

AFTER TWENTY YEARS



Notes

"After Twenty Years" is a short story written by O. Henry. It is a story of a meeting between two friends, Bob and Jimmy according to the promise they made twenty years ago. They wish to tell each other of what befell them in the intervening years. The end of the story brings surprise.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this lesson, the learner:

- Identifies the genre of short story as a literary text by close reading, and interpreting possible meanings
- Composes in different styles (narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive) from their own experiences and experiences of others;
- Formulates their point of views over complex situations;
- Evaluates the qualities like friendship and loyalty, arrogance and self absorption and trust through the actions of the characters.

7.1 SECTION I

The Policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had **well-nigh** developed the streets.

Trying doors as he went, **twirling** his club with many **intricate** and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the **pacific thoroughfare**, the

- **Well-nigh:** almost, but not completely or exactly; very nearly.
- **Twirling:** turning something quickly several times.
- **Intricate:** complex.
- **Pacific thoroughfare:** calm and quiet street.

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- **Stalwart:** marked by outstanding strength and vigour.
- **Vicinity:** surrounding area

officer, with his **stalwart** form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The **vicinity** was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.



Fig. : 7.1

LET US UNDERSTAND 7.1

A policeman confidently walked around the deserted nighttime streets of New York City in cold, windy, wet weather. He was very impressive as he completed his rounds and confidently checked the locks of every door to be sure they were secured. The area was deserted and there were very few people around and most of the businesses had already closed for the day, the policeman was alert.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.1

1. What is the setting of the story?
2. What does 'beat' mean in the story?
 - a) tired and ready to drop
 - b) the territory that a police officer is assigned to patrol

- c) sound or express especially by drumbeat
 d) strike directly against forcefully and repeatedly
3. What is the policeman doing?
4. Why were the streets depopulated?
5. What does club mean in the story?
- a) stout stick that is larger at one end
 b) a group of people who share an interest
 c) a team of professional players who play and travel together
 d) golf equipment used by a golfer to hit a golf ball
6. The words that best describe the policeman are _____
- a) impressive b) fierce c) confident d) scary
 e) aggressive f) braggart g) cautious

Quote lines from the story to justify your answer.

7.2 SECTION II

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all right. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands-'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was **torn down** then." The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.



Notes

- **Torn down:**
complete demolition of a building.

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Fig. : 7.2

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man. "I dined here at 'Big Joe, Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from the date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

LET US UNDERSTAND 7.2

The policeman suddenly slowed when he noticed a man standing in a darkened doorway. The man had a little white scar near his right eyebrow and wore a scarf pin with a large diamond. Seeing the police officer walking toward him, the man, explained that he was waiting for his childhood friend, Jimmy Wells. Twenty years ago, they had both agreed that they would meet at Big Joe Brady's restaurant at 10 pm on this date. The police officer informed the man that the restaurant had closed five years ago. However, the man added that twenty years ago he had dined at 'Big Joe' Brady's with his best friend Jimmy Wells. They had been as close as brothers. He was eighteen then and Jimmy was twenty. They then decided that they would meet there again exactly twenty

years from that date and time, no matter what their conditions might be. The next morning he left for the West to make his fortune while Jimmy stayed on in New York.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.2

1. What can be inferred about the personality of the man in the doorway based on the description of his appearance and actions?
 - a) He is humble and modest
 - b) He is wealthy and confident
 - c) He is shy and reserved
 - d) He is careless and unkempt
2. How does the man describe his friend, Jimmy Wells?
 - a) As his worst enemy
 - b) As a cunning and clever person
 - c) As his best chum and the finest chap in the world
 - d) as a quiet and shy person
3. Why did the man travel to the west to make his fortune?
4. Where did Jimmy Wells and the man in the doorway grow up?
5. Who made a promise twenty years ago? What was the promise?
6. Why did the friends part?

7.3 SECTION III

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

"Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big **proposition**, and I kept **hustling** around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, **staunchest** old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner



Notes

- **Proposition** - (here) a very large area
- **Hustling** - to sell or buy something from (someone) by energetic and especially underhanded activity
- **Staunchest** - most loyal in support.

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- **Plodder** - someone who works slowly and continuously, but without imagination, enthusiasm, or interest.
- **Groove** - a settled existence, routine, etc, to which one is suited or accustomed, esp one from which it is difficult to escape.
- **Razor-edge** - an extreme degree of sharpness and shrewdness.
- **Call time on him sharp** - wait for him till the exact fixed time

turns up."

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

"Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door,"

"Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

"You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of **plodder**, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits. A man gets in a **groove** in New York. It takes the West to put a **razor-edge** on him."

