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**Opening paragraph**

1. Theme statement
2. Relevant precis of text
3. Tease out elements of theme statement which can be developed in body paragraphs

**The Spider and the Fly**

Up in the dusty corner of the room where the dim light of the fading day hardly reached, a spider sat utterly unmoving at the centre of its intricate web. A fly, tired of buzzing against the dirty, cracked window pane, started to explore the room, and moved towards the dark corner.

Down below, a wasted man stirred feverishly on an unmade bed. He tried to say something, but the words wouldn’t come out of his parched lips. Not that it would have made any difference – there was no-one to listen to him. He’d been a bright young man, born in the countryside, surrounded by groves of coconut palms and the emerald green of rich paddy fields. His family had worked hard and never had much money but, looking back, life had been happy. Everyone in the village was his friend, and he’d fallen in love with the sweetest girl, his neighbour’s daughter with whom he had grown up.

Then the blow had struck; drought and some terrible disease that had got the few poor rice plants and turned them black and rotten, reduced the village to utter poverty. He was an ambitious young man. He wanted money and he wanted it fast so that he could marry his girl and take her away from this suffering. He thought the streets of the great city were paved with gold, so off he set, a young man eager to make his fortune.

Of course, the great city was not as he had thought. Life there was hard. Too many people driven from the countryside were fighting to make a living. They survived – just – in dirty little rooms or even on the streets, doing an odd job here or there. The descent was easy and fast. Misery led to mixing with the petty criminals who found it easier to make a living by illegal than legal means. This in turn led to an underworld of drugs, and sadly, inevitably, to sickness and desertion.

A last great spasm shook the body of the man. His life’s troubles were over.

The fly flew into the corner. It hit something. It couldn’t move. It struggled wildly but the foul sticky substance held it.

The spider moved slowly from the centre of its web.

**Focusing on specific details in a literary text**

1. Write essay planning notes in response to the story. Employ the following reading strategies in order to construct meaning from the text:

* Binary oppositions
* Narration
* Text structure
* Metaphor and symbolism
* Representation
* Ideology

1. Write an opening paragraph which includes a clear theme statement/justifiable interpretation

**Which of these seem MOST relevant?**

* **Man’s inhumanity to man** – the importance of kindness, compassion and empathy.
* **The importance of love and human sexuality** to human happiness.
* **The dangers of totalitarianism**
* **Man’s need for individuality and independence** for self-growth
* **Language** as a means of thought control
* The necessity to **treat all people equally** regardless of race, religion, sexual identity, gender
* **The dangers of technological advancement**
* **The importance of being attuned to nature**
* **The importance of maintaining individual human dignity**
* **The necessity for humans to accept mortality**
* **The struggles inherent in growing from child to adult**
* **Power corrupts**
* **The effect of capitalism on an individual**
* **The importance of adapting to change**
* **The emptiness of attaining a false dream**
* **Loneliness as a destructive force**
* **The importance of not making unfounded assumptions about people**
* **The importance of overcoming fear, weakness or vice**

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**Reading for Inference, understanding symbolism**

Inferring is the process of deducing ideas not directly stated in the text…..it is the key skill required in literary interpretation.

**Three levels of meaning for blood in Macbeth: (**Miss, you’re reading too much intoit….)

So there are different levels of meaning that need to be accessed in texts. We can comprehend on **literal, inferential** and **evaluative levels**, for instance. The **literal** meaning is right there in the text (e.g. blood flows and stains Macbeth’s hands); **inferential** meaning is sometimes compared to ‘reading between the lines’, working out meaning by filling the gaps in the text by working out information the text does not directly state (e.g. It is inferred that Lady Macbeth’s “*Out, damned spot!”* speech shows her trying to scrub blood from her hands; blood is connected to guilt; she is so guilt -ridden over Duncan’s murder that she has gradually been driven insane). At the **evaluative or thematic** level, the reader draws conclusions about meaning (e.g. blood is used symbolically throughout the play to show that guilt prevents both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth from fully enjoying the power they crave; and more universally, man cannot escape responsibility for crimes against his fellow man and/or attaining false dreams does not ensure fulfilment.) These themes and ideologies are not directly stated in the text; they are conclusions arrived at by readers through a process of generalizing from the specific details of the text and through deployment of a range of t-c and w-c-c reading strategies.

Attributing **metaphorical or symbolic** significance to an element of the text involves reading the text on more than one level – seeing textual elements as having meanings other than their surface/literal meanings. E.g. Blood symbolizes the guilt that sits like a permanent stain on the consciences of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, one that hounds them to their graves. (Spark Notes) Symbols may enhance the impact of a text by attaching additional meaning to an object in a poetic way rather than just saying it outright.

**Consider the short story, “The Spider and the Fly”. Consider the**

1. Literal meaning of spider and fly
2. Inferred and symbolic meanings
3. Thematic meaning

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | literal | Inferred and symbolic | thematic |
| spider | spider | City/danger/ill-health/poverty | The emptiness of attaining a false dream  The importance of love and friendship to human happiness  Loneliness as a destructive force |
| fly | fly | Man/vulnerable/weak/easily tempted |

Readers construct symbolic meanings for textual elements by observing repetitions and patterns within the text and drawing on knowledge outside the text, such as commonly used symbols. E.g. In “Crow” there is a pattern to the repeated appearances of the crow (which readers already know something about from their own experience). The colour black is also a commonly used symbol in society and literature.

**THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG INTERPRETATIONS, ONLY ONES THAT MAKE MORE SENSE.**

**The Spider and the Fly**

The invited meaning which may be constructed from the allegorical short story, “The Spider and the Fly”, is that false dreams may ultimately prove to be empty. A young man leaves the friendship and love of family and friends in the drought stricken countryside to make his fortune in the city. Instead, he remains in poverty and misery, slips into crime and, finally, falls into illness and a lonely death. The framing text provides a parallel situation in which an unsuspecting fly is lured into a spider’s web only to be killed by the spider. The text also suggests that the maintenance of love and friendship is more importance than the pursuit of material wealth.

The key binaries on which the idea that the city provides false hope is structured are wealth/poverty, country/city and love/loneliness. The young man had begun life in the verdant countryside, “*surrounded by groves of coconut palms and the emerald green of rich paddy fields*” but in the time of drought a disease which “*got the few poor rice plants and turned them black and rotten*”, he is tempted to move to a city where he thought “*the streets….were paved with gold*”. He “*wanted the money and he wanted it fast”* so that he could take the girl he loved out of poverty. Unfortunately, his “*descent was fast*” as he slipped into a world of illegality, drugs, sickness, desertion and death.

The idea ………………………….enhanced by symbolism.

The man’s life experiences are symbolized by the maneuverings of the spider and the fly who play out their roles in the dim light of a dark corner above the man on his lonely death bed.