

## 2.1 The creative text

One of the ways in which the study design asks you to respond to text is through a creative response to the material presented. In general, this means that you will need to be able to write creatively in a clear, coherent manner.

### THE STUDY DESIGN

In both Unit 1 and Unit 3 you are asked to respond creatively to text in Area of Study 1, 'Reading and creating texts'. In order to demonstrate mastery of these sections of the course you need to be able to explore 'how meaning is created in a text' and respond to the text by developing a creative response.

### KEY KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND TERMS

This section of the course is about the craft of writing—both yours and that of the authors you are studying. You will be looking at how context affects both the creation and the reading of texts. You will need to be able to analyse and discuss the ways in which texts convey meaning and how they provoke us to think about different points of view on key issues. The outcome asks you to create a piece of writing that brings all these elements together in a creative piece of work that draws on the original text.

#### Key knowledge

In order to produce creative responses to the texts you study, you should be aware of the following key elements:

- how texts are constructed
- the ways in which an author creates meaning by using the textual elements such as characterisation, plot, setting and language choices
- how to identify and explain the views and values expressed in the text
- how a reader's context affects their interpretation of a text
- how the author's context affects or influences the construct of the text
- how to critically select key components of the original text for analysis and interpretation
- how to use language to create desired effects in an insightful and original piece
- how to apply an appropriate metalanguage to explain and justify their choices in their writing
- the conventions of Standard Australian English.

#### Key skills

On completion of this unit of work you should be able to:

- identify, explain and analyse key elements of texts such as characters, setting, plot, issues and themes
- examine the ways in which texts are constructed for particular audiences and purposes
- adopt language features and conventions and use them to enhance meaning in your own writing.
- assess the relative impact of texts and text types on different audiences
- develop a creative response to a text taking into account purpose, context and audience
- plan, draft, edit and refine a creative response using the conventions of Standard Australian English
- explain and justify decisions made in the writing process.

#### Key terms

The original text is referred to as the 'canon' text. This means that it sets the rules for the story because it is the key source for information. All other interpretations are either 'canon stories'—meaning they follow the plot lines and characterisations of the original—or 'non-canon stories' that use the text outline but don't stick to it.

### WHAT THE EXAMINERS ARE LOOKING FOR

The creative response is not included in the Victorian Certificate of Education end-of-year examination. It may, however, appear on the Unit 1 and Unit 2 examinations run by individual schools. It is important to remember that the creative response and the reflective commentary are worth 30 marks in Unit 3. The insights that you gain into the text through the creative process will be invaluable in informing your analytical response to the text.

### IN THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter you will learn how to:

- use literary techniques to enhance your writing and understand the work of others
- interrogate your text to ensure you are responding to it appropriately
- identify, use and write clearly in a range of different genres
- reflect on your own writing process.



2.1.1 Adding to a text

## Did you know?

Creating texts from original sources does not only happen in English classrooms; there are websites where dedicated fans write stories about their favourite books, television shows, movies, music, games and cartoons (including anime and comics). One of the more well-known sites, FanFiction, has more than six million stories and the number is still growing.

According to the site's statistics, the average user is female, lives in the United States of America and is 15.8 years old. Australia is at number 4 on the list of contributing countries, after the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. The stories written about most frequently are the Harry Potter series, Naruto (a Japanese manga series) and the Twilight series.



2.1.2 Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter in the 2002 film of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, directed by Chris Columbus

## 2.2 Responding creatively

You will need to know your text thoroughly in order to respond to it in the most sophisticated and appropriate way possible. You will also need to be able to use literary techniques effectively and then to draft and edit your material to ensure your work makes sense.

### KNOWING THE TEXT

If you are going to build a house or fix a car, you need to know a great deal about them before you start. If you don't, what you build may *resemble* the real thing, but it will always be missing something—it will be not-quite-right. The extra information about what you were building might have allowed you to put that missing piece into your plans.

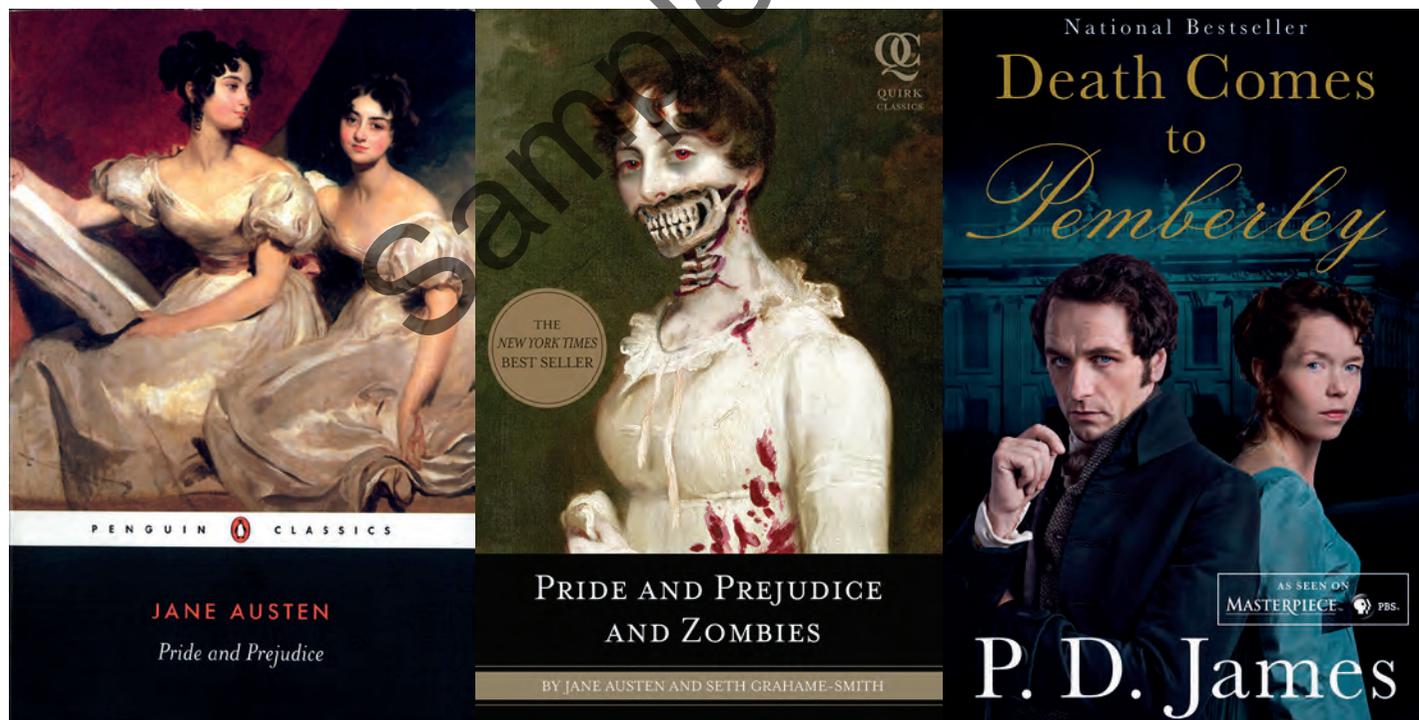
Writing a creative response to a text works on the same assumptions. You want to be able to execute a high-scoring creative response that explores the original text or adds meaning to it. You might be able to write a creative response with very little knowledge of the original, but it will always be missing something. If you thoroughly understand the original text you will be better able to respond to it effectively.

### ADDING TO AND ADAPTING TEXTS

For this part of the course, you're faced with two choices:

- adding to the original material—which asks you to think about what new perspective or idea you can bring to the text ('What do I want to explore further?')
- or
- adapting the original material—which encourages you to manipulate the text ('What do I want to change?').

