



## Session Three

# Creating Connections: A Narrative Writing Workshop





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## Our Understanding of Narrative Writing



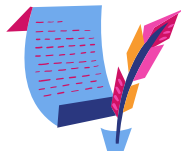
A narrative is a story that you write or tell to someone, usually in great detail. A narrative can be a work of poetry or prose, or even song, theatre, or dance

(Vocabulary.com)



Students should encounter a wide range of texts which have predominately a narrative function. This should involve students in encountering narratives of all kinds, eg. short stories, novels, drama texts, autobiographies, biographies, travel-books and films.”

(Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.12)





# Transferable Knowledge

## Oral Storytelling & Narrative Writing

### Oral Storytelling

#### Medium

Storytellers use their voice, gestures, facial expressions, and sometimes props to convey the story to their audience. The medium allows for immediate interaction and feedback from the audience.

#### Structure

Oral stories often follow a structured format with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Storytellers may use techniques such as repetition, foreshadowing, and pacing to create a cohesive story arc.

#### Detail and Elaboration

Oral storytellers use vivid language and descriptive detail to embellish their stories with colourful imagery, sensory details, and character voices to enhance the listener's experience.

#### Revision and Editing

The nature of oral storytelling often involves spontaneity and improvisation. Storytellers may adjust their storytelling based on audience reactions or feedback.

#### Audience Interaction

Storytellers engage directly with their audience, responding to their reactions, questions, and feedback. This interaction creates a dynamic and participatory storytelling experience.

### Narrative Writing

Writers use words on a page to construct the story, allowing readers to engage with the narrative at their own pace. While the medium lacks the immediacy of oral storytelling, it provides the opportunity for readers to revisit and analyse the story in detail.

Narrative writing also relies on structure to organize the story effectively. Writers use elements such as exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution to create a well-paced and satisfying narrative arc for readers.

Writers may employ descriptive language, sensory imagery, and figurative language to bring characters, settings, and events to life on the page.

Writers typically draft their stories, then revise and edit them multiple times to improve clarity, coherence, and effectiveness. This process may involve restructuring the narrative, refining language, and polishing details.

Writers may anticipate reader reactions and adjust their narrative choices accordingly to create a more engaging and resonant story experience.



## Oral Strategies to Support Narrative Writing

### Turn and Talk:

Arrange these images/panels to create a narrative.



- What is the impact of having no text on this piece?
- What does it do to the story?
- Consider how this oral activity might work in your own context to support planning for narrative writing?

### Sample 1





## Sample 2





## Inspirations for Narratives

Click on the poster below to access the full support:

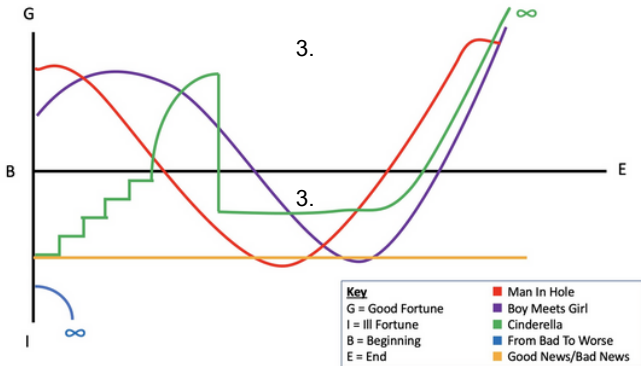
**Oide** Tacú leis an bhFoghlaim Ghairmiúil i measc Ceannairí Scoil agus Múinteoirí Supporting the Professional Learning of School Leaders and Teachers

# SOME WRITING PROMPTS!

- Short Story**  
Write the opening to a story using one of the following lines as your opening prompt:  
-A dying fire  
-She had long, red hair  
-A grey fox with silver eyes
- Podcast**  
Record a podcast in which you discuss your passion or hobby.  
Listen to some podcasts for ideas!
- Personal voice**  
Write about a time where you felt proud of yourself
- Interview**  
Create the questions for a 'This is Your Life' interview.  
Now, use them to interview a family member and record it!
- Short Story**  
In three descriptive paragraphs, write the opening of a story.  
Use the five senses - touch, smell, taste, sight, sound to guide you.
- Mini-Saga**  
In no more than 50 words, write a story. It must include a beginning, middle and end.
- Persuade**  
You can choose one superhero power to help others: fly or stop time.  
Which one do you choose and why?
- Imagine**  
Invent a fifth season. Give it a name and then describe it. Include similes, personification and a metaphor in your writing.
- Review**  
Write a travel blog about a place you've visited using 5 sub-headings of your choice
- House of the Future**  
Design a house for the future. Explain what you would include to make it sustainable and futuristic!
- Manual**  
If you had to move to another country tomorrow, what five items you would pack with you and why?
- Script Writing**  
Two characters meet on the street and one sincerely believes that they know the other whilst the other insists they have never met. Write a dialogue between them.



## Kurt Vonnegut - Shape of Stories



Click [here](#) to access more info in relation to Kurt Vonnegut's story structures

### Application of Structure

- Man in Hole
- Boy Meets Girl
- Cinderella
- From Bad to Worse
- Good News/Bad News

### Examples of texts that follow Vonnegut's structure



Your paragraph text



*Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut  
*Catch 22* by Joesph Heller



Your paragraph text





# Freytag's Pyramid



Freytag's Pyramid describes how narratives should move through difficulty towards a climax, and from there to resolution.

