

**TSSM**<sup>TM</sup>  
Creating VCE Success

SAMPLE

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES  
**The Golden Age**

Text guide by: Kimberley Cunningham

Copyright © TSSM 2017

TSSM

ACN 099 422 670

ABN 54 099 422 670

**A:** Level 14, 474 Flinders Street Melbourne VIC 3000

**T:** 1300 134 518

**F:** 03 90784354

**W:** [tssm.com.au](http://tssm.com.au)

**E:** [info@tssm.com.au](mailto:info@tssm.com.au)

SAMPLE

## Contents

AUTHOR NOTES .....	5
Written Works .....	5
HISTORICAL CONTEXT .....	6
1950s Perth and Polio .....	6
Budapest, Hungary .....	6
GENRE .....	7
Historical Fiction .....	7
Romance .....	7
STRUCTURE .....	8
Features and Conventions .....	8
STYLE .....	9
Use of Character .....	9
Symbolism .....	9
Poetry .....	9
SETTING .....	10
The Golden Age .....	10
Freedom and Restriction .....	10
PLOT SUMMARY .....	11
Chapter 1: Light .....	11
Chapter 2: The Golden Age .....	11
Chapter 3: Elsa .....	11
Chapter 4: Cockatoos .....	11
Chapter 5: Frank's Vocation .....	12
Chapter 6: The Poet .....	12
Chapter 7: The Trains .....	13
Chapter 8: The First Time Frank Saw Elsa .....	13
Chapter 9: The Dark Night .....	13
Chapter 10: The Loving Body .....	14
Chapter 11: Bellbirds .....	14
Chapter 12: Angel Wings .....	14
Chapter 13: Meyer Walks Home .....	14
Chapter 14: Margaret in Her Garden .....	15
Chapter 15: Christmas .....	15
Chapter 16: The Veranda .....	16
Chapter 17: The Sea .....	16
Chapter 18: A Long Cool Drink .....	16
Chapter 19: Lidja .....	16
Chapter 20: The Queen .....	17
Chapter 21: Ida and Meyer .....	17
Chapter 22: The Concert .....	17
Chapter 23: Albert .....	18
Chapter 24: Ann Lee .....	18
Chapter 25: Blue Air .....	18
Chapter 26: The Third Country .....	18
Chapter 27: Poetry .....	19
Chapter 28: The Hunch .....	19

Chapter 29: The Call.....	19
Chapter 30: The Separation .....	19
Chapter 31: The Visit .....	20
New York .....	20
<b>CHARACTER PROFILES</b> .....	21
Major Characters .....	21
Minor Characters .....	23
Relationships between Characters .....	24
<b>THEMES AND ISSUES</b> .....	25
Aloneness/Isolation .....	25
Freedom/Outside .....	26
Love .....	26
The Other .....	26
Family .....	27
<b>IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS</b> .....	28
<b>CREATIVE WRITING</b> .....	36
The Creative Writing Process.....	37
Common Pitfalls .....	38
The Written Explanation .....	39
Creative Writing Ideas to Consider .....	39
<b>ANALYTICAL WRITING</b> .....	40
Understanding and Responding to Analytical Essay Topics.....	40
Essay Planning.....	42
<b>SAMPLE ANALYTICAL ESSAY TOPICS</b> .....	43
<b>FINAL EXAMINATION ADVICE</b> .....	44
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	45
References used and References for Students .....	45

## AUTHOR NOTES

Born on 24 July 1948, Joan Elizabeth London is an Australian author known for her short stories, novels and screenplays. She studied English and French at the University of Western Australia. London has taught English and currently works as a bookseller, living in Fremantle, Western Australia.

### **Written Works**

‘Joan London is the author of two prize-winning collections of stories, *Sister Ships*, which won *The Age* Book of the Year in 1986, and *Letter to Constantine*, which won the Steele Rudd Award in 1994 and the West Australian Premier’s Award for Fiction. These stories have been published in one volume, as *The New Dark Age*. Her first novel, *Gilgamesh*, won *The Age* Book of the Year for Fiction in 2002 and was long-listed for the Orange Prize and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Her second novel, *The Good Parents*, won the 2009 Christina Stead Prize for fiction. Joan London’s books have all been published internationally to critical acclaim. *The Golden Age* is her third novel.’ (Biographical details, *The Golden Age*).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The dual nature of *The Golden Age* presents two very different settings and relevant historical contexts. The current narrative in the story is set in 1950s Perth, Australia at the end of a polio epidemic. There are regular flashbacks and sections devoted to the story of Frank Gold's experience of hiding in a ceiling in Hungary, before moving with his parents as a refugee to Australia.

### ***1950s Perth and Polio***

Australia, especially Perth, had been ravaged by major polio epidemics throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Approximately 70,000 people were affected. Polio, medically called poliomyelitis, first arrived in Australia in the late nineteenth century. It caused great fear due to the lack of understanding about how it occurred, how it was transmitted, the impact it had on the human body and, ultimately, how to treat patients. In 1955, an American, Dr Jonas Salk, announced that he had successfully trialled a vaccine and it was quickly made available to those at risk of catching the disease. The vaccine was highly effective and rapidly led to the end of the outbreaks that had been ravaging the predominantly younger generation for decades. Some common treatments included the iron lung, a large contraption that assisted patients to breathe and the immobilisation of patients in the Thomas Brace that left sufferers spreadeagled.

### ***Budapest, Hungary***

Some short sections of the text, predominantly narrated through the character of Ida, show the reality of life in Budapest in the lead up to World War II for the Jewish population. In Hungary, as in areas throughout Austria and Germany, many Jewish individuals, were sent away to labour camps. There were heavy restrictions placed on the Jewish population and many Jewish people went into hiding. Budapest was also extensively bombed and the Jewish population sent to internment, concentration and death camps. There were very few survivors.

## GENRE

Understanding the genre of a novel allows the audience to deepen their understanding of the message and meaning being conveyed by the author. Primarily, *The Golden Age* is a historical fiction, though it can also be perceived as a romance novel, with innocent love forming between the two young main characters. Finally, it is important to acknowledge how the inclusion of poetry shapes and changes the story.

### ***Historical Fiction***

*The Golden Age* is a well-researched fictional story based on historical events, with some degree of accuracy. London completed extensive interviews with a number of polio sufferers and included many of these onset stories and experiences with recovery into *The Golden Age*. As historical fiction, there are references made to real events of the time: the bombing in Budapest, the royal visit and how polio was managed. The encounters and stories from these real events are, however, fictionalised:

### ***Romance***

Though the romance in *The Golden Age* can be viewed as a matter of survival, it is evident that Frank and Elsa fall heavily in love. There is also the rekindling of relationships between Meyer and Ida and the sparks of passion never acted on by Meyer and Sister Olive Penny. As a romance, *The Golden Age* focuses on the stories and encounters between two individuals. Symbolism is also used throughout the text to reflect the growing relationships. Frank and Elsa's physical recovery parallels their emotional relationship and bond, along with their growing independence from their families and dependence on each other.

## STRUCTURE

*The Golden Age* is divided into 32 chapters. The first 31 are numbered chronologically, whereas the final chapter, simply labelled “New York”, acts as a post-script. The first fourteen chapters are devoted to characterisations of the different characters, though each separate story shapes the audience’s understanding of Frank, whose story is the primary focus.

### *Features and Conventions*

Feature/Convention	Explanation
Poetry	Frank and Sullivan’s poetry is interspersed throughout the entire novel. This allows the reader to further understand what is going through the minds of both boys.
Titled chapters	Each of the first 31 chapters is both numbered and titled. This allows London to shape the reader’s understanding prior to reading the chapter and to distinguish between characters, time and place.
Final Chapter	The final chapter is not listed as a post-script, but represents a significant jump in time and the reader is made aware of how the stories panned out for Elsa and Frank. This removes much of the sentiment and hopefulness that would remain without the final chapter.



## STYLE

The story of *The Golden Age* is told in a gentle and romantic manner. Although the book is filled with horrible, depressing and at times outright harrowing stories, they are intertwined with a growing love story filled with hope. The darkness of life for polio victims and their families is overshadowed by the actions of the kind and compassionate nurses, the clear inclusion of everyday elements of childhood and life simply going on around the characters. London fluidly strikes a balance between these elements, showing compassion for all of the characters. *The Golden Age* is written in the third person omniscient; the narrator knows all and can be inside the mind of each character. This is pivotal to the way in which London constructed the text, using snapshots of characters to build the larger story.

