



WAKING UP

a short story for English
reading and speaking

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Introductory Questions

Discuss the questions below with a partner.

Have you ever been very ill and stayed in bed for a long time? What was it like?

How do you usually feel when you wake up after sleeping for many hours?

Do you prefer a quiet house or a noisy house? Why?

What would you do if you woke up and your house was completely silent?

Do you think it is scary to be alone? Why or why not?

What is the scariest situation you can imagine waking up in?

Waking Up

Read the story below and try to understand the main events.

I opened my eyes and shifted in the bed.

My eyelids stuck together, and I rubbed the sleep from them. My back gave a small twinge as I moved.

I must have been out for hours.

I stretched my arms above my head, feeling the pull and release of muscles and joints.

Maybe today was the day I actually got out of bed.

The doctor had said it would take a lot out of me, but I hadn't expected this.

"A rarely seen virus," he had said. "Lots of rest, then you'll feel right as rain."

That's when I called my mum and dad and asked if I could stay with them.

Mum loved it, of course. I was back in my old room, the walls still covered in those little trains.

She brought meals up to me. I slept. I woke. Slept again. A quick trip to the bathroom, then back to sleep.

I hadn't slept like this in years.

Yesterday... I must have been out most of the day. I could barely remember being awake at all.

One thing I did need to do was pee.

I stretched my arms and legs, testing myself, then pulled back the covers and lowered my feet to the floor.

A wave of dizziness hit me as I sat up. I waited for it to pass, then slowly stood.

Out on the landing, everything felt strange. Familiar, but distant — like a place I hadn't seen in a long time.

I held the banister and looked down the stairs.

Nothing.

No television. No voices. No radio from the kitchen.

“Mum?” I called.

My voice sounded wrong somehow.

My stomach growled. I couldn't remember eating

yesterday — though Mum would never let that happen.

No reply.

Dad would be at work. But Mum...

I went to the bathroom.

Afterwards, I turned on the tap and cupped water into my mouth.

My throat was dry — painfully dry.

I drank again. And again. It felt like something inside me was cracking open as the water went down.

When I finally looked up, I caught sight of myself in the mirror.

And stopped.

There was a beard on my face.

Not stubble. Not a few days' growth.

A full beard.

I stared at it, trying to make sense of it. I could remember shaving... after a shower... recently.

Couldn't I?

A cold unease settled in my chest.

I wiped my mouth and stepped back.

At least the dizziness had eased.

But the hunger hadn't.

I went downstairs carefully, one step at a time.

Halfway down, I called again.

“Hey, Mum... you there?”

The sound of my voice seemed to drift through the house and disappear.

No answer.

At the bottom, I turned into the kitchen.

Empty.

I went straight to the fridge and pulled it open.

Ham. Cheese.

I didn't think. I just grabbed the ham and started eating.

Not picking at it — tearing at it, stuffing it into my mouth.

It tasted incredible.

I swallowed quickly, barely chewing, then grabbed the cheese and bit into it.

Gone in seconds.

Only then did I look up.
Out through the window.
At first, I didn't really see anything.
Then my eyes focused.
And I froze.
The garden was covered in birds.
Dozens of them.
Maybe more.
All lying still on the grass.
Dead.
I stepped closer to the glass, squinting.
And then I saw Captain.
Mum's little dog.
Lying on his side among the birds.
Not moving.
Something cold moved through me then.
Something was very wrong.

I grabbed a glass, filled it with water, and drank it in one
go.

Then I went to the living room.

I don't know why.

I just... knew I had to look.

Mum was sitting on the sofa.

Dad in his armchair.

Both facing the television.

Like any normal evening.

But their eyes were open.

Their mouths slightly parted.

They weren't watching anything.

They weren't seeing anything.

I didn't go closer.

I didn't need to.

The panic came fast then.

Sharp. Urgent.

I turned and ran into the hallway, dropping to my knees
by the shelves under the stairs.

Shoes everywhere.

I grabbed my old trainers and pulled them on, hands

shaking.

Think.

Think.

Dad's keys.

Police.

Neighbours.

Anything.

None of it made sense.

Why the birds?

Why Captain?