### Application of Structure

1. Exposition
2. Rising Action
3. Climax
4. Falling Action
5. Denouement

### Examples of texts that follow Freytag's Pyramid structure

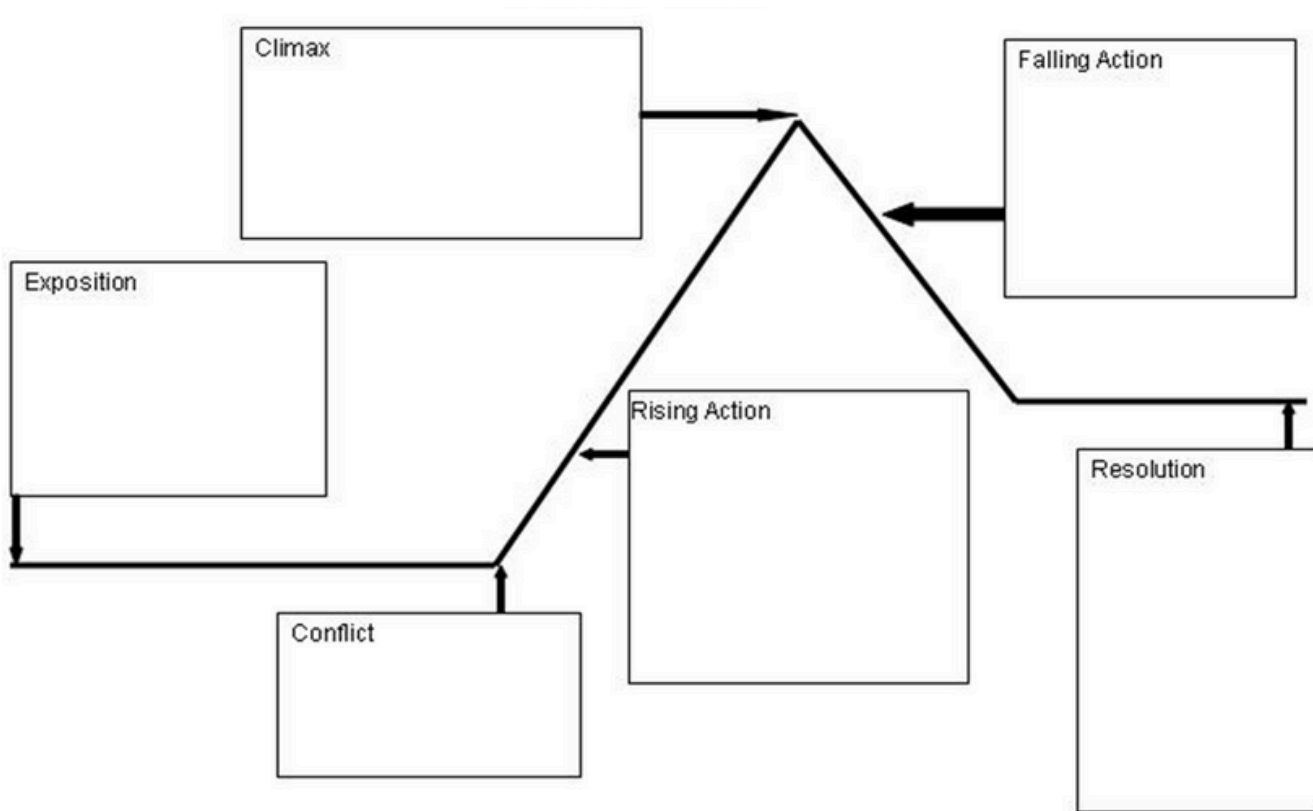
*The Present* directed by Jacob Frey  
*The Shawshank Redemption* directed by Frank Darabont

*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne  
*Holes* by Louis Sachar  
*Skellig* by David Almond  
*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare  
*King Lear* by William Shakespeare



# Freytag's Pyramid





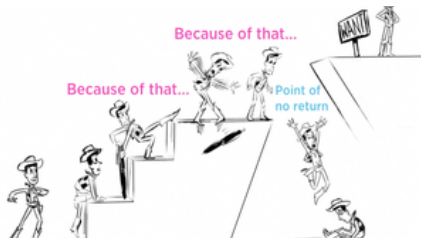
# Pixar



## Application of Structure

The writers and animators at Pixar have a simple outline for writing stories

1. Once upon a time...
2. Every day...
3. But one day...
4. Because of that...
5. Because of that...
6. Until finally..



## Examples of texts that follow the Pixar structure



*Toy Story* directed by John Lasseter.

*Finding Nemo* directed by Andrew Stanton.

*Up* directed by Pete Docter.



