UNIT 4
CRAFTING CHARACTER

The BIG question
How do writers make their characters come to life?

Key learnings
- The way a character speaks affects the way a reader responds to that character.
- Well-written characters create distinctive images in a reader’s mind.
- Well-written characters introduce us to a world of ideas and values.
- Interesting characters provoke us to consider important ethical questions.

Key knowledge, understanding and skills
Students will:
- experiment with dialogue as a means of creating character
- explore the language and structure of classic and historical texts
- understand how characters exist within a particular historical or cultural context.
Characters come alive...

‘It begins with a character, usually, and once he stands up on his feet and begins to move, all I can do is trot along behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does.’
— William Faulkner

‘There’s an old rule about writing that says readers won’t care what happens in a story if they don’t care who it happens to. If we agree with this statement, then we put character before all other considerations in a piece of writing.’
— Writer’s Idea Book, Jack Heffron

‘I wish we could sometimes love the characters in real life as we love the characters in romances. There are a great many human souls whom we should accept more kindly, and even appreciate more clearly, if we simply thought of them as people in a story.’
— What I Saw in America, G.K. Chesterton

‘Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations.’
— Zen in the Art of Writing, Ray Bradbury
What do we mean by ‘crafting character’?

Stories are fundamentally about people. While we are dazzled and held in suspense when we read a thrilling plot, the plot is meaningless to us if we don’t care about the characters in the story. It is the characters who act, speak, feel and think as the events of the play play out. We have all laughed and cried with characters we’ve come to know through films, television and books. Sometimes a character stays with us long after we finish reading the novel or watching the film. We aspire to the greatness of characters such as Harry Potter and we recoil at the cruelty of characters such as Voldemort. We look for ourselves in the characters we meet in texts, and we try to better understand our own lives through the relationships we form with these characters. We learn to navigate our world by sharing vicariously the challenges and triumphs of our favourite characters.

How is it that we derive such rich relationships with these characters when they are mere figments of their creators’ imaginations? Characters are illusions that are nothing more than a series of careful creative choices made by writers to make us think and feel in a certain way. Even though we are aware of this, we love and hate these creations nonetheless.

There is a little bit of magic that goes into crafting convincing characters. What is it that draws us to the characters we love and the characters we love to hate?

Tuning in

1 See, think, wonder:
   a See: Look at the collage on the opposite page. Write down the names of the characters you see.
   b Think: What are the character traits you can remember about the characters you know in the collage?
   c Wonder: For the characters you don’t know, try to write down what you think they might be like.

2 Think and write down:
   a Think about your favourite characters from films, television and books. Write down characters you love and characters you hate.
   b Write down what it is that you love or hate about these characters.
   c Write down any techniques you can think of that the writer or film-maker uses to make you love or hate the character.
   d Consider the quotations provided on the opposite page. Select one with which you agree and explain how it has been true for you in your reading or viewing experiences.

3 Discuss and organise: In small groups, draw up a graphic organiser that has six bubbles or boxes. Use the archetypes in the Literature link at right to fill in each bubble with another example of each. You may be able to use some of the characters from question 2(a). You can use the Brainstorming weblink in your eBookPLUS to create your organiser online.

4 Find out: Do you know all of the characters in the collage? If not, find out who they are, who created them and at least three other facts about their fictional existence. You could organise all the information in a word-processed table under appropriate headings. Alternatively, you could cut and paste images of these characters to create a poster with a Fact File of the information underneath each image.

LITERATURE link

Archetypes

An archetype is a character that you would find in many different stories across the ages. An archetype plays the same role in the story and shares many similar qualities with characters in other stories. The images opposite are examples of archetypal characters. They have been used in folklore and mythology for thousands of years, and we still see them today in popular films and literature. Archetypes you may know include the hero (Harry Potter), the villain (Lord Voldemort), the sage (Gandalf), the trickster (Bart Simpson), the loyal sidekick (Chewbacca) and the star-crossed lover (Juliet).

Think of as many other stories (films or books) in which there is a character that plays the same role in other stories. How many archetypes can you list?
How do characters help us to understand ourselves?

Sometimes we come to learn about ourselves by reading about fictional characters. Characters can serve as mirrors and help us to see ourselves more clearly. Seeing what we don’t like in others can help us to identify similar aspects of our own personality and challenge us to amend these troubling features. When we watch Anakin Skywalker on his descent into becoming Darth Vader or the wicked Queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, we may reflect on our own behaviour and modify it to be less like these unsavoury characters. Good writers can create characters that make us think about good and evil, as well as right and wrong. Thinking about these important questions leads us to reflect on our values.

Similarly, when we empathise with characters and their experiences, we tend to feel a sense of belonging that helps us to better weather the trials of our own lives. Knowing that a character may think or feel the same way as you can make difficult circumstances far less alienating. We can learn how a character navigates particular situations and then follow the same steps to help us solve problems in our own lives. Good writers make us ask ourselves the question, ‘What would I do in this situation?’

As a way of examining how characters can help us understand ourselves, let’s look at an extract from Sonya Hartnett’s novel The Ghost’s Child. In this novel, Hartnett explores true love and loss, as well as asks powerful questions about what is truly valuable in life. Before you read this extract, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.

**NEED TO KNOW**

values fundamental beliefs that determine what we stand for. They help us make important decisions about what is right and wrong and about who we want to be.

empathise to feel what another person or character is feeling. Empathy is a sense of understanding someone else without that person having to explain how he or she is feeling.

**READY TO READ …**

- If you could ask someone just one question to find out what they are really like as a person, what would that question be?
- Read the first paragraph of the extract.
  Maddy is a sixteen-year-old girl who has just finished school. Her father is going to have a serious talk with her. What do you think this talk will be about? Share your ideas with a partner.
- Once you have read the extract, evaluate how accurate your prediction was.
from *The Ghost’s Child*
by Sonya Hartnett

One evening when Maddy was neither a little girl nor a lady but something gangly in-between, her father lay his knife and fork on his plate, wiped his hands on his napkin, and smiled across the dining table at her. His black eyes were sparkling, which they did when he had something clever in mind. ‘Matilda Victoria Adelaide,’ he said, ‘I hear you have now finished school.’

This was true: Maddy had just that afternoon caught the train home from boarding school for the final time. She had climbed the stairs to her bedroom and unpacked her suitcase onto her bed, and had stood staring down at the workbooks she no longer needed, unsure what she was meant to do next. She had felt a lake-like emptiness, the stillness of a held breath. She knew that something must happen, but had no clue what it must be. ‘I have, Papa,’ she said.

‘Excellent,’ said her father. ‘That’s the most tiresome part over and done. So, after all that history and geography and elocution and needlework, did you learn the answer?’

