

## STORY 4

**The end of something****By Ernest Hemmingway**

About Ernest Hemmingway (1898 – 1961)
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Ernest Hemmingway was born in Chicago, in the USA, in 1898. He served as a local journalist and later as a roving correspondent in Europe, where he joined a group of expatriate Americans for a while in Paris. He later lived in Cuba, before returning to the USA. He lived a very physical life, participating in bullfights, deep-sea fishing and big game hunting. In 1925 he met another American novelist, Scott Fitzgerald, who had just published his highly successful **The Great Gatsby**. The two became good friends, but Fitzgerald's wife disliked Hemmingway. She stated that she was convinced that Ernest was homosexual and accused her husband of having an affair with him, and that Ernest's "macho" personality was just a façade. A number of his short stories feature homosexuality as a major theme. After a series of broken marriages, reliance on alcohol, severe accident injuries and liver problems, he was admitted to a clinic. Finding his memory had gone and he could not write anymore, he committed suicide by shooting himself with his favourite shotgun in 1961.

Hemmingway published his earliest stories and poems in his high school newspaper. He went on to publish various short stories and novels. In 1953 he received the Pulitzer prize for his long short story **The Old Man and the Sea**, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature the following year

**Background to The end of something**

Apart from his interest in politics and involvement as a journalist, Hemmingway had a passion for fishing, and this is the activity around which this story unfolds. Yet it is human relationships that are of significance here – the fishing is merely the background against which they unfold. It is Hemmingway's attention to descriptive detail that vividly creates the setting so that the story comes truly to life in our mind. The setting is an American lake town, Horton's Bay, that used to be a lumbering site.

**The end of something**

In the old days Horton's Bay was a lumbering town. No one who lived in it was out of sound of the big saws in the mill by the lake. Then one year there were no more logs to make lumber. The lumber schooners came into the bay and were loaded with the cut of the mill that stood stacked in the yard. All the piles of lumber were carried away. The big mill building had all its machinery that was removable taken out and hoisted on board one of the schooners by the men who had worked in the mill. The schooner moved out of the bay toward the open lake carrying the two great saws, the travelling carriage that hurled the logs against the revolving, circular saws and all the rollers, wheels, belts and iron piled on a

hull – deep load of lumber. It's open hold covered with canvas and lashed tight, the sails of the schooner filled and it moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay a town.

The one-story bunk houses, the eating-house, the company store, the mill offices, and the big mill itself stood deserted in the acres of saw dust that covered the swampy meadow by the shore of the bay.

Ten years later there was nothing of the mill left except the broken white limestone of its foundations showing through the swampy second growth as Nick and Marjorie rowed along the shore. They were trolling along the edge of the channel bank where the bottom dropped off suddenly from sandy shallows to twelve feet of dark water. They were trolling on their way to the point to set night lines for rainbow trout.

"Their's our old ruin, Nick," Marjorie said.

Nick, rowing, looked at the white stone in the green trees.

"There it is." he said.

"Can you remember when it was a mill"? Marjorie asked.

"I can just remember," Nick said.

"It seems more like a castle," Marjorie said.

Nick said nothing. They rowed on out of sight of the mill, following the shoreline. Then Nick cut across the bay.

"They aren't striking," he said.

"No," Marjorie said. She was intent on the rod all the time they trolled, even when she talked. She loved to fish. She loved to fish with Nick.

Close beside the boat a big trout broke the surface of the water. Nick pulled hard on one oar so the boat would turn and the bait spinning far behind would pass where the trout was feeding. As the trout's back came out of the water the minnows jumped wildly. They sprinkled the surface like a handful of shot thrown into the water. Another trout broke water, feeding on the other side of the boat

"They're feeding." Marjorie said.

"But they won't strike," Nick said.

He rowed the boat around the troll past both feeding fish, then headed it for the point. Marjorie did not reel in until the boat touched the shore..

They pulled the boat up the beach and Nick lifted out a pail of perch. The perch swam in the water in the pail. Nick caught three of them with his hands and cut their heads off and skinned them while Marjorie chased with her hands in the bucket, finally caught a perch, cut it's head off and skinned it. Nick looked at her fish.

