

English Level 8

Chapter 3 — the Literature spine

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Ideas, issues and points of view in literary texts from diverse contexts, and the values they represent

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English (VCAA), Level 8. This section owns **VC2E8LE01**: students learn to “explain the ways that ideas, issues and points of view in literary texts drawn from diverse historical, cultural and social contexts ... may represent the values of individuals and groups”. Strand: Literature; sub-strand: Literature and contexts. Per this book’s scope decision D3, the section is delivered through the neutral half of the content description — literary texts from diverse historical, cultural and social contexts by a wide range of **Australian and world authors**; the front-of-book note records what is not taught. Draws on elaboration **VC2E8LE01.E01**: “discussing representations of characters from historical contexts in literary texts; for example, discussing the romantic representation of the Australian swagman and the values it reflects”; and **VC2E8LE01.E02**: “explaining attitudes and ideas about the natural world in literary texts drawn from contexts different to their own” (delivered here in neutral cultural contexts). The level’s Reading and Viewing standard names the skill: students “identify and explain ... issues and points of view from diverse historical, cultural and social contexts”. Coming in, students have met texts from different contexts and explored the ideas and points of view in them (**VC2E7LE01**); the step up here is from *explore* to *explain how* those ideas represent values. At Level 9, **VC2E9LE01** picks this up as the analysis of representations of people and places in texts from diverse contexts.

About the sources in this section. The passages labelled (**sample text**) were written for this book. They exist so you can practise the skill on texts you can see in full. The section also names real, checkable works — a poem, a ballad, novels and a haiku — with their authors and dates. One short quotation from a real work is included, with its source line. In your own writing about texts, always name the works you mean and quote them exactly.

Theory

1. Literary texts and their contexts

A **literary text** is a text written with close attention to language itself — to how the words are shaped and what they make a reader feel. Novels, short stories, poems, picture books, plays and ballads are literary texts. A text message is not.

Every literary text comes from somewhere and somewhen. That somewhere-and-somewhen is its **context** — the time, place and social world the text was written in, and the time, place and social world it represents. Context comes in three kinds this section keeps apart:

- **Historical context** — *when*. The time the text was written and the time it is set in: the 1890s Australian bush, a city in 1947, a drought year, a winter blackout.
- **Cultural context** — *whose ways of life*. The languages, customs, stories and daily habits of the people in the text: a herding family on the grasslands of Mongolia, a poet in 17th-century Japan, a girl growing up in a busy city street.
- **Social context** — *how people live together*. Family shapes, work, money, and the roles people are given: neighbours who never speak, a town split over a dam, a father who gives his seeds away.

The three contexts of a literary text

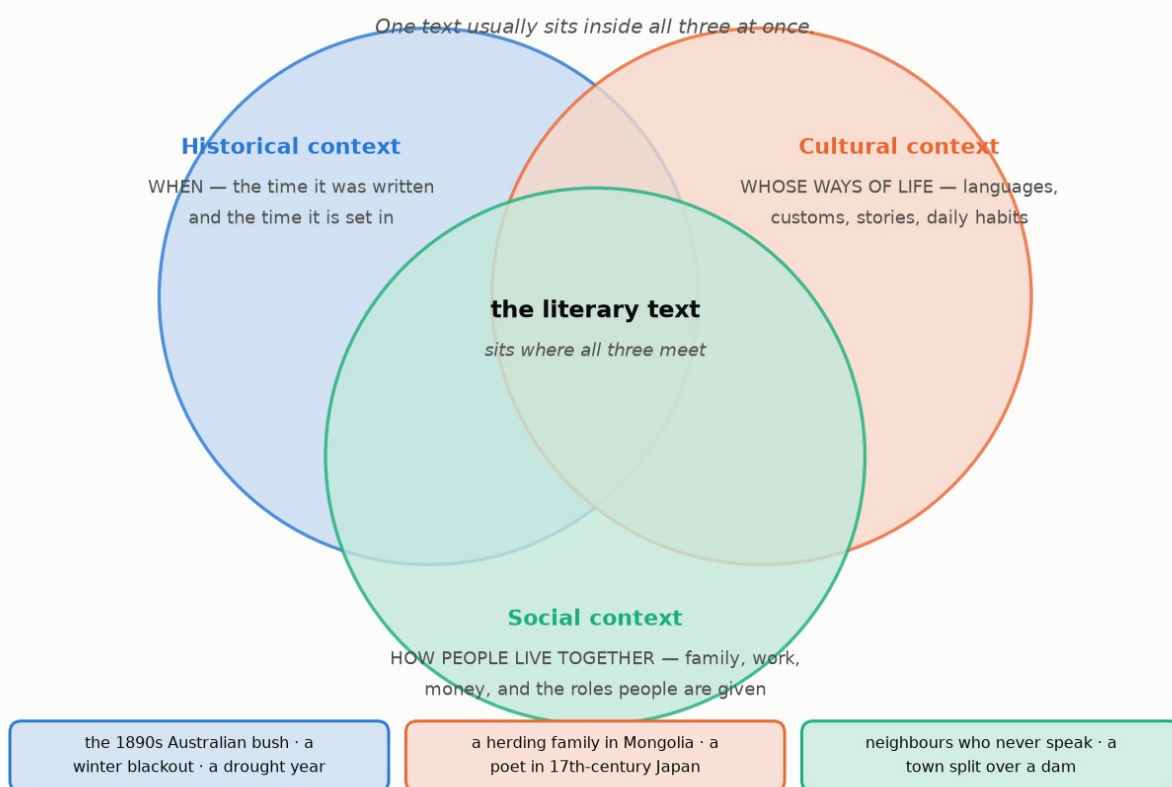


Diagram of three overlapping circles labelled historical context (when), cultural context (whose ways of life) and social context (how people live together), with the literary text sitting where all three overlap

One text usually sits inside all three at once, and a change of context often changes the story a text can tell. A poem about water written in a dry inland town and a poem about water written in a rainy coastal city are not likely to say the same thing — because their contexts are not the same.

2. Ideas, issues and points of view

Three more terms do the work of this section. Each is defined at first use and used that way throughout:

Term	Meaning in this section	Example
idea	a big thought a text is working on — something the text keeps turning over	<i>Home is more than a building.</i>
issue	a question or problem the text raises that people could genuinely disagree about	<i>Is it ever right to break a law?</i>
point of view	(a) whose eyes and voice the story comes through — which character speaks or watches; (b) the position the text seems to take on its issue	A story told by the youngest child; a ballad that seems to side with the swagman
values	what a person or group treats as worth having, keeping or doing — what they hold to matter most	freedom, fairness, family, hard work, care for the land

Notice what separates an **idea** from an **issue**. An idea is a thought the text explores; an issue is a live question the text opens, one with at least two sides a reasonable person could take. Strong literary texts often do both at once: they turn an idea over *and* leave the issue open for the reader to judge.

The key terms of this section

Each term is defined at first use in the section and keeps this meaning throughout.

Term	Meaning in this section	Example
Literary text	a text written with close attention to language itself — how the words are shaped and what they make a reader feel	novel, poem, ballad, picture book, play
Context	the time, place and social world a text comes from and represents	the 1890s Australian bush; 17th-century Japan; a winter blackout in a city tower
Idea	a big thought a text is working on — something it keeps turning over	Home is more than a building.
Issue	a live question the text raises that people could genuinely disagree about	Is it ever right to break a law?
Point of view	(a) whose eyes and voice the story comes through; (b) the position the text seems to take on its issue	told through Tom's eyes, and leaning towards his father's side
Values	what a person or group treats as worth having, keeping or doing — what they hold to matter most	freedom, fairness, family, hard work, care for the land
Represent	to build a version of the world through chosen detail — a text never copies life whole	the word jolly tells you to like the swagman before he has done anything

Table defining the key terms of this section — *literary text, context, idea, issue, point of view, values and representation* — each with its meaning and an example

3. Values: the term this section keeps testing

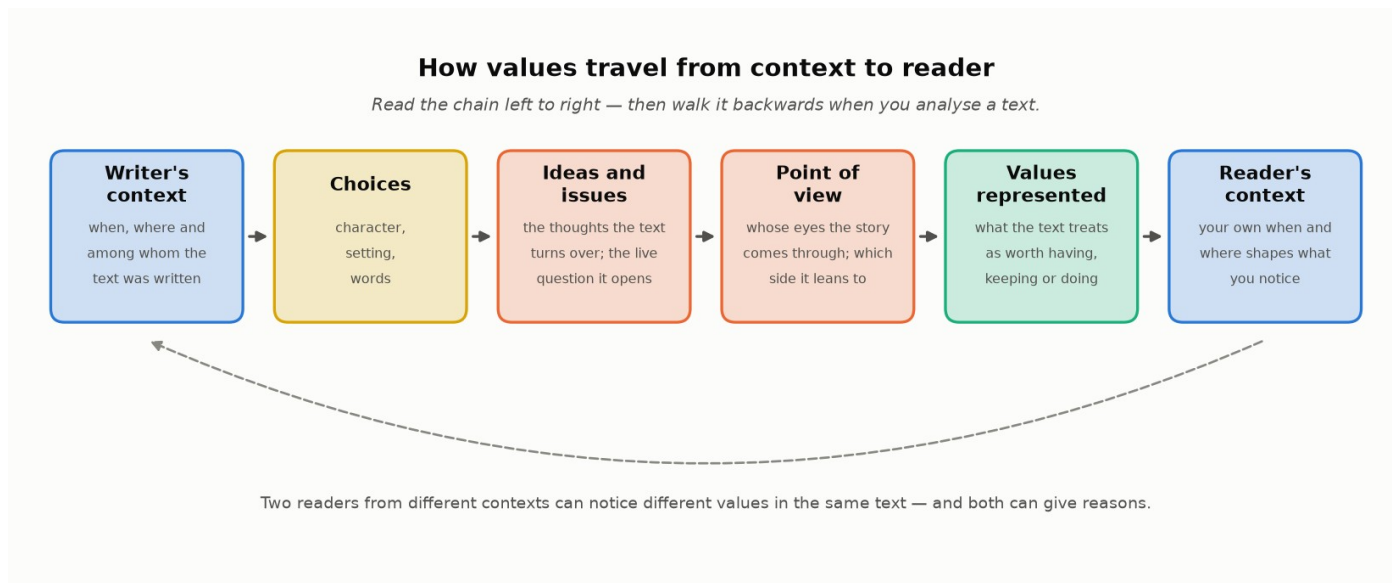
Defining the term. The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *values* but does not define it. The word is also the kind of word people genuinely disagree about — not a measurable word like *mass* with one fixed meaning, but a contested one. This section therefore treats *values* as **the things a person or group treats as worth having, keeping or doing — what they hold to matter most**, and every question in this section is answerable on that definition alone. Readers may disagree about which values matter most; that disagreement is not a problem to solve but exactly what this section asks you to trace in texts.

Values can belong to **individuals** (one character's loyalty, one poet's love of quiet) or to **groups** (a family's habit of sharing, a town's pride in hard work, a culture's care for the land). When a text represents a character or a group, it almost always represents some of their values with them — through what the characters do, what they say, what they notice and what the text seems to admire or question.

Values are not printed on the page in one neat line. They are *represented* — shown through choices. That word needs its own definition: to **represent** is to build a version of the world through chosen detail. A text never copies life whole; it selects which person to show, which words to use, which moment to end on. Every one of those choices is a place where values can enter a text — and a place where you can go looking for them.

4. How values travel from context to reader

The path runs in one direction, and you can walk it backwards when you read:



Chain diagram: a writer's context leads to choices of character, setting and words; the choices carry ideas and issues; the ideas and issues take a point of view; the point of view represents values; a reader's own context shapes what they notice — with a return arrow from the reader back to the text

1. **A writer's context** — when, where and among whom the text was written — shapes what the writer thinks stories are for and which values feel worth writing about.
2. **The writer makes choices** — which character to follow, where to set the story, which words to put in whose mouth.
3. **Those choices carry ideas and issues** — the thoughts and live questions of the text.
4. **The text takes a point of view** — through whose eyes the story is told, and which side of its issue the text seems to lean towards.
5. **Together these represent values** — of the characters, of the groups in the text, and often of the world the writer comes from.
6. **Your own context meets the text.** You read from your own when, where and among-whom. Two readers from different contexts can read the same text and notice different values in it — and both can give reasons.

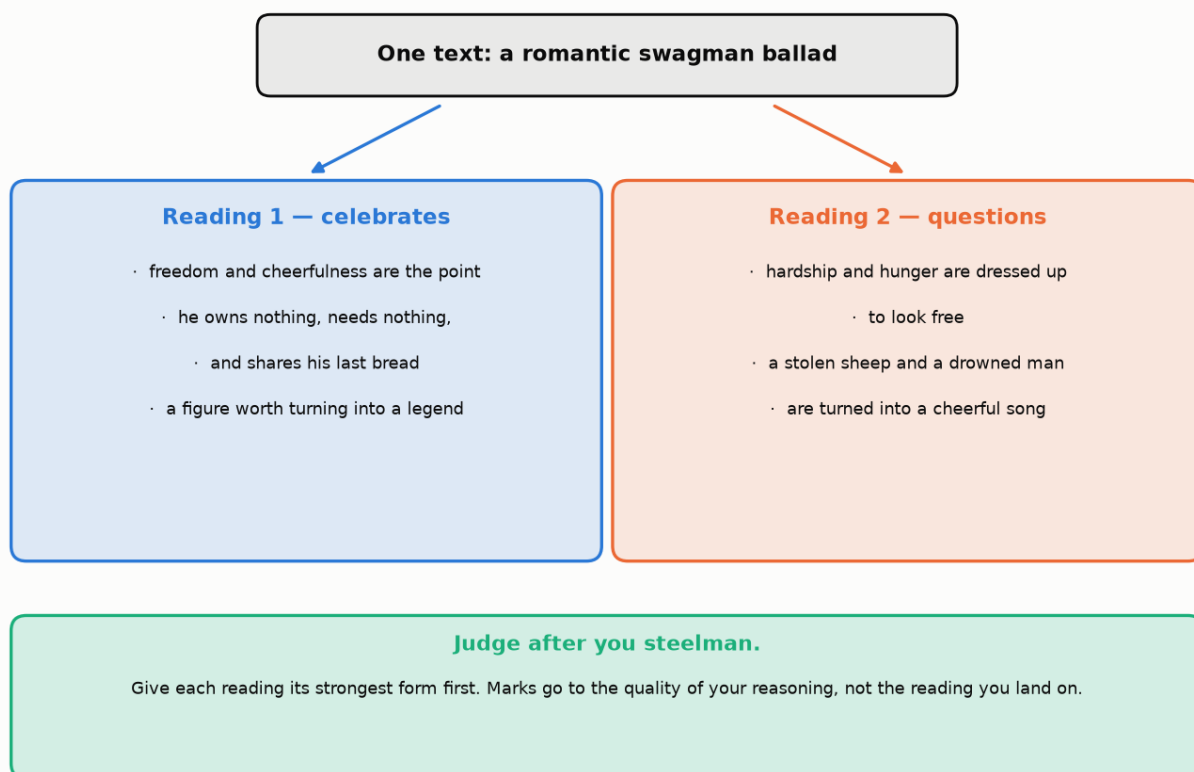
That last point is the engine of this section. When a text seems to praise a value you do not share, or question one you do, your job is not to agree or disagree at once. Your job is to explain *how* the text represents the value — and then to judge it on its reasons.

5. Two readings, one text: judging with reasons

Some texts are written so that readers can take two strong readings of them. The romantic bush ballads of the 1890s are a good example: one reading celebrates the free, cheerful swagman; another asks what the cheerful picture leaves out. When that happens, this book's rule is to put each reading in its **strongest form** before you judge between them — to give each side the best reasons its own supporters would give, not a weak version that is easy to knock down. Marks in this section go to the quality of your reasoning, never to the reading you land on: two students who reach opposite conclusions can both earn full marks if both argue from defined terms and stated evidence.

One text, two readings

A romantic swagman ballad, 1890s Australia — readers can take two strong readings of it.



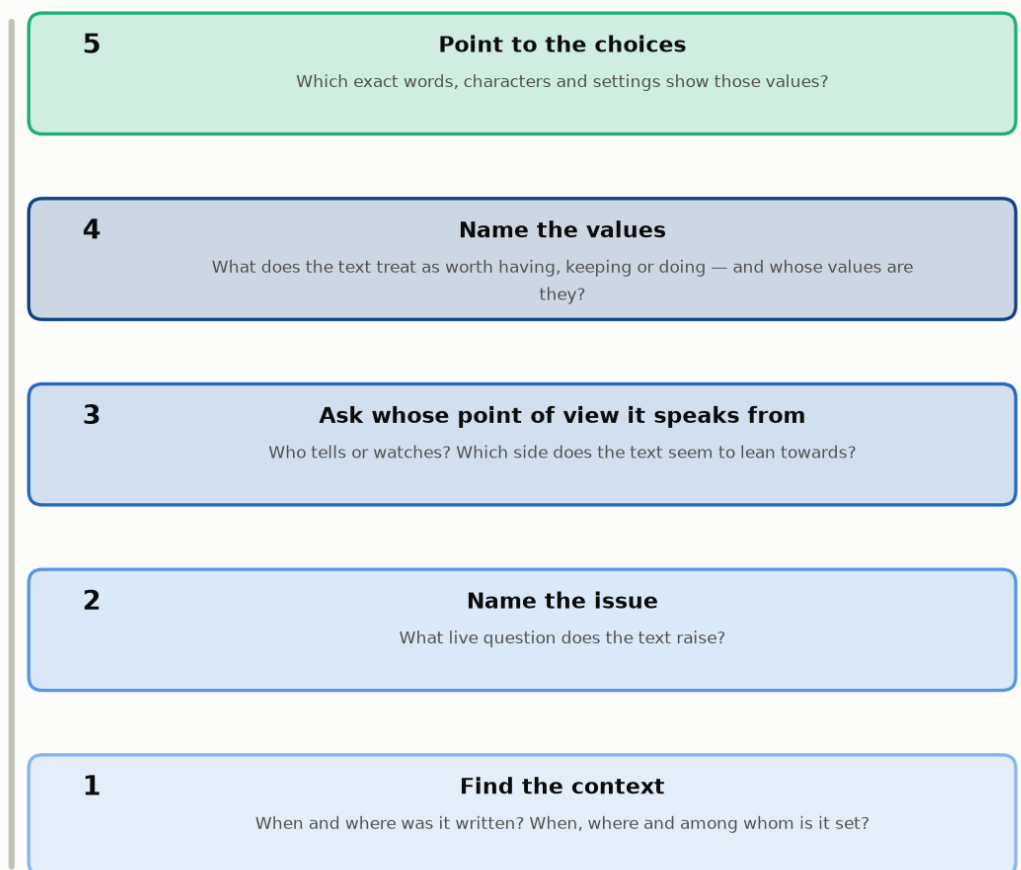
Split diagram of one text read two ways: on the left a reading that celebrates the swagman's freedom and cheerfulness, on the right a reading that questions what the cheerful picture leaves out, each side stated in its strongest form

6. The reading ladder

When you read any literary text for its values, climb the same five rungs in the same order:

The reading ladder

Climb the five rungs in order when you read any literary text for its values.



A value you cannot point to in the text is a guess, not a reading.

Checklist drawn as a ladder with five rungs: find the context, name the issue, ask whose point of view the text speaks from, name the values represented, and point to the exact choices — words, characters, setting — that show them

1. **Find the context.** When and where was it written? When, where and among whom is it set?
2. **Name the issue.** What live question does the text raise?
3. **Ask whose point of view it speaks from.** Who tells or watches? Which side does the text seem to lean towards?
4. **Name the values.** What does the text seem to treat as worth having, keeping or doing — and whose values are they?
5. **Point to the choices.** Which exact words, characters and settings show those values? A value you cannot point to in the text is a guess, not a reading.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Context: the Australian swagman, 1890s. A **swagman** was a worker who walked the Australian countryside in the late 1800s carrying his **swag** — a bedroll of canvas and blankets — looking for work as he went. In the songs and stories of the 1890s he became a romantic figure: footloose, cheerful, answerable to no one. Read the sample passage below, written for this book in that romantic style. Then follow the table, which takes the passage's choices apart one by one.

The Sundowner (sample text)

The swagman came down the track with the sun on his back and a song on his lips. Everything he owned rode in a roll of canvas on his shoulder — a blanket, a tin cup, and the heel of yesterday's loaf. By the billabong he made his camp, lit a small fire, and boiled his billy while the stars came out one by one. No boss told him when to rise; no clock told him when to rest. When a stranger sat down by his fire, he split the last of his bread without a word. "The road's long," he said, "but it's free." In the morning he shouldered his swag and walked on, leaving nothing behind but the ashes of his fire and the tune of his song.

*Glossary: a **billabong** is a still pool of water beside a river; a **billy** is a tin can boiled over a campfire for tea.*

Reading The Sundowner for values

A romantic picture of the 1890s Australian swagman — each choice carries a value.

Choice in the text	What it suggests	Value represented
a song on his lips; the tune of his song	a man with so little is still cheerful and singing	cheerfulness; joy in little
Everything he owned rode in a roll of canvas	he owns almost nothing and needs almost nothing	freedom from things; independence
No boss told him when to rise; no clock told him when to rest	no one commands his time	freedom; answerability to himself alone
he split the last of his bread without a word	he shares his last food with a stranger, without fuss or pride	generosity; looking after strangers
The road's long ... but it's free.	he names freedom as worth more than comfort	freedom as the highest value

Every rung of the ladder answered: context, issue, point of view, values — and the choices that show them.

Table reading the sample text The Sundowner for values: five choices in the text — the song on his lips, the roll of canvas on his shoulder, no boss and no clock, the last of the bread shared with a stranger, and the words 'The road's long, but it's free' — each with what it suggests and the value it represents, from cheerfulness and independence to freedom as the highest value

Every rung of the ladder is answered by that table. **Context:** the 1890s Australian bush (historical), the bush workers' way of life (cultural), a lone man with no fixed work or home (social). **Issue:** is this free life something to admire — or does the cheerful picture hide hardship and law-breaking? **Point of view:** the passage watches the swagman from outside and leans towards admiration. **Values:** freedom, independence, generosity. **Choices:** the five rows above.

The real texts behind this example. The most famous romantic swagman in Australian writing opens a ballad by A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson:

"Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong." Source: A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson, 'Waltzing Matilda' (1895). (Public domain in Australia; retrieved 24 August 2026.)

A **ballad** is a story told in verse, usually in strong rhythm and made to be sung or recited. One word does the romantic work in that line: *jolly*. Before the swagman has done anything at all, the word tells the reader to like him. In

Paterson's ballad the swagman takes a sheep for food, and when the police come for him he jumps into the billabong and drowns rather than be taken. The ballad's last lines say his ghost is still heard at that water — the story turns a man who broke the law into a legend, and that choice tells you exactly which side of the issue the ballad leans on.

Not every writer of the 1890s agreed. In the poem 'Up the Country' (1892), Henry Lawson wrote back against the romantic picture: his bush is drought, loneliness and grinding, tiring work — a place that wears people down rather than sets them free. The two poets argued their positions in public, in the pages of the Sydney magazine *The Bulletin*, in a debate that ran through the early 1890s. Same context, same subject — two points of view, and two sets of values.

Example 2 — unscaffolded

Context: attitudes to the natural world, from a context different to your own. Remember: at Level 7 you explored ideas and points of view in texts from contexts different to your own; here you explain how those ideas represent values. Read the sample passage below, set among a herding family in Mongolia. (A **ger** is a round tent covered with felt; the **steppe** is the wide, near-flat grassland country of Mongolia.) Then, without any table to help you, answer the four questions that follow.

The Wind Lesson (sample text)

Sarnai helped her grandmother count the sheep each morning before the sun cleared the hills. The family lived in a ger on the wide steppe, with grass running in every direction and no fence in sight. That morning the sky to the west had turned into a hard grey line. Her grandmother stopped counting and watched it, one hand resting on the roof pole of the ger. "The wind is changing," she said. "We move the herd to the shelter of the hill before noon." Sarnai asked why they could not simply wait and see. Her grandmother pointed at the clouds racing above the slow grass. "We do not fight the weather," she said. "We read it, and we get ready. The steppe takes care of us — but only if we take care first."

1. Identify the context of the passage: one historical or cultural detail and one social detail.
2. What attitude towards the natural world does the passage represent?
3. Name two values represented in it, and say whose values they are.
4. Point to two exact choices in the passage — words, characters or setting — that show those values.

Work out your own answer first, then check it against the model in the fully-worked solutions.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Sorting contexts. Each detail below comes from one of the three kinds of context. Sort them into historical, cultural and social.

- (a) Set in the years just after 1945, when many new families arrived in Australia from Europe.
- (b) A herding family reads the weather and moves the herd before a storm.
- (c) Neighbours in a tower block have lived beside one another for years without speaking.
- (d) A poet in 17th-century Japan writes about a frog and an old pond.
- (e) A town divides over whether to dam its river.
- (f) A girl walks to school through streets where everyone greets each other by name.

Q2. Matching actions to values. Each action below comes from a sample text. Match it to the value it most clearly represents, from this bank: *freedom · generosity · hard work · care for the land · family loyalty · fairness*.

- (a) A character gives half her lunch to a student who has none.
- (b) A character walks out of a job rather than lie about a friend.
- (c) A character spends every weekend repairing the creek bank after floods.
- (d) A character turns down a better-paid job in another city to stay near her parents.

- (e) A character insists the prize be shared because both teams did the work.
- (f) A character packs everything she owns into one bag and takes the open road.

Q3. One issue, two points of view. The town of Redgum is split over a plan to dam the river above the town. Two residents speak at the town meeting (sample text).

Resident A: “A dam means stored water for the dry years. A town that can water its own crops can face any drought with its head up.”

Resident B: “That river has run free for longer than this town has stood. Dam it, and everything downstream changes — the fish, the birds, and every family that lives by the banks.”

- (a) Name one value behind Resident A’s statement, and one behind Resident B’s.
- (b) Each statement rests on an assumption — something taken for granted. Name one assumption for each.
- (c) Which statement do you find stronger, and why? Give the other side its best one-sentence answer before you decide.

Q4. Pointing to the choices. Here are three sentences from a sample text about a new neighbourhood (sample text). For each, say which value the choice seems to represent and how you know.

- (a) “Mrs Otieno set an extra plate at her table every night, in case someone knocked.”
- (b) “The street was finished last, after every other street in the estate had been sealed.”
- (c) “He counted the coins twice, put the smaller pile back in his pocket, and paid for the milk anyway.”

Q5. Real texts, real contexts. Match each real work below to (i) its context and (ii) the value or attitude it most clearly turns on. Contexts and values may be used once only.

