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**Standalone Test**

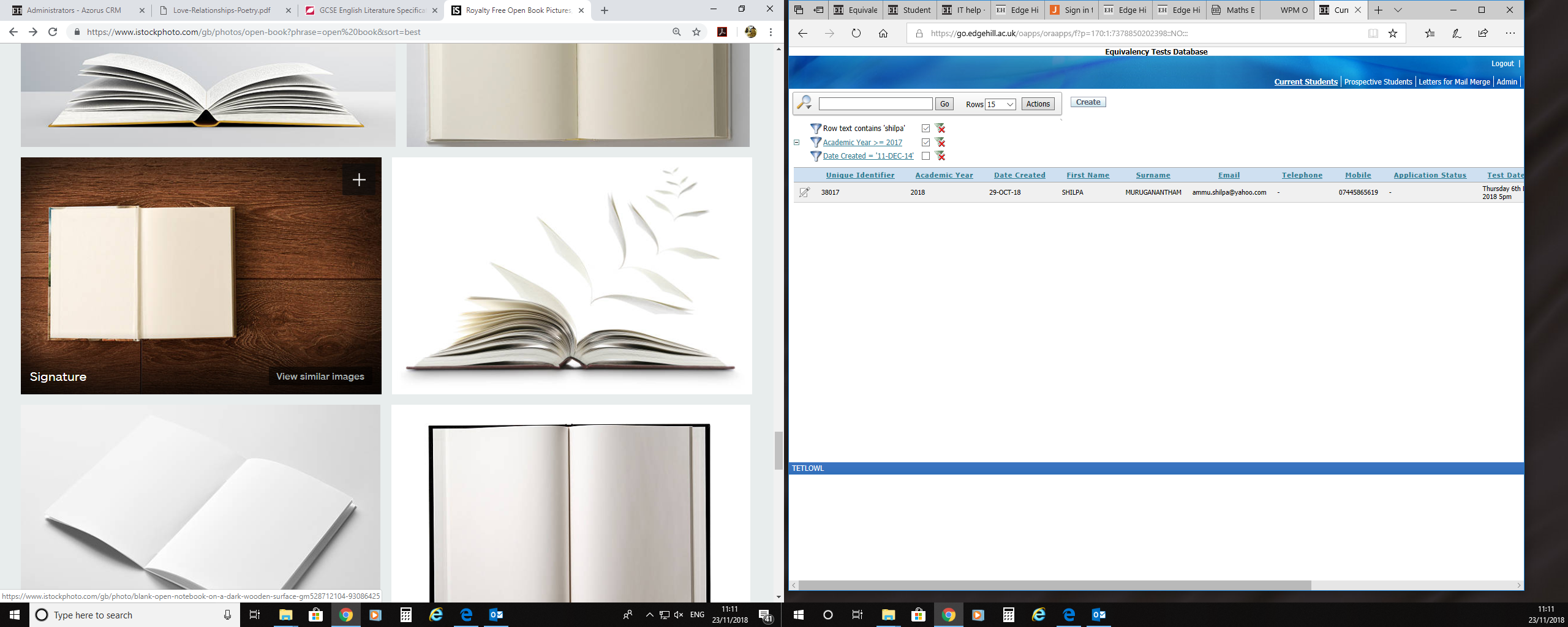
**Revision Support**

**GCSE English**

**Equivalency Exam**

**Prose:**

**Creative Writing**



For tests from September 2019 onwards

Version 2

1 September 2025

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**PROSE:**

**CREATIVE WRITING**

You will be asked to write the opening of a short story.

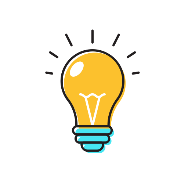
**Creative Writing**

Important! The *Elements of a Short Story* chapter (page 84) will also help you with this assessment.

Remember that you are not being assessed on how entertaining your story is; more importantly you are being assessed on your standard and competency of written English.

You will not have time to write a complete story from start to finish. It would be advisable to concentrate on the opening and middle of the story (if time permits).

image: bowie15



**How will I think of an idea?**

Do not worry about this as you will be given a visual stimulus in the examination. For example:

A person walking on a beach



Your local newspaper is holding a creative writing competition.

Describe the journey this character is taking illustrated by this picture or you may choose to focus on the setting and imagery.

**(10 marks)**

image: Nathan Peterson

**Beginning a Story:**

When you write a story, it is important to make an impact right from the start and engage the

reader.

