



First reaction

- 2 Which of these comments do you agree with?
- a) Mr Maloney gets what he deserved for treating his wife the way he does. This is a moral story with a very satisfactory ending.
 - b) This is simply a witty, amusing story: morality has got nothing to do with it. Dahl's purpose is to make the reader laugh, not to judge the characters.
 - c) This story is immoral. At the end Mrs Maloney doesn't show any regret for what she has done. She even seems glad, and it looks as though she isn't going to be found out.

Close reading

Interpreting characters' actions

- 3 a) The reader is given a number of clues that Mr Maloney is preoccupied by something (lines 19-83). List them.
 Is there anything that makes the reader think that Mr
 Maloney is a rather unpleasant man? (lines 19-98)
- 4 Choose the phrase that best completes the following sentences. Sometimes your choice will depend on evidence in the story, sometimes on your personal interpretation.
- a) When Mr Maloney tells his wife something that will be 'a bit of a shock' to her
 - i) it is the confirmation of something that she has suspected for a long time.
 - ii) it comes as a complete surprise to her.**
 - iii) it is the confirmation of something that she has suspected ever since he came home that evening.
 - b) Mary Maloney thinks of killing her husband
 - i) soon after he finishes speaking to her.
 - ii) when she finds the leg of lamb in the freezer.
 - iii) when he says 'For God's sake, don't make supper for me. I'm going out.'**
 - iv) she never thinks of it: she does it unconsciously.**
 - c) When Mary puts the lamb in the oven
 - i) she has just invented a plan to hide the murder weapon.**
 - ii) she is following the plan she had thought of when she killed her husband.

- iii) she does it unconsciously: she would have done this anyway.
 - d) When Mary sees her husband dead on the floor after she comes back from the shop
 - i) she is genuinely shocked.
 - ii) she pretends to be shocked.
 - iii) she is shocked, even though she knew what to expect.
 - e) Mary begins to cry when the police arrive because
 - i) she deeply regrets killing her husband.
 - ii) she is acting: she thinks this is the reaction the police will expect.
 - iii) she is terrified of what might happen to her.
 - iv) she is in a state of shock: she feels a variety of emotions.
 - f) When Jack Noonan asks her if she would like to spend the night somewhere else, she refuses because
 - i) she wants to keep an eye on what the policemen are doing.
 - ii) she is too shocked to move.
 - iii) she has already thought of the idea of inviting the policemen to eat the lamb.
 - g) Mary asks for a drink herself, and offers a drink to the policemen because
 - i) she needs a drink to calm her nerves.
 - ii) she wants to create a diversion, as the policemen are still looking for the murder weapon.
 - iii) she feels sorry for the policemen, who are friends of hers.
 - h) Mary invites them to eat the lamb because
 - i) she wants to destroy the evidence.
 - ii) she feels sorry for the policemen, who must be feeling hungry by now.
 - iii) the lamb reminds her of what she has done, and she can't bear to have it in the house.
 - i) At the end of the story, Mary giggles because
 - i) she is rather drunk: she has been drinking whisky on an empty stomach.
 - ii) the policemen are so stupid.
 - iii) she feels a mixture of emotions: relief, nervousness, and even an appreciation of the absurdity of the situation.
 - iv) she is still nervous and worried about being found out.
 - j) Why does Mary decide not to confess to the murder?
-

- 5 Look at the dictionary definitions, then choose the interpretation of the title you most agree with. If you think none of the interpretations is satisfactory or sufficient by itself, you can write an interpretation of your own.

lamb /læm/ *n* 1 (a) [C] young sheep. ϕ illus at SHEEP. Cf. EWE. (b) [U] its flesh as food: *a leg of lamb* \circ [attrib] *lamb chops*. Cf. MUTTON. 2 (infml) gentle or dear person. 3 (idm) **one may might as well be hanged/hung for a sheep as a lamb** ϕ HANG. **like a lamb (to the slaughter)** without resisting or protesting: *She surprised us all on her first day of school by going off like a lamb*. **mutton dressed as lamb** ϕ MUTTON.

