Themes, metaphors and motifs

in narrative writing

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Numero Uno

Do the task yourself.

If you can’t do it, they can’t do it.

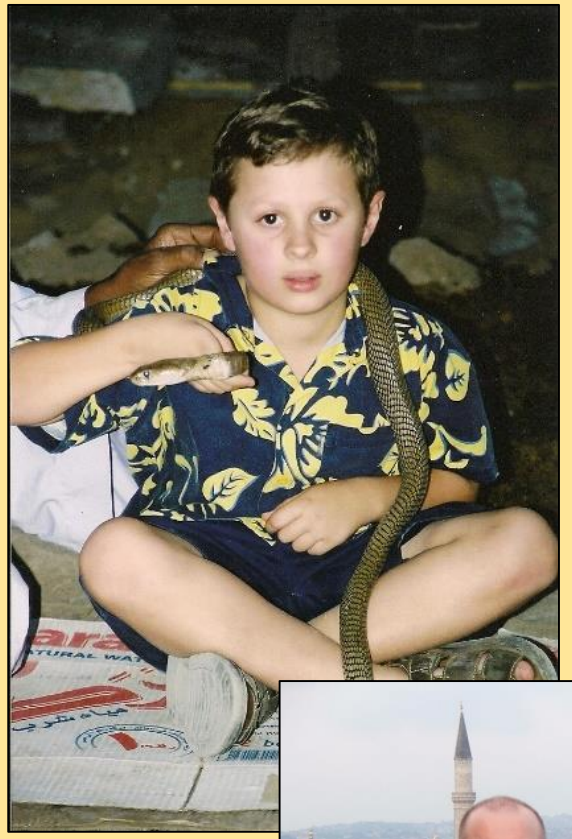
Do the task yourself!

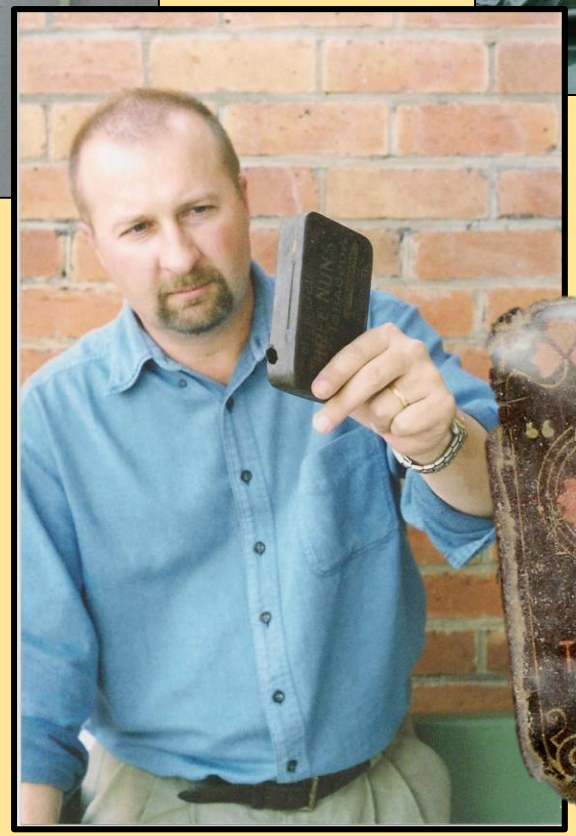
When you do the task yourself, the following will become apparent:

Literacy Task X

- Specific subject matter
- How long it takes to complete
- Generic structure
- Grammar
- The purpose of the task
- Planning Steps
- Specific language techniques
- The technology requirements
- Explicit vocabulary
- How bloody hard it is to write figuratively

