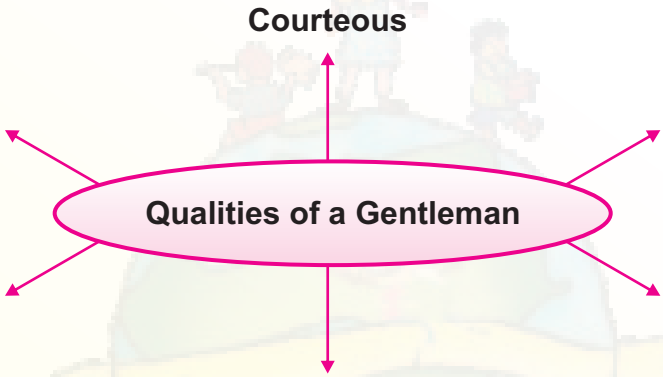
Fiction 1 UNIT

F. 1 Two Gentlemen Of Verona

A. J. Cronin

1. What are the qualities of a "gentleman"? Work with your partner and complete the following web-chart by listing the qualities of a gentleman.



Does a gentleman have consideration for others and their feelings?

2. Based on your discussion above, what do you think the story is about?

- .....
- .....

3. Now read the story given below. Your teacher will use a variety of techniques for different parts of the story e.g.

- Silent reading
- One student reading aloud to the whole class
- Students reading in small groups
- Dramatised reading in small groups

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

1. As we drove through the foothills of the Alps two small boys stopped us on the outskirts of **Verona**[1].

1 **Verona:** a city in Italy. Romeo and Juliet are believed to have lived there



2. They were selling wild strawberries. "Don't buy," warned Luigi, our cautious driver. "You will get fruit much better in Verona. Besides, these boys....."

3. He shrugged his shoulders to convey his disapproval of their shabby appearance.

4. One boy had on a **worn**[2] jersey and cut-off khaki pants; the other a shortened army **tunic**[3] gathered in loose folds about his skinny frame. Yet, gazing at the two little figures, with their brown skins, tangled hair and dark earnest eyes, we felt ourselves strangely attracted. My companion spoke to the boys, discovered that they were brothers. Nicola, the elder, was 13; Jacopo, who barely came up to the door handle of the car, was nearly 12. We bought their biggest basket, then set off toward town.

5. Next morning, coming out of our hotel, we saw our friends bent over shoeshine boxes beside the fountain in the public square, doing a brisk business.

6. We watched for a few moments; then as trade slackened we went over. They greeted us with friendly faces.

7. "I thought you picked fruit for a living," I said.

8. "We do many things, sir," Nicola answered seriously. He glanced at us hopefully. "Often we show visitors through the town ... to **Juliet's tomb**[4] ... and other places of interest."

9. "All right," I smiled. "You take us along."

10. As we made the rounds, my interest was again provoked by their remarkable **demeanour**[5]**.** They were childish enough, and in many ways quite **artless**[6]. Jacopo was lively as a squirrel. Nicola's smile was steady and engaging. Yet in both these boyish faces there was a seriousness which was far beyond their years.

11. In the week which followed we saw them frequently, for they proved extremely useful to us. If we wanted a pack of American cigarettes, or seats for the opera or the name of a good restaurant, Nicola and Jacopo could be relied upon to satisfy our needs.

12. What struck one most was their willingness to work. During these summer days, under the hot sun, they shined shoes, sold fruit, hawked newspapers, conducted tourists round the town, and ran errands.

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2 **worn**- old and damaged

3 **tunic-** a loose outer garment that does not have sleeves

4 **Juliet's tomb-** the place where Juliet, the woman Romeo loved, was buried. Romeo and Juliet is a play written by Shakespeare.

