

Answer Key

| Word | Part of Speech | Definition | Synonyms |
|----------|----------------|---|----------------------|
| ascetic | adjective | describes someone practicing strict self-discipline; avoiding comfort or pleasure | austere, disciplined |
| fanatic | noun | A person with extreme enthusiasm or devotion to a belief or cause | extremist, radical |
| paroxysm | noun | A sudden, intense burst of emotion or physical sensation | outburst, surge |
| ruse | noun | A clever trick or strategy meant to deceive someone | ploy, scheme |
| reel | verb | To stagger, lose balance, or move unsteadily as if about to fall | wobble, falter |
| remorse | noun | A deep feeling of guilt or regret for something you have done | guilt, shame |
| oath | noun | a serious promise or formal pledge, often made publicly or ceremoniously (or legally) | vow, sworn statement |

Answer Key
Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where is the sniper positioned at the beginning of the story?

He is positioned on a rooftop near O'Connell Bridge in Dublin.

2. Why does the sniper hesitate before lighting his cigarette, and what happens when he does?

He hesitates because the flash from the match could reveal his location. When he lights the cigarette, an enemy immediately fires at him.

3. Who are the two people the sniper kills early in the story, and why does he shoot them?

He kills the armored car gunner and an old woman informer. He shoots them because they are the enemy, and possibly about to reveal or attack his position.

4. How does the interaction between the old woman reflect the complexity of the Irish Civil War?

The incident with the old woman shows how the Irish Civil War involved civilians, blurred loyalties, and constant danger. It illustrates that ordinary people could act as informers, that trust was fragile, and that violence could erupt anywhere, even in the middle of a city street. It highlights how the conflict pulled everyday citizens into the fighting and turned neighbors into enemies.

5. How does the sniper realize he has been shot, and what steps does he take to treat his wound?

He realizes he's been shot when he cannot lift his rifle and feels numbness in his arm. He examines the wound, treats it with iodine, and bandages it with a field dressing.

6. What plan does the sniper use to trick the enemy sniper across the street?

He creates a fake death scene by placing his hat on the rifle, lifting it into view, dropping it as though shot, and letting his arm hang limply so the enemy thinks he's dead.

7. What emotions overwhelm the sniper after the enemy falls from the rooftop?

He feels guilt, horror, and revulsion after seeing the enemy fall and realizing the brutality of what he has done.

8. What shocking discovery does the sniper make at the end of the story?

When he goes down and discovers the body, he realizes the man he killed is his brother.

Answer Key
Literary Analysis Questions

1. How does O'Flaherty create tension in the opening paragraphs?

The darkness of the nighttime setting and sounds of heavy guns roaring create immediate tension and establish the danger surrounding the sniper.

2. How does the author build suspense during the confrontation between the two snipers?

The author builds suspense by detailing the sniper's gunshot injury, leaving readers to wonder if this will be his downfall. Furthermore, O'Flaherty builds suspense through the fake-death trick, as readers wait to see if the ruse will pay off or if it will cost the sniper his life. The suspense is heightened again when the sniper crosses the street, putting himself in harm's way just to see the face of the man he killed.

3. How does the final revelation that the enemy sniper is his brother work symbolically within the story?

The twist reinforces the theme that civil wars divide families and turn brother against brother, showing how internal conflict destroys what should be sacred. A "brother" is symbolically anyone who is your neighbor or part of your nation, not just your literal family member. The twist emphasizes that in a civil war, the enemy is not a distant stranger but someone who could easily be part of one's own family, making the violence even more tragic.

4. How does the setting of Dublin during the Irish Civil War shape the events, mood, and overall message of the story?

Understanding the Irish Civil War helps readers see that the sniper isn't fighting foreign enemies, he is fighting his own countrymen. This shapes the theme that civil wars tear families apart literally and emotionally.

The mood is tense, grim, and suspenseful. The smoky rooftops, the darkened streets, and the constant gunfire create a tense, dangerous mood that mirrors the sniper's own emotional numbness.

The setting shapes the events in the story because the sniper is forced into a situation where he must kill quickly, quietly, and without hesitation.

