

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“The Stories of Tobias Wolff”

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CONTENTS

Areas of Study	Chapter	Topics Covered
Area of study 1 – Reading and the study of texts	Chapter 1- Genre	-
	Chapter 2- Structure	-
	Chapter 3- Historical Issues	-
	Chapter 4- Style	-
	Chapter 5- Background Notes	-
	Chapter 6- Character Profiles	
	Chapter 7- Themes and Issues	7.1 Marriage, infidelity and divorce 7.2 Loneliness and the human condition 7.3 Social inequity 7.4 The army 7.5 Loyalty and betrayal
	Chapter 8- Story Summaries	8.1 Next door 8.2 Hurdles in the snow 8.3 An episode in the life of Professor Brooke 8.4 Smokers 8.5 Face to face 8.6 Passengers 8.7 Maiden voyage 8.8 Worldly goods 8.9 Wingfield 8.10 In the garden of the North American Martyrs 8.11 Poaching 8.12 The liar 8.13 Coming attractions 8.14 The missing person 8.15 Say yes 8.16 The poor are always with us 8.17 Sister 8.18 Soldier's joy 8.19 Desert breakdown, 1968 8.20 Our story begins 8.21 Leviathan 8.22 The rich brother 8.23 The barracks thief

	Chapter 9- Sample Examination Questions	9.1 Sample Part 1 Questions 9.2 Sample Part 2 Questions
	Chapter 10- Final Examination Tips	-

SAMPLE

AREA 1:

READING & THE STUDY OF TEXTS: THE STORIES OF TOBIAS WOLFF

Chapter 1 **GENRE**

Short stories demand a great deal from readers. Novels may be longer, but many don't require the same intense level of attention to nuances embedded in stories. They contain moments of levity, but the tension within their narrative, tantalise and suspend the reader's disbelief regardless of how casual the concentration they initially invest.

Tobias Wolff has said that the difficulty of the short story is its own reward. 'The reader really has to step up to the plate and read a short story.' That the writer's thrill is 'working a miracle, making life where there was none' in the space of a few precisely and elegantly distilled pages. '

Chapter 2 **STRUCTURE**

The structure of the stories is largely linear, told from either a first or third person perspective. However, each story examines the inner turmoil which drives the characters - relationships with families, significant others or transitory characters creating the tension which is at the core of each story. The stories often lack a definitive end and trail off on a tangent of contemplation or acknowledgement of the often-painful truth.

Chapter 3 **HISTORICAL ISSUES**

The issues pertaining to the residual impact of the Civil War between the Northern and the Southern United States is explored in a number of stories, as is the Vietnam War and the nature of the Army in which Wolff served.

Chapter 4

STYLE

Tobias Wolff's writing employs what dramatists call 'the fourth wall', which goes some way to explaining why some have aligned him with Chekhov. While reading the stories, we feel as if we are vicariously living snippets of the lives of the characters that are presented to us, as does Charlie in *Our Story Begins*.

Wolff's writing demonstrates a keen ear for the vernacular and an eye for profound and telling details, which he uses to define and describe characters, their emotions and their often mundane states of existence, as well as their turmoil - both internal - within their relationships. Although Wolff shows empathy for the suffering of his characters, he does not moralise against those who are less than heroic.

While the prose is crisp and economical, Wolff uses natural elements such as wind, darkness, fog and rain to allude to the drama that lies either within the individual or in their relationship with the outside world.

Chapter 5

BACKGROUND NOTES

Tobias Wolff was born in Alabama in 1945 and travelled around the country with his mother, finally settled in Washington State, where he grew up. He was a student at the Hill School in Pennsylvania until he was expelled for repeatedly failing Mathematics in his final year, after which he joined the Army.

Wolff spent four years as a paratrooper, including time in Vietnam. Following his discharge, he attended Oxford University in England, where he received a First Class Honours degree in English in 1972.