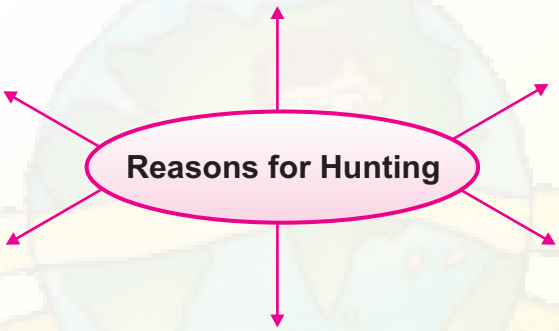
Fiction

UNIT 2

F.2 Mrs Packletide's Tiger

by Saki

1. Why do people hunt? Complete the web chart giving various reasons for the same:



2. Read these lines and guess the answers to the questions given below

It was Mrs. Packletide's pleasure and intention that she should shoot a tiger …. The compelling motive ….was the fact that Loona Bimberton had recently …… personally procured tiger-skin and a heavy harvest of Press photographs could successfully counter that sort of thing.

a) Why did Mrs. Packletide want to kill a tiger?

b) What does it tell you about her?

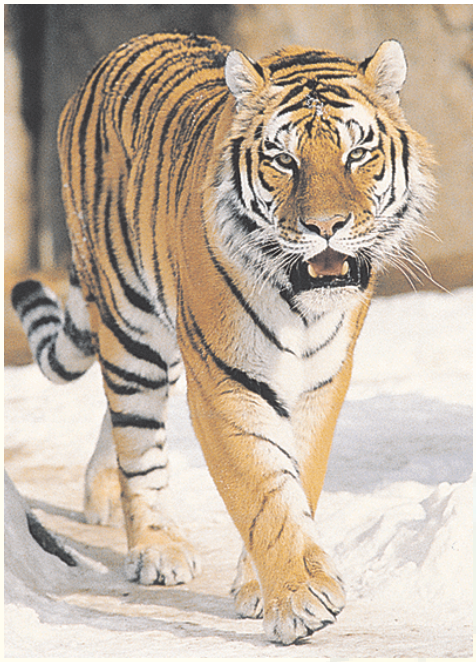
c) What is the tone of the storywriter?

d) Do you think she was successful in her mission?

e) What do you think the story is all about?

3. This story was written at a time when there was very little awareness about the need to protect the environment and the wildlife. Now read the story.

1. It was Mrs. Packletide's pleasure and intention that she should shoot a tiger. Not that the lust to kill had suddenly descended on her, or that she felt that she would leave India safer and more wholesome than she had found it, with one fraction less of wild beast per million of inhabitants. The compelling motive for her sudden deviation towards the footsteps of **Nimrod**[1] was the fact that Loona Bimberton had recently been carried eleven miles in an aeroplane by an Algerian aviator, and talked of nothing else; only a personally procured tiger-skin and a heavy harvest of press photographs could successfully counter that sort of thing. Mrs. Packletide had already arranged in her mind the lunch she would give at her house in Curzon Street, **ostensibly**[2] in Loona Bimberton's honour, with a tiger-skin rug occupying most of the foreground and all of the conversation. She had also already designed in her mind the tiger-claw brooch that she was going to give Loona Bimberton on her next birthday. In a world that is supposed to be chiefly swayed by hunger and by love Mrs. Packletide was an exception; her movements and motives were largely governed by dislike of Loona Bimberton.



2. Circumstances proved **propitious**[3]. Mrs. Packletide had offered a thousand rupees for the opportunity of shooting a tiger without over-much risk or exertion, and it so happened that a neighbouring village could boast of being the favoured **rendezvous**[4] of an animal of respectable antecedents, which had been driven by the increasing infirmities of age to abandon game-killing and confine its appetite to the smaller domestic animals. The prospect of earning the thousand rupees had stimulated the sporting and commercial instinct of the villagers; children were posted night and day on the outskirts of the local jungle to head the tiger back in the unlikely event of his attempting to roam away to fresh hunting-grounds, and the cheaper kinds of goats were left about with elaborate carelessness to keep him satisfied with his present quarters. The one great anxiety was lest he should die of old age before the date appointed for the memsahib's shoot. Mothers carrying their babies home through the jungle after the day's work in the fields hushed their singing lest they might curtail the restful sleep of the venerable herd-robber.