\triangleright **lamb** *v* [I] 1 (of a ewe) give birth to lambs: *lambing ewes*. 2 (of a farmer) tend ewes doing this: *the lambing season*, ie when lambs are born.

\square **lambskin** *n* 1 [C] skin of lamb with its wool on (used to make coats, gloves, etc). 2 [U] leather made from this.

lamb's-wool *n* [U] soft fine fluffy wool from lambs, used for making knitted clothes: *a scarf made of lamb's-wool* \circ [attrib] *a lamb's-wool cardigan*.

slaughter /'slɔ:tə(r)/ *n* [U] 1 the killing of animals, esp for food. 2 the killing of many people at once; massacre: *the slaughter of innocent civilians* \circ *the slaughter on the roads*, ie the killing of people in road accidents. 3 (infml) complete defeat: *the total slaughter of the home team*.

\triangleright **slaugh-ter** *v* [Tn] 1 (a) kill (an animal), usu for food: *slaughter pigs by humane methods*. (b) kill (animals or people) in large numbers: *thousands slaughtered by the invading army*. 2 (fig infml) defeat (sb/sth) completely, esp in sport: *We slaughtered them at hockey*.

\square **slaughterhouse** (also **abattoir**) *n* place where animals are killed for food.

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)





- a) Mr Maloney has done nothing wrong; or if he has done something wrong he has, at least, acted honestly. He is the innocent lamb in the title who has been slaughtered. It may even be that his wife has always been unbalanced, and he has finally found the courage to leave her.
- b) The lamb in the title refers to gentle, harmless Mrs Maloney, who finds herself, because of the circumstances and without any premeditation, killing her husband.
- c) The title is a joke: it makes the reader think of a common expression meaning 'death without protest', but its real meaning is that a leg of lamb is used as the murder weapon.
- d) The title is ironic. Neither Mr Maloney nor Mrs Maloney is a *lamb* (he is certainly not gentle, she is certainly not obedient), and there is no *slaughter* (only one person is killed).
- e) Your interpretation? _____

- d) _____ so that they wouldn't suspect her.
- e) _____ so as not to look suspicious.
- f) _____ so that nobody would know what had happened.

Vocabulary

Feelings and reactions

11 Mary Maloney, and the policemen who come to investigate, experience a variety of feelings and reactions during the story. Complete the table below. The first two have been done for you. Use your dictionary if necessary. (The words in **a-f** come from the story.)

Noun	Verb	Adjective(s)	
a) anxiety	(no derivative exists) (use: to make someone anxious)	anxious	(no derivative exists)
b) bewilderment	bewilder	bewildered,	bewildering
c) horror		_____ ,	_____
d) shock		_____ ,	_____
e) 		surprised,	_____
f) _____	_____	exasperated,	_____
g) _____	satisfy	_____ ,	_____
h) worry	_____	_____ ,	_____
i) _____	_____	fascinated,	_____
j) _____	_____	_____ ,	pleasant/(pleasing)
k) _____	annoy	_____ ,	_____
l) amusement	_____	_____ ,	_____
m) _____	_____	_____ ,	outrageous
n) _____	frighten	_____ ,	_____
o) charm	_____	_____ ,	_____
p) _____	_____	_____ ,	embarrassing
q) _____	_____	frustrated,	_____
r) _____	delight	_____ ,	_____
s) _____	_____	_____ ,	disappointing
t) _____	_____	disgusted,	_____

- 12** What connections can you make between the words above? Try to group them in the following ways:
- a) words describing pleasant feelings and reactions
 - b) words describing unpleasant feelings and reactions
 - c) words describing feelings and reactions that you often experience
 - d) words describing feelings and reactions that you rarely experience

13 Group work

Discuss these questions in pairs or groups. Then prepare similar questions for other pairs or groups.

What are you frightened of?

What is the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you (that you can talk about!)?

What is the most pleasant surprise you have ever had?

What is the most unpleasant surprise you have ever had?

What kinds of things make you anxious?

What kinds of things exasperate you?

What kinds of people do you find fascinating?

