

Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad

By M R James

Part 5

Author: Ceri Jones

Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson, the students will:

1. recall the story so far;
2. listen for specific information;
3. listen for gist and attitude;
4. listen for detail;
5. practise intonation patterns in questions;
6. discuss attitudes to superstitions.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first part of Part 5), Track 2 (rest of Part 5), Track 3 (short extracts) and Track 4 (full audio) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

Summary: The story is set in Burnstow, a seaside town on the east coast of England. It tells the story of how a university professor makes an interesting discovery with disturbing consequences. It is told in seven parts. In Part 5, Parkins and the Colonel discuss superstitions and the possible link between the whistle and the wind.

Activity 1

Aims: to recall the main events from the previous instalment and their relevance to the story; to listen to the first, short extract

1. Write these three words on the board: *whistle, wind, dreams*. Ask the students to work in small groups to recall the role of the three words in the last instalment (Part 4).
 2. Ask each group to report back on one of the words and ask them if they remember what happened at the end. Ask them to look again at the last paragraph in their transcripts from the last lesson and underline any information that they think might be significant. Ask them to share what they have underlined with the whole class. Prompt discussion of the possible cause of the 'rustling'.
 3. Tell the students that they are going to listen to a conversation between Parkins and the maid and answer some questions. Hand out the worksheet and tell students to read the questions in Activity 1.
- Play Track 1.
4. Ask the students to compare their answers in pairs and discuss the possible significance of the conversation. Tell them that it includes an important clue for the rest of the story,

but don't tell them what it is. (The crumpled sheets and the rustling of the supposed rat are both significant details.)

Key: 1. *whether he wants an extra blanket, and on which bed he'd like it;* 2. *because he has only slept in one of the beds;* 3. *He imagines he must have moved the bedclothes when he was unpacking his bag.*

Activity 2

Aims: to practise extensive listening; to listen for gist and attitude

1. Explain to the students that they are going to listen to a conversation between Parkins and the Colonel about superstition and the supernatural. Ask them to look at Activity 2 on the worksheet and work in pairs to discuss whether the sentences apply to Parkins or the Colonel. Ask the students to share their answers with the whole class, but do not confirm the answers at this stage.
2. Ask the students to listen to the rest of Part 5 and check their answers. Play Track 2, then check the answers with the whole class. If there is still some doubt or confusion about the correct answers, give the students the complete transcript and ask them to check their answers in the transcript.

Key: 1. C; 2. P; 3. P; 4. C

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3. When the students have checked their answers, ask them to look again at the transcript and answer the following questions (you can write them on the board or read them out to the class).

1. How would you describe Parkins's tone and attitude when he's discussing the topic of superstitions with the Colonel?
2. How does the Colonel react to Parkins's tone?
3. Do the two men enjoy each other's company?

Key: 1. He is derisive of the idea that there could be any truth in superstitions, and proceeds to 'lecture' the Colonel.; 2. He becomes restive.; 3. Though they do not agree on the subject of the supernatural, overall they get on very well.

4. To recap, ask the class what exactly the superstition was that the Colonel described and how it ties in with the story and, more specifically, the title of the story. (*The superstition says that if you whistle, the wind will blow. Parkins blew on the whistle he found and immediately the wind began to blow. The title suggests that the whistle conjures up more than a wind.*)

Activity 3

Aims: to listen for detail; to look at intonation patterns in questions

1. Refer students to Activity 3 on the worksheet. Ask them to listen to some extracts from the story and write down the questions they hear. Play Track 3. They may need to listen two or three times to get the complete questions.

Key: 1. Is there a superstition of that kind still current in your part of the country?; 2. Do you mean to tell me you don't believe in second-sight, or ghosts, or anything of that kind?; 3. And what sort of whistle did you use?

2. Ask the students to look at the questions again and practise reading them out loud, expressing the same emotion as in the audio. Ask them to decide which question shows the most surprise and how the intonation reflects this. Play Track 3 again. Check the answers with the whole class.

Key: Question 2 shows the most surprise. This is reflected in the wider pitch range on the stressed words.

Activity 4

Aim: to discuss local superstitions and attitudes to superstitions

1. Ask the students to look at Activity 4 on the worksheet and complete the superstitions according to their meanings in their own culture. They may not be familiar with all of them, in which case just ask them to guess. When all the class is ready, read out the versions below. Ask the students if the superstitions in their countries are the same or different. For example, in most countries, black cats are considered unlucky.

