The Ring

by Bernard Smith

SUMMARY

Rafael is a poor fisherman, who, for some reason in the past, has gone mad. All he can say is ‘She gave me the golden fish.’ or ‘She gave me the ring. I still have it. She gave the ring back to me.’ Did he go mad for love of a girl, or because he saw or committed some terrible deed?

The narrator is a doctor when the story starts, but he still remembers meeting Crazy Rafael when, as a twelve year old boy, he was visiting his Uncle Miguel. He determines to get treatment for Rafael and find out what is wrong with him. But first, he tries to learn the facts surrounding the strange case.

The people of the village oblige. He assembles many facts. Indeed, nobody lies to him at all, and he is able to piece together the evening before Rafael’s sudden descent into madness. It was the night that Rafael’s childhood sweetheart, Anita, the girl to whom he had given a marvellous golden ring in the shape of a fish, disappeared, together, it seems, with the soldier, a dashing visitor to the village who, according to village gossip, stole Anita’s heart and eventually took her away for ever. It was also the night that Santiago’s donkey went missing. Although it is hard for anyone to see a connection, since the donkey was too old to carry anyone.

It emerges that Rafael’s mother thought that her son had murdered the soldier, and had covered up for him. Rafael apparently even admitted the murder to her, but how could that be, since he was seen in the café after talking to his mother that night, and the soldier was alive and well. And how could Anita have given the ring back to him, since it does not appear that Rafael could have met Anita that night?

The truth only emerges when Rafael falls sick and confesses to the doctor. He did indeed kill the soldier, his rival for Anita’s affection, by attracting sharks to his boat. At the time of the soldier’s death, he was in the village café, and thus had a perfect alibi. But Rafael did not realise that the night of his perfect crime was also the night planned for the lovers’ elopement. Anita was in the boat when the sharks attacked and was killed by them, too. And Rafael’s ring? Anita did indeed give it back to him. When Rafael went to destroy any evidence of his crime, he cut open one of the dead sharks and found Anita’s hand, complete with ring, inside the shark’s stomach.

Bernard Smith lives near Eastbourne on the south coast of England. He and his wife teach English as a Foreign Language. He has written many books, mainly for exams, but also a number of Readers.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The Ring is a good example of the type of whodunnit in which even the actual crime is obscure. Only one person actually knows what happened that terrible night and, in his madness, Rafael cannot tell anyone anything useful. The reader knows instinctively that Rafael either did something or saw something terrible. But as each person gives their, entirely truthful, account of events, the web of confusion increases.

In fact, the reader is given all the information needed to solve the crime and identify the criminal, but it requires lateral thinking to see how everything fits together and you probably won’t do any better at trying to solve the puzzle than the narrator!
Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher’s notes

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 the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Tell students that this is a story about a person who goes mad for no reason that his friends or family can explain. Put students into groups and ask them to think of reasons why a person might suddenly go mad.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–4

1 Put students into pairs. Ask them to try to remember the story of Rafael and the sharks from Chapter 2.
2 Put students into pairs to role play the first conversation between Anita and the soldier.

Chapters 5–12

1 Put students into groups. Ask them to remember what happened in each of these conversations in Chapter 5.
   (a) The conversation between Rodrigo and Rafael’s mother.
   (b) The conversation between Rafael and the old goldsmith.
   (c) The conversation between Rafael and Rodrigo.
2 Put students into pairs to talk about the conversations in Chapter 7. What important information does the narrator learn in this chapter?
3 Put students in groups to discuss the following question.
   How is the story that Anita wrote (Chapter 10), the same as Anita’s real life? How is it different?
4 Put students into pairs to discuss these questions about the information in Chapter 10.
   (a) Where were the main characters on the evening that Anita disappeared?
   (b) What does the narrator not understand about this information?
   (c) What do you think happened that evening?
5 Ask students to work in pairs to answer these questions?
   (a) What was the ‘terrible secret’ that Clara told Rosa (Chapters 11 and 12)?

(b) Why did Miguel say the idea was impossible?

