

## "The Psychopath Next Door"

**QUIZ:** Are you a psycho?! Read the following statements and circle the answer that best describes you.

1. I get bored easily. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
2. I'm a very confident person. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
3. I don't really care what people think. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
4. If I have a problem at work or college, I blame someone else. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
5. I have problems controlling my anger. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
6. I remember telling lies when I was a child. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
7. I have long-term relationships. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
8. I spend a lot of time on my physical appearance. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
9. I love to be the centre of attention. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
10. I only speak to my family when necessary. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
11. If I have the opportunity to steal something without being caught, I'll do it.  
**Yes / Sometimes / No**
12. I have an excellent 'poker-face'. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
13. I often feel guilty for something I've done or said. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
14. I over-exaggerate my achievements to impress people. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
15. My friends think I'm cold. **Yes / Sometimes / No**
16. People find me charismatic. **Yes / Sometimes / No**

### Scoring

**3 points = Yes**

**2 points = Sometimes**

**0 points = No**

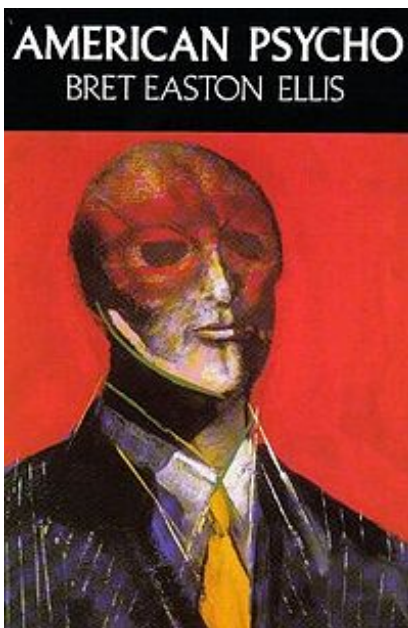
### Results

**0 -20 You're pretty normal**

**30 - 40 You display mild psychopathic tendencies.**

**40+ You lack empathy, are highly manipulative, and disregard the law. Therapy is unlikely to help you.**

## Reading



Psychopaths and serial killers have been the subject of endless fascination and the staple of Hollywood films and TV series for many years. Their behavior is often glorified, and some have even become pop culture celebrities. In fact, if you do a search of the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) using the keyword ‘psychopath’, a staggering 1,135 films and TV series come up. [1].

The subject isn’t only dealt with on the screen, but also in books: *The Millennium Trilogy* by Steig Larsson has sold an amazing 65 million copies worldwide [2]. And our interest isn’t limited to these characters’ lives and crimes: serial-killer artifacts, such as their identity-cards, drawings and, even more bizarrely, nail-clippings and pubic hair have become highly collectable and are known as ‘murderabilia’. But why do the public have such a morbid interest in psychopaths and serial killers?

Perhaps one reason is because we can indulge feelings of both attraction and repulsion within a safe environment. According to Schmid [3], a doctoral candidate of Modern Thought and Literature at Stanford University: ‘Reading a book or watching a film about a serial killer allows those in the audience to fantasize about being such a person, capable of killing without guilt or remorse. But at the same time, a film like *Silence of the Lambs* reflects our own normality back to us. We can watch it and say “My God, that man’s crazy!” and the implied message is “Thank goodness I’m so normal”.’

But what *is* a psychopath? People often tend to use the term as a synonym for a ‘crazy’ person, and the dictionary defines a psychopath as ‘a person suffering from chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behaviour’. It may surprise you to know that there is no official clinical definition, as there are so many factors involved. Generally speaking, psychopaths are confident, charming, egocentric, irresponsible people who exhibit a lack of empathy, generally blame other people for their own problems, and often behave in an anti-social and even violent manner. The condition is thought to be genetic, rather than something that develops as a result of life experiences.

So now that we know what one is, what are your chances of meeting one? Well, it can depend on where you work. According to the Chartered Financial Analyst Institute magazine [4], on Wall Street and within other sectors of the financial industry - especially where enormous amounts of money can be made - an incredible 10% of traders exhibit psychopathic tendencies. These ‘financial psychopaths’, as they are sometimes known, often become successful in their fields by exploiting these very traits.