1. If a black cat crosses your path, you will have good luck.
2. If you walk under a ladder, you will have bad luck.
3. If you break a mirror, you will have seven years' bad luck.
4. If you see a single magpie, you must salute it or you will have bad luck.
5. If you drop a fork on the floor, you will have an unexpected visitor.

2. Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups and think of more superstitions. Ask them to write out the first part of three or more superstitions, using an *if* clause, as on the worksheet.

3. Ask the students to pass their *if* clauses to another pair or group, who must then complete the superstitions. When they have finished, they should read their superstitions out to the class and discuss any differences.

4. Ask the students to discuss the questions on the worksheet in small groups and then report back on their discussion to the class. Extend the discussion to personal good luck rituals and charms, asking the students if they have any good luck charms or rituals they use before or during an exam or an important sporting event. Give a personal example if you can. For example, *I used to wear the same t-shirt to all my exams at university.*

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Follow-up tasks

1. Ask the students to read through the transcript again and underline the main events and the main points of interest in the conversation between Parkins and the Colonel. They should then write a short summary of Part 5 (no more than 50 words).
2. Superstitions and good luck rituals are very common among sports people. Ask the students to search for stories of sports stars' superstitions or rituals on the internet. They can compare and discuss their findings in the next lesson.
3. A lot of superstitions surround the number 13 in English-speaking countries. Ask the students to look for examples of superstitious behaviour connected to the number 13.

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Activity 1

Listen and answer the questions.

1. What does the maid ask Parkins?
2. Why is he surprised by the question?
3. How does he explain the situation?

Activity 2

Complete the sentences by adding either *P* (for *Parkins*) or *C* (for *the Colonel*) in the gaps.

1. _____ knows of a superstition involving whistles and wind.
2. _____ doesn't believe in superstitions, ghosts or the supernatural.
3. _____ thinks that people make up superstitions to explain phenomena they don't fully understand.
4. _____ thinks that the whistle may have supernatural powers.

Activity 3

Listen and write the questions you hear.

1. Should you, indeed!
_____?
2. What!
_____?
3. Whistling, were you?
_____?

Activity 4

a. Complete the superstitions.

1. If a black cat crosses your path, ...
2. If you walk under a ladder, ...
3. If you break a mirror, ...
4. If you see a single magpie, ...
5. If you drop a fork on the floor, ...

b. Discuss the questions.

- What superstitions are most common in your country or region?
- Do you think people in your country are generally superstitious?
- What is your personal attitude to superstition?

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Transcript

After breakfast he was in his room, putting the finishing touches to his golfing costume – fortune had again allotted the Colonel to him for a partner – when one of the maids came in.

“Oh, if you please,” she said, “would you like any extra blankets on your bed, sir?”

“Ah! thank you,” said Parkins. “Yes, I think I should like one. It seems likely to turn rather colder.”

In a very short time the maid was back with the blanket.

“Which bed should I put it on, sir?” she asked.

“What? Why, that one – the one I slept in last night,” he said, pointing to it.

“Oh yes! I beg your pardon, sir, but you seemed to have tried both of ‘em; **leastways**, we had to make ‘em both up this morning.”

“Really? How very absurd!” said Parkins. “I certainly never touched the other, except to lay some things on it. Did it actually seem to have been slept in?”

“Oh yes, sir!” said the maid. “Why, all the things was crumpled and thrown about all ways, if you’ll excuse me, sir – quite as if anyone ‘adn’t passed but a very poor night, sir.”

“Dear me,” said Parkins. “Well, I may have disordered it more than I thought when I unpacked my things. I’m very sorry to have given you the trouble, I’m sure. I expect a friend of mine soon, by the way – a gentleman from Cambridge – to come and occupy it for a night or two. That will be all right, I suppose, won’t it?”

“Oh yes, to be sure, sir. Thank you, sir. It’s no trouble, I’m sure,” said the maid, and departed to giggle with her colleagues.

Parkins set forth, with a stern determination to improve his game.

I am glad to be able to report that he succeeded so far in this enterprise that the Colonel, who had been rather **repining** at the prospect of a second day’s play in his company, became quite chatty as the morning advanced; and his voice boomed out over the flats, as certain also of our own minor poets have said, “like some great **bourdon** in a **minster** tower.”

