

Portraying Work in Fiction

R. K. Narayan's "Forty-Five a Month" (pp. 35-40 in the Course Pack) portrays the world of work in fiction. Despite having a white-collar job in an office, the protagonist or main character of this Venkat Rao is underpaid and very overworked. How can an author use fiction to bring out aspects of the real world of work? We will use this story try out our 'elements' for discussing fiction.

- In groups of 3:

Part I – R. K. Narayan's "Forty-Five a Month" (pp. 35-40)

- First, read "Forty-Five a Month" for ~15 minutes.

This story portrays the world of office work -- and comments on the lack of work/life balance for its protagonist.

1) As a group **sketch out the character of Venkat Rao, who is the main character (or protagonist) of the story. What kind of a person is he? Why can't he spend time with his daughter Shanta? What kind of job does Venkat Rao have? Describe it in a sentence or two.**

2) Next, try to sketch out the setting of the story. **Where and when does the story take place? What 'economic class' do Venkat Rao and his family inhabit? (Are they rich, poor or something in between?)**

3) As we have seen, often in recent fiction there is a 'realization' that a character under at the end of a story. But Venkat Rao's 'realization' seems to be interrupted. **Why does ne resign from his job? What stops him? Do you think his boss could have given him a raise earlier?**

4) Challenge Question: **Is Venkat Rao a courageous or cowardly character (or something else)?** As a group try to decide. What do you think Narayan the author is trying to say about the world of work with the ending of this story? Is it easy to find a balance between work and family, even for white-collar jobs like Venkat Rao's?

- **Reporting Out** – We will collect some answers from the class.