up.' (p. 191). The intensity, the act of holding the biro, joining letters, and recording the unfolding scenes from her imagination, entrances Ruby. She continues to protect what she has written from her family despite their great interest.

The spell is broken when, the very time she carelessly leaves her notebook on her desk whilst looking for biscuits, Nico steals it. Her screams cause her parents to tell Nico he has done the wrong thing and to give it back but when Nico starts reading aloud, commenting on a spelling mistake, Adrian and Dalia are interested to hear more. Ruby senses an impending disaster but her writer's vanity wants to know what the story sounds like. She truly believes that her family will be amazed. 'Wouldn't the words forged in such passion stupefy her audience, making them

at last see what she saw.' (p. 193). Adrian reacts when he hears 'upon her breasts' (p. 193) and Ruby turns around to find her father grinning and her mother's hand over her mouth, suppressing laughter. She feels angry and betrayed, not understanding what they are laughing at. Her story is not intended to be funny.

An inconsolable Ruby barricades herself in her room. Her family try to make amends with apologies and presents, Dalia telling her daughter how angry she is with Nico and resorting to lies; they were laughing with delight, not because the story was funny. She has her notebook back, at first working bitterly and without conviction, angry that her family had 'hollowed out the best thing she'd ever done ...' (p. 194). Ruby is finishing the stupid story simply to prove they were right. However, she finds the hold her story has over her is powerful. The plots unexpectedly alters in her mind as she decides to strike down the members of her fictional family one by one. All die of a wasting fever except Lady Carole who has nursed them in vain to be left alone. Ruby cries as she finishes her novel; 'her heart was swollen with love, and writerly triumph.' (p. 194).

Suggested classroom activities

- Discuss what Hadley is suggesting about the emotional needs of children.
- How does the story present Nico's betrayal and her parents as his accomplices?
- Discuss the therapeutic powers of reading and writing. Consider how this idea is shown in other stories in the collection.
- What is it about the books she reads that most engages Ruby?
- How does the story explore the negative side of sibling relationships?
- Collect vocabulary that highlights Ruby's immersion in East Lynne.

'Silk Brocade'

This story is set in Bristol during the 1950s but also steps forward about twenty years in the second part. The opening sentences establish Ann Gallagher as a pattern designer as she is depicted 'arranging and rearranging them like pieces of a puzzle ...' (p. 195). Her scissors are personified; 'bit', 'growling' and 'deadly' as Ann weaves her magic with them. In an era before the mass production of clothes for retail stores, dressmaking was a reasonably common professional or hobby occupation for women. (The mother sews in 'Bad Dreams'.) Ann and her friend, Kit Seaton, rent the basement of a building from which they run their business.

Ann is interrupted by the arrival of a woman, unrecognisable through the door, who has arrived without an appointment. Before realising the identity of the woman, Ann has already noticed that she is dressed in a military-style uniform that is unflatteringly tight over a heavy bust. Her visitor is an old school classmate, Nola Higgins, with whom Ann had grown up in Fishponds, a not-so-nice suburb. Both had won places at the same girls' grammar, but Ann had ignored Nola's overtures of friendship, preferring to start afresh. Now a district nurse, she wants Ann to make her wedding dress, an unwelcome job, for as her colleague Kit says, they can't sew 'for just anyone'. (p. 197). Although Ann still lives with her family in Fishponds, at work she wants to leave that world behind. Thinking Nola might be deterred by their prices, Ann invites Nola in for a quick coffee. The fitting room is decorated in a glamorous manner; velvet, gilt mirror and plants, with Ann wondering if her new style of life impresses Nola. She looks over her guest's body with her pattern-maker's eye, the critical description inferring Ann's reluctance to create an outfit for Nola. Nola needs a wedding dress made for her forthcoming marriage in June, quickly reassuring Ann that she is not marrying because she is pregnant. When Ann tactfully raises the question of their prices, Nola says money is not a problem. When she speaks of her fiancé, her eyes fill with tears, and she flushes all over. It is a marriage for love. He was nursed by Nola and now walks with just a little limp.

When Nola shows Ann some fabric she would like to use for her wedding dress, Ann is astonished at the beauty of the thick silk brocade embroidered with flowers. It is expensive material. Nola reveals that her fiancé's home has a lot of old fabric, as well as clothes, telling Ann she should come and see it. Initially, Nola is worried that the brocade will look terrible on her, but Ann persuades her that the rich off-white will flatter her dark hair and lovely skin. She believes that the right clothes can 'become whatever you wanted, you could transform yourself.' (p. 200). Nola is unsure whether she should doubt or trust Ann's words: 'With your full figure ... nice clean silhouette, nothing fussy ... this could look stunning, actually.' (p. 200). These words also invite the reader to consider whether they doubt or trust Ann.

Once again, Hadley moves forward in time. Kit is introduced in person, described as 'slamming the door', 'screaming with laughter' and 'half-cut already' (p. 201). Her current boyfriend, Ray, is with her but Ann knows of the existence of another already married lover of Kit's. They have brought another medic, Donny Ross, with them who Ann can immediately tell is not enamoured with Kit's bossiness and snobbery. He is a socialist, not impressed by women like Kit's mother who have their hats made in Paris. Kit is surprisingly enthusiastic to hear about their new client and taken aback at Ann's ignorance about the family into which Nola is marrying. She exclaims that the wedding pictures will be in all the papers and bring them new business. When Ann tells her 'But Nola Higgins is from Fishponds', Kit responds, 'She's marrying a Perney and they've owned Thwaite Park for centuries.' (p. 202). An exploration of social class will be a key element of this story. Kit desperately wants an invitation to Thwaite Park to see what else is stored in the attic. Donny ironically suggests skeletons. As Kit and Ray entertain each other, Donny hangs around Ann in the cutting room. He makes her anxious; she wants her fabrics to be pristine. At the same time, there is something curious about Donny: 'Some new excitement seemed to be waiting, folded up inside her, not even tried on yet.' (p. 204). Hadley's use of metaphor here is very fitting.

Kit meets Nola when she drops by to consider dress designs with Ann. Kit goes all out to win Nola over as she angles for an invitation to Thwaite Park. Ann's designs, drawn on impossibly slender models, worry Nola; however, she is reassured by Kit of Ann's talent. They decide on the dress design and also achieve the desired for invitation to Thwaite Park. Nola is sure Blaise would love to meet them. Kit laughs at the thought of the intersection of social class and teases Ann about her crush on Donny the socialist. By the time of the visit to Thwaite Park, Kit is engaged to Ray although she is still having an affair with the married man, now named as Charlie the lawyer. Ann has seen him with his wife and children; he pretended not to know her even though he had been at their place the night before. He wiggled Ann a 'jaunty, naughty secret signal.' (p. 206). The visit to Thwaite Park is an eye-opener for Ann. Donny is there, too, as Ray drives disconcertingly fast in his convertible. The Palladian style house and its grounds are open to the public so they head to the side door as instructed by Nola. Donny is described as 'stiff with disapproval of class privilege.' (p. 207). Blaise is a very affable man; Ann reflecting that she could easily win him over 'if she chose to test her power'. (p. 207). The house turns out be a jumble of past and present. Initially, Ann is envious but then decides that her future will be better than this house.

The picnic with Nola and Blaise is a great success. Kit has brought elaborate sandwiches and pinched alcohol from her father's cellar. It turns out that she still lives at home too. They learn that Blaise is as much a socialist as Donny, having no objection to paying taxes despite struggling to maintain a property that is a money pit. He has thought of selling but is too sentimental, plus there are too many old, high maintenance houses like Thwaite Park on the market. He and Nola are depicted as made for each other, calling each other 'dear'. Blaise's limp is because of polio and he believes Nola saved his life. Kit's father's Armagnac makes them all brilliantly drunk and they explore the grounds after the public has gone, forgetting about the intended search for fabric in the attic. Kit thinks Blaise a sweetheart but Ann, interestingly, claims that he had, in fact, seen right through their condescension towards Nola and did not think much of them. The four of them leave, promising to return soon. The final sentence of this section indicates this won't happen: 'That was in 1953.'

Hadley moves her story to 1972 and adopts a narrative perspective more from the point of view of Ann's daughter, Sally Ross. Sally is sixteen and her mother has 'made her a jacket out of an old length of silk brocade, embroidered with flowers.' (p. 211). They have dyed this fabric, that Sally remembers always being around, purple. It is summer, the same one that Sally's father, a doctor, has left home for another woman. Ann's furious reaction to his infidelity is revealed. She sold his

records, chopped his ties, and burned them. Everyone is shocked at her vengeance, not having seen this side of her character before. Sally is not beautiful like her mother, but Ann always makes her daughter feel good about herself. They immerse themselves in a project of transformation, dieting together with Ann looking more lovely than ever after losing a stone. Ann is unsuccessful in her efforts to find a lover but at the end of the summer, Sally's father returns home. Sally knows the story of the white brocade; how it belonged to a lady who died from diphtheria before her wedding. She had caught it from a patient. Her fiancé had written to Sally's godmother, Kit, returning the designs 'for the saddest of reasons' (p. 213). They never wrote back to him as they did not know what to say. Their business turned out to be successful although Ann only kept a few of the Gallagher and Seaton labelled clothes when she married. Taking photographs of the clothes they made never crossed their minds.