However, fortunately this percentage drops considerably for the the general population: only about 1% exhibit such tendencies, which seems like a very low number ... until you realise that for every 100 Facebook friends you have, one of them may be a psychopath!

[1]. <http://www.imdb.com/>

[2]. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-16110375>

[3] <http://news.stanford.edu/pr/94/940531Arc4242.html>

[4] CFA Institute Magazine March/April 2012, Vol. 23, No. 2  
<http://www.cfapubs.org/toc/cfm/2012/23/2#Feature+Stories>

## Exercises

### Gist-reading task

Read through the text quickly, and answer this question:

According to the article, how probable is it that you know a psychopath?

### Reading comprehension

Now read the text again and decide if these sentences are True or False, according to the writer.

1. Serial killers are sometimes shown in a positive light. T / F
2. People are only interested in psychopaths' personal history. T / F
3. People are interested in psychopaths because we identify with them. T / F
4. Doctors are in agreement as to what a psychopath is. T / F
5. Psychopaths are born that way. T / F

### Vocabulary

Look at these extracts from the text, and replace the underlined adjectives with an antonym (a word which has the opposite meaning) from the box:

*insignificant   believable   unsuccessful   healthy   peaceful   offensive*

1. ...a staggering 1,135 films and TV series come up... [paragraph 1]
2. ...but why do the public have such a morbid interest... [paragraph 2]
3. ...an anti-social and even violent manner... [paragraph 4]
4. ...psychopaths are confident, charming, egocentric... [paragraph 4]
5. ...especially where enormous amounts of money can be made... [paragraph 5]
6. ...often become successful in their fields... [paragraph 5]

## Notes for teachers

These notes are only a guide. You're welcome to adapt the text or activities for your class' needs.

