Born of Man and Woman

Richard Matheson

Pre-reading

1. **Vocabulary: form a new word that fits in the gap.**
   Use the word in italics to form a new word that fits in the gap.
   a. A gene ________ is a permanent change in the DNA sequence that makes up a gene.  
      *to mutate*
   b. They saw a baby with a very rare facial ________.  
      *to deform*
   c. The expression “you little ________” is often used to describe poorly behaved children as a colourful but figurative way of saying “bad”.  
      *monstrous*
   d. Functional ________ is a term used to describe inadequate reading and writing skills.  
      *illiterate*
   e. What he wrote was still ________ though his handwriting was shaky.  
      *legibility*
   f. You can call a person ________ if he is disgusting and despicable.  
      *vileness*

4. **Find information on the internet about Freud’s model of the mind.**
   You may find the following link useful: [http://wilderdom.com/personality/L8-4StructureMindIdEgoSuperego.html](http://wilderdom.com/personality/L8-4StructureMindIdEgoSuperego.html)

Post-reading

**LEARNING CHECK**

1. **Say it!**

In groups of three: The first student names a square – for example B2 – and the second student in the group has to perform the task. Continue until all the tasks have been performed. When you are given a task, talk for at least one minute. If the student who has to perform the task needs help, he or she can ask the other students for help.
2. Role play

In groups, write the script for a role play where the parents discuss the situation and try to work out what to do. Perform your play. It should last 2 minutes.

TEXT-RELATED ASSIGNMENT

1. Written assignment

Write a continuation of the story. Use about 150 words.

WIDER CONTEXTS

1. Psychological context

Use Freud’s model of the mind to interpret the text (pre-reading task 4). Does this way of interpreting the story add to your understanding of it?

2. Literary context

Read a summary of Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” on the internet. You may find the following link useful: http://www.bookrags.com/notes/frk/SUM.html. Then read the following excerpt of an article about “Born of Man and Woman”. Do you agree that the two stories are similar in theme?
Born of Man and Woman” is also the story of a life created, only instead of in a lab it is by natural means. Something went wrong and a monster child was born to "normal" parents. These parents approach the situation in much the same way that Dr. Frankenstein and society approach the monster of that tale—with no compassion or understanding. They keep their eight-year-old child locked in the basement, chained to a wall. They beat him when he tries to peek upstairs or does other things they don't like. And like the monster in Shelley's story, the child is referred to as a “wretch”.

Beyond these superficial similarities, the two also share a common theme: the plight of one upon whom the door has been shut by family and society. Matheson leads us straight into the heart of this theme through the eyes of the shunned illiterate child, using poor grammar and a simple world view that allows us to put ourselves in the monster's shoes.

[...]

I feel that both have good souls and just want to be accepted. When they aren't they gradually turn away from their inherent goodness. Frankenstein's monster kills again and pledges revenge on the scientist who brought him into existence. Likewise, the monster of "Born of Man and Woman" decides at the end that the next time his parents beat him he will “hurt them”.

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/sf_and_society/54221

3. Literary context: Author’s comments

Read Richard Matheson’s own comments on the story. Why would he not be able to write the story today? Do his comments add anything to your understanding of the text?

MATHeson: I don't recall what the circumstances were of how I got the idea for "Born of Man and Woman". I think I just wanted to write a story about what would happen to an average set of parents if they had a monstrosity for a child. I did not mean for it to be science fiction. I assumed it was a fantasy, and as I have told people, I would not write it today, and I would not have written it for a long time in the past, simply because I could not have believed it with what I know now, having been a parent and having raised four children. I just wouldn't be able to accept the logistics of it, which would be unfortunate, because it works out pretty good, and it somehow became a classic in the field, even though it doesn't have that logic.

http://www.scifistation.com/matheson/matheson_index.html