Rikki-Tikki-Tavi Study Guide

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi by Rudyard Kipling

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Introduction

Rudyard Kipling's endearing "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" initially appeared in 1895 as part of the second volume of *The Jungle Book*, a collection of children's stories set in colonial India that Kipling wrote while living in Brattleboro, Vermont. Telling the tale of Rikki-tikki-tavi, a brave and heroic mongoose, and his battle against the evil king cobras, Nag and Nagaina, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" is a war story that depicts in the simplest of terms the triumph of good over bad. Emulating the contemporary trend in children's literature to create imaginary worlds to appeal to a child's imagination, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" takes place entirely in a small garden populated by anthropomorphized birds, snakes, muskrats, and frogs.

By imparting values particularly characteristic of Kipling's Victorian society, including loyalty, productivity, hard work, and courage, the story serves an educational purpose. "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" also implicitly affirms the Victorian assumption of British superiority and its faith in the inherent goodness of empire-building.

In its use of suspense and pacing, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" is a wonderful example of Kipling's expertise in storytelling and a testament to why his stories remained popular into the early 2000s. "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," both as part of *The Jungle Book* and as an independent story, appeared in numerous incarnations throughout the twentieth century. As of 2004, numerous versions of *The Jungle Book* volumes were in print, including a paperback version by Penguin that included a critical introduction by Daniel Karlin.

Author Biography

Poet, novelist, and short story writer Rudyard Kipling, the first English writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, was the most popular literary figure in the late nineteenth century. He was born December 30, 1865, in Bombay, India, to John Lockwood Kipling and Alice MacDonald Kipling. Both of his grandfathers had been Methodist ministers and, though Kipling did not practice Christianity as an adult, the symbolism and values of the religion heavily influenced his work. He had one younger sister, Alice, who was known as Trix.

As was the custom of the time, at the age of six Rudyard was sent to boarding school in England, where he was subjected to severe strictness, bullying, and abuse. In 1878 he was sent to a military training school, where he also encountered bullying, but where he was able to form the values preached in "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi": courage, loyalty, and an ethic of hard work.

His poor eyesight kept Kipling from advancing into a military career, so at the age of sixteen he returned to his parents in Lahore, India, and began his career as a journalist, first at *The Civil and Military Gazette*, from 1882 to 1887, and then as a worldwide correspondent for the *Pioneer*, from 1887 to 1889. He became quite popular for his work, especially for his satirical and humorous verse. When he returned to England in 1889 at the age of twenty-four, he was already regarded as a national literary hero.

In 1892 Kipling married Caroline Balestier and moved to Vermont, near Caroline's family. Their two daughters, Josephine□who was to die at the age of six of pneumonia□and Elsie, were born there. Fatherhood inspired Kipling to write the children's stories which remained his most enduring works. Both volumes of *The Jungle Book* were published during Kipling's time in Vermont. The Kiplings returned England in 1896 after a bitter quarrel with Caroline's family; their only son John was born later that year. They remained based in England and traveled regularly around the world.

Kipling was a prolific writer, and his skill at storytelling, his immensely readable and song-like verse, his refusal to mince words, and the strong sense of British patriotism that characterized his work made him immensely popular with a wide audience. However, his receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1907 was met with disapproval from some literary critics and writers, who considered him vulgar and lacking in craftsmanship.

The death of his son John during World War I, combined with his own failing health, affected Kipling's writing deeply. His output decreased dramatically after this period. Kipling died on January 18, 1936 and is buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Among Kipling's most well-known and enduring works are *Captains Courageous* (1897), *Kim* (1901), the first and second volumes of *The Jungle Book*, and the poems "If," "White Man's Burden," and "Recessional."

Plot Summary

A song-like poem serves as prologue to "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," prefiguring the battle between the mongoose Rikki-tikki-tavi and Nag, the king cobra. The struggle between the mongoose and snake is the central focus of the story and the poem, which foreshadows the conflict but only hints at its resolution and creates a sense of suspense and expectation before the story even begins.

In the first paragraph the setting and the main characters are introduced: Rikki-tikki-tavi, who is established as the hero, with the help of Darzee the tailor-bird, fights a battle in the garden of a bungalow in colonial India. Rikki's curious and energetic personality is also established.

Rikki-tikki-tavi, washed by a flood from his parents' home into the garden of a bungalow, lies unconscious in the garden path. Teddy, the boy who lives in the bungalow, happens upon him with his parents. They take him into the house and revive him. Rikki-tikki-tavi regains his energy and endears himself to the family with his energetic, curious, and friendly nature.

That night he sleeps with Teddy, much to the consternation of Teddy's mother. Teddy's father reassures his wife that Teddy is safe with a mongoose because, as the natural predator of snakes, he would be able to protect Teddy if one were to enter the house: the expression of fear and the realistic threat of poisonous snakes foreshadows Rikki's future conflict with the local king cobras.

The next morning, Rikki explores the garden. He meets the tailor-birds Darzee and his wife, who are mourning because Nag, the garden's resident king cobra, ate one of their babies. As Rikki is conversing with the birds, Nag, who knows that Rikki the mongoose poses a mortal danger to him and his family, emerges to confront Rikki. He is described as "evil" and "horrid," as well as foreboding in size and strength. Nag introduces himself as being marked by Brahm himself, the greatest god in the Hindu pantheon, creating a reference to the sacred status of snakes in Hinduism, the predominant religion of India.

As Nag faces off with Rikki-tikki, Nag's wife, Nagaina, makes a surprise attack on Rikki from behind. However, Rikki escapes unscathed because Darzee warns him in time. The snakes, defeated, retreat into the grass.

Rikki, who has not fought snakes before, returns to the bungalow, feeling confident about his quickness against the snakes and gaining confidence in his skill. Teddy runs up the path to pet Rikki, only to be confronted by Karait, the "dusty brown snakeling"□a fatally poisonous snake who hides in the dirt. For the first time in the story Rikki's eyes glow red□the sign that a mongoose is about to attack. He manages to leap onto Karait and kills him with a swift and strong bite. Teddy's parents run out from the bungalow just in time to find Rikki killing the snake. They are very grateful to him for protecting Teddy.

Later that night, after the family has gone to bed, Rikki patrols the house. He runs into Chuchundra, the cowardly muskrat, who hints that Nag may have a wicked plan in store that night. Soon after talking with Chuchundra, Rikki overhears Nag and Nagaina plotting outside the bathroom's water sluice. They plot to kill the human family in order to get rid of Rikki-tikki-tavi. Rikki also learns that they have a nest of unhatched eggs.

Nag sneaks into the bathroom to lie in wait for the humans, and Nagaina leaves. Rikki is afraid, but he is driven by loyalty to the family and by his honor as a mongoose to attack the snake. When Nag finally falls asleep, Rikki leaps onto Nag and grabs hold of his neck. He bites and hangs on while Nag thrashes about, until the snake is dead. The big man, hearing the commotion, runs into the bathroom with his shotgun and shoots Nag, but the snake has already been killed by Rikki.

