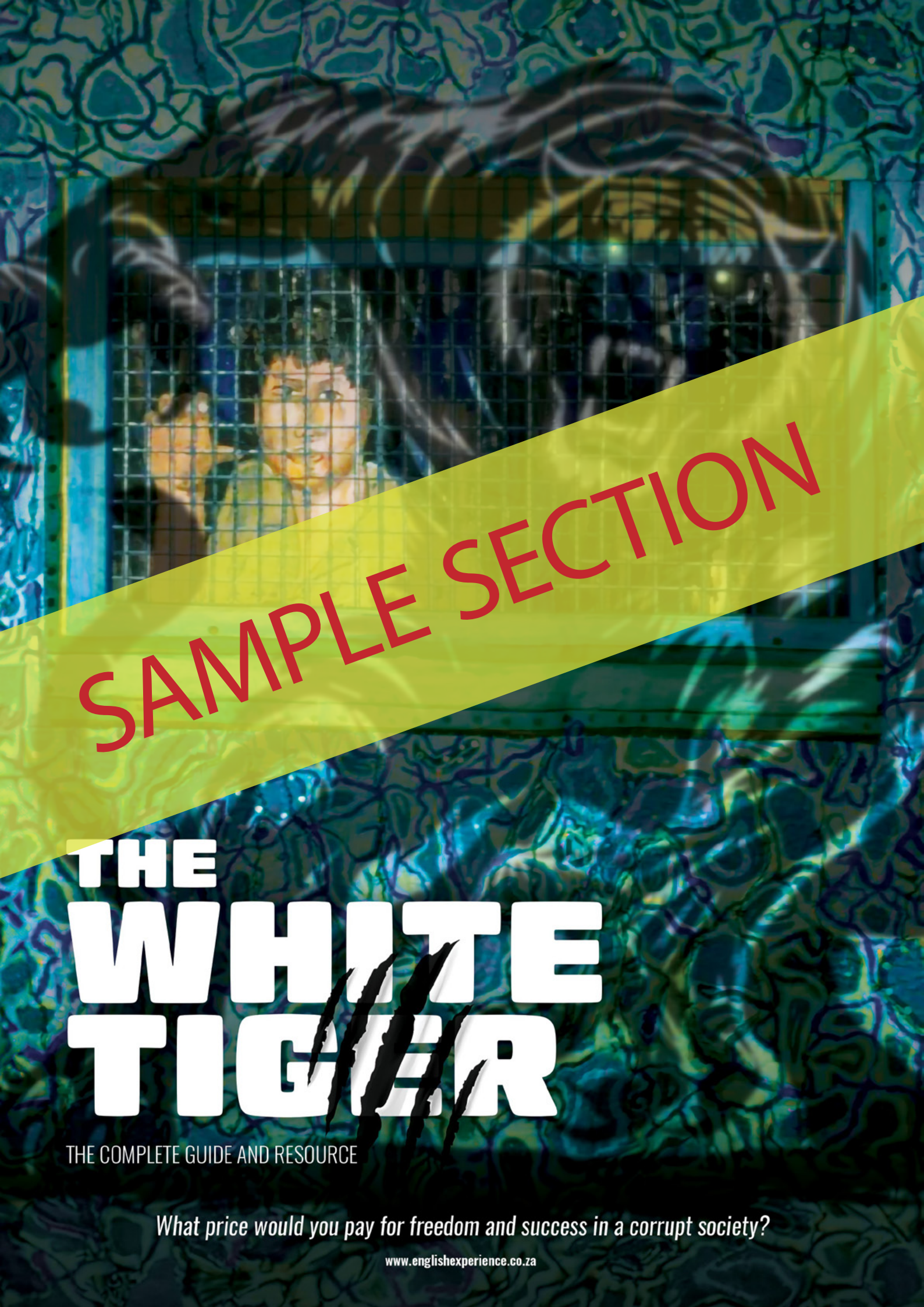
SAMPLE SECTION
THE WHITE TIGER
THE COMPLETE GUIDE AND RESOURCE
What price would you pay for freedom and success in a corrupt society?
www.englishexperience.co.za

The White Tiger

THE COMPLETE GUIDE AND RESOURCE FOR GRADE 12

PUBLISHED AND EDITED BY: THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE

ISBN: 978-1-77634-576-2

All references made to the novel in this resource and the companion *Suggested Answers* booklet refer to the 2009, Atlantic Books, edition of the novel (ISBN 978-1-84887-808-2).

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Foreword

About the English Experience

The English Experience *is an independent South African publishing house that specialises in developing high-quality English and Life Orientation educational resources for IEB educators and students. The team of passionate, talented experts behind* The English Experience *works tirelessly to ensure that every resource encourages insight, growth and debate — enriching and challenging both educators and students — without losing sight of the important goals of academic success and examination readiness.*

Focused on bringing the subject to life, every resource *The English Experience* publishes incorporates a range of features — including content and contextual questions and stimulating enrichment materials — designed to encourage a critical appreciation of the subject and to inspire the higher-order thinking for which examiners are always looking.

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The world-class *English Experience* team includes highly experienced educators, some with over 20 years of classroom experience, passionate literary experts in various fields such as historical fiction, poetry and Shakespeare, fanatical historians and researchers, creative writers, skilled editors, pernickety proof-readers and obsessive fact-checkers — together with spirited university lecturers and enthusiastic young minds who help to ensure our approach remains unique and fresh.

While academic success is a non-negotiable consideration, our aspiration is to inspire a genuine interest in, and love of, English literature.

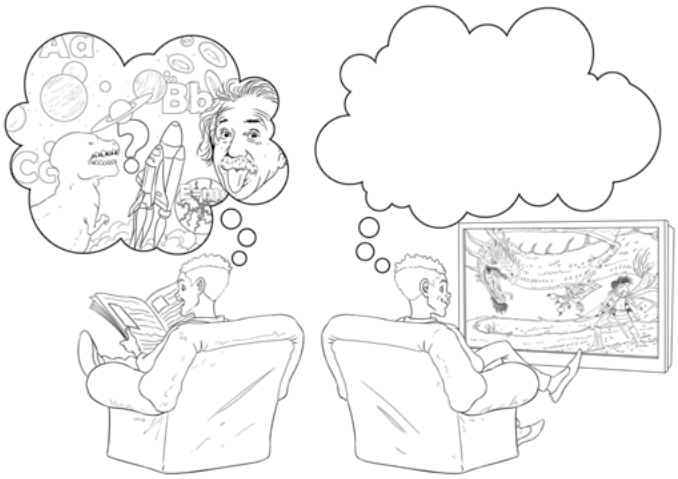
Visit **www.englishexperience.co.za** to learn more about *The English Experience* and the range of educational resources the company publishes. You can use the camera on a digital device like a phone or tablet to scan this QR code and launch the site automatically. Please note that you may need to have a 'tag reader' app installed. There are free versions of these apps available, which you can download from the app store on your device.

Our approach

Perhaps the toughest challenge with teaching literature to modern students is convincing them that the extra effort required in reading a novel — compared with the passive immediacy of movies and TV shows — is worth it. Decoding the language and bringing the text to life in the imagination can be taxing for young adults so it is perhaps not surprising that many of them see novels as works through which they must slog to earn marks or pass an examination.

This resource has been written with this reality in mind. Even though the language, themes and settings of the novel are likely to be easily accessible to Grade 12 students, particular attention has been paid to providing the kind of context and insight necessary to help them empathise fully with the characters and their struggles.

We passionately believe that studying literature rewards us with a broader, deeper understanding of ourselves and those around us. Our experience of this rewarding understanding is why this resource does more than provide students with a comprehensive, detailed analysis of the text. It also encourages them to engage with the novel on a personal level and to develop their own responses through the extensive chapter-specific questions, enrichment tasks and essay topics.



Reading a written description of a person, event or place encourages us to use our imaginations as we picture everything in our minds, which is unlike watching a movie or TV show that creates these images for us on the screen. When we read, we are only limited by what we can imagine.

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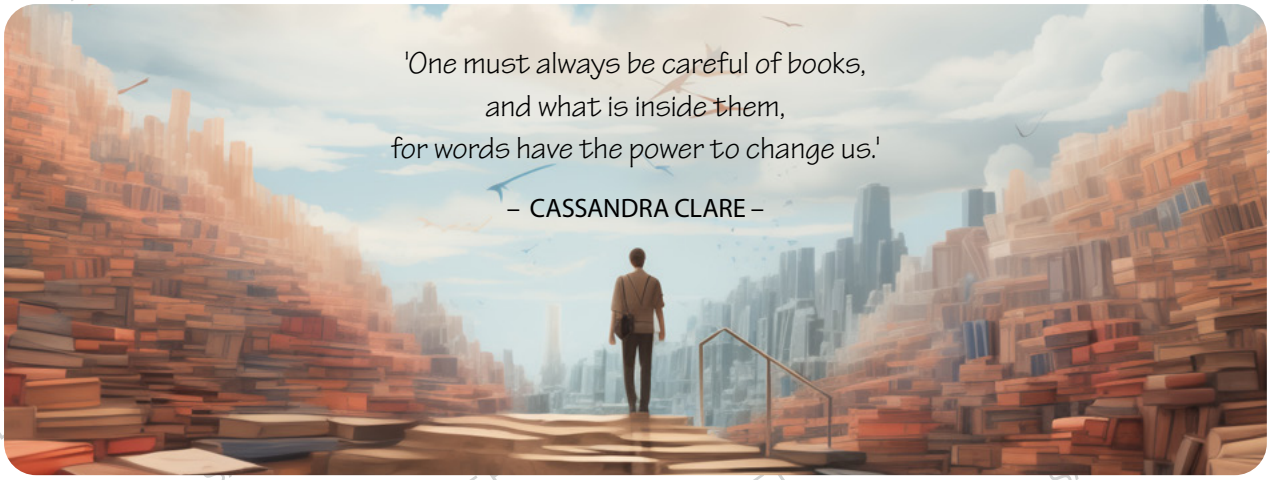
Throughout this resource, students are challenged to engage with both the characters and events in the novel and to agree or disagree with that has been suggested. By formulating and expressing their own responses to the opinions, ideas and themes explored in the novel, students are encouraged to reflect and grow as individuals, as well as learners.

