**Extraordinary little cough**  
by Dylan Thomas (abridged)

**Worksheet**

A Brainstorm the following word:

August

B Jot down a few ideas suggested by this picture:

C The adjectives below can be used to describe people. Sort them out in the two columns and find the Portuguese equivalents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical traits</th>
<th>Personality traits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>active , aloof , asleep , bad , beautiful , big , broad , brown , butter-coloured , content , curly , dark , dirty , elderly , fair , fat , good , handsome , happy , jolly , laughing , little , naked , old , pale , plain , quiet , red-haired , regular-featured , shy , sick , small , spectacled , squat , tall , thin , white , young</td>
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</tbody>
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II

A In small groups, read the excerpts from a story and suggest its correct sequence. (p 4)

B Fill in the table with information from the excerpts. Do it in note form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>How</th>
</tr>
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</table>

C In two big groups, ask and answer questions about the excerpts.

D Imagine and write the story.

II

A Read the story up to line 34. Answer:

1 How do they travel?
2 How do they behave?
3 Why does George’s face grow pale?
4 What is Dan going to do next term?
5 What equipment do they take?
6 Who is the leader of the group? Justify.
7 Who seems to be an outsider? Find evidence.

B Read the story up to line 88.

1 Choose the best option:
   a They are going to camp
      - for one week.
      - for two weeks.
      - for three weeks.
   b Sidney’s and Dan’s last holidays were
      - boring.
      - exhausting.
      - unforgettable.

2 Find evidence for
   a George’s anxiety and insecurity during the trip.
   b the boys’ humour as an answer to George’s anxiety and efforts to fit in the group.

C Read the story up to line 121. Answer:

1 What are their plans for tomorrow?
2 How does Sidney show his experience and leadership?
3 George’s idea of pitching the tents in the middle of the field is not followed and he burns his hand while lighting the stove. What do these facts show about his character?
4 How does the narrator arrange the couples? What does this show about his character?

D Read the story up to line 217. Find evidence:

1 Skully and Brazell are bullies.
2 Sidney, George, Dan and the narrator would prefer not to be with Skully and Brazell.
3 George wears glasses.
4 Skully and Brazell pick on George’s sports and physical skills.
5 Dan begins defending George.
E Read the story up to line 244.

1 Fill in the table with the quotes below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical traits</th>
<th>Clothes</th>
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<td>Girls:</td>
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<td>Gwyneth:</td>
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<td>Peggy:</td>
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<td>Jean:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- shy and curly, butter-coloured hair
- short white trousers
- admiring the sunset with little attention
- fair
- fat, hockey legs, tomboy crop
- arms, legs and throats brown as berries
- very white teeth
- gold and brown
- tallest, distinguished piece and quite sixteen
- With little studied movements of her hands, as though she were distributing flowers

2 Answer:

a How does the narrator rearrange the couples?
b Do you think he is confident or arrogant?

3 Explain the meaning of

a “With little studied movements of her hands, as though she were distributing flowers…”
  (lines 236-7)
b “…a distinguished piece and quite sixteen…”
  (lines 241-2)

F Read the story up to line 303. Give evidence

1 of the narrator’s insecurity and tension.
2 of Jean’s lack of interest in the narrator’s suggestions.

G Read the story up to line 344. Answer:

1 How are the couples arranged by the end of the day?
2 Write down the names of all the boys and girls in the story. Draw lines, arrows and hearts to show the changes in their relationships.
3 “Sidney unhappily held Peggy’s hand.” (line 329). Justify the use of the adverb in the sentence.
4 How do Dan and the narrator show their feeling of loss and rejection?

H Read the story up to the end. Answer:

1 What has George been doing?
2 What does he want to prove?
3 Do you think Brazell and Skully appreciate his feat?

III

A Write a summary of Extraordinary Little Cough.
B Describe your adventures in your last summer holidays.
‘What's your name?’
I told her.
‘That’s Welsh,’ she said.
‘You’ve got a beautiful name.’
‘Oh, it’s just ordinary.’
‘Shall I see you again?’
‘If you want to.’

