
STAGE FRIGHT

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# Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever had to make a speech in front of people?
2. How did you feel?
3. Did you feel nervous? Why?
4. Could you be a professional public speaker?

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# Stagefright

It was easy, Ray told himself. There was nothing to it.

All the others had done it. He could do it too.

Standing at the side of the stage, he stared out at the vast, dark space beyond the lights. Bill Martinez was speaking. Ray could not understand a word he was saying. The sound seemed distorted, echoing through the venue as if Bill were shouting into a tunnel.

“It’s the angle of the speakers,” Bill had said before going on stage. “They’re directed towards the audience, so from where we’re standing, we can’t hear anything at all.”

Ray took little comfort from this. He had never liked the sound of his own voice. Whenever he heard it in a message or on one of the training videos they had to make at work, he sounded as though he was on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

He didn’t like the way he looked, either.

He had shifty eyes. They made him look untrustworthy. Unreliable. At best, someone who could not do the job. At worst, the kind of person who would stab you in the back and then pull the ladder up behind him.

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The audience burst into laughter.

Ray jolted. He tilted his head to get a glimpse of them. Bill stood by the mic, a self-deprecating smile on his face. A shrug of the shoulders. Ray could only make out the first row of people. Their teeth gleamed white under the lights. Their eyes looked cartoon-like and freakish.

He shrank back into the shadows.

Soon it would be Ray's turn to speak. He would have to go out there and speak.

He looked behind him. A lighting technician stood to the side, a bored expression on his face. He didn't want to be here either. But not because of the fear and sheer terror that Ray felt in his chest. No, this guy found it all tedious. This was no fun for him.

He chewed his gum in a meditative rhythm, his eyes staring out without focusing on anything at all.

Another laugh from the crowd. This one bigger, accompanied by cheers and a smattering of applause.

Ray jerked his head round to find Bill. Where was he?

He had taken the mic out of the stand and walked to the far end of the stage.

Confidence oozed from him.

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He was in control. He looked so at ease. He was like one of those seasoned stand-up comedians who just knows, absolutely knows, how to control an audience. He owned them. They were sitting right in his pocket.

The way he moved. A slight swagger. The crooked grin. It worked like a charm.

They loved him and they wanted more.

When Ray went out there, they would hate him. He knew that much.

They would clear their throats in embarrassment for him. He would stand on the stage and stare back into the big, dark space and mumble and bumble through his lines. No one would understand what he was saying as he stopped to clear his throat and wiped a bead of sweat from his face.

A tap on his shoulder and Ray jumped out of his skin.

It was the stage manager, a woman who chain-smoked and wore a permanent look of disdain on her face.

“You’re up next,” she said.

Ray stopped breathing. His hand clutched at his chest. Maybe he could tell her he was not ready. Maybe he could just slip away.

And if his manager asked him on Monday morning where he

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had gone, he could say that he had felt ill. He had to go to the toilet. He was vomiting.

Or he could just not go to work on Monday and leave the company altogether. He could find a new job. Jobs were scarce these days, but he could do anything. Clean the streets, work in a factory, drive a taxi. Anything.

His wife would hate it and go mad. She would probably leave him, take the kids and go and live with her mother. But all of that was better than going out onto the stage.

The audience let out a roar of approval. They applauded, and then a second wave of cheering broke out.

Bill stood in front of them, making that half-nod, half-bow motion, smiling back at them. Then he raised his hand and waved before turning to walk off the stage.

“Let him off first,” said the stage manager, her breath reeking of cigarettes. “Then they’ll announce you. I’ll give you the nod when to walk on. Piece of cake.”

Suddenly, Ray’s throat constricted. He needed water. He needed a bucket of water.

Bill came into view and gave Ray a grin.

“They’re a great crowd out there tonight,” he said. He tapped

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Ray on the upper arm. “Go out there and do your thing.”

He brushed past the stage manager, and the technician pointed a finger at him.