Ultimately, we have approached *The White Tiger* the same way we approach every text — with two interrelated goals in mind. Our first, non-negotiable objective is to ensure examination readiness and academic success. Our second ambition is to inspire a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, the work being studied.



Using this resource

This comprehensive resource includes: an extensive introduction to the author, the novel and its context; detailed summaries; rich literary analyses; diverse, chapter-specific short questions; challenging essay questions; and stimulating enrichment tasks — in short, everything needed to study the novel intensively and bring it to life.

Preparing with the right mindset

We recommend working through the **Background to the novel** section first so that students become familiar with the author and the context of the novel. This section starts with an introduction to the author so that students can gain an understanding of the experiences that helped shaped his perspectives and inspired him to write the novel, together with his explanation of the issues he wished to explore and his interpretation of the novel.

Since the characters in the novel are shaped by their experiences as contemporary Indian citizens, a brief introduction to several of the major events in the history of the country that have shaped the society it portrays — including the caste system, the struggle for independence, the economic liberalisation policies of the 1990s, globalisation, and the 'IT boom' of the early 2000s — is provided to help students interpret the perspectives and motivations of the characters more completely.

© coreymill (DeviantArt)

Next, a succinct discussion of the literary movement (category) and genres into which the novel fits, as well as the literary works identified by the author as having exerted an influence on it, is provided to help students situate the novel within its literary context.

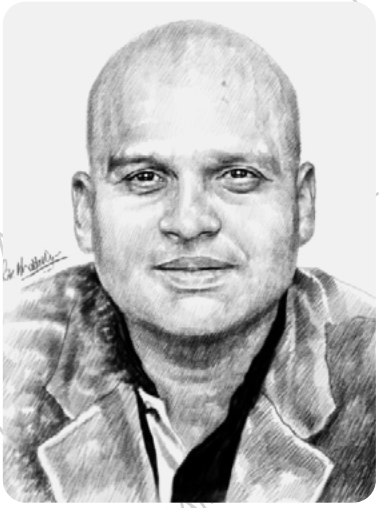
The **Introduction to the novel** completes the preparatory section of this resource. It provides students with an initial overview and appreciation of the plot, characters and themes of the work, before they engage with the text itself.

By working through this comprehensive introductory section first, students will be prepared, engaged and able to read the novel with the right mindset.

Background to the novel

Author background

In The White Tiger, *author Aravind Adiga has created a provocative, unflinching and memorable novel that explores inequality and injustice, power, freedom and identity in modern India. In this section, we present a short biography of the author, followed by a collection of his comments and observations regarding the novel, including what inspired him to write it and the issues he wished to explore in the text.*



© Ulka Anjaria

Author biography

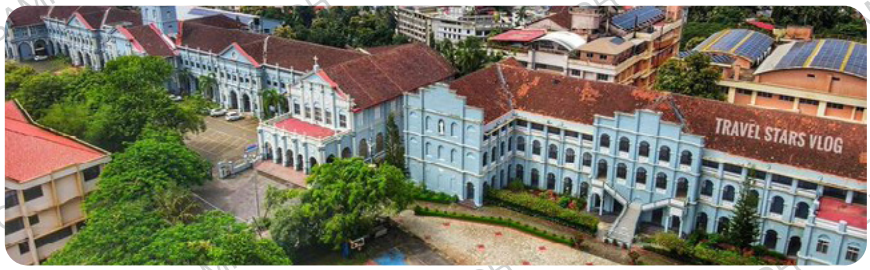
Aravind Adiga was born in Chennai on 23 October 1974. His father was an affluent physician, and his mother pursued a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in social work. At the age of six years old, Adiga and his family moved to the city of Mangalore. Adiga was a top student at Canara High School and St. Aloysius College (*pictured below right*), graduating from the later with the highest marks in the state for the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC). After the sudden death of his mother in 1990, the family emigrated to Sydney, Australia, where Adiga finished his high school education.

Student of English literature

After high school, Adiga left Australia and studied English literature at Columbia University in New York City. He graduated as salutatorian (second-highest-ranked graduate) in 1997. Adiga claims that both the time he spent away from India and his study of literature, especially African American literature, gave him a new perspective on the injustices of the caste system in India. After Columbia, Adiga continued his studies at the University of Oxford in England, where he completed a Master of Philosophy (M Phil) degree in English Literature in 1999.

© Diliff (Wikipedia)

Magdalen College, University of Oxford, England.



© Travel Stars Vlog

St. Aloysius College, Mangalore, India.

From academia to journalism

© Financial Times Ltd (Wikipedia)

After Oxford, Adiga intended to become a full-time academic and even enrolled at Princeton University in New Jersey to read towards a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree. He changed his mind soon after arriving at Princeton, however, and left to begin his career as a journalist, starting at London's *Financial Times*. As a correspondent for the *Times*, Adiga covered the stock market and investments and, famously, interviewed former United States of America President Donald Trump.

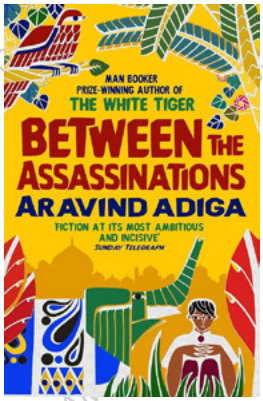
In 2003, Adiga became *Time* magazine's South Asia correspondent. While based in New Delhi, he spent a good deal of the next three years travelling extensively across India to research and file stories. It was during this time that he gathered much of the material that would inspire his fiction.

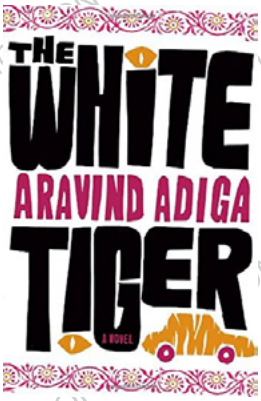
© Time Inc (Wikipedia)

From journalism to fiction

Although Adiga had begun writing fiction while at Oxford, it was only when he left *Time* magazine in 2006 to become a freelance journalist that Adiga had the opportunity to focus on writing fiction. He moved to Mumbai and published both his first novel, *The White Tiger*, and a collection of interconnected short stories titled *Between the Assassinations* in 2008.

Adiga was propelled to international acclaim later that year when *The White Tiger* won the prestigious Man Booker Prize. He is one of only three first-time novelists to be awarded the prize. Adiga has published three novels since 2008, *Last Man in Tower* (2011), *Selection Day* (2016) and *Amnesty* (2020), and he continues to write nonfiction articles for publications like the *Daily Beast* and *The New Yorker*.





© Atlantic Books

India's most famous literary recluse

'Aravind Adiga has always struck me as India's most famous literary recluse, an anomaly in the modern publishing world where the order of the day seems to be: Publicise *or* be damned. A self-avowed misfit, he is not a fixture at literary festivals and his public appearances and interviews in the media, especially in India, are few and far between. In an age when the writers are wont to taking the cloak of performers and clubbing themselves with various 'camps', Adiga forges — and walks — a lonely path. Like Thomas Pynchon and JD Salinger, his American prototypes, the 45 year-old author shies away from self-promotion. In an inversion of the mantra that marketing is a necessary evil, the bane of an author's existence that ultimately has its reward, he refuses to do too much publicity around his books, often to the chagrin of his publishers.'

– Nawaid Anjum, *Firstpost* (2021)

Author quotes: The author in his own words

What are Aravind Adiga's perspectives on the issues raised in The White Tiger? *What did he hope to convey through the work? This section consists of a selection of quotes from interviews with the author and extracts from essays written by him on topics related to the novel.*

On writing:

'What we Indians want in literature, at least the kind written in English, is not literature at all, but flattery. We want to see ourselves depicted as soulful, sensitive, profound, valorous, wounded, tolerant and funny beings… But the truth is, we are absolutely nothing of that kind… We are animals of the jungle, who will eat our neighbour's children in five minutes, and our own in ten.'[1]

© Creative Fabrica

'I don't think a novelist should just write about his own experiences. Yes, I am the son of a doctor, yes, I had a rigorous formal education, but for me the challenge of a novelist is to write about people who aren't anything like me.'[2]

'The influences on *The White Tiger* are three black American writers of the post-World War II era (in order), Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright. The odd thing is that I haven't read any of them for years and years — I read Ellison's *Invisible Man* in 1995 or 1996 and have never returned to it — but now that the book is done, I can see how deeply it's indebted to them. As a writer, I don't feel tied to any one identity; I'm happy to draw influences from wherever they come.' [2]

'A first draft of *The White Tiger* was written in 2005, and then put aside. I had given up on the book. Then, for reasons I don't fully understand myself, in December 2006, when I'd just returned to India after a long time abroad, I opened the draft and began rewriting it entirely. I wrote all day long for the next month, and by early January 2007, I could see that I had a novel on my hands.'[3]

[1] Aravind Adiga, *Selection Day* (p.233)
[2] Extract from interview with Stuart Jeffries for *The Guardian*
[3] Extract from an interview published on BookBrowse.com

'My background as a business journalist made me realize that most of what's written about in business magazines is bullshit, and I don't take business or corporate literature seriously at all. India is being flooded with "how to be an Internet businessman" kind of books, and they're all dreadfully earnest and promise to turn you into Iacocca in a week. This is the kind of book that my narrator mentions, mockingly — he knows that life is a bit harder than these books promise.' [2]

'The book is a novel: *it's fiction*. Nothing in its chapters actually happened and no one you meet here is real. But it's built on a substratum of Indian reality. Here's one example: Balram's father, in the novel, dies of tuberculosis. Now, this is a make-believe death of a make-believe figure, but underlying it is a piece of appalling reality — the fact that nearly a thousand Indians, most of them poor, die every day from tuberculosis. So if a character like Balram's father did exist, and if he did work as a rickshaw puller, the chances of his succumbing to tuberculosis would be pretty high. I've tried hard to make sure that anything in the novel has a correlation in Indian reality. The government hospitals, the liquor shops, and the brothels that turn up in the novel are all based on real places in India that I've seen in my travels.' [2]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'The novel is a critique of the state of things in the country and an attack on a rotten political system. It is a 'thought experiment' and not meant to be the 'verisimilitude of a picture of India.' [4]

