

W.Somerset Maugham (1874 – 1965)

Task 1. Read the text

W. Somerset Maugham is one of the most popular and well-read authors of the twentieth century. His many works include novels, short stories, and plays.

If you want an author who has lived the struggles he writes about, then **W. Somerset Maugham** is your man! Maugham is a British author who left a medical career when his first novel sold and did well. He then struggled to find renewed success, but when it returned it never left and he was the most popular and well-paid author of the 1930s.

William Somerset Maugham was born in Paris in 1874. His parents who worked at the English Embassy, died early and the boy was brought up by his uncle, a clergyman. He said:

“My parents died when I was so young, my father when I was 10. He was a great traveler of those days; he had a considerable library of travel books...”

Evidently William took after his father. It was his cherished desire from childhood to see different countries and soon he had the opportunity to realize his dream.

After his parents' death the boy was taken away from the French school which he had attended and he went daily for his lessons to the apartment of the English clergyman attached to the Embassy.

“His method of teaching me English was to make me read aloud the police court news and I can still remember the horror with which I read the ghastly details of a murder in the train”.

At the age of 12 the boy was sent to England to attend school. In 1890 he went abroad and studied at the Medical University.

“All this was a valuable experience to me. I do not know a better training for a writer than to spend some years in the medical profession. I did not want to be anything but a writer...” he wrote.

His experience in treating the sick of the working class areas gave Maugham material for the first work, *Liza of Lambeth*, a realistic novel characterized by a powerful photographic portraiture of life, which shocked the conventional tastes of his days readers. After that, although he had taken his degree in medicine and become a fully qualified doctor, he decided to devote his life to literature.

Soon after the publication of his first novel Maugham travelled to all the parts of the world.

Somerset Maugham wrote 24 plays, 19 novels and a large number of short stories in addition to travel works. The most popular novels are: *Of Human Bondage*, *Theatre*, *Razor's Edge*, *Cake and Ale*, *The Moon and the Sixpence*.

Few of his plays stood the test of time. He is primarily a short-story writer and a novelist. Many of his stories are set in foreign lands as they were inspired by his travels in China, Malaysia, Borneo, Siam and others. His rich experience of life and acute insight into human nature gave him an analytical and critical quality which found its expression in the vivid depiction of characters and situations.

Maugham believes that the charm of the story lies in its interesting plot and exciting situations, but we cannot share his opinion: his own stories though they are indeed interesting and exciting at the same time convey deep thought keen observation and sharpness of characterization. Though Maugham does not give a broad panorama of contemporary society and does not deep into social problems, he shows many different aspects of life.

A realistic portrayal of life, keen character observation, interesting plots coupled with beautiful expressive language and a simple lucid style, all these place Somerset Maugham on a level with the greatest English writers of the 20-th century.

Task 2. Complete the sentences

1. From the early age he cherished _____
2. He did not want to be anything but _____
3. All his life he remembered the horror with which _____
4. _____ shocked the conventional tastes of his readers
5. He is primarily _____
6. Many of his stories were inspired _____
7. Maugham believes that the charm of the story lies _____
8. His stories convey _____

Task 3. Listen to (or read) one of Maugham's stories

Rain

<https://esl-bits.net/ESL.English.Listening.Short.Stories/Rain/01/default.html>

Letter

<https://esl-bits.net/ESL.English.Listening.Short.Stories/The.Letter/01/default.html>