The closing part of the story once again moves ahead in time. Sally, now training to be a teacher, goes to Thwaite Park where her boyfriend is working. She has worn the silk brocade jacket deliberately, hanging it on a hook in the kitchen whilst she helps. After the conference luncheon, she heads upstairs to explore but is followed by 'a better-looking and more dangerous' boy (p. 215). She tells this boy about her mother's sad association with the house and her parents' separation. Her motives are deliberate: 'Sally was trying her power out on this boy; she shed tears of self-pity, until he put his arms around her and kissed her.' (p. 215). Ironically, she forgets to collect her jacket but does not confess the loss to her mother until months later. In Sally's view, 'A jacket hardly mattered, in the scheme of things.' (p. 215).

Suggested classroom activities

- Discuss the ways in which class distinctions are crucial in the story.
- Is there a sense of social change embedded in events of the story?
- Consider how Hadley makes use of the silk brocade.
- How is setting used in the story?
- How does Hadley develop Kit's character? Look for vocabulary and inferences.
- Discuss the structure of 'Silk Brocade'. Consider the narrative perspective, voice, and use of time.
- What views of men and their attitudes to women are offered in the story? Vice versa?

Characters

Bad Dreams and Other Stories presents students with a range of characters inviting different interpretations of each. Hadley writes about children, adolescents, women, and men who exist in differing times and places. What they have in common are experiences that change them in particular ways, sometimes briefly, whilst for others the effects are more prolonged. We like some characters better than others. Some elicit greater sympathy – or empathy. A few behave in questionable ways and raise doubts about their moral values or inability to relate appropriately to others. There are those who are materialistic, arrogant, self-absorbed, or immature. Some are supremely confident whilst others are hesitant or shy. We read of characters who are secretive, afraid, and unable to fulfil their potential. But as Hadley reminds us, all are ordinary people who respond to the extraordinary in their lives in different ways.

Women

Create a table like the one below to build ideas and notes about the various female characters in the stories. Consider the different times in which each lives as that contributes to the historical-social-economic values of the time. Look for connections (both similar and different) that can be drawn between different female characters. Remember that many of the stories have more than one female protagonist (or antagonist). For example, 'Experience' although written from Claire's perspective, also provides excellent examples in Susan, Amy, and the deceased mother whose house becomes symbolic of the friction between the sisters. 'The Stain' focuses on Marina but Wendy is also vital to the story's outcome.

Story	Who?	Their role as a woman – employment, mother, wife, etc.	Their experience	Consequences	Quotes
An Abduction					
The Stain					
Deeds Not Words					
One Saturday Morning					
Experience					
Bad Dreams					
Flight					
Under the Sign of the Moon					
Her Share of Sorrow					
Silk Brocade					

- Consider to what extent women in the stories relate to other women (if applicable).
- Do they relate differently to the men in their lives?
- How does Hadley present women as mothers? Does she suggest that mothering is not always easy?
- Discuss the homes or workplaces of each of the women. How do they view their homes and domestic life?
- Discuss which woman you feel suffers the most in their story. Write a paragraph arguing why your chosen character experiences a more difficult time than one or two others of Hadley's women.
- How does ageing affect women in different ways?
- Are some better mothers than others?

Men

Although Hadley's short stories are not told through the narrative perspective of men, the male characters are vital to events in each story. A group of young men 'abduct' Jane. Marina housekeeps for an old man in 'The Stain' but also juggles her roles as wife and mother. Laura Mulhouse and the suffragettes are fighting against patriarchal barriers whilst Edith is drawn into an affair with a married man on the cusp of World War One. Carrie's Saturday morning is disturbed by the visit of Dom Smith, a man in mourning. In 'Experience', Laura's husband suddenly ends their marriage and her encounters with Julian preempt big changes in her life. The young wife in 'Bad Dreams' perceives shortcomings in her husband. Claire experiences a negative sexual encounter with a male colleague before her surprise visit to Leeds where she meets new father Boyd and her nephew Ryan who are lovingly caring for baby Calum. 'Under the Sign of the Moon' provides insights into Greta's first and present husbands, her daughter's partner, and the strange young man encountered on the train, Mitchell. The time shift in 'Silk Brocade' examines male behaviour in Ann's younger days as well as her travails with a fickle husband in her middle age. Ruby's father and brother contribute to her discomfort in 'Her Share of Sorrow'.

- Create a similar table to the one on the previous page and make headings appropriate to the male characters in the short stories.
- Discuss how Hadley chooses to depict husbands in the stories. Which husbands are supportive? Which are the best communicators? Who acts badly?
- Many of the male characters have children. Find examples in each of the relevant stories about their fathering abilities or attitudes to their children.
- What type of working environments does Hadley create for her male characters?
- Some stories depict young girls who have male siblings. What role do they have in those stories?
- Several male characters could be viewed as abusive, manipulative, or simply strange. Discuss how Hadley presents these men. Is it through memories, dialogue, bruises (both literal and metaphorical) or Hadley's vocabulary choices? What views and values are explored through these men?

Children

The young girls in 'One Saturday Morning', 'Bad Dreams' and 'Her Share of Sorrow' are of similar ages and all are starting to edge into some of the 'knowingness' of the adult world. They do not yet fully understand all they see, hear, read, or dream but are curious about new sensations and new knowledge they acquire. Jane, the protagonist in 'An Abduction', is a few years older, a bored adolescent whose experience, known because of Hadley's epilogue style at the end of the story, will be remembered all her life. In these four stories, Hadley also takes time to explore how the girls view their parents and vice versa. Some of the other stories in the collection contain mentions of children of various ages as well. Ann's daughter in 'Silk Brocade' appears in the second part of the story; she is described as having a weight issue, her mother dieting with her as well as creating a jacket for her daughter from the symbolic silk brocade. Julian brings his son to Hana's house in 'Experience' as he searches for his tent to take his children camping. A new baby joins the family tribe in 'Flight' whilst 'Deeds Not Words' takes the reader – at a distance – into an early twentieth-century girls' boarding school. Edith never even finds out the sex of her lover's children. Jane's younger sister plays imaginary games with her friends in 'An Abduction'. Some of the children have younger brothers and sisters who are briefly mentioned whilst others play a more important role in events that unfold.

- Discuss how Hadley embeds references to children's physical appearances. How do they perceive themselves and how do their parents perceive them?
- Find quotes that reflect how children perceive the adult world. Make a table to assist you.
- Hadley depicts some of her young characters as readers. Consider why she does this.
- Some of Hadley's protagonists have adult children who are important to the story. Discuss how Anthony, Kate, Amy and Ryan, and Sally relate to their mothers.
- The relationship between older siblings is a key element of 'Flight'. Write a paragraph about the relationship between Claire and Susan which considers their different life experiences and personalities.
- What role does Nigel's sister, Fiona, play in 'An Abduction'?

Minor characters

Some minor characters are developed by Hadley more than others but even those who are only briefly glimpsed assist in conveying the views and values of the communities in which they reside. Construct a chart or table as you head back into each story to revisit these minor characters. Record important quotes or actions.

- Look over 'The Stain' again. How does Hadley create an awareness of other residents in the village?
- Even though Helen Smith has died in 'One Saturday Morning', Hadley still develops an awareness of her as a friend, wife, and mother. In what ways does she do this?
- The Williams family own the house in the south of France where Ruby and her family stay. What does the reader learn about the Williamses?

Marina ('The Stain')

Marina stands out from several of the other adult female protagonists in Hadley's collection. The way she walks, her pink Puffa jacket, her cleaning and dry-cleaner jobs plus the perception of her as an 'oddball', all these set Marina apart from the well-attired, childless Claire, the socially conscious mother of Jane Allsop or the worldly experience of Hana. Hadley also efficiently juxtaposes Marina with the other female character in the story, the old man's daughter, Wendy – two different women whose only reason to connect is the old man. There is initially a passivity about Marina's personality that contrasts the physicality of her cleaning labours. She accepts the eccentricities of the old man but in her own quiet way, perhaps without fully understanding why, she works out ways to deal with his behaviour. When he tries to put an arm around her, she rebukes him. Her refusal of the extra money, the offer to buy her new appliances or help with Liam's schooling emphasise Marina's firm moral compass. Her dreams remain just that – dreams that could have been actualised if she were to accept the house left to her in the old man's will; the house that Marina fantasised about as a young girl but ends up symbolic of a 'stain', and ironically sullied despite Marina having cleaned every inch of it. Other aspects of Marina's characterisation invite further discussion. Why does she go above and beyond in her caring for the old man? The airplane craft kit, taking Liam over to play, bearing the weight of the old man as she walks him to church on Sundays? Her husband, Gary, thinks she's 'more like a full-time carer than a cleaner' (p. 44).

Marina provides some commentary about her own naivety later in the story but Hadley plants enough clues to encourage her reader to question Marina's inability to wholly see the truth. The ninetieth birthday party takes an uncomfortable turn when the old man takes Marina's hand and refers to her in his speech. She quickly pulls her hand away in her embarrassment but her acceptance, under pressure and 'against her better judgement' (p. 49), of a lift home with Anthony is strange. His story about his grandfather finally enables Marina to reflect on her relationship with the old man with new clarity and recognise the truth of what Anthony tells her. She cannot forgive herself for her innocence as she remembers 'how the old man had courted and flattered her.' (p. 49). Ultimately, Marina is a kind, caring person; however, the narrowness of her life has limited her ability to see what Hadley invites the reader to realise before she does. Her memories of the repulsive dead creature she had encountered years ago now equate to her new distaste of the old man. She won't be able to 'undo the knowledge' (p. 52) of her ignorance. Marina's refusal of the house means the relinquishing of her fantasies of moving forward economically and socially in life. Her moral instincts win although she is now back to being firmly rooted in her working-class existence.

