About the author

Stephen King is a writer who knows all about fame. The huge popularity of books such as *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Salem's Lot* and *Misery*, have made him one of the world's highest-earning authors. Many of his stories have been made into films or TV series, most of which have also been very popular. A film based on *Misery* was released in 1990 to critical and public acclaim.

Born in Portland, Maine in the north-eastern United States in 1947, King's first published story was *I Was a Teenage Grave Robber*, which appeared in an amateur magazine. From 1966 he attended the University of Maine, and alongside his full-time programme took creative writing classes. He was already selling stories before he left college, and continued writing while working as a teacher at a private school in the small town of Hampden, also in Maine.

It was during this time that he produced his first novel, *Carrie*, about a young girl who is unpopular at school and takes revenge through the use of psychic powers. He sold it in 1973, and when he was offered an incredible $400,000 for the paperback rights, he was able to leave teaching and write full-time.

King now lives with his family in Bangor, only a short distance from the poor area where he grew up.

Summary

One of Stephen King's most terrifying stories, *Misery* concerns Paul Sheldon, a famous writer of novels about a heroine called Misery Chastain. After celebrating the completion of a new book, Sheldon has a car crash on a forest road in the Colorado mountains. As he gradually returns to consciousness he finds himself in bed in a strange house, but also begins to realise that the woman who has found him and taken him home is dangerously insane and has no intention of letting him go. Paul has no choice: he must wait and hope that he doesn't make her angry – because, as he discovers, when Annie Wilkes is angry, there's no limit to what she will do. His only sources of relief are the novel that Annie asks him to write for her, and the idea that one day he might get revenge for the tortures she inflicts on him.

Chapter 1: Paul Sheldon wakes up in pain. In a state of semi-consciousness, he hears a woman's voice urging him to breathe, and realises she is giving him the kiss of life. As he slowly returns to consciousness, he remembers the events that led to his accident on a mountain road. When he wakes up he is aware of a woman sitting next to his bed. She tells him that he is her favourite author.

Chapter 2: The woman, whose name is Annie Wilkes, feeds him and gives him pain-killing tablets, but her behaviour is terrifyingly unpredictable and she makes him wait before giving him his pain-killers. Paul keeps listening out for visitors to the house, but none come. Annie tells him how she rescued him from his overturned car and brought him home with her. Paul's legs were broken in the crash and Annie put splints on them. She seems to know what she is doing and Paul assumes she must be a nurse.

Chapters 3–4: Before she gives him his pills, Annie tells Paul she has started reading the latest Misery Chastain novel. She is very enthusiastic about it. She also tells him she has found a typescript of a new novel in his bag. Paul tells her it is not a Misery novel and tells her she can read it if she wants to. At first, Annie is very happy and tells Paul that she loves him, but the next day her mood has changed dramatically. She has been reading Paul's new book and she doesn't like it at all. She flies into a terrible rage and makes Paul take his pill with soapy water from a bucket.

Chapters 5–6: Two days later, Annie is looking extremely unwell. Paul suddenly realises she must have been reading the latest Misery Chastain novel. She is very enthusiastic about it. She also tells him she has found a typescript of a new novel in his bag. Paul tells her it is not a Misery novel and tells her she can read it if she wants to. At first, Annie is very happy and tells Paul that she loves him, but the next day her mood has changed dramatically. She has been reading Paul's new book and she doesn't like it at all. She flies into a terrible rage and makes Paul take his pill with soapy water from a bucket.

Chapters 5–6: Two days later, Annie is looking extremely unwell. Paul suddenly realises she must have been reading the latest Misery Chastain novel and has reached the part where Misery dies. Annie is distraught and very angry with Paul. She tells him she has to go away for a while otherwise she will do something stupid. She leaves Paul alone and in pain for over two days without medicine. When she returns, Paul is desperate for the pills, and Annie refuses to give him any until he agrees to start burning the typescript of his new book. Paul has kept no copy, and for the first time he realises he wants to kill Annie.
Chapter 7: While in a drug-induced sleep, Annie lifts Paul into a wheelchair. When he wakes up, she tells him she thinks he will get better if they don’t have any more arguments. She has brought him a second-hand typewriter with no ‘n’. She tells Paul she wants him to write a new Misery story and bring her back to life. Paul agrees, but says the paper she has bought is no good. This makes Annie very angry, and she punches Paul’s injured knee and leaves him alone in the house once again.

