

The Distant Past

Short Story by William Trevor



READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **5A** Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction. **RC-12(B)** Make complex inferences about text and use textual evidence to support understanding.

DID YOU KNOW?

William Trevor . . .

- did not abandon his art career to write full-time until his mid-30s.
- gave up sculpting because his pieces became too abstract.
- enjoys Woody Allen and Marx Brothers movies.

Meet the Author

William Trevor born 1928

A masterful storyteller, William Trevor is admired both for his novels and for his short stories. Trevor often writes about ordinary people who fall victim to circumstance. He depicts their lives with compassion, subtle irony, and careful detail.

Middle-Class Gypsy Born in County Cork, Ireland, Trevor was raised as a Protestant. During his childhood, his family relocated often, moving from town to town throughout southern Ireland as his father pursued a career in banking. While leading the life of “a middle-class gypsy,” as Trevor later termed it, there were times when he did not attend school at all as the family settled into a new home. Nevertheless, Trevor loved to read, devouring as many detective stories and crime novels as he could find. He also enjoyed going to the movies, even though they were often heavily censored in Ireland during this period.

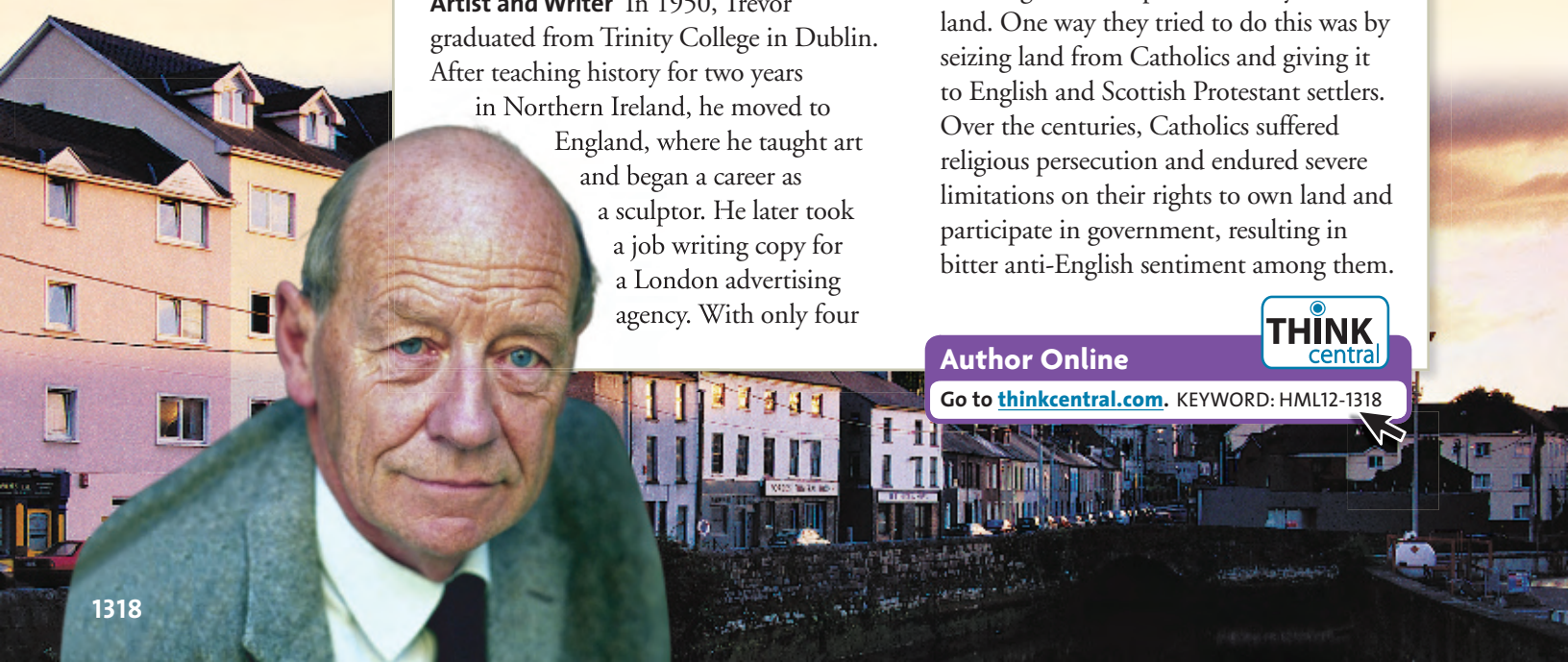
Artist and Writer In 1950, Trevor graduated from Trinity College in Dublin. After teaching history for two years in Northern Ireland, he moved to England, where he taught art and began a career as a sculptor. He later took a job writing copy for a London advertising agency. With only four

lines of copy to write in as many days, Trevor found himself with ample spare time. To supplement his income, he started writing fiction, publishing his first novel in 1958. It was largely ignored, but his second novel, *The Old Boys* (1964), won an important literary prize. His first book of short stories, *The Day We Got Drunk on Cake and Other Stories* (1967), cemented his reputation as a major new author.

