FICTION TIPS & TRICKS

STEAL ANALYSIS

The STEAL method is a tool used to analyse a character in a text. The acronym "STEAL" stands for Speech, Thoughts, Effect on Others, Actions, and Looks.

S - Speech: What does the character say? How does the character talk? Speech provides insight into a character's personality, social status, education, and beliefs. A character's choice of words, tone, and style of speaking can reveal a lot about their character.

T - Thoughts: What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings? This could include fears, hopes, motivations, and inner conflicts. Thoughts give a more profound insight into what drives a character, what they value, and how they perceive their environment.

E- Effects: What is the character's relationship with others? How do they treat them, and how are they treated in return? Understanding how a character interacts with others can reveal their role in the story, their social skills, and their perspective on others.

A - Actions: What does the character do? How does the character behave? Actions can speak louder than words, and a character's behaviour is often a direct indication of their personality and beliefs.

L - Looks: What does the character look like? How does the character dress? Physical descriptions can provide information about a character's personality, background, and lifestyle.

Example Extract:

"In the bustling market, John nervously adjusted his tie and forced a smile. 'Fresh apples! Best in town!' he called out, his voice almost drowned by the surrounding noise. He glanced at his competitor, a veteran vendor with a booming voice, and sighed quietly."

STEAL Analysis:

- *Speech*: John is trying to sell his apples by calling out, "Fresh apples! Best in town!"
- *Thoughts*: John is feeling nervous, as indicated by his adjustment of his tie and his forced smile.
- *Effects*: The extract doesn't give a lot of information about how John affects others, but his voice doesn't carry well in the busy market, suggesting he's not attracting a lot of attention.
- *Actions*: He glances at his competitor and sighs, suggesting he feels inadequate or worried.
- *Looks*: The description of John nervously adjusting his tie and forcing a smile gives us a picture of a man who's not comfortable in his situation.
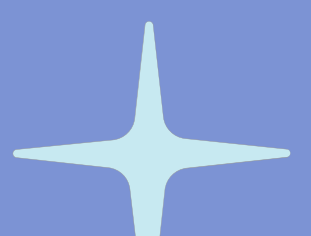
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Extract Example

The Painter of the Revolution

In the chaotic backdrop of the French Revolution, amid the cacophony of fallen aristocracy and rising radicals, there existed a singular tranquillity in the studio of Alexandre Mercier. Mercier, known far and wide as the Painter of the Revolution, was not a man swayed by political tides. His allegiance lay not with the royals nor the republicans, but with the silent language of art.

Mercier's studio was a small universe within itself. An array of canvases scattered about, a palette splashed with a spectrum of colours, and brushes of varying sizes carefully arranged in an ancient tin box. The strong scent of paint and turpentine filled the room, combining oddly yet harmoniously with the faint trace of burnt cinnamon from the bakery next door.

Mercier's latest masterpiece was a portrayal of the infamous storming of the Bastille. It was a raw, powerful depiction, bringing together the strength of the crowd, the fear in the guards, the looming grey fortress, and the uncertain, turbulent skies above. The complexity of the emotions that he managed to capture within the confines of the canvas was a testament to his genius.

Yet, for Mercier, each painting was a struggle. He felt the burden of responsibility. His paintings were not just for those of his time, but for the generations to come. He desired to capture the spirit of the Revolution, the essence of a time when people were willing to risk everything for their beliefs.

On a cold day in December, a young woman named Madeleine walked into Mercier's studio. She was a seamstress with fiery eyes and a quiet strength, who had been part of the crowd storming the Bastille. Mercier was immediately taken by her courage and determination and decided that she, too, would be immortalized on canvas. Their unlikely friendship turned into a deep affection, offering a gentle contrast to the chaos outside.

Question: Based on the text, which of the following best describes Mercier's character?
A. He is a supporter of the monarchy.
B. He is indifferent to the happenings around him.
C. He is an artist committed to truthfully depicting the revolution.
D. He is a recluse who is afraid of the revolution.
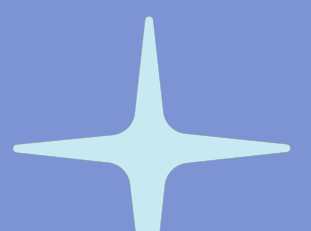
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STEAL Analysis:

- **Speech**: The text does not provide any direct quotes or dialogue from Mercier. However, his silence amidst the chaos can be interpreted as a reflection of his focus and dedication to his craft.