### ***Use of Character***

London uses characters in an intentional, yet subtle manner. Each of the snapshots she provides throughout Chapters 1-14 allows the audience to develop a sense of time and place in order to understand the extent to which polio affected society and individuals throughout Perth. She also captures the background of Frank's family, without ever pointing out explicitly the specific horrors they encountered. The portrait she paints of the individuals in and around the Golden Age home also carefully weaves the background information and story of Elsa and Frank, their recovery and their love story.

### ***Symbolism***

The symbolism throughout *The Golden Age* is not particularly subtle. Birds are continually referenced showing the pain and suffering of being caged, versus the freedom of the outside world. In the same way, 'outside' is constantly referenced as a place of reflection, peace and freedom for all of the characters, not just those living at the Golden Age. Music too is symbolic of health, life and freedom. It is predominantly used in reference to the Gold family, but as the music returns to heal their relationships, it flows down into the children at the home, offering healing to all; even the strangers around the home that make their way to listen to the concert.

### ***Poetry***

Another stylistic feature that London includes throughout *The Golden Age* is poetry. She uses the poetry to reflect how times and understanding have changed; that poetry no longer needs to rhyme, but also to deepen the reader's understanding of Frank and his deep emotions and reflections on life. These break the stories apart and show how Frank is constantly living in a world, free, outside of his body and the constraints polio has placed upon him. The sense of hope - even though often the poems lack hope - that London builds through these inclusions rely on the stylistic nature of her writing.

## SETTING

The setting of *The Golden Age* is paramount to how the story unfolds. The Golden Age home, though filled with love and compassion for the young children recovering there, acts as a cage to all of the children, family and staff. There are constant references to the contrast between the outside, versus the inside, along with the discussions of characters' homes and Budapest. There is a complex relationship between the numerous settings and how these influence the characters' lives.

### ***The Golden Age***

The majority of the story is told from the setting of a converted pub, the Golden Age; now a home for children recovering from polio. The home has boys' and girls' wings, plus a babies' room. The nurses live upstairs and there is space for physiotherapy, as well as a school large enough for day students to attend for treatment and education. Though it is clearly stated that the home is always unlocked and parents are free to visit when they have time, there is clearly a social divide between those in the home and the outside world.

### ***Freedom and Restriction***

Much of the setting is described in terms of the freedom it provides or the restrictions it creates. Frank talks about the restrictiveness of the home and his need to get out each evening for fresh air, along with the confines of hiding in Budapest and his short experience in the ceiling. He strongly sees the connection between his current experiences, the people living in the iron lungs and his experience in Budapest. Within the description of the setting is also the individual setting for many of the children; locked into wheelchairs, crutches or callipers with splints limiting the children's movements overnight. The constant restrictions begin to dissipate throughout the novel as the setting incorporates greater freedom; the trip to the beach where the children can move more freely, the summer nights spent outside and the concert held in the quadrangle. The novel shifts towards outside locations that depict freedom.

## PLOT SUMMARY

### ***Chapter 1: Light***

*The Golden Age* commences with an introduction to the protagonist, Frank Gold; quickly establishing his physical disabilities and his presence in a hospital with which he is exceptionally familiar. London shows Frank to be distanced from the younger children in the polio rehabilitation clinic, stuck somewhere between the younger children and adult he feels like.

### ***Chapter 2: The Golden Age***

At thirteen years of age, Frank had entered the facility The Golden Age Children's Polio Convalescent Home, as his New Australian parents both worked and it was unsuitable for him to be housed with the adults. The patients in the facility were from all over Western Australia and were, except for Elsa Briggs, generally much younger than he was. Chapter Two focuses on describing the suburb surrounding the facility and the converted pub as the central setting for the story. The chapter finishes with the line that forms the pivotal element to Frank's experiences: 'Polio had taken his legs, but given him his vocation: poet', (p.8).

### ***Chapter 3: Elsa***

Chapter three focuses on introducing Elsa, the central romantic figure within the story. She is introduced in the babies' room, tending to the crying babies as she has always done with her younger sisters. With compassion and clear kindness, she helps to settle the young baby, Rayma, by talking about the baby's mother but also comforting herself in the process. Elsa also establishes the distance and loss between the children at Golden Age and their parents; how it is essential to learn to survive without your parents.

### ***Chapter 4: Cockatoos***

London further establishes the disconnect and divide between the patients at the Golden Age and the surrounding suburbs. The Cockatoos, flying freely in parallel to the Golds, emphasise the isolation of the children segregated in their own beds to eat dinner. The reader is also introduced to Frank's parents, Ida and Meyer, and a small part of their journey to Australia. Ida strongly believes that her life and their journey to Australia is 'ill fated,' (p.14). Though the family had rented the house with a piano, Ida no longer played the piano, being 'a bird who refused to sing' (p.15).

### **Chapter 5: Frank's Vocation**

Chapter Five commences with Frank discussing how he always felt he had a vocation already; he was just yet to discover that it was being a poet. However, he also points out that he does not like to talk about his vocation just as he does not like to talk about his past in Hungary – the first hint of the ordeal he underwent before arriving in Australia. Frank reflects on his need to be outside, not only to connect with the habits his parents formed whilst living in Perth, but also with the time spent on the boat journey to Australia.

The reader is first introduced to Sullivan Backhouse, though only briefly in reference to the poetry; it is also the first foreshadowing of Sullivan's death and reveals Frank's understanding of the role that death plays in living.

### **Chapter 6: The Poet**

Commencing with what life was like in the IDB with the young adults prior to moving to The Golden Age, Chapter 6 begins to piece together numerous elements of the story. A large section of the chapter is devoted to explaining Sullivan, how he came to be residing inside an iron lung and the impact of his story on Frank. London also reveals the battle of aloneness and the strength that characters like Frank, Sister Addie and Sullivan develop from their isolation. Frank reminisces about his first experience of the iron lungs, the black-out that left the nurse's hand cranking the lungs for hours and Sullivan's death and the profound impact this had on Frank. He was left with 'the old darkness... He lay rigid on his back, eyes open, arms at his side, barely breathing, as if he had died too.' (p.34)

### ***Chapter 7: The Trains***

Chapter Seven reflects a shift in the story away from the Golden Age and back to Frank as a young child, fleeing into hiding. Under the cover of night, Frank is taken by his mother to her old piano teacher who hides him. Ida leaves and reflects on the generosity that has been offered to save her son and how eventually, as the bombings of Buda commence, the women, Julia and Hedwiga, will look after him and not let him be hunted down and killed. Piece by piece, London reveals the nature of Frank's upbringing through Ida's story of learning the piano, her Jewish heritage and her steadfast love for Meyer that carried her through the war. Whilst Meyer had already been sent to a work camp, Ida adopted a Christian persona, Terezia Bala, and became a house-keeper. She reflects on how a beautiful city, her passion and love, turns against her and becomes a hunting ground. Life for Frank was relatively comfortable. He was well provided for and did not go as hungry as he previously had been. During a piano lesson he hid in the roof space and followed all of the instructions he was given. However, the confined space, even for only an hour dramatically changed him and he was unable to hide in the roof again, thus cutting off the financial provision of Julia teaching the piano. After the extensive bombing in December 1944, which separated Buda from Pest, Ida was reunited with Frank, where they lived in the cellar with the other survivors of the attack.

### ***Chapter 8: The First Time Frank Saw Elsa***

Beginning with Ida and Meyer connecting with other European parents, London shows the disconnection between family and the growing sense of aloneness that Frank feels and sees, even in the young babies, around the Golden Age. Then Frank sees Elsa; he is overcome by her and feels a strong connection to her without having spoken to her. The chapter finishes with Frank dreaming of Sullivan as a man he hasn't seen, but who is ultimately free and no longer suffering from the after-effects of polio.