## Pixar Story Structure

Set a strong structure for your story and add in the details afterwards



**Once Upon a Time**

Set the stage

01



**Every day...**

Describe the hero's daily routine

02



**But one day...**

Something that upsets your hero's routine

03



**Because of that...**

The character's journey

04



**Because of that...**

New journeys the character takes

05



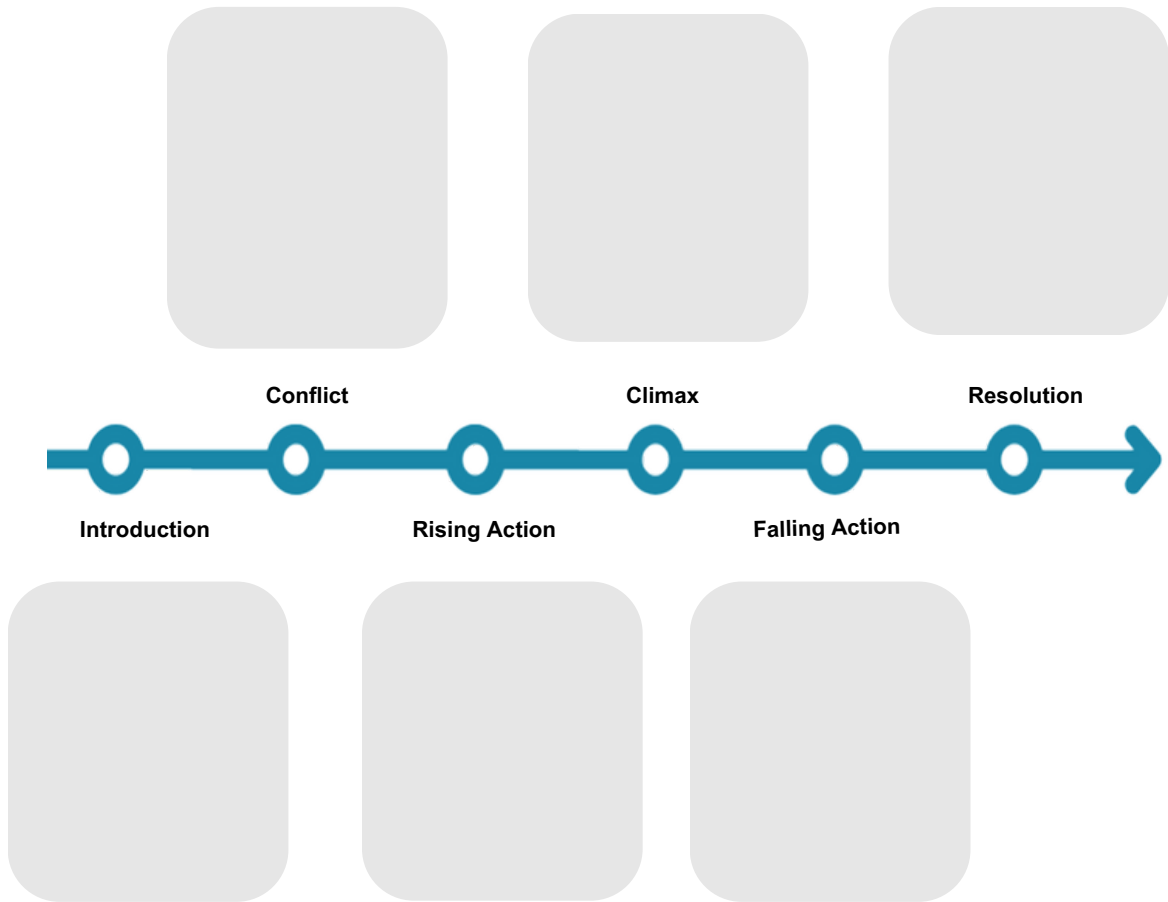
**And finally...**

Resolution of the story

06



# Linear Narrative





# Application of Linear Narrative

Arm has a son with additional needs, Jack. He wants to be more present in his son's life but his way of life acts as a barrier

**Conflict**

Dympna is murdered by his uncle. Arm flees, injured and irrational

**Climax**

Arm dies loyal to the Dever's family. But at the cost of his own family.

**Resolution**



**Introduction**

**Rising Action**

**Falling Action**

The story begins with Arm, a former boxer and enforcer for the criminal gang, the Devers, in a small Irish town

Arm murders an enemy of the Dever's family.

Arm seeks revenge for Dympna's murder.

***Calm with Horses***  
**by Colin Barrett**



# Getting started with...

## Oide *Calm with Horses from Young Skins*

by Colin Barrett



### Main Characters

**Douglas "Arm" Armstrong** is the central character, a former boxer turned enforcer for a drug-dealing family in rural Ireland. Despite his intimidating presence and violent tendencies, Arm has a sensitive side, particularly when it comes to his son. He struggles with his own inner turmoil, torn between his loyalty to the family and his desire for a better life.

**Dympna** has a tough exterior, but with glimpses of vulnerability and inner turmoil. Dympna's sense of loyalty and protectiveness towards those he cares about is navigated through moments of fierce determination and unwavering commitment.

**Ursula** is Arm's ex-girlfriend and the mother of his young son. She left Arm due to his violent behaviour but still has complicated feelings for him. Ursula wants what's best for their son and tries to shield him from the dangers of Arm's lifestyle.

**Jack** is Arm's best friend and closest confidant. He helps Arm with his enforcer duties and is fiercely loyal to him. Despite his tough exterior, Jack cares deeply for Arm and worries about his well-being.

### Setting

*Calm with Horses* is primarily set in the rugged landscape of **County Mayo**. The setting reflects the harsh realities of life in a remote, economically depressed area.

### Brief Plot Overview

*Calm with Horses* is the longest story from the collection *Young Skins*, exploring crime and drama. Arm is an ex-boxer who works as an enforcer for the drug-dealing Devers family in rural Ireland while providing for his son. Torn between these two families, Arm's loyalties are tested when he is asked to kill for the first time.

### Some Themes



Identity



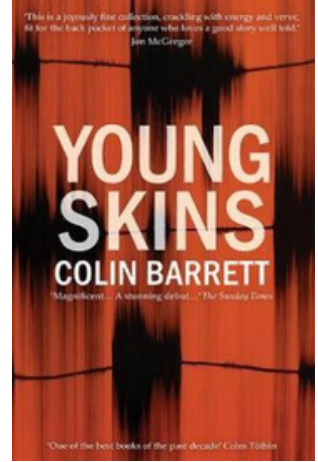
Violence



Isolation



Redemption



“ Arm had the clear head and cold-bloodedness required by the ring, the knack of detachment.”



**[Click to watch the trailer for the film adaptation of \*Calm With Horses\* courtesy of Altitude Films.](#)**





## Exploring Senior Cycle Texts 'Calm with Horses' from *Young Skins* by Colin Barrett

**Please note:** *Calm with Horses* by Colin Barrett is a drama included as part of the List of Texts prescribed for comparative study, for examination in the year 2025 and 2026. *Calm with Horses* is one of seven short stories from the collection, *Young Skins*.

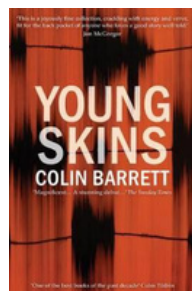


Image courtesy of A Stinging Fly

### Please note:

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- Students may also wish to engage in a think, pair, share activity for some tasks.

### Making connections with the continuum of learning



Students should be able to:

Develop an awareness of their own response to texts and analyse and justify that response.

Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations.

(Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)

### Pre-reading discussion:

1. "What do you think the title "Calm with Horses" suggests about the story? How does it make you feel or what images does it conjure in your mind?"

2. How might a setting contribute to the mood and tone of a narrative?





**Below are two extracts from the short story ‘Calm with Horses’****Read both extracts and answer the questions that follow**

***The novella opens with Arm waiting patiently in the car while his boss confronts an old man who abused his family’s hospitality.....***

Dympna told Arm to stay in the car while Dympna gave Fannigan a chance to plead his case. This wasn’t the way it usually went, but Arm nodded okay. Arm watched Dympna stalk up the lawn and politely hammer on the front door of the council house Fannigan shared with his mother. Eventually Dympna was let inside.

Arm slid in his earphones and sank in the passenger seat. The car was originally Dympna’s Uncle Hector’s, a battered cranberry Corolla Dympna dubbed the shitbox, its interior upholstered in tan vinyl that stank of motor oil, cigarette ash and dog. Recessed into the dash was a dead radio, its cassette-tape slot jammed with calcified gobs of blue tack, cigarette butt-ends and pre-euro-era Irish coins. The dash smelled of fused electricals. Above Arm’s head, a row of memorial cards, their laminate covers wilted by age and light, were tucked into the sun visor and a red beaded rosary chain was tangled around the inverted T of the rear-view mirror.