"You don't want to take the ventral fin out," he said "It'll be alright for bait but it's better with the ventral fin in."

He hooked each of the skinned perch through the tail. There were two kooks attached to a leader on each rod. Then Marjorie rowed the boat out over the channel-bank, holding the line in her teeth, and looking toward Nick, who stood on the shore holding the rod and letting the line run out from the reel.

"That's about right," he called.

"Should I let it drop?" Marjorie called back, holding the line in her hand

"Sure. Let it go." Marjorie dropped the line over board and watched the baits go down through the water.

She came in with the boat and ran the second line out the same way. Each time Nick set a heavy slab of driftwood across the butt of the rod to hold it solid and propped it up at an angle with a small slab. He reeled in the slack line so the line ran taut out to where the bait rested on the sandy floor of the channel and set the click on the reel, When a trout, feeding on the bottom, took the bait it would run with it, taking line out of the reel in a rush and making the reel sing with the click on

Marjorie rowed up the point a little way so she would not disturb the line. She pulled hard on the oars and the boat went way up the beach. Little waves came in with it. Marjorie stepped out of the boat and Nick pulled the boat high up the beach.

"What's the matter, Nick?" Marjorie asked.

"I don't know," Nick said, getting wood for a fire.

They made a fire with driftwood. Marjorie went to the boat and brought a blanket. The evening breeze blew the smoke toward the point, so Marjorie spread the blanket out between the fire and the lake.

Marjorie sat with her back to the fire and waited for Nick. He came over and sat down beside her on the blanket. In back of them was the close second-growth timber of the point and in front was the bay with the mouth of Horton's Creek. It was not quite dark. The fire-light went as far as the water. They could both see the two steel rods at an angle over the dark water. The fire glinted on the reels.

Marjorie unpacked the basket of supper.

"I don't feel like eating," Nick said.

"Come on and eat, Nick",

"All right."

They ate without talking, and watched the two rods and the fire-light in the water.

"There's going to be a moon tonight," said Nick. He looked across the bay to the hills that were beginning to sharpen against the sky. Beyond the hills he knew the moon was coming up.

"I know it," Marjorie said happily.

"You know everything." Nick said.

"Oh, Nick, please cut it out! Please , please don't be that way!"

"I can't help it," Nick said. "You do. You know everything. That's the trouble. You know you do."

Marjorie did not say anything.

"I've taught you everything. You know you do. What don't you know , anyway?"

" Oh, shut up," Marjorie said "There comes the moon."

They sat on the blanket without touching each other and watched the moon rise.

"You don't have to talk silly" Marjorie said. "What's really the matter?"

"I don't know"

"Of course you know."

"No I don't"

Nick looked on at the moon, coming up over the hills

"It isn't fun any more."

He was afraid to look at Marjorie. Then he looked at her.

She sat there with her back toward him. He looked at her back. "It isn't fun anymore. Not any of it."

She didn't say anything. He went on. "I feel as though everything has gone to hell inside of me. I don't know Marge. I don't know what to say.'

He looked on at her back.

"Isn't love any fun?" Marjorie said.

"No." Nick said. Marjorie stood up. Nick sat there, his head in his hands.

"I'm going to take the boat," Marjorie called to him." "You can walk back round the point."

"All right," Nick said. "I'll push the boat off for you."

"You don't need to," she said. She was afloat in the boat on the water with the moonlight on it. Nick went back and lay down with his face in the blanket by the fire He could hear Marjory rowing on the water.

He lay there for a long time. He lay there while he heard Bill come into the clearing walking around through the woods. He felt Bill coming up to the fire. Bill didn't touch him either.

“Did she go all right?’ Bill said.

‘Yes,” Nick said, lying, his face on the blanket.

“Have a scene?”

