

English Level 10

Chapter 3 — Literature

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Versions of people and places: how context shapes them

A street in a small country town. In 1893 a writer describes it like this: one road, a row of shops with sun-bleached verandahs, men leaning outside the hotel watching the road for a dray. In 2024 another writer describes the same kind of street: the old bank is now a cafe, a grain silo has been painted with a mural, a bakery sign advertises fibre broadband. Same kind of place — two completely different pictures, and neither writer has even introduced a person yet.

What changed between those dates was not just the street. It was the writers. Each one wrote out of a different world — different work, different worries, different ideas about what a town is for — and each world left its marks inside the description. That is the subject of this section. Every text builds pictures of people, groups and places; those pictures are called **representations**, and they never arrive from nowhere. They are made by someone, in some time and place, and they carry the traces of it. By the end of the section you will be able to take a representation apart, name the context showing through it, evaluate how well it holds up — and control the same moves in your own writing and speaking.

Curriculum focus

VC2E10LE01 (Literature — Literature and contexts)

Draws on

VC2E10LE01.E01, VC2E10LE01.E03 (§2A: .E02 excluded)

Builds on (Level 9)

VC2E9LE01

Modes in this section

Reading and viewing · Writing · Speaking and listening

Content note (§2A). The full text of VC2E10LE01 names literary texts by First Nations authors alongside a wider Australian and world range. Per this book's content policy the First Nations portion is excluded — the standing note at the front of the book explains why, and the build's TOC §2A records the decision. This section therefore teaches the content description through its remaining clause: representations in classic and contemporary Australian and world literature. It draws on .E01 and .E03 only, and it is none the thinner for the exclusion: an elaboration is one illustration of a content description, never the syllabus itself.

What this section means by *representation*, *context* and *reflect*. The Victorian Curriculum uses all three terms but does not define them. This section therefore treats a **representation** as a picture of a person, group or place that a text builds out of its choices — what it shows, what it leaves out, who speaks, and which words it uses to name them. A representation is a version built by someone, never a neutral copy. It treats **context** as the circumstances that surround a text: the time it was written (historical), the community and its beliefs and stories (cultural), the way life is organised and who holds power (social), and the writer's own position (authorial). To say a representation **reflects** its context is to say it carries traces of those circumstances. *Reflect* is not meant the way a mirror is flat — a text can argue with its times, escape them or push against them — but no text floats free of them entirely. A **literary text** is a text shaped as an art of language: a novel, a story, a poem, a play. Every question in this section is answerable on these definitions alone.

Theory

1. Representations: choices, not copies

Every text you meet hands you versions of people, groups and places. A novel introduces a character; a poem speaks about “the locals”; a film shows you a city as if for the first time. Each of these is a **representation** — a picture built out of choices. Four bundles of choices do most of the work:

- **Naming.** Does the text give a person a name, or a category — *a girl*, *the locals*, *the new kids*? Does it give a place a name, or leave it as *the town*, *the bush*, *the city*? Naming decides whether you meet an individual or a type.
- **Voice.** Who speaks, and in what tone? A group described from outside by an official is a different picture from the same group speaking for itself.
- **Detail.** What is shown — work, weather, buildings, faces — and how closely? A street shown in two flat sentences is not the street shown in twenty details.

- **Leaving out.** Every representation hides as much as it shows. What a text never mentions is also a choice, and often a loud one.

Notice what this means: the same person, group or place can be represented in endless ways, because the choices can vary endlessly. Figure 1 sets the three objects of this section — individuals, groups, places — against the choices that build them and what those choices can reveal.

Representation is a bundle of choices

What a text chooses to do — and not do — when it shows a person, a group or a place

What is represented	The choices a text makes	What those choices can reflect
Individuals	a name or a category label; who speaks about them; which details are given and which are kept back	what the time prizes in a person — talent, obedience, courage, money
Groups	who is named and who is lumped together; who acts and who is acted on; one voice speaking for all, or many voices	how the time sorted people — insiders and outsiders, the powerful and the powerless
Places	what is shown — buildings, weather, work, people; what is left out; the mood the details build	what the time felt about that kind of place — home, threat, opportunity, loss

Same person, group or place — different choices, different picture, different world revealed.

Table of three kinds of representation — individuals, groups and places — listing the choices a text makes for each and what those choices can reflect about the text’s context

Your job as a reader is to describe the choices and the picture they build. Not “the text shows a town” but “the text builds the town out of heat, dust and waiting, and gives its street only to men”. That is the difference between noticing a representation and analysing one.

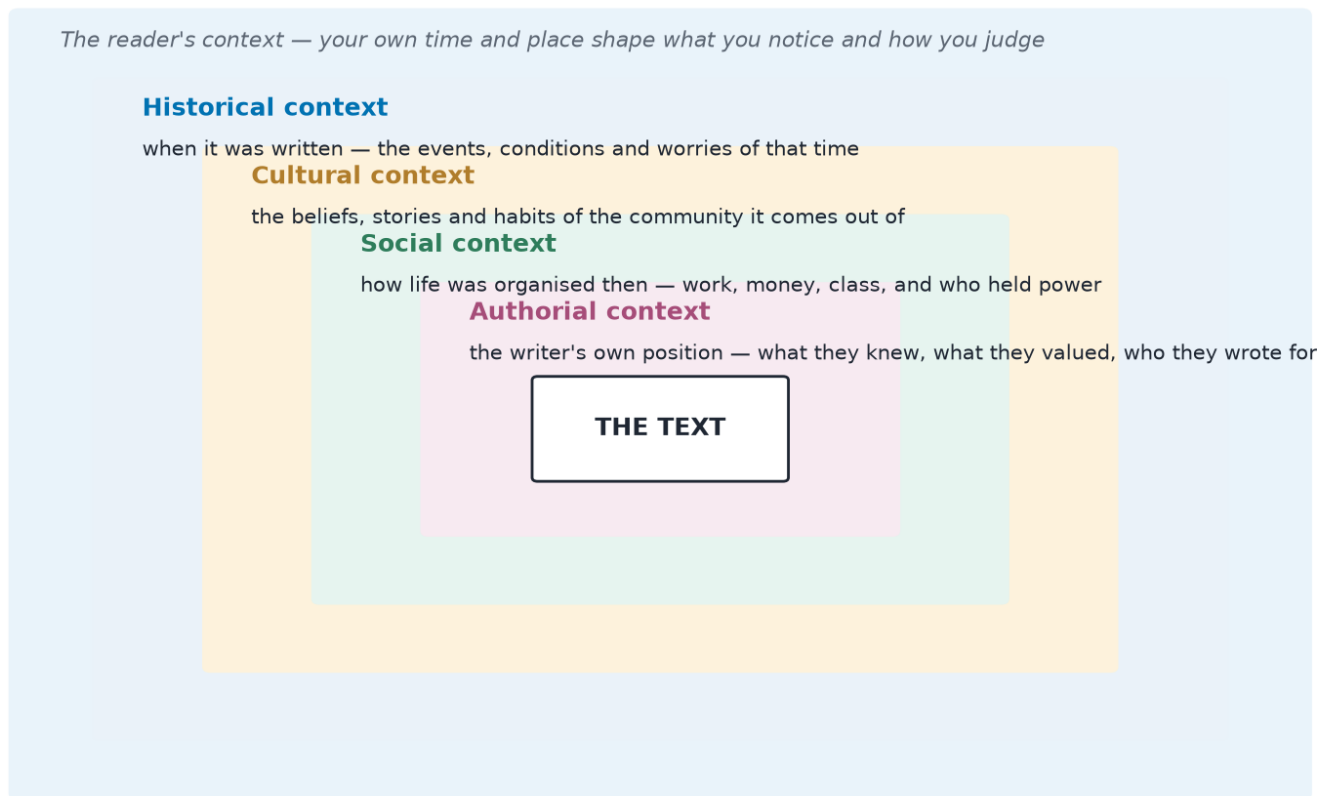
2. Context: the layers around a text

Context is the world the text was written inside. It helps to picture it in layers, because several of them press on a text at once:

- **Historical context** — when. The events, conditions and worries of the time: droughts, wars, booms, new machines, old arguments.
- **Cultural context** — whose. The beliefs, stories and habits of the community the text comes out of: what it celebrates, what it tells its children, what it laughs at.
- **Social context** — how. The way life is organised: work and money, class, gender, who holds power and who does not.
- **Authorial context** — who exactly. The writer’s own position: what they have lived, what they value, who they are writing for.

Figure 2 shows the layers nested around a text.

The layers of context around a text



Every text sits inside these layers, and a representation carries traces of each one.

Nested diagram of four layers of context — historical, cultural, social and authorial — around a central text, with the reader's context as the outer band

One more layer matters, and it is yours. **Your context as a reader** shapes what you notice and what you judge. A reader in 2026 meets an 1890s story differently from the story's first readers — and you yourself may read the same text differently after a year of living. That is one reason the achievement standard asks you to compare *initial* and *subsequent* impressions: impressions change when contexts do, on either side of the page.

3. How a representation reflects its context

Here is the key claim of this section: **choices are made inside a context, so patterns of choices carry traces of that context**. A representation tells you about the person, group or place it shows — and, often without meaning to, about the time and place that built it. Three signs to look for:

- **What goes without saying.** Every era has its assumptions — things a writer does not argue for because everyone around them already accepts them. When a text treats something as obvious, it is usually reporting the beliefs of its context.
- **What gets praised or blamed.** The figures a text rewards and the ones it mocks reveal what its world admired and disapproved of. Values surface fastest at the moments of praise.
- **What gets feared or laughed at.** Eras store their worries in their stories — in their monsters, their villains and their jokes. What a text treats as frightening or ridiculous often says more about its context than anything it states outright.

A small example. When an 1890s Australian sketch builds a bush town out of heat, dust and waiting, and praises the people who hold on without fuss, it is reflecting a world in which drought, distance and hard work were daily facts for many readers. Endurance gets praised because endurance was what that world demanded. A sketch of the same kind

of town today, choosing murals and broadband instead, reflects a different set of facts — and a different set of demands.

Hold one caution in view from the start. Reflection is a trace, not a chain. A text can carry competing traces — doubt alongside belief, mockery alongside love — and a strong writer can argue with their own era. The claim here is that representations *carry* their contexts, not that contexts write the text for them. The “two sides” box at the end of the theory returns to this.

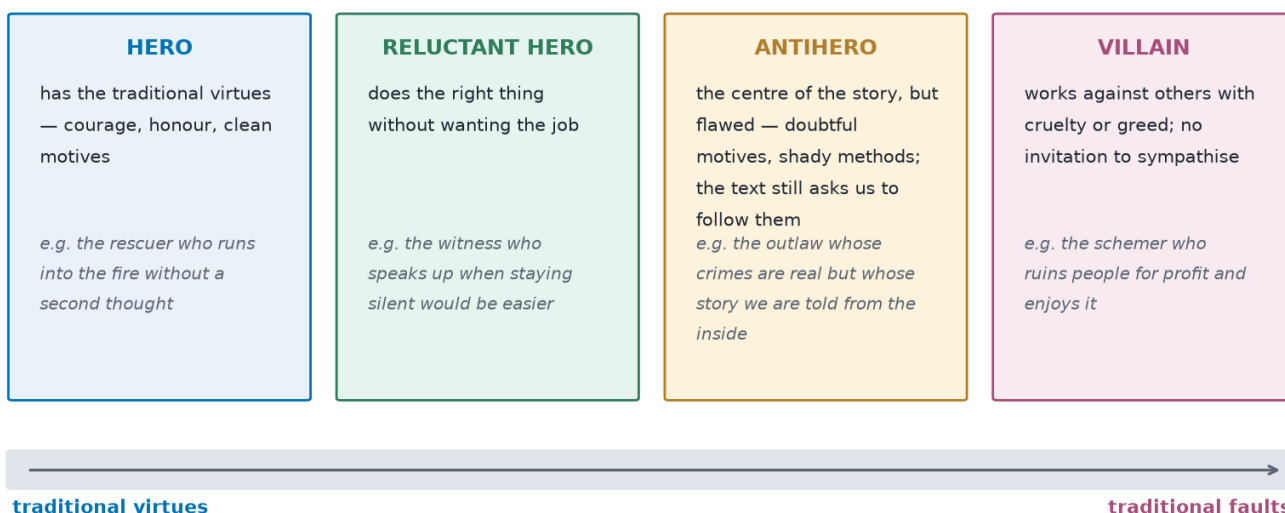
4. Stories that travel: the antihero across contexts

Cultures retell their stories. A figure or plot that matters to a community gets told again in each new era — and each telling comes out different, because each era has different worries and different uses for the story. A character type a culture keeps returning to is sometimes called an **archetype** (a pattern-figure that recurs across many stories).

One of the most travelled archetypes is the **antihero**. An antihero is a central figure who lacks the traditional heroic qualities — courage, honour, clean motives — but whom the text still asks you to follow: flawed, doubtful, sometimes doing wrong, yet holding the story’s centre. Figure 3 places the antihero on a spectrum.

Where the antihero sits: hero to villain

Character types on a spectrum — not boxes. A figure can move along it, and contexts change where readers place them.



The antihero is the type that changes most from one context to the next: each era decides anew what flaws are fascinating.

A spectrum from hero to villain with four character types marked — hero, reluctant hero, antihero and villain — each with its traits and an example

The antihero is the type that changes most from one context to the next, because each era decides for itself which flaws are fascinating. Consider Australia’s most retold figure: **Ned Kelly**, the bushranger hanged in 1880. The historical man was one thing; the representations of him have been many. In the official accounts of the 1880s he is a criminal to be caught. In the bush ballads — story poems written to be recited or sung — of the decades after, he becomes a bold underdog, a “poor man’s mate” defying the powerful. In Peter Carey’s novel *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) he speaks in his own raw voice, writing his story before anyone else can write it for him. Three eras, three Kellys — and each one reflects the era doing the retelling: law-and-order worry, a young nation shaping its own story, and a modern care about who gets to tell a life. Figure 4 shows three short retellings in the three voices (all written for this book, to show the shape of the move).

One Australian antihero, three retellings: Ned Kelly

The figure is historical; the three excerpts were written for this book in the style of their era

Retelling 1 — official notice, 1879 style	Retelling 2 — bush ballad, 1907 style	Retelling 3 — novel opening, 2000s style
NOTICE. — Information is sought leading to the capture of Edward Kelly, a newly escaped from lawful custody, a man of desperate character who keeps armed company and is suspected of offences against the Crown. Any person harbouring or supplying the said man will be dealt with as the law allows.	They tracked him through the ranges bare, / they tracked him through the rain; / yet half the selectors swore he'd camped / where half had seen him again. / For every lock the law put on, / a friendly hand would free — / the poor man's mate, the bold outlaw, / the boy from Beveridge tree.	I was twenty-five years old and I wanted to set down what happened while the remembering was still mine, because I had learned that stories belong to the people who write them down, and if I did not write mine someone else would, and theirs would be the one believed.
Context trace: the state's voice. Law and order are the measure; the figure is a threat to be caught, not a person to be known.	Context trace: the ballad admires the rebel. As Australia shaped its own national story, the underdog who defied authority became worth singing about.	Context trace: a modern care about voice — who gets to tell a life changes whose life it seems to be. The outlaw now speaks for himself.

Same figure, three contexts — and three different men emerge. The retelling reflects the era that does the retelling.

Three original retellings of Ned Kelly side by side — an official notice in 1879 style, a bush ballad stanza in 1907 style, and a novel opening in 2000s style — each with the context it reflects

None of this is unique to Australia — the antihero travels the world. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the self-made Jay Gatsby carries Jazz Age America's faith in money and reinvention. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the creature is at once monster and victim, built by an age starting to ask what new science answers for. In the Chinese classic *Journey to the West* (16th century), the rebellious Monkey King has been adapted for over four hundred years — into opera, film, television and games — and each adaptation bends him toward its own era's idea of a rule-breaker. Figure 5 gathers a reading pool of such texts for this section.

A reading pool for this section

Candidate texts set for Level 10: Australian classics, new Australian voices, world literature and stories from across Asia

Text, author, form	The context it comes from	The representation it offers
The Union Buries Its Dead — Henry Lawson, short story (1893)	colonial Australia in the 1890s: drought, unionism, bush work	underdog workers met with dry humour
The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke — C. J. Dennis, verse story (1915)	inner-city working life in Australia around the First World War	a rough city young man, softened by love, speaking in street slang
True History of the Kelly Gang — Peter Carey, novel (2000)	modern Australia retelling its most famous outlaw legend	the outlaw antihero given his own voice
The Book Thief — Markus Zusak, novel (2005)	Germany in the Second World War, told by Death himself	ordinary families, and quiet resistance, seen from above
Frankenstein — Mary Shelley, novel (1818)	an age of new science and big questions about who must answer for what they make	a creature built as a monster, read as a victim
The Great Gatsby — F. Scott Fitzgerald, novel (1925)	Jazz Age America: new money, old money, and the dream of remaking yourself	the self-made man as antihero; the dream itself put on trial
The Kite Runner — Khaled Hosseini, novel (2003)	Afghanistan across decades of change and conflict	friendship, class and guilt inside a changing nation
Never Let Me Go — Kazuo Ishiguro, novel (2005)	England in an invented near future	a group of students whose future was decided for them before they were born
Journey to the West — Wu Cheng'en, novel (16th century)	Ming dynasty China; still adapted today into film, television and games	the Monkey King — a rebellious, rule-breaking antihero

Publication details: standard publication records, checked 2026-08-24.

Table of nine candidate texts set for Level 10 — Australian classics, new Australian voices, world literature and stories from across Asia — with the context each comes from and the representation it offers

When you study a retold story, analyse the text in front of you, not the legend. Ask what *this* version chooses — and what its context wanted from the story.

5. Humour and the underdog

If the antihero is one story Australian texts keep retelling, the **underdog** is the figure they keep laughing with. An underdog is a person or group low in power, status or odds — the one expected to lose — whose struggle the text asks you to side with.

Humour is one of the most powerful ways to represent the underdog, because a joke can say what a complaint cannot. The underdog's wit becomes proof of their dignity: beaten in the contest, undefeated in the head. And laughter can be aimed upward — at the powerful, the judges, the teams with the matching jackets. Five tools do most of this work; Figure 6 sets them out with an example of each (all written for this book).

The underdog's humour toolkit

Five common tools for representing the underdog through humour (examples original, written for this book)

Tool	What it does	Example	What it lets the underdog say
Understatement	makes a big trouble sound small	"The cart was not fast. It was, however, present."	dignity — the underdog refuses to complain
Colloquial voice	everyday spoken words, slang, the talk of the street or the paddock	"It wasn't a joke, it was a budget."	ownership — sounding like yourself, not like the people in charge
Bathos	a sudden drop from the grand to the ordinary, for comic effect	"We arrived with a goat."	surprise — pops the importance of the big players
Self-mockery	laughing at yourself before anyone else can	the award framed and hung "above the goat's stall, because that's where the research department works"	control — nobody else gets to use your faults against you
Irony	saying the opposite of what is meant, so the gap does the work	"Ninth of forty," Dee said. "The judges were too kind."	judgement — pointing at unfairness while still laughing

A joke can say what a complaint cannot — and the wit itself becomes proof of the underdog's dignity.

Table of five humour tools used to represent the underdog — understatement, colloquial voice, bathos, self-mockery and irony — with an example of each and what it lets the underdog say

- **Understatement** makes a big trouble sound small — and the smallness is the dignity: no self-pity, no begging.
- **A colloquial voice** — the ordinary spoken words and slang of a time and place — keeps the underdog sounding like themselves instead of like the people in charge.
- **Bathos** drops suddenly from the grand to the ordinary, for comic effect. It pops the importance of the big players.
- **Self-mockery** laughs at the self before anyone else can. Nobody else gets to use your faults against you.
- **Irony** says the opposite of what is meant, so the gap between the two does the judging.

Underdog humour runs deep in Australian writing: the dry union funeral in Henry Lawson's story "The Union Buries Its Dead" (1893), the rough young city man redeemed by love in C. J. Dennis's verse story *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915), and the school communities of much modern fiction. The figure reflects its context each time. Ask of any underdog joke: *what must this culture believe about fairness, luck and itself, for this to be the way it laughs?*

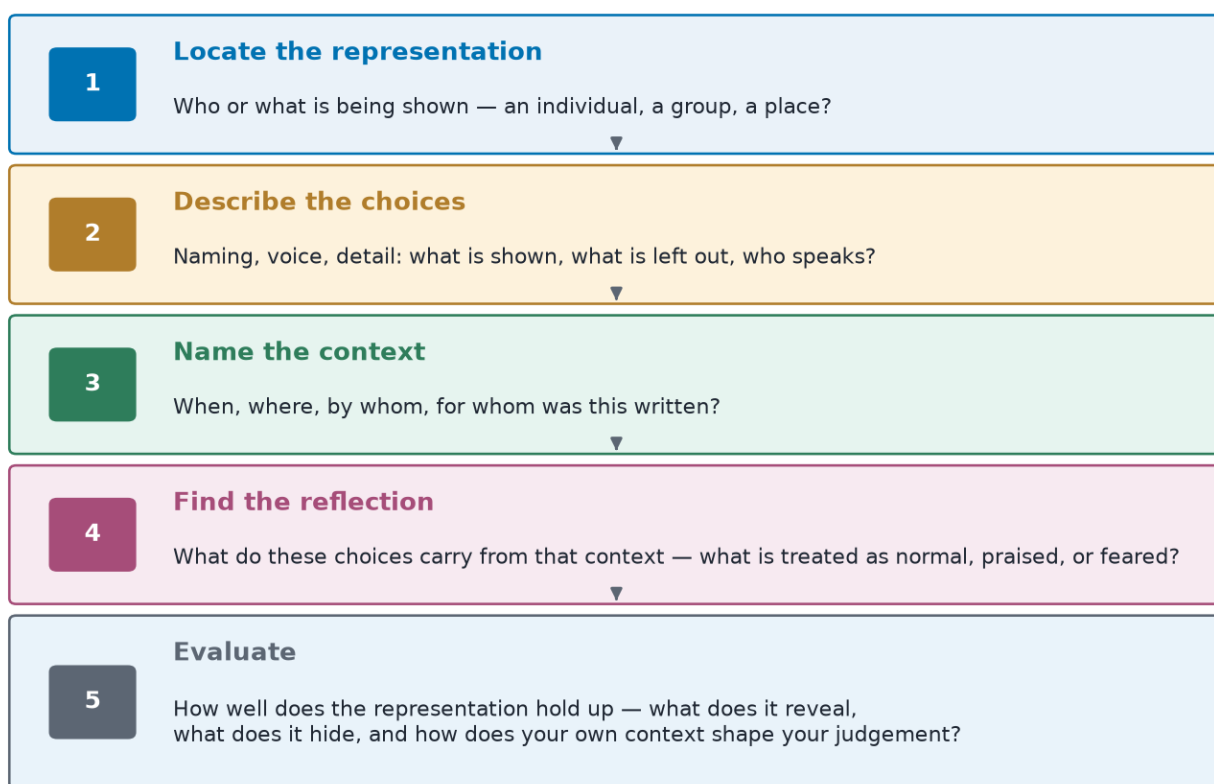
6. The routine: five questions

Finding context in a representation is a method, not a mood. The routine in Figure 7 runs five questions in order; the worked examples and practice questions use it throughout.

1. **Locate the representation.** Who or what is being shown — an individual, a group, a place?
2. **Describe the choices.** Naming, voice, detail, leaving out. What is shown, what is not, who speaks?
3. **Name the context.** When, where, by whom, for whom was this written?
4. **Find the reflection.** What do the choices carry from that context — what goes without saying, what gets praised, what gets feared or laughed at?
5. **Evaluate.** How well does the representation hold up? What does it reveal, what does it hide — and how does your own context shape your judgement?

A five-question routine: representation and context

Run the questions in order on any literary text



Steps 1-3 gather; step 4 connects; step 5 judges.

Flow diagram of the five-step routine: locate the representation, describe the choices, name the context, find the reflection, evaluate

Two cautions before you use the routine:

- **Read patterns, not single details.** One choice is a hint; a repeated pattern is evidence. Before you say what a text's context shows through it, check that several choices point the same way.
- **Explain, don't reduce.** A representation is not *only* its context. Craft, genre and one writer's imagination also made it — and a text can argue with its own era. The claim "this text is just a product of its time" is itself an argument, and one that often cuts analysis short.

Reading through context — the case on both sides. Representations carry their contexts, and reading for that has real defenders and real limits. Hold both in view.

The strongest case for it: texts are made inside history. A writer chooses from the language, ideas and worries their time offers, so the pattern of choices carries that time whether the writer announces it or not. Retold stories prove it: the Kelly figure changes shape with every era that tells him. And readers from different times genuinely notice different things — which is why your first impression of a text and your later one can disagree. Reading this way also protects you: it lets you see that a representation claiming to be “just the way things are” is a build, made in a particular time and place, by someone with a position.

The strongest case for caution: a text is not a document of its era, and a writer is not a decade. Reducing a representation to “a product of its time” can erase the craft and the individual choices that made it — and it can excuse what should be criticised, because “that is how people thought then” is a description, not a pardon. Readers bring their own contexts too, and two readers in the same classroom can honestly disagree. The words on the page remain the evidence everyone argues from.

Both points can be true at once: context explains the choices a writer had available; analysis judges what the text did with them. Question 11 asks you to reason across exactly this tension.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Task. Figure 8 shows two short sketches of the same (invented) country town, Karinda. Both were written for this book: one in the manner of an 1890s town sketch, one contemporary. The analysis table below is completed for you. Read it line by line, matching each quote to the kind of choice and to what it reflects.

Two sketches of the same kind of town

Both passages written for this book — same kind of place, two different eras of writing

Passage A — in the manner of an 1890s town sketch

The town of Karinda sat on the plain like something dropped there and forgotten. There was one street, a row of shops with verandahs the sun had bleached white, a courthouse with a clock that never agreed with the station clock, and beyond that, the paddocks. On weekdays the street belonged to flies, and to the men who leaned outside the hotel watching the road for a dray. Nobody hurried. There was no point.

Written for this book. Highlights: what the sketch chooses to show.

Passage B — a contemporary sketch

Karinda's main street still runs the same length it always did, but the Saturday crowd is new. The old bank became a cafe; the grain silo at the edge of town was painted with a mural by the secondary college art class and now appears in tourist photographs. A sign outside the bakery advertises fibre broadband. Even so, the hardware store shut in winter, and the town notices these things too — a place that keeps a ledger of what stays and what goes.

Written for this book. Highlights: what the sketch chooses to show.

Same street, two eras: notice how the choices differ.

Two sketches of the same invented town side by side — one in the manner of an 1890s town sketch, one contemporary — with the key representational choices highlighted in each

Quote	Kind of choice	What it reflects
Passage A: “one street, a row of shops with verandahs the sun had bleached white”	Detail — the town is built out of almost nothing; bleaching sun, not people	A world of scarcity and exposure, where a town was measured by how much it put up with.
Passage A: “the men who leaned outside the hotel watching the road for a dray”	Voice and detail — the street is given to men, and their action is <i>waiting</i>	A social world in which public space belonged to men, and transport decided the rhythm of working life.
Passage A: “Nobody hurried. There was no point.”	Voice — a flat, dry tone that carries a judgement	Endurance treated as the normal condition; hurrying is not even worth discussing.
Passage B: “The old bank became a cafe; the grain silo ... painted with a mural”	Detail — buildings are shown being <i>reused</i>	An era of change: small towns remaking themselves for visitors, services and image.
Passage B: “advertises fibre broadband”	Detail — technology placed next to the bakery	The modern pressure on small towns to prove they are connected and current.
Passage B: “Even so, the hardware store shut in winter, and the town notices these things too”	Leaving nothing out — decline is kept inside the same sentence as the renewal	A contemporary value: honesty about loss treated as part of respect for a place.

The point to copy. Every line of the table names (1) the exact words, (2) the kind of representational choice, and (3) what the choice carries from the text’s context. Notice that both passages also reveal values, not just facts: Passage A quietly praises holding on, while Passage B values reinvention but refuses to fake it. Same kind of street — two eras, two pictures, two sets of values.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Task. Look again at Figure 4: three retellings of Ned Kelly, each in the voice of its era (all three written for this book). The table glosses the voice of each retelling and the context showing through it.

Retelling	Voice and genre	What the representation does	Context showing through
1. Official notice, 1879 style	The state speaking, in the genre (kind of text) of an official notice	Labels the figure “a man of desperate character” before anything else; he is a threat to be caught, not a person to be known	Law and order as the measure of things; an offence against “the Crown” — authority itself is what is being defended.
2. Bush ballad, 1907 style	Ordinary sympathisers speaking, in the rhyming, repeating form of a bush ballad	Turns the hunted man into “the poor man’s mate”; the law’s locks are met by “a friendly hand”	A young nation shaping its own story: defiance of authority becomes worth singing about, and the underdog rises.
3. Novel opening, 2000s style	Kelly himself speaking, in the reflective voice of a modern novel	The figure is no longer hunted or sung about but <i>writing</i> — claiming his story before anyone else can	A modern care about voice and point of view: who tells a life decides whose life it seems to be.

Notice the pattern. The three retellings are not three stages of getting the facts right. They are three different eras asking three different questions of the same man: *is he a threat? is he a hero? whose story is it?* Each answer reflects the era asking. When you evaluate the retellings — step 5 of the routine — name what each one was trying to do before you judge how well it does it.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Task. Figure 9 shows an original passage of underdog humour, written for this book. It is marked up with the four humour tools it uses.

An underdog passage, marked up

Passage written for this book. Colours match the numbered notes below.

Our school entered the state engineering challenge with a cart built from a donated wheelbarrow, eleven dollars and what Mr Marios called 'aggressive improvisation'. The city schools arrived with trailers and matching jackets. We arrived with a goat. The goat was not part of the entry; she had got into the trailer and nobody had the heart to put her out. When the judges read our materials list, one of them asked if it was a joke. Our captain, Dee, said it wasn't a joke, it was a budget. The cart did not win. It placed ninth of forty and completed every heat, which was more than three trailers-and-jackets schools could say. The judge who'd laughed gave us the day's only award: a certificate 'for outstanding resourcefulness', which Mr Marios framed and hung above the goat's stall, because, he said, that's where the research department works.

Four humour tools at work — find the numbered notes below.

- 1 Understatement — 'eleven dollars' reports the whole budget without a single word of complaint.
- 2 Bathos — after the city schools' trailers and jackets, the drop to 'a goat' does the comic work.
- 3 Colloquial voice — Dee's flat one-liner answers a powerful judge on the team's own terms.
- 4 Self-mockery — the school hangs its award above the goat's stall, laughing at itself before anyone else can.

An original underdog-humour passage marked up with colour highlights for understatement, bathos, colloquial voice and self-mockery, with a numbered note for each

Apply the five-question routine from Figure 7 to the passage. Write eight to ten sentences covering:

- who or what is represented, and as what kind of underdog;
- at least three representational choices, quoted exactly;
- the context the passage comes from (when, where, what kind of story);
- at least one value the humour reveals — what the passage praises by laughing;
- a final evaluation: what the representation reveals, and anything it hides.

Pointers to structure your answer (no scaffold given):

- Open with a claim about how the passage represents the underdog.
- Move through the routine: quote, name the choice, connect the context.
- Close with your evaluation in one or two clean sentences.

A model opening, to show the shape — finish it yourself:

The passage represents a small country school as the underdog of the state engineering challenge, and its humour is the tool of that representation. From the first line, the school's cart is introduced by understatement...

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Copy the table below. Sort the eight representational choices into the three objects of this section: **individuals**, **groups** and **places**.

- (a) giving a character a name and a job
- (b) calling everyone in a town "the locals"
- (c) describing a street only through its weather
- (d) letting a person tell their own story
- (e) saying a crowd "surged" without naming anyone in it
- (f) listing the shops of a suburb one by one
- (g) showing one worker's hands in close detail
- (h) naming a family only by its father

Represented	Choices
Individuals	
Groups	
Places	

Q2. Each statement below points to one of the four layers of context — **historical**, **cultural**, **social**, **authorial**. Sort them.

- (a) "It was written in the year of a severe drought."
- (b) "It was written by a woman who grew up in the town she writes about."
- (c) "In this era, a wedding was a whole community's business, not a private one."
- (d) "When this was published, only men could vote in the colony."

Q3. Match each line of underdog humour below to its tool — **understatement**, **colloquial voice**, **bathos**, **self-mockery**, **irony** — then state what the joke lets its speaker say without saying it outright.

- (a) "The engine had a few issues. It fell off twice."
- (b) "The mayor unveiled the statue. Then he unveiled the wrong statue."
- (c) "Reckon we'll be right," said Sal, holding the bucket.
- (d) "We came, we saw, and we came sixth — but we came."
- (e) "The sponsor's name was printed biggest on the medal."

Q4. The same person is introduced three ways below: Ivy Peralta, sixteen, who fixes bicycles behind the milk bar.

- (i) "A teenage girl has been fixing bikes behind the milk bar."
- (ii) "Ivy Peralta, 16, has fixed every flat tyre on this street since she was twelve."
- (iii) "Behind the milk bar you'll find our local genius, Ivy Peralta, elbow-deep in someone's chain."

For each version: (a) name the representational choices (naming, voice, detail); (b) state the impression it builds of Ivy. Then (c) say which version you would choose for a school newsletter, and why.