### ***Chapter 9: The Dark Night***

With a focus on Elsa and The Girls' Ward, Chapter 9 explores Elsa's perspective and understanding of the Golden Age. Elsa makes a contrast with Frank in her hope and optimism; she sees herself on a path to recovery and believes that Frank is somewhat of a bully and a pessimist. She has a drive for survival and sees the hope in the attempts of the nurses to heal the broken bodies of the patients around her. She discusses her own struggle with the isolation room and a sense of the good and evil fighting in her during her battle with polio. However, like Frank, she has a deep sense of aloneness.

### ***Chapter 10: The Loving Body***

This chapter switches to Sister Olive Penny, the senior nurse at The Golden Age. After losing her husband, she moved to live behind her mother-in-law's house with her now grown-up daughter, until her mother-in-law died. Then Sister Olive Penny took up the position of senior nurse at the Golden Age. The chapter describes her nomadic and kind approach to life, how she cares greatly and naturally for the children in her care and how she conquers her sense of aloneness with night-visits from police officers to satisfy her sexual urges. The chapter also outlines the relationships she had with injured soldiers and the shifting acceptance of female sexuality and desire.

### ***Chapter 11: Bellbirds***

Shifting back to a focus on Frank, the school day for both the day students and patients is explained. Once again, Frank is presented as the other. His schoolwork is based around his foreign nature and catching up on the history and literature (including poetry) important to residing in and understanding Australia. Though his spoken and written English is clear, his teacher, Mrs Simmons, is surprised he knows the word 'nostalgia'. This moment creates yet another divide between himself and the people around him. Though he states no one in the room understands poetry, he is alluding to their lack of understanding of him as a person.

### ***Chapter 12: Angel Wings***

This chapter creates a snapshot of Lidja, the physiotherapist who is loved by all of the children. Frank, after making excuses to leave the classroom arrives in search of Elsa, whom he feels it is necessary to see immediately. He finds her in the bath and his fascination for her grows in the brief moments before he is caught and sent back to school. However, he returns to his bed and lies down.

### ***Chapter 13: Meyer Walks Home***

The focus of this chapter is Meyer, Frank's father. He is walking home from work reflecting on the differences between Perth and the horror that became Budapest; he then decides to visit Frank before heading home. It is revealed that Frank is a quick learner and quite intellectual, having picked up English in a very small period of time and having received a scholarship to the most sought-after school in Perth. The relationship between Meyer and Frank is discussed and how Meyer is afraid of saying farewell. After visiting Frank, Meyer talks with Sister Penny and Elsa's mother and leaves feeling a strong sense of peace and calm.

### ***Chapter 14: Margaret in Her Garden***

Chapter Fourteen is the last chapter focusing on a separate character; this time, Margaret, Elsa's mother. The chapter describes what life is like for the family of a polio sufferer. It also depicts what life is like on the 'outside' and how important the outdoors is to Margaret. She describes the horror over Elsa's diagnosis and polio in general. As with the relationship between Ida and Meyer, the reader is shown the destruction of the parental relationship through Margaret being kept from her daughter due to circumstance. She also describes the isolation that is apparent in society after a child has been diagnosed with polio, even long past the contagious stage. The chapter then displays the changes that have occurred in Elsa, how her home is now the Golden Age and how Elsa feels that her mother's visit is an imposition on her day-to-day life. The chapter finishes with Frank questioning Elsa about her mother.

### ***Chapter 15: Christmas***

At this stage, the text switches to a description of everyday life in the Golden Age rather than snapshots of the characters. However, the story continues to look predominantly at Frank, Elsa and their families. Some children, including Elsa, have headed home to celebrate Christmas. However, Frank's parents have come in to help cook and clean for the Christmas celebrations for the children that remain behind. London focuses this chapter on showing the divide between families, personalities and expectations. Sister Olive Penny finds herself further away from her daughter and excluded from her daughter's new family in-jokes. Many children return saddened by seeing their families' lives happily continuing without them. Malcolm Poole's father pushing him to be stronger and further recovered is contrasted to the children who were treated like babies and their recovery ignored.

London emphasises how life goes on within the Golden Age through the factory shutting down for Christmas. The happiness and escape that many of the children find in their newfound home becomes as dark as the lights in the factory. Elsa speculates on how dependent she is also becoming on Frank. In some ways, their growing relationship is reflected in their healing process – both children now out of their wheelchairs and walking with the assistance of crutches. Elsa opens up to Frank about her onset story and how the relationship with her sister looks unlikely to recover. Sally, Elsa's sister had been so jealous and angry about her tennis lessons and late arrival home that she had kicked and hit the polio-stricken, immobile Elsa on the ground. After hearing this, Frank kissed Elsa and then wrote a poem.

The chapter closes with Ida and Meyer returning home and briefly discussing the connection felt with Sister Olive Penny.

### ***Chapter 16: The Veranda***

Following Christmas, Perth is struck by an intense heat-wave and incredible fires. Day to day life runs to a holiday timetable, including in the Golden Age with lessons suspended and the physiotherapist absent. The children reflect normal children on their summer holidays; finding ways to entertain themselves including races, spit balls and the resulting tears. Often the children are all out on the veranda being reminded of what life is like on the outside but also slowly re-engaging with the world outside. The chapter concludes with the story of Ann Lee and her passion never to be so helpless again after the horses begged for water and she had no capacity to help.

### ***Chapter 17: The Sea***

All of the children head off to the beach with the nurses for some relaxation. The water, a refreshing treat after the blistering heat, allows the children to play and move with a freedom they haven't experienced in a long time. All of the children have a fantastic time, except for Elsa because is too close to her previous life and home. She is reminded of all of the experiences she is never going to recover fully enough to enjoy again. Frank talks about how he feels there are poems around him but they are only easy to locate when they are about Elsa. Elsa reflects on how she has a growing need to be around and near Frank.

### ***Chapter 18: A Long Cool Drink***

Meyer has started a new job delivering drinks for Bickford's and drops into the Golden Age whilst all of the children are at the beach to deliver the drinks as a treat. Instead, he shares a drink with Sister Olive Penny and becomes more aware of his growing attraction to her, though he chooses to leave before acting on his desires. Sister Olive Penny discusses how much she needs time alone and the time she spends at the beach.

### ***Chapter 19: Lidja***

Lidja, the physiotherapist, is late returning from her holiday and eventually the nurses and children are made aware of the tragic boat accident that has left her lost at sea, presumed drowned. A Scottish replacement, Moira temporarily replaces Lidja.



## ***Chapter 20: The Queen***

This chapter reflects a real life event, the royal visit that was carefully managed to ensure that the Queen would not contract polio. Frank's recovery has moved to the point at which he is able to walk with just a walking stick, yet Elsa, is walking much better but is still dependent on crutches. A fellow patient, Susan, documents her parents' involvement in the visit; yet London shows her disappointment and how disconnected the patients are from their families' lives as Susan impatiently waits for her parents' promised immediate return.

Ida is regularly practising the piano for the concert whilst Meyer is happy with the freedom of his new job.

## ***Chapter 21: Ida and Meyer***

Ida is playing the piano more and there is life returning into her playing. She sees the concert as a thank-you to the Golden Age for healing her son, but she never intends to play once the concert is over. London reflects the growing difference between the perspectives of Ida and Meyer regarding Australia. Ida complains about having to play 'their' horrible national anthem; yet Meyer thinks of it as his own anthem now.

## ***Chapter 22: The Concert***

The concert is being set up outside and all of the contacts and locals from the area are coming in to listen. Ida is aware of the growing bond between Elsa and Frank and is quite anxious about the performance, but treats it as formally as any other performance she has given. After playing the national anthem, she launches straight into the concert pieces and the children are mesmerised and transfixed by the music. Elsa walks unaided to present Ida with a thank-you bunch of flowers. Her father, sister and aunt are present and her father realises it was a mistake not to make Nancee babysit and bring his wife instead. After the concert, Ida is asked if she is available for hire, but states she is too expensive. Ida is also beginning to feel as if Australia could be considered home.

Elsa and Frank are walking in callipers and using each other for balance. The music concert has allowed Frank to feel the music healing his family and pulling them back together. Meanwhile Elsa is feeling closely bonded to Frank, stating that she feels she now belongs to him.