“Good job, man,” he said.

“Okay,” said the stage manager. “You’re up in about thirty seconds.”

A voice boomed out from above. The Voice of God. It sounded ominous and threatening, as if it were about to strike down with fury and wreak havoc upon the tuxedoed masses below.

“Fifteen seconds,” said the stage manager.

“Now, we have a very special speaker talking to you about the importance of product design, Mr Ray…”

Ray could not hear the rest of the introduction. His throat was stuffed full of wires. He couldn’t swallow.

“And you’re up.” The stage manager pushed him between the shoulder blades onto the stage.

Ray could not feel his legs. They moved but did not belong to him.

He walked towards the mic stand. The audience gave him some polite applause.

He reached the mic and turned. There, in front of him, were

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hundreds of people waiting to hear him speak.

Ray's hand reached up to his throat. He tried to clear the thick glob of fear stuck there, but nothing came out.

He opened his mouth to speak.

The audience glared back at him.

None of them smiling.

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# Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the main character in the story?
2. Who are the other characters?
3. Where does the story take place?
4. How does Ray feel about going on stage?
5. Why does Ray feel anxious about speaking on stage?
6. How does Ray describe his own voice?
7. What does Ray dislike about his appearance?
8. How does Ray view the audience's reaction to Bill Martinez? Positive or negative?
9. How does Ray describe the lighting technician and the stage manager?
10. Does Ray think the lighting technician is happy to be working that night?
11. What does Ray think will happen when he goes on stage?
12. How does Ray react when the stage manager informs him that he is up next?
13. What are the thoughts that go through Ray's mind then?
14. What actions does he consider taking instead?

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15. How does Ray feel physically as he contemplates his turn on the stage?
16. What expression does the stage manager use to describe Ray going out on the stage?
17. What does it mean?
18. Who or what is the Voice of God?
19. How does Ray feel when he first steps onto the stage?
20. How does the audience initially react to seeing Ray?
21. What does Ray do just before the story ends?
22. What does Ray see when he looks at the audience after opening his mouth?
23. How does the audience respond to Ray at the end of the story?

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# True or False?

**Take a look at the list of statements below.**

Say which ones are true or false. If the statement is false, correct it and make it true.

1. Ray is confident about speaking on stage.
2. Bill Martinez speaks before Ray.
3. Ray dislikes the sound of his own voice.
4. Ray believes he looks trustworthy and reliable.
5. Ray observes the audience's reaction to Bill's performance.
6. The lighting technician is enthusiastic about the event.
7. Bill captivates the audience with his stage presence.
8. Ray believes the audience will dislike his performance.
9. Ray considers avoiding the stage altogether.
10. The audience reacts negatively to Ray when he steps on stage.

***Now check all your answers at the end of the lesson plan!***

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# Essential Vocabulary

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| he stared out | the vast, dark space | distorted |
| echoing | venue | tunnel |
| angle | directed | audience |
| comfort | training videos | on the edge of a nervous breakdown |
| shifty eyes | untrustworthy | unreliable |
| stab you in the back | pull the ladder up | burst into laughter |
| jolted | tilted his head | glimpse |
| mic | self-deprecating | shrug |
| row | gleamed | cartoon-like |
| freakish | shrank | shadows |
| lighting technician | a bored expression | sheer terror |
| tedious | approval | chewed |
| gum | meditative | rhythm |
| focusing | crowd | accompanied |
| cheers | a smattering of applause | jerked |
| stand | the far end of | confidence |
| oozed | at ease | seasoned |
| stand-up comedian | swagger | crooked grin |
| worked like a charm | clear their throats | embarrassment |
| mumble and bumble | a bead of sweat | tap |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| jumped out of his skin | stage manager | chain-smoked |
| permanent | disdain | clutched |
| slip away | vomiting | scarce |
| a roar of approval | reeking | announce |
| piece of cake | constricted | he brushed past |
| boomed | The Voice of God | ominous |
| threatening | to strike down | fury |
| wreak havoc | tuxedoed | masses |
| product design | stuffed | swallow |
| shoulder blade | glob | glared |

**Exercise**

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

**Distorted —** *(of an image, sound, or shape) altered in form or appearance, typically as a result of being twisted, stretched, or otherwise manipulated.*

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**Venue —** *a place where an event or gathering takes place, typically providing the necessary facilities and technical support for such activities.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

> ***I tried to take a picture of the dog, but it came out distorted.***

> ***We went to see the band at this really cool venue.***

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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# What is the Correct Synonym?

