One of Stephen King’s most terrifying stories, Misery, concerns Paul Sheldon, a famous writer of novels about a heroine called Misery Chastain. After celebrating the completion of a new book, Sheldon has a car crash on a forest road in the Colorado mountains. As he gradually returns to consciousness he finds himself in bed in a strange house, but also begins to realise that the woman who has found him and taken him home is dangerously insane and has no intention of letting him go. She feeds him and gives him pain-killing tablets, but her behaviour is terrifyingly unpredictable. Helpless, Paul has no choice: he must wait and hope that he doesn’t make her angry – because, as he discovers, when Annie Wilkes is angry, there’s no limit to what she will do. His only sources of relief are the novel that Annie asks him to write for her, and the idea that one day he might get revenge for the tortures she inflicts on him.

**About Stephen King**

Stephen King is a writer who knows all about fame. The huge popularity of books such as Carrie, The Shining, Salem’s Lot and Misery, have made him one of the world’s highest-earning authors. Many of his stories have been made into films or TV series, most of which have also been very popular. A film based on Misery was released in 1990 to critical and public acclaim.

Born in Portland, Maine in the north-eastern United States, in 1947, King had the makings of a horror writer from his earliest years. As a child he loved listening to horror tales on the radio and watching science fiction films, and was already writing unusual stories while at high school. His first published was / Was a Teenage Graverobber, which appeared in an amateur magazine. From 1966 he attended the University of Maine, and alongside his full-time course took creative writing classes. He was already selling stories before he left college, and continued writing while working as a teacher at a private school in the small town of Hampden, also in Maine.

It was during this time that he produced his first novel, Carrie, about a young girl who is unpopular at school and takes revenge through the use of psychic powers. Horror was enjoying a boost in popularity at the time through such films as Rosemary’s Baby, The Exorcist and The Amityville Horror, and King’s book was just what publishers wanted. He sold it in 1973, and when he was offered an incredible $400,000 for the paperback rights, he was able to leave teaching and write full-time.

King now lives with his family in a large Victorian house in Bangor, only a short distance from the poor area where he grew up. He keeps to a very strict schedule as a writer. He likes to write 1,500 words every day, and works at his oak desk 362 days a year, taking a break only for Christmas Day, his birthday and 4th July - American Independence Day. He plays rock and roll on his stereo in the background while he writes.

There are parallels between the character Paul Sheldon and his creator, too. Like Sheldon, King writes other kinds of fiction besides the type he is best known for. Under the pen name of Richard Bachman he has written novels of science fiction, psychological horror and suspense, and Misery was originally intended as a Richard Bachman novel. He has also written stories under his own name which are closer to literary fiction than his usual work. Many of the stories collected in Different Seasons (1982) fall into this category. For example, The Body is a semi-autobiographical novel about the adventures of four boys in the New England forest, and Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption is about prisoners.

**Background and Themes**

Another aspect of Paul Sheldon’s life which reflects that of King himself is Sheldon’s worldwide fame, and King is also well aware of the dangers which this brings. In 1986, the year before Misery was published, the iron fence surrounding the writer’s house was attacked and some valuable ornaments removed. He also receives a great deal of ugly or abusive ‘fan mail’, like other famous people, which his publishers and secretary do not let him see.

King has come much closer to real danger than this, however. In a lecture which he gave in 1986, discussing the background to Misery, he told of one of his most disturbing encounters with a fan. Many people ask the author for his autograph, whenever they recognise him, and he says among these are often a good number with a ‘strange look in their eyes’. Once in the late 1970s in New York, he left a television studio and was approached by a man who seemed particularly odd and who called himself his ‘number one fan’. The fan asked King to pose in a photograph with him, and then to sign it. The author wrote: ‘Best wishes to Mark Chapman, from Stephen King’. So strange was the man that King remembered his name – and recognised it again in 1980, when Chapman himself became famous as the murderer of John Lennon.
Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student’s Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Ask your students: Have you heard of Stephen King? If they have, ask them to tell you what they know about him. If not, move straight on to question 2.
2. Ask your students to look at the front and back covers and tell you what kind of story they’re going to read. Then divide the class into pairs. In each pair, Student A reads the first part of the introduction and Student B reads the second part of the introduction, about Stephen King. They close their books and As tell Bs as much as possible about the story, and Bs tell As as much as possible about Stephen King. They can also ask each other questions.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–6

Before the beginning of this story, Paul Sheldon is interviewed on TV. He talks about his life, his career so far, and his hopes for the future. In pairs, students carry out this interview. They should plan it first, writing the questions and deciding what Paul Sheldon will say. They should use the information given in these chapters about Sheldon’s work and life, but also ask anything else they want, from their own imaginations.

Chapters 7–11

Put students into small groups. Each group makes up an ‘escape plan’ for Paul. This should be as likely and believable as possible. The groups write down their plans, then each group passes its plan on to the next group. The groups now all decide whether the plans they have been passed could really work, making notes which they keep.

