

Abitur **MEHR  
ERFAHREN**

Englisch

Gymnasium · Gesamthochschule

Hessen

ab 2024

Das musst du können:

**STARK**

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### **Verfasst von:**

Rainer Jacob: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "Shooting an Elephant", "My Son the Fanatic", "Embassy of Cambodia", *The Circle*, *Othello*

Sonja Corleis: *Gran Torino*

# Vorwort

Liebe Schülerinnen und Schüler,

dieses handliche Skript bietet Ihnen umfassende Informationen zu allen **verbindlichen Materialien** (Pflichtlektüren und -film), die Sie für die **Abiturprüfung 2024 und 2025** im Fach Englisch kennen müssen. Die Schwerpunktlektüren überschneiden sich im Wesentlichen. Nur der **Film *To Kill a Mockingbird*** (Abitur 2024) wird für das Abitur 2025 durch den Film *Gran Torino* ersetzt. Das **Drama *Othello*** ist nur für Schülerinnen und Schüler des Leistungskurses relevant.

Dank der knappen, übersichtlichen Darstellung eignet sich das Skript besonders zur Auffrischung und Wiederholung des Prüfungsstoffs kurz vor dem Abitur:

- Zu jedem Werk finden Sie die wichtigsten **Fakten**, eine **Zusammenfassung der Handlung** und eine Übersicht über die zentralen **Figuren**.
- Unter „Themes and interpretation“ können Sie **Interpretationsansätze** zu den Werken nachlesen, die Ihnen bei der Bearbeitung von möglichen Abituraufgaben helfen können. Auch finden Sie hier die wichtigsten historischen und politischen Hintergründe.
- Zahlreiche **Schaubilder** und **Beispiele** helfen Ihnen, sich das Gelernte besser einzuprägen.

In einer der Textaufgaben wird von Ihnen verlangt, inhaltliche Aspekte aus dem Prüfungstext (den Sie im Abitur erstmals zu Gesicht bekommen) zu den verpflichtenden Materialien (die Sie aus dem Unterricht kennen) in Bezug zu setzen. Mit einer guten Textkenntnis können Sie hier Pluspunkte sammeln.

Viel Erfolg beim Lernen mit diesem Skript und im Abitur!



# “Shooting an Elephant”

## 1 Key facts about the short story

- **author:** George Orwell (real name Eric Blair, 1903–1950), born in India, where his father worked for the Indian Civil Service. Return to England in 1904, education at Eton public school. Served in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma from 1922–1927. First novel *Burmese Days* (1934). Disgusted by his first-hand experience of imperialism, Orwell left the service. In 1936 he went to Spain as a war correspondent. In 1950, George Orwell died of tuberculosis in London. His works include *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and his masterpieces *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).
- **year of publication:** 1936 in *New Writing* magazine
- **genre:** short story, essay – autobiographical elements
- **narrative technique:** first-person narration
- **setting:** Moulmein, Burma (now Myanmar)
- **time:** 1920s
- **content:** In Burma a crowd of local people provoke a young police officer from the British Imperial Police to shoot an elephant on the rampage. The police officer immediately regrets his deed.
- **explanation of the title:** An imperial police officer shoots an elephant, but due to his inexperience the death of the elephant is spent in long-drawn-out agony.

## 2 Plot

### I Exposition

- a young officer serves in the British Imperial Indian Police in a Burmese town

### II Rising action

- one day, a sub-inspector informs him that a tame elephant has gone “must” (the “must” is a period during which male adolescent elephants are more sexually active but also more aggressive, similar to female animals in “heat”)
- the beast is now at large ravaging the bazaar
- the Burmese ask for the police officer’s help because the keeper of the elephant is twelve hours away
- the keeper has taken the wrong route in his search for his animal
- the Burmese people need the officer’s protection because they have no weapons to defend themselves against the wild animal
- unsure how to act, the policeman eventually takes his old Winchester rifle
- he rides his pony to the area, a poor quarter, where the elephant has last been seen
- he finds a dead man lying in the mud who, the surrounding people tell him, was killed by the elephant
- the young officer now realises the danger of the situation, sends his pony back and gives the order for someone to bring him a proper elephant rifle
- news comes that the elephant has been spotted in the paddy fields nearby
- the young officer sets out, armed with the new weapon meant only for self-defence
- more and more people follow him with rising excitement, expecting a spectacular shooting of the elephant
- additionally, they hope to secure a piece of the animal’s meat for themselves
- the officer feels increasingly uncomfortable as he has no intention of killing the animal

