

Australian Teacher

Reading Comprehension

*Suitable age group:
10 and older*



Frederick the Fisherman



He was always there when I arrived, just before sunrise. He'd be sitting at the end of the jetty, rod in hands, waiting for a bite.

A most unsociable fellow he was. We'd sit there for hours, just him and me, and not a word would be spoken. I used to try to talk to him but all I got were one-word responses, sometimes only grunts or nods, so I gave up. He obviously preferred the silence. Maybe he was deep in his thoughts, I never knew.

I'd heard that his name was Frederick. No-one could tell me any more about him than that. He'd been coming to Coogee Beach for about five years, every morning (weather permitting).

I don't know how old he was. It was hard to tell really. He was always dressed the same, summer and winter, with one of those fishermen's hats with a flap down the back, a dark waterproof coat, and big blue rubber boots. He had a full grey beard with flecks of black; his hands were weathered and gnarled.

Did he have a family? Where did he live? No-one knew. And I think no-one cared.

Frederick didn't catch too many fish. When he did get a bite he'd reel it in, take it off the hook, throw it in the bucket, cast his line again and sit back on his folding chair...no words, no gestures, no emotions.

It annoyed me that he kept fish that were undersized; in all the hundreds of times I sat out there beside him I never saw him throw a small one back.

English

Occasionally a boat would pass by and someone on it would wave. I'd wave back. But not Frederick. I don't think he even noticed boats. He'd just stare blankly, vacantly, at the water.

One winter's morning I arrived at the jetty. It was fresh and crisp, good for fishing, but Frederick wasn't there.

Days passed.

Weeks.

Still no Frederick.

Then one day I was reading the newspaper and I came across this:

Obituary: *Frederick William Thompson, 1949-2019. Former Professor of Mathematics at the University of Western Australia. Respected and admired by colleagues and students; renowned for his humour and for making mathematics fun and interesting. Cause of death: unknown (suspected broken heart). Mr Thompson was the devoted husband of Laura (deceased) who was tragically drowned in a 2014 boating accident.*

RIP Frederick the Fisherman.

Story Details

Genre: *narrative*

Mood: *sombre, reflective*

Vocabulary Enrichment: *unsociable preferred gestures renowned colleagues tragically inwardness solitary*

Figurative Language Used: *paradox*

Talk about or Write about

1. Why do you think Frederick went fishing every day?
 2. Frederick's 'inwardness' and solitary behaviour can be explained by a tragic incident from his past. Do you think he may have been on the boat when his wife drowned? What may have happened?
 3. Why should we not be too quick to judge people who we don't really know?
 4. A tragedy can affect someone's future behaviour. Perhaps a wonderful experience may also affect future behaviour. Can you think of an example?
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