Chapters 13–15

1 Imagine that Rafael didn’t die of tuberculosis but got better. Should the doctor tell the police what he has discovered? Give reasons for and against.
2 Imagine that this story happened in your country and the police found out the true story. What would happen to Rafael? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Ask students to work in pairs. They try to think of another ending for the book which fits all the facts. They tell your ideas to other pairs. Can they see any problems with your ending? Can you see any problems with theirs?

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 1–4

anchor (n) a heavy metal object that is lowered into the water to prevent a ship or boat from moving
battery (n) an object that provides the electrical power for a toy, machine, car, etc.
engine (n) the part of a boat, car, plane, etc that makes it move
lamp (n) a thing that produces lights by using electricity, gas or oil
mad (adj) mentally ill
net (n) a piece of material that you use for catching fish
paraffin (n) oil used for heating and in lamps
shark (n) a large sea fish with very sharp teeth
shore (n) the land along the edge of a large area of water
spear (n) a pole with a sharp pointed blade at one end, used as a weapon

Chapters 5–12

carpet (n) a heavy woollen material for covering a floor
donkey (n) a grey or brown animal like a small horse with long ears
fingernail (n) the hard flat part that covers the top end of your finger
God (n) the being who Christians, Jews, Muslims pray to
goldsmith (n) a person who makes gold into jewellery
lead (v) to put a quantity of something onto a vehicle
magic (n) a special power used to make strange or impossible things happen

Chapters 13–15

ambulance (n) a special vehicle for taking ill or injured people to hospital
truth (n) true facts about something
tuberculosis (n) a serious infectious disease that affects the lungs
Activities before reading the book

Work in pairs. Look through the pictures in the book. Find these things in at least one picture.
- a boat shed
- a cassette
- a doctor
- a fishing net
- a knife
- a paraffin lamp
- a rope
- a shark
- a spear
- rocks

Activities while reading the book

Chapters 1–4
1 Match each person (a–f) from Chapter 1 with a description (i–vi).
(a) Rafael  
(b) Miguel  
(c) Anita  
(d) Rodrigo  
(e) Clara  
(f) Pablo  
(i) He is the narrator’s younger brother.  
(ii) He is a mad man.  
(iii) He is the shopkeeper.  
(iv) He is the narrator’s uncle.  
(v) She is a young, beautiful girl.  
(vi) She is Rafael’s mother.

2 Who, in Chapter 1 …
(a) had a terrible secret?  
(b) told their stories to the narrator?  
(c) lied to the narrator?  
(d) saw Rafael in the boat-house?  
(e) had long hair and a beard?  
(f) threw stones at Rafael?  
(g) lives in the house at the end of the village?  
(h) called to the narrator to help him?  
(i) studied to be a doctor?  
(j) did the narrator find on the beach when he went back 12 years later?

3 Put in order the story of Manuel’s death from Chapter 2.
(a) Manuel became weak and sleepy.  
(b) Manuel fell asleep and his heart stopped.  
(c) Manuel said to Rafael, ‘Be a good son. Help your mother.’  
(d) Manuel smoked a cigarette.  
(e) Manuel went cold.  
(f) Manuel went into the water to do something with the nets.  
(g) Manuel went white.  
(h) Something happened to the nets.  
(i) Suddenly a shark attacked Manuel.  
(j) The men put a shirt round the top of Manuel’s legs.  
(k) The other men pulled Manuel into the boat.  
(l) The shark bit off one of Manuel’s legs.

4 Match each adjective with a noun to make phrases from Chapter 3.
(a) beautiful  
(b) village  
(c) small  
(d) good  
(e) picture  
(f) story  
(g) little  
(h) big  
(i) poor  
(j) another  
(k) long and strange

(a) books  
(b) boys  
(c) brothers and sisters  
(d) child  
(e) fisherman  
(f) girl  
(g) magazines  
(h) plans  
(i) story  
(j) town  
(k) village