Ireland's Troubles As a Protestant who grew up in the largely Catholic south of Ireland, Trevor has an unusual perspective on Anglo-Irish relations. He sets many of his stories in Ireland and frequently examines the ways in which people—both Protestant and Catholic—cope with Ireland's long history of violence and hatred. The conflict can be traced back to the 12th century, when England gained control of part of Ireland. The English later attempted to establish Protestantism as the sole religion in the predominately Catholic land. One way they tried to do this was by seizing land from Catholics and giving it to English and Scottish Protestant settlers. Over the centuries, Catholics suffered religious persecution and endured severe limitations on their rights to own land and participate in government, resulting in bitter anti-English sentiment among them.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-1318



● **LITERARY ANALYSIS: SETTING**

Setting, as you recall, is the time and place of the action in a story. “The Distant Past” takes place in southern Ireland over a number of decades during the 20th century. In addition to time and place, setting encompasses culture and customs—the characters’ way of life. Religion, historical events, economic conditions, popular attitudes, and leisure pastimes are all part of a story’s setting. As you read this story, notice such aspects of the setting and how they affect the characters. Consider ways in which the setting contributes to the story’s conflict.

● **READING SKILL: ANALYZE CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS**

“The Distant Past” centers on the complex relationship between the main characters—the Middletons—and the townspeople who know them. Sometimes the narrator will state a relationship directly:

In the town they were regarded as harmlessly peculiar. Odd, people said, and in time the reference took on a burnish of affection.

At other times you must infer the relationship from clues such as laughter or kind actions. As you read, use a chart to make notes about the Middletons’ relationship with the townspeople at different points in the story. Try to determine the reasons for their feelings toward each other.

Relationship	Evidence	Reasons

▲ **VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

Knowing the following boldfaced words will help you understand the story. Use context to help you figure out the meanings. Then provide your own definitions of the words.

1. The new **regime** began governing in October.
2. I enjoy the **convivial** spirit of small friendly gatherings.
3. No one else gave **credence** to the Gurneys’ odd ideas.
4. They were an **anachronism**, out of touch with the times.
5. The comedy was so funny, it made us **guffaw**.
6. To persist in inappropriate behavior is sheer **perversity**.
7. The brutal invader committed a terrible **atroc**ity.
8. “I see no happiness ahead,” she sighed **disconsolately**.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

When should we let go of the PAST?

There are many reasons why people, particularly older people, cling to the past. They may want to relive happy memories, nurse painful wounds, or avoid confronting present difficulties. Is it harmless to live in the past, or can it create problems? In the following story, William Trevor explores what can happen when people remain immersed in history.

DISCUSS Recall someone you know who likes to think and talk about events that happened long ago. Discuss this person with a small group of classmates. Why do you think he or she focuses on the past? How does this focus affect his or her life?



THE DISTANT PAST

William Trevor

BACKGROUND Catholics in Ireland demanded self-rule in the late 1800s, but Protestant settlers in the north opposed the plan. In 1920, following a violent rebellion, Britain divided Ireland into two self-governing entities: Northern Ireland and the mainly Catholic Southern Ireland, which a year later came to be called the Irish Free State. By 1949, the Irish Free State had severed all ties with Great Britain, becoming the independent Republic of Ireland. Meanwhile, bloody clashes between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland increased. In the 1960s, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), an outlawed group of Catholic militants, launched terrorist attacks aimed at removing the British from Northern Ireland.

In the town and beyond it they were regarded as harmlessly peculiar. Odd, people said, and in time this reference took on a burnish¹ of affection.

They had always been thin, silent with one another, and similar in appearance: a brother and sister who shared a family face. It was a bony countenance, with pale blue eyes and a sharp, well-shaped nose and high cheek-bones. Their father had had it too, but unlike them their father had been an irresponsible and careless man, with red flecks in his cheeks that they didn't have at all. The Middletons of Carraveagh² the family had once been known as, but now the brother and sister were just the Middletons, for Carraveagh didn't count any more, except to them. **A**

10 They owned four Herefords,³ a number of hens, and the house itself, three miles outside the town. It was a large house, built in the reign of George II,⁴ a monument that reflected in its glory and later decay the fortunes of a family. As the brother and sister aged, its roof increasingly ceased to afford protection, rust ate at its gutters, grass thrived in two thick channels all along its avenue. Their father had mortgaged his inherited estate, so local rumor claimed, in order to keep a Catholic Dublin woman in brandy and jewels. When he died, in 1924, his two children discovered that they possessed

Analyze Visuals ►

What **mood** do the painting's details help create? Explain.