Photos and objects as an inspiration for writing



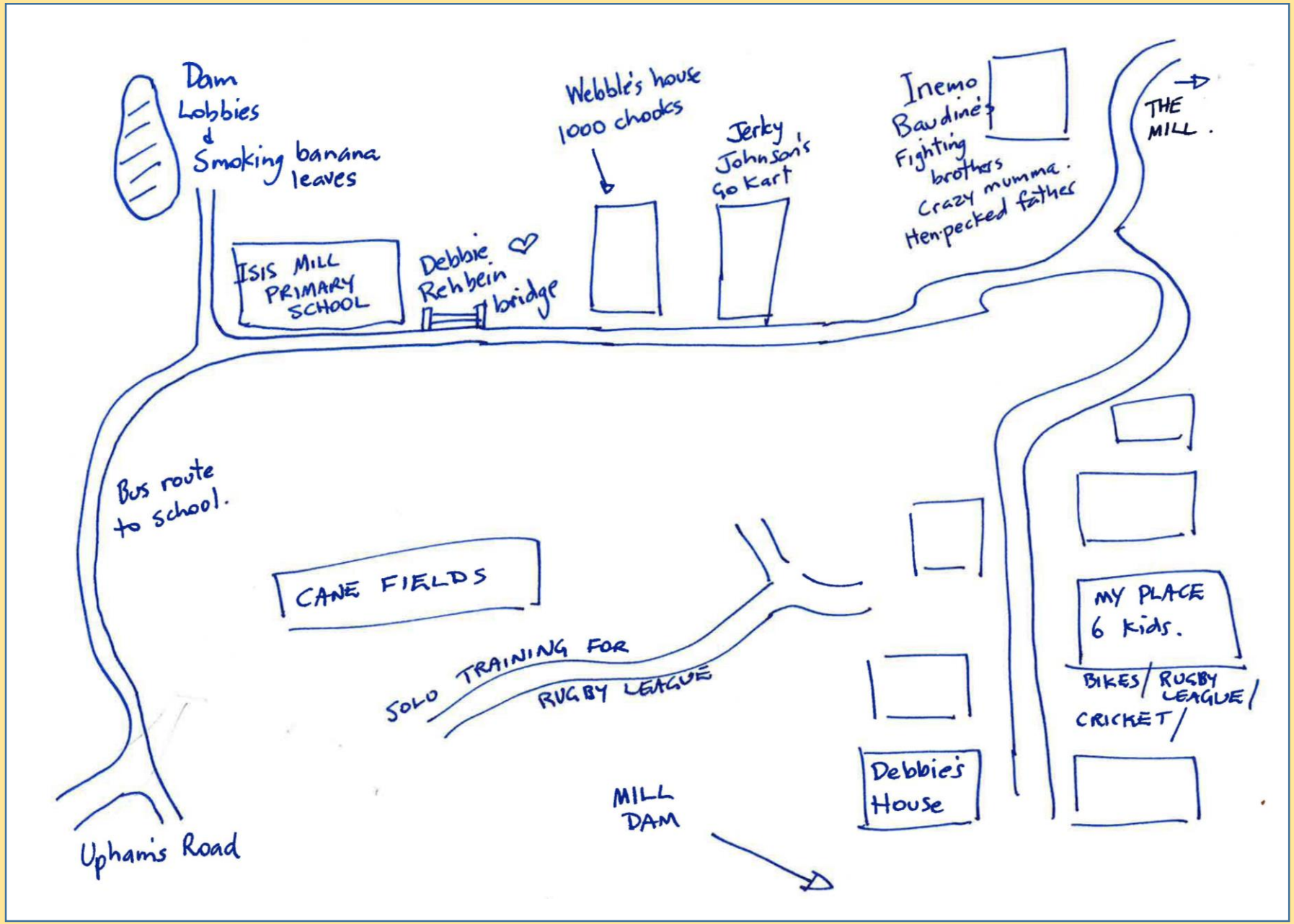


FORODWAITH
RHÛN
Icebay of Forochel
Himling
Carn Dûm
Angmar
Mtns of Angmar
Here was of old the Witch-realm of Angmar
The Lost Realm of ARNOR
Mount Gundabad
ERED MITHRIN
(Grey Mountains)
Withered Heath
IRON HILLS
Erebor
The Lonely Mountain
Wood Elves
Esgaroth
the Long Lake
Mountains of Mirkwood
Langwell
Greylin
Ettenmoors
ERED LUIN
EMYN UIAL
Nenuial (Lake Evendim)
North Downs
Fornost
Weather Hills
Weathertop (Amon Sûl)
RHUDAUR
Trollshaws
Rivendell
High Pass
Carrock
Old Ford
Old Forest Road
Forlindon
Forlond
Mithlond
Gulf of Lhûn
Grey Havens
Tower Hills
White Downs
ARTHEDAIN
THE SHIRE
Hobbiton
Brandywine Bridge
Bree
East-West Road
Last Bridge
Bruinen (Loudwater)
Far Downs
Harlond
Harlindon
(Blue Mountains)
Sarn Ford
South Downs
CARDOLAN
Mitheithel
ERIADOR
Baranduin (Brandywine)
Tharbad
Nîn-in-Eilph (Swanfleet)
Eregion (Hollin)
Moria Gate
Dimrill Dale
Gladden Fields
Celduin (River Running)
Carnen (Redwater)
MIRKWOOD
RHOVANION
East Bight
Sea of Rhûn
MINHIRIATH
Gwathló (Greyflood)
Glanduin
Eryn Vorn
Nimrodel
LÓRIEN
Anduin (The Great River)
Field of Celebrant
Limlight
NORTH UNDEEP
SOUTH UNDEEP
The BROWN LANDS
Lond Daer
ENEDWAITH
Dunland
North-South Road
Isengard
FANGORN
The Wold
ROHAN
East Emnet
West Emnet
WESTFOLD
Helm's Deep
Fords of Isen
Angren (Isen)
Adorn
Sarn Gebir
EMYN MUIL
Falls of Rauros
Dead Marshes
Dagorlad (Battle Plain)
Morannon
ERED LITHUI (Ash Mountains)
Nindalf (Wetwang)
CAIR ANDROS
Snowbourn
Edoras
EASTFOLD
Entwash
Anórien
Minas Tirith
Isenmouthe
Barad-dûr
Orodruin
Plateau of Gorgoroth
Udûn
MORDOR
NURN
Sea of Núrnen
EPHEL DUATH (Mountains of Shadow)
Osgiliath
Emyn Arnen
ERED NIMRAIS
Erech
GONDOR
Pinnath Gelin
Anfalas (Langstrand)
Lefnui
Drúwaith Iaur
Andrast (Ras Morthil)
Edhellond
Dol Amroth
Dor-en-Ernil
Belfalas
Lebennin
Gilrain
Sirith
Lossarnach
Pelargir
Poros
Crossings of Poros
Tolfalas
Ethir Anduin
South Gondor
(now a debatable and desert land)
Harad Road
Harnen
NEAR HARAD
N
The Realm of MIDDLE EARTH
Miles
50
100
150
200