Ruby ('Her Share of Sorrow')

Despite the putdowns and questionable behaviour of her family, Ruby achieves a pyrrhic victory with her decision to kill off all but one character in her novel; her revenge is full of 'writerly triumph' (p. 194) as the fictional family is struck down by a mysterious wasting fever. Hadley, injecting a mix of grief, victory, and irony, leaves the reader with Ruby dropping tears 'on her page for her dear family.' (p. 194). 'Her Share of Sorrow' starts with a portrait of Ruby's mother, Dalia, before introducing Ruby as distinctly different from her accomplished mother. Language, such as 'plump', 'stubby', 'lank', 'told lies' and 'changeling', distinguish poor ten-year-old Ruby from her 'distinguished and beautiful and tall' parents and brother. Even though she raids the food cupboards, steals money, and leaves a mess everywhere, Hadley invites sympathy for Ruby's boredom and frustration that greatly irritates her parents who have naturally – because they are so perfect – read all the right parenting guides. They seem to have neglected, however, reading up on supporting their child's emotional needs. She hears her choice of friends criticised, the lamentations about her lack of interest in anything suggested by her parents, and puts up with the comparisons of her failings to brother Nico's successes. Ruby simply has not yet found her niche; something to spark a passion within – she is similar in this way to Jane Allsop, bored on a hot summer day or Carrie who is feeling trapped by her Saturday morning piano practice. They are all ripe for new experiences. It takes a book to awaken Ruby's latent passion; a dated adult historical romance titled East Lynne to rouse her from the dullness of the French holiday. Locked away from her family, Ruby immerses herself in a strange literary world that she does not fully understand but is certainly not wanting to share with her family. The novel astonishes her, makes her question the plot and the intoxicating language makes Ruby's eyes flood with tears as sorrow pours out of the pages. The lives of these fictional characters evoke an outpouring of emotions that Ruby has learned to quell in her own insubstantial life. Her realisation 'that books could transport you ... into something better' (p. 188) profoundly affects Ruby who, upon returning home from holiday, moves into the next phase of her transformation – her decision to write a novel. Just as Hadley creates a separation between Ruby and her family in France, she does again once the family are back home. The rest of the family return to their normal activities whilst Ruby withdraws to her bedroom to become a writer. Hadley's depiction of Ruby's betrayal by Nico, and subsequently by her parents, is heartbreaking. The proud author, ironically keen to hear her words read aloud, feels angry and humiliated at their response. She is intuitive enough to see through their laughter and later their excuses. They are all accomplices in their inability to genuinely praise Ruby rather than mock her very first literary achievement. Luckily, once she has recovered from her own sorrow, Ruby is able to use writing and the power of her imagination in a therapeutic, as well as a revengeful way.

Claire ('Flight')

Whereas readers feel great sympathy for Ruby, Claire's navigation of the adult world seems somewhat questionable. Her sister, Susan, is contrasted as putting the needs of everyone else before her own but Claire has chosen an independent path in life that has not necessarily brought her fulfilment. Susan is surrounded by a loving family whilst Claire, in the story, is mostly depicted alone and cast as an intruder of sorts. The very first impression of Claire is of a woman, badly hungover, regretting the previous night's sexual encounter with a man she does not even know well or even like, and her condescending response to an air hostess simply trying to be friendly. Her 'little display of her own power' (p. 128) is recognised by Claire but she appears to rationalise her behaviour, just like her 'stand-offish' reputation at work, down to her English background being at odds with her American colleagues. Claire's need to wash away her fatigue, hangover and the previous night's sex is understandable upon her arrival at the hotel but Hadley embeds early clues about the possible tensions that will be unveiled in the story. Her meticulousness at dressing 'right down in London' (p. 129), the plan to make an unannounced visit to her estranged sister, and the deliberate choices of expensive gifts for the family and her niece's new baby, create discomfort for the reader. Hadley heightens this reaction through the narrative perspective given to Claire. The narrative is third person but we are viewers of the world through Claire's eyes – and her judgements. She likes to be in control, to exert power over others which is why the drunken sexual encounter unbalances her. Before she arrives in Leeds, the reader has been alerted, but given no detail, to the quarrel between the two sisters which has led to them not speaking for several years. Claire's decision to arrive unexpectedly provides her with the upper hand; she does not allow Susan the opportunity to refuse the visit. Claire is strategic though; the leaving of her suitcase at the station and the hotel booking do highlight that rejection at the front door has been considered. Again, the narrative perspective unveils Claire's arrival from her viewpoint. She is in control. Hadley's repetition of the phrases 'Claire knew …' and 'Claire thought …' heightens the judgement of past and present she brings into her sister's home. Susan's absence at work allows Claire the opportunity to win over the rest of family with her champagne, gifts, and chameleon-like ability to shape herself into someone affable, interested, and full of stories. She finds herself intrigued by the baby and very much aware of the comfortable, loving relationships existing in her old family home – the home viewed as an economic asset by Claire in opposition to a place of family care as nurtured by Susan. Having won over Susan's family, Claire is denied the opportunity to converse with her sister. Susan exercises her own power by locking herself in her bedroom. Claire's reflection on the events leading to their estrangement are crucial in allowing the reader to reach their own conclusions as to the rights and wrongs of the situation. Her pursuit of her own aspirations of education, property ownership and career options whilst Susan, originally the one who most wanted to escape Leeds as a teenager, became the parents' carer thus forgoing her own opportunities, can be viewed as unfair. Claire's insistence on being paid out for her share of the house also feels unfair particularly when Susan is still working long hours in a low paid job to meet the mortgage. Claire's departure back 'to her own world' (p. 150) and leaving a note for Amy rather than saying a personal farewell, feels definitive. Her action of so carefully secreting the silk scarf in Susan's work bag, then the unseen, unwritten cleverness of Susan sneaking it back past her sleeping sister, suggests the fractured relationship will remain just that, forever broken. As the story reaches its conclusion, we wonder if Susan has ended up the real winner surrounded by her loving family as Claire heads back to the United States alone. But she's experienced at knowing 'how to push that sorrow down and bury it.' (p. 152).

Issues and themes

Motherhood

> The topics I write about are hugely affected by motherhood. Since my life from age twenty-three through my thirties was completely taken up by motherhood, all of my ingenuity and interest have been focused on that. It's the challenge of trying to capture in writing the essence of women juggling home and work, women with babies, sexuality and young mothers, the division of labor – that's been my story, and that's what I know about.
> (Dellasega, 2004)

The words above, from Tessa Hadley herself, clarify just how important motherhood is in defining her self-identity and that of the women about whom she writes. Her own experiences moving through the different stages of raising children, managing her working and domestic life, and the ups and downs of marriage, bring insights that younger readers of her stories may need some assistance in navigating. Some students will recognise themselves in moments such as hovering over their mother's dressing table, testing perfume or fingering objects as does Carrie, interior decorating choices or like Ruby and Jane, rejecting suggestions for keeping suitably occupied.

Hadley delves into the realities of motherhood in each of the stories that constitute the *Bad Dreams* collection. Whilst some of these maternal experiences are depicted in sharp, detailed narratives, other mothers are relegated to the background of stories. This is partly the nature of short story writing; the writer does not have the space to develop too many characters, but the reader must always remember that fleeting references are embedded for a reason. Reflecting on authorial decisions such as this make for interesting classroom discussion. Subtle references are made in 'Deeds Not Words' and 'Experience' as the reader is denied any insight into the experiences of Fitz's wife and Suzanne, Julian's wife, who are both mothers of young children, betrayed by their husbands. Charlie, one of Kit's lovers in 'Silk Brocade', is seen with his betrayed wife and children by Ann. Ironically, Ann's own husband is unfaithful when her daughter Sally is fifteen. Laura Mulhouse is nursed back to health by her mother whilst the girls who board at St Clements are away from maternal influences during term. Susan and Claire are at odds because of their mother's decision to bequeath her home to both daughters. Does Mitchell see Greta as a substitute for his recently deceased mother, Margaret? These are all points that can be explored by students whilst completing the table overleaf or a similar learning activity.

Hadley's response to a question from Deborah Treisman (2014) in *The New Yorker* magazine provides an excellent framework to develop interpretations of the mothers who are characterised in greater detail. It would be interesting for students to frame similar questions and possible responses about Ruby's, the unnamed child's, and Jane's mother.

> Carrie's mother is such a figure of competence in the story: everything is planned, orderly, and in accordance with her taste, down to the aesthetic style of the house the family lives in. Carrie, on the other hand, isn't particularly gifted at piano or ballet, hasn't inherited her mother's good looks, and even miscalculates the humor in her letter to her best friend. Is her mother an inspiration for her, or an ideal she feels she can't live up to?
> *(Question to Hadley)*.

> Again, the answer's probably both, isn't it? I wanted the whole story to breathe with her love for her mother, which is both sensual and imaginative, as a child's love is. And Carrie will no doubt come unstuck sometimes in the future, trying to be the kind of woman her mother is and failing at that, too. But perhaps she will be good at something. It hasn't occurred to her yet what it is. But she's already responsive to lapses of tone and language—Dom's oddly hearty tone when he announces his wife's death, her own mistake in the rude letter. Invisible, omniscient, hanging out of the window, she soaks up the detail of her mother circling on the balcony with the bearish Dom, as if she may need to remember it later.' *(Hadley's response)*.