- **Thoughts**: Mercier's thoughts reflect his sense of responsibility and commitment to his work. For instance, the text mentions, "*He felt the burden of responsibility. His paintings were not just for those of his time, but for the generations to come. He desired to capture the spirit of the Revolution, the essence of a time when people were willing to risk everything for their beliefs.*" This tells us that Mercier is deeply thoughtful about his role as an artist during this turbulent time, and feels a profound sense of duty to accurately capture the spirit of the Revolution.

- **Effects**: The text introduces Madeleine, a young woman who is moved by Mercier's work. The text states, "*Mercier was immediately taken by her courage and determination and decided that she, too, would be immortalized on canvas. Their unlikely friendship turned into a deep affection, offering a gentle contrast to the chaos outside.*" This suggests that Mercier's work and personality have a profound impact on those who encounter him, inspiring admiration and affection.

- **Actions**: Mercier's actions revolve around his art. For example, the text describes how "*Mercier's latest masterpiece was a portrayal of the infamous storming of the Bastille. It was a raw, powerful depiction, bringing together the strength of the crowd, the fear in the guards, the looming grey fortress, and the uncertain, turbulent skies above.*" This indicates his dedication to representing the reality of the Revolution in his work, even when it involves portraying scenes of violence and turmoil.

- **Looks**: Mercier's physical appearance is not described in the text. However, the descriptions of his studio — from the array of canvases and palette of colors to the strong scent of paint and turpentine — create a vivid image of his artistic environment.

Through this STEAL analysis, it can be inferred that Mercier is a dedicated artist deeply committed to capturing the essence of the French Revolution in his work, showing a strong sense of responsibility towards future generations. He profoundly impacts those around him, as demonstrated by his relationship with Madeleine. Thus, the most fitting description for Mercier's character, based on this analysis, is "***an artist committed to truthfully depicting the revolution***" (option C).

Scholarly

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HOW TO INTERPRET THE UNDERLYING MEANING OR IMPLICATION OF THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE?

Step 1: Identify & Understand

The first step involves recognising the type of figurative language used (metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, idiom, etc.) and understanding its literal meaning. By identifying the type of figurative language, you gain insights into the purpose and the effect the author is trying to achieve. This includes defining unfamiliar words or phrases and breaking down complex constructions to understand what's being said literally.

Example: If you encounter the metaphor, "Her words were a sharp knife," you identify it as a metaphor, where "words" are compared to a "sharp knife". The literal understanding would be that her words are being likened to a knife that is sharp.

Step 2: Contextualise & Symbolise

The second step is to examine the context and symbolism. This involves analysing the surrounding text, the situation, characters involved, their feelings or motivations, and the broader narrative arc. It also involves understanding the symbolic meaning of the figurative language. The symbols could be character-specific, culturally universal, or broadly relatable.

Example: If the character speaking the harsh words is usually kind and gentle, the metaphor "Her words were a sharp knife" could symbolise a significant emotional change or moment of tension. The "sharp knife" might symbolise pain, danger, or conflict, providing deeper insights into the character dynamics or plot.

Step 3: Evaluate & Draw Conclusions

Finally, evaluate why the author used this particular piece of figurative language at this juncture in the text and what they're trying to convey. This could involve revealing character traits, setting the mood, creating vivid imagery, or foreshadowing events. Drawing conclusions involves interpreting the broader implications or meanings that the author is communicating through this figurative language.

Example: The author might have used the metaphor "Her words were a sharp knife" to highlight the emotional harm that the character's words can inflict, which could be a turning point in the storyline. The conclusion could be that this moment is a significant conflict point in the narrative where the character's words have a damaging impact.

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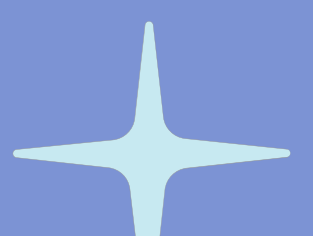
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Extract *Example*:

Mama always said, "When the wind speaks, listen carefully." I never really understood what she meant until that fateful summer in '32 when the very soil of our land rose up in a monstrous tempest, screaming its protest at the injustice we had wrought. The winds were no longer whispering then; they were crying, wailing for all the world to hear. We had stripped the earth bare, taken everything it had to give, and it was fighting back.