GAME OF THRONES

Draw a map

Get the memories flowing



Trying to explain THEME

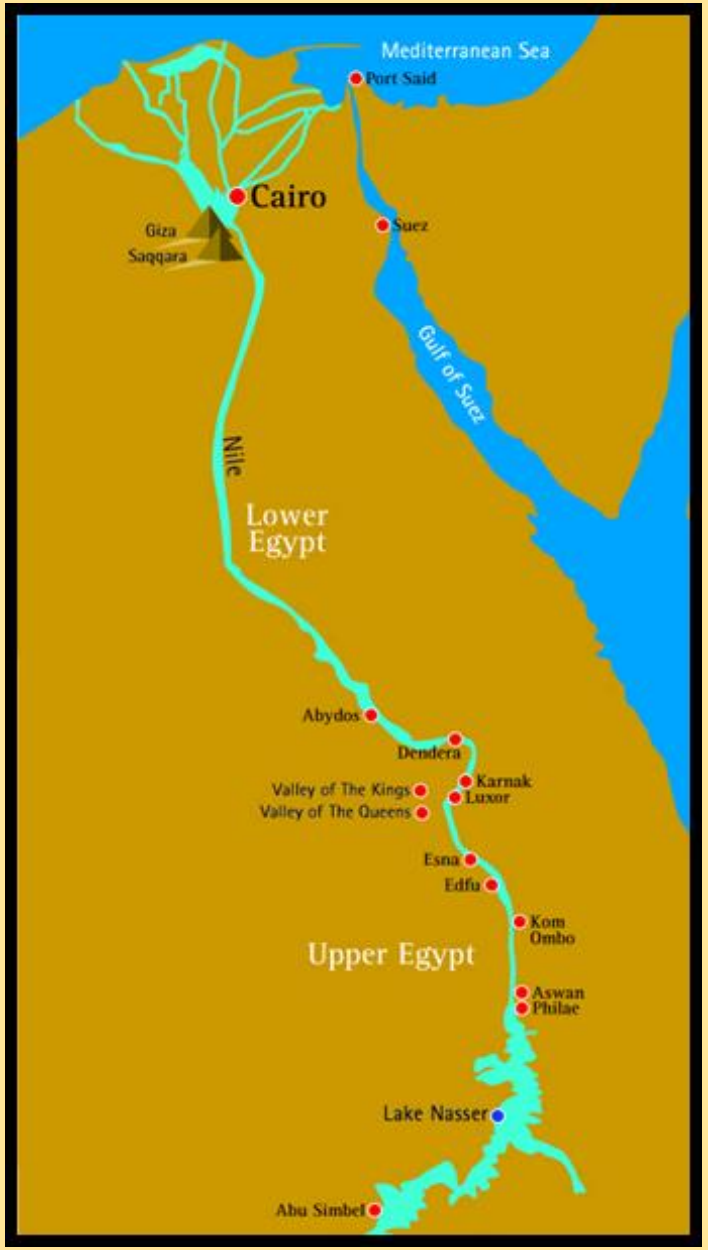
These preceding activities will help to identify moments in a student's life that they feel are significant.

To take this beyond a recount we must establish a theme.

Think of your story's *theme* as the Nile River flowing through Egypt.

It is central to the heart and life of the narrative.
It flows through the entire piece.

It gives the text purpose, direction, nourishment, and meaning.



Theme

One of the big tricks. How to get students understanding AND incorporating the concept.

- The theme of a story is what is revealed about *life* during the character's experiences or even what the character learns about themselves.

- It could be that he or she learns the importance of being honest, or the character discovers who they really are when faced with a challenge.

Pick the right language for the selected age group to explain the idea.

Advice to students

"Be constantly thinking about ways to incorporate the **theme** in your narrative."

"A way to do this is by having your character regularly **REFLECT** on the events being described."

More on reflection later.

Perhaps you provide students with possibilities. E.g.

What theme will you be developing in this story? Circle one of the following.

A. A person who is timid transforms into a fighter when they are threatened.

B. The importance of staying calm in a crisis and the outcome if you don't.

C. Proving the hard way that honesty is the best policy.

- What does a personal conflict reveal about two individuals?
- How do events find or define your identity?
- A demonstration of the place of family in your life.
- The birth or rebirth of a personal passion.
- A tale of accepting responsibility and the journey to that moment.
- The beginning of an individual asserting their independence.
- What happens when someone is tempted?
- A story about the good of showing forgiveness/being forgiven.
- Why struggling for freedom or recognition is important?
- The consequences of some personal failing.
- A journey from innocence to maturity.