We can also make connections between some of Hadley's older mothers, those with adult or late adolescent children who are leading or craving independent lives. Jane ends up leading a life much like her own mother despite her telling her 'abductors' that she aspires to a different future. Jane can also be seen as a boarding school girl who only spends extended times with her mother during school holidays, as do the girls who attend St Clements (although what Jane pursues in the 1960s is rather different to the St Clements' girls pursuing the vote for women and knitting socks for soldiers.) What we do learn about Jane from the epilogue is that her life has not been a fulfilling one. This lack of fulfillment is also seen in the unnamed mother in 'Bad Dreams' who once aspired to being an artist but now spends her days as a housewife, dressmaker, and mother. (Note: Her husband's mother cooked him bacon every morning. Think about the symbolism of her cooking bacon the next morning.) Her young daughter, before she upends the chairs, stops, and reflects on her mother's sewing machine conjuring up an image of her hard at

work making dresses. Intriguingly, the only interaction between mother and daughter occurs in the final paragraph as she ignores her daughter's protests and takes her book away. As well, neither will ever know what the other has done during the night.

Motherhood can bring great joy, as can becoming a grandmother. Susan cannot wait to get home from work to her new grandson whilst new mother, Amy, who clearly articulates the difficulties of adapting to life with a baby, shows much affection for Calum as well as her own mother. Greta craves a hug from her adult daughter, Kate, but never receives one. The older Ann and her daughter, Sally, absorb themselves in projects of transformation together, Sally loving the silk brocade jacket her mother lovingly makes her at sixteen. Wendy still has one son, Anthony, living at home although she would be happy to see him moving on and making his own life. Marina is a working mother but conveys strong maternal love for Liam. For some readers of the short story collection, Dalia, Ruby's mother, may be the one who provokes the most dissatisfaction. Her put-downs about Ruby's weight, lack of talent and joining in the laughter when hearing her daughter's story depict a not-so-admirable side of mothering. Ruby's killing off her fictional family with 'fever', and leaving Lady Carole alone in her sorrow, seems fitting justice.

Story	Character	Key ideas	Key quotes
An Abduction	Mrs Allsop Jane Allsop		
The Stain	Marina Wendy		
Deeds Not Words	Fitz's wife Laura Mulhouse's mother Boarding school staff substitutes		
One Saturday Morning	Carrie's mother Helen Smith		
Experience	Suzanne		
Bad Dreams	The child's mother		
Flight	Susan Amy Claire The deceased mother		
Under the Sign of the Moon	Greta Margaret, Mitchell's mother		
Her Share of Sorrow	Dalia Lady Carole		
Silk Brocade	Ann Gallagher		

Bad things happen in life

Unexpected bad twists are simply part of life. Some are relatively minor, whilst others reverberate across the years. Children are not immune as Hadley highlights to the reader; their understanding of events may be immature or not fully comprehensible, but they too can suffer hurt and sorrow. The adult world is not always easy to navigate through events such as the death of parents, the loss through death or divorce of marital partners, betrayal through infidelity or the revelation/non-revelation of secrets, sibling friction or unfulfilled desires. Hadley's interest lies in the way people respond to the unexpected trials and tribulations, their emotions, actions and the short- and long-term consequences.

At fifteen, Jane does not realise that the memories of the day she accepts a ride with a carload of unknown university students, and subsequently loses her virginity, will forever linger in the back of her mind. She does not watch events unfold in the same way as the readers who are privy to the third person omniscient narrator's view of her abduction. Hadley invites the values of readers to be challenged but the climactic moment in the story for Jane is her discovery of Daniel and Fiona in bed together. Her feelings of betrayal are extreme as Jane, who has spent this short time in a young, rebellious adult world of sex, drugs, and shoplifting, returns home and reverts to a stereotypical description of an unwell fifteen-year-old, who still reads *Chalet School* books, being looked after by her mother. Fifteen-year-old Sally lives through a summer where the equilibrium of family life has been shattered by the departure of her father. Sally, troubled by her teenage weight gain, and her mother trying to regain her confidence to date again, work together towards overcoming their pain.

Carrie, already painfully mulling over the shameful letter exchange with her friend, and the incriminating letter she believes she left at her piano teacher's house, is jolted by the revelation by Dom Smith that his wife has died. Carrie finds it difficult to absorb this death and understand the reactions of her parents. In her childish mind, the problem would be more simply solved if Dom simply left the house. She also doesn't quite understand the moment when Dom tries to seek physical comfort from her mother. However, upon realising that her mother also found Dom's actions difficult, Carrie appears able to recover her sense of well-being in the final paragraph of the story. The young girl in 'Bad Dreams' has no-one to comfort her after her unexpected encounter with death in her nightmarish epilogue to her favourite book. It will remain her painful secret as will her mother's belief that her husband was responsible for the chair chaos and her subsequent reflections on her marriage. Poor Ruby, whose life does not appear particularly happy, is grief-stricken by the book she reads. She shares the sorrow of the characters but feels unable to share her new discoveries about life and death with her family. Even worse is the mockery she encounters when her contemptible brother steals her notebook and reads her story aloud to the family. Her pride in what she has written disintegrates. Luckily, Ruby can draw strength from her bad experience and transfer her feelings into written words.

- Discuss the bad experiences of other characters in the stories. Once again, creating a table is suggested. Collect quotes and make connections between various characters.
- Decide which character experiences the most life-changing 'bad' event. Whose is the most trivial or likely to be forgotten?
- Which women suffer because of the actions of men? Find supporting evidence.
- Whose actions are the most immoral?

Caring, consolation and sorrow

Hadley is also concerned with the way people deal with their emotions, and react to the emotions of others, when encountering challenging situations. Some of the characters in *Bad Dreams* are imbued with a natural empathy towards others, for example, Marina and her kind treatment of the old man. Others are less caring, behave inappropriately or are simply unable to articulate how they feel. Hadley appreciates that not everyone lives their life from the same emotional/psychological/moral framework. Past experiences, family dynamics, stage of life and innate personality traits influence emotions.

Marina moves from caring in practical ways for the old man from South Africa to a closer, nurturing way of caring until she learns about his past. Wendy's practical care for her father is commendable. She cooks meals, tends the garden and takes him to medical appointments. However, she notices the way her father plays with Liam, recalling to Marina how he never played with own children in such a way. Susan, living in Leeds, has also taken on many years as carer, nursing her and Claire's parents until their deaths. She has devoted her life to looking after her family and now works as a carer visiting elderly and disabled people to help with home care. Susan's eldest daughter has followed her mother's path and become a nurse. Despite her negative reactions to the interior styling of her childhood home, even the hard-hearted Claire can acknowledge the strong bonds of love and nurturing that permeate the house. Hadley leads the reader to question Claire's compassion as she focuses on what she cares about; her appearance, financial status, facing the colleague with whom she has sex and winning the trust of Susan's family. However, she does not even farewell them as she departs, leaving a note for Amy in the kitchen. The story's end does raise the idea of sorrow for what Claire has lost and left behind in her life, but she knows 'how to push that sorrow down and bury it.' (p. 152).

Hadley's observation in 'An Abduction', '... in the 1960s, when parents were more careless.' (p. 1), may seem strange to students studying the story in this era of stranger danger and closer monitoring of children's movements. In the 1960s, the expectation was generally that children would entertain themselves at times – a practice that Ruby's mother, in a later decade, saves for the holidays. Jane cares about what the boys think of her – her measured answers to questions about politics and the future indicate this. Daniel is unsure about whether he can sit his finals at Oxford: 'And he doesn't know whether he cares.' (p. 15). Ironically, Hadley's clever narrative twist lets the reader know that the adult-Daniel has no memory of Jane, which begs the question of whether people only remember events that emotionally affect them. Fiona worries about her brother's friends taking drugs, and the wet patch she found on the rug, but her mood changes to 'why should she care?' (p. 22). She casts off her motherly stance and thinks about her own life and the possibilities of drama school.

Some characters care about causes – the girls of St Clements and the WSPU whose slogan is 'Deeds Not Words' reflect this in different ways. Edith does not care about causes much, only her affair. This changes when she challenges Fitz who argues '... how can I stay at home teaching French to little girls, when other men are giving their lives out there.' (p. 64). In 'Silk Brocade', Donny is passionate about politics – even Blaise, who owns Thwaite Park, argues that he believes in owners of big properties paying taxes. We can contrast adult concerns with what children care about. Carrie is terrified of her piano teacher finding the letter she has written to her friend. Until the arrival of Dom, this worry has been eating away at her, so it is a relief when she finds it later in the day. Carrie moves from not knowing how to deal with Dom Smith's loss 'and his hunger for consolation' to 'a vision of what consolation might be – something headlong and reckless and sweet, unavailable to children.' (pp. 85-86).

A sense of being careful also permeates the titular story 'Bad Dreams'. The young girl has learned to be careful where she steps when her mother is sewing but Hadley is more interested in the emotional reactions in the story. Her dream about a different ending for *Swallows and Amazons* evokes great sorrow in the young girl, leading her to channel her feelings into action by creating a deliberate chaos with the lounge room chairs. On the other hand, seeing the chairs upended brings a different emotional reaction from her mother who interprets the chaos as representative of her husband's frustration and dissatisfaction. She cares what he thinks of her as well as how her life has evolved in a way not originally intended. Despite these ordinary concerns, the next morning sees the mother back in her caring role, making breakfast for the family and her husband kissing and nuzzling her as usual.