Why Mum and Dad?

Why me?

I ran back into the kitchen.

The car keys were on the table.

I snatched them up and rushed to the front door.

Pulled it open.

Ran outside.

Down the short driveway.

Out to the road.

And stopped.

There were people in the street.

A few of them.

Standing.

Not moving much — but alive.

Relief hit me so hard I nearly laughed.

“Hey!” I shouted, stepping forward. “Hey! What happened—?”

One of them turned.

He saw me.

And then he ran.

The others followed.

No hesitation. No questions.

Just fear.

“Wait!” I called after them.

My voice sounded... wrong again.

Rougher.

Hungrier.

I stopped.

My mouth felt dry.

Dry, but not from thirst.

Something else.

Something deeper.

I swallowed.

And suddenly understood why they had run.

Essential Vocabulary

eyelids	stretched	muscles
joints	virus	rest
bedroom	landing	banister
stairs	silence	voice
stomach	growled	dizzy
bathroom	tap	throat
mirror	beard	hunger
fridge	ham	cheese
garden	birds	dead
dog	window	glass
shadow	panic	fear
empty	quiet	alone
kitchen	sofa	armchair
television	eyes	mouth
shaking	shoes	keys
door	street	people

relief	shouted	running
	dry	deeper
realised	wrong	alive

Vocabulary Practice Exercise

Follow the steps below to help you learn and remember new words and phrases more effectively:

1. Write each new word or phrase in your vocabulary notebook.
2. Look up the meaning of each word in your dictionary. Write a clear and simple definition next to the word.
3. Create your own sentence using the word or phrase correctly. Try to make the sentence meaningful and connected to your own life or experiences.

Examples

Eyelids – *the thin pieces of skin that cover and protect*

your eyes.

Example sentence: *My eyelids felt heavy, and I struggled to keep my eyes open during the long meeting.*

Stretched – *made your body longer by extending your arms or legs.*

Example sentence: *After sitting for hours, I stood up and stretched to relax my muscles.*

Why do this?

Doing this regularly will help you improve all areas of your English — reading, writing, speaking, and listening. By writing definitions and making your own examples, you are actively using the language, which helps it stick in your memory.

Waking Up — story and reading comprehension questions

The story below is divided into smaller sections. After each section, you will find a set of reading comprehension questions.

This approach can be more suitable for some classes, as it allows students to read step by step and check their understanding as they go. It can also help build confidence, especially for lower-level learners.

Encourage students to read each section carefully and answer the questions in full sentences before moving on to the next part of the story.

Model answers for all questions can be found at the end of the lesson plan.

Section 1

I opened my eyes and shifted in the bed.

My eyelids stuck together, and I rubbed the sleep from them. My back gave a small twinge as I moved.

I must have been out for hours.

I stretched my arms above my head, feeling the pull and release of muscles and joints.

Maybe today was the day I actually got out of bed.

The doctor had said it would take a lot out of me, but I hadn't expected this.

“A rarely seen virus,” he had said. “Lots of rest, then you'll feel right as rain.”

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where is the main character at the beginning of the story?
2. What is he doing?
3. What did the doctor tell the main character that he has?
4. What does he advise him to do?

Section 2

That's when I called my mum and dad and asked if I could stay with them.

Mum loved it, of course. I was back in my old room, the walls still covered in those little trains.

She brought meals up to me. I slept. I woke. Slept again. A quick trip to the bathroom, then back to sleep.

I hadn't slept like this in years.

Yesterday... I must have been out most of the day. I could barely remember being awake at all.

Reading Comprehension Questions

5. Who does the main character call and ask for help?
6. Where does he stay?
7. What can he see on the walls?
8. What does he do while staying at his parents' home?
9. Can he clearly remember the previous days?

Section 3

One thing I did need to do was pee.

I stretched my arms and legs, testing myself, then pulled back the covers and lowered my feet to the floor.

A wave of dizziness hit me as I sat up. I waited for it to pass, then slowly stood.

Out on the landing, everything felt strange. Familiar, but distant — like a place I hadn't seen in a long time.

I held the banister and looked down the stairs.

Nothing.

No television. No voices. No radio from the kitchen.