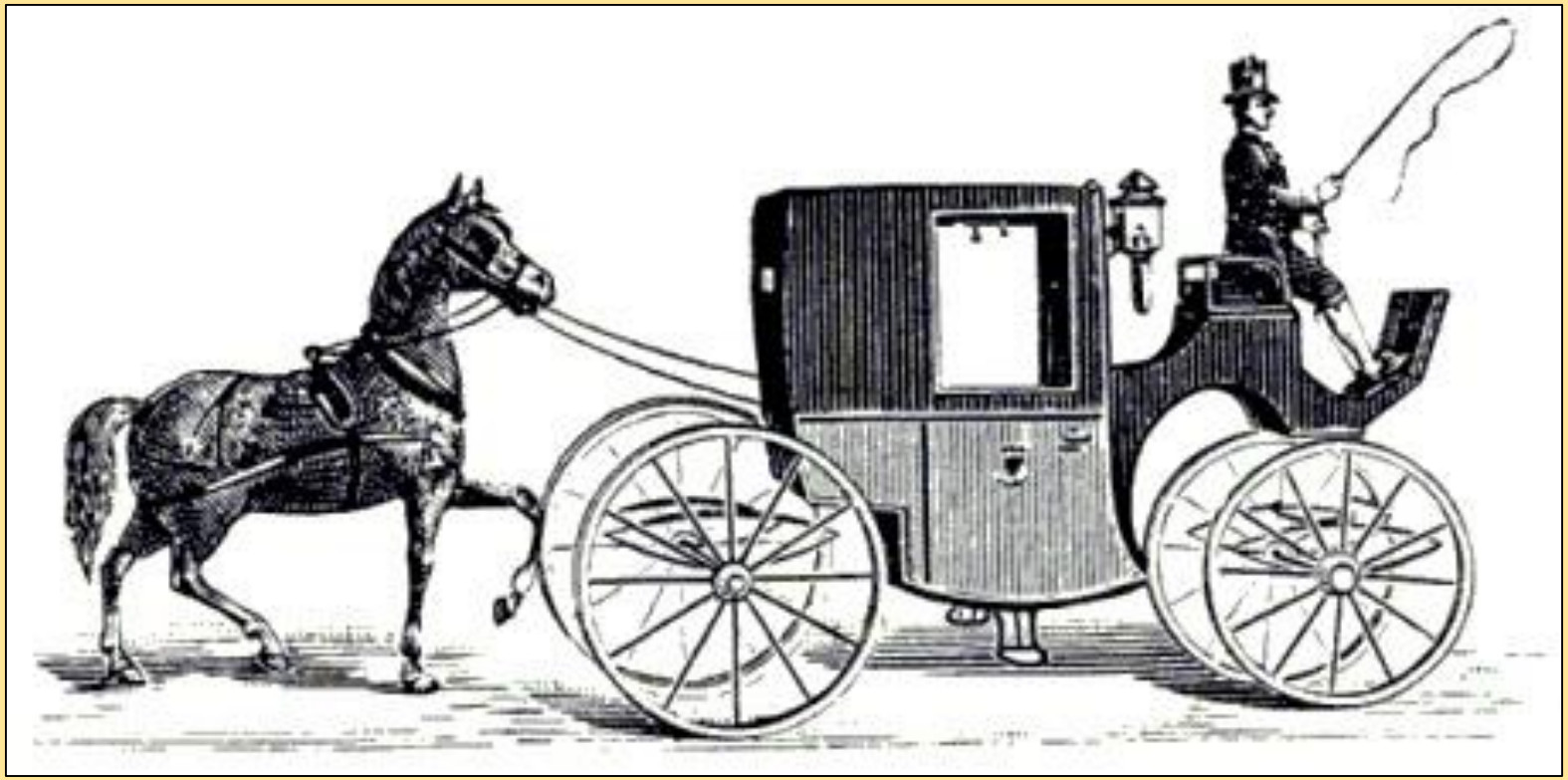
A work in progress.

Writing Themes Bank

Breaking free of an addiction	The battle for equality.	Man versus technology.	Connecting to our ancestors.
Broken dreams and battling on.	Learning from failure.	Choosing paths in life – the consequences of a major life decision.	Mesmerised by beauty.
Change/evolution/ rebirth in your life.	The virtues of forgiveness.	The importance of a faithful friend.	Striving to experience freedom.
Family – rituals, patterns, personalities and influences.	Giving into temptation or not giving in to temptation – consequences.	Alienation – living on life's margins.	Corruption and hypocrisy in high places.
Friendship and bonding.	Cultural divides.	Consequences of greed.	Adolescence – its pain and confusion.
Finding your identity.	Defiance and courage for a cause.	Courage and perseverance.	Father and son – conflicts, struggles for understanding and acceptance.
Personal inspiration.	memory nostalgia reflection time youth remembrance	Sibling rivalry.	Mother and son - conflicts, struggles for understanding and acceptance.

Maybe start the process talking about “Theme”

Should the theme drive the narrative, or should the narrative dictate the theme?



Are stories about struggles the best?

In the movie, *Shadowlands* , about writer C.S. Lewis, the main character makes a speech about suffering in our lives.

He says that suffering in our lives is a gift.

