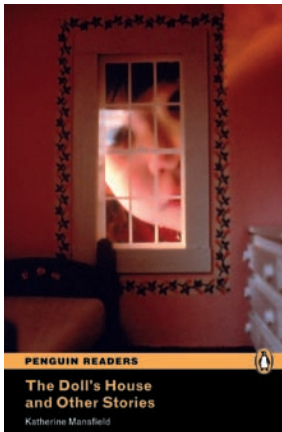




The Doll's House and Other Stories

Katherine Mansfield



About the author

Katherine Mansfield was born in Wellington, New Zealand in 1888. Mansfield spent her childhood in New Zealand with three sisters and a beloved younger brother. Mansfield went to England with two of her sisters when she was 15. She studied there for three years and was known for her writing and cello playing.

After two years back in New Zealand, Mansfield wanted to return to England as a writer. Her father agreed and Mansfield moved back to London when she was 20 years old.

Mansfield was involved in various relationships, including a marriage to a singing teacher who she left a day later. Mansfield met John Middleton Murry, a journalist and editor of a magazine, in 1911. They spent time in England and Paris and eventually married in 1918.

Through the years, Mansfield wrote many short stories. Her first collection came out in 1911. She met many leading writers (D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce) and travelled a lot between England and Europe.

In 1915, Mansfield spent time with her brother Leslie who had been training in England with the army. His death in France that same year was very upsetting to Mansfield; however, she continued her writing. Most of her stories dealt with characters and events from her childhood home in Wellington. Two more collections of short stories came out in 1920 and 1922.

Around 1915, Mansfield became ill. Because of her poor health, she kept travelling back and forth between Europe and England to escape England's cold winters. She died

in Fontainebleau, France in 1923 at the age of 34. Her husband released additional books of her writing after her death.

Summary

This collection includes four of Mansfield's stories.

Bliss takes place in London and is about a woman who is happy with her husband, her baby, her house and her friends. Is her life as perfect as it seems?

Mr Reginald Peacock's Day allows readers to consider life from the perspective of a singing teacher. His students and fans greatly admire him. Why does he seem to be at war with his wife?

The Doll's House is about three girls and their wonderful doll's house. What is preventing everyone from enjoying this treasure?

The Garden Party is about a young woman who is confronted with two different realities in one afternoon. She attends a fancy garden party at her home and then visits the home of some poor neighbours who have had a death in the family. How does she respond?

Bliss, pages 1–6: In *Bliss*, Bertha Young is happily married to Harry. They have a baby girl and live in a nice house with a garden. On this particular day, Bertha is feeling very happy about life in general. They have interesting friends who are coming over for dinner. Bertha is especially interested in Miss Fulton, her new friend.

Bliss, pages 6–13: Bertha enjoys dinner. While she enjoys her connection with Miss Fulton, she feels Harry does not get along with their guest. However, later that evening, Bertha catches a glimpse of Harry and Miss Fulton together and realises they are having a relationship.

Mr Reginald Peacock's Day, pages 15–19: *Mr Reginald Peacock's Day* is the story of a singing teacher and his feelings about himself and his wife. The day begins with Reginald feeling unhappy with his wife. When she wakes him up, he feels she is trying to make him feel guilty by letting him know about all the work she has already done around the house. He also feels his son does not show him enough respect.

Reginald's dissatisfaction with his wife continues at breakfast. Meanwhile, he gets a flattering note from a woman who appreciates his singing. Reginald feels he is at war with his wife.



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Mr Reginald Peacock's Day, pages 20–26: That afternoon, Reginald's female singing students all praise him for his teaching. However, Reginald continues to feel annoyed with his wife and her daily routine. That evening, he is invited to dinner and is asked to sing at someone's house. He is much appreciated by everyone. At home, he tries to tell his wife about his successful evening, but he cannot express his feelings.

The Doll's House, pages 27–32: In *The Doll's House*, the Burnell girls receive a beautiful doll's house as a present. All the girls at school wait for their chance to see it. Only the two Kelvey girls are left out. The other girls are not allowed to talk to the Kelvey girls because they are 'different'. Kezia, the youngest Burnell girl, asks her mother if she can invite them over but her mother says she cannot.

The Doll's House, pages 33–38: Soon everybody has seen the doll's house, except the Kelvey girls. At school, one of the girls (Lena) is not nice to Lil Kelvey (the older of the two girls). At home, Kezia sees the Kelvey girls walking by and invites them to see the doll's house. Kezia is showing them the doll's house when Aunt Beryl sees them.

Aunt Beryl yells at Kezia and tells the girls to leave. Aunt Beryl, who is having problems of her own, feels better after this scene. Far away from the Burnell home, Lil feels ashamed. However, Else (the younger girl) feels happy that she has finally seen the doll's house.

The Garden Party, pages 39–44: In *The Garden Party*, Laura Sheridan's family is planning a fancy party that afternoon. Laura hears that a man whose home is nearby has been killed in an accident. He comes from a poor family and has a wife and five children. Laura thinks they should stop the party but the others in her family do not agree. Laura feels better after her mother gives her a new hat and she continues planning the party.

The Garden Party, pages 45–51: The party is a success. After it is over, Laura's father talks about the accident. Laura's mother decides Laura should take the family some food. Laura goes to the house and is invited inside. She meets the crying wife and sees the dead man. He looks peaceful and happy. Laura returns home crying. She tells her brother that it was wonderful but she cannot explain why.