### Recommended Level

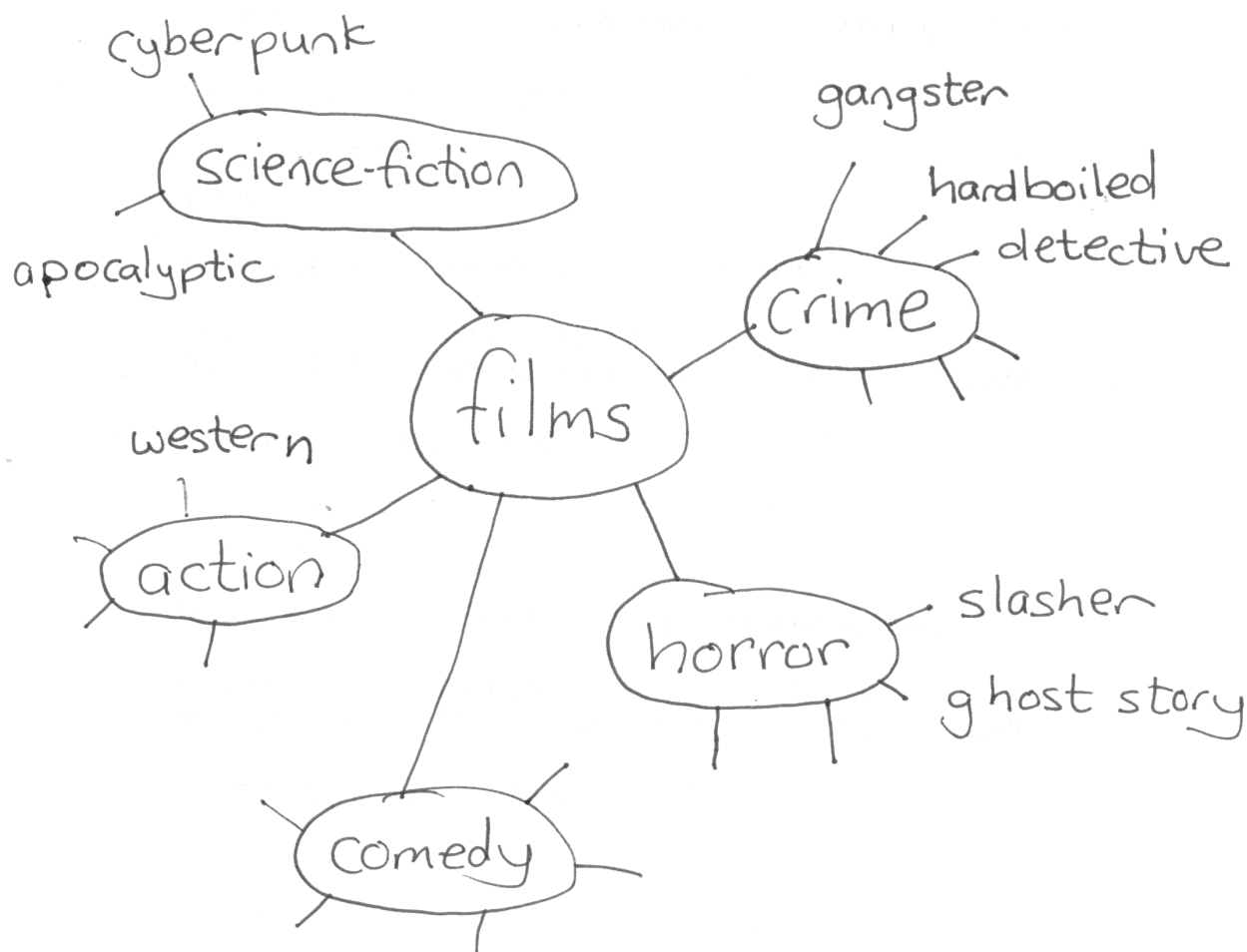
Intermediate +

### Warm-up Options

**Option 1:** Ask your class if they like films and who their favourite actors are. Bring in pictures of film stars or show them on a computer screen or tablet and ask students to clap/cheer depending how much they like them.

You could use this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43Dbne3ywWA>

**Option 2:** Ask the class to brainstorm different genres of film. Write them on the board, using a mind-map to show the categories. Your board should look something like this:



**Lead-in Options**

**Option 1:** Tell class that your favourite actor is Anthony Hopkins and ask if anyone has heard of him. Say that you loved his portrayal of Hannibal Lector. Ask students why they think these films about psychopaths are so popular.

**Option 2:** Tell class you are a fan of police/cop shows on the TV. Ask if anyone watches *CSI* or *The Mentalist*, and ask why they are so popular.

**Pre-Reading Activities**

1. Tell students they are going to read a passage called ‘The psychopath next-door.’ Ask students to write down 10 words they think they’ll find in the passage and explain them to a partner.

2. Write these questions on the board. Have students work in pairs/small groups to discuss them:

- a) Why do you think people are fascinated with serial killers and psychopaths?
- b) What traits do they have?
- c) How are they usually portrayed on the screen (in TV and film)?

3. Students do the quiz. Compare the results, ask if anybody was surprised by the results.

**Gist Reading**

Set up the gist-reading task from page 3.

**Answer to Gist Reading:**

*It depends where you work. If you work in the financial sector it’s 1 in every 10 people. For the rest of the population it’s only 1 out of every 100 people. It depends on how many people you know.*

**Reading Comprehension**

Set up reading comprehension task from page 3.

**Answers to Reading Comprehension:**

- 1. **True.** Their behavior is often glorified, and some have even become pop culture celebrities.
- 2. **False.** And our interest isn’t limited to these characters’ lives and crimes: serial-killer artifacts, such as their identity-cards, drawings and, even more bizarrely, nail-clippings and pubic hair have become highly collectable.
- 3. **False.** We think “My God, that man’s crazy!” and the implied message is “Thank goodness I’m so normal.”
- 4. **False.** It may surprise you to know that there is no official clinical definition.
- 5. **True.** The condition is thought to be genetic.

**Vocabulary Answers**

- Staggering ≠ believable
- Morbid ≠ healthy
- Violent ≠ peaceful
- Charming ≠ offensive
- Enormous ≠ insignificant
- Successful ≠ unsuccessful

If you have any fast-finishers in the class, ask them to put the adjectives in the correct columns according to the stress:

Oo	Ooo	oOo	ooOo	ooOo

## Extension activities

Here are a few follow-up listening texts if you want to extend the lesson:

The monster within - 45 min documentary on serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QywKy2VF1pA> (US accents)

45 min Documentary on Fred and Rose West (UK accents)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ouhoy6QI3CY>

The Pig Farm: Robert Pickton Serial Killer 1.30 mins Documentary (Canadian accents)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyr1stchTZI>