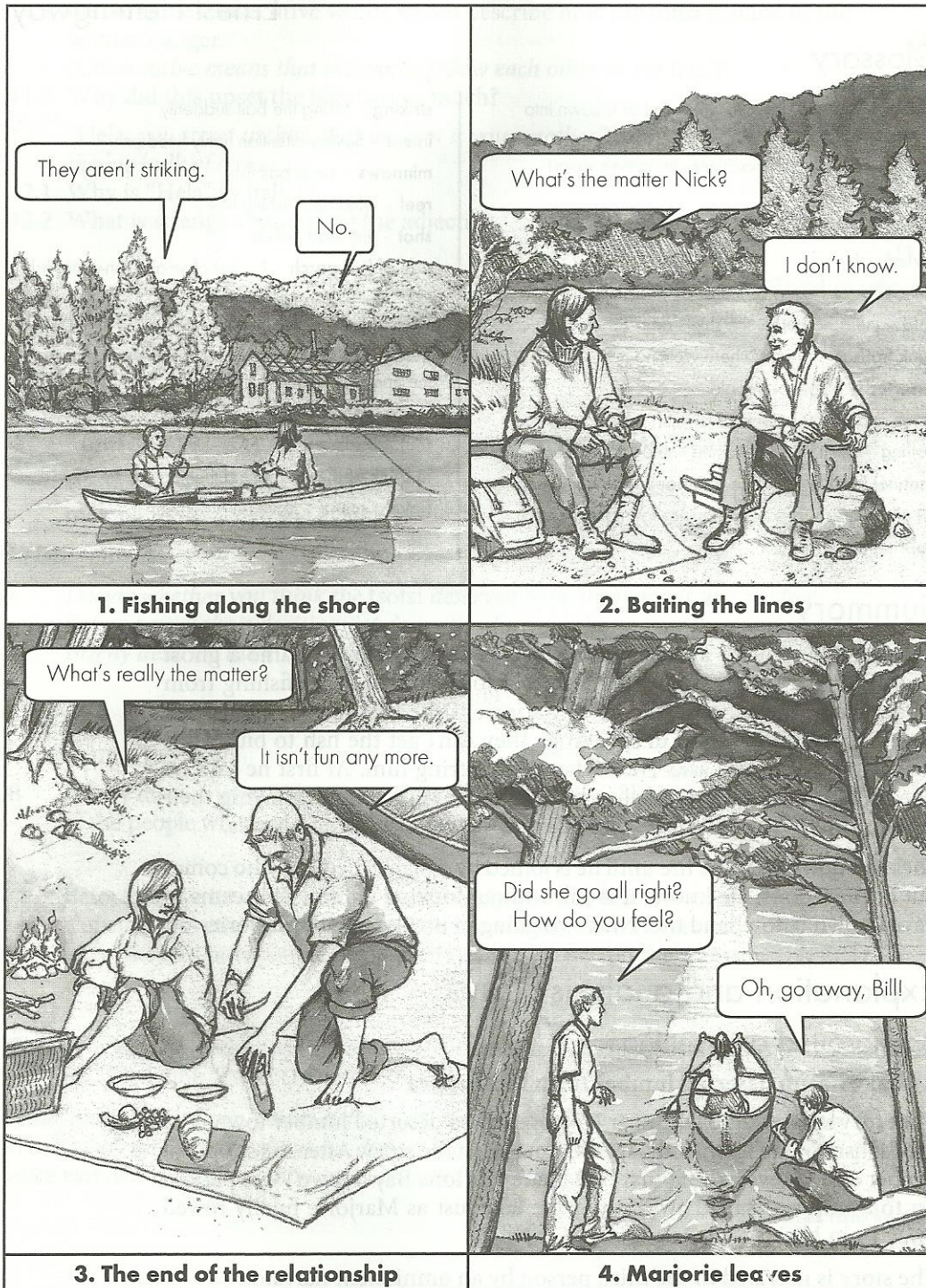
“No, there wasn’t any scene.”

“How do you feel?”

Oh, go away, Bill! Go away for a while.”

Bill selected a sandwich from the lunch basket and walked over to have a look at the rods.

Taken from Literature Study Guide, Maskew Miller Longman



## Themes

- **The end of a relationship**

The main theme is, as the title suggests, the end of a relationship. The story is structured around this. We get a hint early on, with the negativity that Nick displays, that the heart of the relationship is not there. The writer shows us this with his comment “They aren’t striking.” This is repeated later: “But they won’t strike.”

