

SPM LITERATURE COMPONENT

GUIDELINES FOR THE LITERATURE COMPONENT

Introduction

1. Students have to study 2 poems, 2 short stories and 1 drama in Form 4. The poems are:
 - (a) *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Lord Alfred Tennyson
 - (b) *The Living Photograph* by Jackie Kay
2. The short stories are:
 - (a) *Tanjong Rhu* by Minfong Ho
 - (b) *Leaving* by M. G. Vassanji
3. Students also have to study a drama, *The Right Thing To Do* by Martyn Ford.

Note:

The short stories and drama is currently not tested in the SPM examination.

4. In Form 5, students have study 2 more poems. They are:
 - (a) *A Poison Tree* by William Blake
 - (b) *What Has Happened to Lulu?* by Charles Causley
5. Students will also have to study 1 of these 3 novels:
 - (a) *Dear Mr Kilmer* by Anne Schraff
 - (b) *Sing to the Dawn* by Minfong Ho
 - (c) *Captain Nobody* by Dean Pitchford

FORM FIVE



POEM 1: A Poison Tree

by William Blake

Synopsis

The poem explores the theme of anger. It describes what happens when we deal with anger and when we suppress it and nurture it. When anger is addressed and dealt with, it actually disappears.

When it is hidden and nursed, it grows and overcomes all good feelings. Wickedness and bitterness fill the heart. It has a total grip on the angry person until he is eaten up with hate and revenge. In the poem, the persona is actually happy to see his enemy dead. His anger has been destructive. Thus his anger has led to his own downfall.

Theme

- **Anger that is suppressed can become destructive**

The main theme of *A Poison Tree* is not anger itself but how suppressing anger leads to the nurturing of anger. When we choose to bury anger we are not dealing with the matter at hand. We are not exposing it or acknowledging it, therefore this anger turns into an evil that will fester and grow. Through constant attention and nourishment by the energy of the angry person, this wrath or anger grows into a mighty and destructive force.
- **Revenge is a double-edged sword**

Revenge always harms both parties involved. The victim allows the anger to grow in his heart and he nurses it constantly, thus destroying all good feelings in him. He seeks to harm the other person and is glad if that person is harmed. As he destroys the other person, all that is good in

him dies too. If we plot and plan another person's downfall, we are also bringing about our own downfall.

• Communicate with people

- The importance of communication cannot be over-emphasised. We need to reach out to people who matter and express our feelings, our pains and our joys. If we keep our feelings hidden and nurture negative feelings, we harm ourselves.
- In this world of technology and extensive social media, we must not get trapped in the world of gadgetry and forget to communicate. No doubt this poem was written more than two centuries ago, when there were no such gadgets, but its relevance cannot be ignored.

Moral Value

- Always resolve issues and reach out to the other person.
- Be sincere - do not be deceitful.
- Do not be happy to cause another person's downfall.
- Be aware of the potential evil within yourself before it becomes destructive.
- Be careful of other people's motives and the ability of others to manipulate the innocent.

Persona or Speaker

The poem is in the first person. It could refer to anyone who has had a bad experience with anger management and nursed his anger until it ate into his life.

Setting

The poem was written and published in 1794 as part of Blake's Songs of Experience collection. While it is set in a different period of time and a different country, the values expressed are relevant in today's world and are universal.

Tone and Mood

It has a serious overtone as it deals with anger, revenge and the fallen state of man. It is very focused on its main idea of a person being poisoned by thoughts of indignation and revenge. The persona's joy at finding his enemy dead vividly shows the destructive result of seeking revenge. The persona loses all his goodness by allowing his uncontrolled anger to take over his personality. The mood is somber.

Language and Style

The poem has four stanzas and each stanza is called a quatrain as it has four lines. The first two lines rhyme [friend-end] and the next two lines also rhyme [foe-grow] in this poem. These rhyming pairs are called couplets. The consistent rhythm in the lines gives it a musical note.

The language used is apparently simple but the thoughts expressed are complex and can be read at many levels.

Literary Devices

(a) Metaphor

- The poison tree is a metaphor for what happens when you nurse your anger and let it kill all that is good in you. Anger grows into a fruit that is poisonous. The poison hurts you and the other party.

POEM 2: *What Has Happened to Lulu?* by Charles Causley

Synopsis

The poem starts with a rhetorical question and ends on a similar note. It appears as if a younger child is enquiring about the whereabouts of an older sibling. There is puzzlement and anxiety as the child wonders what happened the previous night and why his/her mother is in grief. The older sister has presumably run away and that has shattered the mother. However she tries her best to shield the younger child from knowing the truth. She says that everything is all right and denies that anything is wrong. She claims that what the child heard was only a dream.

However, she cannot hold back her tears. Her movements are aimless and she appears preoccupied. The child persists with his questions.

Theme

• Grieving over a lost child

The mother is totally devastated that her older daughter has run away. Perhaps she has run away to be with a man or she wants her freedom from home. She has taken money and left with someone in a car. The grief of the mother can only be imagined. She cannot even answer the probing questions of the younger child who is also missing his or her older sister. The younger child heard the cry of anger or pain but the mother lies by saying that it was just a gust of rain. When children run away from home for whatever reason, they leave parents in anguish.

(b) Personification

- Anger or wrath is seen as a plant that will grow and overpower the angry person.
- The persona's fears and tears nurture the anger and encourages it to grow.
- Night, like a person 'had veiled the pole.'

(c) Alliteration

- The S sound in the lines below give it a light musical tone that makes it pleasant reading.
'And I sunned it with smiles, /And with soft deceitful wiles'
- Again the B sound in lines 9, 10 and 11 must be noted.

(d) Anaphora

- The repetition of a word or words at the beginning of two or more successive verses shows the use of this device as in the use of **And**...to begin the three stanzas.

(e) Irony

- A plant that grows bears fruits and brings joy. It is a symbol of life but here a poison tree is nurtured and bears a fruit that kills.

• Protecting children from the harshness of life

The mother is determined to protect the younger child from knowing the truth about his sister. She denies everything and lies too. She would rather that he did not know the truth and also suffer in turn. Such is her love for her children. She is hurt bitterly but she tries her best to keep the painful truth away from the child. Parents sacrifice much to ensure the wellbeing of their children.

• Parent/child relationships

There are many questions about parent-child relationships. There is a suggestion that there is a breakdown of trust and love between the mother and the older daughter. The daughter has not confided in her mother. The mother is in the dark about what really happened to her. The mother also lies to the younger child and does not find comfort in telling the truth. This again casts a shadow on their relationship. Truth and honesty help to build a strong foundation for any relationship. But one must consider the age of the younger child before telling him some painful truths. Thus this poem raises many issues.

Moral Value

• Honesty in relationships

- The daughter has failed to tell her mother about her problem and decided that running away is a solution. If she had told her mother what was happening to her, perhaps she would have received some support and advice. By choosing to run away, she has caused much pain to her mother.
- The mother is unable to tell the truth to the child who is asking many questions. In her earnestness to protect her child she withholds the truth.

- **Family love**

- There appears to be a breakdown in communication. It is obvious that the mother loves her children and that is why she feels so much pain. Love among family members helps to give strength and stability. It helps to weather the hardships that come along in life.
- There is this whole over-protectiveness of the mother and that suggests that the relationship between them is quite close. The mother cares deeply, almost too much, for her son and hides information that she does not feel he is quite ready for.

Persona or Speaker

The persona is a young child who is very puzzled that his older sister has run away during the night. There is a childlike questioning tone throughout the whole poem.

Setting

Lulu's home is bare and has few luxuries. A money box seems a dated object today. Lulu's background appears simple and basic. A rag doll seems to be her only possession and that has been left behind too.

Tone and Mood

The rhetorical question heavily underlines the feeling of puzzlement and anxiety. The child is puzzled and sad that his older sister is missing from the house. He sees his mother's tearful face and wants answers. There is something so terribly sad in the child's questions and the mother's inability to answer them truthfully.

