

Second Best by D H Lawrence Part 1

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. talk about sibling personalities and birth order;
2. categorize adjectives of personality;
3. listen for gist and detail;
4. listen for strong forms of auxiliary verbs in elided sentences;
5. discuss the protagonist's problem.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (an extract from the start of the story), Track 2 (a longer extract also beginning at the start), Track 3 (the rest of Part 1), Track 4 (a short extract) and Track 5 (full audio) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student; one dictionary per pair (class sets, the students' own or online – if these are not available, the transcript glossary)

Summary: The story tells of a young woman looking for love after a disappointing affair. It is told in two parts. In Part 1, Frances is lazing in the summer heat chatting to her sister about matters of the heart when they catch sight of a small, helpless creature.

Activity 1

Aims: to discuss typical relationships among siblings; to check understanding of adjectives of personality

1. Before the class, quickly draw a stick man 'family photo' of your immediate family that includes your brothers and sisters. If you don't have any, draw another family that you know well with siblings. Show it to the class and talk about the people in the 'photo'. Make sure you talk about:

- where it was taken
- the siblings' names
- the oldest and youngest
- their different personalities, and whether these conform to stereotypes of oldest, middle and youngest siblings, in your opinion. Invite the students to ask questions.

2. Ask the class to draw their own family photos. Give them just two minutes for this. When everyone has finished, put students into groups of three or four. Have them tell each other about their photos, focusing especially on whether their personalities are affected by birth order.

3. Use whole-class feedback to field a

discussion about personality and birth order among siblings.

4. Explain that the students are going to categorize some adjectives that appear in Part 1 into three groups: words that most likely describe an older sibling, words that most likely describe a younger sibling, and words that don't naturally fall in either category. Hand out the worksheet and point out Activity 1. Put the students into pairs or threes and make sure each group has access to a dictionary (alternatively, they could use the glossary at the end of the transcript). Explain that there are few clear-cut answers, so they will need to discuss their ideas and justify their choices.

5. Elicit the students' suggestions and use feedback to check their understanding of the vocabulary.

Key: *There are no right or wrong answers, although condescending, motherly, responsible and wise are likely to be chosen as adjectives to describe an older sibling, and petulant and unvexed to describe a younger one.*

Note: *Unvexed* is particularly uncommon; suggest that the students search in the dictionary for *vexed*.

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6. Have the students tell a partner which adjectives, if any, they would use to describe themselves and their siblings, giving reasons.

Activity 2

Aims: to listen for gist; to tune in to the narrator's voice

1. Explain that you are going to listen to the beginning of the story, whose main characters are sisters. Direct students to Activity 2. Tell them to only answer questions 1 to 3 as they listen to Track 1. Play the recording.

Key: 1. *Frances is much older than Anne. Anne is 14, Frances 23.*; 2. *They are in the countryside near their village, where they are talking.*; 3. *Anne thinks Frances is tired because she has been travelling.*

2. Tell the students to listen again, this time making notes in answer to questions 4 and 5. Play Track 1 again.

Key: 4. *It is typical in that Anne looks up to her sister.*; 5. *Anne likes to 'play elder' and 'mother' her big sister.*

Activity 3

Aim: to listen for detail

1. Explain to the students that they are going to listen to a longer extract from Part 1 and will hear the first part of the story again. Point out Activity 3 on the worksheet and ask them to read through the statements. You may want to check understanding of *mole* before listening. Play Track 2.

2. Hand out the transcript for the students to check their answers. Make sure they read only as far as the sentence: *She felt a keen pity for the little creature.* Once they have read through, let them check their answers in pairs.

Key: 1. *True*; 2. *False* – *Frances seems nervous.*; 3. *False* – *She says that she is only a bit tired because of the journey, but she doesn't explain the problem.*; 4. *False* – *It is a hot day.*; 5. *True*; 6. *False* – *Tom said he would take her to a feast, but he's*

taking someone else.; 7. *True*; 8. *False* – *Frances first sees the mole.*

Activity 4

Aims: to engage the students' interest in pests and how we deal with them, and to personalize the theme; to prepare them for listening to the final instalment; to listen for gist

1. Tell the students to look at the list of animals in Activity 4, and ask them what they have in common.

Key: *They can cause problems for humans, i.e. they are often perceived as 'pests'.*

To check understanding, ask them what problems pests can cause (e.g. *cockroaches spread diseases*).