Chapters 12–17

1. Hold a class debate on this statement: ‘In this book Stephen King is unfair to people who are mentally ill. He has made a monster out of someone who is in pain and suffering from a sickness. It is not fair to treat such people this way just in order to make a “good story”.’
2. In pairs, students discuss the following question: ‘If you were trapped like Paul and thought you were going to die, what would it make you think about? How would you feel? What would you do (assuming you could not escape)?’

Chapters 18–21

Students discuss the following questions in small groups:
1. When the young policeman comes to Annie’s farm to find Paul, does Paul do the best thing? What would you have done?
2. What other chances has Paul had to escape so far? Could he have escaped by now, do you think? If so, how?

Chapters 22–27

Put students in the same pairs as for Chapters 1-6. They carry out another interview with Paul Sheldon. This time the interview takes place a year after the events of Misery. However, they should include the following questions: In your time at Annie Wilkes’ farm, what was the worst moment for you? How have those events changed your life? (They should imagine that there has been at least one positive result.) What are your plans for the future now?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. Take a class vote on: What were the three most horrible moments in the book?
2. In small groups, students discuss the following question: ‘If you had children of 12–15, would you want them to read Misery? Why? Why not?’

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the ‘Before You Read’ sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1–6

barbecue (n) a metal frame for cooking food on outdoors
blush (v) to become red in the face, usually because you are very embarrassed
foul (adj) very unpleasant
misery (n) great suffering or discomfort
punch (v) to hit someone or something hard with your fist
splint (n) a flat piece of wood, metal, etc used for keeping a broken bone in position
stale (adj) food that is stale is no longer fresh or good to eat
stove (n) a thing used for heating a room or for cooking which works by burning wood, coal, oil or gas
stubborn (adj) determined not to change your mind
typescript (n) a copy of a document made using a typewriter

Chapters 7–11

barn (n) a large farm building used for storing crops or keeping animals in
choke (v) to prevent someone from breathing
flattery (n) insincere praise
mattress (n) the soft part of a bed you lie on
sarcastic (adj) saying things that are the opposite of what you mean in order to make an unkind joke
wheelchair (n) a chair with wheels used by people who cannot walk

Chapters 12–17

album (n) a book in which you put photographs, stamps, etc
axe (n) a tool with a heavy metal blade on the end of a long handle, used to cut down trees
blowlamp (n) a tool which produces a small very hot flame, used especially for removing paint
contempt (n) a feeling that someone or something is not important and does not deserve respect
dragon (n) a large imaginary animal that has wings and a long tail and can breathe fire
squeak (v/n) (to make) a very short high noise
stump (n) the bottom part of a tree that is left in the ground after it has been cut down
syringe (n) a hollow plastic tube with a needle used for taking blood from someone’s arm or putting drugs into it

Chapters 18–21

lawnmower (n) a machine that you use to cut grass
blister (n) a swelling on your skin caused by a burn or continuous rubbing
1 The story takes place in the American state of Colorado. Look on a map of the United States, and decide whether these statements are true or false.

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<tr>
<td>(a) Colorado is a small state.</td>
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<td>(b) It’s in the mid west of the United States.</td>
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<td>(c) Its capital is Denver.</td>
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<td>(d) It has no mountains.</td>
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<td>(e) It has forests.</td>
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2 Try to imagine the whole story that you are going to read, using the chapter headings on the Contents page of the book. Write a sentence or two for each chapter heading.

**CHAPTERS 1–6**

**Chapters 1–2**

Put the events of Paul’s crash in order:

(a) He loses control of the car at a steep corner.
(b) Annie gives Paul the ‘kiss of life’.
(c) She is sure she’s found Paul Sheldon because she looks in his wallet.
(d) The car’s tyres won’t grip the road.
(e) She takes him home and puts him to bed.
(f) He nearly dies when Annie puts on his splints.
(g) He screams, so she knows he’s going to live.
(h) He drives through the mountains in snow.
(i) She pulls him out of his car and into her car.
(j) Paul wakes up and remembers what happened.
(k) Annie finds Paul unconscious in his car.
(l) He almost dies a second time.
(m) He almost dies a second time.
(n) Paul finishes his novel.

**Chapters 3–4**

1 Why do you think Annie keeps the pain-killing tablets back from Paul?

2 How would you describe her attitude towards him?

**Chapters 5–6**

1 Fill in the gaps in these sentences.

   (a) ‘____ Wilkes? Annie? Are you all right?’
   (b) ‘You dirty ____!’
   (c) ‘She ____ be dead!’
   (d) ‘It’s just a ____.’
   (e) ‘If ____ didn’t ____ her, who did?’
   (f) ‘I think I have to go ____ for a ____.’
   (g) ‘What about my ____?’
   (h) ‘Soon, ____, soon.’

   (i) It’s _____ and no good.’

2 Why doesn’t Paul want to destroy his *Fast Cars* typescript?

**CHAPTERS 7–11**

**Chapter 7**

1 Imagine that in his fear and loneliness, Paul starts to write a secret diary. What would he write now? Write one paragraph of it.

**Chapter 8**

1 (a) Write a summary of what we know about *Fast Cars* from this and previous chapters.

(b) Imagine the whole story and write a paragraph explaining it.