**III Climax**

- when he sees the elephant grazing peacefully in a field he believes the “must” attack has passed
- he does not think the creature poses a danger any longer, so there is no need to shoot it
- however, the huge crowd of Burmese people put increasing pressure on the young man
- he feels trapped, realising that he has to play the role of the White man, the “sahib”, in order not to lose the respect of the Burmese
- against his own will, the young officer pulls the trigger and shoots at the animal
- as he is not an experienced big-game hunter, he aims at the wrong spot
- instead of killing the animal instantly, he merely wounds it severely
- he has to fire several shots into the elephant’s heart at close range

**IV Falling action**

- unable to watch the terrible death throes of the tortured creature, the young officer escapes from the scene
- he later learns that the elephant suffered great pain for half an hour until it eventually died
- the Burmese people brought baskets to collect the meat

**V Resolution**

- the furious protests of the Burmese owner of the elephant against the shooting of his animal are brushed aside by the authorities
- opinions among Europeans are divided
- older British people defend the young officer’s action, while younger ones disapprove of it (arguing that the life of the elephant was worth more than that of the Burmese man he killed)



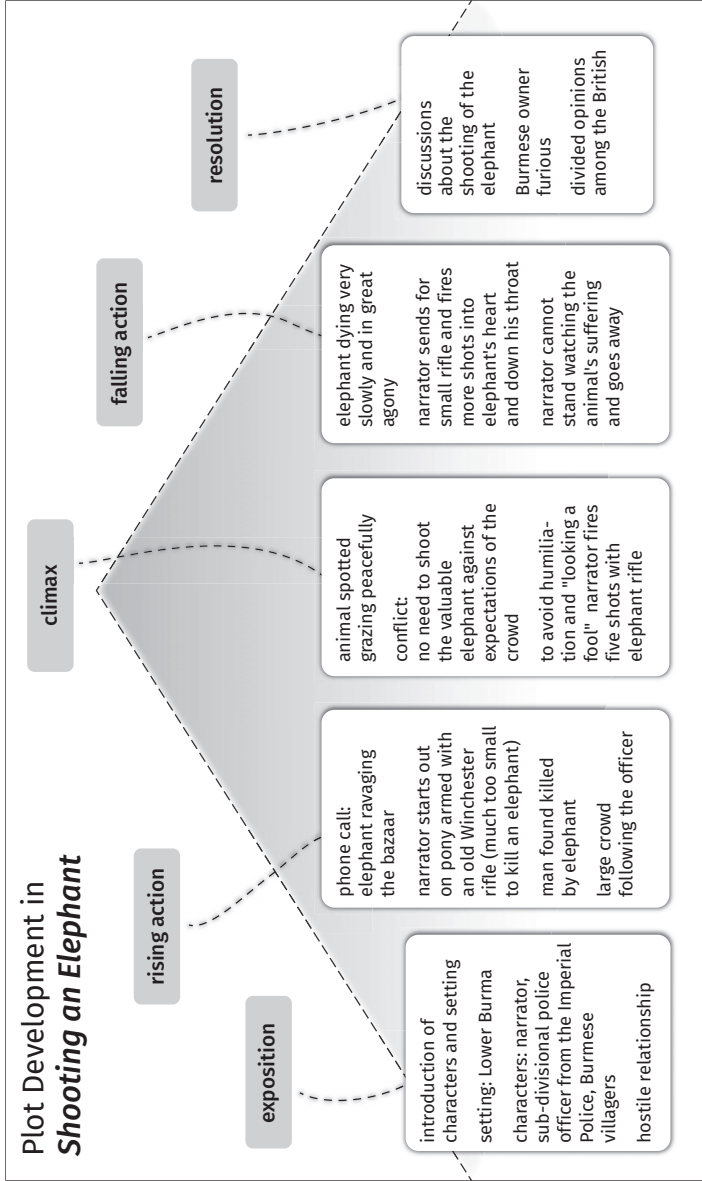
### 3 Characters

#### The first-person narrator

- the main character of the story is a young British police officer serving in the Indian (Imperial) Police in Burma (now Myanmar)
- he is still rather inexperienced and only holds this responsible position because he is a White European
- his relationship to the Burmese population is ambivalent and rather strained
- he hates them for being hostile and harassing Europeans, but, at the same time, he feels pity for them because of the brutal oppression by the British
- he is rather unprepared when the locals demand help with a mad elephant that is at large
- as a representative of the British Empire and the only person to own a gun he has to act
- because of his professional inadequacy and insecurity, he is never in control of the events
- the rising pressure from the Burmese crowd puts him in a moral dilemma
- he cannot confront the crowd and stop the cruel action which he believes is wrong
- he feels forced to play the role of the omnipotent White man
- to prove his superiority he succumbs to the demands and expectations of the greedy crowd and commits an act which violates his beliefs and convictions
- as a result, the oppressor has become the oppressed

#### The Burmese crowd

- the Burmese people who follow the narrator keep a close watch on the young officer's movements
- they act as a catalyst, changing the young officer's initial intention to spare the animal into needless and brutal aggression
- lusting after a spectacle and greedy for the elephant's meat, they force the policeman to act against his conscience



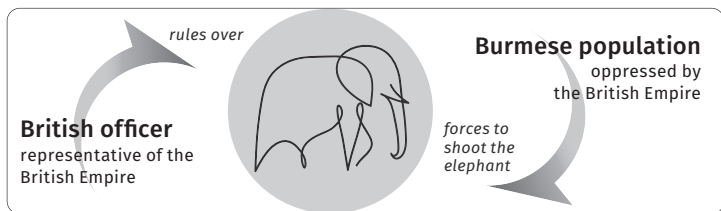