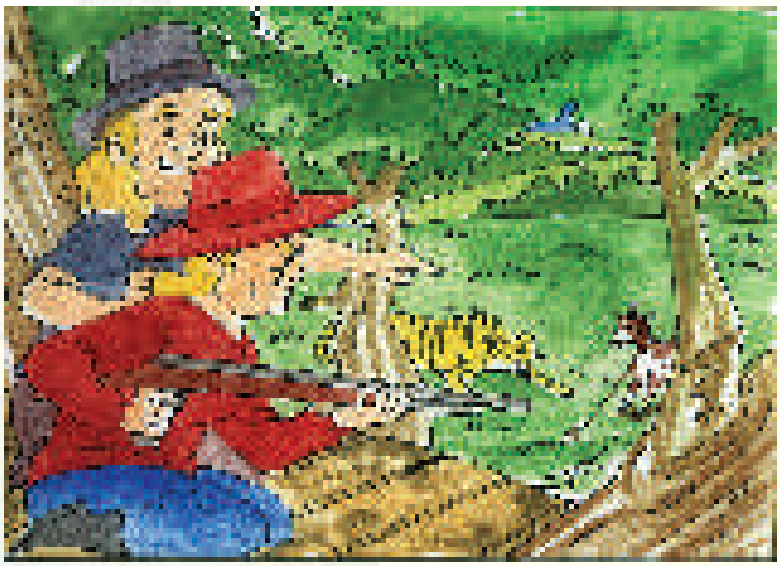
1. **Nimrod :** Biblical character (great grandson of Noah); a mighty hunter
2. **ostensibly:** supposedly
3. **propitious :** favourable
4. **rendezvous :** meeting

3. The great night duly arrived, moonlit and cloudless. A platform had been constructed in a comfortable and conveniently placed tree, and thereon crouched Mrs. Packletide and her paid companion, Miss Mebbin. A goat, gifted with a particularly persistent bleat, such as even a partially deaf tiger might be reasonably expected to hear on a still night, was **tethered**[5] at the correct distance. With an accurately sighted rifle and a **thumb-nail pack of patience cards**[6] the sportswoman awaited the coming of the quarry.

4. "I suppose we are in some danger?" said Miss Mebbin.

5. She was not actually nervous about the wild beast, but she had a morbid dread of performing an atom more service than she had been paid for.

6. "Nonsense," said Mrs. Packletide; "it's a very old tiger. It couldn't spring up here even if it wanted to."



7. "If it's an old tiger I think you ought to get it cheaper. A thousand rupees is a lot of money."

8. Louisa Mebbin adopted a protective elder-sister attitude towards money in general, irrespective of nationality or denomination. Her energetic intervention had saved many a rouble from dissipating itself in tips in some Moscow hotel, and francs and centimes clung to her instinctively under circumstances which would have driven them headlong from less sympathetic hands. Her speculations as to the market depreciation of tiger remnants were cut short by the appearance on the scene of the animal itself. As soon as it caught sight of the tethered goat it lay flat on the earth, seemingly less from a desire to take advantage of all available cover than for the purpose of snatching a short rest before commencing the grand attack.

9. "I believe it's ill," said Louisa Mebbin, loudly in Hindustani, for the benefit of the village headman, who was in ambush in a neighbouring tree.

10. "Hush!" said Mrs. Packletide, and at that moment the tiger commenced ambling towards his victim.

11. "Now, now!" urged Miss Mebbin with some excitement; "if he doesn't touch the goat we needn't pay for it." (The bait was an extra.)

5. **tethered -** fastened
6. **thumb - nail pack of patience cards -** small sized playing cards to play solitaire

12. The rifle flashed out with a loud report, and the great tawny beast sprang to one side and then rolled over in the stillness of death. In a moment a crowd of excited natives had swarmed on to the scene, and their shouting speedily carried the glad news to the village, where a thumping of tom-toms took up the chorus of triumph. And their triumph and rejoicing found a ready echo in the heart of Mrs. Packletide; already that luncheon-party in Curzon Street seemed immeasurably nearer.



13. It was Louisa Mebbin who drew attention to the fact that the goat was in death-throes from a mortal bullet-wound, while no trace of the rifle's deadly work could be found on the tiger. Evidently the wrong animal had been hit, and the beast of prey had succumbed to heart-failure, caused by the sudden report of the rifle, accelerated by **senile**[7] decay. Mrs. Packletide was pardonably annoyed at the discovery; but, at any rate, she was the possessor of a dead tiger, and the villagers, anxious for their thousand rupees, gladly connived at the fiction that she had shot the beast. And Miss Mebbin was a paid companion. Therefore did Mrs. Packletide face the cameras with a light heart, and her pictured fame reached from the pages of the *Texas Weekly Snapshot* to the illustrated Monday supplement of the *Novoe Vremya*. As for Loona Bimberton, she refused to look at an illustrated paper for weeks, and her letter of thanks for the gift of a tiger-claw brooch was a model of repressed emotions. The luncheon-party she declined; there are limits beyond which repressed emotions become dangerous.