Extension

14 Discussion

Do you think thrillers and crime stories are simply for entertainment, or can they teach us something about human nature?

15 Composition

The next day, Mary Maloney decides that she has to confess, but she can't do it face to face with a policeman whom she knows and who knew her husband. Write the letter of confession she gives in at the police station. (about 150-200 words)

Beyond the text

The technique of Sherlock Holmes

- 16** Perhaps the most famous detective in the world, Sherlock Holmes, was the creation of Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). The Sherlock Holmes stories were an instant success, and so successful were they that when Conan Doyle had Holmes

killed in one of his stories, public demand obliged him to bring Holmes back to life in another series of short stories. Sherlock Holmes' cases can be found in the short novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and in the stories collected in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

Conan Doyle, like Holmes' assistant Dr Watson, was a doctor, and it is said that the methods of diagnosis used by a professor of medicine at Edinburgh University when Conan Doyle was a student there gave him the idea for Holmes' techniques of deduction.

In this extract from the story *The Sign of Four*, we see Dr Watson asking Holmes for a demonstration of his technique. Dr Watson speaks first. Read the extract and fill in the missing words given in the box.

impulse	know	simplicity	remains	observation
send	rest	deduction	avoid	explanation

The Sign of Four

'But you spoke just now of observation and deduction. Surely the one to some extent implies the other.'

'Why, hardly,' he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his armchair and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. 'For example, (1) _____ shows me that you have been to the Wigmore Street Post-Office this morning, but (2) _____ lets me know that when there you dispatched a telegram.'

'Right!' said I. 'Right on both points! But I confess that I don't see how you arrived at it. It was a sudden (3) _____ upon my part, and I have mentioned it to no one.'

'It is (4) _____ itself,' he remarked, chuckling at my surprise – 'so absurdly simple that an (5) _____ is superfluous; and yet it may serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. Observation tells me that you have a little reddish mould adhering to your instep. Just opposite the Wigmore Street Office they have taken up the pavement and thrown up some earth, which lies in such a way that it is difficult to (6) _____ treading in it in entering. The earth is of this peculiar reddish tint which is found, as far as I (7), _____ nowhere else in the neighbourhood. So much is observation. The (8) _____ is deduction.'

'How, then, did you deduce the telegram?'

'Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite to you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of postcards. What could you

go into the post-office for, then, but to (9) _____ a wire? 25
 Eliminate all other factors, and the one which (10) _____ must
 be the truth.'

Vocabulary

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 4 wreaths: <i>rings of smoke</i> | 15 instep: <i>middle part of shoe</i> |
| 7 dispatch: <i>to send</i> | 17 tread: <i>step, put one's foot</i> |
| 11 chuckle: <i>to laugh quietly</i> | 18 tint: <i>colour</i> |
| 14 reddish: <i>of a kind of red colour</i> | 24 sheet: <i>page</i> |
| 14 mould: <i>mud, wet earth</i> | 24 bundle: <i>pack</i> |
| 14 adhere: <i>to stick</i> | 25 wire: <i>telegram</i> |

- 17 Imagine that Sherlock Holmes has been requested to help solve Patrick Maloney's murder. Write a brief account of, or discuss, how he solves the mystery.

Author

Roald Dahl (1916-1990) was born and brought up in Great Britain, though his parents were Norwegian. During the Second World War he was a fighter pilot, and was sent to Washington, where he started writing short stories. Dahl's writing career was extraordinary in that he was famous for writing both for adults and for children. His books for children are distinguished by the fact that they include really unpleasant characters. Some of these stories are *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (filmed as *Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory*, with Gene Wilder), and *The BFG*. He scripted the children's film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* about a magical car.

His short stories for adults, in collections such as *Kiss Kiss*, *Switch Bitch* and *Someone Like You* (from which *Lamb To The Slaughter* is taken), are notable for their 'blackness' as well as 'the sting in the tail' or the 'twist' at the end of the story: a very unexpected development which takes the reader by surprise.

He also wrote two volumes of autobiography, *Boy* and *Going Solo*.