On Balram:

'Balram Halwai is a composite of various men I've met when travelling through India. I spend a lot of my time loitering about train stations, or bus stands, or servants' quarters and slums, and I listen and talk to the people around me. There's a kind of continuous murmur or growl beneath middle-class life in India, and this noise never gets recorded. Balram is what you'd hear if one day the drains and faucets in your house started talking.'[2]


© bangladeshlivenews.com

'I spent a lot of time hanging around stations and talking to rickshaw pullers. What rickshaw pullers, especially, reminded me of was black Americans, in the sense that they are witty, acerbic, verbally skilled and utterly without illusions about their rulers.'[1]

'I don't intend for the reader to identify all the time with Balram: some may not wish to identify with him very much at all.' [2]

'My book too will cause widespread offence. Balram is my invisible man, made visible. This white tiger will break out of his cage.' [1]

On India:

'I simply wrote about the India that I know, and the one I live in. It's not "alternative India" for me! It's pretty mainstream, trust me.' [2]

'If we were in India now, there would be servants standing in the corners of this room and I wouldn't notice them. That is what my society is like, that is what the divide is like.' [1]

'The past fifty years have seen tumultuous changes in India's society, and these changes — many of which are for the better — have overturned the traditional hierarchies, and the old securities of life. A lot of poorer Indians are left confused and perplexed by the new India that is being formed around them.' [2]

'At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do — it's not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination.' [1]


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[4] Extracted from an interview with David Godwin at *The Hindu Lit for Life* symposium in 2014.

'This is the reality for a lot of Indian people and it's important that it gets written about, rather than just hearing about the 5% of people in my country who are doing well. In somewhere like Bihar there will be no doctors in the hospital. In northern India politics is so corrupt that it makes a mockery of democracy. This is a country where the poor fear tuberculosis, which kills 1,000 Indians a day, but people like me — middle-class people with access to health services that are probably better than England's — don't fear it at all. It's an unglamorous disease, like so many of the things that the poor of India endure.' [1]

'There are lots of self-made millionaires in India now, certainly, and lots of successful entrepreneurs. But remember that over a billion people live here, and for the majority of them, who are denied decent health care, education, or employment, getting to the top would take doing something like what Balram has done.' [2]

© Reuters

'The Indian middle-classes, especially, think of themselves still as victims of colonial rule. But there is no point anymore in someone like me thinking of myself as a victim of [the British]. India and China are too powerful to be controlled by the West anymore. We've got to get beyond that as Indians and take responsibility for what is holding us back: the corruption, the lack of health services for the poor and the presumption that the family is always the repository of good.' [1]

'Just ask any Indian, rich or poor, about corruption here. It's bad. It shows no sign of going away, either.' [2]

On the Rooster Coop:

'The conflict may be more intense in India, because the family structure is stronger here than in, say, America, and loyalty to family is virtually a test of moral character. (So, "You were rude to your mother this morning" would be, morally, the equivalent of "You embezzled funds from the bank this morning.") The conflict is there, to some extent, everywhere.' [2]

'The fact that Halwai casts off his family is a shameful and dislocating thing for an Indian to do. In India, there has never been strong central political control, which is probably why the family is still so important. If you're rude to your mother in India, it's a crime as bad as stealing. But the family ties get broken or at least stretched when anonymous, un-Indian cities like Bangalore draw people from the villages. These really are the new tensions of India, but Indians don't think about them.' [1]

© Amarjeet Kumar Singh

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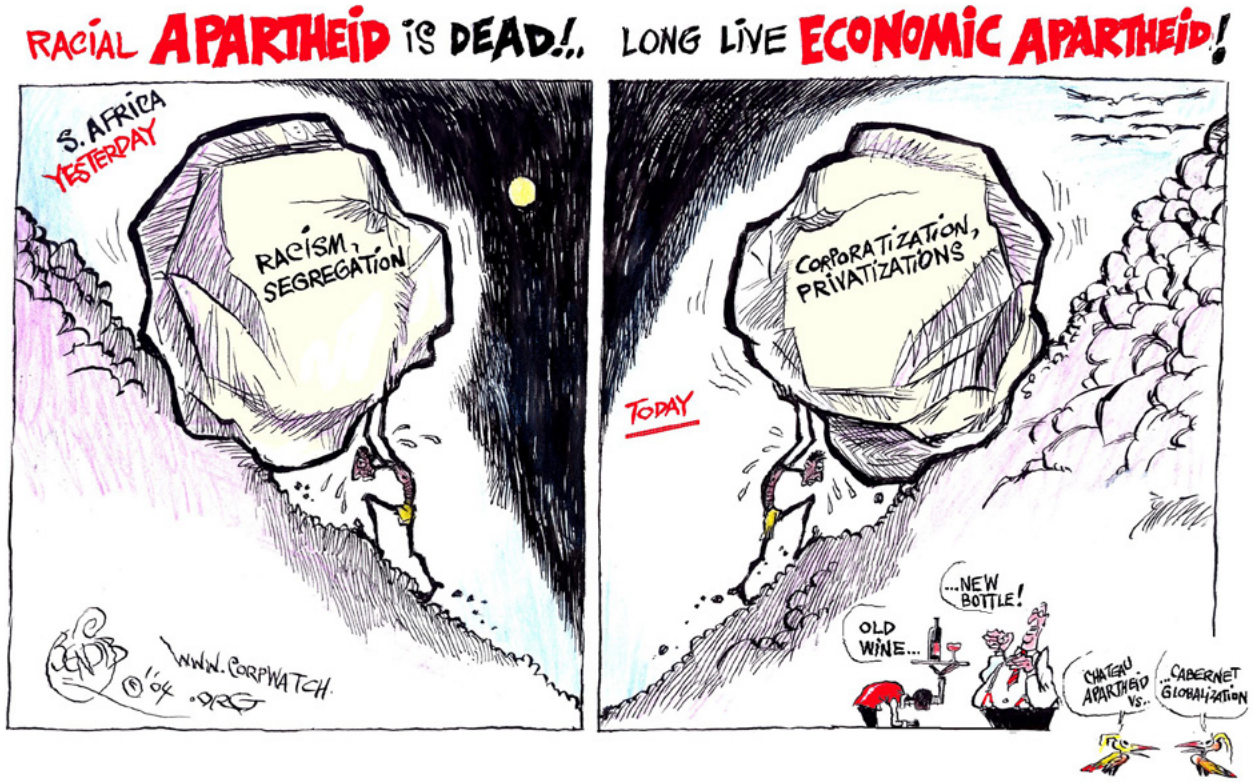
Enrichment task

Exercise 1: Critical and visual literacy

Consider the following cartoons and answer the questions that follow. Model answers to the questions are available in the companion Suggested Answers *booklet.*

TEXT 1



1. What does the depiction of the figure pushing the boulder suggest about his situation? (4)

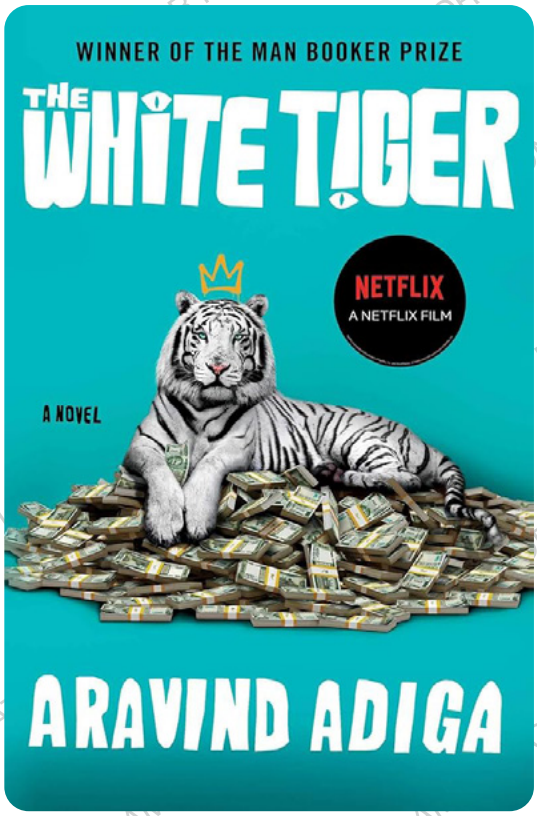
2. Who is the figure pushing the boulder meant to represent? (1)

Introduction to the novel

Fast facts

A quick reference guide to the key details of The White Tiger*:*

Title: *The White Tiger*
Author: Aravind Adiga
Year: 2008
Genre: Post-colonial fiction/satire/Bildungsroman
Narrative style and structure: First-person, epistolary (told in letters), non-linear
Setting: Contemporary India (rural Bihar, then urban Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore)
Protagonist: Balram 'Munna' Halwai
Antagonist: Mr Ashok
Key themes: Masters and servants (freedom and identity), morality and corruption, economic inequality and social injustice
Symbols: White tiger, rooster coop, black fort, rearview mirror, chandeliers



© Atlantic Books

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Synopsis

The White Tiger is a rags-to-riches story that exposes how the underprivileged are abused and exploited in modern, democratic India. It is a stark, unflinching and darkly comic novel that describes the extreme inequality and injustice of contemporary Indian society. The novel is narrated by Balram Halwai, the protagonist who rises from his humble origins in a rural village to become a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. The narrative unfolds through a series of letters that Halwai writes to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, that reveals how the ruling class uses the caste system, money and violence to keep power and ensure that the underprivileged are effectively trapped in economic servitude.