Works: (1) ‘Waltzing Matilda’, A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson (1895). (2) The frog haiku of Matsuo Bashō (Japan, 1686) — a **haiku** is a very short Japanese poem, usually about a moment in the natural world. (3) *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros (1984). (4) *A Long Walk to Water*, Linda Sue Park (2010).

Contexts: (A) a girl growing up in a poor, busy city neighbourhood in the United States · (B) the Australian bush of the 1890s · (C) 17th-century Japan · (D) Sudan, across two time periods, following children whose lives turn on the search for water.

Values/attitudes: (i) freedom and independence · (ii) hope and holding on through hardship · (iii) still, close attention to small moments in the natural world · (iv) home, family and the dream of a place of one’s own.

Q6. Two readings of the swagman. The romantic reading of the swagman celebrates freedom and cheerfulness; a questioning reading asks what the cheerful picture leaves out — hardship, hunger, and, in ‘Waltzing Matilda’, a stolen sheep. Copy the table below and complete it, giving each reading its strongest form before you judge.

	Romantic reading	Questioning reading
One value this reading admires or looks for		
One thing this reading says the other leaves out		
Its strongest one-sentence case		

Which reading do you find more convincing for ‘Waltzing Matilda’? Give one reason that a supporter of the other reading would have to answer.

Unscaffolded

Q7. Read the sample passage below, then climb the reading ladder: context, issue, point of view, values, choices. Write your answers as five numbered points.

The Seed Tin (sample text)

In the autumn of 1947, Tom's father carried the seed tin to the fence and stood there a long time, looking next door. The new family had arrived from Italy the week before, with two chairs, a mattress and nothing planted. Tom watched his father open the tin — their tin, the one saved through the war years — and pour half of it into a newspaper cone. "Dad," Tom said, "we worked for those." His father folded the cone shut. "So did they, somewhere. And seeds are like that, Tom. They only keep if you plant them. So does kindness." The next morning the newspaper cone sat on the new family's doorstep, and by the weekend two gardens grew where one had stood.

Q8. Two short passages, two contexts, one subject: water (sample texts).

- (a) In Karringull the tank water was counted like coins. Children learned the rule before they learned to read: the shower is short, the tap is shut, and the rain tank is checked every Sunday without fail.
- (b) In the city where Eli lived, rain was just noise on the roof and the tap never stopped. He was fourteen before he ever thought about where water comes from — and that was only because the storm took the roof off the school hall.

Explain how each context shapes a different attitude to water, and name the value each passage seems to represent. Then say which attitude a reader from your own context is more likely to share, and why.

Q9. Two attitudes to the natural world (sample texts).

- (a) Before sunrise, the farmer walked the line of the sky with his eyes, the way his father had and his father's father before him. A red edge meant wind by ten. A green tint meant rain before the cows were in. The weather was not a friend and not an enemy; it was a test, and a man met it prepared or not at all.
- (b) Mia had never seen snow. When the bus crested the hill and the high country came up white on both sides, she pressed both hands to the glass and forgot to breathe. At the first stop she ran into it with her mouth open, catching flakes on her tongue, while the guide laughed and told her it had been falling for a million years.

Compare the attitude towards the natural world in each passage. Name one value represented in each, and explain one word choice in each passage that shows it.

The figure below puts three of this section's natural-world texts side by side — the frog haiku of Matsuo Bashō, The Wind Lesson, and the farmer's sky from Q9 (a). Use it to check your own answers to Q5 and Q9 once you have written them, and to help you choose a passage for Q10.

Three texts, three attitudes to the natural world

The same subject, read from three contexts — different values come into view.

Text (from this section)	Attitude to the natural world	A choice that shows it
The frog haiku of Matsuo Bashō (Japan, 1686)	still, close attention — a small moment in nature is worth pausing for	the poem ends on the sound of water and adds no comment
The Wind Lesson, a herding family in Mongolia (sample text)	the weather is a power to read and get ready for; the land takes care of people if people take care first	"We do not fight the weather. We read it, and we get ready."
The farmer's sky, a farming family (sample text)	the weather is a test to be met prepared — not a friend and not an enemy	the skill is handed down: "the way his father had and his father's father before him"

Different contexts teach different ways of seeing the same sky, the same grass, the same water.

Table comparing three texts and their attitudes to the natural world: the frog haiku of Matsuo Bashō, Japan 1686, the Mongolian herding sample text The Wind Lesson, and the farming family sample text from Q9 — each with the attitude it represents and one choice in the text that shows it

Q10. Choose any one sample passage from this section — The Sundowner, The Wind Lesson, The Seed Tin, the two water passages or the two natural-world passages. Write one paragraph of five to eight sentences explaining how it represents the values of an individual or a group. Your paragraph must name the context, name at least one value, and quote at least one exact group of words from the passage.

Product task — analytic response

Read the sample passage below, written for this book.

The Night the Lights Went Out (sample text)

The blackout hit the tower at seven o'clock on a winter night. The lifts stopped, the screens went dark, and for a minute nobody moved. Then doors opened one by one, and torch beams appeared in the hallway like slow fireflies. Maya followed her mother up the stairs. On the fourth floor they found Mr Chen from next door sharing candles with the family above. On the sixth, someone had laid out biscuits and a flask of tea on the landing. "I have lived beside these people for six years," her mother said quietly, "and tonight is the first time I have seen them." Maya played cards with two children she had never met, by candlelight, while the grown-ups talked in low, easy voices. When the lights came back at ten, the doors began to close again. But the next morning Maya said good morning to Mr Chen by name — and he said hers back. The tower was the same tower. She was not the same neighbour.

Part A. Climb the reading ladder in a table of your own: (1) the context — one historical detail, one cultural detail and one social detail; (2) the issue the passage raises; (3) whose point of view the story is told from, and which side of the issue the text leans towards; (4) two values represented, and whose values they are; (5) two exact choices of words that show those values.

Part B. Write your analytic response: one extended paragraph, or two, explaining how the passage represents the values of individuals and groups. Use at least two short quotations from the passage, each worked into your own sentences with a lead-in, and say what each quotation shows. Build the response layer by layer, from the ground up:

Scaffold for your analytic response

Build from the ground up — each layer supports the one above it.

6

Meet the other reading

Give the strongest reading that disagrees with yours — then judge.

5

Tie it to the value

Show how the choice represents what the text treats as worth having, keeping or doing.

4

Explain what it suggests

Say what the choice means — do not leave the quotation to speak alone.

3

Quote a choice

Bring in the exact words of the text, worked into your own sentence.

2

Place the context

Give the when, where and among-whom the text needs.

1

Name the values

Say what the text represents, and whose values they are — an individual's, a group's, or both.

The ground: the terms of this section, used exactly as they are defined.

Scaffold of six layers for an analytic response, built from the ground up: name the values, place the context, quote a choice, explain what it suggests, tie it to the value, and meet the other reading before you judge — standing on the terms of this section, used exactly as they are defined

Part C. In three sentences, reflect on your reading: (1) name one reader from a different context — for example, a reader from a small farming town where everyone already knows everyone — who might read this blackout in another way from you, and say what they might notice; (2) give the strongest reading that disagrees with yours; (3) say how you kept your answer fair to that reading.

Marks for this task go to the quality of your reasoning — terms used as they are defined in this section, evidence quoted from the passage, and the link between evidence and value clearly explained — not to which reading you land on. Two students reaching opposite conclusions can both earn full marks.

Answers

Q1. Historical: (a), (d). Cultural: (b), (d) — note that (d) carries both a historical and a cultural detail; if you placed it under cultural for the poet's way of life, that is right too. Social: (c), (e), (f).

Q2. (a) generosity · (b) family loyalty — or friendship, if you argued the friend was like family; the bank's nearest fit is family loyalty · (c) care for the land · (d) family loyalty · (e) fairness · (f) freedom.

Q3. (a) Resident A leans on planning, hard work and providing for the town; Resident B leans on care for the river and for the living things and families that depend on it. (b) Sample assumptions: A assumes the dry years will come and that stored water is the answer; B assumes a free river is worth more to the town than stored water, or that the changes downstream cannot be fixed. (c) Answers will vary; the side that earns the mark is the one that gives the other side its strongest answer first.

Q4. (a) Generosity and welcome — the extra plate is set *before* anyone knocks, so the kindness is a habit, not a reaction. (b) Fairness questioned or absent — the street is finished last, which suggests its people are treated as least important. (c) Honesty doing hard work — the smaller pile going back in the pocket shows he pays what he owes even when it costs him.

Q5. (1)–(B)–(i) · (2)–(C)–(iii) · (3)–(A)–(iv) · (4)–(D)–(ii).

Q6. Sample completions. Value admired or looked for: romantic — freedom, cheerfulness, independence; questioning — honesty about hardship, and respect for the people the bush was hard on. What the other leaves out: the romantic reading leaves out hunger, danger and the broken law (the stolen sheep); the questioning reading can leave out the real appeal of freedom and the ballad's warmth. Strongest case: romantic — “A man who needs nothing and shares what he has is the freest person in the story.” Questioning — “A story that sings about a stolen sheep and a drowned man as if they were a joke is hiding the costs it names.” Judgement answers will vary; the one to beat is the one that meets the other side's best sentence.

Q7–Q10, Example 2, product task. These are written responses. Full model answers are in the fully-worked solutions. Check yours against the reading ladder: context named, issue stated, point of view identified, values named, and exact choices pointed to.

Fully-worked solutions

Example 2 — model check.

1. *Context:* cultural — a herding family on the Mongolian steppe, living in a ger and moving the herd with the weather; social — knowledge passes from grandmother to granddaughter, and the family works as one unit. (Historically, this way of life has run for many generations.)
2. *Attitude to the natural world:* the weather and the land are not enemies to fight and not servants to command. They are powers to read, respect and get ready for — and the land “takes care of us” only when people take care first.
3. *Values:* preparedness and care (reading the sky, moving the herd early) and respect for the land (“we do not fight the weather”). They are the grandmother's values, passed on as the family's values.
4. *Choices:* “We do not fight the weather. We read it, and we get ready” — the grandmother's own words state the attitude directly; “the clouds racing above the slow grass” — the image sets human hurry against the land's own pace and shows that the weather moves first and people must answer.

Why this model works: every rung of the ladder is answered, every value is tied to a choice in the text, and the attitude is stated in a form that could be tested against the words.

Q7 — model check (The Seed Tin).

1. *Context*: historical — the autumn of 1947, just after the war, when many new families came to Australia from Europe; social — an old family beside a brand-new one with almost nothing.
2. *Issue*: when there is little to go around, do you keep what is yours or share it?
3. *Point of view*: the story is told through Tom's eyes. It begins on his side ("we worked for those") and moves to his father's — so the text leans towards sharing.
4. *Values*: generosity and community (the father gives half the seeds); hard work is honoured too ("So did they, somewhere") — the gift is given as one worker to another, not as charity.
5. *Choices*: "the one saved through the war years" — the tin carries the family's own hard times, which makes the giving cost something; "Seeds ... only keep if you plant them. So does kindness" — the father's words turn the seed into a picture of how kindness works: it grows only when it is given away.

Q8 — model answer.

Passage (a) comes from a dry inland town where water is scarce and counted, so the passage represents water as something to guard: short showers, shut taps, the tank checked every Sunday. The value is careful thrift — and behind it, a kind of respect for what the land does not give. Passage (b) comes from a wet city where water never stops, so the passage represents water as something unnoticed — "just noise on the roof" — until a storm takes a roof off and forces the boy to think about it. The value in (b) is really the lack of one: taking for granted what is always there. A reader from a big Australian city with steady rain will probably share (b)'s starting attitude and recognise the shock that ends it; a reader from a dry farming district will read (a) as simple fact. The point is that neither attitude is a choice the characters made of their own — each context taught it.

Q9 — model answer.

Passage (a) represents the natural world as a test to be met with preparation. The farmer reads the sky "the way his father had and his father's father before him" — the repeated phrase hands the skill down the generations, and the value is readiness, passed through the family. "The weather was not a friend and not an enemy; it was a test" states the attitude in one clean sentence. Passage (b) represents the natural world as a source of wonder. The value is delight — and attention: Mia "pressed both hands to the glass and forgot to breathe", and the guide's laughing fact that the snow "had been falling for a million years" sets her one small first moment against the land's deep time. One passage meets nature with prepared hands; the other meets it with open ones — and both passages treat the natural world as worth close attention.

Q10 — model paragraph (on The Sundowner).

“The Sundowner” represents the values of freedom and generosity through a romantic picture of the 1890s Australian bush. The swagman owns almost nothing — “a blanket, a tin cup, and the heel of yesterday’s loaf” — yet the passage treats his poverty as a kind of riches, because nothing owns him and no one commands him: “No boss told him when to rise; no clock told him when to rest.” That pair of lines is the heart of the text’s point of view, which leans wholly towards admiration. Freedom is then shown to be generous rather than selfish, because the swagman “split the last of his bread without a word” — sharing what he least could spare, and without any pride in it. His own words, “The road’s long ... but it’s free,” say the value plainly: freedom is worth more than comfort. Read from today’s context, the passage can look like a daydream — but that is exactly what romantic representation does: it builds the life its readers wished the bush could be.

Product task, Part A — model table.

Rung	Model answer
1. Context	Historical: a winter night in a modern city tower block. Cultural: a city of separate households, each behind its own door — screens, lifts, hallways. Social: neighbours who have lived beside one another for years without speaking.
2. Issue	Do people need a shared trouble before they become neighbours — or is the distance their own doing?
3. Point of view	Told from beside Maya, watching her mother and the floors go by; the text leans towards the view that the blackout gave the tower something it had been missing.
4. Values	Neighbourliness and attention — giving time and notice to the people beside you. They are shown as the tower’s values once the doors open: Mr Chen’s, the mother’s, and finally Maya’s.
5. Choices	“torch beams appeared in the hallway like slow fireflies” — the shared dark turns into something soft and shared; “The tower was the same tower. She was not the same neighbour.” — the closing contrast puts the change in the people, not the building.

Product task, Part B — model response.

“The Night the Lights Went Out” represents neighbourliness as a value that lives in small, given things — time, food, notice — rather than in money or buildings. The tower’s social context does the first half of the work: its people have “lived beside these people for six years” without seeing one another, so the text starts from distance, not from community. The blackout then becomes the moment the values appear, and they appear as actions. Mr Chen is found “sharing candles with the family above”; on the sixth floor, “someone had laid out biscuits and a flask of tea on the landing.” Nobody is asked to give anything and nobody counts the cost; the sharing simply happens, which tells the reader that these values were already in the people, only locked behind the doors. The text’s point of view comes through Maya’s mother, whose quiet words — “tonight is the first time I have seen them” — name the issue directly: the distance was never about the building. The closing contrast, “The tower was the same tower. She was not the same neighbour,” lands the text’s final value: what changes a place into a community is attention — one name, spoken and answered.

Product task, Part C — model reflection.

A reader from a small farming town where everyone already knows everyone might read the blackout as strange rather than moving, because in their context doors are not closed in the first place, and they might notice how much the tower’s people had been missing. The strongest reading against mine is that the text makes one night look like more than it is: the doors close again at ten, and nothing proves the neighbourliness lasts once the screens come back on. I kept my answer fair to that reading by naming it here and by granting its best evidence — the closing doors — before arguing that Maya’s named good morning the next morning is the text’s own answer to it.

Opinions about the language features, literary devices and text structures that create literary style

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English (VCAA), Level 8. This section owns **VC2E8LE02**: “explore opinions about the language features, literary devices and text structures that contribute to the styles of literary texts”. Strand: Literature; sub-strand: Engaging with and responding to literature. Draws on elaborations **VC2E8LE02.E01**: “comparing reviews of a literary text and evaluating opinions that challenge or support their personal opinions” and **VC2E8LE02.E02**: “reflecting on and evaluating opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts, including characterisation, setting and plot”. The level’s Reading and Viewing standard says students “explore opinions about texts through explorations of how literary devices and language features ... influence the reader’s response”. At Level 7, VC2E7LE02 asked for opinions about characters, settings and events, and about where readers agreed and differed; this section turns opinion onto the machinery that makes those characters, settings and events. At Level 9, VC2E9LE02 takes this further as the comparing of first and later impressions of a text.

About the texts in this section. One novel named here is real: *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005). It is discussed, not reprinted, and the single short quotation from it carries a source line. Everything else — the story “The River Decides”, the five reviews and the book-club discussion — was written for this book and is labelled as a sample.

Theory

1. Style: the word this section uses

Defining the term. The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *style* but does not define it. This section therefore treats *literary style* as the characteristic way a text uses language features, literary devices and text structures — the pattern of choices it makes where other choices were possible. Every task in this section is answerable on this definition alone.

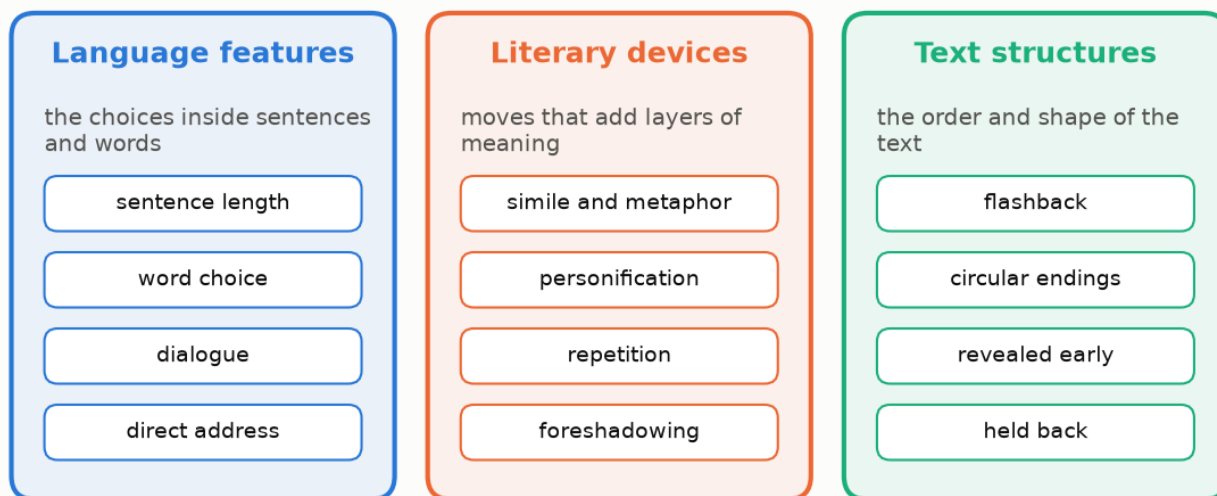
You cannot see a habit in one act, and you cannot see a style in one line. Style is the pattern that shows up across a whole text: the choices that keep happening, the moves the text keeps making. Two writers can tell the same event and produce two different styles, because they choose different words, different sentence shapes, different orders.

Style is built from three families of choices. Here are the terms this section works with, defined at first use:

Term	Meaning
language feature	a choice made inside sentences and words: sentence length, word choice, dialogue, and who speaks to the reader
literary device	a move that adds layers of meaning, such as simile (likening one thing to another with <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>), metaphor (saying one thing <i>is</i> another), personification (giving a thing or idea human actions), repetition, and foreshadowing (hints about what is coming)
text structure	the order and shape of the whole text: where it starts, what is revealed early, what is held back, flashback (a jump back to an earlier time), and endings that return to the beginning
effect	what a choice does to the reader — what it makes the reader feel, picture, expect or notice

Style is built from three families of choices

one text uses all three at once — style is the pattern they make together



An opinion about style names the choice, says which family it sits in, and shows what it does.

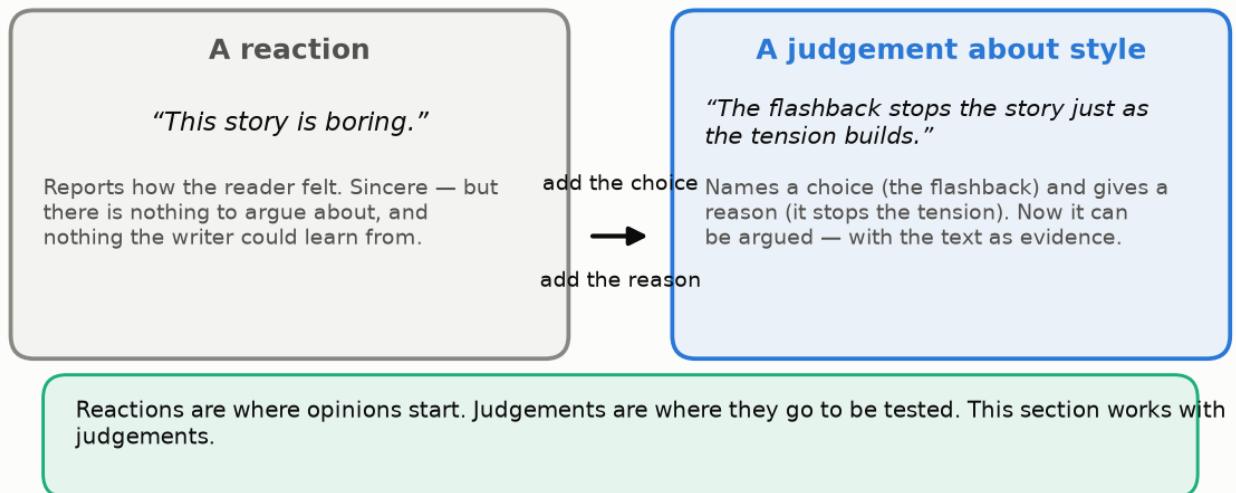
Style is built from three families of choices: language features, literary devices and text structures, each with a plain meaning and examples

An opinion about style names a choice, says which family it sits in, and shows the effect it has. That is the whole skill of this section, and everything below builds it.

2. Reactions and judgements

There are two kinds of opinion about a text, and they are different kinds of words. A **reaction** reports how a reader felt: *boring, brilliant, I couldn't put it down*. A reaction can be sincere, but it cannot be wrong in the way a claim can be wrong, and there is nothing in it to test. A **judgement** names a choice and gives a reason: now it is a claim, and claims can be argued — with the text itself as the testing ground.

Two kinds of opinion about a text

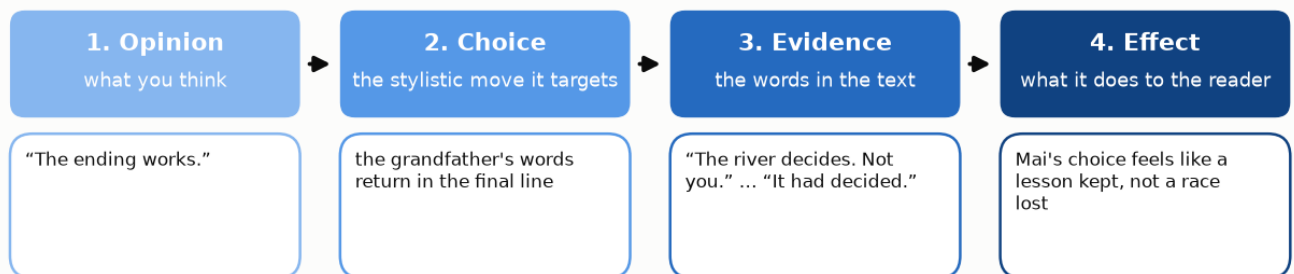


A reaction reports how a reader felt; a judgement names a choice and gives a reason, so it can be argued

When you turn a reaction into a judgement, you are not hiding your feeling. You are giving it something to stand on. The move is a four-link chain: opinion, then the choice it targets, then the evidence (the actual words in the text), then the effect on the reader.

The opinion chain

four links turn an opinion about style into an evaluation



A chain with a missing link is an opinion still waiting to become an evaluation.

The opinion chain: opinion, the choice it targets, evidence from the text, and the effect on the reader, with an example under each link

A chain with a missing link is an opinion still waiting to become a judgement. Most weak opinions about books are not wrong; they are just short of a link.

3. The review: an opinion made public

A **review** is a judgement about a text made public. Real reviews live in newspapers, magazines, book websites and the back covers of books; they carry a writer's name and a date, and they do a job for the reader: should I spend my time on this text? This section uses sample reviews written for this book, clearly labelled, so you can take them apart without needing the real ones.

A review has five parts, and each part has a job:



The five parts of a review

a review is an opinion about a text made public — and it has a job to do in each part

1. What the text is	title, author, the kind of text — in one or two lines
2. A short summary	just enough to place the reader; no spoilers
3. Opinions about style	what choices the text makes, and how well they work
4. Reasons and evidence	each opinion backed by the text itself
5. The verdict	who should read it, and why

Parts 3 and 4 are the heart of a review: an opinion about style is only as good as its reasons.

The five parts of a review: what the text is, a short summary with no spoilers, opinions about style, reasons and evidence, and the verdict

Notice what a review is not: it is not a summary. The summary only places the reader. The review judges, and the judgement lives in parts 3 and 4. If you take the opinions and the evidence out of a review, what is left is a blurb — and a blurb never argues.

4. Comparing opinions

Two reviews of the same text will rarely match, and that mismatch is where the learning is. When you compare reviews, look in three places:

- **where they agree** — often about what the text *does*, even when they disagree about whether it works;
- **where they clash** — one calls a choice a strength, the other calls the same choice a flaw;
- **where they weigh different things** — both may see the same choices but care about different effects.

Comparing two reviews of one text

sample reviews of *The Book Thief* (Markus Zusak, 2005), written for this book

Review A

Review B

Opinion	The narrator choice is the style of the book — and it works.	The boldest choice is also the book's problem.
Choice it targets	Death narrates, speaks to the reader, and tells some events before they happen.	The same choices: Death narrating, speaking out, telling things early.
Reason	Knowing the end turns surprise into weight; we read to see how, not what.	Early telling drains suspense; a narrator who comments leaves the reader little room to feel.
Evidence	The opening warning; small moments made huge by a narrator who has seen everything.	The opening warning; effects announced, not trusted to the story.
Where they agree	the narrator choice makes the book hard to forget	
Where they clash	does telling early build weight, or drain suspense?	
What they prize	Reviewer A prizes feeling; Reviewer B prizes trust in the story	

A comparison frame with rows for each review's opinion, the choice it targets, its reason and its evidence, and a bottom band for where the reviews agree, clash and weigh different things

Comparing is also where you test your own opinion. The rule this section works by: when someone disagrees with you, meet the strongest version of their view, not the weakest. That move is called **steelmanning** — building the other side's case as well as its own holders could, before you answer it.