Three houses down, two schoolgirls were sitting on a garden wall, talking and smoking. They were in their teens, their figures swollen to shapelessness by puffa jackets and the voluminous skirts of navy-and-green convent plaid heaped up in their laps. It was ten on a Wednesday morning, and the girls, Arm figured, were mitching from school. They were sharing the one cigarette, passing it back and forth and gabbing and rocking their feet from side to side in insistent tandem. Their heads were bent low, they covered their mouths as they spoke, each the other’s confidant, and Arm could have happily sat and watched them for the rest of the morning but he sensed movement from Fannigan’s house. Dympna was stomping back down the lawn in a way that reminded Arm of his own little boy, Jack. Dympna loomed by the passenger window, made a gun shape with his finger and pointed at Arm’s head. Arm popped out his earphones. Dympna’s features, which always looked too small for his wide face, were pinched, consternated. His trackie top was zipped right up to his neck, and Arm watched the zipper shiver tautly against the protuberant knot of his Adam’s apple. Dympna let out a long sigh, like a mammy.

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***We are introduced to Jack, Arm’s autistic son, aged 5. Arm is no longer with Ursula, Jack’s mother. However they maintain a collegial relationship for the sake of their son. Here we see Arm describe his son.....***

Jack had his noises, and Arm could read the colour and shape of his moods in the noises as plain as day. There were the moos and coos of contentment, the squawks and trills of delight, the stream of burbles that attended his absorption in some odd task, the injurious kitten mewling for when things weren’t going his way, and then there was the deep, guttural screaming that stood for itself and nothing else. His tantrums were infrequent, but came on abruptly, and often without identifiable course. He could become violent, usually to himself, knocking his head against a wall, trying to kick through glass frames or wooden doors, mauling his own fingers until they bled. Anyone who got in his way was fair game for a savage swick. The violence was an undirected venting of pressure, and meant nothing beyond the compulsion of its expression – so hazarded the doctors. It was what it was, like the weather

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## Possible Questions

1. What does the first extract tell us about the character of Dympna? Support your answer with three pieces of information from the extract?
2. Arm is introduced to us in this opening extract. What do we learn about him from this? Give evidence to support your answer.
3. The language in 'Calm with Horses' is a mixture of eloquent description and colloquial phrasing. What effect does this have on the reader and their understanding of the characters?

You might consider some of the following:

- Imagery
  - Onomatopoeia
  - Alliteration
  - Verb choice
4. 'Calm with Horses' explores relationship between male characters who live on the periphery of a small rural town. How would you describe the dynamic between Arm and Dympna based on this extract?
  5. Having read the first extract, how does the setting contribute to the narrative? What impression do you get of this setting and how might it affect the characters' actions?
  6. Exploring Arm's relationships with his autistic son Jack forms a central part of this short story.  
In the second extract, how does Barrett humanise Arm's character through his relationship with his son?
  7. How does the portrayal of Jack's personality, with its unpredictable moods mirror Arm's inner world?



## Oral Strategies Possible Activities



### Title: "Unveiling Arm: A Podcast Interview"

The objective of this task is to engage in oral communication and creative storytelling by embodying the role of a podcast host interviewing a fictional character. By exploring Arm's character in-depth, you will develop a deeper understanding of Arm's motivations and the themes of the short story "*Calm with Horses*."

#### Task Description:

Imagine you are hosting a podcast centred around character exploration and development in short stories. Your next episode will feature an in-depth interview with Arm, the complex protagonist from the short story "*Calm with Horses*." Your goal is to delve into Arm's psyche, motivations, and the challenges he faces throughout the film.

**Preparation:** Re read the short story "*Calm with Horses*," paying close attention to Arm's character arc, relationships, and key moments.

Prepare a list of interview questions that will prompt Arm to reflect on his experiences, emotions, and decisions. Consider questions about his background, relationships with other characters, and internal conflicts.

**Introduction (1 minute):** Start your podcast episode with a brief introduction, setting the stage for the interview and introducing your audience to Arm in the short story "*Calm with Horses*."

**Interview (5 minutes):**

Conduct the interview as if Arm were a real person sitting across from you. Use your imagination to embody the role of the interviewer, asking the prepared questions and allowing space for Arm's responses.

Stay in character and respond to Arm's answers as if you were engaging in a real conversation. React empathetically to his experiences and emotions, seeking to deepen the exploration of his character.

**Reflection (2 minutes):** After the interview, take a moment to reflect on Arm's responses and the insights gained into his character. Discuss key revelations or moments of understanding that emerged during the interview.

Consider how Arm's character adds depth and richness to the narrative of "*Calm with Horses*," and how his experiences resonate with broader themes explored in the film.

**Conclusion (1 minute):** Wrap up the podcast episode with a brief conclusion, summarising the highlights of the interview and expressing gratitude to Arm for his participation.

Encourage listeners to read "*Calm with Horses*" and engage with the story's complex characters and themes.





## Oral Strategies Possible Activities

### Title: "Exploring Themes and Issues using Debate"

The objective of this task is to develop students' oral communication skills, critical thinking abilities, and literary analysis techniques through the exploration of the short story "*Calm with Horses*."

#### **Possible Topics for Debate.**

*Below are a selection of topics that arise within the story encouraging students to reflect on broader social, cultural, and ethical considerations. However, are not intended to be exhaustive.*

#### Parental Responsibility and Influence:

- Debate the role of Dympna as a mother and her influence on Jack's upbringing. Discuss whether her actions contribute to Jack's behaviour and decisions, and examine the theme of parental responsibility in the story.

#### Gender Roles and Expectations:

- Examine the portrayal of gender roles and expectations in the story and how they influence characters' behaviour and relationships. Discuss stereotypes, gender norms, and the importance of challenging societal expectations to promote equality and inclusivity

#### Mental Health and Well-being:

- Explore the portrayal of mental health and well-being in the story. Discuss how characters like Arm cope with stress, trauma, and internal struggles, and examine the importance of mental health awareness and support in real-life communities

#### Rural Isolation and Community Support:

- Discuss the theme of rural isolation and the importance of community support networks in remote areas. Explore how characters in the story navigate challenges such as limited resources, access to services, and social isolation, and consider real-world solutions to address these issues

#### Effects of Toxic Masculinity:

- Explore the theme of toxic masculinity as depicted in the story. Debate how societal expectations of masculinity influence the characters' behaviour and relationships, and discuss the consequences of adhering to or rejecting these expectations.