## Character

- **Nick:** negative
- **Marjorie:** strong, independent, decisive, competent

The two main characters are Nick and Marjorie. The writer portrays them economically but convincingly. He does this by focusing on what they do and say rather than by describing them. The characters speak in an informal style, mostly in short, simple sentences.

The writer creates **Marjorie’s** strong, independent character by showing her doing things usually associated with men: skilfully fishing and beheading a fish for bait, rowing powerfully and skilfully. There is a suggestion that **Nick** finds her too strong and competent (“You know everything. That’s the trouble.”).

## Plot

The story line is simple and economical. Nick and Marjorie go fishing together, they break up and Marjorie rows away. What the writer is focusing on is the actions and dialogue of the two characters to convey the dying relationship.

At the end, questions remain: Does Nick feel certain about his rejection of Marjorie? Will he recover from her departure?

## Symbols

The symbolism of the **lumbering town** Hortons Bay is important in this story. After the supply of timber ended it was loaded onto the schooner, which then sailed away, just as Marjorie rowed away from Nick. The town became deserted and died as a town. This symbolism as well as Nick’s response to Bill at the end raises a questions: Will Nick recover from Marjorie’s departure?

## Language

The writer writes in a simple economical and non-abstract way. He uses almost no figurative language. There is only one figure of speech in the whole story: “They sprinkled the surface like a handful of shot thrown into the water.”

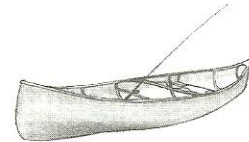
### Key quote

She loved to fish. She loved to fish with Nick.

### Key quote

“What’s the matter, Nick?” Marjorie asked.

“I don’t know,” Nick said, getting wood for a fire.



### Key quote

Nick looked on at the moon, coming up over the hills.

“It isn’t fun any more.”

### Key quote

“Oh, go away, Bill! Go away for a while.”

## Exam preparation

### Sample contextual question

This question contains THREE extracts. Answer the questions on ALL THREE extracts.

#### Extract 1

Read the extract from “*Ten years later there was nothing of the mill left*” to “*‘But they won’t strike,’ Nick said.*” and answer these questions:

1. “*nothing of the mill left.*”  
 What had been the function of the mill ten years before? (2)  
*(Read the first three paragraphs of the story. Use your own words.)*
2. “*They were trolling along the edge of the channel.*”  
 Write down just the letter of the answer you think is correct. Nick and Marjorie were:
  - a. sailing
  - b. rowing
  - c. fishing with a moving line behind the boat
  - d. pulling a fishing net along the bottom of the channel (1)*(To answer a multiple-choice question, find the option that is MOST correct. It’s easier if you cross out the incorrect answers first. The glossary will help you.)*
3. “*... where the bottom dropped off suddenly ...?*”  
 Write down just the letter of the answer you think is correct. The water of the lake suddenly became:
  - a. deeper
  - b. shallower
  - c. more muddy
  - d. a deeper shade of green (1)*(Remember to cross out the incorrect answers first.)*
4. “*‘There’s our old ruin.’*”  
 What is Marjorie referring to? (2)
5. Write down two comments from the extract that Nick makes that show that he is being negative towards Marjorie. (2)
6. Write down a sentence from the extract that suggests Marjorie loves Nick. (1)
7. “*They sprinkled the surface like a handful of shot thrown into the water.*”
  - 7.1 Identify the figure of speech in this sentence. (1)
  - 7.2 What two things are being compared? (2)
  - 7.3 What does this image suggest about the minnows? (2)  
*(Use your glossary to help you with this figures of speech.)*

[14]

AND



Extract 2

Read the extract from “*You don’t have to talk silly, Marjorie said*” to “*You can walk back around the point.*” and answer these questions:

8. “*What’s really the matter?*”  
What was “really the matter” with Nick? (2)
9. “*It isn’t fun any more.*”  
What is the “it” that Nick is referring to? (1)
10. “*He was afraid to look at Marjorie ...*”  
10.1 Which word in this sentence is repeated three times in the extract? (1)  
10.2 How does the repetition of this word add to the description of what is happening between Nick and Marjorie? (2)  
*(Try to imagine how Nick in particular is feeling about Marjorie and about himself at this point in the story.)*
11. “*I’m going to take the boat, Marjorie called to him.*”  
Choose THREE of the following adjectives that you think best describe Marjorie’s character in story as a whole: indecisive, strong, decisive, uncertain, bitter, competent, vague (3)  
[9]

