

The Most Dangerous Game

Literary Analysis

Conflict is a battle between two powers:

- **External conflict:** a character fights with another character, the public, or nature.
- **Internal conflict:** a character fights with his or her own feelings, beliefs, needs, or desires.

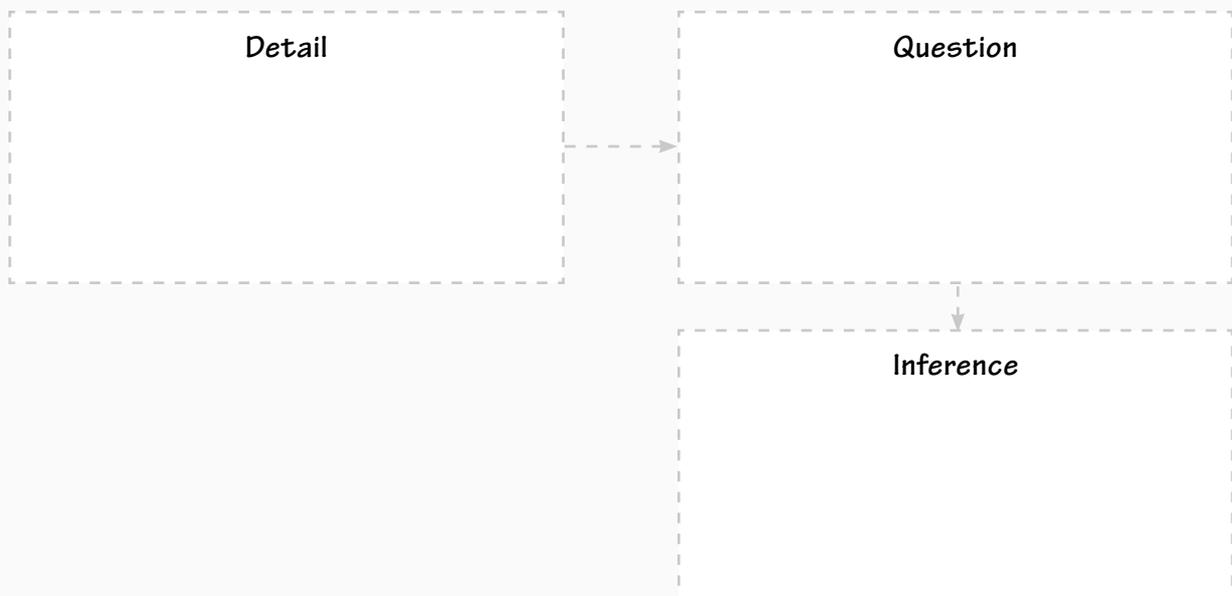
The end of a story usually provides a **resolution**, or an end, to the conflict. In some stories, the character has an **epiphany**, or a sudden understanding. The conflict does not end, but the character's feelings about it change.

Reading Skill

An **inference** is a logical guess based on details in a story. Making inferences about a text helps readers understand information that the author does not state. **Ask questions** like the following:

- *What does this detail show about the reasons for a character's actions or words?*
- *What does this passage say about the character's feelings?*

Use this chart to make inferences as you read.



The Most Dangerous Game

Richard Connell

Summary Rainsford is an expert hunter. While on a boat trip he falls overboard and swims to an island. There, he meets General Zaroff. Zaroff stocks the island with shipwrecked sailors. He hunts these men instead of animals. Rainsford refuses to join the hunt. As a result, Zaroff hunts Rainsford. Rainsford escapes and then returns to confront Zaroff.



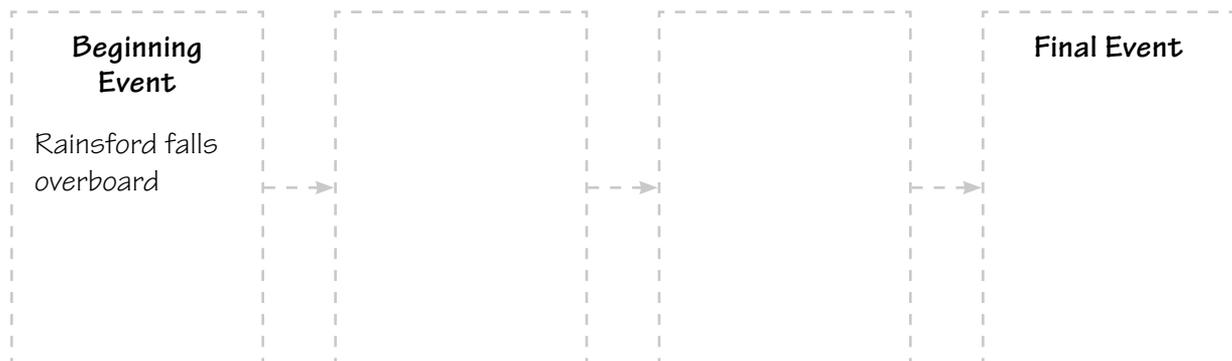
Writing About the Big Question

Is conflict necessary? In “The Most Dangerous Game,” a hunter faces a life-threatening conflict. Complete this sentence:

To succeed in a fight for survival, a person needs to _____

Note-taking Guide

Use this chart to recall the main events in the story.