A ANALYZE RELATIONSHIPS

Based on lines 1–9, what can you **infer** about the Middletons?

1. **burnish**: a smooth, polished finish.
2. **Carraveagh** (cär'ə-vā')
3. **Herefords** (hûr'fərdz): cattle of a breed raised for beef.
4. **George II**: king of Great Britain, 1727–1760.

Back View of a Victorian House (1958), Ruskin Spear.
Oil on canvas, 89 cm × 114.3 cm. Private collection.
© Bridgeman Art Library.



Ruth Sparrow

only a dozen acres. It was locally said also that this adversity hardened their will and that because of it they came to love the remains of Carraveagh more than they could ever have loved a husband or a wife. They blamed for their ill-fortune the Catholic
 20 Dublin woman whom they'd never met and they blamed as well the new national **regime**, contriving in their eccentric way to relate the two. In the days of the Union Jack⁵ such women would have known their place: wasn't it all part and parcel? **B**

Twice a week, on Fridays and Sundays, the Middletons journeyed into the town, first of all in a trap⁶ and later in a Ford Anglia car. In the shops and elsewhere they made, quite gently, no secret of their continuing loyalty to the past. They attended on Sundays St. Patrick's Protestant Church, a place that matched their mood, for prayers were still said there for the King whose sovereignty their country had denied. The revolutionary regime would not last, they quietly informed the Reverend Packham: what sense was there in green-painted pillar-
 30 boxes⁷ and a language that nobody understood?⁸

On Fridays, when they took seven or eight dozen eggs to the town, they dressed in pressed tweeds and were accompanied over the years by a series of red setters, the breed there had always been at Carraveagh. They sold the eggs in Keogh's grocery and then had a drink with Mrs. Keogh in the part of her shop that was devoted to the consumption of refreshment. Mr. Middleton had whisky and his sister Tio Pepe.⁹ They enjoyed the occasion, for they liked Mrs. Keogh and were liked by her in return. Afterwards they shopped, chatting to the shopkeepers about whatever news there was, and then they went to Healy's Hotel for a few more drinks before driving home.

40 Drink was their pleasure and it was through it that they built up, in spite of their loyalty to the past, such **convivial** relationships with the people of the town. Fat Driscoll, who kept the butcher's shop, used even to joke about the past when he stood with them in Healy's Hotel or stood behind his own counter cutting their slender chops or thinly slicing their liver. "Will you ever forget it, Mr. Middleton? I'd ha' run like a rabbit if you'd lifted a finger at me." Fat Driscoll would laugh then, rocking back on his heels with a glass of stout¹⁰ in his hand or banging their meat on to his weighing-scales. Mr. Middleton would smile. "There was alarm in your eyes, Mr. Driscoll," Miss Middleton would murmur, smiling also at the memory of the distant occasion.

50 Fat Driscoll, with a farmer called Maguire and another called Breen, had stood in the hall of Carraveagh, each of them in charge of a shotgun. The Middletons, children then, had been locked with their mother and father and an aunt into

regime (rā-zhēm') *n.* a government in power

B SETTING
 What do you learn about the setting from lines 10–22?

convivial (kən-vĭv'ē-əl)
adj. characterized by friendly companionship; sociable

5. **days . . . Jack:** days when Ireland was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Union Jack is the British flag.

6. **trap:** a light, two-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage.

7. **green-painted pillar-boxes:** mailboxes painted Irish green instead of the old red British mailboxes.

8. **a language nobody understood:** Irish is the traditional language of Ireland's Celtic inhabitants. By the 20th century, after centuries of English rule, it was spoken by a minority of Ireland's population. After independence, it became one of Ireland's official languages.

9. **Tio Pepe** (tē'ō pĕ'pĕ): a brand of Spanish sherry.