Q5. Read the two representations of the same (invented) event: a new student's first day.

Representation 1: "The new student arrived late, without the correct uniform, and was shown to the office before being assigned a locker."

Representation 2: "By the time I found the right building, the bell had gone, my shirt was the wrong shade of everything, and a man with a clipboard was already writing my name down wrong."

- (a) Whose voice carries each representation?
- (b) What does each one reflect about how a school sorts people — who belongs, who is processed?
- (c) Which representation invites sympathy for the new student? Quote the exact words that do the work.

Q6. Four invented figures are described below. Place each on the spectrum from Figure 3 — **hero, reluctant hero, antihero, villain** — and justify each placement in one or two sentences.

- (a) A firefighter who runs into a burning house twice, then refuses the medal because "the house still won".
- (b) A smuggler who breaks the law every week — and whose boat is the only one that ever brings medicine to the island.
- (c) A witness who saw everything, hates attention, and finally stands up in court anyway.
- (d) A moneylender who buys people's debts so he can call in favours at elections.

Then (e): which of the four do you think would be most admired in a story told in 1890s Australia, and which in a story told today? Give a reason for each — your answer is about context shaping judgement.

Q7. Each pair below gives a plain complaint and a humorous version of it. For each: name the humour tool at work, and state what the humorous version adds that the plain one does not.

- (a) Plain: "Our funding was very small." — Humorous: "Our whole budget fit in one pocket, with room for a sandwich."
- (b) Plain: "The judges ignored us." — Humorous: "The judges gave us the attention usually reserved for weather."

Q8. (*Speaking and listening.*) Work with a partner. Each of you names a film, series or novel you both know. Each argues that one representation in it — of a person, a group or a place — is the one that most reflects the context the text was made in. Each speaker gets one minute and must quote or describe one exact moment from the text. The listener's job is to name the context claim they heard — "You're saying the text reflects..." — and ask one follow-up question. Swap roles. Protocol: one voice at a time; quote the moment before naming the context; disagree with the claim, never the person.

Un scaffolded

Q9. Look again at the two town sketches in Figure 8. Write one paragraph of six to eight sentences answering:

How do the two passages use representation to reflect different contexts?

Structure your paragraph with a claim, at least one quote from each passage, and an explanation of what each quoted choice reflects. A colour-coded model paragraph is shown in Figure 10 and printed in full in the solutions.

A model analytical paragraph, colour-coded

Answer to Q9: how do the two passages use representation to reflect different contexts?

 Claim  Evidence: Passage A  Evidence: Passage B  Explanation: context  Link to the question

The two passages represent the same kind of town, but their choices carry two different eras — and two different sets of values.

Passage A builds its sketch out of stillness: the street belongs to "flies" and to "the men who leaned outside the hotel", and it closes with "Nobody hurried. There was no point." — a place measured by waiting.

Passage B chooses the marks of change instead — "the old bank became a cafe", the silo "painted with a mural", the bakery sign that "advertises fibre broadband" — and still counts its losses: "the hardware store shut in winter".

The first sketch reflects a context in which a town's worth lay in holding on through hard work and distance; the second reflects a context in which small towns must remake themselves, and honesty about decline is part of respect.

Same street, two mirrors: each passage tells us as much about the era that wrote it as about the town it shows.

Claim, then evidence from both passages, then the contexts named, then the link back to the question.

Model analytical paragraph colour-coded to show the claim, the quoted evidence from each passage, the explanation of context and the linking sentence

Q10. Apply the five-question routine from Figure 7 to the three Kelly retellings in Figure 4. Write a full analysis of ten to twelve sentences. You must quote each retelling at least once, name the context showing through each, and close with an evaluation stated as a full claim: "The retelling I find most convincing is ... because ...".

Q11. Consider this claim:

"A representation tells us more about the time that made it than about the person, group or place it shows."

Write a reasoned response. You must:

- give the strongest version of the case *for* the claim (what its defenders would actually say);
- give the strongest version of the case *against* it (what its critics would actually say);
- then state your own position — with conditions if you need them — supported by examples from this section.

Use the definitions of *representation*, *context* and *reflect* given at the start of this section. You are marked on the quality of your reasoning — defined terms, real examples, honest limits — not on which side you land on. Whichever side you favour, spend equal effort on the other one.

Q12. Write two representations of the same person — a fifteen-year-old with a weekend job — each of 100–120 words. Build the first to reflect the context of Australia in 1955, and the second to reflect your own context. The facts of the person can stay the same; the choices must change. Then add a craft note of three or four sentences naming at least two choices you made in each version and stating what each one carries from its context.

Q13. Take a story everyone in your class knows — a fairy tale, a legend, a famous sporting moment, a family story. Plan a retelling of it in a new context of your choice. Your plan must state:

- the new context — when, where, and who is telling;
- three representational choices you will change from the original;
- what you want your retelling to reflect about its new context.

Then write the opening 80–100 words of the retelling. (You may plan it as the opening of a film instead of a written text — in that case, describe the first three shots and the sound over them.)

Q14. (*Speaking and listening.*) In pairs, prepare a two-minute presentation answering:

“Here is a representation, and here is the context showing through it.”

Choose one text from this section (a town sketch, a Kelly retelling, or the underdog passage) or bring a short text of your own with your teacher’s approval. Present the text, then walk the class through the five-question routine using it. Protocol: share the speaking evenly; quote the text, don’t paraphrase the evidence; end by inviting one question. The listening class applies the routine in their books and checks one context-claim against a quote from the text.

Answers

These are sample answers. For open questions, any response that meets the task is acceptable.

Q1. Individuals: (a), (d), (g). Groups: (b), (e), (h). Places: (c), (f). (Note that (h) sits on the border — naming a family by one member is a choice about how a group is presented; either placement earns credit with a reason.)

Q2. (a) historical; (b) authorial; (c) cultural; (d) social.

Q3. Samples: (a) understatement — the joke lets the speaker report disaster without self-pity, keeping dignity; (b) bathos — the drop from the grand moment to the wrong statue lets the speaker mock official importance without attacking anyone directly; (c) colloquial voice — “reckon we’ll be right” keeps the speaker sounding like themselves in the face of trouble, not like someone reporting trouble; (d) self-mockery — owning the sixth place first stops anyone else using it as a weapon; (e) irony — the gap between sponsor and medal lets the speaker say the event cared more about money than effort, without stating it.

Q4. (a) Samples: (i) category naming (“a teenage girl”), no voice or detail — a type, not a person; (ii) name, age, and counted detail (“every flat tyre ... since she was twelve”) — an individual with a history of work; (iii) a community voice (“our local genius”) plus close detail (“elbow-deep in someone’s chain”) — a person held in affection. (b) Samples: (i) a teenager doing a thing; (ii) a skilled, reliable worker; (iii) a valued member of the place. (c) Answers will vary; a strong answer picks (ii) or (iii) and explains that a newsletter should name the person and let the work carry the praise — and that (iii)’s “genius” is a judgement the newsletter should earn, not borrow.

Q5. (a) Representation 1 speaks in an official voice from outside the student; representation 2 speaks in the student’s own voice from inside the day. (b) Sample: representation 1 reflects a context in which institutions process people — arriving, being “shown”, being “assigned”; representation 2 reflects the lived context of being the one processed — lost, wrong-coloured, written down wrong. (c) Representation 2; sample quotes: “a man with a clipboard was already writing my name down wrong” — even the student’s name belongs to the system on day one.

Q6. Sample placements: (a) hero (or the hero/reluctant border — the refused medal adds modesty but the acts are traditional virtue); (b) antihero — law-breaking with motives the text asks you to side with; (c) reluctant hero — virtue without wanting the job; (d) villain — power used over others for private gain, no invitation to sympathise. (e) Answers will vary; reward answers that connect the judgement to context — for example, that 1890s ballad culture had room to admire (b), the law-breaker with a cause, while a story told today might give more room to (c), the quiet witness. The point is that admiration moves when context moves.

Q7. Samples: (a) understatement through comic scale (“one pocket, with room for a sandwich”) — adds dignity and shared laughter where the plain version only reports; (b) irony — “the attention usually reserved for weather” says the judges treated the team as something nobody controls and nobody answers for; the plain version states neglect, the joke measures it.

Q8. Teacher observation. Look for: one exact moment quoted or described per speaker; a context-claim named by the listener in the listener’s own words; one follow-up question asked; disagreement kept on the claim, not the person.

Q9. See the model paragraph in the fully-worked solutions (and Figure 10). A sound paragraph makes a claim about the two eras, quotes at least once from each passage, and names what each quoted choice reflects.

Q10. See the fully-worked solutions for a model analysis. A strong response quotes each retelling at least once, names a context for each, and closes with a stated evaluation beginning “The retelling I find most convincing is ...”.

Q11. Marked on reasoning, not conclusion. A strong response: defines its terms (representation, context, reflect); gives the defender’s case in real strength (choices are made inside a context, so patterns of choices carry that context; retold stories change shape with each era; reading this way exposes “just the way things are” as a build); gives the critic’s case in real strength (a text is not a document of its era; craft and individual choice also made it; “product of its time” can excuse what should be criticised; readers bring their own contexts and the words on the page are the shared evidence); then takes a position with conditions — for example, representations tell us most about their time when they are least aware of arguing, and most about their subject when the writer works against the grain of their era. Responses that attack only one side, or reach a conclusion without reasons, score low regardless of which side they pick.

Q12. Answers will vary. Reward: two versions of the same person with the facts roughly held and the choices genuinely changed; at least two named choices per version (naming, voice, detail, leaving out); craft notes stating what each choice carries from its context. A strong 1955 version might build the weekend job around duty, cash handed to a parent, and work as part of a household's survival; a strong contemporary version might build it around saving for a goal of the teenager's own, with the job competing with school and screens. Both are defensible; the mark is for choices that carry their context, not for historical detail as such.

Q13. Answers will vary. Reward: a stated new context; three named changes to representational choices; a stated intention for what the retelling reflects; an opening that actually makes at least one of the planned choices visible. The opening is not marked for polish — it is marked for doing what the plan says it will do.

Q14. Teacher observation. Look for: a text presented clearly; the five steps of the routine applied in order with quotes; a context-claim stated as a full sentence; even floor-sharing; the listening class checking one context-claim against a quote from the text.

Fully-worked solutions

Q3 — the reasoning. Humour tools work by keeping a judgement inside a joke, so the task is to recover the judgement. Understatement shrinks the report so the speaker's dignity grows (a) — disaster reported small reads as strength. Bathos drops from the grand to the ordinary (b), and the drop itself is the judgement: the ceremony was not as important as it claimed. Colloquial voice (c) is not a joke at all but a refusal to sound like someone else under pressure — the judgement is that the speaker's own words are good enough for trouble. Self-mockery (d) lands the blow on the self first, which removes it from everyone else's hands. Irony (e) keeps the surface praise and lets the gap condemn: the sponsor's name biggest says the event honoured money, not effort.

Q6 — the reasoning. The spectrum sorts by two tests: does the figure act with the traditional virtues (courage, honour, clean motives), and does the text invite sympathy? The firefighter has both virtue and sympathy — hero territory; the refused medal keeps him there, or slides him toward reluctant hero, and either placement earns credit if argued. The smuggler breaks the law but holds the sympathy through motives — the shape of an antihero. The witness has virtue but no wish for the role — reluctant hero. The moneylender has neither virtue nor an invitation to sympathise — villain. Part (e) is the real test of the section's claim: admiration is not fixed, it moves with context, and a good answer says which feature of each era does the moving.

Q9 — model analytical paragraph (this is the paragraph colour-coded in Figure 10).

The two passages represent the same kind of town, but their choices carry two different eras — and two different sets of values. Passage A builds its sketch out of stillness: the street belongs to “flies” and to “the men who leaned outside the hotel”, and it closes with “Nobody hurried. There was no point.” — a place measured by waiting. Passage B chooses the marks of change instead — “the old bank became a cafe”, the silo “painted with a mural”, the bakery sign that “advertises fibre broadband” — and still counts its losses: “the hardware store shut in winter”. The first sketch reflects a context in which a town's worth lay in holding on through hard work and distance; the second reflects a context in which small towns must remake themselves, and honesty about decline is part of respect. Same street, two mirrors: each passage tells us as much about the era that wrote it as about the town it shows.

The claim is underlined by quotes from both passages, each quote is followed by a sentence naming what it reflects, and the final sentence links the evidence back to the question.

Q10 — model analysis of the Kelly retellings.

The three retellings of Ned Kelly in Figure 4 represent the same figure, but each reflects the era doing the retelling. In the official notice, the state's voice names Kelly “a man of desperate character” before he is anything else — the representation is of a threat, and the context showing through is one in which law and order are the measure of things and an offence is “against the Crown” itself. In the bush ballad, the voice belongs to ordinary sympathisers: the hunted man becomes “the poor man's mate”, and every lock the law puts on is met by “a friendly hand”. The context here is a young nation shaping its own story, in which defiance of authority becomes worth singing about. In the novel opening, Kelly speaks for himself: he

writes because “stories belong to the people who write them down”, and the context is a modern care about voice and point of view — who tells a life decides whose life it seems to be. Each voice also leaves something out: the notice never asks what Kelly wanted, the ballad never asks what his victims felt, and the novel never asks whether a life can be told truly by its owner. Those silences are choices too, and each one belongs to its era. Notice that none of the three is simply more factual than the others; they are three eras asking three questions — is he a threat, is he a hero, whose story is it? The retelling I find most convincing is the third, because it is the one most honest about what all retellings do: it admits that every version of a life is claimed by someone. A reader who prefers the ballad’s loyalty or the notice’s sternness can argue just as well — the mark is in naming what each retelling was for.

Q11 — model structure.

For: a representation is built by choices, and choices are made inside a context, so patterns of choices carry that context whether the writer announces it or not. Retold stories prove it: the Kelly of the official notice, the ballad and the modern novel is three different men, and the difference each time is the era, not the facts. What a text treats as obvious, praises, or fears is usually reporting its time — and readers from different times genuinely notice different things, which is why initial and subsequent impressions disagree. Reading this way also protects the reader: a representation that claims to be “just the way things are” turns out to be a build, made somewhere, by someone.

Against: a text is not a document of its era, and a writer is not a decade. Two writers in the same year can build opposite pictures, so the era cannot be doing all the work — craft, genre and imagination are real causes too. “A product of its time” can also become an excuse, treating what should be criticised as only what was normal; and a text can argue with its own era, which a pure context-reading struggles to explain. Finally, readers bring contexts of their own, and the words on the page remain the evidence everyone — from any time — argues from.

Position (sample): the claim is strongest when a text is least aware it is arguing — the things it takes for granted belong most fully to its time — and weakest when the writer chooses to work against the grain, because then the representation tells us about a person choosing, not an era speaking. So the better wording is not “more about the time than the subject” but “never about the subject only”.

Note that the model takes a position — yours may differ, and a well-reasoned opposite position scores equally. What is marked: defined terms, both sides at full strength, a position with conditions, and honest limits.

Q12 — one possible pair.

Version 1 (context: Australia, 1955): Lesley Parnell, fifteen, stacked shelves at Whitton’s grocery every Saturday, and had done since the February she left school at fourteen. The pay went to her mother on Saturday night, unopened, and her mother counted it at the kitchen table while Lesley washed up. She wore an apron with the shop’s name on it, and folded it under the counter at noon. Nobody called it a weekend job. It was what you did, the way her brothers had done it, and the way the shop itself had stood on the same corner for thirty years. If Lesley wanted anything of her own — and she rarely asked — she asked the jar on the mantelpiece first.

Version 2 (context: today): Lesley Parnell, fifteen, works Saturday shifts at the same building, which is a cafe now, and keeps her tips in a banking app toward a goal she has not told her parents yet. The job competes with everything else in her week — assessments, training, the group chat that never sleeps — and she measures it by more than the pay: the manager who writes her roster around her exams, the regulars who know her order of jokes. On good weeks she saves a picture of the total and tells nobody. Her mother still asks how the money is going. Lesley still says “it’s sorted”. Some things travel.

Craft note: In version 1, the pay going to her mother “unopened” is a detail of duty — the household, not the teenager, owns the money, which carries a 1950s context in which a teenager’s work belonged to the family. The line “nobody called it a weekend job” is a voice choice: the era’s own words do the reflecting. In version 2, the banking app and the roster around exams carry a context of individual goals and institutions bending around study, and the kept joke between the two versions (“some things travel”) is itself a representation of change — the same building, two lives.

The two versions hold the person roughly fixed and move the choices — that is the task’s point. Your pair may differ entirely; it is marked the same way.

Q13 — one possible plan and opening.

Story: the fairy tale of Cinderella. *New context:* a small town today, told by a radio announcer on the night of the school formal. *Three changes:* the “ball” becomes the school formal, open to everyone in theory; the “fairy godmother” becomes a neighbour with a sewing machine and a borrowed car; the “prince” becomes the school captain, who turns out to be the least interesting person in the room. *Intended reflection:* a context in which the door is said to be open to everyone, and the joke is on anyone who believes the door is the point.

Opening: “If you’re just tuning in, the formal is under way, and I am told the girl nobody expected has just walked in wearing a dress borrowed from a neighbour, courage borrowed from somewhere deeper, and no plans at all for the rest of the night. Out on the court, the school captain has just dropped his cup, and the whole hall has gone quiet enough to hear it land. Somebody near the door is laughing. It is not a kind laugh, and it is not meant for him. We’ll bring you that again.”

The opening is marked on whether it does what the plan says: the voice (a radio announcer) is audible in the first line, and the borrowed-dress choice lands inside the first sentence.

Q14 — what a strong presentation contains.

- A clear claim in the first sentence (“This passage represents ... and its context shows through in ...”).
 - At least two exact quotes from the text, each tied to a representational choice (naming, voice, detail, leaving out).
 - The context named in full — when, where, by whom, for whom.
 - A final evaluation in a full sentence, and an invitation to one question from the class.
 - Even floor-sharing between the pair, with one partner building on the other’s point.
-

Section 3A · English 10 · Curriculum reference: VC2E10LE01, drawing on VC2E10LE01 .E01 and VC2E10LE01 .E03; the portion of the content description naming texts by First Nations authors, and elaboration .E02, are excluded per §2A. All passages, notices, ballad stanzas and openings in this section were written for this book; the town of Karinda and every character in the exercises are invented. Real texts named in the reading pool (Figure 5) are referenced by title, author and first publication only; details checked 2026-08-24.

Synthesising an interpretation — and testing it against others'

One poem, two readers. On Monday your class reads a twelve-line poem about an unfinished boat in a shed. By Friday, two students are arguing at the classroom door. One says the poem is about a love that keeps working — a person staying close to what someone left behind. The other says it is about someone stuck — a person who cannot move past a loss. They have the same lines in front of them. Both point at real words. Neither is making things up — and yet the two readings are completely opposed.

Something happened between Monday and Friday. Each reader took a first impression — *this feels sad, this feels still* — and built it into an **interpretation**: a claim about what the poem means that can be argued for with evidence. That building has a name, and it is the skill this section teaches: **synthesising** — pulling scattered impressions, observations and quotations into one connected claim. And then comes the harder half of the title: handing your claim to other readers, and testing theirs against it, without anyone pretending there is only one right answer.

Curriculum trace. Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English, Level 10 · Literature strand · sub-strand *Engaging with and responding to literature* · **VC2E10LE02** · Draws on: VC2E10LE02.E01, .E02, .E03 · Builds on Level 9 VC2E9LE02

What this section means by *interpretation, synthesise, universal and relevant*. The Victorian Curriculum uses these terms but does not define them. This section therefore treats them as follows, and every question here is answerable on these definitions alone. An **interpretation** is an arguable claim about what a text means, how it works, or what it values — built from evidence inside the text itself. *Arguable* means another careful reader could disagree without anyone making a mistake; a claim nobody could dispute is a plain fact, not an interpretation. To **synthesise** is to join separate parts into one connected whole — here, to shape your scattered impressions, observations and quotations into a single claim that holds together. A text's **universal qualities** are the features readers from different times and places can recognise and respond to — experiences, feelings or problems the text shares with people far beyond its own moment. A text **retains relevance** when readers today still find something in it that helps them think about their own lives or their own time. Note that *universal qualities* is a contested term: readers genuinely disagree about which features of a text are shared across time, and the definition you adopt changes the conclusion you reach. Section 7 gives that disagreement its full run.

Theory

1. From impression to interpretation

In Level 9 you compared your **initial and subsequent impressions** of texts: how a text first lands on you, and how that landing changes on a second meeting. Impressions are the raw material of this section, but they are not yet the product. An impression is about your encounter with a text; an interpretation is a claim *about the text itself*, built so that someone else can examine it.

Figure 1 sets the difference out.

Impression and interpretation — the Level 10 move <i>An impression is how a text lands on you; an interpretation is a claim about the text, built to be answered.</i>		
	IMPRESSION	INTERPRETATION
What it is	Your meeting with the text — how it lands on you.	A claim about the text — what it means, how it works.
Where it starts	Feeling, reaction, memory.	Noticings: words, images, patterns.
What it needs	Honesty — say what you felt.	Evidence — lines a reader can check — and the claim must be arguable.
Example — The Unfinished Boat	"It felt quiet and sad and still."	"The poem presents grief as a kind of waiting."
<i>An impression is data, not a mistake. An interpretation is an impression built into an arguable claim — with the text itself named as the place to check it.</i>		

A table comparing an impression with an interpretation across four rows: what it is, where it starts, what it needs, and an example response to the poem studied in this section

The move from the left column to the right column is the move Level 10 asks of you. Notice what the interpretation does that the impression does not: it makes a claim (*the poem presents grief as a kind of waiting*), and it offers the text itself as the place to check the claim (*the word "still", the sleeping pencil, the speaker who sits but does not build*). Someone who disagrees can point at those same lines and argue back. That is the point — an interpretation is built to be answered.

2. The text for this section

Everything in this section works from one short poem, written for the section. Read it once for the feel of it; you will return to it in every part of the theory.

The Unfinished Boat

The boat my grandfather started
still rests on the shed's stone floor,
its ribs half-raised, its hull unsealed,
one plank short of the door.

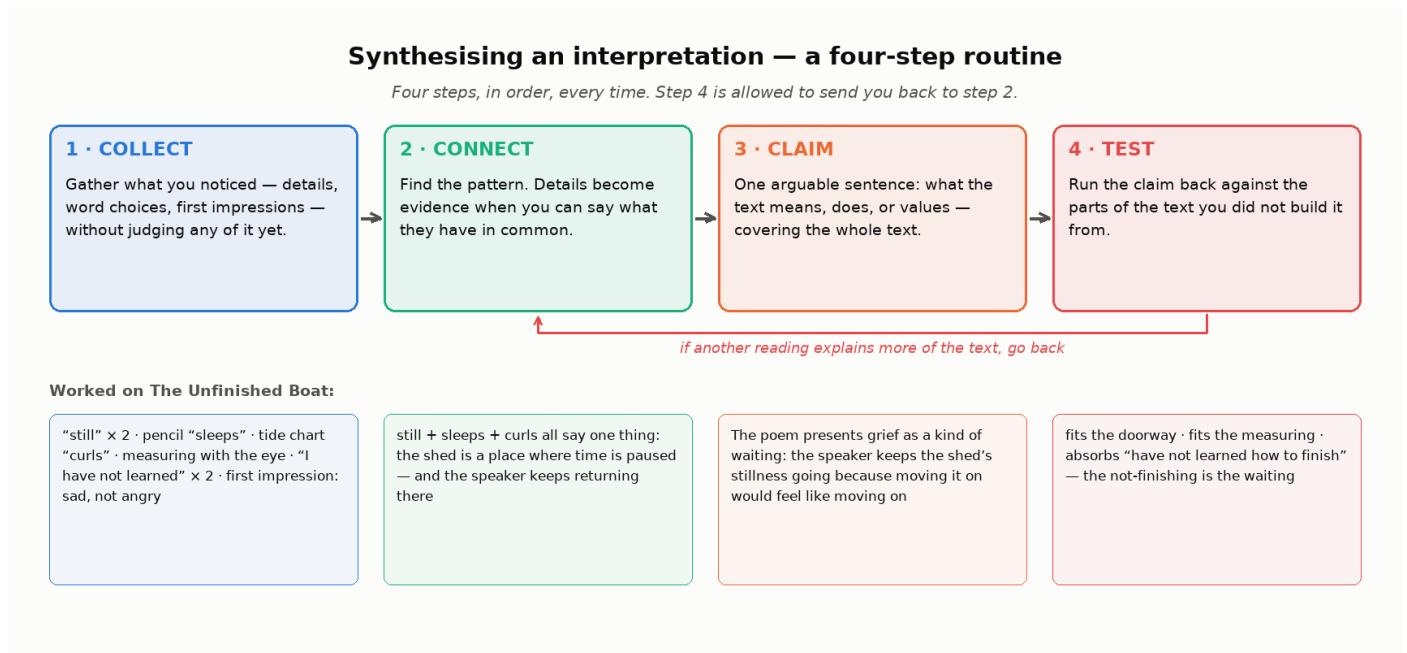
His pencil still sleeps in the toolbox.
The tide chart curls on the wall.
The last line he marked in September
is faint as a moth's wing, and small.

Some evenings I sit in the doorway
and measure the planks with my eye.
I have not learned how to finish.
I have not learned to walk by.

A first reading usually lands as an impression: *still, sad, quiet, stuck*. Keep that impression — it is data, not a mistake. The work now is to ask *what in the poem made it land that way?*

3. Synthesising: a four-step routine

Synthesising is a routine before it is a talent. Four steps, in order, every time.



A four-step flowchart for synthesising an interpretation — collect, connect, claim, test — with a worked example from *The Unfinished Boat* shown beside each step

The steps in brief:

- **Collect.** Gather what you noticed — details, word choices, images, your first impressions — without judging any of it yet.
- **Connect.** Look for the pattern. What keeps appearing? What works together? Details become **evidence** — the parts of the text that will support a claim — when you can say what they have in common.
- **Claim.** Write one sentence: what the text means, or does, or values. The sentence must be arguable and must cover the whole text, not just the bits you noticed first.
- **Test.** Run the claim back against the text. Does it fit the parts you did *not* build it from? If another reading explains more of the text, go back to Connect.

Two habits ruin the routine. One is leaping from Collect to Claim — deciding what the poem “means” from a single line and ignoring the rest. The other is refusing to Test: keeping a claim because it was yours first. The routine only works if step 4 is allowed to send you back to step 2.

4. Close textual analysis: what grounds a claim

The elaboration (VC2E10LE02.E02) points to arguments grounded in close reading of the text as its model of support. **Close textual analysis** means slowing down at a small stretch of language — a word, an image, a line — and saying exactly what it does. It is the difference between pointing at a detail and *using* it.

A reliable shape for an analytical paragraph is a four-part stack — claim, quotation, close reading, return:

A close-analysis paragraph in four parts

Each part has a job. The engine is the close reading; the rule is at the bottom.

CLAIM

Your interpretive point, in one sentence.

The poem keeps the grandfather's absence gentle.

QUOTATION

The exact words you are reading — short, copied correctly.

"His pencil still sleeps in the toolbox."

CLOSE READING

Name what the language does — word choice, image, pattern — and say what it makes the reader feel, picture or weigh.

"Sleeps" personifies the pencil: it is resting, not broken, so the work is kept in the grammar of waiting. This is the poem's second "still", and the repetition spreads the pause from the boat to every object in the shed.

RETURN

One sentence tying the reading back to the claim.

Through one quiet verb, the poem makes the whole shed into grief held mid-breath.

The rule: the claim must depend on the quotation. If your close reading could sit under a different quotation unchanged, the evidence is decoration, not support.

A labelled model paragraph in four stacked parts: a claim sentence, a quotation from the poem, close reading of the quotation's word choices, and a return sentence linking the reading back to the claim

The parts and their jobs:

- **Claim.** Your interpretive point, in one sentence.
- **Quotation.** The exact words you are reading — short, copied correctly, just enough to work on.
- **Close reading.** The engine of the paragraph. Name what the language is doing — the word choice, the image, the sound, the pattern — and say what it makes the reader feel, picture or weigh. This is where metalanguage earns its keep: naming the move (**personification**, where an object is given a human action; **simile**, where one thing is compared using *like* or *as*; **repetition**, where a word or structure returns for weight) lets you say *how* the line works instead of only *that* it works.
- **Return.** One sentence tying the close reading back to the claim, so the paragraph lands where it started.

One rule decides whether a paragraph like this succeeds: **the claim must depend on the quotation.** If your close reading could sit under a different quotation unchanged, the evidence is decoration, not support.

5. Two readings of one poem

Return to the argument at the classroom door. Two readers applied the routine to the same poem and arrived at opposed claims. Figure 4 sets both readings out fairly.

One poem, two readings — The Unfinished Boat

Both quote real lines. Both hold together. When readings collide, ask which claim explains more of the text — not which reader is cleverer.

	READING 1 — love keeps working	READING 2 — grief has stopped time
The claim	The speaker stays as an act of love — the unfinished boat is a project of devotion kept alive.	The speaker is frozen — grief has paused time itself inside the shed.
Evidence used	"measure the planks with my eye" · "I have not learned to walk by" · "His pencil still sleeps" (kept, not abandoned)	"still rests" · "still sleeps" · "The tide chart curls" · "one plank short of the door" (the boat goes nowhere)
What it spotlights	The staying as devotion — the refusal to walk away.	The staying as a freeze — the refusal to move.
What it leaves open	The chill in the shed's stopped time.	Why the speaker keeps returning — measuring, sitting, keeping watch.

A third reader may hold both: the staying is the comfort and the trap. That is not a fence to sit on — it is synthesis, and it must still be tested against the text.

A table comparing two interpretations of *The Unfinished Boat* — one reading the poem as a love that keeps working, the other as a grief that has stopped time — with rows for the claim, the evidence used, what each reading spotlights, and what each leaves open

Both readings quote real lines. Both hold together. So what do you do when interpretations collide? You do not ask *which reader is cleverer* — you ask which claim explains more of the text, and you name the parts each reading handles best. Reading 1 makes strong sense of *measure the planks with my eye* as devotion; Reading 2 makes stronger sense of the repeated *still* as a freeze. A third reader might hold both: the poem is about a love that keeps working *and* a grief that has stopped time — the staying is both the comfort and the trap. That third position is not a fence to sit on; it is what synthesis looks like when two readings each hold real evidence. It must still be tested against the text like any claim.

6. Testing interpretations — including your own

"Explore the interpretations of others" is the second half of the content description, and it needs a method, or it collapses into *you have your opinion and I have mine*. The method is four questions, asked of any reading — a classmate's, a reviewer's, a director's, and (yourself first) your own.

Testing an interpretation — four questions, three verdicts

Apply the questions to any reading — a classmate's, a reviewer's, a director's — and to your own first.

1 What is the claim?

Restate the reading in one sentence. If you cannot, you are not ready to judge it.

2 What in the text supports it?

Name the evidence. A reading with no quotation behind it is a mood, not an interpretation.

3 What does it not explain?

Every reading leaves something in the shade. Find the part of the text where the reading goes quiet.

4 Does another reading explain those parts better?

Compare honestly — including against your own claim.

Then the verdict — all three are legitimate outcomes:

ADOPT

the reading survives testing — make it part of your own

EXTEND

it holds but misses something — add the missing part

COUNTER

it fails at a named point — say why, with better evidence

Four numbered question cards for testing an interpretation — what is the claim, what in the text supports it, what does it not explain, does another reading explain those parts better — followed by the three possible verdicts: adopt, extend, or counter

The four questions:

1. **What is the claim?** Restate the reading in one sentence. If you cannot, you are not ready to judge it.
2. **What in the text supports it?** Name the evidence. A reading with no quotation behind it is a mood, not an interpretation.
3. **What does it not explain?** Every reading leaves something in the shade. Find the part of the text the reading goes quiet on.
4. **Does another reading explain those parts better?** Compare honestly — including comparing against your own.

The verdicts are then **adopt** (the reading survives testing and you make it part of your own), **extend** (it holds but misses something, and you add the missing part) or **counter** (it fails at a named point, and you say why). All three are legitimate outcomes. What is not legitimate is dismissing a reading because it is not yours, or keeping one because it is. The standard is the same one from section 4: evidence and fit — and that standard applies to positions you favour exactly as it applies to positions you oppose.

7. Universal qualities and continuing relevance — the debate

The curriculum names a sharper form of this testing (VC2E10LE02.E01): arguing over whether a text carries universal qualities and stays relevant. Now the questions from section 6 turn on the biggest claim anyone can make about a text — that it speaks beyond its own time.

Both sides of that debate have a long, serious case. Figure 6 presents each in its strongest form.

Does a text possess universal qualities and retain relevance?		
Two positions, each in its strongest form. The analyst's job is not to pick a team — it is to test both positions on the same text.		
	POSITION 1 — shared human experience	POSITION 2 — meaning is made in the meeting
Anchor	Samuel Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare (1765) — summarised and attributed.	Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading (1978) — summarised and attributed.
Strongest case	A work pleases many people, and pleases for a long time, only by giving a true picture of general human nature. Particular customs age; the passions they hide inside do not.	Meaning is not locked inside the text — it is an event that happens when a reader meets it. Different times bring different questions, so the same text keeps producing new meanings.
What it notices	Recognition — a reader who has never built a boat can still feel The Unfinished Boat. That travelling is the proof something in it is shared.	Change — readers in 1926, 1976 and 2026 bring different losses to the same lines, and the lines meet them differently.
What it risks	Treating one era's feelings as everyone's — and naming that "universal".	Flattening the particulars — one shed, one pencil, one September — that give the poem its grip.
Both positions are right about something real. No passage is quoted from either source; the positions are summarised and attributed.		

