



Making the text do the work

How you can use one text to boost your English skills



The Great Expanding Text!

- Why is **one text** so much greater than the **sum of its parts**?
- Because...
- The **CHARACTERS, THEMES, ISSUES** and **CONTEXTS** may shed light on **OTHER TEXTS** you are studying
- The **FORM, STYLE** and **GENRE** may help you understand how other texts are the same or different
- The **READING SKILLS** you develop can be applied to other texts you study
- **WRITING SKILLS** and **TECHNIQUES** you learn about can be applied to **YOUR OWN** writing

1. Read this text extract from '*A Cup of Tea*' by Katherine Mansfield

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling, and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas. Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her muff against her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course, the car was there. She'd only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea. But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark, shadowy—where had she come from?—was standing at Rosemary's elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed: "Madam, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Speak to me?" Rosemary turned. She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

"M-madam," stammered the voice. "Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"

2. Highlight key elements in the text

- These elements are ones you will also explore in **your set texts**. **Read the text** again and **note, list** or **highlight**...
- **VOICE** and **VIEWPOINT** – whose point of view? What person (I/he/she)? What formality or informality? What tense? (past, present, future forms?)
- **CHARACTER** and **SETTING DETAILS** – what is described? What can be pictured? Use of imagery? How do characters speak?
- **ACTION** – what happens in the extract? Who does what? How do others react? What is said? How does this move the plot on (if at all)?

3. Highlights you might have made

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling, and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas. Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her muff against her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course, the car was there. She'd only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea. But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark, shadowy—where had she come from?—was standing at Rosemary's elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed: "Madam, may I speak to you a moment?"

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Note:

Voice and viewpoint: red text

Character and Setting details: blue text

Action: green text

4. Now to focus in...

- Sample test or exam question:

How does the writer use language here to describe the girl who speaks to Rosemary?

You could include the writer's use of:

- words and phrases
- language features and techniques
- sentence forms

[8 marks]

5. How to do it

- Look at your **first set of highlights** or **notes** about the text
- Now, focus specifically on **language** to do with **the girl**
- **Make some more detailed notes on:**
 - **Vocabulary** – specific words and phrases **about the girl**
 - **Language features** – things such as **imagery, repetition, symbolism**
 - **Particular sentences** – these could be **short, long, commands, questions etc.**
- **REMEMBER TO NOTE DOWN WHAT THESE TELL US ABOUT THE GIRL**

6. Possible language points

Words and phrases

- The use of **adjectives, verbs** and **noun phrases** which give a strong sense of the girl's smallness and suffering ('thin', 'enormous eyes', 'reddened hands', 'shivered', 'standing at Rosemary's elbow')

Language features and techniques

- **Imagery** which builds on the idea of the girl as **slightly unreal, animalistic** or **ghostly** ('dark', 'shadowy', 'voice like a sigh', 'battered creature', 'as though she'd just come out of the water', 'where had she come from?')
- Her **way of speaking** – **formality** (repetition of 'Madam' and her politeness) and her **stammering** evoking **her fear, cold**, etc.
- **Tone/mood**: the girl could be seen as linked with, emerging from the scene with its 'rain...like ashes' and 'cold, bitter taste in the air' **in contrast to** Rosemary's distance from it with her warm 'muff', yet linked by age

Sentence forms

- We experience the girl as Rosemary does through her **questions and observations** – the unseen poor? ('Where had she come from?' 'no older than herself')
- The **word order, positioning** 'Sad' at the **end of one sentence** and at the **start of the next** add to the sombre mood
- The **longer sentence** ('But, at that very instant...' to '...May I speak to you for a moment?') allow the writer to show how the girl **impresses herself on Rosemary's** self-regard with **both appearance and speech**

7. Now draft a response

- You could use these prompts to help you compose your answer to the language question based on the points you have identified
- *The writer uses language to create an impression of the girl as...*
- *The writer further builds this impression through the use of...*
- *She is contrasted with Rosemary through...*

8. Read this response

The writer uses language to **create an impression of the girl as phantom-like and other-worldly**. She appears **without Rosemary noticing** ('Where had she come from?) and is 'thin, dark, shadowy'. The writer builds on this impression with **further physical details** in the **noun phrases** – her 'reddened hands', her 'enormous eyes' and imagery which **enhances this animal-like quality** – 'as though she'd just come out of the water.' The girl is **contrasted with Rosemary** through her speech – **her lowly status is emphasised** by the **formality** of 'Madam' and 'May I...?', and she 'stammered', though whether **through cold or timidity we are not told**. All these impressions are conveyed **through Rosemary's point of view** as the **short phrase**, 'no older than herself' makes clear.

Note:

Points and interpretations made: **red text**

Quotations and other evidence: **blue text**

9. Apply the skills yourself

- Now, have another go

How does the writer use language here to describe Rosemary?

You could include the writer's use of:

- words and phrases
- language features and techniques
- sentence forms

10. Expand to create your own story

Situations where characters from different classes or different walks of life meet are very typical in stories and novels.

- **Write your own opening to a story in which two characters from contrasting backgrounds meet**
- Before you start writing, decide:
 - WHO the two characters are (strangers? Relations? friends?) and WHAT the contrast is (money, age, race, class, etc.)
 - WHERE and WHEN the meeting takes place (city, country, train, summer, evening, etc.)
 - WHY they meet (does one want something of the other? Is the meeting coincidental?)

11. Remember...

- Try to use Mansfield's technique of embedding vivid character or setting details or imagery into what is happening. Think about the way clauses such as the one below beginning with 'who' can add detail.

'She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands...'

- If you use dialogue, think carefully about its purpose – what does it tell us about who is speaking or what is happening?

"M-madam," stammered the voice. "Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"

12. Expand into themes and contexts

- Read the whole story of 'A Cup of Tea' which can be found at the Katherine Mansfield Society website:
<http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/assets/KM-Stories/A-CUP-OF-TEA.pdf>

Answer these questions:

- What does the story seem to suggest about **society at the time**? What ideas about **context** can you get **from it** (for example, the presentation of Rosemary's home life)?
- How does Mansfield **present poverty** in the form of the **girl**? What are we supposed to think about the **narrator**?
- Are there **any other issues** which Mansfield explores? For example, what about the relationship between husband and wife? Think about the final sentence of the story: what might this be saying about **gender or male/female relationships**?

13. Expand into other texts



What links can you see between...

- The relationships between Rosemary and the girl and any other relationships in the plays or novels you are studying? (For example, how does this compare to the situation between Sheila and Eva/Daisy in ***An Inspector Calls*** or between Pip and Estella in ***Great Expectations***?)
- The presentation of social class, and rich and poor in other set texts? (Again, this might be relevant to ***An Inspector Calls***, but also to ***Jane Eyre***, ***Great Expectations***, ***Lord of the Flies*** and ***A Christmas Carol***)
- The presentation of a particular viewpoint – and how sympathetic we feel towards a protagonist in this story and one in your set texts? (You could consider the first person viewpoint of Jane in ***Jane Eyre***, of Meena in ***Anita and Me*** or of Watson in ***The Sign of the Four***; or the third person voice/viewpoint of Scrooge in ***A Christmas Carol*** or of Ralph in ***Lord of the Flies***)

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