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| **Text-Centred** | **Text structures and language features** |
| **Genre and conventions of genre** | Coming of age, **bildungsroman,** growing up, rites of passage, **memoir**, autobiographical.**Conventions:** first person narration, reflective, retrospective, focusing on experiences of youth. |
| **Concepts** | Growing up, betrayal, parent/child relationships, escapism, financial/rural hardship, hopes and fears  |
| **Binary oppositions****Note:** Binaries are **activated** in the text. Both halves of the binary may not be present in the text. | **YOUTH/EXPERIENCE** also truth/lie, male/female, renewal/decay, **trust/betrayal**, fertile/desolate, **dreams/reality**, **escapism/reality**, selfish/selfless, loneliness/companionship, city/country, sophisticated/naïve, abundance/poverty, noise/silence,  |
| Which of the binaries could best underpin a reading of all aspects of the text? Which binary draws all the strands of the text together? Which binary allows you to draw on the broadest range of text structures and language features to support your theme statement? **E.g**. **youth/experience** draws most strands of the text together. The girl is at an age where she is faced with the harsh realities of the adult world. The cutting down of the tree symbolizes the end of her childhood and the loss of her childhood dreams. Therefore this binary may provide an umbrella theme/central idea/unifying idea which may be supported by most of the evidence in the text. **Note:** The **cultural setting a reader** is a part of may **influence their interpretation** of a work of literature; only one concept, from the binary opposition, is ready, in our mind, to be privileged and the other one is usually put aside as having the second priority. |
| **Narration and narrative structure**How is the text narrated to position the audience? Consider how point of view (e.g. first person vs. third person), focalisation and voice position the reader in relation to perspectives, ideas and reliability of the characters or narrator in the text.  | First person, retrospective, memoir, framed narrative (present frames past), initially positions audience to sympathize with the narrator but closer reading may alienate the reader from the girl’s ideology. Creation of suspense e.g.” *I’m not sure I ever forgave my father*“, “*betrayal”, “heartbreak”.* Well defined climax i.e. chopping down of tree.  |
| **Symbols and metaphors**What are some key symbols and/or metaphors that significantly contribute to meaning in the text? Consider symbols and metaphors that are repeated and/or developed in a text to shape representations and ideas in the text.  | The tree as symbol of dreams, childhood pleasures, escapism; dirt under fingernails symbolizing disgust at rural lifeMetaphors; *fissures in a marriage*; *Mother Nature; My father’s voice carried up through the branches and landed heavily in my ears; The land had worn him and his patience down; It wailed as it cut its way through my childhood.* |
| **Stylistic features and literary techniques** | Literary allusions to *Jane Eyre* and *Breakfast at Tiffany’s,* comparisons, visual and auditory imagery |

1. **W-C-C - Representations** — How does the text construct representations of people, groups, places or ideas? Consider the representation of the girl herself, mother, father, city and country.

**The girl – (support your evaluations of character with quotes from the text in exam essay)** unforgiving, bitter,avoids household chores (but does have dirty hands…), does not help her mother enough, dreams of a hedonistic and unrealistic future (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s* is about a rural girl living for pleasure in New York. She searches for happiness but never finds it.), escapes into romantic/Gothic literature.

**Values:** sophistication, city life**,** freedom

**Attitudes:** resents rural life, is unsupportive of her parents’ circumstances

**Beliefs:** Life will be better in the city

**Mother:** weak, worries, failing marriage, protective of her daughter, prone to tears, her name is **Karen…**.

**Values:** largely unknown – perhaps motherhood; **attitudes** – quarreling with husband, perhaps resentful of his attitude and/or distressed by drought and financial hardship

**Father:** harsh, demanding, never satisfied with daughter’s behaviour, impatient, worn down by drought and financial hardship, pragmatic

**Values:** survival, self-reliance, hard work, mutual support within family; **attitudes** - resentful of daughter’s behaviour, **belief**: daughter is old enough to accept necessity to fell tree; daughter must ‘grow up’, accept responsibilities, face reality

**City** – sophistication and fun

**Country** – hardship and toil

So, does the text **position** us to view the daughter as having been completely betrayed by a harsh father or is there a more **universal message** here? The key to meaning might be to consider how we are positioned to view the girl. Is she someone we can sympathize with or is she simply selfish?

1. **W-C-C - Ideology -** What cultural beliefs, values and attitudes that reinforce particular power structures in society underpin the text? How does the text challenge or reinforce dominant worldviews? i.e. Are we positioned to appreciate the girl or the father’s perspective/world view? Or are we invited to sympathize with both ideologies? Which is a dominant worldview – the father’s or the girl’s?

Given that the girl is represented as being bitter and selfish and that the father is represented as being in great hardship, we are ideologically positioned to sympathize with the father’s survivalist worldview despite his harshness.

1. **W-C-C –** **Cultural ideas** – Which is the most important topic in this text – gender, environment or age? Why?

As this can be categorized as a coming of age genre, age is the most important cultural idea examined in the text.

**Possible theme statements:**

The story, “The Girl in the Tree”, examines **the idea** that there is a struggle and a loss of dreams involved for the narrator in moving from childhood to adulthood and from youth to experience.

The short narrative, “The Girl in the Tree”, is about the difficult transition between childhood and adulthood and **reveals** that this may seem like a betrayal and a time of lost dreams.

The central **theme** of the story, “The Girl in the Tree”, is the anguish of growing up in the face of parental betrayal and material adversity.