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Enduring poverty and servitude in Laxmangarh

Halwai's journey starts in the small village of Laxmangarh, where he is born into a poor family, burdened by the heavy shackles of servitude and social constraints. Despite being a bright student, his educational opportunities are cut short when the family forces him to work in the local tea shop to settle their debts. While working there, Halwai begins to confront the severe inequalities that plague Indian society and first dreams of escaping his predetermined fate.

© Amar Yadav (Deviantart)

Navigating corruption and conflict in Delhi

© kevron2001 (Deviantart)

Halwai's life takes a pivotal turn when he is hired as a chauffeur for Mr Ashok, a wealthy landlord's son. Moving to Delhi with Mr Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam, exposes Halwai to the corrupt nature of life in the city and the vast economic disparities created by it. His role affords him an insider's view of the corrupt dealings of his master's family, further fuelling his desire for freedom and a better life.

The narrative reaches its climax when Halwai's disillusionment turns into a desperate, dark resolve. After a series of morally ambiguous and unjust events, including a hit-and-run accident involving Pinky Madam, an increasingly angry and desperate Halwai sees only one way to liberate himself from his oppressive circumstances: murdering Mr Ashok. After a period of confusion and internal struggle, he seizes his opportunity and kills his master, stealing a considerable sum of money at the same time.

Embracing corruption and success in Bangalore

Halwai flees to Bangalore with his nephew, Dharam. After another period of doubt, anxiety and adjustment, he embraces the corrupt practices he previously despised and successfully reinvents himself as a businessman, launching a taxi service for the burgeoning call centre industry. In the end, Halwai accepts the consequences his actions will have had for his family in Laxmangarh, and his entrepreneurial ventures are marked by the same cunning and ruthless tactics that he once loathed but now considers necessary for survival and success in a corrupt society. Ultimately, he concludes that the act of breaking free from servitude, and experiencing life as his own master, was worth the price.

The cost of inequality and injustice

Halwai's tale is not just a story of crime and personal success. Through his experiences, the narrative offers a gritty, unapologetic exposé of the social contracts and economic forces that bind most Indians and define the possibilities available to them. In particular, it critiques the remnants of the caste system and the pervasive corruption that offers wealth and power to a select few at the expense of the rest. In doing so, it raises profound questions about the nature of justice and equity in a world where opportunity often comes at the expense of others, and directly challenges the reader to consider the cost of this.

Mumbai: More than 13 million people live in slums in the Indian city.

Enrichment task

Exercise 2: Critical response

Consider the following extracts from articles and reviews of The White Tiger *and answer the questions that follow. Model answers to the questions are available in the companion* Suggested Answers *booklet.*

*Read **TEXT 1** and answer the questions that follow:*

TEXT 1

Adiga […] writes forcefully about a corrupt culture; unfortunately, his commentary on all things Indian comes at the expense of narrative suspense and character development. Thus he writes persuasively about the so-called Rooster Coop, which traps family-oriented Indians into submissiveness, but fails to describe the stages by which Balram evolves from solicitous servant into cold-blooded killer. Adiga's pacing is off too, as Balram too quickly reinvents himself in Bangalore, where every cop can be bought. An undisciplined debut, but one with plenty of vitality.

– Staff, *Kirkus Reviews*, 2008

[https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/aravind-adiga/the-white-tiger/]

1. What example of poor character development does the reviewer offer? (1)

2. What example of weak narrative suspense does the reviewer offer? (1)

3. What two aspects of the novel does the reviewer praise? (2)

4. Provide a synonym for 'vitality'. (1)

Using this section

Working through the novel chapter by chapter ensures that a solid foundation of knowledge is laid, and then gradually and effectively expanded. Students are not required to deal with the entire novel until they have worked through it in a methodical, step-by-step manner.

Each chapter is summarised and analysed separately. Glossaries are included, and learners are required to engage with the content directly through chapter-specific questions. At the end of the summaries, there is also a series of enrichment tasks, ensuring that students tackle the novel in its entirety.

The First Night

(Chapter 1. Pp. 3–42)

dowry (p.36): property or money brought by a bride to her husband on their marriage.

Excellency (p.3): title of respect used for certain high-ranking officials.

emancipation (p.15): being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberation.

erstwhile (p.5): previous, earlier, old.

expectorate (p.29): matter expelled from the throat or lungs by coughing or hawking and spitting.

ghat (p.16): flight of steps leading down to a river.

Naxals (p.25): militant group of far-left radical communists (*see page 51 for more info*)

incidental (p.33): secondary, associated, extra.

namaste (p.4): Sanskrit word that means 'bowing to you' or 'I bow to you', used as a respectful greeting, salutation, or farewell, typically accompanied by a gesture of placing the palms together before the face or chest and bowing.

mural (p.29): painting or other work of art executed directly on a wall.

outsourcing (p.3): business practice of hiring an external company to perform services and/or create goods that were previously performed 'in-house' by company employees (e.g. call centre customer service).

paan (p.13): chewy delicacy or treat

saffron (p.16): orange-yellow flavouring, food colouring, and dye made from the dried stigmas of crocus flowers.

sovereigns (p.8): former British gold coins worth one pound sterling.

vivacious (p.35): lively, animated, spirited, energetic.

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Summary

The opening chapter introduces the narrator and protagonist, Balram Halwai, and provides a good deal of biographical and contextual information about him. It establishes the first-person, epistolary narrative structure of the work as Halwai decides to dictate a letter to the Chinese Premier, through which he describes the poverty, hardship and corruption of rural village life and some of the significant events of his childhood, as well as presaging the violent 'act of entrepreneurship' (p.11) that helped him become a 'successful […] business[man]' (p.6) in Bangalore.

Salient events

- A Bangalore businessman.
- Wanted for murder.
- Corruption and poverty in Laxmangarh.
- The influence of his family.
- His early education.

The letter

The chapter begins with Balram Halwai alone in his office in Bangalore. It is a few minutes before midnight. A radio presenter has just announced that the Chinese Premier, **Wen Jiabao**, intends to visit Bangalore the following week to learn the secret of its success from its entrepreneurs. This news prompts Halwai to start **dictating** the first of eight letters to the Premier.

The novel strongly suggests that Halwai is using speech-to-text software to transcribe what he says into a letter; for example, he uses the verb '**dictating**' (p.5) and says he will 'read from [the wanted poster] directly' (p.12). This would make sense since he appears to be alone at the time (the presence of another is not mentioned, and he is extremely candid) and his writing skills may not match his reading skills. He may not be using his 'silver Macintosh laptop' (p.11), however, as he says he will have to 'open' (p.12) that device to find the wanted poster. It may simply be that dictating a letter suits his image of himself as a successful, important man, of course. It is perhaps worth noting that the film adaptation avoids this complication and pictures him typing on his laptop.

Halwai begins his letter by explaining his reasons for writing it and for sharing the story of his life: to tell the Premier the 'truth about **Bangalore**' (p.6), along with offering his current (mis)understanding of the Chinese. With some apparent cynicism, he observes that it is proper to start by praying to the gods and then recalls a conversation with his previous employer to explain that entrepreneurs are typically 'half-baked' (p.10) people who are unable to secure decent employment due to a lack of formal education.

Wen Jiabao (*pictured*) served as the premier of China from 2003 to 2013. He was a popular politician, nicknamed 'Grandpa Wen', who grew up in poverty, campaigned for reform and the rights of ordinary people and regularly quoted lines from ancient Chinese poets and scholars. In 2012, *The New York Times* reported that his family had accumulated more than US$ 2.7 billion in assets from investments in companies that were directly influenced by Wen's position.

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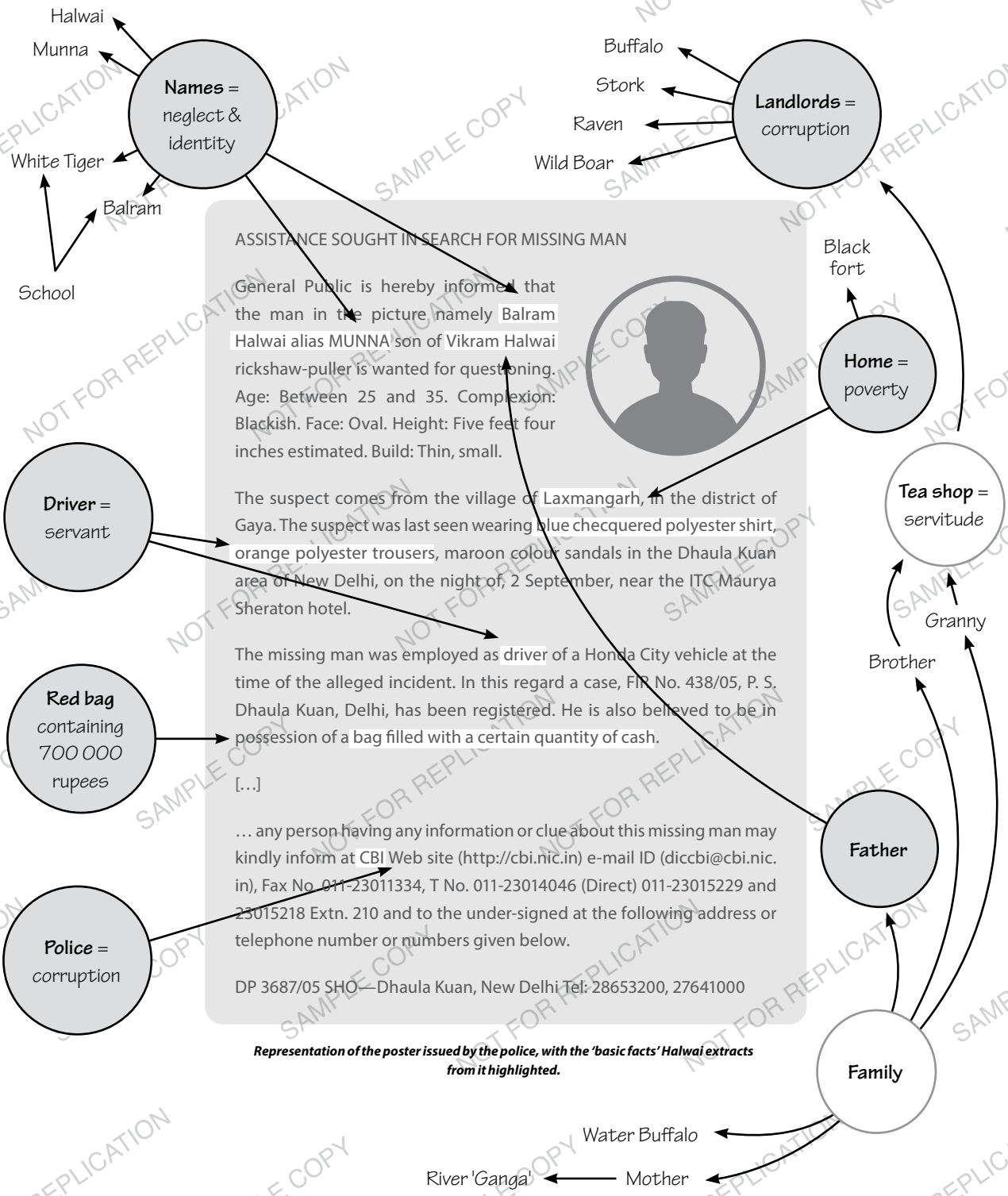
Bangalore, officially Bengaluru, is the capital of the southern Indian state of Karnataka and the third largest city in India. It is also one of the fastest-growing cities in the world and its population has expanded from 5 million to more than 14 million in 20 years. It is nicknamed 'the Silicon Valley of India' because it has been home to a booming IT industry since the turn of the century, with the headquarters of more than 200 IT, aerospace, biotech and venture capital companies based in the city.

