

# Chapter 4

## A Shady Plot

### NCERT Question Answers

**1. Given below is a list of words related to ghosts and ghost stories with their jumbled up meanings against them. Match the words/expressions with their correct meanings:**

Apparition	a feeling of anticipation of or anxiety over a future event
Poltergeist	a reanimated corpse that is believed to rise from the grave at night to suck the blood of sleeping people
Clairvoyance	a conjurer who expels evil spirits by conjuration
Crystal Ball	a spelling board device intended to communicate with and through the spirit world, obtaining answers to questions
Eerie	beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation
Medium	any of a set of 22 playing cards bearing allegorical representations, used for fortune telling
Transmigration	a supernatural appearance of a person or thing, a ghost, spectre or phantom
Psychic	so mysterious, strange, or unexpected as to send a chill up the spine
Ouija Board	the supposed power to see objects or events that cannot be perceived by the senses
Exorcist	a person through whom the spirits of the dead are alleged to be able to contact the living

Premonition	a globe of quartz crystal in which images, believed to portend the future, are supposedly visible to fortune tellers
Paranormal	to pass into another body after death: going from one state of existence or place to another
Tarot Card	capable of extraordinary mental processes, such as extrasensory perception and mental telepathy
Vampire	German word, meaning "noisy ghost"-a troublesome spirit that announces its presence with unexplainable sounds and the creation of disorder

### Answer

Apparition	a supernatural appearance of a person or thing, a ghost, a spectre or phantom
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Exorcist	a conjurer who expels evil spirits by conjuration
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**4. Based on your reading of the story above, answer the following questions by ticking the correct options.**

1. The narrator earns his living by .....

- (a) writing ghost stories
- (b) working as a reader for a magazine
- (c) working as a stenographer
- (d) working as an accountant in a lumber company

**Answer**

(d) working as an accountant in a lumber company

2. The writer was overconfident about his ability to write ghost stories because .....

- (a) whenever magazines wanted a ghost story, they got in touch with him
- (b) he was always able to write a ghost story whenever he had to write one
- (c) the readers appreciated his ghost stories
- (d) he knew the ghost lady would help him write a good ghost story

**Answer**

(b) he was always able to write a ghost story whenever he had to write one

3. The sight of the ghost materialising in his room filled the narrator with .....

- (a) fear
- (b) excitement
- (c) joy
- (d) anticipation

**Answer**

(a) fear

4. The ghost wanted John to .....

- (a) stop his wife from using the Ouija board
- (b) stop using the Ouija board himself
- (c) stop his guests from using the Ouija board
- (d) stop people from using the Ouija board

**Answer**

(d) stop people from using the Ouija board

5. John wants the ghost to disappear before his wife enters the room and waves his arms at the ghost with something of the motion of a beginner when learning to swim. His movement shows his .....

- (a) fear
- (b) amusement
- (c) desperation
- (d) anxiety

**Answer**

(d) anxiety

6. When the narrator says his wife is never so pretty as when she's doing something she knows he disapproves of, his tone is .....

- (a) amused
- (b) ironic
- (c) angry
- (d) irritated

**Answer**

(b) ironic

7. The ghost says "It's all your fault.'It' here refers to .....

- (a) the narrator's wife's anger
- (b) the ghost's anger
- (c) the narrator's wife leaving him
- (d) the ghost materialising in sections.

**Answer**

(d) the ghost materialising in sections.

8. Gladolia wishes to leave the narrator's house as .....

- (a) she does not like the Ouija boards

- (b) she is afraid of the ghost
- (c) she is afraid of magic and hoodoo
- (d) she likes Ouija boards and hoodoo

**Answer**

- (c) she is afraid of magic and hoodoo

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**5. Answer the following questions briefly.**

- (a) What genre of stories does Jenkins want the narrator to write? Why?

**Answer**

Jenkins wanted the narrator to write fictions about ghosts i.e. ghost stories. He wanted supernatural theme which gave horror to the public as ghosts were live propositions.

- (b) Does the narrator like writing ghost stories? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

**Answer**

No, the writer was not fond of writing ghost stories at all. He himself says 'I didn't specialize in ghost stories.' Whenever he sat down to write a ghost story, he hadn't the shade of an idea. He had chased the inspiration in vain for months when he started writing ghost fiction for the first time. This all shows that the narrator was, though natural, an accidental ghost fiction writer.