5. How does the story reveal a human desire to understand others, even in moments of conflict?

The story shows this human desire through the sniper's reaction after the battle ends. He becomes curious about who the other sniper was and feels compelled to cross the street to look at him. This moment reveals that, beneath the violence and division, there remains a natural human urge to understand others.

6. How might Liam O'Flaherty's own experiences with war and political conflict have influenced the themes and emotional impact of *The Sniper*?

O'Flaherty's personal exposure to war helps explain the story's realism, emotional depth, and its tragic final twist. O'Flaherty served in World War I. It is very likely he lost people he cared about or people he grew up with. He experienced shell shock from the war (today more commonly known as PTSD). Shell shock happens when someone experiences extreme stress, fear, and trauma from battle, especially from things like constant explosions, gunfire, and seeing death. After WWI, he returned to Ireland and witnessed part of the civil war. Even if he did not lose an immediate family member, he almost certainly witnessed friends or fellow fighters being killed and his community being divided.

7. What do you think the author is trying to suggest about the cost of war?

The author suggests that war is tragic, senseless, and deeply destructive. Through the sniper's emotional breakdown and the shocking discovery that he has killed his own brother, O'Flaherty shows how war forces people to harm those who should be closest to them. The ending makes it clear that war doesn't create heroes; rather, it creates loss, regret, and the painful realization that no one truly "wins" when the conflict tears families and communities apart.

8. How does the sniper's emotional transformation throughout the story reveal the psychological impact of violence on individuals?

The sniper's emotional transformation shows how violence can numb a person during the moment but overwhelm them afterward. At first, he is cold, focused, and detached. But once the final enemy is dead and the immediate threat is gone, his suppressed emotions surge back. He shakes, feels sick, and is suddenly horrified by what he has done. This shift from detachment to remorse demonstrates the psychological cost of violence: even when someone tries to disconnect from their actions in the moment, the emotional consequences eventually surface, often painfully and unexpectedly.

9. The sniper only feels remorse once the danger is gone. Why do you think people sometimes suppress emotions until after a difficult moment has passed? Have you experienced this?

People often suppress emotions during a difficult or dangerous moment because the brain shifts into "survival mode." In high-stress situations, staying calm, focused, and emotionally detached helps a person think clearly and act quickly. Feelings like fear, guilt, or sadness would slow them down or make it harder to make decisions, so the mind pushes those emotions aside temporarily. Once the danger passes, the adrenaline fades, and the body feels safe again, all the emotions that were held back can suddenly rush in.

10. In your own words, what is an enemy? How does this story change the way you think about what an enemy is?

An enemy is someone you have a conflict with. The story shows that someone we call an "enemy" might not be as different from us as we think. When the sniper discovers he has killed his own brother, it shows that people on opposite sides can still share the same background, experiences, or values. It made me realize that even in real life, people we disagree with often have more in common with us than we know. Even though someone may be my enemy in real life, it doesn't mean I want them to suffer.

11. What if the sniper didn't cross the street? How would the story be different?

If the sniper didn't cross the street, he would never learn that the man he killed was his brother, and the story would lose its most powerful and tragic moment. Without that final revelation, the story would focus mainly on his survival and skill rather than the deeper message about how civil wars divide families and destroy personal bonds. The sniper's guilt might fade more quickly, and he might continue seeing the enemy as just another target instead of a human being like himself. The commentary on the true cost of war may not be as impactful.

Human Qualities

Part 1: Choose 10 traits or behaviors that you believe define humanity or human behavior.

Example responses:

kindness, courage, creativity, forgiveness, compassion, logic, morality, respect, violence, self-control, empathy, cruelty, loyalty, apathy, numbness, guilt, selfishness, joy, revenge, fear, hatred, generosity, love, curiosity, honesty, loneliness

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| Trait #1 | |
| Trait #2 | |
| Trait #3 | |
| Trait #4 | |
| Trait #5 | |
| Trait #6 | |
| Trait #7 | |
| Trait #8 | |
| Trait #9 | |
| Trait #10 | |

Part 2: Write a short explanation explaining which **two** traits matter the most to you *personally*. (At least 3 sentences)

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