A table presenting two positions on whether texts possess universal qualities — one position arguing that lasting texts picture shared human experience, the other arguing that texts stay alive because each time and place reads them anew — with rows for the position's strongest case, what it notices, and what it risks

Position 1 — shared human experience. In his 1765 *Preface to Shakespeare*, the critic Samuel Johnson argued that a work pleases many people, and pleases for a long time, only by giving a true picture of general human nature — particular customs age, but the passions they hide inside do not. In its strongest form, this position says: if grief were not shared, a reader who has never built a boat could not feel *The Unfinished Boat* at all — the fact that the poem travels is the proof that something in it is shared.

Position 2 — meaning is made in the meeting. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), the literary scholar Wolfgang Iser described meaning not as a property locked inside a text but as an event that happens when a reader meets it — different times and places bring different questions, so the same text keeps producing new meanings. In its strongest form, this position says: the poem's hold may lie exactly in its particulars — one shed, one coastline, one pencil — and calling those particulars "universal" can blur the very things that make the poem work. Texts stay alive, on this view, because each generation reads them anew.

Both positions are right about something real. Position 1 catches what is true about recognition — the poem moves readers whose lives share nothing with its shed. Position 2 catches what is true about change — readers in 1926, 1976 and 2026 bring different losses to the same lines, and the lines meet them differently. The analyst's job is not to pick a team; it is to notice which position a given claim about a text depends on, and to test both positions on the same poem — which is exactly what Practice question 10 asks you to do. (The positions above are summarised and attributed; no passage is quoted from either source, and Johnson's phrase "general nature" is rendered here as a paraphrase. Other definitions of *universal* exist and are not interchangeable with the one at the top of this section.)

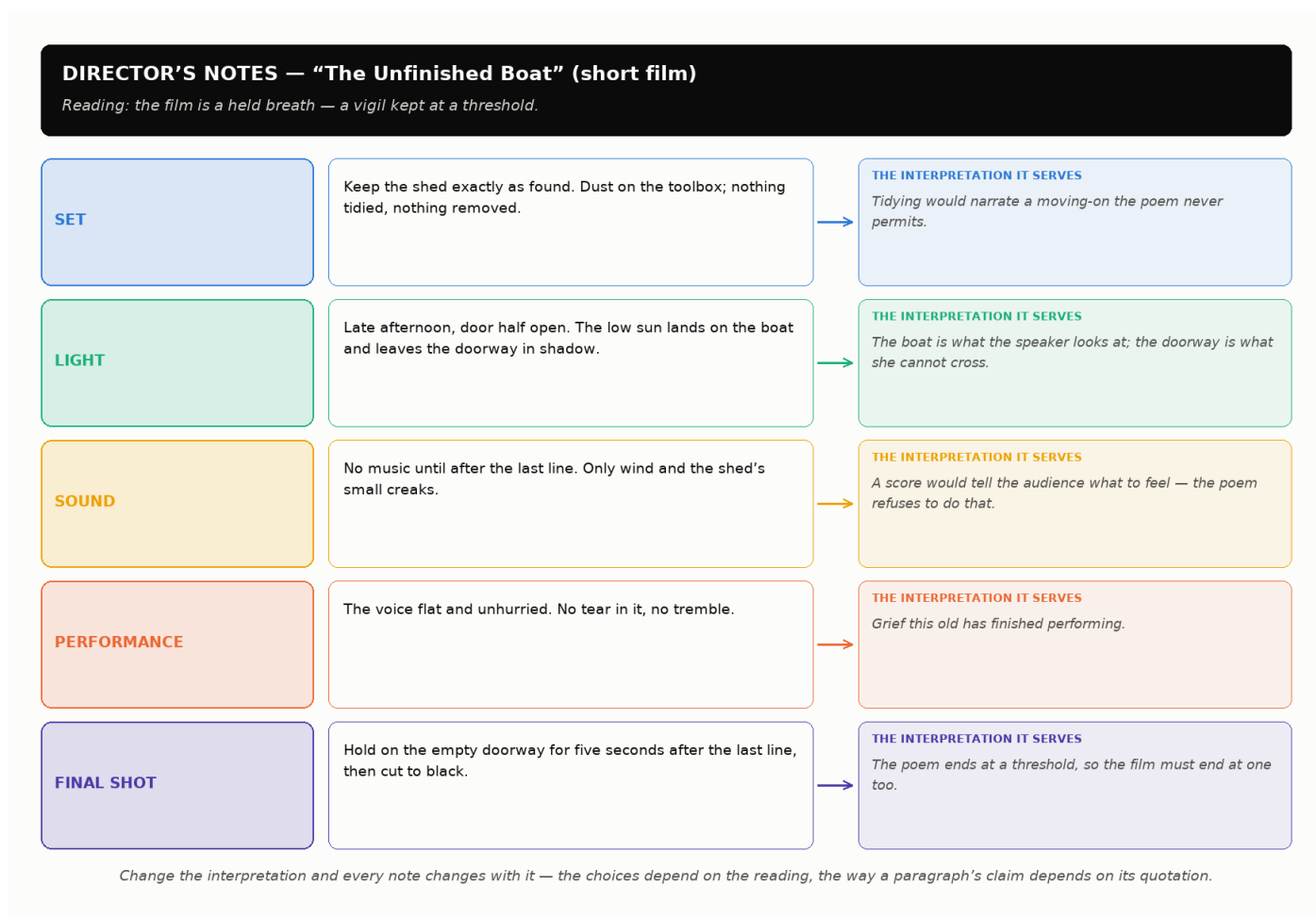
8. Two shapes for an interpretation: the essay paragraph and the director's notes

An interpretation is not only an essay's property. The elaboration (VC2E10LE02.E02) names two ways to support one: in an essay, or in director's notes for a staging. The two shapes prove the same skill in different materials.

An **essay paragraph** argues the interpretation in words, using the four-part stack from section 4. **Director's notes** are the written plan a director gives a cast and crew before staging or filming a text — and every practical choice in them (the set, the light, the sound, the pauses) is an interpretation made visible. A director who decides the shed in *The*

Unfinished Boat must be filmed tidily has made an interpretive claim just as clearly as a writer who decides the poem is about being stuck — the difference is that the director’s claim arrives as light, sound and objects.

Figure 7 is a model set of director’s notes for a short film of the poem, with each choice annotated by the interpretation it serves.



A model set of director’s notes for a short film of The Unfinished Boat — five notes covering set, light, sound, performance and the final shot — each with a side note naming the interpretation the choice serves

Read the side notes down the right-hand side and you can see a whole argument — a reading of the poem as a held breath, a vigil at a threshold — carried entirely by practical decisions. If you changed the interpretation, every note would change with it. That is the test of real director’s notes, and the reason they count as supporting an interpretation: the choices depend on the reading, the same way a paragraph’s claim depends on its quotation.

9. Personal reading lists — interpretations at shelf length

The last move the curriculum suggests (VC2E10LE02 . E03) is building your own reading lists across genres — and being able to say why each text earns its place on the list. A reading list looks like the gentlest task in this section. It is actually the same skill in a new shape: every entry needs a reason, and the reason is an interpretation.

The discipline is the **criterion** — the rule a text must satisfy to earn a place. Without a criterion a list is only a pile. With one, the list becomes an argument about what you value in reading, and each entry’s “why” says how that text satisfies the rule. A **genre** is a recognised family of texts with shared features — novel, short story, verse novel, drama, memoir, speculative fiction. The curriculum asks for variety across genres because a criterion that only one genre can satisfy is probably not a criterion yet.

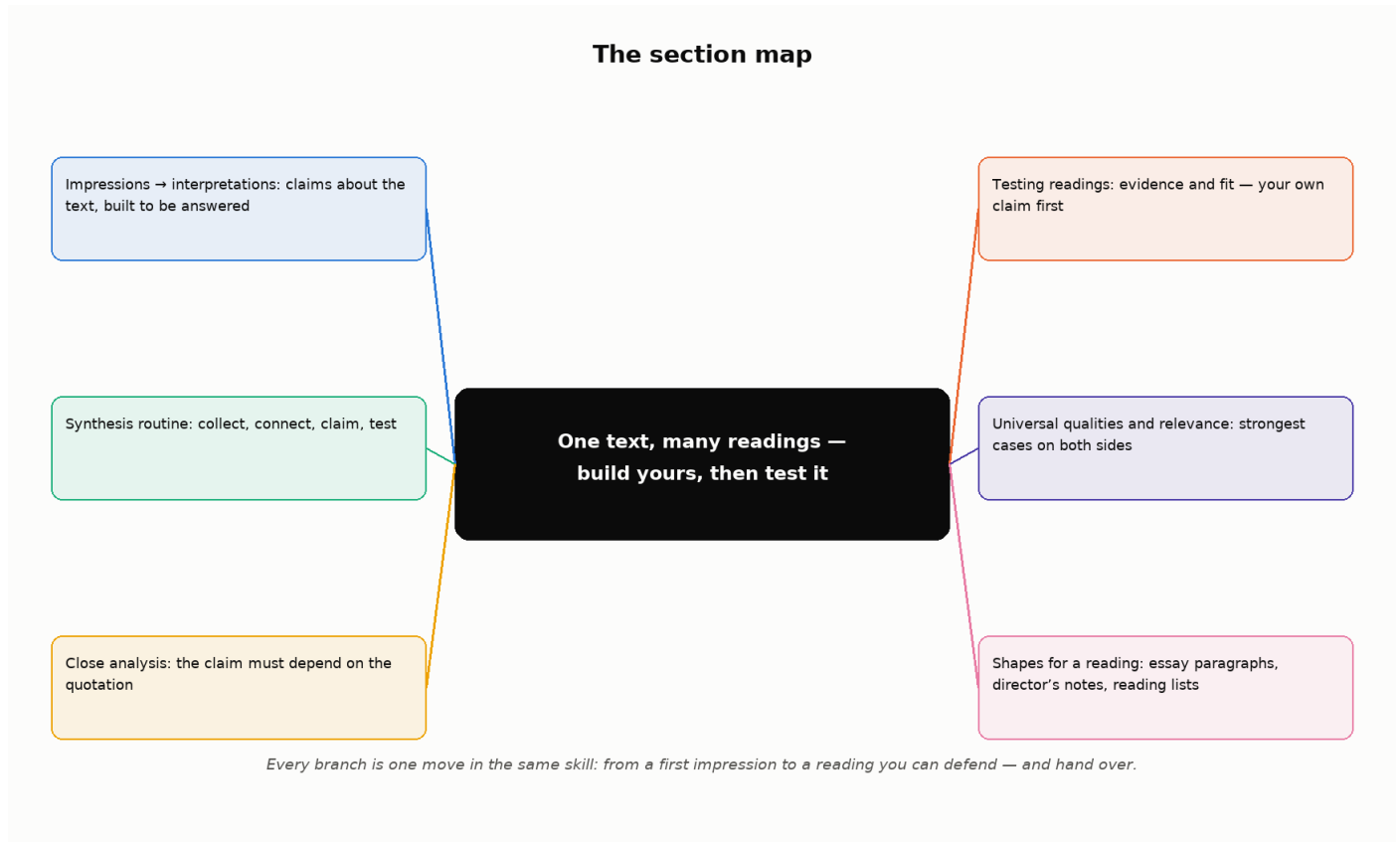
Figure 8 shows one student’s model list, built to a stated criterion.

A personal reading list — interpretation at shelf length <i>Every entry needs a reason, and the reason is an interpretation. A list without a criterion is only a pile.</i>		
Criterion: texts that put ordinary people inside decisions you can argue about.		
GENRE	TEXT	WHY IT QUALIFIES
Classic Australian short story	“The Drover’s Wife” — Henry Lawson (1892)	One woman’s night of small, arguable decisions against flood, fire and a snake under the floor.
Contemporary Australian novel	Tomorrow, When the War Began — John Marsden (1993)	Ordinary teenagers forced into decisions no one their age should have to make.
Verse novel	The Simple Gift — Steven Herrick (2000)	Three voices making quiet decisions about kindness, told so close the deciding is audible.
World literature	The Kite Runner — Khaled Hosseini (2003)	One decision in an alley runs a whole life — the hardest kind of arguable choice.
Contemporary speculative fiction	A Monster Calls — Patrick Ness (2011)	A decision no child should have to make, arriving by way of a monster’s stories.
<i>The “why” column says what each text does, not only that it is liked. Two readers with different criteria would build two different lists from the same shelf — and both could be right.</i>		

A model personal reading list table with a stated criterion across the top and five rows — one genre per row — giving the text, its author and year, and a one-sentence reason the text qualifies for the list

Notice what the “why it qualifies” column does: each sentence names something the text does — a decision held under pressure, a choice kept quiet — and ties it to the criterion. That is the entry’s interpretation. Two students with different criteria would build two different lists from the same shelf of books, and both lists could be right — the same shape as two readings of one poem, argued by evidence and fit, not by volume.

10. The section map



A concept map with the central claim “One text, many readings: build yours, then test it” and six branches — impressions into interpretations, the four-step synthesis routine, close analysis as the ground of claims, testing readings by evidence and fit, the universal-qualities debate, and interpretations in essays, director’s notes and reading lists

Worked analyses

Worked analysis 1 — scaffolded (synthesising an interpretation)

Use the four-step routine to synthesise an interpretation of *The Unfinished Boat*.

Step	Worked result	Why it matters
Collect	Noticings: the word <i>still</i> twice; the pencil <i>sleeps</i> ; the tide chart <i>curls</i> ; the speaker <i>measures with my eye</i> ; the last two lines both begin <i>I have not learned</i> . First impression: quiet, sad, not angry.	Raw material first; no theory yet.
Connect	<i>Still</i> , <i>sleeps</i> and <i>curls</i> all say the same thing: the shed is a place where time has been paused. The speaker keeps returning to that paused place instead of passing it.	Details become evidence when the pattern is named.
Claim	The poem presents grief as a kind of waiting: the speaker keeps the shed's stillness going because to move the shed on would feel like moving on from the grandfather.	One sentence, arguable, covering the whole poem.
Test	<i>Measure the planks with my eye</i> fits — a watch kept, not work refused. The doorway image fits — a threshold the speaker stays beside. No line contradicts the claim. Reading 2 would press <i>have not learned how to finish</i> , but the claim absorbs it: the not-finishing is the waiting.	A claim that survives the whole text earns the name interpretation.

Worked analysis 2 — scaffolded (testing someone else's reading)

A classmate offers this reading of the poem: “*It’s really about anger. The speaker is angry the boat was never finished — you can hear it in the last two lines.*” Run the four test questions on it.

Question	Application
1. What is the claim?	Grief in the poem is really anger at unfinished work.
2. What in the text supports it?	<i>One plank short of the door</i> could carry blame, and the repeated <i>I have not learned</i> can be read as frustration with oneself.
3. What does it not explain?	<i>Sleeps</i> is gentle, not hard. <i>Faint as a moth’s wing</i> , and <i>small</i> is tender. <i>Some evenings I sit</i> is a habit of quiet, not of heat. Nothing in the poem has an edge to it.
4. Does another reading explain those parts better?	Yes — the waiting reading of Worked analysis 1 handles the soft images <i>and</i> the last two lines. Verdict: counter , with respect — the reading is possible, but the text gives it almost nothing to hold.

Notice the shape of the verdict: the classmate’s claim is restated fairly, its best evidence is named, and it is countered at named points with better-evidenced alternatives. That is what testing another reader looks like when it is done as analysis rather than as winning.

Worked analysis 3 — unscaffolded (a close-analysis paragraph)

Write a close-analysis paragraph on the line “*His pencil still sleeps in the toolbox.*”

Sample. The poem keeps the grandfather’s absence gentle by giving his tools a kind of life. In the line “*His pencil still sleeps in the toolbox,*” the verb *sleeps* personifies the pencil — it is resting, not broken; the tool is described as if it could wake, which means the work itself is kept in the grammar of the waiting rather than the finished. This is the

poem's second use of *still*, and the repetition spreads the pause from the boat to every object in the shed: nothing here has been put away, because putting away would admit an ending. Through one quiet verb, the poem makes the whole shed into an image of grief held mid-breath — which is exactly the waiting this section's model claim describes.

Worked analysis 4 — unscaffolded (justifying a reading-list entry)

Criterion: *texts that put ordinary people inside decisions you can argue about.* Entry: *The Drover's Wife*, Henry Lawson (1892, classic Australian short story).

Sample justification. Lawson's story puts one woman alone in a hut with children and a snake under the floor, and makes the whole story a run of small decisions — stay or leave, fight or wait, remember or keep going. Every one of her choices is one a reader can argue with, and none needs a hero to make it; that is the criterion at full stretch, so the story earns its place.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1 (Reading and viewing). Sort these five responses to *The Unfinished Boat* into **impressions** and **interpretations**.

(a) The poem felt still and quiet to me. (b) The poem presents the shed as a place where time has been paused on purpose. (c) I liked the image of the moth's wing. (d) The repeated *still* shows that grief has frozen the speaker's world. (e) The last two lines hit harder than I expected.

Q2 (Reading and viewing). Each quotation below is used as evidence by Reading 1 (love keeps working), Reading 2 (grief has stopped time), or both. Label each one.

(a) *still rests on the shed's stone floor* (b) *measure the planks with my eye* (c) *His pencil still sleeps in the toolbox* (d) *one plank short of the door* (e) *I have not learned to walk by*

Q3 (Writing). Use the synthesis routine on stanza 3 of the poem. Write one line for each step: (a) two things you collected; (b) the pattern that connects them; (c) a one-sentence claim; (d) one part of the poem outside stanza 3 that your claim must also fit.

Q4 (Writing). Here is a claim and a quotation. Write the two missing parts of the paragraph — the **close reading** and the **return**.

Claim: *The poem treats the grandfather's work as unfinished rather than lost.* Quotation: *"its ribs half-raised, its hull unsealed, / one plank short of the door."*

Q5 (Reading and viewing). Apply the four test questions, one line each, to Reading 2 in Figure 4. Finish with a verdict: adopt, extend, or counter.

Q6 (Speaking and listening). In pairs, take one position each from Figure 6. Before you argue your own position, speak for one minute presenting your *partner's* position in its strongest form — what it sees that yours misses. Then each argue your own.

Unscaffolded

Q7 (Reading and viewing). Choose one image from the poem — *the tide chart curls on the wall, faint as a moth's wing*, or *measure the planks with my eye* — and write a close-analysis paragraph of 100–140 words using the four-part shape from section 4. Your paragraph must end on an interpretive claim about the whole poem.

Q8 (Writing). Claim: *The poem is really about thresholds — doors and doorways the speaker cannot bring herself to cross.* Write a full four-part paragraph supporting this claim with at least two quotations. Then add one sentence naming the part of the poem your claim handles least well.

Q9 (Writing). Write your own set of five director's notes for a short film of the poem. Each note must give a practical instruction (set, light, sound, camera, performance) and a one-sentence note naming the interpretation it serves. Your five notes together must add up to one consistent reading of the poem — name that reading in a heading.

Q10 (Speaking and listening). Debate the motion: “*That this poem still matters to readers our age, because what it is about is not locked to one time or one place.*” Prepare both sides with equal care, using the two positions from section 7 and specific lines of the poem. Marks reward the quality of the reasoning on each side — terms defined, claims tested on the poem, limits admitted — not the side you land on.

Q11 (Writing). Build your own personal reading list: one stated criterion, then five texts across five different genres, each with a one-sentence justification tying the text to the criterion. Real texts from your own reading are the point — but every “why” must say what the text *does*, not only that you liked it.

Q12 (Speaking and listening). Interpretation swap. Give a partner the claim you built in Q3 or Q7. Your partner runs the four test questions on it aloud, and you answer each one; then swap roles. Finish by writing one sentence each: what the testing changed in your claim, or why it survived unchanged.

Q13 (Reading and viewing). Read this flash text, written for this section:

The bus left at seven. Mara watched it go from the kitchen window, then put the letter back in its envelope and set the envelope under the fruit bowl. She made her lunch and had it standing up.

Write two different arguable interpretations of why Mara puts the letter under the fruit bowl — each supported by something in the text. Then say, in one or two sentences, which of your two readings is better supported and why.

Q14 (Writing). Reflection, 80–120 words. Describe how your reading of *The Unfinished Boat* moved from first impression to synthesised claim across this section. Name the moment or the step that changed your reading most, and say what changed it — a quotation, a partner’s reading, one of the test questions, or the debate.

Answers

Q1. Impressions: (a), (c), (e) — reports of how the poem landed. Interpretations: (b), (d) — claims about the poem, arguable and pointing at evidence.

Q2. (a) Reading 2, chiefly — the freeze reading leans on *still rests*; Reading 1 can use it too, as the thing devotion keeps. (b) Reading 1 — measuring as a watch kept. (c) both — *sleeps* is devotion's evidence for Reading 1, and the freeze's evidence for Reading 2. (d) both — a shortfall Reading 1 reads as "still in progress" and Reading 2 reads as "never going anywhere". (e) both — refusal to leave as loyalty, or as being stuck. The point of the question: the same line can serve two readings, which is why interpretations must argue from *what the line is made to do*.

Q3. Sample. (a) *I have not learned how to finish / I have not learned to walk by*. (b) Both refusals use the same words — the speaker defines herself by two things she cannot do, one about the boat and one about leaving it. (c) The ending pairs finishing and leaving as the same refusal, so the poem says that to complete the work would be to let the grandfather go. (d) It must also fit *the tide chart curls on the wall* — a sign that time outside the shed has kept moving.

Q4. Sample close reading: the boat is described by what it has, not what it lacks — *ribs half-raised, hull unsealed, one plank short* — each phrase naming a stage of making, so the poem's grammar keeps the work mid-sentence rather than over. Sample return: as long as the boat is one plank short, the grandfather's project is still running, and the shed keeps holding a place for him in it.

Q5. Sample. Claim: grief has stopped time in the shed. Support: *still rests, still sleeps, curls*. Not explained: *measure the planks with my eye* — a frozen person does not keep appointments with the boat. Verdict: extend — the freeze is real, but the poem adds a keeping-watch the reading misses.

Q6. No fixed answer; see the model guidance below.

Q7–Q14. Open tasks — see the model responses below.

Model responses

Q6. A strong pair sounds like this: each speaker first presents the *other* position with its best evidence — Position 1 pointing at the fact that readers who have never seen a boat shed still feel the poem; Position 2 pointing at how differently the same lines read to readers with different losses of their own. The argument improves because each side now knows what it must answer. If a pair can only argue its own side, the test from section 6 has not yet been applied to the positions themselves.

Q7. Sample. The poem's most quietly devastating image may be the tide chart: "*The tide chart curls on the wall*." The chart is the shed's only working object — the one thing that once connected the boat to the sea it was built for — and the verb *curls* gives it a slow, unguarded ageing: paper doing what paper does when nobody consults it any more. The detail sets two kinds of time against each other — tide time, which never stops, and shed time, which has — and the speaker watches from the side where time stopped. In one curling sheet of paper, the poem says what grief has done: not ended the grandfather's world, but sealed it off from the sea it was meant to meet.

Q8. Sample. The poem keeps placing its speaker at edges she will not cross. The boat itself stands "*one plank short of the door*" — short of the shed's exit, the threshold between the work and the world; and the speaker takes her stand in the same place, sitting "*in the doorway*" between the shed and outside, measuring the planks but never moving through. The two final refusals rhyme with the pattern: to *finish* is to cross the boat's threshold, and to *walk by* is to cross the shed's, and the poem grants her neither. Honest limit: the reading handles least well the tenderness of "*His pencil still sleeps*," which fits better with keeping than with being trapped.

Q9. Sample heading: *Reading: the film is a held breath — a vigil kept at a threshold*. Notes: (1) Set — keep the shed exactly as found; dust on the toolbox, nothing tidied, because tidying would narrate a moving-on the poem never permits. (2) Light — shoot in late afternoon with the door half open, so the low sun lands on the boat and leaves the doorway in shadow: the boat is what the speaker looks at, the doorway is what she cannot. (3) Sound — no music until after the last line; only wind and the shed's small creaks, because a score would tell the audience what to feel and the poem refuses to do that. (4) Performance — the speaker's voice flat and unhurried, no tear in it; grief this old has

finished performing. (5) Final shot — hold on the empty doorway for five seconds after the last line, then cut to black; the poem ends at a threshold, so the film must end at one too.

Q10. A strong debate opens each side from its strongest form. For the motion: the poem moves readers whose lives share nothing with a boat shed, and that travelling is the evidence that its subject — holding on, letting go — is shared, not local; define *universal qualities* as features readers across times can recognise, and test the claim on the last two lines, which name a refusal any reader can feel. Against the motion: what grips us may be exactly the particulars — one pencil, one September, one chart — and “universal” risks flattening them; also, *matters to readers our age* needs proof about readers our age, not about readers in general. Two speakers reaching opposite verdicts can both deserve full marks; the motion is a frame for reasoning, not a loyalty test.

Q11. Sample. Criterion: *texts that put ordinary people inside decisions you can argue about*. (1) Classic Australian short story — *The Drover’s Wife*, Henry Lawson (1892): one woman’s night of small, arguable decisions against flood, fire and a snake. (2) Contemporary Australian novel — *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, John Marsden (1993): ordinary teenagers forced into decisions no one their age should have to make. (3) Verse novel — *The Simple Gift*, Steven Herrick (2000): three voices making quiet decisions about kindness, told so close the deciding is audible. (4) World literature — *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini (2003): one decision in an alley runs a whole life, the hardest kind of arguable choice. (5) Contemporary speculative fiction — *A Monster Calls*, Patrick Ness (2011): a decision no child should have to make, arriving by way of a monster’s stories. Each entry names what the text does, not only that it is liked.

Q12. A strong swap sounds like: “My claim survived questions 1 and 2 but fell over at 3 — I had no answer for the tide chart, so I extended the claim: the shed’s time is paused *against* a world whose time keeps going, which is what makes the pausing cost something.” The sentence names the question that did the work. That is the section’s skill in one line: testing changes claims by name, or explains why they stand.

Q13. Sample. Reading A: Mara hides the letter — *under the fruit bowl* is a place nobody looks, and watching the bus leave first suggests she has let something go and is not ready to read what follows. Reading B: Mara keeps the letter close — under the fruit bowl is the middle of the house’s daily life, where she will see it every time she eats, so she is holding the news near but unopened, not buried. Reading B is the better supported: *put the letter back* says she has already opened it once — she is delaying a re-reading, not a first one — and hiding is a stranger fit for an envelope you handle and then place in the busiest spot in the kitchen.

Q14. Sample. My first impression was that the poem was “just sad”. Collecting changed that: once I had written down the two uses of *still*, I could not read the sadness as weather any more — it looked like a decision. The moment that moved me most was the test step: my first claim was that the speaker was stuck, and a partner asked what *measure the planks with my eye* was doing in a poem about being stuck. I had no answer, so I extended the claim into the one I now hold — the staying is both the comfort and the trap. The section’s routine did not tell me what to think; it told me where my thinking had a hole.

Looking back. An impression is how a text lands on you; an interpretation is a claim about the text, built from evidence and open to argument. Synthesising is the routine that joins the two — collect, connect, claim, test — and close textual analysis is what keeps the claim honest: the claim must depend on the quotation. When interpretations collide, the question is never who is cleverer but which reading explains more of the text, and the same testing applies to your own claim first of all. The biggest version of that testing asks whether a text carries universal qualities and stays relevant — a debate with strong cases on both sides, and one worth running on any text you value. And interpretation is not only an essay’s property: the same skill shapes a director’s notes, where a reading becomes light and sound, and a reading list, where every entry’s “why” is a small argument about what you value. One text, many readings. Build yours — then have the confidence to hand it over.

Social, moral and ethical positions in literary texts

Curriculum trace. Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English, Level 10 · Literature strand · sub-strand *Engaging with and responding to literature* · **VC2E10LE03** · Draws on: VC2E10LE03 .E01 · Builds on Level 9 VC2E9LE03

Three terms, defined up front

The Victorian Curriculum names three kinds of position in this content description and defines none of them. All three are **contested terms** — competing definitions exist, and which one you choose changes what you see — so this section states the working definitions it will use, and every task here is answerable on these definitions alone.

Three terms, defined for this section

TERM	KIND	WORKING DEFINITION HERE	QUESTION IT ANSWERS
social position	contested	a view about how people should live together: what a community owes its members, who belongs, and who gets what	Who should the town honour?
moral position	contested	a view about what a person or group should do: what counts as right and wrong conduct in a given case	Should the gatekeeper open the gate?
ethical position	contested	a moral position taken up as something to reason about: its values and principles laid out, tested, and argued for	Which reasons hold up, and which do not?

The Victorian Curriculum uses all three terms without defining any of them. These are the working definitions this section uses; other definitions exist and are not interchangeable.

A three-row table defining the section's working terms: a social position as a view about how people should live together, a moral position as a view about what a person or group should do, and an ethical position as a moral position taken up to be reasoned about, each with the kind of term it is and the question it answers

- A **social position** is a view about how people should live together: what a community owes its members, who belongs, and who gets what.
- A **moral position** is a view about what a person or group should do: what counts as right and wrong conduct in a given case.
- An **ethical position** is a moral position taken up as something to reason about: its reasons laid out, tested, and argued for. Every ethical position starts life as a moral position; what makes it ethical is the reasoning.

One philosopher's framing is worth naming. In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985), Bernard Williams used *ethics* for the wide question — how should a person live? — and *morality* for one narrower system of duties, rules and blame inside it. Other writers pair the words differently, which is exactly why this section states its own usage instead of borrowing one. The same honesty applies to two small words this section leans on:

- a **value** is what a person or group treats as worth protecting or pursuing — fairness, loyalty, honesty, mercy;
- a **principle** is a rule for acting that a person is willing to apply across cases — *tell the truth even when it costs you, the same rule for everyone*.

A value is a thing you hold; a principle is a value put to work as a rule. When a text represents a position, it almost always rests that position on values and principles, stated or unstated — and finding them is half the skill this section teaches.

The set texts

This section works on a **range of literary texts**: a fable, a scene from a play, a poem, and a pair of short tellings. All four are original texts written for this section; none is quoted from any published source.

Text A — “The Gate That Paid Twice” (a fable). A **fable** is a short made-up story, often plain-told, built to carry a lesson about how to act.

The gatekeeper had kept the toll gate for thirty years, and in all that time the rule had never changed: everyone who crossed paid, and everyone who paid crossed. It was a fair rule, the gatekeeper said, because it made no difference who you were.

One night in the rain, a stranger came to the gate with a child in his arms. The child was burning with fever, and the doctor lived on the far side of the river.

“I have no money,” said the stranger. “Take it from me when I come back.”

The gatekeeper looked at the rule-book, and at the child. Then he opened the gate.

“Cross,” he said. “And when you come back, pay twice — once for the crossing and once for the night. The rule is still the rule.”

The apprentice watched the stranger vanish into the rain. “You broke the rule,” he said.

“I kept it,” said the gatekeeper. “The rule says the toll is owed. It does not say when.”

“And if he never comes back?”

The gatekeeper closed the gate. “Then we will know he was not the kind of man the rule was built for. But we will not have built the rule into a wall.”

The stranger came back in the spring and paid twice, as he had been asked. And the apprentice, who kept the gate after the gatekeeper was gone, wrote the case into the rule-book — not to weaken the rule, but to teach the next gatekeeper how to read it.

Text B — “The Queue” (a scene from a play). The harbour office, on a night of storm. MARA is the harbourmaster; JONAS is her deputy. A fishing boat, the *Petrel*, is two hours out with a dead engine and nine people aboard, asking to dock ahead of the queue. The rule of the port: first to call, first to dock.

MARA. The *Petrel* is two hours out with a dead engine and nine aboard.

JONAS. And the queue is four boats deep. Each of them called in first. Each of them has held their turn in the weather.

MARA. The *Petrel* cannot hold her turn.

JONAS. Then her turn holds her. Mara, listen to me. Every skipper in this port knows the rule. It is the only reason they trust us. You pull the *Petrel* in ahead, and tomorrow every boat with a leaking hatch and a sick cook will be calling a crisis, and we will be choosing whose trouble is real, and by nightfall the port runs on favour.

MARA. And tonight nine people hold their turn in the weather, because we are afraid of being unfair tomorrow.

JONAS. I am not afraid of tomorrow. I am answerable for it.

MARA. So am I. But a rule that cannot bend in a storm will break in one.

JONAS. Or the port will. (*He slides the log across the desk.*) Either way, it is your name at the bottom of the page.

(*The lights fade on the open log. No entry has been written.*)

Text C — “The Plaque” (a poem).

The plaque on the hall names the man who paid for the stone: his letters cut deep, gold in the shadow, telling the town what money can build and a memory keep.

But lower, along the lip of the arch, the masons have left their marks in the stone — a bird, a bent nail, a circle, a star — the small signs of hands never made known.

The town walks over what money began but stands on the labour the plaque never names. Ask who built the hall, and the stone answers plain: one bought the naming of it; a hundred, the frame.

Text D — two tellings of one crossing. The same night from Text A, told twice.