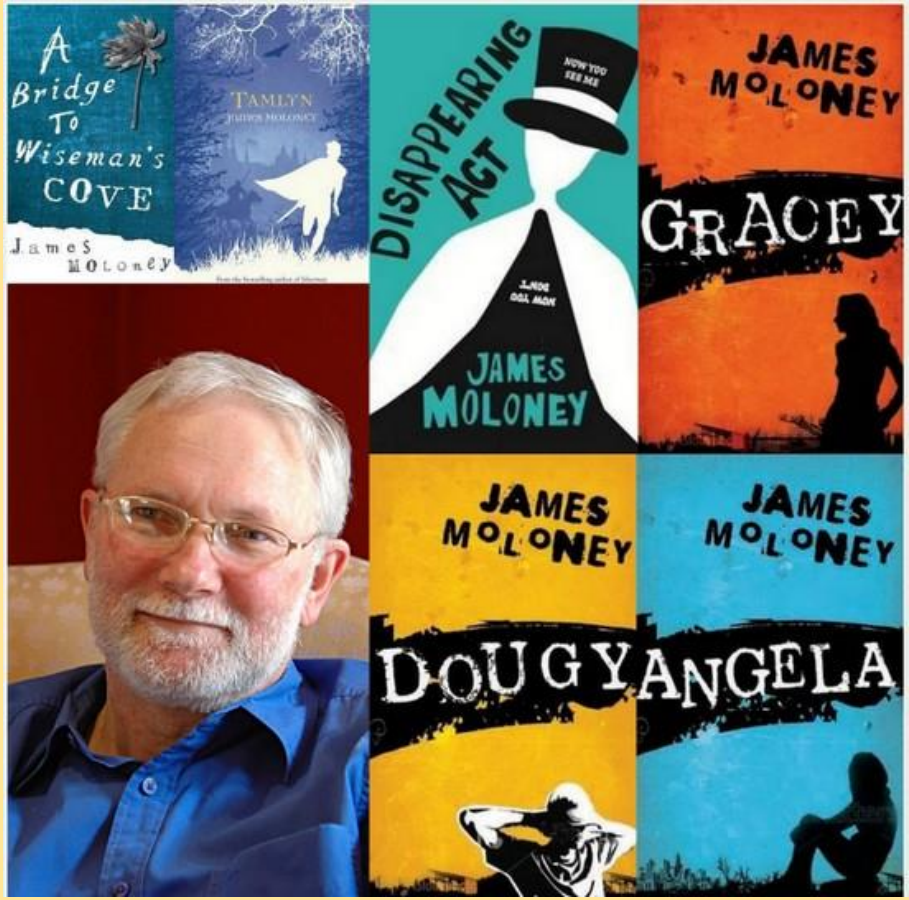
"Through suffering, we release our hold on the toys of this world … We're like blocks of stone, out of which the sculptor carves the forms of men. The blows of His chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect."

Shadowlands

Delete - Change – Add

This is a great technique to use in your planning.

Firstly, make a bullet point list
of the incidents you are planning on
writing about.



This technique comes from Queensland writer, *James Moloney*.

- We sailed from Luxor to Kom Ombo
- For breakfast we had hot chocolate with our bacon and eggs.
- We then had a buggy ride to the big temple.
- The next stop was a temple devoted to crocodile sacrifices.

- Late in the afternoon we walked back towards the Nile and our cruise ship.
- I saw a man in old Egyptian gear sitting on the side of the path. He motioned for me to sit down.
- He had two mysterious baskets beside him.
- He opened one and produced a cobra that he put around my neck.
- My parents looked startled but I was enjoying the experience.
- Dad took some pictures then we left for the ship.

- **Delete** information that is not necessary. Do not waste words on unnecessary action? It slows down the story. (School assessment has strict word limits. You need to cut to the chase.)

- **Change** the order of the remaining information. You want to begin the story on the verge of something exciting or interesting about to happen and it should build to a climax at the end. What could be the new starting point? What could the climax be?

- **Add** incidents, ideas, danger etc to create tension and interest.

- ~~We sailed from Luxor to Kom Ombo~~
- ~~For breakfast we had hot chocolate with our bacon and eggs.~~
- ~~We then had a buggy ride to the big temple.~~
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The new bullet point list after doing a **Delete/Change/Add:**

- (***Orientation/Sizzling start***) I find myself sitting on a square of cardboard on a dusty path in Egypt staring a cobra in the face. Events leading up to this moment include the family (in Egypt on a holiday) dragging themselves back towards the Nile cruise boat after a hot day sightseeing.

  I spot an old man beckoning me to sit down. He has baskets. I ignore parental advice about staying close to them.