**Take a look at the table below.**

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

| | |
|---|---|
| stagefright | meltdown |
| vast | retreat |
| distorted | mutter |
| nervous breakdown | monotonous |
| untrustworthy | performance anxiety |
| shrink back | altered |
| tedious | awkwardness |
| embarrassment | tight |
| mumble | immense |
| constricted | unreliable |

***You can find all the answers at the end of the lesson plan!***

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# What is the Correct Antonym?

**Take a look at the table below.**

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

| | |
|---|---|
| easy | insecurity |
| understand | discomfort |
| comfort | despise |
| liked | challenging |
| confidence | speak indistinctly |
| control | hated |
| love | misunderstand |
| seasoned | jeered |
| speak clearly | chaos |
| applauded | amateur |

***You can check all your answers at the end of the lesson plan!***

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# What is the Correct Meaning?

**Look at the table below.**

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Self-deprecating | A feeling of extreme fear. |
| Meditative | To flow or seep slowly and steadily. |
| Smattering | The person responsible for coordinating and organising the various elements of a stage production. |
| Disdain | A small amount of something. |
| Oozed | Humorously or mockingly belittling oneself. |
| Terror | Past tense of to stare angrily or fiercely. |
| Embarrassment | A feeling of contempt towards someone regarded as inferior. |
| Stage manager | Engaged in deep thought or contemplation. |
| Constricted | A feeling of self-consciousness or shame due to one's own actions. |

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| | |
|---|---|
| Glared | Squeezed, compressed, or restricted. |

***You can find all the right answers at the end of the lesson plan!***

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# What is the Special Phrase?

**Take a look at the table below.**

Match all the phrases and collocations on the left with the correct meaning on the right.

| | |
|---|---|
| Do it | The way in which one's own voice is perceived or heard. |
| Stand at the side | To prevent others from progressing or advancing, especially in a competitive or hierarchical context. |
| Speak into a tunnel | To make a noise by forcibly expelling air from the throat, often to prepare for speaking or singing. |
| On the edge of a nervous breakdown | Something that is very easy or effortless to do. |
| Sound of one's own voice | To perform or accomplish a task or action. |
| Clear their throats | To suddenly start laughing loudly or uncontrollably. |
| Pull the ladder up | Extremely close to experiencing a mental or emotional collapse. |
| Burst into laughter | To be positioned or situated at the edge or adjacent to something. |

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| | |
|---|---|
| Shrink back | To have one's voice sound distorted as if speaking into a confined space. |
| Piece of cake | To move or retreat backwards, often due to fear, apprehension or a desire to avoid attention. |

***Check all your answers at the end of the lesson plan!***

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# Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe Ray's feelings and thoughts before going on stage?
2. Why do you think Ray dislikes the sound of his own voice?
3. What do you think is the reason behind Ray's fear of speaking in front of an audience?
4. How does Bill's confident and relaxed demeanour affect Ray's self-perception?
5. Why do you think Ray believes the audience will hate him when he goes on stage?
6. How does the stage manager's attitude contribute to Ray's anxiety?
7. What are some of the options Ray considers instead of going on stage? Why do you think he contemplates these choices?
8. Do you think Ray's fear of public speaking is justified? Why or why not?
9. How would you characterise the relationship between Ray's fear and his perception of the audience?
10. How does the audience respond when Ray walks on stage, and how does it appear to him at the end?