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

"I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to **call time on him sharp?**"

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

"Good night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.



Fig. : 7.3

LET US UNDERSTAND 7.3

The policeman found the story interesting. He asked the man in the doorway if he had ever heard from his friend since then. The man replied said that they had lost track of each other a year or two after they parted but was sure that if Jimmy was alive, he would come. Just as he had travelled "a thousand miles" to be there. Then he pulled out a handsome watch, the lid of which was set with small diamonds. Noting the man's expensive jewellery, the police officer observed that the man must have been successful in his endeavours. The man confirmed this, explaining that while in the West he had to pit his wits against some of the sharpest wits for his fortune. He hoped his friend, who was slower, had done half as well as him. At this point, the police officer wished the man a good night and a successful reunion and moved on to continue his patrol. The man expressed his determination to wait some more, even as the weather became increasingly cold and rainy.

*Notes*

- **Dismally** - (here) gloomily; unhappily
- **Absurdity** - ridiculousness.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.3**

1. How did the man to make his fortune?
2. Why is the man confident that Jimmy will keep his promise?
3. What does the man think of his friend Jimmy Wells?
4. What does the man show to indicate he has done well out west?
5. How long did the man plan to wait for his friend? Why do you think the police officer asked him the question?
6. What does the man imply about life the New York compared to life the West?

7.4 SECTION IV

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried **dismally** and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to **absurdity**, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went

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- **Bully** - (slang)
splendid

directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own.

"It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!-twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?"

"**Bully**; it has given me everything I asked it for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.



Fig. : 7.4

At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned **simultaneously** to gaze upon the other's face. The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a **Roman** to a **pug**."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells."

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short:

Bob; I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a **plain-clothes man** to do the job.

"JIMMY."

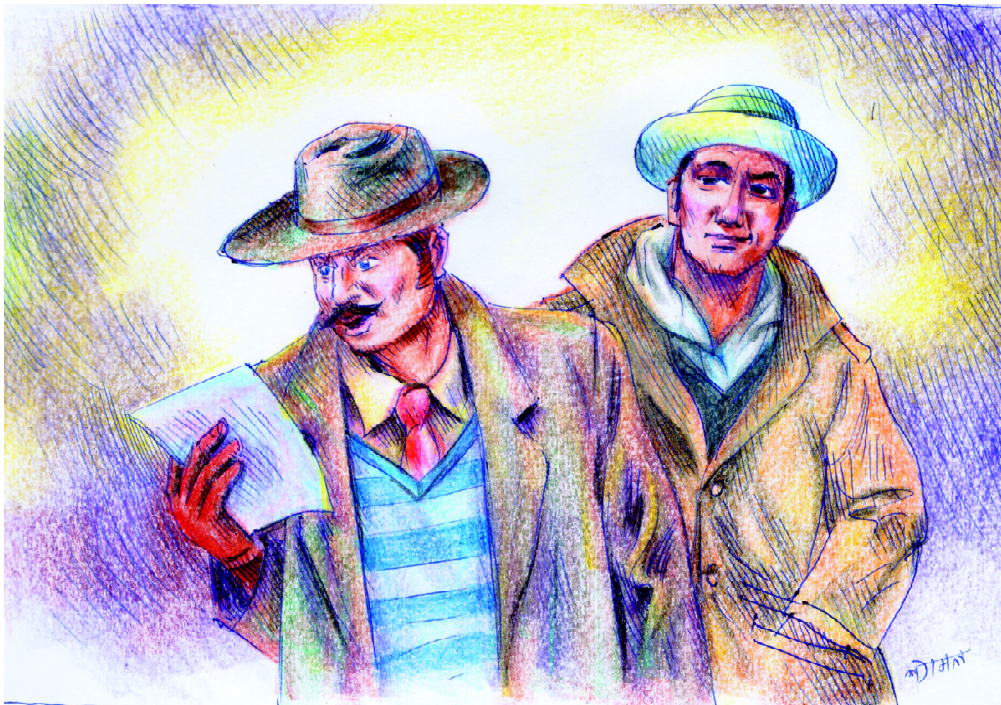


Fig. : 7.5



Notes

- **Simultaneously** - happening at the same time.
- **Roman nose** - a Roman or an aquiline nose is one with a prominent bridge, giving it the appearance of being curved or slightly bent.
- **Pug Nose** - a short nose with an upturned tip.
- **Plain-Clothes Man** - a police officer who does not wear a uniform while on duty.

