Tutor In A Box

Start Here

This box contains a range of reading and writing activities based on a short story entitled 'Martha, Martha' by modern-day writer Zadie Smith which is available to read for free on the internet by visiting: https://granta.com/martha-martha.

Activity	Assessment Objectives
Reading	AO1: Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas select and synthesise evidence from different texts AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views
Writing	AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts

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Aa Vocabulary

Aa Vocabulary from the text

- **realty** - real estate (American for property or the selling of property)
- **lithograph** - a print produced using oil and water
- **demotic language** - colloquial language (that used by ordinary people) adapted from Martha Martha by Zadie Smith
- **divesting** - removing
- **flapper** - a fashionable young woman of the 1920s
- **kiss curl** - a lock of curled hair pressed onto the face and held in place by hair product

Aa Vocabulary for the skills covered in this box

- **implicit** - implied or suggested
- **explicit** - clearly stated leaving no ambiguity
- **inference** - working out meaning using evidence and reasoning
- **interpret** - explain the meaning of information or ideas
- **connotation** - the idea or feeling attached to or created by a particular word

Tutor In A Box

📖 Reading

📖 **Read the extract of the short story from the opening to 'Pam had never seen anything quite like it in her office before.'**

Reading an unseen text

When faced with a text for the first time, especially in an exam, it can be tempting to read it quickly and just get on with answering the questions.

✓ It's correct that you can't spend absolutely ages, enjoying the text at your leisure.

✓ However you do need to give it enough consideration to be able to answer the questions to the best of your ability.

✓ Some details in the text will be subtle and could be easily missed if you skim-read. Skimming is useful when you go back to the text to recall a word or quotation, but it is not enough on your first read.

To begin with, we are going to consider the skill of retrieving explicit information (AO 1). This refers to information that is clearly expressed and does not require any inference. In the exam, ensure you read the question carefully as it may direct you to a specific location in the text. If you select information from elsewhere in the material, you will not gain the marks.

An example would be, 'List four things we learn about [character] in lines 1-8.' For this kind of task, you are simply taking information from the text. Some exam boards may ask you to write the information in your own words, or you may be able to use a combination of quotations and your own words. Make sure you know what is expected of you.

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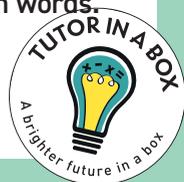
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Those are some of the easier marks to be gained in the exam, but are nevertheless important. Now, how can we build upon this skill? We are now going to develop the skill of inference, which is working out implicit or implied meaning (AO 1). This involves 'reading between the lines' to identify what the writer was trying to suggest or hint at when they wrote a particular word or line. Inference is a more developed skill as it requires you to go beyond simply identifying what is on the page.

When inferring, or working out what the evidence suggests, we need to consider what the writer was trying to convey (show) the reader when they wrote the text. We should also be thinking about how a reader would interpret the information (AO2). When making inferences about a character, we can consider a character's description, their actions, what they say and how others behave around them or speak to them.

For example, if people ignore a character, we could infer that the character may be unpleasant.

If you want to improve your answers even further, the ability to offer an alternative interpretation will also impress the examiner. Here, you make a suggestion about what the quotation could mean, as well as offering another idea about how it could be understood by a reader. For example, if a character is not making eye contact in a particular situation, we could infer that they are:

- 📖 **rude**
- 📖 **self-conscious**
- 📖 **guilty/hiding something**

Seeing yourself as a writer

One important factor to remember when you complete the writing section of the exam is that you are a writer, not just a student doing a writing task.

Believing this will transform your mindset and help you to be the best writer you can be.

With this in mind, you need to view your writing as a construct and draw upon the literary devices you have analysed in other writers' work. If you have been studying a character, you can use similar ideas to those of the writer (without copying them, of course!), when you create one of your own.