## Some aspects of short story include...

### Definition of Short Story

*..an invented prose narrative shorter than a novel usually dealing with a few characters and aiming at unity of effect and often concentrating on the creation of mood rather than plot*

*Merriam Webster*

### Key Considerations for Short Story

A short story is a brief work of fiction that typically focuses on a single incident, character, or theme. It is shorter in length compared to novels and novellas, often ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand words. Short stories aim to convey a complete narrative arc within a limited space, usually featuring a concise plot, well-defined characters, and a clear resolution.



**Brevity:** Short stories are concise and focused, with no unnecessary digressions or subplots. They aim to tell a complete story within a relatively small word count.

**Single Plot or Theme:** Short stories usually revolve around a single plot or theme, allowing for a clear and focused narrative structure.

**Limited Character Development:** Due to their brevity, short stories often feature a smaller cast of characters and may focus more on action or plot-driven elements rather than extensive character development.

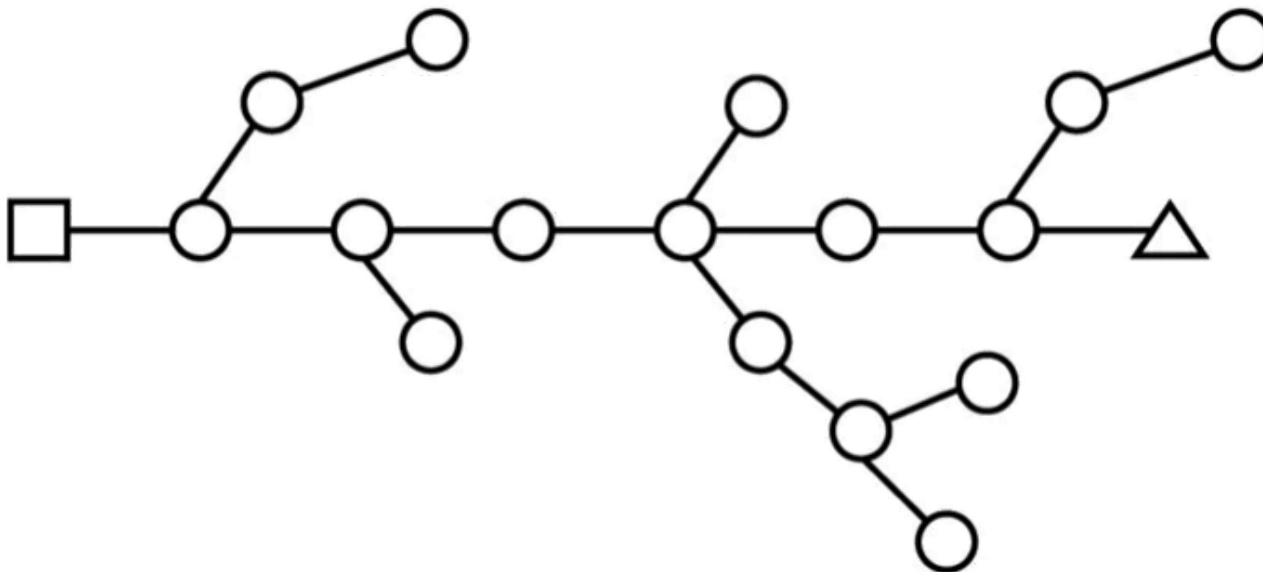
**Impactful Endings:** Short stories often conclude with a twist, revelation, or resolution that leaves a lasting impression on the reader. The ending is designed to provide closure or provoke thought.

**Exploration of Themes:** Despite their shorter length, short stories can explore complex themes and ideas, offering insights into human nature, society, and the human experience.





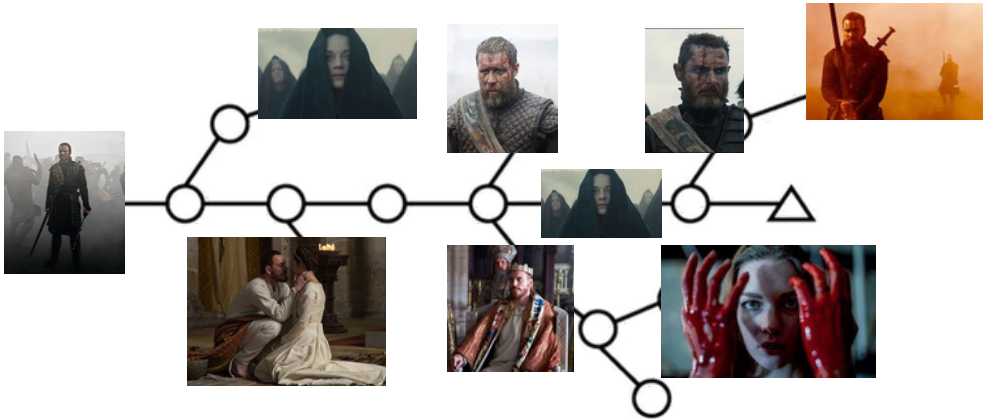
## Sting Of Pearl Narrative





## Application of the String of Pearl Narrative

# Macbeth



1. While returning from a battle victory, Macbeth and Banquo meet three Witches who predict that he will become King of Scotland.
2. Acting on the witches' predictions, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth plot and execute a plan to kill King Duncan.
3. Banquo, Macbeth's best friend, becomes suspicious of what his friend has done so Macbeth has him murdered too.
4. Now crowned as king, but uncertain in his power, Macbeth pays a second visit to the Witches and receives more predictions.
5. In England, Malcolm (Duncan's oldest son) and his main supporter, Macduff, plan to invade Scotland to win back the throne. A now acerbic Macbeth has Macduff's wife and children killed; Macduff swears revenge.
6. Lady Macbeth suffers from guilt for what she has done, symbolically imagining blood on her hands that won't wash off, and eventually takes her own life.
7. Malcolm's invasion is successful and Macduff kills Macbeth. Malcolm becomes the new King of Scotland. The country mourns and counts the cost of Macbeth's short but bloody reign.



## Main Characters

**Macbeth** - a Scottish general, led to wicked thoughts by the prophecies of three witches. A brave and powerful man, but not a virtuous one, easily tempted into murder to fulfill his ambitions to the throne.

**Lady Macbeth** - a deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position, urging her husband to kill the King and seize the crown, inevitably falling victim to madness leading to her untimely death.

**The Three Witches** - manipulate Macbeth's fate through prophecies, leading him to commit murder and descend into madness, embodying a sinister force that delights in orchestrating human tragedy.