Maddy blinked twice. ‘Which answer, Papa?’

Her father poured the last of the wine into his glass, and motioned for the maid to bring the port. ‘The answer to the only important question there is, of course: *What is the world’s most beautiful thing?*’

Mama, opposite Maddy, leaned on her elbows and gave a languorous laugh. ‘That’s easy, Matilda,’ she said. ‘Victory is the world’s most beautiful thing. There’s nothing uglier than defeat, and nothing prettier than winning. Don’t ask the girl ridiculous questions, Frank.’

Papa smiled at his wife with cool patience. ‘Maddy, allow me to clarify. What is the world’s most beautiful thing, *apart from victory?*’ Maddy looked back at him, the cutlery stilled in her hands. The world’s most beautiful thing: was her father serious, could there be such a thing? Maddy had never known the iron man to joke, or to say or do something that had no meaning. Indeed, she sensed that this was a vital moment, that her father expected nothing less than that she dive deep inside herself for the answer. Her response would be a measure of her, something he wouldn’t forget. She thought for a minute, her hands...
cramping into fists. There were so many beautiful things in the world — in the dining room alone there were dozens. The chandelier in the ceiling was dazzling. The tiles of the hearth were charming. The smell of roast beef was divine. On a cushion in a corner sat her little black cat Perseus, whose Egyptian face was finer than a chip of onyx. Maddy thought about all she had seen in her sixteen years of life — the city and the ocean, the hills arranged round the town. She had seen trees and earth and animals, and the sky in its various blue-black moods. From among these things, she selected carefully. 'I think,' she said, 'that sea-eagles are the most beautiful things in the world.'

Perseus was a hero of Greek mythology. (38)

onyx: a semi-precious stone, often black in colour (38)

'Sea-eagles!' Papa guffawed, slapping his palm on the table-top so the wine in the glasses jumped. 'Ten years of the best education, and you give me an angry chicken? Think again, Maddy.'

Maddy flinched, feeling a wobble of panic: she had disappointed him. Nevertheless, she was the iron man's daughter, and she had inherited a touch of his stubborn pride. She pretended to think harder, but mulishly fetched up the same reply: 'Sea-eagles.'

Her father smiled to see himself in her; then he rolled his expensive eyes, which had already seen countless gorgeous things and intended to see more. 'It's commendable that you stand by your convictions, Maddy,' he said, 'yet your answer makes me fear your mind is quite provincial. Now your schooling is over it's time you learned a thing or two. We can't have you wandering round with a dishcloth for a brain. Before the week is out, you and I will be embarking on a journey around the world,' he informed his child. 'It will not be a holiday or a grand tour, but a working expedition. We will make it our duty to see everything upon which human eyes should rightly feast. And when we have witnessed them all, you will tell me what is, without doubt, the most beautiful thing in the world.'

'Don't forget to bring me back a present,' said Mama, bone-wearily.
Activities ...

UNDERSTANDING character in narratives

Getting started
1 List the characters we meet in this extract.
2 Is Maddy male or female? How do we know?
3 What is the important question Maddy’s father asks her?
4 The title of the whole book is The Ghost's Child. If you were going to give this section a title, what would it be?

Working through
5 Having read this extract, can you predict what happens next?
6 Maddy’s father is not satisfied with Maddy’s answer. He is going to take her on a trip around the world so she can find the answer. What do you think her final answer will be?
7 The writer introduces three characters in this extract. Identify key phrases, words or images that create a picture of each character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Key phrase that creates a picture of the character</th>
<th>Key adjective</th>
<th>What does this tell us about the character?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mama</td>
<td>leaned on her elbows and gave a languorous laugh</td>
<td>languorous</td>
<td>It suggests she does not take the question seriously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddy</td>
<td>neither a little girl nor a lady but something gangly in-between</td>
<td>gangly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papa</td>
<td>the iron man</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Select other quotations from the extract you believe most vividly represent the personality of each character to complete a table with the headings below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Quotation from the text</th>
<th>How does this quotation inform the reader’s understanding of the character’s attitude and values?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9 Maddy’s father is described as the ‘iron man’. What do you think this means? How does his dialogue reinforce that characterisation?
10 At the end of the extract, Maddy’s mother states, ‘Don’t forget to bring me back a present’. What does this statement tell us about the mother’s character? What kind of a person is she? What is most important to her?
11 Writers use many different techniques to convey the personality, values and attitudes of characters.
   a In the extract annotations, the gestures of Papa are highlighted. What do his gestures suggest about his personality, values and attitude?
   b How does Harnett use gestures to convey the personalities, values and attitudes of Maddy and her mother?
   c What does Papa’s dialogue (as highlighted in the extract) suggest about his character?
   d How does Harnett use dialogue to develop the characters of Mama and Maddy?

LITERACY link

Adjectives and adverbs
An adjective gives more descriptive information about a noun or pronoun. It mostly sits before the noun or pronoun, but may follow it.

- ‘Don’t ask the girl ridiculous questions.’
- ‘The chandelier in the ceiling was dazzling. The tiles of the hearth were charming. The smell of roast beef was divine.’

An adverb adds extra meaning to verbs, adjectives or other adverbs; it tells us how, when, where, why and to what extent.

- She pretended to think harder, but mulishly fetched up the same reply: ‘Sea-eagles.’

Identify two other examples of adjectives and adverbs in the extract on pages 101–2.

Knowledge Quest 1
Quest
Adjectives
Adverbs
**Going further**

12 At the end of this extract, which character do you believe is most effectively developed? Why have you selected this character? Use close reference to the extract to support your response.

**EVALUATING character in narratives**

**Getting started**

13 Which character did you like the most in this extract? Why?

14 Which character did you like the least in this extract? Why?

**Working through**

15 In this extract, Hartnett creates distinctive characters by showing us that they have different values. For Maddy, the most beautiful thing in the world is a sea-eagle. What does this tell us about what is valuable to her?

16 Maddy’s mother has a different answer. What can you say about her values after reading her answer?

17 What is your opinion of Maddy’s father? What do you think his values are? Justify your response by using quotations from the text to support your ideas.

18 What do you think might be Maddy’s father’s answer to the question about the most beautiful thing in the world?

19 How would you feel if you were Maddy in this situation?

**Going further**

20 Do you think Maddy’s answer to the question will change as the novel progresses and she grows up? Why or why not?

**CREATING characterisation in narratives**

**Getting started**

21 How do writers build characters? Use a graphic organiser like the one below to map the different ways readers find out about characters. Use the techniques used by Hartnett in the extract to prompt your thinking.

