**HOLES by Louis Sachar**

**Lesson 2 – Chapters 3 & 4**

Taken from http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english

Character

**If you are analysing a character, you should look at what the writer tells you outright and what you can read between the lines. This is known as explicit and implicit meaning.**

**Introduction**

This Lesson covers:

* [**Explicit meaning**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english/reading/character/revision/2/)
* [**Implicit meaning**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english/reading/character/revision/4/)
* [**The PEE technique**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english/reading/character/revision/6/)
* [**Using quotations and useful phrases**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english/reading/character/revision/7/)

**Explicit meaning**

Something that is explicit is obvious, out in the open, plainly stated and up-front. Explicit meaning is the easiest to pick out from a piece of text. Sometimes a writer wants it to be obvious that a character is good or bad or cruel or generous or mean and so on.

Take a look at this extract:

Jim Wellings was not a man to be glanced at. But nor was he a man to be stared at. To say he was a big man is like calling Buckingham Palace a big house. He was a man who filled whatever space there was. He wasn't fat, though; just big.

Even from this short extract, we can tell a lot about Jim.

**Explicit meaning**

**TASK**

Now consider the following extract. Read through it carefully and note down THREE things you think it tells us about the main character.



He (Stanley) didn't have many friends at home. He was overweight and the kids at his middle school often teased him about his size. Even his teachers sometimes made cruel comments without realising it. On his last day of school, his math teacher, Mrs Bell, taught ratios. As an example, she chose the heaviest kid in the class and the lightest kid in the class, and had them weigh themselves. Stanley weighed three times as much as the other boy. Mrs Bell wrote the ratio on the board, 3:1, unaware of how much embarrassment she had caused both of them (page 7).

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**Question**

What does this extract show us about the main character?

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**Answer**

Stanley is another big male, but it is clear that the writer wants us to react differently to him than we did to Jim Wellings in the earlier extract.

Stanley is a lonely boy, because he "didn't have many friends at home". He is bullied and teased, even by adults. The fact that the teacher causes him "embarrassment" by showing him up in front of the class proves that he feels uncomfortable about his weight.

**Implicit meaning**

Something that is implicit is inferred - it is suggested, but not actually said. Implicit meaning can be a little harder to find than explicit meaning. Writers like to draw you into their text and get you involved. It's up to you to make your mind up about a character, just as it is when you meet someone in real life.

The clues you need to make up your mind about a character are all in the text. Look for the following:

* What the character **says**.
* What the character **does**.
* What others **say** about them.
* How others **react** to them.

Take another look at one of the extracts from 'Holes'. Stanley has just arrived at the prison camp. What can you tell about the character of Mr Sir, the man in the cowboy hat, from reading between the lines? Some important phrases have been put in bold to give you a few clues.

**A man was sitting with his feet up on a desk.** He turned his head when Stanley and the guard entered, but otherwise didn't move. Even though he was inside, **he wore sunglasses and a cowboy hat**. He also held a can of cream soda, and the sight of it made Stanley even more aware of his own thirst.

He waited while the bus guard gave the man some papers to sign.

"That's a lot of sunflower seeds," the bus guard said.

Stanley noticed a burlap sack filled with sunflower seeds on the floor next to the desk.

"**I quit smoking last month**," said the man in the cowboy hat. He had **a tattoo of a rattlesnake on his arm**, and as he signed his name, the snake's rattle seemed to wiggle. "I used to smoke a pack a day. Now I eat a sack of these every week." (page 12)

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On the surface, this extract doesn't tell us much about Mr Sir, but you've probably begun to **form an opinion** about him. If we read between the lines, we can tell that he likes to make an impression and wants to be seen to be in charge. He is sitting "with his feet up on a desk" and has made his appearance even more striking by wearing sunglasses and a cowboy hat indoors.

Sometimes people who act like this can like power a bit too much, and can be bullies. Could Mr Sir be a bully?

When we consider the can of cream soda, we can say that the fact that Mr Sir fails to offer either Stanley or the bus driver anything to drink after their nine-hour, cross-desert journey suggests that he is a **selfish** man. That he keeps his own drink in full view of Stanley and the bus driver further suggests that he is cruel and likes to see other people's discomfort.

We learn that Mr Sir stopped smoking recently. We could then expect him to be bad- and short-tempered. The tattoo of a rattlesnake, a dangerous reptile that is supposed to have a bad temper, adds to this impression. The sunflower seeds are, we are led to believe, there to help him as an alternative to cigarettes, but we don't get the feeling of optimism that they'll be successful.

So there we have it; **Mr Sir is a bad-tempered, selfish bully!**

**The PEE technique**

As well as having lots of ideas, you need to explain them clearly. One really effective way of doing this is to use **PEE**.

**P**oint

**E**vidence

**E**xplanation

So if you're answering a question, state your point, back it up with a piece of evidence and then explain it.

Try out the PEE method. Here's an extract from 'Holes' about Stanley and the prison work camp.

**TASK**

**Find two features of Stanley's character and explain how they are suggested. Write your answer down and then compare it to ours.**

Stanley and his parents had tried to pretend that he was just going away to camp for a while, just like rich kids do. When Stanley was younger he used to play with stuffed animals, and pretend the animals were at camp. Camp Fun and Games he called it. Sometimes he'd have them play soccer with a marble. Other times they'd run an obstacle course, or go bungee jumping off a table, tied to broken rubber bands. Now Stanley tried to pretend he was going to Camp Fun and Games. Maybe he'd make some friends, he thought. At least he'd get to swim in the lake (page 6-7).

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**Point:**

1.

Stanley is a lonely boy.

2.

He is willing to make the best of a bad situation.

**Evidence:**

1.

The writer suggests that Stanley spent long periods, when younger, playing alone with stuffed toys.

2.

Stanley thinks that he will have the chance to make friends and 'at least he'd get to swim in the lake'.

**Explanation:**

1.

The writer lists the sort of games Stanley played with his stuffed toys at 'Camp Fun and Games' in a way that suggests he was playing on his own - the toys became his friends.

2.

He is going to a boy's prison work camp, but, instead of thinking about the horrors he might face, he shows that he is hopeful and ready to make the best of things.

**Using quotations and useful phrases**

When quoting from a text, remember to:

* Use quotation marks.
* Quote accurately.
* Quotes of three words or less can be used in the sentence you're writing - for example ...**when the writer talks about the "futility of life" he means**...
* Longer quotations need to be included on a line of their own and with a space before it (known as an indent).
* Short, well-chosen quotations are better than long, vague ones.

Remember that certain words and phrases are helpful when you're explaining an idea in some detail, especially if you are commenting on implicit meaning. The following list shows some of those phrases.

* this implies
* this suggests
* which gives the impression that
* possibly
* perhaps
* this indicates that
* this shows
* obviously

Some other words and phrases that may be useful are those that help move your argument on. These are called connectives. Here are some examples:

* however
* therefore
* in contrast
* because
* but
* and
* furthermore
* also
* then
* at first
* later
* as well as