Language and Style

The poem is a ballad written in four line stanzas. The end rhyme is in the second and fourth lines. The repetition of questions and the apparent controlled simplicity of vocabulary are particularly suited for the voice of a young, inquisitive child who wants answers. Using the abbreviated form of Lulu to Lu shows the underlying affection of one sibling for another.

Literary Devices

- (a) **Rhetorical questions**
 - Very effectively used questions appear frequently in the poem and sustain interest in the subject matter.
- (b) **Imagery**
 - The rag doll represents the daughter who has discarded her toy and left her childhood behind. She is no more the little girl who played with the doll. The money box too is part of her childhood.
 - The roar of the car engine represents the adult world and no one can say what it will bring for the young girl who has left.
- (c) **Sound**
 - The name Lulu has a repetitive sound to it and gives a plaintive tone to the child's questions.
- (d) **Alliteration**
 - The sounds in the phrases 'window wide open.... flapping free' allow for easy reading for the childlike voice of a young narrator.

FORM FIVE



NOVEL 1: *Captain Nobody*

by Dean Pitchford

Synopsis

Captain Nobody by Dean Pitchford is a family drama but it has enough exciting adventures to capture the interest of young minds. It deals with Newt Newman who at ten is quite invisible to his family and to all at school. He has a football star brother, Chris, whom he looks up to greatly. They both share a special bond which is rather heartwarming.

Newt Newman has always been ignored. People are always surprised to know that Chris has a ten-year old brother. When Chris is struck down in a major football game and goes into a coma, it is a devastating moment for the family. To cheer him up, Newt's two best friends, JJ and Cecil persuade him to get into a Halloween costume and to assume a new personality. And Newt does just that – he becomes Captain Nobody, a hero for the weak, wimpy and overlooked children.

He uses Chris's old, oversized clothes and feels strong and confident in them. He wears them to school to the astonishment of the teachers who think that he is traumatized by his brother's plight. Everyone tries to be supportive and sympathetic to him.

As Captain Nobody, Newt gets into a string of adventures. He helps Mr. Clay, the locksmith who always gets lost because of his 'fuzzy' mind. Newt takes him back to his house but does not make a big deal of it. He foils a robbery at a jewellery store, rescues Ferocious the Ferret on a busy road and saves a planeload of passengers.

In addition, he climbs the water tower to rescue Reggie Ratner [the guy thought to have put Chris into a coma] but Reggie was up there only to play a prank. Newt helps him out of a sticky situation but unfortunately falls and hurts himself badly as the overweight Reggie falls on top of him. At the hospital and in the same room as his brother, Newt feels useless at not being able to help his brother. In frustration he shouts his usual call 'Hit the showers' and strangely enough Chris responds by throwing a pillow at him! Chris is on the road to recovery.

Newt is now the hero of the moment and receives all the attention he had not had all this while. Newt's journey through some peculiar adventures as Captain Nobody leads him to discover his inner self and to reach out to his own latent abilities. He is no longer a Nobody—he is Somebody in his own right.

Plot

- It is the day of the big game. Newt's elder brother, Chris is the big star player and the family is very excited. Newt makes breakfast for the family but everyone is too busy to eat. He awakens his brother with the call 'Hit the showers' and Chris as always, responds by throwing a pillow at him.
- Newt and his two friends, JJ and Cecil chat and discuss the fact that they are normally ignored by people and are invisible. They plan to dress up for Halloween and find their inner self in the process. Newt wonders what his inner self is.
- In the meantime the family and friends go for the big football game where Chris is playing. It is an exciting game and Chris plays well but gets knocked down by one of the players and becomes unconscious.
- He is taken to the hospital and the family is told that he is in a coma. His parents rush to the hospital and Newt is sent home by friends. Newt is very disappointed that he is not allowed to go to the hospital.
- His good friends divert his attention by discussing Halloween costumes. Newt wears some of Chris's oversized clothes and with the help of his friends creates the person called Captain Nobody. Newt feels a sense of confidence in his new costume.
- Newt and his friends have a wonderful time trick-treating and reach home late.
- The next day, Newt goes to school in his weird clothes and gets a lot of unpleasant attention. The teachers feel that Newt is reacting in his own way because of his brother's plight. He gets sent to the Principal's office but the Principal takes a kindly view of the whole matter.
- His two friends, JJ and Cecil tell Newt that he should be prepared to act in case there is an emergency although Newt thinks that that is unlikely.
- Cecil calls him to show him a discarded bass drum on top of a Dumpster and even though he is scared of heights, he manages to get it. At that moment he sees an old man whom he recognises as Mr. Clay, the locksmith in the place. Mr. Clay had got lost. Newt helps him home.
- When Newt's father sees him in his strange clothes, he is very worried but Newt convinces him that it is all right. The father and son share some quiet, heartwarming moments together.
- Slowly his schoolmates accept Newt and his strange attire. One day, Newt meets Reggie's cousin, Ricky who warns him harshly. He wants him to make sure that Reggie is not harassed by students who think he caused Chris's coma. Newt finds a lot of support among his schoolmates who stand up for him against Ricky's bullying.
- JJ calls on him to help at an emergency at Sullivan's jewelry store. She is very upset that there are many spelling errors on their signs and wants Captain Nobody to get them corrected. While Captain Nobody talks to the Sullivans, they realize that a customer is actually there to rob them and manage to press the hidden alarm button. The robbery is foiled as the robber runs into Newt and all the jewellery falls and he runs away empty-handed.
- The foiled robbery is reported on the news but Newt is identified as a little midget or leprechaun, much to his dismay! But worse news awaits Newt when he realises that his parents have been protecting him by keeping him away from the hospital.
- The school mascot, the Ferocious Ferret is made to visit every classroom and one lucky student gets to take the ferret home for an overnight stay. It falls upon Newt to keep the ferret but in an encounter with Ricky and his friends, the ferret escapes. It runs into a busy street with Captain Nobody dashing after him. The cars come to a stop and the highway becomes clear. An airplane that is smoking lands safely on the cleared highway, much to the amazement of the motorists and Captain Nobody. Captain Nobody finds the ferret at his feet and scoops him up happily.
- Only when Newt and his friends go home, do they discover that the airplane had engine trouble and landing on the highway saved the lives of the passengers.
- Newt had done it again! He had saved the airplane and its passengers incidentally! However he feels strongly that he can't help his brother. He also realises that it was Darryl Peeps who put his brother in a coma, not Reggie Ratner.
- The next day, Newt hears that Reggie is up the water tower and wants to commit suicide as he had been harassed by students for causing Chris's coma. Newt decides to act as he is only one who knows the truth.
- He dresses as Captain Nobody and climbs the ladder to the top of the tower even though he hates heights. He talks to Reggie and finds out that Reggie had gone up to play a prank but unfortunately his leg got stuck in a hole and he was unable to move. Captain Nobody frees him but the two of them fall down accidentally. Reggie falls on top of Newt, breaking his ribs and ankle.
- Newt is in the same hospital as Chris. His parents find out the truth about the role played by Newt as Captain Nobody. They realise that he had been very brave and feel proud of him. Cecil and JJ give interviews on television and tell about his exploits. Newt's parents also find out that Newt never boasted about his actions and always downplayed his role.
- Reggie visits him in the hospital and is apologetic. He also tells Newt not to tell anyone about his real reason for climbing the tower.
- Chris and Newt share the hospital room and Newt feels terrible that he is unable to help his brother and in frustration shouts out 'Hit the showers!' A pillow sails across and hits him – as it usually does at home. Chris has come out of his coma!
- Everyone is very happy. They are very excited with the turn of events. Newt is now a hero.
- Chris is very proud of his younger brother and agrees to go on a victory parade only if Newt leads it.
- The two brothers are discharged from the hospital and return home. All is well with the family.

Setting

• Physical setting

The story is set in Appleton, a small town where school football games are the most exciting events for the townspeople. It is essentially middle class.