- (c) What makes Helen, the ghost, and her other co-ghosts organize The Writer's Inspiration Bureau?

**Answer**

Helen and other co-ghosts organised The Writer's Inspiration Bureau because they felt there were many writers without ideas, however, with a vulnerable mind who were looking for an inspiration to write ghost stories. The bureau would assign a ghost to such a writer so that he/she could write good ghost stories.

- (d) Why had Helen, the ghost been helping the narrator write ghost stories? Why was she going on strike? What condition did she place for providing continued help?

**Answer**

Helen had helped the narrator because he was keen to write ghost stories but had no ideas and his mind was impressionable. But now the ghosts were fed up of being called too often from their beds. They had given up haunting and had taken up answering questions on

the Ouija board but people had started pestering them too often. Helen promised to help the narrator if he would get his friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board.

(e) How does the ghost undermine the narrator's faith in his ability to write ghost stories?

**Answer**

The narrator is sure that ghost stories specialize in him. He never refuses Jenkins whenever he demands a ghost story for his magazine. He had always been able to dig up one for him. So he has started feeling overconfident about his ability to write on the supernatural everytime. But the lady ghost tells him that he always call her to help him in writing a ghost story. Many a time she has leaned on his shoulder to give him ideas. Now, he will not get more ideas or plots of ghost stories for him. In this way, the lady ghost undermines the narrator's ability to write ghost stories.

(f) Why does John want the ghost to disappear before his wife appears on the scene? What impression of his wife's character do you form from his words?

**Answer**

Lavinia, John's wife, is a jealous lady. John does not want Helen to be seen by his wife for fear of complications in his married life. His wife is over sensitive and the sight of a ghost in her house will affect her badly. Lavinia is basically a lady, who is a spendthrift and socialite, spending her time in parties and friends.

(g) Why does the narrator hesitate to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during the Ouija Board Party?

**Answer**

Helen, the ghost, had asked the narrator to influence his friends to stop using the Ouija board. It was only on this condition that Helen promised to help the narrator to write ghost stories. If Helen sees him now himself trying to communicate ghosts through Ouija board, he fears how and what she would do to him. That is why the narrator was reluctant to be a partner to Laura Hinkle during the Ouija Board party.

(h) What message does the ghost convey to the group that had assembled in the narrator's house? What is their reaction to the message?

**Answer**

Helen called John a traitor as he bluffs her. He had promised Helen that he would convince his friends to stop contacting ghosts; rather here he himself was doing the same. She is annoyed and filled with anguish and so goes to everyone's Ouija board one by one and tells that Mr. Hallock is a traitor. After this revelation everybody suspected John of cheating upon his wife, later John clarified to his wife and she even understood.

(i) Do you agree with the narrator calling the assembly of women "manipulators?" Give reasons.

**Answer**

Assembly of Women were rightly called 'manipulators' by narrator as they very successfully and craftily manipulated the spirits to answer their questions. The way in which they brought report about Helen's statement about the narrator calling him traitor seemed like manipulation to him.

(j) Why is John's wife angry? What does she decide to do?

**Answer**

John's wife is angry because she, like other women, believed what the spirit said through the Ouija board, about her husband. A woman even reported that Helen has called John a traitor. Lavinia thought that her husband was cheating on her. She decided to go to her grandmother's house. She also decided to separate from her husband.

(k) Why does John wish he were dead?

**Answer**

John wished he was dead because a brief meeting with a ghost had created such situations that he was about to lose his wife, whom he loved dearly, it destroyed his happiness and home.

(l) When confronted by Lavinia about his flirtations over the Ouija Board, John insists that 'the affair was quite above-board, I assure you, my love'. Bring out the pun in John's statement.

**Answer**

John assures his wife that his flirtations with Helen the ghost are above board. He tries to tell her that whatever that has happened between him and Helen is over the board of Ouija and there was nothing that he wished to hide from his wife; in fact there was nothing to tell.

(m) John's apprehensions about his wife's reaction to her encounter with the ghost are unfounded. Justify.