Laura reflects on Hana's lack of curtains that, in her view, put Hana 'flamboyantly on display, careless of who might be watching'. (p. 88). Laura lacks confidence,

not wanting to draw attention to herself and later, in her failed effort to be seduced by Julian, chooses to dress as Hana does rather than in her own style: 'Disguised, I was able to perform a part: I could hear myself sounding carefree and flirtatious.' (p. 102). Hana's great attraction to Julian is evident through her diary entries, and despite her denials, she cares about the possibility that Julian and Laura have slept together. She warns Laura to be careful: 'He'll take advantage of you because you're vulnerable.' (p. 107).

- Discuss different ways of interpreting caring, consolation, and sorrow. Make a list of synonyms (and antonyms as well.) The word 'consolation' as used in 'Bad Dreams' may not be familiar to many students.
- There are many other examples of caring, consolation and sorrow to be found in the collection. Here are some possibilities for students to consider.
  - Greta wanting her daughter to openly discuss her illness.
  - Mitchell seeking some sort of consolation from Greta.
  - Nola working as a nurse when she meets Blaise as a patient.
  - Wendy appreciating the care Marina provides for her father.
  - The old man and whether he lacks remorse for his past actions.
  - Edith's lack of concern for Laura Mulhouse
  - The suffragettes and the sufferings of those in prison
  - Carrie's inability to deal with Dom's grief at Helen's death.
  - Carrie's limited understanding of what consolation could mean.
  - Laura and whether she really is sorry that her marriage has ended.
  - Ruby's sorrow when characters in East Lynne die.
  - The consolation Ruby finds in writing her own story.
  - Ann and Kit never replying to Blaise's letter informing them of Nola's death.

Dreams and aspirations

Each short story in Hadley's collection in some way examines how people dream, hope, and hold aspirations in life – a common human experience. Young children, adolescents, young, middle-aged and older adults, women and men all yearn or fantasise in a range of ways. Hadley very specifically invites the reader into the minds of her key characters but also alludes to the dreams of those in close relationships with the protagonist, or on the periphery of the story. Characters hold hopes not only for themselves but for their families and the fulfilment of professional or personal needs. Some want marriage, children, sex or satisfying personal relationships. Others value education, their career, making a name for themselves or fighting for a cause. New life experiences, creative expression, good health or a better home and social mobility – the reader will find more to add to this list. Jane knows that some of the girls at school are ahead of her 'in the fated trek towards adulthood' (p. 4) and the unexpected invitation to join the boys in the car provides just the opportunity for something new that she craves. Jane is depicted as 'yearning' for Daniel's approval and dreaming of a different life to her parents. She recreates her persona to embrace new experiences; however, the aftermath of her 'abduction' and the epilogue suggest that Jane is never truly fulfilled as an adult. Marina fantasises about a life in the big house when she is a girl as well as a better future with her low-earning husband and young son. But she does possess the capacity to reject gifts from the old man which would theoretically help her: 'These are just dreams ...They're nonsense. You don't know us.' (p. 40). She persists, to the surprise of others, in her refusal to accept the house. Marina is practical in her understanding that the moral 'stain' of the big house is larger than her aspirations to a better home and education for Liam. 'Deeds Not Words' highlights dreams within and beyond St Clements. Set against a background of the suffragettes aspiring for voting rights for women, Edith is fulfilling her sexual needs but is trapped by the social mores of the time; she is having an affair with a married man who has a child. The end of the story sees her shattered by the departure of Fitz as well as a broken Laura Mulhouse. Both are back where they started whilst the students, always clamouring for a cause, have moved on to knitting socks for soldiers fighting a war that will devastate Europe and put the suffragettes' dreams on hold.

- Discuss this quote from the titular story 'Bad Dreams': '... though it didn't occur to her then that she was the author of her own dreams ...' (p. 115). Re-read pages 113-116 and consider how you would categorise her dream. Have the young girl's parents fulfilled their aspirations in life?
- 'Carrie had worn out all the hopefulness she'd felt ...' (p. 69). What hopes and dreams are examined in 'One Saturday Morning'?
- Laura in 'Experience' leaves a marriage that has not been fulfilling for either her or her husband. How does her time in 'Hana-land' allow her to dream of new experiences?
- Consider the characters in 'Flight'. Do any of them aspire to a better life or are they content as they are?
- What does Greta in 'Under the Sign of the Moon' wish for herself – and others? Is Mitchell a young man of dreams?
- In 'Her Share of Sorrow', Ruby's mother seems discontented. Why? Are Ruby's aspirations to being a writer authentic? Discuss whether Ruby's family is the most aspirational or goal-driven in Hadley's collection.
- Discuss why Anne does not want to continue her friendship with Nola at the new grammar school. What dreams come true in 'Silk Brocade'? Which do not?
- The counsellor to whom Jane talks in 'An Abduction' comments: 'These women's fantasies ... have more to do with interior décor than with repressed desires.' (p. 28). Discuss this comment and also consider whether it can be applied to any other of the short stories.

Other themes for exploration

Students can collaborate on a Google doc to create a table that explores the following ideas, issues and themes in *Bad Dreams*. The **Structure** section of this guide also provides more analysis of many of these suggestions.

- Forgetting something bad once you have known it (or simply remembering)
- Family relationships
- Homes
- Self-awareness and knowingness
- Innocence and experience
- Secrecy and concealment
- The power of words
- The power of silence
- Regrets
- Discoveries
- Love
- Marriage
- Transformation
- Memory
- The familiar and the unfamiliar
- Pushing boundaries
- Societal values
- Stages of life
- Manipulation and exerting power

Language and style

Much can be learned about Tessa Hadley's use of language and style through reading reviews and analyses of her short stories as well as listening to Hadley speak about writing fiction. She talks about why she does not try and write through the child's voice in an interview in *The New Yorker* magazine: 'But if you have all the ripe resources of an adult's sophisticated language, in the service of a child's groping but opened perceptions, it's a rich mixture.' (Treisman, 2014.). It is worth pursuing this conversation with students to consider the effect of adult knowingness and not being stuck with only what the child sees. Because Hadley can see the child seeing things, her narrative scope is widened. A good exercise would be to ask students to choose a passage from one of the stories where the protagonist is a child and then rewrite it from the perspective of the child – removing the adult narrative insights. They should then be able to understand why Hadley makes this choice.

Students can find examples of the following features of Hadley's language and style and explain how they create meaning in each of the stories. Many of these features are expanded upon in the **Structure** section of this guide. Check for the examples provided and ask students to collect others from individual short stories.

Similes and metaphors

Whilst a simile is an indirect comparison using the word 'like' or 'as', metaphors are direct comparisons. Hadley uses similes to bring an extra layer of description to her characters. The reader's interpretation of a character is enhanced by the comparison of a certain trait or quality with another, different thing. Wendy, the daughter of the old man in 'The Stain', is described as having 'her hair dyed black and cut in a shape like a pixie's cap.' (p. 36). Hadley's simile allows the reader a clear sense of Wendy's hairstyle. Likewise, in 'The Stain', Marina's walking style is depicted as 'her long scissoring stride like a wading bird's ...' (p. 31). The simile invites an image of a tall, slender woman's noticeable way of moving. Claire, in 'Flight', observes baby Callum to be 'curled with his head down like a comma' (p. 134), and Kit, from 'Silk Brocade', is described as flopping onto a lounge 'in exaggerated despair, limbs flung out like a doll's (p. 203). In both these examples, the simile enables us to clearly visualise the physicality of Calum and Kit.

An example of a metaphor is found in the titular story 'Bad Dreams'. The young girl's dreamed epilogue to *Swallows and Amazons,* her favourite book, metaphorically represents an upheaval in her understanding of the world as she knows it. Her shock and horror at the dreadful endings given to her much-loved characters in her dream also correlates with her act of upending the loungeroom furniture – which then in turn could be interpreted as a metaphor for the mother's uncertainty about her relationship with her husband. 'Silk Brocade' uses something tangible as a metaphor to help connect the story between past, present, and future. The beautiful fabric, found in the attic at Thwaite Park, is intended to be used for Nora's wedding gown. Her bereft fiancé gifts the fabric to Anne who passes on the sad story of its history to her daughter. Later, during her own difficult period, the fabric is transformed into a jacket for Sally. The power of Hadley's metaphor lies in Sally's wearing of it back to Thwaite Park.