Chapters 8–9: While Annie is away, Paul manages to pick the lock of his bedroom door with a hairpin and to find a supply of painkillers in the bathroom. He checks to the phone, but it is disconnected. He manages to get back to his room and hide the pills under his mattress just before Annie comes back.

Chapter 10: Paul begins work on bringing Misery back to life. His first attempt is a failure, and Annie tells him it is unconvincing. Paul has to agree, and soon he is working enthusiastically on the new novel.

Chapter 11: Annie has a visitor from the local town. She ties Paul up and warns him not to make a sound or she will kill the visitor. The man gives her a tax bill for over five hundred dollars. Annie is shaken, and to try to keep her calm, Paul says she can have the money in his wallet to pay the taxes. Three weeks pass and Paul progresses well with the Misery book.

Chapters 12–15: Annie’s mood changes again when the rain comes. Her behaviour is very strange and she suggests she and Paul commit suicide together. Paul manages to dissuade her and she decides instead to go away again. This time she leaves him some pills, but no food. So Paul uses the hairpin again to leave his room in search of a way to escape. But all the doors and windows are locked. There is no way out. While he is in the sitting room, he looks through Annie’s things. He reads an album in which she has collected newspaper cuttings about many mysterious deaths, dating back over thirty years. Paul realises that Annie is a serial murderer and now knows that he must kill her to survive. He takes a butcher’s knife from the kitchen goes back to his room, waiting for Annie’s return.

Chapters 16–18: Annie returns while Paul is asleep, and his plan to kill her fails. Annie realises he has been out of his room and that he does not want to stay with her. To stop him from leaving, she carries out a little ‘operation’ on him – she cuts off his foot! Later on, when Paul makes her angry again, she cuts off his thumb as well.

Chapters 19–22: A young policeman comes to the house to ask questions about the missing writer. Paul screams for help, but Annie kills the policeman before he can do anything. She locks Paul in the cellar while she goes to dispose of the body, and Paul comes up with a plan. He hides a small bottle of fuel under his mattress.

Chapters 23–27: Paul finishes the book and tricks Annie into letting him have a last cigarette to celebrate. Before she has a chance to read it, he uses the fuel to set fire to the pages. She desperately tries to save the pages, and Paul takes his chance to attack her. A terrible fight ensues, and finally Annie is dead.

Background and Themes

Writers: There are parallels between the character Paul Sheldon and his creator. Like Sheldon, Stephen King writes other kinds of fiction besides the type he is best known for. Under the pen name of Richard Bachman he has written novels of science fiction, psychological horror and suspense, and Misery was originally intended as a Richard Bachman novel. He has also written stories under his own name which are closer to literary fiction than his usual work. Many of the stories collected in Different Seasons (1982) fall into this category. For example, The Body is a semi-autobiographical novel about the adventures of four boys in the New England forest, and Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption is about prisoners.

The risks of being famous: Another aspect of Paul Sheldon’s life which reflects that of King himself is Sheldon’s worldwide fame, and King is also well aware of the dangers which this brings. In 1986, the year before Misery was published, the iron fence surrounding the writer’s house was attacked and some valuable ornaments removed. He also receives a great deal of ugly or abusive ‘fan mail’, like other famous people, which his publishers and secretary do not let him see.