**Banquo** - a noble and honorable figure, serves as a moral contrast to Macbeth, embodying the path of integrity and resisting the temptation of ambition, haunting Macbeth as a reminder of his moral failure.

## Setting

The play unfolds across **medieval Scotland**, including the royal castle of **Forres**, Macbeth's castle at **Inverness**, the heath where the witches meet, the battlefield where Macbeth encounters Macduff, and the **Birnam Wood** where Malcolm's army advances towards Macbeth's stronghold.

## Brief Plot Overview

*Macbeth* is a **tragedy**.

The play follows the tragic downfall of a Scottish nobleman, spurred by prophecies from three witches and the manipulation of his ambitious wife, as he murders King Duncan to seize the throne. Guilt and paranoia consume Macbeth as he descends into tyranny, leading to a bloody reign marked by betrayal, supernatural visions, and eventual defeat at the hands of his enemies.

## Some Themes

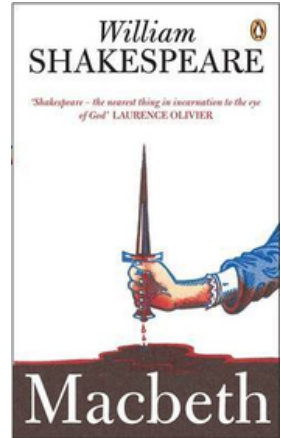
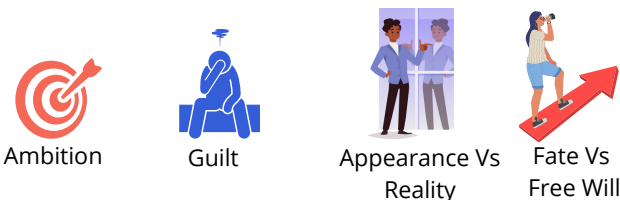
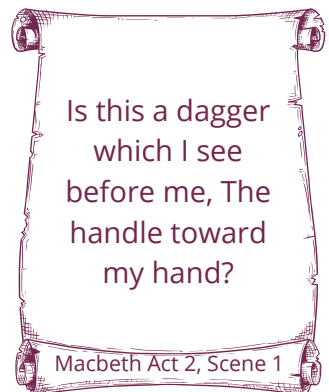



Image courtesy of  
Penguin



**Click to watch a performance** of the Dagger Speech from Act 2 Scene 1, courtesy of Shakespeare's Globe 





## Exploring Senior Cycle Texts *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

**Please note:** *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare is a drama included as part of the List of Texts prescribed for comparative study, for examination in the year 2026. At Higher Level a play by Shakespeare must be one of the texts chosen.



Image courtesy of *The Guardian*

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### Making connections with the continuum of learning



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(Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)

**Pre-reading discussion:**

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” - John Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton



Discuss this statement considering how power is seen and valued from different perspectives. You may wish to discuss whether a person’s moral compass is compromised and if these changes are positive or negative, or both.



## ACT II Scene II

Enter MACBETH.

Macbeth I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

Lady Macbeth I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.  
Did not you speak?

Macbeth When?

Lady Macbeth Now.

Macbeth As I descended?

Lady Macbeth Ay.

Macbeth Hark – Who lies i'th' second chamber?

Lady Macbeth Donalbain.

Macbeth This is a sorry sight.

Lady Macbeth A foolish thought,  
To say a sorry sight.

Macbeth There's one did laugh in's sleep,  
And one cried 'Murder', that they did wake each other.  
I stood and heard them. But they did say their prayers,  
And addressed them again to sleep.

Lady Macbeth There are two lodged together.

Macbeth One cried 'God bless us', and 'Amen' the other,  
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands;  
List'ning their fear, I could not say 'Amen',  
When they did say 'God bless us'.

Lady Macbeth Consider it not so deeply.

Macbeth But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?  
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'  
Stuck in my throat.



- Lady Macbeth    These deeds must not be thought  
After these ways: so, it will make us mad.
- Macbeth            Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more;  
Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast'.
- Lady Macbeth    What do you mean?
- Macbeth            Still it cried 'Sleep no more' to all the house:  
'Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more – Macbeth shall sleep no more'.
- Lady Macbeth    Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,  
You do unbend your noble strength to think  
So brain-sickly of things – Go get some water,  
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.  
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?  
They must lie there – go carry them, and smear  
The sleepy grooms with blood.
- Macbeth            I'll go no more:  
I am afraid to think what I have done;  
Look on't again, I dare not.
- Lady Macbeth    Infirm of purpose;  
Give me the daggers; the sleeping, and the dead,  
Are but as pictures, 'tis the eye of childhood  
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,  
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,  
For it must seem their guilt.

Exit LADY MACBETH.



## A note on foreshadowing

The content of this scene foreshadows a lot of the events that will occur later in the play, perhaps most notably the bloodied hands on Lady Macbeth.



**Foreshadowing** is a technique used in literature, involving authors or playwrights dropping hints about future plot twists or developments that unfold later in the story. This can be done through direct statements or subtle clues embedded in the narrative.

Anton Chekhov, the Russian playwright, famously illustrated foreshadowing with his statement: "If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off." Essentially, this means that the initial description of the rifle should anticipate its eventual significance or use in the story.

## The role of a director in giving a play new life

Each director will have a different creative vision for a play, which is why these scenes can be reworked so effectively, so appeal to different audiences, or to highlight various aspects of the script and story.



Directors will often conduct their own research on the context of the play, the playwright or at times a more unusual theatrical concept that the director may wish to portray on stage.

The director has quite often worked through an entire script, considering and liaising with departments in costume, sound, lighting, set-design and working with individual actors on blocking, presence and body language. All of these ideas stem from the original text, in this case a script.

## Hangman's Hands

Macbeth sees his hands as akin to the hangman's after he has killed King Duncan, drawing a connection between his own act of murder and the methodical, remorseless actions of an executioner. This comparison suggests Macbeth's recognition and admission of his responsibility for the king's death.



While hanging was a ghastly death for some, the reference to the hangman's hands is in particular relation to the act of treason against the King. In these instances, the hangman would also disembowel the traitor, with the remains typically parboiled and displayed as a threatening reminder of the penalty for high treason.