Figure 2.2.1 shows an original text (*Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen) and two creative responses to it: an adaptation (*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith) and an addition (*Death Comes to Pemberley*, by P. D. James).



2.2.1 Covers of an original text, an adaptation and an addition

## THE ORIGINAL TEXT

In this section you will look at how certain aspects of the original text are written—those technical details that you will need to be able to explore if you are to achieve highly. You will look at the content and construction of the original text.

You will need to be able to discuss and explore the elements of the original text, as outlined in Table 2.2.2.

### ► Learning activities

- 1 Complete a table that outlines clearly the themes, views and values the author is expressing in the text you are responding to.
- 2 Add quotes to each of the columns to help you explore the text more deeply.
- 3 Decide which of the themes, views or values you are going to deal with in your creative response.

## Content

You must have a firm knowledge of what the author is saying in the text. It is worth making a table that clarifies this information. It could be as simple as the following:

Themes explored	Views expressed	Values espoused

You could also incorporate key quotes from the text that relate to or illustrate these key ideas. This will give you a ready bank of textual reference points so that, when you begin writing, you can use them quickly and easily. Make sure that you go back to this material (as well as the text) while you are writing.

To score highly, it is important that you understand the philosophical underpinning of the text that you are using as a base for your piece. To achieve a high score, you must respond to the ideas, issues or concerns raised by the original text.

### 2.2.2 The elements of texts

Element	Description
Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 'big ideas' that the text is illuminating</li> <li>• There may be more than one theme present in the text.</li> <li>• The themes will underpin the construction and give meaning to the text.</li> <li>• Example: 'While <i>Of Mice and Men</i> is the simple story of two itinerant workers, its themes include male friendships, the American Dream and the disparity between the weak and strong members of society.'</li> </ul>
Views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The perspective an author takes on the cultural, political, social and economic ideas that arise in their text or in their society</li> <li>• Example: 'In <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> George Orwell exposes the dangers of unquestioning compliance to the dictates of a government or regime.'</li> </ul>
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The moral, ethical or religious foundation of the author or their text</li> <li>• Example: 'C. S. Lewis's <i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> uses the author's Christian beliefs to underpin the story of a self-sacrificing hero.'</li> </ul>
Characterisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The way in which the author uses language techniques to create the idea of a character</li> <li>• This may include physical description, the use of idiom to form speech patterns, repetition of particular phrases or ideas, or the association of a particular motif with the character.</li> <li>• Example: 'In Reginald Rose's <i>Twelve Angry Men</i> different characters use different speech patterns or idioms to ensure that we understand their particular social and educational status. In the instance below, Juror #10 is shown to be an ignorant bigot in just a few sentences: <i>JUROR #10: I don't mind telling you this, mister. We don't owe him a thing. He got a fair trial, didn't he? You know what that trial cost? He's lucky he got it. Look, we're all grownups here. You're not going to tell us that we're supposed to believe him, knowing what he is. I've lived among 'em all my life. You can't believe a word they say. You know that.'</i></li> </ul>
Plot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The events that happen in the narrative and why those events occur</li> </ul>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The way the author uses the English language to create meaning</li> <li>• This takes into account such things as grammar, word choice, syntax and use of figurative language.</li> </ul>
Syntax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study of the way words go together to create meaning in sentences</li> <li>• Includes the way in which the rules of language are employed</li> </ul>
Author's context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ideas, events or movements that influenced a writer during the creation of a text</li> </ul>

## Writer's toolbox

Do not try to respond to or explore *all* the themes, views or values in your original text. Concentrate on one or two that you will be able to explore in depth and with clarity.

### Construction

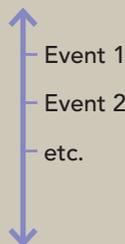
The particular way in which an author creates the text helps them tell their story and will assist you in responding. In particular you need to pay attention to the elements outlined in Table 2.2.3.

#### 2.2.3 The construction of a story

Story	Events that occur in a narrative
Plot	Events that happen in the narrative and why they happen
Characters	The method through which the big ideas are explored
Characterisation	The means by which a character is constructed
Setting	Place and time in which the action of the text occurs
Symbols	Authors will use an object or repeated idea to convey meaning. Often a tangible object will be used to represent a concept, emotion or idea.
Narrative structure	The way in which a text is constructed and the choices made by the author about chronology and voice
Style	Characteristics and qualities in the work

### ► Learning activities

- 1 Make a chronological bulleted list or timeline (see the example below) of the key events in the text you are studying.



- 2 In another colour, add the characters involved in each of these key events.
- 3 In another colour, add the settings for these key events.
- 4 Finally, choose three events and work out how the author linked them to each other. What happened between the three events, and why was it necessary for the next event to happen?

## WRITING YOUR OWN RESPONSE

### The craft of writing

Once you know the original text really well, it is time to turn your attention to your own writing. There are many skills that you can employ to ensure that your creative response is a good one.

The basics of good creative writing never change. You will capture your readers' interest by:

- structuring your piece logically and coherently
- using interesting and appropriate language
- making sure that you have drafted and edited your work carefully.

### Structure

You will need to choose a form in which to write your creative response. While the original text could be a novel, a poem or a film, you might choose to respond in a completely different form. Each form has its own rules and contains distinct features. Table 2.2.4 looks at some of the most common forms and features.

### ► Learning activities

Brainstorm ideas about what you want to write. Think carefully about the form in which you should write. Does the form that you choose change any elements of the creative response?

Once you have chosen a form for your writing, then you need to plan the sequence of events. In a carefully crafted creative response your reader must be able to follow the sequence of the story. Make sure that the links between these events are clear.

## Writer's toolbox

It is best to make a list of the events that will happen in your story. This should include which characters are involved and where the events will take place. You could highlight each event in a different colour to make sure that you are clear about what each section of the story encompasses.

You can use the following traditional narrative structure as a guide:

- A Exposition
- B Rising action
- C Climax
- D Falling action
- E Denouement (loose ends tied).