The water tower is the tallest building in the town. It has its own newspaper, the Appleton Sentinel. School matters are considered as hot news in the newspaper and events are eagerly discussed by the residents of the town.

• Social setting

The residents of the town are cooperative and caring people. Newman's friends take Newt home when the parents have to rush to the hospital. The friends are excited when Chris is having his big game and join in the celebrations. There is much care and concern for Chris among the school students and teachers. The school will not celebrate the football victory until Chris is well. It is a town that cares.

• Time setting

The story is set in modern times. However, the children use walkie-talkies to communicate while the parents use cell phones.

Characters

• Newt also known as Captain Nobody

- Named after Isaac Newton, Newt is short, skinny, freckled and is just a ten-year old.
- Makes breakfast for the family as his parents are too busy to do so, remembers all the important details that help the smooth running of the home.
- He is good-natured and considerate, and doesn't mind the fact that everyone is busy and has no time for him.
- Has a good rapport with his older brother, Chris. He usually wakes him up by calling loudly 'Hit the showers!' Chris used to read to him and because of his influence, he created his own comic superheroes. His brother also taught him to skate when he was four.
- He considers himself as invisible as he is ignored at school. He chooses to wear Chris's old oversized clothes and a mask. He becomes more confident and self-assured as Captain Nobody, a crime fighter.
- He is not unduly disturbed that he gets to watch the big game from the parking lot of the stadium as he gets pushed out of his seat.
- He is totally devastated when his brother falls and goes into a coma. He cares deeply for his brother.
- His caring friends rope him to dress up for Halloween and thus he puts on many of his brother's oversized clothes and becomes a crime-fighter, Captain Nobody, a hero for the weak and the wimpy.
- As Captain Nobody, Newt helps Mr. Clay the lost locksmith home, stops traffic and helps a smoking airplane land and incidentally saves the passengers, rescues Ferocious the Ferret, foils a robbery at the Sullivan jewelry shop and 'saves' Reggie Ratner from an apparent suicide. Most importantly, he brings his brother

Chris out of the coma and brings joy to his family and the community.

- Newt is humble and unassuming; he is just the guy next door, not like the heroes he has created in his own comic series.
- His adventures make him more confident. He learns to overcome his fears. He climbs to get the discarded drum in the Dumpster and the water tower to talk to Reggie even though he is terrified of heights.
- He is caring without being emotional. He is a good friend, a responsible son and a loving sibling.
- Captain Nobody is very visible and Somebody in his own right.

• Chris

- Chris Newman, Newt's older brother is the super star football player of Fillmore High School. He is featured in the front page of the local newspaper
- He shares a charming sibling routine with his younger brother who shouts at him to 'Hit the showers!' when he oversleeps in the morning. By way of a reply, Chris would throw a pillow at him.
- There is a good rapport between the two brothers and they care for each other.
- When Newt was younger, Chris used to read to him from his comics. He also taught him to skate.
- He plays football well and is seen as a school hero. His fall in the big game that put him into a coma was a devastating moment for the family and the community.
- When he becomes well and the mayor wants him to lead a victory parade, he declines as he thinks it is Newt who should go on the parade. He is generous and very good-natured.
- He forgives Darryl Peeps for knocking him down on the football field. Chris is awesome, as Newt says!

• Mr. Newman

- Father of Chris and Newt, he is a supervisor for a building company and is a very busy man. He ensures that everything is done before the big game.
- A caring father, he is shocked when his son goes into a coma at the football game. Before going to the hospital, he makes sure that his friends take Newt home.
- Very protective of his younger son, he shields him from knowing the truth about Chris's condition. He spends the night in the hospital to care for Chris.
- He feels bad that he is neglecting Newt and thinks that that is the reason for Newt's weird dressing. He shows him a picture of Chris on his cell phone to comfort Newt.
- Kisses Newt and wants to be hugged by him – there is much love between the father and the sons.
- He is loving, caring and very responsible.

• Mrs. Newman

- Mom to the two boys, she is a real estate agent whose phones start ringing very early in the morning.
- She once poured milk into a bowl of raw turkey and

that is when Newt decides to take over making the breakfast. She can never remember where she put the keys or files or the plastic forks! Luckily for her, her very sharp son remembers! She says, '...if it weren't for you, I'd forget my head!'

- She is very upset when her son is knocked unconscious and goes with him to the hospital. She checks on Newt to make sure that he is all right too.
- She touches Chris's clothes lovingly and hugs his sweatshirt and cries quietly. Her pain is very real.
- She is shocked to find out that Newt has been in all sorts of adventures but handles that well.
- She is very caring and loves her boys absolutely.
- **Cecil**
 - Another fourth grader who is ignored by his friends, he is shorter and skinnier than Newt. His dream is to be a drummer and he carries two drumsticks with him all the time.
 - He is determined to make people notice him and his two friends during Halloween and goes all out to do so. He encourages Newt to work on his inner self and provides the push to get him out of his misery.
 - He is very concerned about Newt's state of mind and tries his best to get him into the Halloween mood. He gives him a walkie-talkie so that if there is an emergency he can be contacted.
 - Cecil calls him to get a discarded drum from the dumpster and that gets the first activity started for Captain Nobody who incidentally sees Mr. Clay the lost locksmith there and guides him home to his very distraught wife.
 - Cecil is the one who suggests that Newt should look after Ferocious the Ferret and that leads to the second exploit when the ferret escapes and runs on the busy roads and causes a huge jam. Newt is forced to wave the cars down and this leads to a freeway where a plane in trouble lands.
 - Cecil is the motivating factor in Newt's life. He gets very excited and enthusiastic about things. Cecil is also instrumental in getting Newt to climb the tallest building in town to 'save' Reggie.
 - Later when everything is sorted out, Cecil enjoys giving interviews and speaking up for his best friend, Newt.
 - Cecil is a caring, supportive friend and despite his size, a lovable character with a good heart. He is Newt's sidekick and seems happy in that role.
- **JJ**
 - **JJ is Juanita Josephina Gonzalez**, the tallest girl in the fourth grade. She has thick, untamed hair. She taught herself to read at the age of three and is very intelligent. She loves using big words and always tries to be correct and exact in what she says. JJ is obsessed with fantasy and she's an avid reader. She dresses as Splendida the Queen of the Dungeon of Dreams for Halloween.
 - She is also very strict about grammar and signs that are written incorrectly really annoy her.
 - She is concerned for Newt and tries to help him. She makes him the mask that lends a sense of mystery to

his outlandish costume of oversized clothes.

- When she sees the signs in Sullivan's jewelry shop are incorrect, she is very upset and considers it an emergency. She wants Captain Nobody to get them corrected. He does that and ends up foiling a robbery there.
- She enjoys the limelight and is enthusiastic about the interviews with television and newspaper reporters when Newt lands in hospital after his rescue of Reggie.
- She is a true friend of Newt.
- **Reggie Ratner**
 - He weighs two hundred and eighty pounds and has a neck as thick as a telephone pole. Chris thinks that he is a concrete truck with hair. He is determined to bring Chris down in the football field but has been unable to do so. He promises to snap Chris like a day old breadstick!
 - He gets very frustrated during the game and yanks off his helmet and smashes it to the ground. The fans shout that he is a crybaby! Reggie is not much of a sportsman.
 - The football spectators and the football team think that Reggie caused Chris's coma. The students punish him by throwing garbage in his compound and give Reggie a hard time in general. It makes him frustrated as he is innocent.
 - Later he climbs the tallest building to play a prank and gets his leg caught in a hole in the tower. The students and the public actually thought that he was intending to commit suicide! He asks Newt not to tell anyone that he had gone up to play a prank as that would appear immature.
 - He asks Newt about Chris's condition and that makes Newt realize that Reggie is really a caring person.
 - Reggie is a good person as he visits Chris and Newt when they are in the hospital and is sorry about the turn of events.
- **Ricky Ratner**
 - He is a hulking seventh-grader and a cousin of Reggie Ratner. He warns Newt to call off the friends and football players who are harassing Reggie. He finds out that the fourth graders are surprisingly supportive of Newt and stand up against him forcefully.
- **Darryl Peeps**
 - Darryl is the boy who actually struck Chris with his helmet and that caused him to become unconscious. His action is not deliberate and therefore he is forgiven.

