

## UNSEEN CRIME KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

### CRIME TROPES (A)

|    | <b>Crime Trope</b>               | <b>Explanation</b>   |
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| 1. | <b>Victim/Villain</b>            | The presentation of both the victim and the villain and the natural response of the reader towards these: <i>do we have feelings of sympathy for the victim? Do we vilify the villain? Are they more complex and therefore is the criminal a villain at all?</i>   |
| 2. | <b>Setting</b>                   | <i>Is the setting conducive to crime? Is it an archetypal crime setting? Is it typical of a particular sub-genre or era?</i>   |
| 3. | <b>Punishment</b>                | Is the criminal punished? Is the punishment fitting of the crime? Does this bring about a restoration of order? <i>E.g. in Peter Grimes we know the protagonist is suffering mentally with his guilt at the end of the poem but there is no formal punishment.</i> |
| 4. | <b>Guilt</b>                     | Whether or not the criminal experiences a sense of guilt, how this is conveyed by the writer and how this makes the reader responds to them.   |
| 5. | <b>Retribution</b>               | Retribution is the punishment inflicted on someone as vengeance for a wrong or criminal act and is often carried out outside the justice system e.g. <i>vigilante justice.</i>   |
| 6. | <b>Legal system</b>              | How the legal and justice system is portrayed to the reader: <i>are they the enemy? Are they effective?</i> Is the narrator a member of the legal system e.g. police officer/detective?  |
| 7. | <b>Social/Religious morality</b> | Especially in highly religious societies (think about context) we must question the morality of the actions in crime texts. Take Oliver Twist for example: whilst child labour isn't a legal crime, it arguably is a moral one.                                    |
| 8. | <b>Transgression</b>             | A transgression is an act which goes against the law, a rule or code of conduct e.g. <i>what is the nature of the crime? Again, is it a purely moral one? Are certain transgressions worse than others?</i>  |

### ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES (C)

|     | <b>AO</b>  |                                   |
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| 13. | <b>AO1</b> | Line of argument                  |
| 14. | <b>AO2</b> | Methods                           |
| 15. | <b>AO3</b> | Context                           |
| 16. | <b>AO4</b> | Links across texts (genre theory) |
| 17. | <b>AO5</b> | Other interpretations of the text |

### KEY AREAS TO CONSIDER (B)

|     | <b>Key area</b>              | <b>Examples</b>   |
|-----|------------------------------|---|
| 9.  | <b>Typical characters</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Hero / anti-hero / protagonist (often a detective)</li> <li>b) Villain / antagonist (the criminal)</li> <li>c) 'Love interest' – often an innocent <i>ingénue</i>, or a voluptuous <i>femme fatale</i></li> <li>d) 'Wingman' – i.e., the hero's best friend</li> <li>e) Chief of police / commanding officer</li> <li>f) The wise old mentor</li> <li>g) The 'Rival'</li> <li>h) The low-life criminal informant</li> </ul>   |
| 10. | <b>Plotlines and stories</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Master criminal commits seemingly unsolvable crime(s)</li> <li>b) Hero is on a 'quest for redemption'</li> <li>c) Opens with the crime, followed by the crime scene investigation</li> <li>d) Cuts between slow-burning investigative phases, and high-octane bursts of action</li> <li>e) May revolve around the crime as a mystery to be slowly revealed, often with plot twists.</li> <li>f) Or we may follow both hero and criminal from their respective POVs.</li> <li>g) Hero often uncovers a much bigger crime or even conspiracy behind the initial crime.</li> <li>h) Stories involving personal revenge.</li> <li>i) Stories involving 'saving the girl'.</li> </ul>  |
| 11. | <b>Themes and ideas</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Genius / intellect:</b> both detective and criminal are often seen as exceptional intellects – a battle of wits between elite figures. Crime &amp; detection as 'art'.</li> <li>b) <b>Morality:</b> the difference between 'good' detective and 'bad' criminal is the criminal's rejection of societal morality and law, contrasted to the detective's upholding of them.</li> <li>c) <b>Moral ambiguity:</b> detective is often flawed, criminal is often admirable, system is often dysfunctional and corrupt – we are led to call societal morality and justice into question.</li> <li>d) <b>Sin, vice &amp; atonement:</b> whether or not criminal villain and or detective protagonist harbour feelings of guilt, regret and the desire to atone.</li> <li>e) <b>The law:</b> the limitations and contradictions of law and criminal justice systems as a means of controlling and/or preventing crime.</li> </ul> |
| 12. | <b>Effects and appeal</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Fantasy identification with characters: we may admire and identify – and/or be maddened by – both the protagonist and the antagonist. They may be performing fantasy fulfilment for us.</li> <li>b) The fascination with the complexity and ingenuity of the crimes and/or the investigation of them.</li> <li>c) An atmosphere involving some or all of the following genres: <b>Horror / Noir / Suspense / Mystery / The Gothic</b>. The crime genre creates an atmosphere notable for thrills, playing on our fears, shocking us, and creating a sense of peril and at times despair which is often – but not always - rewarded by a satisfying resolution when the criminal is caught / mystery is resolved etc.</li> </ul>   |