### 2.2.4 The different forms of a story

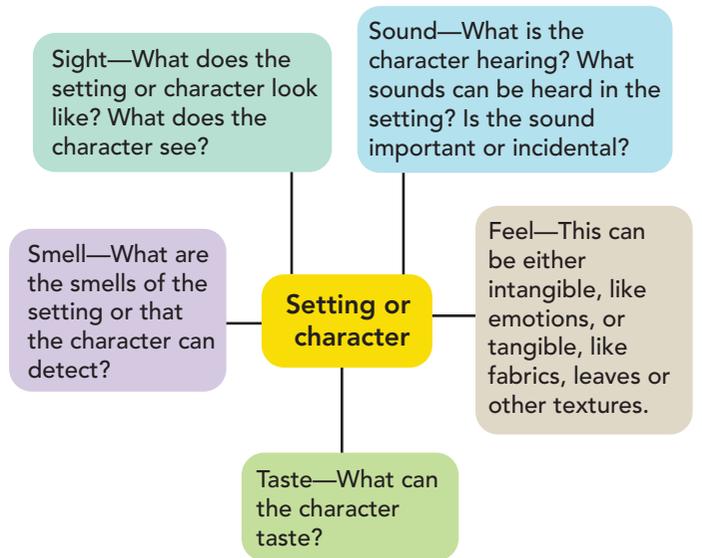
Form	Written elements
Diary entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written in the first person</li> <li>• Usually addresses the events of a particular day</li> <li>• Contains emotional language and addresses the emotions of the writer as well as events</li> <li>• May be addressed to an 'uninvolved' or 'imaginary' figure</li> <li>• Example: <i>Dear Diary,</i> <i>Today has been one of the most overwhelming days of my life. It isn't just because it is my birthday, although that was really exciting too. It's because, after all these years, I finally met my father. My real father. The biological one. My Dad, the one who raised me, organised for me to go to Berlini's, the local Italian restaurant, for lunch. I just thought that it was because I turned 18 today ...</i></li> </ul>
Journal or blog entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written in the first person</li> <li>• May provide an overview of events rather than look at a particular day</li> <li>• Tends to be reflective – looking for patterns and themes behind events</li> <li>• May be written for publication</li> <li>• Example: <i>I am hoping, dear readers, that you will understand that I have no problem with the idea of adoption. I myself am adopted and could not have been raised by kinder or more loving parents. This is not the issue I wish to discuss. I wish to discuss the idea of abandonment, specifically of how a man could leave his family and simply disappear ...</i></li> </ul>
Short story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narration will usually be in first or third person</li> <li>• May have a single or multiple narrators</li> <li>• Should have a limited number of characters</li> <li>• Should tell of one complication and one resolution</li> <li>• Can be a stand-alone tale or could be a 'missing chapter' from the original text</li> <li>• Example: <i>Sitting at the table was a man. He had dark hair, slightly thinning on top, and there were slivers of silver running through the temples. His hands were nervously fiddling with the fork in front of him, although his attention was steadfastly directed towards the phone on the table. I couldn't see his eyes, although a shiver of recognition went through me as if I already knew what I would see when he looked up. I knew I would see my own face, older, more masculine, but my face. Or at least, where my face had come from ...</i></li> </ul>
Play script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will have a scene heading to indicate where the action is taking place</li> <li>• Will feature dialogue</li> <li>• Stage directions will include any instructions about costuming, sets or character blocking (movement)</li> <li>• The emotions and attitudes the characters display will be included in author notes or directions</li> <li>• Example: [A typical Italian restaurant. There are checked tablecloths on the tables, at some of which patrons enjoy lunch and chat quietly. A middle-aged man sits alone at one table, looking at his mobile phone. Veronica and her father Dan enter.] <b>VERONICA:</b> <i>Seriously? We're having lunch here?</i> <b>DAN</b> [with a slight laugh and a shrug]: <i>What's wrong with here? It's a nice restaurant. They serve good food.</i> <b>VERONICA</b> [shaking her head but smiling with affection at DAN]: <i>I just thought you would take me out somewhere more ... luxurious for my first adult lunch.</i> <b>DAN</b> [smiling sadly and pointing to the table where the man is sitting alone]: <i>I think it will do for this lunch, Ronnie.</i> <b>VERONICA:</b> [Looks towards the table that DAN is pointing at and her eyes widen.] <i>What have you done?</i></li> </ul>
Film script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will include all the features of a play script, with the addition of directions for how the camera should be used to film the action—for example: FADE IN [The camera pans around the restaurant.] CLOSE-UP of VERONICA's face</li> </ul>
Poem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will depend on the style of poetry that is chosen</li> <li>• May have a rhythm or rhyming pattern dictated by the form</li> <li>• May have a set number of lines</li> <li>• May form part of a poem cycle or saga</li> </ul>
Song	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will have a number of verses and a repeated chorus</li> <li>• May form part of a song cycle or album</li> </ul>

## Using interesting and appropriate language

The language you choose will be influenced by the characters, scenes and settings that you are using. Your language should keep your readers entertained. Choose evocative and interesting language that will engage your readers.

As a writer, you should remember that the reader is reliant on the picture you paint for them. Your reader can only 'see' or 'hear' or 'smell' what you describe in your writing. You can use the 'five senses' as a way of making sure that your audience experiences a vivid scene.

Creating a character or setting is also reliant on your choice of language. If you are trying to give your reader an understanding of a character, you will need to use appropriate adjectives to describe their appearance and their personality. If they are the narrator, their character will inform the way in which you tell the story so you will need to be clear about what they are like.



### 2.2.5 Using the five senses in your writing



2.2.6 *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens: quotes from the novel and a still from the film by David Lean, 1946

## Writer's toolbox

When choosing synonyms it is important to remember the difference between the literal meaning of a word (denotation) and the emotional meaning attached to it (connotation). Using a synonym-replacement program or choosing a word from a list does not guarantee that you will achieve the desired meaning. Check a dictionary to make sure you've got the right word.

You can use the lists in Table 2.2.7 to help you describe your character's appearance or personality.

### 2.2.7 Words to describe characters

Appearance	Personality
alluring	ambitious
bewildered	combative
drab	determined
elegant	frank
filthy	generous
homely	hesitant
nervous	naughty
smiling	placid
wasted	sedate

### ► Learning activities

- 1 Add to the lists of adjectives in Table 2.2.7.
- 2 Make lists of all the adjectives the author uses to describe the main character, and one minor character, in the text you are studying. What do you notice about the two lists?
- 3 Think of a person that you know and write a list of adjectives to describe them.
- 4 Picture a character you plan to write about, and make a list of adjectives you could use to describe them. Now describe them to a partner and ask them to draw the character you describe.

If you want your audience to empathise with a character, you need to make an effort when describing their emotional state. It isn't always enough to say a character is 'happy' or 'sad' or 'angry'. You need to describe how they are feeling. Table 2.2.8 gives you some more options.

### 2.2.8 Words to describe a character's emotions

Happy	Sad	Angry
jovial	anxious	livid
lively	unhappy	irritated
proud	miserable	fuming
silly	depressed	mad
joyous	gloomy	irate

The use of idiom, or how your characters speak, is also important. Idiom will be informed by the original text, and you should also make sure that *what your characters say and how they say it* help to tell your story.

Similarly, when characters are speaking, you could use a word other than 'said'. Say they:

- expostulated
- trilled
- announced
- threatened
- screeched
- whispered
- screamed.

### ► Learning activities

- 1 Find more synonyms for *said*, *happy*, *sad* and *angry*.
- 2 Keep a list of interesting adjectives and their meanings in your notebook for use during the year.

## Drafting and editing your work

Although it can be difficult given the time pressures of VCE, try not to rush your work. The course demands not only that you draft and edit your work, but that you reflect on what you have written.

Make sure that you give yourself plenty of time to do this. Stepping away from a piece once it is written will often give you perspective and allow you to see flaws or omissions that weren't obvious as you wrote.

Asking someone else to read your work can also be helpful. A teacher or fellow students should be able to help you by reviewing your work. The kinds of things to look for include:

- spelling, grammar and punctuation
- links to the original text
- the flow of the creative response—is it logical and clear?
- whether the characters are true to the original text
- whether you are using interesting language
- whether you are using figurative language.

Asking a family member to read your creative response can also help: they may not be familiar with the original text and this may allow them to point out gaps in logic or clarity.

Keep your drafts and at each stage make a note of what you have changed, and why. Keeping feedback and recording changes will help you to write your reflection on the writing process.

## Writer's toolbox

Don't rely too heavily on a spellchecker. These programs recognise patterns and do not read for meaning. A word that is spelt correctly may still be the wrong word in the context of your piece. For example, if you write the word 'cant' instead of 'can't', a spellchecker may not pick it up, as 'cant' is actually a word. Similarly, if you misspell a word such as 'definitely', a spellchecker may 'correct' it to 'defiantly'.

## 2.3 Additions

In this module, you will examine story plot and how you might add to it while staying true to the original text.

