

The Darkness Out There

The aim of the following worksheets is to help you read and understand as fully as possible the short story *The Darkness Out There*.

When you read a story that you are studying for an examination it is important to gain as much information as you can about elements such as structure, plot, language (both as descriptive detail and dialogue) and characterisation. All of these and more will contribute to the ultimate meaning or message. There will not necessarily be a *right* answer to any of these or other aspects of a story, but whatever your view and understanding, you need to support this with evidence.

The worksheets will prompt you to read certain pages carefully and to search for and select specific pieces of information. You will be asked to think about suggestions or clues being made at certain points in the story. This may lead to you making predictions about possible conclusions or meanings.

Eventually, you will be able to make some annotations (notes) on the story itself so that you can have these with you in the examination. It is extremely important that these annotations are *light*, in other words, brief, general suggestions and helpful hints to guide you when answering exam questions. Too many detailed notes will only encourage you to copy them out in full. This generally leads to irrelevant responses and ones that will not read as fresh and thoughtful.

To do well in your GCSE Literature examination there will be many aspects of your writing which will lead to the highest marks for which you as an individual are capable. One key area is in the level of response you make to particular points. The marking criteria label this as the ability to **identify**, **explain** and **explore**. You should see this as a ladder, and the higher you can climb, the higher your marks will be. For example:

- ◆ To **identify** the language a character uses could be to state that she speaks with a West Country accent
- ◆ To **explain** the language a character uses could be to state that she speaks with a West Country accent which makes her sound Devonian and out of place
- ◆ To **explore** the language a character uses could be to state that she speaks with a West Country accent which the author uses to suggest she is from a rural background and thus rather naïve in the city setting of the story

The higher rungs of the ladder, where you can explain and explore, are only reached with careful reading and the hard graft of actually making notes about the many elements that contribute to the meaning of a good short story. These worksheets will help you with your climb!

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Worksheet One

Read pages 56-57 (*NEAB Anthology 2000/2001*)

- ◆ Make a list in the appropriate columns of
 - (a) bright, positive images/references
 - (b) dark, negative images/references

(a) Bright, positive images/references	(b) Dark, negative images/references
e.g. 'bare brown legs brushing through the grass, polleny summer grass that glistened in the sun'	e.g. 'voices coming out of the trees, nasty, creepy'

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Worksheet Two

Characterisation

Most short stories will obviously contain various characters - people who are affected by or in control of the events and situations described in the story. These people will come in all shapes, sizes and types. Their *characterisation* comes about by the author's direct description of their appearance, attitude and behaviour. As readers we will also learn about them through what they actually say and do.

A miserable, grumpy person might be described as having dark eyebrows, a scowling frown, stooping shoulders and a lazy waddle of a walk. He might say "Bugger off and get out of my way. You young people are always hangin' around where you're not wanted!" On the other hand, a happy, friendly person might be described as having bright blue eyes, a perpetual smile, upright posture and an energetic march of a walk. He might say "What a fantastic time I'm having at school today. I can't wait to get to English and read some great stories!"

The above are rather simple descriptions, but you get the idea! Characters in short stories will often be quite complex and it isn't always clear from the beginning just how we as readers should view and perhaps even judge them. It takes careful reading to get to *know* the people in a story.

When writing about these characters and their thoughts and feelings you will again need evidence to support your views. The following tasks are designed to get you thinking carefully about the main characters Mrs Rutter, Sandra and Kerry from *The Darkness Out There*.

Read pages 58-59 (up to line 164)

- ◆ EITHER draw a portrait of Mrs Rutter based on the information/descriptions in these pages, OR make a montage (collection) of images which represent Mrs Rutter, again based on the details provided in these pages
- ◆ Write a couple of paragraphs describing how the author gets the reader to view Sandra and Kerry in different ways. Refer to the kinds of information we get about both and why this is so (e.g. the references to Sandra's sexuality)

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Worksheet Two (cont.)

Read pages 58-60 (from lines 139 to 228)

- ◆ Use the columns below to quote examples [see note below] of how the author gets the reader to view Sandra and Kerry in different ways. Refer to the alternative kinds of information we get about both and add comments as to why this is the case (e.g. the references to Sandra's sexuality). Go on to another sheet if necessary.

NB When supplying evidence in your writing to back up your views on characters, it will be useful to produce quotations from the text. These should be reasonably brief. Introduce your quote by providing a context (what you think it shows or where it is from in the text, and so on) and add a comment to show that you understand its relevance. Always put quotes in quotation marks.

Sandra	Kerry
e. g. Sandra is a little 'precious', like when she thinks of Kerry's job as a mechanic: "She thought of the oily workshop floors, of the fetid underside of cars". These are rather melodramatic descriptions.	e. g. Kerry's early description is quite negative: "His chin was explosive with acne". The word 'explosive' exaggerates his condition.

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Worksheet Three

Reassessment

Read the remainder of the story.

Sometimes, a person in a story will have her or his character-traits consolidated by what we continue to learn about them after our first meeting. If they initially appear generous, we might continue to see acts of kindness. If initially nasty, we might continue to see examples of their evil side.

However, it is equally the case, as in real life, that first impressions are deceptive! Is this the case with Mrs Rutter, Sandra and Kerry?

Make notes in the columns below of **Before** and **After** characteristics of these three people. Refer to specific details:

	Before	After
Mrs Rutter		
Sandra		
Kerry		

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Worksheet Four

Symbolism

Short stories and novels will often include elements that shouldn't be read and taken literally. In other words, they should not always be taken at face value and may in fact be used to suggest or represent other features. These elements may be the characters, a particular place, a particular object or the overall situation. When this happens we refer to these as **symbolic** (an easy way to think of the word **symbolic** is when what is described is being used to **represent** something else). Some famous examples are:

- ◆ *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. In this novel, a group of schoolboys are stranded on an island during a war. The island, although real enough in the story, is actually meant to **symbolise** the whole world we all live in. The boys, who battle for leadership and supremacy on the island, variously **represent** the battle between good and evil in our world at large.
- ◆ *The Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndam. In this novel, the light of a passing comet causes much of the watching population to go blind. At the same time, killer plants are on the loose. People fight one another, as well as the triffids, in order to survive. On the surface, this would appear to be just a science fiction story. However, the book uses the **symbolic** threat of the triffids to **represent** how people behave when fending for themselves in a world without the protection of law and order.

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You should have already discovered how characters can be used to **represent** *good* and *bad* features. You will have also discovered how this can be a complex business when first impressions can be so deceiving! In this story, Kerry's acne is a **symbol** of his youth, but also of how it should not be used to misjudge him. The **symbolic** line "His anger eclipsed his acne" demonstrates how shallow it was for Sandra, herself a **symbol** of naiveté, to brand him as a *bad* person.

However, the most important **symbol** in this story is Packer's End.

- ◆ Considering all that has been said above, draw an imaginary map/outline of this wood. Label it with quotations from the text that refer to what it **represents**. Number these quotes and produce an accompanying chart to show how these images/references gradually build up to the **symbolic** picture and/or message contained in the story's final two paragraphs.