Remember to:

• Make the opening dramatic so that the reader is compelled to want to continue reading.

• Take the reader straight into the story.

* Incorporate literary/poetic devices, as studied in pages 74 - 80.

You could include a character.

Some writers like to include:

* Physical description. e.g. his face was as dirty like a lump of ...
* Profession (if they have one).
* Description of their dwelling.
* Personality (emotions, habits, quirks, etc).
* Dialogue.

Use sensory imagery: what can the character see, hear, taste, smell and touch/feel.

**You could include a setting.**

A vivid setting and atmosphere will help to create a mood for your story. What is the weather like?

# Ways to start a story:

Stories can begin in different ways. They can start with: description of a character, description

of the setting, action or dialogue.

* Describing the setting: e.g. *“Thick fog surrounded the church*.”
* Describing a character: the main person in the story. Remember how you describe them must have an impact on the story. For example, “*Sam was an unlucky boy…”*

being unlucky must have an impact on the story line- e.g. Sam loses his wallet etc…

(catalyst).

* Action: Straight into the excitement, characters are doing something, e.g. “*He kicked the door open...”*
* Dialogue: The characters are speaking to each other, e.g. *“I can’t find it! Did you take it?” he yelled desperately and then began to pull out several items from the suitcase.*

## Middle of the Story

The middle of the story must keep the reader’s attention. Continue the action, develop the characters and story line. Remember to start a new paragraph when something changes.

### Ways to start new paragraphs

* Change of setting: The action in the story happens in another place.
* Change of time: The story moves on to another time that day or the next day etc…
* Change of person: A new character is introduced.
* Change of event: Something new happens in the plot.

## Ending a Story

The conclusion of a story is vital.,

* Draw all the threads of the story together.
* Resolve any conflict within the story.

# Ways to end a story

* **Conclusive**: Draw to an end all the events that have happened in the story.
* **Cliff – hanger**: Leave the reader in suspense, wondering what will happen next.
* **Reflective**: The narrator or a character, thinks about something that has happened

in the story. Direct speech may be included.

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Stories are the way we most enjoy hearing and learning about the complex events in the world. From childhood, stories have been the best way we have of being able to shape and make sense of experience and the world: a world that (at least to a child) is disordered and potentially hostile.

We like to tell and hear stories because not only do they fascinate, entertain, engage and involve us (we can usually relate to one or more characters within them) but they allow us the pleasure of learning something new. Furthermore, they permit us to simplify complex aspects of life by making an outcome appear to be the result of a series of “cause and effect” events. When reading a story we derive much pleasure of predicting outcomes (what will happen next…)

We enjoy the emotion that stories offer us: being involved, concerned and having a sense of expectation. A narrative is a simplified representation of a real (or imagined) event told to make the event more interesting, realistic and, often – very oddly – more believable. But short stories are made to be far more economical and coherent than reality can ever offer; economical because we only want to hear about details that seem to lead to a final outcome; coherent because we want to believe that outcomes are the result of a sequence of connected events

The traditional story derives its power from characters, action and plot; it has a beginning, middle and an end. However it must be remembered that not all stories are like this; some are experimental. The distinguishing factor between a short story and a novel is length.

The brevity of a short story permits variations and experiments that would be difficult to sustain throughout the much longer course of a novel. A short story can focus on sketching a character, evoking a mood, presenting a slice of life, a fragment of experience. Therefore a short story is exactly that -*short*;it can vary from a hundred words or less (flash fiction) to 5000 words.

**ELEMENTS OF THE SHORT STORY**

The key ingredients for a short story are:

* **Plot**
* **Point of view**
* **Characters**
* **Setting**
* **Theme**

**PLOT**

Many students become confused when asked to distinguish between story and plot. Let us look at the following:-

The dictionary definition (Oxford dictionary, 2010) of *plot* is, ' **the main events of a play, novel, film, or similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence.’**

Perhaps the following example will help:

If an author writes, "*The king died and then the queen died*," there is no plot for a story. But by writing, *"The king died and then the queen died of grief,"* the writer has provided a plot line for a story.

The plot is what drives the story. The plot would then be the sequence of events. It draws the reader into the character's lives and helps the reader understand the choices that the characters make. A plot's structure is the way in which the story elements are arranged. Writers vary structure depending on the needs of the story. It's not always a straight line from the beginning to the end of a short story.