“Extraordinary wind, that, we had last night,” he said. “In my old home we should have said someone had been whistling for it.”

“Should you, indeed!” said Parkins. “Is there a superstition of that kind still current in your part of the country?”

“I don’t know about superstition,” said the Colonel. “They believe in it all over Denmark and Norway, as well as on the Yorkshire coast; and my experience is, mind you, that there’s generally something at the bottom of what these country-folk **hold to**, and have held to for generations. But it’s your drive” (or whatever it might have been: the golfing reader will have to imagine appropriate digressions at the proper intervals). When conversation was resumed, Parkins said with a slight hesitancy: “**Apropos** of what you were saying just now, Colonel, I think I ought to tell you that my own views on such subjects are very strong. I am, in fact, a convinced disbeliever in what is called the ‘supernatural.’”

“What!” said the Colonel, “do you mean to tell me you don’t believe in **second-sight**, or ghosts, or anything of that kind?”

“In nothing whatever of that kind,” returned Parkins firmly.

Track 1

Track 2

Track 3

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Transcript

“Well,” said the Colonel, “but it appears to me at that rate, sir, that you must be little better than a **Sadducee**.”

Parkins was on the point of answering that, in his opinion, the Sadducees were the most sensible sons he had ever read of in the Old Testament; but, feeling some doubt as to whether much mention of them was to be found in that work, he preferred to laugh the accusation off.

“Perhaps I am,” he said; “but – Here, give me my **cleek**, boy! – Excuse me one moment, Colonel.” A short interval. “Now, as to whistling for the wind, let me give you my theory about it. The laws which govern winds are really not at all perfectly known – to fisher-folk and such, of course, not known at all. A man or woman of eccentric habits, perhaps, or a stranger, is seen repeatedly on the beach at some unusual hour, and is heard whistling. Soon afterwards a violent wind rises; a man who could read the sky perfectly or who possessed a barometer could have foretold that it would. The simple people of a fishing-village have no barometers, and only a few rough rules for **prophesying** weather. What more natural than that the eccentric personage I **postulated** should be regarded as having raised the wind, or that he or she should clutch eagerly at the reputation of being able to do so? Now, take last night’s wind: as it happens, I myself was whistling. I blew a whistle twice, and the wind seemed to come absolutely in answer to my call. If anyone had seen me –”

The audience had been a little **restive** under this **harangue**, and Parkins had, I fear, fallen somewhat into the tone of a lecturer; but at the last sentence the Colonel stopped.

“Whistling, were you?” he said. “And what sort of whistle did you use? Play this stroke first.” Interval.

“About that whistle you were asking, Colonel. It’s rather a curious one. I have it in my – No; I see I’ve left it in my room. As a matter of fact, I found it yesterday.”

And then Parkins narrated the manner of his discovery of the whistle, upon hearing which the Colonel grunted, and **opined** that, in Parkins’s place, he should himself be careful about using a thing that had belonged to a set of **Papists**, of whom, speaking generally, it might be affirmed that you never knew what they might not have been up to. From this topic he diverged to the enormities of the Vicar, who had given notice on the previous Sunday that Friday would be the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, and that there would be service at eleven o’clock in the church. This and other similar proceedings constituted in the Colonel’s view a strong presumption that the Vicar was a concealed Papist, if not a Jesuit; and Parkins, who could not very readily follow the Colonel in this region, did not disagree with him. In fact, they got on so well together in the morning that there was no talk on either side of their separating after lunch.

Both continued to play well during the afternoon, or, at least, well enough to make them forget everything else until the light began to fail them. Not until then did Parkins remember that he had meant to do some more investigating at the preceptory; but it was of no great importance, he reflected. One day was as good as another; he might as well go home with the Colonel.

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Glossary

Glossary

leastways (dialect, informal) at least

repining feeling unhappy

bourdon church bell

minster large and important church

hold to to continue to believe

apropos of (formal) relating to (used for saying something else about the subject you are talking about)

second-sight knowledge that cannot be explained, for example about something that is happening in a different place

Sadducee an ancient Jewish sect, which was said to refute the existence of the soul, the spirit or life after death

cleek a kind of golf club

prophecy to describe a future event using religious or magic powers

postulate (formal) to suggest the existence of something as a basis for reasoning

restive not willing or able to keep still or be patient

harangue a long, pompous speech

opine (formal) to state your opinion

Papists an insulting word for people who are Roman Catholic