**Chapter 23: Albert**

After the concert, and his family returning home, Albert decides to run away from the Golden Age, back home to his family. He quietly and methodically leaves, deciding to follow the railway. The first hill he gets to is incredibly hard to wheel the chair up and he stops and sleeps instead. When he wakes, he zigzags his way to the top, though, when he finally comes to a stop, he forgets to put the brake on and loses control, crashing the chair. He hurts his head and breaks his leg.

**Chapter 24: Ann Lee**

After the concert and Albert's accident, things begin to change at the Golden Age. Albert is promised he can go home to his family and the students all begin to study music as part of their daily lessons. Ann Lee's father suddenly arrives after both he and Ann Lee's mother sense she is ready to come home. He whisks her off against the doctor's orders and Sister Penny is very concerned that she will now spend the remainder of her life lame and never fully recover, leaving her forever an outcast. Sister Penny decides to head away overnight and leaves suddenly.

**Chapter 25: Blue Air**

Sister Penny arrives at her old friend's country property; he was a friend she met while working who had survived the war and been struck down by polio. She feels lost within herself and cannot work out exactly why; eventually settling on feeling as if the invisible tie she feels to Meyer has been lost. In the morning, she becomes uneasy and concerned about the Golden Age, and after a quick phone call, rushes home to discover that overnight Elsa and Frank have been found naked in bed together and the home's governors have been called in.

**Chapter 26: The Third Country**

Frank and Elsa have grown very close to each other and feel lost with any time, even briefly, spent apart. The nurses notice that their bond and how they work together is speeding up their recovery. Frank starts to explain his childhood, his time hiding in Budapest and his experience in the ceiling. Their talking helps him to see the war and polio as a battle that is forming part of his journey in life.

The governors question Elsa, to check if the bed incident was entirely Frank's doing or if she played a part. They want to ensure she was not raped or sexually assaulted. Elsa will not change her story and they cannot confirm that there was an assault. Their questioning leaves Elsa feeling broken and dirty. Sister Penny knows that this second incident means it is time for her to look for new work.

**Chapter 27: Poetry**

Frank has been expelled from the Golden Age and sent home. When the weather doesn't impede his movement, he heads into the State Library to read volumes of poetry. He is devastated that no one stood up for his and Elsa's relationship and that, consequently, they have been separated. He continues to seek solace from poetry and attempts to contact Sullivan's father to pass on the poetry. Sullivan's whole family have, however, moved overseas and no address can be handed on.

**Chapter 28: The Hunch**

Meyer seeks out Olive (Sister Penny) at the beach during her alone time. They chat about the melancholy that has settled over Frank and how he so intensely misses Elsa. Olive discusses her new job in Darwin and her daughter's sudden engagement and new family. Both of them are feeling a strong sense of connection; yet again chooses not to act on it.

**Chapter 29: The Call**

Ida comes home to Frank, listening to a bird calling. He states the bird is saying over and over 'just in the way'. This reminds her of all of the tanks arriving in Budapest and she impulsively calls Margaret, Elsa's mum.

**Chapter 30: The Separation**

Margaret is doing everything in her power to ensure that Elsa's recovery continues. She stands up to Nance for the first time, telling her to butt out and to stop limiting her daughter's ability and future family prospects. Elsa spends her days at home, yet to return to school. She too, is constantly thinking of Frank and she makes an attempt to mend her relationship with Sally. Ida calls and a meeting is set up for the next day for the two families. Elsa is so overjoyed she walks without callipers to kiss her mother.

**Chapter 31: The Visit**

The Golds arrive at the Briggs' house for afternoon tea. The entire occasion is uncomfortable and formal. Suddenly, at the incoming threat of rain the whole group race outside to get the nappies inside as quickly as possible. Elsa and Frank take the opportunity to flee into isolation; hiding in a tree-covered cove. However, the claustrophobic nature of Elsa's hiding spot is too much for Frank to bear and Elsa has to calm him down and bring him back inside.

**New York**

The story now jumps ahead to Frank as an old man who has spent his life in New York after university. He still walks with a walking-stick but has spent his life writing poetry. He is visited by Jack, youngest of Elsa's three sons, the only one not to follow his parents into medicine; instead, he is a writer. Jack is there to interview him over his most recent publication but also tells Frank about his mother's loneliness. Elsa achieved her dream of becoming a doctor and getting married, whilst Frank had continued to live a solitary life overseas.

## CHARACTER PROFILES

### *Major Characters*

#### **Frank Gold**

Frank is the protagonist of the story, though his story itself is often told through the many characters around him in the hospital. He came down with polio when he was 12 years of age and spent time in isolation before briefly living at the IDB (The Infectious Disease Branch of the Royal Perth Hospital). During his recovery, he met an older boy who was recovering from polio, though still dependent on the iron lung. It is his brief relationship with Sullivan that teaches him about poetry – Frank’s life vocation. Sullivan has a profound impact on his understanding of the world around him and how he sees and views life’s experiences. Shortly after Sullivan’s death, Frank is moved to the Golden Age.

Frank feels old and out of place when he first arrives, yet quickly forms a strong bond with Elsa and establishes his place in the children’s home. He works hard towards rebuilding his muscle tone so that he can walk again and he tolerates the education he is provided with. Elsa becomes his saving grace and how he survives the lonely existence lived by the nearly orphaned children. She is the focus of all his poetry.

As a new immigrant to Australia, Frank has spent his early childhood tolerating and hiding from the anti-semitic sentiment in Budapest. His time hiding with Ida’s piano teacher has fundamentally changed him and how he understands the world around him, especially the hour he spent hiding in the ceiling.

The final chapter lets the audience know that he continued to live a solitary life, moving to New York shortly after university to write. He lived the remainder of his life there.

**Elsa Briggs**

Elsa resides at the Golden Age and her story is almost as important to Frank's, yet is provided by London to complement and deepen the audience's understanding of Frank's experiences and emotions. Elsa's onset story is confronting and heart wrenching, hence she keeps it a secret from everyone around her until she finally reveals the truth to Frank. Her parents had sent her to tennis lessons and her sister Sally, who resented that she was not learning to play tennis, was left at home to care for their baby sister. One day, Elsa struggled to ride her bike home and took a long time. Sally was infuriated and kicked and hit Elsa, even though she had collapsed and was motionless on the ground, unable to move due to the polio ravaging her body.

Elsa originally dislikes Frank, seeing him as obstinate and bossy. Yet the two form an incredibly strong bond and help each other in their recovery. Elsa's family is suffering disconnection and the stigma that comes with a child suffering from polio and she rarely has the chance to see her mother. Elsa becomes increasingly in love with and dependent on Frank, though she is also expelled from the home after being caught naked in bed with Frank.

The final chapter reveals that Elsa worked hard to live a normal life. She married, had three sons and became a doctor, working into her old age.

**Sister Olive Penny**

Sister Olive Penny is presented as a resilient woman who has learnt to find her own path and strength in life. Her husband, having died early in the war, left her as a single mother who had to find work to support her daughter. They lived behind her parents-in-law until her mother-in-law's death when she was cut off from the family and left with nothing. Sister Olive Penny had lived what could be considered an open and modern life having significant relationships with a number of men. It is this that she thinks her mother-in-law disapproved of. Sister Olive Penny then takes up the live-in role of senior nurse at the Golden Age and her daughter moves in with a friend's family for university. Eventually this new family replaces Sister Olive Penny and she loses her daughter seemingly forever.

At the Golden Age, Sister Penny is well loved and maintains a homely and loving environment for the children now in her care. She knows their needs and naturally meets each of their needs without being asked. She receives visitors during the night, mainly police officers who satisfy her desires and seeks out old friends when she is in need of consolation and comfort. There is a strong connection between herself and Meyer, though neither ever acts on their desires.

After the two incidents in her absence at the Golden Age, she finds work in Darwin.

## **Minor Characters**

### **Ida Gold**

Ida is Frank's mother, a woman who had been fighting to survive ever since the unrest in Budapest and her husband being taken away to the labour camps. By the end of the war, she was an old woman who had managed to protect her son by sending him to hide with another family. A gifted pianist, she had stopped playing once her son had been diagnosed with polio and did not play again until she felt compelled to at Christmas and a thank-you concert. She feels dispossessed in Australia and believes that the family is eternally cursed.