“Mum?” I called.

My voice sounded wrong somehow.

Reading Comprehension Questions

10. What urgent thing does the main character need to do right now?
11. How does he feel when he sits up?
12. As he gets to the landing, can he hear anything?

13. Who does he call out to?
14. How does his voice sound to him?

Section 4

My stomach growled. I couldn't remember eating yesterday — though Mum would never let that happen.

No reply.

Dad would be at work. But Mum...

I went to the bathroom.

Afterwards, I turned on the tap and cupped water into my mouth.

My throat was dry — painfully dry.

I drank again. And again. It felt like something inside me was cracking open as the water went down.

When I finally looked up, I caught sight of myself in the mirror.

And stopped.

There was a beard on my face.

Not stubble. Not a few days' growth.

A full beard.

Reading Comprehension Questions

15. What does he feel in his stomach?
16. Did he eat anything the day before?
17. Which room does he go to next?
18. What does he do there?
19. What change in his appearance does he see in the mirror?

Section 5

I stared at it, trying to make sense of it. I could remember shaving... after a shower... recently.

Couldn't I?

A cold unease settled in my chest.

I wiped my mouth and stepped back.

At least the dizziness had eased.

But the hunger hadn't.

I went downstairs carefully, one step at a time.

Halfway down, I called again.

“Hey, Mum... you there?”

The sound of my voice seemed to drift through the house and disappear.

No answer.

At the bottom, I turned into the kitchen.

Empty.

Reading Comprehension Questions

20. How does he respond to his appearance in the mirror?
21. What other strong feeling does he have right now?
22. Who does he call out to on the stairs?
23. Which room does he go to downstairs?

Section 6

I went straight to the fridge and pulled it open.

Ham. Cheese.

I didn't think. I just grabbed the ham and started eating.
Not picking at it — tearing at it, stuffing it into my
mouth.

It tasted incredible.

I swallowed quickly, barely chewing, then grabbed the
cheese and bit into it.

Gone in seconds.

Only then did I look up.

Out through the window.

At first, I didn't really see anything.

Then my eyes focused.

And I froze.

The garden was covered in birds.

Reading Comprehension Questions

24. What does he do first in this room?
25. What food items does he find in the fridge?
26. Does he eat slowly or very quickly?
27. Why does he eat so quickly?

28. What does he see in the garden outside?

Section 7

Dozens of them.

Maybe more.

All lying still on the grass.

Dead.

I stepped closer to the glass, squinting.

And then I saw Captain.

Mum's little dog.

Lying on his side among the birds.

Not moving.

Something cold moved through me then.

Something was very wrong.

I grabbed a glass, filled it with water, and drank it in one go.

Then I went to the living room.

I don't know why.

I just... knew I had to look.

Reading Comprehension Questions

29. How many birds does he see?
30. Are they alive or dead?
31. What else does he see on the grass?
32. What action does he take next?
33. Which room does he go to next?
34. Why does he feel he needs to go there?

Section 8

Mum was sitting on the sofa.

Dad in his armchair.

Both facing the television.

Like any normal evening.

But their eyes were open.

Their mouths slightly parted.

They weren't watching anything.

They weren't seeing anything.

I didn't go closer.

I didn't need to.

The panic came fast then.

Sharp. Urgent.

I turned and ran into the hallway, dropping to my knees by the shelves under the stairs.

Shoes everywhere.

I grabbed my old trainers and pulled them on, hands shaking.

Reading Comprehension Questions

35. Who does he see in the living room?

36. Where are they sitting?

37. Are they alive or dead?

38. What feeling does the main character have at this point in the story?

39. Where does he go next?

40. What is he looking for?

Section 9

Think.

Think.

Dad's keys.

Police.

Neighbours.

Anything.

None of it made sense.

Why the birds?

Why Captain?

Why Mum and Dad?

Why me?

I ran back into the kitchen.

The car keys were on the table.

I snatched them up and rushed to the front door.

Pulled it open.

Ran outside.

Down the short driveway.

Out to the road.

And stopped.

Reading Comprehension Questions

41. What thoughts go through his mind as he puts on his shoes?
42. Where does he find the car keys?
43. Where does he go next?