AND

Extract 3

Read the extract from “*He lay there for a long time*” to “*to have a look at the rods*” and answer these questions:

12. “*He lay there for a long time ...*”  
Where was Nick lying? (1)
13. “*... he heard Bill come into the clearing ...*”  
What was Bill’s relationship to Nick? (1)
14. “*Bill didn’t touch him either.*”  
14.1 Who else did not touch Nick that evening? (1)  
14.2 Why do you think Bill did not touch Nick? (2)
15. “*Have a scene?*”  
Write down just the letter of the answer you think is correct. Bill asked Nick if he and Marjorie had had:  
a. a love affair  
b. a fish on the end of the line  
c. an argument (1)  
*(Use the glossary to help you.)*
16. “*Oh go away, Bill!*”  
How do you think Nick was feeling at this point in the story? (3)  
*(Try to imagine how Nick would feel after Marjorie had left.)*
17. What role does Bill play in the story? (3)

[12]

**Total marks: 35**

### Sample essay question

Write the following essay as well as the two paragraphs:

#### Structured essay

- A** Discuss the relationship between Nick and Marjorie. Include how each felt about the other at the beginning of the story, the reasons Nick gave for not wanting the relationship to continue and the feelings of each of them at the end of the story. (Length: 100–120 words) [15]

*Before you start to write:*

- *Reread the story carefully in order to pick up clues from what Nick and Marjorie say to each other about how each of them feel.*
- *Note Marjorie's action when Nick rejects her. What does it show about how she feels?*
- *Note what Nick says to Bill at the end of the story. Try to decide what his words show about how he feels. Are his feelings at the end simple and straightforward or a mixture of feelings?*

AND

#### Paragraph questions

- B** Write a paragraph of 80–100 words describing Marjorie's character. Refer to incidents in the story. [10]

*Before you write your paragraph:*

- *Reread the story carefully, noting all the things Marjorie says and does*
- *Note all the things she is able to do that Nick can do*
- *Note her response to Nick's rejection of her. What does this tell us about her character?*

AND

- C** Write a paragraph of 80–100 words on Bill. Include who you think he is, what his relationship with Nick is and what role he plays in the story. [10]

*Before you write your paragraph:*

- *Read carefully the last part of the story where Bill walks out into the clearing just as Marjorie is rowing away.*
- *Why do you think Bill appeared just at this moment? What was his motive and intention?*

**Total marks: 35**

## MEMORANDUM

## The End of Something (page 97)

## Contextual question

## Extract 1

1. It had been a mill that cut up timber✓ for transport up the lake.✓ (2)
  2. c✓ (1)
  3. a✓ (1)
  4. The ruin✓ of the timber mill.✓ (2)
  5. “They aren’t striking.”✓ “But they won’t strike.”✓ (2)
  6. “She loved to fish with Nick. ✓ (1)
  - 7.1 Simile (or metaphor) ✓ (1)
  - 7.2 The way in which the minnows sprinkled the surface of the water✓ and the way in which shot thrown into the water would sprinkle its surface.✓ (2)
  - 7.3 They were small, numerous✓ and fast moving.✓ (2)
- [14]

## Extract 2

8. He was in fact bored with Marjorie✓ and wanted to break up with her.✓ (2)
  9. He is referring to his relationship with Marjorie.✓ (1)
  - 10.1 “Look” and “looked”.✓ (1)
  - 10.2 It emphasises that Nick did not want to look at Marjorie directly✓ – instead he looked at the moon and at her back.✓ (2)
  11. strong,✓ decisive,✓ competent✓ (3)
- [9]

## Extract 3

12. Nick was lying on a blanket on the shore of the lake.✓ (1)
13. Bill was Nick’s friend.✓ (1)
- 14.1 Marjorie did not touch Nick.✓ (1)
- 14.2 Bill probably realised that Nick was feeling sensitive and confused✓ having just broken up with Marjorie.✓ (2)

