The Ring

Bernard Smith

About the author
Bernard Smith lives near Eastbourne on the south coast of England. He and his wife teach English as a Foreign Language. He has written many books, mainly for exams, but also a number of Readers.

Summary
Rafael is a poor fisherman, who, for some reason in the past, has gone mad. All he can say is, ‘She gave me the golden fish,’ or ‘She gave me the ring. I still have it. She gave the ring back to me.’ Did he go mad for love of a girl, or because he saw or committed some terrible deed?

Chapters 1–4: In Chapter 1, the narrator, who is a doctor when the story starts, still remembers meeting Crazy Rafael when, as a twelve-year-old boy, he was visiting his Uncle Miguel. Rafael was living in an abandoned boat-house and kept mumbling the same words. Twelve years later, mad Rafael is at the same place and still deluded. The doctor determines to get treatment for Rafael to find out what is wrong with him. In Chapter 2, the doctor tries to learn the facts surrounding the strange case. The people of the village oblige. He assembles many facts. He learns through his uncle that Rafael’s father was a fisherman who was killed by a white shark. Rafael therefore devoted his whole life to avenging his father’s death by killing sharks. In Chapter 3, the doctor’s uncle retells the life story of Anita, Crazy Rafael’s beloved. He also talks about their unrequited love and Anita’s mysterious disappearance. In Chapter 4, Miguel retells the story of the soldier who came to the village on an engine boat and fell for Anita. He made friends with Anita’s father and became a local at his shop. One day, to everyone’s shock, Anita vanished into thin air and the soldier was never seen again. It is believed that they eloped. According to village gossip, the soldier stole Anita’s heart and eventually took her away forever. That was also the night that Santiago’s donkey went missing, but it is hard for anyone to see a connection, since the donkey was too old to carry anyone. Anita’s father was broken-hearted and furious and he never mentioned his daughter again. To him, his daughter was dead.

Chapters 5–7: In Chapter 5, Miguel tells the story behind the ring. Rafael wants to propose to Anita. He and his mother want to talk to Rodrigo to agree on a marriage. However, they know he wants his daughter to marry a businessman. Rafael leaves the village for six months and works hard to save money to buy a golden ring in the shape of a fish for Anita. Rafael and his mother eventually talk to Anita’s father about allowing her to marry him. But he opposes their marriage and Rafael has to keep the ring to himself. In Chapter 6, Miguel retells the events that took place the night that Rafael danced at the café dressed in his best clothes. That very night the soldier, who appears to be another suitor to Anita, is present at the shop for a while and leaves. Soon after, Anita is reported missing and the whole village, especially Rafael, starts searching for her. It is also that night that the young fisherman goes mad. In Chapter 7, the doctor and his uncle visit Rodrigo, Anita’s father, after many years to find out more about what actually happened. However, he refuses to disclose any facts. Yet, Anita’s younger sister, Marta, wants to tell them the story of Anita and Rafael to help the mad fisherman.

Chapters 8–12: In Chapter 8, Marta talks about her sister Anita’s selfish personality and her secret outings with her prince, Rafael. Anita was very sad when he left for six months but was happy again when he returned and gave her a ring. In Chapter 9, Marta discloses what she saw on the night Anita disappeared. She witnessed her sister packing her things to leave with her true prince. Marta assumed that this meant she was eloping with the soldier and that she would give the ring back to Rafael first. Marta talks about the story her sister wrote. In Chapter 10, the doctor reads out Anita’s story. The story is not very revealing but it confirms many of his intuitions. Yet it is difficult to understand how things turned out the way they did. In Chapter 11, the doctor starts to believe that something really frightening happened to Rafael and that repressing this made him mad. The doctor wants
to help him remember so that he can come back to his senses. Rosa, Rafael's aunt, begs the doctor not to do this, since she believes her late sister's argument that her son committed a terrible crime. In Chapter 12, Rosa retells Clara's story about Rafael. Clara narrates the events that took place the night she saw her son standing by his boat, soaked with blood, and she thought he had killed the soldier. She told him to wash himself and dress up to go to the café and be seen by everybody so that nobody could suspect him.

Chapters 13–15: In Chapter 13, the doctor sketches his ideas about what actually happened the night Rafael went mad in the form of questions and answers. He receives a letter from Rosa telling him that Rafael is very ill. Rafael is committed to hospital with serious tuberculosis and, on the sixth day, he confesses everything he has done to the doctor and dies. In Chapter 14, the doctor retells all the events as they happened on the night of the soldier's murder. He also discloses Rafael's scheme to frame and kill his enemy. In Chapter 15, the doctor retells how Rafael, wanting to destroy all the evidence of his lethal plot, kills a white shark. As he opens its stomach with his spear, he finds his beloved's hand still wearing his golden ring. Rafael ties the ring around his neck using a fishing line. He then tries to kill himself but his punishment is to live to remember what he did. Yet in attempting to escape from the gruesome reality of his guilty deeds, he goes mad.

Background and themes

*The Ring* is a good example of the type of *whodunnit* (who-has-done-it?) in which even the actual crime is obscure. There is a first-person witness narrator, the doctor, who retells the mysterious story of mad Rafael, Anita, the dead soldier and the ring after fourteen years. Yet only one person actually knows what happened that terrible night and, in his madness, Rafael cannot tell anyone anything useful. The reader knows instinctively that Rafael either did something or saw something terrible. However, as each person gives their entirely truthful account of events, the web of confusion increases. In fact, the reader is given all the information needed to solve the crime and identify the criminal, but it requires lateral thinking to see how everything fits together and you probably won’t do any better at trying to solve the puzzle than the witness narrator!