14. "How amused every one would be if they knew what really happened," said Louisa Mebbin a few days after the ball.

15. "What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Packletide quickly.

16. "How you shot the goat and frightened the tiger to death," said Miss Mebbin, with her disagreeably pleasant laugh.

17. "No one would believe it," said Mrs. Packletide, her face changing colour as rapidly as though it were going through a **book of patterns**[8] before **post-time**[9].

18. "Loona Bimberton would," said Miss Mebbin. Mrs. Packletide's face settled on an unbecoming shade of greenish white.

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7. **senile -** characteristic of old age
8. **book of patterns -** Book showing the colour patterns of racing. stables, with colours worn by jockeys.
9. **post-time-** the start of horse race and deadline for placing a bet

19. "You surely wouldn't give me away?" she asked.

20. "I've seen a week-end cottage near Darking that I should rather like to buy," said Miss Mebbin with seeming irrelevance. "Six hundred and eighty, freehold. Quite a bargain, only I don't happen to have the money."

* * *

21. Louisa Mebbin's pretty week-end cottage, christened by her "**Les Fauves**[10] ," and gay in summer-time with its garden borders of tiger-lilies, is the wonder and admiration of her friends.

22. "It is a marvel how Louisa manages to do it," is the general verdict.

23. Mrs. Packletide indulges in no more big-game shooting.

24. "The **incidental**[11] expenses are so heavy," she confides to inquiring friends.

About the Author

Saki, (1870-1916), whose real name was Hector Hugh Munro, was a British writer, whose witty stories satirized the society and culture of his day. He was considered a master of the short story.

4. Answer the following questions in your own words:

(a) Why did Mrs. Packletide wish to kill a tiger?

(b) What made her decide to give a party in Loona Bimberton's honour? What did she intend to give Loona on her birthday?

(c) How was the tiger shooting arranged? What kind of a tiger was chosen for the purpose?

(d) In what way did the villagers help Mrs. Packletide shoot the tiger?

(e) Who was Miss Mebbin? Was she really devoted to Mrs. Packletide? How did she behave during the tiger shooting?

(f) Mrs. Packletide was a good shot. Discuss.

(g) What comment did Miss Mebbin make after Mrs Packletide had fired the shot? Why did Miss Mebbin make this comment? How did Mrs Packletide react to this comment?

(h) How did the villagers react to the tiger's death?

(i) Do you think Mrs. Packletide was able to achieve her heart's desire? Give reasons for your answer.

10. **Les Fauves -** French for ' The Wild Animals'
11. **incidental -** secondary.

(j) How did Miss Mebbin manage to get her week-end cottage? Why did she plant so many tiger lilies in her garden?

(k) "The incidental expenses are so heavy," she confides to inquiring friends. Who is the speaker? What is she referring to here?

5. Discuss the following questions in detail and write the answers in your notebooks:

(a) Do you think the tiger shooting organized by the villagers was a serious affair? Give reasons for your answer.

(b) Do you think the writer is trying to make fun of the main characters in the story i.e. Mrs. Packletide, Miss Mebbin and Loona Bimberton? Pick out instances from the story that point to this fact.

(c) A person who is vain is full of self importance and can only think of himself/herself and can go to great lengths to prove his/her superiority. Do you think Mrs Packletide is vain? Give reasons in support of your answer.

(d) Sometimes writers highlight certain negative aspects in society or human beings by making fun of it. This is called satire. In your groups discuss whether you would classify this story as a satire. Give reasons to support your answer

(e) How does the writer create humor in this story?

6. Choose extracts from the story that illustrate the character of the people listed in the table given below. There are some words given to help you. You may add words of your own. One has been done as an example:

vain jealous competitive shrewd manipulative stingy materialistic spiteful

Character	Extract from the story	What this tells us about the character
Mrs. Packletide	(i) The compelling motive for her sudden deviation towards the footsteps of Nimrod was the fact that Loona Bimberton had recently been carried eleven miles in an aeroplane by an Algerian aviator, and talked of nothing else; only a personally procured tiger-skin and a heavy harvest of Press photographs could successfully counter that sort of thing	Competitive