Steelmanning an opinion you disagree with

if you can beat the strongest version of the other view, your own view has earned its ground

1. Restate

step 1 of 4

say the other opinion the way its holder would — in its strongest form, not its weakest

2. Arm it

step 2 of 4

give that opinion its best reason and its best evidence from the text

3. Answer it

step 3 of 4

meet that reason with one of your own — no dismissal, no mocking

4. State yours

step 4 of 4

give your own position, now tested against the strongest version of the other side

Marks go to the quality of the reasoning, never to the side reached.

The steelman ladder: restate the other opinion at its strongest, give it its best evidence, answer that evidence with reason, then state your own tested position

A word about marks and about life: two readers can reach opposite conclusions about the same text and both reason well. In this section, marks go to the quality of the reasoning — the links in the chain, the evidence cited, the other side met at its strongest — never to the side you end up on.

5. Three lenses: characterisation, setting, plot

Opinions and arguments about a literary text nearly always look through one of three lenses. The curriculum names them, so this section names them too.

- **Characterisation** is how a text makes its people — by what they do and say, by what others say of them, by what the text tells you outright.
- **Setting** is how a text makes its time and place — and whether that place is a backdrop or a force that pushes the plot.
- **Plot** is how a text orders its events — what is revealed early, what is held back, where the story starts and why there.

Three lenses: characterisation, setting, plot

the aspects of a text that opinions and arguments most often turn on

Characterisation

how a text makes its people

- Is the character shown by what they do and say, or told about?
- Which actions or lines of dialogue carry the most weight?
- Does the character change — and what makes the change?

Setting

how a text makes its time and place

- Is the setting a backdrop, or a force that pushes the plot?
- What does the weather, place or time make the characters do?
- Which details does the writer keep returning to, and why?

Plot

how a text orders its events

- What is revealed early, and what is held back?
- Where does the story start, and why there?
- Do the choices of order pay off by the end?

When you hear an opinion about a text, first ask which lens it looks through.

Three lenses on a text: characterisation, setting and plot, each with the questions to ask when an argument is about that part

When you meet an opinion about a text, first ask which lens it looks through. “Mai is brave” is a characterisation claim. “The creek is the real engine of the story” is a setting claim. “The flashback is placed exactly right” is a plot claim. Each is argued with different evidence.

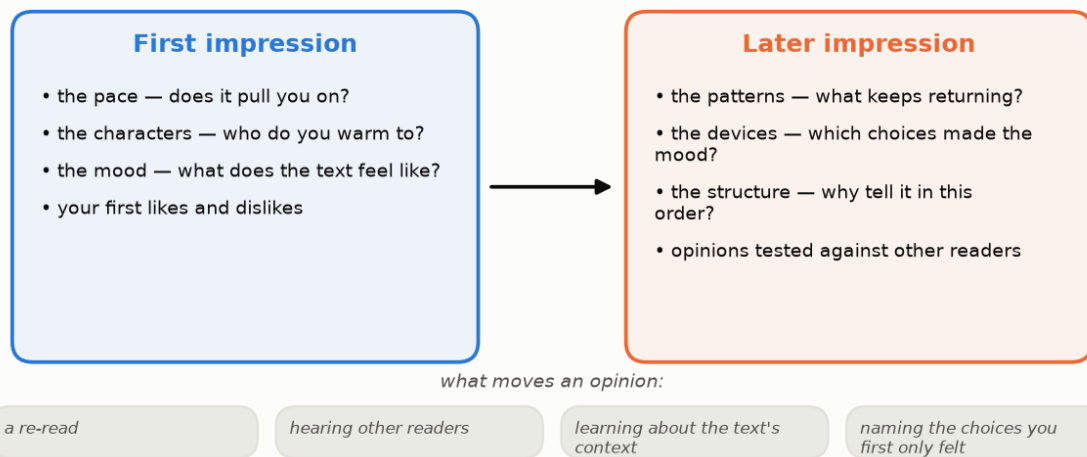
6. Building and testing your own opinion

Put the pieces together and your own opinion follows a sequence:

1. **Read** the text once for the story, once for the choices.
2. **Notice** what kept happening — the repeated words, the returning images, the shape of the ending.
3. **Name** the choices, family by family.
4. **Back** each opinion with the text’s own words.
5. **Weigh** your opinion against other readers’ — and let a good argument move you if it does.

That last step matters more than it looks. A first impression is honest; a later impression is tested. Neither is the whole of reading.

Opinions move: first impressions and later ones



Changing your mind after good reasons is not a mistake. It is the point. At Level 9 you will compare first and later impressions on purpose (VC2E9LE02).

First impressions notice pace, characters and mood; later impressions notice patterns, devices and structure; a re-read, other readers and named choices move an opinion between them

Changing your mind after good reasons is not a mistake. It is the point. At Level 9 you will do this on purpose, comparing your first and later impressions of a text (VC2E9LE02); this section gives you the habit early.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Read the two sample reviews of a real novel, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2005). The novel is set in Germany in the Second World War; it is narrated by Death, who tells the story of a girl who steals books, and of a man hidden from the secret police in a basement. The reviews were written for this book.

Review A — sample review written for this book

A novel about the Second World War narrated by Death sounds grim. It is the opposite. The narrator choice is the style of the book, and it works. Death stands outside the story, speaks as “I”, and from the opening warns the reader: “Here is a small fact: You are going to die.” (Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 2005; checked 24 August 2026). Because this narrator already knows every ending, some events are told before they happen — and that turns surprise into weight. You read to see *how*, not *what*. And because the narrator has seen everything, the smallest moments — a stolen book, a hidden man — are made huge. At the end it is Death, not the humans, who is left shaken.

Verdict: for readers who want a war story that feels like being told a secret.

Review B — sample review written for this book

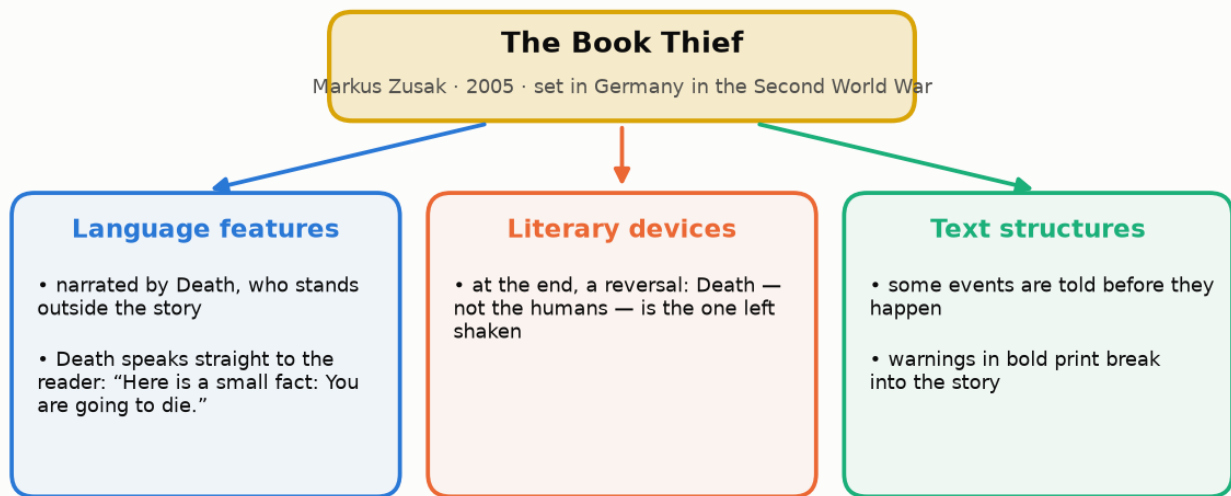
Nobody can deny that *The Book Thief* stands out — a book narrated by Death is not easy to forget. But its boldest choice is also its problem. When the narrator tells you early what will happen, surprise is replaced by waiting; and a narrator who comments on everything leaves the reader little room to feel things alone. From the opening warning, the book announces its effects instead of trusting the story to carry them. Some readers will call that style. Others will call it interference. The book asks to be admired; it might work better if it simply let you be moved.

Verdict: for readers who like a strong narrator voice, and who do not mind being told how to feel.

Before taking the reviews apart, map the novel’s choices onto the three families. One novel uses all three at once, as every real text does. The map names one language feature not listed in the table above: **direct address** — the narrator speaking to the reader as “you”.

One novel, three families

stylistic choices in *The Book Thief* (Markus Zusak, 2005) — a real novel, discussed here without quoting it at length



The families overlap in real texts — that is normal. What matters is naming the choice and its work.

Stylistic choices in The Book Thief mapped onto the three families: narrated by Death and direct address under language features, the reversal at the end under literary devices, early telling and bold warnings under text structures

Now run the comparison frame over the two reviews.

	Review A	Review B
Opinion	The narrator choice is the style of the book — and it works.	The boldest choice is also the book's problem.
Choice it targets	Death narrates, speaks to the reader, and tells some events before they happen.	The same choices: Death narrating, speaking out, telling things early.
Reason	Knowing the end turns surprise into weight; the reader reads to see how, not what.	Early telling drains suspense; a narrator who comments leaves the reader little room to feel.
Evidence	The opening warning; small moments made huge by a narrator who has seen everything.	The opening warning; effects announced, not trusted to the story.

Read across the rows and the comparison does itself:

- **They agree** on what the text does: a Death narrator who speaks to the reader and tells some things early. Neither reviewer disputes that the choice makes the book hard to forget.
- **They clash** on what that choice does to the reader: Review A says early telling turns surprise into weight; Review B says it drains suspense. Same choice, opposite effect named.
- **They prize different things:** Review A prizes feeling — the weight, the shaken narrator; Review B prizes trust — the story carrying its own effects.

The reviews are not "one right, one wrong". They are two judgements, each with its links in place, weighing different effects. Your own opinion about the novel — if you read it, or when you do — will sit somewhere on this frame, and you will now be able to say exactly where.

Example 2 — unscaffolded

Read the sample story below, then the sample book-club discussion that follows it.

The River Decides *(sample story written for this book)*

Mai stood where the track ended and counted her breaths the way Pop had taught her. In. Out. Slow. On the far side of the creek the bus stop waited, a grey sign behind a wall of rain. On this side: water.

The footbridge was gone. Not broken — gone. Two posts remained, and the creek ran past them fast and brown, the colour of cold tea. It growled under the rain.

Mai tightened her backpack straps twice and tested the nearest branch with her toe. It moved. Everything moved.

Last summer, Pop had taken her fishing from this same bank, when the water sat low and the stones showed. He had shown her how to stand still long enough for the river to forget her. “You can’t push water, Mai,” he had said. “You wait for the gap. The river decides. Not you.” She had rolled her eyes. Pop only smiled, the way he did when he knew something was true and could wait for her to find it out.

Now the creek was up to the fence line, and there was no gap.

Mai watched the brown water for a long moment. Then she stepped back from the bank, turned her collar up, and started the long walk around to the road bridge. She would be late. She would be soaked. She would arrive.

The river kept moving. It had decided.

The labelled version below names the story’s choices family by family — check your own noticing against it.

“The River Decides” — a story with its choices named

sample story written for this book; labels name the stylistic choices family by family

Mai stood where the track ended and counted her breaths the way Pop had taught her. In. Out. Slow. On the far side of the creek the bus stop waited, a grey sign behind a wall of rain. On this side: water.



Language feature — short sentences slow the reader down: “In. Out. Slow.” The setting is placed in three lines.

The footbridge was gone. Not broken — gone. Two posts remained, and the creek ran past them fast and brown, the colour of cold tea. It growled under the rain.



Literary devices — simile: “the colour of cold tea”; personification: the creek “growled.”

Mai tightened her backpack straps twice and tested the nearest branch with her toe. It moved. Everything moved.



Characterisation — shown by what Mai does, never told.

Last summer, Pop had taken her fishing from this same bank, when the water sat low and the stones showed. He had shown her how to stand still long enough for the river to forget her. “You can’t push water, Mai,” he had said. “You wait for the gap. The river decides. Not you.” She had rolled her eyes. Pop only smiled, the way he did when he knew something was true and could wait for her to find it out.



Text structure — a flashback pauses the story for the lesson; Pop’s words are planted here to return.

Now the creek was up to the fence line, and there was no gap.

Mai watched the brown water for a long moment. Then she stepped back from the bank, turned her collar up, and started the long walk around to the road bridge. She would be late. She would be soaked. She would arrive.



Language feature — the short sentences return for the decision.

The river kept moving. It had decided.



Text structure — circular ending: the river’s words handed back; what Pop said is now true.

 language feature

 literary device

 text structure

 characterisation lens

The full text of The River Decides with margin labels: short sentences and a three-line setting under language features, simile and personification under literary devices, characterisation shown by action, the flashback under text structures, and the circular ending that hands Pop’s words back

Three Year 8 readers then argued about it (sample discussion written for this book):

Reader 1: Mai never says she is scared, and the story never calls her brave. We know her by what she does — she counts her breaths, she tightens her straps twice, she tests the branch with her toe. That is the best kind of characterisation: shown, not told. And because she is shown as careful, her choice to walk the long way reads as strength, not as giving up.

Reader 2: I agree she is careful, but you have named the wrong engine. The creek is the real engine of this story. The weather takes the bridge; the water makes every choice. Without the storm there is no story at all. The setting is not a backdrop — it is doing the plot's work.

Reader 3: Then why does the story stop at the exact moment the water is highest? That flashback is the riskiest move in the piece, and the smartest. It stops the action at peak tension so the reader can see Mai's decision as the fishing lesson kept. Plot-wise, the story is not about the crossing at all. It is about what the crossing teaches.

Without a table to help you:

1. For each reader, name the opinion and the lens it looks through (characterisation, setting or plot).
2. For each reader, find the evidence from the story that backs the opinion.
3. Decide which of the three arguments is best backed, and say why in two or three sentences.
4. Steelman: take the reader you found weakest and write the strongest two-sentence version of their case, using evidence they did not use.

Work out your own answers first, then check them against the worked solution at the end of this section.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Three families. Sort each choice below from “The River Decides” into its family — language feature, literary device or text structure — and add one clause on its effect.

- (a) Pop's words “The river decides. Not you.” return in the final line.
- (b) The creek is “the colour of cold tea”.
- (c) The creek “growled under the rain”.
- (d) The fishing lesson from last summer arrives in the middle of the story.
- (e) “It moved. Everything moved.”

Q2. Reaction or judgement? Sort each opinion about a text into *reaction* or *judgement*. For the reactions, add the missing links to rebuild them as judgements.

- (a) “I couldn't put it down.”
- (b) “The flashback explains Mai's final choice.”
- (c) “This story is boring.”
- (d) “Telling the reader the ending early takes away the tension.”

Q3. Review anatomy. Here is a third sample review of “The River Decides” (written for this book), with its parts in the wrong order. Rearrange them into the five-part shape, and label each part.

- (i) For readers who like storms outside and quiet choices inside.
- (ii) “The River Decides” is a short sample story about a girl, a flooded creek and a walk to school.
- (iii) Its cleverest move is the last line, where the river takes Pop's words for itself.
- (iv) A girl named Mai must cross a flooded creek to reach her bus stop, but the footbridge is gone.
- (v) That closing echo makes the whole story feel like one lesson kept.

Q4. The comparison frame. Read the two sample reviews of “The River Decides” (written for this book).

Review A — sample review written for this book

“The River Decides” looks small: a girl, a flooded creek, a walk to school. But its style does big work. The smartest choice is structure. Just as the water is at its worst, the story stops and flashes back to a fishing lesson, and that pause turns a crossing into a test of everything Mai was taught. Pop’s words — “The river decides. Not you.” — arrive early and return in the last line, so the ending does not repeat the lesson; it lets the river say it. The short sentences (“It moved. Everything moved.”) slow you down exactly where the story wants you slow.

Verdict: for readers who like quiet stories where the sentences carry the weight.

Review B — sample review written for this book

The sentences of “The River Decides” are built with care — nobody could dispute that. But the story spends its best writing on a place where nothing happens. The personification is easy (a creek that “growled”), and the flashback stops the tension at the one moment tension should be built. Worst of all, the ending is visible from the minute Pop speaks: by the time Mai steps back from the bank, the reader has known her choice for a page. A story the reader never has to work out risks being a mood instead of a plot.

Verdict: for readers who care more about how sentences sound than about what happens next.

Complete the frame: one point of agreement, one point of clash, and one point where the two reviews prize different things.

Q5. Stems for agreeing and disagreeing. Finish each stem about the reviews in Q4, using words of your own and naming at least one choice from the story.

- (a) Review A is right that ..., because ...
- (b) Review B is right that ..., but ...
- (c) The two reviews disagree about ..., and I side with ... because ...

Q6. Steelman. Pick the review in Q4 you disagree with more. In three or four sentences, write the strongest case *for* it: its best reason, backed by evidence from the story that the review itself did not use.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Write your own short review of “The River Decides” in the five-part shape. Name at least two stylistic choices from different families, back each with the story’s own words, and end with a verdict.

Q8. Return to the book-club discussion in Example 2. Which reader’s argument did you find best backed? Write three or four sentences: name the reader, name the lens, and say what made the backing strong — or what the other two were missing.

Q9. First and later impressions. Re-read “The River Decides” after reading Reviews A and B. In three or four sentences, report whether your opinion of the ending moved, and name what moved it: the re-read, the reviews, or naming the choices you had only felt.

Q10. Real-world bridge. *The Book Thief* opens by telling the reader, in Death’s voice, that they are going to die. Review A calls that a strength; Review B calls it interference. In three or four sentences, give your own judgement on that one choice: opinion, choice, reason, effect. Then add one sentence steelmanning the side you did not take.

Product task — analytic response

Read “The River Decides” (Example 2) and the two reviews of it (Q4) one more time.

Part A. Write two paragraphs giving your own opinion of the story’s style. Each paragraph must run the full chain: opinion, the choice it targets (name the family), evidence from the story, and the effect on you as the reader. Use two different families across the two paragraphs.

Part B. Place your opinion on the comparison frame: against Review A, name one point of agreement and one point of difference; do the same against Review B. For each difference, say which effect you weigh more, and why.

Part C. In three sentences, reflect: what was your first impression of the story, what is your later one, and what moved you between them — if anything did.

Marks for this task go to the quality of the reasoning — every link in place, evidence cited, the other side met at its strongest — never to the side you reach. Two students with opposite opinions of the same story can both earn full marks.

Answers

Q1. (a) Repetition — literary device; it hands Pop’s lesson to the river at the end. (b) Simile — literary device; it paints the water as flat, cold and unlovely. (c) Personification — literary device; it makes the creek an animal, a force with a temper. (d) Flashback — text structure; it pauses the present to plant the lesson. (e) Sentence length — language feature; the short sentences make the reader stop and look, as Mai does.

Q2. (a) Reaction — rebuild: name what pulled you on (for example, the early warning of the ending) and the effect. (b) Judgement — it names a choice (the flashback) and its work. (c) Reaction — rebuild: name the choice that failed for you (for example, the visible ending) and the effect (no work left for the reader). (d) Judgement — it names a choice (early telling) and an effect (lost tension).

Q3. Order: (ii) what the text is; (iv) short summary; (iii) opinion about style; (v) reason and evidence for the opinion; (i) verdict.

Q4. Agreement: both reviews say the sentences are built with care. Clash: the flashback — Review A says the pause turns the crossing into a test; Review B says it stops tension at the wrong moment. They prize different things: Review A prizes what the sentences carry; Review B prizes what happens next.

Q5. Sample answers will vary; a good one names a choice (for example, the returning words, the short sentences, the visible ending) and gives a reason.

Q6. A strong answer uses evidence the review did not — for example, for Review B: “The ending is visible early, and that is the point: Mai’s choice is not a surprise to work out but a lesson to watch, and the last line says so.” For Review A: “The sentences slow you at the bank, and slowness there is the whole feeling the story is built to give.”

Q7–Q10, product task. These are writing tasks. Full models are in the fully-worked solutions. Check yours against the chain: opinion, choice, evidence, effect — and against the steelman if you disagreed with anyone.

Example 2. (1) Reader 1 — characterisation: Mai is made by her actions. Reader 2 — setting: the creek does the plot’s work. Reader 3 — plot: the flashback orders the story as a lesson. (2) Reader 1 backs the claim with the counted breaths, the doubled straps, the tested branch. Reader 2 backs the claim with the lost bridge and the water that “makes every choice”. Reader 3 backs the claim with the flashback’s placement at peak tension. (3) Most answers will find Reader 1 best backed, because the evidence is quoted action, not feeling; but a well-argued case for Reader 2 or 3 also stands. (4) Sample steelman for Reader 2: “Every choice Mai makes is a reply to the water, and the story’s first three lines are all creek. Remove the storm and there is no test, no lesson, no story — only a girl who already knows what she will do.”

Fully-worked solutions

Q7 — model review.

What it is: “The River Decides” is a short story written for this book, about a girl, a flooded creek and a walk to school.

Summary: Mai reaches the creek on her way to the bus and finds the footbridge gone. A flashback returns her to a fishing lesson with her grandfather, and his words — “The river decides. Not you.” — end the story.

Opinions: Its strongest choice is a language feature: the short sentences. “She would be late. She would be soaked. She would arrive.” — three beats that land like footsteps, and make Mai’s calm feel earned. Its riskiest choice is a literary device: the personified creek that “growled”. Easy, yes — but it sets up the ending, where the river is given the last word.

Verdict: for readers who like a small story told with a steady hand.

Why it works as a review: all five parts are present; both opinions name a family and are backed with the story’s own words; the verdict says who the story is for, not just that it is good.

Q8 — model answer.

Reader 1's argument is the best backed of the three. The lens is characterisation, and every claim in it points at an action in the text: the counted breaths, the straps tightened twice, the branch tested with a toe. Reader 2 names a true thing — the water drives the story — but offers one piece of backing where Reader 1 offers three. Reader 3 argues the plot well but leans on a feeling about placement rather than on words. Strength of backing is strength of evidence, and actions quoted beat effects described.

Q9 — model answer.

My first impression was that the ending was quiet to the point of being flat: Mai just walks away. After the reviews I re-read the last two paragraphs and noticed the returning words — “The river decides. Not you.” handed back as “It had decided.” Naming that repetition moved me: the ending is not flat, it is the lesson arriving. My opinion changed because I could finally name the choice that had only been a feeling.

Q10 — model answer.

Telling the reader they are going to die on the first page is a strength, and the choice that does it is direct address: Death speaking to *you*, not about you. The reason it works is that it sets the book's whole mood in one line — calm, certain, a little cold — and every later warning reads as the same voice keeping its word. The effect is that the reader stops asking *what* and starts asking *how*, which is exactly the reading Review A describes. Steelman for the other side: a warning that strong can drain every later scene of its risk, and a story with no risk left asks the reader to admire instead of to worry.

Example 2 — full check. Given in Answers above; re-check yours against it before reading on.

Product task, Parts A–C — model response.

Part A (paragraph 1 — text structure): The story's best choice is where it puts the lesson. The flashback arrives at the exact moment the water is highest, and that placement turns a crossing into a test: “Last summer, Pop had taken her fishing from this same bank.” The effect is that the reader watches the present through the past, and Mai's stillness at the bank stops being delay and starts being the point.

Part A (paragraph 2 — language features): The story's second strength is its sentence shapes. The memory runs long and loose, while the present runs short — “It moved. Everything moved.” — and the switch between them is the story's heartbeat. The effect on me was pace: I read the memory slowly and the bank quickly, which is exactly how Mai herself experiences both.

Part B: With Review A I agree that the structure is the smartest choice, and I differ only in weighing: A prizes the returning words most, while I prize the flashback's placement more, because the placement is what gives the words their power. With Review B I agree that the ending is visible early, and I differ on whether that is a flaw: B weighs surprise most, while I weigh the feeling of watching a lesson being kept, and a visible ending is what makes that feeling possible.

Part C: My first impression was that the story was slight — one decision, told small. My later impression is that the smallness is the craft: everything in it is load-bearing. What moved me was naming the choices; a re-read with the reviews in mind turned “quiet” from a complaint into a description of the style.

The model reaches opinions different from some readers' and the same as others'. That is fine, and it is the point: the marks are in the chain, not the conclusion.

How language and images in literary texts shape social and ethical positions

Curriculum trace — Victorian Curriculum 2.0 English (VCAA), Level 8. This section owns **VC2E8LE03**: “explain how language and still and moving images in a range of literary texts influence an audience’s response to and formation of social and/or ethical positions”. Strand: Literature; sub-strand: Engaging with and responding to literature. Draws on elaboration **VC2E8LE03.E01**: “discussing how a complex picture book combines words and images to position readers to respond”, and elaboration **VC2E8LE03.E02**: “sharing opinions about how a film positions the viewer to respond to a character”. The level’s Reading and Viewing standard says: “They explore opinions about texts through explorations of how literary devices and language features, and still and moving images and sound, influence the reader’s response to represented values.” This section is the chapter’s main Viewing mode work. At Level 7 (VC2E7LE03) students met devices and dialogue as things that create character and influence emotions and opinions; here that steps up to the formation of social and ethical positions. At Level 9, VC2E9LE03 picks this up as analysing how devices shape an audience’s preference about social, moral or ethical positions.

About the texts in this section. The picture-book spreads and the film storyboard in this section are original samples, written and drawn for this book, and are labelled (**sample**). Where real picture books and films are named, they are real, checkable works, named with their creator and year; this section does not copy any words or pictures out of them. In your own responses, always write about texts you have read or seen yourself.

Theory

1. What it means to be positioned

Defining the terms. The Victorian Curriculum uses the words *social positions* and *ethical positions* but does not define them. This section therefore treats them as follows: an **ethical position** is a view about what is right and wrong, fair and unfair. A **social position** is a view about how people should live together and treat one another. (*Position* also has another everyday sense — a person’s rank or place in a group. That is not the sense used here; here it means a view you can stand on.) Other definitions exist and are not interchangeable with these ones. Every task in this section is answerable on these definitions alone.

Texts never just show us people and events. They show them *from somewhere*. The words, images and sounds are chosen, and the choices guide us toward some feelings and judgments and away from others. That guiding work has a name.

Positioning (defined here as a subject term) is the way a text uses language, images and sound to guide an audience toward particular feelings, judgments and views about people and issues. A text *offers* a position. It does not force one.

At Level 7 you met devices and dialogue as things that build character and shape how you feel. This section takes one step up: how those same choices quietly build positions about bigger questions — who deserves help, what fairness looks like, whether honesty is worth something when nobody is watching.

