



## Teaching Resource for 'At the Bay' by Katherine Mansfield

### PURPOSE

This resource has a variety of activities and suggestions for topics of discussion designed to support the teaching of Katherine Mansfield's short story 'At the Bay.' The activities have been designed with students from Year 11 and above in mind, but teachers can choose the activities that they believe will work best for the year level of their students and their own approach to teaching.

It is worth noting that 'At the Bay' is one of Mansfield's longest stories and takes the form of connected sections. You may like to select some sections to focus on with students rather than reading the whole story.

### WHERE TO FIND THE STORY

You can find the full text of 'At the Bay' online here:

- Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1429/pg1429-images.html#chap01>
- NZ Electronic Text Centre <https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-ManGard-t1-g1-t1-body-d1-d1.html>
- A Celebration of Women Writers (University of Pennsylvania Libraries) <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/mansfield/garden/bay.html>

Or by searching 'Katherine Mansfield At the Bay full text' online.

### BEFORE READING

Before reading 'At the Bay' you might like to explore one or more of these introductory topics with your students.

#### Who was Katherine Mansfield?

These two activities are designed to give students a quick introduction to the life of Katherine Mansfield. Students can then see whether they think Mansfield may have used people, experiences and places from her own life as inspiration for the story.

#### *Photographs*

Look at the images in this DigitalNZ image story 'Introducing Katherine Mansfield': <https://digitalnz.org/stories/6243bca9c8015e002a68f45a>

Discuss what clues the images give about Katherine Mansfield's life. For example:

- What was her family like - for example, was her family wealthy?
- Where did she grow up?
- Where did she go to school?
- What were her interests?
- Where did she live as an adult?
- How did fashion change during her lifetime?

### Timeline

Use one of the sources listed below to create a timeline of key events in Katherine Mansfield's life. For example:

- What year and where she was born
- Where she went to school (both primary and secondary)
- When she moved to England permanently
- What year her first book was published
- What year her brother Leslie died in the First World War
- What year she was diagnosed with tuberculosis/a 'spot on her lung'
- What year her second book was published
- What year her third book was published
- What year she died and where she is buried

Use one or more of these sources to find the information:

- Katherine Mansfield House & Garden's website  
<https://www.katherinemansfield.com/about/katherine-mansfield>
- Wikipedia entry [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katherine\\_Mansfield](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katherine_Mansfield)
- Dictionary of New Zealand Biography entry  
<https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3m42/mansfield-katherine>
- Walking with an ANZAC entry on Leslie Beauchamp  
<https://www.walkingwithananzac.co.nz/leslie-heron-beauchamp>

### The short story

Explore the form of the short story. This webpage gives a great overview of the short story form and highlights some famous short stories – including Mansfield's 'The Garden Party':  
<https://www.blurb.com/blog/what-is-a-short-story/>

The British Library says, "Widely regarded as a pioneer of the [short story] form, Mansfield focussed on capturing the psychology and inner lives of characters through free indirect discourse and 'epiphanies' (sudden moments of realisation and insight). Unlike traditional narratives, the stories typically begin in the heart of a moment and end abruptly. Mansfield strove for absolute precision and distillation, writing in a letter that, ideally, 'there mustn't be one single word out of place, or one word that can be taken out'. From contemporaries including Virginia Woolf to later writers such as Alice Munro and Philip Larkin, Mansfield's influence and contribution to literary modernism extends throughout the 20th century." From: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-garden-party-and-other-stories-by-katherine-mansfield>

### Symbolism

Explore the literary device of symbolism. The literary definition of symbolism is "the use of symbols that represent other concepts or ideas in order to convey a deeper meaning." Writers can use all sorts of things (including an object, character, setting, event, word or action) to represent a deeper meaning that contributes to the understanding of the overall piece of writing. Symbols always have a literal (concrete) meaning and a figurative (abstract) meaning.