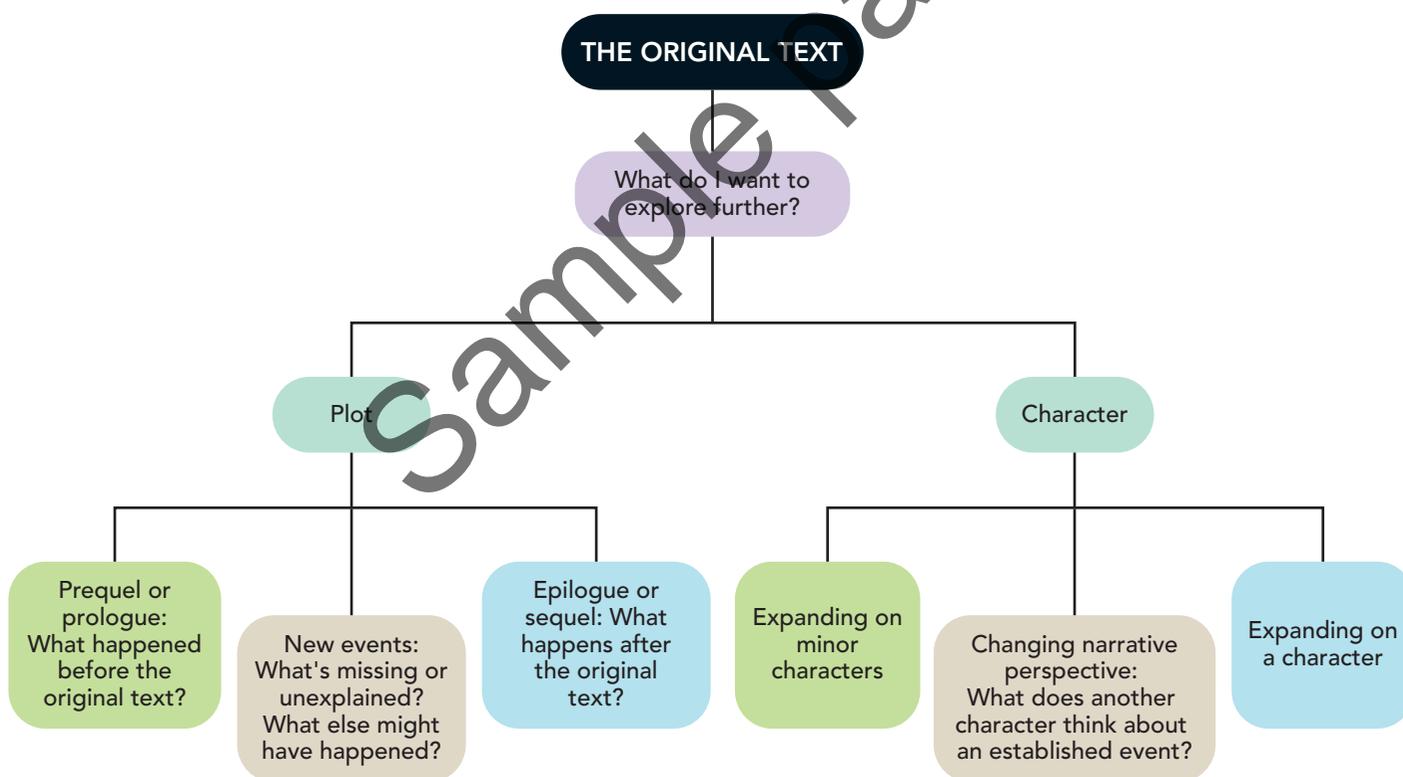
### ADDING TO THE TEXT

The opportunity to add to a text can be a rewarding creative experience. Revisiting an original piece and finding some new element that you would like to explore enables you to step into its world again. You can flesh out events or re-imagine a scene from another character's point of view. You can answer questions that the original piece overlooked or deliberately left unanswered. You can fill in gaps about what happened before, during or after a scene. In fact, the nature of creative writing is such that the options are limitless. First, you should consider what elements of the original story you want to examine.

### EXPLORING THE PLOT

#### The prologue or prequel

Although most stories appear to have a definitive beginning (the main character is born, for instance) and end (the main character dies, as an example), as readers it is possible to imagine events existing *before*, *during* and *after* the ones that the author provides you with.



#### 2.3.1 Ideas to help you to add to the text



**2.3.2** *Romeo and Juliet*, film by Baz Luhrmann, 1996

Even an omniscient narrator only reveals as much as they want you to know. Authors provide you with a construct of a world they have created, but as readers you are free to imagine further. In this task, as long as you aren't contradicting what has been established in the text, you can imagine whatever you like.

If an author provides you with a background to the story, you can still wonder about the events that led up to the story as you know it. Take for instance, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Before the action begins, Shakespeare provides you with a prologue that sets the scene behind what you are about to see on stage.

*Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.*

Here, Shakespeare tells you what he thinks you need to know: there are two warring families in Verona who have been enemies for a while and who are about to let the tensions between them boil over into a bloody street brawl. While this provides some context for what you are about to see on stage, it also raises other questions:

- What was the source of the conflict between the Montague and Capulet families?
- Why have tensions been simmering for so long?
- How long have the families known each other?
- Were they ever on friendly terms?
- How has this tension manifested itself in the past?

Shakespeare starts his play at a particular point in time. As an audience you are expected to believe that the world the characters inhabit is fully formed, with events that happen before and after the events that you see on stage.

### ► Learning activities

- 1 What advantage might a storyteller have in beginning their story with high action?
- 2 How does the text you are studying commence? Is this an effective means of drawing its audience in? Justify your response by using examples from the text.

## ■ WRITING THE PROLOGUE

When you write a prequel or prologue, you are fleshing out the background to the story. You explore, in more depth, what may be:

- hidden
- hinted at
- unexplored
- unacknowledged.

A prologue may explain why a character behaves in the way that they do. For instance, you might imagine that there has been a pivotal moment in the character's life that has shaped them, or that there has been an experience that helps explain why they act in the way that they do. Or it might be your interpretation of how a character ended up in prison; how they managed to fall from a hot air balloon; how they met their partner or how they came to face a murder charge.

Do the things you are exploring in your creative piece provide an insight into the already-existing text? For instance, in George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* no clear explanation is given as to how the political situation came to be. Similarly, in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Curley's wife reveals that her ambitions to be a famous movie actress have amounted to nothing; yet you learn very little else about her. By resolving these unexplained mysteries you are offering an explanation of how the situation in the text came to be.

## Gaps in the text

Depending on the type of text that you are studying, the plot might be an epic that takes place over several years or generations (such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement*) or it might be a day in the life of an individual (such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*). It might be a short story that captures a brief moment in time, a play where the lapse of time isn't made clear (Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*) or even a multi-voiced, multi-genred piece of work (such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*).

There can be large shifts in time between events, or the narrator or characters may make reference to an event that is not explored in depth. These are the gaps in the text that a good creative response can fill. What happened in the nineteen years between Harry Potter's final battle with Voldemort and the epilogue at the train station? We don't know for sure, but we are allowed to imagine. Look at the following examples.

### Sample 1

*The shame and mortification had never gone away. It would be another thirteen years before she could shop in that store—and even then she looked furtively around and behind displays reassuring herself that she couldn't recognise anyone. One day, however, she opened a long-forgotten handbag retrieved from a deep corner of a closet and the smell that came from a small sheet of paper in a side-pocket brought a smile that was easy and reflective.*

### Sample 2

*As much as he tried to forget, it would always haunt him. He could pretend that this time it was going to be different; that he would find a way to do it differently, to be different.*

What these examples have in common is that they hint at something more.

