LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER
BY ROALD DAHL
LESSON, ACTIVITY, & VIDEO!
You may recognize Roald Dahl from some of his famous stories for children, some of which have been made into movies. However, he has also written a great deal of short fiction for adults.
Based on the title of this short story, "Lamb to the Slaughter", make a prediction about the plot!

MY PREDICTION IS...
Do you think that murder can ever be justified? Why or why not?
I will stop from time to time to ask you to predict what will happen next.
FEEDBACK

What is your initial impression of this story? Did you enjoy it?

How do you feel about the main character, Mrs. Maloney?

How do you feel about Mr. Maloney?
If you were in Mrs. Maloney's position how do you think you would have reacted?

Keep in mind: You are completely and madly head over heels in love with someone who has just broken your heart. You are hormonal/more sensitive because of the pregnancy.
Let's analyze this story more closely
1. What do the first few paragraphs of the story suggest about Mary Maloney’s relationship with her husband?

1. Before the husband breaks the news, what three clues are there that this particular evening is going to be a break with routine?

1. Do you think the murder was “premeditated” or a “crime of passion”? Give examples from the text to support your answer.

1. Is it reasonable that the policemen should be fooled by what she says (remember she is a policeman’s wife) or do you find the whole thing rather unlikely?

1. Do you think Mary Maloney is a “normal” person? Did she react in a normal way? Why or why not?
The first few paragraphs reveal a marriage that follows a predictable routine. Mary waits blissfully for her husband who arrives home at the same time every day. She is described as tranquil, placid, and smiling. Her happiness is evident as she gets up immediately to greet him when her husband arrives. As far as the reader knows at this point, they are living in marital bliss.
2. Three clues that this evening is a break in routine:

- Mr. Maloney is drinking much more than usual.

- He is speaking very rudely to her ("Sit down", "No").

- She continues to ask him questions, but he ignores her. This is not ordinary behavior. It states that "Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign."
Questions 3, 4, and 5 are opinion questions, so the answers will vary. Students should support their ideas with evidence from the text and provide a clear argument.
This short story is a dark comedy which means it has elements of both comedy and tragedy.
She is the typical obedient, kind, loving housewife who does everything for her husband. She is six months pregnant. When she is shocked by the news that her husband is leaving her, she kills him with a leg of lamb. During this time, she is acting automatically (without thinking). Soon after, we learn that she is a very intelligent and clever woman since she covers up her crime and outwits many investigators. Some people argue that at the end of the story Mrs. Maloney represents the radical feminist – opposite to the usual woman in literature who is very weak and passive.
One of the themes of this story is guilt. There is a lot of discussion as to whether Mrs. Maloney was a crazed and evil woman who killed her husband, or whether she was a woman who took the law into her own hands. Some think she simply punished her husband for being unappreciative and leaving her while she was six months pregnant, while others see her as a cruel murderer.
Another theme of this story is identity. This story shows the importance of having your own identity. Mrs. Maloney defined herself by her husband and lived her life for him. As a result, when left her, she felt that she no longer had her own identity which may have pushed her to her violent actions.
Dramatic irony occurs when the audience or reader is aware of something that one or more characters are not aware of. In this story, when the policemen are eating the leg of lamb we, the reader, are aware that this is the murder weapon (evidence) but the policemen are not. This is ironic!
VIDEO
Click the image below to watch the video of Lamb To The Slaughter

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1sBQZfDh0I