Creating a character

In the extract from 'Martha, Martha', we see that Zadie Smith has used a range of techniques to create an impression of the characters of Pam and Martha:

- ✏ **Interests:** Pam listens to Mozart.
- ✏ **Appearance:** Pam always wears 'black', whereas Martha is wearing 'a red overcoat' and 'a cheap-looking grey trouser suit' with 'fake pearls'.
- ✏ **How they speak:** Martha says, 'The lift's broken, it don't work.' This is non-standard English.
- ✏ **How they behave towards other characters:** Pam greets Martha by saying, 'It's so good to meet you.'

When creating a character of your own, you must first consider what overall impression you want to create for your reader (AO5). So, before you decide on any small details of their appearance, personality or mannerisms, think about whether you want them to appear as:

- ✏ fun-loving
- ✏ stern
- ✏ introverted
- ✏ eccentric

This will also be determined by the task itself and how the characters will fit into your plot. If there is more than one character, decide whether you want them to be similar to each other or very different like Pam and Martha. Who is more powerful? Is there an age difference? Do their personalities clash or do they get along? All of this will contribute to your storyline as well.

We suggest - you don't create more than two characters for the purposes of a short narrative or story opening in the exam.

Once you have worked out what overall impression you want to create of your character(s), you can then begin to work on the finer details. Remember that all the small details will build together so don't lose focus during the planning stage. You could end up contradicting yourself and this will result in the character being unconvincing. Don't forget to draw upon any techniques you have encountered in other texts you have read and use those.

Remember that you are a writer yourself!

Dialogue

As seen in Zadie Smith's writing, we can use dialogue as a tool for creating an impression of a character. If you can write in a particular accent (pronunciation of words) or dialect (regional variation of words, such as Martha's: 'it don't work'), you can suggest where a character is from, how they present themselves and what their background could be. Their vocabulary choices could also reflect their age. A small amount of dialogue can be particularly effective for this, but don't rely too heavily on it as it will hamper your plot development.

Reading

Read the extract of the short story again, from the opening to 'Pam had never seen anything quite like it in her office before.'

1. Summarise the extract in your own words to show that you have understood it. Write about 3-5 lines.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. List four things we learn about the setting in the opening paragraph.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

3. Complete a spider diagram for each of the two main characters, Pam and Martha, with explicit information from the whole extract.

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4. Now transfer some of the quotations from your spider diagrams into the left-hand column of each of the two tables below. Try to choose the quotations that will allow you to do the most inferring, therefore showing the examiner that you truly understand what the writer is implying or suggesting. We are trying to build up a picture of the reader's impression of each character as they read the short story. Then, complete the right-hand column, inferring what is suggested by the quotation. Try to think of alternative interpretations too. Remember to use quotation marks if your explicit detail is taken word-for-word from the text. They are not necessary if you have paraphrased the information (put it into your own words).

Pam

Explicit detail (what the text says)	Inference (what the writer could be suggesting about Pam)
'she had her slippers on'	She is relaxed at work/wants her customers to feel comfortable around her/is eccentric/is unprofessional

Martha

Explicit detail (what the text says)	Inference (what the writer could be suggesting about Martha)
'she seemed to waver between two doorways'	She is lost/lacks confidence/is indecisive

Writing

Imagine you have been asked to write the opening to a short story entitled 'The Outsider'.

1. Using techniques employed by Zadie Smith, plus any others you have read on the information pages or that you have learnt in school, think of two characters. Bear in mind the title of the story, 'The Outsider' – one of your characters needs to be an outsider.

2. Create a mind map for each character, noting down features of their appearance, personality etc. Remember to keep in mind the overall impression you are trying to create of each character, therefore each small detail should contribute to this.

3. Give the characters a name, again thinking about how this can add to the reader's image of them.

4. Write the opening to the short story (about one to two sides of A4), introducing your two characters. Consider which one will appear first and how they will interact with each other, then develop this throughout your piece. Remember to plan your paragraphs first!

Park Bench

This game can be played in pairs or a small group.