As a quick introduction to (or reminder about) symbolism, you can work with students to identify and discuss some common symbols. For example:

- A red rose = love, romance
- A dove = peace

- The sun = happiness, warmth, life
- A seed = growth, potential, new life
- A diamond = wealth, engagement
- A book = knowledge
- Different colours e.g. blue = sad, the ocean; yellow = happy, the sun; green = nature, growth

Even through this basic exercise students may find that an object can symbolise different things to different people and the context can change what an object symbolises. Some symbols have a universal meaning, like the ones listed above. However, writers can also create their own specific symbols in their writing by referring to something repeatedly, emphasising it through the language used to describe it or by the attention given to it. See 'Symbolism' on page 5 of this document for symbols in 'At the Bay.'

### **Modernism and Literary Modernism**

'Modernism' was a global movement in society and culture that began from the end of the 19th century (the late 1800s) and developed through the early 20th century (the early 1900s) until around the Second World War (1939-1945).

Writers, painters, musicians and other artists used new techniques to try to express the experience of their 'modern' lives. This experience included new technology, industrialisation and the First World War.

Some of the characteristics of modernism in literature were:

- **Experimentation:** Modernist literature employed different experimental writing techniques that broke the conventional rules of storytelling. Some of those techniques include blended imagery and themes, absurdism, nonlinear narratives, and stream of consciousness—which is a free-flowing inner monologue.
- **Individualism:** Modernist literature typically focuses on the individual, rather than society as a whole. Stories follow characters as they adapt to a changing world, often dealing with difficult circumstances and challenges.
- **Multiple perspectives:** Many modernist writers wrote in the first-person perspective with multiple characters to emphasize the subjectivity of each character and to add depth to the story by presenting a variety of viewpoints.
- **Free verse:** Many modernist poets rejected the traditional structure of poetry and opted for free verse, which lacks a consistent rhyme scheme, metrical pattern, or musical form.
- **Literary devices:** Many modernist writers rely on literary devices like symbolism and imagery to help the reader understand the writing, and to create a stronger connection between the text and the reader.

(From this website: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/modernist-literature-guide#what-is-modernist-literature>)

### **AFTER READING**

After reading the story, you can use some or all of these activities and topics of discussion to help students interrogate the text.

#### **What was it about? How did it make you feel?**

This is particularly useful if the story is read as a class rather than individually for homework.

As soon as the story has been read, ask the students to pair up and summarise what the story was about and how it made them feel. This could also be done as a whole class discussion.

### Write the blurb

'At the Bay' is being published and a one paragraph blurb needs to be written for the back cover to promote it. To encourage potential readers and help them to decide if they want to read it or not, what would you say?

E.g. This is from the actual blurb of a Penguin Books' edition of 'At the Bay': "Told in thirteen parts, beginning early in the morning and ending at dusk, 'At the Bay' captures both the Burnell family's intricate web of relatives and friends, and the dreamy, unassuming natural beauty of Crescent Bay."

Or "One day of a family's summer holiday is explored through the experiences of different family members and the people around them. The bay may be quiet and beautiful, but the people in it are full of hopes, fears and emotions."

### Setting



*Two women and a young boy swimming at an Auckland beach in the early 1900s, taken by Hubert Earle Vaile, from Auckland Libraries Heritage Collection:*

<https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/photos/id/104904>

The story is set over 100 years ago, in the early 1900s. It was written in 1921 at a time when Katherine Mansfield was thinking back to people, places and events in her own childhood. The setting is inspired by Eastbourne and Days Bay, across the harbour from Wellington city, where Mansfield's family spent summer holidays.

What stands out to you when reading the story as a marker of the era that the story is set in? For example:

- particular words or phrases
- the way people speak to or interact with each other
- objects mentioned
- clothing described

Write a list of them and look up any words you don't understand.

Even though the story is set over 100 years ago, are there things that remain the same today? For example, the game the children play in the washhouse? The way wet togs and towels are hung over the veranda railing to dry?

### **Structure**

'At the Bay' is divided into 13 sections, often called 'vignettes'. What is a literary 'vignette'? Where did the word come from? Why do you think Katherine Mansfield chose to tell the story this way?

The story is set over the course of one day. What are some of the positives and negatives of imposing this timeframe?

### **Themes**

A theme is an idea that the writer explores, develops and repeats in a particular piece of writing. Identify the themes explored in 'At the Bay' and discuss the ways they are explored in the story, using examples of actions and quotes.