5 **demeanour-** appearance and behaviour

6 **artless-** guileless; innocent

13. One night, we came upon them in the windy and deserted square, resting on the stone pavement beneath the lights.
14. Nicola sat upright, tired. A bundle of unsold newspapers lay at his feet. Jacopo, his head resting upon his brother's shoulder was asleep. It was nearly midnight.
15. "Why are you out so late, Nicola?"
16. "Waiting for the last bus from Padua. We shall sell all our papers when it comes in."
17. "Must you work so hard? You both look rather tired."
18. "We are not complaining, sir."
19. But next morning, when I went over to the fountain to have my shoes shined, I said, "Nicola, the way you and Jacopo work, you must earn quite a bit. You spend nothing on clothes. You eat little enough --- when I see you have a meal it's usually black bread and figs. Tell me, what do you do with your money?"
20. He coloured deeply under his sunburn, then grew pale. He looked to the ground.
21. "You must be saving up to emigrate to America," I suggested. He looked at me sideways, spoke with an effort.
22. "We should greatly like to go to the States. But here, at present, we have other plans."
23. "What plans?"
24. He smiled uncomfortably. "Just plans, sir," he answered in a low voice.
25. "Well," I said, "we're leaving on Monday. Is there anything I can do for you before we go?"
26. Nicola shook his head, but suddenly Jacopo said, "Sir," he burst out, "every Sunday we make a visit to the country, to Poleta, 30 kilometres from here. Usually we hire bicycles. But tomorrow, since you are so kind, you might send us in your car."
27. I had already told Luigi he might have the Sunday off. However, I answered, "I'll drive you out myself."
28. There was a pause. Nicola was glaring at his young brother in vexation. "We could not think of troubling you, sir."
29. "It won't be any trouble."
30. He bit his lip, then, in a rather **put out**[7] tone, he said, "Very well."
31. The following afternoon we drove to the tiny village set high upon the hillside. I imagined that our destinations would be some humble dwellings. But, directed by Jacopo, we drew up at a large red-roofed villa, surrounded by a high stone wall. I could scarcely believe my eyes and before I could recover breath my two passengers had leaped from the car.

7 **put out :** offended; annoyed

32. "We shall not be long, sir. Perhaps only an hour. May be you'd like to go to the cafe in the village for a drink?" They disappeared beyond the corner of the wall.

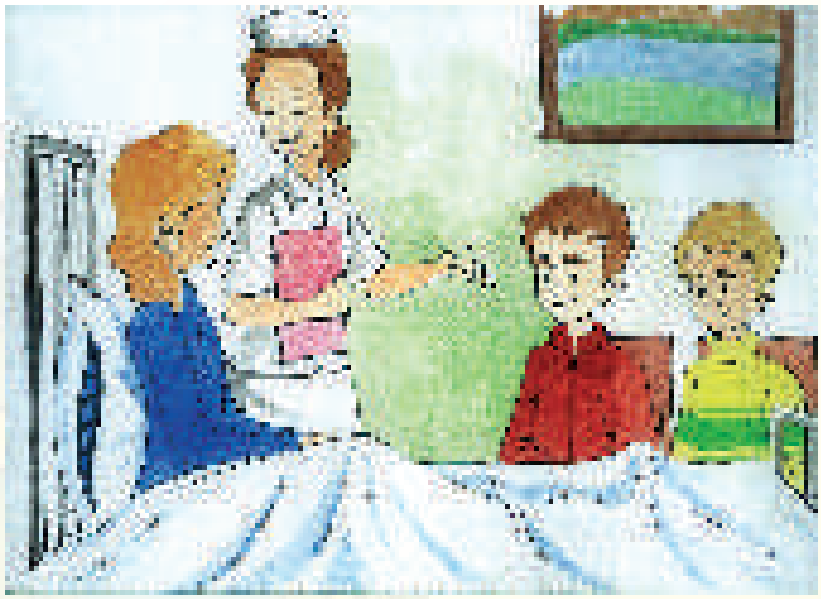
33. After a few minutes I followed. I found a grilled side-entrance and, determinedly, rang the bell.

34. A pleasant-looking woman with steel-rimmed spectacles appeared. I blinked as I saw that she was dressed in the white uniform of a trained nurse.

35. "I just brought two small boys here."

36. "Ah, yes." Her face lit up; she opened the door to admit me. "Nicola and Jacopo. I will take you up."

37. She led me through a cool, tiled **vestibule**[8] into the hospital --- for hospital the villa had become. At the door of a little cubicle the nurse paused, put her finger to her lips, and with a smile bade me look through the glass partition.



38. The two boys were seated at the bedside of a girl of about twenty who, propped up on pillows, wearing a pretty lace jacket, was listening to their chatter, her eyes soft and tender. One could see at a glance her resemblance to her brothers. A vase of wild flowers stood on her table, beside a dish of fruit and several books.