The next morning, Rikki, who knows he now has to face Nagaina, enlists the help of Darzee and his wife in destroying the snake and her eggs. Darzee is busy singing a triumphant song about Rikki's defeat of Nag, much to Rikki's annoyance. Darzee informs Rikki that Nagaina's eggs are hidden in the melon patch, but he does not understand why Rikki wants to harm them. Darzee's wife, however, does understand that "cobra's eggs meant young cobras later on"; she distracts Nagaina by pretending her wing is broken, buying Rikki time to destroy the eggs.

While Rikki is destroying the cobra's eggs, Nagaina, who is angry with the big man because she thinks he killed Nag, heads up to the house to attack the human family. Rikki, with a warning from Darzee's wife, runs up to the veranda and finds Teddy and his parents sitting within Nagaina's striking distance.

Rikki shows her the last of her eggs to distract her from the human family, and he tells her that it was he who killed Nag, not the big man. Rikki draws Nagaina to fight, but rather than engage Rikki she manages to rescue the last of her eggs, and she rushes towards her lair. Rikki, in hot pursuit, follows her down into her cave. Darzee, who witnesses Rikki's descent, begins to sing about Rikki's imminent death.

After a highly suspenseful period, however, Rikki emerges dusty and exhausted from the lair and announces that Nagaina is dead. The Coppersmith bird, the garden crier, announces Nagaina's death to the whole garden. The birds and frogs rejoice, and Rikki-tikki-tavi is rewarded for his efforts both by being considered a hero by the denizens of the garden and by being given a permanent place in the human family's home, where he remains as their protector for the rest of his life.

The story closes with a reproduction of Darzee's unfinished song of triumph, "Darzee's Chaunt," which he composed after the death of Nag. The style of the song, which calls on the birds of the garden to praise Rikki for delivering them from the evil Nag and Nagaina, is reminiscent of Christian hymns of praise, and like the heroes of ancient, classic epics, Rikki is immortalized in these songs of praise.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

This story describes a battle waged by Rikki-tikki-tavi within the confines of a bungalow in India. Rikki-tikki-tavi is a mongoose – an animal described as both cat- and weasel-like.

Following a summer flood, Rikki finds himself washed out of the burrow where he lives with his mother and father and deposited in the midst of a garden path. As he struggles to get his bearings, he hears the voice of a little boy. The boy, whose name is Teddy, thinks Rikki is dead and suggests holding a funeral. His mother, realizing that Rikki is most likely just stunned, suggests that they take the animal inside to dry. Once inside, Teddy's father, realizing that Rikki has been through a terrible ordeal, suggests wrapping the animal in a warm cloth. Eventually Rikki awakes and when he does, the boy's father cautions the others to not frighten Rikki.

As a rule, a mongoose's natural curiosity makes it difficult to scare it. Rikki is no exception and generally lives by the mongoose motto of "Run and find out." As a result, it does not take long for him to shed the warm cloth he is wrapped in and run around the table before settling on the shoulder of the little boy. The boy's father tells him there is nothing for him to be afraid of; Rikki is trying to be his friend.

As she watches Rikki, the boy's mother notices that despite the fact that he is a wild animal, Rikki is quite tame and suggests that this is likely the result of the fact that they treated him so well. The boy's father tells her that all mongooses are like Rikki and that as long as the boy doesn't antagonize him in any way, he will busy himself running into and out of the house all day.

After having a piece of meat to eat, Rikki goes outside to lay in the sunshine. He realizes that there is plenty to explore at this new house and so he makes up his mind to stay and see all there is to see. He spends the rest of the day roaming all over the house investigating the bathroom, the writing table and other places. That night, he joins Teddy in his bedroom and joins him in his bed. However, Rikki has trouble falling asleep and so he is still awake when Teddy's parents come in later to check on him. While Teddy's mother is concerned that Rikki will hurt him, his father assures her that Teddy will be safer than if there were a dog in the room, particularly if a snake were to come into the room.

The next morning, Rikki comes to breakfast riding on Teddy's shoulder. He is given banana and boiled egg to eat and then, remembering advice his own mother had given him, Rikki spends some time sitting on each family member's lap. He hopes that by endearing himself to the family, he will be allowed to stay.

Later, Rikki ventures out to the garden to see what is there. The garden is lush and full of bushes, trees and grass. As Rikki surveys the garden, he thinks that it will be a splendid hunting ground. His thoughts are soon interrupted by a sorrowful sound coming from a nearby bush. Upon going to investigate, Rikki discovers that the sound is coming from Darzee, a tailor-bird, and his wife. He soon learns that one of Darzee's babies had fallen from the nest and it was eaten by Nag, a large, black cobra. Upon hearing his name, Nag rises from the grass nearby and hisses at Rikki. While Rikki is momentarily frightened – after all, he has never met a live cobra before - he quickly realizes that adult mongooses are supposed to fight and eat snakes. Nag realizes this too and while he doesn't show it, he is frightened.

Rikki asks Nag if he thought it was right to eat Darzee's baby. Nag doesn't answer right away; rather, realizing that Rikki will eventually kill him, he decides to try to catch the mongoose off guard by suggesting that they talk. As he asks Rikki what the difference is between him eating Darzee's baby and Rikki eating eggs, Darzee yells out for Rikki to look behind him.

Sensing something bad is about to happen, Rikki jumps high into the air to avoid Nagaina, Nag's wife, who is attempting to attack Rikki from behind. As Rikki lands, he takes a bite out of Nagaina's back – a bite that is not severe enough to kill her, but certainly severe enough to cripple her. The snakes retreat into the grass and Rikki returns to the house to think of what he should do next. As he replays the scene that just occurred in his mind, he realizes that his ability to survive Nagaina's attack is a remarkable feat, a thought that pleases him greatly. As Rikki is lost in his thoughts, Teddy joins him on the path. As Teddy reaches down to pet Rikki, a small voice warns: "Be careful. I am death." The voice belongs to Karait, a snakeling with a bite every bit as dangerous as the cobra's. Rikki tries to find the best angle at which to attack; however, his youth and inexperience cause him to make errors in judgment.

Meanwhile, Teddy has run into the house to tell his parents that Rikki is killing a snake. By the time they make it outside, Rikki has attacked the snake and inflicted a final, paralyzing bite. He prepares to eat the snake as he was taught to do, but then realizes that doing so will fill him up and slow his reflexes. He watches Teddy's father beat the already dead snake and wonders why he is bothering to do that. Meanwhile, Teddy's mother picks Rikki up and hugs him, saying that he has saved their little boy from certain death. Rikki isn't sure why the family is making such a fuss over him, yet he is enjoying the attention.