Authors make decisions about what they think readers need to know. They select and shape the work in such a way that the reader can construct enough meaning and draw enough conclusions to understand the plot. In this way, whole moments in time can be omitted.

However, it is possible that you are interested in these moments. Perhaps you want to know about a character before the war started. Perhaps you are not satisfied that the story jumps from the character's childhood to their experience as an adult in the space of a paragraph, or perhaps you would have liked to read more about the romance and courtship of your favourite characters.

When you are ready to write your piece, you should give consideration to where and when this new scene takes place. You need to decide whether your addition fits in terms of the events that precede it and follow it. Once you have considered what purpose your additional scene serves, you can think about some of the elements outlined in Table 2.3.3, which will help to shape your writing.

#### 2.3.3 Questions and elements to assist your writing

- 1 Does your piece reveal a new facet of the characters' lives?
- 2 Who needs to be in the scene(s) that you are developing?
- 3 Where is your scene set?
- 4 Does your scene contradict anything in the original text? If it does, you will need to re-work it, so it fits.
- 5 Does your scene have the following elements in it?
  - Emotion
  - Dialogue
  - Conflict
  - Action
- 6 Have you checked for spelling, punctuation, grammar?
- 7 Have you made clear links to the original text?

## Examples of an addition

### ■ ATONEMENT

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* is the story of Robbie and Cecilia, whose love is thwarted by the outbreak of the Second World War and a terrible misunderstanding that sees Robbie accused of a crime he did not commit. Both students have elected to commence their pieces with an excerpt from the original that clearly indicates where their new addition slots in.

2.3.4 *Atonement*, by Ian McEwan

NATIONAL  
BESTSELLER

Now a  
Major  
Motion  
Picture

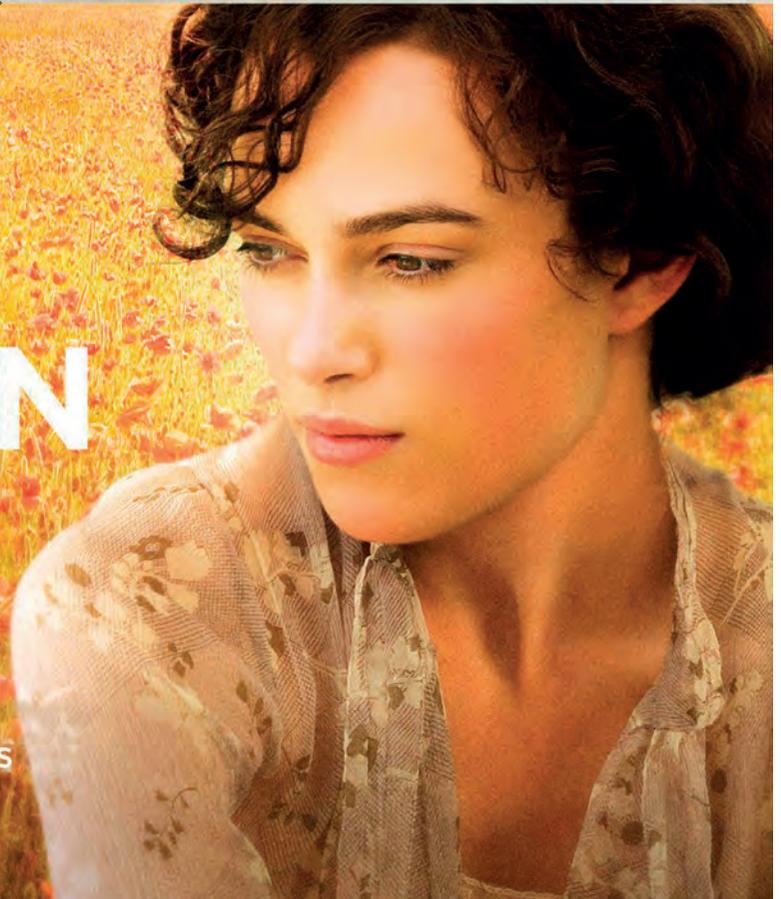


A NOVEL BY

IAN  
MCEWAN

"A tour de force.... Every bit as  
affecting as it is gripping."

—The New York Times



## Student A

Suddenly a figure was running towards the car as fast as was possible in a tight dress. Cecilia slowed as he approached. Robbie turned and took a half pace towards her and, surprisingly, the inspector stepped back. (Ian McEwan, *Atonement*, Vintage, 2002)

'Cecilia!' The cry came not from his own lips, but from those of Emily Tallis, who watched helplessly as her daughter ran toward Robbie. As she approached he did not see the dishevelled girl running toward him—the girl with the wrinkled dress, the tousled hair, the bloodshot eyes. Instead his mind was filled with images of the woman he had met in the library. He saw the paleness of her body, her legs, adorned with soft pink scars and dark moles.

He stretched his hands out toward her, thinking that perhaps, if he could catch her in his arms, they could return to those fleeting moments in the library. Those moments that, like so much else, Briony had stolen from them. The sight of the metal that bound his wrists pulled him back from his fantasies, and he was reminded of the eyes that watched his every move, conscious that they were hesitant to let Cecilia consort with a maniac. Though every nerve in his body cried out for him to wrap his arms around her, to pull her close to him, he resisted and, instead, allowed his hands to fall.

Sensations filtered through his consciousness, drawing him into the sphere that seemed to encompass only him and Cecilia. Mist hung in the air, drawing a veil between the lovers and the onlookers who watched warily from a distance. Something about it was reminiscent of their previous encounter in the library; there was an air of seclusion, and a sense that they were beyond the present, outside of time. Even so, the elements of the ordinary world held them back: the tension in the air, the watchful eyes boring into them, and the knowledge that, unlike in the library, there was no physical wall between them and the rest of the world.

He felt the brush of Cecilia's hands over his own; he could see the trembling of her jaw despite the steadiness of her gaze. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse from the previous hour that he had spent pleading his innocence, and shouting to have himself heard. 'Cee, it wasn't me.'

'I know.'

'It wasn't me.'

Jess D., VCE student

## Student B

Throughout his training, they continued to write. Liberated from censorship and the need to be inventive, they proceeded cautiously. Impatient with living on the page, mindful of the difficulties, they were weary of getting ahead of the touch of hands and a single bus-stop kiss. They said they loved each other, used 'darling' and 'dearest', and knew their future was together, but they held back from wilder intimacies. Their business now was to remain connected until those two weeks. (Ian McEwan, *Atonement*, Vintage, 2002)

It was nearing nine o'clock, and Robbie had just returned to camp with his unit. Soaked in sweat and mud, a drill had never been so

challenging as the one he had just finished—and he had never felt so completely alive; so in tune with every ache and objection his body made as he sidled into his bunk. It was a wonderful feeling—the feeling of being mentally alert, while his body resisted him. It elated him, knowing that his mind could be so wonderfully blank and clear, as it had not been for months. Lying on top of his sack, Robbie ignored the shooting pain in his arm as he reached for a pen and paper, with which he decided he would compose another letter to Cee. He could not afford to drift off to sleep, not when his mind was so freshly relieved of the thoughts that usually haunted his free time. In this moment, he was consumed by the freedom of thought, and the memory of Cecilia.

He pushed himself into a sitting position, and began to write.

August 12, 1939

Dear Cecilia,

The possibility of war seems far removed; much less real than the dreams that sustain us. I pray that if it does eventuate, that I return home to you in one piece, with heart enough to love you and hope enough to resume, despite the events of a summer night in 1935.

