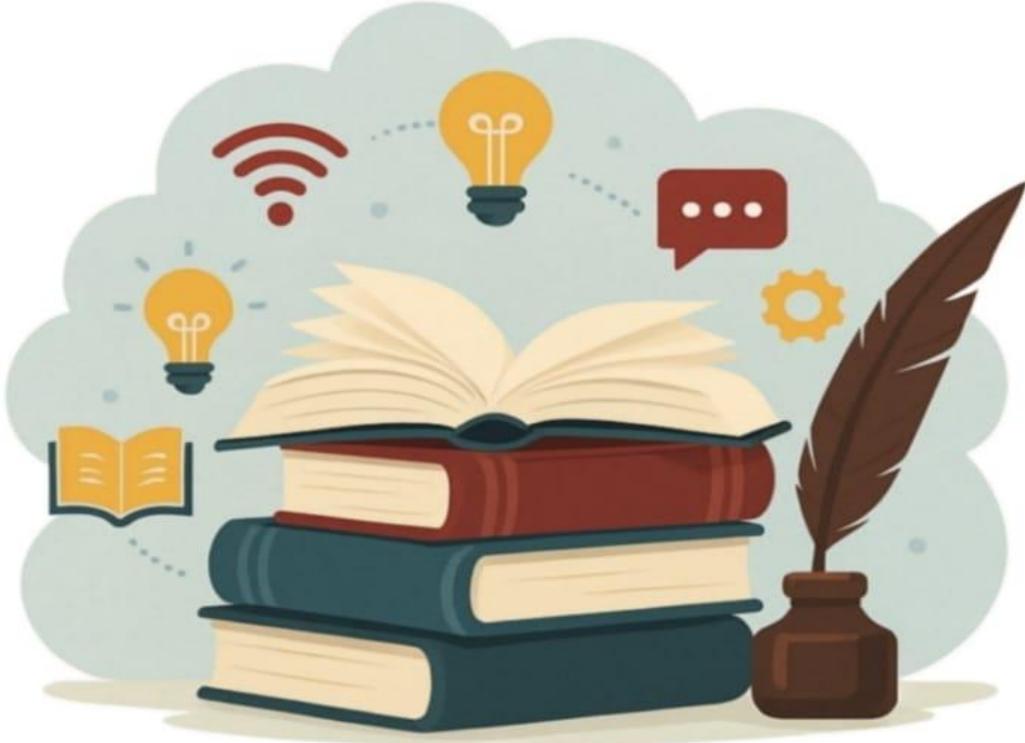


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English Literature

ملخصات تخصص الأدب الإنجليزي

E121 MTA