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**Notes****LET US UNDERSTAND 7.4**

The man had waited about twenty minutes when a tall man in a long overcoat, with a collar turned up to his ears. He approached him and asked him if he was Bob. The man answered in the affirmative and asked excitedly if the tall man was the friend he had been waiting for. They greeted each other warmly and talked of the years when they had lost touch. Bob said that the West had given him everything he asked for, while the tall man stated that he worked for the city and had done moderately well. Bob commented that Jimmy had grown a few inches since their last meeting. Then they walked together to have a good long talk at a place chosen by the tall man till they came to a drug store that was brilliantly lit with electric lights. They gazed at each other. Bob finally got a good look at the tall man's face and the shape of the nose gave away the fact that the tall man was not Jimmy. He stopped suddenly and released his arm. The tall man commented that twenty years had changed a good man into a bad one. He then revealed that Bob was under arrest as Chicago police officers had informed the New York police that Bob, a wanted criminal known as "Silky Bob," was in New York. Before the tall man led Bob away, he said that he had been instructed to give him a note written by a police officer named Wells. The short note said that Jimmy was there at the appointed place on time. But when he struck the match to light his cigar, Jimmy saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. He could not arrest his friend himself and had sent a patrolman in plain-clothes to do the job.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.4**

1. How does the weather change as the story progresses?
2. What was the change that Bob noticed in 'his friend, Jimmy'?
3. How did Bob recognise that the tall man he was talking to was not Jimmy?
4. What was the real identity of the tall man in the overcoat? Why had he gone there?
5. Why did Bob's hands begin to tremble as he almost finished reading the note?
6. What would you have done in Jimmy Wells' place?

CHARACTER SKETCHES

Bob (Silky) Dawl

- Once a close friend of Jimmy, now polished and involved in a life of crime;
- Exhibits sentimentality and criminality, highlighting the impact of time on individuals;
- Represents the changed dynamics of friendship and life choices over two decades.

Jimmy Wells

- A uniformed policeman with a quiet demeanor who questions Jimmy about his activities;
- Symbolizes law and order, adds tension to the narrative;
- Central character; symbolises constancy and the passage of time.



DO YOU KNOW

- O. Henry's real name was William Sydney Porter. He was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1862.
- He specialised in the short story that ends with a completely unexpected surprise.
- This story was first published in his anthology, *The Four Million* in 1906.
- Point of view (POV) is the narrator's position in relation to the story. "After Twenty Years" is narrated in third person omniscient, where an 'off-page' narrator relates a story about the characters. The narrator wanders free, giving a broader view of things.

LET'S LEARN



GRAMMAR

Simple, Complex and Compound Sentences

We have read the clause and its types in the last lesson. now, consider the following



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sentences:

- (a) The sun sets in the west.
- (b) Everyone knows that the sun sets in the west.
- (c) The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

You must have noticed that sentence (a) has only one independent clause or main clause. This is called **Simple sentences**.

Example:

- The cat meows loudly.
- The little boy is too short to reach the branches of the tree.
- The girl is writing a letter inviting her friend to her birthday party.

You can find that all the sentences in the example are complete, and each has only one subject and a finite verb.

Now, let's move on to sentence (b) and sentence (c). Both of them have two clauses each.

But, in sentence (b), one is the main clause and the other one is depending on the main clause.

Everyone knows that the sun sets in the west.

The clause "Everyone knows that" is depending on the clause "the sun sets in the west." This sentence is called a **Complex sentence**. You can find that complex sentences consist of one independent clause, and one or more dependent clauses. Use a comma when the dependent clause comes first. No comma is needed if the independent clause comes first.

Example:

- After the game, we went for a movie.
- Because it was sunny, we decided to have a picnic.
- While I was studying for my exams, which were approaching rapidly, my younger sister was playing in the backyard.

In sentence (c), both the clauses are independent clauses joined by a coordinating

conjunction, and can be put as two simple sentences. This sentence is called a **Compound sentence**.

The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

Hence, a compound sentence is a combination of two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).

Example:

- I like coffee but my friend prefers tea.
- It's raining so I'll stay indoors.
- I enjoy hiking in the mountains, my sister prefers relaxing on the beach, and our parents love exploring historical cities.

Understanding simple, compound, and complex sentences enhances your ability to express ideas with clarity and variety.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.5

Read each sentence below and identify whether it is a simple, complex, or compound sentence.

1. The policeman completed his rounds and confidently checked the locks of every door.
2. She walked to the store and bought some groceries.
3. After the rain stopped, the children went outside to play.
4. Although it was late, he decided to finish his homework.
5. Maria loves to read, but she doesn't have much time.
6. The cat slept peacefully on the windowsill.
7. Whenever it rains, the streets get flooded.
8. Sarah baked cookies, and her brother decorated them.
9. Because he forgot his umbrella, Peter got soaked in the rain.
10. Sam enjoys playing basketball, so he practices every day.