## Possible Questions

1. Lady Macbeth says, "a little water clears us of this deed, how easy is it then". How does this seem to be an understatement? Discuss the gravity of her statement and what it might foreshadow.
2. What can we conclude from this scene regarding Macbeth's state of mind?
3. Take a look at the following performance of this scene, as performed by the Royal Shakespeare company and available on their Learning Zone Youtube channel



How does the director employ dramatic techniques to create a rich storytelling experience for the audience?

You might consider some of the following:

- **Blocking** The placing/moves/choreography of the actors on stage
- **Characterisation** The investigation and portrayal of a character
- **Gesticulation** The act of making gestures. In theatre, quite often a dramatic movement that gets attention.
- **Levels** Contrast of height used in positioning, this could be with actors or set
- **Message** The overall point the director wants to communicate to the audience in this scene
- **Mood** The feeling or emotion of a moment or piece
- **Set** Objects, flats and furniture we see on stage to help create the setting



### Main Characters

**JJ O'Malley:** JJ is a Romanian orphan adopted by a farmer who, after a personal tragedy, volunteers for an experiment in the use of deep coma as an option in the EU penal system.

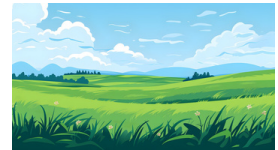
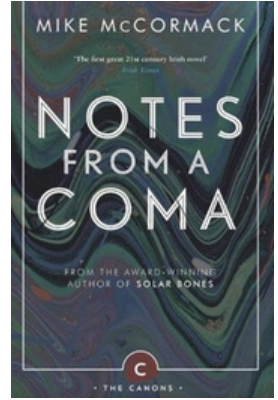
**Anthony O'Malley:** A bachelor farmer from the West of Ireland who travels to Eastern Europe when his farm is quarantined because of BSE

**Frank Lally:** A neighbour of the O'Malleys and one of the narrators of the novel, Frank's son Owen forms a deep fraternal bond with JJ.

**Gerard Fallon:** JJ's teacher, Gerard Fallon gives us a well-rounded picture of JJ as a complicated and highly intelligent person.

**Sarah Nevin:** One of the narrators of the novel, Sarah is JJ's long-term girlfriend.

**Kevin Barrett TD:** A government minister, Kevin is one of the narrators of the novel, helping us to understand the complexities of JJ's character.



### Setting

*Notes from a Coma* is set primarily in a small village in **County Mayo, Ireland**. This rural setting plays a significant role in shaping the novel's atmosphere and themes. In addition to the Irish village, a crucial part of the story takes place in a **futuristic experimental facility** where JJ participates in a European Union pilot program that simulates a coma. This dual setting allows McCormack to juxtapose the simplicity and tradition of rural life with the complexity and ethical dilemmas of modern technology.



### Brief Plot Overview

Struggling with his past and a sense of detachment, JJ volunteers for a controversial European Union experiment involving a state-of-the-art coma, designed to test a new form of detention.

🗨️ Once you open the door to the past, the present starts to unravel." 🗨️

### Some Themes



Memory & Trauma



Technology & Humanity



Family Dynamics



Identity

Click to watch a clip of Mike McCormack discussing the novel, Notes From a Coma.



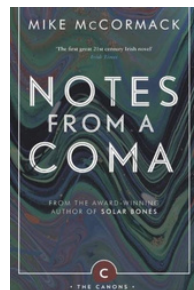
## Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

### *Notes From a Coma* by Mike McCormack

Senior Cycle  
English



Please note: *Notes From a Coma* by Mike McCormack is a novel included as part of the List of Texts prescribed for comparative study, for examination in the year 2026.



### Background to the novel:

*Notes From a Coma* is the tale of JJ O'Malley, a Romanian orphan who is adopted by an Irish bachelor and raised in the west of Ireland. JJ's childhood is a happy one. However, after a personal tragedy, he decides to do something radical and volunteers for a Government experiment in which prisoners are put into a deep coma and kept on a prison ship.

### Making connections with the continuum of learning



Students should be able to:

Develop an awareness of their own response to texts and analyse and justify that response.

Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations.

(Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)



## The following extract is taken from the opening chapter of the novel:

### Frank Lally

My heart went out to Anthony that day, that's no lie. Nearly twenty years ago now but I remember it like it was last week.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the cars and the cattle truck came up the road. I followed them up and when I got to the yard the truck had reversed into the barn door and the vet and the bailiffs were already loading up the herd.

Anthony was standing at the back of the house with the collar pulled up around his ears. I went over and stood beside him and said nothing. What could I say?

A dirty day it was too, pissing rain all morning and a wind blowing through the yard that would shave you. No one said anything but it didn't take them more than twenty minutes to load up the whole herd—eight Friesian cows, a couple of yearlings and two calves. One by one they marched up that ramp without a bit of bother and I remember thinking we'd often had more trouble loading up two or three beasts of a Monday morning for the mart.

They pinned up the tailgate and moved off and I saw the sergeant, Jimmy Nevin, coming over to Anthony. But whatever was on his mind he thought better of it and stood off holding the gate for the truck. Anthony turned into the house without a word. I watched the truck down the bottom of the hill and saw it turn out on to the main road. Jimmy Nevin closed the gate and walked over to me.

"Before you go," he said, "give him this."

He handed me a brown envelope.

"It's the quarantine order. Six months."

Anthony got barred from Thornton's that night and it was years afterwards before he could have a drink in it.

There was a time when Anthony had a reputation for being able to start a fight in an empty room: a short temper and tidy with his fists. I'd seen him in action a few times, London and elsewhere, and he wasn't a man you wanted to do battle with. But that was all in the past—or so I thought. It all came back to him that night in Thornton's.

He'd been drinking since mid-afternoon and by eleven he was well on it. Ger, behind the bar—he was only young at the time—wouldn't serve him any more. He came outside the bar and tried to lead Anthony to the door. Anthony of course was having none of it. He'd come in under his own steam, he'd go out the same way. And he did too a few minutes later when he saw he was getting no more drink. But that wasn't the end of it.



**Please note:**

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons or as part of a unit of learning
- Students may wish to complete some tasks individually or in pairs/groups
- Tasks might be completed orally and/or in written format.
- Students may also wish to engage in a think, pair, share activity for some tasks.

