

William Wymark Jacobs (1863–1943) grew up in London near the waterfront wharfs. As a boy, Jacobs absorbed the tales of strange, distant lands told by passing sailors. As a young man, Jacobs worked at a bank—a job that he hated—and wrote stories in his spare time. He eventually became a popular writer of humor. Ironically, his best-known work, “The Monkey’s Paw,” became a classic of the horror genre.



The Monkey’s Paw

Short Story by W. W. Jacobs

SETTING A PURPOSE As you read, pay attention to the relationships among the members of the White family. How does the appearance of the monkey’s paw affect those relationships?

Part I

Without, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlor of Laburnum Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess; the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

“Hark at the wind,” said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

“I’m listening,” said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. “Check.”

peril
(pĕr’əl) *n.* A *peril* is something that is dangerous.

"I should hardly think that he'd come tonight," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway's a bog,¹ and the road's a torrent.² I don't know what
20 people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses in the road are let,³ they think it doesn't matter."

"Never mind, dear," said his wife soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin gray beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the
30 door, was heard **condoling** with the new arrival. The new arrival also condoled with himself, so that Mrs. White said, "Tut, tut!" and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall, burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.⁴

condole
(kən-dōl') v. If you *condole* with someone, you express sympathy or sorrow.

"Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him.

The sergeant-major shook hands, and taking the proffered seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host brought out drinks and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

He began to talk, the little family circle regarding with
40 eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of wild scenes and doughty⁵ deeds; of wars and plagues and strange peoples.

"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away, he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don't look to have taken much harm," said Mrs. White politely.

"I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, "just to look round a bit, you know."

¹ **bog**: a swamp.

² **torrent** (tôr'ənt): a swift-flowing stream.

³ **let**: rented.

⁴ **rubicund** (rōō'bī-kənd) **of visage** (vīz'ij): with a ruddy complexion.

⁵ **doughty** (dou'tē): brave.

50 "Better where you are," said the sergeant-major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass, and sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier hastily. "Leastways nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's paw?" said Mrs. White curiously.

60 "Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the sergeant-major off-handedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absent-mindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the sergeant-major, fumbling in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a **grimace**, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

70 "And what is there special about it?" inquired Mr. White as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the sergeant-major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that **fate** ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

80 "Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert White cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the sergeant-major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished?" persisted the old lady.

grimace
(grĭm'is) *n.* A *grimace* is a facial expression of pain or disgust.

fate
(fāt) *n.* *Fate* is a power that is thought to determine the course of events.

90 "The first man had his three wishes. Yes," was the reply;
"I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for
death. That's how I got the paw."

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now,
then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for?"

**“ His tones were so
grave that a hush fell
upon the room. ”**

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said
slowly. "I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I
will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people
won't buy. They think it's a fairy tale, some of them; and those
100 who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me
afterward."

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man,
eyeing him keenly, "would you have them?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his forefinger
and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a
slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the other, "give it to me."

110 "I won't," said his friend doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If
you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the
fire again like a sensible man."

The other shook his head and examined his new
possession closely. "How do you do it?" he inquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the
sergeant-major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

"Sounds like the *Arabian Nights*,"⁶ said Mrs. White, as she
rose and began to set the supper. "Don't you think you might
wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

⁶ *Arabian Nights*: a famous collection of Asian stories.

120 Her husband drew the talisman⁷ from his pocket, and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant-major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

"If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second installment of the soldier's adventures in India.

130 "If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time for him to catch the last train, "we shan't make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, Father?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A trifle," said he, coloring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

140 "Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous, and happy. Wish to be an emperor, Father, to begin with; then you can't be henpecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an antimacassar.⁸

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact," he said slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want."

"If you only cleared the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you?" said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that'll just do it."

150 His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face, somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

credulity
(krĭ-dōō' lĭ-tē) *n.*
Credulity is a
tendency to believe
too readily.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

⁷ **talisman** (tāl' ĭs-mən): an object thought to have magical powers.

⁸ **antimacassar** (ăn' ŭ-mə-kās' ə): a cloth placed over an arm or the back of a chair.

160 “It moved,” he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on the floor. “As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake.”

“Well, I don’t see the money,” said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, “and I bet I never shall.”

