

## Task for *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*

### Elements of a short story

#### 1. Character

There are only two or three characters in a short story so it is important to bring them to life by making them as realistic as possible, at least in a naturalistic story (in a genre story, the characters will have to meet the conventions of the genre). This means giving each of the characters a distinctive 'voice' by what they say and how they say it, showing them in action and describing their appearance in sufficient detail to create a mental image for readers.

#### Some preparatory exercises:

- Write a short passage of dialogue for your main character. Try to create a distinctive way of speaking that gives a unique 'voice' to the character. Try to match the character's way of speaking with a personality trait (have another look at Bruce Trelfo's dialogue with Carl outside the Wattle Beach café. Would you recognise him if you heard him talking in the main street at Wattle Beach? His attitude to young women and his arrogance are both obvious in the way he talks).
- Again, write a pared-down scene that you think could be included in your short story involving one of your characters. Then, add some descriptive words to make the character more vivid.
- Remember, the character must change as a result of what happens in the story. You should already have included this in your author's note. The change can be shown through action but also through the character's thoughts.

#### 2. Setting

The setting for a story can perhaps be little more than a backdrop for the action. However, it would be better to think of the setting as an active element in the meaning of a story. This is certainly the case with *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*. The story begins in a suburb in the city, but this is only a prelude to the trip to Wattle Beach which will be an important setting for the next phase of Carl and Harley's lives. Carl intuitively understands this: 'Carl was fifteen years old when he stepped off the bus at Wattle Beach. He'd have his sixteenth birthday here, he knew it.' (p. 16)

In fact, within the Wattle Beach setting there are several places that carry meaning for Carl:

- Aunt Beryl's home
- the bus stop at Nugent's grocery store
- the Bowls Club
- the café in the main street

Wattle Beach is also important to Carl's growing sense of self because it is here that he learns a great deal more about his family's history. It becomes a pivotal place for Carl. It is the place from which he tries to move forward to the next two important (and symbolic) settings in the

story, and to which he returns when confronted with various challenges. It is the place where he finally has to decide whether to move forward in his life or retreat to the past. Finally, a very important setting for Carl is Wiseman's Cove itself. It represents a new beginning, a place of love and of freedom from the past.

In addition to linking setting to character, an author has to describe a setting in enough detail to give readers a sense of place. Here are some examples from *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*:

- The country on the road to Wattle Beach: 'The dust at the road's edge grew whiter, the trees shorter and the matted native grasses retreated to defensive clumps on the desolate, bone-dry ground.' (p. 16)
- The café in Wattle Beach: 'Metal chairs and wobbly tables, empty cans and ice-cream wrappers belching from a solitary rubbish bin.' (p. 33)
- The beach at Wiseman's Cove: 'Here, under a wisp of cloud sprayed across the sky, the blue and gold grandeur of the ocean beach opened up before them.' (p. 181)

### **Preparatory exercises:**

- Write several descriptions of the setting(s) in your story, using the above as a model.
- Reflect on whether any aspects of the setting(s) in your story have a symbolic meaning.

## **3. Plot**

Plot is the re-arrangement of the events of the writer's recount to conform to the conventions of narrative structure. Some of these conventions include:

- The need for conflict or tension of some sort. In *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*, for example, Carl experiences emotional tension within himself but also conflict with others.
- A rising action to create suspense and hold the reader's interest.
- The resolution of the conflict at a point of crisis (the climax).
- And, in a coming-of-age story, the action of the story has to produce a change in the main character.

Here are some suggestions to help you to plan your short story:

- Identify the source of conflict in the recount. Is it a power conflict (e.g. parent and child), a clash of values, a fear to be overcome or something else?
- Identify the characters involved (in a short story it would be best to limit the number of characters to two).
- Begin the story in the middle (this is known as 'media res'), then move to and fro between a back story and the story in the present.

### **A preparatory exercise:**

Draw a graph of the action of your short story, showing the rising action and labelling the various parts (complication, crisis, etc.).

#### **4. Method of narration**

You will need to make some choices about how you want to tell your short story. Here are some ideas that you can discuss with your teacher:

- First or third person? The recount is written in first person ('I') but it might be best to write the story in third person. However, as the author, you should still make your main character the 'focalising' character and tell the story from that character's perspective.
- Past or present tense? It is probably easier to tell the story in the past tense. Often when student writers begin in the present tense they lapse later into the past tense anyway. However, any back story will be told in the past tense.
- Showing and telling: You will need to 'tell' the events in the story to move the action forward in an efficient way. However, you must also try to 'show' aspects of the story by describing characters' appearance, through the action of the story and through the use of dialogue. For example:
  - 'He barked an answer' instead of 'He was angry'.
  - 'She moved stealthily' instead of 'She was untrustworthy'.
  - 'Dark clouds threatening thunder and lightning hung low over the hills' instead of 'It was a gloomy day'.