

## Literary analysis

### Lesson plan

Gábor T. Szántó – 1945 (Homecoming)

## Teacher's guide

**Developers:** Nárcisz Vida and Zsolt Moldvay (©Zachor Foundation for Social Remembrance)

Please note that in order for students to be able to complete the activity, a deep understanding of the short story is required.

**Duration:** 2 × 45 mins.

**Grade level/Age:** 15-18 years

**Learning aims:**

By the end of this double lesson, students will

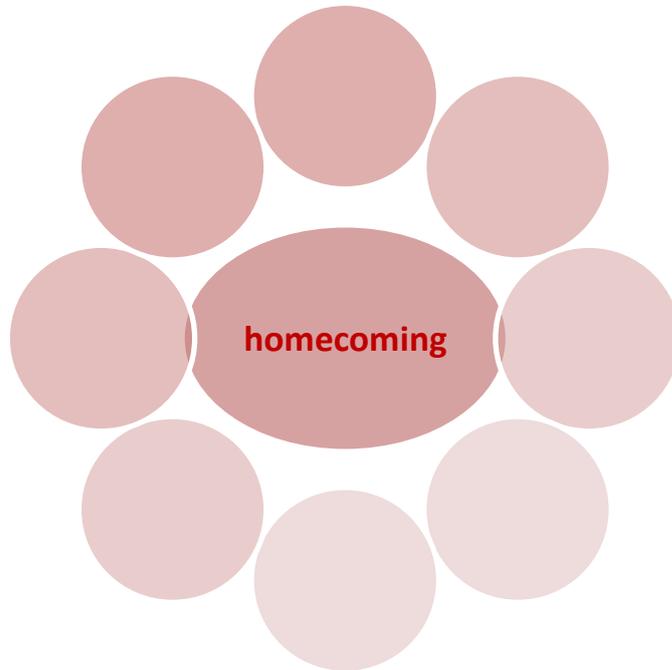
- develop their close reading skills and analytic skills in the short story genre
- gain an understanding of the historical context depicted in the short story
- reflect on different forms of human behavior and motivations
- practice close reading and short story genre analysis methods
- develop their critical thinking skills and social emotional learning
- identify and analyze the relations between time and space
- perceive the difference between the narration and the chronology of the story
- recognize the narrator's point of view and position
- be able to develop affective analytical skills and interpret and comment on moral choices.

## Lesson Outline

### CONSIDER

#### Title analysis

1. Based on your literary studies, think about pieces of literature in which the motif of **homecoming** or arrival is depicted.  
(e.g. Homer's *Odyssey*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, etc.)
2. What are the words that come to mind when you think about *homecoming*? In pairs, collect as many words and phrases as you can.



3. Now think about the short story and add more words to your collection that are connected to *Homecoming* (the short story). Use different colors.
4. How are your newly collected words different from the previous ones? How is the experience of homecoming in this short story different than the experiences of homecoming in other pieces of literature?

*Possible answer: e.g. These are mostly negative words*

5. What is the connection between the title and the text?

*Possible answer: homecoming is usually a happy and joyful event but in the text it's more of a bitter and sad nature that takes place in a hostile context.*

**6. Why do you think the writer gave the short story the title *Homecoming*?**

*Possible answer: the writer wanted to express that the Hungarian Jewry considered the country as their home*

**7. Give a different title to the short story.**

Here you can tell the students that the Hungarian film adaptation of the short story is titled 1945 and was translated to French as *The Just Route*.

**8. Why did you choose this title?**

**How the short story fits in the author's other works**

The short story was first published in Gábor T. Szántó's volume of collected short stories (*Lágermikulás /The Crunch of Empty Boots*, Palatinus, 2004). Parallel with the theater release of the film adaptation of the short story (1945), the text was republished (*1945 és más történetek /1945 and other stories*, Noran- Libro, 2017)

## CONSTRUCT

### Analysing the short story – identifying the genre-based features

**1. How are the features of a short story manifested in the text?**

*Possible answers:*

- *Epic >> Narrative text*
- *Short time span of the plot >> the narration only covers a few hours*
- *Number of characters >> residents of the village, two Jews*
- *Setting >> the village*
- *Simple plot >> two Jews arriving in the village*
- *Unexpected denouement >> burial*

### Narration time

- 1. Find extracts in the text which help you define when the events took place. Can you find backward and forward references (called anaphors and cataphors) in the text? What's the aim of these?**

*The use of anaphors and cataphors is aimed at creating suspense: readers get to know the antecedents, the past, so they can build a connection between now and the future.*

*Tell the students that the plot takes place in the present but the past events determine the present happenings. The things done in the past influence the characters' present(s), and their futures as well.*

## Historical context

2. Based on your previous studies what historical happenings could have shaped the lives of the characters.

1.
2.
3.