10. **stout:** a heavy, dark brown beer.

an upstairs room. Nothing else had happened: the expected British soldiers had not, after all, arrived and the men in the hall had eventually relaxed their vigil. “A massacre they wanted,” the Middletons’ father said after they’d gone. “Damn bloody ruffians.” **C**

The Second World War took place. Two Germans, a man and his wife called Winkelmann who ran a glove factory in the town, were suspected by the Middletons of being spies for the Third Reich.¹¹ People laughed, for they knew
60 the Winkelmanns well and could lend no **credence** to the Middletons’ latest fantasy: typical of them, they explained to the Winkelmanns, who had been worried. Soon after the War the Reverend Packham died and was replaced by the Reverend Bradshaw, a younger man who laughed also and regarded the Middletons as an **anachronism**. They protested when prayers were no longer said for the Royal Family in St. Patrick’s, but the Reverend Bradshaw considered that their protests were as absurd as the prayers themselves had been. Why pray for the monarchy of a neighboring island when their own island had its chosen President now? The Middletons didn’t reply to that argument. In the Reverend Bradshaw’s presence they rose to their feet when the BBC played “God Save the King,”¹² and
70 on the day of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II¹³ they drove into the town with a small Union Jack propped up in the back window of their Ford Anglia. “Bedad, you’re a holy terror, Mr. Middleton!” Fat Driscoll laughingly exclaimed, noticing the flag as he lifted a tray of pork-steaks from his display shelf. The Middletons smiled. It was a great day for the Commonwealth of Nations, they replied, a remark which further amused Fat Driscoll and which he later repeated in Phelan’s public house. “Her Britannic Majesty,” **guffawed** his friend Mr. Breen. **D**

Situated in a valley that was noted for its beauty and with convenient access to rich rivers and bogs over which game-birds flew, the town benefited from post-war tourism. Healy’s Hotel changed its title and became, overnight, the New
80 Ormonde. Shopkeepers had their shop-fronts painted and Mr. Healy organized an annual Salmon Festival. Even Canon¹⁴ Kelly, who had at first commented severely on the habits of the tourists, and in particular on the summertime dress of the women, was in the end obliged to confess that the morals of his flock remained unaffected. “God and good sense,” he proclaimed, meaning God and his own teaching. In time he even derived pride from the fact that people with other values came briefly to the town and that the values esteemed by his parishioners were in no way diminished.

The town’s grocers now stocked foreign cheeses, brie and camembert and Port Salut, and wines were available to go with them. The plush Cocktail Room of the
90 New Ormonde set a standard: the wife of a solicitor,¹⁵ a Mrs. O’Brien, began to

**C ANALYZE
RELATIONSHIPS**

From lines 31–56, what do you gather about the present and past relationships between the Middletons and the townspeople?

credence (krēd’ns) *n.*
belief, especially in the ideas of another person

anachronism
(ə-năk’rə-nĭz’əm) *n.*
anything out of its proper time; someone or something that seems to belong to a former time but not the present

guffaw (gə-fô’) *v.* to laugh loudly

**D ANALYZE
RELATIONSHIPS**

Reread lines 57–76. Why do the townspeople laugh at the Middletons?

11. **Third Reich** (rĭk): Nazi-controlled Germany.

12. **when . . . “God Save the King”**: when the British Broadcasting Corporation played the British national anthem.

13. **the day . . . Elizabeth II**: June 2, 1953, more than four years after Ireland withdrew from the British Commonwealth of Nations, severing all official ties with Britain and its monarch.

14. **Canon**: the title of certain Roman Catholic priests.

15. **solicitor**: a lawyer who represents clients in lower court cases and takes care of other legal matters.

give six o'clock parties once or twice a year, obliging her husband to mix gin and Martini¹⁶ in glass jugs and herself handing round a selection of nuts and small Japanese crackers. Canon Kelly looked in as a rule and satisfied himself that all was above board. He rejected, though, the mixture in the jugs, retaining his taste for a glass of John Jameson.¹⁷

From the windows of their convent the Loretto nuns¹⁸ observed the long, sleek cars with G.B. plates;¹⁹ English and American accents drifted on the breeze to them. Mothers cleaned up their children and sent them to the Golf Club to seek employment as caddies. Sweet shops sold holiday mementoes. The brown,
100 soda and currant breads of Murphy-Flood's bakery were declared to be delicious. Mr. Healy doubled the number of local girls who served as waitresses in his dining-room, and in the winter of 1961 he had the builders in again, working on an extension for which the Munster and Leinster Bank had lent him twenty-two thousand pounds. **E**

But as the town increased its prosperity Carraveagh continued its decline. The Middletons were in their middle-sixties now and were reconciled to a life that became more uncomfortable with every passing year. Together they roved the vast lofts of their house, placing old paint tins and flowerpot saucers beneath the drips from the roof. At night they sat over their thin chops in a dining-room that
110 had once been gracious and which in a way was gracious still, except for the faded appearance of furniture that was dry from lack of polish and of a wallpaper that time had rendered colorless. In the hall their father gazed down at them, framed in ebony and gilt, in the uniform of the Irish Guards. He had conversed with Queen Victoria, and even in their middle-sixties they could still hear him saying that God and Empire and Queen formed a trinity unique in any worthy soldier's heart. In the hall hung the family crest, and on ancient Irish linen the Cross of St. George.²⁰ **F**