Section 10

There were people in the street.

A few of them.

Standing.

Not moving much — but alive.

Relief hit me so hard I nearly laughed.

“Hey!” I shouted, stepping forward. “Hey! What happened—?”

One of them turned.

He saw me.

And then he ran.

The others followed.

No hesitation. No questions.

Just fear.

“Wait!” I called after them.

My voice sounded... wrong again.

Rougher.

Hungrier.

I stopped.

My mouth felt dry.

Dry, but not from thirst.

Something else.

Something deeper.

I swallowed.

And suddenly understood why they had run.

Reading Comprehension Questions

44. What does he see in the street?

45. How does the main character feel upon seeing them?

46. Does he call out to them?

47. How do they react?

48. How does his voice sound to himself?
49. Why does he think the people ran away?

Reading Comprehension Questions

Now answer all the questions below based on the full story.

Write your answers in full sentences.

You can find model answers at the end of the lesson plan.

1. Where is the main character at the beginning of the story?
2. What is he doing?
3. What did the doctor tell the main character that he has?
4. What does the doctor advise him to do?
5. Who does the main character call and ask for help?
6. Where does he stay?
7. What can he see on the walls?

8. What does he do while staying at his parents' home?
9. Does he clearly remember the previous days?
10. What urgent thing does the main character need to do?
11. How does he feel when he sits up?
12. When he reaches the landing, can he hear anything?
13. Who does he call out to?
14. How does his voice sound to him?
15. What does he feel in his stomach?
16. Did he eat anything the day before?
17. Which room does he go to next?
18. What does he do there?
19. What change in his appearance does he see in the mirror?
20. How does he respond to his appearance in the mirror?
21. What other strong feeling does he have?
22. Who does he call out to on the stairs?
23. Which room does he go to downstairs?
24. What does he do first in the kitchen?

25. What food items does he find in the fridge?
26. Does he eat slowly or very quickly?
27. Why does he eat so quickly?
28. What does he see in the garden outside?
29. How many birds does he see?
30. Are they alive or dead?
31. What else does he see on the grass?
32. What does he do next?
33. Which room does he go to after that?
34. Why does he feel he needs to go there?
35. Who does he see in the living room?
36. Where are they sitting?
37. Are they alive or dead?
38. What feeling does he have at this point?
39. Where does he go next?
40. What is he looking for?
41. What thoughts go through his mind as he puts on his shoes?
42. Where does he find the car keys?

43. Where does he go next?
44. What does he see in the street?
45. How does he feel when he sees them?
46. Does he call out to them?
47. How do the people react?
48. How does his voice sound to him?
49. Why does he think the people ran away?

True or False

Read the statements below and decide if they are True or False.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan.

1. The main character wakes up feeling strong and full of energy.
2. The doctor tells him he has a rare virus.
3. He is staying at his parents' house while he recovers.
4. He clearly remembers everything that happened the day before.
5. When he goes onto the landing, he can hear the television downstairs.
6. He notices something unusual about his face in the mirror.

7. He eats the food slowly and carefully in the kitchen.
8. He sees many dead birds in the garden.
9. His parents are alive when he finds them in the living room.
10. When he goes outside, the people in the street run away from him.

What is the Correct Synonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the word on the left with the correct synonym on the right.

A synonym is a word of similar meaning.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan.

Words	Synonyms
silent	unusual
empty	fast
huge	not making any sound
frightened	little
quick	start
strange	very scared
tired	not full
small	very big
begin	needing rest
look	see

What is the Correct Antonym?

Look at the table below.

Match the word on the left with the correct antonym on the right.

An antonym is a word of opposite meaning.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan.

Words	Opposites
alive	dead
dark	light
open	closed
strong	weak
cold	warm
fast	slow
hungry	full
quiet	loud
afraid	brave
near	far

Words and Meanings

Look at the table below.

Match the words on the left with the correct meaning on the right.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan.

Words	Meanings
throat	to understand something suddenly
shake	a strong chair with arms for sitting
armchair	to make a loud noise with your voice
stare	to move your body quickly without control
swallow	a feeling when something bad has ended
empty	to look at something for a long time

relief	to move one foot forward when walking
step	a part of your body where food and drink go down
shout	to take food or drink down your throat
realise	with nothing inside

Gap Fill Exercise

Look at the word bank below.