Themes

- **Family unit is important**
 - The Newmans care for their children and shower them with love and concern. The children in turn love them a lot too. There is hugging and gestures of love in their daily life. When Newt takes over making the breakfast, it is because he sees his mother is totally absent-minded and engrossed with her work. He wants his parents and brother to have a good breakfast to start the day.
 - When he awakens his brother in the morning, that ritual is heartwarming and charming. The brothers love

and care for each other. Chris read his comics to Newt and taught him how to skate. It is very obvious that Newt is very proud of his brother's achievements and doesn't mind the fact that he is usually overshadowed by him.

- When Chris falls unconscious, the whole family is devastated. They hang on for the sake of each other. Mrs. Newman hugs Chris's clothes while Mr. Newman hides his tears. Newt feels that his whole world has fallen apart and there is something poking in his heart. He hugs his father and hears him laugh for the first time, he says. He dresses weird to cheer up his mother.
 - The Newmans try to shield Newt from knowing the truth about Chris's condition. They keep him away from the hospital but the mother takes a photo of Chris so that Newt can see him.
 - They worry for Newt when he dresses in Chris's clothes. They talk to him to make sure that he is all right.
 - Newt feels useless that he cannot do anything to bring Chris out of his coma. When he shouts his command to 'Hit the showers!' and it works, everyone is positively delighted. There is more hugging and kissing and one can feel the love in this family. Family love is a stabilizing force in this world of stress and strain.
- **Friendship counts**
 - JJ and Cecil are supportive of Newt and show their concern by getting him interested in Halloween. They do not want him to mope and they check on him all the time to make sure that he is all right. When Newt is not very enthusiastic, they push him to look for his inner self. They help him with his costume and make him feel strong and more confident. They push him into situations where he is forced to act and be brave.
 - Both Cecil and JJ are happy just being his sidekicks – they make no attempt to become heroes themselves. They want Newt to be the hero of the small guy, defender of the weak and the wimpy. They are totally unselfish in their attitude towards their friend.
 - Friends and classmates stand up for Newt when Ricky Ratner threatens him. It is a heartwarming gesture and makes Newt feel great. He is not invisible now. Friends stand up for each other and are there when you need them.
 - **Things are not what they seem**
 - Newt is small and mostly unnoticed and ignored by schoolmates and people. But he makes a big impact as Captain Nobody. He gets into many adventures and proves to be brave, rational and responsible. He becomes Somebody, despite being small and skinny.
 - On Halloween he dresses in his brother's oversized clothes and he looks like a clothes hamper. But this is when he turns into a hero! He gets the attention of his school mates and teachers. His acts of kindness and compassion help people in an unassuming manner. He helps at home and in the community in a meaningful way.
 - When he does something good, he does not brag

about it. He acts as the next-door guy. His friends go on television and talk about his kind deeds.

- In comparison Reggie is huge with a weight of a hundred and eighty pounds and he talks big about how he is going to smash Chris in the football field. But it does not happen. When he goes up the water tower to play a prank, everyone thinks he is going to commit suicide. He does not want people to know the truth and pleads with Newt to keep it a secret. So much for the school tough guy!
- It is Newt who actually prods Chris out of his coma with a simple trick. He shouts 'Hit the showers' and Chris responds in his usual way by throwing a pillow at him. No great medical or scientific solution brings Chris out of his coma! Things are not what they seem.

Moral Values

• Love and compassion

- There must be love and compassion in our hearts. When parents love their children and do the right thing for them, they are loved in return. When Newt takes over making breakfast for the family, it is because he loves his family. The parents in turn are working hard for the sake of their children and care very much about what is happening to them. They are heartbroken when Chris goes into a coma and try their best to protect Newt from knowing the truth about his condition.
- There is much love and compassion in the Newman family and it is very obvious.
- The school teachers are very concerned about Newt's state of mind. They worry that his weird dressing might have something to do with his brother's condition. They allow him to dress as he wishes.

• Be caring and kind-hearted

- Newt is very caring in everything he does. His friends are also very caring when they try their best to distract him from his misery. They encourage him to find his inner self and become a crime-fighter.
- Newt takes Mr. Clay the lost locksmith home out of goodness of his heart. He knows that Mrs. Clay will be worried about her husband.
- The teachers are very caring and good-hearted. They understand that it must be difficult for Newt to handle the family situation and therefore are very supportive.
- Newt is kind-hearted even in his handling of Reggie. He helps him and is supportive of him. He agrees not to tell the truth about his prank as people might think that Reggie is a loser. It does not take much to be caring and kind-hearted but it makes a big difference to those concerned.

• Do not be judgmental

- Newt never says that Reggie caused Chris's coma even when everyone else was sure. He gives him the benefit of the doubt. He is unhappy that people were punishing Reggie. Later when he knew that it was Darryl Peeps

who had knocked into his brother, he is not angry or revengeful. Both he and his brother are happy to forgive and forget. Such is their generosity of spirit.

Point of View

It is in the third person point of view and we see things through the eyes of the ten-year old Newt. It is generally light-hearted except when dealing with Chris's coma when we find that Newt is hurting within himself. His love for his brother is very apparent.

Tone and Mood

The tone is amusing and light even though it deals with a serious topic of what a family goes through when there is an unexpected tragic event. It is humorous at many points and keeps the reader interested by its easy pace. The reader laughs

at the quirky things Cecil, JJ and Newt say and understand that children are like that, very much in their own world. Even Newt's comments to his parents are funny and lovable. It reflects the warmth in this home very vividly. The story does not dip into the depressing – it tugs at the heart without being sentimental.

Language and Style

The language used is basically simple and fairly direct as we are seeing things through ten-year old Newt's eyes. Literary devices are used naturally to create sharp imagery. Short sentences in between quicken the pace of action and create a sense of urgency. The book is easy to read and grasp and holds the reader's attention throughout. Similes, metaphors, vivid descriptions and the dream motif are used appropriately to create a heartfelt blend of action, humor, and family drama.



NOVEL 2: *Dear Mr Kilmer*

by Anne Schraff

Synopsis

The story is about Richard Knight, a farm boy who is passionate about writing poems. He cannot relate well with his brother who appears very interested in hunting animals and sports. He finds himself unable to kill animals as he finds them beautiful. His father understands his pain but tells him that death is a part of life. In school Richard gets a chance to listen to a poem by Joyce Kilmer and is impressed by the thoughts expressed in it. With the support of his teacher, he begins a correspondence with Kilmer and also mentions that he writes poems. This starts a beautiful relationship between Kilmer and Richard.

Kilmer joins the army to fight the enemy. Richard worries about the war as it affects the way people treat foreigners in his own town. A student, Hannah, is shunned by the classmates because of her German background. Richard stands up to support her and is ostracised too. Richard and Hannah become good friends. Some of the townspeople also rally around when they realise that Hannah's family is patriotic to the country they live in.

Kilmer gets killed in the war. It is most heartbreaking for Richard who is shattered by the news. He writes a beautiful poem about the pain of losing a friend and it appears in the local paper. Richard is most pleasantly surprised and comforted when his father tells him that the poem expresses well the pain he felt when he lost his brother in another war. There is mutual understanding as father and son talk over things that had not been mentioned before. The war too comes to an end and Richard hopes that anti-German sentiments would also fade.

Richard is sensitive and gentle; someone who wishes that society will treat everyone in a just and humane manner. Reality, unfortunately is a different matter.

