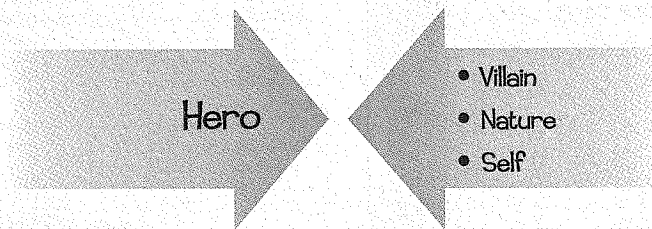


Rikki-tikki-tavi

Literary Focus: Conflict

Conflict is the problem or struggle that makes a story interesting. Often, we can explain the main conflict in one phrase, like “hero versus villains.” The diagram below shows a few of the types of conflicts a story’s hero might face. Try to identify other types of conflicts by adding to the arrow on the right.



Remember, the main conflict often gets played out in a series of smaller conflicts and events.

Reading Skill: Retelling

Retelling a story means telling, in your own words, a story that someone else has written. Retelling helps you understand what you read. When you retell a story, one of the first things you need to identify is the main conflict.

Into the Story

The following story is set in India during a time when the British government ruled that country. The hero of the story, Rikki-tikki-tavi, is a mongoose. A mongoose is an animal that looks like a cross between a squirrel and a weasel. The story is about a conflict between the mongoose and the deadly snakes that share his yard.

Rikki-tikki-tavi

Based on the Story by

Rudyard Kipling



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RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI 1



Here's HOW

RETELLING

In lines 1-14, I meet the main character (Rikki-tikki-tavi) and find out how he came to live with Teddy's family.

Your TURN

RETELLING

Which character did Rikki-tikki meet in lines 15-20 that was five feet long? Write your answer on the lines below.

Here's HOW

CONFLICT

In lines 21 and 22, I have underlined the names of two characters I think will be in conflict.

Here's HOW

VOCABULARY

In line 32, I think the word *slithered* tells how Nagaina moves. She is a snake, so *slither* must mean "sliding from side to side."

1 **T**his is the story of a great war. Rikki-tikki-tavi fought this war in an English family's home in India. He had some help, but he did the real fighting.

Rikki-tikki was a mongoose. His name came from the sound he made going into battle: *Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!*

When Rikki was small, a flood swept him away from his home and family. A little boy named Teddy found him half-dead and brought him home. Teddy and his mother warmed the mongoose till he woke up.

10 Although the mother had a soft spot for animals, she wasn't sure she wanted a wild animal in her house. But Teddy's father convinced her that a mongoose was the perfect house pet. After all, deadly snakes lived right in their garden, and mongooses were snake killers.

15 Rikki-tikki soon felt better, and he spent the rest of the day and the next morning exploring Teddy's house. In the yard he heard the sad voices of two tailorbirds, Darzee and his wife. The birds were crying because a cobra named Nag had eaten one of their babies. Just then, Nag himself appeared. He was a huge black cobra, five feet long.

"I am Nag," he said. "Look, and be afraid!"

Though Rikki had never met a cobra, he knew that a mongoose's job was to kill snakes. Nag knew that, too, and the cobra was afraid.

25 Rikki-tikki replied, "Well. Do you think you should eat baby birds?"

Nag then played a trick on Rikki-tikki.

"Let's talk," he said. "If you eat eggs, why shouldn't I eat birds?"

30 "Behind you! Look behind you!" cried Darzee.

Rikki-tikki jumped high up in the air. He just missed being struck by Nag's wife Nagaina, who had slithered up

behind him. Rikki landed on Nagaina's back and bit her, but she struggled free.

35 When a mongoose's eyes grow red, it means he is angry. Now Rikki-tikki's eyes grew very red. But Nag and Nagaina were gone.

Teddy ran down the path to pet Rikki-tikki. But as Teddy bent down, something moved in the dust. It was Karait, a
40 small but deadly snake. Rikki's eyes glowed red.

Teddy shouted to his parents. His father ran out with a stick. But Rikki-tikki had already killed Karait.

Teddy's father beat the dead Karait.

45 "Why is he doing that?" thought Rikki-tikki. "I have already killed the snake."

The family treated Rikki like a hero. He enjoyed the attention. But he did not forget about Nag and Nagaina.

That night, Rikki wandered around inside the house. He met Chuchundra the muskrat, a little ratlike animal.

50 Chuchundra was very scared.

"Don't kill me!" cried Chuchundra.

"Why would I kill you?" said Rikki-tikki scornfully.

"I don't know," said Chuchundra. "Maybe Nag will think I am you some dark night, and he will kill me. My
55 cousin Chua, the rat, told me—"

"Told you what?" said Rikki-tikki.

Chuchundra was terrified, but he told Rikki that Nag and Nagaina were planning an attack that very night.

Just then, Rikki-tikki heard a soft *scratch-scratch* coming
60 from the bathroom. Rikki-tikki moved quietly into the bathroom. There he heard Nag and Nagaina whispering in the drainpipe.

"Go in quietly, and kill the big man first," said Nagaina.

65 "Are you sure we should kill the people?" said Nag.



Your TURN

RETELLING

Two important events occur in lines 30–42.

- First, Rikki-tikki has a fight with Nagaina, the female cobra.
- Whom does he fight next?

