Let’s look at themes in stories

Katie Morag Delivers the Mail

Pleased to escape, Katie Morag set off. She loved any excuse to visit her Grannie, who lived all alone in the very last house on the other side of the Bay.

But it was a hot day, and Katie Morag had just stopped for a moment to paddle in a pool beneath the Redburn Bridge, when suddenly — splash! — she slipped on a slithery stone. She fell into the water, mailbag and all.

From Katie Morag Delivers the Mail by Mairi Hedderwick

Helpful hints

A discussion is when you talk with other people about something to reach a decision or to think about different ideas. It is important to listen to what the other people say so that your ideas link to what is being talked about.

Talk Partners

In a group of four, discuss your favourite books. Make sure each person has the chance to explain which their favourite book is and why they like it. Are there any things that are the same in your choices, such as characters, themes or settings?
1. Read the story extract on page 4 and answer the following questions:
   a. Who was Katie Morag looking forward to visiting?
   b. Why had Katie stopped to paddle in a pool?
   c. Where was the pool Katie slipped into?
   d. Why might it be a problem that the mailbag fell into the water too?

2. From the short extract, what information do you have about the setting of the story?

Helpful hints

The setting of a story is where it takes place. For example, the setting in Goldilocks and the Three Bears is a cottage in the middle of the woods. The setting helps the reader understand the theme (what the author is trying to show the reader or the main idea of the story).

Talk Partners

The title of the story on page 4 is Katie Morag Delivers the Mail. In a group of three, discuss what might happen in the rest of the story now the letters (that Katie was going to deliver to people) are wet. Share your ideas with another group.
Understanding settings

**Helpful hints**

*Settings* in stories tell the reader where the story takes place. There are hundreds of different settings that are used in stories, some of the more popular ones are:

- a castle
- a dark forest
- space
- seaside
- a palace

You could make your stories even more exciting by thinking of more unusual settings such as:
- an underground ant hive
- a fridge
- a rubbish bin
- the palm of your hand.

1. Write down the names of three stories you have read recently. Write down the main setting of each story. Some stories have more than one setting.

2. Match the setting to the story. Look at the pictures in the Helpful hints box above and decide which book title they match in the box below.

   The Royal Mystery, Castle in the Sky, Travels Here and There, Exploring the Universe, The Scary Forest
Detective Dan

Dan and Billy were best friends. They walked to school together every morning. Every afternoon they ran home together. They did everything together.

One Monday afternoon Dan came out of school very slowly.

“What’s the matter, Dan?” his mum asked.

“Someone threw his lunch box on the floor,” Billy told her.

Mum said, “Maybe it just fell off the shelf.”

“Mrs Harper said Dan was untidy,” Billy said.

“Yes,” said Dan. “And I’m not untidy!”

Dan stamped crossly all the way home.

From Detective Dan by Vivian French

1. Read the story extract above and answer the following questions:
   a. Where did Dan and Billy run to every afternoon?
   b. What does Mum suggest might have happened?
   c. Did Dan and Billy run all the way home on Monday afternoon? How do you know?
Finding meaning in a text

Helpful hints

When reading, it is important to understand the details given to you by the writer but also to try to understand what is meant by an author when they do not give you all of the details. For example, *A smile crept across Jim’s face as he saw the new pet.* The author wants you to know that Jim is happy about the new pet but does not say this — you realise that he is happy because he is smiling.

1. Read the extract on page 7 and answer the following questions:
   a. How does the author show through Dan’s movement that he is cross?
   b. What is Dan actually cross about?
   c. Do you agree that Dan should be cross? Why do you think so?

2. Choose one activity you like doing with your friends and write four sentences describing the activity and why you like doing it.

Helpful hints

We use a capital letter to show the start of a sentence and a full stop to show the end of a sentence. For example, *It is a hot day.*
Exploring characters

Helpful hints

Stories need to have characters. Often they have a main character – the person the story is about. The character doesn’t have to be human, it could be an animal or a made-up creature.

A character portrait describes special things about a person in a story – what the character likes to do, their mood and how they behave towards other people. It does not include a description of what they look like.

Here is a short character portrait for a well-known story character: This is Goldilocks. She is a naughty girl who never does what she is told. Every day, she finds a different naughty thing to do. Sometimes she can be very kind and helpful but only when she chooses to be.

1. Using the information above, write a character portrait for a character in a story that you have read recently. Remember to include:
   - the name of the character at the start
   - information about what they like
   - describing words throughout.

2. Draw a detailed picture of your character, choosing features from the table below. Add labels to show all of the details and features alongside your character portrait. This will give the reader a clearer understanding of your character’s looks and personality.
Reading aloud

Helpful hints

When reading aloud to an audience (to one or many people), think about how to keep them interested. Make your voice sound exciting to add expression to your reading. Punctuation tells you how to read each sentence:

- a comma means you need to pause
- exclamation marks, question marks and full stops show a sentence has ended so you need to stop and pause
- exclamation marks mean you need to add excitement to your voice
- question marks mean the sentence must be read as a question
- speech marks show someone is speaking – use a different voice.

Buffalo Bert

I used to think my Gramps was fantastic!
He used to tell me cowboy bedtime stories.
He used to sing me cowboy bedtime songs.
We used to have fun in the park.
I used to LOVE it!
But now I’m big I say: “Don’t be silly, Gramps” or “Grow up, Gramps” and “Act your age!”

I bet your granddad doesn’t wear a cowboy belt,
a cowboy shirt and boots with spurs that jungle-jangle-jingle?
I bet your granddad doesn’t wear a cowboy hat with a big feather in it, like this?
I bet people don’t point and stare at your granddad.
When people point at Gramps do you know what he does?
He just tips his hat and says, “Howdy!”

From Buffalo Bert by Michaela Morgan
**Reading aloud**

**Talk Partners**

a Read the extract on page 10 in your head. Think about how you will use the punctuation marks to add expression. For example, how will you say “Howdy!”?

b Read the extract aloud to a partner, using the hints from page 10 to help you.

c Ask your partner to tell you two things you did well and one thing you could improve upon.

d Listen to your partner read the extract aloud.

e Tell them two things they did really well and one thing they could improve upon.

**Glossary**

**spurs**: a small spike worn on a rider’s heel for encouraging a horse forward

1 Use the information from the extract on page 10 to write a character portrait for ‘Gramps’. Remember to talk about his likes, personality and mood.

2 Write a short description to explain what you think ‘Gramps’ looks like from the information in the extract on page 10.