Here are some suggested themes for discussion:

*Family* – The story explores family relationships, including the dynamics between different family members and their personalities. There is a big contrast between the way Linda feels about her baby, and the relationship between Kezia and her grandmother for example. The personalities of the three siblings (Isabel, Kezia and Lottie) and their relationships are seen in many ways including the way they eat their porridge (in section III), the beginning of section IV as they head to the beach, and their game in the washhouse in IX.

*Identity* – The story explores how people see themselves versus how other people see them, for example, Stanley and Jonathan in section II, and Beryl and Mrs Kember in section V. A number of characters reflect on their life as it is now compared with how they thought it might be or should be, for example Linda reflecting on her dreams as a young woman in section VI, and Jonathan's feeling that his work is like a prison in section X. Beryl is struggling with her identity throughout the story.

*Gender roles* – The story is set at a time when the expectations of men and women (their role in society, their behaviour, the way they dressed and much more) were very different from today. In a family like the Burnells, the father was considered the head of the family. He goes out to work while his wife and female relatives stay home with the children. Some of the characters in 'At the Bay' are not happy with these roles, for example Linda does not like babies yet she has had four of them. The sense of relief everyone feels when Stanley leaves the house at the end of section III reflects the way the women of the house are expected to serve and please the man of the house. The house can be seen as a 'microcosm' (a little version of) society as a whole. In section XII Beryl escapes the unwanted advances of Harry Kember who tries to exert his power over her. Although a lot has changed since the time portrayed in this story, in what ways are gender roles are still evident today?

*Death* – Death is a recurrent theme in Katherine Mansfield's writing, perhaps because she was unwell for so much of her relatively short adult life. The scene between Kezia and her grandmother in section VII specifically addresses death as they talk about Kezia's uncle who died and her grandmother explains that everyone must die one day. In section X Jonathan reflects on how life is short as he dreads returning to work on Monday. The structure of the story itself, from the early morning light to the falling of night is like life itself from birth to death.

## Symbolism

What are some of the symbols in the story? What do they stand for? Are they universal symbols or specific to this story?

Here are some suggested symbols for discussion:

- The sea symbolises the connection between humans and nature, many of the characters in the story are drawn to the sea.
- The beach is a liminal space, an 'in between' space, the border between the land and the sea, liminal spaces can be where people behave differently, push the boundaries and explore their identity. It can symbolise a place to relax and have fun, but also a place of danger as the gateway to the sea which is powerful and can cause death.
- Animals feature throughout the story as another symbol of the connection between humans and the natural world – the children even become animals during their game in the washhouse.
- Light and dark, morning and evening, sun and moon – these are all symbols of the ups and downs of life, changing moods and emotions, and of life itself from birth to death.

## Historical Society of Eastbourne video

As part of the events marking the 2023 centenary of the death of Katherine Mansfield, a group of Mansfield enthusiasts and the Historical Society of Eastbourne produced this special video to honour the story set in their local area: <https://vimeo.com/813701323>

After watching, ask students to discuss these questions:

- When you read the story, did you picture the setting and the clothes like they are portrayed in the TV adaptation? Were the characters how you imagined them?
- Why do you think they chose those particular sections of the story?

## FEEDBACK

If you have any feedback on this resource, including suggestions for improvement, we'd love to hear them! Email us at [info@katherinemansfield.com](mailto:info@katherinemansfield.com) or fill out the contact form on our website: [www.katherinemansfield.com](http://www.katherinemansfield.com)

We'd also love to hear about any activities you have developed for teaching 'At the Bay' or any other stories by Katherine Mansfield, especially if you'd be happy to share them with other teachers.

## Who are we?

Katherine Mansfield House & Garden is a writer's museum and Category 1 Historic Place in the inner-city heritage suburb of Thorndon, Wellington. Opened to the public in 1988, Katherine Mansfield House & Garden offers a unique insight into 19th-century Wellington and the life and literature of its most famous former occupant, the internationally acclaimed Aotearoa New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield.

The house is owned and operated by the Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society Incorporated, a registered charity. Staffed by a small, dedicated team with assistance from volunteers, Katherine Mansfield House & Garden runs regular events and activities. We also offer guided tours for small and large groups and welcome school groups for education visits that take an active learning approach. Find out more at [www.katherinemansfield.com](http://www.katherinemansfield.com)