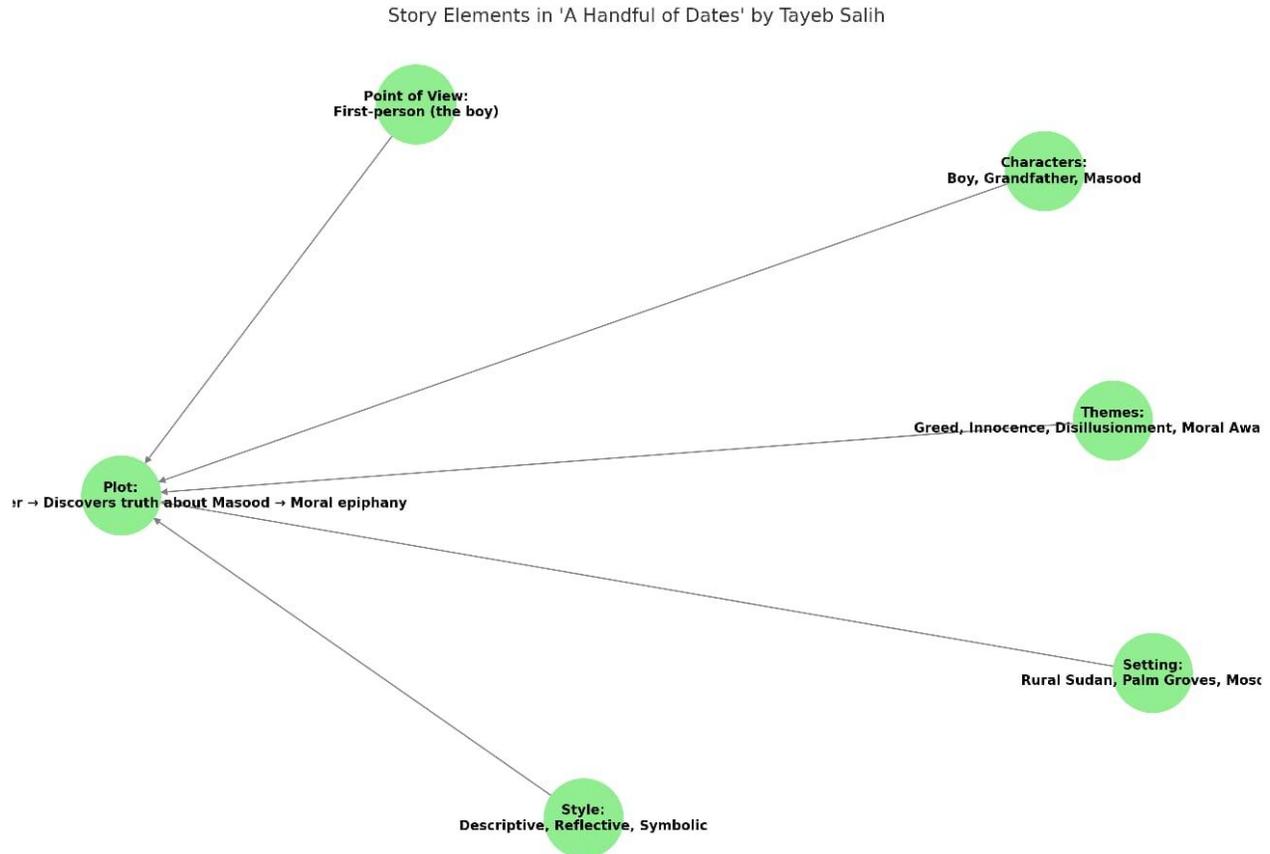


ملخصات البروفيسور



E121: A HANDFUL OF DATES - MTA

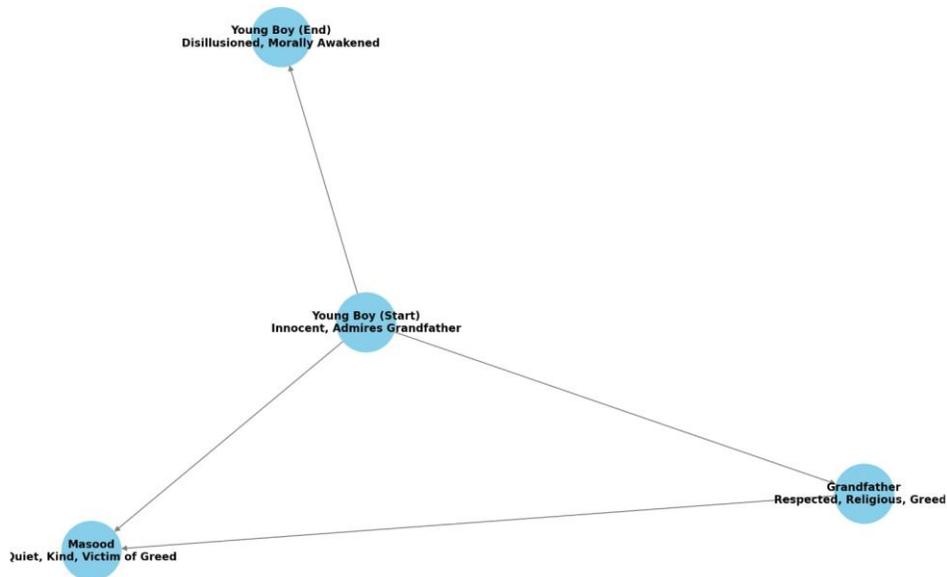
ANALYSIS:



1. Characters: are the individuals in a literary work who carry the plot and reflect their themes.

- **The Boy (Narrator):** a sensitive, observant child who initially idolizes his grandfather but undergoes a moral transformation. *"I used to run with my grandfather to the mosque... I felt proud walking with him."*
- **The Grandfather:** A powerful, respected, yet morally complex figure who represents traditional authority and greed. **For example,** *"My grandfather had acquired all that land little by little from Masood."*
- **Masood:** A kind but defeated man who loses his land due to debt and exploitation, symbolizing victimhood. *"Masood said gently, 'I sold it to your grandfather.'"*





2. Point of View: the perspective from which a story is told. It refers to the narrative perspective from which a story is told. The story is told in the first-person point of view, through the eyes of the young boy. “I used to imagine that when I grew to be a man I would be like him.” This perspective allows readers to witness the boy’s internal transformation and moral awakening. “I used to know when my grandfather was pleased... I would see his face shine with joy”. This narrative voice allows the reader to experience the protagonist’s emotional journey and moral awakening intimately.

3. Theme: a central idea or message explored in a literary work.

- **Greed and Exploitation:** embodied by the grandfather’s actions toward Masood. “Your grandfather took almost all of it piece by piece.” The grandfather’s accumulation of Masood’s land through debt manipulation illustrates systemic greed.
- **Loss of Innocence:** As the boy learns the harsh truth about his grandfather. “I had a feeling of utter revulsion”. The boy’s admiration for his grandfather is shattered as he witnesses the exploitation of Masood. “I felt I had been tricked and hated my grandfather.”
- **Justice and Compassion:** Expressed through the boy’s sympathy for Masood and moral rejection of injustice. His decision to reject the dates reflects this newfound sense of justice. The boy’s revulsion at the end signifies a rejection of injustice and the birth of ethical consciousness. “I vomited the dates I had eaten... I felt I had swallowed something poisonous.”
- **Tradition vs. Change:** The story critiques traditional social norms that allow powerful men like the grandfather to exploit others. The contrast between the grandfather’s pride and the boy’s silent rebellion reflects intergenerational tension.

4. Setting: the setting is the time and place in which a story unfolds. It is set in a rural Sudanese village, characterized by palm groves, fields, and a tight-knit agricultural community. “The land lay flat and green with fields of millet and rows of date palms”. This setting is significant as it reflects the agrarian social structure and the underlying themes of land ownership, exploitation, and tradition.