Plot

- Richard Knight, Gus, his brother and his father go hunting. Richard's father wants this to be a special occasion as he wants Richard to kill his first deer. Richard prays that no deer will appear. But it does.
- Richard takes aim but misses the deer to the dismay of Gus. But his father knows that Richard didn't want to kill the animal. Richard explains that he doesn't like killing and his father tells him that death is part of life. He had lost his brother a few years ago in a war.
- Gus teases him and also tells him that he should try to fit in by playing games but Richard tells him that fitting in is not his plan. Gus says that Richard should enjoy hunting as only sissies feel sad about killing animals. Gus also wants to join up as a soldier.
- Richard helps his sister, Angie with the chores while Gus and his father discuss sports. Later, Richard remembers the first time he saw a beautiful deer die in the hands of his grandfather. He wrote a poem then to express his sadness.
- In school, Mrs. Hansen, his teacher reads to him a beautiful poem by Joyce Kilmer. Richard feels that perhaps his own poems would be acceptable too. Mrs. Hansen tells the class that poetry is not sissy stuff and that many poets served as soldiers and were tough people.
- Richard sees his classmate, Hannah crying because someone had scrawled the words 'Dirty Hun' on her book. His friends feel that it was right as she is a German.
- Richard writes to Kilmer about how he felt his teacher read Kilmer's to him. He also mentions that he too writes poems.
- Three weeks later, Mrs. Hansen tells the class that Hannah's father's tavern had been vandalised and that she wants the class to sign a card to express their sympathies. Everyone refuses except Richard. He also offers to deliver the card to the family.
- Richard gets into a fight with his classmates, Abner and Harry who harass him about Hannah. When he gives the card to Hannah, she is very upset and sullen. He feels disturbed.
- He goes home to find a letter from New York. It is from

- Kilmer. He is very happy and wishes to tell his family that he too writes poetry. When he does so over a meal, this news is received in a lukewarm manner. Gus warns him that he should not tell others that he writes poems as people will not like a person who is different.
- The next day Mrs. Hansen reads his poems and praises them. Hannah apologizes to him for her behavior and told him that neighbors came and painted over all the awful words on their walls. She also added that her brother Otto had joined the army as a patriotic American. Richard is concerned for all those fighting in the war.
 - Three weeks later, Mrs. Hansen persuades Richard to talk about his correspondence with Kilmer and read one of his poems in class. The class is shocked to hear that Kilmer is going to serve the army as a soldier. He receives support from some of his friends while Abner and Harry mock him.
 - The students get to know more about the war in their History class. The school holidays gives Richard more time to work on the farm, a job which he likes. He also likes working with his father, even though they do not speak much to each other.
 - Richard learns that Kilmer is in France and that puts him in fear. In the meantime school starts again and the students are told that there will be a special programme to sell Liberty bonds. Two students will be chosen to represent Lady Liberty and a lucky guy will accompany her based on essays they write. Richard is chosen as the lucky gentleman while Hannah is selected as Lady Liberty. The students resent Hannah being chosen, thus she declines the role. Richard too decides to step down. Mrs. Hansen is proud of her two students.
 - Hannah invites Richard home for dinner. He has a good time there and enjoys the company of Hannah's parents. When he returns home, his father asks him why he declined the role in the show. His father tells him not to do things to upset the community and says that writing poetry has given him foolish ideas. Richard is very sad.
 - Kilmer writes to tell Richard that being in France is tough and that his family is missing him. Hannah and her family send some gifts to cheer Kilmer.
 - The war goes on. The school term comes to an end with a picnic when Richard and Hannah spend some time together. Hannah gets hit by a stone thrown by someone.
 - Gus announces that he has enlisted in the army, much to his father's dismay. He scolds him harshly for leaving all the farm work and going off to fight in a meaningless war. Gus leaves the next day. Kilmer writes about the painful effects of war and tells Richard to keep writing his poems. Richard writes a reply that he will never give up writing poems and goes to post the letter.
 - On the way, he stops to see Hannah who tells him that Kilmer has been killed in the war. Richard reads how Kilmer died and knows that he was buried under a tree stump. He remembers the letter he had written and not posted. He cries bitterly then. He writes a beautiful poem

for Kilmer which was printed in a local newspaper. His father was very impressed with the feelings expressed and father and son have a meaningful conversation.

- The war ends and with it some fears. Peace returns.

Setting

• Physical setting

It is set in Iowa, the United States of America, during the First World War. The USA had declared war on Germany and was fighting along with the Allies. Young men were drafted and sent to Europe to fight and many died.

• Social setting

The war had polarized the people. People from other countries were looked upon suspiciously. Thus the Schermers were ostracised because they were from Germany even though they were patriotic and their son Otto had joined the army to fight the Germans. In school, Hannah was often harassed by other students. Her parents' tavern was vandalized by unruly people.

• Time setting

It is set in the early twentieth century, around 1917, right in the middle of World War 1.

Characters

• Richard Knight

- He is 15 years old and the younger son of a farmer in Iowa. Pale and slender, he looks like his mother. He lost his mother at the age of 7.
- Dislikes hunting and killing animals but his father and brother think he should hunt. Richard remembers the first time he had gone hunting with his grandpa and how upset he was when his grandpa killed a beautiful deer.
- Doesn't want to get into sports, would rather be farming.
- Very considerate, Richard helps his sister with the household chores.
- Writes poems to express his pain but keeps them in a secret place.
- Very sensitive, sees poetry in ordinary experiences. Understands Kilmer's poems as a kindred soul.
- Brave, stands up for Hannah against classmates, supports her family when vandals attack her father's tavern
- He suggests that students should write to the soldiers to spur them on.
- Richard is loyal. He gives up being Doughboy out of loyalty towards Hannah who is forced to decline the position of Lady Liberty.
- Feels terrible about Kilmer's death and finds peace by writing a poem for him
- Wants his father's approval and is very happy when he gets it finally

• Gus

- The older brother of Richard, he loves hunting and playing games; popular in school as he always tries to fit in, unlike Richard

- He is proud that he killed his first deer and earned the respect of his father early. Wishes to join the army but cannot until he finishes high school.
- He is always warning Richard to be part of the crowd and not stand alone. He thinks Richard is a sissy to dislike hunting and killing.
- He is quite aware of what is happening to Richard in school and keeps a brotherly eye on him.
- Joins the army after finishing high school but it does not please his father.
- **Hannah**
 - The daughter of the Schermers, who moved to Iowa a few years ago.
 - She is upset at being called a Hun, a derogatory term for Germans.
 - She is smart and does well in school but even though her essay won her the Lady Liberty award, she declines the position because of her classmates' prejudice and harassment.
 - Warm and good-natured – she invites Richard to her house for dinner and the two become friends.
 - She feels strongly that people must learn to care about one another despite differences in race, religion and nationality. She believes that people must learn to wage peace, not war.
 - Hannah breaks the news about Kilmer's death to Richard.
 - Hannah and Richard are good friends. They care very much for each other.
- **Knight**
 - He is Gus and Richard's father, firm and reserved, doesn't say much.
 - Dropped out of school in grade 5 but wants education for his boys.
 - Takes the boys hunting and wants Richard to kill his first deer which he doesn't.
 - Firm and stern – forbids Gus from dropping out of school to join the army. He wants him to complete high school.
 - Grieves for his brother Roland who was killed in a war.
 - Tries to forbid Richard from writing poems but fails.
 - Understand Richard's poem well when he reads about the pain of losing someone you love greatly. He had loved his brother a great deal.
 - He is a good, responsible father.
- **Mrs. Hansen**
 - Good English teacher, introduces the poetry of Kilmer to the class.
 - Encourages Richard to write poems and reads his poems in class.
 - Organised the project of writing essays to be chosen as Lady Liberty and Doughboy.
 - Puts Abner and Harry in their places.
 - A source of inspiration to her students, wishes all the students were like Richard and Hannah.