Use each word from the word bank to complete the sentences below.

(Two extra words are not needed.)

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan.

dizzy	landing	mirror
beard	hunger	fridge
garden	panic	keys
street	silence	window

Sentences

1. When he stood up, he felt very _____ and had to wait before moving.

2. He stepped out onto the _____ and looked down the stairs.
3. When he looked in the _____, he noticed something strange about his face.
4. He was surprised to see a full _____, even though he remembered shaving.
5. He felt a strong sense of _____ and needed to eat immediately.
6. He opened the _____ to find something to eat.
7. When he looked outside, he saw dead birds lying in the _____.
8. A feeling of _____ rushed through him when he saw his parents.
9. He grabbed the car _____ from the table before leaving the house.
10. When he reached the _____, he saw people standing there.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the main character's situation at the beginning of the story?
2. How does he feel physically when he wakes up?
3. Why do you think the house feels so strange and quiet to him?
4. What was the first moment when you felt something was wrong?
5. How does the writer create a feeling of tension in the story?
6. Why is the beard an important detail? What does it suggest?
7. How would you feel if you woke up and couldn't remember the previous days clearly?
8. Why does he eat the food so quickly in the kitchen?
9. What do the dead birds and the dog suggest about the situation?

10. How does the mood change when he enters the living room?

11. Why doesn't he touch his parents to check if they are alive?

12. What do you think is going through his mind at this point?

13. Why does he decide to leave the house so quickly?

14. What is the effect of the short sentences near the end of the story?

15. How does the ending make you feel? Surprised? Confused? Afraid? Why?

16. Why do you think the people in the street run away from him?

17. Do you think the main character understands what has happened? Why or why not?

18. What do you think has happened in the world outside the house?

19. Have you ever been very ill and stayed in bed for a long time? What was it like?

20. If you woke up in a completely silent house, what would you do first?

Role Play Activity: “Something Is Wrong”

Instructions:

Work in pairs. Read the situation and act it out. One student is Student A, the other is Student B. Try to speak for 2–3 minutes.

Situation 1: Calling for Help

Student A:

You have just woken up and feel very weak and confused. The house is completely silent. You call your parent on the phone.

Student B:

You answer the phone. You are outside the house and something strange is happening in the town. You must explain what you know.

Situation 2: At the Doctor's Office

Student A:

You visited the doctor before you became ill. You feel very tired and weak. Ask questions about your illness.

Student B:

You are the doctor. You think it is just a rare virus, but you are not completely sure. Give advice and reassurance.

Situation 3: Talking to a Neighbour

Student A:

You leave the house and see your neighbour. You are scared and confused. Ask what is happening.

Student B:

You are the neighbour. You have seen strange things (dead animals, empty streets). You are also afraid.

Situation 4: People in the Street

Student A:

You see a group of people in the street and try to talk to them.

Student B:

You see Student A coming towards you. You are afraid of them for some reason. React and explain why you feel this way.

Situation 5: After the Event

Student A:

You believe you may be the cause of what has happened. You feel scared and guilty.

Student B:

You meet Student A. You must decide: do you trust them, help them, or run away? Ask questions and respond.

Teacher Tip

Before students start, give them a few helpful phrases:

What's going on?

Something isn't right...

I don't understand...

You need to listen to me.

Stay away from me!

I think something happened while I was asleep.

Practice in pairs for 5–10 minutes.

Then when you are ready show your role play to the class.

Your classmates and teacher may ask questions and you should try to answer them.

Writing Activity: Continue the Story

Instructions:

Choose one of the situations below and write a short story.

Write 100–200 words.

Try to:

use past tense

include descriptions (what you see, hear, feel)

explain what happens next

Writing Prompts

1. The Empty World

You wake up one morning and your house is completely silent.

There is no one outside. No cars. No people.

👉 What do you do?

👉 Where do you go?

👉 What do you discover?

2. Everyone Is Afraid of You

You try to talk to people, but every time they see you, they run away.