Telling 1 — from the gatekeeper's ledger, dated that night: *One crossing, after hours, toll unpaid. Debtor: the man with the fevered child. To be repaid on his return, double. Rule observed; payment delayed.*

Telling 2 — from the stranger's letter, years later: *We reached the doctor before morning. I have thought of the gate every night since, and of the man who stood in the rain to open it, and who asked nothing of me but that I come back and be honest.*

Theory

1. A position is carried, not announced

A text's **position** is the view of right and wrong, or of how people should live, that the text represents as worth holding. Rarely is it announced. A character may say something wise or something vile, and the text may agree with neither — the speaker's view is one voice in the text, not the text's view. The text's own position is carried, and it travels along three channels.

Three channels: how a text carries a position

1 what characters choose

A position shows in what a text's people do under pressure, and in whom the story treats as worth trusting.

from the set texts

The gatekeeper opens the gate in the rain.

2 what the plot rewards

A position shows in how choices turn out: whose choice is paid for by the ending, and whose is punished.

from the set texts

The stranger comes back and pays twice; the rule is repaid.

3 who gets a voice

A position shows in who speaks, who is heard, and who stays silent: the story's attention is the story's weighting.

from the set texts

The child never speaks; the fever speaks for the child.

Three labelled cards showing the channels by which a text carries a position: what characters choose, what the plot rewards, and who gets a voice, each with a one-line example from the set texts

- **What characters choose.** Under pressure, a text's people show what the text treats as worth doing — and whom it treats as worth trusting. The gatekeeper opens the gate in the rain; the text lets us watch him choose.
- **What the plot rewards.** Endings are arguments. Whose choice is paid for, and whose is punished, is the text weighing positions whether it says so or not. The stranger comes back and pays twice; the fable's mercy is repaid, so the fable's mercy is rewarded.
- **Who gets a voice.** A text's attention is its weighting: who speaks, who is heard, and who stays silent. In Text A the child never says a word; the fever says everything for the child.

Read those three channels together and you can state a text's position even when no character states it. That is the move from *a character's view* to *the text's position* — and it is the move this content description asks for.

2. Values and principles: what a position stands on

The curriculum's elaboration for this section (VC2E10LE03.E01) asks you to identify and analyse an ethical position on a **significant issue** — a question that matters beyond the story, like *when may a fair rule be bent?* — “including values and/or principles involved”. So a position is not a feeling; it has a structure. It stands on values, and it acts through principles.

Unpacking one line of a text

"Every skipper in this port knows the rule. It is the only reason they trust us." — Jonas, text B

VALUES it rests on

- fairness: the queue treated every boat the same
- trust: the port runs on promises kept in the dark

the PRINCIPLE it states

- apply the rule the same way to every case, or you are not applying a rule at all — you are picking favourites

FRAMES that carry it

- rules and duties: the rule is one Jonas would accept for his own boat in the queue
- outcomes: break it once and, Jonas argues, trust in the queue collapses for every boat

A worked unpacking of one line of Jonas's speech: the quoted line at the top, then an arrow down to the values it rests on — fairness, and trust — then to the principle it states, that a rule must be applied the same way to every case, then to the frames that carry it

Work the move once on Jonas. His line — *"Every skipper in this port knows the rule. It is the only reason they trust us."* — rests on two values: **fairness** (the queue treats every boat the same) and **trust** (the port runs on promises kept in the dark). From those values he draws a principle: *apply the rule the same way to every case, or you are not applying a rule at all — you are picking favourites*. Notice the test built into that principle: it is a rule he would accept applied to his own boat. A principle you would only accept for other people is not a principle; it is a claim to an exception.

The significant issue differs across our texts. Texts A and B share one — *when may a fair rule be bent for a person?* — while Text C raises a social one: *whom should a community honour, and why?* Different issue, same structure: values underneath, a principle acting, a position carried.

3. The analyst's pencil

Analysis is a habit of the pencil before it is a habit of the mind. Take four lines of Text A and mark what each carries:

An annotated extract: the analyst's pencil

The gatekeeper looked at the rule-book, and at the child.

ANALYST

the issue: which wins when the rule and the child cannot both be served?

"Cross," he said. "And when you come back, pay twice —

ANALYST

the position: mercy now, honesty owed — neither value is given up

once for the crossing and once for the night. The rule is still the rule."

ANALYST

values: compassion and fairness, held at once

"But we will not have built the rule into a wall."

ANALYST

principle: a rule is for the ordinary days — it must not become a wall

Four lines from the fable on the left, each joined to an analyst's note on the right: the first line carries the issue, the second the position of mercy with honesty owed, the third the two values of compassion and fairness held at once, and the fourth the principle that a rule is for the ordinary days and must not become a wall

Four lines, four loads: the **issue** (rule against child), the **position** (mercy now, honesty owed), the **values** (compassion and fairness at once), the **principle** (a rule is for the ordinary days; it must not become a wall). Nothing in those notes is invented; every note is unpacked from what the lines say and do. That is the standard of evidence this section works to: a claim about a text's position must point at the words that carry it.

4. Three frames for sorting reasons

Once a position is unpacked, VC2E10LE03.E01 asks for the next step: judging how strong and how weak the position is. Reasons are easier to weigh once they are sorted, and most ethical reasons sort into three frames.

Three frames for sorting reasons

FRAME	WHAT IT LOOKS AT	ITS KEY QUESTION	ASSOCIATED SOURCE
outcomes	the results of the choice: who gains, who loses, and what everyone is left with once the dust settles	What follows from this, and who pays for it?	J. S. Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (1861): judge an act by the good it does for the most people
rules and duties	the rule being followed, and whether the speaker could accept it applied to everyone, including themselves	Would this still be right if everyone did it?	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (1785): act only on a rule you could make universal
character	the kind of person the choice builds: what acting this way makes of the one who acts	What sort of person acts like this?	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (c. 340 BC): the good act is what a good person would do

These are frames for sorting reasons, not three answers. A strong position can be tested from all three directions, and the sources are given so you can follow the ideas to where they come from.

*A three-row table of frames for sorting reasons — outcomes, rules and duties, and character — each with what it looks at, its key question, and its associated source: Mill's *Utilitarianism* of 1861, Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics**

The sources are given so the ideas can be followed to where they come from. John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861) is the classic statement of judging an act by the good it does for the most people; Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) is the classic statement of acting only on a rule you could make universal; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 340 BC) asks what a good person would do, and what acting this way makes of the one who acts. They are **frames, not answers** — lenses for sorting the reasons a position gives, and a strong position can be tested from all three directions.

Kant's frame hides the sharpest single test in the kit, and this section uses it openly: the **everyone-test**. A principle holds only if it still makes sense when everyone acts on it — including acting on you. Jonas's principle passes it: a port where everyone keeps the queue is a port everyone can trust. The softer principle — *bend the queue whenever you judge a case special* — fails it, because if everyone is judge of their own case, the queue means nothing. One limit must be named, because it is real: a rule can pass the everyone-test at one level of description and fail at another (*never break a promise* passes; *never break a promise made under threat* would trap its maker). So the test sorts reasons; it does not end arguments. That is exactly the work this section wants from it.

5. Who tells it: the position in the narrator

A fourth channel rides on the first three: **who tells the story**. Return to Text D, the crossing told twice. The ledger and the letter disagree about nothing factual — same night, same gate, same debt — and yet they carry different positions.

One crossing, two tellings, two positions

The same event from text A, told by its gatekeeper and by the man he let through. Same facts; different weighting.

TELLING 1 — the gatekeeper's ledger

one crossing, after hours; toll owed, delayed; rule observed

SPOTLIGHTS

- the debt and the order it keeps
- the rule as a thing that is still the rule
- the gatekeeper as officer of a fair system

LEAVES IN THE SHADE

- the fear and the urgency
- the night's weather
- the child, who is a line item

TELLING 2 — the stranger's letter

the gate opened in the rain; a man who asked only honesty

SPOTLIGHTS

- the gift and the trust it asked for
- the gatekeeper as a person, remembered every night
- the child as the reason for everything

LEAVES IN THE SHADE

- the debt and the doubling
- the rule-book
- what the gatekeeper gave up by waiting

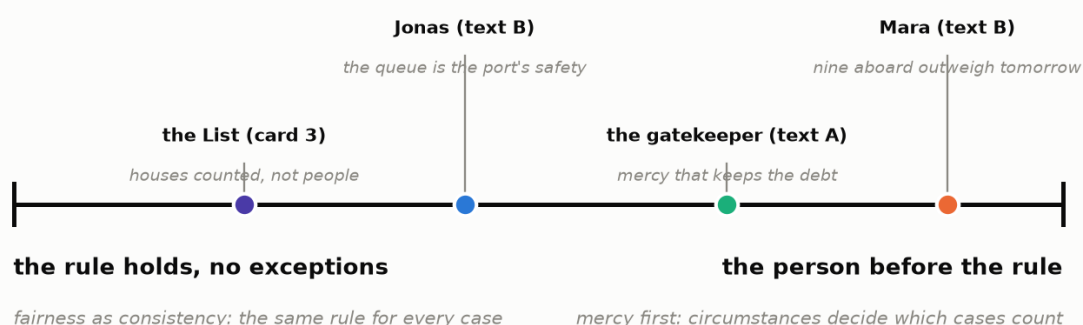
The narrator is a choice, and a choice of narrator is a choice of position: order and debt, or gift and trust.

Two cards retelling the same crossing from Text A: the gatekeeper's ledger, spotlighting the debt, the order and the rule, and leaving the fear, the weather and the child in the shade; and the stranger's letter, spotlighting the gift, the trust and the child, and leaving the debt, the doubling and the rule-book in the shade

The ledger's position is the position of **order**: a debt, a doubling, a rule observed — mercy filed under bookkeeping so that fairness can see it. The letter's position is the position of **gift**: a gate opened in the rain, a trust asked for and honoured — the debt not even named. Neither telling is false; each is a choice of what to spotlight and what to leave in the shade. So the narrator is a choice, and a choice of narrator is a choice of position. Section 3E will take *voice* further as a device; here the point is simpler: before you say what a text's position is, check who is telling, and what their telling serves.

6. Where the texts land

Placed on the section's significant question — the rule against the person — the set texts spread out rather than pile up.



One significant question, read across the set texts: no text lands at either end, and the distance between Jonas and Mara is the section's work.

A horizontal scale running from “the rule holds, no exceptions” to “the person before the rule”, with four markers between the ends: the List nearest the rule end, then Jonas, then the gatekeeper, then Mara nearest the person end

The List (card 3, below) counts houses because houses cannot plead — a rule that never bends is its shield against favour. Jonas holds the queue even in the storm. The gatekeeper opens the gate but keeps the debt: mercy that refuses to become an exception. Mara weighs nine lives now against every maybe of tomorrow. No text lands at either end of

the scale, and the distance between Jonas and Mara — two honest people, one rule, one storm — is precisely the work of this section. A text that put every character at one end would not be analysing a position; it would be preaching one.

7. Strengths and weaknesses: judging the position

Evaluation is not picking a side. VC2E10LE03.E01 asks for the strengths **and** the weaknesses of the position presented, and the checklist below is what that looks like in practice.

Judging the position: a two-column checklist

signs of a STRONG position

- It is stated plainly, so it can be tested — not hidden in fear or mockery
- Its principle is one the holder would accept applied to themselves
- It counts the cost to others, including the people it disadvantages
- It survives the everyone-test, or says honestly where it must make an exception and why
- The text itself tests it — hard cases appear, and the position is made to answer them

signs of a WEAK position

- It makes an exception for its own side without saying why that exception is fair
- It argues by fear, mockery or name-calling instead of reasons
- It ignores, or never lets speak, the people who pay its cost
- It changes ground when tested — the reason today is not the reason yesterday
- The text props it up by making the other side look foolish instead of letting it argue

A two-column checklist: five signs of a strong represented position — stated plainly, holding a principle the holder would accept for themselves, counting its cost to others, surviving the everyone-test, and being tested by the text itself — against five signs of a weak one — an exception for its own side, fear or mockery instead of reasons, silencing the people who pay its cost, changing ground when tested, and a text that makes the other side look foolish instead of letting it argue

Two rules of the house apply with full force here. First, **steelman before you evaluate**: present each position in the strongest form its own advocates would recognise, then judge it. Second, symmetry: the side you agree with gets the same tests, at the same depth, as the side you do not. A substitution test used on one side only is advocacy wearing rigour's clothes.

Two positions, both worth their strongest form.

Position 1 — Jonas, the rule first. In its strongest form, Jonas is not heartless; he is the guard on the one thing the port owns that the storm cannot touch — the promise that every boat is treated the same. His case is not *rules matter more than people*. It is: the queue is how nine hundred strangers keep faith with each other in the dark, and a harbourmaster who spends that promise to buy one boat's relief has spent everyone's trust for one night's comfort.

Position 2 — Mara, the person first. In its strongest form, Mara is not careless; she is the guard on the reason the rule exists, which is people. A rule is a tool for saving boats and keeping promises; a tool that cannot serve its purpose in the one case where the purpose shouts loudest has stopped being a tool and become a master. Her case is: the port exists for the boats, not the boats for the port.

Both positions stand, and the scene gives the last word to neither — the log stays open, the entry unwritten, so the weighing is the reader's work. That refusal is itself a position: the text's position is that this choice should be made with open eyes, not by habit.

And a note on marks, because students guess at expected answers faster than adults expect: two readers can reach opposite conclusions about Jonas and Mara and both deserve full marks, if both reasoned from stated values, tested their principles, and counted the costs. Marking is on the quality of the reasoning, not the conclusion reached.

8. Positions in miniature

Four more tiny texts close the theory — stories in miniature, each carrying a position on a significant issue. They return in the worked analyses and the practice set; hold them in your head whole, and test the routine on them. Like the rest, all four are original summaries written for this section.

Four story cards: positions in miniature

For each card: state the position in one sentence, name a value and a principle, and say one strength and one weakness.

card 1 — the baker's loaf

Each dawn the baker sets one free loaf on the bench, and never watches who takes it. In winter a boy begins taking it to sell on. The baker keeps setting it out: better cheated some mornings than to stop feeding the hungry.

card 2 — the whistle

In the town final a player realises the referee is his cousin, and says nothing. A close call goes his cousin's way, and the town wins the cup. Some years on, he still cannot say which weighed more that day: the cup, or the silence.

card 3 — the list

After the flood, aid goes out by the list: every household the same. A household of nine receives what a man alone receives. The one who wrote the list says: we counted houses, not people, because houses cannot plead their case and people can.

card 4 — the return

A sailor wronged his brother, sailed away, and returned after ten years to pay back every coin with interest, and to tell the truth of it. The brother weighs the coins — and leaves the door shut. Some debts are paid in gold and owed in something else.

All four cards are original summaries written for this section.

Four story cards, each a tiny original summary carrying a position to be identified and judged: card 1 the baker's loaf, card 2 the whistle, card 3 the list, and card 4 the return

9. The routine

Five steps, in order, every time. The routine turns the whole content description — analyse how positions are represented, and evaluate them — into moves you can repeat on a fable, a scene, a poem or a letter.

The five-step routine: read a position, then judge it

1. State the position

one sentence, in your own words: who holds it, and what it says should be done — not what you think of it yet

2. Unpack it

the values it rests on (what it treats as worth protecting) and the principle it would apply to every case

3. Test the principle

everyone-test: would it hold if everyone acted on it, and on you? outcomes-test: who pays, and is that counted?
character-test: what does it make of the person who acts on it?

4. Weigh it

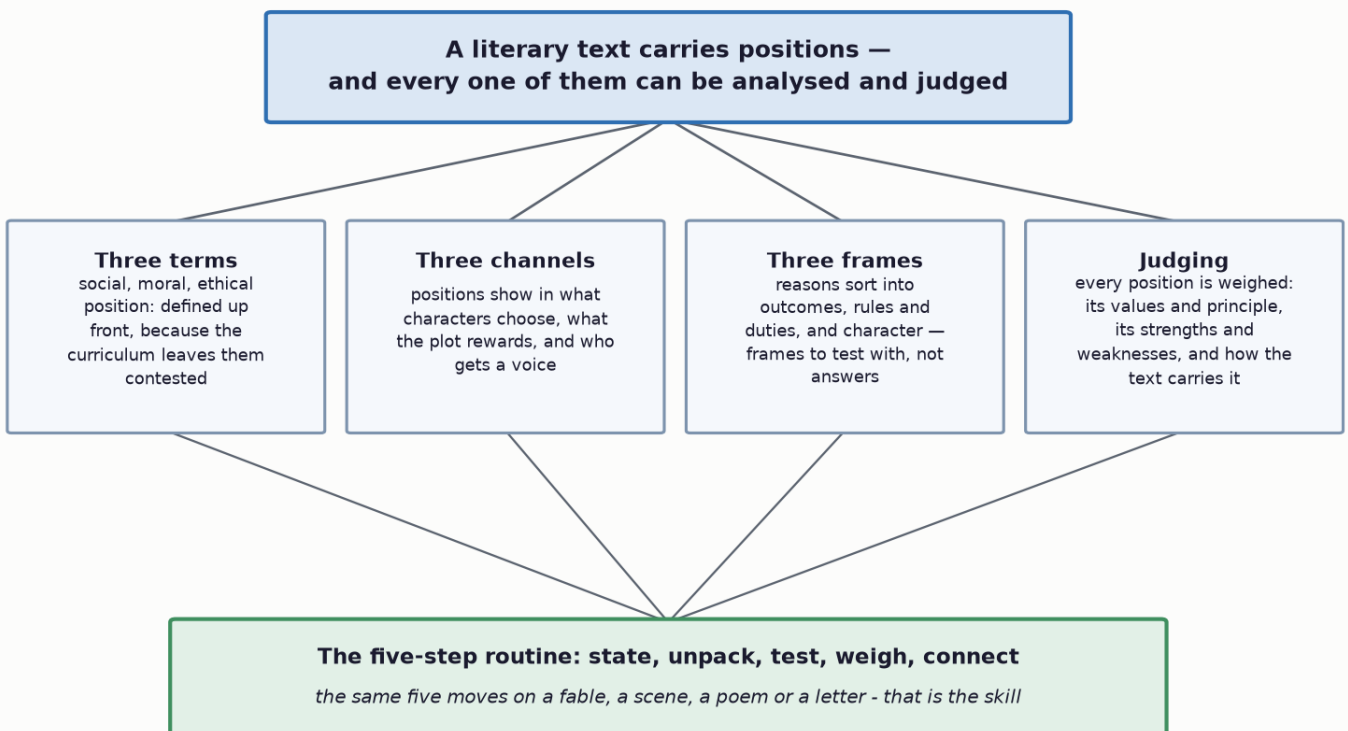
one strength: what it protects, or sees, that the other side misses; one weakness: what it costs, ignores, or leaves unsaid

5. Connect to the text

how the text carries the position — voice, choice, outcome, image — and how much stronger or weaker the text has made it

A five-step flowchart: state the position in one sentence; unpack its values and its principle; test the principle with the everyone-test, the outcomes-test and the character-test; weigh one strength and one weakness; then connect to how the text carries the position and how much stronger or weaker the text has made it

10. The section map



A concept map with the central claim that a literary text carries positions and every one of them can be analysed and judged, four branches for the three terms, the channels, the three frames and the judging of strengths and weaknesses, and a base node stating the five-step routine: state, unpack, test, weigh, connect

Worked analyses

Worked analysis 1 — scaffolded (the fable through the routine)

Analyse the position carried by Text A.

Step	Analysis	Why it matters
State	The fable's position: a fair rule may be bent for a person in need, provided the bending is honest and the debt is honoured.	One sentence, no verdict yet — the position, not your opinion of it.
Unpack	Values: compassion and fairness, held at once. Principle: the toll is owed, not instantly — mercy now, honesty owed, and the rule still the rule.	The position stands on both values; drop either and it is a different position.
Test	Everyone-test: it holds only if the exception repays the rule — if every borrower came back as the stranger did. Outcomes-test: the child lives and the rule survives; the cost falls on the gatekeeper, who carries the risk. Character-test: it builds a gatekeeper who reads the rule instead of reciting it.	The principle passes only in its strict form; a mercy that never repays would fail the same test.
Weigh	Strength: it refuses the false choice — neither the child nor the rule is sacrificed. Weakness: it leans on the stranger's honesty; the apprentice's question — <i>and if he never comes back?</i> — is answered with a shrug, not a reason.	A strength and a weakness, both pointed at in the text: the doubling repaid, the shrug at the gate.
Connect	The fable carries the position through all three channels: the gatekeeper's choice, the plot's reward (the doubling repaid in spring), and the voice given to the apprentice, whose doubt is printed, not punished.	Because the doubt is printed, the text tests its own position — the strongest sign on the checklist.

Worked analysis 2 — scaffolded (the scene, both sides)

Evaluate the two positions in Text B.

Position	Strength	Weakness
Jonas: the rule first	It counts what mercy forgets — the four boats already holding their turn, and every future boat that will trust the queue. Its principle passes the everyone-test: Jonas would accept it for his own boat.	It asks nine people tonight to pay for a trust that pays off only tomorrow, and it never quite answers Mara's storm: a rule with no bend may have no break, but it has no mercy either.
Mara: the person first	It keeps the rule's purpose in view — the port exists for the boats — and it counts the cost of waiting in real weather, not in theory.	Its principle fails the everyone-test as stated: if every skipper self-declares a crisis, the queue dies. Mara's version only works if someone trustworthy decides which cases count — and the scene never says who, or how.

The scene's own move is the blank page. By ending on the open log with no entry written, the text refuses to cash either position in, and hands the weighing to the reader. Representing a position by withholding a verdict is still representing a position — the position that this choice deserves open eyes.

Worked analysis 3 — unscaffolded (the poem)

Analyse the position carried by Text C, and evaluate it.

State. The poem's social position: a community's memory should honour the labour that built it, not only the money that paid for it. **Unpack.** Values: the dignity of work, and fair remembrance. Principle: honour follows contribution, not payment. **How it is carried.** Nobody in the poem argues this; it is carried entirely. The plaque is gold and deep-cut but sits "in the shadow", while the masons' marks — *a bird, a bent nail, a circle, a star* — are small but everywhere along the arch. The verb work does the weighing: the town *walks over* what money began but *stands on* the labour. And the closing line splits the buying in two — *one bought the naming of it; a hundred, the frame* — so the donor keeps a share of the honour, framed by the hundred. **Weigh.** Strength: it gives the unrecorded a record, and it lets the stone itself give evidence, so the claim is shown rather than asserted. Weakness: the money side never speaks — no line asks what the hall would be without the man who paid — so the poem is a stronger advocate than a judge. That is not a failure to notice; it is the poem's job. The analyst's job is to notice it.

Worked analysis 4 — unscaffolded (card 2, the whistle)

Evaluate the position carried by the whistle card.

State. The card's position: loyalty that buys a win at the cost of fairness is a debt, and silence is its interest. **Unpack.** Value: fairness — the cup should mean what it says. Principle: a win kept by silence is not kept clean. **Test.** The everyone-test fails against the cousin's call: a sport where every referee favours their own is not a sport. But the card's position is not the cousin's; it is the player's later weighing, and *that* principle — name the silence or carry it — passes the test. **Weigh.** Strength: the position costs its holder something (the cup he cannot quite enjoy), so it is argued from sacrifice, not from comfort. Weakness: the card lets the loyalty side speak only as *the cup, or the silence* — a family tie is reduced to a weight on a scale, and the card never asks what speaking up on the day would have cost his cousin. **Connect.** The ending does the carrying: *some years on, he still cannot say which weighed more* — the plot withholds the comfort of an answer, so the position lands as a question the reader inherits.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1 (Reading and viewing). In one sentence each: (a) the significant issue in Text A; (b) the position Text A carries on that issue.

Q2 (Reading and viewing). From the gatekeeper's position, name (a) two values it rests on and (b) the principle it applies. Quote the words that carry each.

Q3 (Reading and viewing). In Text B, which frame does each speaker mainly argue from — outcomes, rules and duties, or character? Quote one line for each as evidence.

Q4 (Writing). Write two lines of verse carrying the opposite position to Text C — *the plaque is right; the money built the hall*. Rule: make the other side as strong as you can; mockery is not an argument.

Q5 (Reading and viewing). Text D: name two values spotlighted by the ledger and two by the letter. Which single fact does each telling leave in the shade?

Q6 (Speaking and listening). Think–pair–share on the apprentice’s question — *and if he never comes back?* Is the gatekeeper’s answer a strength of his position or a weakness? Each partner argues one reading, then the pair states in one sentence what the stronger reading catches.

Unscaffolded

Q7 (Reading and viewing). Run Jonas’s position through steps 1–4 of the routine in a paragraph of roughly 120–160 words: state, unpack, test, weigh.

Q8 (Reading and viewing). Analyse how Text C carries its position. Name three choices the poem makes (in its images, its verbs, or its closing line) and say what each does; finish with one strength and one weakness of the position as represented.

Q9 (Writing). Write a scene of ten to fourteen lines that represents a position on a significant issue of your choice. The position must never be stated outright; it must be carried by what a character chooses and by one stage direction that carries the weight. Add one sentence after the scene naming the position you carried.

Q10 (Writing). Write a third telling of the crossing from Text A, in the apprentice’s voice, 80–120 words. Then add one sentence stating which value your telling spotlights and which it leaves in the shade.

Q11 (Reading and viewing). Evaluate the position in card 3, the list. Use the everyone-test on the list-writer’s principle, and state one strength the card itself gives the position and one weakness the card itself exposes.

Q12 (Speaking and listening). In pairs, steelman the gatekeeper both ways. One partner presents *the gatekeeper broke the rule*, the other *the gatekeeper kept the rule*, each in its strongest form; then the pair writes one agreed sentence stating what each reading catches that the other misses.

Q13 (Speaking and listening). Prepare a two-minute talk on a text your class is studying: state one position the text carries, point at the words or choices that carry it, and run one test from step 3 of the routine.

Q14 (Speaking and listening). Panel discussion: “*Mercy is unfair.*” Argue for and against the motion with equal care. Marks reward the quality of the reasoning on each side — terms defined, principles tested, costs counted — not the conclusion reached.

Answers

Q1. (a) When may a fair rule be bent for a person in need? (b) A fair rule may be bent, provided the bending is honest and the debt is honoured.

Q2. (a) Compassion (*the gatekeeper looked at the rule-book, and at the child* — the child is weighed with the book) and fairness (*the rule is still the rule*). (b) The toll is owed, not instantly: *when you come back, pay twice — once for the crossing and once for the night*.

Q3. Jonas argues from rules and duties (*every skipper in this port knows the rule*) backed by outcomes (*by nightfall the port runs on favour*). Mara argues from outcomes (*nine people hold their turn in the weather*) backed by character — the kind of harbourmaster she would be (*I am answerable for it cuts both ways, and she accepts it*).

Q4. Sample: *The hall stood because one man paid / while a hundred watched with empty hands*. A strong opposite must keep the donor's real gift in view.

Q5. Ledger: order and honesty (the debt, the doubling, *rule observed*). Letter: gratitude and trust (the gate remembered *every night*, the ask for honesty). Shade: the ledger leaves out the fear and the weather — the fever sits only inside the debtor's name, *the man with the fevered child*; the letter leaves out the debt and the doubling.

Q6. Open task — see the model responses below.

Q7–Q14. Open tasks — see the model responses below.

Model responses

Q6. A strong pair names what each reading catches. The weakness reading catches the risk: the fable's mercy only works because the stranger came back, and the text admits this by printing the question. The strength reading catches the principle: the gatekeeper never waived the debt, so the risk is carried openly by the gatekeeper, not hidden from the rule. An agreed sentence might run: *the position is strongest as a rule-with-a-lending-clause, and weakest if it pretends the lending has no risk*.

Q7. Sample. *State*: the queue must hold even in a storm, because the rule applied the same way to every boat is the whole of the port's trust. *Unpack*: values of fairness and trust; principle that a rule applied unevenly is not a rule but a series of favourites. *Test*: the everyone-test passes — a port where every skipper keeps the queue is a port every skipper can trust — while Mara's principle as stated fails it, since nine self-declared crises kill the queue. *Weigh*: strength, it counts the four boats already waiting and every future boat; weakness, it asks nine people to pay tonight for a trust that only pays tomorrow, and it never says what trust is for if not for nights like this.

Q8. Sample. The image pair carries the position first: gold letters "in the shadow" against small masons' marks everywhere along the arch — the paid-for name is dim, the unpaid hands are everywhere. The verbs weigh it second: the town *walks over* what money began but *stands on* the labour — what is honoured is walked on, what is ignored is load-bearing. The closing line closes it third, splitting one act of building into two purchases so the hundred outweigh the one without ever saying so. Strength: the position is shown from evidence inside the poem — the stone itself testifies. Weakness: the donor's side never speaks, so the poem advocates rather than judges; a reader who asked *and without the payer?* would find no answer in the poem.

Q9. Sample scene. *A shop, closing time. A woman counts the day's takings. A boy waits at the counter with a loaf under his coat, unpaid for, half-hidden*. WOMAN: That's the third loaf this week. BOY: I'll bring it back. WOMAN: (*without looking up*) The bread by the door is yesterday's. It goes in the bin. Take two. (*The boy goes. She writes one line in the day book: "waste, two loaves." She does not write "stolen."*) Position carried: honesty in the books, mercy at the door — the shop keeps its rule by naming the loss as waste, not theft.

Q10. Sample. *Kept the gate that night as the gatekeeper kept it: one crossing after hours, toll owed, toll doubled, and the rule still the rule. I have thought about it most nights since. The gatekeeper saw a debt where I saw a gift, and I have spent the years since learning that both of us were right, and that a rule-book with no room for that page is a poorer book. I watched him weigh the rule-book against the child and choose the child first and the book after; I have*

never seen any man do a harder thing so quietly. One sentence: my telling spotlights the bond between the two men and leaves the rule's fairness in the shade.

Q11. Sample. The list-writer's principle — count houses, not people, because houses cannot plead — passes a narrow everyone-test (every household treated the same is a shield against favour) but fails the wider one: if every aid rule counted containers instead of need, the biggest families starve fairest. Strength the card itself gives: the position names its own reason openly (*because houses cannot plead*), so it can be argued with rather than guessed at. Weakness the card itself exposes: the line admits that people *can* plead — so the rule is really a rule against hearing them, and the household of nine is the cost the position chooses.

Q12. A strong pair answer: *broke* catches the act — the gate opened with no toll in the box, and a system that never names that moment cannot audit itself; *kept* catches the principle — the debt was doubled, honoured, and filed, so the rule's claim was preserved in full. Agreed sentence sample: *he broke the rule's letter on purpose, to keep the rule's reason — and a position that can say that plainly is answerable, which is what rules are for.*

Q13. A strong talk names the text and the position in one sentence (*the novel carries the position that a promise made under pressure still binds*), points at the carrier (the chapter where the hero honours the promise at cost, and the plot rewards it), and runs one test (the everyone-test: a world where pressure cancels promises is a world where the hero's own promise means nothing — so the text's principle passes its own test). The marking listens for the routine, not the vocabulary display.

Q14. A strong panel opens each side in its strongest form. For the motion: mercy is a departure from the equal treatment fairness requires, and a mercy nobody can claim as a right is a lottery — the stranger was lucky his gatekeeper read the rule the way he did. Against the motion: fairness without a mercy clause is blind to the very differences it exists to weigh fairly — nine in a storm and four at anchor are not the same case, and treating unlike cases alike is its own unfairness. Marks reward each side for testing its principle and counting its costs; two speakers reaching opposite conclusions can both deserve full marks.

Looking back. A literary text's position is the view of how people should act, or how they should live together, that the text represents as worth holding — and it is carried, not announced: in what characters choose, in what the plot rewards, in who gets a voice, and in who tells. Every position stands on values and acts through a principle, and the curriculum's elaboration asks for both, plus the weighing: how strong and how weak the position is. The everyone-test, the outcomes-test and the character-test sort the reasons; the five-step routine — state, unpack, test, weigh, connect — turns the analysis into repeatable moves. A position is strong when its holder would accept its principle for themselves and its text tests it; weak when it claims an exception, silences its costs, or lets mockery argue for it. To reason that way, about texts and about storms and gates and queues, is the whole of this section — and it is the skill the level asks for: to evaluate how literary texts represent values, beliefs and attitudes, with the reasoning, not the conclusion, carrying the marks.

How structure, language, devices and other texts steer a reading

Curriculum trace. Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English, Level 10 · Literature strand · sub-strand *Examining literature* · **VC2E10LE04** · Draws on: VC2E10LE04 .E01, .E02 · Builds on Level 9 VC2E9LE04

Three terms, defined up front

The Victorian Curriculum uses the words *interpretation*, *intertextual connection* and *satire* without defining any of them, and two of them are the kind of words people argue with rather than about. This section therefore states its own working definitions, and every task here is answerable on them alone.