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11. The dog barked loudly when the doorbell rang.

LITERARY DEVICES

O' Henry has used a technique called **Foreshadowing** in this story.

Foreshadowing is a literary device used to give an indication or hint of what is to come later in the story. It is useful for creating suspense, a feeling of unease, a sense of curiosity, or a mark that things may not be as they seem.

In this short story, foreshadowing is used when Bob mentions his appointment with a friend at a specific location twenty years later. This creates anticipation and sets the stage for the story's eventual revelation about the consequences of that meeting.

Some other literary works that includes this device are:

- "Rain, Rain, Go Away" by Isaac Asimov
- "The Landlady" by Roald Dahl
- "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe

VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT EXERCISES

One word can have more than one meaning.

Example:

- a) The president placed a wreath on the grave of the unknown soldier. (a place where someone is buried)
- b) With a grave look Mr. Birla told his employee, "You must never whistle while working." (serious)

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.6**

Guess a word that could replace both the underlined phrases of a set of sentences:

1.
 - a) You have been at the computer all morning; you deserve a stop for a brief period.
 - b) Thieves steal into a locked house in and steal everything.
2.
 - a) The proposal or plan to increase college fees was unanimously rejected.

- b) The slow movement of the bullock cart lulled him to sleep.
- 3. a) She was a leading person in the movement against child labour.
- b) Without looking at the accounts we cannot say whether the company is running at a loss.
- 4. a) The audience burst into uncontrolled, excited applause.
- b) Lions that have been living in natural conditions usually do not thrive in zoos.



Notes

LET'S TALK

1. Have you ever faced a real life situation where a dilemma between right and wrong occurred? Share your views.
2. In the age of mobile phones and quick communication, how would this story turn out? Discuss with your friends..

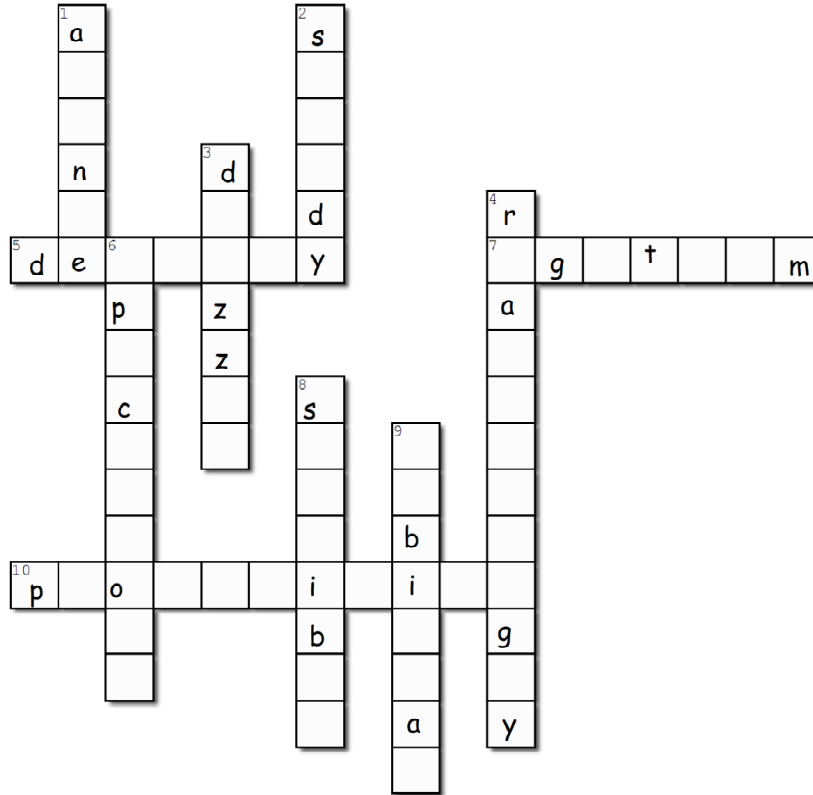
LET'S WRITE

Imagine yourselves as main characters: Bob or Jimmy. Connect with their thoughts and feelings about the reunion and the events of the story and write your experience. Use direct quotes from the story to maintain authenticity.