👉 Why are they afraid?

👉 How do you feel?

👉 What do you decide to do?

3. You Slept for Too Long

You wake up and realise many days — or even years — have passed.

👉 What has changed?

👉 What is different about the world?

👉 Can you find anyone you know?

4. Something Is Wrong With You

After you wake up, you notice something strange about your body or voice.

👉 What has changed?

👉 When do you realise it?

👉 What do you do next?

5. The Last Person

You believe you are the only person left alive.

Then suddenly, you see someone else.

👉 Who are they?

👉 Can you trust them?

👉 What happens when you speak to them?

Now write your story based on your chosen prompt.

When you have finished, read your story out in front of your classmates.

Encourage questions and feedback on your story and

answer any questions you receive.

Reading Comprehension Questions — model answers

Below is a list of model answers according to the reading comprehension questions.

These are model answers. Your answers may be different, but as long as they are accurate, they are correct.

Check with your teacher!

1. The main character is in bed at the beginning of the story.
2. He is waking up and trying to move after being asleep for a long time.
3. The doctor told him that he has a rare virus.
4. The doctor advised him to get plenty of rest.
5. He calls his mum and dad and asks them for help.
6. He stays at his parents' house.

7. He can see pictures of little trains on the walls.
8. He sleeps most of the time while staying at his parents' home.
9. No, he does not clearly remember the previous days.
10. He needs to go to the toilet.
11. He feels dizzy when he sits up.
12. No, he cannot hear anything when he reaches the landing.
13. He calls out to his mum.
14. His voice sounds strange to him.
15. He feels hunger in his stomach.
16. No, he does not remember eating anything the day before.
17. He goes to the bathroom next.
18. He drinks water from the tap.
19. He sees that he has a full beard on his face.
20. He feels confused and uneasy when he sees his

beard.

21. He also feels very hungry.
22. He calls out to his mum again on the stairs.
23. He goes to the kitchen downstairs.
24. He goes straight to the fridge and opens it.
25. He finds ham and cheese in the fridge.
26. He eats very quickly.
27. He eats so quickly because he is extremely hungry.
28. He sees many dead birds in the garden outside.
29. He sees dozens of birds.
30. They are dead.
31. He also sees his mum's dog, Captain, on the grass.
32. He drinks a glass of water.
33. He goes to the living room after that.
34. He feels that he needs to go there even though he is not sure why.
35. He sees his mum and dad in the living room.

36. His mum is sitting on the sofa and his dad is sitting in an armchair.
37. They are dead.
38. He feels a strong sense of panic at this point.
39. He goes to the hallway next.
40. He is looking for his shoes and his dad's car keys.
41. He thinks about calling the police, going to the neighbours, and trying to understand what is happening.
42. He finds the car keys on the kitchen table.
43. He goes outside to the street.
44. He sees a few people standing in the street.
45. He feels relief when he sees them.
46. Yes, he calls out to them.
47. The people run away from him.
48. His voice sounds rougher and hungrier to him.
49. He thinks the people ran away because there is

something wrong with him.

True or False — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Statement	Answer
1	False
2	True
3	True
4	False
5	False
6	True
7	False
8	True
9	False
10	True

What is the Correct Synonym — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Words	Answers
silent	not making any sound
empty	not full
huge	very big
frightened	very scared
quick	fast
strange	unusual
tired	needing rest
small	little
begin	start
look	see

What is the Correct Antonym — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Words	Answers
alive	dead
dark	light
open	closed
strong	weak
cold	warm
fast	slow
hungry	full
quiet	loud
afraid	brave
near	far

Words and Meanings — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Word	Meaning
throat	a part of your body where food and drink go down
shake	to move your body quickly without control
armchair	a strong chair with arms for sitting
stare	to look at something for a long time
swallow	to take food or drink down your throat
empty	with nothing inside
relief	a feeling when something bad has ended
step	to move one foot forward when walking
shout	to make a loud noise with your voice

Word	Meaning
realise	to understand something suddenly

Gap Fill Exercise — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

1. dizzy
2. landing
3. mirror
4. beard
5. hunger
6. fridge
7. garden
8. panic
9. keys
10. street

Credits

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