**Answers**

John thought that his wife would become hysterical if she saw the ghost Helen; however, when the encounter happened, she confidently spoke to the ghost and was not at all scared of it.

**6. Answer the following questions in detail :**

(a) After her reconciliation with her husband, John Hallock, Lavinia writes a letter to her friend expressing how her relationship with him had almost been on the verge of breaking and what saved it. Write her letter.

**Answer**

Dear Friend,

How are you? Hope you are doing fine. Sorry about delaying in replying to your letter. I was caught in some personal problems.

I wished to share a life-changing experience with you, my dear. About a month ago I, along with the women in my group, was fascinated with Ouija boards and we organised a party at my home. We were all excited and John had to substitute for someone. The party progressed and you wouldn't believe what happened next. A ghost named Helen tried to communicate with John through all the five boards and called him a traitor. John looked uncomfortable and guilty. I was angry and jealous. I could not believe it and spent the while night crying. By morning I had packed and decided to file a divorce. I went to inform John and was shocked when he tried to hide someone in the room from me. I thrust him aside and was greeted with a ghost! Can you believe it? She looked like phantom and I understood later that she had been providing John with inspiration for his stories. She was somewhat annoyed with him because she wanted him to convince people to stop using Ouija boards. I am so glad that my marriage did not break up. A ghost saved it, literally!

John and I share a wonderful life now. I hope you enjoyed reading about my encounter with a ghost.

So much for now.

Look forward to your reply. Love

Yours truly

Lavinia

(b) John Hallock reflects upon his experience with Helen's ghost and in retrospect he finds it quite amusing. All the same he is relieved that he is no longer plagued by it. Ironically, the self same ghost inspires his creativity and he writes a diary entry reflecting upon the comical aspect of his experience. Write his diary entry.

**Answer**

30 November

Dear Diary

The past few days have been a roller coaster ride for me. I was sitting in my study trying to write a ghost story and suddenly a ghost appeared. At first I could not believe it, however, slowly I got talking to it. She declared that she and other ghosts were going on a strike.

Imagine ghosts going on a strike! Apparently, she had helped me write all my earlier ghost stories, as what she claimed. She then appeared in the Ouija board session that my wife had organised for her friends. She called me a traitor openly in front of all my folks. My wife and her friends almost believed that I was cheating on my wife. Lavinia threatened to leave me. Here I was caught between a ghost who threatened to go on a strike and a wife who was on

the verge of leaving me. Phew!!

Thankfully Lavinia, got a chance to meet and speak to Helen and her misunderstanding was cleared. One good thing came out of these encounters with Helen, I now have got an idea for my next story. This one is going to be my best story so far. John

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**7. The narrator and his wife reveal something about their character in their words and actions. We also learn about them from what other people say. Can you pick out the words that describe them from the box given below? Also, pick out lines and instances from the story to illustrate your choice.**

shy      arrogant      loyal      clever      overconfident      Manipulative

protective      self-disparaging      suspicious      sceptical      jealous      fearless      Firm

shrewd      strong      gullible      sly      creative      Loves novelty and thrills

Person	Extract from story	What it tells us about the character
John Hallock	1. ...in the end things had always come my Hallock way..... somehow I'd always been able to dig one (plot) up for him, so I'd begun to get a bit cocky as to my ability (to write stories).	1. _____
	2. "But my ghosts aren't a bit like you----".	2. sceptical
	3. We scout around until we find a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression.	3. gullible
	4. _____ _____	4. creative
	5. _____ _____	5. protective
Lavinia Hallock	1. _____ _____	1. loves novelty and thrills
	2. _____ _____	2. Spendthrift

	3. _____ _____	3. suspicious
	4. _____ _____	4. jealous
	5. Buys the Ouija board but says it is for John's research	5. manipulative
	6. Does not flinch when she meets the ghost but talks to her casually.	6. strong