2. Ask the students to imagine that they live and work in the countryside and have found a mole. If possible, find and show them a picture of a mole that emphasizes its cuteness. Have them decide, in pairs, what they are going to do with it. Will they kill it? If so, which of them is going to do it and how? If not, what will they do with it instead? Give them a minute or two to decide, then elicit some ideas.

3. Field the class's ideas about what Frances and Anne are going to do with the mole. Explain that they are going to listen to the final part of the story, to find out what they do with the mole. Play Track 3.

4. Hand out the transcript and ask them to read to check their answers.

Key: *Anne catches it (by stepping on it). Frances tells her to kill it (but refuses to do it herself). Anne succeeds in picking it up and wraps it in her handkerchief. She plans to take it home and ask her father or somebody else to kill it.*

Activity 5

Aim: to raise awareness of the use of strong forms of auxiliary verbs in elided sentences and short responses

1. Write on the board:

This story wasn't written by DH Lawrence.

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Ask the students whether they agree. Elicit the short response: *Yes, it was*. Elicit the full sentence: *Yes, it was written by DH Lawrence*. Point out the possibility of eliding, or leaving out, verb phrases when the context makes meaning clear.

2. Read out these two sentences and ask the students to repeat them. Make sure you pronounce the first *was* as a weak form (with a schwa; it isn't stressed) and the second as a strong form (rhymes with *Oz*; it is stressed):

*It was written by DH Lawrence.
Yes, it was.*

Ask the students how *was* is pronounced in each sentence.

3. Put the students in pairs. Have them do Activity 5 on the worksheet. When they have finished, play Track 4 for them to check their ideas. Then let them check against the transcript.

Note: They may notice the use of *so* and *done* as replacement words for the elided phrases. *Done* is used as a replacement past participle in verb phrases with perfect aspect; *so* means *in the way already described* and is often used with verbs of saying or thinking, e.g. 'No, he oughtn't! and I told him so.'

4. Nominate different students to contradict you with short phrases. Some examples:

It's hot in here.

No, it *isn't*.

I told you to do your homework.

I *have*. / I *have* done. / I *did*.

You can't swim in the sea. It's too cold.

You *can*.

Get the students to continue testing each other in pairs in the same way.

Prediction task

Aim: to predict the rest of the story

1. With the students still in pairs, ask them to read the final section of the transcript about Jimmy. Let them discuss why they think Frances is upset. Ask them to imagine

that Anne and Frances continue talking; Anne asks her sister to tell her what is really upsetting her. Ask them to improvise the dialogue between the sisters. To help them get started, write these suggested first lines on the board:

Anne What is it, Fran? You're not just tired, are you?

Frances Oh, it's nothing. It's silly, really.

Anne What is? Go on, tell me ...

Frances Well, ...

2. When the students have finished, field explanations for Frances's state of mind. Ask if anyone has any ideas about what is going to happen in the rest of the story.

Follow-up tasks

1. Suggest that the students find out more about birth order and its effect on personality.

2. Ask the students to imagine the conversation that Anne had with Tom after she found out he had invited another girl to the feast. Then ask them to write the dialogue.

3. Students read the transcript and write a one-paragraph summary of the story so far.

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Activity 1

Decide whether the adjectives describe older or younger siblings, or whether you do not associate them with either.

commonsensical	condescending	motherly	naïve	nervous
obtuse	peculiar	petulant	responsible	sarcastic
unvexed	whimsical	wilful	wise	

words you might associate with older siblings	words you associate with neither older nor younger siblings	words you might associate with younger siblings

Activity 2

Listen to the beginning of the story and answer questions 1–3.

1. Who is the eldest? What's the age difference?
2. Where are they and what are they doing?
3. Why does Anne think Frances is tired?

