

TEXT	<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>
AUTHOR	F. Scott Fitzgerald
THEMES	Family ties (Unit 1), Making a point (Unit 2), When tomorrow comes (Unit 3), Fit as a fiddle (Unit 9), The past isn't what it used to be (Unit 11), Economical with the truth (Unit 13)
VOCABULARY	Various, including feelings and atmosphere.
WRITING	Students write a letter to a close friend.
SPEAKING	Students discuss the causes and consequences of unexpected events.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Though most famous for his novels (such as *The Great Gatsby*), F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), wrote a large number of short stories. This particular story was inspired by a comment Mark Twain made about the idea of living our lives backwards in time. The 2008 film of the same name starring Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett was based on this story.

WARMER

Focus on the picture. Ask students what they think the picture might mean. What does it say about time? Possible answers are that 'time flies', or time is not as fixed as we think, that we can lose or waste time, etc. If possible, get students to think about whether time only goes in one direction – if you have any students who are interested in physics, ask them what scientists say about time (for example, that it might be possible for time to go backwards as well as forwards or that time is something we have invented that doesn't exist objectively).

ABOUT YOU

The questions direct attention to some of the themes relevant to the extract – expectation, childbirth, time and age. Encourage students to think of personal examples – the birth of a sibling, looking forward to a holiday, etc.

- 1 Ask for suggestions – these might include anticipation, excitement and expectations as positive things, but also worry, concern, surprise and puzzlement (confusion) as more negative things.

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Suggested answers

- 1 We learn that such a person was expected to be more dignified than Mr Button. You might want to explain that 'Southern' refers to people from the Southern states in the USA. This was an old-fashioned and conservative society so perhaps it looked bad for Mr Button to be so excited and emotional.
- 2 This question focuses on the way narrative is constructed. Having identified the parts that are not in direct speech, get students to think about what they tell us, such as extra information we don't know from direct speech (who Mr Button is, how Southern gentlemen should behave), how people feel (the nurse's look of terror, Mr Button 'on the verge of collapse') and what is termed 'deictic' reference – such as a word like 'there', which is known to the speakers but not the reader unless we are told – '... and this is what he saw'. Looking at these aspects can help students gain a deeper understanding of how narrative works.
- 3 The doctor is annoyed, angry – even rude, and the nurse is upset, worried and behaving strangely. Neither behave in the way you would expect in this situation.
- 4 Ask for ideas and suggestions. In the story, the 'baby' has been born as an old man and will get younger and younger until he dies as a baby seventy years later.

VOCABULARY

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Answers

- 1 ... on the verge of leaving the party ... (Point out the preposition + gerund as in the Glossary, or noun structure as in the text.)
- 2 ... he/she was through with ...
- 3 ... irritation as a ... (Point out the way nominative forms are used – changing an adjective or verb into a noun, sometimes adding a preposition, because the noun often has more impact.)
- 4 ... winning the race, I was gasping ...

4

Answers

- 1 dignity 2 cribs 3 gloom 4 frowned

WRITING

5

If necessary, brainstorm ideas with the whole class and write suggestions on the board. Assign the nurse to half the pairs and the doctor to the other half. It could be a good idea to revise/ elicit expressions of surprise, e.g. *You won't believe what happened; I couldn't believe my eyes; I've got something really amazing to tell you*, etc.

SPEAKING

- 6** Go through the three questions with the class and check they understand what to talk about when they read the two situations. Ask them to make notes of their ideas and suggestions. After groups have discussed the situations, compare ideas with the whole class.

MIXED ABILITY

As a follow-up vocabulary activity, form groups of four or five. Tell one or two of the stronger students that they have to mime five words or phrases from the glossary. Weaker students can refer to the definitions, if necessary. They call out the word when they think they know what it is.