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11. How would you describe Ray's physical and emotional state when he finally steps onto the stage?
12. What do you think Ray's initial interaction with the audience reveals about his stage fright?
13. Why do you think the author emphasises the audience's lack of smiles when Ray opens his mouth to speak?
14. How might Ray’s fear affect his ability to communicate? Why?
15. How might the stage manager’s and Bill’s words affect Ray before he speaks?
16. What role does the Voice of God play in heightening Ray's anxiety?
17. How do you interpret the audience's polite applause when Ray walks towards the microphone?
18. What might Ray be feeling when he opens his mouth and sees the audience looking at him?
19. What emotions or thoughts do you think Ray experiences when he realizes the audience's reaction?
20. How do you predict Ray's experience on stage will impact his future attitude towards public speaking?

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# Role Play

**This is a role play activity.**

There are two characters in the role play.

**Ray** — the man in the story above.

**John/Jane** — Ray's boss.

Imagine that Ray is unable to speak in front of the audience.
He was supposed to give a presentation about product design on behalf of his company. Imagine that it was important and could have provided the company with marketing opportunities.
But imagine that Ray was unable to speak.

Now he is in a meeting with his boss. His boss is not happy.
They have a conversation about what happened and why.
And then Ray's boss makes a decision.

1. What decision does the boss make?
2. And how does Ray react?

In pairs, take some time to prepare your role play.

***Then, when you are ready, show your classmates.***

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# Public Speaking

**Prepare a one-minute talk on one of the following topics.**

Each student chooses ONE topic and then prepares a talk.
Give a speech in front of the class.

***When each student has finished speaking, the rest of the class ask relevant questions about the speech and give feedback.***

My favourite hobby

The benefits of reading

My dream holiday destination

The importance of exercise

How to make a simple recipe

My favourite film or TV show

The impact of social media on society

The benefits of learning a second language

The importance of recycling

The history and significance of a famous landmark

The impact of technology on our daily lives

My favourite book and why I recommend it

The benefits of volunteering

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The importance of time management

Tips for effective communication skills

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# Writing

**This is a creative writing exercise.**

You are going to continue the story at the beginning of the lesson.

Think about the following questions:

1. How does Ray's speech continue?
2. Does he remain silent and unable to speak?
3. Or maybe he suddenly gains confidence and speaks eloquently?
4. How does the audience react?
5. How do the lighting technician and the stage manager react?
6. What does Ray do when he leaves the stage?
7. Where does he go after that?

**Now write your story.**

When you have finished, you can read your story in front of all the class.

***Or give it to your teacher for review.***

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# Reading Comprehension Questions — Answers

1. The main character is Ray.
2. The other characters are Bill Martinez, the lighting technician, the stage manager and the announcer, whose voice is heard introducing Ray.
3. The story takes place at a venue where Ray is waiting beside a stage before speaking to an audience.
4. Ray feels extremely nervous and frightened about going on stage.
5. Ray worries that the audience will hate him, that he will mumble through his speech and that nobody will understand him.
6. Ray thinks that his voice sounds as though he is on the edge of a nervous breakdown.
7. Ray dislikes his shifty eyes because he thinks they make him look untrustworthy and unreliable.
8. Ray sees the audience's reaction to Bill as positive: they laugh, cheer and applaud, and he thinks they love Bill.
9. Ray describes the lighting technician as bored and the stage manager as a woman who chain-smokes and has a permanent look of disdain.
10. No, Ray thinks the lighting technician finds the event tedious and does not want to be there.

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11. Ray thinks the audience will hate him, feel embarrassed for him and struggle to understand him as he mumbles through his speech.

12. Ray stops breathing, clutches his chest and wonders whether he can say he is not ready or slip away.

13. Ray thinks about escaping, making an excuse for his absence and even leaving his job. He also imagines that his wife might leave him and take the children.