**LITERATURE link**

**Context**

While there is timelessness in the setting of Harnett’s novel, she draws on many of the ideas and values of the nineteenth century, particularly the Victorian era, to inform her characters and their experiences.

Maddy’s father embodies the spirit of the Victorian era. It was a time of restraint, industrialism, exploration and improvement. Women in the nineteenth century were regarded as having lower status than men. Their education focused more on art, music and Romance languages.

The extract makes note of ‘elocution and needlework’, which were features of a girl’s education. Elocution is the study of formal speaking in pronunciation, grammar and style. Needlework is a general term for decorative sewing that was popular in the nineteenth century.

**Discuss with a partner whether girls and boys need to be taught different skills today.**
Working through
22 Harnett gives the reader a very distinct impression of the character of Papa without relying too much on describing his appearance. Instead, she captures his gestures and dialogue to evoke his character. The table below shows how she has done this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gestures</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Her father lay his knife and fork on his plate, wiped his hands on his napkin, and smiled across the dining table at her. Her father poured the last of the wine into his glass, and motioned for the maid to bring the port. Papa smiled at his wife with cool patience. Papa guffawed, slapping his palm on the table. Then he rolled his expensive eyes.</td>
<td>‘It’s commendable that you stand by your convictions, Maddy, yet your answer makes me fear your mind is quite provincial.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His black eyes were sparkling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now it is your turn. Use four brief sentences to describe gestures, one piece of dialogue and one physical description to create a distinctive character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gestures</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Physical description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Be ready to read your description to the rest of the class.

Going further
23 Write the ‘About me’ section of this character’s info page on Facebook. You will need to use the language and details that would be appropriate to this character.

RESPONDING to character

Working through
24 Having read the extract, what do you think is the most beautiful thing in the world?
25 What does your choice say about your values?

Going further
26 Where do your values come from? Have they changed over time?
Wordsmith ...

WRITING DIALOGUE TO REVEAL CHARACTER

Dialogue can add richness and texture to a narrative and provides greater insight into characters and situations. Readers make judgements about characters based on their interpretations of characters’ dialogue, which helps them to empathise with specific characters.

There are three very important functions of dialogue in any piece of writing:

- It can serve to move a story forward.
- It can reveal the personality and values of a character.
- It is an important tool to impart important information about the plot and other necessary information to the reader.

When you edit your writing, make sure your dialogue does these three things. If it doesn’t, then you need to seriously consider whether your inclusion of dialogue is enhancing your writing.

How can we improve our use of dialogue?

Good writers use dialogue as an important tool to create the distinctive personalities of different characters, as we have seen in the extract from The Ghost’s Child. Papa and Maddy speak in very different ways: Papa uses long sentences and very formal language, whereas Maddy is brief but sincere.

Often dialogue is used as a way of keeping the story going rather than creating really distinctive voices. Have a look at the following dialogue as an example of this.

‘Where are you going?’ Sue asked.
‘I am going to Westfield.’ Mandy replied.
‘Why are you going to Westfield?’
‘I am going to meet Tim. We are going to the movies together,’ said Mandy.

This type of dialogue is boring and does nothing more than tell us what the characters are going to do. We have no idea how they feel or what the relationship is between them. Is Sue annoyed with Mandy or happy for her? Is Sue Mandy’s mother or best friend? This dialogue tells none of those aspects of character; in fact, Mandy and Sue are completely interchangeable. In the following dialogue, Sue and Mandy are best friends, but maybe not for long.

‘So, you’re going to Westfield again?’
‘I’m late.’
‘With Tim?’
‘It’s just a movie.’
‘Whatever.’

1 Write two dialogues of your own. In the first one, use dialogue to progress the plot. You can choose any event you want. Now, edit this dialogue to make it less about the plot and more about the characters.

Here are some starter lines if you need them:
‘I can’t believe you just did that!’
‘I could see Riley was about to live up to his reputation.’
Portia, you’re crying! What’s wrong?’
‘Now do you understand why I have to leave?’
Subtext
As you can see in the dialogue between Mandy and Sue on the previous page, it is sometimes the details that are not said that can be the most revealing. In order to keep the reader interested, there should be some tension between the characters. It has been said that good dialogue is about two characters saying ‘no’ to each other without directly saying it. If you think back to the extract from The Ghost’s Child, you can see how Sonya Hartnett might be aware of this idea too.
2 Write your own dialogue in which two characters disagree without actually saying ‘no’ or ‘I disagree’ to each other. Try to be subtle and ensure that your dialogue is more about character and less about plot. Remember that different characters use language differently as well. Choose a specific situation or topic. Some suggestions are:
- What should we do for Christmas?
- It’s time to log off Facebook now.
- We need to sell this house and move somewhere else.
- Your exam is tomorrow and you haven’t started studying.
- Choose another situation of your own.

Distinctive voice
Often, when we listen to someone speaking on the phone, we can tell what they are talking about without actually hearing the other side of the conversation, and we can tell what the other person might be saying and what they might be feeling. How can we tell?
3 Practise writing one side of a phone conversation without including the other side. Try to think of a situation where there is tension in the relationship.
Here’s an example:
‘Come on, Michael.’
‘No, I didn’t say that.’
‘I was going to give it back to you on Thursday. The only thing is, I had to give him a lift. You know we work in the same building, Michael. He doesn’t have a car.’
‘I never said I feel sorry for him. Come on, we’ve known each other since we were kids. Our mothers go to church together. He thinks I’m annoying.’

OVER TO YOU …
Write a scenario that brings together the three features explored in this Wordsmith — dialogue to reveal character, subtext and distinctive voice. You can imagine a situation of your own or you might choose to write the dialogue that would occur around the dinner table with your parents on the day that your parents received your school report.
For how to set out dialogue, see the Wordsmith in Unit 2 on pages 56–7.

My view …
Who is a character from a film or book that has helped you better understand yourself? What aspects of the character helped you to achieve this self-understanding. Did this character help you to clarify any of your personal values?
Dickensian England  

Charles Dickens is widely regarded as the greatest English novelist of the Victorian period. He was very popular in his time and his novels are still highly prized today. Many of his novels were published in serial form or monthly instalments in magazines. This type of publication demanded the use of cliff-hangers to ensure the readers would be looking forward to the next instalment. His novels explored the exceptionally harsh living and working conditions of the lower social classes. The phrase ‘Dickensian’ was coined to describe conditions that are particularly dark, unpleasant or induce suffering as vividly depicted in Dickens’ novels.