### Discussion activities

**Before reading**

1. **Group work:** Put students into groups and ask them to work on the following activity: *This is a story about a young man who goes mad for no clear reason that his friends or family can explain. Think of reasons why a person might suddenly go mad.*

2. **Pair work:** Students work in pairs. They should imagine they are going on to visit a relative who lives in a fishermen's village: *In pairs, imagine you are on a village by the sea. You are walking on the beach and you see a mad man. What do you do? What do you tell him? Write down your ideas.*

3. **Predict:** Ask students to look through the pictures in the book and work out a possible story from the pictures. Elicit ideas from different groups but don't confirm or correct any of the ideas: *In groups, look at the pictures in the book and the titles in the Contents page. Discuss what the story will be about.*

4. **Write:** Ask students to work in groups. They should write a short paragraph about the story of a mad man living on a beach using at least ten of the words below: *In groups, pick ten words from the box and write a paragraph about a mad man living on a beach to publish in a newspaper.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>anchor</th>
<th>engine</th>
<th>shore</th>
<th>shark</th>
<th>fisherman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>goldsmith</td>
<td>boat</td>
<td>poor</td>
<td>magic</td>
<td>truth rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>ambulance</td>
<td>tuberculosis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Ask students to look up the words they do not know in the Word List in back of the book.

### Chapters 1–4

**While reading**

5. **Pair work:** Pair students up to role play a scene: *Read pages 1–3 in pairs and imagine you are the two boys. Talk about the strange man you saw, how you felt and what you think of him. Then act out your conversation.*

6. **Discuss:** Ask students to work in groups and to discuss the following: *As you read pages 3–5, discuss why you think the doctor is so interested in the madman.*

7. **Write:** Tell students to work in groups as they read pages 5–8: *Read the story about Rafael's father and imagine you are the doctor listening to it. Make notes of the most important things.*

8. **Discuss:** Ask students to pair up and do the following activity: *In pairs read pages 8–9 and write as much as you know about Anita and her father:*

| Anita | Rodrigo (Anita’s father) |

9. **Discuss:** Put students into groups and ask them to discuss the following: *As you read pages 10–12, discuss in groups: (a) what the soldier is like, (b) if he is good for Anita, (c) what Rodrigo and Anita may think of him.*
The Ring

After reading

10 Role play: Students pair up and work on the following activity: You are two village gossips. Talk about the secrets you know about Anita and Rafael, and Anita and the soldier. Discuss why Rafael went mad.

11 Write: Ask students to imagine they are Anita: Write down in your personal diary what you want in life, how you feel about your father, the man you love, the village, etc.

12 Pair work: Put students into groups. They imagine they are Rafael: Write five secret sentences on the wall of your boathouse. What will you write?

Chapters 5–7

After reading

13 Read and check: Tell students to read Chapter 5 and to concentrate on Rafael: In groups, read pages 13–16 and discuss what went right and what went wrong for Rafael. Then complete this chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What went right</th>
<th>What went wrong</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

14 Write: Ask students to work in pairs as they read pages 17–19: Imagine you are Rafael and the soldier at the café. Choose one part and write down what you are secretly thinking. Then take turns to read out what you wrote.

15 Discuss: Students work in groups and discuss as they read pages 20–21: After reading all these pages, what do you think actually happened to Anita? Why did Rafael go mad?

16 Read and check: Tell students to work in groups and do the following activity: As you read pages 21–23, make notes on the new things we know about Rafael’s story through Rodrigo and Luis Valdez. Then, complete the chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rodrigo</th>
<th>Luis Valdez</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After reading

17 Write: Ask students to work in groups: Imagine you are the doctor. Write down in your notebook how you are feeling now. What are you thinking of? How have you changed your mind about Rafael’s story?

18 Predict: Ask students to discuss how the story goes on in groups after reading page 23: What will Marta say about Anita? What will she say about Rafael and the soldier? How will the story change?

Chapters 8–12

While reading

19 Compare: Students work in pairs as they read pages 24–26: Read and compare Anita and Marta. How different are they?

20 Predict: Ask students to work in groups and to predict how the story goes on: In groups, read pages 26–28 and discuss who you think Anita went to see.

21 Read and check: Tell students to work in the same groups as in the previous activity: Now keep reading pages 29 and 30 and compare your predictions with what happened in the story.

22 Pair work: Ask students to work in pairs as they read Anita’s story on page 31: In pairs, read the story Anita wrote and compare it to what really happened to her. How close is her story to her life story?

23 Discuss: Ask students to work in groups as they read pages 33–34: What is so surprising about Rosa’s words? What new things do we know through her? What is the doctor thinking now? Why? What will he do next?

Chapters 13–15

While reading

26 Pair work: Tell students to pair up for the following activity: Read pages 38–39 in pairs. Read the questions the doctor makes and his answers. Then discuss different answers for each question and write them down.

27 Write: Ask students to read the letter the doctor receives on page 40: In pairs, decide what the doctor will do and write it down in a letter to Rodrigo.

28 Read and check: Tell students to work in groups as they read pages 43–48: In groups, read Chapter 14 and make notes of the most important things that we learn in this chapter. Did you predict them?

After reading

29 Discuss: Ask students to work in pairs after reading Chapter 15: In pairs, discuss what the worst thing that happens to Rafael is. Why do you think he went mad? Why will the doctor never say what actually happened?

30 Write: Tell students to work in groups and to work on a different ending: In groups, think of a different ending for the story. What would you change? Write it down. Ask five groups to read their different versions.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.