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GUIN ACTIVE READING

LEVEL 3

Sweeney Todd

Anonymous



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1.1 What's the book about?

- Look at the pictures on the cover and on page 1. Circle the words that match your idea of the story.
 - modern / old
 - frightening / funny
 - a love story / a murder mystery
 - about a strange man / about an ordinary man
 - in England / in the United States
- Sweeney Todd and Johanna Oakley are both important to the story. Look at the pictures below and describe them. What do you imagine that they are like as people?



1.2 What happens first?

What do you think? Are these sentences right (✓) or wrong (X)?

- ☐ Sweeney Todd has a lot of good friends.
- ☐ Sweeney Todd's shop is at the centre of a mystery.
- ☐ Sweeney Todd is a kind, honest employer.
- ☐ Sweeney Todd has many secrets.
- ☐ Sweeney Todd is afraid of his neighbours and his customers.

Two Exciting Days in 1785

*Sweeney Todd was clearly unusual; perhaps he was even a little crazy.
But he had a successful business, so his neighbours accepted him.*

Many years ago when George III was King of England, the area around Fleet Street was like many other busy parts of London. There was an old church, St Dunstan's, and many small houses and shops were crowded into the narrow streets.

One of the shops near the church was a small **barber's** shop. The barber was a man with the unusual name of Sweeney Todd. This name was written in fat yellow letters above a little poem in the window:

*Looking for a smooth face and tidy hair?
Take a seat in Sweeney Todd the barber's chair.*



And what did this barber look like? He was a tall, ugly man with a very large mouth and unusually big hands and feet. And for a barber, he had terrible hair. It was very long, thick and untidy. Mr Sweeney Todd kept most of his barber's tools in his hair, but he kept his **razors** in his sitting-room. Nobody except Mr Todd went into this private room. The sitting-room and barber's shop were on the ground floor of the barber's very large house. The neighbours noticed that the upstairs rooms showed no signs of use.

barber /'bɑ:bə/ (n) a man who cuts men's hair. He also shaves men's beards.

razor /'reɪzə/ (n) a sharp tool for shaving beards

The barber was also known for his unusually loud, frightening laugh. It was specially strange because he often seemed to laugh for no reason. Perhaps he was remembering a very funny personal story or joke.

Sweeney Todd was clearly unusual; perhaps he was even a little crazy. But he had a successful business, so his neighbours accepted him. They chose to forget about his strange hair, his frightening laugh and his big empty house. They went to him for a shave or a haircut, but they didn't become too friendly with him.

'Listen carefully, Tobias Ragg,' began Sweeney Todd one rainy evening. 'I've given you a good job here, and you can learn a lot from me. One day you'll have a good profession as a barber. You have every reason to be a happy boy.'

Tobias was Sweeney Todd's only employee. The poor young boy worked long hours for a few pennies and was afraid of his employer.

'But remember my orders!' continued the barber. 'If you talk about me or my business, I will kill you. You don't ask questions. You don't think. You don't talk. Do you understand?'

'Yes, sir. I won't say anything. I promise. If I break my promise, you can give me to Mrs Lovett's for one of her meat **pies**.'

Sweeney Todd was a bit surprised by this suggestion. He looked carefully at the boy for a minute or two in silence. Then he said, 'Very good. Just remember that I can make very serious trouble for your mother. Now, run out and look at St Dunstan's clock. Find out the time.'

At the church Tobias learned that it was fifteen minutes to seven. On his way back to the barber's shop, he noticed a man with a dog looking at the clock too. But he couldn't think about them. He had to worry about Mr Todd's orders.

'Almost seven o'clock, Hector,' the man in front of the church said to his dog. 'There's a barber's shop opposite. Perhaps I'll have a shave before I visit poor Miss Oakley. I have to tell her that Mark Ingestrise is dead. On the ship, his one subject of conversation was Miss Oakley: her beautiful eyes, her pretty mouth, her shiny hair. Now he's at the bottom of the Indian Ocean, and I have to give her this **pearl necklace**. Her heart will break because her true love is lost. But these pearls will make her rich. So I'll go for a shave immediately.'

The stranger crossed the street and went into Sweeney Todd's shop with his dog. 'I'd like a shave,' he said to the barber.

pie /paɪ/ (n) a food made of meat, fish, vegetables or fruit cooked in an oven
pearl /pɜːl/ (n) an expensive white round thing formed inside a sea animal
necklace /ˈneɪkləs/ (n) something that women wear around their necks

The man's dog **growled** softly and looked round. He lifted his head and smelled the air.

'Hector, what's wrong?' the man asked his dog. 'I've never seen you act like this before.'

'I have a fear of dogs, sir,' said Sweeney Todd. 'Please take him outside before he attacks me.'

'Hector doesn't attack without a reason,' said the man. 'But perhaps he doesn't like the look of you. I can understand that.'

When Hector was outside, he watched the door unhappily. He sensed that something inside the shop was not right.

'Tobias,' said Sweeney Todd before he began to shave his customer, 'go to Mr Peterson's shop and buy a bag of his little cakes for me.'

With the boy out of the shop, the barber began to talk to his customer.

'Where are you from, sir? What's your business in this part of the city?'

'I'm looking for a young woman named Johanna Oakley in Fore Street. Do you know her? Her father makes glasses for people who have problems with their eyes.'

'Yes, of course. She's a beautiful young lady. Are you a friend of hers?'

'No, sir, I've never met her. I'm a stranger here,' replied the customer. 'I've just returned from a journey to the Indian Ocean. My friend, Mark Ingestrie, went down with our ship, but he wanted Miss Oakley to have this fine pearl necklace.' He took it from his pocket and showed it to the barber. 'I'm going to give it to her after I have my shave.'

'Beautiful,' said Sweeney Todd, looking greedily at the pearls. 'Sir, I need a stronger razor for your thick beard. I'll return in one minute.'

Sweeney Todd walked into his sitting-room and closed the door. Suddenly there was a loud noise. Then the barber returned to his shop and walked to the empty chair. He picked up the customer's hat and quickly hid it in his cupboard.

'Hello,' said Tobias, opening the door. 'I heard a terrible noise. Is everything all right? I forgot the money for the cakes.'

Sweeney Todd caught the boy's arm and pushed him against the wall.

'Speak!' cried Sweeney Todd. 'Speak or you die! How long were you watching at the door before you came in?'

'Watching? I wasn't watching anything, sir. I forgot the money for the cakes,' Tobias said, shaking with fear.

Sweeney Todd gave one of his frightening laughs and said, 'No, of course not. I was joking. Why don't you laugh at my joke?'

Tobias couldn't answer this question, but the barber quickly forgot about it.

Anonymous

British English
 Classic

In the narrow, crowded streets of 18th century London, Sweeney Todd runs a successful barber's shop, but his neighbours worry about his strange appearance and frightening laugh. Is the barber hiding something? Tobias, his young employee, thinks he is. Then other people, searching for missing friends, become interested in the shop. Are terrible secrets hidden there?

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