Imagine that you are a character sitting on a park bench. Think about your mannerisms, speech and how you might behave towards other people. You could begin to speak aloud while sitting alone to allow the others to get an idea of what you are like.

Another character should then join you on the park bench, again thinking about how they want to present themselves. The two characters should now interact in role, ensuring that they are believable at all times. Any other characters can then join, depending upon how many of you there are in a group. Continue your dialogue for as long as you can all remain convincing!

Hands-on element

A set of props could be included in the box, or some flash card with images of characters/ accessories to inspire the characters.

Reading

1. Your summary should be along these lines:

The extract is about two women. The first is Pam, who is a real estate agent who is waiting for a client, Martha, to come and meet her. Pam seems older than Martha and a bit eccentric from what she is wearing at work (Chinese slippers) but she seems very friendly and tries to make Martha feel comfortable. She is also friendly to some men who have found her office by mistake. Martha, on the other hand, is younger and comes across as a little rude to Pam.

2. Your answer may include any four of the following:

- Pam's office is tiny.
- Pam's office is on the third floor.
- The weather where Pam's office is located is extremely cold.
- They have snows that last four months.
- Pam's office is dinky.
- Pam's office is hard to find.
- Pam's office is at the top of the building.
- You can reach Pam's office by an antique elevator.
- Pam's office has a filing cabinet.

3. Your spider diagram may include ideas along these lines:

Pam	Martha
wears Chinese slippers is a realtor (estate agent)	is shrimpish
is listening to Mozart	is pushing twenty-two
is singing along to the Mozart	gets lost trying to find Pam's office
has a sore instep	has on a red overcoat and cream snow boots
wears glasses	walks on the edges of her boots like an ice skater
wears loose black clothes	wavers between the two doorways
always buys the same kind of clothes	believes she can get a property with two bedrooms and a garden for a thousand dollars a month
has a moustache	says she's sorry for being late but doesn't look sorry
speaks warmly to Martha	has very black skin and doesn't blush
young men do not register with her any more	Has an English accent
	Stands in the centre of the room
	Is short and muscular

Pam	Martha
	Wears a cheap-looking grey trouser suit and fake pearls Her buttons look like rusty spare change Has short ironed hair, cut in a flapper's style with a kiss curl on her cheek

4. Your completed table should look something like this:

Pam

Explicit detail (what the text says)	Inference (what the writer could be suggesting about Pam)
'she had her slippers on'	She is relaxed at work/wants her customers to feel comfortable around her/is eccentric/is unprofessional
Sings along to Mozart	Doesn't seem concerned about what others think of her. Office is in a busy building - must know other office workers can hear her. The fact that she makes up the words suggests this even further. Or, could imply she is rude or inconsiderate – music is 'swelling' and capital letters show it is loud when others are working

'Her moustache was moist and visible'	Doesn't care about her appearance – could be because she is comfortable in herself and doesn't need to make an effort to impress others. Backed up by 'young men did not register with Pam any more.

Martha

Explicit detail (what the text says)	Inference (what the writer could be suggesting about Martha)
'she seemed to waver between two doorways'	She is lost/lacks confidence/is indecisive
'had on a red overcoat'	Colour red suggests bold/confident/perhaps danger (connotations). Could be hiding something behind the 'loud' coat – could be to detract people's attention away from something
Believes she can get a property with two bedrooms and a garden for a thousand dollars a month	Young/inexperienced/new to the area/over-confident

Writing

Responses here will vary but you can use the self-assessment task below to work out your strengths and areas for development!

Feature	I have included this	I need to work on this
Description or information to suggest that one of the characters is an outsider		
Mention of the characters' hobbies/interests to shape who they are		
Description of the characters' appearance, considering connotations of their clothing and other accessories		
Dialogue to show how the characters speak and add to the reader's impression of them		
Mention of how the characters behave towards one another to add to the impression the reader gains of them		