That evening at dinner, Rikki is careful to not overeat; he knows that he still has to contend with Nag and Nagaina. That night, after Teddy had fallen asleep, Rikki goes for a walk in the house. He meets up with Chuchundra, a very timid muskrat. In fact, Chuchundra is so timid that he cannot seem to summon the courage to run into the middle of the room and so he stays near the wall. When he sees Rikki, Chuchundra begs him to not kill him. When Rikki responds by implying that snake killers don't kill muskrats, Chuchundra responds by saying that he is afraid that Nag will mistake him for a mongoose. Rikki tries to assure Chuchundra by saying that there is little chance that Nag will bother him since Nag is in the garden, a place Chuchundra will never visit.

Chuchundra begins to tell Rikki something he had heard from his cousin, Chua, the rat, but stops before finishing. Assuming that Chua's news is important, Rikki asks Chuchundra to finish what he was saying. When Chuchundra resists, Rikki threatens to bite him. Rather than answer, Chuchundra tells Rikki to simply listen. As Rikki listens to the quiet house, he hears a faint sound, almost like a scratching sound. He realizes that either Nag or Nagaina is crawling into the house and so he goes off to investigate.

As he enters Teddy's parents' bathroom, Rikki can hear Nag and Nagaina talking. They are devising a scheme to kill Teddy and his parents, after which, they assume Rikki will move on, leaving the garden to them. Nagaina is instructing her husband to kill Teddy's father first and then they will look for Rikki together. When Nag wonders aloud if there is anything to be gained by killing the people, Nagaina reminds him that doing so is the only way that they will be able to reclaim the garden and ensure the safety of their own children. Realizing he hadn't thought about the safety of his own children, Nag agrees to kill Teddy and his parents but he does not think it is necessary to kill Rikki, since he will probably leave on his own once the house is empty.

Hearing this makes Rikki angry, and as he contemplates the best way to attack, he sees Nag enter the room. Nag calls out to Nagaina to tell her that he intends to wait in the bathroom until morning and he will attack Teddy's father as he comes in for his bath, but she has already left. Eventually, Nag falls asleep and Rikki begins to creep slowly toward the snake, all the while trying to decide where the best place is to strike. He finally settles on the head and reminds himself that once he has bitten in, he cannot let go.

Rikki strikes and a startled Nag begins to thrash about. As the animals fight, they knock down a soap dish and brush, bringing Teddy's father into the room to find out what is causing the commotion. With a single shot from his gun, he kills Nag and then tells his wife that Rikki has again saved them. Rikki retreats to Teddy's bed and spends the rest of the night checking his body for injuries.

In the morning, Rikki realizes that he still has to contend with Nagaina and so he sets out to look for Darzee. By the time he reaches the garden, news of Nag's death has already spread and Darzee is singing a happy tune. Rikki tells the bird that this is not the time to sing before asking if he knows where Nagaina is. Darzee tells him of seeing Nag being taken out of the bathroom on the end of a stick and thrown into the trash heap. As he begins to sing again, Rikki reminds the bird that he is still in the midst of a battle and once again, asks him to stop singing. Darzee does as he is asked and then he tells Rikki that Nagaina is by the trash heap mourning her husband. Next, Rikki asks Darzee if he knows where Nagaina keeps her eggs, then asks him to distract Nagaina long enough to allow him to get to the eggs. Darzee, fearing that Rikki is going to eat the eggs, is reluctant to do what he is asked; however, Darzee's wife sees the importance of distracting Nagaina, and so she flies off to find Nagaina.

When Darzee's wife finds Nagaina, the snake is clearly angry. She tells Darzee's wife that she intends to make sure that Teddy is dead by that night. Meanwhile, Rikki goes off in search of the eggs. When he finds them, he realizes that they are about to hatch,

which will result in twenty-five more cobras with which to contend. He bites the tops of the eggs off and in the process, crushes the young cobras. When he is nearly done, Darzee's wife returns with a warning that Nagaina is heading toward the house and the bird fears the cobra is about to kill someone. Rikki smashes two of the three remaining eggs and then runs toward the house with the last egg in his mouth. When he reaches the house, he sees Teddy and his parents sitting at the table. It is clear from the expression of fear on their faces that they have seen Nagaina. As Rikki draws nearer, he sees Nagaina within striking distance of Teddy.

Rikki approaches and challenges Nagaina to a fight. When Nagaina tells Rikki that she will deal with him after she has finished with Teddy and his parents, Rikki suggests that she go see her eggs. He then tells her that the egg he has is the last surviving egg of her entire litter. Upon hearing this, Nagaina turns her attention to Rikki long enough for Teddy's father to snatch him out of harm's way.

Nagaina, realizing that she has lost her chance to kill Rikki, pleads for him to return the egg in return for allowing her to leave safely. Rikki refuses saying that the only way she will leave is with the rest of the trash. Knowing that Teddy's father has gone inside to get his gun, Rikki bounces around Nagaina. He taunts her, taking care to stay out of her reach.

Unfortunately, Rikki forgets about the egg that he had left on the patio and by the time he realizes it, Nagaina has already gotten it and is attempting to flee the garden. Rikki pursues the snake and finally, with the help of Darzee's wife, he is able to catch up and grab hold of Nagaina's tail. Refusing to let go, Rikki is dragged into the hole where Nagaina lives. Darzee, certain that Rikki will be killed, begins to sing a mournful song. Minutes later, however, Rikki emerges and announces that Nagaina is dead.

Clearly exhausted, Rikki falls asleep in the grass and when he awakes several hours later, he asks Darzee to tell the others that Nagaina is dead.

Returning to the house, Rikki is greeted by Teddy and his parents and treated to a lavish meal. That night, as he sleeps on Teddy's shoulder, he thinks about what he has done that day. Rikki-tikki-tavi spends the rest of his life living with Teddy and his parents, making sure that the garden is kept free of snakes.

Analysis

Rudyard Kipling's "Rikki-tikki-tavi" is a story that explores the themes of youth, loyalty and the triumph of good over evil.

When the reader first meets Rikki, he has been deposited at the home of an unfamiliar family by a flood that swept through his home. Since he lived with his mother and father, one assumes that he is a young mongoose and probably not very wise to the ways of the world. While this may to a certain extent be the case, it doesn't take long to see that he is also somewhat independent, as evidenced by his decision to remain with the family rather than return to his home. Further, his decision to behave in a manner that

will please the family and result in him being welcomed into their home tells us that he has a certain level of maturity. He also demonstrates his maturity when he declines the large meals he is offered so that he can remain quick and agile as he defends Teddy and his family from the cobras. His annoyance with Darzee when the bird continually celebrates Nag's death by singing tells us that he is extremely focused on the task at hand. Finally, when Rikki is in battle with Nag, he decides that if he is indeed going to be killed, he wants to be found with his teeth locked – a position generally thought to demonstrate bravery.

