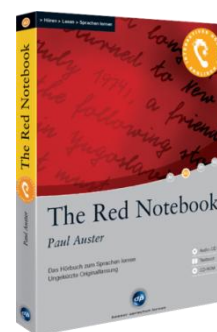


The Red Notebook

Paul Auster



Notes for the teacher

If you like, share some information on the author with your students.

The author

Paul Benjamin Auster (born February 3, 1947) is an American author and director whose writing blends absurdism, existentialism, crime fiction, and the search for identity and personal meaning. ***The Red Notebook*** is a collection of 16 stories and anecdotes written in 1995, and they are true stories gathered from Auster's life as well as the lives of his friends and acquaintances. They all have one thing in common: the paradox of coincidence, and that everyone and everything is somehow, mysteriously, connected to each other. The 16 stories can be dealt with individually; there is no obligatory reading sequence.

For further information please see <http://us.macmillan.com/author/paulauster>

Students should have a level of B1/B2 to be able to fully understand Paul Auster's stories.

General introduction

Independent of the story you choose, you can introduce the topic like this:

Start your lesson by showing the CD and the booklet and eliciting the meaning of *notebook*.

Some students might think of a small laptop computer so this is a good occasion for pointing out that originally it is a kind of thin paper booklet for noting down things you would like to remember.

Write down *notebook*, *diary*, and *blog* on the board and elicit the meaning of the words.

Do the partner interview (Hand out one sheet per team of two, Person A and Person B.)

Depending on the time available, students can interview each other asking all the questions, or choosing their favourite questions only.

Students interview each other and report back on one or two interesting facts they found out.

If you choose to work with Story 10, p. 31, hand out one worksheet per student. Go through the worksheet with your students and stop and replay the recording at the indicated spots.

Student's sheet for the partner interview

Partner interview person A

- 1) Do you use paper notebooks for remembering things? What do you write down?
- 2) Have you ever written a diary? Why? Why not?
- 3) If you wrote a blog, what would the topic be?
- 4) Do you know someone who writes a travel diary? Or has photo albums of their holiday trips? Are there any written notes in there?
- 5) Have you ever read a book in diary format, like "Bridget Jones's Diary"? What was it like?

Partner interview person B

- 1) When you were a teenager, did you write a diary? What were the topics?
- 2) When you travel, do you take notes on what you did and what you saw?
- 3) Have you ever written a blog? If not, would you?
- 4) If you were a writer, what kind of stories would you write?
- 5) Do you sometimes read your old diaries? Is it interesting? If not – would it be interesting?

Student's Worksheet for story no. 10

Before the listening

1. What do you think is the topic of this story?
 - a. a flat tire
 - b. bad weather
 - c. travelling by plane



© iStock/ErikaMitchell

2. Here are some key words from the story.
tire, flat, station wagon, bad luck, coincidence, emblem.
Check the words in your dictionaries and compare.

3. Now listen from the beginning to "... we were close.", then answer the following questions.

3.1. The author and J. are:

- a. neighbours
- b. brothers
- c. old friends
- d. colleagues

3.2. Where does most of the story take place?

- a. on airplanes
- b. on trains
- c. in cars

3.3. The real topic of the story is

- a. friendship
- b. friendliness
- c. unfriendly people

Please listen again and compare with your partner.

Now listen until "... out of my mind".

4. Match the sentence beginnings and endings

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1) J and the author | a) through the wilderness of Quebec. |
| 2) They drove | b) he and J had a flat tire again in the South France. |
| 3) Five years later | c) borrowed the author's father's station wagon. |

Listen again and check.

Now listen to the end of the story.

5. The next flat tire happened in _____ .
6. They wanted to go to the store and _____ .
7. They hadn't even left _____ .
8. Now listen to the complete story again and answer the following questions, then compare with your partner:
 - 8.1. How does the author feel about this series of bad luck?
 - 8.2. What did the flat tires do to their friendship?
 - 8.3. Do you think it was pure coincidence that the author had four flat tires, always with the same person in the car? Or is there something like predestination?
 - 8.4. Have you ever had a flat tire? Or someone you know? When and where was that?

Key

1 a | 3.1. c | 3.2. c | 3.3. a | 4. 1c, 2a, 3b |

5) The next flat tire happened in New York State.

6) They wanted to go to the store and shop for dinner.

7) They hadn't even left the house.

8.1. He feels that the series of four flat tires is not meaningless.

8.2. He feels that in "some perverse way" the flat tires were an emblem for their friendship because J and he have lost contact and have never spoken to each other again.

8.3. and 8.4. Students' individual answers