**What Goes into a Plot?**

**\*Exposition** is the information needed to understand a story. Exposition is information that is offered to readers to help them understand the plot, characters, or setting in a story. Exposition is telling, not showing, and passive rather than active.

**\*Complication** is the catalyst that begins the major conflict. The part of the plot when conflicts develop and suspense is built. Complications are the new factors added to the plot that give the main character new problems to deal with.

**\*Climax** is the turning point in the story that occurs when characters try to resolve the complication; the moment when the ultimate suspense reaches its peak.

**\*Resolution** is the set of events that bring the story to a close.

**POINT OF VIEW**

**Who** is telling the story?

Let us look at the following example:

*A car accident occurs. Three drivers are involved. Witnesses include five passersby, a window cleaner an, a tourist with a video camera who happened to be shooting the scene, and the pilot of a helicopter that was flying overhead. Here we have eleven different points of view and, most likely, eleven different descriptions of the accident.*

In short fiction, *who* tells the story and *how* it is told are critical issues for an author to decide. The tone and feel of the story, and even its meaning, can change radically depending on who is telling the story.

Remember, someone is always between the reader and the action of the story. That someone is telling the story from his or her own point of view. This angle of vision, the point of view from which the people, events, and details of a story are viewed, is important to consider when reading a story.

A point of view can be fixed or it can change; it can stay the same distance from the events of the story, or indeed it can zoom in and out, like a camera lens.

**Types of Point of View**

There are many different types of point of view:-

**First Person Point of View**  
In the first person point of view, the narrator does participate in the action of the story. When reading stories in the first person, we need to realize that what the narrator is recounting might not be the objective truth. We should question the trustworthiness of the accounting.

In the first person point of view ‘I’ is telling the story. The camera lens is firmly behind the narrating character’s eyes, and the reader only sees what the narrating character sees, knows what the narrating character knows, and so on.

The narrator is usually the main character/[protagonist](http://www.fiction-writers-mentor.com/writing-definitions.html).  
  
However it can also work well if the first person narrator is the protagonist’s sidekick, e.g. Dr. Watson (Sherlock Holmes) or Hastings (Hercule Poirot).

It’s very easy to get into the head of your protagonist, and for the reader to identify with him/her.

There’s an immediacy and intimacy between the reader and the protagonist. It’s natural - we all live our lives from our own point of view anyway. It’s easier to share the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings and emotions.

**Second Person Point of View**

The second person is 'you'. So, the second person point of view in a story would go something like this:

*You woke up suddenly. What had woken you? That strange noise - that rhythmic banging. But what was it? And hang on a second - where were you? This wasn't where you had gone asleep. This wasn't your bedroom. What had happened to you while you slept?*

**Third person Point of View**  
With this point of view, the writer tells what happens without stating more than can be inferred from the story's action and dialogue. The narrator never discloses anything about what the characters think or feel, remaining a detached observer;

John laughed hollowly. “You’re joking,” he said. The neon light flickered on his face, turning it a ghastly yellow.  
Veronica shook her head slowly. Her fingers were busy shredding her tear-stained paper tissue. “I’m not joking. It’s all true.”  
John stood up and banged his fist against the wall, hard, once. He was shaking his head in disbelief. “I’ll have to leave now,” he said, his voice terse.

Here the narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know exactly how the characters feel. We learn about the characters through this outside voice.

In [Third Person](http://www.fiction-writers-mentor.com/3rd-person-point-of-view.html) the reader has access to one person's head at a time.

This narrator describes the characters' actions by saying *he*, *she* and *they* (whereas in [first person point of view](http://www.fiction-writers-mentor.com/first-person-point-of-view.html) the action is described by saying *I* and *we*.)

**Multiple narrators**

A writer may choose to let several narrators tell the story from different points of view. Then it is up to the reader to decide which narrator seems most reliable for each part of the story.

As you read a piece of fiction think about these things:

**How does the point of view affect your responses to the characters? How is your response influenced by how much the narrator knows and how objective he or she is? First person narrators are not always trustworthy. It is up to you to determine what is the truth and what is not.**

**CHARACTERS**

Memorable characters come alive for us while we read. They live on the page and in our hearts and minds. We cannot forget them. Yet, they are FICTIONAL; they don't really exist. Important to remember students fall into the trap believing they are ‘real’- help the reader relate to the story- we either empathise with or dislike characters.

