

## The prime minister of the United Kingdom

There is no direct election in which the voters directly vote for the person that they want to see as prime minister. By convention, the leader of the strongest party in the House of Commons is appointed prime minister by the monarch.

When Labour won a landslide victory under the leadership of Tony Blair in 1997, Mr Blair consequently became prime minister. When he laid his office down in 2007, it was not necessary to call an election: he was automatically succeeded by Mr Gordon Brown, the new party leader.

## The powers of the prime minister

Once the prime minister is appointed, the monarch asks him to form a government. Thus the prime minister

- chooses the cabinet,
- selects and dismisses ministers,
- determines the domestic and the foreign policy of the nation,
- presides over cabinet meetings,
- sets the agenda for parliament.

He/she also

- “advises” the monarch on the appointment of officials and on granting honours (by convention the monarch follows his/her advice),
- consults and informs the monarch about government decisions.

The prime minister

- can call an election and
- can deploy troops.



## The Civil Rights Movement

Ratified on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1865 the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery. With the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment stating that all persons born in the USA are citizens, the former slaves automatically acquired citizenship while the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment emphasised that the right to vote should not be withheld on account of race. Yet in the south, Blacks were denied the rights of citizens, such as the right to vote, the rights of personal liberty and equal opportunity. Racial injustice and discrimination were institutionalised when in 1896 the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation was legal as long as “separate but equal facilities were provided” thus laying the legal foundation for segregation. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Civil Rights Movement became instrumental in fighting segregation and ensuring civil rights for African Americans. On their initiative the legal framework was created to promote racial equality through a number of measures.

## Some landmark decisions

- 1954 The Supreme Court ruled that separate schools could not be of equal quality.
- 1955 The bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, ended segregation on public transport.
- 1963 Two black students were admitted to the University of Alabama.
- 1964 Under the 1964 Civil Rights Act discrimination in public places was forbidden.
- 1965 The 1965 Voting Rights Act enabled more Blacks to participate in elections, for instance by abolishing the poll tax, a fixed amount of money which had to be paid in order to be allowed to vote, thus inevitably excluding poor Blacks from the elections.
- 1971 To achieve racial balance at school “bussing” was introduced: children from black residential areas were transported to schools in white neighbourhoods and vice versa.
- 1972 The Equal Opportunity and Employment Act encouraged “affirmative action” to improve the employment opportunities of minorities.



There are numerous creative writing tasks: for instance you might have to write a diary entry, a dialogue or a letter from the perspective of a fictional character. Perhaps the assignment consists in the continuation of a story.

1. Thus begin by defining the task: What kind of text do you have to produce? What does the genre require?
2. Then do some brainstorming and simply collect ideas.
3. Do you have to adopt a certain perspective?
4. What characters do you want to create/include? Develop characters by deciding on their background and determining what kind of language they use etc.
5. What is the atmosphere like? Establish and describe a setting.
6. What will your text be about?

7. How does your story develop? Might problems or tensions – perhaps between the characters – lead to a conflict or a catastrophe?
8. Plan your text carefully, outlining the beginning, the middle and the ending of the story.
9. Begin writing, following your story line.
10. Go through the text again when you have finished writing.
11. Do you have to improve on the descriptions?
12. Are the characters convincing?
13. Is the story consistent? It might contain some surprising turns but it should not lack coherence.
14. Finally you should proofread your text.



## Definition

In contrast to prose, the words of a poem are arranged in lines. Thus one might say, the main difference between a poem and a piece of prose is merely the point at which the lines stop before they reach the end of the page.

### **Hugh MacDiarmid: “Perfect”**

I found a pigeon’s skull on the machair,  
All the bones pure white and dry, and chalky,  
But perfect,  
Without a crack or a flaw anywhere.

At the back, rising out of the beak,  
Were twin domes like bubbles of thin bone,  
Almost transparent, where the brains had been  
That fixed the tilt of the wings.

(Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Complete Poems*, Vol. 1, ed. by Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 573)

## Typical features

- A number of lines arranged together constitute a verse or a stanza.
- These lines may rhyme, perhaps in order to stress their inner coherence.
- In some poems the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables forms a rhythm.



## Theme

A theme is one of the main ideas explored in a literary work. It does not necessarily have to be stated explicitly, the central themes in a drama or a narrative evolve as the narration proceeds or the plot unfolds. Thus Macbeth's overpowering ambition which finally leads to his own destruction is one of the central themes in Shakespeare's drama. It is introduced in the first act when Lady Macbeth remarks: "Thou wouldst be great, / Art not without ambition" (I,5,18 f), and Macbeth himself expands on this by saying: "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition" (I,7,25 ff). But driven by his ambition he is finally persuaded to kill Duncan and in murdering the king, Macbeth becomes guilty. Guilt is another important theme developed in the play and it is intricately linked with the motif of washing blood off one's hands.

## Motif

A motif is a recurrent element which is used to present or to illustrate one of the main themes in a literary work. In repeating and varying a distinctive statement, image, object or stylistic device a motif might be crucial in developing a major idea or concept.

When Macbeth has accomplished the first murder, Lady Macbeth tells him to "Go, get some water, / And wash this filthy witness from your hand." (II,2,43 f) Macbeth later takes up this motif saying: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (II,2,57 f)

Lady Macbeth echoes his question in her hallucinations when asking: "What, will these hands ne'ver be clean?" (V,1,43), and she seems to give the answer a few lines later: "Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." (V,1,50 f)

In using the image of hand washing as a recurrent motif, Shakespeare elaborates on the theme of indelible guilt which cannot be absolved.