The reader also learns that Rikki is quite aware of the effect that making threats can have on helping to resolve a potentially dangerous situation. The biggest and by far most effective use of threats we see is when Rikki threatens to eat Nag and Nagaina's last remaining baby. We see a similar scenario develop earlier in the story when Rikki threatens to bite Chuchundra when the muskrat hesitates to give him some important information regarding Nag and Nagaina's motives.

Even so, there are instances throughout the story where we are provided glimpses into the younger, less mature aspects of Rikki. The first is when Rikki attacks Nagaina; his inexperience in such matters leaves him fearful of the snake and so he does not bite the snake for a long enough period of time. Later, when he confronts Karait, his youthful inexperience causes him to misjudge the small snake's potential for harm and chances are, he might have been killed if Teddy's father hadn't intervened and killed the snake with his gun. Likewise, he almost loses his chance to kill Nagaina when he forgets about the egg. Finally, his decision to follow Nagaina into the hole - a decision that older, wiser mongooses would likely not make – tells us that Rikki does not fully understand the implications of his actions.

Few would dispute that Rikki is a loyal character. Although he has been with this family for a very short period of time, he immediately assumes the role of protector. His initial decision to confront Nag stems from the snake's horrific crime of eating Darzee's baby. However, when it becomes clear that Nag and Nagaina intend to harm the family so that Rikki will leave the garden – and them alone – Rikki takes control of the situation and decides to do what he can to protect the family. His decision to do this shows the extent of his loyalty; given the fact that he had just arrived, few would have questioned his decision to leave the garden altogether and avoid any confrontation. However, Rikki chooses to stay and protect the family that had shown him so much kindness. It also gives the reader another glimpse into Rikki's overall character. Rikki realizes that he perpetuated the unrest within the garden by antagonizing Nag and so he feels a certain responsibility to the others to finish what he has started.

In addition, Rikki is not the only character to display a strong sense of loyalty. Teddy's mother, despite her fears that Rikki may harm her son, agrees to let him stay after her husband tells her that a mongoose is a better protector than a bulldog. Later, after Rikki has killed Karait, she sees him as a hero and treats him as such. Similarly, the boy's father insists that Rikki stay with them after he realizes how well he can protect his family. Clearly, Rikki's bravery and decisive actions have rewarded him with the loyalty of the family. He has also earned the loyalty of the other animals in the garden. Despite

being a newcomer, he was able to get Darzee and his wife to put their own lives in danger in order to help him in his scheme to kill the cobras.

While the story's final outcome is never really in doubt – after all, the very first sentence implies that Rikki emerged victorious– there is a certain element of suspense that keeps us wondering if Rikki will successfully succeed in ridding the garden of the evil cobras. Much of this suspense is created in the language used to describe Rikki's various confrontations. While most of the story moves along at a steady pace, during those particular instances in which Rikki is in the midst of a battle with one of the snakes, the action becomes almost frenetic. The author uses words such as "whizzed," "lashing," "quickness" and "plunged" to create a sense of urgency within these scenes, which, in turn, makes the reader wonder what will ultimately happen.

It is also interesting to note that Rikki becomes involved in this confrontation because Nag ate one of Darzee's babies. There is a certain irony in this because apparently Rikki regularly dines on eggs and so is effectively doing the same thing. Needless to say, he doesn't see this connection and therefore doesn't hesitate to kill Nag and Nagaina's babies in his effort to ultimately kill Nagaina. This causes the reader to question Rikki's tactics –his decision to kill the cobra babies is no better than Nag's decision to eat Darzee's baby – yet, we tend to overlook Rikki's decision because it was done in order to protect others.

Finally, it is somewhat ironic that during Teddy's first encounter with Rikki, he mistakenly believes the mongoose is dead. It is this "dead" mongoose that not only saves Teddy, but also his parents as well. This "dead" mongoose, as the story ends, is the newly crowned ruler of the garden.

Characters

Alice

See Teddy's Mother

The Big Man

The big man is an Englishman who has just moved, with his son Teddy and wife Alice, into the Indian bungalow where the main action of the story takes place. The big man owns a "bang-stick"□a shotgun□and when he shoots Nag into two pieces during Rikki's battle with him in the bathroom, Nagaina wrongfully blames him for the death. As an Englishman in India during the late nineteenth century, the big man represents imperial England's presence in India and thus gives a historical and cultural context to the story. He and his family take Rikki-tikki-tavi into their home and thereby earn his loyalty and protection. The big man and his family's gratitude to Rikki for saving their lives earns him a lasting place in their home.

Chuchundra

A muskrat who lives in the bungalow, Chuchundra is portrayed as a cowardly creature who weeps and whines when he speaks. He tips Rikki off to Nag and Nagaina's planned attack on the big man and his family. Chuchundra's cowardliness serves as a foil to Rikki-tikki-tavi's courage.

The Copper Maker

When Rikki-tikki-tavi successfully kills Nagaina and emerges from her lair unhurt, the Copper Maker, a bird who serves as the garden crier, announces Rikki's triumph and the demise of Nag and Nagaina to the denizens of the garden.

Darzee

A tailor-bird who, together with his wife, keeps a nest in the bungalow's garden, Darzee is described as "a feather-brained fellow" because he fails on more than one occasion to competently assist Rikki-tikki-tavi against their common enemies, Nag and Nagaina. Darzee, unlike Rikki, is severely lacking in foresight. He begins to sing a song of triumph after the death of Nag but before Nagaina and her eggs are destroyed, for which Rikki scolds him. His lack of foresight serves as a foil to Rikki's own impetus for action. Darzee also plays the role of a bard. He composes songs about Rikki-tikki-tavi's showdowns against Nag and Nagaina, which are used to highlight Rikki's heroic aspects.

Darzee's wife

Darzee's wife plays a pivotal role in assisting Rikki against the snakes and is therefore called "sensible" by serving as a decoy to distract Nagaina and allow Rikki time to destroy the cobras' unhatched eggs.

Karait

Karait, a small, quick, poisonous snake who lives in the dust, is confronted by Rikki-tikki-tavi when he threatens to fatally bite Teddy. Karait is the first snake that Rikki kills, and his success gives Rikki the confidence to battle against the more dangerous cobras.

Nag

One of two king cobras who reside in the garden of the bungalow, Nag, along with his wife Nagaina, are Rikki-tikki-tavi's archenemies. Nag and his wife are depicted as evil. His enormous size "five feet long from tongue to tail" and strength make him a formidable and, therefore, worthy opponent for Rikki, the hero of the story. Prior to Rikki's arrival in the garden, Nag and Nagaina held free rein over the garden. Nag is killed by Rikki-tikki-tavi inside the bungalow when he, at Nagaina's bidding, enters it to kill the human family. Nag's name is derived from the Hindi word for snake.