Be alert to characters in the same way you are when you meet someone. Observe their actions. Listen closely to what they say and how they say it. Notice how they relate to other characters and how other characters respond to them. Look for clues as to their purpose and significance in the story.

They are created to help a writer develop certain themes or ideas. Characterisation is important-

How they speak and what they speak about, what they do and how they do it, what other characters say about the character, behave, how they react when the character is around etc. Can help us form judgements about them- all stereotypically of course!

The Hero can often be referred to as the *protagonist*. They have to face up to problems –conflicts- often created by *antagonists.*

**Whenever you discuss a character, discuss why that character is present in the story. Of course it will be related to the plot but most importantly to your essays, characters exist to help develop some aspect of the story’s ideas or themes. Always connect character to the THEMES.**

**Learning about Characters**

Characters are either major or minor and either static (unchanging) or dynamic (changing). The character who dominates the story is the major character.

Readers can learn about characters in many ways, including:

* Physical traits
* Dialogue
* Actions
* Attire
* Opinions
* Point of view

There are no limits on the types of characters who can inhabit a story: male or female, rich or poor, young or old, prince or pauper. What is important is that the characters in a story all have the same set of emotions as the reader: happiness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, joy, and love.

As Nathaniel Hawthorne said, "Blessed are all the emotions be they dark or bright." In emotions lie the motivations of the characters who drive the story.

**Many questions will ask you to write about character in some way. For instance, you might need to look at someone's feelings, examine their role in the story, or show how a particular character is presented.**

When analysing character, consider the following:

**1) Pay attention to the character’s ethics.** Does the character make just or unjust choices? Consider Atticus Finch in Harper Lee’s [To Kill a Mockingbird](http://www.enotes.com/mockingbird). Atticus does not make morally correct choices only when it is convenient for him to do so. Rather, he shows he’s a truly just character by sticking to his principles even when his life is at stake.  
  
**2) Decide whether the character’s actions are wise or unwise.** For example, one may think of Friar Laurence in Shakespeare’s [Romeo and Juliet](http://www.enotes.com/romeo) as being a character who continually makes poor decisions that reflect his inner corruption.   
  
**3) What is the character’s motivation?** As you are mulling over the pros and cons of each character’s internal thoughts and external actions, you will want to also consider why the character is acting or thinking in a particular way. Has the author given you any clues about the character’s past? In Amy Tan’s novel [The Joy Luck Club](http://www.enotes.com/joy-luck), Lindo Jong’s domination of her daughter Waverly can be understood, if not entirely excused, by her terrible experiences in China.  
  
**4) Consider the effects of the character’s behaviour on other characters.** Jane Austen’s [Pride and Prejudice](http://www.enotes.com/pride) is rife with the effects of one character’s actions on others. When Lydia decides to run off with the charlatan Wickham, she puts the whole family’s reputation, as well has her own, at risk, and even involves those outside her family, like Darcy.  
  
**5) Look for repeatedly used words that describe the character.** Those words often give insight into a character’s psychology and motivations. In John Steinbeck’s novel [East of Eden](http://www.enotes.com/east-eden), Kathy is frequently referred to as having “sharp little teeth” and a “flickering tongue,” which are symbols of her snake-like monstrousness.  
  
**6) Be aware of items associated with the character.** They may say something about his or her state of mind. A classic example is the delicate unicorn figurine in Tennessee Williams’ play [The Glass Menagerie](http://www.enotes.com/glass-menagerie). The figurine is symbolic of Laura’s own sense of hope and her own fragility.

**7) Read between the lines.** Often what a character does not say is as important as what he or she does say. Think of Abner Snopes in William Faulkner’s short story [“Barn Burning.”](http://www.enotes.com/barn-burning) When the court finds Snopes guilty of ruining his boss’ rug, prior knowledge of Abner’s character tells us that his silence upon hearing the verdict actually speaks volumes. We know he will react later...and violently.  
  
**8) Is the character “flat” or “round”?** A character is considered flat (or static) when he or she does not experience change of any kind, does not grow from beginning to end. Shakespeare often uses comic villains as flat characters, like Don Jon in [Much Ado About Nothing](http://www.enotes.com/muchado). Round characters are those who do experience some sort of growth, like Nora in Henrik Ibsen’s [A Doll’s House](http://www.enotes.com/dollshouse). By the end of the play, she has gone from being meek and submissive to being strong and liberated.  
  