5. Conflict: is a struggle between opposing forces, often driving the plot.

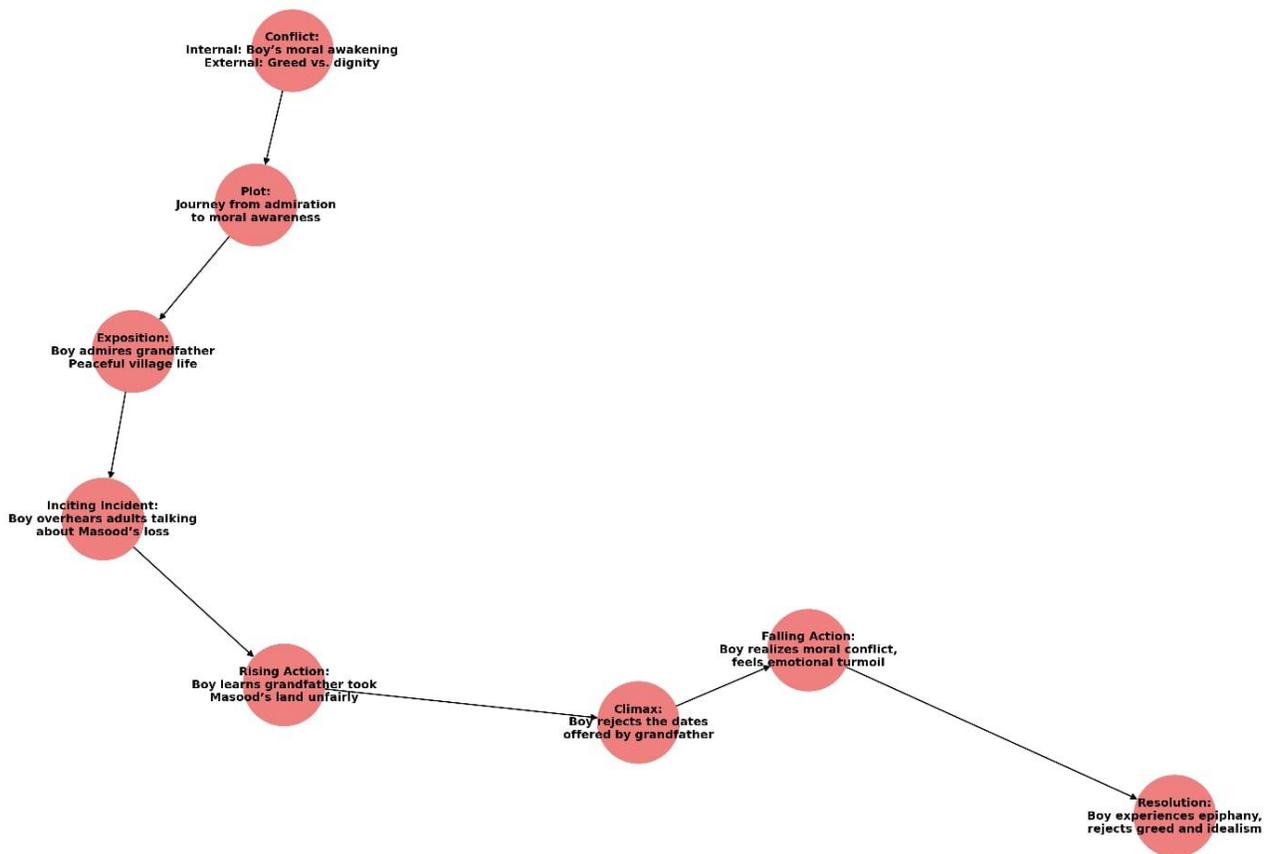
- **Man vs. Self:** The boy struggles internally with his admiration for his grandfather and the new awareness of his grandfather’s moral flaws. This internal conflict leads to the boy’s moral awakening.
- **Man vs. Man:** The grandfather vs. Masood, an external conflict where the grandfather exploits Masood's poverty to take his land.
- **Man vs. Society:** The story critiques societal acceptance of greed and exploitation in rural communities.



6. Plot: is the sequence of events that form the structure of a narrative.

- **Exposition:** the narrator introduces his grandfather and their life in the village. “My grandfather was tall and slender... people respected him.”
- **Inciting Incident:** the boy asks why his grandfather dislikes Masood. “Why does grandfather hate Masood so much?”
- **Rising Action:** the grandfather explains how he bought Masood’s land, and they attend the harvest date. “He sold me his land little by little.”
- **Climax:** Masood receives no dates and is reminded of his debts. “He gave the dates to others, and Masood stood there, empty-handed.”
- **Falling Action:** the boy feels pity for Masood and disgust toward his grandfather. “I slipped away quietly though grandfather called me.”
- **Resolution:** the boy vomits the dates, symbolizing rejection of his grandfather’s values. “I vomited... I felt I had eaten something rotten.”