- An **interpretation** is a claim about what a text means or does, made by a reader and backed by evidence from the text itself. It is not the same thing as a response. *I liked it* reports the reader; *the poem is about being replaced, because the kettle is left for no one* claims something about the text — and can be tested against the text. Other senses of the word exist and are not interchangeable with this one.
 - An **intertextual connection** is a link a text makes to another text — by allusion, quotation, parody or retelling — where a reader's knowledge of the first text changes what they take the second text to mean. You met the related phrase *intertextual references* in Level 9; Level 10's interest is what the connection *does* to the reading.
 - **Satire** is used here in the sense it has carried since the Roman poets Horace (first century BCE) and Juvenal (first and second centuries CE) wrote against the follies and abuses of their own day: an attack on foolishness, vice or abuse that works through humour, irony or exaggeration rather than through direct argument. Other definitions exist — some reserve the word for formal verse, some allow any mocking humour — and they are not interchangeable with this one.
-

Theory

1. Four hands on the reader

The content description names four things that shape interpretation. Each is defined at first use here, because each is a tool you will be asked to name.

- **Text structure** is how a text is built and sequenced: what comes first, what is held back, what is returned to, where it ends.
- **Language features** are the choices at word and sentence level — vocabulary, sentence shapes, rhythm and sound.
- **Literary devices** are deliberate techniques that add a layer of meaning on top of the literal one: metaphor, symbolism, irony, personification and the rest. You have been reading them for years; Level 10's business is saying precisely what each one does to the reading.
- **Intertextual connections** are links to other texts, defined above.

None of these sits in a text like a decoration. Each one steers the reader: what to notice, what to feel, what to assume, what to suspect. That steering is what analysis names.

Four hands on the reader

The content description names four things that shape interpretation. Each one steers the reader.

Shaper	What it is	What it controls	The analyst's question
Text structure	how the text is built and sequenced: what comes first, what is held back, what returns, where it ends	the order of the pieces — and therefore what the reader knows, and when	What does this order make me feel, and what would change if the pieces came in another order?
Language features	choices at word and sentence level: vocabulary, sentence shapes, rhythm and sound	pace, texture and tone — how the language sounds in the reader's head	Why this word, this sentence shape, here?
Literary devices	techniques that add a layer of meaning on top of the literal one: metaphor, symbolism, irony, personification	the second storey of meaning — what is meant beneath what is said	What does this device add that the plain words do not say?
Intertextual connections	links a text makes to other texts: allusion, quotation, parody, retelling	the meaning a reader brings from other texts they know	What does knowing the source text change about this reading?

One question folds them together: what is this choice making the reader notice, feel or assume — and what is it keeping out of sight?

A table of the four shapers named in the content description — structure, language, devices and connections — with a column stating what each one controls in the reading and a column giving the analyst's question for each

The analyst's questions in that table all fold into one: *what is this choice making the reader notice, feel or assume — and what is it keeping out of sight?*

2. How devices layer meaning

The curriculum's first elaboration (VC2E10LE04.E01) points at the core move: language devices **layer meaning** and shape how listeners, viewers and readers respond. Layering is the right word. A device does not swap the plain meaning for a hidden one; it adds a second floor to the building while the ground floor stays open. Read this short poem, written for this section.

A model poem, annotated — Signal

Written for this section. The margin names the devices; the body text defines each one.

Signal

They wired the light to run itself in spring,
and the man packed one case.
He left the kettle on the shelf
for whoever might come.

No one came. The beam still sweeps
the wall where his bed was —
the tower keeps its old habit,
the town says, like weather.

The town says many things at night.
The kettle holds its small dark.

PLAIN VOICE
report language: the facts arrive without comment

SYMBOL
the kettle — a welcome kept for no one; it returns in the final line

IMAGERY
light doing the man's rounds in an empty room

PERSONIFICATION
the tower inherits the man's routine

REPETITION
the town speaks twice; the man never speaks

The devices do not replace the plain meaning. They add a second floor to the building while the ground floor stays open — that adding is what layering means.

An original ten-line poem titled Signal, about a man who loses his lighthouse job when the light is wired to run itself, with margin labels naming the devices at work — a symbol in the kettle, personification in the tower keeping its habit, repetition in the town says, and imagery in the beam sweeping an empty wall

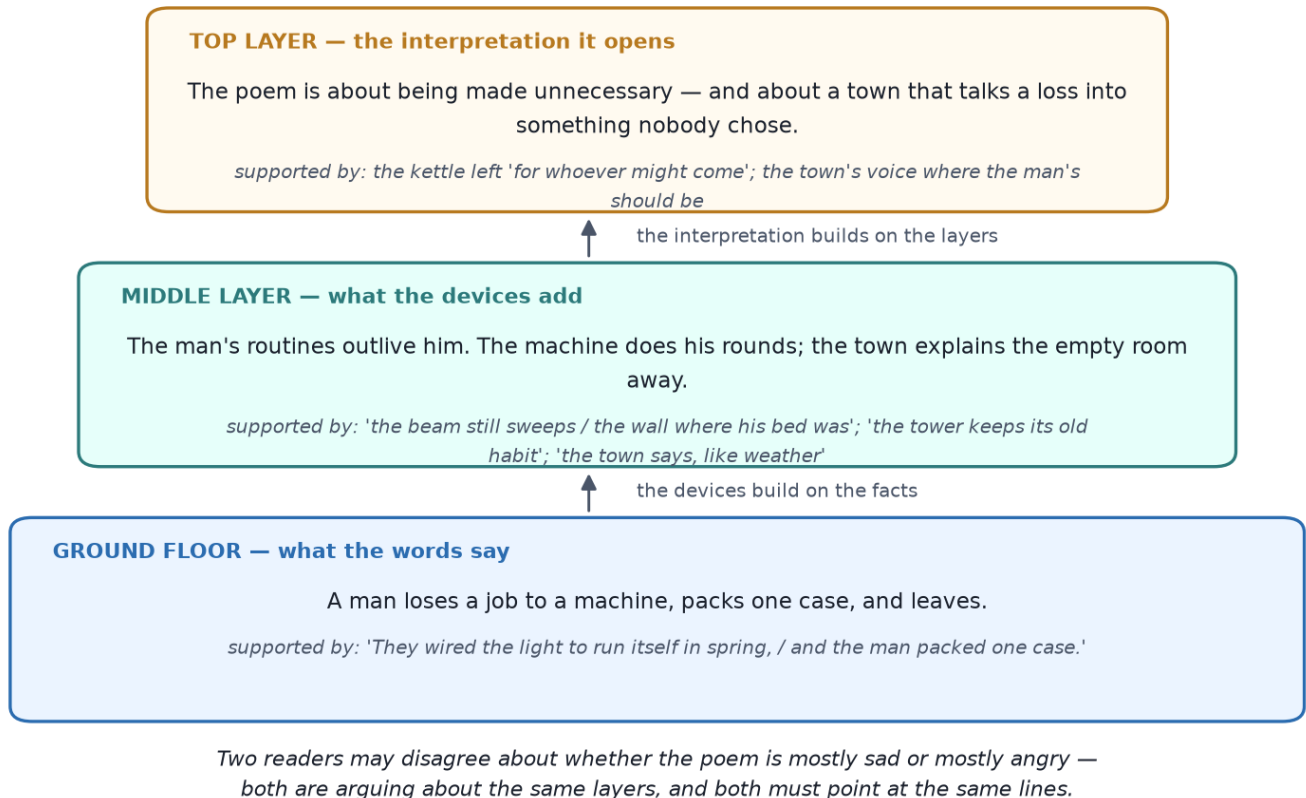
Four terms in those margin labels, defined now:

- A **symbol** is a thing in the text that carries meaning beyond itself. The kettle is plainly a kettle; it is also a household, a welcome kept for whoever might come, and a life with nobody left in it.
- **Personification** gives human habits to what is not human — the tower *keeps its old habit*; the kettle *holds its small dark*.
- **Repetition** — *the town says*, repeated — turns a phrase into a pattern, and patterns invite the question: why does the writer keep returning here?

- **Imagery** is language that builds pictures for the senses: the beam sweeping a bare wall is seen before it is explained.

Layering, shown as layers

A device does not swap the plain meaning for a hidden one. It adds a floor while the ground floor stays open.



A three-layer reading of the poem Signal: the surface layer states what literally happens, the middle layer names what the devices add, and the top layer states the interpretation the layers open — that the poem is about being made unnecessary — each layer matched to the lines that support it

Notice what the layers do to the response. On the surface, this is a report: a man loses a job to a machine. The devices turn the report into something a reader *feels from the inside* — the sweep of light across an empty wall, the kettle kept for no one — and they decide where the feeling lands: not on progress, but on being made unnecessary. Two readers may still disagree about whether the poem is mostly sad or mostly angry. Both are arguing about the same layers, and both must point at the same lines.

3. Order is meaning: structure shapes interpretation

Devices layer meaning inside a line or an image. **Structure** decides the order in which a reader meets the pieces — and order alone can change what a story seems to be about. These two passages tell the same story.

Same story, two orders

Where a writer places the reveal — a piece of information held back and released at a chosen moment — is a choice of meaning.

Version A — the reveal held back

Mara was sorting her grandmother's coats when she found the envelope. The address was in the old woman's own hand: Elias Marlow, North Quay. The stamp had never been cancelled. Mara unfolded the letter and read to the last line

—

I should have answered. I am sorry.

— and sat down on the floor of the wardrobe room.

Reading: a regret found too late. The reader spends the passage inside a question, so the apology lands as a discovery.

Version B — the reveal stated first

Mara had known since the funeral that her grandmother carried one unfinished story. She found it in a coat pocket: an envelope addressed in the old woman's hand to Elias Marlow, North Quay —

a fifty-year-old apology, never posted.

Mara sat down on the floor of the wardrobe room and read it twice.

Reading: what the living do with what the dead leave unfinished. Nothing is hidden, so the sentences are free to sit with Mara.

Same facts. The order alone changes what the story seems to be about — that is structure shaping interpretation.

Two versions of the same short scene, in which Mara finds her grandmother's unsent fifty-year-old apology addressed to Elias Marlow: Version A withholds the apology until the final sentence so the reader discovers it with Mara, and Version B states the apology first and spends its sentences on Mara, with a note under each version stating what the order makes the story feel like

Same facts. Different readings. In Version A the reader spends the passage inside a question — *what is in the envelope?* — so the apology lands as a discovery, and the story reads as one about regret found too late. In Version B the apology is known from the second sentence, so nothing is hidden, and the sentences spend themselves on Mara instead: the story reads as one about what the living do with what the dead leave unfinished.

The device at work has a name: a **reveal** is a piece of information a text holds back and releases at a chosen moment. Where a writer places the reveal — or refuses to use one at all — is not a packaging decision. It decides whether the reader experiences the story as a discovery or as a burden carried in full view.

4. Intertextual connections: meaning the reader brings

Some meaning is carried by the words on the page. Some is carried by *another text the reader remembers*. That second kind is the intertextual connection, and it is the part of meaning the writer shares with the reader: the writer builds the link, but the reader has to know the source text for it to fire.

Here is a pair written for this section. Text 1 is a made-up town legend in four sentences. Text 2 is a poem that never tells Text 1 — it only leans on it.

A source text and its retelling, joined at the hip

Both texts written for this section. The dotted lines are the intertextual connections: the meaning the reader brings.

The Fire of Aldra

a town legend, in four sentences

The people of Aldra kept a fire on the cliff to warn ships off the rocks. One storm night the man on watch overslept, and his daughter climbed the cliff and burned her own bed to keep the fire alive. The ship came safe to harbour. From that night, when the people of Aldra wanted to say a thing was worth any cost, they said: it is worth a bed-fire.

Bed-Fire

a poem that never tells the legend — it only leans on it

Mum takes the night shift at the depot —
no cliff, no ship to watch for —
just the timetable taped to the wall
and the storm warnings on the radio.

When the power fails she walks the yard
in the rain, flagging the late trucks in,
and when I ask why she bothers she says:
someone out there is counting on a light.

She has never told me about the fire.
You don't need the story to keep the watch.

A reader who knows the legend reads a retelling. A reader who does not still reads a fine poem — the connection does not lock anyone out, but it rewards the reader who brings more with them.

*An original prose legend titled **The Fire of Aldra** beside an original ten-line poem titled **Bed-Fire** about a mother working the night shift at a depot, with connecting lines joining the poem's phrases to the legend's details — someone is counting on a light back to the cliff fire, keep the watch back to the man who overslept, and the fire back to the daughter's burned bed*

A reader who has just read Text 1 meets Text 2 as a **retelling** — the mother is the daughter, the depot is the cliff, the late trucks are the ship; the last line, *You don't need the story to keep the watch*, says something about duty that neither text says alone. A reader who has never met Text 1 still reads a fine poem about a mother who turns up in the rain. Both readings are supported by the text. They are not the same reading — and the difference is made entirely by the connection.

The moves a text can use to make these connections are worth naming, because analysis names them:

Four moves a text can make on another text

The intertextual toolkit, named — so analysis can name what it finds.

Move	What it does	Original example
Allusion	a passing reference that does not stop to explain itself	<i>She kept the light the way someone keeps a fire.</i>
Quotation	the source text's own words, brought in and marked as borrowed	<i>The chapter opens with the song's first line in quotation marks, with the writer named.</i>
Parody	a text or style copied closely enough to be recognised, for comic or critical effect	<i>A nature-documentary trailer in an epic voice, about a snail crossing a footpath.</i>
Retelling	a story's bones kept, but given a new body — a new setting, a new voice	<i>The race between hare and tortoise, told at tortoise-pace, by the tortoise.</i>

All four depend on the reader knowing the source text. Allusion and quotation borrow briefly; parody and retelling borrow at length. All examples written for this book.

A table of four intertextual moves — allusion, quotation, parody and retelling — each with a definition and a short original example, and a final row stating that all four depend on the reader knowing the source text

An **allusion** is a passing reference that does not stop to explain itself; a **quotation** brings the source's own words in and marks them as borrowed; a **parody** copies a style or a text closely enough to be recognised, for comic or critical effect; a **retelling** takes a story's bones and gives it a new body. You will notice allusion, parody and retelling again in the satire section below — they are among satire's favourite tools.

Two readers, one text:

Reader	Knows the source?	Reading of the last line, <i>You don't need the story to keep the watch</i>
Reader 1	Yes — has read <i>The Fire of Aldra</i>	The mother keeps the watch as the daughter did; duty passes down without needing to be explained. The line is about inheritance.
Reader 2	No	The mother simply does not talk about her reasons; some people just turn up. The line is about modesty.

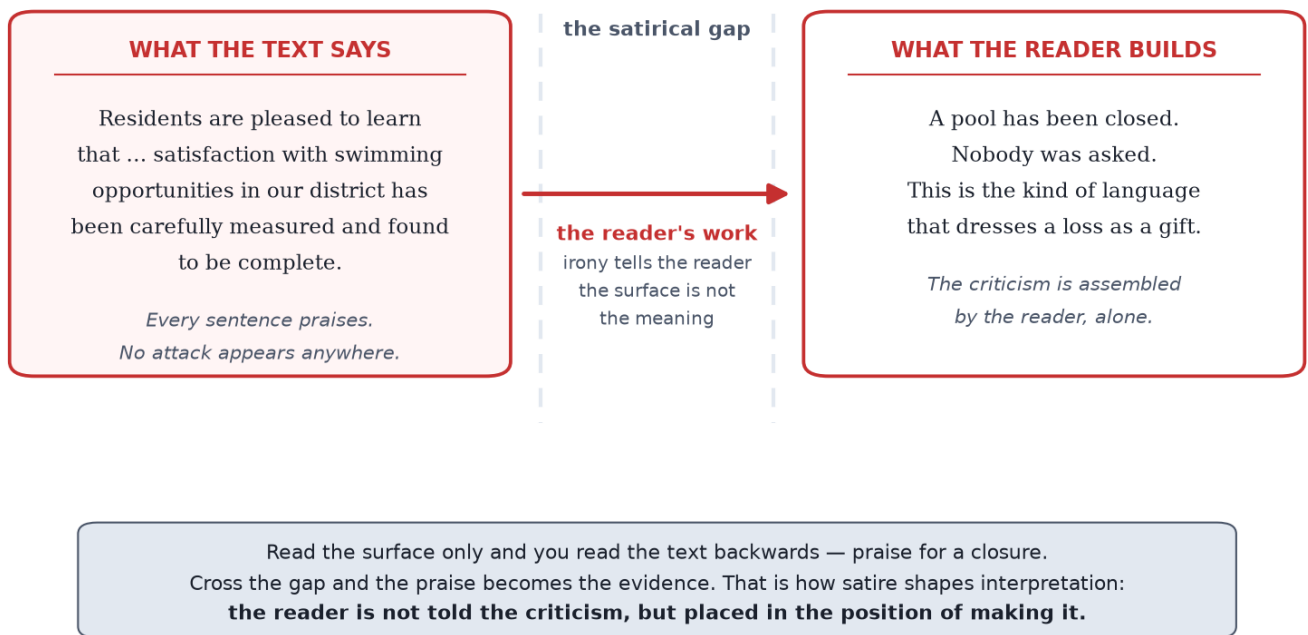
Neither reader is wrong. The first has more. That is the honest shape of intertextual meaning: it does not lock readers out, but it rewards the ones who bring more with them — which is one reason wide reading pays.

5. Satire: meaning built across a gap

The curriculum's second elaboration (VC2E10LE04.E02) asks you to examine satirical versions of real events or ideas, and work out how the satire steers what readers make of them. Satire is the sharpest test of everything in this section, because a satire's real meaning is never on the surface of its sentences. A satire says one thing and means another, and the reader must build the second meaning. The space between the two is called the **satirical gap**, and the reader's work of crossing it is what makes satire feel different from plain argument.

The satirical gap

A satire says one thing and means another. The reader's work is crossing the space between.



A labelled diagram of the satirical gap: the text's surface says one thing in praise of a decision, an arrow marked the reader's work crosses the gap, and on the far side sits the text's real meaning — criticism of the decision and of the language that dresses it up — with a note that a reader who stops at the surface reads the text backwards

Four tools build most of that gap:

- **Verbal irony** — saying one thing and meaning its opposite. *Residents are pleased* said of residents who have just lost their pool.
- **Exaggeration** — pushing a claim past the point where it can be believed, so the reader stops believing it.
- **Understatement** — the same trick reversed: treating something large as small.
- **Euphemism** — a soft or official-sounding word substituted for a blunt one, so the bluntness shows through by contrast. *Streamlining* for cutting; *listening program* for not listening.

Study this notice, written for this section in the voice of no real office.

A satirical notice, annotated

Written for this section in the voice of no real office. Nothing on the surface attacks — the attack is built by the reader.

Notice — Office of Community Streamlining

Residents are pleased to learn that, following the closure of the Millfield Swimming Pool, satisfaction with swimming opportunities in our district has been carefully measured and found to be complete.

Under the Listening Program, a photograph of the pool will hang in the library, at twice the pool's former size. Residents who miss swimming are invited to view the photograph during library hours.

Queues for the photograph are expected to be shorter than queues for the pool were.

VERBAL IRONY

'pleased' — without anyone ever being asked

EXAGGERATION

'carefully measured and found to be complete': a claim too perfect to trust

EUPHEMISM

Streamlining for cutting; Listening Program for not listening

ABSURD SUBSTITUTE

a photograph, twice life size, doing the pool's job

FALSE COMFORT

the only courtesy on offer is about queues

The target: official language that dresses a loss as a gift. The tool in every line: saying one thing and meaning its opposite.

An original satirical notice from a made-up Office of Community Streamlining, announcing that satisfaction with swimming has been found complete after the closure of Millfield pool and inviting residents to view a photograph of the pool in the library, with margin notes identifying verbal irony, exaggeration, euphemism, an absurd substitute and false comfort in its sentences

Nothing in that notice is an open attack. Every sentence praises. Yet the interpretation a reader builds is a criticism — of the pool's closure, and of the kind of official language that dresses a loss as a gift. That is how satire shapes interpretation: the reader is not told the criticism but placed in the position of making it, and a meaning the reader constructs lands harder than one they are handed.

Two positions on satire, both worth their strongest form.

Position 1 — satire as correction. In the tradition running from Horace and Juvenal through to modern parody, satire exists to correct: it attacks folly and abuse with laughter because laughter can say what direct argument cannot, and because the powerful can shrug off an argument but not a joke that sticks. In its strongest form this position says: satire is a check on power, and a society that cannot laugh at its own officials has given up one of its ways of seeing them clearly.

Position 2 — satire's limit. Satire's weapons do not aim themselves. Irony is easier to aim at whoever is already exposed; exaggeration flattens whatever it touches; and a satire that only confirms what its audience already believes has corrected nothing — it has flattered. In its strongest form this position says: laughter is not an argument, and the reader's job is to check who the joke costs and who it comforts.

Both positions are right about something real. The analyst does not pick a side first; they test both on the same text — the notice above is a fair ground — and decide which position the text supports better. (No

source is quoted. Position 1 is summarised from the tradition it names; Position 2 is stated in this section's own words.)

6. Keeping interpretations honest

An interpretation is a claim, and claims have a duty their impressions do not: they must be answerable to the text. Three habits keep them honest.

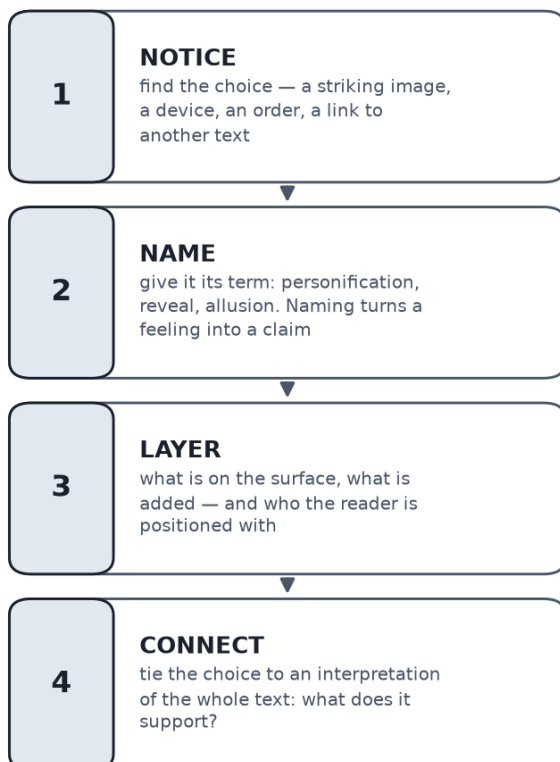
- **Point at the text.** Every step of an interpretation should land on a nameable choice — a line, a device, a structural move, a connection. *The poem feels lonely* is an impression; *the poem builds loneliness by letting the only human voice belong to the town, never to the man* is an interpretation, because it can be checked.
- **Let the text push back.** If a reading needs a sentence to mean something the words will not carry, the reading has outrun the text. Notice what the text *does not* say: *Signal* never says the man is angry, and a reading that makes anger its centre must admit it is reading between the lines, not on them.
- **Expect more than one.** Two supported interpretations can stand at once — sad *and* angry; a retelling about inheritance *and* about modesty. Disagreement between readers is usually not a sign that one has failed; it is a sign that the text has layers. The achievement standard asks you to judge how the four shapers connect across a text — and judging includes saying which reading the connections support best, and why.

7. A routine for analysis

Analysis of these four shapers is a routine before it is a talent. Four steps, in order, every time:

A routine for analysis

Four steps, in order, every time. On the right, the second stanza of *Signal* goes through all four.



Worked: *Signal*, stanza two

*No one came. The beam still sweeps
the wall where his bed was —
the tower keeps its old habit,
the town says, like weather.*

NOTICE

the beam sweeping a wall where a bed used to be

NAME

personification and imagery, carried over the line break by enjambment

LAYER

the machine keeps the man's routine; the light now serves an empty room; the town's voice explains the loss away

CONNECT

the poem reads as being about replacement — the reader is positioned to feel the loss, not the efficiency

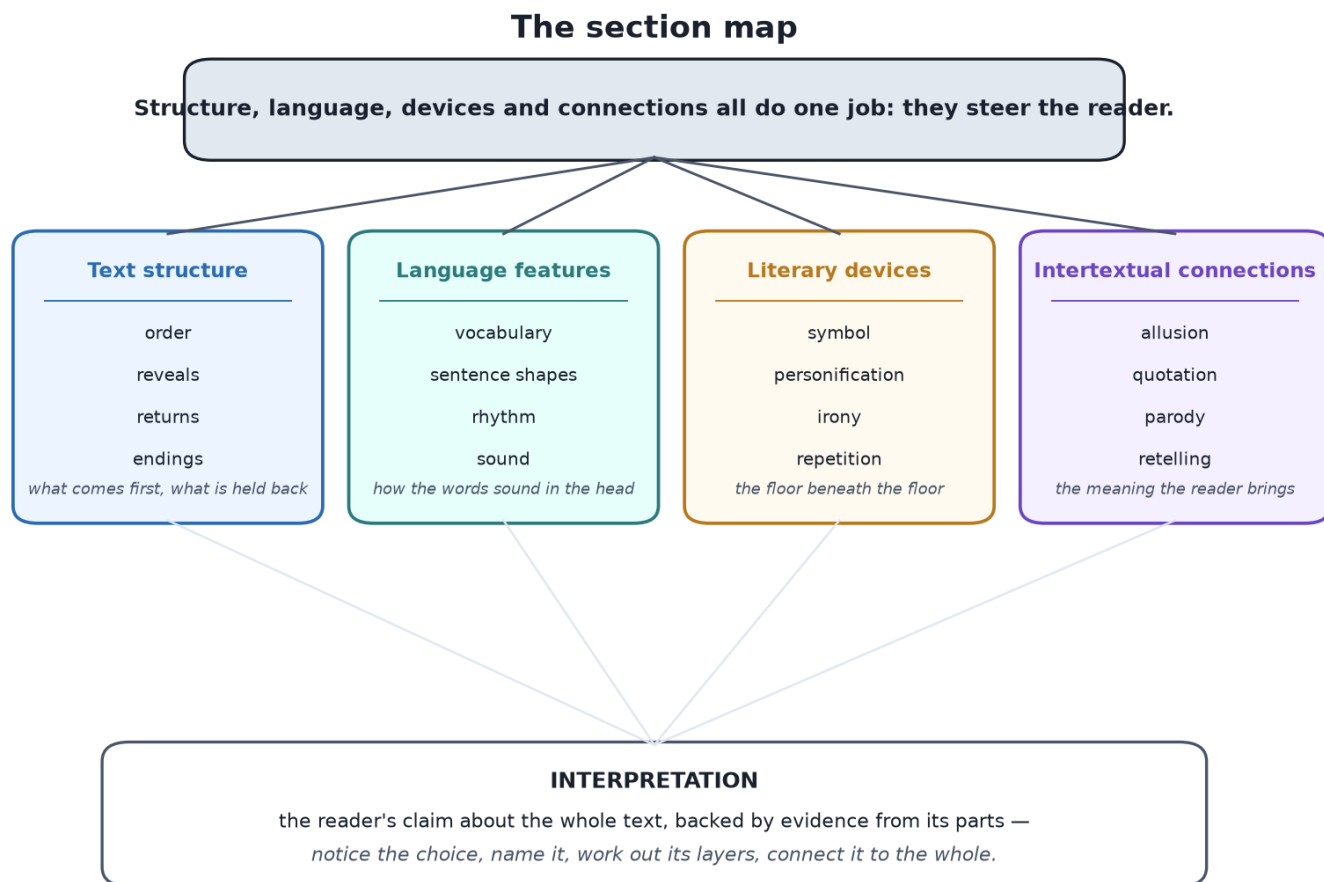
Analysis is a routine before it is a talent — the talent is noticing, and the routine makes the noticing sayable.

*A four-step flowchart — notice a choice in the text, name it with the correct term, work out the layers of meaning it builds and who it positions the reader with, and connect the choice to an interpretation of the whole text — with the second stanza of the poem *Signal* worked through all four steps in side boxes*

Worked on the stanza in the figure, the routine produces a complete analysis in four moves: the choice is noticed (the beam sweeping a wall where a bed used to be), named (personification and imagery, carried over the line break by

enjambment — the running of a sentence across the end of a verse line without a pause), layered (the machine keeps the man’s habit; the light now serves an empty room), and connected (the poem reads as being about replacement, and the reader is **positioned** — given a seat and an angle on the scene — to feel the loss, not the efficiency). Use the routine in the worked analyses below and in every practice task.

8. The section map



A concept map with the central claim that structure, language, devices and connections steer the reader, four branches for structure, language, devices and connections each carrying its key terms, and a base node stating that an interpretation is the reader’s claim about the whole text, backed by evidence from its parts

Worked analyses

Worked analysis 1 — scaffolded (layered meaning in a poem)

Analyse the second stanza of *Signal*: *No one came. The beam still sweeps / the wall where his bed was — / the tower keeps its old habit, / the town says, like weather.*

Step	Analysis	Why it matters
Notice	Three choices sit close together: the beam sweeping a wall, the tower keeping a habit, and the town's voice stepping in.	Nothing in four short lines is accidental; the clustering is the signal to slow down.
Name	Personification (the tower <i>keeps its old habit</i>), imagery (light sweeping a bare wall), repetition of the town's voice, which returns in stanza three.	Naming turns a feeling into a claim that can be discussed.
Layer	Surface: the light still works. Added: the machine has inherited the man's routine, and the room it serves is empty. The town's comparing of the beam to weather makes the loss sound natural — as if nobody chose it.	The layer is where the response lives: the stanza is calm on top and accusing underneath.
Connect	The stanza supports the reading that the poem is about being made unnecessary — and that a town can talk a loss into something nobody is responsible for.	The interpretation is now a claim with three pieces of evidence, not a mood.

Worked analysis 2 — scaffolded (satire and its gap)

Analyse this sentence from the notice in §5: *Residents are pleased to learn that, following the closure of the Millfield Swimming Pool, satisfaction with swimming opportunities in our district has been carefully measured and found to be complete.*

Tool	What the sentence does	What the reader builds
Verbal irony	Announces that residents are pleased, without asking any resident.	The reader supplies the opposite: residents are not pleased, and were never asked.
Euphemism	<i>Swimming opportunities</i> for the pool itself.	The soft phrase flags that the writer is avoiding the plain word — the avoidance is the tell.
Exaggeration	<i>Carefully measured and found to be complete</i> treats satisfaction as if it were a survey with a perfect score.	A claim that big defeats itself; the reader stops trusting the voice.
Effect on interpretation	Every part of the sentence praises.	The reader assembles the criticism alone: a loss has happened, and this is the language that hides losses.

That last row is the whole of §5 in one move: the satire's surface says one thing, and the interpretation it shapes is its opposite, built by the reader.

Worked analysis 3 — unscaffolded (structure: two tellings)

Same story, two orders — Versions A and B in §3. Version A withholds the apology until the final sentence, so the reader travels inside a question and the apology lands as a discovery: the story is *about* a regret surfacing fifty years too late, and the reader feels the shock of it with Mara. Version B spends its first sentence on what Mara has known since the funeral, so the apology is a fact by line two and no mystery survives; the sentences are then free to sit with Mara — where she sits, how many times she reads, what she does next. Same events, two stories: one about the dead and their secrets, one about the living and their inheritance. The choice of order is the choice of meaning — which is exactly what the content description means by text structure shaping interpretation.

Worked analysis 4 — unscaffolded (an intertextual connection)

Analyse the last two lines of *Bed-Fire*: *She has never told me about the fire. / You don't need the story to keep the watch*. The definite article is the tell: *the* fire, not *a* fire. Nothing in the poem's lines has mentioned a fire before, so the phrase points outside the poem — an allusion to a story the speaker and the mother share. For a reader who knows *The Fire of Aldra*, the mother becomes the daughter grown up: the depot is her cliff, the trucks are her ship, and the last line says that duty does not need its legend retold to be kept. For a reader who does not, the lines still work as modesty — a mother who does not explain herself. The connection does not lock the second reader out; it gives the first reader a second storey. That is what the content description means by an intertextual connection shaping interpretation: the words are identical, and the meaning changes with what the reader brings.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1 (Reading and viewing). In *Signal*, find and copy one example of each: **(a)** personification; **(b)** repetition; **(c)** the symbol at the centre of the poem. For each, add one sentence saying what the device adds to the plain meaning.

Q2 (Reading and viewing). The notice in §5 contains two euphemisms: *streamlining* and *listening program*. State, in one line each, the blunter phrase each one stands in for, and say what the use of the softer phrase asks the reader to ignore.

Q3 (Reading and viewing). Classify each intertextual move as allusion, quotation, parody or retelling.

(a) A poem that tells the story of a famous race from the tortoise's point of view. **(b)** A speech that drops in the line *someone out there is counting on a light* without saying where it comes from. **(c)** A trailer for a nature documentary, narrated in the grand voice of an epic film, about a snail crossing a footpath. **(d)** A novel that prints the first verse of a real hymn, in quotation marks, on its opening page.

Q4 (Writing). Write one satirical sentence about this announcement: *The school canteen will now sell only plain bread, to help students focus on learning*. Your sentence must praise the decision while letting a reader see the criticism. Underline the words that carry the irony.

Q5 (Writing). Retell a fairy tale or folk story you know in exactly two sentences, from the point of view of the character the original treats worst. Your two sentences must make a reader revise what they thought the story was about.

Q6 (Speaking and listening). In pairs: one of you argues *Signal* is mostly a sad poem, the other that it is mostly an angry one. Each speaker must quote at least one line as evidence. Then agree on one sentence stating what the poem does *better* than either label says.

Unscaffolded

Q7 (Reading and viewing). Use the four-step routine to analyse this line from the notice: *Queues for the photograph are expected to be shorter than queues for the pool were*. Write your analysis as a short paragraph (roughly 100–140 words) moving through notice, name, layer, connect.