### Historical context (Teacher's notes)

1945 was the last year of World War II. The Allies liberated Europe from the Nazi regime. The war caused enormous destruction and trauma. In Hungary, the German and Arrow Cross regimes were followed by the Soviet regime. The inhabitants were affected by food shortage and inflation. During the war, morals and solidarity vanished, expropriation and looting became customary. From 1944, a huge proportion of society became involved in legal robbery, in which Jewish properties and other belongings expropriated by the state were allocated to the people. Therefore, citizens of Hungary were able to lawfully receive the wealth of their Jewish neighbours. When steps were taken to try to get the Jewish wealth back, conflicts among the inhabitants took place. So, Jews who were deported during the war and survived the Holocaust, found that when they returned to Hungary, they lost everything and became targets of a new wave of antisemitism. To make matters worse, during the Soviet occupation, there was a lack of food and a housing shortage. New home-owners were in great need of the allocated or stolen houses and objects. Even some of the helpers, who had previously been benevolent or simply opportunistic, turned against the Jews because they could not account for Jewish properties and belongings they were supposed to be responsible for during the war. Oftentimes, they justified the losses by speaking of the destruction of the war, the German and Soviet looting, and the general difficulties of life, in many cases, rightfully so. This situation provoked distrust, recrimination, and denunciation. However, the authorities called upon the residents to give everything back to the Jewish owners. While these rightful reparatory initiatives were designed to promote the return of Jewish property, they also resulted in a feeling of resentment towards the Jews. When the authorities took action to help them, others saw it as the Jews' revenge on the Hungarians, which in turn seemed to justify retrospectively all that happened to Jews in the war. The conflict within the society was also complicated by the different perceptions of the Soviet occupation. The Jews were liberated by the Red Army, they were rescued by the Soviets. Simultaneously, other members of the society saw the Soviet occupation as another defeat. Mainstream society considered itself the victim of the war, and therefore, exempt from responsibility; many people did not feel responsible for the Jews' tragedy. The consequences of the Soviet occupation concerned everybody, Jews and non-Jews, alike. Even today, we can feel the so-called 'victim blaming.' A term used in social psychology, which, in this context, results in accusing Jews--who were deprived of their possessions, humiliated, and who lost their families and their world and who managed to return to their original homes but were not able to enter-- of being grossly materialistic when they talk about their losses.

English translation based on

[http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=148:nepirtasutanzsidoellenes-atrocitasok-magyarorszagon-1945-1948-&catid=15:tanulmanyok](http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148:nepirtasutanzsidoellenes-atrocitasok-magyarorszagon-1945-1948-&catid=15:tanulmanyok)

**Setting – individual work**

5. **Make a list of important places according to the order they appear in the text.**
6. **Collect the important characters, as well, who are linked to each place. (Which characters are important at each place?)**
7. **Quote a sentence from the text connected to each place. Find examples that best describe the importance of the place within the plot.**

Location Character(s) Quotation	
Location Character(s) Quotation	

**Colors**

8. What colors come to your mind when you think about the world as depicted in the short story? (class work or group work)

9. Fill in the chart with objects from the short story of each color. (individual work)


*Possible answers:*

Colors	Objects
	<i>smoke, railwayman's sooty face, passengers' hats, suits, old Jew's beard</i>
	<i>sunlight, passenger's shirt, whitewashed walls</i>
	<i>beer</i>
	<i>field of wheat</i>
	<i>trees</i>
	<i>soap</i>

**10. In 2017, a feature film adaptation of the short story was released, directed by Ferenc Török. The film is in black and white. What do you think was the director’s idea by making the film in black and white and not multicolour? (frontal discussion)**

*Possible answer: black and white are in contrast; black is the color of mourning and grievance, while white is the symbol of cleanliness.*

**Characters**

**11. Collect information about the characters in the chart below. What do we get to know about them in the text? (group work)**

Name (if known)	Job	Age	Characteristics	Past	Aims and motivation

**You are going to work in groups/pairs. Each group/pair is going to receive an envelope. Fill in the chart with information connected to the character your find in your envelope.**

Characters:

1. ticket controller
2. Jewish father and son
3. notary
4. son of notary
5. threshing-machine operator and barman

**12. Describe the relationship of the Jewish father and his son and the relationship of the notary and his son. (frontal discussion)**

**Structure**

- I. Introduction, lead-in – conflict (What do we learn from the introduction? What feeling does the introduction provoke? Does the introduction set the scene for the rest of the plot?)
- II. Creating suspense (repeated events) – unfolding the conflict
- III. Climax – most important events and dialogues, “the clash”
- IV. Conclusion – Are there any solutions?

**Conflict**

**13. Highlight extracts from the text which depict the tense conditions in the village. (frontal discussion)**

**14. Examine what reactions the arrival of the two Jews evoked among the residents of the village. Why do you think the residents reacted as they did? Try to find several explanations and organise your ideas in the chart below. (pair work)**

Character	Reaction(s)	Possible reasons

*Possible answers:*

Character	Reaction(s)	Possible reasons
<i>notary</i>	<i>hostility</i>	<i>keeping the druggist's shop</i>
<i>barman</i>	<i>neutrality</i>	<i>didn't benefit from the Jewish wealth, bought the leasing of the bar</i>
<i>most of the inhabitants</i>	<i>hostility, suspicion</i>	<i>because of the gained Jewish wealth</i>
<i>son of the notary</i>	<i>remorse</i>	<i>because of the gained Jewish wealth</i>

**Symbols**

**15. Find objects or gestures of symbolic meaning in the text. What do they symbolise? (frontal discussion, teacher explanation)**

*Possible answers:*

- *soap, prayer shawl (tallit), earth from Jerusalem – object and symbols of burial, final homecoming*
- *handshake – symbol of peace, form of greeting*
- *colors*

## **REFLECT**

**Aim:** to formulate and express personal impressions and opinion regarding the message of the short story.

### **Elective written assignment (individual work):**

- Write a review / an advertisement of the short story. To whom do you recommend reading the short story? Why? What is the most important message of the short story?
- Write an article as if you were a journalist working for the local newspaper reporting the events which took place in the village.
- Make an interview with the Jewish men on their way back from the village. The interview should contain your questions and your imagined answers.