The dog that accompanied the Middletons now was called Turloch, an animal whose death they dreaded for they felt they couldn't manage the antics of another pup. Turloch, being thirteen, moved slowly and was blind and a little deaf. He
120 was a reminder to them of their own advancing years and of the effort it had become to tend the Herefords and collect the weekly eggs. More and more they looked forward to Fridays, to the warm companionship of Mrs. Keogh and Mr. Healy's chatter in the hotel. They stayed longer now with Mrs. Keogh and in the hotel, and idled longer in the shops, and drove home more slowly. Dimly, but with no less loyalty, they still recalled the distant past and were listened to without ill-feeling when they spoke of it and of Carraveagh as it had been, and of the Queen whose company their careless father had known.

E SETTING

In what ways does the town change, and why?

F SETTING

What does the Middletons' home convey about their status and political attitudes?

16. **Martini:** a brand of vermouth, often mixed with gin to create the cocktail that in America is called a martini.

17. **John Jameson:** a brand of Irish whiskey.

18. **Loretto nuns:** members of a Roman Catholic religious order founded near Dublin in 1822.

19. **G.B. plates:** British, instead of Irish, license plates. *G.B.* stands for *Great Britain*.

20. **Cross of St. George:** horizontal and vertical red bars crossing on a white background—an ancient flag of England.

The visitors who came to the town heard about the Middletons and were impressed. It was a pleasant wonder, more than one of them remarked, that old wounds could heal so completely, that the Middletons continued in their loyalty to the past and that, in spite of it, they were respected in the town. When Miss Middleton had been ill with a form of pneumonia in 1958 Canon Kelly had driven out to Carraveagh twice a week with pullets and young ducks that his housekeeper had dressed. “An upright couple,” was the Canon’s public opinion of the Middletons, and he had been known to add that eccentric views would hurt you less than malice. “We can disagree without guns in this town,” Mr. Healy pronounced in his Cocktail Room, and his visitors usually replied that as far as they could see that was the result of living in a Christian country. That the Middletons bought their meat from a man who had once locked them into an upstairs room and had then waited to shoot soldiers in their hall was a fact that amazed the seasonal visitors. You lived and learned, they remarked to Mr. Healy. **G**

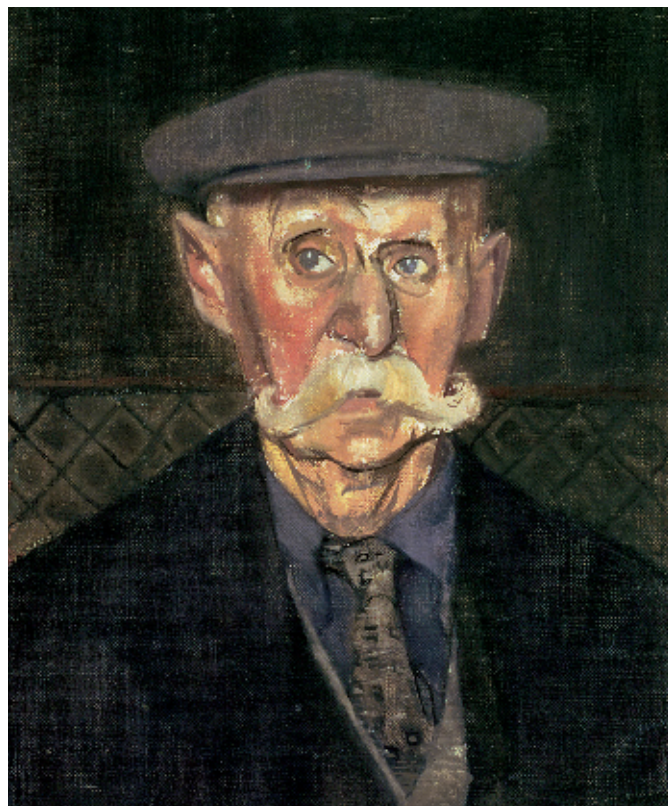
The Middletons, privately, often considered that they led a strange life. Alone in their two beds at night they now and again wondered why they hadn’t just sold Carraveagh forty-eight years ago when their father had died: why had the tie been so strong and why had they in **perversity** encouraged it? They didn’t fully know, nor did they attempt to discuss the matter in any way. Instinctively they had remained at Carraveagh, instinctively feeling that it would have been cowardly to go. Yet often it seemed to them now to be no more than a game they played, this worship of the distant past. And at other times it seemed as real and as important as the remaining acres of land, and the house itself.