- Reflect on the journey to this point. (***Backfill***)
- He drapes the cobra around my neck. (***Rising action***)
- Reflect on parental protection and family history of killing snakes. (***Rising action***)
- Make some Garden of Eden reference – being tempted. (***Rising action***)
- Cobra, Nile, scales etc become a combined metaphor for a transformation and an ongoing journey of discovery in my life. (***Climax***)

- Return to narrative. Parents' reactions. Photos. "Baksheesh". (***Falling Action***)
- Continue on, somehow renewed, to follow the river where it leads. (***Resolution***)

Plot Structure:

Orientation/Exposition

Rising Action

Climax

Falling Action

Resolution

An alternative plot structure:

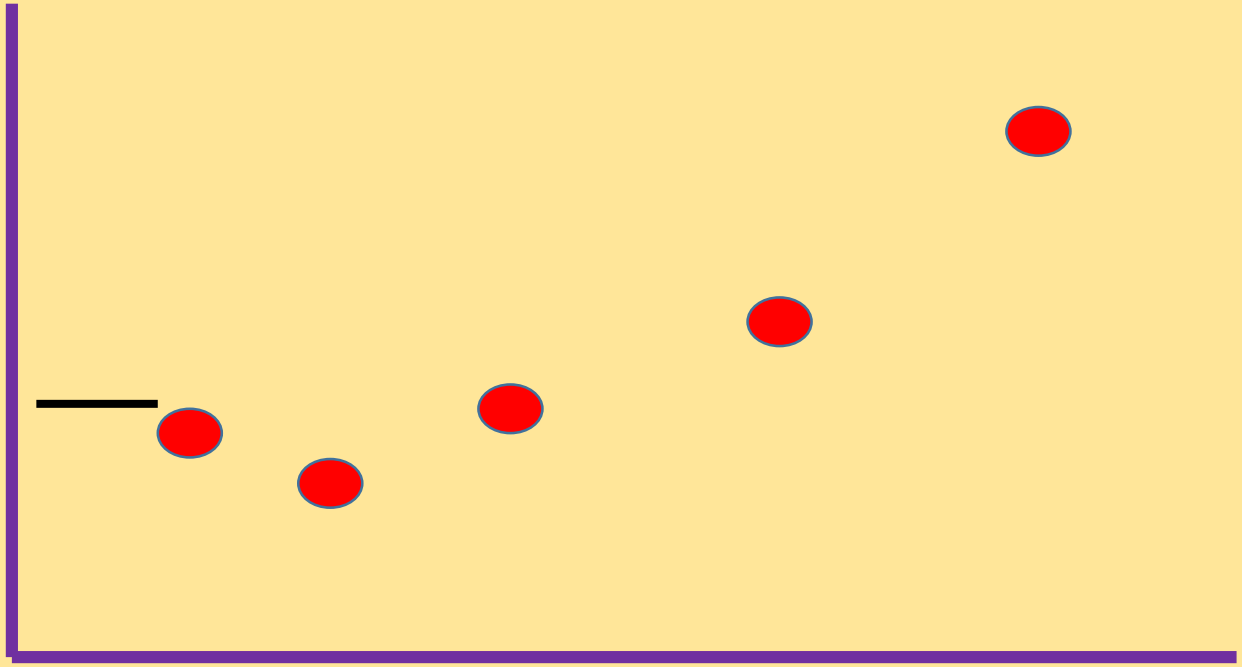
Sizzling start

Backfill/Tic toc

Rising action/obstacles/conflict

Climax

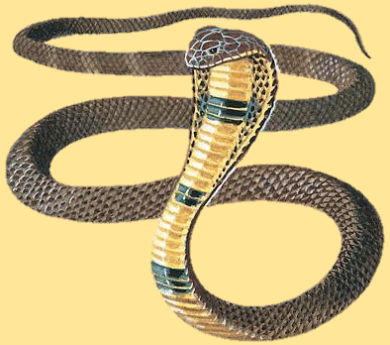
Falling action/resolution

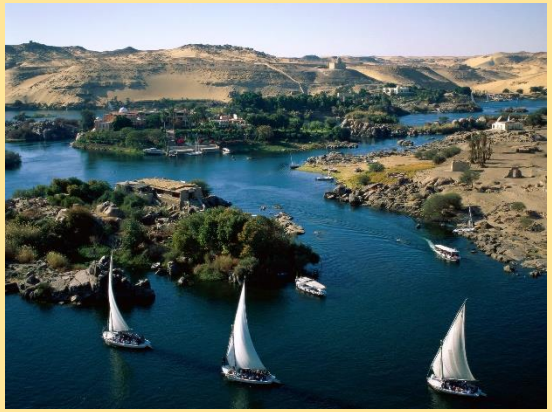


Thoughts and feelings
Reflecting on the theme

Teacher, where do metaphors come from?

Is there something in the story that lends itself to becoming an extended metaphor?





Two samples from ***Cold-Blooded*** by C.A.

*From the **Climax***

The serpent had shown me the forbidden fruit of the outside world. He presented its succulent juices of independence, making me want to leave the luscious garden my parents had planted for me. The temptation of the flesh of the earth was too sweet not to try, and I was filled with the desire to have it. It would be years before I could taste it, but the seeds were planted in my mind.

*From the **Resolution***

Following the track over the crest of the hill, we were greeted with the sight of the Nile. The water flowed down from the South to the North. Giving life to all of Egypt, the Nile was Egypt's cold blood. Its arteries and veins swelled and emptied to the steady beat of the country's heart, the rains and seasons, fuelling life and growth. The glistening current slid and weaved its way through the countryside, it never turned back, only at times splitting in two. Two streams running away from each other, following different paths; I wondered if they would meet up somewhere.