Q8 (Writing). Write an original poem of four to six lines that layers meaning using at least one symbol. Below it, write three sentences: name your symbol, state the surface meaning, and state the layer beneath it.

Q9 (Reading and viewing). Return to *Bed-Fire*. Write the reading of the poem a reader would build if they had never read *The Fire of Aldra* — then write two things the connected reader knows that change or deepen that reading. Finish with one sentence stating whether the poem *needs* its source text, and why.

Q10 (Writing). Write your own satirical notice of 80–120 words in the voice of a made-up office, attacking a mild foolishness you choose (for example: an app that tells you how well you slept, or a shop that sells bottled water beside a drinking fountain). Then write two sentences identifying your target and naming at least two of the four tools from §5 that you used.

Q11 (Reading and viewing). Take five facts: a ferry broke down; the town rowed its own rescue; the ferry company sent a letter of thanks; the letter arrived a year later; the town framed it. Write **(a)** a version that holds the letter's lateness back as a reveal in the final sentence, and **(b)** a version that states the lateness first and spends its sentences on the framed letter. Then state, in two sentences, what each order makes the story feel like.

Q12 (Speaking and listening). Panel discussion: *Satire only works on people who already agree with it.* Argue for and against the motion with equal care. Test your case on the notice in §5, and say honestly what each side struggles to explain. Marks reward the quality of reasoning on each side — terms defined, examples tested, limits admitted — not the conclusion reached.

Q13 (Speaking and listening). Prepare a two-minute talk on one intertextual connection in a text your class is studying (a film, novel, poem or play). Name the source text, name the move (allusion, quotation, parody or retelling), and end with one sentence on what the connection adds to the interpretation of the newer text.

Q14 (Speaking and listening). In pairs, take Position 1 and Position 2 from the box in §5. Apply both to your own notice from Q10: each partner presents the *other* partner's position in its strongest form before answering it. End with one agreed sentence on which position your notice supports better, and why.

Answers

Q1. (a) *The tower keeps its old habit* (also *the kettle holds its small dark*): giving the tower and the kettle human habits makes the man's absence felt in the objects he left behind. **(b)** *The town says* — spoken in stanza two and repeated in stanza three: the repetition turns the town into a chorus and sets its easy explanations against the man's silent rooms. **(c)** The kettle: left *for whoever might come*, it stands for the welcome and the household the man leaves behind, still set for a guest who never arrives.

Q2. *Streamlining* stands in for cutting or closing services; it asks the reader to ignore that something has been taken away. *Listening program* stands in for not listening at all; it asks the reader to ignore that no resident's voice appears anywhere in the notice.

Q3. (a) retelling. **(b)** allusion. **(c)** parody. **(d)** quotation.

Q4. Sample: *Students are delighted to learn that the new plain-bread menu has been carefully designed to sharpen the mind, and that flavour has been removed only where it distracted from learning.* The irony sits in *delighted, carefully designed* and *flavour has been removed only where it distracted* — praise words doing criticism's work.

Q5. Sample (the wolf in a little-pigs tale): *They built their houses of straw and sticks, and when I asked at each door for shelter the tale made my asking a threat. History is written by the ones with the brick house.* The point of view revises the story from a warning about laziness into a story about who gets to tell it.

Q6. A strong pair quotes lines for both labels — sad: *He left the kettle on the shelf / for whoever might come*; angry: *the town says, like weather*, which turns a choice into something nobody made — and lands on a sentence such as: *The poem is quietest where it hurts most: it lets a machine, not a person, have the last routine.*

Q7–Q14. Open tasks — see the model responses below.

Model responses

Q7. Sample. *Notice*: the sentence compares queues for the pool's photograph with queues for the pool itself. *Name*: false logic dressed as comfort — and a kind of understatement, since it treats losing a pool as a queuing problem. *Layer*: on the surface the sentence is a courtesy, sparing residents a worry; underneath, it quietly accepts the pool's closure as settled and offers a photograph as the replacement for swimming. The joke is that it is only an improvement if the photograph is all anyone was ever going to get. *Connect*: the line sharpens the interpretation built across the whole notice — the Office's language exists to make a loss sound like service, and this sentence is where the disguise is thinnest.

Q8. Sample poem: *The gate keeps its latch up / though the house went years ago. / The garden answers the phone of the rain / and nobody lets it ring.* Symbol: the gate. Surface: an empty property with a gate still fastened. Layer: the gate stands for a welcome still offered by a home that no longer exists — readiness outliving its reason, which positions the reader to feel the place's loyalty rather than its emptiness.

Q9. Sample. The unconnected reader builds a poem about a mother who works nights and turns up in the rain: the last lines read as modesty — she does her job and does not explain herself. The connected reader adds two things: first, that the mother is doing, in a depot, what the daughter of Aldra did on a cliff, so her turning-up becomes an inheritance rather than a habit; second, that *keep the watch* answers the man who overslept, so the line quietly says this watch has been kept properly for a long time. The poem does not need its source text — the modesty reading stands alone — but the connection turns a good poem about one mother into a poem about duty as something passed down.

Q10. Sample notice: *The Office of Restful Mornings reminds residents that the new SleepScore app now measures the quality of their sleep each night and emails the results before breakfast. Early reports show that residents who check their scores wake an average of four minutes earlier, which the Office attributes to excitement. Residents who feel tired despite a high score are advised to refresh the page. All participation is entirely optional, and a form will arrive by email to confirm it. The Office thanks residents for sleeping so measurably.* Target: the habit of measuring rest until it becomes work. Tools: euphemism (*Office of Restful Mornings, excitement*), verbal irony (*thanks residents for sleeping so measurably*), exaggeration (emailing results before breakfast, refreshing the page to feel less tired).

Q11. Sample. **(a)** *When the ferry broke down in the strait, the town rowed its own rescue. The ferry company was grateful. It sent a letter of thanks, and the town framed it. The letter arrived a year later.* Holding the lateness to the final sentence lets it land as a reveal, and the story reads as one about gratitude arriving too late to mean anything. **(b)** *The ferry company's letter of thanks arrived a year after the town rowed its own rescue. The town framed it and hung it by the door, where it has learned to greet the weather.* Stating the lateness first turns the letter into a standing joke, and the story reads as one about a town that keeps its own irony on the wall.

Q12. A strong panel opens each side in its strongest form. For the motion: the notice's irony only lands on a reader who already knows a pool closure is a loss worth complaining about; a reader who genuinely trusts the Office reads the notice at face value, and the satire has no gap to work on — so the text is preaching to the converted. Against the motion: the notice does not tell any reader what to think; it builds the criticism out of the reader's own noticing, and a reader who starts neutral can still hear *carefully measured and found to be complete* defeat itself. Marks reward each side for testing on the text and admitting its limit — the for side must explain how the notice can still persuade a newcomer, and the against side must explain why a believer in the Office hears nothing. Two panels reaching opposite conclusions can both deserve full marks.

Q13. A strong talk names both texts, names the move precisely, and lands the connection on interpretation, not just on spotting. Sample shape: *The film's final scene is a retelling of the novel's first chapter — same choice, new consequence. The connection changes the reading because the novel presents the choice as free, and the film, by repeating it, presents it as fate; a viewer who catches the retelling reads the ending as a trap the character built in chapter one.* The marking listens for the named move and the interpretive payoff, not for how many references the speaker can list.

Q14. A strong pair presents the other's position first, honestly. Position 1 as presented by its opponent: the notice corrects because it lets laughter do what a complaint letter cannot — it makes the Office's language ridiculous in public, and a reader who laughs has already judged. Position 2 as presented by its opponent: the notice flatters, because the reader it imagines already agrees that pools matter and that offices dodge; nobody who loved the notice ever changed their mind. The agreed sentence might run: *Our notice supports Position 1 better, because its irony is aimed at an office that cannot laugh back — but Position 2 is right that we wrote it for readers who were already on our side.*

Looking back. Interpretation is a claim about what a text means or does, backed by evidence from the text. Four hands steer it: structure decides the order in which the reader meets the pieces — and order alone can change what a story is about; language features and literary devices layer meaning, adding floors to the building while the ground floor stays open; and intertextual connections let a text borrow meaning from other texts, rewarding the reader who brings more with them. Satire is the sharpest test of all four, because its surface says one thing and its meaning is built by the reader across the gap. None of this makes one reading compulsory — two supported interpretations can stand at once — but it does make readings answerable: notice the choice, name it, work out its layers, connect it to the whole. That routine is the skill, and it works on any text that asks to be read more than once.

Voice as a device: comparing feeling and craft

Curriculum trace. Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English, Level 10 · Literature strand · sub-strand *Examining literature* · **VC2E10LE05** · Draws on: VC2E10LE05.E01, .E02, .E03, .E04 · Builds on Level 9 VC2E9LE05

Three terms, defined up front

The Victorian Curriculum uses the words *voice*, *emotional response* and *aesthetic quality* without defining any of them. Other definitions exist and are not interchangeable with the ones used here, so this section states its own. In this section:

- **voice** means the combination of *who speaks* and *how it sounds*: the speaker and the position they speak from, together with the pattern we can hear — word choice, rhythm, repetition, tone;
- **emotional response** (here, *emotional effect*) means what the reader feels — sympathy, anger, unease, tenderness — and an emotional answer names the feeling and the exact words that raised it;
- **aesthetic quality** (here, *aesthetic effect*) means what the reader savours as craft — pattern, sound, the rightness of an image — above and beyond the message.

The third term is the contested one. Some readers treat an aesthetic judgement as a report of a property of the object (*this poem is beautiful*); this section treats it as a report of a response, argued from features (*the refrain does more work the second time it returns, and here is the evidence*). Both definitions are live in the world; every task here is answerable on the second, and the same honesty applies to the analysis words: each is defined the first time it appears. Marks reward the reasoning — features named, effects split, judgements argued — not the conclusion you reach.

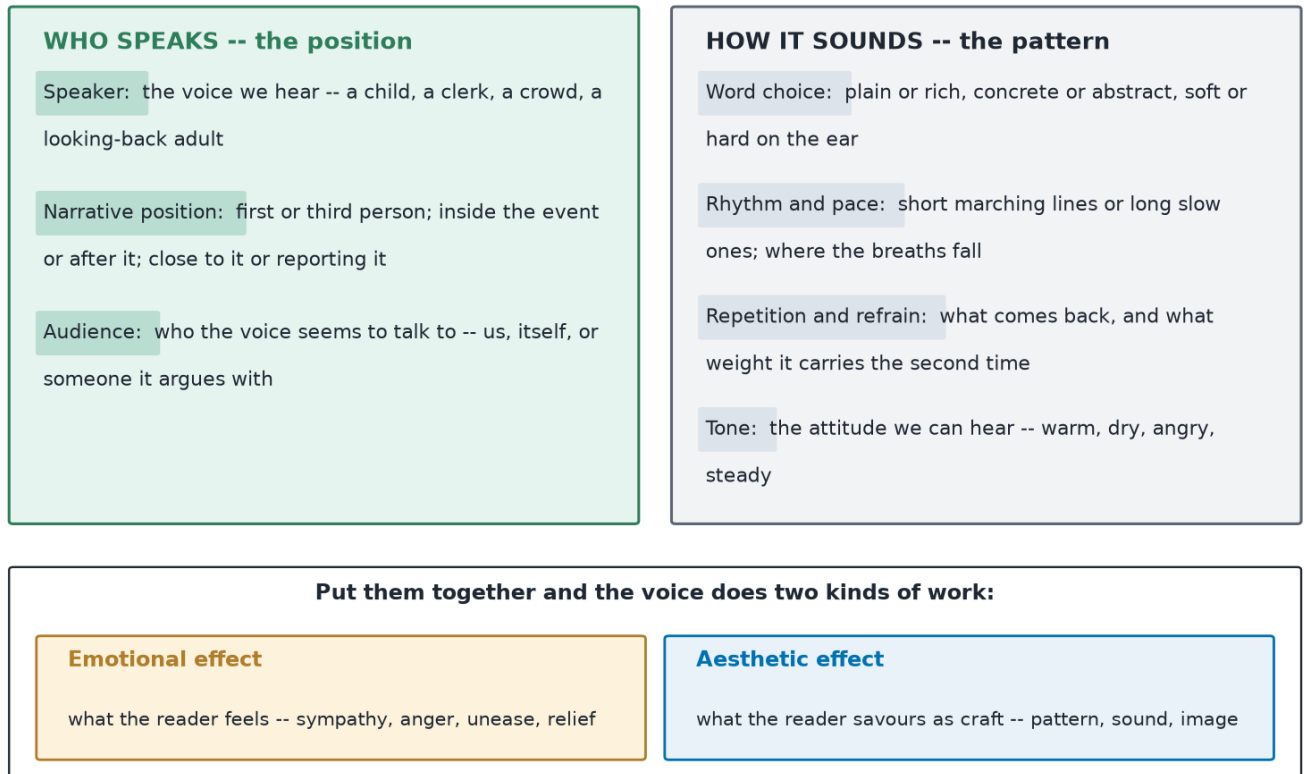
Theory

1. The anatomy of a voice

A **voice** is not a mood and not a mood board: it is two countable things joined. *Who speaks* — the speaker, the **narrative position** they stand in (first or third person, inside the event or after it), and the **audience** they seem to address. *How it sounds* — the **word choice**, the **rhythm** (the pattern of beats and pauses; the pace of the voice), the **repetition** and **refrain** (a line or phrase that returns, gathering weight), and the **tone** (the attitude we can hear — warm, dry, angry, steady).

What a voice is made of

Voice = who speaks + how it sounds. Together they decide what a text does to a reader.



A labelled diagram in two panels — WHO SPEAKS (speaker, narrative position, audience) and HOW IT SOUNDS (word choice, rhythm and pace, repetition and refrain, tone) — above a base band splitting the work of voice into emotional effect (what the reader feels) and aesthetic effect (what the reader savours as craft)

Put the two halves together and a voice goes to work on the reader in two ways: it evokes emotional responses, and it creates aesthetic qualities. Those are the two jobs named in the content description, and the habit this section builds is never to collapse one into the other.

2. Four positions a voice can stand in

The first choice a voice makes is where to stand. Four positions cover most texts you will meet, and each one opens a view and closes one.

Four positions a voice can stand in

Every example sentence below is original to this book.

Position	Example (original)	What it opens up	What it closes off
First-person child witness	'I asked if the house would come with us.'	Opens: closeness, sympathy, the half-understood.	Closes off: causes, the bigger picture, what adults know.
First person, looking back	'I heard the kindness she packed the words in only much later.'	Opens: double view -- the child's moment and the adult's understanding of it.	Closes off: the raw speed of the moment; memory admits it can get things wrong.
Third person, close	'Mara watched the farm in the mirror until the road straightened. She did not look twice.'	Opens: one person's inner life with a little room to breathe.	Closes off: the warmth of 'I'; other heads stay shut.
Neutral report	'The family left the property at dawn. Their goods filled one truck.'	Opens: facts, scope, a calm overview.	Closes off: feeling; the reader stands outside as a witness, not a companion.

No position is best. The analyst asks: what can this voice see, what can it not see -- and what does that do to the reader?

A four-row table — first-person child witness, first person looking back, third person close, neutral report — each with an original example sentence, what the position opens up, and what it closes off

No position is best. The analyst's question is the one at the foot of the figure: *what can this voice see, what can it not see, and what does that do to the reader?*

3. The child's position and the work of sympathy

The curriculum's first elaboration (VC2E10LE05 . E01) names one position worth special attention: whether telling a story through a child's eyes wins reader sympathy for an event or issue. Read the two passages below. They report the same night, on the same farm, with the same red tin.

Passage A — 'The Biscuit Tin' (written for this book). The night before we left, Mum put the biscuit tin in the box with the good cups. The tin is round and red, with a picture of a swan on the lid. Dad says it is only a tin. Mum says tins remember things. Ours remembers every birthday since my brother was small, because that is where the candles live.

I asked if the house would come with us. Mum laughed in the way that is not a laugh. She said houses stay where you put them.

The truck came before the sun. Dad carried the tin to the cab himself, like it weighed something. I watched the house from the back window until the bend took it. It did not wave. Houses never do, but I waited anyway.

Passage B — ‘The Last Night’ (written for this book). I was eight the year the drought ended our farm, and I have spent every year since trying to remember it right. We left on a Tuesday. What stays with me is not the truck or the grey paddocks. It is my mother wrapping a red biscuit tin in a tea towel and packing it beside the good cups, as if it were worth carrying. My father said it was only a tin. She said tins remember things. She was right. It remembers every birthday of my brother’s childhood, because that is where we kept the candles.

In the dark that last night I asked her whether the house would come too. She told me houses stay where you put them. I heard the kindness she packed the words in only much later, when I was old enough to know what we were leaving, and what was leaving us.

The same night told two ways

One event, two voices — both passages written for this book.

'The Biscuit Tin' -- told by the child inside it

The night before we left, Mum put the biscuit tin in the box with the good cups. The tin is round and red, with a picture of a swan on the lid. Dad says it is only a tin. Mum says tins remember things. Ours remembers every birthday since my brother was small, because that is where the candles live.

I asked if the house would come with us. Mum laughed in the way that is not a laugh. She said houses stay where you put them.

The truck came before the sun. Dad carried the tin to the cab himself, like it weighed something. I watched the house from the back window until the bend took it. It did not wave. Houses never do, but I waited anyway.

'The Last Night' -- looking back

I was eight the year the drought ended our farm, and I have spent every year since trying to remember it right. We left on a Tuesday. What stays with me is not the truck or the grey paddocks. It is my mother wrapping a red biscuit tin in a tea towel and packing it beside the good cups, as if it were worth carrying. My father said it was only a tin. She said tins remember things. She was right. It remembers every birthday of my brother's childhood, because that is where we kept the candles.

In the dark that last night I asked her whether the house would come too. She told me houses stay where you put them. I heard the kindness she packed the words in only much later, when I was old enough to know what we were leaving, and what was leaving us.

Same event, same tin, two voices. The child's position reaches for sympathy; the looking-back position reaches for understanding.

The same two passages set side by side in coloured panels — the child’s voice in an amber panel, the looking-back voice in a blue panel — with the caption: same event, same tin, two voices

Passage A stands inside the night. The child reports faithfully and understands partly: *Mum laughed in the way that is not a laugh* is a sentence whose full meaning the speaker cannot yet see. That gap — reader understands more than speaker — is called **dramatic irony**, and it is the engine of **sympathy** here: we ache for a narrator who is keeping steady without knowing what is being kept steady against. Passage B closes that gap. The looking-back voice understands everything, and what it evokes is not the raw ache but a sadder, calmer understanding. Same facts, two positions, two different emotional responses — which is exactly the comparison VC2E10LE05.E01 asks you to make.

4. Two kinds of effect a voice works through

Once the position is named, the second half of the content description splits every effect a voice produces into two kinds.

Two kinds of effect a voice works through

One feature can do both jobs at once -- but the analyst names them separately.

EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

What the text makes the reader FEEL: sympathy, anger, unease, tenderness, relief.

Built from: the narrative position (a child witness pulls at us), word choice, what is at stake, the tone we can hear.

A reader says: 'I ached for the family; I wanted someone to help them.'

Test: name the feeling, then find the exact words that raised it.

AESTHETIC EFFECTS

What makes the text worth savouring BEYOND its message: pattern, sound, the rightness of an image, quietness, force.

Built from: rhythm, refrain, word choice, the fit between voice and subject.

A reader says: 'The refrain comes back heavier each time -- that is craft.'

Test: say what the craft adds that a plain telling would lose.

Emotional effect asks what you felt. Aesthetic effect asks why the telling itself deserves attention.

Two panels — EMOTIONAL EFFECTS (what the text makes the reader feel; built from position, word choice, what is at stake, tone) and AESTHETIC EFFECTS (what makes the text worth savouring beyond its message; built from rhythm, refrain, word choice, the fit between voice and subject) — each with a sample reader response and a test

One feature can do both jobs at once — a refrain can ache *and* click into place — but the analyst names the jobs separately, because the content description does. The tests at the foot of the figure are the ones to run in every answer: name the feeling, then find the exact words that raised it; say what the craft adds that a plain telling would lose.

5. The metalanguage kit

The third elaboration (VC2E10LE05.E03) lists the terms analysis reaches for — its own examples include 'stanza', 'symbolism', 'figurative language' and 'soundtrack'. Each term this section uses is defined here, before the poems put the terms to work.

The metalanguage kit for voice

The words analysis reaches for — each defined, each shown at work.

Term	Definition	At work in this section
stanza	a grouped set of lines in a poem, like a paragraph in prose	'The Minutes' has four stanzas; each moves the meeting a step closer to silence.
line	one row of a poem; where it ends is a choice	'Item six: the pool.' stands as a short, flat line — the way the decision lands.
rhythm	the pattern of beats and pauses; the pace of the voice	'Say the River's Name' marches; 'The Minutes' keeps time like a clock.
refrain	a line or phrase that returns, gathering weight	'Say the river's name' comes back at the start and end — second time, it sounds like a promise.
figurative language	wording beyond the literal — simile, metaphor, personification	'The river taught us how to speak' — the river as a teacher.
symbolism	using one thing to stand for more than itself	the red tin stands for home and memory; the minutes stand for every record that leaves feeling out.
tone	the attitude we can hear — warm, dry, angry, steady	the clerk's tone is flat and careful; that flatness is where the protest hides.
soundtrack	the sound layer of a song, film or digital text: music, silence, ambient sound, the voice	sung aloud, 'Say the River's Name' would carry its marching rhythm into the soundtrack.

Four of these terms — stanza, figurative language, symbolism, soundtrack — are the curriculum's own examples (VC2E10LE05.E03).

A table defining eight terms — stanza, line, rhythm, refrain, figurative language, symbolism, tone, soundtrack — each with a definition and an example drawn from this section's poems, with a footnote naming the curriculum's own example terms

- A **stanza** is a grouped set of lines in a poem, like a paragraph in prose; a **line** is one row, and where it ends is a choice.
- **Rhythm** is the pattern of beats and pauses; **rhyme** is the echo of sounds at line-ends; a **refrain** is a returning line or phrase that gathers weight each return.
- **Figurative language** is wording beyond the literal — **simile** (a comparison using *like* or *as*), **metaphor** (a comparison that says one thing is another), **personification** (giving a thing the actions of a person, as a river that *taught us how to speak*).
- **Symbolism** is using one thing to stand for more than itself; **tone** is the attitude we can hear.
- A **soundtrack** is the sound layer of a song, film or digital text — music, silence, ambient sound, the voice. Read aloud or set to music, a poem's rhythm and tone become part of its soundtrack.

6. Protest voices, loud and quiet

The second elaboration (VC2E10LE05.E02) asks you to compare protest voices across a set of poems and songs — and to judge how each different voice pulls its response. Read two original poems written for this book. Both protest. Neither protests the same way.

Say the River's Name (written for this book).

Say the river's name. Say it at the mill gate, say it in the square, say it till they hear us on the dry September air.

They took the silver bream from it, they took the clear and cold, they left us something brown and slow and called it worth the gold.

We were small when it was clean. We are tall enough to stand. Bring back what you borrowed from the water and the land.

Say the river's name. Say it loud and long. The river taught us how to speak — we learned it in a song.

The Minutes (written for this book).

I write the minutes tidily. Item six: the pool. The motion and the second, and the counting, done by rule.

I note the time: four fifty-two. I note the vote: five-three. I note the hall was standing room. That's all a clerk should see.

The cups get washed, the chairs get stacked, the room goes dark and still. The minutes say: resolved, five-three. The minutes always will.

A whole town's grief in two short lines, in ink, without a fuss. Item six: the pool, now closed. That's minutes. That was us.

Say the River's Name

A protest poem in a loud voice (written for this book).

1

Say the river's name.

Say it at the mill gate,
say it in the square,
say it till they hear us
on the dry September air.

2

They took the silver bream from it,
they took the clear and cold,
they left us something brown and slow
and called it worth the gold.

3

We were small when it was clean.
We are tall enough to stand.
Bring back what you borrowed
from the water and the land.

4

Say the river's name.

Say it loud and long.
The river taught us how to speak —
we learned it in a song.

Voice features to hear: the repeated command 'Say the river's name', a marching rhythm, a speaker who says 'we', and a final turn from loss to song.

The poem 'Say the River's Name' reproduced with its repeated refrain 'Say the river's name' highlighted in amber, with a caption naming its voice features: the repeated command, a marching rhythm, a speaker who says 'we', and a final turn from loss to song

The loud voice is a crowd voice: *we*, commands, a refrain that marches back like a chant. The quiet voice is one official voice: *I note*, neat rhyme, and **understatement** — saying less than is meant, so that *That's all a clerk should see* carries a whole town's anger under a clerk's calm. Understatement is protest's quiet instrument the way the refrain is its loud one.

The Minutes

A protest poem in a quiet voice (written for this book).

- 1 I write the minutes tidily.
Item six: the pool.
The motion and the second,
and the counting, done by rule.
- 2 **I note the time: four fifty-two.**
I note the vote: five-three.
I note the hall was standing room.
That's all a clerk should see.
- 3 The cups get washed, the chairs get stacked,
the room goes dark and still.
The minutes say: resolved, five-three.
The minutes always will.
- 4 A whole town's grief in two short lines,
in ink, without a fuss.
Item six: the pool, now closed.
That's minutes. That was us.

Voice features to hear: one small official voice saying 'I note', understatement, neat rhyme, and the minutes themselves standing in for every record that leaves grief out.

The poem 'The Minutes' reproduced with the clerk's repeated 'I note' lines and the minutes lines highlighted in blue, with a caption naming its voice features: one small official voice, understatement, neat rhyme, and the minutes standing in for every record that leaves grief out

Two protest voices compared

Same job -- objecting -- opposite instruments.

Voice feature	Say the River's Name (loud)	The Minutes (quiet)
Speaker	a crowd voice saying 'we'	one official voice saying 'I'
Stance	demand, out loud, in the open	recording, quietly, from inside the room
Pace and sound	short marching lines; a refrain that returns	steady ABCB rhyme; the neatness IS the point
Key device	repetition and personification ('The river taught us how to speak')	understatement, and the minutes as a symbol of what records leave out
Emotional effect	rouses; turns loss into strength	grieves; anger kept under a calm surface
Aesthetic effect	the refrain gathers weight each return	the neat form enacts control -- and the last line breaks it open

Evaluation needs both columns: neither voice is 'more protest' than the other -- they press different buttons in the reader.

A comparison table of the two poems across speaker, stance, pace and sound, key device, emotional effect and aesthetic effect, with the caption: neither voice is 'more protest' than the other — they press different buttons in the reader

Two positions, both worth their strongest form.

Position 1 — the craft case. In the school of close reading — the careful study of how a text's own choices make its effects, associated with Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938) — a poem's power is said to live in countable features: the refrain, the rhyme, the symbol, the turn. In its strongest form, this position says: if you cannot point to the feature, you have not explained the effect; "it moves me" is a report, not an analysis.

Position 2 — the reader case. In reader-response theory — the study of how readers make meaning, associated with Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980) — the effect is an event in the reader, and the same lines can land differently on different readers and in different moments. In its strongest form, this position says: the features do not carry the feeling like a wire carries a current; a reader brings the grief that the poem then shapes.

Both positions catch something real. Position 1 keeps analysis honest — claims tested on the words on the page. Position 2 keeps it humble — the same refrain can rouse one reader and rest another. The analyst uses both: point to the feature, then say what it does to a reader, and admit that the doing needs the reader. (No text is quoted from either source; the positions are summarised and attributed.)

7. Symbolism at work

The fourth elaboration (VC2E10LE05.E04) has you comment on what symbolism does in a text — its example of analysing and evaluating a literary device. A symbolism commentary is a chain of three links: the feature, what it gathers, and the effect — split, as always, into emotional and aesthetic.

Symbolism at work: the red biscuit tin

One object, followed through three links — from feature to effect.

1 THE FEATURE

A round red tin with a swan on the lid appears three times: packed with the good cups, carried to the cab by the father 'like it weighed something', and held in the exchange between the parents — Dad says it is only a tin, but Mum says tins remember things.

2 WHAT IT GATHERS

The tin stands for home and memory: every birthday since the brother was small lives in it. It is what the family can carry when the house itself must stay. 'Only a tin' — and the whole weight of leaving.

3a EMOTIONAL EFFECT

Tenderness and ache: a small object makes the loss feel carried, not just announced.

3b AESTHETIC EFFECT

Quiet rightness: one tin does the work a page of explanation could not.

The same chain works on 'The Minutes': the neat record stands for every account that leaves grief out.

A three-link worked commentary on the red biscuit tin — 1 THE FEATURE (the tin appears three times; 'tins remember things'), 2 WHAT IT GATHERS (home and memory; what the family can carry when the house must stay), 3a EMOTIONAL EFFECT (tenderness and ache) and 3b AESTHETIC EFFECT (quiet rightness; one tin does the work a page of explanation could not) — with a footnote applying the same chain to 'The Minutes'

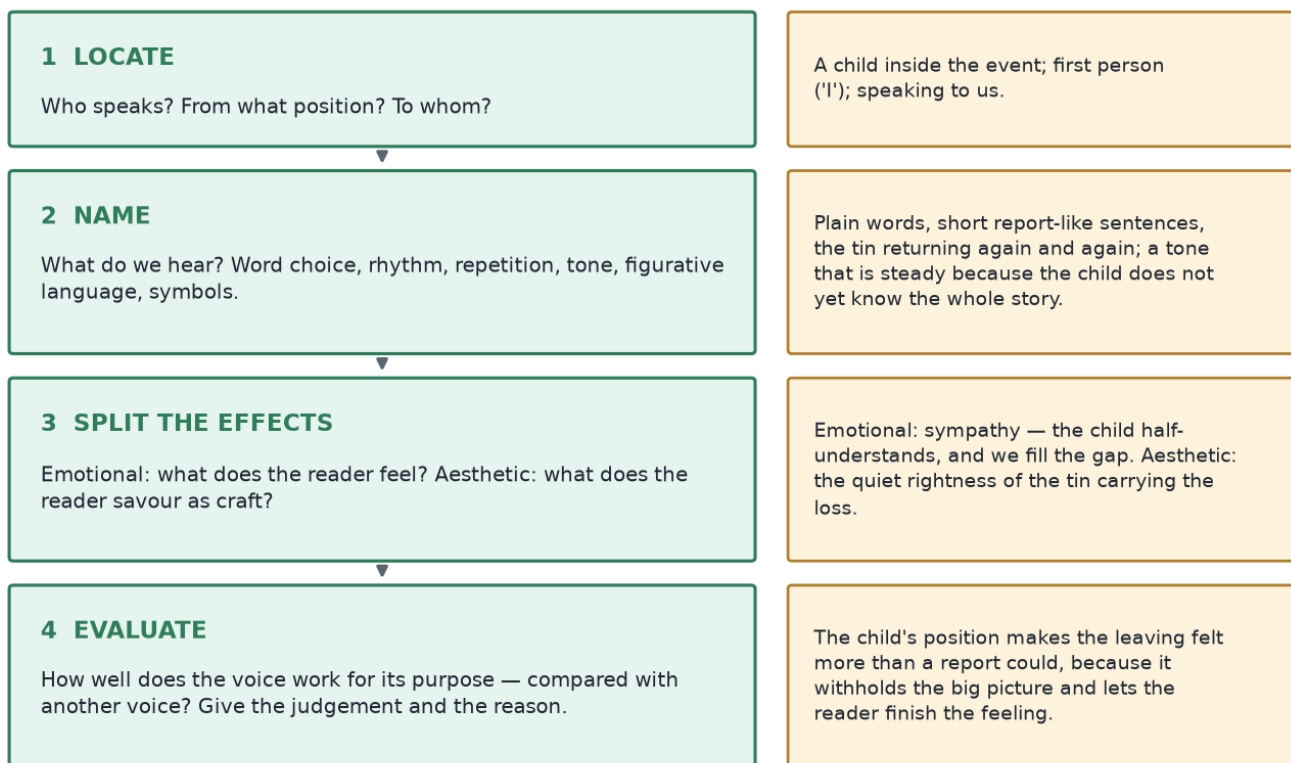
The chain is the skill. Mum says *tins remember things* is **personification** in the service of **symbolism**: the tin stands for everything the family cannot carry, and the reader is trusted to feel the weight without a page of explanation. Run the same chain on 'The Minutes': the neat record stands for every account that leaves grief out — and the last stanza's *That's minutes. That was us.* is the moment the symbol stops hiding and says what it stands for.