Across	Down
5. fate or what happens in the future	1. a wide, straight road, especially one with trees on either side.
7. an exaggerated sense of self-importance	2. firm; not shaking
10. something (eg. a proposal) offered for consideration or acceptance	3. rain in very small drops or very lightly
	4. restoring or boosting confidence, certainty, or security
	6. a person who looks on (as at a sports event)
	8. indicative of good sense or reason
	9. regularly or repeatedly doing or practicing something or acting in some manner

LET'S DO

A. Complete the crossword using the hints given.



B. Fill in the blanks with the words from the crossword.

1. We walked down the _____ lined with trees.
2. He drank his _____ cup of coffee after dinner.
3. Around twenty thousand _____ came to watch the match of the century.
4. Mother spoke to me _____ and said things would turn out for the best.
5. She felt that it was her _____ to be a famous singer someday.
6. Having achieved fame and success only fanned her _____.
7. I think the _____ thing to do now would be to stop and ask for directions.



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8. His progress at school has been slow but _____.
9. I love walking about when there is a light _____.
10. He sent us an attractive business _____.



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

- The story explores the themes of loyalty and friendship through the characters of Jimmy Wells and Bob. Despite the passage of twenty years, Jimmy remains loyal to his promise to meet Bob at a specific location, highlighting the enduring nature of their friendship.
- The story emphasizes how time can change people and circumstances. The reunion of Jimmy and Bob after two decades reveals how both characters have evolved and experienced different life paths.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Create character profiles for Bob and Jimmy. Describe their physical appearance, personality traits, motivations, and how they change over the course of the story.
2. Write a note on the atmosphere of the story After Twenty Years. How does the writer create the atmosphere?
3. In a short story, conflict provides crucial tension in any story and is used to drive the narrative forward. Conflict can be both external and internal. Comment on Jimmy's internal conflict.
4. Analyse the contents of the letter Bob shows to the police officer. Write the letter from Bob's perspective, explaining his thoughts and feelings behind its creation.
5. Do you like the character of Bob? Provide textual evidence for what makes the character likable or unlikable.



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ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

7.1

1. a deserted nighttime streets of New York City in cold, windy, wet weather.
2. b) the territory that a police officer is assigned to patrol
3. The policeman is on his regular patrol duty. He moves up the deserted street, trying doors as he goes, twirling his club and looking around cautiously as he checks everything is secure on his beat
4. Because of the chilly wind and sudden bursts of rain.
5. a) stout stick that is larger at one end
6. a) impressive - "The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show."
 c) confident - "The police officer walked with a slight swagger."
 g) cautious - "he tried doors as he went... turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the road."

7.2

1. b) He is wealthy and Confident.
2. c) As his best chum and the finest chap in the world.
3. Because he believed the West offered better prospects for achieving success and wealth.
4. Jimmy Wells and his friend grew up in New York City.
5. The stranger in the doorway Bob and his friend Jimmy Wells, made a promise to each other twenty years ago. They agreed to meet at a restaurant called 'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant at 10 pm exactly twenty years later, regardless of their circumstances.
6. The friends parted when they decided to go their different ways to make their fortunes. The man in the doorway went West to make his fortune. Jimmy, on the other hand, decided to stay on in New York.



Notes

7.3

1. The man had gone to the West to make his fortune. He has lived by his wits and has done well.
2. Because Jimmy was always the truest, staunchest old chap.
3. The man thinks Jimmy was the most loyal of friends and will turn up for the meeting. At the same time he feels Jimmy remains a blodder and has stayed on in his own familiar atmosphere.
4. A handsome watch set with small diamonds.
5. for another half an hour.
6. New York makes people dull, while the West sharpes them.

7.4

1. It turns into a fine, cold drizzle with a steady wind.
2. Bob noticed that Jimmy had become two or three inches taller.
3. As the two men crossed a well-lit drug store, the two men turned to have a good look at each other. Bob at once noticed that the man who had claimed to be Jimmy Wells had a pug nose, while Jimmy had a Roman nose.
4. The tall man in the overcoat was a plain clothes man. Jimmy Wells had sent him to arrest Bob, a wanted criminal called Silky Bob.
5. Bob's hands began to tremble as he almost finished reading the note as the events had taken an unexpected turn. He was expecting a happy meeting and not an arrest.
6. Individual answer.

7.5

1. Compound
2. Compound
3. Complex
4. Complex
5. Compound
6. Simple
7. Complex
8. Compound



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9. Complex
10. Compound

7.6

1. break
2. motion
3. figure
4. wild

Let's Do**A. Across**

5. destiny
7. egotism
10. proposition

Down

1. avenue
 2. steady
 3. drizzle
 4. reassuringly
 6. spectators
 8. sensible
 9. habitual
- B.**
1. avenue
 2. habitual
 3. spectators
 4. reassuringly
 5. destiny
 6. egotism
 7. sensible
 8. steady
 9. drizzle
 10. proposition