Settings

The importance of setting in short stories cannot be overstated. Students must be alert to Hadley's detailed use of setting, both explicitly and implicitly, in each of the stories in the collection. Every character inhabits a specific place, whether a village, city or county of England. Several characters have overseas links – Claire with Philadelphia, the old man with South Africa, and Hana visiting Los Angeles – but the Englishness of each character is reflected in where they live, their house, rooms within each house and their interiors. Some characters shift from one place to another: Greta has caught a train to Liverpool; Laura has temporarily moved to Hana's; Jane is 'abducted' from her home to Nigel's; Marina's house is overshadowed by her focus on the old man's house which is transformed at the end of the story. Around her characters, Hadley creates a canvas of colours, fabrics, furniture, décor, and domestic life. Some meld beautifully into their surroundings whilst others seem at odds. Claire has long left her childhood home in Leeds but what she recognises, as well as the changes, help shape her characterisation and that of her estranged family. Her eyes notice every aspect of the kitchen down to the colour, the clock, and the Ikea cupboards. Laura is mesmerised by Hana's home, noting every aspect of its design and décor. The setting of the locked attic becomes vital as a repository of Hana's detritus but also of Laura's discovery of the diary, and thus her education about Julian. Likewise, the attic in the French holiday house becomes Ruby's hiding place whilst she discovers the joys, and sorrows, of reading. The attic also symbolises Ruby's isolation from her family. Hadley takes great care in her depiction of the bohemian café where Greta meets Mitchell. Mitchell is depicted as never fitting into the café surroundings just as Claire is now out of place in her childhood home. An excellent extract to use for a discussion of setting is from pages 117-118 of 'Bad Dreams'. Hadley takes the reader, through the young girl's perspective, on a journey through her home – so much detail is provided, from colours to textures to lighting, the reader feels as though they are along the girl, seeing what she sees.

Flashbacks, flashforwards and shifts in time

Whilst simple flashbacks are used in the construction of most stories in the collection, some provide greater insights into characters and situations. Laura recollects some incidents with the husband who has asked her to move out, but Hadley does not spend long elaborating on them as Laura's concerns are based in the present. Interestingly, Hana's diary provides an alternative form of flashbacks – written rather than thought. The conclusion of 'Experience' is a flashforward as the reader is given a glimpse into the 'renewed' Laura, now employed, and holding a form of power over Hana who cannot believe Laura did not have sex with Julian. This move forward in time emphasises the transformation of Laura and her ability to move on whilst Hana is still clinging to her mixed feelings about Julian. 'An Abduction' also plays with time. Most of the story occurs over twenty-four hours without much looking back from Jane, which is apt as she is embarking on a day of new experiences. Upon her return home, Jane cuddles up with her hot-water bottle and book, given sugared tea and aspirin. But page 27 takes a different direction: 'Jane never told anyone what happened to her, not even … her husband …' and then 'Jane and her husband divorced in their mid-fifties …'. She recalls the events of her fifteen-year-old self to a counsellor. Next, Hadley adds an epilogue-style conclusion to contrast Daniel's life experience. It is a marvellously constructed story. 'Silk Brocade' moves between past, present, and future. Anne Ross designs dresses in the 1950s and is forced into flashback mode when Nola arrives at her door. She does not want reminders of Fishpond where she and Nola grew up as Anne aspires to a different life. The first part of the story ends on page 212: 'That was in 1953'. We then move forward to 'When Sally Ross was sixteen, in 1972, her mother, Ann …'. Hadley uses this flash-forward to create a circular effect that completes the story as Sally wears the silk brocade jacket back to Thwaite Park. A shift in time is used in 'Deeds Not Words' as Laura Mulhouse returns to St Clements after the summer holidays. This passing of some weeks enables her recovery after being in prison, the outbreak of war, Fitz's enlistment and abandonment of Edith, and for Hadley to emphasise the moving on of the girls to pursue other 'causes'. Greta's mind flashes back to her first husband, Ian, in 'Under the Sign of the Moon'. These flashbacks enable the contrast between her two marriages to be made: one to an unreliable, exciting and self-absorbed Ian; the present marriage to a quieter, supportive and dependable Graham.

Literary allusions

As Hadley's stories progress through a number of complicated and difficult relationships, the symbolism of books and specific literary allusions makes sense. Books educate people, evoke emotion, bring comfort and distraction, create conversations, and expose new experiences. Jane Allsop finds comfort in the *Chalet School* series as she reverts to a familiar, safe world after her experience with Daniel and his Oxford chums. Nigel kept a copy of Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* in his pocket – a contrivance or a genuine love of the text? Jane recognises the mention of Keats because of the bust in her home, not because she has read his poetry. The unnamed young girl in 'Bad Dreams' adores *Swallows and Amazons,* her dream of a new, terrible epilogue upsetting the balance of her world. Edith and Fitz make love in the French office surrounded by Racine and Victor Hugo among others on the bookshelves – not that Edith is interested in reading them. Ruby has never enjoyed reading but finds *East Lynne* transports her to an astonishing world that she does not fully understand. Nevertheless, her reading inspires her to write her own novel. Jane's brother Robin has his head buried in a book, as does Carrie's brother Paul. The father in 'Bad Dreams' is writing a book called *Leviathan,* Claire's friends back in the US have read all the right baby books; Greta is interrupted from her reading by Mitchell. A book is also symbolically used at the conclusion of 'Under the Sign of the Moon' when Mitchell presents her with a second-hand book inscribed 'To Margaret. With love.' (p. 182). It is a historical novel Greta 'wouldn't dream of reading: a gritty, working-class romance ...' (p. 180) – the type of book which perhaps sums up Mitchell.

Other elements of language and style that can be found in the short stories

- Beginnings and endings
- Revelations and laying down of clues
- Imagery
- Symbols and motifs
- Sentence structure
- Descriptive language
- Creation of dialogue and the use of the long dash
- Brackets
- Revealing inner thoughts
- Use of humour
- Use of sarcasm
- Building of tension through critical moments
- Narrative point of view and voice
- Idiom used by characters
- Characterisation
- Significance of titles
- Common elements of each story

Perspective on the text

Each of the short stories in *Bad Dreams* are similar but different: similar, in that Hadley brings to each her ability to observe the intricacies of everyday life so acutely; different, in that Hadley provokes a different response to the ending of each story from her readers. Some stories reach what may be seen as a clear ending but will leave other readers curious to know more. Does Ruby let her family read her finished story? Does Fitz survive WWI? Will Claire ever reconcile with Susan? Does Hana ever see Julian again? How much longer does Greta have to live? Surely the power of a good short story is that the reader is left thinking about what they have just read. All keen readers know the feeling of letting what has just been read seep through one's reasoning processes as well as working out an appropriate emotional response to the story. Did we like it or love it? The plot, the characters, and the ideas we have been invited to think about by the author.

As with some other collections of short stories previously listed for VCE English, not all the stories in *Bad Dreams* will immediately resonate with student readers. They are being invited into the lives of some characters who are removed from their own experiences. Whilst the angst, disappointments and confusion of the child/adolescent characters are recognisable, our students may need some guidance into Hadley's world mainly seen through a female perspective. They can be encouraged to talk about the types of life experiences encountered by women at various stages of their lives. What was it like to be a woman in 1914? What are the highs and lows of being a mother and a wife? Do women always achieve what they want in life? What type of disruptions can affect their life journeys? However, *Bad Dreams* contains a wonderful range of male characters. Yes, several are not very likeable but nor are all the women. Even though the behaviour of men is questionable in several stories, Hadley encourages the reader to understand that life is not always easy for them. They are husbands, lovers, fathers, workers, students and brothers with their own hopes and dreams. They love, hurt, and make mistakes too.

One of the strengths of Hadley's writing is to set us up to react in a certain way to characters before we meet them face-to-face in the story. Julian is an example of this. As Laura works her way through Hana's private diary (not exactly an action to be condoned), Julian is represented through the perspective of Hana. It is her voice being heard from the pages of the diary, albeit filtered by Laura's reactions. Julian is painted as a great lover but there are also warning signals in what Hana has written. The reader is on tenterhooks when it is revealed that Julian is at the front door, wanting to know what Laura, with her secret knowledge, thinks of him. More and more about Julian is revealed as the story continues. He is a confusing character. He appears genuinely concerned upon learning Laura has not been eating, heading off to the shops for fresh ingredients and cooking her a nutritious meal from scratch. Even though he has been unfaithful to Suzanne and has ultimately left her, perhaps in his clumsy way, he is genuinely trying to remain a good father to his children. As well, if we rearrange our view of him formed from Hana's diary, Laura can be seen as the predator in this encounter. She does not end up with the experience she wants from Julian and after her initial feelings of humiliation, is able to reconstruct herself and move on – a little proud that Hana doesn't believe her denials. Students can discuss others such as Blaise and Susan to further consider Hadley's setting up of characterisations.

Hadley has said in interviews that the phrase 'nothing had happened' is one packed with rich matter. All can appear in everyday order on the surface but what awaits beneath the ordinary and mundane. Hadley shows us that all sorts of complexities lurk: unhappiness, unfulfillment, betrayal and other dangers. Jane's day starts out in a very boring fashion, but the sense of foreboding has been created in the opening sentence. Readers are on tenterhooks and the moment Jane gets in the car with the three boys, the narrative voice cleverly letting us know they have gone out deliberately to look for girls, concern mounts. Her parents do not know she has gone and later in the day, her mother easily accepts Jane's phone call that she's staying with a school friend. Hadley evokes fear for Jane as she is

so expectant that new experiences will come her way. Laura, who also wants to experience something new, can be compared to Jane; one still a child, the other in her late twenties but married for six years.