Nagaina

Like her husband Nag, Nagaina is characterized as evil. While Nag is foreboding in his size and strength, Nagaina is said to be intelligent. It is she who formulates the plan which Rikki thwarts to kill the human family in order to rid the bungalow of the mongoose, who is her natural enemy. She is killed by Rikki in her lair, to which she flees to protect the last of her eggs.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi

Rikki-tikki-tavi, whose name is derived from his characteristic chattering noise, is a young mongoose who, at the beginning of the story, has little experience but, by the end, has become a mongoose of legendary strength and fighting ability. He is rescued by a human family and taken into their home after he is swept away from his parents' nest during a flood. As a mongoose, Rikki is the natural enemy of snakes, and his presence in the garden threatens the resident king cobra couple, Nag and Nagaina, who become Rikki's archenemies. Rikki is emblematic of the archetypal hero: he exhibits the qualities of courage, strength, and loyalty, and he uses his virtues to fight evil. Prior to arriving in the garden, Rikki had never fought a snake, and his ultimate

triumph over the cobras not only protects the lives of the birds and the humans he befriends, but it also serves as his coming of age.

Teddy

Teddy is the little boy who lives in the bungalow with his parents. He, of all the human characters, is most fond of Rikki-tikki-tavi. His innocence and vulnerability as a small child make him an easy target for the poisonous snakes of the garden and the most in need of Rikki-tikki-tavi's protection.

Teddy's Mother

Teddy's mother, Alice, lives in the bungalow with her son and her husband, the big man. She initially has misgivings about keeping a wild animal as a pet, but Rikki later earns her trust and affection by protecting her and her family from the cobras.

Themes

Courage

"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," as a children's story, is designed both to entertain and to disseminate the values of virtuous behavior. Courage, one of the characteristics exhibited by the hero, Rikki-tikki-tavi, is one such virtue. Rikki, knowing that he has to kill Nag in order to protect the human family, is fearful of the cobra's size and strength, but his fear is trumped by his own courage, and he succeeds in killing the snake. He is rewarded for his courage by being deemed a hero and given a permanent place in the home of the humans. The virtue of courage is further emphasized by the story's portrayal of shameful cowardliness; Chuchundra, the fearful muskrat who "never had spirit enough to run out into the middle of the room" is unable to overcome his fear and, therefore, elicits disdain from Rikki and the other garden creatures.

Loyalty and Duty

Kipling was deeply influenced by the codes of honor and duty evangelized at the military prep school he attended in his late childhood. Loyalty especially figures as a theme in "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi." Rikki is loyal to the human family that takes him in, and his loyalty drives him to protect them from the cobras, even to the point of risking death. Rikki also risks death out of a sense of duty regarding his heritage as a mongoose: when he attacks Nag he "was battered to and fro. . . . he made sure he would be banged to death, and, for the honour of his family, he preferred to be found with his teeth locked."

British Imperialism

Kipling is well known for promoting British imperialism in his writing; Victorian-era imperialism was not just the practice of colonization, but it reflected an attitude and philosophy of assumed British superiority, and even the children's story "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" reflects this racial prejudice. The story makes clear that the family living in the bungalow in India is an English family, and it is intimated that Rikki is a very lucky mongoose for having been rescued by humans who are white: "every well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to be a house-mongoose . . . and Rikki-tikki's mother . . . had carefully told Rikki what to do if ever he came across white men." The white family's home and way of life□which dramatizes the British presence in India□is idealized and, in the specific use of the term "white men," portrayed as superior to the indigenous cultures of India. The culture of the Indian people and their Hindu religion is further symbolically denigrated in the story when Nag, the villain, is directly associated with the Hindu god Brahm.

Survival

Survival is the motivating factor behind the actions of all of the characters, and it seems to be the only law that governs the fantasy world of the garden: the act of killing, for example, is not against the laws of the garden but is consistently portrayed as a means towards the more important goal of survival for both the heroic and villainous characters.

This preoccupation with survival reflects the values of social Darwinism that were prevalent during the late nineteenth century. Social Darwinism applied the biological theories of natural selection, put forth by Charles Darwin, to human behavior. Encapsulated in the catchphrase "survival of the fittest," certain modes of social Darwinism argued that some groups of people□those of a certain race or nation, for example□were more "fit" for survival than other groups and should, therefore, for the good of humanity, be given a superior role of power. In "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" the human family succeeds in surviving and the snakes are eliminated; when their roles are viewed as representations of the British and Indian struggle for control of the Indian subcontinent, the survival of the British family implies both British superiority and British domination.

Progress and Work

In Victorian England, during which the Industrial Revolution took place and the British Empire expanded greatly, progress and hard work were idealized. Kipling emphasizes the virtue of hard work by contrasting Rikki-tikki-tavi's heroic behavior with the "unsensible" behavior of Darzee. When Darzee, the "feather-brained" tailor-bird begins to sing a song of triumph after the death of Nag, Rikki-tikki-tavi grows angry with him because he knows that Nagaina is still alive and, therefore, his work is only half done: "Oh you stupid tuft of feathers! . . . Is this the time to sing?" "You don't know when to do the right thing at the right time." Darzee further impedes Rikki-tikki-tavi's progress against the snakes by not helping him distract Nagaina from her eggs. Darzee's wife flies off to help Rikki-tikki against Nagaina, leaving Darzee to "continue his song." He is portrayed as foolish in his preference for sitting in the nest and singing rather than accomplishing hard work.

Style

Setting: The Fantasy World

"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" illustrates a trend in children's literature especially characteristic of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century: like the works of Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum, Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Grahame, and J. M. Barrie, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" is set in a fantasy world: a garden populated by animals who can talk and who have distinctive personalities. Setting stories in imaginary places was seen as especially appealing to and appropriate for the active imagination of children. Prior to this period, stories were not specifically written with a child's point of view in mind, and literature for children was largely adapted from works for adults, such as Shakespeare, the Bible, and classical literature.

Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics to non-humans, such as animals, plants, and objects. The animal characters in "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" all are characterized by distinct, human-like personalities. Anthropomorphism is commonly found in children's literature and serves to create a fantasy world that is compatible with the active imaginations of children. Anthropomorphism is the key characteristic of fables, simple moral tales, like Aesop's fables, which use animals that can talk to teach lessons about human behavior and morality.

Epithet

An epithet is an adjectival phrase attributed as a title to a character, focusing on a specific characteristic: for example, in Greek mythology the goddess Athena is often referred to as "Grey-Eyed Athena." In Homer's epics epithets are used to label the heroes, for example "Nestor, Breaker of Horses." In direct imitation, Rikki-tikki-tavi is called "Red-Eye," and Darzee also refers to him as "Killer of the terrible Nag" and "Rikki-tikki with the white teeth." Kipling uses this classical device in order to heighten the act of Rikki-tikki-tavi's story and make clear his status as a legendary hero.