### 4.2 CHARACTERS AND THEIR WORLDS

#### How do characters help us understand the world of the text?

History revolves around people. Each time we open a book, we are opening a door into a particular place and time. When this place and time is quite foreign to us, we rely on characters to personalise the experience for us and make it relevant to us. As we read and view texts, we form relationships with the characters and we come to know their world through our understanding of the characters. For example, we come to know what it is like to be hiding from the Nazis during World War II through our relationship with Anne in *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

While we have never experienced that world ourselves, we feel we understand its concerns because we have seen it through the eyes of Anne. We travel through time with the characters to worlds we could never know without them.

The following extract is from a nineteenth-century novel by Charles Dickens called *Hard Times*. This novel explores what life was like in the industrialised north of England and the ‘hard times’ experienced by the poor and working class people of this era. This particular extract from the beginning of the novel provides a snapshot of what school was like at this time. The purpose of schools in Dickensian England was to prepare children for a future of working in factories. Before you read the extract, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.

#### READY TO READ …

- Find the words from the left-hand column below in the extract. Match them with a synonym (word of similar meaning) from the right-hand column. Use a dictionary to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>unaccommodating</th>
<th>bossy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>objectionable</td>
<td>unhelpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irradiated</td>
<td>sternly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monotonous</td>
<td>horrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dictatorial</td>
<td>illuminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obstinate</td>
<td>stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peremptorily</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galvanizing</td>
<td>dull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lustrous</td>
<td>rousing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deficient</td>
<td>shiny</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Look at the illustration before the extract. In your own words, say what you expect the nineteenth-century classroom might be like based on what you see in the picture.
from *Hard Times* 
by Charles Dickens

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BOOK THE FIRST — SOWING

CHAPTER I — THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

‘NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!’

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker’s square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker’s obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders, — nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was, — all helped the emphasis.

‘In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!’

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.
CHAPTER II — MURDERING THE INNOCENTS

THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir — peremptorily Thomas — Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind — no, sir!

In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words ‘boys and girls,’ for ‘sir,’ Thomas Gradgrind now presented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.

Indeed, as he eagerly sparkled at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.

‘Girl number twenty,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, square pointing with his square forefinger, ‘I don’t know that girl. Who is that girl?’

‘Sissy Jupe, sir,’ explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.

‘Sissy is not a name,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Don’t call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.’

‘It’s father as calls me Sissy, sir,’ returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsey. Then he has no business to do it,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Tell him he mustn’t. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?’

‘He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.’

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

‘We don’t want to know anything about that, here. You mustn’t tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don’t he?’

‘If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.’

‘You mustn’t tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horsebreaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?’

‘Oh yes, sir.’

‘Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker. Give me your definition of a horse.’

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

‘Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!’ said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. ‘Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals!
Some boy’s definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours.’

The square finger, moving here and there, lighted suddenly on Bitzer, perhaps because he chanced to sit in the same ray of sunlight which, darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely white-washed room, irradiated Sissy. For, the boys and girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval; and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end. But, whereas the girl was so dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun, when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed. His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His short-cropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white. ‘Bitzer,’ said Thomas Gradgrind. ‘Your definition of a horse.’

‘Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.’ Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

‘Now girl number twenty,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘You know what a horse is.’

She curtseyed again, and would have blushed deeper, if she could have blushed deeper than she had blushed all this time. Bitzer, after rapidly blinking at Thomas Gradgrind with both eyes at once, and so catching the light upon his quivering ends of lashes that they looked like the antennae of busy insects, put his knuckles to his freckled forehead, and sat down again.
Activities ...

UNDERSTANDING characterisation in classic texts

Getting started
1 Use the words in the grid below to complete the cloze passage that summarises the extract from *Hard Times*.

Mr Gradgrind is the ___________ in charge of the classroom. He has no interest in anything that he cannot ___________ and has no respect for people who believe in things which are not ___________. All his students are ___________ of him. The first student that Mr Gradgrind chooses is number 20, whose name is ________ Jupe. Mr Gradgrind disapproves of Sissy's name and then asks her what her father's ____ is. Sissy's father works with ___________. Mr Gradgrind then asks Sissy to give a ___________ of a horse, but she does not know how to answer his question. So, Mr Gradgrind points his ___________ at the boy sitting next to Sissy whose name is ___________. He is a very pale boy who seems as if he has almost never been ___________, probably because he is always ___________. Bitzer defines what a horse is by giving a definition that sounds as if it comes straight out a ___________, and that he has learnt off by heart. Mr Gradgrind then says to Sissy, 'Now you ________ what a horse is.' This extract is ________ because Bitzer probably has had little ________ with horses but he still gets the 'correct' answer, whereas Sissy's father works with horses so she would spend time with horses all the time, but she cannot answer the question in the way Mr Gradgrind wants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive connotation</th>
<th>Negative connotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relaxed</td>
<td>lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thin</td>
<td>emaciated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lively</td>
<td>hyperactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assertive</td>
<td>bossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discreet</td>
<td>sneaky</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 In what location is this extract set? How do you know?

Working through
3 In your own words, what kind of teacher is Thomas Gradgrind?
4 Explain the problem Mr Gradgrind has with Sissy's name.
5 Why is Mr Gradgrind satisfied with Bitzer's definition of a horse?

Going further
6 What would it be like to be a student in Mr Gradgrind's class?
SATIRE

Satire is a literary genre that highlights and ridicules the vices, follies and shortcomings of humanity. Satire often makes fun of people, but it also tries to make an important point at the same time. The intent of satire is to shame individuals and society into improvement. Dickens uses satire in this extract from *Hard Times* to make a comment about the conditions in nineteenth-century schools and his society’s attitude towards children. He is making the point that these schools are not really teaching anything, just terrifying the children.

One of the tools of satire is parody. A parody sends up its subject by imitating or mocking it. Often a parody will exaggerate or caricature certain aspects of an individual to emphasise their folly. Gradgrind is a parody. He is not a real person and real teachers were probably not quite this extreme, but they probably had many of the same characteristics and lack of humanity.

Is the television series *The Simpsons* a satire? Explain your viewpoint.
**Wordsmith ...**

**SENTENCE STRUCTURE AND IMAGERY**

**Sentence structure**

Effective writers control their sentence structures using a variety of simple, compound and complex sentences. Every sentence consists of at least one clause. A clause is a meaningful group of words in a sentence that contains a subject and a predicate that contains a verb. Simple sentences have a main or independent clause. An independent clause makes complete sense and can stand alone as a sentence.

*The thieves ran off.*

A dependent (or subordinate clause) adds further information to the main clause but does not make sense by itself. However, it still contains a subject and a verb. Dependent clauses rely on the main clause to make sense. This type of sentence is known as a complex sentence.