The collection also invites the reader to put pieces of a puzzle together as we search for links between the short stories. The idea of a 'bad dream' varies between the different protagonists as some encounter situations that will shape them forever. Blaise Perney, although not a main character, is so devastated by the sudden death of Nola, just before their wedding, that he sells off Thwaite Park. This tragedy is looked back on with regret by Ann who can see that she and Kit should have replied to Blaise's letter just as they never thought to take photos of the clothes they made. Hadley's perspective-shifts in 'Silk Brocade' also add to the puzzle: the younger Ann, the older Ann and finally, her daughter Sally. Dom Smith has lost his wife whilst Greta faces an uncertain future with her cancer prognosis. Ruby, Carrie, and the young girl in 'Bad Dreams' deal with reactions to death whilst Mitchell is still recovering from the loss of his mother. Connections between the stories are just not in terms of characters or key ideas or values, but also within the homes of people. Many stories contain references to mirrors, lights, colours of upholstery, cushions, books, sewing machines, attics, and clothes. The ordinariness of daily existence still goes on around the problems with which the characters are dealing. There are also historical and cultural references to be unpacked. In order to fully appreciate 'Deeds and Words', the reader needs some background knowledge of the suffragettes, Pankhurst and what happened to the women in prison. It is a story of its time in history. Several of the stories inspire this search for further information of the time or setting.

It is the inner world that is in turmoil for many characters rather than what their external façade suggests. In 'Flight', Claire brings her career tactics to Leeds to win over Susan's family. To them, she is a confident businesswoman who arrives with gifts, alcohol, and entertaining stories. Underneath, Claire hides her lack of success with men, her angst at the rift with her sister and other untold sorrows which possibly include not having a family of her own. Hana's home and its contents in 'Experience' suggest a successful career but her diary and subsequent determination to know more about events between Laura and Julian indicate Hana has her own problems, too. Money does not equal happiness. The mother in 'Bad Dreams' presents to her family as hardworking and capable, but cracks exist in her world and it appears these will remain hidden beneath the surface; her unfulfilled existence in a world dominated by her husband and children, and in the past, the men at art school with whom she felt inferior as an artist.

Hadley brings so much skill as a writer to this collection. Her rhythmic sentences, often laced with alliteration and threaded with 'ing' words, her use of brackets and dashes, the double story effect seen in 'Bad Dreams' and 'Silk Brocade', the literary allusions, the way readers can associate with characters wanting new experiences, and the intriguing fleet of men who provide a range of interactions with the female protagonists, all make this a collection worthy of close study in the classroom.

Close study

Passage 1

'The Abduction' (**p. 2**)

From: 'The morning of the abduction, Mrs. Allsop—dishevelled in a limp linen shirtdress ...'

To: '... She certainly seemed to have her mother's figure, with not much bust, no waist to speak of, and a broad flat behind.'

This excerpt comes from the very early stages of the short story as Hadley is still constructing Jane's home environment for the reader, who of course know from the precisely written first sentence that she will be abducted. Several elements of Hadley's writing style, to be replicated in other stories, are evident here. The setting is being established as well as clues about the family's socio-economic background. Early detail is provided about the appearance and self-image of both mother and daughter; the mother has plenty of life experience whilst her daughter yearns for the adult world.

- How does Hadley create a distinction between Mrs Allsop in the garden and Jane's image of her mother?
- Note the precise details about Mrs Allsop's clothes, face, and hair. Find a short description of a character's appearance from another of the short stories that is similarly precise.
- Why does Hadley choose to reveal the abduction before it takes place?
- What type of woman does Mrs Allsop appear to be? Select several words that help us reach this conclusion and explain why.
- Mirrors, as well as mother's dressing tables are referred to in other stories. What might they reflect about the lives of women – and their young daughters?
- Clothes are an important motif throughout Hadley's collection. What values can be learned about people through their clothes? Find several examples from other stories.
- How does Hadley suggest that women can be 'immensely capable' in certain aspects of their daily lives but not in others?
- What evidence is there at the end of 'The Abduction' that Jane ends up leading a similar life to her mother?
- Mother/daughter relationships are of great importance to Hadley. Find passages from at least three other stories which can be linked to the excerpt above. Consider the similarities and differences. Discuss what views of mother/daughter relationships are being endorsed or challenged by Hadley.

Passage 2

'Deeds Not Words' (**p. 65**)

From: 'And on her way up the back stairs she met Laura Mulhouse coming down ...'

To: '... In their shame, they could hardly bear to look at each other.'

Here we have the final paragraph from 'Deeds Not Words', one of the stories that is firmly set in a specified time in history. The era in which it is set, not long before World War I whilst Mrs Pankhurst and the WSPU were fighting for the right of women to vote, is essential to the views and values explored in the story. Hadley, by inserting this story in the collection, invites her readers to consider what life was like for women in past times who lacked many of the rights taken for granted by her female characters situated in contemporary times. Edith Carew relies on Fitz's assurances that he 'knew what he was doing' (p. 60) to avoid pregnancy in a time when a pregnant unmarried woman had few options; backyard abortion or public shaming and loss of her job. Even worse is that Fitz is a married man so rapid marriage (that Nola Higgins has to deny in 'Silk Brocade') is out of the question. Compare Edith's situation to the casual sexual encounters of Claire in 'Flight' or Hana's affair with the married Julian. The reader can only guess if Amy's pregnancy was unplanned and luckily for Jane, who has not even thought of pregnancy, her period arrives the very next day. Both Edith Carew and Laura Mulhouse are brave women for very different reasons. It is sad that both are depicted as broken and shamed as the story concludes even though the reader may well feel greater sympathy for Laura. Like Claire in 'Flight', they will need to learn 'how to push that sorrow down and bury it' (p. 152).

- Why is the back staircase a symbolic place for Edith to encounter Laura?
- For what reason has Laura been imprisoned? What does this say about society's values at the time?
- What is Hadley inferring when she writes that Laura had 'quietly resumed' her teaching?
- Find examples of 'the madness of last term'. Why does no one now talk about it?
- Make a list of the words used to describe Laura's appearance. Go back and find the description of her in the opening paragraph of the story. Discuss why Hadley has created this contrast.
- How did Edith and Fitz differ in their reactions to hearing about the forced feeding of the imprisoned women?
- What is the effect of story's ending being continued through Edith's third-person narrative perspective?
- Consider how each of them is 'broken'. Are any of the female characters in other stories depicted as broken?

Passage 3

'Her Share of Sorrow' (**pp. 188-189**)

From: 'Much of *East Lynne*, in truth, was fairly incomprehensible ...'

To: '... what was inside her seemed poured out on to the page.'

This excerpt reveals to the reader what Ruby was doing, isolated from her curious family, whilst on holidays in France. After rejecting her mother's suggestions about how she could entertain herself, Ruby has discovered some books in the attic of the Williamses' holiday home. The attic itself symbolises a barrier between Ruby and the rest of the family; she is not interested in the activities pursued by her high-achieving parents and brother and perhaps senses that her mother would rather relax alone rather than with her daughter. Ruby's previous focus was on food, but the books draw her into another world, completely different from her own, and utterly fascinating to her young imagination.

- Make a list of the words that suggest Ruby does not fully comprehend the content of *East Lynne*.
- Collect words and phrases that highlight Ruby's reaction to the novel. Discuss which of the choices are most powerful for the reader.
- Which part of the story affects Ruby most profoundly?
- Choose an excerpt from 'Bad Dreams' that connects with key ideas suggested by Ruby's reaction to *East Lynne*. Write a paragraph exploring how both excerpts suggest that children's values can be shaped by their own imaginative experiences.
- Discuss the reasons why Ruby and the young girl in 'Bad Dreams' react differently to their experiences.
- Why does Hadley italicise the quotation that takes Ruby's breath away? As well, discuss Hadley's italicisation of *had* in the phrase, 'what *had* they done wrong exactly?'.
- Discuss what views and values of Ruby's world are starting to collide with views and values of the adult world.
- Is the story even more powerful because of Ruby's lack of full understanding of what she reads?
- Find the simile in this excerpt, and then locate a simile in each of the short stories that use a third person perspective to show the reader what is in the children's thoughts. Consider what extra power the use of similes (and metaphors) can bring to writing.

Further activities

- Write down from memory all you can about your own house. Draw on colours, fabrics, textures, lighting, windows, what's on the wall, what's on front of fridge, names of books, magazines, newspapers lying about, furniture and different rooms. Try personifying an item. Provide a simile.
- Track down the literary/historical/cultural allusions in the stories to appreciate each story to its fullest. Record why particular allusions or references are important to the story. You might also find some crossover references.
- Gather references to alcohol or drugs. In which stories, and why, does it affect the behaviour of characters?
- Get a map of London/England and locate the places where Hadley sets her stories. Also, locate some of the other places mentioned such as the Olive Mount railway, find out what a Palladian house near Bath might look like or a Georgian terrace house in London.
- Create a glossary of the unfamiliar vocabulary used by Hadley.
- Run a short writing activity at the start of each lesson. Choose a quote or several sentences that raise questions/ambiguities/different morality and ask students to write their thoughts for five or ten minutes. Extend students by asking them to link the quote to similarities/differences in other stories.
- Look for examples of passages that unsettle the reader and in small groups or as a class, discuss why.
- Find a review of *Bad Dreams,* set up a Google doc and ask students to write their response to the review. There are some links provided in the **References** section.
- 'An Abduction' and 'One Saturday Morning' both contain imagery of an insect. Find both these passages and discuss why Hadley has included them.
- Look for mini-scenes that Hadley creates with the stories, for example: the doll's tea party in 'An Abduction' where a bit of rabbit poop has been put in each cup; the picnic at Thwaites Park in 'Silk Brocade'; Claire's shopping expedition in London.
- Hadley makes references to different attics. Find the examples and consider their importance. Are there any other locked doors?
- Create a table that gives an overview of the collection. Columns could include opening/closing sentences, key symbols/ motifs, type of characters and so on.
- Consider the way Hadley decorates the interior of the houses. Find examples of mismatched objects. The use of colours and fabrics. The placement of furniture and belongings. Discuss why she writes this way. Is any humour generated? What other reactions are evoked in the reader?
- Find examples of what remains unsaid in different stories. Discuss the importance of these gaps and silences for the reader.