**Answer**

<b>Person</b>	<b>Extract from story</b>	<b>What it tells us about the character</b>
John Hallock	1. ...in the end things had always come my Hallock way.... somehow I'd always been able to dig one (plot) up for him, so I'd begun to get a bit cocky as to my ability (to write stories).	1. Overconfident, self-disparaging
	2. "But my ghosts aren't a bit like you----".	2. sceptical
	3. We scout around until we find a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression.	3. gullible
	4. A ghost story had been the first fiction I had written. Curious how that idea for a plot had come to me out of nowhere after I had chased inspiration in vain for months! Even now whenever Jenkins wanted a ghost, he called on me.	4. creative
	5. I threw a protecting husbandly arm about her to catch her when she should faint.	5. protective
Lavinia Hallock	1. ...and how on earth I was going to cure her of her alarming tendency to take every new fad that came along and work it to death.	1. loves novelty and thrills

	2. You know I bought the loveliest thing this afternoon.	2. Spendthrift
	3. Lavinia stopped and began to look at me through narrowed lids much as she had done in the library the evening before.	3. suspicious
	4. She went on, "It is bad enough to have you flirt over the Ouija board with that hussy..... She thrust me back with sudden muscle. "I will see who's behind you! Where is that Helen?"	4. jealous
	5. Buys the Ouija board but says it is for John's research	5. manipulative
	6. Does not flinch when she meets the ghost but talks to her casually.	6. strong

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**8. Gladolia, the narrator's cook, is an African. The language she speaks is different from that of the others. This is known as Dialect. A dialect consists of words or phrases that reflect the regional variety of a language. An author often uses a regional dialect to make the dialogue more authentic. Initially a dialogue may seem a little difficult to understand. However, as you continue reading, the language will become more comprehensible.**

**Working in groups, write what Gladolia's words mean as shown.**

Column A	Column B
Misto Hallock	Mister Hallock
de Missus	
sho t'inks you's lost!	
she done 'phone you dis mawnin'	
fo' de lawd's sake	
not to stop to argify now	
I's gwine t' quit.	
I don't like no hoodoos.	
I'se done lef' dis place	

I is	
------	--

**Answer**

Column A	Column B
Misto Hallock	Mister Hallock
de Missus	the Mrs.
sho t'inks you's lost!	she thinks you are lost
she done 'phone you dis mawnin'	she called you this morning
fo' de lawd's sake	for the Lord's sake
not to stop to argify now	don't stop to argue now
I's gwine t' quit.	I am going to quit
I don't like no hoodoos.	I don't like voodoo magic
I'se done lef' dis place	I am done with this place and I am going to leave this place.
I is	I am

**9. Read and understand the following ghost phrases and expressions:**

- (a) To give up the ghost-- to die or to stop trying
- (b) A ghost of a chance-- a poor chance, not likely to happen
- (c) The ghost at the feast-- something or someone that spoils your enjoyment by reminding you of something unpleasant
- (d) Ghost town-- a town where most people have left-abandoned and deserted
- (e) Ghost-write- to write for someone else
- (f) Lay the ghost of something/somebody (to rest)-- to finally stop being worried or upset by something or someone that has worried or upset you for a long time
- (g) Ghost image -- secondary image, esp. one appearing on a television screen as a white shadow, caused by poor or double reception or by a defect in the receiver
- (h) the ghost of a smile - faint trace of a smile
- (i) As white as a ghost- very pale or white in the face

**Now complete the following story by using the appropriate phrases in the blanks given below:**

I was alone in a place that bore a deserted look like that of a \_\_\_\_\_. I increased the pace of my footsteps as I walked through the dark forest. I felt someone walking behind me. I turned immediately and spotted the contour of a figure in the form of a \_\_\_\_\_.

It smiled at me wickedly .I started shaking with fear and perspiring profusely when I felt its skeletal hand upon my neck. I woke up with a start, relieved that it was only a nightmare.

This was not the first time I had had one. It had all started when I had watched the horrendous horror film with a eerie ghost character that had a scary ghost of a smile on its face.It had been almost a month. The strange thing was that I saw a similar face at the station the next morning. That was uncanny.

I was to attend a dinner at my friend's at Northanger Abbey that night. I had decided to narrate my experience to the group that would assemble there although I knew there was \_\_\_\_\_ that they would be convinced.