In the middle of the night, George appeared, like a ghost, in the firelight and stood there trembling until I said:
‘Where’ve you been? You’ve been gone hours. Why are you trembling like that?’

‘One of us must light the primus,’ Sidney said, and, after George had burned his hand, we sat in a circle outside the sleeping-tent talking about motor-cars, content to be in the country, knowing always that the sea dashed on the rocks not far below us and that to-morrow we would bathe and throw a ball on the sands and perhaps meet three girls.

‘One of us must light the primus,’ Sidney said, and, after George had burned his hand, we sat in a circle outside the sleeping-tent talking about motor-cars, content to be in the country, knowing always that the sea dashed on the rocks not far below us and that to-morrow we would bathe and throw a ball on the sands and perhaps meet three girls.

Fat Peggy, I thought, too jolly for me, with hockey legs and tomboy crop, was the girl for Dan; Sidney's Gwyneth was a distinguished piece and quite sixteen, but Jean, shy and curly, with butter-coloured hair, was mine. Dan and I walked slowly to the girls.

One afternoon, in August, some years before I knew I was happy, George Hooping, whom we called Little Cough, Sidney Evans, Dan Davies, and I sat on the roof of a lorry travelling to the end of the Peninsula.

‘No,’ George said. ‘I can swim and I can run and I can play cricket. I’m not frightened of anybody.’

Sidney and Dan had stayed there last year, coming back brown and swearing, full of stories of campers’ dances round the fires at midnight, and elderly girls from the training college who sun-bathed naked on the rocks surrounded by laughing boys, and singing in bed that lasted until dawn.

We sat by the fire in the corner of the field. The sea, far out, was still making a noise. We heard a few night birds.

They were the worst and biggest boys in school. Every day for a term they caught me before class began and wedged me in the waste-paper basket and then put the basket on the master’s desk.

It was nearly dark when the others came. Brazell and Skully were with Gwyneth, one each side of her holding her arms, Sidney was with Peggy, and Dan walked, whistling, behind with his hands in his pockets.
Extraordinary Little Cough
by Dylan Thomas
(abridged)

One afternoon, in August, some years before I knew I was happy, George Hooping, whom we called Little Cough, Sidney Evans, Dan Davies, and I sat on the roof of a lorry travelling to the end of the Peninsula. It was a tall lorry, from which we could spit on the roofs of the passing cars and throw our apple stumps at women on the pavement. One stump caught a man on a bicycle in the middle of the back, he swerved across the road, for a moment we sat quiet and George Hooping's face grew pale. And if the lorry runs him over, I thought as the man on the bicycle swayed towards the hedge, he'll get killed and I'll be sick on my trousers and perhaps on Sidney's too, and we'll be arrested and hanged, except George Hooping who didn't have an apple. But the lorry swept past; behind us, the bicycle drove into the hedge, the man stood up and waved his fist, and I waved my cap back at him.

'You shouldn’t have waved your cap,' said Sidney Evans, 'he’ll know what school we’re in.'

'We’re not in school now.'

'Nobody can expel me,' said Dan Davies. He was leaving next term to serve in his father's fruit shop for a salary.

We all wore haversacks. Inside the lorry were two tents, a box of food, a packing-case of kettles and saucepans and knives and forks, an oil lamp, a primus stove, sheets and blankets, a gramophone with three records, and a tablecloth from George Hooping's mother. We were going to camp for a fortnight in Rhossilli, in a field above the five-mile beach. Sidney and Dan had stayed there last year, coming back brown and swearing, full of stories of campers' dances round the fires at midnight, and elderly girls from the training college who sun-bathed naked on the rocks surrounded by laughing boys, and singing in bed that lasted until dawn. But George had never left home for more than a night; and then, he told me, it was only to stay in St Thomas, three miles from his house, with an aunt.