Background and themes

Most of Mansfield's writing involved characters and events from her childhood home in Wellington, New Zealand. Mansfield's style of writing was new for that time. Rather than following the traditional short story format that involved a beginning, middle and end, Mansfield's stories often involved a moment in time and had the characters face something sudden that could change their lives.

While the subject matter chosen by Mansfield might appear to be quite simple (preparing for a party or receiving a present), readers find themselves questioning bigger social issues through her writing. Mansfield's stories often dealt with marriage (*Bliss* and *Mr Reginald Peacock's Day*) and also with issues related to childhood, innocence and social class (*The Doll's House* and *The Garden Party*). While the characters in Mansfield's stories seem to have ordinary lives, readers wait for something unexpected to happen.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Guess:** Have students look at the picture on the cover. *What kind of feeling do you get from this picture? Read the titles of the stories on the Contents page. Do you have any ideas what these stories might be about?*

Introduction

After reading

- Careful reading:** Have students read about Katherine Mansfield in the *Introduction*. Have students work in pairs and fill out a chart about the author.

Author's name: <u>Katherine Mansfield</u>
Place of birth:
Date of birth:
Family:
Family interests:
Education:
Travels to London:
Fashion style:
Early relationships/First marriage:
First book:
Subsequent relationships/Second marriage:
Health issues:
Friends (other writers):
Other books/Stories:
Death:



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Bliss, pages 1–6

Before reading

- 3 **Guess:** Look at the title (*Bliss*) and the picture on page 5. In groups, have students list possible reasons why this woman might be so happy. Then have them discuss what they think a person needs to have a happy life.

After reading

- 4 **Write:** Bertha is having a wonderful day. Have students think back to a special moment in their lives. *Where are you? How do you feel? What are you doing?*
- 5 **Discuss:** Have students think about the scene involving Bertha, the Nurse and Bertha's baby. *How would you feel if you were Bertha. How would you feel if you were the Nurse?*

Bliss, pages 6–13

Before reading

- 6 **Guess:** Have students think about the guests who are coming to the dinner party and look at the picture on page 8. *What kind of feeling do you have about the people at the dinner party? What might happen at the party? Will Bertha be happy?*

After reading

- 7 **Write:** Have students imagine that they are Bertha and they are writing in their journal the next day. *Respond to Bertha's own question: 'What is going to happen now?' Write in Bertha's own words.*
Example: *Yesterday, I saw ... I think ... I am going to ...*
- 8 **Role play:** Imagine a conversation between Bertha and a close friend.
Student A: You are a friend of Bertha's who is asking about the evening.
Student B: You are Bertha and you are responding to your friend's questions. Would you tell your friend what you saw?

Mr Reginald Peacock's Day, pages 15–19

Before reading

- 9 **Guess:** Look at the picture on page 18. In pairs, have students look at these three people. Write adjectives to describe them. Look at the title, *Mr Reginald Peacock's Day*. Have students guess what might happen.

After reading

- 10 **Write:** Have students imagine they are Reginald's wife and they are writing a letter to a friend. *Write about your daily life and your feelings about Reginald.*

Mr Reginald Peacock's Day, pages 20–26

- 11 **Careful reading:** Have students look at Reginald's three students and discuss the following: *How does each student feel when she arrives? What does Mr Peacock do during the lesson that makes each student feel better? How does she feel when she leaves? Is Mr Peacock a good teacher? Why or why not?*

The Doll's House, pages 27–32

Before reading

- 12 **Guess:** Have students look on page 28 at the doll's house that the three sisters get as a present. *How do the girls feel about this present? What will happen? What will their friends think of the present?*

After reading

- 13 **Pair work:** Have students discuss how the Kelveys are different from the other girls. What do the adults think about the Kelvey girls? Does the way the adults think about the Kelveys affect the way the children think about them? Have students give examples.

The Doll's House, pages 33–38

Before reading

- 14 **Guess:** Have students look at the pictures on pages 35 and 37. *What do you think is happening with Kezia and the two Kelvey girls (Lil and Else)? How do Kezia, Lil and Else feel on page 35? How do they feel on page 37? Who is the woman on page 37? What is she saying?*

After reading

- 15 **Discuss:** Have students think about the scene with Lena and Lil. Imagine that a teacher has observed this. What could the teacher say to Lena?

The Garden Party, pages 39–44

Before reading

- 16 **Guess:** Have students look at the picture on page 40 and discuss the following: *What words can you use to describe the young woman? How does she feel about the party? Look at the picture on page 42. How do the people look? What might have happened?*

After reading

- 17 **Group work:** In groups of four, assign each student the role of one of the following: Laura, Laura's sister, Laura's mother, or the cook. Have students write their thoughts about stopping the garden party after hearing about the death of the young man.
Example: *I just heard about the accident. I feel ... Our party is this afternoon, so I think we should ...*
Have students share their ideas together. Why might each person have a different feeling?

The Garden Party, pages 45–51

After reading

- 18 **Group work:** Tell students that people are gathering at the party and also at the house of the dead man. Have them compare the two scenes. *What can you see? What can you hear? What are the people doing? How does Laura feel at each place?*

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.