After everyone had finished pouring their drinks to themselves, I cleared my throat and started narrating my spooky experience. However, every one of the group started accusing me of being \_\_\_\_\_ and held me responsible for spoiling the spirit of revelry. I gave up the ghost and sat quietly waiting for the party to be over. Back at home, the fears returned .I knew I had to talk about my experience to somebody to feel better. I have now decided to \_\_\_\_\_ and publish my experience under a pseudonym. Only then can I \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Answer**

I was alone in a place that bore a deserted look like that of a ghost town.

I increased the pace of my footsteps as I walked through the dark forest. I felt someone walking behind me. I turned immediately and spotted the contour of a figure in the form of a ghost image .

It smiled at me wickedly .I started shaking with fear and perspiring profusely when I felt its skeletal hand upon my neck. I woke up with a start, relieved that it was only a nightmare.

This was not the first time I had had one. It had all started when I had watched the horrendous horror film with a eerie ghost character that had a scary ghost of a smile on its face.It had been almost a month. The strange thing was that I saw a similar face at the

station the next morning. That was uncanny.

I was to attend a dinner at my friend's at Northanger Abbey that night. I had decided to narrate my experience to the group that would assemble there although I knew there was a ghost of a chance that they would be convinced.

After everyone had finished pouring their drinks to themselves, I cleared my throat and started narrating my spooky experience.

However, every one of the group started accusing me of being the ghost at the feast and held me responsible for spoiling the spirit of revelry. I gave up the ghost and sat quietly waiting for the party to be over. Back at home, the fears returned .I knew I had to talk about my experience to somebody to feel better. I have now decided to ghost write and publish my experience under a pseudonym. Only then can I lay the ghost .

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## Writing

**11. Do you think a story has an atmosphere? Complete the following blanks to make up your ghost story by choosing the correct options.**

A Ghost Story

She opened the \_\_\_\_\_ (secret door/ spaceship's hatch/ door of the cottage/ cemetery gate/ door of the castle/ cockpit) \_\_\_\_\_ (brashly/ loudly/ silently/ stupidly/ fearfully/ joyously).

Standing in front of her was a \_\_\_\_\_ (terrifying/ handsome/ smelly/ anonymous/ tiny/ huge/ bossy) \_\_\_\_\_ (policeman/ spy/ apparition/ witch/ prince/ wizard) with a \_\_\_\_\_ (wand/ rose/ rod/ knife/ scythe/ coded message) in his/ her (its) \_\_\_\_\_ (ghoulish/ bony/ beautiful/ fair/ manly/ gloved/ magical) hand.

Now that you have shared a ghost story/anecdote as well as completed a guided story in the class, create your own Ghost story on the basis of the starters given below:

- (a) Stephen knew he would never sleep. The noises, those horrid sounds, would keep him awake...
- (b) Tap, tap, tap. Was it the branches of the nearby tree, or fingernails against the window?
- (c) People often say, 'There's no such thing as ghosts....'

## Answer

A Ghost Story

She opened the cemetery gate silently.

Standing in front of her was a huge apparition with a scythe in his bony hand.

M G road was unusually lonely and deserted. It generally is crowded at the time. It was only half past six in the evening. Maybe the unusual downpour had forced people to leave their offices early. Darkness had descended earlier than the usual. Stephen had to stop and wait for the storm to halt. He had to break his journey that night. The weather did not seem to favour him. He spotted a motel and pulled in. He turned the car into their driveway. His room was on the top floor. Stephen knew he would never sleep; new places always unsettled him. As he tossed and turned in the bed, he heard strange noises. The noises died down after sometime, they returned again. Those horrid sounds were keeping him awake. He decided to investigate. Suddenly, he heard tap, tap on the window pane. Was it the branches of the nearby tree, or fingernails against the window? Stephen could not see anything. Maybe it was just a figment of his imagination. He tried going back to sleep; however, the incessant tapping on the window pane kept him awake. Maybe it was a ghost. The storm seemed to abate a little. Stephen decided to go for a walk. The motel was all quiet except for a faint light at the reception. Stephen saw a frail figure bent over a book, probably trying to read something in that faint light. Stephen was happy. He had company now. He approached the reception. The old man's back was against him. Stephen cleared his throat to get his attention. As the old man turned around to face Stephen.....Stephen screamed in horror....he had no face....there were just balls of fire in his eye sockets. Stephen ran out of the motel and sped away in his car. And they say, 'There is no such thing as ghosts'.