

PRACTICE TEXT — SHORT STORY EXTRACT

Read the practice text, then choose one question

Rust

An original text written for this practice paper.

The workshop had not been opened since the funeral, and the padlock gave way with a shriek that made Mere flinch. Inside, the air was thick with oil and cold metal, the smell of her grandfather's hands. Light fell through the one dirty window in a long slab and lay across the bench, where every tool hung in its painted outline like a body chalked on a floor.

"We should have done this in summer," said Wiremu. He stood in the doorway with a box of rubbish bags, as if he might have to make a quick escape. He was seventeen, a year older than she was, and since the funeral, he had taken to speaking in short, careful sentences, the way you walk across a frozen pond.

They began with the drawers. Nuts and washers, sorted by size into jam jars. A tin of fishing hooks, each one wrapped in a twist of newspaper. A ball of string, wound so tightly that it felt like a stone. Wiremu held up a rusted spanner and weighed it in his hand. "Bin?" he asked. Mere opened her mouth, and found that there was nothing in it but a kind of ache. "Bin," she said. It was dropped into the bag with a clank that sounded, somehow, final.

By noon, they had filled six bags. The bench was clear, and the room had begun to look like any other room, bare and echoing. Mere stood in the middle of it, and the quiet pressed against her ears. "It is just stuff," Wiremu said, but his voice caught, and he turned to the window so that she would not see his face.

It was Mere who found the engine. It sat beneath a tarpaulin in the far corner, a small, dismantled motor spread out on a sheet of newspaper, every piece laid in order, like an argument she could not follow. Beside it was a notebook, open to a page of her grandfather's cramped writing: 'Fixed bearing. Still to do: pistons, gasket, ask W. about the carburettor.' The pencil lay beside it, as if he had only stepped out for tea.

"He was going to teach you," she said. Wiremu did not turn round. His shoulders rose, and fell. "He said I was too impatient," he said at last. "He said I wanted things finished." He crossed the room, slowly, and knelt beside the engine, and put one finger on a piece of brass that was green at the edges. "It is only rust," he said, and she understood that he was not talking about the metal.

Mere took a clean rag from the bench and placed it in his hand. For a moment, neither of them moved. Then Wiremu bent to the engine and began, with great care, to wipe.

CHOOSE ONE QUESTION

About 750 to 800 words

QUESTION ONE

Analyse how the writer uses setting and symbolism to develop the theme of memory and loss in 'Rust'. Support your answer with evidence from the text.

QUESTION TWO

Analyse how the writer presents the relationship between Mere and Wiremu, and how it develops, in 'Rust'. Support your answer with evidence from the text.

QUESTION THREE

Analyse how the writer uses narrative viewpoint and structure to shape the reader's response in 'Rust'. Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Write an essay of about 750 to 800 words. Use short quotations from the text as evidence.

Planning space (not marked)

Setting: the workshop as a preserved space.

Symbols: the outlines of the tools, the engine, the rust.

Character: Wiremu's reactions.

The final image and what it suggests about memory.

A MODEL RESPONSE AND GUIDANCE FOR THAT TASK

QUESTION ONE — GUIDE AND MODEL ANSWER

Worked solution

What the question asks

You must develop a clear argument about how setting and symbolism develop the theme of memory and loss, explaining the writer's techniques and supporting each point with precise evidence.

What each grade looks like for this question

Grade	What the response shows
Achieved	Identifies the setting and some symbols and links them to loss, with relevant quotations.
Merit	Explains convincingly how the workshop and symbols such as the engine and the rust develop the theme of memory and loss.
Excellence	Analyses perceptively how the writer uses setting and symbolism to show that loss is not only an ending but a demand to continue what was left unfinished, with insightful, well-integrated evidence.

Evidence you could use

- “like a body chalked on a floor”: simile: the tools’ outlines are the traces of the dead man
- “like an argument she could not follow”: simile: the engine as an unfinished conversation
- “as if he had only stepped out for tea”: the notebook as an unfinished life
- “It is only rust”: Wiremu’s double meaning

Model response (about 730 words, aiming at Excellence)

In ‘Rust’, the writer develops the theme of memory and loss by turning the grandfather’s workshop into a place that preserves him, and by using symbols that show that loss is a form of unfinished business. The text suggests that grief is not only the end of a life but the question of what to do with what is left behind.

The setting is established as a space where the dead man is still present. The air smells of “oil and cold metal, the smell of her grandfather’s hands”, a sensory detail that links the room directly to the man. Each tool hangs “in its painted outline like a body chalked on a floor”. This simile is powerful because it combines two ideas: the careful order of the craftsman and the grim image of a crime scene. The outlines are traces of tools that are absent, just as the grandfather is absent, so the setting becomes a symbol of loss in itself.

The writer then uses the process of clearing the workshop to show how memory is threatened. Each object has been kept with love: nuts and washers “sorted by size into jam jars”, hooks “wrapped in a twist of newspaper”. When Wiremu asks, “Bin?” Mere finds “nothing in it but a kind of ache”, and the spanner is dropped “with a clank that sounded, somehow, final”. The word “final” suggests that throwing away each object is a small funeral. The pace of the paragraph, with its list of short items, shows how much of a life can be reduced to things, and how hard it is to decide which things to keep.

The writer also uses silence and sound to express absence. After the rubbish bags are full and the bench is clear, “the quiet pressed against her ears”. The personification of the quiet makes the emptiness feel like a physical force, and it contrasts with the earlier noise of the padlock, which gave way “with a shriek”. The shift from sharp sound to pressing silence marks the move from the shock of opening the workshop to the heavier mood of seeing it emptied. Wiremu’s remark that “It is just

stuff” is undermined by the catch in his voice, so the text shows that what is said and what is felt are different.

The title itself supports the theme. Rust is the slow, quiet destruction of metal over time, and it is also what the green “brass” shows at the end. The writer chooses a single, plain word that suggests neglect and the passing of years, but also something that can be wiped away, so the title anticipates the final image of care. In this way, the writer implies that loss may be permanent, but that attention can slow its damage.

The central symbol is the dismantled engine. It is laid out “like an argument she could not follow”, and the simile suggests an unfinished conversation between the grandfather and the grandchildren. The notebook beside it, with the note ‘ask W. about the carburettor’, shows that the grandfather planned to involve Wiremu, so the engine represents a future that was lost. The pencil lying “as if he had only stepped out for tea” gives a poignant sense that death has interrupted ordinary life. The reader understands that the loss is not only of a person, but of everything the person was about to do.

The writer uses Wiremu’s character to show how memory shapes the living. His short, careful sentences show that he is guarding his feelings, and his confession that the grandfather said he “wanted things finished” reveals a guilt that grief has sharpened. His comment that “It is only rust” is a double meaning: it refers to the green corrosion on the brass, but it also expresses his attempt to belittle his pain. The writer makes rust a symbol of time and decay, and of what cannot be reversed.

The ending offers a response to loss. Mere places a clean rag in Wiremu’s hand, and he begins “with great care, to wipe”. The word “care” contrasts with the earlier impatience that he admitted, so the act of cleaning shows that he is beginning to continue his grandfather’s work in his own way. The writer therefore suggests that memory is not preserved by keeping a room untouched but by taking up the tasks the dead have left.

Why this response earns Excellence

- It builds one argument (loss as unfinished business) across all the paragraphs.
- It analyses the writer’s methods (simile, symbol, pace, contrast) and explains what each one does.
- It links the final image to the opening, showing a perceptive reading of the whole text.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Treat setting and symbols as parts of one argument: say what each stands for, quote it, and show how the ending answers the opening.

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