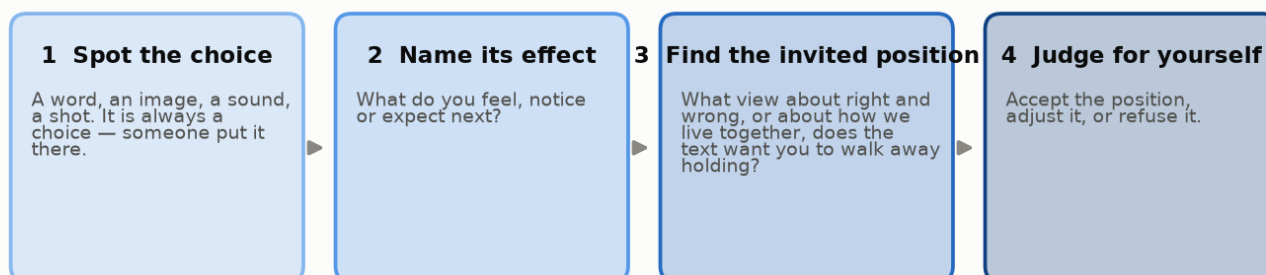
Here are the terms this section works with, defined at first use:

Term	Meaning
positioning	the way a text guides an audience toward particular feelings, judgments and views
ethical position	a view about what is right and wrong, fair and unfair
social position	a view about how people should live together and treat one another
literary text	a text written to be read as literature — stories, poems, drama, picture books
complex picture book	a picture book that deals with serious or layered ideas and asks the reader to build meaning from words <i>and</i>

Term	Meaning
spread	images together the two facing pages of an open book, read together as one unit
shot	one run of the camera in a film, from cut to cut
storyboard	a strip of drawn frames that plans a film shot by shot
gaze	where a person in an image looks — at the viewer (a <i>demand</i>) or away (an <i>offer</i>)
framing	what the image lets in, and where each thing is placed
focal point	the spot in an image your eye goes to first
close-up	a shot that fills the frame with one thing, usually a face
long shot	a shot filmed from far away, showing a whole scene
camera angle	how high or low the camera sits: high angle, low angle or eye level
point-of-view shot	a shot filmed as if from one character's eyes, so we see what they see
connotation	the feelings and ideas a word carries with it, over and above its plain meaning

All of the analysis in this section runs along one chain. Learn the chain and you can take apart anything that positions you — a picture book, a film, an advertisement, a post.

The positioning chain



Positions are invitations, not orders. The text builds the invitation; you decide whether to take it up.

Four-step chain for analysing positioning: spot the choice, name its effect, identify the invited position, then judge for yourself whether to accept, adjust or refuse it

1. **Spot the choice.** A word, an image, a sound, a shot. It is always a *choice* — someone put it there.
2. **Name its effect.** What do you feel, notice or expect next?
3. **Identify the invited position.** What view about right and wrong, or about how people should live together, does the text want you to walk away holding?
4. **Judge for yourself.** Accept the position, adjust it, or refuse it.

Two things are worth holding onto from the start.

- **Positioning is not the same as tricking you.** Every story positions. A story that took no view about anything would have nothing to say. The trouble starts only when we forget we are being positioned — when the invitation starts to feel like plain fact.
- **You are the last step.** Positions are invitations, not orders. The text builds the invitation; you decide whether to take it up.

2. How language positions readers

Language positions long before you notice it doing so. The toolkit below covers the six moves worth knowing first. Each row gives an original sample sentence written for this book.

The language positioning toolkit		
Six moves worth knowing first. Sample sentences are original — written for this book.		
Choice	Sample (original)	How it positions
Naming and word choice	"She was determined to finish." ("Stubborn" would position the reader another way.)	Every name carries a connotation — feelings over and above the plain facts.
Evaluative language	"It was a cruel trick."	The judging word hands the reader the judgment already made.
Pronouns	"People like us look after each other."	"We" pulls the reader inside a circle; "they" draws the circle around someone else.
Imagery	"Her voice was a door closing."	The picture the words paint tells the reader how to feel about the moment.
Sentence forms	Short. Quick. No escape.	Short sentences hurry the reader; long ones slow them; a question puts the reader to work.
Dialogue	"You can sit with us."	What a character says — and what others say about them — sets how we meet them.
Whose voice is missing counts too — silence and absence position the reader just as words do.		

Table of six language choices that position readers: naming and word choice, evaluative language, pronouns, imagery, sentence forms and dialogue, each with a sample sentence and how it positions

Three of these moves reward a closer look.

Naming and word choice. The same person can be *determined* or *stubborn*, *careful* or *fussy*, *frugal* or *mean*. The plain facts have not changed; the **connotation** has. Connotation is the feelings and ideas a word carries with it, over and above its plain meaning. Every time a writer names someone or something, the name is already doing positioning work.

Pronouns. *We* pulls the reader inside a group; *they* holds people at arm's length. A text that keeps saying *people like us* is quietly drawing a circle and deciding who is outside it.

What is missing counts too. Whose voice is absent? When a story about a school never lets a student speak, that silence is a choice, and it positions the reader just as much as the words that are on the page.

3. How images position viewers

Still and moving images have a grammar of their own. The toolkit below uses terms from the visual grammar framework given by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* (1996), which treats gaze, distance and angle as ways images position the people who look at them.

The image positioning toolkit

Gaze, distance and angle are used in the sense given by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, Reading Images (1996).

Choice	What it can do
Gaze — demand	The person looks straight out at the viewer. The image asks something of you — a response, a decision, a feeling.
Gaze — offer	The person looks away. You watch unseen, and you are left to make up your own mind about what you see.
Distance	A close-up puts you inside a character's feelings. A long shot puts you across the street, studying the situation around them.
Camera angle	High angle looks down — the character can look small or exposed. Low angle looks up — powerful or imposing. Eye level meets the character as an equal.
Framing and focal point	What sits in the middle, in the light, biggest — that is what the image says matters. Your eye goes there first.
Colour and light	Warm or cold, bright or dark — colour sets the mood, and a change of colour can track a change of heart.
Symbol	An object that carries more than itself: a locked gate can say being shut out; an empty seat can say a place waiting to be filled.

Table of image choices that position viewers: gaze, distance, camera angle, framing and focal point, colour and light, and symbols, each with what the choice can do

Gaze: demand and offer. When a person in an image looks straight out at you, Kress and van Leeuwen call that a **demand**: the image asks something of you — a response, a decision, a feeling. When the person looks away, the image is an **offer**: you watch unseen, and you are left to make up your own mind about what you see.

Distance works like closeness in life. A close-up on a face puts you inside someone's feelings. A long shot puts you across the street. Films use that gap on purpose: close when they want you to feel *with* a character, far when they want you to study the situation around them.

Angle is about power. A high-angle shot looks down on a character and can make them look small or exposed. A low-angle shot looks up and can make them look powerful or imposing. Eye level puts you with them, as an equal.

Colour and light carry mood, and a change of colour can track a change of heart. Watch what happens in a film when the picture turns from cold to warm — that is rarely an accident.

4. Complex picture books: words and images working together

A **complex picture book** is not a simpler book for younger readers. It is a book that deals with serious or layered ideas and asks you to build the meaning from words and images together — sometimes from the gap between them. Picture books are read in **spreads**: the two facing pages you see when the book lies open, designed as one unit.

Words and images in a spread can work together in three ways.

Three ways words and images can work in a spread

Match	Complement	Contradict
Words: "The storm broke over the town." Image: rain slashing onto rooftops under a black sky. Both carry one message. Clear and strong, but simple.	Words: "No one saw Mara leave." Image: Mara small in a doorway, looking back over her shoulder. Each adds what the other leaves out — what happened, and how it felt.	Words: "Everything was fine." Image: a boy alone in a dark room, head down, a broken cup on the floor. The gap does the work: the reader holds both. A close cousin of irony.

Most complex picture books move between all three — and the contradictions are often where the meaning lives.

Three ways words and images can work in a picture-book spread: match, complement and contradict, each with an original mini example and what it does to the reader

- **Match.** The words and the image say the same thing. This is clear and strong, but simple.
- **Complement.** Each adds what the other leaves out. The words might tell you what happened; the image shows you how it felt.
- **Contradict.** The words say one thing and the image shows another. The reader holds both, and the gap between them does the work. This is a close cousin of the irony you met in Section 1B.

Some real, checkable picture books that position their readers in exactly these ways:

- **Shaun Tan, *The Lost Thing* (2000).** A boy finds a huge strange creature that no one else seems to notice, and searches for the place where it belongs. The flat, busy world of the images positions the reader to see what that world has stopped seeing.
- **Anthony Browne, *Voices in the Park* (1998).** The same walk in the same park is told four times by four different voices. Each voice's words and images position the reader in different ways toward the same people — so the reader feels how much a telling can shape a view.
- **Jeannie Baker, *Mirror* (2010).** A wordless book that follows two families — one in Sydney, one in Morocco — across one day in parallel pictures. With no words at all, the whole position is built by the images and left for the reader to complete.
- **Gary Crew, illustrated by Steven Woolman, *The Watertower* (1994).** A small town, a brooding water tower, and something the pictures hint at that the words never say. The reader is positioned to sense trouble the characters will not name.

5. How film positions the viewer to respond to characters

Film has everything a picture book has — image, framing, colour — and adds three more levers: **movement**, **sound**, and the **cut**. A **cut** is the join between one shot and the next, and it is one of the strongest positioning tools a film owns, because the cut decides what you see, when you see it, and — just as important — what you do *not* see.

A film is planned in **shots**, and a **storyboard** draws those shots out frame by frame before the camera rolls. Here is what the main shot choices typically do to a viewer's response to a character.

Shot and sound choices, and what they usually do

Usually — not always. The effect of any shot depends on the scene around it.

Shot or sound choice	Typical effect on the viewer's response
Close-up	Fills the frame with one face or object; the viewer is placed close to what the character feels.
Long shot	The character seen from far away, small in their setting; the viewer studies the situation rather than shares the feeling.
High angle	The camera looks down; the character can look small, exposed or caught.
Low angle	The camera looks up; the character can look powerful, imposing or threatening.
Eye level	The camera meets the character as an equal; the viewer stands with them.
Point-of-view shot	The camera takes the character's eyes; for one moment, the viewer is them.
The cut — and what is hidden	What the film chooses not to show, the viewer's own mind fills in — often with the worst reading.
Music and sound	Sound tells the viewer how to feel about what they see. Silence can do the same job.
Colour shift	A move from cold to warm — or warm to cold — can track a change of heart.

Table of film shot and sound choices and their typical effect on the viewer: close-up, long shot, high angle, low angle, eye level, point-of-view shot, cut and hidden information, music and sound, and colour shift

Two patterns do most of the positioning work in films about characters.

The first meeting. The first shot of a character sets the terms of your relationship with them. If the film opens on a close-up of their face, you meet them from the inside. If it opens on a long shot of them following someone through a grey street, you meet them from the outside — and you are already forming a judgment before they have said a word.

The reposition. Sometimes a film builds a judgment in you on purpose, then turns it. You are led to think one thing about a character; a later shot shows you what was really happening, and your first judgment collapses. When that happens, notice your own feeling — usually a little shock, or a little shame. That feeling is the point. The film is not just telling you that quick judgments can be unfair. It has just let you make one.

A real, checkable example of the reposition: **Adam Davidson's short film *The Lunch Date* (1989)**. A woman waiting between trains believes a stranger at the station counter is eating her salad; she sits down and shares the meal with him, and the film's last shots show her that she had it wrong all along. The film positions the viewer to feel, from the inside, how an assumption can run ahead of the facts. And **the film of *The Lost Thing* (2010), directed by Andrew Ruhemann and Shaun Tan, which won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film in 2011**, positions the viewer to feel for whatever the busy world overlooks.

6. From response to position

Here is the step that makes this section more than a list of devices. A response is personal — *I like this character, I feel for her, I don't trust him*. A **position** is bigger than one character: it is a view about how things should be. When a film positions you to admire a character who tells the truth at a cost to herself, the invited ethical position is about honesty itself. When a picture book positions you to notice the one person left out of every group, the invited social position is about who belongs.

The response ladder below is your writing scaffold for this section: one rung per step, from the choice on the page to the view in your own mind.

The response ladder

One rung per step when writing about positioning. Each rung stands on the one below it.

5 Give your own response

Accept, adjust or refuse — with reasons.

4 Find the invited position

What view about right and wrong, or about how we live together, does the text want you to leave holding?

3 State the effect

What does it make the audience feel, notice or expect?

2 Give the evidence

Where does it appear? Quote it or describe it exactly.

1 Name the technique

What choice did the maker make — a word, an image, a sound, a shot?

Five-rung response ladder for writing about positioning: name the technique, give the evidence, state the effect, identify the invited position, then give your own judged response

One last thing, and it matters. Apply these tools to texts you **like** as carefully as to texts you dislike. A favourite book is still positioning you; a film you love is still choosing what you see and when. The skill is not being harder to please. The skill is knowing, at all times, when you are being invited somewhere — and walking in with your eyes open.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded: reading a sample picture-book spread

The Empty Seat is a sample complex picture book written and drawn for this book (all three spreads below are samples). Read the three spreads in order.

*At lunchtime, the yard filled with noise.
Every bench had its group.*



The Empty Seat, spread 1 (sample — written and drawn for this book)

Spread one of the sample picture book The Empty Seat: a grey schoolyard seen from above with small groups on benches and one small grey figure standing apart; the words read, At lunchtime, the yard filled with noise. Every bench had its group

*Sam stood where the noise could not reach him.
Across the yard, Mia looked up from her bench.
Beside her, one seat sat empty.*



The Empty Seat, spread 2 (sample — written and drawn for this book)

Spread two of the sample picture book The Empty Seat: Sam small and grey on the left, alone, while on the right Mia turns from her bench to look at him and one empty seat glows with warm light; the words read, Sam stood where the noise could not reach him. Across the yard, Mia looked up from her bench. Beside her, one seat sat empty

*Mia moved her bag. It was such a small thing.
But the seat was not empty any more —
and neither was Sam.*



The Empty Seat, spread 3 (sample — written and drawn for this book)

Spread three of the sample picture book *The Empty Seat*: warm colours now, with Sam and Mia sitting together on the bench talking while the other groups sit softly in the background; the words read, *Mia moved her bag. It was such a small thing. But the seat was not empty any more — and neither was Sam*

Now follow the table, which takes the spreads apart with the positioning chain: choice, effect, invited position.

Choice	Where	Effect on the reader	Position built
Colour	Spread 1	Sam and his corner of the yard are drawn in cold grey-blue while the groups sit in warm colours. The yard reads as two places at once: warm for the groups, cold for Sam.	We are positioned to feel Sam's aloneness, not just see it.
Distance and size	Spread 1	Sam is drawn small, low in the picture, seen from far away — the way someone looks when nobody is looking at them.	We are positioned to notice what the yard's own people do not notice.
Word choice	Spread 1	<i>Every bench had its group.</i> The word <i>its</i> makes each bench sound closed and settled — spoken for.	We are positioned to see Sam as outside the pattern, not part of it.
Gaze and focal point	Spread 2	Mia is drawn turned toward Sam, and the empty seat beside her sits in a pool of warm light — the focal point of the spread.	We are positioned to look where Mia looks, and to put our hope where her choice will land.
Matching sentence shape	Spread 3	<i>The seat was not empty any more — and neither</i>	We are positioned to read the offer of a seat as the

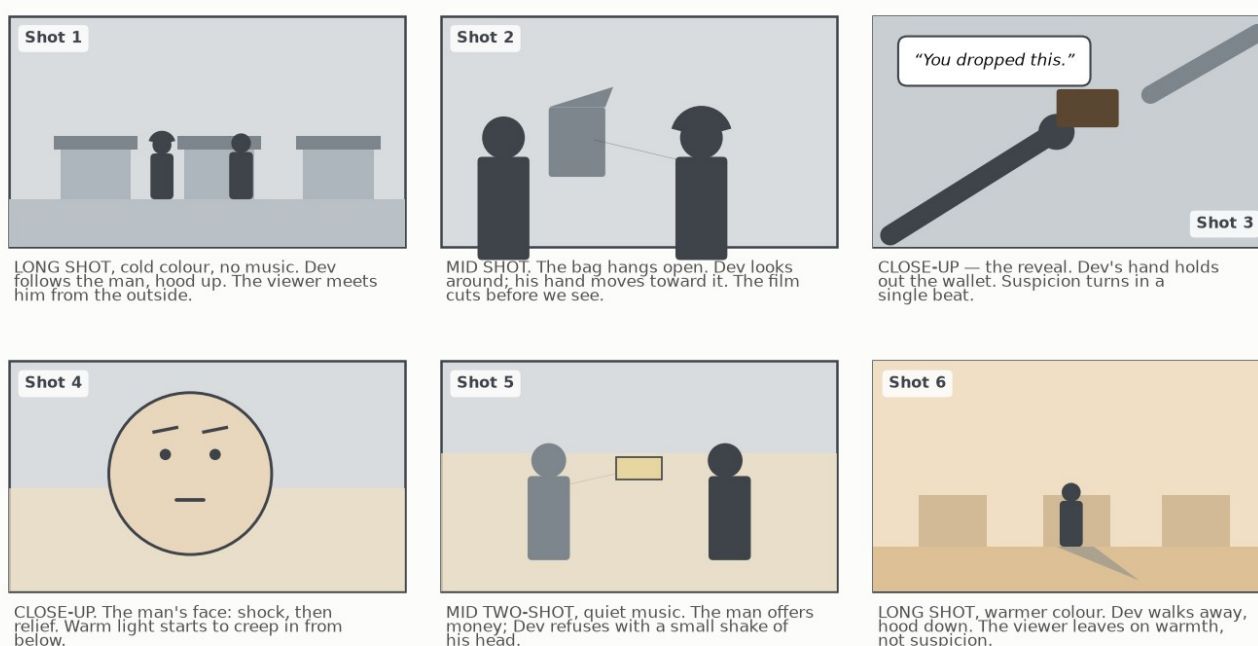
Choice	Where	Effect on the reader	Position built
		was Sam. The two halves of the sentence share one shape, tying the seat to Sam's feelings in a single beat.	offer of a place.

Follow the chain to the end and the positions come into view. The invited **ethical position** is that reaching out to someone is a small act worth making. The invited **social position** is that everyone deserves a place. And notice the book's craft: it never states either position. Both are built from choices you can point to on the page.

Example 2 — unscaffolded: reading a sample film storyboard

Found is a sample short film planned for this book (sample). Its storyboard is below, drawn as six shots. Watch it on paper the way you would watch it on a screen: in order, one shot at a time.

Storyboard of *Found* — a sample short film written and drawn for this book



Storyboard of the sample short film *Found* in six labelled panels: a hooded boy following a man through a grey market street, a hand reaching toward the man's open bag, the reveal of the boy holding out the dropped wallet, the man's relieved face, the man offering money that the boy refuses, and the boy walking away under warmer light

Without a table to help you:

1. Identify three choices the film makes — in its shots, its cuts, its colour or its sound — that position the viewer's response to Dev, the boy. For each, say what the choice does.
2. Name the invited **ethical position** and the invited **social position**, and say which shot or shots build each one.
3. The film only works if the viewer first suspects Dev of taking the wallet. Is it fair of a film to use the viewer's own quick judgment against them like that? Give one reason each way.

Work out your own answers first, then check them against the answers at the end of this section.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Matching choices to effects. Match each choice (i)–(v) to the effect it most often has (A)–(E).

Choices: (i) a close-up on a character's face · (ii) a high-angle shot looking down on a character · (iii) dark, cold colours across a scene · (iv) a character who is never named and is called only *the stranger* · (v) cheerful music playing under a sad scene.

Effects: (A) makes the character look small or exposed · (B) keeps the character distant and unknown · (C) puts the viewer close to what the character feels · (D) sets a heavy mood over everything · (E) creates irony — the scene feels unsettled, as if something is wrong.

Q2. Connotation. Both passages below describe the same character, Bek, at the same gate. They position the reader in different ways.

- (a) *Bek stood at the gate, steady and patient, her bag packed tidily for the trip.*
- (b) *Bek hovered at the gate, shifting from foot to foot, her bag crammed for the trip.*

For each passage, pick two words or phrases that do positioning work, and say whether each one positions the reader **for** Bek or **against** her — and what it invites you to think about her.

Q3. Shot choices. A girl tells her class she has lost her notebook, and no one believes her. You are planning this scene. For each moment below, name one shot or sound choice from the word bank and say what it does for the viewer's response to her.

Word bank: *close-up · long shot · high angle · eye level · point-of-view shot · music stops · cold colours*

- (a) The moment she tells the class.
- (b) The moment she sees that no one believes her.
- (b) The moment she sits down.

Q4. Match, complement or contradict. Each spread below is described in words. Say whether the words and the image **match**, **complement** or **contradict**, and give one reason.

- (i) Words: *The storm broke over the town.* Image: rain slashing onto rooftops under a black sky.
- (ii) Words: *No one saw Mara leave.* Image: Mara small in a doorway, looking back over her shoulder.
- (iii) Words: *Everything was fine.* Image: a boy sitting alone in a dark room, head down, a broken cup on the floor.

Q5. Fill the gaps. Complete each sentence with one term from the box.

Box: *gaze · close-up · colour · point-of-view · high angle*

- (a) A shot filmed as if from one character's eyes, so we see what they see, is a ——— shot.
- (b) When a person in an image looks straight out at the viewer, their ——— makes a demand.
- (c) Filming a character from above, so they look small, is a ——— shot.
- (d) A ——— on a character's face fills the frame with what they feel.
- (e) A shift from cold to warm ——— can show a change of mood.

Q6. Positioning in prose. Read the passage below (written for this book).

Mr Orton set the test papers face down on his desk and looked at the class over his glasses. "Someone," he said, "decided to be clever." No one moved. Tomas felt his ears go hot, even though he had done nothing but sit in his usual seat.

- (a) Find two choices that position the reader to feel **for** Tomas, and say how each one works.
- (b) Find one choice that positions the reader **against** the person Mr Orton means, and say how it works.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Analytic paragraph. Using the response ladder, write one paragraph explaining how *The Empty Seat* (Worked example 1) positions its readers toward a social or ethical position. Point to at least two choices — one of language, one of image — and follow each one through to the position it builds.

Q8. A reposition, planned. In a short film, a new student, Ari, is blamed for a broken window. The truth: Ari was trying to stop the window breaking. Plan the film's reposition.

- (a) List four choices — shots, cuts, sound, colour, what to show or hide — that position the viewer **against** Ari at the start. Give a one-line reason for each.
- (b) List four choices that turn the viewer **to** Ari's side when the truth comes out. Give a one-line reason for each.

Q9. A real text. Choose one real picture book or film you know — perhaps one from this section's list (*The Lost Thing*, *Voices in the Park*, *Mirror*, *The Watertower*, *The Lunch Date*, *The Red Balloon*, directed by Albert Lamorisse, 1956) or one your class has studied. In one paragraph, explain one way it positions its reader or viewer to respond to a character. Describe the technique in your own words from your own memory of the text. If you do not know any of these texts, use the storyboard of *Found* instead.

Q10. Create a spread. Make one picture-book spread that positions the reader toward an ethical position about fairness. Write the words of the spread (one to three sentences) and describe — or sketch — the image that goes with them. Then write three sentences of commentary: name the way your words and image work (match, complement or contradict), name one language choice and one image choice, and say what position you are inviting.

Product task — viewing

Viewing: study the storyboard of *Found* (Worked example 2). If your teacher screens a real short film in class — for example, *The Lunch Date* (Adam Davidson, 1989) — you may use the film you have seen in place of the storyboard for Parts B and C.

Part A. Copy this table and complete it for *Found* with three different techniques.

Technique	Where it appears	What it does to the viewer's response to Dev
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Part B. Name the invited **ethical position** and the invited **social position** of the film. For each, explain one technique that builds it, using the shape: *The film invites the view that ... It builds this by ..., which positions the viewer to ...*

Part C. Give your own response to the invited positions: do you accept them, adjust them, or refuse them? Give your reasons. Then take the question one step further: *the film only works if the viewer first suspects Dev of taking the wallet*. Write two or three sentences for each side of this question — one side arguing that it is fair of a film to use the viewer's own quick judgment this way, the other arguing that it is not.

Marks for this task go to the quality of your reasoning — positions named, techniques pointed to, effects explained, your own view given with reasons — not to which side you finish on. Two students reaching opposite conclusions can both do full marks.

Answers

Q1. (i)–(C) · (ii)–(A) · (iii)–(D) · (iv)–(B) · (v)–(E).

Q2. Sample answers. Passage (a): *steady and patient* positions for Bek — it invites us to see her as calm and ready; *packed tidily* positions for her — it suggests she is prepared and takes care over the trip. Passage (b): *hovered* positions against her — it invites us to see her as unsettled, or as someone who does not quite belong where she stands; *crammed* positions against her — it suggests she is not on top of things. The facts of the scene have not changed; only the connotations have.

Q3. Sample answers. (a) A **close-up** as she tells the class puts the viewer close to her hope and her nerves. (b) When she sees that no one believes her, **the music stopping** leaves her words hanging in the silence, and the viewer feels the room turn away from her. (c) A **high-angle shot** as she sits down makes her look small and alone with what has happened. (Other word-bank choices can work if the reason fits.)

Q4. (i) **Match** — words and image both say the storm has hit; they carry one message. (ii) **Complement** — the words tell us something the image cannot (that nobody saw her); the image adds what the words leave out (how Mara feels about leaving — she looks back). (iii) **Contradict** — the words say all is well while the image shows it is not; the reader holds both, and the gap reads as irony.

Q5. (a) point-of-view · (b) gaze · (c) high angle · (d) close-up · (e) colour.

Q6. (a) Two of these: *even though he had done nothing* tells us directly that Tomas is not guilty, so we feel the unfairness with him; *his ears go hot* puts us inside his body and his embarrassment; *his usual seat* paints him as ordinary and blameless — the sort of person who just sits where he always sits. (b) *decided to be clever* — Mr Orton's own words — positions us against the unknown student by framing the act as a choice made to show off; the unnamed *someone* also keeps that person at a distance. *Looked at the class over his glasses* builds the mood of suspicion the whole class now sits under.

Example 2. Sample answers: (1) Three choices — Shot 1's **long shot** keeps Dev distant and hooded, following a man through a grey street, which positions the viewer to read him as someone up to no good; the **cut at the end of Shot 2** hides what Dev's hand does at the bag, and the viewer's own mind fills the gap with the worst reading; Shot 3's **close-up** reveals the truth — Dev holding the wallet out — and repositions the viewer in a single beat, turning suspicion into shame and then into admiration. The shift from **cold to warm colour** across Shots 4–6 and the **music coming in quietly** at Shot 5 also track the viewer's changed judgment. (2) The invited **ethical position** is that doing the right thing is worth doing even when nobody expects it of you and no reward follows — built strongest at Shot 5, where Dev refuses the money. The invited **social position** is that quick judgments about strangers can be unfair — built by the whole shape of the film, since the viewer has just made exactly that judgment and felt it collapse. (3) One reason each way: fair — the film never tells the viewer to suspect Dev; it simply shows what our own habits of judgment do, and viewers who feel the sting may notice those habits next time. Not fair — to make its point the film must first build a quick judgment about a young stranger, so it trades on the very habit it criticises, and some viewers may remember only the suspicion, not the lesson.