I watched as a wall of dust, dark and ominous as a wrathful deity, blotted out the sun and swallowed the horizon whole. It wasn't just a storm; it was an embodiment of our own sins, a reflection of our greed coming back to haunt us.

From "The Whispering Winds", a historical fiction novel set in the Midwest during the Dust Bowl era

Questions:

1. What does the metaphor, "*The winds were no longer whispering then; they were crying, wailing for all the world to hear*" primarily suggest about the wind's transformation?

A. The wind has gained the ability to communicate vocally.
B. The wind's gentle whispers have transformed into loud, painful cries.
C. The wind has developed a human-like capability to express sorrow.
D. The wind's whispers are no longer audible.

2. The phrase, "*a wall of dust, dark and ominous as a wrathful deity,*" uses figurative language to:

A. Suggest the storm is a divine punishment.
B. Show that the storm is blocking all light.
C. Convey that the dust storm is a physical barrier.
D. Indicate the narrator's fear of the approaching storm.

3. In the sentence, "*It wasn't just a storm; it was an embodiment of our own sins, a reflection of our greed coming back to haunt us,*" the phrase "*an embodiment of our own sins*" primarily symbolises:

A. The physical form of human sins.
B. The collective guilt of the community.
C. The damaging environmental practices that led to the dust storm.
D. The haunting fear experienced by the narrator.

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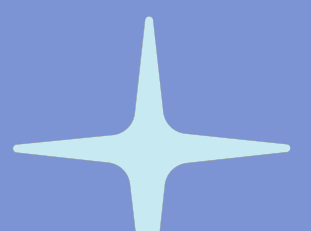
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Let's apply the 3-step-plan to answer these questions:

Question 1: Metaphor: "*The winds were no longer whispering then; they were crying, wailing for all the world to hear.*"

1. Identify & Understand: The metaphor compares the winds' previous state (whispering) to their current state (crying, wailing). The literal understanding is that the sound or intensity of the wind has changed.
2. Contextualise & Symbolise: The context is the onset of an environmental disaster caused by human activities. The wind here symbolises nature's response. The 'crying and wailing' is symbolic of pain, distress, or protest.
3. Evaluate & Draw Conclusions: The author uses this metaphor to emphasise the severity and urgency of the disaster. The conclusion is that the wind's transformation from whispering to crying and wailing signifies a drastic change in the environment due to human actions.

Answer: The wind's gentle whispers have transformed into loud, painful cries (B).

Question 2: Phrase: "*a wall of dust, dark and ominous as a wrathful deity.*"

1. Identify & Understand: We can see the phrase "a wall of dust, dark and ominous as a wrathful deity" is a simile because it makes a comparison using the word "**as**". The simile compares a "wall of dust" to "a wrathful deity". The literal understanding is that the dust storm is as dark and ominous as an angry god.
2. Contextualise & Symbolise: The context is a severe dust storm caused by human activities. The 'wrathful deity' could symbolise divine anger or punishment.
3. Evaluate & Draw Conclusions : The author uses this simile to underline the terrifying impact and significance of the storm. The conclusion is that the storm, symbolised as a wrathful deity, is a form of retribution or consequence for human actions.

Answer: Suggest the storm is a divine punishment (A).

Question 3: Phrase: "an embodiment of our own sins."

1. Identify & Understand: The phrase "an embodiment of our own sins" is a metaphor as it equates one thing (the storm) with something else (the sins of the people) without using "like" or "as" for the comparison. The literal understanding is that the storm represents their sins.
2. Contextualise & Symbolise: The context here is an acknowledgement of guilt and responsibility for the disaster. '*Sins*' could symbolise wrong actions or decisions, particularly the damaging environmental practices that led to the dust storm.
3. Evaluate & Draw Conclusions: The author uses this metaphor to link the storm directly to human actions, establishing a cause-and-effect relationship. The conclusion is that the storm, symbolised as the embodiment of their sins, is a direct result of their damaging actions.

Answer: The damaging environmental practices that led to the dust storm (C).

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