King has come much closer to real danger than this, however. In a lecture which he gave in 1986, discussing the background to Misery, he told of one of his most disturbing encounters with a fan. Many people ask the author for his autograph whenever they recognise him, and he says among these there are often a good number with a ‘strange look in their eyes’. Once in the late 1970s in New York, he left a television studio and was approached by a man who seemed particularly odd and who called himself his ‘number one fan’. The fan asked...
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King to pose in a photograph with him, and then to sign it. The author wrote: ‘Best wishes to Mark Chapman, from Stephen King’. So strange was the man that King remembered his name – and recognised it again in 1980, when Chapman himself became famous as the murderer of John Lennon.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Pair work: Ask the students if they have heard of Stephen King. If they haven’t, go straight to activity 2. If they have, put them in pairs and give them three minutes to make a list of as many of his books as they can. After three minutes, call on each pair to read out their list. Make a list of the titles on the board to see how many of Stephen King’s books the class has heard of. Then, go through the list of titles, asking individual students to say in one or two sentences what each book is about.

2 Guess: Ask the students to look at the front and back covers of Misery. Put the students into small groups and give them five minutes to come up with a brief account of what they think the story will be about. Conduct a feedback session with the whole class, calling on individual students to say what they think will happen. Encourage the class to comment on each other’s suggestions.

Introduction, pages v–vii

After reading

3 Read carefully: Divide the class into pairs. In each pair, Student A reads the first part of the introduction and Student B reads the second part of the introduction about Stephen King. Give the students five minutes to read and to note down the important points of the section that they are reading. After the five minutes, the students exchange information. They may also ask each other questions.

Chapters 1–6

4 Discuss: Tell the students to re-read the paragraph on page 3, which begins ‘Everybody in the world has a centre’ and ends with ‘All a person’s other qualities turn round this centre.’ Give the students a few minutes to think about whether they agree with the idea expressed in this paragraph and why (or why not). Then put the students into small groups and tell them to exchange their ideas. After ten or fifteen minutes, you may want to conduct a feedback session with the whole class.

5 Role play: On pages 3 and 4, Annie and Paul are having their first conversation, but only a small part of this conversation is actually written in reported speech in the book. Put the students into pairs and ask them to imagine more of this conversation. Give them ten minutes or so to prepare and then have them practise reading it out loud. After they have had enough practice, ask some of the pairs to perform their dialogues in front of the rest of the class.

6 Debate: Annie is very upset by Paul’s new book because she doesn’t approve of people swearing. Paul says that it is true to life. Is it acceptable to swear? Divide the class into two equally-sized groups. Tell them that they are going to have a debate on the above question. Write the following statement on the board: This house believes that it is acceptable to swear. Regardless of their personal views, allocate to one half of the class the role of arguing in favour of the statement, and to the other half, allocate the role of arguing against the statement. Give the groups enough time to prepare their arguments and to elect two spokespersons. Then proceed with the debate, with the two speakers in favour going first. At the end of the debate have the class vote on the question.

7 Pair work: In Chapter 5 Annie is very angry about the way Paul has ended Misery’s Child. Write the following question on the board: Have you ever been angry or disappointed about the way a book, film or television series has ended? If so, how would you have liked it to end? Give the students a couple of minutes to consider their answers and then put them into pairs and ask them to tell each other about their answers. Each member of the pair must ask their partner why they reacted as they did and be ready to report back to the rest of the class. After ten or fifteen minutes call on some of the students to present what they have found out from their partner to the whole class. Encourage the rest of the class to ask questions.

8 Discuss: Write the following question on the board: Why do you think Paul didn’t keep a copy of his manuscript of his new book? Put the students into small groups and ask them to try to imagine a believable reason why he didn’t keep a copy. Each group elects a spokesperson and after ten minutes, ask the spokespersons to present the reasons found by their groups. Hold a vote to decide who came up with the best reason.

9 Role play: Tell the students to imagine that Paul Sheldon is interviewed on television before the beginning of this story. He talks about his life, his career so far, and his hopes for the future. In pairs, students carry out this interview. They should plan it first, writing the questions and deciding what Paul Sheldon will say. They should use the information given in the first six chapters about Paul’s life and work, but they should also use their imagination to add further details. When they have finished the preparation stage, get them to practise their dialogues until they can perform them without looking at their notes.
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Chapters 7–11

10 Role play: Put the students into pairs. Tell them to write out the conversation on pages 16–17 between Annie and Paul as if it were a stage play. They should begin with Annie saying ‘I’ve bought you another present’, and end with her saying ‘I think that when you’ve finished you should be ready to meet other people again.’ Tell the students to practice reading the dialogue out loud in their pairs, working on pronunciation and intonation. Encourage them to try to memorise the dialogue. After they have had enough practice, call on some of the pairs to perform the dialogue in front of the whole class.