© Mohseen Khan (Flickr)

The 'Missing Man' poster

Halwai introduces a poster 'the police made of me' (p.11) to share the 'basic facts' (p.11) about himself. He notes that he found it in a train station while travelling to Bangalore with 'one very heavy red bag' (p.12). He notes how the photograph is 'barely recogni[s]able' (p.39) and could be 'half the men in India' (p.39). He also observes that he is no longer 'thin' (p.12) but '[fat] and potbellied' (p.13), thanks to a diet of 'rich food, beer [and] nightclubs' (p.13).



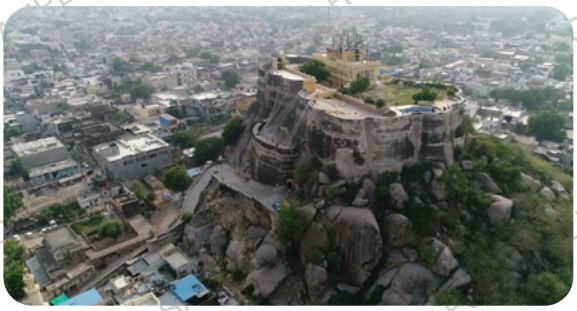
Representation of the poster issued by the police, with the 'basic facts' Halwai extracts from it highlighted.

The first detail from the poster that Halwai wants to explain is why it offers 'MUNNA' (p.12) as his alias: His mother was too ill, and the rest of his family had 'no time' (p.12) to name him. On his first day of school, his teacher decides to give him 'a real name' (p.13) and calls him 'Balram' (p.13), the 'sidekick of the god Krishna' (p.14).

The village of Laxmangarh

The poster identifies his home as 'the village of **Laxmangarh**, in the district of Gaya' (pp.14,18). This detail prompts Halwai to introduce the concept of 'two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness' (p.14). The '[l]ight' (p.14) of the prosperous, urban cities and the '[d]arkness' (p.14) of the poverty-stricken, rural villages, fed by 'Mother Ganga' (p.15) the 'black river' (p.14). He recalls fainting at his mother's cremation on the banks of the Ganga in **Benaras** when he was between six and eight years old.

Laxmangarh is a small town with a population of approximately 390 000 (similar in size to Krugersdorp or Welkom) in the Sikar district of Rajasthan state in the northeast of India, 280 kilometres east of Delhi. In the late 1700s, Laxmangarh grew in significance as a staging post on the caravan trade route through the region and Laxman Singh, the Rao Raja of Sikar, decided to build a fort there in 1805 (*pictured*). The unique architecture and cultural significance of the fort continues to attract tourists to the town, along with the intricate, ornate 19th century townhouses or *havelis* built by prosperous traders (*pictured*).



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© Sudha Ganapathi (Flickr)

Halwai describes Laxmangarh as having a single street, split in two by a 'bright strip of sewage' (p.19), featuring a market of three identical shops and a solitary temple. He sarcastically calls it 'your typical Indian village paradise' (p.19) and a place that the Buddha would have run through 'as fast as he could' (p.18), complete with 'defunct' (p.19) electricity poles, 'broken' (p.20) water taps, 'lean and short' (p.20) malnourished children, an abandoned colonial fort, and a school.

Halwai compares the corruption that afflicts Laxmangarh to land that has been overgrazed and 'fed on' (p.26) by '[a]nimals' (p.26) until there is 'nothing left' (p.26). The animals in question are the four violent gangsters or 'landlords' (p.24) who have divided the area between them and exploit the villagers by overtaxing or underpaying them. Halwai explains how each landlord has been given a name by the villagers that describes his 'peculiarities of appetite' (p.24). The Stork owns the river and taxes the fishermen and boatmen. The Wild Boar, his brother, owns the agricultural land and underpays those who farm it. The Raven owns the hillsides and charges the goatherds grazing fees. The Buffalo owns the roads and charges anyone using them a toll fee, and the rickshaw pullers must pay him one-third of their earnings. The landlords live in 'high-walled mansions' (p.25) just outside Laxmangarh, only entering the village 'to feed' (p.25).

The chapter ends portentously with Halwai recollecting the day he returned to the village at the age of 24 with his previous employer, Mr Ashok, a man whose throat he would slit '[e]ight months later' (p.42). Perhaps summing up his conflicting feelings about his 'little Laxmangarh' (p.42), he recalls climbing the hill to the fort and 'look[ing] down on the village' (p.42), which he describes as 'the most beautiful sight on earth' (p.42), then leaning out and spitting on it '[a]gain and again' (p.42).

Benaras or Varanasi is a city on the Ganges river in northern India that has a central place in the traditions of pilgrimage, death, and mourning in the Hindu world. It is one of the oldest still-habited cities in the world believed to have been settled between 2500 and 3000 years ago. Also known as the 'City of Light' or 'City of Temples', Varanasi is considered an extremely holy site and is renowned for having more than 4000 Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh and Christian temples, shrines and religious buildings.

© Roop_Dey (Shutterstock)

The Manikarnika Cremation Ghat* (pictured) *on the bank of the Ganges river in Varanasi. An estimated 40 000 cremations are performed in Varanasi each year. A typical ceremony takes six hours to complete, and the cremation fires burn day and night. The remains of the bodies are placed in the river, along with the corpses of those whose families cannot afford to cremate them.

His family

Halwai notes that a fat 'water buffalo' (p.20) stood at the entrance to the house and that her milk was used as a source of income. The women slept in one corner of the house and worked in the courtyard. The men and boys slept in another corner.

The matriarch of the house was his granny, '[s]ly old Kusum' (p.15), who had 'grinned her way into control of the house' (p.16) and his four uncles and six aunties 'lived in fear of her' (p.16). Kusum had his elder brother, Kishan, taken out of school and forced to work in the local tea shop to pay back the loan the family had taken out to pay for his 'cousin-sister Meera's wedding' (p.38).

His mother appears to have had a difficult relationship with the family before she died (probably from tuberculosis, as Halwai remembers her lying in bed, coughing or 'spew[ing] blood' (p.13)). He could tell from how 'grand' (p.16) her funeral was that the family felt 'guilty about something' (p.16). At the time, Kusum had told him that she was 'a good, quiet girl the day she came to our home' (p.17), before the 'fighting' (p.17). Yet Kusum is quick to denounce her as 'a crazy one' (p.29) and be grateful that 'she's dead' (p.29), nonetheless, when Halwai's mother's wish that he stay in school opposes Kusum's desire to send him to work in the tea shop.

© Amit Nayek

Halwai seems particularly fond of his father. He wishes the poster identified him with respect as 'Mr Vikram Halwai' (p.23) and describes him as a 'man of honour and courage' (p.23). He recalls helping him take the buffalo for a bath at sunrise, visiting him after school at the tea shop and 'play[ing] around with him' (p.26), climbing on his back and touching his face and neck. He appears to respect his father for not 'begging [a] landlord' (p.27) for work but 'cho[osing] to fight' (p.27) and retain his dignity and agency pulling a rickshaw instead. Halwai notes that his father 'never crouched' (p.24) but stood no matter how uncomfortable he became. His father was also 'a man with a plan' (p.27): that Halwai would graduate from school and be his one son to 'live like a man' (p.30).

The school

The school suffers from the same neglect and corruption as its surroundings. The walls are 'dirty' (p.29), and the mural is 'faded' (p.29). Halwai sarcastically describes it as 'a paradise within a paradise' (p.32). Claiming he has not been paid his salary, the schoolteacher refuses to teach and sleeps off his hangovers in the classroom. He also 'st[ole] the money' (p.33) the government provided for free lunches and uniforms. Yet no one blamed him since '[y]ou can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet' (p.33). Halwai only had a 'black slate and chalk' (p.36) on which to write because his father had bought it for him. The schoolteacher describes Halwai as 'the smartest of the lot' (p.34) and the school inspector declares him to be 'an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow' (p.35) after assessing him. The inspector gifts Halwai a book and offers to organise a scholarship for him to attend a 'real school' (p.35) so he can obtain a 'real education' (p.35).

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The tea shop

Halwai's dreams of a scholarship soon faded, however, and his brother took him to work for the Stork in the village tea shop to settle the loan his family had taken for the wedding of his 'cousin-sister Reena' (p.36). Nonetheless, Halwai claims that he got a 'better education at the tea shop' (p.38) than he would have at school.