Plot Structure and Conflict in 'A Handful of Dates'



7. Style: refers to the author’s distinctive way of using language, including diction, imagery, and tone.

- **Lyrical and descriptive prose:** Tayeb Salih uses poetic imagery to evoke setting and emotion. “The trunks of the palms leaned toward us like tired women.”
- **Symbolism:** the dates symbolize both economic wealth and moral corruption. For example, the boy’s vomiting of dates becomes a powerful symbolic rejection of injustice.
- **Tone:** the tone shifts from admiration and nostalgia to disillusionment and moral clarity. For example, the final lines reflect a somber, contemplative tone as the boy re-evaluates his values.



DEFINITIONS:

1. Epiphany : is a sudden realization or moment of insight that changes a character's understanding of the world. **For example**, the young boy experiences an epiphany during the date harvest when he realizes that his grandfather, whom he idolized, is in fact greedy and exploitative. This moment of awareness occurs when Masood is left with nothing while the grandfather takes his share. *"Then, without knowing why, I put my finger into my throat and spewed up the dates I'd eaten."* This act symbolizes the boy's rejection of his grandfather's values and marks his transition from innocence to moral awareness.

2. Bildungsroman (Coming of Age): a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. **For example**, he starts with *"a longing to be like his grandfather,"* and ends with a rejection of that ideal by *"spewing up the dates"*. *A Handful of Dates* is a classic example of a Bildungsroman. The boy begins the story as an innocent child who idolizes his grandfather. However, by the end, he has undergone a deep internal transformation after realizing the injustice inflicted on Masood.

3. Symbolism: is a literary device in which objects, characters, or events represent deeper meanings. **For example**, it symbolizes wealth, power, and greed. When the boy vomits the dates, he symbolically rejects the moral corruption they represent. *"I put my finger into my throat and spewed up the dates I'd eaten."*

4. Identification: when the reader or character relates deeply to another character's experience. **For example**, the narrator identifies deeply with Masood by the end of the story, feeling sympathy for his suffering and recognizing a shared love for nature and dignity. He feels *"a sudden desire to reach out and touch him."*

5. The Acacia Tree: Represents the contrast between illusion and reality. Early in the story, the boy imagines giants behind the tree like his grandfather, but by the end, it becomes the place where he realizes his grandfather's flaws. *"I reached the river bank near the bend it made behind the wood of acacia trees..."*

6. Situational Irony: occurs when there is a stark difference between what is expected to happen and what actually occurs. **For example**, the boy initially admires his grandfather and aspires to be like him. However, he ends the story, running away from him in disgust after learning the truth about his greed. The expected admiration becomes revulsion, and the respected elder becomes the antagonist in the boy's moral journey.

SORT ANSWER:

Q: Who is the protagonist of the short story *A handful of Dates*? How is he different from other stories protagonists?

The protagonist is the young boy, and unlike many traditional protagonists, he is a child whose internal development is the central focus. His growth is not based on action but on moral awakening. He stands out for his sensitivity and ability to question authority, a rare trait in child protagonists.

Q: What are the young boy's feelings towards his grandfather in this short story 'A Handful of Dates'? **Q: What are the young boy's feelings towards his grandfather? Support your answer with evidence from this short story *A Handful of Dates*?**

At the beginning of *A Handful of Dates*, the boy admires his grandfather deeply. He describes him as *"a tall man with a white beard"* and expresses pride and joy in accompanying him to the mosque and listening to his wise words. The grandfather represents wisdom, authority, and goodness in the boy's eyes. However, this perception shifts drastically by the end of the story. By overhearing a conversation between his grandfather and others about how Masood's land was gradually



taken through manipulation and debt, the boy experiences a moment of deep disillusionment. When his grandfather takes dates from Masood's trees and offers the boy a handful, the child rejects them, feeling "a lump rise in [his] throat." His grandfather, once a symbol of virtue, is now seen as complicit in greed and injustice. The boy's feelings evolve from admiration to disappointment, marking a critical emotional and moral shift.

Q: How the boy feel/looks to his grandfather at the beginning and at the ends of the story. Are the young boy's and the grandfather's feelings towards Masood the same or quite different?