15. ✓ (1)
16. Nick was probably feeling guilty ✓ and sad ✓ (regretful) ✓ (3)
17. Bill is a friend of Nick's. He arrives some time after Marjorie has left in the boat. ✓ He asks Nick if Marjorie took the break up "all right". ✓ He is probably there to offer moral support while Nick recovers from his feelings of confusion. ✓ (3)

[12]

**Total marks: 35**

### Essay question

#### A Structured essay

At the beginning of the story Nick and Marjorie go fishing as they usually do. It is clear that Marjorie loves going fishing with Nick and loves Nick – “She loved to fish with Nick.”

As they start to fish she is talkative but Nick either says nothing or makes negative comments – “But they won't strike.” His comments suggest that he is feeling negative about fishing and being with Marjorie. Marjorie notices Nick's negativity and asks him what the matter is. He picks on her, saying that the trouble with her is that she knows everything. Marjorie asks him again what the matter really is. He says that it “isn't fun any more”. The life has gone out of the relationship.

Although Marjorie is hurt, she gets into the boat and leaves. Nick is left on the shore feeling confused. He is probably feeling guilt and a sense of loss. [15]

#### Paragraph questions

##### B

Marjorie loves fishing, especially fishing with Nick. She is strong, competent and independent. She can do things that, at the time that the story was written, were usually associated with men. She is good at fishing. She can behead a fish for bait and she is a skilful and powerful rower. There is a suggestion that Nick finds her too strong and competent. Her strength and decisiveness are shown when Nick reveals his feelings about her and about their relationship. She immediately gets into the rowing boat and rows off into the dark. [10]

##### C

Bill appears after Marjorie has left in the boat. He seems to have walked through the woods to the clearing where Nick is. The fact that Bill asks Nick “Did she go all right?” suggests that Bill knew that Nick was going to tell Marjorie that he wanted to end their relationship. He must have got this information

## Taken from Oxford Exam Success

**Storyline:**

Nick and Marjorie are fishing for rainbow trout on the lake in Hortons Bay. The **lumber mill** that used to be there closed when the timber supply ran out and now only its foundations are left. Marjorie romantically thinks of the ruins as a castle while Nick barely remembers it. At this point the fish are not biting, so they cross the bay in search of fish. Two trout feed on their bait but do not bite. Nick rows the boat while Marjorie fishes, an activity which she enjoys, especially when she is with Nick.

They pull the boat up on the beach and Nick stays on the beach, looking after the rods, while Marjorie rows out and drops more lines. When she comes back to the beach, she asks Nick what is wrong. She has sensed there *is* something wrong. Nick claims he does not know what is wrong. They make a fire and take out a picnic basket. Nick does not feel like eating. The atmosphere is tense and although Nick eats, they do not talk. One of the issues that is bothering Nick is the fact that Marjorie knows everything: "You know everything. That's the trouble." He seems upset that his girlfriend is strong, **competent** and intelligent. When he confesses to her that their relationship and being in love is no longer fun for him, she does not argue or try to change his mind.

She takes the boat and leaves him to walk back. She refuses his help to push the boat into the water, as she is quite capable of doing it herself. Nick lies face-down on the blanket for a long time. When his friend, Bill, appears out of the woods, Nick is not surprised. It seems this was arranged; Bill asks about Marjorie's leaving and whether she made a scene. Nick is in a very unhappy state and wants Bill to go away as well. Bill takes a sandwich from the basket and goes to check the rods.

The relationship between Nick and Bill is unclear, but Nick does confide in Bill more than he seems to with Marjorie, as Bill knows about the intended break-up of the relationship. The author has probably left his story open-ended deliberately so that it is open to the reader's interpretation. Readers often have unanswered questions at the end of a Hemingway story, as is the case here.