Analysis

The opening chapter sets the tone for the novel and introduces several of its themes, including social and economic inequality, corruption, and the desire for freedom and self-determination. Halwai is presented as a complex character: intelligent, witty, sensitive, ambitious and practical, yet also egotistical, cynical and capable of murder. His tone oscillates between cynical, humorous and insightful as he recounts his experiences and offers a raw, unfiltered description of the harsh reality of social and economic life in India. Halwai uses the details of his 'Wanted' poster to describe the poverty and neglect of his childhood in a rural

Salient subjects

- Names, identity and freedom.
- Childhood of poverty and neglect.
- Social and economic servitude.
- Darkness and light.
- Cynicism and sarcasm.
- Masters and servants.

village and what he does to escape the fate prescribed by being 'born and raised in Darkness' (p.14). The chapter ends with Halwai recalling the contempt he felt when he returned to the village years later and revealing that he 'slit Mr Ashok's throat' (p.42) soon after the visit, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of his character and the lengths to which he will go to achieve freedom in the rest of the novel.

Format and tone

The opening lines of the first chapter establish its intended (if not actual) format and tone. The use of seemingly official addresses and titles suggests that it is a formal letter. This authoritative tone is supported by the instruction that the letter be sent to 'the [d]esk of […] His Excellency Wen Jiabao' (p.3) from the desk of a presumably equally important man who calls himself 'The White Tiger' (p.3). Yet this impression of formality appears to be subverted almost at once by the chatty, blunt, informal tone of the writing. The apparent high-status of the narrator also seems misplaced as he soon admits that his office is a 'hole in the wall' (p.7) in which he must sit the whole night.

An unreliable narrator?

As the information is offered only by the narrator and protagonist himself, it may not be entirely objective or reliable. It is solely his memory and interpretation of events. At times, he appears to be naïve and perhaps prone to fanciful exaggeration; for example, telling Jiabao that he considers himself a fellow 'great m[a]n' (p.3) and one of the 'most successful […] businessmen' (p.6) in Bangalore. At other times, however, when he offers unflattering and even incriminating descriptions of his life, he seems completely authentic and honest, for example, candidly volunteering at the end of the chapter that he is wanted by the police because he 'slit Mr Ashok's throat' (p.42) to steal '[s]even hundred thousand rupees' (p.32) from him.

'A man of action and change'

Halwai makes quite a vibrant, engaging first impression in this opening chapter. He claims to be a 'Thinking Man' (p.3), an 'entrepreneur' (p.3) and a 'man of action and change' (pp.5, 12), which is presumably why he has made the presumptuous decision to dictate a letter to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, to tell him 'the truth about Bangalore' (p.4). What impression is made by someone who hears of a foreign head of state's visit and promptly decides to write to them directly? How do you interpret his decision? Does it suggest that Halwai is ambitious, egotistical and/or naïve?

> 'My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time.' (pp.8-9)

© Jitish Kallat

Sarcastic and cynical

Halwai appears to possess a ready wit and makes sarcastic jokes regularly; for example, joking about the reliability of 'All India Radio' (p.4), challenging Jiabao to consider '[h]ow quickly [he] could kiss 36,000,004 arses' (p.9) and instructing him to 'turn […] upside down' (p.15) whatever the Indian prime minister says to learn the truth. He also describes the corruption of public sector workers as the 'incidental advantages' (p.33) of a government job, and his poverty-stricken village as 'your typical Indian village paradise' (p.19), a place that the Buddha would have run through 'as fast as he could' (p.18). Notably, he uses jokes to describe the incompetence, corruption and injustice of Indian society: the 'thugs' (p.35) and thieves masquerading as politicians, policemen, teachers and gangster 'landlords' (p.24).

He seems equally cynical about religion and compares the '**36,000,000 gods**' (p.8) of the Hindus to politicians who require their 'divine arses' (p.8) to be kissed and who 'keep winning re-election to their golden thrones in heaven, year after year' (p.8), despite seeming to do 'awfully little work' (p.8). He seems to accept and understand power and corruption, though, and is quick to declare that he is not 'blasphemous' (p.8) and still 'respect[s] them' (p.8) (i.e. the gods) since it 'pays to play it both ways' (p.9) in India and to be 'mocking and believing' (p.9) at the same time.

While **36 000 000 gods** seems to be deliberate hyperbole for comedic effect, the number is probably a reference to the figure of 330 million that is often quoted. This figure is not meant to be an actual count of the number of Hindu deities but an expression of the idea of an infinite number, stemming from the 33 supreme deities. Hinduism is the world's third most popular religion, with an estimated 1 billion followers, and there are many different traditions or denominations within it. This diversity encompasses a wide variety of beliefs about the concept of God. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2020, nonetheless, suggests that the vast majority of Hindus believe there is one ultimate reality or God (Brahman) and that the other deities are manifestations or aspects of this entity. The pantheon of Hindu deities has been compared to a planetary bureaucracy, with each god responsible for managing a different aspect of reality.

'The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian'

Halwai's apparent naïvety is perhaps understandable as he admits that he is 'somewhat lacking' (p.6) in terms of formal education and 'never finished school' (p.6). He acknowledges that he is 'self-taught' (p.6) and 'ha[s]n't read many books' (p.6), while defensively insisting that he has read 'all the ones that count' (p.6). To prove his point, he boasts that he knows 'by heart' (p.6) the 'works of the four greatest poets of all time' (p.6), before admitting he can only remember three of their names. He also naïvely believes that the Chinese are 'great lovers of freedom and individual liberty' (p.5) because he found a book 'on the pavement' (p.5) that said so.

His lack of formal education appears to be an important, painful subject for Halwai. He reveals that he had to leave school after 'two [or] three years' (p.10) to work in the village tea shop to help his family repay their debt to the Stork. He recalls how humiliated he was when his 'ex-employer' (p.9), Mr Ashok, described him as 'half-baked' (p.10) because he could not answer four simple questions about religion, history, the planets and the solar system. Nonetheless, he appears to have accepted or even claimed the insult since then and become motivated by it. He argues that being able to find decent employment means that educated men lose their freedom and 'take orders from other men for the rest of their lives' (p.11). He also claims that he got a 'better education at the tea shop' (p.38) than he would have at school.

'An India of Light and an India of Darkness'

Halwai's use of darkness and light as metaphors throughout this chapter appears to reveal his perspective and understanding of the country. He suggests that India is 'two countries in one' (p.14) and describes its prosperous urban cities as the 'India of Light' (p.14) and its poverty-stricken, rural villages and towns as the 'India of Darkness' (p.14). He claims that the 'ocean brings light' (p.14) but the 'river (Ganga) brings darkness' (p.14). His association of darkness with misery and poverty and light with happiness and prosperity is also reflected in the way he chooses to summarise his journey from rags to riches: 'I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness' (p14), and perhaps even in his delight that his office is the 'only […] space in Bangalore with its own chandelier' (p.7) and how he enjoys the way its glow 'spins around the room' (p.7). It is perhaps telling that Halwai uses the metaphors to refer to practical comparisons only (e.g. prosperity versus poverty) and does not include moral considerations (e.g. good versus evil), which may hint at the ethical ambiguity of his life story.

Masters and servants

Another theme that is introduced in this first chapter is the relationship between servants and masters. It is perhaps unsurprising that a man who was 'a servant once' (p.5) should understand colonialism in the same way. Halwai describes the British as 'our erstwhile master, the white-skinned man' (p.5) and claims to admire the Chinese for not allowing the British to 'make [them] their servants' (p.5). He also describes the god Hanuman as being 'foisted on us' (p.19) because he is a 'shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion' (p.19). While the caste system is introduced in Chapter 2, Halwai describes Mr Ashok as 'my master' (p.41) and contrasts being a servant with being an '[e]ntrepreneur' (p.3) throughout the chapter. He also equates being a servant with being a slave and observes how he was 'destined not to stay a slave' (p.41).

> *'Even as a boy I could see what was beautiful in the world: I was destined not to stay a slave.'* (p.41)

© Shivam (Instagram)

Questions

1. What expectations are created by the addresses at the start of the chapter? (2)

2. Where and when is the protagonist writing his letter? What does this setting suggest about his current situation? (2)

3. In your own words, explain what the description 'half-baked' (p.10) means in the context of the novel. (3)

4. What does 'Munna' (p.12) mean and what is the significance of it being used as Halwai's name by his family? (2)

5. What are the nicknames of the four landlords in Laxmangarh? (2)

6. How does Halwai become known as the 'White Tiger' (p.35) and what does this name suggest about his identity and fate? (3)

7. How had Vijay inspired Halwai? (3)

8. Why does Halwai have to start working in the tea shop? (1)

9. Why does Halwai stand 'gaping at the fort' (p.41)? (2)

[20]

Literary analysis

Summary

The following description is intended as a brief account of the significant events that occur in the novel. For more in-depth analysis and commentary, see the detailed ***Summaries and analyses*** *in the preceding section from page 35 of this resource.*

© Miva Arts

Early life in Laxmangarh

Halwai is born in the impoverished village of Laxmangarh. His family is lower caste, referred to as the 'Halwai' or 'sweet-makers', but his family is too poor to practise the trade and Halwai suspects that they had their shop stolen from them in the lawless aftermath of independence. Halwai's mother dies when he is around six years old, and his father is a rickshaw puller who struggles to provide for the family.

Despite his intelligence, Halwai is forced to leave school and work in a tea shop to settle a debt his family owes to a local landlord. He proves to be a terrible employee, however, and is soon fired by the tea shop owner. He is forced to leave the village to find work and so heads to the town of Dhanbad with his brother and cousin.

Learning to drive in Dhanbad

Halwai refers to his village and situation as living in 'the Darkness', a metaphor for the oppression and ignorance that keeps the poor subjugated. Determined to escape this life, Halwai learns to drive and eventually lands a job as a chauffeur for Mr Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam, the son and daughter-in-law of one of the wealthy landlords from Laxmangarh. This job represents Halwai's first step out of the Darkness and into the world of the rich, which he calls 'the Light'.

Delhi and the dead child

© Scheinbar (Deviantart)

Halwai moves to Delhi with Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam. He is exposed to the stark contrast between the lives of the wealthy and the poor. He learns about the rampant corruption that permeates Indian society, including bribery and manipulation of political officials. Despite his loyalty, Halwai realises that his employers view him as nothing more than a servant, and his resentment begins to grow.

