

**Lesson  
One**

# Introducing *Stone Cold*

**Aims**

By the end of this lesson you should know more about:

- your own attitude towards the homeless
- how words can carry values and be positive or negative
- how authors can use different kinds of narrative viewpoint
- the character of Link in *Stone Cold*
- the character of Shelter

**Context**

This lesson leads you into reading Robert Swindells' novel about homelessness, *Stone Cold*. The next three lessons focus on later sections of the novel.



Oxford Open Learning

## Who cares about the homeless?

Robert Swindells' novel *Stone Cold* is about a young man who becomes homeless. We never find out his real name, but he calls himself Link. He makes, and loses, a friend, meets a young woman who changes his life, and finds himself in terrible danger.

We have all seen homeless people, especially those of us who live in cities. Many of these people are young, and many are begging. A few are selling copies of *The Big Issue*. We all live in homes, with families, carers, or at least people who care about us. We may well see the homeless as inhabiting another world from ours.

### Activity One

Start by exploring your current attitudes towards the homeless. Find someone with whom you can discuss the following statements. Fill in the grid to rate how far you agree with them. Try to be honest in your answers.

If you prefer, you can rate the statements 0–5, with 0 meaning you strongly disagree, and 5 that you completely agree.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Most of them have brought it upon themselves. They don't need to be homeless.			
Anyone could end up in their position just through bad luck.			
They could get some sort of work and get out of their rut if they tried hard enough.			
I feel sorry for them.			
They embarrass me when they beg.			
They disgust me.			
Begging should be illegal because most people don't want to be asked for money.			
Some are probably very talented but don't have a chance to show it.			
Most are hopeless inadequates who couldn't hold down a job if you gave them one.			
If you give them money, it will go on drink and drugs.			
The government should give them a lot more help to get back on their feet.			
If people feel embarrassed by beggars, that's their problem.			
It's our duty to help the hungry and homeless.			

## Positive and negative words

Many of the words we use convey values – our beliefs and opinions about things. Nouns (words for things), for example, can be used as if they are just labels, but in fact contain values. This is especially true of colloquial (popular) or slang words.

For example, if someone calls a psychiatrist a ‘shrink’, short for ‘head-shrinker’, this refers to tribes who once practised ‘head-hunting’ – cutting off the heads of their enemies and pickling them, which shrinks them. Therefore, the word ‘shrink’, applied to a psychiatrist, suggests that the speaker is suspicious or critical of psychiatry, perhaps seeing it as less advanced than psychiatrists themselves would like to think it was.

Think of some slang terms you use, or know of, for different types of people, that imply (suggest) a value judgement.

### Activity Two

Below are some words and phrases used for the homeless in *Stone Cold*. Discuss or think about what each one implies about the homeless (and about anyone using the phrase). Write your thoughts in the right-hand column.

Put the phrases in order according to how positive or negative they are.

dossers	
winos	
invisible people	
scruffy blighters	
crims	
down & outs	
street people	
garbage	

## Narrative viewpoint

One important feature of a novel is how the story is told – its **narrative viewpoint**. Most novels are written in the **first person** or the **third person**. Writing in the first person means telling the story from the viewpoint of one character ('I saw myself in the mirror ...'). An author using the third person ('Link saw himself in the mirror ...') is sometimes called the **omniscient author**. This 'all-knowing author' can tell us whatever he or she likes about the characters, including what they're thinking.

However, a clever author can write in the third person and still give us the viewpoint of one character.

She must have been mad. What was she thinking of! Of course Jemima was lying! She'd always been devious.

Think of novels you've read and consider their narrative viewpoint. How effective is it? Reread a page or two if necessary.

### Activity Three

Read the extract below and write a paragraph saying (a) what the narrative viewpoint is and (b) how effective it is and why.

As soon as the great black velvet pall outside my little window was shot with grey, I got up and went down stairs; every board upon the way, and every crack in every board, calling after me, "Stop thief!" and "Get up, Mrs Joel!" In the pantry, which was far more abundantly supplied than usual, owing to the season, I was very much alarmed, by a hare hanging up by the heels, whom I rather thought I caught, when my back was half turned, winking. I had no time for verification, no time for selection, no time for anything, for I had no time to spare. I stole some bread, some rind of cheese, about half a jar of mincemeat (which I tied up in my pocket-handkerchief with my last night's slice), some brandy from a stone bottle (which I decanted into a glass bottle I had secretly used for making that intoxicating fluid, Spanish-liquorice-water, up in my room: diluting the stone bottle from a jug in the kitchen cupboard), a meat bone with very little on it, and a beautiful round compact pork pie. I was nearly going away without the pie, but I was tempted to mount upon a shelf, to look what it was that was put away so carefully in a covered earthen ware dish in a corner, and I found it was the pie, and I took it, in the hope that it was not intended for early use, and would not be missed for some time.