11 Discuss: On page 18, Annie and Paul have a disagreement about whether expensive things are better than cheaper things. Put the students into small groups. Ask them to answer the following question: Do you agree with Annie or with Paul? Justify your opinion. After the group discussions, you may want to broaden the discussion into a whole class activity with each group presenting its opinions to the rest of the class.

12 Write: The typewriter that Annie gives Paul has no letter ‘n’. Ask the students if they think it would be possible to write a story without using the letter ‘n’. If they seem unconvinced, remind/tell them that the French writer Georges Perec managed to write a whole novel without the letter ‘c’. Put the students in groups of two or three and tell them to try to write a 100–150-word summary of the story so far without using the letter ‘n’. When they have finished, get one member of each group to read their text out loud to the rest of the class.

13 Pair work: What motivates you? On page 21, despite his pain and his terrifying predicament, Paul finds the motivation to try to pick the lock and leave his room. Write the question What motivates you? on the board. Working in pairs, tell the students to discuss the question and to try to produce a list of things that they find motivating. After ten or fifteen minutes, conduct a feedback session and write up a list of the students’ suggestions on the board. Depending on their level of motivation, you may subsequently ask them to put the items on the list in order, with the most motivating at the top and the least motivating at the bottom.

14 Discuss: At the beginning of Chapter 9, despite being tortured and imprisoned by Annie, Paul feels ‘as guilty as a child who has been caught smoking a cigarette.’ Working in small groups, the students discuss whether they understand Paul’s feeling of guilt. Ask each of the groups to summarise their ideas for the rest of the class and write the most important points up on the board. You may wish to broaden this activity out to a whole class discussion at this point.

15 Pair work: Tell the students to re-read Annie’s account of how she felt cheated as a child at the cinema by the way the writers allowed Rocket Man to escape from the car he was trapped in (pages 27–28). Ask the students if they have ever felt similarly cheated at the cinema or while watching television. Then put them in pairs and have them exchange stories.

16 Read carefully: Tell the students to read Paul’s description of the game ‘Can You?’ that he used to play as child. Ask one of the students to explain the game to the rest of the class to make sure everybody understands how it works. Then begin playing the game as a whole class activity, or in smaller groups, depending on the size of your class.

17 Role play: Write the following question on the board: How does Annie feel when the visitor arrives in Chapter 11? Write the students’ suggestion up on the board. After a few minutes, put the students into pairs and ask them to imagine the conversation between Annie and the visitor which takes place at the bottom of page 31. Give them enough time to practise in pairs and then ask some of the pairs to perform their dialogue in front of the rest of the class.

18 Discuss: Put the students into small groups. Each group makes up an ‘escape plan’ for Paul. This should be as believable as possible. The groups write down their plans, and then each group passes its plan on to the next group. The groups now decide whether the plans they have been given would work. Finally, each group elects a spokesperson to come to the front of the class to present the plan that they have been given to the whole class. You may also want to hold a class vote to elect the best plan.

19 Guess: At the end of Chapter 11, we can read: ‘Then the rain came and everything changed.’ Put the students in pairs and ask them to think of answers to the following questions: What will happen next? Why is the rain important? Give them a few minutes to consider their answers and then hold a feedback session with the whole class.

Chapters 12–17

20 Write: Tell the students to imagine that Paul is keeping a secret diary. Working individually, have them write an entry in the diary in which Paul tells of how he feels at the end of Chapter 12 when Annie leaves him to go to her ‘Laughing Place’.