I have hope enough to imagine this, Cee. I have not abandoned our Wiltshire dream, or our future together, despite the war that is promised. The army has strengthened me, in more than one way. It has strengthened me physically—men complain about the food, and the supply of challenges we are dealt increasingly, with each passing day—but I feel renewed; alive as I have not felt since I was last with you. I no longer feel weak. But more importantly, it has strengthened my resolve; to return to you, and change the course that fate has set me. To resume, in spite of the difficulties, and live without shame.

I have written this letter in my mind a thousand times, but never has it been truer than it is in this moment, as I write it. I have hope, darling, and you inspire it. The course my life will take seems clear, as it never did before, and I know that I am the driving force behind it—behind my determination to do my duty here, return to you, love you, and live without shame. I can never lose that, because if I did I would lose myself and my reason for life. It's in everything I do, every memory I feed on and every encounter ever stolen from us—moments that were rightly ours and that we will have again, once I am done here.

I love you. I will come back to you.

Robbie

Bronte D., VCE student

## ► Learning activities

- 1 In what ways have both students used an excerpt from the original?
- 2 Use examples to show how each writer has conveyed the passion between the lovers.
- 3 Is there a difference in the voice of the narrators? Find evidence to support your claim.

## Writer's toolbox

### A checklist for writing a prequel or prologue

- ❑ Is it clear to the audience that these events occurred before the original narrative?
- ❑ Do your ideas provide a good insight into the characters' backstories?
- ❑ Do your new ideas align with established facts? If we know from the original text that your character has never been married before, they can't be married in your prequel.
- ❑ Have you thought about who is narrating the story? Is the narrator the same as in the original? Is it a minor character, or the protagonist, the antagonist or even multiple narrators?
- ❑ If we know your characters' circumstances (in the original), is it clear from your prequel how they might have arrived in that situation?
- ❑ Have you fleshed out information that is implied in the original? For instance, if your character has a fear of the number 8, does your prequel consider why this might be the case?
- ❑ Is your characterisation the same as that of the original text? Why or why not?

## The sequel or epilogue

Perhaps the story you have been reading ended abruptly. Perhaps it hinted at events to follow or gave a short summation of what happened next. Perhaps you're just not done with this fictional world yet, or you're interested in a tangent that the story might take you on. It's possible too that your story hinted at more adventures or relationships or challenges to come. The 'what happened next' notion is a fun one to entertain. You might want to know how your characters responded to what they had experienced.

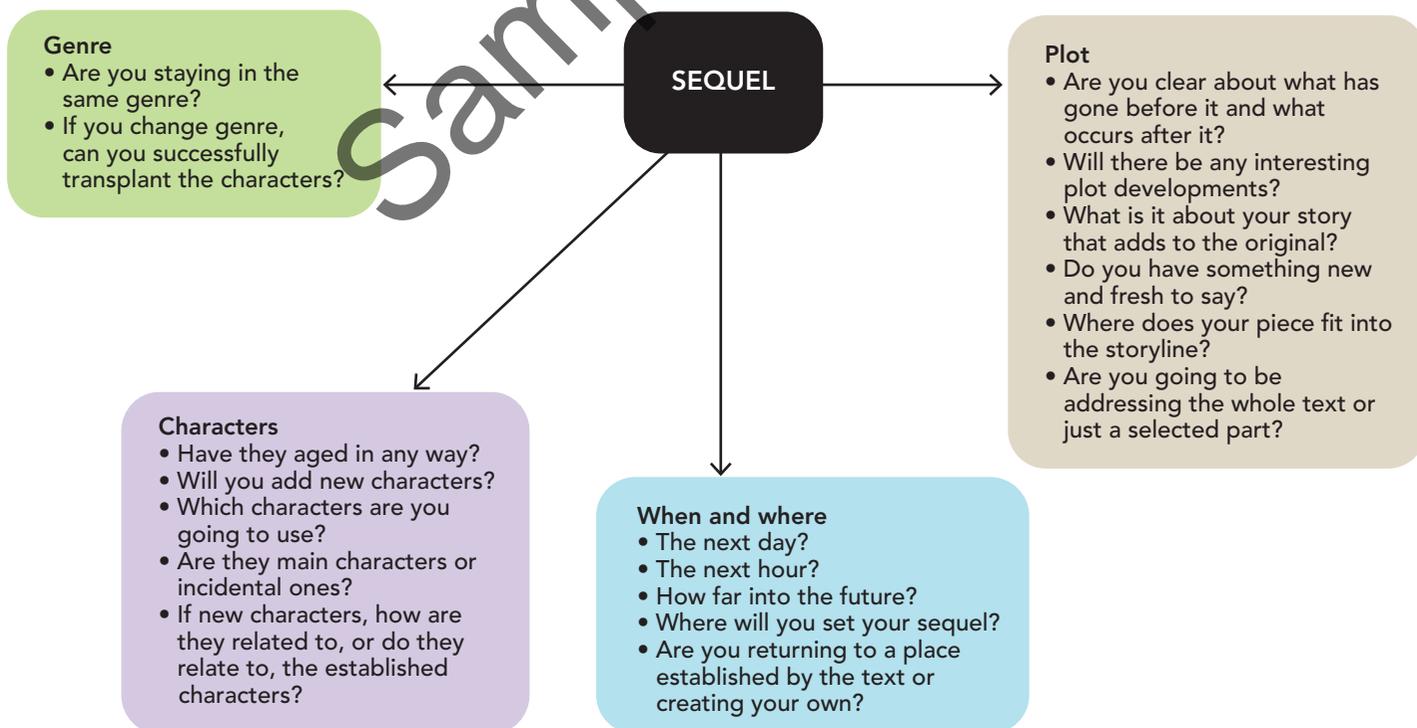
One of the things to consider about your sequel or epilogue is the continuity of the scene. If the character from the original source died, consider how their death impacted others. For instance, after the deaths of Romeo and Juliet you might want to know how the characters went about bringing peace to Verona.

Think about how your piece of writing can seamlessly fit in to the original piece of work. It is sometimes helpful to think of the work you are creating as a missing scene or a missing chapter. In order to achieve this, you should think about certain things that are outlined in Figure 2.3.5.

### Example of a sequel

#### ■ ATONEMENT

Read the following example of student work. Note how the student has drawn on an idea suggested by the closing lines of Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* to further elaborate on an idea that she wished to explore. After reading the piece, answer the questions that follow. Note that the premise of this piece is that the narrator of the story, Briony Tallis, has been diagnosed with vascular dementia, an illness that will ultimately rob her of her memory.



2.3.5 Questions to assist you with writing a sequel

There is no other way of putting it. I do not know where I am. I stare around the room and slowly take it all in. The huge bed on the right, a wardrobe, a window, all of it is unfamiliar. My eyes stray to the left, and linger on the only comforting object in the room: the simple writing desk boasts a neat stack of papers at one end, and a small lamp at the other. A mirror hangs above it, the only ornament on the otherwise empty walls. The white paint seems to glare at me, and I want to close my eyes as though I have looked too long into the sun. I am overwhelmed by its emptiness. Whoever lived here must have led a simple and lonely life. I begin to panic. I want to get out. I do not belong here, and the walls seem to be surrounding me, trapping me. There is no escape.

I hobble towards the window and open it. The first thing I see is London. I cannot deny my sense of loss as I watch the lights, shimmering like a million stars at the edge of the horizon. Why aren't I at home amid the crowds and the cars? From where I am standing, that shining city where I spent my adult life might as well be the moon.