### **Meyer Gold**

Frank's father feels the disconnection between the three family members and works towards finding his own inner peace; this is eventually found through conversations with Sister Olive Penny and his new work out of an office delivering drinks. Throughout the story, he develops a fondness for Australia and slowly his family reconnect through Ida returning to her music and his regular visits to the Golden Age.

### **Sullivan Backhouse**

Sullivan is a pivotal character to Frank's story, though only present in the first couple of chapters. He is an older boy that Frank meets at his first out-of-home care. Sullivan, who relies on an iron lung for life, introduces Frank to poetry and teaches him about his newfound vocation. A brief time later, he dies and Frank is moved to the Golden Age, a more appropriate facility for his age.

### **Margaret Briggs**

Elsa's mother is torn about caring for her family and her ability to visit her daughter regularly at the Golden Age. She, too, is disconnected from her family but feels the disconnection and isolation from the community that has come from her daughter's diagnosis. Her husband seems to rely very heavily on his sister, Nance, who is often the one to visit Elsa and even attends the piano concert in the place of Margaret. Eventually Margaret stands up to Nance and works her hardest towards helping Elsa recover from polio.

### **Jack Briggs (Senior)**

Elsa's father regularly visits Elsa and ensures she is well looked after. He too is distanced from his family and cannot see that his relationship with his sister is isolating his wife and causing issues in the relationship between Margaret and Elsa.

**Lidja**

Frank, along with all of the other children at the Golden Age, has a very strong affinity and connection with the physiotherapist they work with daily. She, as a fellow New Australian, has made a successful path in life and Frank looks up to her. After Christmas, Lidja is involved in a boating accident and is presumed drowned.

**Mrs Simmons**

Mrs Simmons is the schoolteacher responsible for the education of all the children. She assumes that Frank is behind in his English skills and makes him work hard in this area, even though he is a very smart boy and has been offered a scholarship to an elite academic school in Perth.

***Relationships between Characters***

A core theme running throughout all the lives of the characters is the sense of being alone; yet it is the blossoming of relationships and growing openness among the characters that leads to the healing of all the characters, not just those recovering from polio. Both Frank and Elsa are distanced from their families; feeling the burden and shame they have brought to their families.

Ida and Meyer diverge in their opinions of Australia and this is reflected in their relationship. Throughout the novel, they gradually grow closer to their son and, consequently, each other and deepen their connection to Australia. Though Ida considers polio the ultimate expression of the curse against them, it is also what slowly mends her relationship with Meyer.

Due to the nature of polio, the single life of nurses at the time and the children's utter dependence on their pseudo-family in the home, the relationships within the constraints of the Golden Age are pivotal. They are what sustain and develop each of the characters, eventually leading to their recovery.



## THEMES AND ISSUES

### *Aloneness/Isolation*

Every character, at some stage throughout the text, discusses their sense of being alone or isolated from those around them. Some characters feel that their aloneness shapes who they are and is pivotal to their personality and identity, yet others resent the feeling of being the other and unwelcome in the community around them.

Frank seems to embrace being alone at the beginning of the novel. He would prefer to be alone rather than be a burden on his family and feels he is stronger and more capable of surviving when he considers his isolation from the world. Though he establishes an incredibly strong bond with Elsa, it can be seen during the “New York” chapter that he embraces his isolation and enjoys living his life this way. Yet, he also takes in a friend’s child while living in New York rather than letting that child feel the same sense of loss and abandonment that he did whilst at the Golden Age.

Elsa also feels that her isolation is a better situation for herself and her family; yet she misses her life before polio increasingly throughout the text leading her dependence on Frank and her family to grow. She feels that her family impinge on the community in the home and feels incredibly lonely at times. This can be seen most strongly when she comforts the baby by talking about their mothers and looking to the outside world.

Both Elsa and Frank embrace their aloneness and this is reflected in their dependence on their wheelchairs. As they begin to move away from being alone and establish a friendship and a dependence upon each other, their bodies are allowed to heal.

Meyer and Sister Olive Penny have also embraced the aloneness they feel; they use it to strengthen their identities and how they see the world. In contrast, Margaret and Ida feel isolated and resent the way they are treated within the society. Both are outcasts due to their children suffering polio and in Ida’s case being new to the country; they feel a great burden and stress due to their isolation. London makes a clear distinction between aloneness and isolation.

## ***Freedom/Outside***

Also evident throughout the text is the character's need for freedom and to be outside in a world that isn't burdened by their suffering or worries. This is often symbolised through the repetitive references to birds embedded throughout the entire novel. The Golden Age has a cramped and locked-down feel about it that slowly changes once summer arrives and the children spend more and more time on the verandah, a space that feels like a halfway home reconnecting them to their families, their previous lives, the outside world and their future lives. Frank feels compelled to leave the building each evening and to connect with his parents from a distance as they too spend time out the front of their house each evening. Sister Penny craves the open air of the ocean, while Elsa is tormented by the sea and her old life.

London constantly contrasts the insides of buildings with the people and their craving for freedom from their illness, their minds and their histories.

## ***Love***

The blossoming love between Frank and Elsa forms the pivotal element of the theme of love. Their innocence and natural affinity to each other provides hope and desire in other characters. It alludes to how life can go on, no matter how dire the circumstances are around you. It builds hope, friendship and ultimately recovery. *The Golden Age* also explores the love between families, the ebbs and flows within marriages and the need to embrace and love oneself to be able to love those around you. Both Meyer and Ida have struggled to rekindle their own love following their suffering at the hands of Nazi Germany. However, as they journey to find love for themselves in their new environment they are eventually able to find their love for each other. Meyer's growing satisfaction with Australia and finding his own freedom allows him to love himself and he recognises this through his passion and desire for Sister Penny.

## ***The Other***

*The Golden Age* explores what it means to be 'the other' to the society around you; to be the outcast Jew, the victim of polio that everyone fears, the family of a polio victim who carries shame and stigma, the single mother with an active sexual life, the newly arrived immigrant, the individual that doesn't understand the fundamentally Australian references - the list could go on. What London points out is that from most people's perspective they are 'the other' for some reason. They feel that there is some element to their experience, personality and identity that separates them from their communities. London demonstrates that it is through this otherness that individuals bond, grow and recover; that essentially it is otherness that defines one's identity and makes one strong.

**Family**

London also explores the role of blood and situational families. She shows the struggling bonds of families who are suffering and trying to make the best of the situations they are in. The complex relationships of siblings left to fend for themselves and care for each other are contrasted to the tight bonds formed between the pseudo-siblings at the Golden Age. London shows that the ties of chosen and situational families are just as strong, if not stronger than the ties of blood. All of the children, though welcoming visitors from home, also feel that they are impinging on the family life they now enjoy.

London defines family as people who live and work together; showing this through the growing dislocation that Elsa and Frank have from their families on the outside and how hard they find it to blend back into their previous lives. It is also shown through the chapter outlining the children's experiences of Christmas; those that went home are all too aware of how they no longer belong, yet those that stayed at the home experience a caring and loving Christmas filled with belonging.

## IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

- Though like his past in Hungary, it was something he didn't talk about. (p. 17)
- Frank always felt the need to go outside. (p. 18)
- Your bed was empty today/when I looked for you./Why? (p. 19)
- It occurred to him that this poem could just as easily be about Sullivan. (p. 19)
- In recovery, he felt a hunger to know why he was alive. (p. 21)
- Saved, but not yet back into real life. (p. 22)
- Sullivan said his real life had always been when he was alone. (p. 28)
- It turns out that/we are tough/as cockroaches. (p. 29)
- He remembered the day with a peculiar vividness. In his mind it had a sort of beauty. (p. 30)
- *I refuse to be their only light.* (p. 31)
- In the end we are all orphans. (p. 33)
- 'Our dear boy has lost his life,' ... An act of respect for a friend of his son. (p. 33)
- The old darkness was waiting for him there. He lay rigid on his back, eyes open, arms at his side, barely breathing, as if he too had died. (p. 24)
- It was a long time since he'd been outside and everything looked older, sadder. (p. 35)
- Darkness everywhere... He'd forgotten how huge outside was. (p. 35)
- But now she was going to start a job. ... She had become somebody else. (p. 36)
- He knew she was afraid. (p. 38)
- But, she knew, their true heroism lay in acquiescing to this intrusion into their peace together, the decades-long sweetness of their routines. (p. 40)
- In these times, kindness and unselfishness were as unexpected, as exhilarating, as genius. (p. 40)
- It was her giftedness that saved him. (p. 40)
- Those keys, which only rewarded you with beauty after years of faith and patience, had nothing to do with the mad, sly hostility that was beginning to insinuate itself into their lives, the insults, the exclusions, the peremptory laws... This mounting force for which they had no name. (p. 42)
- When he came back from the work camp, it would be an old woman he took in his arms. (p. 43)

- Could Frank really remember this journey? The cold, the bridge, the dark city? Or was this a story composed from Ida's reminiscences? Her stories grew up with him, they were intertwined with his, part of him, like the food she prepared. (p. 45)
- To stay quiet could be a matter of life or death. But the effort of lying still in that space, alone, never left him. (p. 48)
- But when Hedwiga opened the trapdoor and lifted him down, something had happened to him. For many days he did not speak with his voice. He spoke in his thoughts. (p. 49)
- They lay blankly, forgotten and unloved. (p. 55)
- It seemed sadder somehow. He knew they cried because they were alone. But visitors reminded you of how much you had grown apart from them. It was almost a relief when they went home. (p. 55)
- Frank had been tested and found out, revealing himself as un-Australian. For some reason this gave Warren pleasure. (p. 55)
- Over and over again, Frank thought, he, Meyer and Ida had been forced to live within breathing distance of strangers, like animals in a burrow. (p. 56)
- He felt alone and trapped here. (p. 56)
- For a moment everything at the Golden Age had mystery, glamour. Shadows deepened, the last long beams of light streaked across its polished floorboards. (p. 58)
- She felt aware of everything in the world. (p. 59)
- As soon as she came to the Golden Age she'd begun to feel all right. (p. 60)
- Even at night the work went on to straighten their crooked bodies. (p. 60)
- After [the isolation ward] was over, like a terrible dream, you couldn't remember much about it. But you were not the same. (p. 60)
- As if there were another person inside her who had suddenly taken charge, a sort of captain who was going to hold on no matter what. The captain was still there. Elsa was not afraid anymore. (p. 61)
- She had to concentrate on this one thing, holding on. She had to cut off from everything else. (p. 61)
- Polio had taken her legs, made her pale with thin cheeks, and yet, somehow, herself. (p. 62)
- Sister Penny had put her arms around her and carried her inside. It felt like being loved. In the isolation ward all the nurses had worn masks and gloves. (p. 63)
- Frank Gold talked a lot, unlike most boys. ... He was snobby, critical of the other kids. (p. 63)

- Wherever she went, she saw the long, pale oval of his face, his deep, watchful eyes, the mass of his curly reddish hair. (p. 63)
- Sometimes she saw a look in his eyes that she recognised, the look of someone who has lain in bed thinking, alone, for too many nights. (p. 64)
- Being here was like a play. (p. 64)
- She'd had to get used to, and now she loved, this freedom of choice. Like a man's. (p. 670)
- Some weren't very nice people. And some were very nice indeed. (p. 67)
- Like them, the last thing she wanted was scandal. (p. 67)
- It's what you find out about yourself if you're left in the world with a child and no husband. ... You have to be father and mother, woman and man in the world. (p. 68)
- Elizabeth Ann and she would have much preferred their own place, but houses were in short supply. Like men. There were simply not enough to go around. (p. 68)
- It began through kindness. ... They'd lost faith in everything, God, wives, government, sometimes even their mates. She was amazed at the loneliness in some men's hearts. Vast as an ocean or a desert: no woman she knew would ever be so lonely. (p. 68)
- Yet it was nursing that sustained her. (p. 71)
- These days she thought of herself as a sort of nomad... (p. 71)
- Mrs Simmons had ascertained that he was quick with maths but must catch up, as a New Australian, on history and English literature. (p. 74)
- He couldn't stand the thought that he had come to a country which once again was inferior to another, like a servant or a child. (p. 75)
- A reminder to the Golden Age kids of how *they* must look in the outside world. Tragic children, cursed, deformed. (p. 76)
- Poetry gave relief. From what? From everything else. (p. 77)
- Mrs Simmons didn't understand poetry. Nobody in this room did. Sullivan had opened a door to a world that made everything have meaning, and when he died, it closed behind him. (p. 77)
- 'How do you know the word "nostalgia", Frank?' He looked at her. How could he not? Nostalgia was everywhere. It had a special voice and special time – sunset, Sunday nights. (p. 78)
- Frank was proud that Lidja too was a New Australian. (p. 80)
- They must fight, they must never give up, they were going to win! (p. 80)

- To become a normal child again. To walk. (p. 81)
- Some boys were throwing stones into the water, competing with each other, like boys everywhere in the world. (p. 86)
- Budapest was the glamorous love of his life who had betrayed him. (p. 86)
- He, Ida and Frank had left behind all their family and friends, those who had survived. But the dead came with you. (p. 87)
- This power came from a lack of respect for all that called itself authority. (p. 88)
- Small things give you happiness. . (p. 88)
- Was all happiness just a memory of childhood? . (p. 88)
- People grew old quickly here. They had a self-consciousness about them, like country people come to the city. . (p. 89)
- It was when he was alone that he became aware of how much he thought about this exile, this new chapter in their life, which was likely to be the last. . (p. 89)
- At last their decision to migrate seemed justified. . (p. 89)
- The son had brought honour to the family. . (p. 90)
- This is why the human race goes on having children, he thought. To remind us of the bliss of being loved. . (p. 91)
- Of all the trials, this one had come closest to bringing Meyer down. . (p. 92)
- He couldn't unlearn the practice of death, living with the closeness of its presence, like a roar in his ears. Like a sailor keeps hearing the sea. . (p. 93)
- She was vibrant with life and yet she was solitary. Unburdened by domesticity. She was brave, even audacious. . (p. 97)
- He had a feeling of escape. . (p. 98)
- At this time of the day she always found an excuse to go outside for a moment. It was as if she was being called. If she didn't go she felt trapped. (p. 100)
- It was never silent there and she did not feel alone. (p. 100)
- ...a black crow flew out of the twilight and knocked a slender bone against the trunk of the fig tree. (p. 101)
- The first time she'd walked into the butcher's after Elsa went to hospital, some people walked out. (p. 104)

- She felt like an outcast when she pushed her pram up the road past the other houses. (p. 104)
- But already he was everywhere, knew everything, Elsa thought. (p. 105)
- Walking was so ferociously hard that she feared she would give up, be one of those who didn't make it. This fear shadowed her. (p. 106)
- It was as if she had changed sides and belonged here now. (p. 106)
- The shock and violence of polio, the instant transformation of it, reminded her of a cruel trick, or sorcery in a fairytale. (p. 108)
- For some reason she thought about the bird she had seen last week when she was hanging out the wash. She'd become aware of it standing a few feet away, watching her. When she crouched down, it stood its ground, quivering, its eyes outraged, astonished. (p. 109)
- That they belonged to no one but themselves. (p. 110)
- ...they did not have family here (nor anywhere else in the world, which they did not say). (p. 111)
- ...reveal their critical attitudes to Australia, or their un-Australian fits of passion or melancholy, (p. 111)
- Frank knew Elsa's pride and determination, but her family knew only pity. (p. 112)
- This is the community we belong to now, Meyer thought. With the humble of the earth. The halt and the lame. (p. 113)
- 'You are home,' Meyer said. (p. 115)
- Just before the children were put to bed, Ida went to the schoolroom piano and played a little of Mozart's '*Ah vous dirai-je, Maman*'. (p. 115)
- To Meyer, the music, its plangent song of childhood, seemed like an elegy. (p. 116)
- The children who celebrated Christmas at the Golden Age seemed much happier than those who returned at bedtime, exhausted, silent, distant and alone. (p. 116)
- As if she had found out she belonged here now, with him, not back with her family. (p. 117)
- Until they went home they'd forgotten they were in a tragedy. (p. 117)
- Some families treated them like babies, almost needing to be fed. (p. 117)
- When something ends, she thought, something new takes its place. (p. 118)
- The Golden Age quietened and slowed, became its own self-contained world. (p. 126)
- Left on their own, like birds gathered at a waterhole at sundown, the children were revitalised, their thin voices echoing in the twilight. (p. 126)