“It must have been your fancy, father,” said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. “Never mind, though; there’s no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same.”

170 They sat down by the fire again. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

“I expect you’ll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed,” said Herbert, as he bade them good-night, “and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten gains.”

180 He sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, and seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so simian⁹ that he gazed at it in amazement. It got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey’s paw, and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

Part II

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. There was an air of **prosaic** wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shriveled little paw was pitched on the sideboard¹⁰ with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.¹¹

prosaic
(prō-zā’īk) *adj.* If something is *prosaic*, it is dull or ordinary.

190 “I suppose all old soldiers are the same,” said Mrs. White. “The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?”

⁹ **simian** (sīm’ē-ən): monkey- or ape-like.

¹⁰ **sideboard**: a piece of furniture used to store linens and dishes.

¹¹ **virtues**: powers.

"Might drop on his head from the sky," said the frivolous¹² Herbert.

"Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence."

"Well, don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a
200 mean, avaricious¹³ man, and we shall have to disown you."

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him down the road; and returning to the breakfast table, was very happy at the expense of her husband's credulity. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, "but for all that, the thing
210 moved in my hand; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say it did," replied the other. "There was no thought about it; I had just—What's the matter?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of glossy newness. Three times he paused at the
220 gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden resolution flung it open and walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of apparel beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed at her furtively, and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologized for the appearance of the room, and her husband's coat, a garment which he usually
230 reserved for the garden. She then waited patiently for him to broach his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

¹²frivolous (frīv'ə-ləs): inappropriately silly.

¹³avaricious (āv'ə-rīsh'əs): greedy.

"I—was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from Maw and Meggins."

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've
240 not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir;" and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry—" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother wildly.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

"Oh!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank goodness for that! Thank—"

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the assurance dawned upon her and she saw the awful
250 confirmation of her fears in the other's averted face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old courting days nearly forty years before.

260 "He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking round. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried
270 into his first action.

"I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility," continued the other. "They admit no liability

at all, but in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as **compensation**."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, "How much?"

"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

compensation
(kŏm' pən-sā' shən) *n.*
Compensation is something, such as money, that is received as payment.

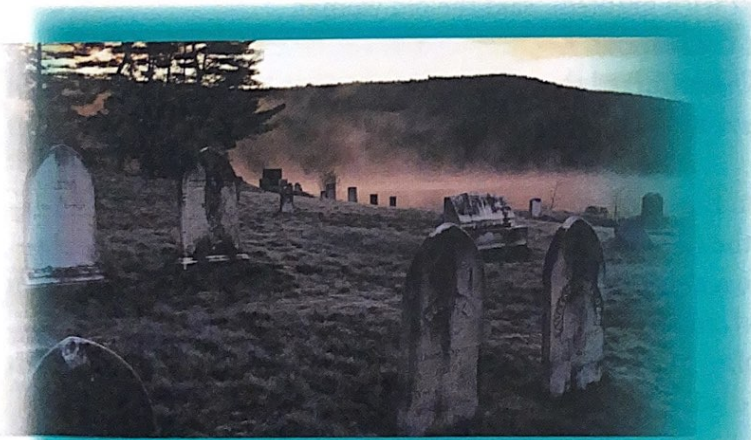
Part III

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to a house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realize it, and remained in a state of expectation as though of something else to happen—something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear.

But the days passed, and expectation gave place to **resignation**—the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to weariness.

resignation
(rĕz' īg-nā' shən) *n.*
Resignation is the acceptance of something that is inescapable.

It was about a week after that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.



300 "Come back," he said tenderly. "You will be cold."
"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed fitfully, and then slept until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

"*The paw!*" she cried wildly. "The monkey's paw!"

He started up in alarm. "Where? Where is it? What's the matter?"

She came stumbling across the room toward him. "I want it," she said quietly. "You've not destroyed it?"

310 "It's in the parlor, on the bracket," he replied, marveling. "Why?"

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

"I only just thought of it," she said hysterically. "Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't *you* think of it?"

"Think of what?" he questioned.

"The other two wishes," she replied rapidly. "We've only had one."

320 "Was not that enough?" he demanded fiercely.