160 “Isn’t that shocking?” Mr. Healy said one day in 1967. “Did you hear about that, Mr. Middleton, blowing up them post offices in Belfast?”²¹

Mr. Healy, red-faced and short-haired, spoke casually in his Cocktail Room, making midday conversation. He had commented in much the same way at breakfast-time, looking up from the *Irish Independent*. Everyone in the town had said it too: that the blowing up of sub-post offices in Belfast was a shocking matter.

“A bad business,” Fat Driscoll remarked, wrapping the Middletons’ meat. “We don’t want that old stuff all over again.”

“We didn’t want it in the first place,” Miss Middleton reminded him. He laughed, and she laughed, and so did her brother. Yes, it was a game, she thought:



One of the Regulars, Ruskin Spear. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
© Bridgeman Art Library.

G ANALYZE RELATIONSHIPS

What surprises visitors about the town’s view of the Middletons?

perversity
(pər-vûr’sî-tē) *n.* a stubborn determination to act in an inappropriate or unexpected way

21. **blowing up . . . Belfast:** In Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom, some members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) set off bombs in terrorist attacks aimed at ousting the British and winning independence. Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland.

170 how could any of it be as real or as important as the afflictions and problems of the old butcher himself, his rheumatism and his reluctance to retire? Did her brother, she wondered, privately think so too?

“Come on, old Turloch,” he said, stroking the flank of the red setter with the point of his shoe, and she reflected that you could never tell what he was thinking. Certainly it wasn’t the kind of thing you wanted to talk about.

“I’ve put him in a bit of mince,”²² Fat Driscoll said, which was something he often did these days, pretending the mince would otherwise be thrown away. There’d been a red setter about the place that night when he waited in the hall for the soldiers: Breen and Maguire had pushed it down into a cellar, frightened of it.

180 “There’s a heart of gold in you, Mr. Driscoll,” Miss Middleton murmured, nodding and smiling at him. He was the same age as she was, sixty-six: he should have shut up shop years ago. He would have, he’d once told them, if there’d been a son to leave the business to. As it was, he’d have to sell it and when it came to the point he found it hard to make the necessary arrangements. “Like us and Carraveagh,” she’d said, even though on the face of it it didn’t seem the same at all. **H**

Every evening they sat in the big old kitchen, hearing the news. It was only in Belfast and Derry,²³ the wireless²⁴ said; outside Belfast and Derry you wouldn’t know anything was happening at all. On Fridays they listened to the talk in Mrs. Keogh’s bar and in the hotel. “Well, thank God it has nothing to do with the

190 South,” Mr. Healy said often, usually repeating the statement.

The first British soldiers landed in the North of Ireland, and soon people didn’t so often say that outside Belfast and Derry you wouldn’t know anything was happening. There were incidents in Fermanagh and Armagh,²⁵ in Border villages and towns. One Prime Minister resigned and then another one. The troops were unpopular, the newspapers said; internment²⁶ became part of the machinery of government. In the town, in St. Patrick’s Protestant Church and in the Church of the Holy Assumption, prayers for peace were offered, but no peace came.

“We’re hit, Mr. Middleton,” Mr. Healy said one Friday morning. “If there’s a dozen visitors this summer it’ll be God’s own stroke of luck for us.”

200 “Luck?”

“Sure, who wants to come to a country with all that malarkey²⁷ in it?”

“But it’s only in the North.”

“Tell that to your tourists, Mr. Middleton.”

The town’s prosperity ebbed. The Border was more than sixty miles away, but over that distance had spread some wisps of the fog of war. As anger rose in the

H ANALYZE **RELATIONSHIPS**

What details in lines 168–185 reveal Miss Middleton’s and Fat Driscoll’s feelings toward each other?

Language Coach

Greek Roots The word *government* (line 196) comes from the Greek root *kubernan*, which means “to steer a ship.” The idea is that a governor “steers the ship of state.” Can you think of other words that come from this same Greek root?

22. **mince:** chopped meat.

23. **Derry:** another large city in Northern Ireland. The name *Derry*, which comes from the Irish name of the city, was expanded by the British to *Londonderry*, still the official city name.

24. **wireless:** radio.

25. **Fermanagh** (fər’mā-nə) and **Armagh** (är-mä’): two districts in Northern Ireland, near its border with the independent Republic of Ireland.

26. **internment:** imprisonment of members of the Irish Republican Army suspected of plotting against the British government.