'How much further?' asked George Hooping. Anything upset his stomach. 'Miles and miles,' Dan said.

'Thousands of miles,' I said. 'It’s Rhossilli, USA. We're going to camp on a bit of rock that wobbles in the wind.'

'And we have to tie the rock on to a tree.'

'Cough can use his suspenders,' Sidney said.

The lorry roared round a corner – 'Upsydaisy! Did you feel it then, Cough? It was on one wheel'.

'Do you see the sea down there, it’s shimmering, Dan,' I said.

George Hooping pretended to forget the lurch of the slippery roof and, from that height, the frightening smallness of the sea. Gripping the rail of the roof, he said: 'My father saw a killer whale.' The conviction in his voice died quickly as he began. He beat against the wind with his cracked, treble voice, trying to make us believe. I knew he wanted to find a boast so big it would make our hair stand up and stop the wild lorry.

'Where did he keep it, Cough, in the wash-house?'

'He saw it in Madagascar’. It had tusks as long as from here to, from here to …' 'From here to Madagascar.'

All at once the threat of a steep hill disturbed him. No longer bothered about the adventures of his father, a small, man standing all day in a shop full of herbs, where old men with backache and young girls in trouble waited for consultations in the half-dark, he stared at the hill swooping up and clung to Dan and me.

'She’s doing fifty!'

'The brakes have gone, Cough!'

He caught hard with both hands on the rail and steered the lorry to safety round a stone-walled corner and up a hill to a gate of a farm-house. Leading down from the gate, there was a lane to the first beach. It was high tide, and we heard the sea dashing. Four boys on a roof - one tall, dark, regular-featured, precise of speech, in a good suit, a boy of the world; one squat, ungainly, red-haired, his red wrists fighting out of short sleeves; one heavily spectacled, fat, with indoor shoulders and feet in always unlaced boots wanting to go different ways; one small, thin, indecisively active, quick to get dirty,
curly - saw their field in front of them, a fortnight’s new home that had hedges for walls, the sea for a front garden, a green gutter for a lavatory, and a tree in the middle.

I helped Dan unload the lorry while Sidney tipped the driver and George struggled with the farm-yard gate and looked at the ducks inside. The lorry drove away.

‘Let’s build our tents by the tree in the middle,’ said George.

We pitched our tents in a corner, out of the wind.

‘One of us must light the primus,’ Sidney said, and, after George had burned his hand, we sat in a circle outside the sleeping-tent talking about motor-cars, content to be in the country, knowing always that the sea dashed on the rocks not far below us and that to-morrow we would bathe and throw a ball on the sands and perhaps meet three girls. The oldest would be for Sidney, the plainest for Dan, and the youngest for me.

It was past five o’clock. ‘Let’s go down to the beach.’

Sidney led the way, running straight as a soldier in his khaki shorts, into a wooded valley, on to a clearing near the edge of the cliff, where two broad boys were wrestling outside a tent. They were Brazell and Skully. ‘Hallo, Brazell and Skully!’ said Dan.

Skully had Brazell’s arm in a grip. ‘Hallo boys! Hallo, Little Cough! How’s your father?’

‘He’s very well, thank you.’

Brazell, on the grass, felt for broken bones.

‘Hallo, boys! How are your fathers?’ They were the worst and biggest boys in school. Every day for a term they caught me before class began and wedged me in the waste-paper basket and then put the basket on the master’s desk. Sometimes I could get out and sometimes not. Brazell was lean, Skully was fat.

‘We’re camping in Button’s field,’ said Sidney. ‘We’re taking a rest cure here,’ said Brazell.

‘And how is Little Cough these days? Father given him a pill?’ We wanted to run down to the beach, Dan and Sidney and George and I, to be alone together, to walk and shout by the sea in the country, throw stones at the waves, remember adventures and make more to remember. ‘We’ll come down to the beach with you,’ said Skully.