*The thieves ran off [main clause] because the dogs were barking [dependent clause].*

**Embedded clauses**

In complex sentences, writers might use an embedded clause. This type of clause occurs within the structure of another clause. Embedded clauses can act like adjectives in a sentence by adding detail to a description of a noun. These embedded clauses that behave like adjectives are sometimes called relative clauses because they start with a relative pronoun such as *that, when, where, which, who, whom and whose.*

*The boy who won the competition [embedded clause] is my cousin.*

*Emma, whose cousin won the competition, [embedded clause] is my best friend.*

Note that some embedded clauses are separated from the main clause by commas. If the information in the embedded clause defines the preceding noun group, it does not need commas. If the information in the embedded clause just adds information about the preceding noun group, it needs commas.

Using embedded clauses is an important way to add texture to writing. Dickens uses them to help create the world of the characters.

*The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellager in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall.*

Embedded clauses can act like adverbs in a sentence by adding detail to a description of a verb. These embedded clauses which behave like adverbs are called adverbial clauses. An adverbial clause is a clause that does the work of an adverb and answers the questions *how, when, where, why or under what conditions.*

*The plan, if it works, [adverbial clause] will make us rich.*

Dickens uses an embedded adverbial clause in this sentence:

*His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white.*

1 Find two other examples in the extract from *Hard Times* where Dickens uses either a relative clause or an adverbial clause.

2 Now write a sentence of your own that combines at least three different facts or events into a single fluent sentence.
Varying sentence structure

Writers make their writing interesting and dynamic by varying their sentence structure. While most sentences contain a subject, verb and object, how a writer orders these components can differ greatly.

Here are a few ways to make your sentences a bit more dazzling:

- Begin sentences in different ways.
  - The children giggled as the teacher wrote on the board. (A main or independent clause)
  - As the teacher wrote on the board, the children giggled. (A subordinate or dependent clause)
  - During the morning lesson, the children giggled at the teacher. (A phrase)
  - Excitedly, the children giggled. (An adverb)
  - Excited, the children giggled. (A past participle/non-finite verb)

Imagery — similes and metaphors

An engaging aspect of Dickens’ writing is his ability to use imagery to paint pictures in the reader’s mind in order to evoke distinct characters. He uses similes and metaphors to do this.

Examples:

- ‘… he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge.’
  - The image of a cannon about to explode gives us a very clear understanding of what kind of teacher Mr Gradgrind is.

- ‘Bitzer, after rapidly blinking at Thomas Gradgrind with both eyes at once, and so catching the light upon his quivering ends of lashes that they looked like the antennae of busy insects, put his knuckles to his freckled forehead, and sat down again.’
  - The distinctive image of Bitzer’s eyelashes reinforces his vulnerability.

3 Use a metaphor to describe a character that is furious.
4 Use a simile to describe a character that is lonely.
5 Write another five sentences in which you use metaphors or similes to describe characters that are delighted, terrifying, disgusting, shocked and embarrassed.

OVER TO YOU …

Drawing on the information provided in this Wordsmith, write a short passage that paints a vivid picture of your fellow English students and your classroom. Try to use a variety of sentence structures, including embedded clauses, and a range of imagery to bring this world to life for your reader.

My view …

Writers often use social setting and historical context as a way of making characters interesting. The world you live in today is also a very dramatic time and place. Consider how you could use your present-day context to help you create interesting characters. What are some of the major events in recent world history that may have an effect on characters created in contemporary stories? Consider, for example, the global financial crisis, the Bali bombings, the death of Osama Bin Laden.
4.3 CHARACTERS AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

How do writers craft characters to explore our culture, history and values?

Writers sometimes devise characters to comment on cultures, history and values. It is through the lens of these characters that we can see situations from different perspectives and gain greater understanding. Writers use characters to represent different values and attitudes, and to challenge readers to examine their own values in light of characters’ values. The character of Parvana in the novel *Parvana*, for example, is created in such a way that readers cannot help but empathise with her. This effective characterisation assists readers to better understand what it is like to be a young woman in Afghanistan. Through the character, we come to understand the effects of the Taliban (an extreme religious military group). Authors use their characters to stimulate change in their readers’ attitudes and bring about tolerance and understanding. Deborah Ellis uses the character of Parvana to help readers learn about the plight of women in Afghanistan.

Writers will often adopt distinctive perspectives or viewpoints for their characters to highlight how different people view situations. Readers’ awareness of different viewpoints is heightened because they are invited into the characters’ minds in stories. Seeing a situation through a character’s eyes and understanding what makes a character feel a certain way can help the reader to be more tolerant of different perspectives. Writers can use different characters to demonstrate different perspectives in any situation. When illustrated in a novel or story, the reader can more easily see the complexity of situations through the characters. Situations are rarely as straightforward as one perspective might suggest. By using multiple characters to represent a diversity of perspectives, writers are able to demonstrate why conflict is so difficult to resolve.

The following extract from *Nanberry: Black Brother White* by Jackie French invites readers to reconsider the effects of the European settlement of Australia on the Aboriginal people from the perspective of a young Aboriginal boy.

Before you read the extract, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.

**READY TO READ** …

- Imagine aliens have suddenly landed on earth and have moved in next door to you. They look quite strange and they have odd habits. Write a brief description of this situation and explore how you might react.
- Before you read this extract, do some research with a partner into the following topics. Represent your findings in a mind map.
  a. Nanberry
  b. First Fleet
  c. Surgeon John White
  d. Cadigal people
from Nanberry: Black Brother White
by Jackie French

Jackie French’s book is based on extensive research into historical records. Surgeon John White was a real man who was on the First Fleet; he did his best to save people from the devastating effects of introduced European diseases. Nanberry Buckenau was also a real person and Jackie French has met with descendants of Nanberry who are alive today.

Extract 1

In this first extract, a young Aboriginal boy, called Nanberry, has to make a choice. His tribe has become infected with the deadly infectious disease, smallpox. His mother, sisters and grandfather have all become infected, so his uncle Colbee tells Nanberry that he must leave or he will be infected and die too.

Colbee was right. Nanberry knew that Colbee was right. This strange illness spread and killed so fast that the whole clan might be dead in a few days if they stayed here.

And yet he couldn’t go. He stood still as a grass tree, as the others began to walk away.

‘Come, boy!’ yelled Colbee.

Nanberry didn’t reply. Let Colbee think Nanberry had the sickness too. It was right for his uncle to take the others away. Nanberry wasn’t a warrior. If the illness took him he never would be. But it was right for him to stay here, to care for his family. A warrior ignored the pain so he could do what was right.

He watched as the clan turned into shadows among the trees — the friends he had swum with, the Aunties peering back now and then with horror and sympathy — till even the last glimpse of them was gone.

And then he knelt to help his family. Already his mother was too weak to stand alone.

He couldn’t let them die!

Maybe if he could cool their hot skin the illness would go away.