I feel that sense of desperation creep up on me and I try to calm myself, breathing in the hot night air in frantic gulps. The warm breeze brushes against my cheeks and I feel the faint stirrings of a memory. Like a sleeping snake, it begins to lift its coiled head and I vaguely remember a night like this. A hot summer's evening when I stood on a bridge, waiting for ... it is gone. It is as though I am trying to hold a cupful of water in my hands.

I begin to feel unsettled and irritable. I shut the window impatiently, and just as I am about to turn away, a flicker of movement catches my attention. I peer through the glass but it is difficult to see. The light of the moon is partially obscured by clouds, and what I guess to be trees just looks like a threatening dark mass. I look down, and notice a dilapidated fountain. Has it always been there? For the sake of my sanity, I can only answer yes. Fountains cannot just appear and disappear, now can they? I frown, and squint through the glass. To my surprise, I see a drenched young woman, standing in the fountain and looking up at me. I hastily step away from the window and draw the red curtains.

My gaze sweeps across the room and settles on the writing desk. I make my way towards it, and sit. I look up, into the mirror, and am surprised by the face looking back. Surely that wizened woman is not me? The gaunt features, the colourless cheeks, the wrinkles—surely that is someone else? My eyes dart about the surface of the mirror, silently hoping for the reflection to change and show my face, my real face.

I turn away, and focus instead on the orderly pile of papers on the side of the desk. They are all covered in writing, from short stories to simple sentences. At the top of one, I catch a lazy scrawl, as though the writer was in a daze. Two Figures by a Fountain. I think about the woman outside and shiver. Another sheet is covered entire with a single sentence, from top to bottom, in frenzied writing.

I am Briony Tallis.

I am Briony Tallis.

I am Briony Tallis.

Briony.

I say the word, my lips lingering over each syllable. Briony. It sounds familiar. I turn the page over, and glimpse the phrase, 'Cecilia, I am sorry.'

I begin to sense something, as though I am being watched, so I lift my head and turn around. Before me is that same, young woman from the fountain. But I do not feel alarmed like before. I have that strange sense of calm that people feel in dreams.

I search the woman's face but find nothing. It is like looking at a mask. The mist-like skin and the full lips, pressed in a firm line, seem cold. We stare at each other, and I get the impression that she is waiting for me to say something.

'Cecilia,' I say.

I feel younger in her presence, like a child. That withered figure in the mirror does not exist. When I look down and see my hands, leathery and dry, I refuse to believe that they belong to an old woman.

'Cee,' I say again, my voice coming out higher than I have intended. It sounds like a plea. Maybe it is. It is difficult to look into this woman's face. It is almost frightening, staring into those hard features. 'Say something,' I beg.

She draws out a cigarette from her pocket, inhales deeply, but does not talk.

I cannot stand it, this unbearable silence, so I search her face. 'I need you to say something.' Remembering the scribbled note, I begin to babble, 'I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry.' My voice rises, and suddenly I'm screaming at her.

I feel a pair of arms wrap around my waist and a firm, but gentle voice in my ear. 'Now, now Ms Tallis, you don't need to be behaving like that, now do you?' I close my eyes, and my body shudders. 'It's alright, Ms Tallis,' the voice continues. It is a woman speaking, and she pulls me close to her chest like a mother would. I raise my head and look around, twisting in her grip to see the silent woman again. But she is gone.

I panic, and cry out, 'Come back! Come back!' The phrase seems comforting and familiar, so I keep saying it. The woman shushes me and pulls me tight, so that I murmur to myself, 'Come back, come back.'

'Yes Ms Tallis,' she says encouragingly. Unaware of what it means to me, she continues, 'Come back to us.'

My breathing slows, and I feel disoriented and confused as the woman steadily coaxes me out of my dream world and into reality. 'You're in Lethe's Nursing Home, Ms Tallis,' she explains. Her dry tone makes me wonder if her speech is rehearsed. 'You've been here for some months now. You have vascular dementia, and we need to take care of you.'

I look at her, drinking in her words. They are the only words I know. Everything else is forgotten.

'You need to take care of me,' I repeat slowly.

'Yes, Ms Tallis.'

I chuckle. 'How nice of you! I'm feeling a bit tired, but I don't think I need any help getting into bed.' The nurse gives me an odd look, sighs, and holds my arm. She supports my weight as I hobble over to my bed. She tucks me in, and before leaving, asks if I'm feeling all right. 'Of course,' I say, 'Why wouldn't I be?'

Nicole D., VCE student

## ► Learning activities

- 1 How does the author's attention to detail create atmosphere in the opening scene?
- 2 The student has chosen to not use any contractions such as 'I'm'. What effect does this have on the writing?
- 3 What conclusions can you draw about the narrator, such as her age and occupation? How has the student demonstrated this without telling us explicitly?

## CHARACTER INSIGHTS

The other way you might approach this task is to think more deeply about the characters. In this approach your ability to *empathise* and *imagine* comes to the fore. In climbing into the skin of another person, you begin to understand that person's point of view a little more clearly. You begin to think about what they think about; how they feel; what they reflect upon; how they see the world and how they interact with others.

You will need to demonstrate a strong understanding of the character that you are examining. This is the case whether you choose to:

- expand on the main protagonist or antagonist
- expand on a minor character or
- tell the story from another character's point of view.

One useful strategy for thinking about the character in depth is to use a 'gingerbread man'.



### 2.3.6 Thinking about a character

#### STEPS

- 1 Draw a figure like the one in Figure 2.3.6
- 2 Select a character from the text and write their full name at the top of the page.
- 3 Your character will have had many private and public thoughts during the course of the novel. In the head of the figure, write down what some of this character's thoughts are.
- 4 At different points in the novel, your character has experienced a variety of emotions. In the chest, write down their feelings.
- 5 What are some of the key events that your character has been involved in? In the legs, list their actions.
- 6 Draw speech bubbles and list some of the things that your character says.
- 7 How do other people see your character? Down the left-hand side of your figure, write down how others see them.
- 8 Every individual is, in part, the product of all the factors that have had an impact on them. Such things might include: their personal histories, their faiths, their relationships and their age. List these things down the right-hand side of the figure.

- 9 Under your figure, write down some physical descriptions of the character (such as hair colour, eye colour, height, build, clothing).

## Expanding on a minor character

Many of the texts that you study centre on the key protagonists and antagonists. While an exploration of these characters can be insightful, minor characters can also be worthy of study as they offer unique and valuable insights into the text. They may give us glimpses into the world of the text that are otherwise hinted at or remain unexplored. They may provide alternative viewpoints or experiences from those of the main characters. It may be that they offer something interesting or intriguing to you that you wish to explore further. Whichever character you chose to examine more closely, one thing is certain: you need to be able to justify your selection and think deeply about what you wish to investigate.

### EVERY MAN IN THIS VILLAGE IS A LIAR

Look at the following example from Megan Stack's memoir, *Every Man in this Village is a Liar: An Education in War*, which details her experience as an American journalist in the Middle East after the events of 11 September 2001. In this scene, set in Afghanistan, Stack witnesses the aftermath of American bombs in the north of the country.