Dan said: ‘Are you camping here for long, Brazell and Skully?’ ‘For a whole fortnight, Davies and Thomas and Evans and Hooping.’ When we reached Mewslade beach and flung ourselves down, as I scooped up sand and it trickled, grain by grain through my fingers, as George peered at the sea through his double lenses and Sidney and Dan heaped sand over his legs, Brazell and Skully sat behind us like two warders.

George lay covered to the waist in sand. I watched the sea slipping out, with birds quarrelling over it, and the sun beginning to go down patiently.

‘Look at Little Cough,’ said Brazell. ‘Isn’t he extraordinary? He’s growing out of the sand. Little Cough hasn’t got any legs.’ ‘Poor Little Cough,’ said Skully, ‘he’s the most extraordinary boy in the world.’ ‘Extraordinary Little Cough,’ they said together, ‘extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary.’ They made a song out of it, and both conducted with their switches.

‘He can’t swim.’

‘He can’t run.’

‘He can’t learn’

‘He can’t bowl.’

‘He can’t bat.’

‘And I bet he can’t make water.’

George kicked the sand from his legs. ‘Yes, I can!’

‘Can you swim?’

‘Can you run?’

‘Can you bowl?’

‘Leave him alone,’ Dan said.

They shuffled nearer to us. The sea was racing out now. Brazell said in a serious voice, wagging his finger: ‘Now, quite truthfully, Cough, aren’t you extraordinary? Very extraordinary? Say “Yes” or “No.”’

‘Categorically, “Yes” or “No.”’ said Skully. ‘No,’ George said. ‘I can swim and I can run and I can play cricket. I’m not frightened of anybody.’

I said: ‘He was second in the form last term.’

‘Now isn’t that extraordinary? If he can be second he can be first. But no, that’s too ordinary. Little Cough must be second.’ ‘The question is answered,’ said Skully. ‘Little Cough is extraordinary.’ They began to sing again.

‘He’s a very good runner,’ Dan said.
‘Well, let him prove it, Skully and I ran the whole length of Rhossilli sands this morning, didn’t we, Skull?’
‘Every inch.’
‘Can Little Cough do it?’
‘Yes,’ said George.
‘Do it, then.’
215 ‘I don’t want to.’
‘Extraordinary Little Cough can’t run,’ they sang, ‘can’t run, can’t run.’
Three girls, all fair, came down the cliff-side arm in arm, dressed in short, white trousers.
220 Their arms and legs and throats were brown as berries; I could see when they laughed that their teeth were very white; they stepped on to the beach, and Brazell and Skully stopped singing. Sidney smoothed his hair back, rose casually, put his hands in his pockets, and walked towards the girls, who now stood close together, gold and brown, admiring the sunset with little attention, patting their scarves, turning smiles on each other. He stood in front of them, grinned, and saluted: ‘Hallo, Gwyneth! do you remember me?’
‘La-di-da!’ whispered Dan at my side, and made a mock salute to George still peering at the retreating sea.
225 ‘Well, if this isn’t a surprise!’ said the tallest girl. With little studied movements of her hands, as though she were distributing flowers, she introduced Peggy and Jean.
Fat Peggy, I thought, too jolly for me, with hockey legs and tomboy crop, was the girl for Dan; Sidney's Gwyneth was a distinguished piece and quite sixteen, but Jean, shy and curly, with butter-coloured hair, was mine. Dan and I walked slowly to the girls.
230 ‘Speak to them quickly, before they go away!’ a voice would have said insistently over the dramatic silence. ‘Isn’t it lovely here!’ I said.
235 I spoke to Jean alone; and this is love, I thought, as she nodded her head and swung her curls and said: ‘It’s nicer than Porthcawl.’
Brazell and Skully were two big bullies in a nightmare; I forgot them when Jean and I walked up the cliff, and, looking back to see if they were baiting George again or wrestling together, I saw that George had disappeared around the corner of the rocks and that they were talking at the foot of the cliff with Sidney and the two girls. ‘What’s your name?’
I told her.
‘That’s Welsh,’ she said.
240 ‘You’ve got a beautiful name.’
‘Oh, it’s just ordinary.’
‘Shall I see you again?’
‘If you want to.’
‘I want to all right! We can go and bathe in the morning. And we can try to get an eagle’s egg. Did you know that there were eagles here?’
‘No,’ she said. ‘Who was that handsome boy on the beach, the tall one with dirty trousers?’
245 ‘He’s not handsome, that’s Brazell. He never washes or combs his hair or anything. He’s a bully and he cheats.’
‘I think he’s handsome.’
250 We walked into Button’s field, and I showed her inside the tents and gave her one of George’s apples. ‘I’d like a cigarette,’ she said.
It was nearly dark when the others came.
255 Brazell and Skully were with Gwyneth, one each side of her holding her arms, Sidney was with Peggy, and Dan walked, whistling, behind with his hands in his pockets.
‘There’s a pair,’ said Brazell, ‘they’ve been here all alone and they aren’t even holding hands. You want a pill,’ he said to me. ‘Build Britain’s babies,’ said Skully.
‘Go on!’ Gwyneth said. She pushed him away from her, but she was laughing, and she said nothing when he put his arm around her waist.
260 ‘What about a bit of fire?’ said Brazell.
Jean clapped her hands like an actress. Although I knew I loved her, I didn’t like anything she said or did.