Q7–Q10 and the product task are writing and viewing tasks. Model responses are in the fully-worked solutions below. Check yours against the response ladder: technique named, evidence given, effect stated, position identified, your own judgment offered.

Fully-worked solutions

Q7 — model analytic paragraph.

The Empty Seat positions its readers to accept that everyone deserves a place. In spread one, the words say *every bench had its group*, and the image draws Sam small and grey at the edge of a loud, warm-coloured yard. The word *its* makes each bench sound closed and spoken for, and the cold colour around Sam keeps him apart, so the reader feels the yard as two places at once — warm for the groups, cold for Sam. In spread two, Mia is drawn turned toward Sam, and the empty seat beside her sits in a pool of warm light, which tells the reader where to put their hope. The final line sets two halves of one shape beside each other — *the seat was not empty any more — and neither was Sam* — tying the seat to Sam's feelings in a single beat. The invited ethical position is that reaching out is a small act worth making; the invited social position is that everyone deserves a place. A reader may refuse either position, but the book builds both out of choices you can point to.

Why it works: two choices are followed all the way along the chain (choice → effect → position), both positions are named, and the last sentence keeps the reader's own judgment in view.

Q8 — sample reposition plan.

Against Ari at the start: (1) a **long shot** of Ari alone near the broken window while a crowd gathers — isolation reads as guilt; (2) a **high angle** on Ari's face when the teacher arrives — she looks small and caught; (3) the film **hides the moment the window breaks** — the viewer never sees what happened, so they fill the gap against Ari; (4) **no music, only the crowd's voices** — no sound is on Ari's side, so the viewer's feelings have nowhere to go but with the crowd.

To Ari's side at the truth: (1) the missing moment is **replayed from Ari's point of view** — the viewer finally sees what she was trying to do; (2) a **close-up** on Ari's hands in the replay — braced against the window, not throwing anything; (3) **warm colour and quiet music come in** as the class understands — the film's warmth follows the corrected judgment; (4) a final **eye-level two-shot** of the teacher and Ari — the viewer now meets her as an equal, not from above.

Q9 — model paragraph (using the picture book *The Lost Thing*).

In Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2000), the images position the reader to feel for the strange creature long before the boy finds a home for it. The creature is drawn huge and red, taking up half the page, while the world around it is grey, busy and full of signs and pipes that leave no room for anything strange. The people in the images never look at the creature — their gaze is always somewhere else — and that offer, where nobody in the book sees what we see, positions the reader as the only one who notices. The invited position is social: a world that only has eyes for its own routine stops seeing what does not fit, and the reader is positioned against that habit.

Q10 — model spread and commentary.

Words: *There was a seat for everyone at the table. Tom's just happened to be in the hall.* Image (described): the classroom seen from the hall — warm light and laughing faces inside, and Tom alone at a desk in the cold corridor, drawn smaller than everyone else, his back half-turned to the door.

Commentary: the words and the image **contradict** — the first sentence sounds fair and settled while the picture shows Tom left out, and the gap reads as irony. The language choice *just happened* positions the reader to doubt the fairness being claimed, and the image choice to draw Tom small and in cold light positions the reader to feel his distance from the group. The spread invites the ethical position that an arrangement can be the same for everyone on paper and still leave someone out in fact.

Product task — model response for *Found*.

Part A.

Technique	Where it appears	What it does to the viewer's response to Dev
Long shot, cold colour, hood up	Shot 1	Keeps Dev distant and hard to read; the viewer meets him from the outside and starts to judge him.
Cut that hides the action	End of Shot 2	Withholds what Dev's hand does; the viewer's own mind fills the gap with the worst reading.
Close-up reveal, warm colour coming in	Shots 3–4	Shows Dev holding the wallet out; suspicion turns to shame and then admiration, and the warming picture tracks the change.

Part B. The film invites the **ethical position** that doing the right thing is worth doing even when no reward follows. It builds this by Shot 5, where Dev refuses the money with a small shake of his head, which positions the viewer to see his honesty as its own reward. The film invites the **social position** that quick judgments about strangers can be unfair. It builds this through the whole shape of the film — the viewer is led to suspect Dev, then shown the truth — which positions the viewer to feel the unfairness from the inside, because they have just made the judgment themselves.

Part C — model. I accept both positions, with one adjustment: I think the social position is the stronger of the two, because the film lets me feel my own mistake rather than telling me about someone else's. On the fairness question, the two sides: *Fair* — the film never tells the viewer to suspect Dev; it simply lets our own habits of judgment do the work and then shows us what they did, so a viewer who feels the sting may notice those habits in real life. *Not fair* — to land its point, the film must first build a quick judgment about a young stranger, so it trades on the very habit it criticises; and a viewer who never questions themselves might carry away only the suspicion, not the lesson. Both sides can be argued well; what matters is that each is argued from something the film actually does.

Intertextual references in literary texts: allusion and quotation

Chapter 3 · Literature: examining literature

Strand · Sub-strand

Literature · Examining literature

Content description

VC2E8LE04 — Students learn to: *identify intertextual references in literary texts and explain how the references enable new understandings* (Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, English, Level 8, VCAA).

Elaboration links

.E01 identifying intertextual references through allusion or quotation in written texts and discussing how knowledge of other texts influences the reader's understanding and appreciation. This is VCAA's advisory example only; the content description above is what this section teaches.

Modes

Reading and Viewing — spotting and explaining references in written texts · Writing — using references with purpose in your own analytic and creative writing.

Every text you have ever loved stands on the shoulders of older texts. This section teaches the two ways a writer reaches back — **allusion** and **quotation** — and the habit of mind that turns spotting a reference into an explanation of what it adds.

The idea

1. What an intertextual reference is.

A note on the term. The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *intertextual references* but does not define it. This section therefore treats an **intertextual reference** as *a moment in one text that points to another text, story or well-known phrase, so that knowing the other text changes what the reader understands or appreciates*. The word *intertextuality* was first used in 1966 by the thinker Julia Kristeva, who argued that every text is woven out of earlier texts. Some scholars keep that wide view: every text refers to other texts, whether the writer plans it or not. Others use the word only for references a writer plants and a reader can catch. This section uses the narrow view, because those are the references you can identify and explain. The wide view is worth knowing — and a response that reasons from either view earns marks for the reasoning, not for the side it picks.

An intertextual reference has two ends: the **source** (the older text, story or phrase) and the **new text** (the one you are reading). The reference asks the reader to carry something from the source into the new text. When that happens, the curriculum says the reference *enables new understandings* — the reader understands more than the words on the page say.

2. The two paths: allusion and quotation.

Two ways one text can refer to another

QUOTATION — the direct path

the exact words of the other text appear again, inside speech marks

Sample: "All the world's a stage," she said.



ALLUSION — the indirect path

only a hint appears: a word, a name or a phrase the reader must connect

Sample: Penalty corners were our Achilles heel.

Both are intertextual references. They differ in how directly they point.

Diagram showing a new text connected to an earlier text by two arrows: an orange upper arrow labelled quotation, the direct path where the exact words appear again in speech marks, and a blue lower arrow labelled allusion, the indirect path where only a hint appears

An **allusion** is an indirect reference. The writer drops in a word, a name or a phrase and does not explain it: *Penalty corners were our Achilles heel*. The reader has to connect *Achilles heel* to the Greek story behind it. A **quotation** is a direct reference. The exact words of another text appear again, inside speech marks, and often with a source named: *"All the world's a stage," she said*. The reader's job changes: the words are given, so the reader asks *why these words, here?*

Allusion and quotation, side by side

	ALLUSION	QUOTATION
What it is	an indirect reference — a hint at another text, person or story	a direct reference — the exact words of another text
How it shows up	a word, name or phrase dropped in without any explanation	the borrowed words appear in speech marks, often with a source named
The reader's job	connect the hint to the story behind it	spot the borrowed words, then ask why they are here
Sample (written for this book)	"Penalty corners were our Achilles heel."	"All the world's a stage," she said.

Same job — referring to another text — different path: a hint, or the exact words.

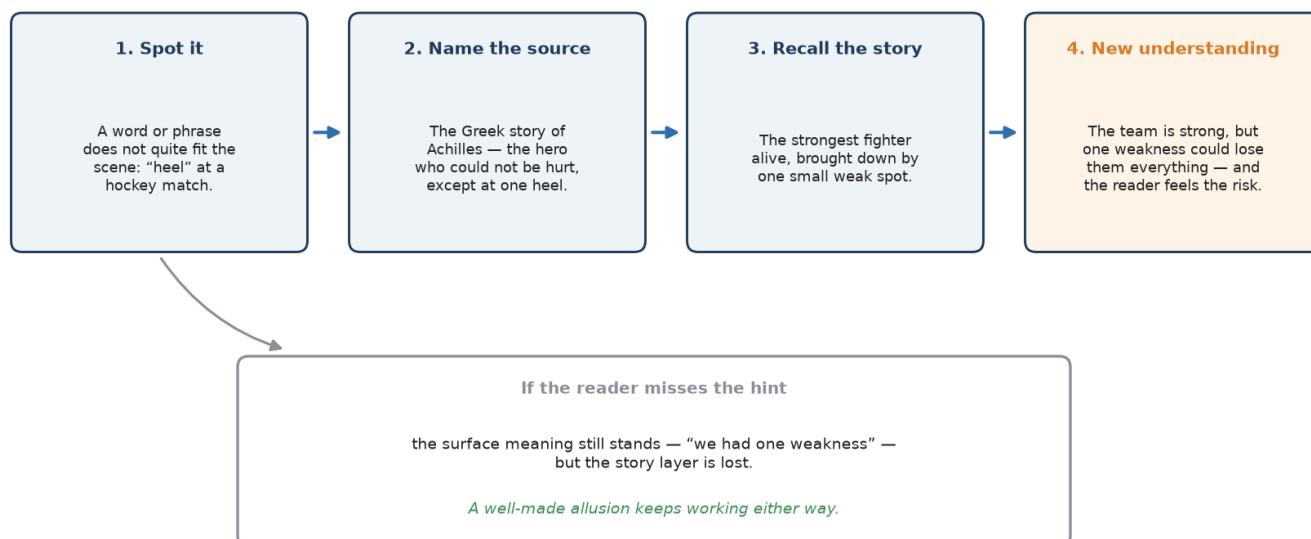
Comparison table with four rows (what it is, how it shows up, the reader's job, and a sample written for this book) comparing allusion, an indirect reference, with quotation, a direct reference

Both paths do the same job — they bring an older text into a new one. They differ in how directly they point.

3. How an allusion works — the reader's share of the job.

How an allusion works — the reader's share of the job

Sample sentence (written for this book): "All season, the defence had been our Achilles heel."



The reference supplies the hint. The reader's knowledge supplies the story.

Flow diagram with four boxes: spot it, name the source, recall the story, new understanding; applied to the sample sentence written for this book, "All season, the defence had been our Achilles heel"; a grey side box shows that if the reader misses the hint, the surface meaning still stands but the story layer is lost

Notice the grey box at the bottom. If a reader misses the hint, the sentence still makes sense on the surface — *we had one weakness*. A well-made allusion keeps working either way. Some readers conclude from this that a missed allusion does nothing, so the reference only matters for readers who catch it. Others answer that a missed allusion still colours the sentence (a *heel* is a bodily weak spot, so the image works even without the story), and that every re-read catches more. Both claims are reasonable; what earns marks is not picking a side but explaining what changes for a reader who does catch it: the story layer arrives, and with it a feeling the surface words never state.

4. Where allusions come from — the pools.

Writers draw allusions from story pools that many readers share. The more you read, the more pools you can spot.

Common pools that allusions draw on

Story pool	Allusion you might meet	What it usually means
Ancient Greek myths (told over 2,000 years ago)	“Achilles heel”	the one weak spot in an otherwise strong person or team
Ancient Greek myths (told over 2,000 years ago)	“the Midas touch”	a knack for making everything you try succeed
Aesop’s fables (about 2,500 years old)	“the tortoise and the hare”	slow and steady beats fast and overconfident
European fairy tales (told for centuries; written down from 1697)	“a Cinderella story”	someone overlooked who suddenly gets their big moment
Stories from the Bible (known by many readers)	“David and Goliath”	a small side taking on a giant one — and winning
Shakespeare’s plays (written 1590s–1610s)	“the green-eyed monster”	jealousy
Australian bush ballads (1880s–1890s)	“a man from Snowy River”	a quiet, unlikely person who succeeds when others can’t

The more you read, the more of these pools you can spot. Every phrase here is in everyday use.

Table of common story pools with an example allusion and its usual meaning: Ancient Greek myths (Achilles heel, the Midas touch), Aesop’s fables (the tortoise and the hare), European fairy tales written down from 1697 (a Cinderella story), stories from the Bible (David and Goliath), Shakespeare’s plays from the 1590s to 1610s (the green-eyed monster), and Australian bush ballads of the 1880s to 1890s (a man from Snowy River)

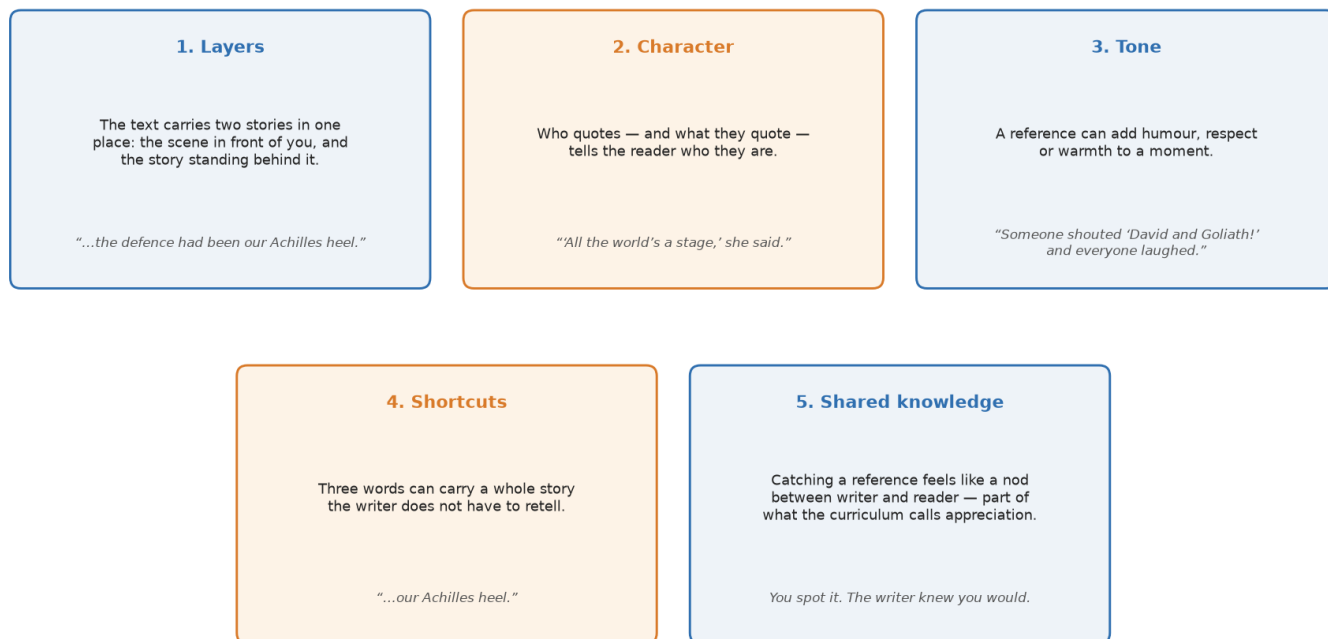
Every phrase in that table is in everyday use in English. You have almost certainly met most of them outside school.

5. How a quotation works.

A quotation hands the reader the exact words, so the reader’s job is not to find a hidden story but to ask three questions: *Who is quoting? What do the words mean in their source? Why do they fit this moment?* The speech marks are a promise: these words belong to someone else, and the writer wants you to hear that.

6. What a reference can do — five effects.

Five things an intertextual reference can do



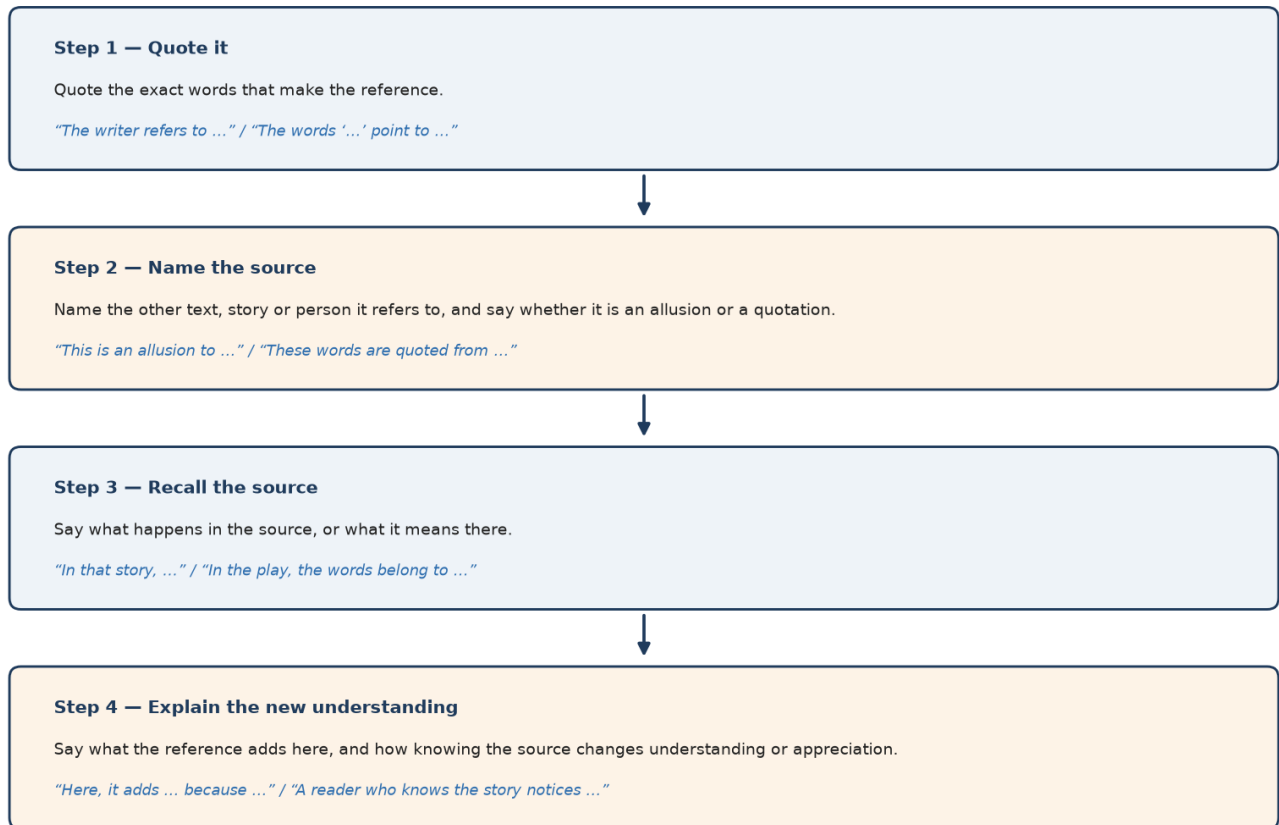
One reference can do several of these at once. Naming what it does is the analysis.

Diagram of five labelled cards: 1 Layers, the text carries two stories in one place; 2 Character, who quotes and what they quote tells the reader who they are; 3 Tone, a reference can add humour, respect or warmth; 4 Shortcuts, three words can carry a whole story; 5 Shared knowledge, catching a reference feels like a nod between writer and reader

When you explain a reference, naming which of these five it does is the analysis. One reference can do several at once.

7. The four-step habit.

The four-step habit for analysing a reference



This is the content description in action: identify the reference, then explain how it enables new understandings.

Flow diagram of four stacked steps for analysing a reference: Step 1 quote it, with sentence starters; Step 2 name the source, with starters; Step 3 recall the source, with starters; Step 4 explain the new understanding, with starters

Step 4 is where the curriculum's *enable new understandings* lives. Steps 1–3 are identification; Step 4 is explanation. In every task below, the marks sit in Step 4.

Worked examples

Example 1 — reading a passage for allusions (scaffolded)

The sample passage below was written for this book. The highlights mark two allusions, and the boxes under the passage run each one through the four steps.

Reading a passage for allusions

Sample text — “The grand final” (written for this book)

Our team had one weakness, and everyone knew it: penalty corners.

All season, the defence had been **our Achilles heel**. In the grand final, with one minute left, the umpire blew for a penalty corner against us.

Their striker stepped up. Our goalie stood her ground, and saved the flick with her boot. The whistle went, and we had won. Someone behind the goal shouted “**David and Goliath!**” — and everyone laughed, because the smallest school in the district had just beaten the biggest.

ALLUSION 1 — “our Achilles heel”

Source: the Greek story of Achilles — the hero who could not be hurt, except at one heel.

What it adds: the team is strong, but one small weakness could bring it down. Because the reader knows the story, the final penalty corner feels more dangerous.

ALLUSION 2 — “David and Goliath!”

Source: the Bible story of David, the boy who beat the giant no soldier could face.

What it adds: it names the win — the little side beating the giant. Naming the story makes the match feel like one of the stories readers love: the unlikely side wins.

Naming a story (“David and Goliath”) is still an allusion — it points at the story instead of quoting its words.

Sample text written for this book, “The grand final”, with two highlighted allusions: “our Achilles heel” linked to a blue box naming the Greek story of Achilles and what it adds, and “David and Goliath!” linked to an orange box naming the Bible story and what it adds

The same four steps as a table:

Step	Allusion 1	Allusion 2
1. Quote it	“our Achilles heel”	“David and Goliath!”
2. Name the source	the Greek story of Achilles; an allusion , because only the name is borrowed, not words from the story	the Bible story of David and Goliath; also an allusion , because it names the story instead of quoting its words
3. Recall the source	Achilles could not be hurt except at one heel	a small boy beat a giant that no soldier would face
4. Explain the new understanding	the team is strong, but one small weakness could bring it down — so the final penalty corner feels more dangerous than the words alone say	the win is named as a story readers already love: the unlikely side wins, so the result feels bigger and warmer

Example 2 — reading a passage for a quotation (scaffolded)

The next sample was also written for this book. This time the reference is a quotation: the borrowed words appear in speech marks, and the source is a real play — William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2 Scene 7 (c. 1599).

Reading a passage for a quotation

Sample text — “Opening night” (written for this book)

Backstage, everyone talked at once. The lead had forgotten his lines twice in rehearsal, and the set door would not open quietly. Our drama teacher looked over the noise and smiled. **“All the world’s a stage,”** she said, **“and all the men and women merely players.”** Then she pointed at us. “You have rehearsed for a term. Tonight you just play your parts.” One line from a play written more than four hundred years ago calmed the room.

QUOTATION — the borrowed words

Speech marks show the words are not the narrator’s.
Source: William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2 Scene 7 (c. 1599).

In the play, a character named Jaques says that life is like a play and every person is a player with parts to act. The teacher borrows the words for her own stage: a school hall on opening night.

What the quotation adds

1. Character: she is the kind of person who keeps old words for new moments.
2. Calm and weight: four hundred years of actors have been nervous, and the words say tonight will be all right.
3. A bridge: “Tonight you just play your parts” turns Jaques’ line into practical advice.

An allusion asks the reader to bring the story. A quotation brings the words itself — and asks why they are here.

Sample text written for this book, “Opening night”, with the quoted words “All the world’s a stage,” and “and all the men and women merely players.” highlighted; an orange box names the Shakespeare source and what the words mean in the play, and a blue box lists what the quotation adds: character, calm and weight, and a bridge to the teacher’s own advice

Step	The quotation in “Opening night”
1. Quote it	“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.”
2. Name the source	William Shakespeare, <i>As You Like It</i> , Act 2 Scene 7 (c. 1599); a quotation , because the exact words appear in speech marks
3. Recall the source	in the play, Jaques says that life is like a play and every person is a player with parts to act
4. Explain the new understanding	three effects at once: character (she is the kind of person who keeps old words for new moments), tone (four hundred years of nervous actors stand behind the words, so they calm the room), and a bridge (her next line, “Tonight you just play your parts,” turns Jaques’ idea into practical advice for a school hall)

Practice tasks

Scaffolded

Q1. Allusion or quotation? Say whether each reference below is an allusion or a quotation, and give the one-word clue that told you.

- Our new goalie is a real Spider-Man around the goal.
- When the call went against us, Coach sighed, “to be, or not to be.”
- The canteen queue was a Dickens novel — long, loud and full of characters.
- My sister’s bike got a flat tyre and she cried, “a horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!”
- The principal said building the new hall had been a Herculean task.

Q2. Match the phrase to its pool. Match each allusion (left) to the story pool it draws on (right).

Phrase	Pool
i. “the Midas touch”	A. stories from the Bible
ii. “a Cinderella story”	B. Ancient Greek myths
iii. “the green-eyed monster”	C. Australian bush ballads
iv. “David and Goliath”	D. European fairy tales
v. “a man from Snowy River”	E. Shakespeare’s plays
vi. “the tortoise and the hare”	F. Aesop’s fables

Q3. Finish the four steps. The table for “our Achilles heel” from Example 1 is repeated here with Steps 2–4 blank. Complete it in your own words.

Step	Your answer
1. Quote it	“our Achilles heel”
2. Name the source	<i>(name the story, and say why this is an allusion)</i>
3. Recall the source	<i>(one sentence: what happens in that story?)</i>
4. Explain the new understanding	<i>(one sentence: what does a reader who knows the story feel at the final penalty corner?)</i>

Q4. One of each. The sample below was written for this book. It hides one allusion and one quotation. Find both, name each source, and say which is which. The quotation is real: A. B. “Banjo” Paterson, “The Man from Snowy River” (1890).

The audition *(written for this book)*

The drama room went quiet when Zoe walked in. Two years of rivalry walked in with her, and I saw a green-eyed monster or two wake up around the room. Then Zoe announced she was trying out for the lead as well. “There was movement at the station,” Maya muttered beside me, “for the word had passed around.” We both laughed too loudly, because we knew the old ballad, and we knew exactly what kind of colt had got away.