21 Discuss: When Paul ventures out into the sitting-room in Chapter 13, he sees Annie’s photograph album. He imagines himself saying to her ‘Don’t you know it’s a bad idea to think about the past when you’re feeling depressed?’ Put the students into small groups and have them discuss this statement.
22 Pair work: By the end of Chapter 13, Paul promises himself that he will kill Annie. Working in pairs, the students try to come up with a plan of how he will manage to do this. The students write down their ideas, and then one of the members of each pair comes to the front of the class to present the plan to the whole class. You may like to hold a class vote to elect the best plan.

23 Role play: Tell the students to re-read the beginning of Chapter 14. Students must imagine that a police officer was called to the house where the student nurse died in 1959 to investigate. He interviewed the sixteen-year-old Annie about the case. Put the students into pairs. Ask each pair to prepare either the role of Annie, or the role of the police officer who has come to investigate the death. After a few minutes of preparation time, get the students to form new pairs and role play the conversation between Annie and the policeman.

24 Role play: On page 46 Paul finds an article in Newsweek written about his disappearance. The journalist has interviewed his agent. Put the students in pairs. Student A plays the role of the journalist, student B plays the role of Paul Sheldon’s agent. Give the students ten minutes to prepare and then have them act out the interview.

25 Write: Working in the same pairs as in exercise 24, the students now write up the interview in form of a news magazine article.

26 Debate: Hold a class debate on the following statement: ‘In this book Stephen King is unfair to people who are mentally ill. He has made a monster out of someone who is in pain and suffering from a sickness. It is not fair to treat such people in this way just in order to make a “good story”’. Divide the class into two equally-sized groups. Regardless of their personal views, allocate to one half of the class the role of arguing in favour of the statement, and to the other half, allocate the role of arguing against the statement. Give the groups enough time to prepare their arguments and to elect two spokespersons. Then proceed with the debate, with the two speakers in favour going first. At the end of the debate have the class vote on the question.

27 Pair work: Working in pairs, students discuss the following questions: ‘If you were trapped like Paul and thought you were going to die, what would it make you think about? How would you feel? What would you do (assuming you could not escape)?’

Chapters 18–21

28 Discuss: On page 62, Paul says People who tell stories usually can’t write stories. Write this sentence on the board to focus the students’ attention. Then ask a student to read the sentence out loud and then say if they agree or disagree with Paul. Tell them to give one reason for their answer. Then move on to another student and ask them if they agree with the first student and why. Continue around the class in the same way until everybody has given their opinion. Write up any new vocabulary items on the board.

29 Read carefully: Put the students into pairs and tell them to re-read Chapter 18, making notes about the way that Paul behaves during the young policeman’s visit to the house. Then ask the students to consider how they would have behaved if they had been in Paul’s position. Give them ten or fifteen minutes to prepare a brief account of what they would have done and why – they may of course decide that Paul did exactly the right thing, in which case they should be prepared to say why. After ten of fifteen minutes, stop the activity and hold a feedback session, asking each pair to report to the whole class.

30 Pair work: Once the students have read until the end of Chapter 21, put them into pairs and ask them to make a list of the chances that Paul has had to escape. Once they have prepared a list, conduct a brief feedback session and call on each pair to read out their list. Write their suggestions on the board. Then ask the pairs to consider which was Paul’s best chance of escape and why.

Chapters 22–27

31 Write: Tell the students to imagine that they are one of the policemen who come to the house in Chapter 26. When he gets back to the police station, the policeman has to write a report on what he found. Working individually, the students write this report. Tell them to try to keep it short and to the point. Set a maximum limit of 100 words. When they have finished, ask the students to exchange their text with another student’s so that they can review it for any factual errors and any mistakes in the English.

32 Role play: Put the students into the same pairs as for exercise 9. Tell them to prepare another interview with Paul Sheldon. This time the interview takes place a year after the events described in Misery. Tell the students that they must include the following questions in the interview: In your time at Annie Wilkes’s farm, what was the worst moment for you? How have those events changed you? What are your plans for the future now? When they have finished the preparation stage, get the students to practise their dialogues until they can perform them without looking at their notes.

33 Debate: Organise a class debate around the following statement: Annie Wilkes got what she deserved. Divide the class into two equal halves and organise the debate in the same way as in activity 25.

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