Pinky Madam is unhappy with her life in India. On her birthday, she insists on driving the car while drunk and accidentally kills a child. Mr Ashok's family decides to frame Halwai for the accident. The incident leaves Pinky Madam even more distressed and she leaves Mr Ashok and returns to the United States of America. Being coerced into signing a false confession also marks a turning point for Halwai, who sees the true nature of his employers and the exploitation he endures ever more clearly.

The murder

With Pinky Madam gone, Mr Ashok becomes increasingly corrupt and despondent. Halwai sees an opportunity to change his fate. His anger and desire for freedom culminate in a clear decision to break free from the shackles of his servitude. He plans to kill Mr Ashok and steal the large sum of money that Mr Ashok routinely uses for bribing politicians.

Halwai executes his plan by brutally killing Mr Ashok and stealing the money. This act of violence symbolises Halwai's final break from his past and his transformation from a submissive servant into a man with agency and in control of his destiny. He escapes to Bangalore with the money, severing all ties with his family, knowing that his actions will probably lead to their deaths in retribution.

© Yori Hatakeyama

From fugitive to successful businessman

In Bangalore, Halwai uses the stolen money to start a taxi service for call centres, capitalising on the booming tech industry in the city. He adopts the name Ashok Sharma and establishes himself as a successful entrepreneur — once he has embraced the corrupt practices he used to despise and begun bribing the local police.

Throughout his letters to the Chinese Premier, Halwai reflects on his actions and the moral compromises he has made. He justifies the murder and theft by arguing that such acts are necessary for someone in his position to rise in a society as corrupt and unequal as India. He views himself as a self-made man, a 'White Tiger' who has broken out of the Darkness.

Halwai ends his narrative by expressing a mix of pride and pragmatism. He acknowledges the moral ambiguity of his rise to power but maintains that it was necessary to escape the life of servitude he was destined to live. He offers a darkly humorous and critical perspective on the social and economic realities of contemporary India, emphasising the lengths to which one must go to achieve personal freedom and success in a deeply flawed system.

© Cynthia Christine

Narration and structure

What is the author trying to say? How are we encouraged to react to the ideas presented in the novel? In this section, we examine some of the literary devices, writing techniques and structural elements that the author, Aravind Adiga, uses to convey the message of his novel.

Epistolary format

The novel is written in an epistolary format as a series of eight letters (e-mails). It is a distinctive narrative choice that immediately sets the work apart. This format creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy by allowing Halwai to directly address his intended audience (and each of us as his reader). This directness engages the reader by breaking the **fourth wall** and positioning the reader as a trusted confidant while Halwai shares his life story and secret. The epistolary format also offers the reader direct insight into the mind and character of the protagonist. The reader is allowed to experience Halwai's inner monologue and psyche through an unfiltered view of his thoughts and feelings, motivations and justifications.

The **fourth wall** is a performance convention in which an invisible, imaginary 'wall' separates the actors from the audience. While the audience can see through this 'wall', of course, the convention assumes the actors should act as if they cannot. It is called the 'fourth' wall because a stage or set typically has three physical walls surrounding and enclosing it (at the back and sides) and so this imaginary wall is an additional one at the front. In a work of literature, the fourth wall is an imaginary boundary that separates the characters and the story from the 'real world' inhabited by the reader. Halwai constantly reminds the reader that the fourth wall is being broken through by addressing the reader in the guise of 'Mr Premier' (p.3), 'Mr Jiabao' (p.7) and even 'Wen! Old friend!' (pp.291-2).

© Matthew D. Innis

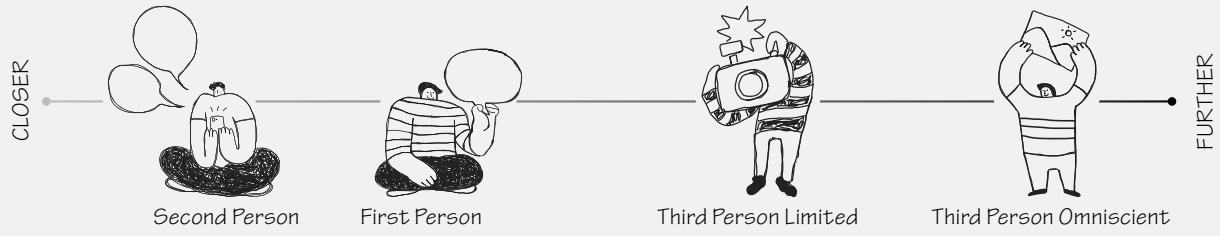
Narration

The White Tiger is narrated in the **first-person** by Halwai. As the narrator, Halwai's perspective is candid, often sardonic, and brutally honest. His narrative voice is distinct and consistent throughout the novel, characterised by a blend of dark humour and stark realism. This narrative viewpoint allows readers to see the world through Halwai's eyes, understanding his motivations and the rationale behind his morally ambiguous actions. The first-person narrative also highlights Halwai's wit and intelligence, making him a sympathetic, if complex, character.

By framing the story as a series of personal accounts or recollections, the novel also reminds the reader that Halwai's memories and descriptions of events may not be reliable. His perspective often appears to be biased and self-serving, making him an unreliable narrator. He often justifies his actions, including the murder of his employer, by portraying them as necessary for his survival and success. This unreliability adds complexity to the narrative, prompting the reader to question Halwai's version of events and consider alternative interpretations. His narrative blurs the line between truth and perception, making him an even more multifaceted and intriguing character.

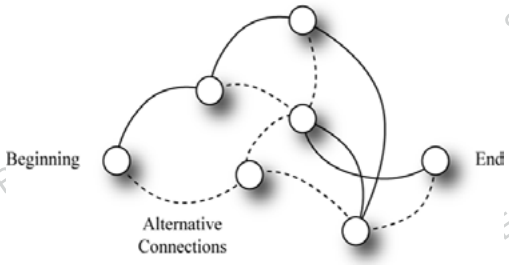
When discussing narrative point of view, the narrative voice (who is speaking) and the focalisation (from whose perspective the story is told) need to be considered; for example, a story that is told in the **first-person** (using the pronoun 'I') is narrated and focalised by the same character. That character is, thus, both the speaker and the person from whose perspective the story is told. By contrast, a story which is told in the second-person (using the pronoun 'you') is narrated by one character to another character, for example, an author narrating to his or her audience.

The narrative point of view in terms of 'distance' from the reader



The story is also narrated in a **non-linear** fashion. While the text follows a generally chronological sequence, it includes numerous flashbacks that provide context and background to Halwai's current situation. The story begins, for example, with Balram addressing the Chinese Premier in the present, but shifts back to his childhood in Laxmangarh. Through these flashbacks, the reader learns about the significant events that shaped his early life, such as his family's poverty, his brief schooling, and his early work experiences. The flashbacks generally follow his progress from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad, from Dhanbad to Delhi, and then his transformation into a businessman in Bangalore, but they occasionally enter the story at a different point, describing events that are thematically related but not always chronological. This technique allows the author to build a comprehensive picture of Halwai's life, gradually revealing the factors that drive him to commit murder.

Non-linear narrative means that the events in the narrative are not told in chronological order. Unlike in linear narrative, in which the plot follows a linear timeline (beginning, middle and end) and where it is clear that one event or decision causes a subsequent event or decision, in a non-linear narrative, the events are told out of chronological order and links between various events are often unclear. Readers are required to pay close attention to the narrative and make their own connections.



Structure

The novel is structured into eight chapters that correspond to the eight letters written by the protagonist and the title of each chapter describes the time when its letter was written (e.g. 'The First Night.'). The letters are written on consecutive nights, except that there are no letters written on the third night, and there are additional letters written on the fourth and sixth mornings. This division adds a clear temporal framework to the story, which helps to organise Halwai's recollections and gives a sense of progression and momentum to his confessional narrative.

Even though the novel does not strictly adhere to a traditional **five-act plot structure**, it can be useful to analyse the work through this framework to understand its narrative progression and highlight the key phases of Halwai's journey.

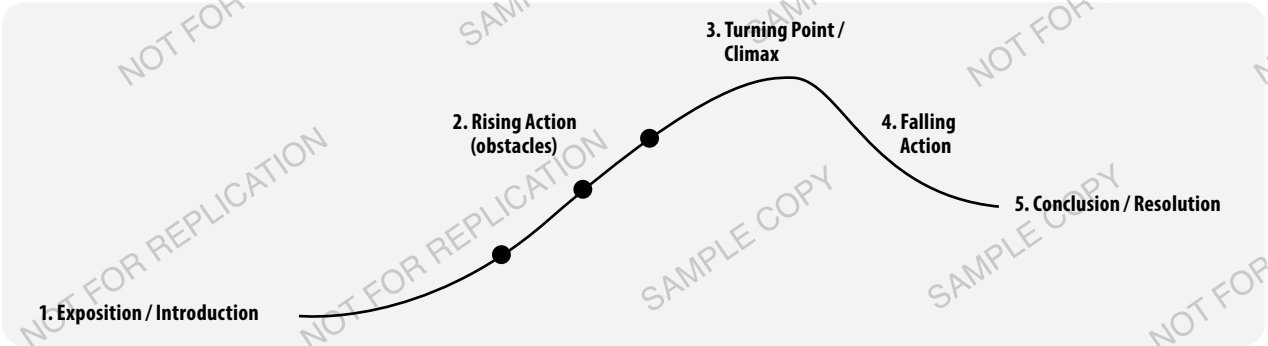


Diagram illustrating a typical** five-act plot structure**. This classification was refined and formalised by the German playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag in his book* **Die Technik des Dramas** *(The Technique of the Drama***), published in 1863. Freytag developed his framework by analysing Shakespeare's plays, as well as ancient Greek and Roman dramas.***

