

Reflex

Dick Francis

Introduction

The story

Philip Nore is a jockey who is interested in photography. Three years ago Nore had been asked to lose races by his boss Victor Briggs and now he starts asking Nore to lose deliberately once again. Nore is very unhappy about having to cheat in this way.

When George Millace, a well-known photographer, dies in a car crash, life begins to change drastically for Philip. He develops photographs from negatives in a box which he picks up from George's house, which has been burgled. The first photograph shows that a well-known owner, Elgin Yaxley, had lied to the police.

After developing this photograph, Nore notices that the unpopular Ivor den Relgan has been allowed to become a member of the Jockey Club by Lord White because White is interested in his daughter, Dana. At the same time, Nore witnesses den Relgan attack Lance Kinship, the famous film-maker, when he tries to talk to Dana.

Once Philip develops George's photos of a naked couple, he believes George was blackmailing the people in the pictures and was murdered. Philip eventually shows Lord White the photograph which proves that Dana is not den Relgan's daughter but his lover. Lord White then expels den Relgan from the Jockey Club.

Meanwhile, Philip is becoming increasingly disillusioned with the world of racing as well as being worried about what to do with the photographs. In search of some comfort, he finds the woman who looked after him sometimes as a child, Samantha. He meets her daughter, Clare, a publisher who tells Philip that his photographs are very good.

After Philip sees Yaxley at the races, he develops blackmail letters from George to Yaxley and tells him he wants the same as George. Yaxley gives him a large cheque for the Injured Jockeys' Fund. Philip now realizes that George was not making money for himself but for a worthy cause.

Life now becomes very dangerous for Philip. He is beaten up very badly by den Relgan's men. Dana demands a list which Philip does not have while

someone else gasses his house and his friend Jeremy nearly dies.

After these events Philip develops the rest of the negatives finding Dana's list (of names, dates and drugs implicating Kinship) and evidence that George had also known about the race fixing.

Philip is an honest man and confronts Victor with George's photograph in order to make him stop cheating, not to blackmail him. He forces Kinship, who had tried to gas him and had killed George, to tell him the name of the drug supplier behind him.

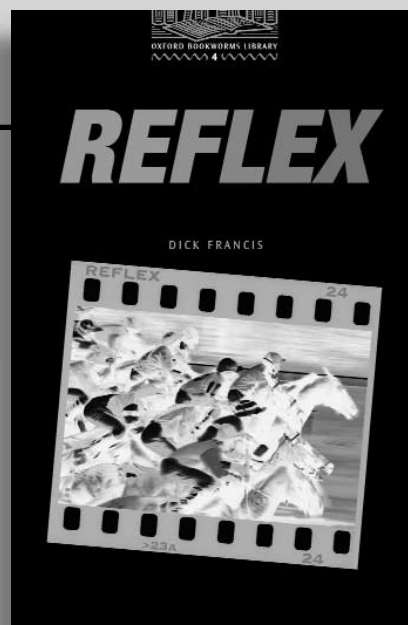
Background to the story

The word 'reflex' is a reference to the cameras of George and Philip which play such an important role in the story; and also to the psychological and moral reflexes which make us what we are.

Dick Francis is the world-famous author of nearly forty best-selling novels, most if not all of which are set in the world of horse racing. He has also written a biography of the famous British jockey, Lester Piggott; an autobiography (*The Sport of Queens*); and produced several collections of racing stories. Before he became a writer, he was a jockey himself (from 1946 to 1957) and then wrote a racing column for the *Sunday Express* from 1957 to 1973. He wrote his first novel in 1962.

Discussion points

- 1 What, in your opinion, are the worst kinds of crime? Are there any crimes which you do not think are very serious?
- 2 Have you ever done something which you felt was right to do but which other people thought was wrong?
- 3 Have you ever deliberately not tried to do your best at something?



Reflex

Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures



- a 'There's a special silver cup for the winner of this race.'
- b I held the piece of paper over the pan and watched George's letter appear.
- c I lay on one elbow. My mouth full of grass and dirt.
- d 'Jeremy, don't die. Jeremy, it's my fault.'

- e Victor picked up a large envelope and held it out to me.
- f 'You know everything, don't you?' said Victor.
- g Lance Kinship smiled happily. 'Two more copies of them all,' he said.
- h Clare opened the box and began to look at the photographs.

To the teacher

Aim: To familiarize students with the setting

Time: 10–20 minutes

Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or to each pair of students. Ask the students to match the picture with the correct caption.