**9) Consider the historical time period of the character.** Refrain from making modern judgments about the past; put the character’s actions and thoughts in context. A female character living in England in the 1800s obviously could not make the choices that she could today, for both political and social reasons.  
  
**10) Finally, what does the author think?** Look for any of the author’s own judgments about the characters he or she has created. The author may be directing you toward an intended interpretation. In [The Scarlet Letter](http://www.enotes.com/scarlet), Nathaniel Hawthorne certainly meant for his readers to see Hester as good and Chillingsworth as evil.

Dialogue is extremely important and is often used to reveal characters and to advance the plot. Note the lines spoken by a character in a story. The author has given the characters’ their spoken words deliberately and carefully.

**SETTING**

Writers describe the world they know. Sights, sounds, colors, and textures are all vividly painted in words as an artist paints images on canvas. A writer imagines a story to be happening in a place that is rooted in his or her mind. The location of a story's actions, along with the time in which it occurs, is the setting.

Settings are always imaginary and yet we are tricked into believing that they are real- a literary device used to trick the reader and absorb them into the story’s plot. It can help create mood.

When setting is being used to reflect the mood of a character – known as pathetic fallacy / mental landscape.

Setting is created by language. How many or how few details we learn is up to the author. Many authors leave a lot of these details up to the reader's imagination.

**What Setting Tells Us**

In William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the narrator carefully describes the house that Miss Emily lives in. This description helps us picture a decaying Mississippi town in the post-Civil War South. We also learn about Miss Emily's resistance to change.

*It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps--an eyesore among eyesores.*

Later we enter the house itself and, eventually, end up inside one particular room. The physical details of the setting become linked with the values, ideals, and attitudes of that place in different times.

Setting can add an important dimension of meaning, reflecting character and embodying theme. As a result, they illuminate the deeper meaning of the story.

**THEME**

What exactly is this elusive thing called theme?

The theme of a fable is its moral. The theme of a parable is its teaching. The theme of a piece of fiction is its view about life and how people behave.

In fiction, the theme is not intended to teach or preach. In fact, it is not presented directly at all. You extract it from the characters, action, and setting that make up the story. In other words, you must figure out the theme yourself.

The writer's task is to communicate on a common ground with the reader. Although the particulars of your experience may be different from the details of the story, the general underlying truths behind the story may be just the connection that both you and the writer are seeking.

**Finding the Theme**

THEME is very important- All writing has a purpose – this is why it was written- Do not begin your analysis until you have worked out the author’s main purpose/theme.

Theme is the controlling idea or central insight – what view of life it supports- what insight into life it reveals.

In essays- your main idea will be connected in some ways with the writer’s purposes and your analysis will be to show how the writer has chosen language.

The purpose of literary theme is to involve the reader deeply and emotionally.

Most writers in fact write in order to persuade rather than just (entertain) – the text is written with a moral purpose; wanting you to look at something in a different way (Dan Brown)- perhaps concerning some aspect of society (Classics – Jane Austen- Pride and Prejudice).

Hence we INTERPRET the text.

For e.g., FISH AND CHIPS £2.99 is very clear-

However, let’s examine *Tyger Tyger Burning Bright –In the forest of the night-*

What are those forests of the night for goodness sake? Therefore this text requires subtle interpretation- your interpretation of various possible layers of meaning.

You will also need to identify how language choices made by an author- act to shape and add layers of meaning. Only then will you discover purpose and theme. For example through the use of metaphor and symbolism.

We will never truly know what a writer’s intended message is- they have never come back from the dead and told us differently or challenged our perceptions/ conclusions of their works.

THEREFORE NO ONE SINGLE INTERPRETATION IS POSSIBLE.

When you discuss meaning consider alternative ways of interpreting the text.

Here are some ways to uncover the theme in a story: Check the title. Sometimes it tells you a lot about the theme.

Notice repeating patterns and symbols. Sometimes these lead you to the theme.

What allusions are made throughout the story?

What are the details and particulars in the story? What greater meaning may they have?

Remember that theme, plot, and structure are inseparable, all helping to inform and reflect back on each other. Also, be aware that a theme we determine from a story never completely explains the story. It is simply one of the elements that make up the whole.

When reading also note the historical/cultural context if applicable. Perhaps a text produced under conditions of strict censorship might conceal its meanings beneath symbolism or allegory-hence what is the tone?

Remember - Always back up your points with evidence from the text.