Q5. Rewrite with an allusion. Each sentence below says its meaning flatly. Rewrite it using an allusion from the pools table (Figure 4), so the same meaning arrives with a story behind it. The first is done for you.

- Our team’s big weakness was defence. → *All season, defence had been our Achilles heel.*
- Nobody expected her to win, and then she won everything. →
- The smallest school beat the biggest school in the final. →

Q6. Why the quotation works. In Q4’s “The audition”, Maya quotes Paterson’s ballad. In two or three sentences, explain what the quotation adds. Use these three prompts, one sentence each:

- Who is quoting, and what does the choice of words tell you about Maya and the narrator?
- In the ballad, the “movement at the station” is news that something big is about to happen. What is the “movement” in this scene?
- What does a reader who knows the ballad feel that a reader who has never met it misses?

Un scaffolded

Q7. Run the four steps twice. The sample below was written for this book. It contains one allusion and one quotation; the quotation is adapted from the Bible, Ecclesiastes 9:11. Run both references through all four steps.

The last lap (*written for this book*)

Two hundred metres to go, and I was three strides ahead. My legs said keep going; my lungs said stop. Behind me, Chen’s steps never changed — slow, even, patient. I thought of the tortoise and the hare, and pushed harder. At the bell my teacher called out, “the race is not always to the swift!” I almost laughed. I was the swift. Then Chen went past me like a door opening, and I learned what the old writer meant.

Q8. Plant your own. Write a passage of 60–80 words, set in any place you like, that contains **one allusion and one quotation**. Under the passage, name both sources in one line each. If you quote a real text, put its title and writer in that line.

Q9. Discuss. “*An allusion only works if the reader notices it.*” Argue the claim as strongly as you can, then argue the opposite as strongly as you can. Which side do you finally land on, and why? (There are marks on both sides — the marks sit in the reasoning, not the conclusion.)

Q10. Two versions. Below are two versions of the same moment, written for this book. In a short paragraph, argue which version is more effective and name at least two of the five effects (Figure 7) behind your choice.

Version A

Dad looked at the torn fence, then at the dog. “Well,” he said, “the dog’s got the Midas touch.” Mum laughed, because nothing the dog touched stayed clean.

Version B

Dad looked at the torn fence, then at the dog. “Well,” he said, “the dog makes a mess of everything.” Mum laughed, because it was true.

Product task — an analytic response

Read the extract below. It was written for this book and contains **one allusion and one quotation**. The quotation is real: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 1 Scene 2 (c. 1599), spoken by Cassius.

The presentation (*written for this book*)

When Mr Hughes handed me the box of prize ribbons, he said, “the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.” I had spent a week blaming the printer, the weather and the bus timetable for the stall’s mess. He was saying, kindly, that the stars were fine and the planning was mine. Running the whole show alone had been a Herculean task — twelve jobs, one person — and now the pack-down was mine too. I taped up the last ribbon and the hall finally looked like the plan I had drawn. Somewhere in the office, a printer hummed, innocent at last.

Your task. Write an analytic response of **250–300 words** that identifies the intertextual references in the extract and explains how they enable new understandings. For each reference: quote it, name the source, say whether it is an allusion or a quotation, recall what the source means, and explain what the reference adds here — to character, tone, or the reader’s understanding of the moment.

Where the marks sit. Identification (quote, name, classify, recall) is Steps 1–3; explanation (Step 4) is where most of the marks sit. A response that names both sources and explains what each adds will score higher than a response that lists five references and explains none. The marks sit in the reasoning, not the conclusion.

Before you hand it in:

Before you hand your response in

☐	I have quoted the exact words that make each reference.
☐	I have named the source text or story for each one.
☐	I have said whether each reference is an allusion or a quotation.
☐	I have said what happens in the source, or what it means there.
☐	I have explained what each reference adds to this text.
☐	I have said how knowing the source changes my understanding or appreciation.
☐	I have credited any quotation I used in my own writing.

Every check maps to a mark: the marks sit in the reasoning, not the conclusion.

Checklist titled “Before you hand your response in” with seven tick boxes: I have quoted the exact words that make each reference; I have named the source text or story for each one; I have said whether each reference is an allusion or a quotation; I have said what happens in the source, or what it means there; I have explained what each reference adds to this text; I have said how knowing the source changes my understanding or appreciation; I have credited any quotation I used in my own writing

Answers

Q1. a. allusion (a name is dropped in, no speech marks); b. quotation (the words sit in speech marks; the source is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*); c. allusion (a writer's name used as a byword); d. quotation (speech marks; the source is Shakespeare's *Richard III*); e. allusion (the name *Herculean* points to the labours of Hercules).

Q2. i → B; ii → D; iii → E; iv → A; v → C; vi → F.

Q3. Sample: Step 2 — the Greek story of Achilles; an allusion because only the name is borrowed. Step 3 — Achilles could not be hurt except at one heel. Step 4 — a reader who knows the story feels the final penalty corner as the one place the team can be beaten.

Q4. Allusion: “a green-eyed monster or two wake up” — Shakespeare's *Othello*, where jealousy is called the green-eyed monster; an allusion because the phrase is borrowed without speech marks. Quotation: “There was movement at the station ... for the word had passed around” — Paterson's “The Man from Snowy River”; a quotation because the exact words appear in speech marks and the narrator names the ballad.

Q5. b. sample — *Nobody expected her to win, but it turned into a Cinderella story.* c. sample — *The final was David and Goliath, and the little school won.*

Q6. Sample: Maya and the narrator are the kind of people who joke in borrowed lines, so the quotation builds character and shared humour. The “movement” in this scene is Zoe's arrival and her announcement — news that something big is about to happen, exactly as in the ballad. A reader who knows the ballad also hears the colt that got away, and so feels the rivalry and the stakes without being told.

Q7. Allusion: “the tortoise and the hare” (Aesop) — the slow, steady runner beats the fast, overconfident one; here it makes Chen's even pace feel like a threat before anything happens, and turns the narrator's lead into the hare's mistake. Quotation: “the race is not always to the swift” (adapted from Ecclesiastes 9:11) — the old line says speed does not guarantee winning; spoken at the bell, it works as a warning the narrator laughs at, and the ending (“I learned what the old writer meant”) lets the source deliver the moral so the narrator does not have to.

Q8. Check: one allusion (a hint, no speech marks) and one quotation (exact words in speech marks), 60–80 words, sources named under the passage.

Q9. Side one: a missed allusion adds nothing to that reader, so the reference only “works” when it is caught. Side two: the surface meaning still stands, the image can still colour the sentence, and a missed hint can be caught on a second read — so the allusion keeps working either way. Land where the reasoning takes you; state why the other side is weaker.

Q10. Sample: Version A is more effective. The allusion adds **tone** (the joke runs opposite to the meaning — gold for mess — so the humour is Dad's, not the narrator's) and **shared knowledge** (readers who catch the Midas touch share the joke with Dad). It is also a **shortcut**: three words carry the whole idea of “makes a mess of everything” plus the joke.

Product task. See the fully-worked model below.

Fully-worked solutions

Q4 (model table).

Step	Allusion	Quotation
1. Quote it	“a green-eyed monster or two wake up”	“There was movement at the station ... for the word had passed around”
2. Name the source	Shakespeare’s <i>Othello</i> ; an allusion	Paterson’s “The Man from Snowy River” (1890); a quotation
3. Recall the source	in <i>Othello</i> , jealousy is the “green-eyed monster” that eats the person who feels it	the ballad opens with news spreading around a station that the colt from old Regret has got away
4. New understanding	the rivalry is named as something alive and hungry, so the quiet room feels less quiet	the audition is renamed as the start of a race; readers who know the ballad hear the whole chase in two lines

Q7 (model paragraph). *The passage plants two references that tell the same story early. The allusion to Aesop’s tortoise and hare lands when the narrator notices Chen’s even pace: naming the fable turns Chen into the tortoise before the race does, and turns the narrator’s lead into the hare’s famous mistake, so the reader feels the result coming. The quotation, adapted from Ecclesiastes 9:11, says the same thing in the teacher’s voice — speed does not guarantee winning — and because it is quoted aloud at the bell, it works as a warning the narrator laughs at. Knowing the sources changes the ending: “I learned what the old writer meant” is not just a line about losing, because the reader has watched two old texts come true in one lap. The references add layers (two stories in one race), tone (the narrator’s confidence reads as the hare’s error), and a shortcut (no need to explain Chen’s method — the fable does it in five words).*

Q9 (model structure). *Side one, stated strongly: meaning happens in readers, not on pages; if no reader connects the hint to its source, the source contributes nothing, so an unnoticed allusion is decoration at best. Side two, stated strongly: “works” can mean more than “is noticed” — the surface sentence still stands, the borrowed image can still colour the line (a heel is a weak spot with or without Achilles), and a missed hint waits for the next read, so the allusion keeps working either way. Landing: the second side is stronger for well-made allusions, because they carry a surface meaning and a story meaning; but the first side is right about the story layer — it only arrives when a reader catches it. That is exactly why writers plant allusions in pools many readers share.*

Q10 (model paragraph). *Version A does more work with fewer words. The allusion to the Midas touch sets the tone: Midas turned everything to gold, Dad’s dog ruins everything he touches, and the gap between gold and mess is the joke, so the humour belongs to Dad’s character and the reader hears him as someone who jokes instead of shouts. That is the character effect as well — who alludes, and to what, tells us who Dad is. The allusion is also a shortcut: “the Midas touch” carries “makes a mess of everything” plus the joke in three words, and readers who catch it share a nod with the writer (shared knowledge). Version B says the fact and loses the joke, the character and the nod. Both versions are clear; only one is layered.*

Product task (model response, 291 words). *The extract layers two references that both move the blame from luck to the narrator. The quotation is Cassius’ line from Julius Caesar, “the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.” In the play, Cassius tells Brutus to stop blaming fate and own his choices; quoted kindly by Mr Hughes, the words rename a week of excuses — printer, weather, bus timetable — as “stars,” and hand the narrator the same choice Brutus had. Knowing the source adds weight to a small moment: a teacher’s joke becomes a four-hundred-year-old argument about responsibility, and the tone stays warm because the quotation does the telling-off so Mr Hughes does not have to. The allusion works the same way from the other end. Calling the job a “Herculean task” points to the labours of Hercules, the impossible jobs one hero had to finish alone, so “twelve jobs, one person” stops being a complaint and becomes a small epic: the reader pictures the labours and feels the size of the week without being told. The two references also answer each other. Hercules finishes his labours, so the allusion hints the job can be done; Cassius says the fault is ours, so the quotation says the mess was ours too — and the closing joke, the printer “innocent at last,” lands only because the quotation already moved the blame off it. Together the references enable the extract’s new understanding: the hall looks like the plan once the narrator stops blaming the stars. A reader who misses both references still follows a student packing up after a hard week; a reader who catches them watches the same scene with two old stories standing behind it, and that is the appreciation the references enable.*

Where to next: Section 3E examines tone, voice and imagery — more of the craft choices that shape a reader’s response. Section 2C is this section’s twin for persuasive texts; 1B’s parody also trades on texts the reader already knows.

Every sample text in this section — “The grand final”, “Opening night”, “The audition”, “The last lap”, the two fence versions and “The presentation” — was written for this book. Three short quotations are real and are credited where they appear: William Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act 2 Scene 7 (c. 1599) and Julius Caesar, Act 1 Scene 2 (c. 1599), both public domain, checked against the Folger Shakespeare Library texts (retrieved 24 August 2026); A. B. “Banjo” Paterson, “The Man from Snowy River” (The Bulletin, 1890), public domain in Australia, checked against the Trove and Wikisource texts (retrieved 24 August 2026). The Ecclesiastes 9:11 line in “The last lap” is an adaptation and is labelled as one.

Tone, voice and imagery: meaning and aesthetic qualities in literary texts

Chapter 3 · Literature

Strand · Sub-strand

Content description

Literature · Examining literature

VC2E8LE05 — Students learn to: *explore how language features such as sentence patterns create tone and voice, and how literary devices such as imagery create meaning and aesthetic qualities in literary texts* (Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, English, Level 8, VCAA).

Elaboration links

.E01 recognising that tone is influenced when an author uses active or passive voice · .E02 examining how writers use tense and relatively simple language choices or more elaborate and complex syntax, and how these influence meaning · .E03 excluded under the series' recorded decision D3 — id retained as a linkage key, content not taught (see the front-of-book note). These are VCAA's advisory examples only; the content description above is what this section teaches.

Modes

Reading and Viewing — exploring how sentence patterns, tense, voice and imagery create tone, meaning and aesthetic qualities in literary texts · Writing — experimenting with those same choices in your own sentences.

Take one plain fact — *the gate was left open* — and say it another way: *Someone left the gate open*. The fact has not changed. The feel has. The first version hides who did it. The second points at someone. That difference is not an accident of grammar; it is a choice a writer made. Choices like that are the craft this section is about. You will explore how the patterns of a writer's sentences create a **tone** and a **voice**, and how literary devices such as **imagery** create meaning and give a text its **aesthetic qualities** — the things that make it worth reading for more than the facts it carries.

The idea

1. Tone — the feeling a text gives off.

Defining the term. The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *tone* but does not define it. This section therefore treats **tone** as *the attitude or feeling a piece of writing seems to hold towards its subject — serious, playful, warm, bitter, calm, tense — which a reader picks up from the writer's word choices and sentence shapes*. Every task in this section is answerable on that definition alone.

Nobody writes *tone: playful* at the top of a story. Tone is never announced. You read it off the choices on the page — the words picked, the length of the sentences, who is made the doer, what is left out — and then you name it.

A claim about tone is a report of your reading. Two readers can honestly name slightly different tones for the same passage, and both can be right, as long as each one points to the words on the page that made the feeling. A tone claim with no quotation behind it is only a guess. In this section, every claim about tone carries its evidence.

2. Voice — one word doing two jobs.

This section uses *voice* in two different senses and keeps them apart, because they are easy to mix up:

Voice - one word doing two jobs

Sense	What it is	Example (written for this book)
Grammatical voice	property of a clause: whether the doer of the action comes first (active voice) or the receiver comes first (passive voice)	<i>The dog dug a hole. (active)</i> <i>The hole was dug by the dog. (passive)</i>
The writer's voice	the sense of a person behind the words - the personality that seems to be speaking, built out of all the writer's choices together	One writer tells the news in short, blunt sentences; another tells it in long, flowing ones. They <i>sound</i> like different people. That is voice.

Before arguing a point about voice, say which sense you mean.

Table of the two senses of voice, grammatical voice and the writer's voice, with an example of each

Sense	What it is	Example (sample, written for this book)
Grammatical voice	a property of a clause: whether the doer of the action comes first (active voice) or the receiver comes first (passive voice)	<i>The dog dug a hole. (active)</i> · <i>The hole was dug by the dog. (passive)</i>
The writer's voice	the sense of a person behind the words — the personality that seems to be speaking, built out of all the writer's choices together	One writer tells the news in short, blunt sentences; another tells it in long, flowing ones. They <i>sound</i> like different people. That is voice.

Other books use *voice* in further senses too. Before you argue a point about voice, say which sense you mean. In this book, the two senses above are the only two in play.

Notice how the two senses meet. The sentence-pattern choices of the first sense — active or passive, this tense or that tense, short shapes or long shapes — are exactly the choices that build the second sense. A writer who favours short, active sentences sounds brisk and direct. A writer who favours long, flowing ones sounds measured and thoughtful. Grammatical choices, made one clause at a time, add up to a person on the page.

3. Three sentence-pattern choices that shape tone and voice.

These are the language features the content description names — sentence patterns — and each one works like a dial a writer can turn. (If you have not met the clause terms before: a **clause** is a group of words built around a verb, and Section 2A has the full picture.)

Three sentence-pattern choices that shape tone and voice

Choice	The dial	What it can do to tone and meaning
Active / passive voice	who comes first in the clause - the doer or the receiver	direct and open - or distant, formal, or hiding who acted
Past / present tense	when the action of the verb sits	settled and looking back - or close and happening now
Simple / elaborate shapes	how long and layered the sentences are	quick, tense, blunt - or slow, rich, thoughtful

Each one is a dial a writer can turn - and a reader can ask about.

Table of the three sentence-pattern choices with their settings and their effects on tone and meaning

Choice	The dial	What it can do to tone and meaning
Active ↔ passive voice	who comes first in the clause — the doer or the receiver	direct and open ↔ distant, formal, or hiding who acted
Past ↔ present tense	when the action of the verb sits	settled and looking back ↔ close and happening now
Simple ↔ elaborate shapes	how long and layered the sentences are	quick, tense, blunt ↔ slow, rich, thoughtful

(a) Active and passive voice. A clause in the **active voice** puts the doer of the action first: *The storm tore the roof off the hall.* A clause in the **passive voice** puts the receiver first and moves the doer back — or drops the doer out altogether: *The roof was torn off the hall.* The doer can vanish. Active voice tends to sound direct, energetic and clear about who did what. Passive voice can sound calm, formal and distant — or shady, because the doer is hidden. When you read a passive clause, ask: *who did this, and why is the writer not saying?*

(b) Tense. Tense tells when the action of a verb sits. In stories the two big choices are the past tense and the present tense. The past tense is the voice of looking back — settled and measured, like a story already finished. The present tense is the voice of happening now — close and quick, and often tense, because neither the narrator nor the reader knows what comes next. A writer who swaps tense in the middle of a story has made a meaning choice, not a mistake. Notice when it happens and ask why.

(c) Simple and elaborate sentence shapes. The curriculum also calls this choice **syntax**. The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *syntax* in its elaborations but does not define it, so this section treats **syntax** as *the way words are arranged into sentences — the shapes a writer's sentences take*. Short, simple sentences hurry the reader along. They punch. They suit action, tension, bluntness, and humour that lands fast. Long, elaborate sentences slow the reader down. They layer detail and feeling, and they suit memory, description and thought. Mixed shapes are a choice too: a long, quiet sentence followed by a short one makes the short one land harder.

4. Imagery — pictures made of words.

Imagery is language that builds pictures, sounds, textures, smells and tastes in the reader's mind. The information in a sentence tells you something; the imagery in a sentence makes you feel it happening. Imagery comes in two families.

Sensory imagery is language aimed at one of the five senses:

Sensory imagery - language aimed at one of the five senses

Sense	Sample (written for this book)
Sight	<i>The lemons shone like small lamps.</i>
Sound	<i>Somewhere a bell rang twice.</i>
Touch	<i>The wool felt scratchy against her neck.</i>
Taste	<i>The air tasted of salt.</i>
Smell	<i>Woodsmoke hung in the lane.</i>

Each image gives the reader a feeling, not just a fact.

Table of the five senses with a sample imagery sentence for each sense

Sense	Sample (written for this book)
Sight	<i>The lemons shone like small lamps.</i>
Sound	<i>Somewhere a bell rang twice.</i>
Touch	<i>The wool felt scratchy against her neck.</i>
Taste	<i>The air tasted of salt.</i>
Smell	<i>Woodsmoke hung in the lane.</i>

Figurative imagery is language that describes one thing as if it were another. Three devices do most of this work:

- **Simile** — compares two things using *like* or *as*: *She moves like the tide*. You met simile and metaphor in Section 1B, where they layered meaning into evaluation. Here their job is imagery — building pictures that carry feeling.
- **Metaphor** — compares two things by saying one thing *is* another: *Her laugh was a door opening*.
- **Personification** — gives human qualities to something that is not human: *The market wakes before we do*. The market does not really wake; saying it does makes it feel alive.

The meaning work: imagery carries feeling inside the picture. *The light lay flat on the water* gives you a picture and a mood — still, tired, late — without naming the mood. That double job, picture plus feeling, is what imagery is for.

5. Aesthetic qualities — why the craft matters.

Defining the term. The Victorian Curriculum uses the phrase *aesthetic qualities* but does not define it.

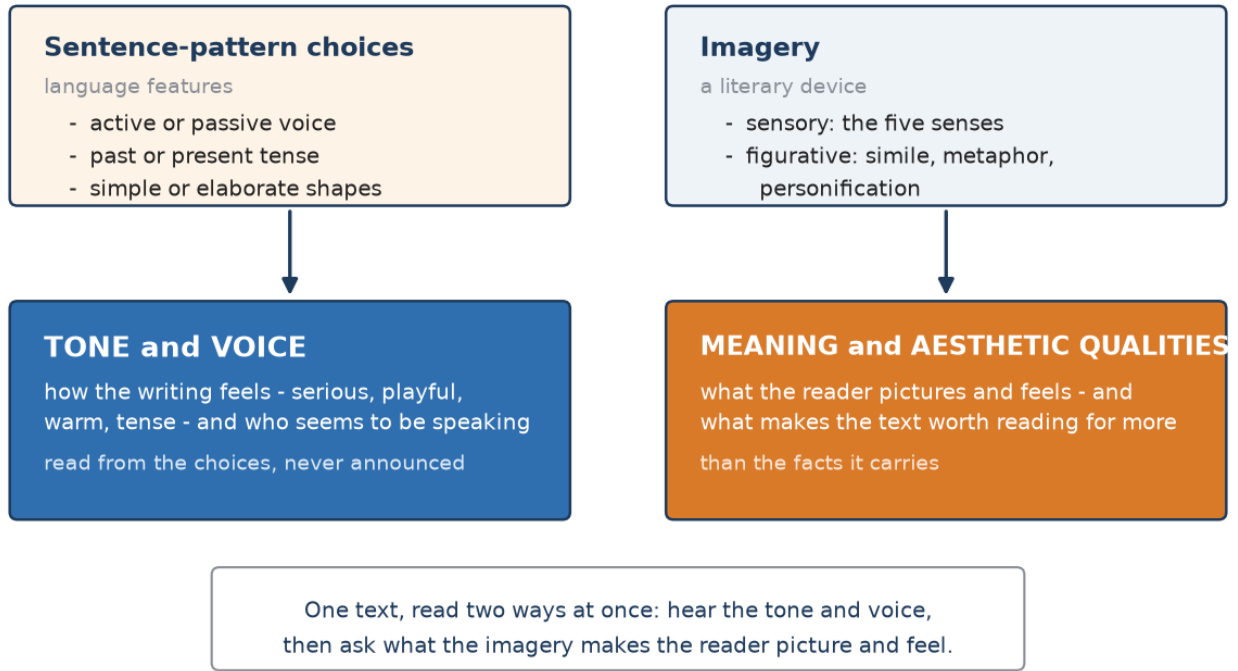
This section therefore treats the **aesthetic qualities** of a text as *the qualities that make it worth reading for more than its information — its beauty, tension, humour, sadness, warmth, pace, and the craft that put them there*. Every task in this section is answerable on that definition alone.

Aesthetic judgements are reports of a reader's response. Your response cannot be wrong in the way a sum can be wrong — but it can be unsupported. The habit this section builds is to tie the response to choices you can name and quote. Done that way, two readers who reach different judgements about the same text can both reason well, and the interesting question stops being *who is right* and becomes *what in the text supports each reading*.

Tone, voice and imagery are three of the main dials that give a text its aesthetic qualities. The map of the whole section:

The two paths of the section

VC2E8LE05: explore how language features create tone and voice, and how literary devices create meaning and aesthetic qualities



Map of the section showing sentence-pattern choices flowing to tone and voice, and imagery flowing to meaning and aesthetic qualities

When you want words for naming what you find, this bank is a place to start:

Naming bank - words for saying what you find

Words for naming tone		Words for naming aesthetic qualities	
- warm	- playful	- beauty	- tension
- gentle	- funny	- humour	- sadness
- calm	- serious	- warmth	- pace
- tense	- urgent	- rhythm	- flow
- bitter	- harsh	- mood	- striking
- soft	- lonely	- memorable	- vivid
- mysterious	- direct	- lyrical	- musical
- forceful	- hopeful	- quiet	- loud
- thoughtful	- reflective	- sharp	- smooth
- moody	- dramatic	- bright	- dark

Start here, then find your own words - every claim still needs quotation behind it.

Naming bank of words for naming tone and aesthetic qualities, in two grouped columns

Worked examples

Example 1 — active and passive, and the tone they carry (scaffolded)

This is elaboration .E01 in action: the choice between active and passive voice influences tone. Here is one scene told two ways (samples, written for this book).

Version A: *Someone left the gate open. The goats got into the garden. By lunchtime they had eaten every last tomato.*

Version B: *The gate was left open. The garden was entered. By lunchtime every last tomato had been eaten.*

Read the two versions step by step:

Step	Working	Comment
1. Find the doer in each clause.	A: <i>someone, the goats, they</i> — all named. B: no doer is named at all.	In B the gate was left open by somebody, but the writer has dropped them.
2. Name the voice.	A: active in all three clauses. B: passive in all three.	Active puts the doer first; passive puts the receiver first.
3. What does the reader notice?	A points at someone. B leaves the cause hanging — things seem to happen on their own.	The missing doer is the loudest thing about B.
4. Name the tones.	A reads direct, and clear about who is to blame. B reads distant, formal, almost shady — as if nobody will say who did it.	Same facts; different feel.

Same facts, different tone — the voice changed

Version A — active voice: the doer comes first

Someone left the gate open.

The goats got into the garden.

By lunchtime **they** had eaten every last tomato.

Tone: direct and clear about who is to blame.

Version B — passive voice: the doer is missing

The gate was left open. (by ?)

The garden was entered. (by ?)

By lunchtime every last tomato had been eaten. (by ?)

Tone: distant and formal — nobody says who did it.

Every orange word is a doer. In Version B the writer dropped them all — and the tone moved with them.

The two versions side by side with the doers highlighted in Version A and the missing doers marked in Version B, each with its tone label

The facts have not changed between the versions. The tone has — because the sentence patterns changed. That is what .E01 asks you to recognise.

Example 2 — tense and sentence shape, and the meaning they move (scaffolded)

This is elaboration .E02 in action: tense, and relatively simple or more elaborate sentence choices, influence meaning. Here is one walk home told two ways (samples, written for this book).

Version A — past tense, long shapes: *We walked home the long way, along the river where the light lay flat on the water and the willows leaned in as if they were listening. Nobody said much, because there was nothing that needed saying, and the day had been full enough already.*

Version B — present tense, short shapes: *We take the long way home. The light lies flat on the water. The willows lean in. Nobody talks. The day is full enough.*

Read the two versions step by step:

Step	Working	Comment
1. Find the tense.	A: <i>walked, lay, leaned, said, had been</i> — past. B: <i>take, lies, lean, talks, is</i> — present.	Past looks back; present happens now.
2. Measure the shapes.	A: two sentences — 27 words, then 18. B: five sentences — 6, 7, 4, 2, 5 words.	Counting is a fair move here. Pace lives in length.
3. What does the tense do?	A feels like memory — settled and warm. B feels close, as if you are walking beside them.	Present tense closes the distance between reader and scene.
4. What do the shapes do?	A's long clauses slow you to a stroll. B's short ones move like footsteps.	Long shapes layer; short shapes tap.
5. Name the meaning and the aesthetic qualities.	Same walk, same quiet between two people. A feels thoughtful and calm; B feels quick and close.	Two dials turned at once.

