

Unseen Fiction Texts

In the Welsh examination board English GCSE exam (WJEC), Paper One, Part A, you will have one hour to read, analyse, and comment on an unseen fiction text. This might be a short story or an extract from a novel. You need to show you understand:



- The ways in which the main features of a narrative (i.e. a told story) are used:

POINT OF VIEW

All stories must be told from someone's point of view (the author's of course); but this is always *disguised* by the use of one of two literary "viewpoints" called a) a limited, first person point of view ("I" - when a character relates the story, usually the main character or **protagonist**) or b) an all-knowing ("omniscient") third person point of view ("he", "they") when an outsider (the author, usually) relates the story.

...Always consider the effect of the author's chosen point of view on the way you feel about the story, its events and characters.

SETTING

All stories have to happen somewhere. Make sure you work out how the setting is made interesting and believable. What is its purpose - to create atmosphere or mood? Or to help you feel the mood of a character (called a "mental landscape")?

...like description, setting is NEVER used for its own sake. It always adds something important to a narrative - it creates a "sense of place" that is a) believable and b) useful in some way to the narrative.

CHARACTER

All stories are about someone facing and overcoming a conflict. The characters are always fictional creations of the author *created for a purpose*.

This might be to help you a) believe in them as real people b) relate to the problems they face (usually a conflict with an **antagonist** or character who the **protagonist** has to "fight" against and overcome - and so "develop" into a better / wiser / more mature individual c) to persuade you to see things the author's way (i.e. to accept the themes of the story).

... fictional characters are NOT REAL, so never fall into the common trap of discussing them as if they were. Characters ALWAYS created for a specific purpose: a) to create interest and involvement; b) to help you relate to them and the story's events; c) to help persuade you to recognise and accept a theme (i.e. the purpose behind the story).

PLOT

Stories are usually straightforward – but not always interesting! **Plot** is the way a story is made interesting and absorbing in the telling by the creation of such things **atmosphere, tension** and **psychological insights into characters** that allow us to relate to what is happening, who it is happening to and - why.

THEME

Stories are nothing more than entertaining vehicles for authors to express views on some important aspect of life. When you finish a story, the **themes** are the thoughts about society, people, life... that you are left with. A good story should develop your thinking about some of life's problems or issues and help you understand the world in a better way.

You will also be expected to show you can:

RECOGNISE THE STRUCTURE

show you understand not only **what** is being *said and implied* but also **how the story's structure** *creates particular and useful effects on the that help the author's intentions in some way.*

SUPPORT YOUR POINTS

always use quotations from the story to support the points you make (one per paragraph is a good guide) – if you say that description is effective, *show some effective description!* If you say that structure is useful, *summarise the development of the story to show why you think this!* If you say a character is realistic – *show evidence of how this is done and say WHY.*

**AND ALWAYS TRY TO RELATE WHAT YOU SAY TO THE THEMES OF THE STORY
- JUST WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?... AND WHY IN THIS WAY?**

SUCCESSFUL PUPILS...

- Read the questions with care and **underline each key word**, making *sure they understand what is being asked* – **the examiner only marks the responses to the key words of the question!**
- Read the story or extract *twice right through*, **second time around in depth paying close attention to structure and language uses**. Make sure you get a definite sense of what kind of story it is (its **genre**), what it is really all about (its **themes**) and who it was intended for (**audience**).
- Search for and mark evidence (use coloured pens?) that might be used to help answer the key words of the questions. Mark especially any evidence of **interesting uses of language** and make a note of its **EFFECT** and likely **PURPOSE**.