39. "Won't you go in?" the nurse murmured. "Lucia will be pleased to see you."

40. I shook my head and turned away. I felt I could not bear to intrude upon this happy family party. But at the foot of the staircase I drew up and begged her to tell me all she knew about these boys.

41. She was eager to do so. They were, she explained, quite alone in the world, except for this sister, Lucia. Their father, a widower, a well-known singer, had been killed in the early part of the war. Shortly afterward a bomb had destroyed their home and thrown the three children into the streets. They had always known a comfortable and cultured life --- Lucia had herself been training as a singer --- and they had suffered horribly from near starvation and exposure to the cold winter.

8 **vestibule :** lobby

42. For months they had barely kept themselves alive in a sort of shelter they built with their own hands amidst the rubble. Then for three years the Germans ruled the city. The boys grew to hate the Germans. When the resistance movement began secretly to form they were among the first to join. When the war was over, and we had peace at last, they came back to their beloved sister. And they found her .....suffering from tuberculosis of the spine."

43. She paused, took a quick breath.

44. "Did they give up? I do not have to answer that question. They brought her here, persuaded us to take her into the hospital. In the twelve months she has been our patient she has made good progress. There is every hope that one day she will walk - and sing - again."

45. "Of course, everything is so difficult now, food so **scarce**[9] and dear, we could not keep going unless we charged a fee. But every week, Lucia's brothers have made their payment." She added simply, "I don't know what they do, I do not ask. Work is scarce in Verona. But whatever it is, I know they do it well."

46. "Yes," I agreed. "They couldn't do it better."

47. I waited outside until the boys rejoined me, then drove them back to the city. They sat beside me, not speaking. For my part, I did not say a word --- I knew they would prefer to feel that they had safely kept their secret. Yet their devotion had touched me deeply. War had not broken their spirit. Their selfless action brought a new nobility to human life, gave promise of a greater hope for human society.

About the author

A.J. Cronin (1896-1974) was a doctor by training. He practised medicine in Wales and in London. It was while recovering from a breakdown in health that he wrote his first novel Hatter's Castle. It was a huge success. Cronin gave up practising medicine and took to writing as a career. He wrote a number of novels and short stories. Among his best-known novels are The Citadel, The Key of the Kingdom, and The Spanish Gardener. Some of his novels have been made into successful films. The title of the story is that of one of the early plays of Shakespeare. The story recounts the hard life chosen by two young boys so that they could pay for the treatment of their sister afflicted with tuberculosis. The boys' sacrifice, their sincerity and devotion to the cause and the maturity they display in their actions gives a new hope for humanity.

9 **scarce :** not enough

4. Based on your reading of the story answer the following questions by ticking the correct options.

1. The driver did not approve of the narrator buying fruit from the two boys because
   a) the boys were untidy and poorly dressed
   b) the strawberries were not fresh
   c) they were asking for a heavy price
   d) the driver did not approve of small boys who worked
2. The narrator was most impressed by the boys'
   a) desire to earn money
   b) willingness to work
   c) ability to perform many tasks
   d) sense of fun
3. Nicola was not pleased when Jacopo asked the narrator to drive them to Poleta as he
   a) did not want a stranger to become involved with their plans
   b) preferred going to Poleta by train so that he could enjoy the scenery
   c) did not want to ask anyone for favours
   d) did not want to take help from someone he did not know well
4. The narrator did not go inside Lucia's room as
   a) he did not want to intrude into their privacy
   b) he thought that the boys would object
   c) Lucia would not welcome a stranger
   d) the boys would feel he was spying on them
5. The boys were the first to join the resistance movement against the Germans because
   a) the Germans had hurt their sister
   b) the Germans ruled the city
   c) the Germans had ruined their family
   d) the Germans had destroyed their home
6. The author did not speak to the boys on their return journey because
   a) he thought the boys would prefer to keep their secret
   b) he thought the boys were ashamed of their sister's condition

c) he thought they wouldn't tell him the truth

d) he thought the boys might ask him for money for their sister

5. What do you understand by the following statements?

a) "We do many things, sir," Nicola answered seriously. He glanced at us hopefully.

b) He coloured deeply under his sunburn, then grew pale.

c) He smiled uncomfortably. "Just plans, sir," he answered in a low voice.

d) Yet in both these boyish faces there was a seriousness which was far beyond their years.