This coming of age, bildungsroman narrative, “The Girl in the Tree”, explores **the idea** that moving from youth to experience involves the loss of childhood innocence and the necessity to face reality.

This bildungsroman narrative charts the movement of the narrator from childhood innocence to the reality of adult experience and **suggests** that this transition involves the loss of youthful dreams.

This coming of age story, “The Girl in the Tree”, **focuses on** the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood in which the narrator is forced to accept poverty, betrayal and the loss of youthful dreams.

 **You could read the text as a feminist critic but would you be able to draw on sufficient evidence in your essay? E.g.** You could focus on the patriarchal ideology underpinning the father’s behaviour, on the man/woman binary, on the performative roles the father expects the girl to play in the family but you need to ask if there is sufficient supporting evidence for a five paragraph essay.

**Put name of text and genre in opening sentence; use inverted commas correctly; try to use the word “idea” or “theme”.**

**The Girl in the Tree –possible essay response (**Highlighting development of central idea.)

This bildungsroman memoir conveys the ideas that moving from childhood to adulthood is a traumatic process, especially when an egocentric ‘child’ is forced to face the reality of everyday life rather than inhabit a world of unrealistic dreams. The child, the eponymous girl, lives in a drought-stricken rural area with her economically struggling parents but she dreams of a glamorous life as a lady in the sophisticated city. She is retrospectively bitter about her father’s attitude and actions, failing to forgive him for cutting down her refuge, her tree. The text implies that the girl must accept the responsibilities and hardships of adult life; she cannot daydream in the fantasy world of her tree forever.

The structure of this coming of age memoir is underpinned by the twin binaries youth/age and dream/reality. Although youth is usually the preferable condition, here age and experience are shown to be the more pragmatic choice. The symbolic tree represents the unrealistic dreams and expectations of the girl, *“The tree housed every world that was conjured up in the under-stimulated mind of an isolated child*”. *It is “The tree. My tree. My place.”* The girlis wrenched away from practicing her “*best Holly Golightly accent*” and dreaming of a glamorous life in the city to be reminded by her father of her responsibility to help her mother with the housework. The father’s later betrayal initially seems to be unnaturally cruel but he recognizes that his family desperately needs money from the harvesting of the tree. The child’s individualist position is ideologically weak when contrasted to the survivalist outlook of the father. Sometimes a young person’s dreams are selfishly unrealistic.

The first person narration, internally focalized on the girl, does not necessarily position the reader to commiserate with her juvenile attitude. She appears to be an unreliable narrator. As the framed narrative moves from the present to the unhappy past, the reader recognizes that a girl who lies across the branches of the tree and dreams of the city rather than helping her mother with the housework may be self-centred rather than in a morally privileged position. The superficiality of her desire to live in “*a place of sophisticated men and women who lunched at cafes and drank cocktails”* rather than look at *the* visual image of *“the lines of dirt that used to gather under*” her “*uneven nails*” is not only hedonistic but impractical. She is old enough to understand drought and a broken marriage but not mature enough to show compassion for her parents’ circumstances. The reader is positioned to instead agree with the father’s rational and reasonable perspective.

The loss of the tree symbolizes the end of the girl’s childhood escapism into dreams and literature. The father had previously attempted to lure the girl from the tree in order to fulfil her domestic responsibilities. Now he pulls her away from “*the sinister attic of Bronte’s Thornfield Hall”* with some money to see a movie, which is fittingly another form of escapism. The father hopes that the girl is “*old enough now”* to understand and bear the loss of the tree; “*the anger will pass*”. The girl, instead, sees the lopping of the tree as an enormous betrayal for which she is not sure she ever forgave her father. In a series of auditory images, she hears the chainsaw struggling, wailing as it “*cut through*” her “*childhood*”. The concrete reality of a chainsaw dashes her childish hopes which metaphorically fell away “*into silence*”. Although the reader initially commiserates with the girl’s loss, the necessity of the father’s decision cannot be disputed.

Significantly, the characters are unnamed in order to emphasize the universality of the memoir’s central idea that ‘coming of age’ is a struggle. The girl is represented as being in an intermediate position, neither a child nor an adult. The father and mother are archetypal characters with mythic gender qualities; that is, the father is a little demanding and dominating, “*Nothing was ever good enough for my father”*, while the mother is represented as being tearfully protective and emotional. Initially it seems that the reader is being positioned to dislike this usually uncharitable and demanding father but the reader concludes that the father’s dour character is formed by adversity. On the other hand, the daughter is represented as being particularly self-centred and hedonistic as the references to pleasure-seeking Holly Golightly in “*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*” attest. Furthermore, the girl does not seem to have learned from her experiences as she continues to write of “*betrayal”* and “*heartbreak*”. Forgiveness and understanding would have been preferable.

Age is undoubtedly the most significant cultural idea explored in a text which upholds the dominant world view that young people must accept responsibilities when entering adulthood. The girl had developed an unrealistic world view in order to break free from her emotionally and physically inhospitable environment but the text positions the reader to side with the pragmatic survivalist ideology of the father. The process of moving from childhood into the responsibilities, and sometimes harsh realities, of adulthood should cause young people to rethink their values, attitudes and beliefs but the memoir emphasizes the incipient selfish hedonism of both the girl and the grown woman. The ‘girl’ does not seem to have grown or changed. This is in stark contrast the father’s strenuous and worthy attempts to provide for his family.