27. **malarkey** (mə-lär’kē): foolishness.

town at the loss of fortune so there rose also the kind of talk there had been in the distant past. There was talk of **atrocities** and counter-atrocities, and of guns and gelignite²⁸ and the rights of people. There was bitterness suddenly in Mrs. Keogh's bar because of the lack of trade, and in the empty hotel there was bitterness also. ❶

210 On Fridays, only sometimes at first, there was a silence when the Middletons appeared. It was as though, going back nearly twenty years, people remembered the Union Jack in the window of their car and saw it now in a different light. It wasn't something to laugh at any more, nor were certain words that the Middletons had gently spoken, nor were they themselves just an old, peculiar couple. Slowly the change crept about, all around them in the town, until Fat Driscoll didn't wish it to be remembered that he had ever given them mince for their dog. He had stood with a gun in the enemy's house, waiting for soldiers so that soldiers might be killed: it was better that people should remember that.

220 One day Canon Kelly looked the other way when he saw the Middletons' car coming and they noticed this movement of his head, although he hadn't wished them to. And on another day Mrs. O'Brien, who had always been keen to talk to them in the hotel, didn't reply when they addressed her. ❷

atrocity (ə-trŏs'ŷ-tē) *n.*
a very cruel, brutal, or
appalling act

❶ **SETTING**

Reread lines 186–209.
How have conditions in
Northern Ireland affected
the town?

❷ **ANALYZE
RELATIONSHIPS**

Explain the change in
the townspeople's view
of the Middletons.

28. **gelignite** (jĕl'ŷg-nit'): a powerful explosive.



Last Self Portrait at Charleston
(1960), Vanessa Bell. Oil on canvas.
Private collection. Purchased with
the assistance of The Art Fund and
the V & A Purchase Grant Fund. ©
The Estate of Vanessa Bell courtesy
of Henrietta Garnett. Photo ©
Bridgeman Art Library.

The Middletons naturally didn't discuss these rebuffs but they each of them privately knew that there was no conversation they could have at this time with the people of the town. The stand they had taken and kept to for so many years no longer seemed ridiculous in the town. Had they driven with a Union Jack now they would, astoundingly, have been shot.

"It will never cease." He spoke **disconsolately** one night, standing by the dresser where the wireless was.



230 She washed the dishes they'd eaten from, and the cutlery. "Not in our time," she said.

"It is worse than before."

"Yes, it is worse than before."

They took from the walls of the hall the portrait of their father in the uniform of the Irish Guards because it seemed wrong to them that at this time it should hang there. They took down also the crest of their family and the Cross of St. George, and from a vase on the drawing-room mantelpiece they removed the small Union Jack that had been there since the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. They did not remove these articles in fear but in mourning for the *modus*
240 *vivendi*²⁹ that had existed for so long between them and the people of the town. They had given their custom³⁰ to a butcher who had planned to shoot down soldiers in their hall and he, in turn, had given them mince for their dog. For fifty years they had experienced, after suspicion had seeped away, a tolerance that never again in the years that were left to them would they know.

One November night their dog died and he said to her after he had buried it that they must not be depressed by all that was happening. They would die themselves and the house would become a ruin because there was no one to inherit it, and the distant past would be set to rest. But she disagreed: the *modus*
250 *vivendi* had been easy for them, she pointed out, because they hadn't really minded the dwindling of their fortunes while the town prospered. It had given them a life, and a kind of dignity: you could take a pride out of living in peace.

He did not say anything and then, because of the emotion that both of them felt over the death of their dog, he said in a rushing way that they could no longer at their age hope to make a living out of the remains of Carraveagh. They must sell the hens and the four Herefords. As he spoke, he watched her nodding, agreeing with the sense of it. Now and again, he thought, he would drive slowly into the town, to buy groceries and meat with the money they had saved, and to face the silence that would sourly thicken as their own two deaths came closer and death increased in another part of their island. She felt him thinking that and she
260 knew that he was right. Because of the distant past they would die friendless. It was worse than being murdered in their beds.  

disconsolately

(dĭs-kŏn'sə-lĭt-lē) *adv.*
unhappily; inconsolably

Language Coach

Cognates Words from different languages that look and sound similar are **cognates**. *Coronation* (line 238) is cognate with the Spanish *coronación*. Both come from the Latin *corona*, which has a Spanish cognate. What is the English word (*not* a cognate) for *corona*? What does *coronation* mean?

ANALYZE RELATIONSHIPS

How are the Middletons affected by the shift in attitude toward them?

29. **modus vivendi** (mō'dəs vĭ-vĕn'dē): Latin for "way of life."

30. **custom**: business; trade.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Describe the Middletons' political loyalties.
2. **Recall** What do the Middletons do in town on Fridays?
3. **Clarify** Why do the town's fortunes rise and then decline?
4. **Paraphrase** What do the Middletons mean when they say, "It is worse than before"?



READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **5A** Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction. **RC-12(B)** Make complex inferences about text and use textual evidence to support understanding.