Your TURN

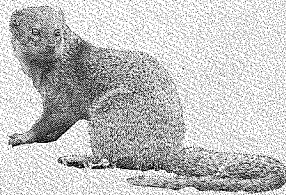
VOCABULARY

Why do you think Rikki-tikki answers Chuchundra *scornfully* in line 52?

Your TURN

CONFLICT

Which event on this page do you think will move the plot forward: Rikki-tikki's conflict with Karait (lines 38–42) or his conversation with Chuchundra (lines 51–58)? Explain your answer.



Your TURN

RETELLING

- In lines 61–68, a new conflict arises: Rikki-tikki overhears Nag and Nagaina plotting to kill the family.
- Re-read lines 70–78. How is the conflict settled? What is Rikki-tikki's role?

Stop:
End of
Part 1

Here's HOW

CONFLICT

Rikki-tikki knows he must destroy Nagaina's eggs. Otherwise, he will have to deal with a whole family of cobras. In lines 90–93, Darzee's wife helps Rikki-tikki by pretending her wing is broken. She flutters away, and Nagaina chases her.

"Of course. The mongoose will leave if we kill them. Then we can be king and queen of the garden, and we will have a safe hatching ground for our eggs," said Nagaina. She and Nag had eggs that were almost ready to hatch.

70 Nag slipped through the drain into the bathroom. His head came first, then his five feet of scaly body. Rikki-tikki was angry, but also afraid. He stayed very still for an hour. Then, he moved slowly toward Nag. He knew he had to kill Nag with his first bite. Rikki jumped on Nag's head. Nag
75 shook him every which way. Though Rikki was dizzy and hurt all over, he held on tightly.

Then Rikki felt a blast. The fight had awakened Teddy's father, who shot Nag.

The man picked up Rikki. He shouted, "It's the
80 mongoose again! This time, he has saved our lives!"

Exhausted, Rikki-tikki dragged himself to Teddy's bedroom.

When morning came, Rikki-tikki knew he had a job to finish. Nagaina was still alive. Rikki went to Darzee for help.
85 Darzee told Rikki that Nagaina was by the trash heap, crying over Nag's body. Her eggs were in the melon garden. But the foolish Darzee refused to help Rikki get rid of the cobra's eggs. Darzee didn't think it was fair to destroy eggs.

90 Darzee's wife had more common sense. She didn't want young cobras around. She helped Rikki by fluttering around, pretending her wing was broken. Nagaina couldn't resist such an easy target, so she pursued the bird.

Meanwhile, Rikki-tikki found Nagaina's twenty-five soft,
95 white eggs. He had crushed all but one when he heard Darzee's wife screaming:

"Rikki-tikki, I led Nagaina toward the house. Now she is going in! Hurry! She is going to kill!"

Holding the last egg in his mouth, Rikki-tikki hurried to
100 the porch.

There, Teddy and his parents sat at the breakfast table.
They were as still as stones, hardly daring to breathe.
Nagaina was coiled up on the floor by Teddy's chair.

Rikki-tikki came up and cried, "Turn round and fight,
105 Nagaina!"

"I will fight you soon," she said, but she didn't turn away
from Teddy's bare leg.

Rikki-tikki's eyes were blood red. "Look what I have
here," he said. "Your last egg! I have smashed all the
110 others."

Nagaina spun around. Teddy's father grabbed Teddy and
pulled him across the table to safety.

"Tricked! *Rikk-tck-tck!*" laughed Rikki-tikki. "*Rikki-tikki-
tck-tck!* Now, come and fight with me."

115 Nagaina looked at her egg. "Give me the egg, Rikki-tikki.
I will go away and never come back," she said, lowering
her hood.

"Yes, you will go away—to the trash heap. Fight!" said
Rikki-tikki.

120 They circled each other in a deadly dance. But Rikki had
forgotten the egg. Nagaina quickly caught her last egg in her
mouth and raced away with it. Rikki-tikki followed her and
caught her tail in his sharp little teeth. Together they
disappeared down a rat hole.

125 Darzee, who was watching the battle, cried, "A
mongoose has no chance against a snake down there.
Brave Rikki is dead!"

But suddenly, the grass moved again. There was Rikki-
tikki. He dragged himself out of the hole.

130 "It is all over," Rikki said. "Nagaina is dead."



Heres HOW

VOCABULARY

The word *coiled* in line 103 tells how the snake was lying on the floor. I think it means that the snake was lying in a circle. I checked the dictionary, and it says "gathered in loops or circles." My meaning was correct.

Your TURN

RETELLING

- Nagaina offers to leave the yard in exchange for her last egg.
- How does Rikki respond when Nagaina asks Rikki to give her back the egg? The answer lies in lines 115–119.



Your TURN

CONFLICT

The major problem in a story usually gets solved before it ends. Re-read lines 130-142. Put a check next to a line that tells you the conflict is over.

Then he curled up right there and slept until late afternoon. He didn't even hear the Coppersmith, a little bird whose job it was to shout out the good news.

That night at the house, Rikki ate a feast. He was amused
135 by all the fuss.

"Just think, he saved our lives and Teddy's life," said Teddy's mother.

"What are they worried about?" Rikki-tikki wondered.

"The cobras are all dead. And if any more come, I'm here."

140 Rikki-tikki was proud in his own way, and he had a right to be. From then on, he protected the yard. No cobra ever again dared to enter it.