- Damaged creatures who could not move unaided. (p. 127)
- Like children everywhere on summer nights, they became free spirits, bold, vagabond, eerie, their grins reckless across their faces. (p. 127)
- The verandah was a halfway existence, half-inside, half-out. It took them one step closer to normal life. They felt themselves lighten. This was their last stretch as patients. They were on their way back into the world. (p. 127)
- She must never ever be so helpless again. (p. 130)
- They screamed and splashed and forgot their daily exertions on land. (p. 132)
- [Elsa] felt a clutch of loss, or possessiveness. (p. 133)
- He knew as soon as he came into this old place that there was a poem here. (p. 133)
- Perhaps they'd all made the same wish – to be a normal child again. (p. 135)
- A lone seagull circled, crying, and he knew that she was sad. (p. 135)
- But she missed him when he left a room. Everything was suddenly boring. A light went out. Every morning when she woke, she listened for the sound of his voice. (p. 137)
- Their bloodstreams recharged by exercise and fresh air, they experienced a fiery burst of pleasure. (p. 138)
- Sister Penny didn't want the door shut to any parent who might suddenly have a chance or need to see their child, nor to the life and sounds of the outside world. (p. 139)
- 'It's my ideal, I think! I'm alone, outside, free to move and look around. I'm beginning to understand this city.' (p. 141)
- There was beauty everywhere, strange beauty, even – especially? – in a children's polio hospital. (p. 141)
- Under any one roof, at any one time, he thought, there is always a couple of creatures a little in love with one another. (p. 143)
- Over and over, it seemed, they were reminded that they were alone, that in the end, their success or failure in overcoming polio was up to them. (p. 146)
- At the Golden Age the children felt a sort of guilt, even though they were all long out of quarantine. (p. 147)
- After weeks of practice, something else had entered. (p. 155)

- Home. She hadn't called Hungary that for years. She was talking of somewhere else. Her place in music. (p. 157)
- When Ida was performing something came alive between them. (p. 158)
- It was eternal, this moment, this solitude, no matter where you were performing or for whom. (p. 160)
- Everything was always about the war. (p. 165)
- Elsa, as senior girl, without stick or crutches... (p. 166)
- This was the land in which her life would take place. In which her music must grow. This was her audience. (p. 168)
- Both in callipers, holding hands for balance, ... (p. 169)
- Her rescue had a storybook feel that made them light-headed, believing for a moment in their own immediate deliverance. (p. 178)
- There was a flatness within her like a deflated heart. Perhaps that was why the landscape here soothed her. (p. 183)
- You couldn't afford to leave one chink open, or fate, accident, mishap, like infection, would step in... (p. 185)
- Their connection seemed to fill the air around them. (p. 187)
- Elsa's stories, by contrast, were all of freedom, of the sea and the neighbourhood. (p. 188)
- It was as if he lived somewhere else now. The title came back to him so clearly he could see it written in his head. 'The Third Country': now he saw that it was not one poem, but a set of poems. About the long journey he had made to find her. About the two devils, war and polio, that had brought it about, and the two angels, love and poetry, that had saved him. Sullivan had showed him the way. (p. 189)
- Every muscle she had nurtured, tried to love back to work, shrank in humiliation. She felt as if clods of dirt had been thrown at her. Not by Frank, but by those old people on the board. She would never forgive them. (p. 192)
- 'You have to understand', she said 'that when children are cut off from their families and live side by side, they become very close.' (p. 192)
- They hadn't learnt what he now knew, that he, and only he, could cope with his condition. (p. 197)
- Only with books did he lose his feeling of panic, of having been discarded, forgotten, thrown away. (p. 198)
- There wasn't much she trusted these days. Not hospitals. Not even God any more. Only the love between parents and children. (p. 216)

- She limped unaided around the house, like a bird with its wing broken. Tame, because it couldn't fly away. (p. 218)
- She didn't know if she could get through this alone. (p. 220)
- The freedom of orphans...How natural it had seemed. He remembered the feeling of power. (p. 225)
- Now he was with Elsa, a calm had descended over him. (p. 230)
- Polio is like love... (p. 240)

SAMPLE

## CREATIVE WRITING

As part of studying this text you may be required to complete a creative writing SAC. The creative writing SAC is only required to be completed for one of the two texts you have studied from List 1 of the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Text List* published by the VCAA. You will complete an analytical text response essay on one text and a creative writing response on the other.

According to the VCE English Study Design you will write, “a creative response to a selected text in written or oral form with a written explanation of decisions made in the writing process and how these demonstrate understanding of the text.” Your teacher will outline whether they expect you to complete a written or oral piece. You may even be provided with a choice. Some sample creative writing ideas have been included in these Study Notes to assist you.

In the end of year exam, you will complete only an analytical text response essay on your choice of texts you studied from List 1. It will be important that you have revised writing text response essays for each of these texts, even if you wrote a creative response for one of them in your SAC.

Just like the text response essay (written on a different text) your creative response will allow you to demonstrate your in-depth knowledge of the text. You should focus on your understanding of the text’s ideas, issues and themes, while your writing will demonstrate your ability to construct a creative piece for a specific purpose, audience and context.

Try to look on the creative writing part of the Outcome as an opportunity to use your imagination with the text, just remember that the text is still to be central to your response and that your writing needs to be credible and authentic.

Consider the following general ideas as ways to keep the text central to your creative response:

- Present the original text from an alternative perspective
- Transpose the original text into another form
- Explore a gap or silence in the text
- Explore an idea, issue or theme from the original text in detail
- Transpose the original text into a new setting
- Adapt the language of the original text to create a new or different impact

## ***The Creative Writing Process***

Some students can find creative writing challenging and may feel that this part of the Outcome will be difficult for them to achieve well in. However, with practice, careful planning, skilful use of language and some other writing skills this outcome is quite achievable.

### **The planning stage**

Planning is particularly important in creative writing. Often students feel they do not know where to begin with a creative piece of writing and therefore it is essential that time is taken to brainstorm and then plan an idea in great detail to help keep your response focused and relevant.

There is, however, a key way that you can go about your planning that will ensure you are meeting the task to the best of your ability and obtaining the best possible marks. Consider following the steps outlined below.

1. What is your contention? Just like any other response in English, you need to have a clear and specific point you are trying to make. All creative writing, and even any other form of creativity, is making a point. For your piece to feel authentic and to be a sophisticated piece of writing you must have an idea you are trying to convey.
2. Considering your contention, what points (like the paragraphs in an essay) do you need to make for your idea to be clearly conveyed?
3. Using the points and contention – what story or response could you write that will show each of these things?
4. Plan out the stages to your response in a way that reflects your overall contention and sub points.
5. The final stage of planning is to intentionally plan out your vocabulary choices, your writing style and how you will be showing an understanding of the original text. Marks are allocated to all these areas.

As part of your planning you need to not only consider your ideas (what you are going to write about?), but also your purpose (what are you trying to demonstrate in your piece?), audience (who you are writing for?), form (what type of creative piece you are writing?) and language choices. You will notice that all of these things need to be communicated in your written explanation: this is addressed later in this section.

### **The writing stage**

While you are writing it is essential that you constantly reflect on your progress and read over your work to ensure you are demonstrating your intended purpose, which your response is responding to the task and has a clear link to the original text.

If your school provides you with the opportunity, make sure you write a draft, which you edit and refine. Even professional writers write drafts (often multiple drafts) before their work is published. Through drafting you are able to continue to refine your ideas and language to ensure you are really meeting the task requirements. You should also seek feedback from others to check that your point is clear and not convoluted. Even if you are not able to bring a draft or plan into the SAC, or if you will not know the specific requirements of the task, it is worth writing numerous drafts so have an idea of how you will undergo the task.

**The editing process**

Be critical when editing your work. Use the marking criteria (this should be provided by your teacher) to check that your work is doing what it is supposed to do. If you do not have marking criteria you can access the VCAA marking criteria for this SAC on page 45 of the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language: Advice for Teachers* handbook.