Imitation of the Christian Hymn

"Darzee's Chaunt," the song of praise Darzee sings to celebrate Nag's death, is reproduced at the end of the story. The song, which praises Rikki-tikki-tavi for ridding the garden of Nag, is reminiscent of Christian hymns of praise to Christ: in Christian belief, Christ is the savior of humanity because, by dying and then resurrecting from the dead, he conquered death and opened heaven to humanity. A common pattern of the Christian hymn is praising Christ as savior by exhorting others to praise Christ.

"Darzee's Chaunt" imitates this hymnal device in his praise of Rikki-tikki-tavi as he exhorts the other birds to praise him:

Sing to your fledglings again,

Mother, oh lift up your head!

Evil that plagued us is slain,

Death in the garden lies dead.

Just as Christ is praised in Christian hymns for saving humanity from death, so the song praises Rikki for saving the garden from Nag, who represents Death for the garden. The use of this hymn device draws parallels between Rikki and Christ and between Nag and Satan.

Historical Context

British Imperialism in the Late Nineteenth Century

When "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" was first published as part of the second volume of Kipling's *Jungle Book* in 1895, Great Britain commanded the most powerful empire the world had ever seen. The Indian subcontinent was one important part of the empire, which thousands of "Anglo-Indians," like Kipling himself, called home. The form of imperialism during Kipling's time was characterized by forceful imposition of British government and British culture upon the natives of a region. But imperialism was not just the practice of the British Empire's acts of colonization of other lands and people; as historian Lerner writes in *Western Civilizations*: "To combat slave-trading, famine, filth, and illiteracy seemed to many a legitimate reason for invading the jungles of Africa and Asia." British imperialism was a philosophy that assumed the superiority of British civilization and, therefore, the moral responsibility of bringing their enlightened ways to the so-called "uncivilized" people of the world. This attitude was taken especially towards non-white, non-Christian cultures in India, Asia, Australia, and Africa. This philosophy of moral responsibility served to rationalize the economic exploitations of other peoples and their lands by the British Empire, and its subsequent amassing of wealth and power. It was nevertheless, during Kipling's time, largely embraced and unquestioned by the British population, and Kipling, being no exception, expressed ideas of cultural superiority and patriotism in much of his writing. In the early 2000s his reputation was negatively affected by his racist support of British imperialism.

British imperialist assumptions were so ingrained in the late Victorian era, that they surfaced in children's literature as well□literature that is, by its nature, meant to impart the values and morals of the adults' society to its young readers. "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" is a prime example. The narrative specifically establishes that Rikki-tikki is very lucky to be a "house-mongoose" in the home of a British family, specifically noting that his mother taught him to aspire to the homes of "white men." That his mother had taught him to aspire to living in white-man's home implies both an idealization of British culture and a perceived inferiority of the non-white, Indian civilization that it dominated.

Social Darwinism

The late nineteenth century was marked by a dramatic shift in theories of philosophy, religion, and science following the mid-century publication of *On the Origin of the Species*, in which Darwin put forth the groundbreaking theory of natural selection. Natural selection is the process by which organisms who have characteristics suited to their environment have a better chance of survival and thus are able to mature, reproduce, that thus pass on their characteristics to their offspring; while those less suited to the environment do not tend to reach maturity and have offspring. The theories put forth by Darwin revolutionized the biological sciences, affected religious beliefs, and revised certain conclusions currently held in the physical and social sciences.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer, widely regarded as the first social Darwinist, wrote *Social Statics*, in which he applied the biological theories of evolution to the study of human society. Spencer coined the subsequently familiar phrase "survival of the fittest" which describes the result of competition between different social groups of human beings. Social Darwinism was typically used by individuals who believed in the superiority of one group of people over another□groups based on nationality or race, for example□to justify the practice of unfair balances of power, institutionalized practices of exploitation, and philosophies of superiority such as imperialism.

The story "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," written at the height of British imperialism forty-five years after Spencer, reflects an implicit acceptance of the "survival of the fittest" theory of social Darwinism. The entire premise of the story is a battle for survival between a mongoose and its human family, on one side, and a family of snakes on the other. That the British family is not eliminated and, instead, remains to rule over the garden, can be viewed as suggesting the strength, superiority, and invulnerability of British who rule in India.

Critical Overview

"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" enjoyed unwavering success as a children's story well into the early 2000s, by which time it was considered a classic and appeared in numerous editions and anthologies.

Kipling himself was the subject of criticism since he began publishing in his early twenties. His receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1907 was met with wide approval from the general readership with which he was immensely popular and dismay by the literary world. He was perceived by the literary establishment as a writer of verse, rather than of poetry; the simple style of much of his prose was considered little more than entertaining; over the decades many found his blunt, straightforward politicizing both unrefined and offensive.

The English poet T. S. Eliot, however, years after Kipling's death, found value enough in his verse to publish a newly edited collection in 1941; in his introductory essay he defended Kipling's abilities as a poet. However, by 1941, Britain had faced one world war, was embroiled in another, and its once-powerful empire was crumbling; the unquestioned optimism and belief in the superiority and the romance of imperialism that was so much a part of Victorian-era philosophy was replaced by cynicism and pessimism that characterized the post-war, post-empire era. Kipling's work was markedly characterized by what became his dated promotion of British imperialism□a theme that appeared even in the children's story "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi"□and by this time the greatest defense Kipling needed was not for his questionable talent, but for the incorrectness of his political views. Eliot attempted a defense by writing: "Poetry is condemned as 'political' when we disagree with the politics; and the majority of readers do not want either imperialism or socialism in verse. But the question is not what is ephemeral, but what is permanent . . . we have therefore to try to find the permanent in Kipling's verse."

Eliot's defense of Kipling was famously rebutted in 1945 by George Orwell, who called Kipling a "prophet of British Imperialism" and wrote, "Kipling *is* a jingo imperialist, he *is* morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting."

Throughout the years Kipling himself suffered for expressing the imperialist superiority that marked the mindset of Britain during his time, as did most of his poetry and prose. But there was evidence in the early 2000s of an effort to take a fresh look at Kipling and his work. Geoffrey Wheatcroft writes in *Harper's Magazine* that, having the benefit of an objectivity possible after a century of removal from Kipling's Victorian England, it may be possible "to start taking [Kipling] seriously as a political writer without embarrassment." He further defends Kipling's inherent talent: "Kipling is a truly great writer, whose gross and glaring faults are overwhelmed by his elemental power. . . . Whether or not one likes 'Kipling and his views,' he was astoundingly perceptive."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Fernando is a freelance writer and editor based in Seattle, Washington. In this essay, Fernando explores Kipling's use of snake symbolism to promote British imperialism.