8. A routine for comparing voices

Analysis of voice is a routine before it is a talent. Four steps, in order, every time:

A routine for comparing voices

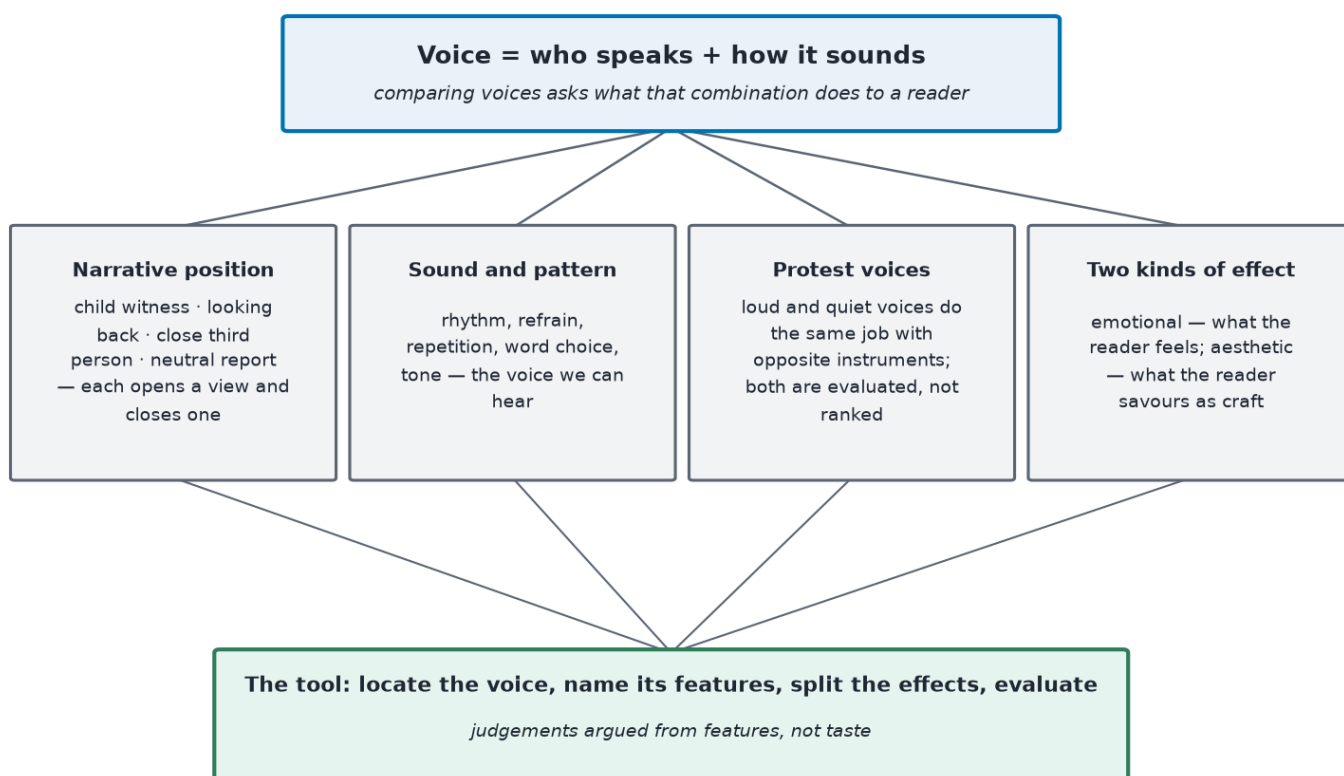
Voice carried through the steps: the child in 'The Biscuit Tin' (written for this book).



A four-step flowchart — LOCATE (who speaks, from what position, to whom), NAME (word choice, rhythm, repetition, tone, figurative language, symbols), SPLIT THE EFFECTS (emotional and aesthetic), EVALUATE (how well the voice works for its purpose, compared with another voice) — with the child voice from 'The Biscuit Tin' worked through all four steps in side boxes

Worked on the child's voice in the figure, the routine produces a complete comparison in four moves. Use it in the worked analyses below and in every practice task; the last step is where the content description lives — *compare and evaluate* — and a judgement there is strong when it is argued from features, not taste.

9. The section map



A concept map with the central claim 'Voice = who speaks + how it sounds', four branches — narrative position, sound and pattern, protest voices, two kinds of effect — and a base node stating the tool: locate the voice, name its features, split the effects, evaluate

Worked analyses

Worked analysis 1 — scaffolded (the child's position and sympathy)

Analyse the voice in Passage A, 'The Biscuit Tin', using the routine.

Step	Analysis	Why it matters
Locate	A child inside the event; first person; speaking to us in short, report-like sentences.	The position decides what the voice can see: the tin, the truck, the bend in the road — not the drought, the debt, the adult grief.
Name	Plain words; the tin returning three times; <i>like it weighed something</i> ; a steady tone that never names the feeling.	The repetition makes the tin the symbol; the plain tone is the child keeping steady.
Split the effects	Emotional: sympathy — the child half-understands (<i>Mum laughed in the way that is not a laugh</i>) and the reader fills the gap. Aesthetic: the quiet rightness of <i>It did not wave. Houses never do, but I waited anyway.</i> — a small image doing a big job.	Two jobs, named separately, each tied to exact words.
Evaluate	The child's position makes the leaving felt more than a neutral report could, because it withholds the big picture and lets the reader finish the feeling.	The judgement is argued from the position and the gap, not from taste.

Worked analysis 2 — scaffolded (*loud against quiet*)

Compare stanza 2 of 'Say the River's Name' with stanza 2 of 'The Minutes'.

Feature	'Say the River's Name', stanza 2	'The Minutes', stanza 2
Speaker and stance	A crowd voice saying <i>we</i> , accusing in the open: <i>They took...</i>	One official voice saying <i>I</i> , recording from inside the room: <i>I note...</i>
Pace and sound	Long open vowels (<i>clear and cold</i>), a marching beat, the rhymes <i>cold/gold</i> landing like a chant.	A steady ABCB rhyme (<i>fifty-two</i> is kept out of the rhyme; <i>five-three/see</i> chime), the pace of a pen keeping time.
Key device	Plain accusation plus rhyme: <i>called it worth the gold</i> turns the thieves' own words against them.	Understatement: <i>That's all a clerk should see</i> says less than is meant, and the neatness is the protest.
Emotional effect	Anger that rouses; the reader is drafted into the <i>we</i> .	Grief held under a calm surface; the reader leans in to hear what is not said.
Aesthetic effect	The rhyme <i>cold/gold</i> snaps the argument shut — craft as a clenched fist.	The rhyme <i>five-three/see</i> keeps ticking like the clock the clerk obeys — craft as control.

Evaluation: neither stanza protests better; they press different buttons. The loud stanza recruits a crowd; the quiet stanza makes one reader lean close. Evaluated against its purpose, each voice is doing exactly what its features were chosen for — which is the comparison VC2E10LE05.E02 asks for.

Worked analysis 3 — unscaffolded (*symbolism in 'The Minutes'*)

Comment on what the symbolism in 'The Minutes' does (VC2E10LE05.E04).

The feature. The minutes themselves — the neat record of the meeting: *Item six: the pool, the counting, done by rule, resolved, five-three.* **What it gathers.** The minutes stand for every official account that records the decision and leaves

out the feeling: a whole town's grief compressed to *two short lines, in ink, without a fuss*. **Emotional effect.** The symbol grieves quietly; the reader supplies the standing room, the washed cups, the stacked chairs, and the ache is the reader's own. **Aesthetic effect.** The symbol earns its keep in the last stanza, where *That's minutes. That was us.* splits the record from the people in five words — the neat form enacts the control, and the final line breaks it open. **Evaluation.** The symbolism works because it is never announced until the end; a text that explained its own symbol would lose the very quietness it is about.

Worked analysis 4 — unscaffolded (one event, two voices)

Same event, two tellings.

Version 1 — neutral report. The family left the property at dawn. Their goods filled one truck. A biscuit tin was carried to the cab by the father.

Version 2 — child witness. The truck came before the sun. Dad carried the tin to the cab himself, like it weighed something.

Version 1 sees everything and feels nothing: the position is outside the event, the words are general (*the family, their goods*), and the tin is one item among the goods. Version 2 sees less and feels more: the child's position catches the tin because the child is watching the father, not the goods, and *like it weighed something* is **figurative language** doing emotional work — the tin weighs nothing, the leaving weighs everything. Compared for sympathy, Version 2 wins for the stated reason: the position puts a witness where Version 1 puts a camera, and *himself* and *something* are the two words the camera cannot see. Compared for scope, Version 1 wins: it can say *at dawn* and *one truck*, facts the child never counts. Different instruments, chosen for different jobs.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1 (Reading and viewing). Name the narrative position in each sentence, and for each give one thing the voice can see and one thing it cannot.

(a) *I put my hand on the gate and said goodbye out loud.* (b) *Years later, I understand why my father never looked back.* (c) *Ben kept his eyes on the road. The house was gone by the next bend.* (d) *The property was sold in March. The family relocated to the coast.*

Q2 (Reading and viewing). Classify each reader response as emotional or aesthetic as this section defines them.

(a) *I wanted to hug the kid.* (b) *The rhyme snaps shut like a lid — that is craft.* (c) *I felt angry at the people who took the fish.* (d) *The refrain comes back heavier the second time.* (e) *It made me think of my own grandfather's shed, and I went quiet.*

Q3 (Reading and viewing). Match each term to its definition.

Terms: stanza · refrain · symbolism · tone · rhythm · soundtrack

(a) the attitude we can hear in a voice (b) a grouped set of lines in a poem (c) the sound layer of a song, film or digital text (d) a line or phrase that returns, gathering weight (e) using one thing to stand for more than itself (f) the pattern of beats and pauses; the pace of the voice

Q4 (Writing). These two report sentences: *The pool was closed after the vote. Residents left the meeting at ten o'clock.* Rewrite them in the voice of (a) a child who was at the meeting and (b) an adult looking back years later. Then add one sentence saying which of your two versions you expect to evoke more sympathy, and why.

Q5 (Reading and viewing). Read the original stanza below (written for this book).

Gran said keep the verandah white. We kept it white through forty years. Keep the verandah white — she said it like a song.

Copy the refrain. Then say, in one or two sentences, what weight the refrain carries the second time it appears, and name the tone you hear.

Q6 (Speaking and listening). In pairs, read stanza 2 of ‘Say the River’s Name’ aloud twice: once at full voice, once slow and cold. Agree on which reading makes the anger land harder, and name one sound feature (rhythm, rhyme, repetition) that supports your choice. Report your decision to the class in two sentences.

Un scaffolded

Q7 (Reading and viewing). Use the four-step routine to analyse the voice in the final paragraph of ‘The Biscuit Tin’ (*The truck came before the sun... to ...but I waited anyway.*) in a short paragraph of roughly 120–160 words.

Q8 (Reading and viewing). Both passages in §3 contain the line *houses stay where you put them*. Compare what the line does in the child’s voice with what it does in the looking-back voice, and evaluate which position evokes more sympathy towards the event — arguing from the words, not from taste (VC2E10LE05 .E01).

Q9 (Reading and viewing). Write a symbolism commentary on ‘The Minutes’ of roughly 120–160 words, using the three-link chain from §7. You may not use the worked analysis above; build your own from the poem’s words.

Q10 (Writing). Write an original protest poem of eight lines, in a quiet voice, about something in your school or town you think has been decided without being felt. Use at least one repeated phrase and one symbol. Then add two sentences of commentary: one naming an emotional effect you built and the words that build it, one naming an aesthetic effect.

Q11 (Writing). The neutral report from §2: *The family left the property at dawn. Their goods filled one truck*. Rewrite it twice — once in a child-witness voice, once in a looking-back voice — two or three sentences each. Finish with one sentence evaluating which of your two voices evokes more sympathy, and why the position creates that response.

Q12 (Speaking and listening). Prepare a two-minute talk: choose ‘Say the River’s Name’ or ‘The Minutes’ and argue that it is the better protest poem *for its own purpose*. Use at least three terms from the metalanguage kit, and end with one sentence that admits what the other poem does that yours cannot.

Q13 (Speaking and listening). In pairs, take Position 1 and Position 2 from the box in §6 and test both on the refrain *Say the river’s name*. Each partner first presents the other partner’s position in its strongest form; then the pair writes one agreed sentence stating what each position catches that the other misses.

Q14 (Speaking and listening). Panel discussion: “*A quiet voice can protest more strongly than a loud one.*” Argue for and against the motion with equal care. Marks reward the quality of the reasoning on each side — terms defined, claims tested on an example, limits admitted — not the conclusion you reach.

Answers

Q1. (a) child witness; sees the gate and the goodbye, cannot see the reasons for leaving. (b) first person looking back; sees the father's reasons now, cannot see the moment raw. (c) third person close; sees Ben's self-control, cannot hear the other heads. (d) neutral report; sees the facts and the scope, cannot feel the leaving.

Q2. (a) emotional. (b) aesthetic. (c) emotional. (d) aesthetic. (e) emotional — it reports a feeling the text raised, and the aesthetic claim would be the separate sentence about which craft did the raising.

Q3. (a) tone. (b) stanza. (c) soundtrack. (d) refrain. (e) symbolism. (f) rhythm.

Q4. Open task — see the model responses below.

Q5. The refrain is *keep the verandah white* (or *Gran said keep the verandah white* returning as *Keep the verandah white*). Second time, it carries forty years of kept promises — the command has become the family's way of loving Gran. The tone is tender and steady, with a smile in it (*like a song*).

Q6. Open task — see the model responses below.

Q7–Q14. Open tasks — see the model responses below.

Model responses

Q4. Sample. (a) *They put a paper on the door and the pool went dark. Mum held my hand on the way out and did not squeeze it, which is how I knew.* (b) *The vote closed the pool that year, and the town learned its own face in the meeting-room glass; I was ten, and I only understood the silence much later.* Preference line: the child version should win on sympathy, because *did not squeeze it, which is how I knew* withholds the explanation and lets the reader fill the gap.

Q6. A strong pair report names the feature: for example, *the full-voice reading lands the anger because the rhyme gold lands like a chant, and a chant wants a crowd* — or the reverse, defended the same way. The marks are in the naming of the sound feature, not in which reading won.

Q7. Sample. *Locate*: a child inside the event, first person, watching the father and the house. *Name*: short sentences that report actions; the simile *like it weighed something*; the personification *It did not wave. Houses never do*; a steady tone that never names the feeling. *Split*: emotional — sympathy, because the child waits for a wave the reader already knows will not come, and the dramatic irony aches; aesthetic — the last two lines let a small image do the work of a paragraph, and the plain rhythm keeps it honest. *Evaluate*: the child's position makes the leaving felt more than a report could, because it sees the tin and the window and misses the big picture, and the missing is exactly what the reader supplies.

Q8. Sample. In the child's voice the line is kindness heard without being understood: the child reports *Mum laughed in the way that is not a laugh* and the line lands soft, and the sympathy goes to a child being carried out of a life without the words for it. In the looking-back voice the same line is kindness decoded: *I heard the kindness she packed the words in only much later* tells us what the line cost the mother, and the sympathy splits between the two. Evaluated: the child's position evokes the sharper sympathy, because the gap between what the child hears and what the reader knows is where the ache is; the looking-back voice trades some of that ache for understanding, on purpose, and owns the trade.

Q9. Sample. *The feature*: the minutes — *Item six: the pool, the counting, done by rule, resolved, five-three* — a record kept tidily by one small official voice. *What it gathers*: every account that records a decision and leaves out the feeling; the standing room, the washed cups, the stacked chairs all live outside the ink. *Emotional effect*: grief held under a calm surface makes the reader lean in, and *without a fuss* hurts more than shouting would. *Aesthetic effect*: the neat ABCB rhyme enacts the clerk's control, so the form is the symbol; when the last line breaks the pattern (*That was us*), the form breaks with the feeling. *Evaluation*: the symbol works because the poem trusts the reader to supply the grief the record leaves out — explaining it would undo it.

Q10. A strong entry keeps the voice small and official or small and personal — the quiet instruments — and lets the symbol do the feeling: a locked bin, a repainted line on the court, a noticeboard no one clears. The commentary

sentences must name exact words: *the repeated 'signed, the office' builds the emotional effect of being decided-about without being asked; the rhyme still/till is the aesthetic effect, because the neatness enacts the control.*

Q11. Sample. Child witness: *The truck came before the sun. I counted our boxes and the tin made five, and I did not know five could be all of it.* Looking back: *We left at dawn, and I have spent the years since learning what the truck was carrying that I could not see from the cab.* Evaluation line: the child voice wins on sympathy because *five could be all of it* is a sentence the speaker cannot yet understand, and the reader finishes it.

Q12. A strong talk argues the poem against its own purpose, not against the other poem: the loud voice is better at recruiting (*say it till they hear us* makes the reader part of the *we*), or the quiet voice is better at making one reader lean close (*That's all a clerk should see* hides the anger where the reader finds it). The closing sentence admits the other instrument: *my poem moves a crowd, and gives up the whisper; the other poem keeps the whisper, and gives up the crowd.*

Q13. A strong pair answer names what each position catches on the same refrain. Position 1 catches the craft: the refrain returns with a heavier job the second time — first a command, then a promise — and that gathering is countable on the page. Position 2 catches the reader: the refrain rouses a reader who has lost a river, and rests one who has not, so the effect is an event between the lines and the reader. The agreed sentence might run: *the feature carries the invitation, and the reader accepts it or not — analysis needs both the invitation and the accepting.*

Q14. A strong panel opens each side in its strongest form. For the motion: the quiet voice makes the reader supply the anger, and supplied anger is owned anger — test it on *That's minutes. That was us.*, where the plainness hits harder than a shout would. Against the motion: the loud voice does what quiet cannot — it builds a *we*, and protest is a crowd act; test it on *say it till they hear us*, where the refrain recruits. Marks reward each side for testing its case on an example and admitting its limit; two speakers reaching opposite conclusions can both deserve full marks.

Looking back. Voice is who speaks and how it sounds, and comparing voices asks what that combination does to a reader. Positions open views and close them: the child witness trades the big picture for sympathy, the looking-back voice trades the raw moment for understanding, and dramatic irony — the reader knowing more than the speaker — is where the child's position does its feeling. Every effect a voice produces splits into two kinds: the emotional, what the reader feels, and the aesthetic, what the reader savours as craft — and protest voices prove the split, because the loud voice and the quiet voice do the same job with opposite instruments. The metalanguage kit — stanza, line, rhythm, refrain, figurative language, symbolism, tone, soundtrack — names the features; the routine — locate, name, split the effects, evaluate — turns the features into judgements argued from the words, not from taste. That is the skill this section builds: not to rank voices, but to say what each one opens, what each one closes, and what each one does to you.

Crafting texts that hold one voice

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English, Level 10 · Strand: Literature · Sub-strand: Creating literature

Owns VC2E10LE06

Draws on — VC2E10LE06.E01, VC2E10LE06.E02

Builds on — Level 9 VC2E9LE06

Theory

1. What ‘voice’ means in this section

Defining our terms. The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *voice* — with quotation marks around it in elaboration VC2E10LE06.E02 — but does not define it. *Voice* is a **contested term**: writers and teachers use it in more than one way, and which meaning you pick changes what you look for. This section therefore treats it as follows, and every question here is answerable on this definition alone:

- **Voice** — the sense of a distinct speaker or style coming through a text, built from choices you can point to: who speaks, which words are chosen, what the sentences do, what attitude sounds through, what images appear.
- **Sustained** — held steady from first line to last. A voice is sustained when the same speaker seems to be audible all the way through, not only in the opening.
- **Aesthetic features** — the parts of a text built to be *felt* — the sounds, rhythms, images and patterns of the language — rather than only understood. (The curriculum uses the term *aesthetic features* without defining it; this is the working definition used here.)

Other definitions exist and are not the same as these. Some writers treat voice as the writer’s true self reaching the page untouched; that sense is examined fairly in part 4, but it is not the one this section marks against, because a self is not something you can plan, check or revise — and this section is about creating.

In Level 9 you experimented with structures, features, devices and voice, possibly mixing forms. This section goes one step further: not just trying a voice once, but **holding one** across a whole text — and choosing the voice that fits a purpose and an audience, then keeping it.

Voice is not volume. It is not “sounding enthusiastic”. Read these two lines:

The gate was closed, so we went around the side.

The gate stood shut against us, so we took the long way around, the way the mud remembers.

Both report the same event. The second has a voice: someone particular seems to be speaking — someone who notices things, who gives the mud a memory. The difference is not the information. It is the choices.

Five kinds of choice build a voice. This section calls them the **five dials**, because a writer turns each one up or down:

Dial	The question it answers	Turn it and hear the change
Person and viewpoint	Who speaks, and from where?	<i>I crept in late</i> versus <i>She crept in late</i> versus <i>Word spread that someone had crept in late</i> . Same event, three speakers.
Diction (word choice)	Which family of words does this speaker live in?	<i>muttered, whispered, announced</i> — three speakers saying the same sentence. Diction is simply the writer's word choices.
Sentence rhythm	How do the sentences move — long and flowing, short and sharp, mixed?	<i>He ran. The door held. Then — daylight.</i> The short beats carry the breathlessness.
Tone	What attitude sounds through — warm, dry, solemn, amused?	<i>Of course. Perfect. Just what we needed.</i> The words say “perfect”; the tone says the opposite. Tone is the speaker's attitude toward the subject, heard through the wording.
Imagery	What can the reader see, hear, smell, taste or touch?	<i>The hall smelled of wet wool and oranges.</i> One smell, and the room is real.

Metalanguage note: *diction* (word choice), *tone* (attitude sounding through words) and *imagery* (language that works on the senses) are the three technical terms this section uses most; each is defined above at first use.

The five dials of voice

A voice is built from choices. Turn each dial and hear the speaker change.

Person and viewpoint

Who speaks, and from where?

I crept in. / She crept in. / Word spread that someone had.

Diction (word choice)

Which family of words does this speaker live in?

muttered / whispered / announced — one act, three speakers.

Sentence rhythm

How do the sentences move — long and flowing, short and sharp?

He ran. The door held. Then — daylight.

Tone

What attitude sounds through — warm, dry, solemn, amused?

Of course. Perfect. Just what we needed.

Imagery

What can the reader see, hear, smell, taste or touch?

The hall smelled of wet wool and oranges.

Five dials, set together, make one voice — and a sustained voice is one where all five stay set.

Diagram of the five dials of voice — person and viewpoint, diction, sentence rhythm, tone and imagery — each with a short example sentence

2. A voice to study — Text A

The worked examples and many practice questions in this section use two original texts: Text A here, and Text B in part 5. Both were written for this section.

Text A — *Four A.M.*, the opening of a short story (original)

Four in the morning, and the whole town is asleep. I am not.

Nonna never knocks. She stands in my doorway with the hall light on behind her, and she says the same two words she has said every winter of my life. *Come on.*

The bakery smells of yeast and burnt sugar before the door is even open. Nonna ties her apron the way other people tie shoes: quick, blind, ready. Flour on the bench. Flour on her sleeve. Flour, she says, is proof somebody worked.

By six, the first loaves are singing in the oven. Singing is her word for it. She says crusts only sing when they are proud. If you have ever heard bread crackle out of the heat, you know what she means.

Say the voice of Text A in one sentence: *a young person, wide awake in the dark, telling you about someone they love through the small details of a job.* Every choice serves that voice. The short opening sentences (*Four in the morning... I am not.*) sound like someone blinking awake. The repeated *Flour on the bench. Flour on her sleeve.* turns a habit into a rhythm you can hear. The loaves *sing* — an image borrowed from Nonna herself, so the narrator sounds like the person they are describing. That is what a sustained voice looks like at work: nothing in the passage sounds like a different speaker.

Text A — Four A.M., annotated

The opening of the story (original), with each voice choice marked by its dial.

Four in the morning, and the whole town is asleep. **I am not.**

Nonna never knocks. She stands in **my doorway** with the hall light on behind her, and she says

the same two words she has said every winter of my life. Come on.

The bakery **smells of yeast and burnt sugar** before the door is even open. Nonna ties her apron the way other people tie shoes: **quick, blind, ready. Flour on the bench. Flour on her sleeve.**

Flour, she says, is proof somebody worked.

By six, **the first loaves are singing in the oven.** Singing is her word for it. She says

crusts only sing when they are proud. If you have ever heard **bread crackle out of the heat,** you know what she means.



Person and viewpoint



Diction (word choice)



Sentence rhythm



Tone



Imagery

Nothing in the passage sounds like a different speaker — that is a sustained voice.

Text A with its voice choices highlighted in five colours, one for each dial, with a key

3. Reading like a writer — the aesthetic features (VC2E10LE06.E01)

Analysing voice is reading like a writer: instead of asking *what happened?*, ask *what is this made of?* The aesthetic features — the felt parts of the language — are where a voice lives. Four to listen for:

- **Sound patterns.** Repeated sounds or words: *Flour on the bench. Flour on her sleeve.* Repetition beats a rhythm into the reader; here it makes the work feel habitual, almost like a chant.
- **Sentence rhythm.** Long sentences carry a reader along; short ones stop them. Text A mixes both — a long, unhurried sentence about Nonna tying her apron, then three sharp fragments: *quick, blind, ready.* The rhythm enacts the speed it describes.
- **Imagery that works the senses.** *Yeast and burnt sugar* is smell; *crackle out of the heat* is sound. Sensory detail does not decorate a voice — it is how a narrator shows they were really there.
- **Echoes and returns.** Nonna's word *singing* comes back twice in the last paragraph, and with it her habit of treating bread as alive. A voice strengthens when its own words return.

To **experiment** with these features, as the curriculum asks, you do two things: notice them working in a text you have read, then try the same moves in a text of your own. Every task below is built on that loop — read like a writer, then write like a reader.

4. Found or made? Two views of voice

Voice is contested in one particular place: is a voice something a writer **finds** (the true self arriving on the page) or something a writer **makes** (choices assembled one by one)? Both views are held by serious writers, and both deserve their strongest form before you judge.

The strongest case for “found”. Readers can tell when writing is forced; the texts people trust most often sound like someone actually talking. Many writers report that a voice arrived only when they stopped performing — when they wrote about what they genuinely knew and cared about. On this view, technique cannot manufacture a voice, because a voice is honesty, and honesty is not a dial you turn.

The strongest case for “made”. Every voice you admire is built from choices you can list — person, diction, rhythm, tone, imagery — and writers revise those choices, sometimes for years. One novelist can write a child’s voice in one book and an old sailor’s in the next; if voice were simply the self, one writer would have only one. On this view, voice is craft, and craft can be taught, checked and changed to suit a purpose.

The working view of this section. Notice that the two views agree on more than they fight about: both say a good voice sounds like a person, not a template. They differ on where that person comes from. For creating texts, the “made” view is the useful one — not because it is the whole truth, but because made things can be planned, sustained, broken and repaired. Marks in this section follow the reasoning: whichever view you argue for, define *voice*, give evidence from a text, and name what the other view explains better than yours does.

Found or made? Two views of voice

Each position is stated as strongly as its own supporters would put it.

FOUND

voice as the self reaching the page

Readers can tell when writing is forced; the texts people trust most sound like someone actually talking.

Many writers say a voice arrived only when they stopped performing and wrote what they genuinely knew.

Technique cannot manufacture honesty — and a voice, on this view, is honesty.

MADE

voice as choices assembled one by one

Every voice we admire is built from choices we can list — person, diction, rhythm, tone, imagery.

One novelist can write a child's voice in one book and an old sailor's in the next; one self cannot.

Writers revise voices for years — made things can be planned, checked and changed to suit a purpose.

— they agree on more than they fight about: both say a good voice sounds like a person, not a template —

The working view of this section

For creating texts, the 'made' view is the useful one — not because it is the whole truth, but because made things can be planned, sustained, broken and repaired. Marks follow the reasoning: whichever view you argue for, define voice, give evidence from a text, and name what the other view explains better.

A contest of views is decided by reasoning, not by which side you start on.

Two panels steelmanning the positions that voice is found and that voice is made, with the working view of this section underneath

5. Same story, different voice — Text B

Text B — a news report in the *Hillgrove Courier* about the same bakery (original)

Town bakery marks forty years of early starts

A Hillgrove bakery has marked forty years of trading, with owner Rosa Marchetti crediting long hours and loyal customers for the business reaching the milestone.

Ms Marchetti opened the shop with her husband in 1986, and said a granddaughter now helped with the morning bake. “She has been coming in since she was small,” Ms Marchetti said. “You teach them young, or you teach them never.”

The bakery supplies bread to four local schools and two cafes, and employs three staff. Ms Marchetti said she had no plans to retire.

Texts A and B tell the same story — a bakery, a grandmother, a granddaughter who helps. But the voices could not be further apart. Text A speaks from **inside** the morning: first person, smells, fragments, bread that sings. Text B reports from **outside**: third person, dates and numbers, complete measured sentences, feeling kept to one quoted line. Neither voice is better. They have different **purposes** — one is made to make a reader *feel* a morning, the other to *tell* a town a fact — and each voice is built to fit.

This is the heart of VC2E10LE06.E02: voice is something you **manipulate** — shape and change on purpose — for particular purposes and audiences. The bar chart below counts the signals: Text A’s weight sits in first-person words, sensory images and fragments; Text B’s weight sits in facts, numbers and formal naming.

Same story, different voice

One bakery morning, told from inside and reported from outside.

TEXT A — Four A.M.

short story opening · first person

Four in the morning, and the whole town is asleep. I am not.

The bakery smells of yeast and burnt sugar before the door is even open.

Flour on the bench. Flour on her sleeve.

By six, the first loaves are singing in the oven. If you have ever heard bread crackle out of the heat, you know what she means.

felt from inside

senses · fragments · bread that sings

TEXT B — Hillgrove Courier

news report · third person

Town bakery marks forty years of early starts

A Hillgrove bakery has marked forty years of trading, with owner Rosa Marchetti crediting long hours and loyal customers.

The bakery supplies bread to four local schools and two cafes, and employs three staff.

Ms Marchetti said she had no plans to retire.

reported from outside

facts · dates · measured sentences

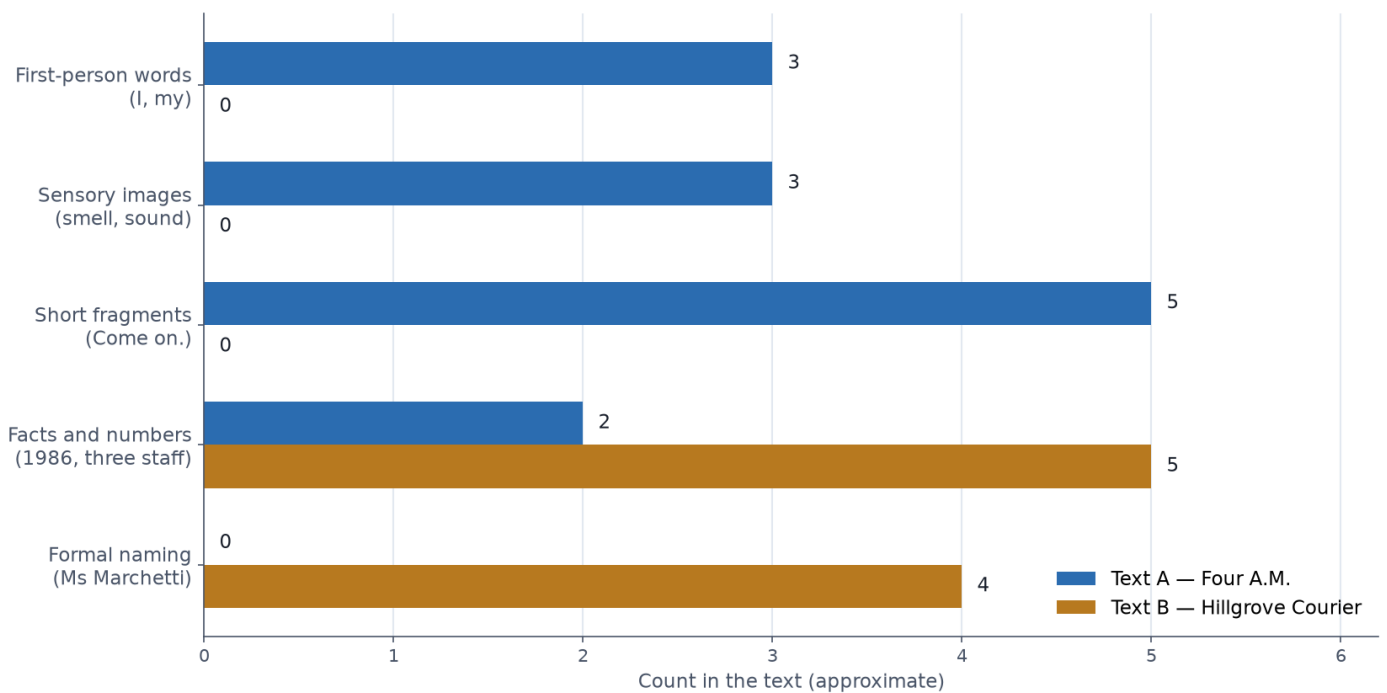
same morning



Neither voice is better — each is built for its purpose. Both hold their voices steady, first line to last.

Side-by-side panels showing the same morning told from inside in Text A and reported from outside in Text B

Voice signals: Text A versus Text B



Text A's weight sits in the personal columns; Text B's weight sits in the factual ones — two voices, each sustained.

Bar chart comparing counts of five voice signals in Text A and Text B

Notice also that **both texts sustain their voices**. Text B is not a failed Text A; it is a voice held just as steadily, only aimed differently. Sustaining is not about warmth or personality — a news report, a formal apology and a recipe can each keep a steady voice. It is about no line sounding like it wandered in from another text.

6. When voices break — drift and the sustain check

The opposite of a sustained voice is **drift**: a line that sounds like a different speaker took over the keyboard. Drift usually happens where a writer starts showing off, starts explaining, or forgets who is talking. Read this version of Text A's next paragraph:

We sold out by eight, same as always. Nonna wiped the bench twice, then stood at the window watching the street wake up. *Small businesses contribute significantly to the economic and social fabric of regional communities.* "Right," she said. "Time you got to school."

