# Assignment 5A – Fiction

1. **Summary**

In the short story “Trio for Four Voices” by Jane McLaughlin, the narrator observes a father and his daughter Amelia, as they play croquet in the hotel garden. In the evening, Amelia joins the narrator’s dinner table and tells the narrator that she hates her mother and wants to kill her.   
The narrator considers if he/she should tell someone about it and get involved in the situation or not. Suddenly Amelia’s mother is gone for some days, and the narrator is worried about her, but she comes back, and the narrator decides to tell her about the conversation with Amelia. She causes a big scene, whereupon Amelia’s father accuses the narrator of making up twisted stories about his daughter. The next day the family stands in the hall about to leave. Amelia and her mother offer the narrator flowers and paintings, and the mother explains that Amelia is easily bored on their trips, so she needs her games.

1. **Analytical essay**

Trust can be hard to gain and especially regain if it has been misused just once, and while a little white lie sometimes does not hurt, it is something else to plan a deceit for fun. Deception is exactly what Jane McLaughlin’s short story “trio for four voices” is about, as the narrator becomes involuntarily involved in an unwanted conflict of pretense with a dysfunctional family.

Conflicts are very essential to the story that contains both internal and external of the kind. Firstly, there is the conflict between Amelia and her mother, which later turns out to be a fraud. Then there is the narrator’s inner conflict about how to deal with the situation, and lastly, there is the conflict of the family scamming the narrator and abusing his/her trust. This conflict also portrays the main theme deception, as the family lies to the narrator and stages a play for Amelia’s entertainment. Thus, the narrator is taken hostage in the family’s disturbed games. Initially, the family looks completely normal and happy. Amelia almost certainly has a great relationship with her father; they play croquet together, and by the look of it they are having a lot of fun. They laugh and tease each other in a friendly way. They also hold hands, when the narrator sees them walking to the gorge. The only glimpse of Amelia’s relationship with her mother is in the end of the story, where the whole family is standing together in the entrance hall, talking and laughing, and that gives the impression of a great and close relationship. Amelia makes a great first impression on the narrator, who is astounded by her level of matureness and finds her very charming and polite, but their relationship develops through the story. After their conversation about Amelia’s mother, the narrator is convinced that Amelia needs help. In the end, the narrator is left dumbfounded and furious with the whole family because they have deceived and made a fool out of him/her. What might not have been a big deal to the family, has affected the narrator a lot. This is visible for example in p. 2, l. 66: *“Ignore it? I cannot get it out of my head”*. It is clear that the narrator is very troubled by the conversation and thinks about it a lot.  
 Amelia appears vey grown up for a child, perhaps even too much.   
*“She asks me questions politely, with the total confidence of the child who talks mainly to adults.”* (p. 1, ll. 26-27). This quote indicates that Amelia spends a lot of her time in the company of adults instead of contemporaries, which is also supported by the fact that she plays croquet with her father instead of playing with other children. She also nonchalantly speaks French with her parents, even though English is their native language, which indicates that she is quite skilled. The whole family seems very privileged and distinguished; they all wear expensive, formal clothes, they have graceful dinner manners, and they speak French, which is often considered very sophisticated. Seemingly, they care a lot about their appearance, and that might have affected Amelia much more, than they know, by depriving her of her childhood. For instance, it is not normal for at child to talk about death as casually as Amelia does, especially the death of a parent. When Amelia tells that she wants to kill her mother, it is without any sign of emotion, thus, she must be abnormally insensitive and cynical, and she clearly lacks the ability of empathy. She does not consider how the narrator feels about being dragged into her psychological games either.

A lot of narrative techniques are used to build up tension and make the story unpredictable. For instance, the story is told by a first-person narrator in the present tense, which causes the narrator to be just as surprised by the events in the story as the readers. There is no foreshadowing that the narrator’s conversation with Amelia was just an act from her side either, which means that the reader and the narrator have the exact same knowledge about the situation; neither the readers nor the narrator know more than the other. This makes the readers connect and identify with the narrator and it also helps to create suspense, since the readers then fear for the mother’s life. The ending of the story is a twist ending, as it contains a plot twist. The narrator and therefore also the readers believed in Amelia’s sincerity and thought that she was indeed going to kill her mother, it was not expected just to be a scheme. The sentences *“Thank you – thank you for being such a good sport”* (p. 4, l. 143) and *“Amelia gets bored to tears being hauled around Europe after us. She must have her little games.”* (p. 4, l. 145) makes the reader reconsider the whole story and introduces the conflict of the deception.

Lies have consequences, and they are inclined to hurt people, when they find out they have been fooled, no matter if the intention behind the lie is selfish or not. “Trio for four voices” is a great example on how lying can be egoistically used to play with people and mess with their heads.