14. Ray considers slipping away, claiming that he was ill, not going to work on Monday and leaving the company to find another job.

15. Ray feels terrified, clutches his chest and finds that his throat constricts. He also feels as though he needs water and cannot swallow.

16. The stage manager describes going on stage as a “piece of cake”.

17. The expression “piece of cake” means that something is very easy to do.

18. The Voice of God is the booming voice of the announcer introducing Ray over the venue’s speakers.

19. When Ray first steps onto the stage, he feels so frightened that he cannot feel his legs, and they seem not to belong to him.

20. The audience initially gives Ray polite applause as he walks towards the microphone.

21. Just before the story ends, Ray reaches up to his throat and

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opens his mouth to speak.

22. Ray sees the audience glaring back at him, and none of them is smiling.

23. At the end of the story, the audience appears to glare at Ray without smiling.

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# True or False — Answers

Below are the answers to all the True or False statements. How many did you get right?

1. Ray is confident about speaking on stage. - False
2. Bill Martinez speaks before Ray. - True
3. Ray dislikes the sound of his own voice. - True
4. Ray believes he looks trustworthy and reliable. - False
5. Ray observes the audience's reaction to Bill's performance. - True
6. The lighting technician is enthusiastic about the event. - False
7. Bill captivates the audience with his stage presence. - True
8. Ray believes the audience will dislike his performance. - True
9. Ray considers avoiding the stage altogether. - True
10. The audience reacts negatively to Ray when he steps on stage. - False

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# What is the Correct Synonym — Answers

Check all the answers below.
Did you get them all right?

| | |
|---|---|
| stagefright | performance anxiety |
| vast | immense |
| distorted | altered |
| nervous breakdown | meltdown |
| untrustworthy | unreliable |
| shrink back | retreat |
| tedious | monotonous |
| embarrassment | awkwardness |
| mumble | mutter |
| constricted | tight |

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# What is the Correct Antonym — Answers

Check all the answers below.
How many did you get right?

| | |
|---|---|
| easy | challenging |
| understand | misunderstand |
| comfort | discomfort |
| liked | hated |
| confidence | insecurity |
| control | chaos |
| love | despise |
| seasoned | amateur |
| speak clearly | speak indistinctly |
| applauded | jeered |

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# What is the Correct Meaning — Answers

Check all the answers below.
Did you get them all right?

| | |
|---|---|
| Self-deprecating | Humorously or mockingly belittling oneself. |
| Meditative | Engaged in deep thought or contemplation. |
| Smattering | A small amount of something. |
| Disdain | A feeling of contempt towards someone regarded as inferior. |
| Oozed | To flow or seep slowly and steadily. |
| Terror | A feeling of extreme fear. |
| Embarrassment | A feeling of self-consciousness or shame due to one's own actions. |
| Stage manager | The person responsible for coordinating and organising the various elements of a stage production. |
| Constricted | Squeezed, compressed, or restricted. |
| Glared | Past tense of to stare angrily or fiercely. |

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# What is the Special Phrase — Answers

Check all the answers below.
How many of them did you get right?

| | |
|---|---|
| Do it | To perform or accomplish a task or action. |
| Stand at the side | To be positioned or situated at the edge or adjacent to something. |
| Speak into a tunnel | To have one's voice sound distorted as if speaking into a confined space. |
| On the edge of a nervous breakdown | Extremely close to experiencing a mental or emotional collapse. |
| Sound of one's own voice | The way in which one's own voice is perceived or heard. |
| Clear their throats | To make a noise by forcibly expelling air from the throat, often to prepare for speaking or singing. |
| Pull the ladder up | To prevent others from progressing or advancing, especially in a competitive or hierarchical context. |
| Burst into laughter | To suddenly start laughing loudly or uncontrollably. |

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| | |
|---|---|
| Shrink back | To move or retreat backwards, often due to fear, apprehension, or a desire to avoid attention. |
| Piece of cake | Something that is very easy or effortless to do. |

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