While you are editing your work as yourself:

- Does my piece do everything I want it to do? (Does it achieve your purpose?)
- Does it sound like it matches the original text? (Are my language choices appropriate?)
- Does it address the task?
- Have I avoided summarising the original text?
- Have I shown a deeper understanding of the original text than the plot?
- Does my written piece have some kind of meaning or message that gives the writing substance?
- Have I produced the best piece of writing I can?

Once you are satisfied with your responses to these questions, and have made any required changes, it is time to write your written explanation.

**Common Pitfalls**

There are two things to be very mindful of while writing your creative piece: be careful not to just re-tell the original story or make your link to the original text obscure or difficult to identify. To avoid these issues, you could:

- Use a crisis, turning point or main event in the text as your starting point
- Explore a key idea or theme in your own writing

## ***The Written Explanation***

Along with your creative response you will need to write a written explanation to explain and justify the decisions you made during the writing process. Put more simply the written explanation is a way for you to communicate the choices you made in your writing. In it you should discuss the choices you made in regards to: Form, Language, Audience, Purpose and Context. Also known as FLAP + C.

Your written explanation will be marked in association with your creative piece. There are no separate marks allocated to the written explanation. However, the written explanation is still an essential component of this task and marks will be assigned for how well it is completed. In your written explanation you can outline what you had intended to demonstrate in relation to the original text and this can assist your assessor in understanding your work.

## ***Creative Writing Ideas to Consider***

It is expected that written pieces will be 800 – 100 words and oral pieces 4 – 6 minutes in length.

Generally, you could:

- Write about a major event or turning point in the novel from the point of view of a minor character
- Replicate the style of writing in your own creative piece
- Use one of the themes from *The Golden Age* to inspire your own creative piece

Remember that you may be given a specific instruction from your teacher regarding the type and/or response you need to produce.

## **ANALYTICAL WRITING**

As part of studying this text you may be required to complete an analytical essay. One of the two texts you study in Semester 1/Unit 3 will be linked to an analytical response. It is important to remember though that you will be writing only an analytical response in the exam, so you need to study and develop your skills to write an analytical response on BOTH texts studied.

### ***Understanding and Responding to Analytical Essay Topics***

It is essential that you read and respond to the exact essay topic. Many hours of work go into deciding these topics so they provide a very specific insight into the text and opportunity to students. Do not ignore part of the topic or decide to rewrite any part of the topic.

Consider the following two questions;

1. Why is the topic written this way?
2. What is it that your teachers are looking for? (Look at the rubric)

What you need to know about the text:

- Everything about the protagonists; how they change and develop
- The pivotal relationships and the aspects of their relationship
- What is distinctive about the structure and why the author/director chose it?
- What is noteworthy and distinctive about the language and repeated images
- The perspective of the author/director and the effect (the views and values)
- The big ideas, themes

Students who respond well to text response questions

- Explore complex issues and ensure they discuss the views and values and how they are presented
- Analyse the structural features – Why has the author/director chosen to ....
- Present a position that is clear, consistent, relates specifically to the topic and is well defined
- Structure and develop a compelling case (i.e. a piece that is interesting to read)
- Fully explore and resolve the topic and any implied questions
- Use quotes to enrich the argument and ensure that they are embedded fluently into the paragraphs

Questions can be based on any of the following areas:

1. Character
2. Narrative/Style
3. Form and construction of the Text
4. Setting
5. Values and Key Ideas



Questions can be formed in the following styles;

Question Type	Description	Advice
Propositional	Will give you a statement that asks you to either: discuss, do you agree etc.	NEVER write ‘Yes I agree.’ Your opinion should become evident from the introduction
Quotation	Based on a quote from the text. With a question based on the quote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure you look at all parts of the question including the quote and how they connect</li> <li>• Know the text well enough to know where the quote comes from, the context of the quote and the significance of the quote</li> <li>• Discuss the quote and topic in direct context</li> </ul>
Direct questions	Asks a specific question (How/What/Why)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t create a shopping list style response. For example, ‘How does The Golden Age reflect the personal fears of individuals?’ Do not just list the different personal fears we see in each paragraph.</li> <li>• Ensure you have an overarching opinion and structure to the response</li> </ul> <p>Often these topics focus on the structures, features and conventions of the text. Especially when the question asks ‘how?’</p>

**A Descriptive Guide to Doing Well:**

Mark of 6 out of 10	Mark of 9-10 out of 10
Adequate knowledge of the text (not a lot of detail)	Shows a perceptive and close reading
It is 'a response'	Understands the implications of the topic
Predictable opinions and messages	Explores complex concepts and constructions
Some evidence	Substantiated with embedded, natural evidence clearly related to the topic
Generally organised (Not tight or always coherent)	Controlled and structured

**Essay Planning**

It is imperative that all essays you write are thoroughly planned. This means that you have clearly thought through what you are going to write and have ensured that you are meeting the essay topic and the criteria to the best of your ability. Follow these steps to ensure that you have thoroughly planned your essay.

1. Analyse the question. What are you being asked to respond to? Are there multiple elements that you need to respond to?
2. Develop a contention. Make sure you are not simply repeating the essay topic but are showing your personal understanding and opinion on the topic.
3. Establish what points you will need to make to ensure that your contention is clear and well supported.
4. Consider what evidence you have to support the arguments you will be making. This must include the features and conventions of the text, not just the plot and quotes you have located.

## SAMPLE ANALYTICAL ESSAY TOPICS

1. One's identity cannot be fully understood when confined and restricted. How does London show the importance of being outside in *The Golden Age*?
2. 'Perhaps they'd all made the same wish – to be a normal child again.' (p.135) Fitting in and being normal is integral to Frank and Elsa's recovery. Do you agree?
3. What role does symbolism play in depicting the growth and recovery of Frank Gold?
4. Family is essentially the people around you in your daily experiences. How important is family to the characters in *The Golden Age*?
5. "In the end we are all orphans." Discuss the themes of isolation and loneliness in *The Golden Age*.
6. To what extent does poetry develop Frank's identity?
7. Love is the only element holding Elsa together and helping her to recover. Do you agree or disagree?
8. 'At the Golden Age the children felt a sort of guilt.' What is the impact of polio on the lives of the children living at the home?
9. How does London show the significance and role of the other in developing an understanding of the self?
10. How does London use caricature to accentuate the story of Frank Gold?
11. 'She limped unaided around the house, like a bird with its wing broken. Tame, because it couldn't fly away.' p. 218 What role do birds play in *The Golden Age*?

## FINAL EXAMINATION ADVICE

- Carefully read the essay topics before choosing a topic.
- Ensure you know how to respond to the type of question you choose.
- Every exam topic is written so that the best and the worst students in Victoria can respond adequately. This means that the first response you think of may not be the best response for you to write.
- When writing, ensure that you discuss how characters change and progress throughout the play, including their motives.
- Try to incorporate a discussion about the textual devices and how they are used to develop the understanding of the plot and characters.
- It is always better to argue a particular theory or idea about the text. Try to avoid giving a generalised discussion about a range of things.
- Memorising short and important quotes is integral; however, if you cannot remember it is better to paraphrase rather than ignore the inclusion of evidence.
- Before the exam consider your personal interpretation of the characters and themes
- When writing try to use a sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure. Using an accurate vocabulary allows you to say more with fewer words.
- Make sure you know the text that you wrote creatively on well enough to write analytically on it.

## REFERENCES

### *References used and References for Students*

- [thestellaprize.com.au/resources/schools-program/](http://thestellaprize.com.au/resources/schools-program/)
- <http://www.abc.net.au/science/kelvin/files/s21.htm>
- <http://adb.anu.edu.au/essay/13>
- <http://www.randomhouse.com.au/blog/reading-group-questions-for-the-golden-age-by-joan-london-2111.aspx>
- <https://dailyreview.com.au/the-golden-age-joan-london-book-review/12307/>
- <https://memoryandyou.wordpress.com/tag/perth-in-the-1950s/>
- <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/joan-londons-the-golden-age-is-written-in-the-poetic-language-of-love/news-story/684eedcee2f3a10b50de778191e566ff>
- <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/interviewjoanlondon20140804zza13.html>