Literary Analysis

5. **Contrast Characters** In what ways are the Middletons unlike the townspeople?
6. **Analyze Character Relationships** Review the chart you completed as you read. How does the relationship between the Middletons and the townspeople change over the years? Explain the reasons for the changes.
7. **Analyze Setting** What does this story reveal about Irish society in the 20th century? Consider the following aspects of setting:
 - economic conditions
 - social customs
 - religious values
 - political attitudes
 - the influence of history
8. **Make Judgments** How responsible are the Middletons for the townspeople's feelings toward them at the end of the story? Support your answer.
9. **Understand Irony** Trevor uses irony to illuminate truths about human nature. What examples of **situational irony** are there in the story? What **verbal irony** is there in the title "The Distant Past"?

Literary Criticism

10. **Critical Interpretations** William Trevor's biographer, Dolores MacKenna, has observed that Trevor writes "with the objectivity of an outsider, but with a native's appreciation of [Ireland's] social and political complexities." Would you agree that in "The Distant Past" Trevor portrays both the townspeople and the Middletons with objectivity and empathy? Support your opinion with references to the story.

When should we let go of the PAST?

What historical or cultural events from the distant past have influenced how different groups of Americans presently view each other? Discuss specific examples.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Use your knowledge of the boldfaced vocabulary words to indicate whether each statement is true or false.

- 1. An election may bring about a change in **regime**.
- 2. Partygoers enjoy **convivial** guests.
- 3. A suspicious person gives **credence** to nearly everything he or she is told.
- 4. In a movie set in ancient Rome, having the characters wear wristwatches would be an **anachronism**.
- 5. Only an unhappy person is likely to **guffaw**.
- 6. A constantly unruly child behaves with **perversity**.
- 7. Showing kindness is a common example of an **atrocity**.
- 8. A tragedy may cause someone to weep **disconsolately**.

WORD LIST

anachronism
atrocity
convivial
credence
disconsolately
guffaw
perversity
regime

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

- approach
- assume
- environment
- method
- strategy

The **environment** one lives in can have a profound effect on one’s happiness. Have you ever been in a situation where you were not entirely welcome? How did it affect you? Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: GREEK ROOTS AND AFFIXES

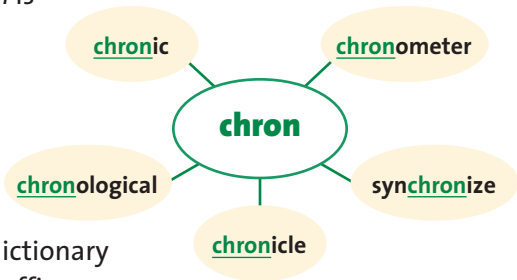
The word *anachronism* contains the Greek root *chron*, which means “time,” and the Greek affix *ana-*, which means “backwards.” An *anachronism* is something out of its proper time. The Greek root *chron* appears in a large number of academic English words from a variety of different subject areas, as you can see from the word web to the right. The prefix *ana-*, however, is somewhat rare. (It appears, for example, in the words *anabolic* and *anagram*.)

PRACTICE Below is a list of common Greek roots and affixes. Use a dictionary to find at least two English words that are formed from each root or affix. Make sure that at least one of the words for each item is related to science or technology.

- 1. The root *ortho-*, meaning “straight” or “right”
- 2. The root *bio-*, meaning “life”
- 3. The affix *a-* (or *an-*), meaning “not” or “without”
- 4. The affix *dia-*, meaning “through” or “apart”



READING 1A Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas derived from Greek roots and affixes.



Interactive Vocabulary

THINK central

Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML12-1330

The Diversity of Postwar Writing

Writers working in the post–World War II era were a diverse group, whose work varied widely in subject matter, style, form, and theme. Yet all shared a sense of struggling with the realities of modern life.

Writing to Evaluate

Imagine Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Stevie Smith, and William Trevor have been nominated for a prestigious literary award and you are on the panel of judges who will decide the winner. Based on the selections you have just read, who do you think should win? To help you consider carefully, use a chart like the one shown to organize your ideas about each piece; you can use the suggested criteria or develop your own. Then, write two or three paragraphs in which you explain the reasons for your choice.

Selection:	
Criteria	Evaluation
Use of imagery and figurative language	
Musicality and lyricism	
Subject matter	
Emotional content	
Theme	
Overall impact	

Extension

LISTENING & SPEAKING Adapt your writing into a speech in which you attempt to persuade the other judges to vote for your candidate. In addition to pointing out the strengths of your chosen writer, it might be effective to compare his or her work with that of the other contenders.



WRITING 16 Write persuasive texts. **LISTENING & SPEAKING 24B** Assess the persuasiveness of a presentation.

Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Stevie Smith, and William Trevor