The marked sentence is drift. The narrator is a teenager in an apron, telling the story through small sharp details — and suddenly the text sounds like an essay about economics. The information could even be true; that is not the problem. The problem is the *speaker*: no line like that belongs in this voice.

The **sustain check** is how you catch drift in your own drafts:

1. **Say the voice.** Write one sentence describing your speaker: *who they are, how they sound, what they notice*.
2. **Read the draft aloud.** Your ear hears a stranger before your eye does — mark every line that sounds like someone else.
3. **Test the dials.** Person, diction, rhythm, tone, imagery — does each stay set the way you planned?
4. **Compare first line and last line.** They should sound like the same speaker, even if the feeling has moved.
5. **Rewrite the drift** in the voice you planned — or, if a new voice is genuinely better, change the plan and make every line match it. Deliberate changes are craft; accidental ones are drift.

When voices break: drift

The narrator is a teenager in an apron — one sentence below sounds like someone else entirely.

The draft, with drift

We sold out by eight, same as always. Nonna wiped the bench twice, then stood at the window watching the street wake up.

Small businesses contribute significantly to the economic and social fabric of regional communities.

"Right," she said. "Time you got to school."

The red sentence is the drift: abstract, impersonal, essay-shaped — an essay took over the keyboard.



The fix — same facts, right speaker

We sold out by eight, same as always. Nonna wiped the bench twice, then stood at the window watching the street wake up. When the last loaf goes, Nonna says the street has eaten well. "Right," she said. "Time you got to school."

The green sentence keeps the voice: concrete, warm, and true to the narrator's habit of echoing Nonna.

Drift is not about the facts — it is about the speaker. Fix the line, or change the plan on purpose.

Paragraph with a drifting sentence boxed in red, and the corrected version shown below with the replacement in green

7. Purpose and audience turn the dials

A voice is not chosen in the dark. The curriculum asks you to select and adapt structures, devices and features **for purposes and audiences** — and purpose and audience decide where every dial sits. Consider one event: *the school vegetable garden wins first prize at the town show*. Three texts could tell it, each with a different voice:

Purpose and audience	Voice choices	Opening line
Amuse young children (picture book)	Simple diction, repetition, warm tone, big images	<i>The carrots grew and grew and grew — and on the day of the show, they came home wearing a blue ribbon.</i>
Excite a live crowd (school assembly call)	Short punchy rhythm, present tense, exclamations, loud tone	<i>And it's first place — the Riverside garden takes out the town show!</i>
Inform ratepayers (council newsletter)	Third person, formal diction, long even sentences, no imagery	<i>Students from Riverside College were awarded first prize in the produce section of this year's town show, after six months of work on the school garden.</i>

Same event. Same facts. Three voices — because three audiences need three different things from the words. Before you draft, answer the three planning questions: **what is this text for, who is it for, and which voice will serve them?**

Purpose and audience turn the dials

One event: the school vegetable garden wins first prize at the town show.	
Amuse young children picture book	Voice choices: Simple diction · repetition · warm tone · big images <i>The carrots grew and grew and grew — and on the day of the show, they came home wearing a blue ribbon.</i>
Excite a live crowd assembly call	Voice choices: Short punchy rhythm · present tense · exclamations · loud tone <i>And it's first place — the Riverside garden takes out the town show!</i>
Inform ratepayers council newsletter	Voice choices: Third person · formal diction · long even sentences · no imagery <i>Students from Riverside College were awarded first prize in the produce section of this year's town show, after six months of work on the garden.</i>
Same event. Same facts. Three voices — because three audiences need three different things from the words.	

Table showing one event told for three different purposes and audiences, with the voice choices and an opening line for each

8. Beyond the page — auditory and visual features

The content description names **auditory** features (to do with sound) and **visual** features (to do with what is seen), because a sustained voice is not only for print. A spoken piece succeeds or fails on the voice in the room; a multimodal text speaks through its images and layout as well as its words. (*Auditory* and *visual* are the curriculum’s own terms; *multimodal* means a text that combines more than one mode, such as words, images and sound.)

Auditory features — for performed texts. When you speak a text aloud, the voice rides on five features:

Feature	What it is	What it can do for a sustained voice
Pace	How fast or slow you speak	Slow for weight, fast for excitement — and keep the pattern, so the audience learns your rhythm.
Pitch	How high or low your voice sits	A lower pitch can steady a solemn voice; a rising pitch can carry wonder.
Pause	Planned silence	A pause before a key word makes the audience lean in; a pause after lets a line land.
Stress	Which words you push	Stressing <i>one</i> word in a line tells the audience what the line is about.
Tone	The feeling in the voice	Warm, dry, stern, amused — the spoken tone must match the written tone, or the voice splits in two.

Visual features — for multimodal texts. If your text carries images, the images have a voice too:

Feature	What it can say about the voice
Image choice	Real photos say <i>this really happened</i> ; drawn lines say <i>a person made this</i> .
Colour	Muted colours steady a serious voice; bright colours raise the energy. Keep one palette — a new colour scheme halfway through is visual drift.
Lettering	Big hand-drawn letters sound personal; a clean even grid sounds organised and official.
Layout	Crowded pages hurry the reader; open space slows them down. Choose the speed that fits the voice.

The spoken voice kit

When a text is performed, the voice rides on five auditory features.

Feature	What it is	What it does for a sustained voice
Pace	How fast or slow you speak	Slow for weight, fast for excitement — keep the pattern, so the audience learns your rhythm.
Pitch	How high or low your voice sits	A lower pitch can steady a solemn voice; a rising pitch can carry wonder.
Pause	Planned silence	A pause before a key word makes the audience lean in; a pause after lets a line land.
Stress	Which words you push	Stressing one word in a line tells the audience what the line is about.
Tone	The feeling in the voice	Warm, dry, stern, amused — the spoken tone must match the written tone, or the voice splits in two.
Try it on Text A: pause after "Come on."; stress not in "I am not"; keep the whole piece warm.		

Table of auditory features — pace, pitch, pause, stress and tone — with what each is and how it sustains a performed voice

The visual voice kit

In a multimodal text, the images and layout speak too — they have a voice of their own.

Feature	What it can say about the voice
Image choice	Real photos say this really happened; drawn lines say a person made this. Match the image to the speaker.
Colour	Muted colours steady a serious voice; bright colours raise the energy. Keep one palette — a new colour scheme halfway through is visual drift.
Lettering	Big hand-drawn letters sound personal; a clean even grid sounds organised and official.
Layout	Crowded pages hurry the reader; open space slows them down. Choose the speed that fits the voice.
The same test applies: first line and last line, first image and last image — do they sound like the same speaker?	

Table of visual features — image choice, colour, lettering and layout — with what each can say about a text's voice

9. The voice plan

Serious voices are planned before they are sustained. A **voice plan** is one page of decisions you make before drafting:

- **Purpose** — what the text is for (to move, to amuse, to unsettle, to honour, to persuade).
- **Audience** — who will meet it, and what they need from it.
- **Form** — story, poem, monologue, letter, spoken piece, multimodal page.
- **Person and viewpoint** — who speaks; what they can and cannot see.
- **The five dials** — one setting each, in a phrase: *everyday words with a few grand ones; short snappy sentences; mock-serious tone; sound imagery.*
- **Proof of sustain** — how you will check at the end (the sustain check of part 6).

The voice plan below is filled in for the capstone task at the end of this section: *write a short piece about someone doing a small job they take pride in*. Read it as a model of how specific a plan should be — “short sentences” is a plan; “interesting voice” is not.

The voice plan

Capstone task: write a short piece about someone doing a small job they take pride in.

Purpose	To honour an unnoticed job — gently, and with a smile.
Audience	Classmates: people who walk past the library cart every day.
Form	Short monologue, spoken by a student who watches.
Person and viewpoint	First person — the watcher at the edge of the library.
Diction	Everyday words with a few grand ones, as if the cart deserves ceremony.
Sentence rhythm	Long piling sentences that load up like the cart, then one short line to land.
Tone	Warm, mock-serious, proud on someone else's behalf.
Imagery	The cart itself: grey metal, one squeaky wheel, the sticky book.
Proof of sustain	First line and last line both about the cart, both in the watcher's voice.

"Short sentences" is a plan. "Interesting voice" is not. Be specific enough to check against.

Completed voice plan for the capstone task, listing purpose, audience, form, viewpoint and the five dial settings

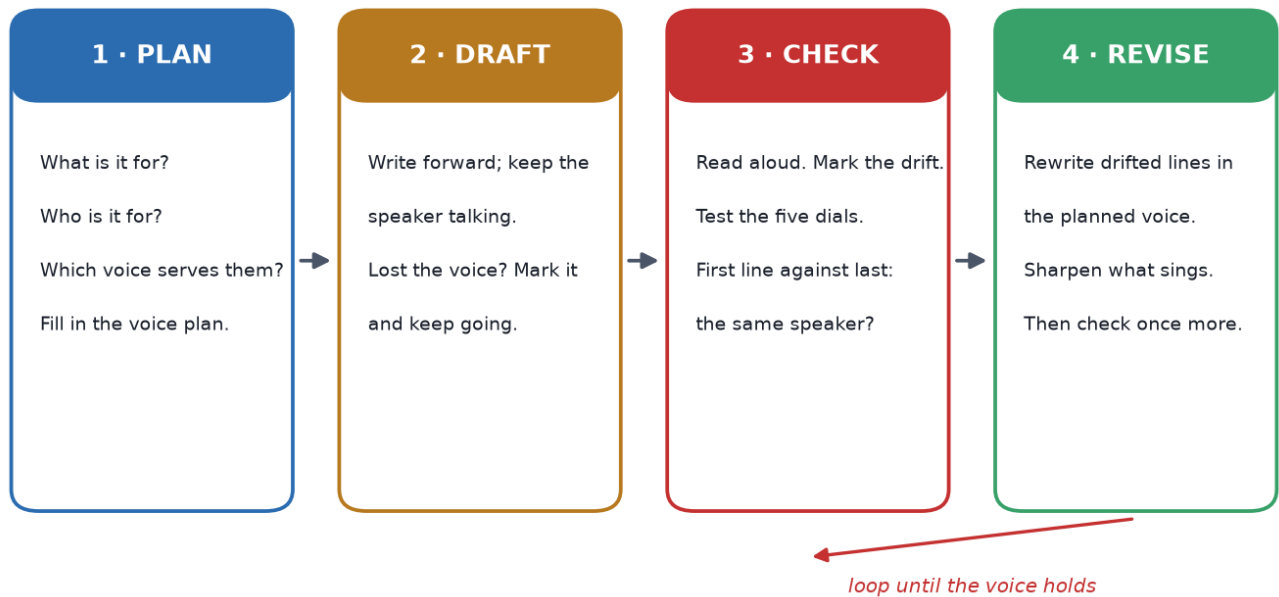
10. A making routine

Four stages, and the checking stage is not optional — it is where “a voice” becomes “a sustained voice”:

1. **PLAN** — answer the three planning questions and fill in a voice plan.
2. **DRAFT** — write forward without stopping to fix; keep the speaker talking. If you lose the voice mid-draft, leave a mark and keep going — repair belongs to the next stage.
3. **CHECK** — read aloud; mark the drift; test the five dials; compare the first line with the last.
4. **REVISE** — rewrite the drifted lines in the planned voice, and sharpen the lines where the voice already sings. Then check once more: the voice you planned and the voice on the page should now be the same voice.

The making routine

Four stages — and the checking stage is where a voice becomes a sustained voice.



Deliberate changes are craft; accidental ones are drift. The plan is what tells them apart.

Flow diagram of the four-stage making routine: plan, draft, check, revise, with the key moves listed under each stage

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Find four voice choices in Text A. For each: quote the evidence, name the dial, and say what the choice does for the voice.

Evidence	Dial	What it does
“Four in the morning, and the whole town is asleep. I am not.”	Person and viewpoint; sentence rhythm	First person inside the moment; the short second sentence sounds like someone suddenly, fully awake.
“Flour on the bench. Flour on her sleeve.”	Sentence rhythm; sound pattern (repetition)	Two verbless fragments with the same shape turn Nonna’s habit into a rhythm the reader can hear.
“the first loaves are singing in the oven”	Imagery (personification — giving a human action to a non-human thing)	The bakery becomes a living place, and the narrator borrows Nonna’s own way of talking, so the voice sounds like its subject.
“Come on.”	Diction	Two plain words, no ceremony: the character appears in miniature — someone who has said this a thousand times.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Texts A and B tell the same story. For three choices, name what changed between the voices and what the change does.

Choice	Text A	Text B	What the change does
Person	First person: <i>I, my</i> — the granddaughter speaks	Third person: <i>Ms Marchetti, she, a granddaughter</i>	A becomes a memory felt from inside; B becomes a report observed from outside.
Detail type	Sensory images: <i>yeast and burnt sugar, crackle</i>	Facts, dates, numbers: <i>1986, four local schools, three staff</i>	A makes the morning real to the senses; B makes the business real to the record.
Rhythm	Fragments and short beats: <i>quick, blind, ready</i>	Complete, measured sentences	A breathes like someone talking at 4 a.m.; B reads like something printed on purpose.

One step further: both texts are “true” to the same morning, but they are not the same *story*. A voice does not just dress the facts — it decides what counts as the story. And both voices are sustained: not one line of Text B smells of yeast, and not one line of Text A mentions a staff count.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Adapt Text A’s opening into a text message from the narrator to a friend, sent at 5 a.m. Keep the narrator’s voice.

Model adaptation

up since four. nonna said the two words so obviously. bakery smells like burnt sugar already and she’s got flour on her sleeve BEFORE we’ve even started. loaves are “singing” apparently. come get one when they’re out

Three choices explained: (1) the lowercase, clipped rhythm keeps the narrator’s fragment habit — a 5 a.m. texter does not write essay sentences, so short beats fit both voice and form; (2) “so obviously” keeps the mock-annoyed, loving tone — Nonna’s ritual is teased, not described; (3) *singing* stays in quotation marks, because that is Nonna’s word, and keeping it preserves the echo that carries her voice into the narrator’s.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

Here is a task: *Write the opening of a story about a dog that waits at the school gate every afternoon for a student who has moved schools.* Build a voice plan first, then write one opening sentence that proves each dial is set.

Model voice plan

- **Purpose:** to move the reader, gently — no tragedy, just loyalty.
- **Audience:** classmates; readers who know what it is to be waited for.
- **Form:** story opening, third person — but told from beside the dog, not above him.
- **Person and viewpoint:** third person, close to the dog; he cannot know why, only that.
- **Diction:** plain, warm words; nothing clever, because the dog is not clever.
- **Rhythm:** long, patient sentences — the waiting should feel like waiting.
- **Tone:** steady and a little sad, never sorry for itself.
- **Imagery:** sound and weather — the bell, the gate, the cold coming on.

Model opening sentences (one per dial)

- Person: *Biscuit did not know about moving houses; he knew about the gate.*
- Diction: *He sat the way he always sat, tail wrapped neat, ears up at every bell.*
- Rhythm: *The bell rang, and the yard emptied, and the children poured out laughing, and still he sat, because nobody had told him otherwise, and a promise was a promise.*
- Tone: *It was not a sad thing, not to him; it was just the job, and the job was waiting.*
- Imagery: *The gate clinked in the wind like it was asking a question he could not answer.*

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Match each dial (i–v) to its question (A–E).

- (i) Person and viewpoint — (ii) Diction — (iii) Sentence rhythm — (iv) Tone — (v) Imagery
(A) What attitude sounds through the words? — (B) Who speaks, and from where? — (C) What can the reader see, hear, smell, taste or touch? — (D) Which family of words does the speaker live in? — (E) How do the sentences move?

Q2. For each piece of evidence from Text A, name the dial at work (one each is enough).

- (a) “I am not.”
(b) “The bakery smells of yeast and burnt sugar”
(c) “quick, blind, ready”
(d) “She says crusts only sing when they are proud”
(e) “Come on.”

Q3. State whether each claim is true or false. If false, correct it.

- (a) A voice only needs to be sustained in the first paragraph.
(b) A formal news report can have a sustained voice.
(c) Changing a voice on purpose, with a new plan, is drift.
(d) Reading a draft aloud can help you hear where the voice breaks.
(e) Two texts with the same facts must have the same voice.

Q4. The school garden wins first prize at the town show. For each audience below, choose the most fitting voice from the list and give one reason.

Voices: *picture-book warmth* · *live-caller excitement* · *formal newsletter calm*

- (a) An assembly announcement to the whole school.
(b) A story read to the local kindergarten.
(c) A paragraph in the council’s monthly newsletter.

Q5. In the drifted paragraph of part 6: (a) quote the sentence that breaks the voice; (b) explain in two sentences why it does not belong; (c) rewrite it in the narrator’s voice.

Q6. Use the bar chart comparing Text A and Text B.

- (a) Which text uses more first-person words, and roughly how many?
(b) Which text relies on facts and numbers?
(c) A student says Text B has “no voice” because it has no sensory images. Use the chart to answer them.

Q7. You are performing Text A aloud to the class. Match each auditory feature (i–iv) to the effect you are aiming for (A–D).

- (i) Slower pace — (ii) A pause after “*Come on.*” — (iii) Stress on *not* in “I am *not*” — (iv) Warm tone
(A) Lets Nonna’s two words hang in the air like an order and an invitation at once. — (B) Tells the audience the narrator is proud and a little amused, not complaining. — (C) Gives the waking-up moment weight instead of rushing past it. — (D) Makes the whole piece sound like affection, even when the narrator grumbles.

Q8. Name two aesthetic features at work in this original line, and say what each does:

The flour rose like snow, and the snow settled on everything, and everything smelled of bread.

Un scaffolded

For the open questions below, marks follow the reasoning and the craft — plan shown, choices named, voice sustained, limits admitted — not the topic you choose.

Q9. Fill in a full voice plan (purpose, audience, form, person and viewpoint, five dial settings, proof of sustain) for this task: *write a one-minute spoken welcome for new students on their first day.*

Q10. Write the opening of a story (80–120 words) in a voice of your choice. Before you write, state the voice in one sentence. After you write, bold three places where a reader can see the voice at work, and name the dial for each.

Q11. Adapt the opening paragraph of Text A into a different form: a diary entry by Nonna herself, in her voice. Explain two choices you made to keep her voice steady while changing who speaks.

Q12. Speaking and listening, in pairs. One student performs Text A aloud, making two deliberate auditory choices (from pace, pitch, pause, stress, tone). The other listens, names the two choices they can hear, and says what each did to the voice. Swap roles with Text B. Report one observation each to the class.

Q13. Here is a draft opening with a drifting line. Run the sustain check: quote the drift, explain why it sounds like a stranger, and rewrite the paragraph so the voice holds.

The football hit the crossbar and bounced away, and our whole team groaned like one person. I could still hear it ringing ten seconds later. *Regular physical activity has been shown to improve concentration and wellbeing in school-aged students.* “Again!” called the coach. “Line up, again!”

Q14. Same event, two voices. The school fete is cancelled by a storm on the morning it was meant to open. Write it twice: once as a live announcement from the principal over the loudspeaker, once as a short news report for the school newsletter. Each version 60–80 words. Then write two sentences comparing how the two voices treat the same bad news.

Q15. Visual voice. Design (on paper or screen) a poster advertising the winning school garden from Q4 to the whole community. Make three visual choices — image, colour, lettering or layout — and write one sentence beside each explaining what it says about the voice of the poster.

Q16. The debate from part 4, in your own words. Write the strongest case you can for the view you **reject**, then the strongest case for the view you hold, then state what the rejected view still explains better than yours. Marks follow the reasoning: terms defined, evidence given, limits admitted.

Q17. Reading extension. Take one page from a novel or short story your class is reading. List three voice features you can quote, then judge: is the voice sustained across the whole page, or does it wobble anywhere? Give evidence for the judgement.

Q18. Reflection. After drafting and revising one piece in this section, write three or four sentences: what was the voice you planned, where did it drift first, and what did you change to bring it back?

Q19. Manipulating voice for humour. Take this formal notice and rewrite it in a wildly dramatic movie-trailer voice. Then explain in two sentences what the mismatch does — why swapping the voice makes it funny.

Notice: The library will close at 3.30 p.m. on Thursday for routine maintenance. Returned items may be placed in the after-hours box.

Q20. Capstone. Write a short piece (200–300 words) about someone doing a small job they take pride in. Any form — story, poem, monologue, letter, spoken text, or a mix. You must: (a) submit your voice plan with the piece; (b) sustain the planned voice from first line to last; (c) add a commentary of about 100 words explaining how your choices served your purpose and audience, and naming one place you fixed drift.

Answers

Q1. (i)–B; (ii)–D; (iii)–E; (iv)–A; (v)–C.

Q2. (a) Person and viewpoint (first person, inside the moment) — also rhythm: three words, wide awake. (b) Imagery — smell; the room becomes real to the senses. (c) Sentence rhythm — three one-word fragments, fast as the action; also diction, plain and physical. (d) Imagery and tone — personification borrowed from Nonna; affectionate, teasing warmth. (e) Diction — two plain words; also rhythm, a sentence with nothing spare.

Q3. (a) False — a voice must be sustained across the whole text, first line to last. (b) True — sustaining is about steadiness, not warmth; a report can hold its voice perfectly. (c) False — a deliberate change with a new plan is craft; drift is the accidental change. (d) True. (e) False — Texts A and B share the same facts and have opposite voices.

Q4. (a) Live-caller excitement — an assembly crowd wants the win announced with energy; short punchy rhythm carries in a big room. (b) Picture-book warmth — young children respond to repetition and big simple images like the ribbon-winning carrots. (c) Formal newsletter calm — ratepayers read for information; third person and measured sentences fit a council document.

Q5. (a) “Small businesses contribute significantly to the economic and social fabric of regional communities.” (b) The narrator is a teenager telling the story through small, sharp, sensory details; the marked sentence is abstract, impersonal and essay-shaped, so it sounds like a different speaker took over. The facts it offers are not the problem — the speaker is. (c) Model fix: *When the last loaf goes, Nonna says the street has eaten well.* (Any rewrite earns the mark if it keeps the short-beat rhythm, the concrete detail, and the habit of letting Nonna’s sayings do the talking.)

Q6. (a) Text A, with about three first-person words (*I, my, my*) against Text B’s zero. (b) Text B — dates, counts and formal naming carry its weight. (c) Text B has a voice — a steady third-person, fact-led reporting voice. The chart shows its weight sitting in the facts-and-formal-naming column rather than the imagery column. “No voice” would mean no consistent speaker at all; Text B’s choices are as consistent as Text A’s, only aimed at a different purpose.

Q7. (i)–C; (ii)–A; (iii)–B; (iv)–D.

Q8. Two of these are enough: repetition (*the flour... the snow... everything... everything*) builds a rolling rhythm that makes the moment feel like it keeps arriving; the simile (*rose like snow*) turns a kitchen into weather, so the scene feels large and quiet at once; sound pattern — the soft *s* and *l* sounds slow the line down; rhythm — three linked clauses in one long sentence float the reader through the room instead of stopping them.

Q9–Q20 (what to look for). **Q9** — every plan field filled with specific settings (“short, bright sentences”, not “good rhythm”); the proof of sustain names a check. **Q10** — voice stated before drafting; three bolded choices, each with a dial named; the voice holds across 80–120 words. **Q11** — the switch to Nonna’s first person is handled; two named choices (for example, keeping the *singing* echo, keeping the flour-as-proof saying) explain how her voice stays steady. **Q12** — two auditory choices named by the listener and matched to effects; observations link choice to voice. **Q13** — drift quoted (“Regular physical activity has been shown...”), explained as a speaker change, and replaced with a line in the narrator’s voice. **Q14** — both versions in the right voice for their audience; the spoken one carries feeling out loud, the written one reports it steadily; comparison names that difference. **Q15** — three visual choices, each with one sentence tying it to the voice; the palette and lettering agree. **Q16** — the rejected view is stated fairly and at full strength before being answered; the final sentence names what it still explains. **Q17** — three quoted features; a judgement with evidence, not just a list. **Q18** — plan, drift point and fix all named; honesty about where the voice slipped is worth more than a perfect story. **Q19** — the rewrite is recognisably the same information in a new voice; the explanation names the mismatch between occasion and voice as the source of humour. **Q20** — plan attached and specific; the piece sustains the planned voice; the commentary links choices to purpose and audience and names one repaired drift.

Fully-worked solutions

Q9. Model voice plan:

- **Purpose:** to settle the new students — to make the first day feel like arriving, not performing.
- **Audience:** new students (nervous) and continuing students (listening for the school's tone).
- **Form:** one-minute spoken welcome, delivered at an assembly.
- **Person and viewpoint:** first person plural — a student captain speaking as one of them, not down from a stage.
- **Diction:** everyday words, a few warm ones; no formal speech words.
- **Rhythm:** mostly short sentences with breathing room, one longer sentence that slows to land the welcome.
- **Tone:** calm and glad, never loud, never joking at anyone's expense.
- **Imagery:** the building and its small rituals — the gate, the bells, the canteen queue — things every student will meet this week.
- **Proof of sustain:** read it aloud once; every line must sound like something one student could say to another in the corridor.

Q10. Model opening (voice: *a nervous new student counting everything to stay calm*):

There are forty-two lockers in the Year 10 corridor. I counted them twice before I found mine. Thirty-one is the number — it sticks, the way my palms stick to my bag strap. Someone has already written *good luck* on the whiteboard inside Room 8, and I am trying to decide if that is for me or a joke, when the bell goes and every single person in the corridor starts moving like they were given the order at exactly the same time. Only me, standing still. Only me, counting.

Bolded choices: *There are forty-two lockers* — **diction and rhythm:** counting in numbers is the character's habit, and the plain counting words make it feel like a real compulsion, not a decoration. *my palms stick to my bag strap* — **imagery:** a touch detail carries the nerves without naming them. *Only me, standing still. Only me, counting.* — **rhythm and tone:** two short repeated fragments end the paragraph the way the voice began (counting, repetition), so first line and last line sound like the same speaker.

Q11. Model adaptation:

4 a.m. and the girl is awake before I reach her door. Good. The bakery smells the way it should — yeast doing its slow work, and the sugar taking the edge off. She watches me tie the apron and tries to copy me. She will learn. Flour on the bench, flour on my sleeve — I let her think it is messy, but it is proof. By six the loaves are singing. I always say that, and she has started saying it back, which means the word will outlive me. That is what a recipe is for.

Two choices explained: (1) the *singing* echo and the flour saying are kept, because they are Nonna's own phrases — the voice lives in them, and a switch of speaker is exactly the moment to prove they belong to her, not to the narrator; (2) her diction stays plain and verdict-shaped (*Good. She will learn. That is what a recipe is for.*) — short statements that sound like someone who has worked since dark — while the narrator's wonder is replaced by Nonna's steadiness, so the voice changes without breaking.

Q12. Reports will vary. A strong observation names the choice and its effect on the voice: for example, "She paused after *Come on.* and the two words hung there, so Nonna sounded gentle even though she was giving an order — the pause did that, not the words." For Text B, a strong observation notices the spoken register problem: the report's voice is flat and even on purpose, and a reader who performs it with feeling has to decide *which* feeling, because the text itself withholds it — that withholding is part of its voice.

Q13. Drift: “Regular physical activity has been shown to improve concentration and wellbeing in school-aged students.” It is abstract, source-shaped (“has been shown”) and spoken by nobody — the narrator is a player standing under the crossbar, still hearing it ring, and no one in that moment quotes a health study. Model rewrite:

The football hit the crossbar and bounced away, and our whole team groaned like one person. I could still hear it ringing ten seconds later. Ten seconds is a long time to stand under a bar that has just said no. “Again!” called the coach. “Line up, again!”

The replacement keeps the player’s viewpoint, the sound image (the bar “said no”), and the short-beat rhythm of the opening.

Q14. Model pair:

Loudspeaker, live: Morning, everyone — eyes this way. I have news, and not the kind I wanted. The storm has made the grounds unsafe, so today’s fete is cancelled. I know. I know. The stalls will wait, the cakes will wait, and the tug-of-war rope has gone back to sleep. Keep your tickets — they will honour them, and we will announce the new date by Friday. Walk safe, and be kind to whoever organised the coconut shy. That is all.

Newsletter report: The school fete scheduled for Saturday was cancelled after a storm made the grounds unsafe on the morning of the long-planned event. The school confirmed that all tickets remain valid and that a new date will be announced by Friday. Organisers thanked families for their preparation work and asked stall holders to collect any remaining goods from the school hall by Wednesday.

Comparison: the spoken voice lets the disappointment be heard — *I know. I know.* — and spends words on feeling, because a crowd needs its mood managed out loud; the newsletter voice reports the same facts evenly, because its audience reads alone and needs the information, not the comfort. Both are honest; only one of them sighs.

Q15. Model poster choices:

- **Image:** a real photo of muddy hands holding one giant carrot — says *this really happened, and real students did it*; a drawn cartoon would have made the win feel like a joke.
- **Colour:** a palette of soil-brown and leaf-green with one ribbon-blue — says *garden first, prize second*; the single blue keeps the eye on the win without shouting.
- **Lettering:** even, printed letters for the facts, one hand-written line — *grown right here* — at the bottom — says *the work was careful and the pride is personal*; the mix of voices is the poster’s voice.

Q16. Model answer:

The strongest case for “found” is that readers can smell effort: writing that tries too hard to have a voice usually has none, and the texts people trust most often sound like someone simply talking. There is truth there that my view has to admit — no plan can manufacture honesty, and a writer performing a voice often loses to a writer telling the truth in their own words. I still hold the “made” view, because voice as we meet it in texts is built from choices we can list — person, diction, rhythm, tone, imagery — and one writer can build many voices, which a single “true self” cannot explain. But the rejected view names the limit of mine: technique can build a convincing voice, yet only honesty makes it worth hearing.

Notice the shape: the rejected view first, at full strength, with a genuine concession; then the held view with evidence; then the honest limit. That order is worth marks wherever the conclusion lands.

Q17. Responses depend on the chosen page. Credit: three quoted features, each named (a repeated word, a rhythm shift, an image, a tone word); a judgement with evidence — for example, “the voice holds until the dialogue on the second half of the page, where the character starts sounding like the narrator instead of herself, which is a wobble, because...”

Q18. Model reflection:

My planned voice was a tired lifeguard telling the story of one quiet afternoon in short, sun-hot sentences. It drifted first in the middle, where I started describing the pool’s history — suddenly the voice sounded like a brochure. I cut the whole paragraph and replaced it with two things the lifeguard would actually

notice: the deep end's cold patch against a knee, and the whistle drying on its peg. The first and last lines both count swimmers now, so they sound like the same person.

Q19. Model rewrite:

In a world... where books grow restless... one library must fall. THIS THURSDAY. 3.30 P.M. The doors close. The maintenance begins. But hope survives — in the after-hours box. Your returns... will be waiting.

The humour comes from mismatch: the occasion is tiny (an early closing) and the voice is enormous (a movie trailer announcing the fate of the world). Voice works by fitting purpose; comedy often works by breaking the fit on purpose, and the joke is exactly the distance between the two. The information survives the swap intact — which proves the voice and the facts are separate things.

Q20. Model piece — *The Cart* (voice plan first):

Voice plan. Purpose: to honour an unnoticed job, gently and with a smile. Audience: classmates — people who walk past the library cart every day. Form: short monologue from a student who watches. Person: first person, watcher at the edge of the library. Diction: everyday words with a few grand ones, as if the cart deserves ceremony. Rhythm: long listing sentences that pile up like the cart, then one short line to land. Tone: warm, mock-serious, proud on someone else's behalf. Imagery: the cart itself — metal, weight, the sticky book. Proof of sustain: first line and last line both about the cart, both in the watcher's voice.

People think the library runs on books. It runs on Mrs Okonkwo and a grey metal cart.

Every lunchtime the cart comes back loaded: paperbacks face down, spines cracked, one novel always sticky with something nobody will ever explain. Most people see a mess. Mrs Okonkwo sees a route. She sorts without looking, shelf stacks building in her arms like she is dealing cards in a game only she knows the rules of. Then she moves into the aisles, and the cart follows her, squeaking one wheel, the way it has squeaked since before we were born.

I have timed her once. Four minutes from full to empty. Four minutes, and the shelves look like nobody ever touched them, which is the whole magic — a job done so well it disappears. She never announces it. She parks the cart, lines its wheels straight with the floor tiles, and goes back to the desk.

Some jobs get applause. Some get a trophy. Hers gets a squeaky wheel and four minutes and a library that never knows what it owes her.

So this is me, knowing. This is me, saying it out loud once: the cart, Mrs Okonkwo, and the quietest perfect job in this school.

Commentary. My purpose was to honour a job nobody notices, so I chose a watcher's voice — first person, at the edge of the scene, proud on someone else's behalf. The mock-serious tone (*People think the library runs on books*) gives a small job ceremony without laughing at it, and the long piling sentences copy the cart loading up before one short line lands. My drift came in the draft's middle, where I wrote a paragraph about library funding — an essay voice, nobody's voice — and I cut it for the four-minute detail, which the watcher could actually have timed. The squeaky wheel returns twice, first and last third, so the voice keeps its own echo, the way Text A keeps *singing*.

Section 3F · English 10 · Curriculum reference: VC2E10LE06, drawing on VC2E10LE06.E01 and VC2E10LE06.E02. Builds on VC2E9LE06 (Level 9). All stories, reports, notices, plans and model responses in this section were written for this book.