"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," Rudyard Kipling's famous children's story about the battle between a mongoose and two cobras, seems to be a straightforward tale in which the hero and villains are clearly defined and good triumphs over evil. However, like most stories that deal with such themes, the methods by which good and evil are defined and represented can serve to make a greater ideological point. Kipling, who wrote during the height of British imperial power, was a well-known proponent of British imperialism, and his ideologies were not absent from his children's stories. In the case of "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," Kipling uses the cobras, Nag and Nagaina, as a symbol of evil in order to demonize the Hindu culture and thereby promote the British agenda of rule over India.

When Nag is first introduced, he is described in simple adjectives that serve to clearly attribute an evil nature to him:

. . . from the thick grass at the foot of the bush there came a low hiss□a horrid cold sound that made Rikki-tikki jump back two clear feet. Then inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag, the big black cobra. . . . and he looked at Rikki-tikki with the wicked snake's eyes that never change their expression. . . .

Both objective and subjective adjectives are used to describe him: while an adjective like "black" reflects an objective observation, other adjectives, such as "horrid" "cold," and "wicked" that do the most to cast Nag as evil, are descriptions based not on fact but on the narrator's subjective bias.

Aside from these subjective descriptions, however, there is little else to indicate why Nag□and by extension, his wife Nagaina□merit the attribution of evil.

The concept of evil itself is, of course, also subjective. It is commonly applied to that which falls outside of the bounds of the laws and morals that govern a particular society. It might be construed that the snakes are evil because they kill□but killing, in the world of the bungalow garden, is not an act that deviates from its laws. The only governing law is the law of survival, by which all the characters, snakes included, are primarily motivated.

The big man who lives in the bungalow does not hesitate to keep a mongoose to kill snakes or to use his shotgun against the snakes as well (as he does twice in the story) in order to protect himself and his family from death. At the same time, Nag and Nagaina would not hesitate to kill the humans in order to preserve their lives and the lives of their children: That survival is their sole motivation in attacking the humans and Rikki-tikki-tavi is evident when Nagaina explains the rationale of their ambush to Nag: "When the house is emptied of people . . . [Rikki-tikki-tavi] will have to go away, and then the garden will be our own again. . . . So long as the bungalow is empty, we are

king and queen of the garden; and remember that as soon as our eggs in the melon-bed hatch . . . our children will need room and quiet."

Not only is killing for survival regarded as acceptable behavior, it is exalted as heroic. Rikki-tikki-tavi is deemed a hero for bringing about the death of Nag and Nagaina. He even resorts to what would otherwise be considered less-than-scrupulous means to achieve his triumph when he fatally attacks a sleeping Nag. In fact, the only character who expresses any reluctance at killing□Darzee the tailorbird, who refuses to help Rikki destroy the cobras' eggs□is called "a feather-brained little fellow" for not understanding that the act of taking life is vital to his own self-preservation.

The narrator's choice of adjectives in describing the snakes, then, is not justified by any evidence of deviant behavior. The perception of the snakes as evil, therefore, is based solely on the snakes' adversarial relationship to Rikki-tikki-tavi and especially to the human family.

Indeed, the narrative voice's bias towards the human family's point of view not only casts the snakes as evil, but it idealizes and, therefore, depicts as good the human family. Rikki-tikki considers himself to be a lucky mongoose for having been taken in by a human family because "every well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to be a house mongoose." The narrative goes further than simply idealizing all of humanity, however, in specifying that "Rikki-tikki's mother . . . had carefully told Rikki what to do if ever he came across white men." The use of the very specific term "white men" creates an exclusivity that leaves out any non-white cultures and races from its representation of what is ideal. Specifically, as this white family is a British family stationed in an army facility in colonial India, it leaves out the non-white and non-Christian, indigenous Hindu culture, and idealizes the British.

That the colonial British family is put on a pedestal reveals that the narrator espouses a worldview characteristic of the British during the time in which the story was written. Great Britain, in the late nineteenth century□the time during which "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" was published□ commanded a worldwide empire larger than the world had ever seen before, of which India was the most important piece. Victorian-era imperialism was characterized by the practice of appropriating others' land for colonization and financial self-interest; it also reflected a paternalistic, self-righteous attitude that assumed British superiority and the moral obligation of British to spread their culture as they conquered other countries.

It would not have been difficult for Kipling's contemporary, Victorian, British, Christian readers□who shared his and the narrator's worldview□to view the cobras as evil to begin with; like Teddy's mother, who "wouldn't think of anything so awful" as snakes crawling through her house, the average British reader already would have associated Nag and Nagaina with evil, not only because snakes are truly potentially lethal to humans, but because in Judeo-Christian tradition the snake is a traditional symbol of evil. This symbol appears in the serpent of in the Garden of Eden in Genesis, which Jews and Christians interpret as the representation of Satan, and it appears in the dragon mentioned in Chapter 12 of Revelations, also taken to be a symbol of Satan.

The symbolic use of the snake continued throughout later Christian and European folklore: St. Patrick was supposed to have driven all the snakes from Ireland, and in the legend of St. George, a community converts to Christianity in his honor after he rescues them from an evil dragon. In these myths, the serpent/dragon figures are allegorical representations of non-Christian religions dispelled by dominating Christianity, and this recurring motif consistently demonizes non-Judeo-Christian gods by associating them with the symbolic representation of Satan.

The vilification of the snake is a particularly Western, Judeo-Christian pattern. In many other cultures the snake plays just the opposite role. In Hinduism specifically, the main religion of India, snakes, particularly king cobras, are held in reverence and awe. In certain parts of India, an actual cult of snake worship exists: the ancient, annual Nag-Panchami festival is held in honor of snakes, during which time they are welcomed into the home and given offerings of milk (the word "Nag" in Hindi means snake). Snakes also play an important part in the religious symbolism of Hinduism. Shiva, one of the most important gods in the Hindu pantheon, is often portrayed with a snake around his shoulders. The snake, because it continually sheds and grows its skin, is used as a symbol of eternity. In stories of creation, the god Vishnu, another important god in Hinduism, is said to have reclined on the back of a thousand-headed cobra during the destruction and recreation of the universe.

Kipling, although not a practicing Christian as an adult, had a childhood influenced by Christianity, and much of his writing reflects themes that draw Christian motifs. He would have been well aware of the association that his Western readers would draw with the image of the snake in the story. At the same time, Kipling, who spent his early childhood in India and later, as an adult, traveled the subcontinent as a journalist, was well versed in the mythology and religious practices of Hindus, and, while he makes use of Christian mythology in depicting Nag and Nagaina as villains, he also makes use of Hindu snake mythology. When Nag first makes his introduction in the story, he invokes his sacred status in Hinduism: "*I* am Nag. The great god Brahm put his mark upon all our people when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahm as he slept."

However, with Nag's next line, the association made between him and the god Brahm is used to inspire not reverence but fear: "Look, and be afraid!"