His grandfather seemed to have the same thought. ‘To the beach,’ he whispered.

Nanberry lifted up his little sister. Her body felt like coals in the fire.

His grandfather helped his mother and Yagali stagger towards the waves.

Step after step after step... his grandfather stumbled as Nanberry’s mother and Yagali leant on him. The short walk to the beach seemed like the longest journey they had ever taken.

Nanberry looked down at the baby in his arms. White blisters seeped across her chest.

At last they reached the water. His mother and grandfather and Yagali sat in the cool shallows, with the waves lapping at their knees. His mother put her arms up for her baby. The tiny girl began to cry. Blisters had erupted on his mother’s face now too. The spots on his grandfather’s chest had turned to weeping sores.

Nanberry tried not to cry as well. He watched his grandfather bend his head and splash water over his hair, over and over as though he might beat the fever with its freshness. His mother lowered the baby onto the wet sand and let the waves run across her body.

Nanberry clenched his fists. The cool water would make them better.
How do writers craft characters to explore our culture, history and values?

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Before you read this extract, your teacher may ask you to complete the following Ready to Read activities.

---

It had to! Meanwhile they needed food. If you didn't have food and fresh water you died. He was the only one now with strength to care for them.

He had no spear — only warriors could carry spears, and it would be many summers yet before Nanberry could go through his initiation ceremony and have his front tooth knocked out. But he had seen a bungu tree as they had staggered here: a big tree, with scratches on the trunk showing where the bungu scrambled up every day to sleep in a hollow where a branch had rotted away. The bungu would be so sound asleep it wouldn't wake until it was too late.

You didn't have to be a warrior to catch a bungu, a possum. He could dig yam roots, and roast them on a fire.

Nanberry glanced down at the others. His mother's eyes were shut, but she still held the little girl. Yagali had covered her face again, perhaps so she couldn't see the blisters breaking out across her body. His grandfather muttered, words that made no sense, staring at the waves.

'I won't be long.' Nanberry didn't think they heard him. He ran into the bush.

The bungu tree was where Nanberry remembered it. He wrapped his arms and legs around its trunk, and pushed with his knees many times, till he reached the first branch. He pulled himself up next to the hollow.

Sometimes snakes or lizards slept in holes like this. But the bungu scratches told him this hole was safe. A big bungu would keep snakes away from its home.

Nanberry reached inside. His fingers met soft fur. It didn't have time to struggle before he twisted its neck and pulled it out. Its head hung limply on its body.

Something dropped from the bungu's back onto the leafy ground. Nanberry peered down. It was a baby bungu, perhaps half grown; it had faint dark fur, not the pink skin of a tiny baby. It lay there stunned, its eyes big and black.

Nanberry considered it, as he slid down the tree. There wouldn't be much meat on it. He needed to get back.

He ran through the dappled shade, leaving the baby bungu among the dead bracken and grass.
His family were where he had left them, dozing as the waves lapped around their limbs. It was late afternoon now. The beach was striped with tree shadows.

Nanberry gathered driftwood and dried tussocks, thrown up above the high-tide mark by the last storm. He held the fire bone — a hollow bone with a slow-burning coal inside it — to the dry grass until it flared. He threw on dry branches, then skinned the bungu. He poked a stick through it, then propped the stick up with stones so the meat would cook.

He sat there as the night gathered itself around him.

How could life change so suddenly?

There had always been many hands to share each task, and songs and love and laughter to brighten the work. Now there was only him to care for his family on the beach.

All his life the seasons had come as they were supposed to: the season of the emu pattern high in the night sky, when the fish swam thickly in the harbour; the season of rain when the geebungs and five-corners fruited, and the figs swelled; and the cold days when you knew the shellfish were sweetest, and the kurrajong bark was at its most supple for weaving into baskets or fishing lines — just before the bloodwood sap flowed so the women could soak the lines in it to harden them.

When the sun rose higher it was time to travel up the river to Parramatta, to strip the stringybark sheets to make the new canoes. When the wattle bloomed the fish swam once more in great families, so many that the lines were always heavy.

There was a time for the settling of disputes, and a time to go west to feast on eels, a time when the bees wore fluffy yellow pollen on their legs, when you knew that in another season of moons the nectar would flow sweet and pale green when you poked a stick into the honey trees.

Everything has its time, he thought.

So this was a time of death.

The moon rose. He held meat to his mother's lips. He tried to coax his grandfather to eat. Yagali just shook her head. 'Water,' she whispered. How could he have forgotten? He hurried to where his mother had dropped her net, and took out two coolamons.

There was no stream near this beach, not even a waterhole, but he'd seen a half-burnt tree, hit by lightning before he was born. There would be rainwater trapped there. He climbed the tree and filled the coolamons, trying not to let the water spill as he climbed down and ran back to the beach. The moonlight was making blue shadows under the trees.

His grandfather gulped the water eagerly, then shivered. 'I'm cold,' he muttered. 'Cold.'

Nanberry felt hope surge through him. Had the cold water driven away the illness? He helped the old man over to the fire, then took the water to his mother. She held the coolamon up to her daughters' lips then she drank too.

The tide had gone out. The waves fell back towards the sea. His mother lay in the wet sand, cradling her baby. Yagali huddled next to her. Nanberry nestled down in the cool sand. His skin burnt like the sun had kissed him.
Extract 2

This second extract comes from later in the book. All Nanberry’s family has died and he has been adopted by Surgeon John White who Nanberry calls ‘Father White.’ Surgeon White has decided to change Nanberry’s name to Andrew to help him assimilate into white culture.

Chapter 20

Andrew/Nanberry

Sydney Cove, 2 June 1789

‘Toast,’ said Nanberry, carefully turning the slice of soda bread over above the flames so that it browned on both sides. Outside the kookaburras welcomed the new day.

Father White smiled at him. ‘Excellent, Andrew. Now bring it to the breakfast table and put it in the toast rack.’

Maria brought a bowlful of boiled eggs over. She sat next to Father White, a bit uncomfortably, Nanberry thought. He placed the toast in its rack then sat on the other chair. They had three chairs now, one for him and Maria too, even though she was only a woman.

Chair, toast, table, eggs . . . He knew so many words now. He was even working out the complicated ways the English put them together.

‘Would you like an egg, Andrew?’

Nanberry took an egg. He placed it in the eggcup, just like Father White did with his, and cut off the top. It was a funny way to eat an egg, yet this was what the English did. It was silly to sit dangling your legs off a chair too, instead of comfortably on the ground.

Father White smiled at Maria. ‘Are you missing your o’possum, girl?’

She flushed. ‘Of course not, sir.’

‘If the Governor’s cat has kittens I will try to get you one.’