	(ii) Mrs. Packletide had offered a thousand rupees for the opportunity of shooting a tiger without over-much risk or exertion, (iii) Mrs. Packletide faced the cameras with a light heart, and her pictured fame reached from the pages of the Texas Weekly Snapshot to the illustrated Monday supplement of the Novoe Vremya.	....
Louisa Mebbin	(i) "If it's an old tiger I think you ought to get it cheaper. A thousand rupees is a lot of money." (ii) Louisa Mebbin adopted a protective elder-sister attitude towards money in general, irrespective of nationality or denomination (iii) "How amused every one would be if they knew what really happened," said Louisa Mebbin a few days after the ball. (iv) Louisa Mebbin's pretty week-end cottage, christened by her "Les Fauves," and gay in summer-time with its garden borders of tiger-lilies, is the wonder and admiration of her friends	....
Loona Bimberton	(i) As for Loona Bimberton, she refused to look at an illustrated paper for weeks, and her letter of thanks for the gift of a tiger-claw brooch was a model of repressed emotions (ii) there are limits beyond which repressed emotions become dangerous.	....

7. There are many amusing lines in the story. Here are a few of them. Rewrite each one in ordinary prose so that the meaning is retained. One has been done for you as an example:

a) It was Mrs. Packletide's pleasure and intention that she should shoot a tiger.

Mrs. Packletide wanted to shoot a tiger

b) Mrs. Packletide had already arranged in her mind the lunch she would give at her house in Curzon Street, ostensibly in Loona Bimberton's honour, with a tiger-skin rug occupying most of the foreground and all of the conversation.

.....

.....

c) Mothers carrying their babies home through the jungle after the day's work in the fields hushed their singing lest they might curtail the restful sleep of the venerable herd-robber.

.....

.....

d) Louisa Mebbin adopted a protective elder-sister attitude towards money in general, irrespective of nationality or denomination

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(e) Evidently the wrong animal had been hit, and the beast of prey had succumbed to heart-failure, caused by the sudden report of the rifle, accelerated by senile decay

.....

.....

(f) As for Loona Bimberton, she refused to look at an illustrated paper for weeks, and her letter of thanks for the gift of a tiger-claw brooch was a model of repressed emotions

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8. An oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines normally-contradictory terms. The most common form of oxymoron involves an adjective-noun combination of two words like- failed success

Writers often use an oxymoron to call attention to an apparent contradiction. For example, Wilfred Owen's poem *The Send-off* refers to soldiers leaving for the front line, who "lined the train with faces grimly gay." The oxymoron 'grimly gay' highlights the

contradiction between how the soldiers feel and how they act: though they put on a brave face and act cheerful, they feel grim. Some examples of oxymorons are- dark sunshine, cold sun, living dead, dark light, almost exactly etc.

The story Mrs. Packletide's Tiger has a number of oxymorons. Can you identify them and write them down in your notebooks?

WRITING TASK

9(a) Years later Mrs. Packletide writes her autobiography. As Mrs. Packletide, write about the tiger episode with the help of the clues given below.

jealous of the applause Loona was getting-thought of tiger hunt--all arranged-- Louisa Mebbin accompanied; turned out to be a blackmailer-huge price to pay to outdo a rival

(b) In groups of four construct the dialogues and enact the following situations from the story:

1. Mrs. Packletide and the headman of the village/other villagers discussing the details of the tiger shooting
2. Miss Mebbin blackmailing Mrs Packletide into gifting her a cottage
3. Loona Bimberton and a lady-friend discussing Mrs Packletide's hunting success

LISTING TASK

10. Listen to the passage on lion hunting and answer the questions given below:

1. The Maasai tribe in Africa hunt lions because
   - i. they live near the forests of Africa
   - ii. they view it as a sign of bravery and personal achievement
   - iii. they are a hunting tribe
   - iv. they adorn their bodies with body parts of the lion
2. Solo hunting has been banned because
   - i. it is dangerous
   - ii. of the declining lion population
   - iii. too many hunters have been killed
   - iv. it creates pride in the minds of the successful hunters

3. The hunting of lionesses is discouraged because

   i. they bear the cubs

   ii. they run much faster

   iii. they are more fierce

   iv. they cannot be spotted easily

4. The Maasai warriors chase a lion with rattle bells to

   i. awaken it

   ii. make it run faster

   iii. make it angry

   iv. frighten it

5. The Maasai use three parts of the lion. They are

   i. the mane, tail and claws

   ii. the mane, nails and claws

   iii. the mane, tail and nails

   iv. the whiskers, tail and claws

6. The tail is given to

   i. the strongest warrior

   ii. the fastest warrior

   iii. the youngest warrior

   iv. the bravest warrior