Now listen again and answer questions 4 and 5.

4. How is Anne and Frances's relationship a typical sisterly relationship?
5. How is their relationship unusual?

Activity 3

Listen to a longer extract of the story. Decide whether the statements are true or false. If they are false, state why.

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|--|--|
| 1. Frances has recently returned from Liverpool. | 5. Anne has something to eat. |
| 2. Anne seems nervous about something. | 6. Anne has been invited to a celebration by a man called Tom. |
| 3. Frances explains her problem to Anne. | 7. Frances thinks that Anne is being naïve about Tom. |
| 4. It starts to get cold. | 8. Anne spots a mole moving around near them. |

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Activity 4

What do these animals have in common?

cockroaches foxes moles fleas mosquitos pigeons

Activity 5

Cross out the unnecessary repetitions.

‘That’s a good thing,’ said Frances, very detached and ironic.

‘Well, it ~~is a good thing!~~ He reckoned he’d take me to Ollerton Feast, but he never did take me to Ollerton Feast. Look here, he took a servant from the rectory; I saw him.’

‘So he ought to take someone else,’ said Frances.

‘No, he oughtn’t take anyone else! and I told him he oughtn’t take anyone else. And I told him I should tell you – an’ I have told you.’

Click and snap went a nut between her teeth. She sorted out the kernel, and chewed complacently.

‘It doesn’t make much difference,’ said Frances.

‘Well, ‘appen it doesn’t make much difference; but I was mad with him all the same.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I was mad with him; he’s no right to go with a servant.’

‘He’s a perfect right to go with a servant,’ persisted Frances, very just and cold.

‘No, he hasn’t a perfect right to go with a servant, when he’d said he’d take me.’

Frances burst into a laugh of amusement and relief.

‘Oh, no; I’d forgot that,’ she said, adding, ‘And what did he say when you promised to tell me?’

‘He laughed and said, “She won’t fret her fat over that.”’

‘And she won’t fret her fat over it,’ sniffed Frances.

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Part 1

‘Oh, I’m tired!’ Frances exclaimed **petulantly**, and in the same instant she dropped down on the turf, near the hedge-bottom. Anne stood a moment surprised, then, accustomed to the **vagaries** of her beloved Frances, said:

‘Well, and aren’t you always likely to be tired, after travelling that blessed long way from Liverpool yesterday?’ and she plumped down beside her sister. Anne was a wise young body of fourteen, very buxom, brimming with common sense. Frances was much older, about twenty-three, and **whimsical, spasmodic**. She was the beauty and the clever child of the family. She plucked the **goose-grass** buttons from her dress in nervous, desperate fashion. Her beautiful profile, looped above with black hair, warm with the dusky-and-scarlet complexion of a pear, was calm as a mask, her thin brown hand plucked nervously.

‘It’s not the journey,’ she said, objecting to Anne’s **obtuseness**. Anne looked inquiringly at her darling. The young girl, in her self-confident, practical way, proceeded to **reckon up** this whimsical creature. But suddenly she found herself full in the eyes of Frances; felt two dark, hectic eyes flaring challenge at her, and she shrank away. Frances was **peculiar** for these great, exposed looks, which disconcerted people by their violence and their suddenness.

‘What’s a matter, poor old **duck**?’ asked Anne, as she folded the slight, **wilful** form of her sister in her arms. Frances laughed shakily, and nestled down for comfort on the budding breasts of the strong girl.

‘Oh, I’m only a bit tired,’ she murmured, on the point of tears.

‘Well, of course you are, what do you expect?’ soothed Anne. It was a joke to Frances that Anne should play elder, almost mother to her. But then, Anne was in her **unvexed** teens; men were like big dogs to her: while Frances, at twenty-three, suffered a good deal.

The country was intensely morning-still. On the common everything shone beside its shadow, and the hillside gave off heat in silence. The brown turf seemed in a low state of combustion, the leaves of the oaks were scorched brown. Among the blackish foliage in the distance shone the small red and orange of the village.