- **Abner and Harry**
 - Very disruptive boys in the class, very opinionated and prejudiced
 - They dislike poetry as they think it is sissy stuff.
 - Dislike Hannah because of her German origin and make life difficult for her.
 - Dislike Richard for standing up for Hannah.
- **Blanche Freebold**
 - Shallow and prejudiced, she is against foreigners.
 - She does not like Hannah who is a German.

Themes

- **The importance of family**
 - Knight, Richard and Gus' father, is a proud man who takes his sons hunting just like his father did before him. His sons want to earn his respect very much. Gus asks Richard if he doesn't want his father to be proud of him and therefore encourages him to take up hunting. Both the boys obey the wishes of the father even though they can't do everything he wants them to do. Gus signs up to join the army despite his father's protests. Richard writes poems even though his father thinks that it only helps to fill his head with foolish ideas. But Richard is very happy when his father is pleased with the poem that he submits to the newspaper about the death of Kilmer. Richard helps his sister with her chores. He is concerned for her wellbeing.
 - The Schermers are close to each other and enjoy the relationship they have. The family is an important unit to them and the fact that they are foreigners in that town has made them closer. They do welcome Richard and shower him with affection. The author thinks that the family unit is a stable platform for a caring society.
- **Be true to yourself**
 - Richard does not try to fit in. He is different. He hates hunting and killing animals. He will not fit in for the sake of fitting in. He knows that his father wants him to kill the deer but won't do it as he thinks animals are beautiful. Gus keeps warning him not to be the odd boy but Richard will not go against what his conscience tells him to do.
 - He stands up for Hannah on the same principle of respecting all human beings regardless of race and religion. He is courageous and true to his beliefs.
 - By writing poems, he shows his sensitive soul. He becomes brave enough to acknowledge the fact that he is different from others. He stays true to himself and his values.
- **Racial polarization-respect for human beings**
 - The war has caused polarization as some people are from different countries. The war in Europe has made people more conscious of their identity and foreigners are frowned upon. The Schermers's tavern is vandalised and Hannah is subject to ridicule and prejudice. Richard tries his best to respect all human beings as he is a sensitive character who cares about people.
 - The students do not like the idea that Hannah is chosen

as Lady Liberty because of her German origin. Hannah declines the position and subsequently Richard decides to withdraw from being Doughboy too. Prejudice clouds people's eyes and causes distress.

- **Love and friendship**

- Richard finds Hannah attractive and likes her. That she is a German does not bother him. He is the only one to sign the teacher's card and offers to take it to her personally. She is not exactly warm or friendly when he gives her the card but makes up for it later. Hannah invites him to meet her family and slowly they become friends. She reads his poems and there is a sincere warm-hearted friendship between them. At the school picnic, Richard carves her name with his on an old oak tree. Hannah thinks very highly of Richard and he thinks well of her too. She is the one who breaks the news to him about Kilmer's death. Richard and Hannah have a good relationship which could blossom into a romance.
- Richard's relationship with a soldier-poet forms the backbone of this story. It is a special warm-hearted relationship of two intensely sensitive souls. When Kilmer is killed, it breaks Richard's heart. Richard finds strength through writing his poems.

- **The importance of education**

- Education is valued highly. Richard's father dropped out of fifth grade but he insists that the two boys must finish high school. Gus wants to stop schooling to join the army but his father forbids him from leaving school. He thinks that they must have some basic education before they branch out into other fields.
- In school, there are many aspects which Richard enjoys. Richard enjoys poetry as it draws out the sensitive nature of the students. The classes seem to relate to communal activities around them. The teacher suggests that the students write a card to show their sympathy to the Schermers whose property is vandalized. Richard suggests that students write letters to serving soldiers to cheer them on. The teachers promote the discussion of issues around them and give them a balanced foundation to prepare them for life.

- **War and its effects**

- Gus wishes to join the army to fight in the war but Knight's brother Roland died in a war and therefore his father is very much against it. Richard knows that the soldiers live in trenches and put up with terrible conditions. The chances of being killed are very high. In addition living through war conditions sometimes made people deaf or crazy. Worse still were the chemical effects which led to slow, painful deaths.
- Hannah's brother fights the Germans when he joins the American army. Gus too enlists in the army when he finishes high school. Kilmer gets killed in the war, devastating Richard who looked upon him as a friend and mentor.
- In her essay, Hannah says that the enemy in the war is war itself as it leaves hatred and horror behind. What the world needs is kindness and understanding so that

people care for one another despite differences in race, religion or nationality. The world needs 'peace without victory' as President Wilson says.

Moral Values

- **Respect and love for family members**

- Richard and Gus are different in nature but the father loves them. They try to earn his respect by doing what he wants them to do. But the father understands that each son is different.
- Roland and his brother are different in personality too but Knight loves his brother and still feels the pain of losing his brother in a war. Richard shows his love for his sister by helping her.
- The Schermers love each other. They worry that Otto is in the army and may get killed.

- **Respect human beings**

Everyone should be respected despite racial or religious differences. Vandalising property, judging people by the language they speak or their cultural habits is unfair and ignorant.

- **Compassion**

- Richard displays compassion for the underdog and the victims of prejudice. He reaches out to Hannah because she is treated badly by their classmates and also the town. He refuses to be part of the meanness that makes Hannah decline the position of Lady Liberty.
- He is kind to his sister as he feels that she looks tired and needs help.
- Mrs. Hansen shows compassion for Hannah and what she goes through in life.
- Hannah believes that hatred and prejudices have no place in this world. She believes that people must care for people without thinking of race, religion or nationality. Compassion plays a big part in making people become better and more caring people.

- **Patriotism**

Kilmer joins the army to show his love for his country. Otto enlists even though he is of German origin out of loyalty to the land he lives in. Gus too joins the army because he thinks it is his duty to fight for the country. Roland who had joined earlier had been killed in the war against the Spanish. Suffering and death are natural results of any war.

Point of View

The novel is written from the perspective of a 15 year-old school boy. We see the events unfold through Richard who loves writing poems and is a gentle, kind-hearted soul.

Tone and Mood

- The tone is essentially serious as it deals with war, prejudice and the painful experiences of growing up.
- The movements of soldiers and the information of death rates in the war are constant reminders of the effects of the war. There is a dismal air and people live with worries for themselves and for those at the warfront.

Language and Style

The language used is simple with vivid descriptions of the winter scenery. The conversation extracts within the family or in the class are appropriate for the situations. The poems that appear constantly are very readable and are delightful.



NOVEL 3: *Sing to the Dawn*

by Minfong Ho

Synopsis

The story is about a village girl's dream to further her studies in the city. Dawan's life is not easy as she faces many challenges. Dawan's wildest dream comes true when she is placed first in the scholarship winners' list. But ironically she has to compete against her own brother who is equally interested in studying in the city. If she rejects the scholarship, her brother has a chance to go to the city. Dawan comes to know that her brother Kwai is placed second in the scholarship list. Kwai is resentful that his sister can go to the city while he may have to study in the village school. There is hostility and their normally-loving sibling relationship takes the brunt of it with the scholarship announcement.

Then there is her father who thinks that a girl does not need to study further. After all girls marry and bear children. Her place is in the kitchen finally. Of what good is an education? In addition, there are other people who warn her that there are many dangers and evils in the city. The city is no place for a girl.

Many obstacles torment Dawan who is torn with doubts. After much persuasion, Dawan's father agrees to let Dawan go to the city for her education. It is interesting to note that Dawan's grandmother is more forward-thinking and wishes Dawan to continue her studies in the city. Kwai comes around to the idea that his sister should accept the offer and continue her studies. He is also a little sad that he and Dawan will not get a chance to see the sunrise together as they usually do. Dawan considers everything and feels that she is capable of taking up the scholarship and the responsibility it entails. Perhaps she can prove something by taking the villagers out of the mental rut they are in. Girls too should further their education and improve their lot. She hopes that she will be the change that the family and her village need.