When they have matched the pictures and the captions, ask them:

- 1 how many different people appear altogether in the pictures (get them to pay particular attention

to the ones who appear most);

- 2 who they are or what the relationships between them are.

Then ask them:

- 1 to look again at the pictures and put them in order as they think they occur in the story;
- 2 to predict, in general terms, the story from the pictures.

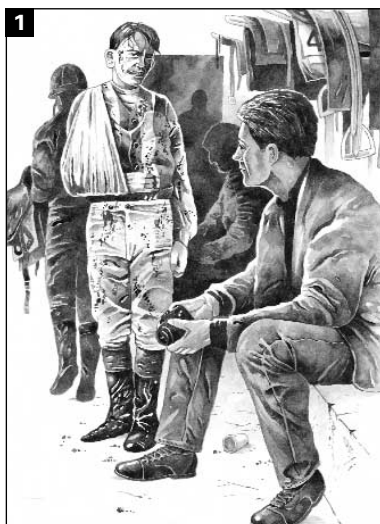
Key: 1c, 2h, 3b, 4a, 5f, 6g, 7e, 8d.

Reflex

While reading activities

Acting the story

Make dialogues for these scenes.



To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 10

Aim: To create dramatic re-enactments of the text (Acting the story)/To focus on the outcome (Story prediction)

Time: 15–30 minutes (Acting the story)/10–20 minutes (Story prediction)

Organization: Give out the worksheets to pairs or groups of students. For the first activity, allocate the roles of the different characters in the pictures to pairs or groups of students. Tell them the illustrations represent key moments in the story. Students re-enact the different scenes in the right chronological order so that by the end of the activity

the class has collectively provided a dramatisation of the story so far.

Ask the students to first read the relevant passage in the book and then rehearse their own extended version of the scene, providing more dialogue than appears in the text.

Each pair or group acts out their own picture in turn. After the first activity, ask students in groups to predict the outcome of the story by using the remaining chapter headings: The other idea; Not careful enough; Dana is desperate; Hidden list; Victor talks; The last photographs.

Reflex

After reading activity

Hunt the crime

Find examples in the book of the following crimes. Write one sentence for each example of each crime you can find in the second column of the table below.

CRIMES	EXAMPLES
1 Adultery (having sex with someone who is not your husband or wife when you are married)	
2 Arson (burning a house or building deliberately)	
3 Assault (hitting someone very hard)	
4 Assuming a false identity (saying you are someone who you are not)	
5 Attempted murder (trying to kill someone)	
6 Blackmail (getting money from someone by warning that you will say bad facts about them)	
7 Bribery and race fixing (giving money to someone to do something wrong; changing the result of a race by not trying hard enough)	
8 Burglary (stealing things from houses)	
9 Drug dealing (selling drugs) and drug taking	
10 Fraud (getting money by telling lies or cheating)	
11 Murder (killing someone)	
12 Perjury (telling lies to the police or in a law court)	

To the teacher

Aim: To revise, remember what has been read, summarize, extend vocabulary

Time: 10–20 minutes

Organization: Ask students to work alone or in pairs to identify all the different crimes in the list. They will probably have to use their dictionaries or ask for your help for some of the terms. By imposing a time limit, you can turn the activity into a race to see who can get the most correct answers in the time allotted.

Key: 1: Lord White with Dana den Relgan – probably (page 23); 2: George Millace's house by den Relgan (page 19); 3: Mrs Millace (page 10); den Relgan on Kinship (page 24); den Relgan's men on Philip (page 63); 4: Dana den Relgan (page 53); den Relgan as the

gasman (page 62); 5: Philip/Jeremy by Lance Kinship (page 69); 6: Millace/Yaxley (page 48); Millace/den Relgan (page 53); Philip/Yaxley (page p57–59); Millace/Victor Briggs (page 81); 7: Philip on Daylight (pages 5–6); Victor's envelope (page 14); 8: the Millace's house (pages 3 and 10); 9: Dana den Relgan and Lance Kinship (page 23); Philip's mother (page p34 and 86); Dana den Relgan (page 67); Lance Kinship (page 86); 10: Yaxley and O'Tree (page 17); 11: George Millace by Lance Kinship (pages 30 and 86); 12: Yaxley (page 17); (NB. There is also the less clearly definable crime of Lord White's in gaining den Relgan's entry into the Jockey Club.)