**Support your answers with reference to the text.**

- How does the opening sentence of the extract ("*My heart went out to Anthony that day, that's no lie.*") establish the tone and draw the reader into the story? Discuss the effectiveness of this opening in setting up the narrative.
- Think about the relationship between Anthony and the narrator as presented in the passage. Write a paragraph explaining how the narrator feels about Anthony and provide evidence from the text.
- How does the author use the description of the weather and the environment to enhance the mood of the passage? Explain how the setting contributes to the overall atmosphere and the reader's understanding of the events.
- With a partner, discuss the key events that happen in the passage. Create a bullet-point list or timeline, summarising the events in the passage.
- Create a visual representation of the passage using any medium of your choice (drawing, painting, digital art, collage, etc.). Focus on capturing the key elements of the story, such as: Anthony's appearance and demeanour, the weather and its impact on the scene, the barnyard setting and interactions between characters.



## Crafting Characters from Poetry

### Aunt Helen

Miss Helen Slingsby was my maiden aunt,  
And lived in a small house near a fashionable square  
Cared for by servants to the number of four.  
Now when she died there was silence in heaven  
And silence at her end of the street.  
The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feet—  
He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before.  
The dogs were handsomely provided for,  
But shortly afterwards the parrot died too.  
The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece,  
And the footman sat upon the dining-table  
Holding the second housemaid on his knees—  
Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.

T.S. Eliot

Above you can see the poem Aunt Helen by T.S. Eliot, who is one of the poets prescribed for ordinary level and higher level in both 2025 & 2026. This text could be used to inspire character creation.



## Character Profiles

### Create a past

- Birthdate
- Birthplace
- Accent
- Family members
- Childhood
- Education
- First-hand jobs
- Accomplishments
- Failures

### Establish physical characteristics

- Height
- Weight
- Body type
- Hair colour/style
- Ethnicity
- Distinguishing features (birthmarks/scars/tattoos)
- Quirks

### Determine the character's role

- Protagonist: the main character or hero
- Antagonist: the villain
- Sidekick
- Orbital: neither good or bad guy but prominent throughout
- Love interest
- Confidante

### Character involvement in the story

- What do they want?
- What are their needs and desires?
- What or who stands in their way?
- What are their choices?
- What if they fail?
- What sacrifices will they have to make?
- What heroic qualities do they need?

### Layer in emotional characteristics

- Personality
- Attitudes
- Introverted or extroverted
- Spiritual worldview
- Political worldview
- Motivations
- Fears
- Internal struggles
- Secrets
- Desires

### Decide on the basics

- Full name
- A nickname
- Age
- Current hometown
- Occupation
- Skills
- Hobbies
- Short/long term goals
- Habits



## Main Characters

**Bill Furlong:** A devoted father and coal merchant, Bill is depicted as conscientious and hardworking individual who takes pride in his work. Despite humble beginnings, he possesses a keen observational eye and reflective nature.

**Eileen Furlong:** The wife of Bill Furlong. She is portrayed as a loving and stabilizing force in Bill's world and stands by Bill through the challenges they face together.

**Michael Hayes:** A local farmer who employs Bill and serves as a mentor figure to him.

**Mrs. Hayes:** Michael's wife, who interacts with Bill and offers insights into rural domestic life.

**Mother Superior:** A controlling figure who intimidates Furlong by making it clear that she knows about his family and offering him a Christmas bonus as a form of hush money.



Image courtesy of Faber

## Setting

*Small Things Like These* is set in **1985** in **New Ross, Co. Wexford** and set against the **backdrop of the Magdalene Laundries**, an institution run by the Catholic Church.



## Brief Plot Overview

*Small Things Like These* is a **historical fiction novel**.

During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Bill Furlong, a coal and timber merchant, faces his busiest season. As he does the rounds, he feels the past rising up to meet him - and encounters the complicit silences of a small community controlled by the Church. A tender tale of hope and quiet heroism, it is both a celebration of compassion and a stern rebuke of sins committed.

“All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable.”

*Bill Furlong*



## Some Themes



Compassion and Empathy



Power and Control



Morality and Conscience



Guilt

**Click to read a short extract from**  
*Small Things Like These*  
Courtesy of  
The Booker Prizes





## Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

### *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan

**Please note:** *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2025.

This opening extract and accompanying questions may be used to explore General Vision and Viewpoint and Cultural Context at Higher Level or Social Setting at Ordinary Level.



#### Background to the novel:

*Small Things Like These* is set in the Irish town of New Ross, Co. Wexford in 1985. In a community controlled by the Catholic Church, coal and timber merchant Bill Furlong is faced with a crisis during the busiest time of the year. The following extract is taken from the opening of the novel.



*In October there were yellow trees. Then the clocks went back the hour and the long November winds came in and blew, and stripped the trees bare. In the town of New Ross, chimneys threw out smoke which fell away and drifted off in hairy, drawn-out strings before dispersing along the quays, and soon the River Barrow, dark as stout, swelled up with rain.*

*The people, for the most part, unhappily endured the weather: shop-keepers and tradesmen, men and women in the post office and the dole queue, the mart, the coffee shop and supermarket, the bingo hall, the pubs and the chipper all commented, in their own ways, on the cold and what rain had fallen, asking what was in it – and could there be something in it – for who could believe that there, again, was another raw-cold day? Children pulled their hoods up before facing out to school, while their mothers, so used now to ducking their heads and running to the clothesline, or hardly daring to hang anything out at all, had little faith in getting so much as a shirt dry before evening. And then the nights came on and the frosts took hold again, and blades of cold slid under doors and cut the knees off those who still knelt to say the rosary.*

*Down in the yard, Bill Furlong, the coal and timber merchant, rubbed his hands, saying if things carried on as they were, they would soon need a new set of tyres for the lorry.*





## Please note:

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### Support your answers with reference to the text.

- In your opinion, what is the atmosphere in the opening scene? How does this impact on us as readers?
- Is the general vision of life optimistic, pessimistic or both?
- What view of family is given? Is the family atmosphere nurturing or is it dysfunctional?
- What view of society does the author offer us as readers?





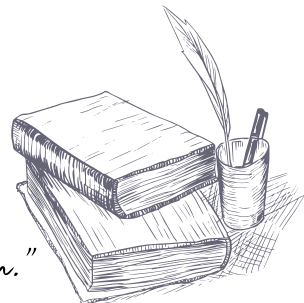
To access and share further supports on narrative writing, please click on the following Padlet links:

[Click here to access a collaborative padlet for sharing ideas in relation to short story writing](#)

[Click here to access further supports for narrative writing](#)



*"Keep scribbling!  
Something will happen."*



Frank McCourt