Another river metaphor

The River by Bruce Springsteen

I come from down in the valley
Where mister when you're young
They bring you up to do like your daddy done
Me and Mary we met in high school
When she was just seventeen
We'd ride out of this valley down to where the fields were green
We'd go down to the river
And into the river we'd dive
Oh down to the river we'd ride

Then I got Mary pregnant ….

That night we went down to the river
And into the river we'd dive
Oh down to the river we did ride

I got a job working construction …..

Now all them things that seemed so important
Well mister they vanished right into the air
Now I just act like I don't remember
Mary acts like she don't care

But I remember us riding in my brother's car
Her body tan and wet down at the reservoir
At night on them banks I'd lie awake
And pull her close just to feel each breath she'd take
Now those memories come back to haunt me
They haunt me like a curse
Is a dream a lie if it don't come true
Or is it something worse
That sends me down to the river
Though I know the river is dry
That sends me down to the river tonight
Down to the river
My baby and I
Oh down to the river we ride

Another work in progress.

Metaphor Bank

Concepts that can easily be developed into extended metaphors

War Soldiers, infantry, cannon fodder, general, smoke, chaos, ranks, trenches, surrender, tanks	**The weather** and its changes, seasons, a long hot summer, an afternoon breeze, an unseasonably hot winter, autumn, cold winds	**The garden -** Plant life, seeds, growth, a twisted vine, a ripening piece of fruit, a dying tree, a swelling pumpkin
Boxing- jab, bloody nose, round, knockout punch, strike, blow, bout, on the ropes, jab, bare knuckle, gloves, referee, below the belt, down for the count, heavy weight, light weight, ring, arena, sucker punch, scored points, footwork, corner, throw in the towel, bell, champ, contender, punching bag, enter the ring	**Snakes-** serpents, bites, poison, fangs, Snake-like cunning, Treachery, Slithering cunning Venomous lies, Original sin, Shedding skin, Forked tongue Sink fangs in, Nothing lower than a snake's belly	An **Animal**: using the characteristics of an animal to enhance your theme, e.g birds symbolising freedom
The ocean/ships/storms **Ja**gged rocks, steerage, rudders, captains, wet sails, safe harbours, full steam	A **river** – The Nile, flows, nourishes, heart of the country,	**The road** – hills ,valleys, strangers on same journey, twists, turns, rocks, potholes, endless

You can try a handholding technique.

- Your opening paragraph should set the scene. Describe the place, describe the time of day by showing the light or darkness. Don't use "I" in the first sentence (or two).
- Describe …. Noises, smells, sights ….
- What is your character thinking?
- Begin to reveal the personality of your character through their thoughts and actions. Have them dwell for a moment on something related to the story's theme.
- Have a surprise in the last sentence of this paragraph.

The next paragraph needs to provide background detail (or backfill) to this moment.

What has led up to this point that the reader needs to know about?

Continue in this vein, bit by bit, sentence by sentence, or paragraph by paragraph.

For a particular age group, and for summative assessment, judge how much is too much.

A student sample …… Possible THEME so far?

The hint of a water metaphor/motif that will develop later.

Crucial decision…..

(Lost)

I sped out onto the barren track pursued by my friends. Dry heat washed over us as we started the course prepared by the Spicer's Resort, a place defined by its luxury accommodation within a thousand hectare working cattle station. Already we were pulling ahead of our parents, who would be accompanying us on the fifteen kilometre bike ride. We were strictly told not to go out of their sight, but it was already clear that this rule would bend.

Twelve year old boys are somewhat fitter and keener than cautious parents. We powered ahead. Obviously they weren't finding it quite as easy to negotiate the bends and slightly steep climbs of the rocky terrain.

Later in the story. Evidence of the THEME?

After a kilometre we reached a point where there were two pathways. Freedom seemed to encourage cockiness. We made a group decision to continue riding uphill. We were astonished by how long it was taking, however, we continued going up, up and up until finally the top loomed before us. Relieved to the core, we looked down. Before us lay a massive downhill track that was insanely steep and uneven. Our relief vanished into thin air. Nervous as a batsmen on ninety-nine, we prepared to descend the impossibly challenging trail. The second before going down, one of my friends voiced what we were all thinking. Maybe this route wasn't the right way. Realisation hit like a tidal wave. We had defied our parents and we had gone the wrong way.

Let's concentrate on the water metaphor/motif.

The sun seemed to smother us like a blanket, our concerned discussion sounding like waves of panic. We decided to head back to the fork in the track and wait for our parents. Racing recklessly to the divergence in the trail, we all seemed calmer as we waited for our parents. They never came. We had missed them. We reluctantly recognised that they had continued on, believing we had continued on the right path. With only drops of water left in our bottles, we could wait no longer. Again we rode our bikes down the other pathway. The unthinkable happened and another fork appeared in the trail. Looking into each other's eyes, everyone understood that we couldn't gamble with another wrong decision.

Fear, heat and thirst started to ravage our bodies. We started cramping up as dehydration did its best work. The sun climbed down the horizon. The view was no longer beautiful, but menacing. We knew we needed help. As we realised that we might have to camp the night, panic surged like a storm.