2 What does Paul find out about the house? Fill in the gaps in this paragraph.

   It’s very difficult for the wheelchair to (a) ______________ through the door, so Annie must have (b) ______________ it up to bring it in. Down the corridor outside his room there’s a bathroom where Annie keeps the (c) ______________. The (d) ______________ to the bathroom is wider. There’s a cupboard on the wall over the (e) ______________. There’s also a cupboard with (f) ______________ and (g) ______________ on the shelves, and under those some (h) ______________ with the words (i) ______________ SUPPLIES on them. Annie keeps the (j) ______________ tablets at the bottom of the second box. There’s a telephone in the (k) ______________ room, but it doesn’t (l) ______________. On a shelf there’s a photograph of Annie’s (m) ______________. On a table there are some figures, including a flying (n) ______________.

**Chapters 9–10**

What is happening, or has just happened, when Paul says or thinks these things to himself?

(a) Did you scratch the paint?

(b) She has things to carry ... You have a few minutes still.

(c) ‘Come on ... come on ...’

(d) Did she hear that? She must have?

(e) Clever, not sweet but maybe clever.

(f) How am I going to please her?

**Chapter 11**

1 In what ways does Annie act like an ordinary fan in this chapter?

2 ‘The thousand and one nights of Paul Sheldon’: What is Paul referring to here? What makes him think of it?

3 Complete these sentences.
(a) She ties Paul up because ...................... 
(b) Annie leads the man away from his car so that ...................... 
(c) The man’s disgusted because ...................... 
4 Why does Paul give Annie the money to pay her taxes?
5 Why is Paul ‘curiously happy’?

CHAPTERS 12–17
Chapters 12–13
1 You are someone who is out wandering in the woods and you accidentally see Annie in her ‘laughing place’. Describe what you see.
2 Write a short description of Annie comparing what she was like before the 15th April to what she is like after it. Why does Paul think the second Annie is the ‘real’ one? Which Annie would you prefer to meet? Why?
3 What clues do we get about Annie’s madness in these chapters? What does she think of (a) herself, (b) the world?

Chapters 14–15
1 What possible reasons are given for Annie’s killing these people?
   (a) The children who lived downstairs from her family
   (b) The student nurse who shared an apartment with her
   (c) The people at St Joseph’s hospital
   (d) The babies at the hospital in Boulder, Colorado
2 Why, and how does Paul plan to kill Annie?

Chapter 16
1 Why do you think Annie has ‘something metal and something wooden’ and a box of matches in the room with Paul? What’s she going to do?
2 What’s (a) ‘the good news’, (b) ‘the bad news’?
3 Finish these sentences about Paul’s car.
   (a) The melting snow on its own wouldn’t have ...........................
   (b) Annie knew that people would ask questions if ...........................
   (c) One of the reasons Annie rescued Paul was that he had crashed in the place where ...........................
   (d) Paul’s car won’t go far because it’s too ...........................
   (e) Annie thinks someone will find the car in two ........................... or ...........................
4 Why did Annie really kill Pomeroy, do you think?

Chapter 17
1 What is Stephen King implying that the British did to their diamond mine workers?
2 Do you find the events in this chapter believable? Why/Why not.

CHAPTERS 18–21
Chapter 18
Choose the correct answer.

(a) When the typewriter loses its ‘t’, Paul knows that
   (i) he won’t complain.
   (ii) he will complain.
(b) Paul remembers everything about Annie’s ‘operation’ to his foot because
   (i) people who have accidents don’t forget them.
   (ii) writers remember everything that happens to them.
(c) Paul decides to carry on living because
   (i) he wants to finish Misery.
   (ii) Annie’s sorry for what she’s done.
(d) After her operation on Paul’s foot Annie was frightened because
   (i) she realised she had nearly killed him.
   (ii) she had not meant to hurt him.

CHAPTERS 19–20
1 What are the arguments in Paul’s head (a) against and (b) for screaming to tell the policeman he’s there?
2 Why does Paul envy the dead policeman?
3 Why doesn’t he try to kill Annie with the vase?
4 Why won’t Annie talk about the picture of Paul that the policeman had?

Chapter 21
1 There is sometimes a very dark sense of humour in this novel. Can you find examples of it in this chapter?

CHAPTERS 22–27
Chapters 22–23
1 Explain these things that the characters say in these chapters. What are they talking about when
   (a) Annie comes back, and Paul asks her if ‘everything’ has gone all right?
   (b) Paul says: ‘There isn’t much time now, is there, Annie?’
   (c) Annie asks Paul: ‘Are you going to be good?’
   (d) Annie says to Paul: ‘It’s what they want’.
2 Write the conversation between Annie and the local TV news reporter. Write what the reporter says to his TV audience on his news programme that night. Include a explanation about why he went to Annie’s farm.

Chapters 24–27
1 What does Paul say he always does after finishing a book?
2 What are the two words ‘which every author loves and hates most’?
3 Why does Paul ‘still see’ Annie Wilkes? Why does he see her ‘in every woman who ever tells him that he is her favourite author’?

Activities after reading the book
At the end, when Annie’s in pain, Paul doesn’t feel sympathetic towards her or sorry. Do you? Say why, or why not.