Plot

- Dawan and Kwai sit on the old bridge above the river and watch the sunrise. There is an easy companionship between the two siblings.
- Dawan asks Kwai what he would do if he won the scholarship. He mentions the things he would do, the changes he would bring to the village.
- When Kwai suggests that Dawan might win the scholarship, she says that won't happen. She is sure that she would not get the scholarship because she is a girl.

Some literary devices, like similes, metaphors and vivid imagery [trains coming and going with soldiers] used are effective and sustain interest in the events in the story successfully.

- In class the teacher asks the students what they saw beneath their houses that morning. The students mention the sacks of rice that are stacked up beneath the house. They are for the tax collector but the students feel that the system is unfair. The poor villagers work but others benefit and rob them of their rights. The students discuss the need to change these bad and harmful systems that are entrenched in the villages.
- A student spotted the headmaster heading to their class and the student shouted 'he's coming.'
- The teacher and the students immediately pretend that they are having Geography lessons until the headmaster goes away.
- Then the teacher and students discuss what they should do if they won the scholarship.
- The teacher asks Dawan what she would do to help the villagers.
- She is surprised at the question but she refuses to answer it. Instead, she asks him who won the scholarship. He tells her that she did.
- The classmates surround Dawan as soon as they hear that she has won the scholarship. They are pleased for her but Kwai is not among them.
- Kwai is unhappy and sad that Dawan won the scholarship instead of him.
- Dawan tells her family that she has won the scholarship. Her father is displeased as he feels that Kwai should have won it. He is especially angry that she took her own brother's chance away from him.
- Dawan's grandmother is supportive and says that she is proud of her. Her mother says that the grandmother should not encourage Dawan too much as her father will not allow her to go. That may lead to greater disappointment.
- Dawan and her grandmother head to Cousin Noi's house and but halfway, Dawan's mother decides to go with Dawan instead of the grandmother.
- Noi describes how difficult life in the city is. She advises Dawan not to go to the city.
- In the meantime, an army officer comes to Noi's house. Noi and her husband, Ghan, has made a deal with him so that he will allow Ghan not to join the army. For that they have to pay him a lot of money. It is another burden the family has to live with.
- Dawan and her mother find out that life in the city is difficult. Children work to be able to survive there. Older children hold all kinds of jobs just to manage their lives in the city.
- Dawan says that she hopes to change things if she gets a chance.

- But Noi tells her that the city will do more harm than good. Dawan realises that Noi and Ghan do not support her move to the city.
- Kwai finds out from his teacher that he came in second in the examination. He now knows that if Dawan does not go to the city, he can get to go. He believes that as a man he can do more for the people. Dawan is only a girl and will not be able to do the many things that he can do. She assures him that she can make this world a better place for the rest of the people.
- Dawan's father says that if Kwai had won the scholarship, he would have allowed him to go.
- Dawan wants to fight for her right to study but realises that she needs more support. Thus she decides to talk to a monk to help her persuade her father to let her go to the city.
- Dawan goes to the marketplace alone and meets a girl who is selling lotus buds and caged sparrows. Dawan realises that the girl, Bao, is the sister of her classmate, Vichai. They have an interesting conversation.
- Dawan goes to see the old monk in the temple. He has already heard of her and her scholarship as he and Dawan's teacher are good friends. However, he thinks that she need not go to the city school. He thinks that she should be satisfied with what she has and not crave for more. Dawan disagrees.
- Dawan is hurt and she goes to the market place and sits there, tired and frustrated. She sees Bao again and she lends a sympathetic ear to Dawan. Bao tells her to ignore the monk and to think of what she can do next. She has rather progressive views and advises Dawan to free herself from the bonds at home and to achieve her dreams. She allows Dawan to free a bird for free.
- Just then Vichai, her brother arrives, and is aggressive towards Bao. He notices that she has not collected money for the birds that have been freed and hits her. Dawan steps in to prevent further abuse. Kwai comes there and restrains Vichai. Bao thanks him and then scolds him for not being nice to his own sister. He is shocked at her reaction and in the scuffle that follows, pushes Dawan who gets a bad cut on her ankle. He tries to tend to her bleeding leg but Dawan scolds him for trying to take the scholarship from her.
- Cousin Noi appears and helps Dawan with her wound.
- Dawan goes to the riverside and finds Kwai there. He remembers vividly that she had called him a bully. They both talk and some of the tension between them eases. Kwai makes a decision and the two of them share an umbrella home.
- Dawan's father talks to Kwai and Dawan together and reluctantly allows Dawan to go to the city school.
- Kwai knows that once Dawan goes to the city school, no one will be there to watch the sunrise with him.
- Dawan too has some doubts. She knows that if she leaves, she will miss everything in her village. Her grandmother convinces her to go finally.

- As she is boarding the bus to go to the city, Dawan looks everywhere for Kwai but he was nowhere to be seen. At last she sees him standing on the bridge and bidding her goodbye.

Setting

• Physical setting

It is set in a village in Thailand. There is a river flowing through the village and it has a rickety old bridge. That is the favourite haunt of both Dawan and Kwai who sit there and watch the sunrise. Dawan comes from a poor family. The family has few luxuries.

• Social setting

- The family is a strong unit and there is love and a show of kindness among the members. The children respect the father and generally obey his wishes. It is essentially a male-dominated society as it is the right of boys to get an education. Girls appear to be thought of as inferior and not as equals to men.

- The people are trapped in a society where the landowners take all the earnings of the workers and leave them poor and miserable.

• Time setting

It is set in modern times but speaks of a village where the mindset goes back several decades. Women are not considered equal to men.

Characters

• Dawan

- Enthusiastic and vibrant, she is full of teenage energy in wanting to grasp at life.
- She shares a special relationship with her brother and both are keen to further their studies. But as a girl, she knows that her opportunities are less and accepts that too.
- Sees social injustice and is angry that the landlord gets to collect the rice as a tax when the poor villagers had worked hard to cultivate it. She wishes to correct the system.
- Wins the scholarship but is in a fix as her brother is keen to study too.
- Very proactive and persistent, she seeks support from many people to convince her father to let her go.
- She is very brave, stands up for Bao when Vicha hits her.
- Courageous enough to speak up to her own brother to make him realise about her dreams and win his support.
- She is happy when her father allows her to go and her brother says he won't stand in her way – and is happy to see her brother waving to her when she leaves.
- Caring and knows that she will miss her family and the village when she leaves.
- Loves her family and wants their support and cooperation.

• Kwai

- Kwai is the younger brother of Dawan and he wins the

- second place in the scholarship list.
- He has a good relationship with his sister and enjoys watching the sunrise with her.
 - Dawan was given a chance to study because he spoke to his father into letting her go to school. He is farsighted.
 - He has some ideas about what he will do to improve life in the village.
 - He is tough and can be aggressive. He is very disappointed that he didn't get the scholarship and is unable to be happy for his sister at first.
 - He acts selfishly and turns away from her.
 - He goes to defend Bao when Vichai hits her.
 - He is brave but he gets an earful from Bao for being selfish and not letting Dawan accept the scholarship.
 - He pushes Dawan in the scuffle with Bao and she hurts her ankle and bleeds. He tries to help her too when he sees her in pain. He cares for his sister and his family.
 - He is willing to change as he allows his sister to pursue her studies. Sits on the same old bridge and watches her leave.
- **The Teacher**
 - He is a good teacher who stimulates his class with discussions of relevant topics. He provokes thought and encourages students to give their opinions. He wants them to help the community and gets their views on what is harmful and how changes will help.
 - He pretends to teach from the book when the headmaster comes by but what he discussed with the students earlier is also important and he shouldn't worry that it is not from his text.
 - He cares about his students.
 - **Grandmother**
 - She is very supportive of Dawan and is the only person to express her pride in what her grandchild has achieved.
 - She strongly believes in what she does and decides to take Dawan to meet Noi, the cousin. The three kilometer walk is no problem for her.
 - But she is happy when her daughter decides to take Dawan and she can stay back to look after the grandson at home. After all that is the role of the mother.
 - **Father**
 - He is fixed in his views – follows the old mindset in thinking that girls need not be educated.
 - He is very angry and disappointed that Kwai did not win the scholarship and scolds Dawan for taking his chance away.
 - Unwilling to discuss issues, expects children to obey without questions.
 - Changes at the end and permits Dawan to pursue her studies – a big change in him.
 - **Mother**
 - She takes a lesser role as she is more subservient to her husband.
 - She does not want her daughter to be disappointed so she does not encourage her.