The grandfather views Masood with disdain and superiority, referring to him as foolish for mismanaging his land and marrying multiple times. Conversely, the boy feels a natural sympathy for Masood. He sees him as a kind, quiet man with dignity, and after witnessing how Masood was exploited, the boy's empathy grows. The stark difference in their attitudes emphasizes the theme of inherited values and moral divergence. "I looked at him and felt a kind of affection for him, a man defeated by life."

Q: Does he solve the problems of the story?

The story does not resolve the external problems, such as the unfair seizure of Masood's land. However, the internal conflict of the narrator is resolved through an epiphany. The young boy gains a new moral understanding and no longer idealizes his grandfather. This realization, though painful, marks a maturation in the boy's character and a rejection of unethical behavior.

Q: Are the young boy's and the grandfather's feelings towards Masood the same or quite different? Support your answer with information from this short story?

The boy feels a silent affinity with Masood, especially after seeing his calm suffering and dignity. Unlike the adults who mock Masood, the boy senses an injustice in how he was treated. This emotional connection is strengthened when the boy realizes that Masood's loss was his grandfather's gain.

Q: In the short story *A Handful of Dates*, the young boy and his grandfather initially admire each other due to their close bond and shared experiences?

Indeed, at the start of the story, the grandfather and the boy share mutual admiration. The grandfather takes pride in the boy's intelligence and presence, while the boy idolizes his grandfather's religious devotion, authority, and status in the community. Their bond is built on tradition, routine, and what the boy perceives as moral uprightness.

Q: Do you think that the end of the short story *A Handful of Dates* is expected or surprising? Explain. Justify from the short story *A Handful of Dates*?

The ending of *A Handful of Dates* may be surprising in emotional tone but is consistent with the buildup. The reader, like the boy, gradually begins to see the grandfather's flaws. The rejection of the dates is a symbolic and emotional climax that marks a clear departure from childhood naivety.

Q: Compare and contrast the young boy at the beginning of the short story and at the end of '*A Handful of Dates*'. Justify your answer?

At the beginning of the story, the boy is innocent, joyful, and reverent. By the end, he is disillusioned, emotionally conflicted, and morally awakened. This transformation represents the painful but necessary journey into moral consciousness.

Q: How different is Masood from the other characters in the short story? Support your answer with information from this short story *A Handful of Dates*?

Masood is different from other characters because he embodies dignity, silence, and suffering rather than manipulation or greed. He represents loss, not due to incompetence, but due to a system that favors cunning over kindness.



Q: "A Handful of Dates" is a beautiful story in which a boy learns to reject greed and accept the realities of life. It is a mixture of a boy's feelings. Feeling that shape our lives and make us who we are?

The story illustrates how the boy learns to reject greed through observation. The realization that his grandfather gained wealth at the cost of someone else's dignity shocks him into awareness. This blend of admiration, disappointment, and empathy shapes his character and understanding of human nature.

Q: Write an essay on the epiphany (the critical moment of awareness) that the narrator experiences in the sort of story A Handful of Dates by Tayeb Saleh. Support your answer with evidence from the story?

The critical moment of awareness occurs when the boy overhears the conversation about how his grandfather came to control most of Masood's land. This realization exposes the greedy underpinnings of the grandfather's behavior. The narrator's rejection of the dates symbolizes his rejection of complicity and corruption. "I had the feeling that I hated him". This marks the loss of innocence and a newfound moral clarity. The boy realizes that being respected and religious does not always align with being just or kind.

ESSAY (1)

Q: How does the narrator's view of his grandfather change throughout Tayeb Saleh's 'A Handful of Dates', and what does this reveal about the theme of growing up? Support your response with incidents from the story?