‘Who’s going to make it?’
‘He’s the best, I’m sure,’ she said, pointing at me.

Dan and I collected sticks, and by the time it was quite dark there was a fire crackling. Inside the sleeping-tent, Brazell and Jean sat close together; her golden head was on his shoulder; Skully, near them, whispered to Gwyneth; Sidney unhappily held Peggy’s hand.

‘Did you ever see such a sloppy lot?’ I said, watching Jean smile in the fiery dark.

‘Kiss me, Charley!’ said Dan.

We sat by the fire in the corner of the field. The sea, far out, was still making a noise. We heard a few night birds. ‘Tu-whit! tu-whoo! Listen! I don’t like owls,’ Dan said, ‘they scratch your eyes out!’ - and tried not to listen to the soft voices in the tent. Gwyneth’s laughter floated out over the suddenly moonlit field, but Jean, with the beast, was smiling and silent in the covered warmth; I knew her little hand was in Brazell’s hand.

‘Women!’ I said.

Dan spat in the fire.

In the middle of the night, George appeared, like a ghost, in the firelight and stood there trembling until I said: ‘Where’ve you been? You’ve been gone hours. Why are you trembling like that?’

Brazell and Skully poked their heads out.

‘Hallo, Cough my boy! How’s your father? What have you been up to to-night?’

George Hooping could hardly stand. I put my hand on his shoulder to steady him, but he pushed it away.

‘I’ve been running on Rhossili sands! I ran every bit of it! You said I couldn’t, and I did! I’ve been running and running! ’

Someone inside the tent put a record on the gramophone. It was a selection from No, No, Nanette.

‘You’ve been running all the time in the dark, Little Cough?’

‘And I bet I ran it quicker than you did, too!’

George said.

‘I bet you did,’ said Brazell.

‘Do you think we’d run five miles?’ said Skully.

Now the tune was ‘Tea for Two.’

‘Did you ever hear anything so extraordinary? I told you Cough was extraordinary. Little Cough’s been running all night.’

‘Extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary Little Cough,’ they said.

Laughing from the shelter of the tent into the darkness, they looked like a boy with two heads. And when I stared round at George again he was lying on his back fast asleep in the deep grass and his hair was touching the flames.
Glossary English - Portuguese

The definitions offered below are correct for the context of the story, but may differ in other contexts.

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