Same walk, different feel — tense and shape moved the meaning

Version A — past tense, long shapes

We walked, home the long way, along the river where the light lay flat on the water and the willows leaned in as if they were listening. Nobody said much, because there was nothing that needed saying, and the day had been full enough already.

2 sentences — 27 words, then 18

Tone: settled and warm — looking back.

Version B — present tense, short shapes

We take the long way home. The light lies flat on the water. The willows lean in. Nobody talks. The day is full enough.

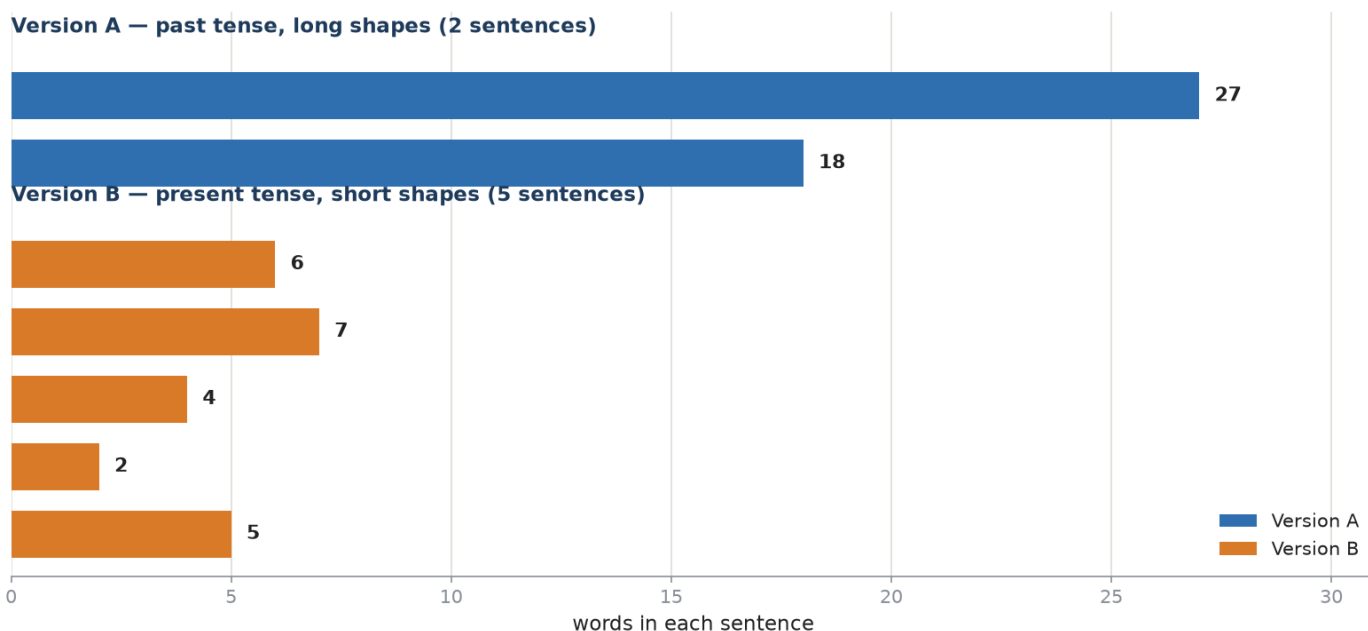
5 sentences — 6, 7, 4, 2, 5 words

Tone: quick and close — happening now.

Blue-underlined words are the tense choices. The sentence lengths do the rest.

The two versions side by side with tense markers and sentence-length labels

Pace lives in length — words per sentence, version by version



Two long bars slow the reader to a stroll; five short bars move like footsteps.

Bar chart of words per sentence for the two versions, showing two long bars for Version A and five short bars for Version B

One scene, two tellings. The tense and the sentence shapes did not decorate the meaning — they moved it.

Practice tasks

Scaffolded

Q1. Active or passive? Identify the voice of each clause. a. *The dog dug a hole under the fence.* b. *The fence was painted over the holidays.* c. *My team scored in the last minute.* d. *The cake had been eaten before the party started.* e. *Someone has left the lights on.*

Q2. Rewrite this passive clause in the active voice: *The song was sung by the whole crowd.* Then answer: what changes in the feel of the clause?

Q3. Match each extract to its best-fitting tone word.

Extract	Tone word
a. <i>Go. Now. Take nothing but your shoes.</i>	i. calm and gentle
b. <i>The kettle hummed, and the afternoon sat softly on the house.</i>	ii. mocking
c. <i>Oh, brilliant. Another wet training session. Just what we wanted.</i>	iii. urgent and serious

Q4. Extract X is written in one tense and extract Y in another. Identify the tense of each, and say which feels closer to the reader, and why. X: *The market woke early that day, and the lane filled with voices.* Y: *The market wakes early. The lane fills with voices.*

Q5. Sort each image under one of the five senses: sight · sound · touch · taste · smell. a. *The wool felt scratchy against her neck.* b. *Somewhere a bell rang twice.* c. *The lemons shone like small lamps.* d. *The air tasted of salt.* e. *Woodsmoke hung in the lane.*

Q6. Name the device in each clause — simile, metaphor or personification. a. *The wind whistled through the crack in the door.* b. *Her laugh was a door opening.* c. *He ran like the ground was on fire.*

Un scaffolded

Q7. Take these plain sentences: *The bell rang. Students moved into the yard.* Write two new versions of the same moment. Make the first feel tense, using short sentences. Make the second feel easy and unhurried, using long sentences. Say what you changed besides sentence length.

Q8. Read this extract (sample, written for this book). Find one active-voice choice and one image. Say what each one does to the tone or the meaning. *The lighthouse stood at the edge of everything. Rain hit the glass. Inside, Mia lit the lamp and the dark jumped back.*

Q9. Write two or three sentences about a moment you know well — a game, a morning, a trip — first in the present tense, then again in the past tense. Say how the feel of the moment shifts.

Q10. Read this line: *The house waited at the end of the street.* Two readers disagree. One says the tone is calm and patient. The other says the tone is lonely and a little scary. Both are asked to support their reading. a. Quote the words the first reader could point to. b. Quote the words the second reader could point to. c. Say which reading you support, and give the words that decided you.

Product task — an analytic response

Read this extract, a piece of literary writing told by a narrator (sample text — written for this book).

The market wakes before we do. Shutters rattle up one by one, and cold air slips in under the door. Oranges are stacked into bright pyramids. Bread arrives on trays, still warm, and the smell of it travels the whole lane. My grandmother moves between the stalls like the tide — slowly, but she gets everywhere. She stops. She listens. Somewhere under the noise of the crowd, a radio plays a song she knows. Her hand finds my shoulder. “This,” she says, “is where the week begins.”

Model extract — the craft choices highlighted

■ sentence-pattern choices: voice and sentence shape ■ imagery: pictures, sounds, touches, smells

The market **wakes** before we do. Shutters rattle up one by one, and cold air slips in under the door. Oranges **are stacked** into bright pyramids. Bread arrives on trays, still warm, and the smell of it travels the whole lane. My grandmother moves between the stalls like the tide – slowly, but she gets everywhere. **She stops. She listens.** Somewhere under the noise of the crowd, a radio plays a song she knows. Her hand finds my shoulder. "This," she says, "is where the week begins."

Sample text — written for this book.

The model extract with its voice choices, tense and imagery highlighted and labelled

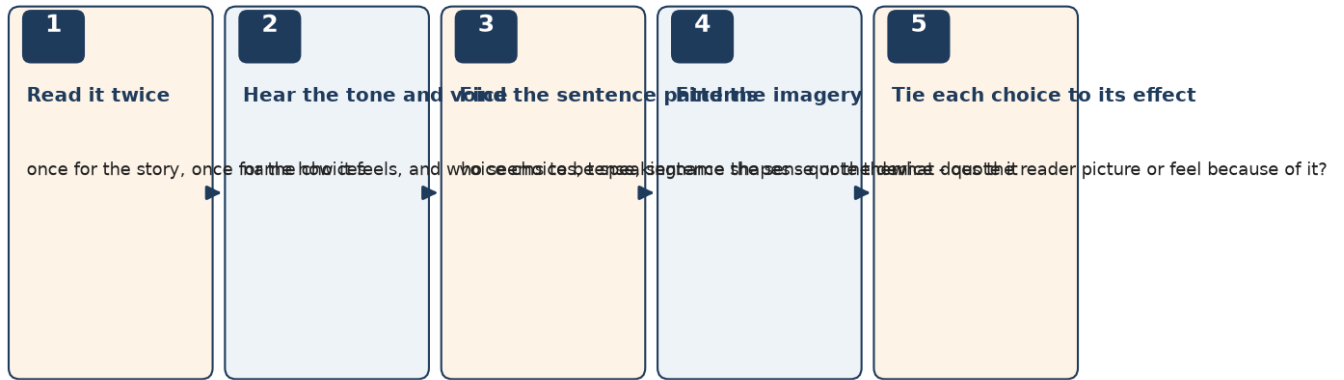
Write an analytic response of 6–8 sentences about the extract. Your response must:

- name the tone you hear and the sense you get of the narrator's voice, and quote one sentence-pattern choice (a voice choice, a tense choice or a sentence shape) that makes them;
- quote one example of imagery and name its sense or its device;
- explain what those choices do to the meaning — what the reader pictures or feels — and name one aesthetic quality they give the text.

Work through the five steps in the figure below, then use this frame if you want one:

The extract opens with a ... tone, and the narrator sounds The writer uses the (voice choice / tense / sentence shape) "... " to The imagery in "... " gives the reader a (picture / sound / smell / touch / taste) of Together, these choices make the text feel ...; its strongest aesthetic quality is ..., because

Five steps to an analytic response



A claim without a quotation is only a guess - quote, then name, then explain.

Five-step flow for an analytic response: read, hear the tone and voice, find the sentence patterns, find the imagery, tie each choice to its effect

Before you hand your response in, check it against the list:

Before you hand it in

- ☐ Have I named the tone and quoted a sentence-pattern choice that makes it?
- ☐ Have I said who the narrator seems to be, and how?
- ☐ Have I quoted one image and named its sense or device?
- ☐ Have I said what the reader pictures or feels because of each choice?
- ☐ Have I named one quality that makes the text worth reading?
- ☐ Does every claim in my response point to words quoted from the extract?

Every box should be a yes you can show.

Student checklist for the analytic response, with the six checks

Check	Question to ask
Tone named	Have I named the tone and quoted a sentence-pattern choice that makes it?
Voice named	Have I said who the narrator seems to be, and how?
Imagery quoted	Have I quoted one image and named its sense or device?
Meaning explained	Have I said what the reader pictures or feels because of each choice?
Aesthetic quality named	Have I named one quality that makes the text worth

Evidence everywhere

reading?

Does every claim in my response point to words quoted from the extract?

Where to next: Section 3F turns these choices around — instead of reading craft, you create it, writing texts that experiment with literary language features and devices. If you want more practice with simile and metaphor, Section 1B is next door. At Level 9, this work continues as analysis of how structures, features and devices create aesthetic qualities.

Answers

Q1. a. active; b. passive; c. active; d. passive; e. active.

Q2. *The whole crowd sang the song.* The crowd becomes the doer and comes first, so the clause feels direct and alive — the singing sounds like something the crowd chose to do, not something that just happened to a song.

Q3. a → iii (urgent and serious); b → i (calm and gentle); c → ii (mocking).

Q4. X: past tense (*woke, filled*). Y: present tense (*wakes, fills*). Y feels closer — the present tense reads as happening now, with the reader standing in the lane.

Q5. a. touch; b. sound; c. sight; d. taste; e. smell.

Q6. a. personification (the wind does a human thing — it whistles); b. metaphor (her laugh is said to *be* a door opening); c. simile (the comparison uses *like*).

Q7. Answers will vary. The tense version should use short sentences (e.g. *The bell rang. Feet moved. Nobody spoke.*); the easy version should use long sentences (e.g. *When the bell rang, students drifted into the yard, talking and stretching, because the sun was out and nobody was in a hurry.*). The test: same moment, two paces — and word choices that help the pace, not just sentence length.

Q8. Sample answers: an active-voice choice — *Rain hit the glass* or *Mia lit the lamp* — puts a doer first, so the scene feels direct and energetic rather than still; an image — *the dark jumped back* (personification) — pictures the light pushing the darkness away, and moves the tone from lonely to safe. Any one active choice and any one image, each with a tone or meaning job.

Q9. Answers will vary. The present-tense version should feel close and quick; the past-tense version should feel like looking back — settled, softer, or sadder. The test is that the student names the shift, not just the tenses.

Q10. Sample answers: a. *waited* can read patient — no hurry, nothing wrong — and *at the end of the street* can read as a settled, familiar spot. b. *waited* can read as if the house is watching, and *the end of the street* can read as far from everyone, out on its own. c. Answers will vary; the test is quoting the words and saying what they do, not which side wins. Both readings can be reasoned well from the same line.

Creating texts that experiment with literary language features and devices

Chapter 3 · Literature

Strand · Sub-strand

Content description

Literature · Creating literature

VC2E8LE06 — Students learn to: *create texts that experiment with literary language features and literary devices for particular purposes and effects* (Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, English, Level 8, VCAA).

Elaboration links

.E01 creating short stories focusing on characters and dialogue · .E02 combining literary devices to evoke a reader response · .E03 collaborating with a peer, which may include using online spaces, to write a short script with 2 characters, focusing on dialogue choices for each character. These are VCAA’s advisory examples only; the content description above is what this section teaches.

Modes

Writing — creating short stories and scripts that experiment with literary language features and devices · Reading and Viewing — reading model texts to see how choices work · Speaking and Listening — planning, drafting and revising with a partner.

About the texts in this section. Every model text, sample passage and sample script in this section was written for this book and is labelled **(sample)**. They are not extracts from published works. They exist so you can see the choices from the inside before you make your own. Your drafts belong to you — and Section 5E is where you will review and edit them.

The idea

So far this chapter has read literary texts like a writer does. 3A looked at the ideas and points of view they carry, 3B at opinions about their style, 3C at how they position readers, 3D at allusion and quotation, and 3E at tone, voice and imagery. This section turns the chapter around. Now you make the text. The tools are the same ones those sections examined. The difference is that every choice now answers to you: *what is this for, and what should it do to the reader?*

1. What an experiment is in writing.

A note on the terms. The Victorian Curriculum asks you to *experiment with literary language features and literary devices*, but it does not define any of the three terms. This section therefore uses them as follows:

- **Literary language features** are the parts of language a writer can choose and control: word choices, sentence lengths, rhythm, punctuation, tense, point of view and dialogue.
- **Literary devices** are shaped moves a writer makes with those parts to guide a reader’s response: simile, metaphor, personification, imagery, symbolism, irony, contrast, repetition and suspense among them.
- An **experiment** is a try-out with a purpose: you make a choice, draft it, read it back, and judge whether it created the effect you wanted. If it did, keep it. If it did not, change it and try again.

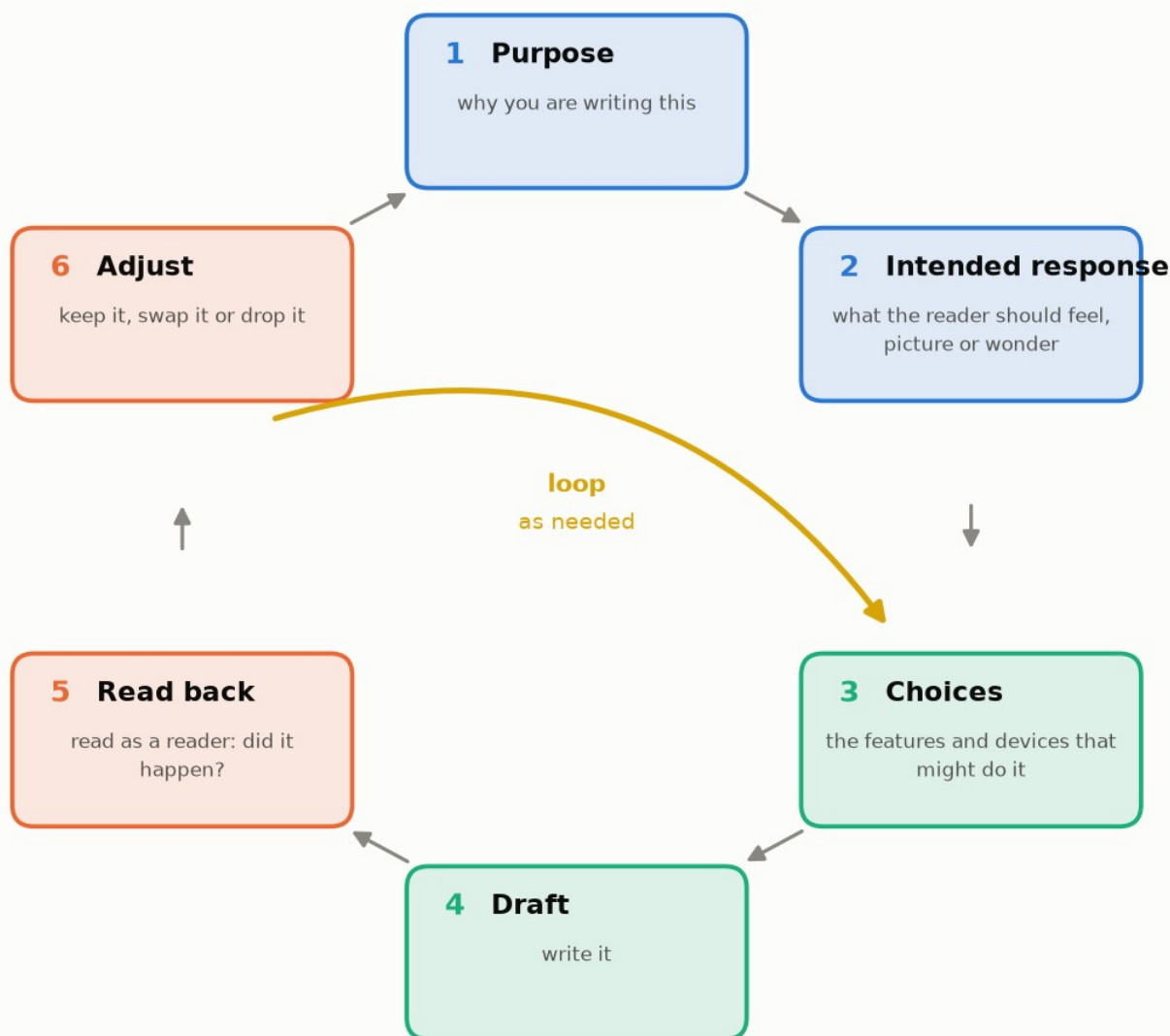
Other books draw these lines in other ways. Every task in this section is answerable on these definitions alone.

A writing experiment is not a guess and not a trick. It is a choice you make on purpose, with a reason you can name. That is what separates experimenting from just writing in a different way. In Level 7, experimenting meant creating texts that tried out the devices you met in your reading; in this section, every experiment is aimed at a particular purpose and effect you choose.

2. The experiment loop. Every experiment in this section runs the same loop.

The experiment loop

Every experiment in this section runs the same way around.



The experiment loop: purpose, intended response, choice of features and devices, draft, read back, adjust — with an arrow looping from adjust back to choice

1. **Purpose** — why you are writing this piece: to amuse, to unsettle, to build tension, to make a reader side with a character.
2. **Intended response** — what you want the reader to feel, picture or wonder, and where.
3. **Choices** — the language features and devices that might create that response.
4. **Draft** — write it.
5. **Read back** — read as a reader. Did the response happen?
6. **Adjust** — keep the choice, swap it or drop it. Then loop around again.

3. The toolbox. You already met most of these in 1B and 3E, where you examined them in other writers' work. Here is the working list for this section, defined at first use.

The writer's toolbox

Features are the parts you control. Devices are the shaped moves you make with them.

Literary language features — the parts you choose and control		
Word choice	picking the one word with the right feeling	sets the tone, shows attitude
Sentence length and rhythm	mixing long, flowing lines with short, sharp ones	controls pace; a short line lands
Punctuation	commas, dashes and full stops shaping the reading	slows, speeds or stops the reader
Tense	past or present telling	changes how close the reader feels
Point of view	through whose eyes the story looks	controls what the reader knows
Dialogue	the words characters speak, and how	shows character and moves the story

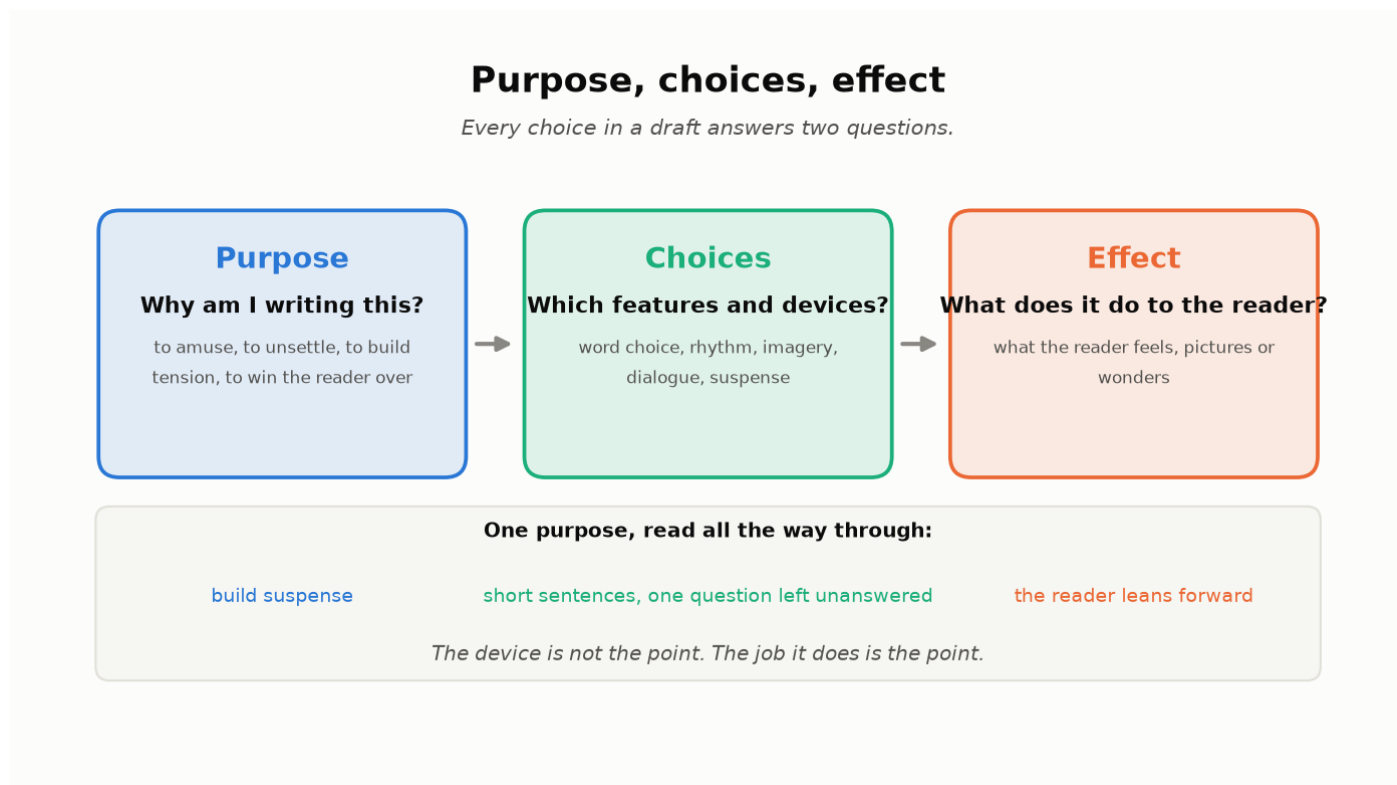
Literary devices — the shaped moves you make with them		
Imagery	simile, metaphor and sensory detail	the reader feels inside the scene
Personification	human qualities for what is not human	places and objects feel alive
Symbolism	one thing standing for a bigger idea	meaning without explaining
Sound devices	alliteration and onomatopoeia	builds rhythm, makes moments sharp
Repetition	a word or shape used again, on purpose	drives a feeling home
Contrast	two different things side by side	makes both stand out
Irony	saying one thing while the situation means the opposite	creates humour or a sting
Suspense	a question the reader must wait for	keeps the reader leaning forward

Table of the toolbox: literary language features and literary devices, each with what it is and the effects it can create

Tool	What it is	What it can do
Word choice	picking the one word that carries the right feeling	sets the tone; shows attitude
Sentence length and rhythm	mixing long, flowing sentences with short, sharp ones	controls pace; a short sentence lands with force
Imagery	language that builds pictures and feelings, including simile (comparing with <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>), metaphor (saying one thing <i>is</i> another) and sensory detail (what is seen, heard, felt, smelt, tasted)	the reader feels inside the scene, not just told about it
Personification	giving human qualities to something not human	makes places and objects feel alive with mood
Symbolism	letting one thing — an object, a colour, the weather — stand for a	adds a second layer of meaning without explaining it

Tool	What it is	What it can do
Sound devices	bigger idea alliteration (repeated starting sounds) and onomatopoeia (words that sound like what they mean: <i>crackle, thud</i>)	builds rhythm; makes moments sharp or musical
Repetition	using a word, phrase or sentence shape more than once, on purpose	drives a feeling home; ties a piece together
Contrast	placing two different things side by side	makes both stand out
Irony	saying one thing while the situation means the opposite (the device 1B layered into evaluation)	creates humour, or a sting
Suspense	giving the reader a question they need answered, and making them wait	keeps the reader leaning forward
Tense and point of view	choosing when the telling stands (past or present) and through whose eyes it looks	changes how close the reader feels, and what they know
Dialogue	the words characters speak, and the way they speak them	shows character directly; moves the story

4. Purpose and effect. Every choice in your draft answers two questions. **Purpose** is the first: *why am I writing this?* **Effect** is the second: *what does it do to the reader?* The same device serves different purposes. A short sentence can land a joke, or it can stop a reader's breath at the end of a suspenseful paragraph. The device is not the point. The job it does is the point.