The willows in the **brook-course** at the foot of the **common** suddenly shook with a dazzling effect like diamonds. It was a puff of wind. Anne resumed her normal position. She spread her knees, and put in her lap a handful of hazelnuts, whity-green leafy things, whose one cheek was tanned between brown and pink. These she began to crack and eat. Frances, with bowed head, **mused** bitterly.

‘Eh, you know Tom Smedley?’ began the young girl, as she pulled a tight kernel out of its shell.

‘I suppose so,’ replied Frances **sarcastically**.

‘Well, he gave me a wild rabbit what he’d caught, to keep with my tame one – and it’s living.’

‘That’s a good thing,’ said Frances, very detached and ironic.

‘Well, it *is*! He reckoned he’d take me to Ollerton Feast, but he never did. Look here, he took a servant from the **rectory**; I saw him.’

‘So he ought,’ said Frances.

‘No, he oughtn’t! and I told him so. And I told him I should tell you – an’ I have done.’ Click and snap went a nut between her teeth. She sorted out the kernel, and

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chewed complacently.

'It doesn't make much difference,' said Frances.

'Well, 'appen it doesn't; but I was mad with him all the same.'

'Why?'

'Because I was; he's no right to go with a servant.'

'He's a perfect right,' persisted Frances, very just and cold.

'No, he hasn't, when he'd said he'd take me.'

Frances burst into a laugh of amusement and relief.

'Oh, no; I'd forgot that,' she said, adding, 'And what did he say when you promised to tell me?'

'He laughed and said, "She won't **fret her fat** over that."'

'And she won't,' sniffed Frances.

There was silence. The common, with its **sere**, blonde-headed thistles, its heaps of silent bramble, its brown-husked gorse in the flare of sunshine, seemed visionary. Across the brook began the immense pattern of agriculture, white chequering of barley stubble, brown squares of wheat, khaki patches of pasture, red stripes of fallow, with the woodland and the tiny village dark like ornaments, leading away to the distance, right to the hills, where the check-pattern grew smaller and smaller, till, in the blackish haze of heat, far off, only the tiny white squares of barley stubble showed distinct.

'Eh, I say, here's a rabbit hole!' cried Anne suddenly. 'Should we watch if one comes out? You won't have to **fidget**, you know.'

The two girls sat perfectly still. Frances watched certain objects in her surroundings: they had a peculiar, unfriendly look about them: the weight of greenish elderberries on their purpling stalks; the twinkling of the yellowing crab-apples that clustered high up in the hedge, against the sky: the exhausted, limp leaves of the primroses lying flat in the **hedge-bottom**: all looked strange to her. Then her eyes caught a movement. A mole was moving silently over the warm, red soil, nosing, **shuffling hither and thither**, flat, and dark as a shadow, shifting about, and as suddenly brisk, and as silent, like a very ghost of **joie de vivre**. Frances **started**, from habit was about to call on Anne to kill the little pest. But, to-day, her lethargy of unhappiness was too much for her. She watched the little brute paddling, snuffing, touching things to discover them, running in blindness, delighted to ecstasy by the sunlight and the hot, strange things that caressed its belly and its nose. She felt a keen pity for the little creature.

'Eh, our Fran, look there! It's a mole.'

Anne was on her feet, standing watching the dark unconscious beast. Frances frowned with anxiety.

'It doesn't run off, does it?' said the young girl softly. Then she stealthily approached the creature. The mole paddled fumblingly away. In an instant Anne put her foot upon it, not too heavily. Frances could see the struggling, swimming movement of the little pink hands of the brute, the twisting and twitching of its pointed nose, as it wrestled under the sole of the boot.

'It *does* **wriggle!**' said the bonny girl, knitting her brows in a frown at the eerie sensation. Then she bent down to look at her trap. Frances could now see, beyond the edge of the boot-sole, frantic **rowing** of the flat pink hands.

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'Kill the thing,' she said, turning away her face.

'Oh – I'm not,' laughed Anne, shrinking. 'You can, if you like.'

'I *don't* like,' said Frances, with quiet intensity.