"No," she cried triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bedclothes from his quaking limbs. "You are mad!" he cried, aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "get it quickly, and wish—Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. "Get back to bed," he said unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

330 "We had the first wish granted," said the old woman feverishly; "why not the second?"

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried his wife, quivering with excitement.

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlor, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him ere he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found
340 that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with

sweat, he felt his way round the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the unwholesome thing in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"*Wish!*" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"*Wish!*" repeated his wife.

350 He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it fearfully. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle-end, which had burned below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it expired. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of
360 relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time gathering up his courage, he took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

370 At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another; and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"*What's that?*" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man in shaking tones—"a rat. It
380 passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband was before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered hoarsely.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling mechanically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door."

"Don't let it in," cried the old man, trembling.

390 "You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling.

"Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman's voice, strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

400 But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade¹⁴ of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back, and at the same moment he found the monkey's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back, and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a 410 long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The streetlamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION Mr. White decides to make a wish, even though he says he already has everything he wants. Discuss with a partner whether his wish is more for himself or for his family. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

¹⁴ **fusillade** (fyoo'sə-lād'): discharge from many guns; a rapid outburst.

Determine Theme

8.RL.1.2, 8.RL.3.9

One reason people read literature is to learn how to avoid or understand common problems. Literature conveys these lessons through **themes**, the messages about life or human nature that writers share with readers.

- In some stories, the theme is stated directly in the text.
- In most cases, readers must **infer**, or make an educated guess about, the theme based on clues in the text.
- One way to determine a story's theme is to ask, "What lesson does the main character learn that applies to real people's lives?"

Contemporary literature often draws on the themes and patterns of events that have been expressed in myths and traditional stories passed down through the centuries. For example, you've probably been told many stories in which a theme about greed is revealed through the granting of three wishes. When the same message can be found in the literature of different cultures and in different time periods like this, it's called a **universal theme**.

Review "The Monkey's Paw" and identify the traditional pattern of events that reveals a universal theme.

Analyze Stories: Foreshadowing

8.RL.1.3

Foreshadowing occurs when a writer provides hints that suggest future events in a story. Writers use this technique to create suspense and propel the action by making readers eager to find out what happens next.

Clues about future events may appear in dialogue, descriptions of events, or imagery. Think about how these examples from "The Monkey's Paw" foreshadow what will occur later in the story.

Dialogue (lines 97–98)	"I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already."
Event (lines 106–107)	"He took the paw, and dangling it between his forefinger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire."
Imagery (lines 176–182)	"He sat . . . at the dying fire . . . seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible . . . that he gazed at it in amazement. It got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey's paw and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went to up to bed."

As you analyze "The Monkey's Paw," look for an additional example of each kind of foreshadowing.

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence

Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- Infer** In what way does the setting described in lines 1–21 suggest or foreshadow later events?
- Analyze** Reread lines 110–119 and identify the **allusion**, or reference to a well-known work that Mrs. White makes. What does the allusion suggest about Mrs. White's view of the paw?
- Compare and Analyze** Complete the chart to identify how Morris's and Mr. White's views about the monkey's paw are different. Then explain how these differing points of view add to the suspense in the story.

Sergeant-Major Morris's View	Mr. White's View

- Draw Conclusions** Examine lines 271–281 to review the Whites' reaction as they realize what has happened to their son. What do they assume about the two hundred pounds they will receive "as compensation"?
- Compare** What do the actions of Mr. and Mrs. White at the end of the story reveal about their different expectations for wishes made on the monkey's paw? Identify what hopes or fears these expectations reveal.
- Analyze** What is the theme of "The Monkey's Paw"? Give examples of how the author develops the theme through the characters and plot.
- Connect** There are many traditional stories in which characters are granted three wishes. What theme do many of them share? Tell what makes "The Monkey's Paw" different from the others.

PERFORMANCE TASK



Writing Activity: Report Review lines 39–56. What ideas and attitudes about India are expressed here? Do research to learn more about the historical relationship between Britain and India. Write a short report in which you

- explain how Britain came to rule India, including the role of the British East India Company

- describe the attitudes the two peoples had toward one another during British rule

Then share your findings with the class. Be prepared to discuss the ways the attitudes in the story reflect the historical context.