**Setting:**

- Hortons Bay – a **ghost town** on a lake in America, once a busy lumbering town
- A beach across the lake from the ruined lumber mill

**Themes:**

- Relationships
- Emotional dishonesty
- Emotional insecurity
- Emotional immaturity
- Communication problems

**Narrative technique:**

- Third person narrator (omniscient) allows us to observe the events
- Colloquial language, typical of a conversation between friends, creates a casual atmosphere
- Effective use of dialogue to indicate tensions in the relationship ("Oh, Nick, please cut it out!", "Oh, shut up")

**Characters:**

- Marjorie – strong independent woman, happy in her relationship with Nick, romantic outlook on life
- Nick – a quiet, unhappy man who seems threatened in his relationship with Marjorie and seems unable to be honest and open with her
- Bill – Nick's friend, seems to be Nick's **confidant**

### Contextual questions

1. The title of a short story is usually carefully chosen by the author.
  - a) Explain the **ambiguity** in the title “The end of something”. (2)
  - b) There is also irony in the title. Explain what is ironic. (2)
2. a) Choose the most suitable answer:
  - A Nick is the stronger person in the relationship. (1)
  - B Marjorie is the stronger person in the relationship. (1)
 b) Give a reason for your choice in Question 2a. (4)
3. When Marjorie asks Nick what is wrong, he says he doesn't know. Answer the question honestly for him, so that she knows what he thinks is wrong. Use direct speech. (2)
4. Nick says, “It isn't fun anymore.”
  - a) What does he seem to be telling Marjorie here? (2)
  - b) Why does he not look her in the eye when he tells her this? Give two reasons. (2)
  - c) What could have ended the fun for Nick in the relationship between him and Marjorie? (2)
  - d) Once you have read the story, what other reason do you think could be the cause of the problem between Nick and Marjorie? (2)
5. This story can be said to have a **twist** at the end. Explain clearly how you think Bill came to be in the woods. (3)



#### Word check:

**lumber mill:** building where logs are processed for use as wood

**competent:** capable, good at what she does

**ghost town:** town with very few or no inhabitants

**confidant:** a person who is trusted with one's private matters

**ambiguity:** having more than one meaning

**twist:** unexpected development

### Essay questions and other activities

1. In a paragraph of 80–100 words, write the entry that Marjorie makes in her diary on the day that Nick ends their relationship. Make it look like a diary entry. Try to express her true feelings. (10)

## MEMORANDUM

### *The end of something – Ernest Hemingway (page 36)*

#### Contextual questions

1. a) “Something” in the title can refer to two things: the mill and its activities in Hortons Bay have come to an end ✓ and the relationship between Marjorie and Nick is ended in the story. ✓ (2)
- b) The relationship between Nick and Marjorie is the something that is ended, ✓ but there is also the *beginning* of a

- new and different lifestyle for each of them after they have broken up, as they move on with their lives / with every ending there will be the beginning of something new. ✓ (2)
2. a) B (Marjorie is the stronger person in the relationship.) ✓ (1)  
 b) She is strong / confident / capable. ✓  
 She wants to know the truth. ✓ Nick is weak ✓ and cannot be honest with her. ✓ (4)
3. "I do not love you anymore." ✓✓ / "I do not enjoy being with you anymore." ✓✓ (2)
4. a) Nick seems to be telling Marjorie that their relationship is no longer fun for him. ✓✓ (2)  
 b) He knows he is not telling the complete truth. ✓ He probably does not want to see how he is hurting her. ✓ (2)  
 c) Nick finds it irritating that Marjorie knows everything. *He* wants to tell her about things and how to do them / be the strong one in their relationship. ✓✓ (2)  
 d) Nick seems to have serious problems communicating honestly with Marjorie. ✓✓ (2)
5. Bill is waiting in the woods for Marjorie to leave. ✓ Nick and Bill must have discussed Nick's plans before the time, because Nick is not surprised when Bill appears ✓ and Bill knows that Nick is going to end his relationship with Marjorie, as he asks if she made a scene. ✓ (3)

### Essay questions and other activities

#### Question 1

(It should have a date, like a diary entry. Colloquial language is acceptable.)

- I can't believe what happened today. This evening when Nick and I went fishing he was in a funny mood and didn't want to talk. I knew something was really wrong when he didn't want to eat. I tried to make him tell me what was worrying him. That was when he told me he didn't enjoy being with me anymore. He said nothing was fun anymore. I refused to let him see me upset so I took the boat and left him to walk home. I wonder what is really going on. (10)