

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES

**“Short Stories by Henry
Lawson”**

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AREA 1:

READING & THE STUDY OF TEXTS:

SHORT STORIES BY HENRY LAWSON

Chapter 1

GENRE

1.1 The Short Story

The late nineteenth century was a period in which artists and writers began to challenge traditional forms, structures and themes. Lawson challenges conventional plot structure by failing to provide clear and positive resolutions in his stories. Lawson's purpose is not simply to entertain his readers in the style of more traditional short story writers, such as Charles Dickens and Edgar Allen Poe. Lawson offers realistic depictions of Australian bush life rather than fantasies. He candidly and seriously presents hardships and pain in people's lives and reveals human nature. Lawson combines his realist approach with some entertaining elements, most evident in *The Loaded Dog*.

Lawson is noted as the first Australian writer to truly present the Australian bush experience through Australian eyes at a crucial time, when a sense of nationalism was growing in Australia at the time of Federation. Lawson portrays the loneliness and difficulties Australians faced in the bush offset by fleeting moments of happiness. Though his stories display pessimism and sadness, Lawson's characters are not depicted as heroes or losers, merely battlers who persist on their journey through life and are saved by friendship and stoicism.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURE

Lawson's stories have a simple, steady tone. The narrative is restrained and of moderate intensity. The steady, even tone of the narrative mirrors the monotonous quality of bush life which the stories depict and reproduces a clear sense of the plight of his bush characters. They exist without great hope for the future and persist with no relief from their chores and regular routines. The structure of Lawson's stories is designed to arouse interest and sympathy, but not sentimentality. This contrasts sharply with traditional, romantic Victorian writers, who were widely read at the time of Lawson's publications.

Lawson's stories may seem to lack structure because plot pattern is not well defined or conventional. Most of his stories begin with rather bland openings and end with subtlety. The narrative tension of the stories is mild. However, the stories are each shaped around an incident, as in *The Union Buries Its Dead*, or a conflict between characters and their environment, as in *Water Them Geraniums*. Some stories follow a more conventional plot structure, including *The Loaded Dog*, *The Drover's Wife* and *Brighten's Sister-in-Law*. At times, Lawson employs dialogue to propel the action in such stories as *The Drover's Wife*.

Lawson employs two types of narrator. In *Telling Mrs. Baker*, *The Union Buries Its Dead* and the Joe Wilson stories, the narrator is a character who tells the story in first person. In this way, Lawson reveals the nature of his protagonists. In contrast, Lawson uses a third person narrator in *The Loaded Dog*, *The Drover's Wife* and *The Bush Undertaker*. This type of narrator serves to report the events in the story as a spectator and is more objective towards the subject matter.