6. Answer the following questions briefly.

a. Why didn't Luigi, the driver, approve of the two boys?

b. Why were the narrator and his companion impressed by the two boys?

c. Why was the author surprised to see Nicola and Jacopo working as shoeshine boys?

d. How were the boys useful to the author?

e. Why were the boys in the deserted square at night? What character traits do they exhibit?

f. The narrator asks the boys, "Must you work so hard? You both look rather tired." The boys reply, "We are not complaining, sir." What do you learn about the boys from their reply?

g. When the narrator asks the boys about their plans, they are evasive. Why don't they disclose their problems?

7. Discuss the following questions and write the answers in your notebook.

a. Appearances are deceptive. Discuss with reference to the two boys.

b. Do you think the boys looked after Lucia willingly? Give reasons for your answer.

c. How does the story 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' promise hope for society?

8. Look at the italic words in the following examples.

a. We bought their biggest basket, then ***set off*** toward town.

b. One night we ***came upon*** them in the windy and deserted square.

c. He bit his lip, then in a rather ***put out*** tone he said, 'Very well.'

d. I shook my head and ***turned away***.

Here are a few more. Match the phrases to their meanings.

Phrases	Meanings
set up	to start on a journey
break down	to tolerate a situation or a person
set off	to lose control of your feelings and start crying
put up with	to enter
put off	to be faced with or opposed by
put on	to start/ establish a company
come in	to refuse/ reject
come across	to postpone
come up against	to try to get help/advice/ sympathy from someone
turn down	to wear
turn in	to meet or find by chance
turn to	to inform on or deliver up

Now use the phrases given above to complete the following sentences.

1. The landlord was suspicious of the two men staying in his flat so he called the police and ……. them …….
2. Early in the morning we packed our bags and …… for a hike over the mountain.
3. Janvi …… some photographs of her grandfather in the old trunk.
4. My father …….. his own business 10 years ago.
5. The Bank …….. Paul's request for a loan.
6. The Corporation's decision to reduce the leave of the employees …… a lot of opposition.

9. **Two Gentlemen of Verona** is written in the **first person**. A story written in the first person is a first-hand account of events told or narrated through the eyes of a single character, typically the main character. Stories written in the first person are easily identified by the use of the pronoun 'I' rather than 'he or she'.

The reader will see phrases such as "I said, I thought," rather than "he said, she thought." Everything is experienced through the eyes of a single character, and all thoughts and observations are limited to that one person. There can be no outside

observer. If the narrator does not see or experience an event first-hand, it cannot be a part of the story. All scenes in the story are filtered through this person's unique perception.

The **third-person** is a narrative mode in which both the reader and author observe the situation either through the senses and thoughts of more than one character, or through an overarching godlike perspective that sees and knows everything that happens and everything the characters are thinking. In this mode of narration, the narrator can tell the reader things that the main character does not know, or things that none of the characters know.

Rewrite any part of the story you like in the third person.

10. The narrator realises why Nicola and Jacopo work so hard. Yet he does not go in to meet their sister nor does he speak to them about what he learns from the nurse. Working in groups, discuss the following aspects of the story and share your views with the class.

a) The love and devotion, and the family values Nicola and Jacopo display.

b) Their pride in themselves and their family

c) The trust they place in the narrator

d) The reason the narrator does not disclose to them that he knows their secret.

WRITING TASK

11. As the narrator, write an article on the lesson of love, faith and trust that you have learnt from the two young boys of Verona.

12. After her brothers' visit, Lucia writes a page in her diary about her past life and her present situation. As Lucia write the diary entry in about 150 words.

LISTENING TASK

13. Listen to an excerpt from the diary of a 13 year old girl Zlata Fillipovic who writes of the horrors of war in Sarajevo in her book Zlata's Diary.

Based on your listening of the passage, complete the following statements.

1. The first sign of approaching war was .....
2. The family went into the cellar when .....
3. The 'awful cellar' was the only place that could save their lives because .....
4. Zlata's friend, Nina died when .....
5. Zlata and her father were worried about her mother's safety because .....