- But she takes her to meet Noi and her husband with the hope that they will help Dawan by talking to her father.
 - She walks three kilometers to go to Noi's house. She too wants the best for her children.
- **Noi**
 - A few years older than Dawan, married to Ghan and has a baby.
 - Burdened with financial problems, she is stressed out with work,
 - She talks negatively of the city and says that it is ugly and cruel. Businessmen profit from the labour of the workers and life is very tough. She says rural life is more healthy and peaceful.
 - Her husband supports her views too.
 - She helps Dawan when she gets hurt in the encounter with Bao. She is kind-hearted but has become hardened by her own problems.
 - **Bao**
 - A girl selling flowers in the market, she is friendly and very generous.
 - Willing to give her flowers to Dawan free. She has never been to school and is awed by the fact that Dawan is smart and has done well.
 - She is very supportive and encourages Dawan to take up the challenge and go for her studies.
 - She lets a bird free to tell Dawan that she too should set herself free like the sparrow.
 - Her brother hits her for it and she scolds him and lets all the other birds free too.
 - She is heartbroken when one sparrow dies in the scuffle between her and her brother.
 - Very courageous; she scolds Kwai for being mean and unfair to Dawan.
 - It is because of her that Dawan speaks up for herself to Kwai.
 - Bao made Kwai think and he thus gives in. Only then does Dawan accept the scholarship.
 - **Vichai**
 - Brother of Bao and classmate of Dawan. He is mean and aggressive.
 - Money matters a lot to him and therefore he is nasty to his sister for giving the birds for free.
 - He is also very abusive and bad-tempered as he hits Bao for being generous.
 - **The Monk**
 - The head monk is old and should be wise but is very fixed in his views. He does not help Dawan and thinks that studying is not for girls. He lets her down badly. He is not willing to change with the times.

Themes

- **Gender inequality**

Girls are not given equal opportunity to study and further their ambitions. They must stay at home and raise their families. Tertiary education is wasted on them as they get married and look after their husbands and children

finally. Noi stays at home to be with her family. To break that mindset is not easy as men like Dawan's father wish to maintain that status quo. Dawan thinks she will bring about that change but it will be a tough journey. Not to give women the right to education and to deprive them of the opportunity to advance and explore their abilities and their talents is a social injustice. It must be corrected everywhere.

- **The importance of education**

In this rural setting education cannot be taken for granted. Winning a scholarship is just about the only way to break the vicious cycle of poverty. Both siblings want that scholarship and it is very awkward that Dawan the girl gets the first place while her brother is placed second. Dawan has to convince just about everyone that she deserves to go to the city school. Her grandmother sees the importance of education and is willing to get help for her sake. Strangely it is Bao who is Dawan's strong supporting force because she makes Kwai think and act rationally. Education will bring change to Dawan and to the family and, through her, the village.

- **The family unit is a stable force**

- The children respect their elders and obey them generally. Dawan wants her father to give permission for her to accept the scholarship. She is hardly rebellious. She also wants her brother to be happy for her and that he is not hurt her greatly.
- There is much gentleness in the relationship the siblings share. Dawan leaves the umbrella for him as she does not want him to get wet and sick. When they share the umbrella home, it is a special moment of reconciliation and renewal of their affection. They watch the sunrise together while Dawan sings to the dawn. It is very touching to know that Kwai feels that he will miss watching the sunrise with his sister.
- Her parents want the children to do well but the mother is afraid that Dawan will be disappointed if she can't go to the city.
- The grandmother is still a force to be reckoned with as she takes the step to take Dawan to meet Noi. And in the end she is the one who convinces Dawan to accept the scholarship. When her father gives permission, it gives Dawan that thrust that she needs to go to the city. The family acts as a support for everyone in times of trouble. People survive their problems better when there is a strong family foundation behind them.

- **Victimization/Abuse of power**

- In the village, the poor people who work hard on their farms are victimized by the landowners who take the sacks of rice as their tax. There is very little chance of escape from this feudalistic system.
- Even the army officer takes money from Ghan so that he will not have to be enlisted in the army.
- It is the same in the city where the bosses take the hard-earned money of the workers.
- The grip of the big, powerful man on the poor worker is harsh and vicious.

- Vichai hits his sister when he finds that she has not taken money for freeing the birds. That is abuse at the family level. Victimization goes on at many different levels and only education or strong governmental action can break this evil cycle.

Moral Values

- **Compassion and kindness**

- It is compassion that makes Dawan feel uncomfortable about accepting the scholarship as her brother is very keen to study too. If she were totally selfish, she would just accept it and go off. But she can't. This is a brother she cares about. It is compassion that makes Dawan leave her umbrella for her brother when it rains. She worries for his wellbeing.
- Kwai too feels torn about blocking Dawan's chance to improve herself. When Bao tells him off for being selfish, he realises his mistake and rectifies it. His better self takes over and he wants her to grab this chance she has.
- Bao is full of compassion and kindness. She tries to cheer Dawan by giving her the lotus bud and allowing her to free the bird. She takes a beating from Vichai for it. She also tells off Kwai so that he will allow Dawan to accept the scholarship. She has a natural sense of justice and fairness.

- **Responsibility**

- With power and position comes responsibility. Dawan knows that she has to do a lot more for her family and society once she has finished her studies. Kwai too says he will improve the plight of the villagers when he can. They both see that there is much that needs to be done for their society and are willing to bring changes for the people. There is clarity of vision between them and that is commendable.
- The grandmother is a very responsible woman. She is quick to act and is willing to go the extra mile for her granddaughter. When she decides to take Dawan to meet Noi, the cousin, her daughter has no choice but to follow and take Dawan instead.
- The parents are responsible people, wanting the children to be educated. But according to the mindset of the people, the father thinks only males should be educated. But he too relents when he lets his daughter go off to the big city on her scholarship. It is the act of a responsible father.

- **Courage**

- It takes courage to break out of an age-old custom and start anew. Dawan wants a chance to study in the city but the general custom is for girls to get married and stay at home, minding the children. She faces many obstacles and it is most frustrating for her when her father and brother stand in her way. She is brave and determined as she does her best to get support from others to make her way in the world. She is not afraid of Vichai and stands up for Bao in the marketplace. She

also tells off her brother even though she is very close to him. Because of her persistence and strength she is able to get the chance to study in the city.

- Kwai is also courageous in his way. He is willing to fight Vichai when he hits Bao. He is also willing to accept the fact that he should not stand in Dawan's way. That takes courage too – to accept the fact that he is wrong and should change his mind about her future.

Point of View

It is in the third person point of view, essentially that of Dawan, a young girl with big dreams. We see and understand her eagerness in wanting to further her studies and the pain of knowing that she may not get that chance.

Tone and Mood

The tone is gentle and thoughtful as Dawan cherishes her hope of winning the scholarship and leaving for the big city.

She has no intention of hurting her brother and the conflict that arises causes her pain. There is a touch of anticipation and nostalgia as she looks forward to the changes that will surely come while she knows she will miss her village and its people.

Language and Style

The language has cameo descriptions of the village and the river which come alive as the story unfolds. The lotus plays a central symbolic role for it rises out of muddy water and blooms in all its glory. It is offered at the temples by devotees. The flower is like Dawan just waiting to grow and bloom.

The caged bird soars and flies to freedom. There is hope yet for Dawan to spread her wings and do her thousand things. Literary devices like similes and metaphors appear in many points of the story and create vivid word pictures.