*The dead men were skinny, all of them, muddy and ragged. One man's face had been blown off. Another lay with the back of his head gone, his brains leaking. Filtered sunlight spilled onto the floor; the smell of death was heavy. An American reporter fell on the ground and lay there crying. I looked at her, and at the corpses. Intellectually, I knew that her reaction was appropriate, but I felt disgusted by her weakness. Staring down at the bodies, I felt numb, light, as if my own body might vaporise, as if I didn't need to breathe.*

*The dying were worse than the dead. They came down from the hills in rattling caravans, slow as torture over bone-cracking roads of mud and rock, bleeding all over the backseats of rattletrap cars. Three hours, four hours, bright red lives seeping away.*

*They wound up in the dim wards of Jalalabad's filthy hospital. There weren't enough antibiotics or antiseptics. Little girls who wouldn't live through the night were stacked two to a cot, covered in blood. A baby with its head caked in scabs and pus and one eye full of blood cried in the listless arms of a young, young girl. A little boy who had lost his arms, his eyesight, and his family lay motionless in the hot afternoon. The rooms smelled of sweat and infection; flies and woollen blankets. All of it coming down from those American planes.*

*We drifted out of the hospital. In the car I tasted metal. After a long time, Brian spoke.*

*'That was pretty bad.' He cleared his throat.*

*'Yeah.'*

Megan Stack, *Every Man in this Village is a Liar: An Education in War*, Scribe, 2011

There are a number of different approaches you could take if you are expanding on this extract. It would be possible to:

- take on the persona of the American reporter who falls to the ground. You might like to explore why she does this. What is she thinking and feeling? What might she do after she leaves the hospital? Could this event have long-term consequences for her? Is she being overly dramatic?
- look at Brian, who is a minor character in the book and who only appears one more time. It might be interesting to examine what his take is on what he and Megan have seen in the hospital. He is clearly shaken by it, but does it affect his future actions? Might he end up working with Médecin Sans Frontières, for example? Or might he be haunted by the visions and develop a drinking problem as a defence against the pain of what he has seen? Is he the character who goes back into the hospital to work alongside the volunteers, or does he walk away without giving it another thought? What are the next words out of his mouth?

## ► Learning activities

- 1 Find a passage from the text you are studying and identify a minor character to explore.
- 2 Complete the 'gingerbread man' activity from page 55 for this character, filling in all of the gaps in the character's backstory.
- 3 Write a short piece in which you take on the persona of this character.

## Changing the narrative perspective

Often a new light can be shed on a story by changing who tells the story. The narrative perspective is necessarily altered when another character brings their understandings and attitudes to bear on the telling of the tale. This can be a particularly useful technique when characters stand in direct opposition to each other but only one point of view is being expressed by the author. Similarly, an omniscient narrator chooses which perspective to recount.

If you decide to engage with the text in this manner, you may find that you need to take a position or perspective that does not reflect your personal views and values. As you write, you need to keep in mind that the character's thoughts, feelings and attitudes are all a part of your written piece.

## Writer's toolbox

### Changing narrative perspective

This piece should be written in the first person.

You will probably use extracts from the original dialogue in this style of writing. It should be incorporated into your piece without attribution, but in your written reflection you should mention what you used, and why.

## Writer's toolbox

### Checklist for changing the narrative perspective

- Choose a key scene in the book. It is best to choose one that is particularly emotive or that raises an idea or issue that you are passionate about.
- Make a list of the key dialogue and issues raised by the scene.
- Think about the events that lead up to this particular scene and the ones that follow it. How does all this information contribute to your understanding of the character and the events in the text?
- Think specifically about the character that you have selected to be your narrator. What sort of person are they? What feelings, ideas and thoughts do they experience?
- What original ideas can you bring to the story? Make certain that these do not contradict anything that is already established in the book.
- Decide on a form for your writing. Does it work as a letter? Diary? Confession?

## ■ THE LONGEST MEMORY

Look at the following extract from *The Longest Memory* by Fred D'Aguiar. In it, Lidia, the daughter of a plantation owner, comes to some interesting revelations about her feelings for a slave.

*This is the day we are reading and my father enters the room and these days are brought to an abrupt end. Chapel, I call him Chapel like his mother, comes in as usual and sits. I hear the voice loud and clear without a trace of the tremor and hesitation that surrounded it when we began two years ago. At what point do I stop hearing the words and listen to the voice alone and realise I am in love with its cadence? My body is suddenly hot. The thought spins my head. It is so clear an idea that I am sure it has left my body and skips around the room in celebration. I open my eyes to see what shape my love has taken and there is my father standing with his legs apart and his hands on his hips. Chapel jumps up quicker than I. The volume of Shakespeare's plays flies across the floor and flutters several of its leaves in the air. Both Chapel and I scramble after them. Father orders me out of the room in his stern voice reserved for reprimanding slaves. I am so scared I obey. But I am more scared for Chapel. I realise I love a boy three years my junior. I realise I am in love with a slave. Chapel is in trouble because of me.*

Fred D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory*, Vintage Books, 1995

In this scene we only get Lidia's thoughts and feelings about the incident. There are, however, two other key characters whose ideas and emotions are unexplored. We get a hint of their social and political situations but we do not hear from them. If we were to change the point of view, however, we might:

- take a sympathetic view of Lidia's father and explore his emotions at the situation in which he has found his daughter
- take a condemning view of the father and use him as a mouthpiece for traditional views on slave ownership
- write a memoir from Chapel's point of view detailing the horror and fear of this moment
- write Chapel's prison confession detailing the love he had for Lidia
- explore the father–daughter relationship and the way in which Lidia's father is torn between his position in society and his love for his daughter.

### ► Learning activities

- 1 Find a passage from the text you are studying and identify a character to explore.
- 2 Complete the 'gingerbread man' activity from page 55 for this character.
- 3 Write a short piece in which you take on the persona of this character.

## Expanding on a major character

While expanding on a minor character allows you to give voice to someone who is marginalised by the author of the original text, expanding on a major character allows you to explore aspects of the character that might not fit the narrator's purpose. You can embellish a character's story by filling in the gaps of their life that weren't described in the text, or by placing them in situations in the text that they weren't in originally.

John Steinbeck's American classic *Of Mice and Men* is a text that lends itself to this kind of creative interpretation. There are a number of key characters whose stories are not fleshed out in the novella, but whose ideas and attitudes are influential to the action of the story. Characters such as Slim, Crooks and Curley's wife all lack detail, and we never get more than a glimpse of their backstories.

Similarly, Reginald Rose's *Twelve Angry Men* could provide a creative writer with an opportunity to develop the stories of any one of the twelve jurors. While Rose uses them as representatives of different ideas, attitudes and socio-economic status, a creative response to this text might develop the story of one of the jurors, using details from the text, and create a more detailed biography.

## ■ OF MICE AND MEN

In the following extract from *Of Mice and Men* we get the first clear description of Slim, a character who is central to the action but lacking in backstory. Slim is later involved in covering up Lennie's misdeeds, including his crushing of the boss's hand. His air of calm authority extends even to the climax of the novella, when Slim urges a course of action upon George that will lead to Lennie's death.

*A tall man stood in the doorway. He held a crushed Stetson hat under his arm while he combed his long, black, damp hair straight back. Like the others he wore blue jeans and a short denim jacket. When he had finished combing his hair he moved into the room, and he moved with a majesty achieved only by royalty and master craftsmen. He was a jerkline skinner, the prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen, even twenty mules with a single line to the leaders. He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule. There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. This was Slim, the jerkline skinner. His hatchet face was ageless. He might have been thirty-five or fifty. His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought. His hands, large and lean, were as delicate in their action as those of a temple dancer.*

John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, Penguin Modern Classics, 2000 (1937)

Expanding on this character might include writing:

- an explanation of his background
- a first person account of his view of the other people on the ranch
- a reason for his employment on the ranch
- an account that changes the story by having Slim execute Lennie to spare George the trauma.

### ► Learning activities

- 1 Find a character from the text you are studying who warrants further exploration.
- 2 Complete the 'gingerbread man' activity from page 55 for this character, being sure to identify what is missing from their story.
- 3 Write a short piece in which you take on the persona of this character.