The god Brahm, or Brahma, in Hinduism is, in simple terms, roughly comparable to the Christian God. He is the god associated with the creation of the universe. In Hinduism, a religion that does not necessarily subscribe to mutually exclusive notions of good and evil to begin with, Brahma especially contains no connotation of unequivocal evil. But here, the evocation of his name and his symbol are used to inspire a sinister fear, in association with the already-described evil nature of the snake.

This evocation of the Hindu deity causes a direct association between the snake characters and the Hindu religion in India, just as there is a direct association between the human characters and the British Empire. Casting Nag and Nagaina as evil and associating them with the Hindu culture, however, presents them and what they represent from a biased Western viewpoint and not from the point of view of Hinduism:

it is not such a big leap in the mind of the Victorian reader from the association of Nag with evil to the association of the god Brahma and therefore all of Hinduism and Indian culture with Satan.

The conflict between Nag and Nagaina□symbols of the Hindu culture which has now effectively been demonized□and the human family□a representation of the British presence in India□then takes on a larger meaning for the Victorian, imperialist readership, much like the stories found in the old European dragonslayer myths: the defeat of the demonic Hindu snake, and the survival of the British family to rule over the garden instead, becomes a rationalization of the British colonization of India, the imperialist ideologies of British superiority, and the moral obligation the British felt to bring "enlightened" ways to India.

In both portraying Nag as evil, reflecting the symbolism of Western Judeo-Christian tradition, and drawing an association between Nag and the Hindu god Brahm, Kipling appropriates the symbolism of the Hindu religion and, stripping it of its original meaning, interprets it based solely from the perspectives and philosophies of the West. This act of appropriation does not just misrepresent and demonize Hinduism; it symbolically annihilates it and replaces it with a Western point of view. In so doing, Kipling effectively performs a literary and cultural colonization of India.

Source: Tamara Fernando, Critical Essay on "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" was adapted as an animated film in 1975. It was directed by Chuck Jones, narrated by Orson Welles, and is available on VHS from Family Home Entertainment (reissued 2001).

A downloadable audio recording of stories from *The Jungle Books*, including "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," is available at http://www.audible.com and is narrated by Flo Gibson.

Topics for Further Study

The characters of Nag and Nagaina are portrayed as villains in "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi." The use of snakes as a symbol of evil is common in Western civilization. Can you think of other stories, myths, or folk tales that use this motif? Research the folktales and mythologies of another, non-Western culture, such as the Chinese culture or the Hindu culture. Are snakes used as symbols in these cultures and, if so, what do they represent?

The Hindu god Brahm, or Brahma, is mentioned in the story "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," but nothing about the god's significance in Hinduism is revealed. Research the following about the Hindu religion. Who is Brahm? What is his significance in Hinduism? What role does he play?

The British maintained a strong presence in India until 1947, when India finally was granted independence and became the independent nations of India and Pakistan. What events led up to India's independence? Why did Britain feel compelled to let go of such a large and vital part of its empire?

Kipling was largely derided in the early 2000s for promoting British imperialism, which embodied a sense of the superiority of British civilization and culture. Do you think that "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" reflects this attitude? Do you think that it is fair or accurate for Kipling to be judged by twenty-first—century political and cultural standards? Look at another of his works, the controversial poem "White Man's Burden." Assess whether this poem promotes imperialist ideologies.

Compare and Contrast

1890s: English readers are fascinated by portrayals of "exotic" British colonies like India, written primarily by British writers such as Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster, who offer depictions of India from the perspective of the British colonizer.

Today: Ethnic Indian writers and novelists writing in English, such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, offer the early twenty-first-century, English-language readership award-winning work portraying the life and culture of India from an Indian perspective.

1890s: England commands the largest worldwide empire, spanning the globe, and India is one of its largest and most important components.

Today: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, formerly the Indian Empire of Great Britain, are each independent, self-governing nations. Strong influences of British rule remain, however, including forms of government and the adoption of English as an official national language.

1890s: The practice of British imperialism reflects a racist belief of white British superiority over the non-white nations of the world, rationalizing their government-sanctioned conquest and rule of other races.

Today: While attitudes of racism still exist, human rights movements in the United States and Europe in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries provide a strong cultural and political opposition to government-sanctioned racist policies in Western countries.

What Do I Read Next?

The Jungle Books, published in two volumes in 1894 and 1895, Kipling's most famous and endearing work, is a collection of stories for children set in the jungles of India and featuring animals as their main characters. The most famous are the stories featuring the character of Mowgli, a boy raised by wolves in the jungle. "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" appears in the second volume.

Puck of Pook's Hill (1906) is one of Kipling's lesser-known children's novels. Like the *Jungle Books* it features a fantasy world in which Puck the fairy of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears to children who are performing the play and leads them on adventures.

Just-So Stories (1902) is another collection of children's stories by Rudyard Kipling. This series of stories draws on the folklore of India to explain in a fanciful manner the origins of different animals. Some stories include "How the Leopard Got Its Spots" and "The Cat That Walked by Himself."

Captains Courageous (1897) is a coming-of-age novel by Kipling that relates the adventures of a rich, spoiled boy who is rescued from a shipwreck by a fishing boat. This novel is typically classified as appropriate for young readers.

Kim (1901) is often said to be Kipling's most mature novel. The main character Kim, also known as Kimball O'Hara, is the orphaned son of an Irish soldier who lives on the streets of India. In a search for his destiny, he embarks on travels that bring him across such figures as the Tibetan Dalai Lama. Although the novel does contain several racial stereotypes, it has also been praised in modern times for its ability to rise above the racism that characterized other contemporary works.

The Wind in the Willows, by the Scottish writer Kenneth Grahame, is a collection of children's stories published in 1924, about the same time that Kipling wrote. Like many of Kipling's children's works, it, too, features an imaginary world populated by distinctively characterized animals, emulating a popular trend in children's writing.

A Passage to India, a novel by English writer E. M. Forster, was first published in 1924 when India was still a part of the British Empire. The novel, although incorporating some distinctly British, colonialist points of view, explores the controversies surrounding relationships between the different races and offers the hope of reconciliation and mutual respect.

Orientalism (1978), a work of criticism by the post-colonial theorist Edward Said, is a seminal criticism of British imperialism and its aftermath. In particular, Said concentrates on the use of literature by Victorian Britain to promote colonization and the exploitation and oppression of other races.

Further Study

Cain, Peter, and Tony Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688—2000*, 2d ed., Longman, 2001.

When this comprehensive history of the British Empire was first published, it was received with critical acclaim. It was later updated to relate imperialism to modern-day international politics.

Ferguson, Niall, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, Basic Books, 2003.

Ferguson offers a history of British imperialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and applies it to the international policies of the twenty-first century.

Gilmour, David, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

Kipling's legacy endured a long history of vilification, but this biography offers a fresh, early twenty-first-century perspective on his life and ideologies.

Mallett, Phillip, *Rudyard Kipling: A Literary Life*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Mallett concentrates especially on Kipling's writing life and family life.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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