In Tayeb Salih's short story *A Handful of Dates*, the central character, a young, observant boy, undergoes a profound emotional and moral transformation. At the heart of this transformation is his shifting perception of his grandfather, a man he once idolized but comes to question. This shift not only highlights the complexities of adult behavior but also reflects the universal theme of growing up, the painful process of gaining moral awareness and learning that admired figures can be flawed. Through vivid characterization and symbolic moments, Salih masterfully explores how the boy's view of his grandfather evolves and how this transformation marks a loss of innocence.

At the beginning of the story, the boy holds his grandfather in the highest regard. He describes him with admiration, calling him "tall and slim with a white beard," and notes his deep attachment to his presence, religion, and wisdom. The grandfather represents everything noble in the boy's eyes: dignity, piety, and knowledge. The boy feels honored to accompany him to the mosque and is pleased when the grandfather praises him to others. This admiration reveals the natural tendency of children to idealize adults, especially those in positions of authority. However, the boy's image of his grandfather begins to crumble when he overhears a conversation between his grandfather and other men about Masood, their neighbor. The grandfather boasts about how Masood lost all his land due to debts, with a tone of triumph rather than sympathy. He mocks Masood's life choices, including his marriages and supposed laziness, and shows no remorse for benefiting from Masood's downfall. This is the boy's first encounter with the complexity and sometimes cruelty of adult morality.

The turning point and the climax of the boy's emotional journey occurs during the harvesting of dates. The boy observes Masood standing silently as others reap the fruits of trees that once belonged to him. The grandfather, leading the effort, offers the boy a handful of dates, expecting him to enjoy the rewards. Instead, the boy feels deeply disturbed. His response is telling: "I had the feeling that I hated him." This is not just a reaction to the act itself, but to the betrayal of the moral image he had constructed of his grandfather. The boy's rejection of the dates symbolizes a rejection of the values his grandfather represents, greed, exploitation, and pride. This moment signifies his loss of innocence and the emergence of a new moral consciousness. He begins to understand that being respected and religious does not necessarily mean being kind or just. It is a painful but essential realization that marks a step toward maturity. Thus, the narrator's changing view of his grandfather serves as a



metaphor for the broader theme of growing up. Through his moral awakening, the boy transitions from innocence to awareness, from admiration to critical reflection. The story does not present a dramatic rebellion but rather a quiet internal transformation, a hallmark of genuine coming-of-age narratives.

In conclusion, *Tayeb Salih's A Handful of Dates* uses the boy's changing perception of his grandfather to illustrate the painful yet inevitable journey of growing up. Through subtle narrative shifts and emotionally charged moments, the story captures the essence of moral development, learning to see the world and the people in it as complex, imperfect, and sometimes unjust. It is through this realization that the narrator begins to define his own values, distinct from those he once blindly inherited.

ESSAY (2)

Q: What made the young boy feel close to Masood in the short story A Handful of Dates? Explain. Justify from the short story?

In Tayeb Salih's poignant short story *A Handful of Dates*, the emotional development of the young narrator is shaped not only by his reverence for his grandfather, but more significantly by his growing sense of empathy towards Masood, the quiet and sorrowful neighbor. Although Masood remains a background character for much of the story, he becomes a figure of deep emotional resonance for the boy. This essay explores the reasons behind the boy's growing sense of closeness to Masood and justifies this connection through key moments and descriptions in the story.

From the very beginning, the boy describes Masood with an innate sense of curiosity and subtle admiration. He notes that Masood "owned the trees" but seemed distant from the village's power structure. Masood is presented as a man who had once owned wealth and land but was now reduced to a mere observer of his former property. The boy notices Masood's calm demeanor and quiet suffering, which contrasts sharply with the grandfather's prideful display of wealth and authority. The boy's feelings toward Masood intensify during the pivotal moment when he overhears a conversation between his grandfather and others, revealing how Masood had gradually lost all his land due to debt and manipulation. The grandfather boasts about how Masood "sold his land bit by bit" and now owns nothing, laughing dismissively. This is a turning point for the boy, as he begins to understand the power dynamics and injustice underlying what had seemed like a simple admiration for his grandfather's prosperity.

