

'NIGHT' ALICE MUNRO

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Alice Munro is a Canadian writer and Nobel Prize winner. She is best known for the changes that she introduced to the modern short story, particularly the way in which she moves the narrative between the past and the present. She has published several collections of short stories, including *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) and *Open Secrets* (1994).

Her stories are often set in Huron County, Ontario, where she was born in 1931. *Night* appeared in the collection *Dear Life*, published in 2012 as the second of four stories in the section titled 'Finale'. Munro herself called these 'not quite stories' in view of the fact that they are autobiographical writings with fictional elements.



▲ Canadian short story writer Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013.

KEY POINT

You can draw upon your own experiences in your writing but you can also be creative with that experience, changing events to explore what might have happened.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 You may have siblings. Quite often, relationships with siblings are complicated, especially between teenagers. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having siblings.
- 2 Good physical health is something that people often take for granted. How would you feel if you were ill, not just for a few days, but for an extended period of time?
- 3 Read about Huron County, Ontario in Canada. What was life like in rural Canada in the 1940s and 1950s?

You can find the text of 'Night' in the Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology, pages 46-51, freely available on the Pearson Edexcel website.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

KEY POINT

'Night' blends elements of the autobiography and short story genres. It narrates events but a present reflection upon on those events.

According to the writer, 'Night' is part of a 'separate unit, one that is autobiographical in feeling, though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact'. This means that, though it is a short story, it is not the same as others in the genre. It borrows heavily from the writer's own childhood experiences. The story, narrated from an adult's point of view, in the first person, is both a narration of events unfolding and a present reflection on those past events.

'Night' shows you the interior world of the narrator. Her thoughts about her illness and its effects, her conflicted feelings about her sister and general reflections about her family and background, are all a part of the narrative. At the same time, the reader is shown a glimpse of life in rural Canada in the 1950s and gains an understanding of the family relationships that have a significant impact on the narrator.



► Alice Munro was inspired by her native Huron County, Ontario in Canada.