## 4 Themes and interpretation

### 4.1 The evils of colonialism

In "Shooting an Elephant", George Orwell illustrates the evils of colonialism, which corrupts both the oppressor and the oppressed, drawing on his **personal experience** while serving in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma (now Myanmar). The country had become part of the **British Empire** in 1886 and was administrated as a **British colony**. Orwell uses the essay to express and illustrate his anti-imperialist opinion in general and specifically his condemnation of the British Empire.

#### Depiction in the story

- the narrator makes it clear "that imperialism [is] an **evil thing**"
- although he defends the Empire at one point, comparing it favourably to its possible successors ("it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it"), he deplores the cruel treatment of the colonial subjects
- he feels pity for the Burmese population because of the brutal oppression they suffer but hates them for the hostile behaviour they show towards the British
- because of the pressure the crowd puts on him he cannot follow his natural impulse and spare the elephant
- he acts like a puppet to satisfy the hostile crowd's lust for a spectacle
- the oppressed Burmese compel the young policeman to shoot the elephant against his own inner convictions
- thus, the Empire – and Imperialism in general – degrades and corrupts both the governors and the governed



## 4.2 Symbols

Elements in the text can be interpreted as symbols hinting at more general ideas and concepts. Although there is no final solution and the symbols are often inconsistent, it is possible to attribute some symbolic meaning to the main character and the elephant. The awkward and hostile relationship between the rulers and the ruled generated a typical kind of behaviour among British officials in the colonies. Generally, the Europeans had no personal contact with the local population but kept to themselves, preserving their particular English way of life and developing a special kind of **expatriate lifestyle**. Seeing themselves as the undisputed lords of the world, many British people looked down on the indigenous population and showed blatant racist tendencies. It was important for the British “to play the White man” and always to keep a safe distance from the “uncivilised natives”.

### Depiction in the story

The **police officer** could be viewed as a symbol of the British rulers’ moral decline and loss of freedom to make decisions:

- the narrator **rejects the British Empire** despite being a part of it
- he condemns “the dirty work of Empire” and feels “an intolerable sense of guilt”
- despite his reservations and aversion to killing the peaceful creature, he gives in to the demands of the greedy crowd
- although the animal is no longer a threat, he shoots it to impress the Burmese crowd

*When the White man turns tyrant, it is his own freedom that he destroys. He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it.*





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