6 These sentences about the information in Chapter 4 are not correct. Find the mistakes and correct them.
(a) Anita was two years older than Rafael.  
(b) The soldier’s name was Carl.  
(c) He fought in America and many other places.  
(d) He had a small boat with a sail.  
(e) He saw Anita telling a story to a group of fishermen.  
(f) Soon the soldier came twice a week, on Tuesdays and Sundays.  
(g) The soldier was a stranger and people didn’t like him.  
(h) He bought Miguel a cassette player but they had no electricity in the village so he couldn’t use it.  
(i) One day Rodrigo found his daughter in her bed, cold and dead.  
(j) Rodrigo was angry because Anita’s clothes and favourite things weren’t there.  
(k) Miguel watched the soldier go out to his boat with Anita.  
(l) Rafael went mad because Anita went away with the soldier.
Chapters 5–12
1. What strange things happened on the night that Anita disappeared?
2. Complete these sentences about the information in Chapter 6. Use a word from the box in each sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>anchor</th>
<th>animal</th>
<th>beach</th>
<th>boat</th>
<th>cassette</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clothes</td>
<td>coast</td>
<td>donkey</td>
<td>engine</td>
<td>meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>noise</td>
<td>paraffin</td>
<td>player</td>
<td>ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rocks</td>
<td>shop</td>
<td>song</td>
<td>stories</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) The soldier arrived in his ... in the early afternoon.
(b) He lowered his ... a few metres from the shore.
(c) He didn't pull his boat onto the ....
(d) He didn't want to break the ....
(e) He went to Rodrigo's ....
(f) He had a big can of ... for Rodrigo's new lamp.
(g) He had a ... with Rodrigo.
(h) He came to the café and told lots of funny ....
(i) Rafael came into the café in his best ....
(j) Suddenly the soldier took a ... from his pocket.
(k) Miguel took it and put it in the ....
(l) It was a love ....
(m) The soldier went at about ten o'clock and he heard the ... of his engine.
(n) Rafael stood up and started to dance to the ...
(o) The next morning the news about Anita went round the ... like fire.
(p) Rafael went down the ... in his boat to look for her.
(q) Santiago couldn't find his ... and said Anita took it.
(r) Some fishermen found Rafael in the afternoon in a quiet place near the high ....
(s) He was like a mad ....
(t) He had the gold ... on a fishing line round his neck.

3. Which of these adjectives and phrases does Marta use to describe Anita in Chapter 8.
- always in trouble
- angry
- beautiful
- clear voice
- clever
- full of stories
- happy
- in love
- kind
- long and pink
- lazy
- fingernails
- lucky
- never helped
- proud
- strange and silly
- ideas
- terrible
- very good child

4. Are these sentences about the information in Chapter 9 true or false or we don't know?
(a) Anita stayed with her parents that night and talked to the soldier.
(b) Anita took things out of her box and put them in a bag.
(c) Anita sometimes met the soldier in the same place that she met Rafael.
(d) Anita's 'true prince' was the soldier.
(e) Anita was wearing the gold fish ring when she left.
(f) Anita gave the fish ring back to Rafael and told him about her plans.
(g) Rafael went mad because she didn't come back.
(h) Marta wrote a story about a magic ring.

Chapters 13–15
1. Work in pairs. The doctor asks himself some questions in Chapter 13, but cannot find a good answer for any of them. Complete his answers. Then check with the information in Chapter 13.
(a) Did Rafael kill someone? Who did he kill? Not the soldier because ...
(b) If the soldier was killed, who killed him? Not Rafael because ...
(c) If Anita was killed, who killed her? Not Anita because ...
(d) Anita's 'true prince' was the soldier.

2. Work in groups. The doctor thinks of someone to explain all the information. Who does he think of? What does he think happened? Why, in the end, does he decide this is also impossible? Check your answers with the chapter.

3. Put in order these events from the murder (Chapter 14 and 15).
(a) Anita stopped meeting Rafael.
(b) Rafael gave Anita the gold ring.
(c) Rafael killed Santiago's donkey, cut it up and put the pieces in the sea near the high rocks.
(d) Rafael made a plan to kill the soldier.
(e) Rafael saw Anita meeting the soldier in secret at a special place near the high rocks.
(f) Rafael tied the donkey's back legs to the soldier's boat.
(g) Rafael went to the café and saw the soldier there.
(h) That Sunday, the soldier arrived at the village.
(i) The soldier came to the village.

Activities after reading the book
Work in groups. Did you work out the answer before the end of the story? When did you work it out?