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**Auszug aus:**

*"Marlene" Katherine S. Prichard*

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**Thema:***Marlene – Katharine Susannah Prichard***TMD:****Kurzvorstellung des Materials:**

- Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) was an Australian authoress. She worked as a journalist in Victoria, was a founding member of the Australian Communist Party and wrote award-winning short stories, novels and plays. Her works principally depict social roles of lower-class citizens in Australia (aborigines, half-castes, workers, and, back then, women)
- The short story „Marlene“ tells about the life of half-castes in Australia, their poor living conditions, their social problems and their relationship towards the whites

**Übersicht über die Teile**

- Tasks to the text and optional solutions (regarding content, character analysis, historical background)
- Sources

**Information zum Dokument**

- Ca. 7 Seiten

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## Quellenhinweis

Die Short Story ist einer Kurzgeschichtensammlung (Jose, Nicholas (2009): “The literature of Australia – an anthology“, W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London) entnommen. Alle Seitenangaben beziehen sich auf dieses Buch. Die Sammlung enthält zwei weitere Kurzgeschichten:

- Price Warung, “How Muster-Master Stoneman Earned His Breakfast”
- Henry Lawson, “The Drover’s Wife”

„Marlene“ ist u.a. in folgenden Bänden erschienen:

- Australian Short Stories von Arthur Kutsch von Klett (Taschenbuch - Oktober 2010)
- Short Stories of the Australian Experience: Textbook - Broschiert (August 2010) von Thomas Rau
- Short Stories from Down Under. (Lernmaterialien) von Arthur Kutsch von Klett (Taschenbuch – 2001)

## “Marlene”

- The short story „Marlene“ lets the reader visit a desolate camp of half-castes in Australia and invites to explore it through the eyes of a white woman, Mrs. Boyd. Boyd is looking for Mollie, a half-caste girl who worked at her farm. Eventually, Mrs. Boyd finds out that 16-year-old Mollie gave birth to a baby called “Marlene“, an incident which again convinces Boyd that the social group Mollie belongs to is not trustworthy. Mrs. Boyds negative attitude towards the half-castes reflects the relationship between whites and half-castes in general.

## Tasks

1. **Write a short summary of the story**
2. **What are the main topics? Explain briefly.**
3. **Make a list of the social problems half-castes are confronted with**
4. **Find examples of stylistic devices which illustrate the half-caste camp and the living conditions there and analyze which impression they create.**
5. **Analyze the Characters Boyle, Molly and Albert. What does the way they are presented tell about the relationship between whites and half-castes in general?**
6. **Find allusions to the identity of Marlenes father in the text and try to find out who he is.**
7. **Rewrite the meeting between Molly and Mrs. Boyd from Mollys point of view. What might Molly think and feel when she’s confronted with Mrs. Boyd’s questions?**
8. **Does K.S. Prichard tell the story objectively or does she seem to have an attitude towards the topic?**
9. **How are the living conditions of half-castes in Australia today? Inform yourself if anything has improved within the last decades.**

## Optional solutions

### 1. Write a short summary of the story

Two white women, Mrs. Boyd and Miss Allison, visit a camp of half-castes in the Australian outback – with different intentions. Mrs. Boyd, a countrywoman, is looking for Mollie, a 16-year-old half-caste girl who works at her farm and has disappeared. Miss Allison, a British author, plans to write a book about aborigines and hopes to gather information about the native's living conditions.

This camp in particular reveals extraordinarily bad living conditions: the provisionally constructed huts hardly protect their occupants from constant rain, the half-castes are dressed in dirty rags and are not allowed to shift their camp to a more suitable location.

Mrs. Boyd repeatedly demands information about Mollie's whereabouts, but the half-castes avoid to answer her obviously disturbing questions and try to distract her by changing the topic, which leads Boyd to the assumption that they know very well where Mollie is, why she is hiding and why this information should be withheld.

Since the crowd offers Boyd news and entertaining camp gossip in order to veil the unanswered question, the reader is provided with fragmental information about the camp and its people, about the high unemployment and criminality rates, about alcohol abuse and, in general, widespread dissatisfaction. Additionally, the camp's rebellious mouthpiece Albert informs about possible historical and social reasons for the disastrous circumstances under which his people have to live.

Even though the camp inhabitants manage throughout the story to keep the initial question unanswered, Mrs. Boyd eventually finds out where Mollie is: the girl appears suddenly on the scene with a newborn baby in her arms, which she calls „Marlene“. She doesn't specifically name the baby's father. Mrs. Boyd is outraged, the incident once more convinces her that half-castes are immoral and dishonorable, that they should be moved out of the district as soon as possible – which, referring to the last sentence of the story, is realized by the end of the month.

### 10. What are the main topics? Explain briefly.

In the short story „Marlene“, the problematic relationship between whites and half-castes with aboriginal and white ancestors is thematized, a controversial subject which has been discussed ever since it has been raised and is still of importance in the modern Australian society.

The white race is convinced of its superiority over Aborigines and half-castes, primarily the latter are used as servants on farms without the right to be well-paid or gain a higher-class employment. The majority of the half-castes, being half-aboriginal and half-white, struggles to find its identity and is neither accepted by

whites nor by Aborigines as their own kind. Since half-castes are not respected, since they hardly find jobs, since they are forced to live in camps which are arbitrarily moved and therefore can't offer a constant shelter, since they inherited the longing for an European way of life by their white fathers or mothers, a way of life they are not allowed to live, social problems such as feelings of boredom, hopelessness and valuelessness, alcohol or drug abuse and an increasing criminality rate are very likely to occur.

These circumstances generate a vicious circle: half-castes are born and raised under disadvantageous conditions, their predominantly insufficient education and their social status doesn't allow them to become a respected member of the (white) society, they are therefore unable to develop their capabilities, which doesn't give hope for improvement for the following generation.

### 11. Make a list of the social problems half-castes are confronted with

- being treated without respect by the whites
- living between two worlds and belonging to neither one of them
- no access to proper education
- not allowed to get any job they want
- if they manage to find work (generally as servants), they are badly paid
- high unemployment rate, little money
- few possibilities to change their situation, not much hope
- feelings of inferiority, of being trapped and abused by the white race
- boredom
- alcohol and/or drug abuse
- high criminality rate
- their former land is now almost completely property of whites. There doesn't remain much space for half-castes, fishing or hunting is considered as theft.

### 12. Find examples of stylistic devices which illustrate the half-caste camp and the living conditions there and analyze which impression they create.

In the beginning of the story, the camp is described with vivid imagery: personifications like „it [the camp] crouched among rocks and wet undergrowth“ (p. 379), metaphores like „crude shells with open mouths [the huts]“, „a breath of smoke“ (p. 379), and „We ought to be ducks“ (p. 380) create an intense, sinister atmosphere and introduce the camp as if it was an evil organism. The language is enriched by alliterations such as „grey with grime and grease“ (p. 379). The descriptions of the setting contribute to the atmosphere of the whole story.

On page 382, Prichard illustrates the obvious social differences between Boyd and the half-castes by comparing the outer appearances of Boyd and a half-caste-



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