The strongest evidence of the boy's empathy comes near the end of the story when he sees Masood's resigned expression and hears his voice "trembling like a tree in the wind." The narrator reflects, "I looked at him and felt a kind of affection for him, a man defeated by life." This moment is emotionally significant because it marks a shift in the boy's loyalty. He feels drawn to Masood not because of his power or wealth, but because of his humanity, his dignity in loss, and the pain he endures quietly. Finally, the symbolic gesture of the boy rejecting the dates handed to him by his grandfather—dates picked from Masood's former trees, further highlights his internal conflict and alignment with Masood. This rejection is not merely physical but moral. It is the boy's unspoken protest against injustice, and a sign of the emotional bond he has formed with the one man who suffered in silence while others profited.

To sum up, the boy feels close to Masood because he senses the quiet tragedy of a man who has lost everything yet retains his dignity. The boy's empathy is awakened as he contrasts the superficial respect he held for his grandfather with the quiet strength of Masood. Through this connection, the story beautifully portrays the moral awakening of a young mind and the deep impact of witnessing injustice.



ESSAY (3)

Q: Is the grandfather in Tayeb Saleh's 'A Handful of Dates' the villain of the story? Support your argument with incidents from the story.

In Tayeb Salih's short story *A Handful of Dates*, the character of the grandfather plays a pivotal role in shaping the young narrator's understanding of morality, power, and human character. While he is not portrayed as a traditional villain in the sense of malice or violence, the grandfather can be interpreted as a morally complex antagonist. His actions, while socially accepted and even admired within the community, embody greed, exploitation, and ethical hypocrisy. This essay argues that the grandfather serves as the moral villain of the story, not through overt cruelty, but through subtle exploitation that deeply impacts the narrator's emotional development and worldview.

At the beginning of the story, the grandfather is admired by the young boy, who sees him as wise, pious, and dignified. The boy describes him with reverence: "I used to love the look of my grandfather, tall and slim with a white beard." This admiration creates a powerful contrast to the disillusionment the boy later experiences. The grandfather is presented as a man of status, respected in the village, and regularly attends the mosque. This façade of virtue initially masks his morally questionable behavior. However, as the story unfolds, the boy overhears a conversation between his grandfather and others, revealing that the grandfather has slowly acquired most of the land that once belonged to Masood, a quiet and sorrowful neighbor. The grandfather speaks about Masood's misfortunes not with sympathy, but with pride and derision: "*He sold it bit by bit... now owns nothing.*" This tone exposes his lack of compassion and hints at calculated exploitation. The grandfather's satisfaction with Masood's downfall reflects an underlying cruelty veiled by respectability.

Further evidence of the grandfather's villainous nature is seen during the harvesting of dates. Masood, the rightful owner of the land and trees, watches helplessly as others pick the fruit. The grandfather not only leads this act but offers a handful of dates to the boy, expecting him to share in the gains. This moment is pivotal which represents the grandfather's blindness to the injustice he perpetuates. The boy, however, rejects the dates, overwhelmed by shame and moral conflict. His rejection symbolizes his disapproval of his grandfather's behavior, "*I felt a lump rise in my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes... I had the feeling that I hated him*". Although the grandfather never commits a crime in legal terms, his role in Masood's misfortune and his pride in this role mark him as a moral antagonist. He is a product of a system that rewards cunning and power while masking injustice with piety and tradition. His villain lies not in evil intent, but in the normalization of exploitation, an inheritance he unknowingly tries to pass on to his grandson.

In conclusion, the grandfather in *A Handful of Dates* is not a villain in a traditional narrative sense, but he is the moral antagonist of the story. His exploitation of Masood and his pride in doing so challenge the narrator's innocence and force a painful awakening. Through this character, Tayeb Salih critiques systems of power that operate under the guise of respectability and expose the quiet tragedies they leave behind. The grandfather's role thus becomes essential in portraying how subtle injustice can be just as destructive as overt wrongdoing.



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