The Most Dangerous Game

Richard Connell

Activate Prior Knowledge

Describe a time when someone else had different rules for playing a game. What happened in that situation?

Read Fluently

Underline Rainsford's remarks about the jaguars he hunts. What seems to be his attitude toward them? Circle the letter of the best answer below.

- (a) sympathy
- (b) respect
- (c) unconcern
- (d) rage

Reading Check

What "two classes" does Rainsford believe make up the world? Circle the words that tell you.

Sanger Rainsford is a famous hunter of big game, or large animals. He and another hunter named Whitney are sailing from the United States to South America. They will hunt large cats called jaguars in South America. Whitney surprises Rainsford by showing sympathy for the jaguars.

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"Don't talk rot,¹ Whitney," said Rainsford. "You're a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?"

"Perhaps the jaguar does," observed Whitney. "Bah! They've no understanding."

"Even so, I rather think they understand one thing—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are the hunters."

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They pass Ship-Trap Island. Whitney tells Rainsford that all of the sailors fear the place. Whitney goes to bed. Then, Rainsford hears gunshots from the island. He goes to the ship's rail to see better. It is dark. He strains to get a good view of the island. Then a rope knocks his pipe from his mouth. He tries to catch it, but he falls into the sea.

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Vocabulary Development

philosopher (fi LAH suh fuhr) *n.* a deep thinker

realist (REE uh list) *n.* someone who sees the world as it really is

1. rot nonsense.

For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more and then—

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror.

He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short.



Rainsford swims to shore with difficulty. Then, he falls asleep. The next day, he can see that a large animal was recently hunted nearby. He follows the hunter’s trail through the jungle. He comes to a mansion. At the door, a large and dangerous-looking servant points a gun at him. His name is Ivan. Then, another man appears.



“It is a very great pleasure to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home.”

Automatically Rainsford shook the man’s hand.

“I’ve read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see,” explained the man. “I am General Zaroff.”



Zaroff is a nobleman and a Cossack who left Russia after the revolution of 1917. After giving Rainsford a comfortable room, he and Rainsford eat together. Zaroff reveals that he is a lifelong hunter. He says he grew bored because the animals he hunted no longer had a chance against him.



Literary Analysis 

An **external conflict** occurs when a character struggles with an outside force. What is the external conflict that suddenly confronts Rainsford?

Reading Skill 

An **inference** is a logical guess based on details in a story. What can you infer from the screaming sounds coming out of the darkness?

Reading Check 

How does Zaroff recognize Rainsford? Underline the words that tell you.

Vocabulary Development

- strokes** (strohks) *n.* motions of the arms when swimming
- anguish** (ANG gwish) *n.* painful suffering
- vitality** (vy TAL uh tee) *n.* energy

TAKE NOTES

Reading Skill

What can you **infer** from this statement by Zaroff? “I needed a new animal. I found one.”

Literary Analysis

Conflict develops between Zaroff and Rainsford. What do they disagree about?

Read Fluently

Read Zaroff’s words in the bracketed section in the way you think he would say them. How do you think Rainsford feels while he listens to Zaroff’s words?

Reading Check

What must the man do to win the “game”? Underline the answer.

“I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purpose—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps—”

“But the animal, General Zaroff?”

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Rainsford does not immediately realize that Zaroff hunts people. Zaroff says his ideal quarry must be able to reason. Rainsford is shocked when he realizes Zaroff’s ideal quarry is a person.

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“I can’t believe you are serious, General Zaroff. . . .”

“Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting.”

“Hunting? General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder.”

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Zaroff says that he considers the men he hunts to be lowly men, not even as valuable as a good horse or dog.

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“But they are men,” said Rainsford hotly.

“Precisely,” said the general. “That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion.² So they are dangerous.”

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Zaroff tells Rainsford that the men he hunts come from ships wrecked off the island. They often come with the help of the lights he uses to trick them onto the rocks. Rainsford is shocked by what he is hearing from Zaroff.

Zaroff explains that he sends a man out with food and a knife. If he cannot find the man in three days, then the man wins. If Zaroff finds the man during the three days, he kills him. If they choose not to hunt, he turns them over to Ivan.

◆ ◆ ◆

2. **after a fashion** in their way.

“Suppose he refuses to be hunted?”

“Oh,” said the general, “I give him his option, of course. He need not play the game if he doesn’t wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honor of serving as official knouter³ to the Great White Czar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt.”

“And if they win?”

The smile on the general’s face widened. “To date I have not lost,” he said.