There was a door in the kitchen, communicating with the forge; I unlocked and unbolted that door, and got a file from among Joe's tools. Then, I put the fastenings as I had found them, opened the door at which I had entered when I ran home last night, shut it, and ran for the misty marshes.

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Chapter 2

	
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### The narrative viewpoint in *Stone Cold*

The narrative viewpoint is a major feature of *Stone Cold*, and of other novels by Robert Swindells. If you have not yet started the novel, begin by reading the first two pages. Then stop and do the following short exercise.

<b>Activity Four</b>	<p><b>Think about and/or discuss</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What do you notice about the narrative viewpoint of these first two pages?</li><li>2. What hints are there about the two characters introduced?</li><li>3. What questions do these pages raise in your mind?</li></ol>
	

## Shared narrative

You should have noticed that *Stone Cold* is written in the first person, but it is written from the viewpoint of two different characters. This is unusual, although not unique. What advantages do you think there are of using first person narrative, and especially of having two narrators in this way?

Now answer the questions in Activity 4. If you have already read on from the first two pages, answer them from the viewpoint of someone who has not.

<p><b>Activity Five</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What could Link mean when he says that he is 'invisible'?</li> <li>2. Why might he not want to give his real name?</li> <li>3. Why do people not want to be reminded that he exists?</li> <li>4. Why does he call his life 'fascinating'?</li> <li>5. Why do you think the second page is headed 'Daily Routine Orders 1'? Hint: it links to the phrase 'get fell in'.</li> <li>6. The phrase 'shelter from the stormy blast' comes from a hymn 'O God our help in ages past'. What could this suggest about the speaker?</li> </ol>
	

Now read on to the end of page 7. As you do, mentally note what we learn about Link. How has he become homeless? Who is to blame?

What new information do we have about the mysterious second narrator? What is his name: What is he up to? Why does he tell himself 'wait for it, you 'orrible little man'?

<p><b>Activity Six</b></p>	<p>Write at least one paragraph describing events leading up to Link leaving home, from the viewpoint of either –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• his mother</li> <li>• Vince</li> <li>• Carole</li> </ul> <p>Remember, they will have different viewpoints. They might also mention Link's father. You will have to invent Link's 'real' name.</p>
	

## Bradford to London

Read on to the end of page 15 (before Daily Routine Orders 4). When you have done so, continue reading here.

Pages 8–10 and 13–15 reveal how Link came to leave Bradford and make his way to London. It makes the story more believable that Link does not go from living at home in Bradford one day to being homeless in London the next. What do you think of the attitude of Chris, Carole's boyfriend, towards Link? Is he uncaring, or is his resentment understandable? How supportive is Carole?

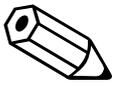
## Daily Routine Orders 3 (pages 11–12)

In this section we get a lot more insight into the mysterious second narrator. You may have worked out by now that 'Shelter' is the name he has adopted. Like Link, we never know his real name. He is a former sergeant-major, discharged from the army at the age of 47, after 29 years service. Do the sum: how old was he when he signed up? How has this time, and his discharge, affected him?

**Activity  
Seven**

Imagine you are a police detective who has found and read Shelter's 'Daily Routine Orders' to this point. Write a profile of his character. Consider:

- his language, and the way he describes the homeless
- his values, including his ideal of manhood
- how he feels about being discharged
- his theories about why he was discharged
- what you think, at this point, that he might do
- the references to Charing Cross and Strensall, North Yorkshire (look them up in a search engine)

**Extension**

Find the website for the organisation Shelter. How does its work relate to Swindells' novel?

**Self-  
assessment  
test**

This test is on the idea of positive and negative words, the concept of narrative viewpoint, and what has happened in *Stone Cold* so far (up to the end of page 15).

1. Which words convey a more positive attitude in the following pairings?  
(a) gang group  
(b) reporter hack  
(c) villager yokel  
(d) tramp traveller
2. Identify the narrative viewpoint in each of the following passages, and what feature or advantage of that viewpoint it shows:
  - (a) Megan felt more than a little guilty. She wondered whether she had done the right thing. Meanwhile, next door, Barnaby lay awake. The ancient clock ticked loudly, like steadily marching mechanical feet.
  - (b) I'm the sort of bloke who never forgets a face, right? So, when I clocked this old geezer heading my way, I knew right away who he was.
  - (c) Celia puffed up with indignation. Who was this upstart trying to take her job? She would jolly well teach him a lesson!
3. What is the narrative viewpoint of *Stone Cold*, and what advantages and disadvantages does it seem to have so far?
4. Sort the following phrases into those used by (a) Link, (b) Shelter, and (c) Vince:  
invisible people scruffy little blighters street people scrounger  
out-and-out bastard cheeky little bugger layabout old dudes
5. What does the phrase 'time to move on' make Link think of?
6. What present do Link's mother and sister give him, and why does he have mixed feelings about it?
7. What kind of ticket does Link get to London? How is that significant? How can he afford it?