‘A cat? Truly, sir?’

‘If I can.’

Father White took his hat and coat — freshly brushed by Maria — and opened the hut’s door.

The bungu glared up at him from the doorstep. It gave a squeak, then ran inside on all fours and clambered up the table leg. It looked around for its sack of wilted greenery and squeaked again.

Nanberry laughed. Oh, it was good to laugh.

‘Maria’s friend is back.’

French uses names at the tops of her chapters to show from whose perspective the chapter is told. Nanberry now has two names because Surgeon White has given him an English name, but Nanberry still calls himself by his Aboriginal name. This use of the two names shows the conflict between the cultures.

The place and date give the reader a clear sense of the setting. The First Fleet arrived on 26 January 1788 (Australia Day), so this date is about 18 months later and it is also in the middle of winter.

By knowing Nanberry’s thoughts, the reader understands a different perspective on the English customs. Just as the English thought the Aboriginal people were ‘strange,’ the Aboriginal people thought the English were ‘strange.’
'My friend —' Maria blushed. Nanberry wondered if she had another friend.

'Your o’possum. I think it’s looking for its bed.'

'I threw the leaves out and washed the sack. It stank.'

Father White stared at the bungu, no, the o’possum. 'Let’s see how tame it will become. It’s quite fascinating, don’t you think?'

'No, sir,' she said frankly.

Father White smiled. ‘Get Lon to gather dry leaves for a nest. Find it a basket.’

‘On my clean table, sir?’ Maria’s voice was resigned.

‘I’ll send a small table up from the hospital. The o’possum's basket can sit on that. Lon can bring fresh leaves for it to eat each day too. But see what other things it will eat.’

‘Oh, it will do that, sir.’

‘It will be company for you,’ Father White said gently. ‘What do you think, Andrew? Will it amuse you to have a pet o’possum?’

Nanberry knew the word pet, though the idea was strange. A pet was an animal you owned, but didn’t eat; you laughed at it, though it could be useful too. The English kept dogs and cats. Like Father White keeps me...

He thrust the thought away. He was no pet!

‘I am Nanberry Buckenau.’ The words came before he knew he was going to say them. It was the first time he had used his full name in the colony.

Father White looked puzzled. ‘Your name is Andrew now.’

‘I am Nanberry.’

Father White shook his head. ‘I don’t have time to argue with you. You be a good boy, and help Maria and Lon.” He picked up the stick with the silver end that he used to help him walk. It was another English thing, using a stick even when you didn’t have a sore leg or foot.

Nanberry watched Father White stride down the dirt lane between the huts. Behind him in the kitchen the bungu — o’possum — chattered, demanding corn.

**Activities ...**

**UNDERSTANDING cultural values**

**Getting started**

1. Which of the two extracts from *Nanberry: Black Brother White* did you find more difficult to read? Why?
2. How would you describe Nanberry in your own words?

**Working through**

**Extract 1**

3. Why does Nanberry’s uncle decide that the clan needs to leave?
4. What are the consequences of his decision?
5. Why did Nanberry not obey his uncle?
6. What do you think will happen to Nanberry’s family? Why?

**Extract 2**

7. Why does Nanberry find breakfast with Father White a strange experience?

**Going further**

8. These two extracts are from a longer novel. What do you think Nanberry will do next after he declares: ‘I am no pet. I am Nanberry Buckenau. Nanberry.’ Write an outline of the events you might expect to read in the novel’s next chapter.

**ANALYSING cultural values**

**Getting started**

**Extract 1**

9. Why does Nanberry decide to stay? What does this decision tell us about his character?
10. How does French show that Nanberry feels closely connected to his country?

**Extract 2**

11. Explain the similarity between the way Maria treats her possum and the way Father White treats Nanberry.
12. Why does Father White correct Nanberry when he says, ‘My name is Nanberry’?

**Working through**

13. Jackie French is using the experiences of Nanberry to comment about the effects of white settlement on Aboriginal Australia. Complete the table below by identifying the phrases and images you feel best convey the negative effects of white settlement on Nanberry and his family. In the second column of the table, explain why the image or phrase is effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images/phrases that show the negative effects of white settlement on Nanberry and his family</th>
<th>Why is this image/phrase effective?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘This strange illness spread and killed so fast that the whole clan might be dead in a few days if they stayed here.’</td>
<td>The phrase is effective because it shows the speed with which the disease spread and its deadly effects. The thought that it could kill the ‘whole clan’ is particularly distressing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He watched as the clan turned into shadows among the trees — the friends he had swum with, the Aunties peering back now and then with horror and sympathy — till even the last glimpse of them was gone.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Nanberry lifted up his little sister. Her body felt like coals in the fire.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The real historical figure, Nanberry, was an interpreter who understood and spoke a number of Aboriginal languages as well as English. In the second extract from the novel, we see the process by which he first starts learning English, as we can see in this passage:

Chair, toast, table, eggs... He knew so many words now. He was even working out the complicated ways the English put them together.

"Would you like an egg, Andrew?"

Nanberry took an egg. He placed it in the eggcup, just like Father White did with his, and cut off the top. It was a funny way to eat an egg, yet this was what the English did. It was silly to sit dangling your legs off a chair too, instead of comfortably on the ground.

The way that we use language reflects the way that we see the world and the way we behave in that world. So, for Nanberry, not only is the word ‘chair’ unfamiliar, but he sees no reason to use chairs.

The way a community uses language to interact also influences the identity of people in that community. When we interact with each other, we share more than just words. The way we use words and the words we choose reflect and influence who we are.

Can you think of any words your family uses or words Australians use that seem strange to people outside your family or from other cultures?
Wordsmith ...

LINKING CHARACTERS TO VALUES USING ANALOGIES AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Analogy

‘Nanberry, he thought. I am no pet. I am Nanberry Buckenau. Nanberry.’

Nanberry feels as if Father White is treating him in the same way that Maria treats her pet possum. Jackie French uses the connection between these two situations to suggest that people like Father White did not respect Aboriginal people for who they really were, but treated them like pets. Drawing a connection between two different situations to make a point is called using an analogy.

Rivalry

‘We need to work together, Greg. Alex is the Harry Potter of this team; he always saves us when we are in trouble. But you are our Ron Weasley. Harry couldn’t do it without you. You are his best friend. You make us all laugh. You don’t have to compete with him.’

Patience

‘Be patient, Beatrice. Solving a problem is like untangling a knot: pulling and tugging will only make it worse.’

Hope

‘It felt to Patrick as if this whole exercise was like driving around and around in a supermarket car park looking for space. You know that it is going to take forever, but you keep hoping that just around the next corner there will be a space especially saved for you.’