Rainsford refuses to join Zaroff in hunting a sailor that night. The next day he demands to leave. But Zaroff has other plans. He wants to hunt Rainsford.



“Tonight,” said the general, “we will hunt—you and I.”

Rainsford shook his head. “No, general,” he said. “I will not hunt.”

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. “As you wish, my friend,” he said. “The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan’s?”

He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

“You don’t mean—” cried Rainsford.



Rainsford is forced to agree. He takes his knife and food and heads into the jungle. There he creates a twisted trail that he

Literary Analysis 

An **internal conflict** occurs when a character fights with his or her own feelings or beliefs. Zaroff’s captives must decide whether to hunt or to face Ivan. How would making this decision present an internal conflict? Explain.

Reading Skill 

What do you **infer** will happen when Rainsford tells the general he will not hunt?

Stop to Reflect 

What is your opinion of Zaroff?

Vocabulary Development

scowling (SKOWL ing) *v.* looking at someone or something in an angry or a disapproving way

3. **knouter** (NOWT er) *n.* someone who beats criminals with a leather whip.

Reading Skill 

Read the bracketed passage.
What can you **infer** about Zaroff's abilities?

Stop to Reflect 

Zaroff escapes some of Rainsford's traps. How do you think Rainsford feels each time Zaroff escapes?

Literary Analysis 

Rainsford jumps into the sea. What **internal conflict** do you think ends with his decision to make this jump?

believes no one could follow. He then sleeps up in a tree. He is careful to leave no trace below. But later that night Zaroff appears. He is clearly able to follow the trail. He stops below the tree, looks up. Then he leaves.

Heading into the woods, Rainsford spots a dead tree leaning against a smaller tree. He uses his knife to build a trap. He wants the trap to cause a tree to crash down on Zaroff. Soon, Zaroff appears, following Rainsford's trail. However, Zaroff sees the trap in time. He escapes with only an injured shoulder. He calls out to Rainsford telling him he will be back.

Rainsford continues to try to get away. He comes to a swamp filled with quicksand. He digs a deep hole for another trap. Then, he hears Zaroff coming toward the trap. Again Zaroff escapes, but his dog falls into the quicksand pit.

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"Again you score, I think, Mr. Rainsford," called the general. "I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

◆ ◆ ◆

At sunrise, Zaroff returns with Ivan and the dog pack. Rainsford tries one last trick that he learned in Uganda. He ties his knife to a young tree that will serve as a spring when someone comes by. But the trap kills only Ivan. As Zaroff and the dogs continue to close in, Rainsford can do nothing but jump into the sea. Zaroff arrives at the place where Rainsford jumped. He shrugs and heads for home.

After dinner that night, Zaroff goes up to bed. When he switches on his light, Rainsford is standing in his room. Zaroff asks him how he got there. Rainsford says he swam.

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The general sucked in his breath and smiled. “I congratulate you,” he said. “You have won the game.”

Rainsford did not smile. “I am still a beast at bay,”⁴ he said, in a low hoarse voice. “Get ready, General Zaroff.”

The general made one of his deepest bows. “I see,” he said. “Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast⁵ for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . .”

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

Reading Skill 

Zaroff congratulates Rainsford on winning the game. What can you **infer** from Rainsford’s response?

Literary Analysis 

How is the **conflict** between Rainsford and Zaroff finally resolved?

Reading Skill 

What do you **infer** about Rainsford’s state of mind in the underlined sentence?

4. **at bay** cornered and forced to fight.
 5. **repast** (ri PAST) for the hounds: meal for the dogs.

The Most Dangerous Game

1. **Respond:** Think about Rainsford’s words and actions. What do you like or dislike about Rainsford? Explain.

2. **Speculate:** At the beginning of the story, Rainsford tells Whitney his attitude about hunted animals. How might his experience on the island change his attitude? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

3. **Literary Analysis:** The main **conflict** in the story is a “game” between Rainsford and Zaroff. In addition, Rainsford experiences other conflicts. Use this chart to record details about Rainsford’s conflicts with himself.

Rainsford vs. nature	Rainsford vs. himself
<p>Rainsford almost drowns in the sea.</p> <p>Rainsford battles the swamp.</p>	

4. **Reading Skill:** An **inference** is a logical guess based on details or events in the story. Write down one inference you made about Whitney.

Writing: Comparison-and-Contrast Essay

Write a **comparison-and-contrast** essay about “The Most Dangerous Game.” Use your notes from the following questions to make comparisons and contrasts.

- How are Whitney’s views of hunting and animals not like Rainsford’s?

- How are Rainsford’s views of hunting like and not like Zaroff’s? How do Rainsford’s views change by the story’s end?

Listening and Speaking: Oral Presentation

Use the following lines to create an oral presentation about two or three big-game species mentioned in “The Most Dangerous Game.”

Species #1: _____

Facts about this species: _____

Species #2: _____

Facts about this species: _____

Species #3: _____

Facts about this species: _____

Sources used: _____

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