Key quotes

'An Abduction'

'Even while Jane spoke to her mother in the ordinary words that seemed to flow convincingly, as if from her old self, her new self pressed her free palm on the rectangle of this glass against which, on the other side, Daniel in his blue shirt was also miraculously pressed, oblivious of her touch.' (pp. 20-21)

Jane, after losing her virginity to Daniel, rings her mother from a phone box providing a fictitious excuse as to why she won't be home that night. The idea of Jane's 'new self' is pertinent here. Something has changed in her; she speaks ordinary words to her mother but on the other side of the glass stands her first experience of desire. Also interesting is the way Hadley depicts Daniel as 'oblivious' of her hand touching the glass. Jane is craving closeness but is Daniel already moving on?

'The Stain'

'There was no violent shock, only a settled change, and the realisation – a surprise – that you couldn't undo the knowledge of the thing with the same calm ease with which you had take it in. And for a while afterwards everything she looked at had seemed unclean, had revealed a leering, repulsive side she'd never seen before.' (p .52)

Marina realises that she cannot return to work for the old man now that his past is partially revealed. This quote links to the title of the short story. The house is now stained by its occupant as well as Marina feeling sullied by her innocence. She can never undo the knowledge she now has.

'Deeds Not Words'

'Both of them were broken, Edith thought. In their shame, they could hardly bear to look at each other.' (p. 65)

This is the last line of the story where Edith links herself with Laura, believing both are broken by their choices and subsequent experiences. Edith's perspective is skewed though. Yes, they have both suffered but the reader assumes that Laura is unaware of what has broken Edith. Her affair has been conducted in private whilst Laura's activism and subsequent imprisonment and force feeding is very public.

'One Saturday Morning'

'Their happiness in that moment was almost too much – its precariousness squeezed Carrie's chest like a tight band.' (pp. 86-87)

This thought from Carrie's perspective in the concluding paragraph of the story contrasts with the emotions she has felt earlier. Rather than being alone, she is now physically and mentally connected to her mother and brother. She is able to view her mother through a different lens after what she saw from the balcony but the experience with the insect, and its beauty and precariousness, gives her a new awareness of life that had been dampened by the news of Helen Smith's death. Things are now different for Carrie on this Saturday night.

'Experience'

'The funny thing was that after my evening with Julian I knew I came across as older and more experienced. People seem to take me more seriously – as if I'd been initiated into something after all, although nothing had happened.' (p. 110)

No-one knows exactly what happened with Julian other than Laura and the reader. Hana does not seem to believe Laura's denial although what matters, as the story ends, is what Laura thinks of herself. She has experienced something new so in fact things have happened, even if it is not sex. Laura has been able to change and progress with her life but is it her lack of worldly experience that makes her believe others see her differently?

'Bad Dreams'

'They would never know, and that was funny too. A private hilarity bubbled up in her, though she wouldn't give way to it; she didn't want to make a sound.' (p. 120)

'The joke of its serenity erupted inside her like bubbles of soundless laughter.' (p. 125)

These two quotes, one from the child's perspective and the other from the mother's, both highlight the cleverness of Hadley's writing. Although depicted as physically unalike, the use of similar vocabulary suggests their close connection. Neither of them know what the other has done – or why.

‘Flight’

‘But you could shed your skin over and over, Claire thought, and believe each time that you’d come to the end of shame, and it wasn’t true. You could always be born again, with a new skin. She hadn’t come to the end of her chances, not yet.’ (p. 151)

Claire thinks this upon her return to London, and before she discovers that Susan has outwitted her. There can be differing interpretations of the title of the story. Claire has taken a flight to London from the US, but she has also taken flight from her childhood, as well as her silent departure from the Leeds’ house that morning. Taking flight allows Claire an opportunity to reconstitute herself, forget words and actions she might be ashamed of, and simply move on.

‘Under the Sign of the Moon’

‘She had learned never to relax her guard, though. He could snatch his favour away from one moment to the next, retreating into a dark mood, leaving her bereft.’ (p. 164)

Ian, Greta’s first husband (although not a ‘real one’) has qualities that she both loves and fears. He is manipulative and his treatment of Greta feels like gaslighting to the reader. Yet she continues to think about him. It is not the made-up vows for the wedding, but events that happen later that night that should have been a ‘sign’ to Greta that Ian is not a nice man.

‘Her Share of Sorrow’

‘She hadn’t had any idea that books could transport you like this – into something better.’ (p. 188)

The reality of Ruby’s life is rather miserable. She doesn’t live up to her high-achieving family’s expectations and simply does not know how to occupy herself. Her discovery of the power of fiction is transformative; her mind is awakened to new knowledge and experiences. Reading provides a springboard to writing and an awareness of the power of the imagination.

‘Silk Brocade’

‘ – But Nola Higgins is from Fishponds.

– I don’t care who she is. She’s marrying a Perney, and they’ve owned Thwaite Park for centuries.’ (p. 202)

This exchange between Ann and Kit highlights the class distinctions evident in the story. Judgements are made about people based on their name and where they live. Ann might be as guilty of this as Kit as she knew enough to reject Nola when they started at grammar school together.

Analytical text response topics

1. What role does family play in the lives of the characters in *Bad Dreams*?
2. "Once the words were said aloud, she would never be rid of them; it was better to keep them hidden."
   How does Hadley explore the idea of secrets in *Bad Dreams*?
3. '*Bad Dreams* highlights that what is most precious is not always easy to see.'
   Discuss.
4. 'All the characters in *Bad Dreams* are damaged in some way.'
   To what extent do you agree?
5. 'The characters in Bad Dreams treat others badly.'
   Discuss.
6. 'Many of the stories in *Bad Dreams* are concerned with ageing and mortality.'
   Discuss.
7. 'Every generation comes up with its own, new forms of innocence and experience.'
   How do the short stories explore this idea?
8. To what extent are bad dreams reflected in the collection?
9. How does *Bad Dreams* explore the connections that bring people together and drive them apart?
10. How does Hadley use settings to enhance the personal worlds of her characters?
11. 'Parental relationships with their children are important in the world of *Bad Dreams.*'
    To what extent do you agree?
12. What role do books and music play in the lives of the characters in *Bad Dreams*?

Creative text response tasks

1. Writing through the eyes of a child or adolescent is a good starting point. Decide on a key incident or provocation that could drive the response. Hadley uses boredom, frustration, curiosity, eavesdropping on the adult world, reading experiences, and misunderstanding to help frame her stories. Students can choose a moment from their own experiences – a time when they felt uncomfortable, discovered a secret, a moment of revelation or epiphany, a problem that seemed insurmountable at the time but in the end was easily resolved. (This task would also suit an oral response.)
2. Choose a book that was a favourite in childhood and create a 'bad dream' that you could have about it, just like Carrie, whose beloved *Swallows and Amazons* is given a terrible epilogue in her dream. Carrie responds by upending the chairs in the loungeroom. Think of another possible reaction. (This topic would also suit an oral response.)
3. Imagine a child exploring a cluttered attic in an old house and making a discovery which changes the way they view the world or shifts them from a state of innocence to a state of knowing – or wishing they didn't now know.
4. Write about lost opportunities or regret using a literary work as a motif.
5. Write a story where the first half is from the perspective of a child and the second half is from the perspective of a parent. (Model Hadley's style in the titular story 'Bad Dreams').
6. Create a story of your own that emulates Hadley's style in the collection. Recreate her stylistic effects such as sentences in brackets, dashes to indicate dialogue, focused description of a house's exterior/interior and literary allusions. Listen to a reading of one of Hadley's stories to gain a feel for the pace and language. (Students' stories could be shared and read aloud as an oral response.)
7. Rewrite the ending of 'Flight' in such a way that Claire and Susan speak to each other.
8. Write as the older Carrie or Ruby reflecting on the events of their childhood. Give them a career, relationships, clues about their parents or siblings. (The reflection could also be delivered as an oral presentation.)
9. Write as, or about, Laura Mulhouse or Edith Carew still teaching at St Clements at some time during WWI. Research and weave in an historical element, as does Hadley by writing Laura as a suffragette. (This could also be presented as an oral response.)
10. Most of Hadley's stories explore the idea of power in some way, particularly the power that people can, or think they can, wield over others. Create your own story where one of the characters manipulates another character in a not so nice way.
11. Write about the antagonism between a mother and daughter. Make the mother more glamorous or attractive than her daughter (just as Hadley does). Decide on a trigger for a disagreement and to what extent you want it resolved at the end of the story.
12. Emulate Hadley's writing choices in 'Silk Brocade'. Decide on something old and meaningful to one generation but discarded by the next. Ensure a clear connection with a house and a sad (or it could be happy) event. (This task could also be an oral presentation.)

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https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03b6s40

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Author Information

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https://www.curtisbrowncreative.co.uk/tessa-hadley-author-interview/

Please note

If you can access *The New Yorker* via subscription only, seven of the ten stories in the collection were originally published there.

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https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/27/tessa-hadley-her-share-of-sorrow-short-story

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A copy of 'Flight' is available from *LitHub* online.
https://lithub.com/flight/

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