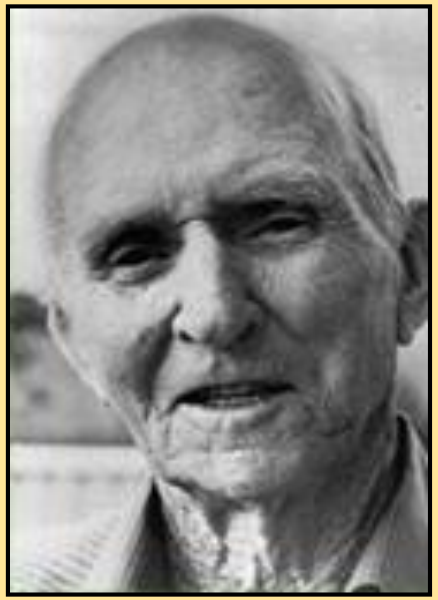
Emotions washed over us like a strong current. Dehydration, stress and being stranded caused us to break down. We sat there, feeling hopeless and childlike, trapped tears

The conclusion.

Emotions washed over us like a strong current. Dehydration, stress and being stranded caused us to break down. We sat there, feeling hopeless and childlike, trapped tears escaped. A sharp noise pierced the silence. We stopped breathing and strained to hear it. It was the sound of help. Tears of joy escaped my eyes as we hoped into the all-terrain four wheeler resort car. In the emotional trip back we had time to think what we could say to our parents.

Perhaps the cure for all of our woes ……

Three Sentence Types



1. sentences about the writer **– I, me, us, we** …
2. sentences about the **situation, scene, others** ...
3. sentences about **feelings, thoughts and reflections**

E.g. **Mud, Mates and Matchbox Cars**: a QCS paper.

The sandpit in the back corner of our yard was the life of the neighbourhood. We would sit for hours at a time in the shade of the swaying leopard tree with our bodies waist deep in mud. That marvellous mud; what a joy it was to slosh about without a care in the world, creating cities of matchbox cars and army men.

From ***A Fortunate Life*** by A.B. Facey

I was told to stand close while the old lady was milking and take notice of the way it was done. She milked two cows, then made me sit on the milking-stool with the milk-pail on the ground under the next cow to be milked. This frightened the wits out of me as I was afraid of cows. The old lady showed me how to squeeze the teats to make the milk come out. But try as I may, I couldn't squeeze hard enough, being under nine years old and a little too young for milking.

I am a Rock

A winter's day

In a deep and dark

December;

I am alone,

Gazing from my window to the streets below

On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.

I am a rock,

I am an island.

You took the words right out of my mouth

It was a hot summer night

and the beach was burning.

There was fog crawling over the sand.

When I listen to your heart

I hear the whole world turning.

I see the shooting stars falling

through your trembling hands.

1. sentences about the writer – **I, me, us, we** …
2. sentences about the **situation, scene, others** ...
3. sentences about **feelings, thoughts and reflections**

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Reflections

A must have.

Check out the sample in your booklet based on this page from *The Arrival.*

Converting similes to metaphors
- (one tip: convert the simile into action)

- The sun came up on that cold morning. It was golden in colour.
- The sun was like a golden blanket on the cold hills.
- The sun threw its golden blanket over the cold shoulders of the hill.

- The old nun was like an armed tank.

- Sister Helen swung the hefty turret of her torso to bring my head into range of the meaty artillery of her fist.

- *Beneath her thick, brown robe her army tank legs crunched into gear and she began to roll towards me. Her pistons pumped harder, fuelled by the sight of my hand on Angela Marano's leg. Too late I realised, inside the turret of her raised sleave, a meaty fist was being loaded for me.*

- The lies rushed out of me like water being released from a dam.
- The dam of my conscience broke and a flood of lies gushed out of my mouth.

- The old lady who lived next door was the pillar of confidence and strength for me during my early years had been toppled by cancer. She was just like the walls of the city of Troy that had been toppled by the Greeks all those centuries before.
- The old lady who was my Trojan wall and defender against of all of my childhood terrors, now crumbled before cancer's relentless siege.

Your turn …

His orders boomed down the presbytery hallway like cannon shots.

He fired off round after round of explosive commands down the hallway of the presbytery.

My life was like a bumpy, dusty road.

The road of my life twisted and turned across many bumps of disappointment and my destination was lost in the dusty clouds of my own doubts.

Playing with noun groups

The Bremer River ….

The meandering brown snake of mud and chemical waste …

The clogged artery of the city’s dying heart …..

Matching the incident with a clearly articulated theme

Incident = Throwing a rock at a kid at school that instead hit a friend's younger brother.

Theme = The story develops the theme of the regrets we feel when we don't think before we act. It is these incidents that make us aware (should make us aware) that some mistakes can't be reversed.

Your turn …

Incident …..

Theme …..

Your turn …

Write an orientation/exposition for your idea.

- *Show not tell the setting, the time - Include a simile*
- *Introduce the character/s*
- *What is the theme that will be developed?*

Show them good samples.

Analyse their elements and compare them to the suggested structure.

Write your own.

A key piece of advice for every task you set and every genre you teach.