Good writers also use analogies to lead a reader to draw comparisons between fictional situations and the real world. Analogies can also be an effective way to create distinctive characters.

To help make characters interesting, good writers often place them in challenging situations. Deciding how a character will react to a challenging situation can provide an opportunity to be creative. One way to express a character’s reaction to such a situation is to have that character use an analogy as we saw above with Nanberry.

In the two examples below, the writer uses the same situation but he creates two very different characters that react very differently to that situation. The writer shows this difference with two very different analogies. Both of these characters are facing their upcoming final exams.

Example 1

I felt as if a car crash was about to happen. You know how they say that when a car crash is happening, the people in the car suddenly see everything happening in slow motion, but there is nothing they can do about what is happening. I swear that is what is going to happen to me.

Example 2

I know the exams are going to be tough; but you know what, I’m actually looking forward to it. It’s like this, you see. I went out on my uncle’s boat on the weekend and we ended up in a storm; there were these huge waves. For a moment I was really scared, but my uncle didn’t give me a chance to think about it really. I was too busy pulling ropes, winding winches and rolling up the sail. It was all happening so fast, but I knew what to do because my uncle had told me many times before. I knew we’d make it and we did. That’s what the exams will be like. Kind of like a storm, but we’ll make it.
1. Choose one of the following challenging situations and create two characters that have very different reactions. Show these reactions by using different analogies for each character.
   - Your character is about to play in the grand final. It is the morning before the big game.
   - Your character is on a plane that is about to land. He or she is about to arrive in this country for the first time to start a new life.
   - Your character is about to give a speech before a huge crowd.

2. Describe situations where a character might face the following situations:
   - A character who is always very honest suddenly finds herself in a situation where she feels that the best thing to do could be to tell a lie.
   - A character has sworn to someone close to them that they will keep a secret, but something changes and now it feels like the best thing to do is to break that promise.

Ethical dilemma — A decision about values

As we saw in Nanberry on pages 117–21, good writers will often place their characters in a situation in which they have to make an important decision, which shows the reader what values are most important to that character. Nanberry had to decide whether to save himself or stay with his dying family to try to help them. These difficult decisions are called ethical dilemmas. Here is another example:

A small rural town is attempting to raise funds to add a much-needed children’s wing to the local hospital. After several fundraising events and contributions from the local council, they have fallen short of funds to complete the wing. A tobacco company has offered to pay for the new wing. They have only one condition: that the wing is named after their company. Janet is the Chief Surgeon at the hospital and she has been asked for her recommendation about whether or not to accept the funding.

2. Describe situations where a character might face the following situations:
   - A character who is always very honest suddenly finds herself in a situation where she feels that the best thing to do could be to tell a lie.
   - A character has sworn to someone close to them that they will keep a secret, but something changes and now it feels like the best thing to do is to break that promise.

My view ...

Jackie French gives us a very clear perspective on the effects of white settlement on the Aboriginal people of Australia. Does reading about historical characters give us real insights into other times and places? Is this a good way to study history?
COMPOSE AND CREATE

Productive focus: writing

Character and relationships

Either
Create a character that has an important relationship. It could be a relationship between a father and a daughter, as we see in The Ghost’s Child; a relationship between student and teacher, as we see in Hard Times; or it could be a relationship between a child and his whole family, as we see in Nanberry. In this piece of writing, you should use the interaction between the characters to help you create a distinctive personality.

Or

Using difficult decisions to create character
Writers will often use difficult or important decisions to create their characters. These decisions reveal the values and attitudes of the characters. For example, the opening of Jackie French’s novel sees Nanberry making the decision to stay with his family members who are stricken with smallpox rather than protect himself from the deadly disease by leaving with his clan.

Your task is to write the beginning of a new Bildungsroman story. Novels about growing up — Bildungsroman — explore how the central character learns about who they want to be and what is important to them.

Some key points to remember

- Remember your purpose: to create a believable character. Your aim is to capture the subtle, distinguishing features that mark your character as an individual even if he or she is also an archetype.
- Consider who your audience might be: your classmates, your teacher, the readers of an online writing club, a friend.
- Decide where in the standard narrative structure (orientation, complication, climax or resolution) you will place your character in the first option.
- Remember in the second option that you are establishing the character as part of the orientation to the narrative.
- You can use dialogue in many ways: to show relationships, to carry the action, to show relationships and interaction, to introduce conflicting ideas and values.
- Use the drafting, editing and proofreading process to refine your work.
Using characters to understand history

Writers often place their characters in very specific social contexts, as we saw in the extract from *Hard Times*.

Select a historical context in which you will create a character to comment on that context. You should draw your historical context from one of the areas you have studied in History this year. Topics covered by the Australian Curriculum may include: the Vikings, Renaissance Italy, Medieval Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Angkor/Khmer Empire, Shogunate Japan, Polynesian expansion across the Pacific, Mongol expansion, Spanish conquest of the Americas, the Black Death in Europe, Asia and Africa. Use your History textbook as a starting point.

You may choose whichever text type you believe is the most appropriate for your context and character. Some suggested text types include: a letter, a journal, a short story or an extract from a novel.

Some key points to remember

- Remember your purpose: to create a character within a particular historical context.
- Choose a context that you know something about to minimise the background research needed.
- Ensure your character authentically represents and embodies the values and attitudes of the historical context.
- If you write in the journal or letter form, your writing will be reflective and be from a first-person point of view.
- If you write in the short story or novel form, you may choose either first- or third-person point of view.
- Use a variety of sentence structures and engaging imagery.
- You can use analogies to explore how a character is feeling.
- Use the drafting, editing and proofreading process to refine your work.
Characterisation as social commentary

Select a key issue that is playing out in Australia today (for example, multiculturalism, reconciliation, environment, youth, technology, history, relationships, identity). Use this context to write a short story with carefully drawn characters that represent different perspectives on the issue.

For example, you might select the topic of multiculturalism and construct three characters from different cultures, place them in the same setting and look at how they interact. You could set your story in a classroom and show how three different students from different backgrounds approach their education.

You could use this grid to help you plan your characters and settings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consider your character’s:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>likes and dislikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manner of speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some key points to remember

- To help you establish the different ways of thinking about the world, you need to create distinctly different characters.
- Different characters use language in different ways.
- Readers care about characters when they make us think about the difference between right and wrong.
- Consider your setting or context carefully as it will be the backdrop for your character.
- Use the drafting, editing and proofreading process to refine your work.

Self-evaluation …

1. What were your favourite parts of this unit? What were your least favourite?
2. What would you like to learn more about after completing this unit?
3. What new skill/s did you learn? Do you think you can now apply it/them to new situations?
4. What skills are you good at? What skills do you need to work on?