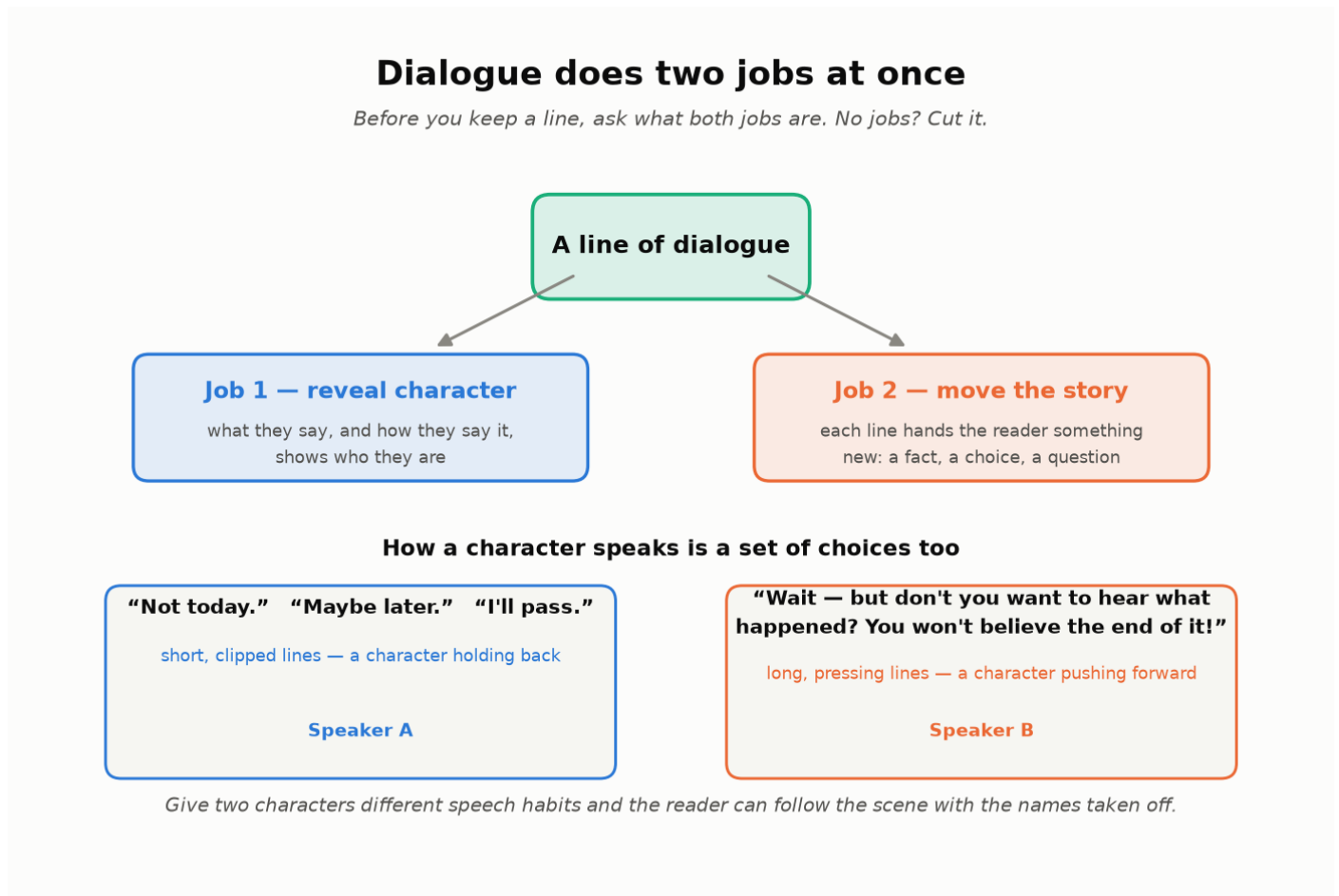
A chain of three boxes: purpose, choices, effect — purpose asks why you are writing, choices are the features and devices you pick, effect is what the reader feels, pictures or wonders

The read-back step in the loop is the only test that counts. Not *did I use a metaphor?* but *did my metaphor make the reader feel what I intended?*

5. Characters and dialogue. One of the main forms this section works in is the short story built on characters and dialogue. Two rules carry it.

- **Show the character.** A character is shown by what they say, what they do and how they speak — not by a list of traits. A reader who meets “*I’m saving my words*” learns more about Jess than a sentence that simply calls her nervous.
- **Dialogue does two jobs at once.** It reveals character *and* it moves the story. Lines that only fill space slow a story down. Before you keep a line of dialogue, ask what the two jobs are. If it has none, cut it.

How a character speaks is itself a set of choices: short clipped lines or long winding ones, questions or jokes, finishing sentences or trailing off, silence. Give two characters different speech habits and the reader can follow a scene with the names taken off.

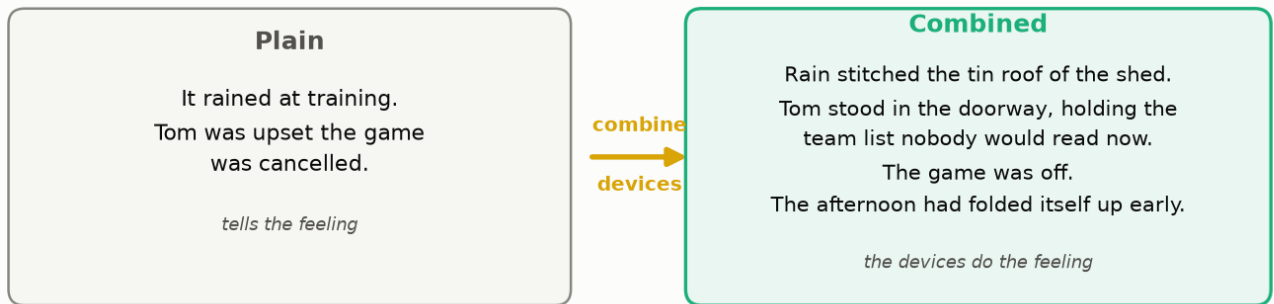


The two jobs of dialogue — reveal character and move the story — with two sample speakers whose different word choices show who they are

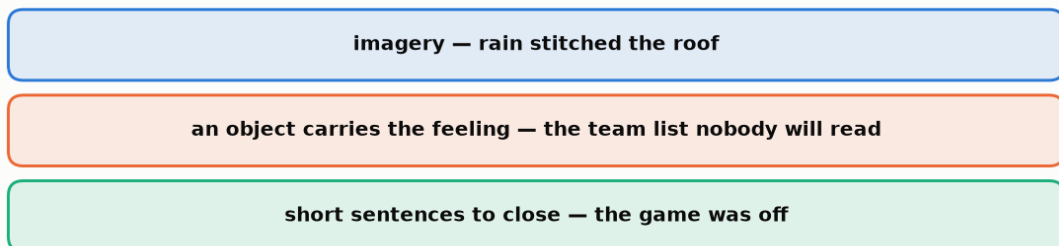
A **speech tag** is the small phrase that says who speaks and how: *said Jess, Ryan laughed*. Tags are choices too. *Muttered, snapped* and *whispered* each carry a different tone. Use them when the how matters, and plain *said* when the words should do the work.

6. Combining devices. Devices rarely work alone. One device is a choice; two or three working together is a scene. Compare:

One device is a choice. Two or three together is a scene.



Three tools combined in the second version:



One response is evoked — flat, wet disappointment — and no word in it says upset.

Before-and-after comparison: two plain sentences, then the same moment rewritten with combined devices labelled — personification, sensory detail and a short closing sentence

- **Plain:** *It rained at training. Tom was upset the game was cancelled.*
- **Combined:** *Rain stitched the tin roof of the shed. Tom stood in the doorway with his boots in two puddles, holding the team list nobody would read now. The game was off. The afternoon had folded itself up early.* (sample)

The second version combines three tools — imagery (*rain stitched*), an object carrying the feeling (the team list nobody will read), and short sentences to close — to evoke one response: flat, wet disappointment. No word in it says *upset*. That is the point of combining: the devices do the feeling so the writer does not have to announce it.

7. Script: words written to be spoken. The other main form in this section is the short script — and the one you will write with a partner. A **script** is a text written to be performed: what the actors say and do, set out in a fixed layout. You met its shape in 1C, where drama scripts appeared as a text type. The layout has three parts.

Reading a script — every part has a job

Sample script written for this book. A script is built to be performed, not just read.

HALF PAST TWO

A bench outside the school office. The door is shut.

(TAYLA sits with her bag on her knees. MARCUS stands, then sits, then stands again.)

MARCUS: You can put the bag down.

TAYLA: I'm right.

MARCUS: You're holding it like it's going somewhere.

TAYLA: (checking her watch) Is it half past yet?

(A pause. The office door stays shut.)

MARCUS: So. Do you know why we're here?

Title
names the scene for cast and crew

Scene heading
names the place and the time

Stage direction
tells performers what to do — never spoken aloud

Character name
in capitals, says who speaks

Dialogue
the spoken words — they must carry almost everything

Bracketed direction
a small note inside a line: how to say or play it

A labelled script layout: scene heading, character names, dialogue and bracketed stage directions, each named with its job

- The **scene heading** names the place and time.
- The **character name** in capitals says who speaks.
- The **dialogue** is the spoken words — in a script, the words must carry almost everything, because there is no narrator to explain.
- A **stage direction** — bracketed and usually italic — tells the performers what to do or how to say a line. Stage directions are not spoken aloud. They are the script's share of the showing.

When two characters share a scene, their **dialogue choices** must differ — different sentence lengths, different habits, different ways of dodging or pressing a question. If both characters sound the same, the reader loses track and the scene goes flat.

Scriptwriting in this section is collaborative: you plan together, draft together, and you may write in an online space (a shared document your teacher approves) so both writers can see and edit the draft as it grows. Read every draft aloud. A script that sounds wrong when spoken is telling you something.

Worked examples

Example 1 — read a short story opening like a writer (scaffolded)

Read the opening below, written for this book as a model. It is the start of a short story built on characters and dialogue. Then follow the table, which takes the choices apart one by one.

The 800 Metres (sample text — written for this book)

The loudspeaker called the names for the 800 metres, and somewhere behind the stand a dog barked twice, the way dogs bark at sports days.

“You’ve gone quiet,” said Ryan.

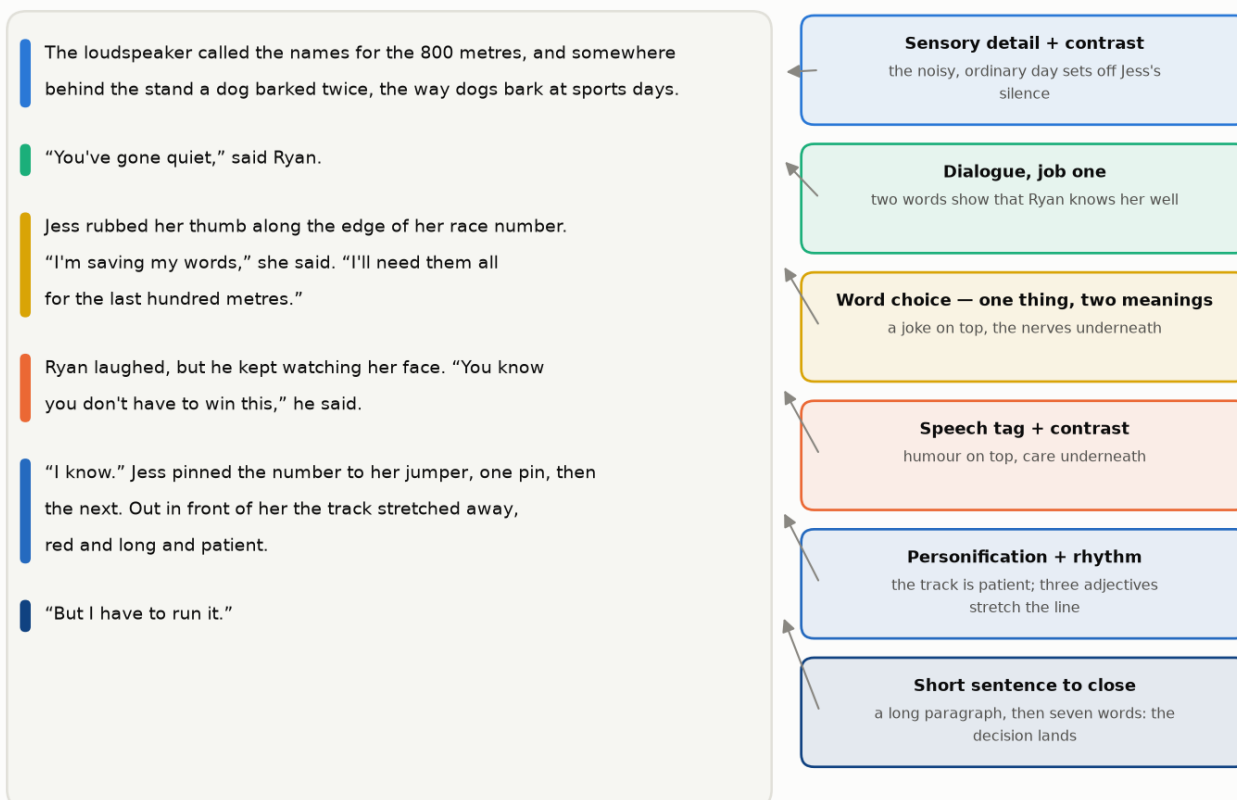
Jess rubbed her thumb along the edge of her race number. “I’m saving my words,” she said. “I’ll need them all for the last hundred metres.”

Ryan laughed, but he kept watching her face. “You know you don’t have to win this,” he said.

“I know.” Jess pinned the number to her jumper, one pin, then the next. Out in front of her the track stretched away, red and long and patient. “But I have to run it.”

The 800 Metres — the choices, taken apart

Sample text written for this book. A purpose runs under all of it: show nerves turning into resolve.



No sentence says Jess was nervous but brave. The combined choices do that work.

The model story opening above, colour-coded and labelled by choice: sensory detail, dialogue jobs, speech tag, personification and the short closing sentence

Text	Choice	What it does
<i>...a dog barked twice, the way dogs bark at sports days.</i>	Sensory detail plus contrast	The noisy, ordinary world of the carnival sits beside Jess’s silent nerves. The contrast makes her quiet feel bigger.
<i>“You’ve gone quiet,” said Ryan.</i>	Dialogue, job one	Two words show that Ryan knows Jess well enough to notice her silence. Character revealed.
<i>“I’m saving my words ... I’ll need them all for the last hundred metres.”</i>	Word choice; saying one thing and meaning two	A joke on the surface, the truth underneath: she is nervous and holding herself together. The reader likes her for it.
<i>Ryan laughed, but he kept watching her face.</i>	Speech tag plus contrast	Humour on top, care underneath. Their friendship is shown, not stated.
<i>...the track stretched away, red and long and patient.</i>	Personification; rhythm	The track is made human — it can wait for her. Three adjectives stretch the sentence out the way the track

Text	Choice	What it does
		stretches.
<i>“But I have to run it.”</i>	Short sentence to close	A long paragraph, then seven words. The decision lands with force.

The purpose of the passage: to show nerves turning into resolve. The effect: the reader is on Jess’s side and feels the race before it starts. Notice that no sentence announces *Jess was nervous but brave*. The combined choices do that work.

Example 2 — read a script scene like a director (unscaffolded)

Read the two-character scene below (sample, written for this book). Then, without a table to help you, work through the four questions. Write your answers first, and check them against the worked solution at the end of this section.

Half Past Two (*sample script — written for this book*)

Characters: TAYLA and MARCUS, both Year 8. **Setting:** a bench outside the school office. The door is shut.

(TAYLA sits with her bag on her knees. MARCUS stands, then sits, then stands again.)

MARCUS: You can put the bag down.

TAYLA: I’m right.

MARCUS: You’re holding it like it’s going somewhere.

TAYLA: (*checking her watch*) Is it half past yet?

MARCUS: It was half past four minutes ago.

TAYLA: Oh.

(A pause. The office door stays shut.)

MARCUS: So. Do you know why we’re here?

TAYLA: Wrong place, wrong time.

MARCUS: That’s not an answer.

TAYLA: It’s the best one I’ve got.

(The door handle starts to move.)

1. Find two differences between the way TAYLA and the way MARCUS speak. What does each choice reveal about its character?
2. The stage direction (*MARCUS stands, then sits, then stands again*) and TAYLA’s line *I’m right* work together. What response do they combine to evoke?
3. What does the final stage direction do, and why is it placed last?
4. State one purpose this scene could serve in a longer play, and one effect it had on you as a reader.

Practice tasks

Scaffolded

Q1. Matching purposes to choices. Match each purpose to the choice most likely to serve it, and say in one sentence why the fit is a good one.

Purposes: (a) build suspense just before a reveal; (b) show that two characters are close friends; (c) make an ordinary room feel unsettling.

Choices: (i) give the friends a private joke in their dialogue that no one else would understand; (ii) use short sentences and leave one question unanswered; (iii) personify the room: *the walls listened*.

Q2. Word choice for purpose. Take the sentence *The bell rang*. Rewrite it three times, each time swapping *rang* for one verb from the box below so that the sentence serves a new purpose. Say which purpose each version serves.

Box: *sang* · *shrieked* · *muttered*

Q3. Find the devices. In the passage below (sample), find one example of each: personification, simile, and a short sentence used for effect. Say what each one does for the reader.

*The old shed waited at the end of the path like a dog told to stay. The door was open. Inside it was dark.
Mia's torch cut a thin gold line through the dust.*

Q4. The two jobs of dialogue. Read the lines below (sample). For each character, say (a) what the dialogue reveals about them, and (b) how the lines move the story.

Leo held the door open. "After you," he said. "I insist."
Sam shook her head. "You first. You're the one who knows the way."

Q5. Rhythm and pace. Copy the passage below (sample). Mark each sentence **L** (long) or **S** (short). Then say what the pattern does to the pace, and where the reader's attention lands.

The gym was full of noise and colour, streamers down from the beams, tables along one wall, everyone talking at once about the dance that night. Priya stood at the door. She checked the time. She left.

Q6. Stage directions change meaning. Ari says the line "*I didn't take it.*" Write two stage directions for it: one that makes Ari look guilty, and one that makes Ari look hurt. Explain how each direction changes the effect of the same words.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Write three to five sentences that build suspense. Combine at least two devices or features from the toolbox. After your passage, name the two devices you used and the response you were aiming for.

Q8. Write six to eight lines of dialogue between two characters who want different things — for example, one wants to tell a teacher what happened, and the other wants to keep it quiet. Give the characters different speech habits so the reader can follow without speech tags. Then point to one dialogue choice you made for each character and say what it reveals.

Q9. Same scene, two purposes. Here is a plain scene (sample): *The kitchen was warm. Dad cooked pasta. The radio played.* Rewrite the scene twice: once to amuse the reader, and once to make the reader uneasy. For each version, name two choices you changed and why.

Q10. The passage below (sample) is flat: it tells, and it never shows. Rewrite it, making two experiments from the toolbox. After your version, write one sentence about each experiment: what you tried, and what you wanted it to do to the reader.

It was raining. Noah walked to the bus stop. He was late.

Product task — a composition

This is the making task of the section. Choose one option.

Option A — a short story. Write a short story of 400–600 words, built on characters and dialogue.

Option B — a two-character script. With a partner, write a script of one to two pages with exactly two characters. Work in an online shared space if your teacher approves one, so you can both see and edit the draft as it grows. Decide which of you will take each character's voice in the first draft, then swap and read each other's lines aloud before you edit.

Whichever option you choose, your text must:

- be written for a **purpose** you can state in one sentence, and for an **intended response** in the reader;



- **experiment with at least three** literary language features and/or devices, combined to evoke that response;
- use **dialogue that does two jobs** — revealing character and moving the text.

Work in three parts.

Part A — the plan (before you draft). Copy and complete the table.

Plan	Your answer
My purpose is ...	
I want the reader to feel / picture / wonder ...	
My three experiments (feature or device, and the job of each)	1. ... 2. ... 3. ...
My characters, and one difference in how each speaks	

Part B — the draft. Write your text. Run the experiment loop as you go: draft, read back, adjust.

Part C — the writer's note (about 150 words). Explain three of your choices: what you tried, which purpose each choice served, and what effect you wanted it to have on the reader. Name one choice you changed after reading back, and say why you changed it.

Before you hand your text in, run it down the checklist.

The read-back checklist

Run your draft down the ladder before you hand it in.

1	Can I state my purpose in one sentence?
2	Have I named the response I want the reader to have?
3	Did I choose at least three experiments to serve it?
4	Does my dialogue reveal character AND move the text?
5	Have I read it back as a reader, not as its writer?
6	Did I adjust at least one choice after the read-back?
7	Is my draft ready for Section 5E's review and edit?

Each rung is a question you answer by reading the draft again — not by remembering what you meant.

Drafting checklist drawn as rungs of a ladder: purpose stated, intended response named, three experiments chosen, dialogue doing two jobs, read-back done, one choice adjusted, ready for Section 5E

Keep your draft and your writer's note: Section 5E picks them up again, when reviewing and editing your own and others' texts becomes the task.

Answers

Q1. (a)–(ii): short sentences and an unanswered question make the reader wait for something they cannot yet see. (b)–(i): a private joke shows a shared history without stating it. (c)–(iii): making the walls *listen* turns a normal room into one that seems aware of the character.

Q2. Sample answers: *The bell sang* — a calm or happy morning; *The bell shrieked* — alarm or danger; *The bell muttered* — humour, as if the bell itself is grumpy. Any fit that matches a verb to a purpose and explains the match.

Q3. Personification: *The old shed waited* — the shed seems alive and watching, which builds unease. Simile: *like a dog told to stay* — the shed is pictured as something held back, which adds tension. Short sentences for effect: *The door was open. Inside it was dark.* — the short, plain sentences slow the reader down and build suspense.

Q4. Leo: *After you. I insist.* shows a playful, formal manner — he is joking around; it also moves the story because he offers to go second. Sam: *You first. You're the one who knows the way* shows she is practical and a little wary; it moves the story by revealing they are going somewhere only Leo knows — which gives the reader a question to carry.

Q5. Pattern: L, S, S, S. The one long sentence full of noise and colour opens wide; then three short sentences close everything down. The pace falls away, and the reader's attention lands on the last word — *She left* — because nothing softens it.

Q6. Sample answers. Guilty: (*looking at the floor, hands in pockets*) — the body hides, so the words read as a dodge. Hurt: (*meeting their eyes, voice steady*) — the steady body makes the words read as honest, and the accusation feels unfair. The words never change; the direction changes the effect.

Q7–Q10, product task. These are writing tasks. Sample responses are in the fully-worked solutions. Check yours against the experiment loop: purpose stated, response intended, choices made, read back, adjusted.

Example 2 — worked solution.

1. TAYLA's lines are short and closed (*I'm right, Oh, It's the best one I've got*): she is deflecting and does not want to talk. MARCUS pushes with observations and questions (*You're holding it like it's going somewhere, Do you know why we're here?*): he is circling the thing neither of them is saying.
 2. Together they evoke tension and unease: his body cannot settle while her words refuse to move. The mismatch makes the reader feel that something is coming.
 3. It is suspense. The reader's question (*what is behind the door?*) is finally answered only by the handle moving — and the scene cuts before the answer arrives, so the reader carries the question out of the scene.
 4. Sample purpose: to make the audience lean in before a reveal that changes the story. Sample effect: the reader wonders what TAYLA knows that MARCUS does not, and keeps reading to find out. Any clearly stated purpose and effect that fit the scene.
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Fully-worked solutions

Q7 — model passage.

The corridor was empty, but the door at the end was open a finger's width, and a line of light lay across the floor like something put there on purpose. Somewhere behind the wall, a pipe tapped once. Then again. Nobody was coming to say what it was. (sample)

Devices: imagery (*a line of light ... like something put there on purpose*), suspense (the tapping is never explained), and a short final sentence that lands the unease. Intended response: the reader feels watched and wants to know what is behind the door.

Q8 — model dialogue.

“We tell her. Today.”

“We tell her nothing. It’ll blow over.”

“It didn’t blow over. It’s still sitting in the gym, in pieces.”

“Exactly. Pieces. Nobody saw who.”

“I saw who. I’m the who.”

“...Right. So what I meant was, nobody saw *me*.” (sample)

Speech habits: the first character speaks in short, flat, deciding lines; the second talks around the problem, rewording it until it suits them. Choices named: “*We tell her. Today.*” reveals a character who has already decided; “*nobody saw who*” becoming “*nobody saw me*” reveals a character rewriting the story to stand outside it.

Q9 — model rewrites.

Amused: *The kitchen was warm. Dad cooked pasta, or fought it — the sauce spat, the lid rattled, and a piece of pasta stuck to the wall like it was staying for the night. The radio played along, unhelpfully.* (sample) Choices changed: the metaphor of fighting the pasta and the personified radio (*unhelpfully*) turn the scene into a small comedy.

Uneasy: *The kitchen was warm, warmer than it should have been. Dad stood over the pasta and did not turn around. The radio played, low, to a room nobody was speaking in.* (sample) Choices changed: *warmer than it should have been* unsettles the one comfortable detail, and the dialogue gap (*nobody was speaking in*) leaves a question hanging.

Q10 — model rewrite.

Rain stitched the bus shelter’s roof. Noah ran the last stretch with his bag over his head, the timetable already wrong in his pocket. The bus pulled in. The doors sighed open. (sample)

Experiment 1: imagery (*rain stitched, the doors sighed open*) — tried to make the rain and the bus feel alive, so the whole scene presses on Noah. Experiment 2: the object carrying the feeling (*the timetable already wrong in his pocket*) — tried to show lateness without saying *he was late*: the timetable is already wrong before he boards.

Product task — model opening (Option A).

The Spare Key (sample text — written for this book)

The house was dark when Ava got home, which was wrong. Her mum’s car was in the driveway, which was also wrong, because the car meant her mum, and her mum meant lights.

“Mum?”

The house gave back nothing. Ava stood in the hallway with her key still in her hand, and the clock in the kitchen ticked twice, three times, like it was counting her.

“Very funny,” she said, to nobody. “Lights on, lights on.”

She found the switch. The hallway filled, warm and ordinary, and her laugh came out small but real. Then the kitchen door began to open, and it was not the wind.

Writer’s note (model): My purpose was to build suspense and then release it once, so the reader trusts the feeling and I can build it again. I wanted the reader to stand in the hallway with Ava. Experiment 1: the repeated *which was wrong* — repetition to make small things feel like signs. Experiment 2: personification (*the house gave back nothing, the clock counting her*) — to make the house feel like a second character. Experiment 3: dialogue to a empty room — to show Ava steadying herself out loud. I changed my first draft’s ending: it said *and her mum walked in*. Reading back, that answered the question too early, so I swapped it for the door opening on its own.