## ERAS/GENRES OF CRIME FICTION (D)

|     | <i>Era/genre</i>  | <i>Characteristics</i>  |
|-----|---|---|
| 18. | <b>Victorian Crime Fiction (1800's – 1900)</b>  | <p>a) <b>Stories were invariably:</b> <i>Violent, Simplistic, Voyeuristic, Moralistic, Sensational, Explicit</i> and explored: duality, psychology, poverty in Victorian England, religion, evolution, science supernatural.</p> <p>b) The situation became more disturbing as late Victorian London became gripped by true life crimes such as those of Jack the Ripper in the late 1880's. Mixing FACT and FICTION became commonplace.</p> <p>c) The Crime Genre obtained a reputation for sleaze, violence and general disrespectability – middle classes looked on in horror as these lurid tales were consumed by a burgeoning readership of Lower-Class people</p> <p>d) <i>Crime Literature flourished during this period due to a number of factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing Literacy rates</li> <li>• Cheaper methods of publishing</li> <li>• Morbid fascination with crime, fuelled by sensationalistic media</li> <li>• New Policing methods grabbed public imagination</li> <li>• Victorian debates on the nature of criminality – the beginnings of the “Nature versus Nurture” debates.</li> </ul>   |
| 19. | <b>The Golden Age (1920's and 30's)</b>   | <p>a) After the First World War in Britain, Golden Age Crime Fiction, paradoxically, satisfied society's desire for the opposite of previously mentioned revolutionary movements. It offered: <i>order, reason, logic, distraction, puzzles, intellectual stimulation, moral certainty.</i></p> <p>b) The stories were usually glamorous, including interesting and exotic people and gave readers the ability to 'enjoy' murder from a distance: a sense of <b>escapism</b>.</p> <p>c) Most of the authors were British, including Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, some were American but by the time the genre reached America it had a British touch with certain conventions and clichés including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Typical whodunnit plotline with numerous twists and turns</li> <li>II. A body, typically that of a stranger is found, typically by a subordinate like a maid</li> <li>III. Characters (suspects) include handsome young gentleman and his rich fiancée, an actress with past glory and her alcoholic husband, clumsy aspiring young author, retired colonel and a famous detective.</li> <li>IV. Stock settings where murder wouldn't be expected like the secluded English countryside mansion or an expensive traincar.</li> <li>V. The police are typically inept or unavailable to deal with the crime.</li> </ol> <p>d) The Golden Age of Crime Fiction offered: safety, escapism, middle/upper class fantasy world, formula, reputation, LACK of realism, familiar tropes and stereotypes, strong sense of morality.</p>   |
| 20. | <b>Hard-boiled Detective Fiction (1930's: typically in America in response to Golden Age)</b> | <p>a) As a response to Golden Age, from the 1930s, mainly in America, there was the rise of Hardboiled detective fiction which was: tough, cynical, amoral at times, vicious, violent, dealing with corruption and organised crime, dark themes, the <b>femme fatale</b> character, forensic detail.</p> <p>b) Hardboiled (or hard-boiled) detective fiction is a literary genre that shares some of its characters and settings with crime fiction. The genre's typical protagonist is a detective who witnesses the violence or organised crime that flourished during Prohibition (1920 – 1933) and its aftermath while dealing with a legal system that has become as corrupt as the organised crime itself. Rendered cynical by this cycle of violence, the detectives of hardboiled fiction are often antiheroes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Works alone</li> <li>II. Aged between 35 – 45</li> <li>III. Heavy drinker, yet always aware of his surroundings</li> <li>IV. Always 'wearing' a gun</li> <li>V. Often involved in physical altercations to solve crimes</li> <li>VI. Has an ambivalent attitude towards the police</li> <li>VII. Not wealthy and often involved in organised crime himself</li> <li>VIII. Cases that at first appear straightforward, often turn out quite complicated, forcing him to embark on an odyssey through the urban landscape</li> </ol> <p>c) Femme Fatale is a stock literary character typically found in hardboiled, sometimes called a maneater or a vamp, she is beautiful, mysterious and seductive woman whose charms ensnare her lovers, leading them into often deadly traps.</p> |

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| 21. | <b>Post-War</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Post War fears and paranoia fuelled the boom in 40's and 50's hard boiled fiction</li> <li>b) The <b>Femme Fatale</b> was a manifestation of male fear and fantasy of how newly empowered women were behaving during and after the War</li> <li>c) The cynical PI represented society that no longer trusted authority in an atmosphere of distrust and fear</li> <li>d) Men returning from War wanted tough fiction full of macho values and tough talking</li> <li>e) Fear of Russia gave birth to war paranoid Cold War crime scenarios and ultimately led to the fascination with Spy Fiction e.g. James Bond in the 1950's.</li> </ul>  |
| 22. | <b>Nordic Noir</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Scandinavian Noir/ Scandinavian Crime Fiction/ Nordic Noir is a genre comprising crime fiction written in Scandinavia with certain common characteristics, typically in a realistic style, with a dark and morally complex mood contrasting heavily with older 'whodunnit' style.</li> <li>b) The protagonists are typically detectives worn down by cares and far from simply hero, similar to 'hard-boiled' detectives.</li> <li>c) The works also owe something to Scandinavia's where the apparent equality, social justice, and liberalism of the Nordic model is seen to cover up dark secrets and hidden hatreds. Stieg Larsson 's <i>Millennium</i> trilogy, for example, deals with misogyny and rape.</li> </ul> |
| 23. | <b>Urban Gangland Crime Novel</b> | <p>Themes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Gangster 'families'</li> <li>b) Crime lords</li> <li>c) Drugs</li> <li>d) Sex/prostitution</li> <li>e) Gambling</li> <li>f) Violence</li> </ul> <p>Example writers include Martina Cole.</p>  |

**APPROACHING THE ESSAY (E)**