After several dabbing attempts, Anne succeeded in picking up the little animal by the scruff of its neck. It threw back its head, flung its long blind **snout** from side to side, the mouth open in a peculiar oblong, with tiny pinkish teeth at the edge. The blind, frantic mouth gaped and **writhed**. The body, heavy and clumsy, hung **scarcely** moving.

'Isn't it a snappy little thing,' observed Anne, twisting to avoid the teeth.

'What are you going to do with it?' asked Frances sharply.

'It's got to be killed – look at the damage they do. I s'll take it home and let **dada** or somebody kill it. I'm not going to let it go.'

She **swaddled** the creature clumsily in her pocket-handkerchief and sat down beside her sister. There was an interval of silence, during which Anne combated the efforts of the mole.

'You've not had much to say about Jimmy this time. Did you see him often in Liverpool?' Anne asked suddenly.

'Once or twice,' replied Frances, giving no sign of how the question troubled her.

'And aren't you **sweet on** him any more, then?'

'I should think I'm not, seeing that he's engaged.'

'Engaged? Jimmy Barrass! Well, of all things! I never thought *he'd* get engaged.'

'Why not, he's as much right as anybody else?' snapped Frances.

Anne was fumbling with the mole.

'**Appen so**,' she said at length; 'but I never thought Jimmy would, though.'

'Why not?' snapped Frances.

'I don't know – this **blessed** mole, it'll not keep still! – who's he got engaged to?'

'How should I know?'

'I thought you'd ask him; you've known him long enough. I s'd think he thought he'd get engaged now he's a Doctor of Chemistry.'

Frances laughed in spite of herself.

'What's that got to do with it?' she asked.

'I'm sure it's got a lot. He'll want to feel *somebody* now, so he's got engaged. Hey, stop it; go in!'

But at this juncture the mole almost succeeded in wriggling clear. It wrestled and twisted frantically, waved its pointed blind head, its mouth standing open like a little shaft, its big, wrinkled hands spread out.

'Go in with you!' urged Anne, poking the little creature with her forefinger, trying to get it back into the handkerchief. Suddenly the mouth turned like a spark on her finger.

'Oh!' she cried, 'he's bit me.'

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Glossary

petulant annoyed and behaving in an unreasonable way because you cannot get what you want

vagaries (old-fashioned) unexpected changes that you cannot predict

whimsical made or done for fun, not seriously

spasmodic happening for short periods and not very often

goose-grass clumps of fluff or fabric on an item of clothing

obtuse not understanding explanations or situations quickly

reckon up (old-fashioned) to contemplate, look at

peculiar strange, often in an unpleasant way

duck (dialect) like dear, a term of affection

wilful determined to do what you want and not caring if you upset other people

unvexed (unusual) not worried

brook-course the path of a small stream

common a large piece of open land near a village where anyone can walk or graze livestock

muse to think about something in a careful, slow way

sarcastic the activity of saying the opposite of what you mean in a way intended to make someone else feel stupid or show them that you are angry

rectory the house of a priest

fret your fat (dialect) to worry or care

sere extremely dry

fidget to keep making small quick movements with your hands because you are bored, nervous or impatient

hedge-bottom the bottom of a line of bushes

shuffle to walk slowly and carefully without lifting your feet

hither and thither (old-fashioned, literary) in many different directions, here and there

joie de vivre (from French) a feeling of pleasure that comes from enjoying life

start (old-fashioned) to jump with fright or surprise

wriggle to move by twisting and turning quickly

row to move a boat through water using long flat poles (oars)

snout the long nose of an animal

writhe to move by twisting and turning, especially when you feel a lot of pain

scarcely (old-fashioned, literary) almost not

dada (dialect) father, daddy

swaddled usually used to describe wrapping a baby very tightly in a blanket

sweet on (colloquial, old-fashioned) attracted to someone in a romantic way

'appen so (dialect, colloquial) I suppose so; maybe

blessed (colloquial, old-fashioned) used for emphasizing that you are annoyed about something (pronounced as two syllables: /'blesɪd/)

commonsensical using good judgment and making sensible decisions

condescending showing that you think you are more important or more intelligent than other people

naïve lacking in experience in life and believing things too easily