Five-act plot structure	Plot structure of *The White Tiger*
1. Exposition/Introduction: This part of the plot introduces the main characters, usually the protagonist and the antagonist (there may be more than one protagonist and/or antagonist), establishes the relationships between these characters and introduces the situation or central conflict with which the protagonist is faced and will have to resolve.	**1. Exposition/Introduction:** Balram Halwai, a poor villager from Laxmangarh, is introduced as the protagonist. The setting of rural India is described. Halwai's impoverished family background is established, showing the limited opportunities available to him.
2. Rising Action: The 'plot thickens': the protagonist understands what he or she must achieve and works towards resolving his or her problem. He or she will face challenges and obstacles and be thwarted along the way. How the protagonist responds to these obstacles sets the stage for the rest of the drama.	**2. Rising Action:** Halwai leaves the village and learns to drive. He gets a job as a chauffeur for the antagonist, Mr Ashok, a wealthy landlord's son. Halwai moves to Delhi with Mr Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam. Halwai's loyalty is tested when Pinky Madam accidentally kills a child in a hit-and-run and the family decides to frame him for the accident. Pinky Madam leaves Mr Ashok and returns to the United States. Halwai watches Mr Ashok bribe officials and is disillusioned by Mr. Ashok's increasing debauchery. Halwai's resentment and anger grows.
3. Turning Point/Climax: This is the focal point of the novel. The protagonist makes a single critical decision. He or she is ready to engage with his or her antagonist(s) and, consequently, there will be a change — for better or for worse — in the ensuing action.	**3. Turning Point/Climax:** Halwai decides to take drastic action to change his fate. He plans to kill Mr Ashok and steal a large sum of money that Mr Ashok uses for bribing politicians. Halwai executes his plan, killing Mr Ashok and stealing the money. This act of violence is the climax of the novel, representing Halwai's ultimate rebellion against his social constraints.
4. Falling Action This is a period of great tension. Either the protagonist is unable to accomplish his or her goal or accomplishing his or her goal does not seem to offer the expected benefits. 'Loose ends' start to be tied up and complications unravel. The story moves towards its conclusion.	**4. Falling Action** Halwai flees to Bangalore with the stolen money, leaving behind his family and his old life. After a period of confusion and depression, he assumes a new identity as Ashok Sharma and successful exploits the corrupt police force to start his own business and become successful.
5. Conclusion/Resolution/Dénouement/Revelation The four terms in this sub-heading all refer to the final action of the story. Typically, the crisis abates, and the situation improves for the protagonist. Usually, the characters gain insights and perhaps 'good' finally triumphs over 'evil' or perhaps a benign power takes control. Ultimately, nonetheless, some form of order is restored and the readers experience 'catharsis' or the release of tension and anxiety.	**5. Conclusion/Resolution/Dénouement/Revelation** Halwai reflects on his journey, his transformation, and the ethical implications of his actions. He accepts his new identity and the moral compromises he has made. He is unrepentant and justifies his actions as necessary for his survival and success in a society where the poor are systematically oppressed. He describes his life in Bangalore and his vision for the future.

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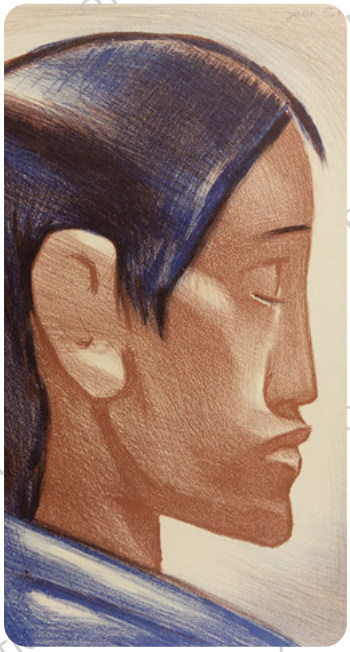
Character analysis

Who are the people in The White Tiger *and what are they like? This section provides succinct descriptions of the main and supporting characters, focusing on their personalities, relationships and roles in the novel.*

Balram 'Munna' Halwai



© Jean Charlot

The first-person narrator and protagonist of the tale, Balram Halwai is a cunning, resourceful and ambitious young man. Born into poverty in a small rural village, he rises from his humble beginnings to become a wealthy businessman in Bangalore through a combination of wit and ruthlessness.

When we meet Halwai, he is around 30 years old, a successful entrepreneur and worth more than 10 million rupees. He describes himself as a 'solid pillar of Bangalorean society' (p.292) and 'one of [the city's] most successful (though probably least known) businessmen' (p.6). Later, we learn that he identifies himself as, 'Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore' (p.302). He tells Jiabao that the best way to establish the 'basic facts' (p.11) about him is to read the 'poster […] the police made of [him]' (p.11). The 'Wanted' poster made by the police describes him in the following manner: 'Age: Between 25 and 35. Complexion: Blackish. Face: Oval. Height: Five feet four inches estimated. Build: Thin, Small' (p.12). Halwai concedes that he was indeed 'lean and dark and cunning' (p.63) when he was younger, but notes, significantly, that his wealthy lifestyle has since made him '"[f]at" and "potbellied"' (p.13).

> **'My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time.'** (pp.8-9)

Intelligent

From an early age, Halwai is identified as intelligent by the people around him. His father feels so strongly about his potential that he dares to defy Kusum and insist that Halwai 'stay in school' (p.29). He notes how Halwai's mother shared his opinion and 'told [him] he'd be the one who made it through school' (p.29). When he learns that Halwai is leaving for New Delhi, Kishan confirms their mother's opinion and says, 'It's just like our mother always said. She knew you were going to make it' (p.111). The local schoolteacher and inspector agree with this estimation of Halwai. During the inspector's surprise visit, the teacher describes Halwai as 'the smartest of the lot' (p.34) and, after interviewing Halwai and realising that he has taught himself to read and write, the inspector agrees, saying, '[Y]ou, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow' (p.35). Halwai's intelligence and literacy is so unusual for a man born into his circumstances that it prompts the inspector to compare him to a white tiger, 'the rarest of animals' (p.35).

Halwai demonstrates his intelligence throughout the novel through his witty observations, imaginative descriptions and keen insights. Accurately assessing the impact of political corruption, for example, Halwai sardonically notes that 'there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections' (p.47), and again when he jokes that '[t]he police know exactly where to find me […] dutifully voting on election day […] in Laxmangarh […] as I have done in every […] election since I turned eighteen. I am India's most faithful voter and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth' (p.102). His descriptions and metaphors are also intelligent. Perhaps the most notable is his comparison between the way chickens are kept in the Jama Masjid market and the way in which the poor and marginalised are trapped in a cycle of servitude and subjugation in the 'Great Indian Rooster Coop' (p.175). His ability to interpret and assimilate the poetic couplet read to him by the bookseller also reflects his intelligence. His realisation that the 'open door' symbolises his innate agency and potential for change signifies his mental liberation from the conditioning and limitations imposed by his socio-economic background.

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> **'I was looking for the key for years**
> **But the door was always open.'** (p.267)

Ambitious

Halwai's ambition is also evident from early on in his life. As he tells Jiabao, '[E]ven as a boy I could see what was beautiful in the world: I was destined not to stay a slave' (p.41). In other words, he believes his appreciation of elegance, artistry and the finer things in life even in Laxmangarh demonstrates that his ambition to pursue a better life and improve himself was there from an early age. Even when he is forced to leave school and work in the local tea shop, Halwai shows his ambition and uses his circumstances to 'keep [his] education going forward' (p.52) by spying and eavesdropping on the customers. This habit pays dividends, of course, as this is how he learns how much chauffeurs are paid and inspires him to learn to drive. His determination to change his destiny is reflected in his response to Laxmangarh when he returns there as Mr Ashok's driver. He recalls looking down on the village from the Black Fort and rejecting his fate by '*spitting* at God again and again' (p.87).

© Deb Weiers

Alone with Mr Ashok in Delhi, Halwai begins to show his ambition by impersonating his master and taking the car for unauthorised joy rides, driving around town 'play[ing] his music [and running] his A/C at full blast' (p.209) as if he was Mr Ashok. Halwai's ambitions really begin to emerge, however, after he discovers that even a driver's retirement is miserable. At that point, he starts 'cheat[ing his] employer' (p.230) by siphoning petrol, overcharging for car repairs, and using the Honda City as his personal taxi. As his aspirations continue to grow, Halwai decides to imitate Mr Ashok and sleep with a golden-haired sex worker as well. It is telling that he reacts with anger and frustration when he realises that the woman he hires is not a real blonde but has dyed her hair. His simmering ambition to attain the lifestyle Mr Ashok enjoys is revealed by his internal response to his master in the tea shop: '[H]e smiled [and said,] "I like eating your kind of food!" I smiled and thought, *I like eating your kind of food too*' (p.239).

© Sara Medhat

Ultimately, the act that expresses Halwai's ambition the most is his murder of Mr Ashok to steal the money needed to start a new life. Halwai is fully aware of the risks involved and the possibility of being caught and having to face 'the hangman's noose' (p.320), but his desire to achieve a better life is so strong it makes these risks seem small in comparison.

Setting up his taxi service also demonstrates Halwai's ambition. He had stolen enough money to disappear and lead a comfortable life for many years, but he chose to risk both exposure and commercial failure as an 'entrepreneur' (p.3) in exchange for the possibility of even greater wealth. As he tells Jiabao, even though he is now 'worth fifteen times the sum [he] borrowed from Mr Ashok' (p.301), he wants to sell his company and 'head into a new line' (p.319). He notes how he is a '*first-gear* man […] who sees "tomorrow" when others see "today"' (p.319) and that he wants to spend three or four years in real estate and then 'sell everything' (p.319) and start an English-language school for poor children. It seems fitting that his ultimate ambition is a 'school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore!' (p.319).

> *'I don't keep a mobile phone, for obvious reasons—they corrode a man's brains, shrink his balls, and dry up his semen, as all of us know.'* (p.38)

Resilient

In many respects, Halwai's entire life story is one of resilience. No matter what misfortunes befall him, Halwai finds the inner fortitude and perseverance to recover and not 'sink in the mud' (p.53). In the first chapter, Halwai describes himself as a 'half-baked fellow' (p.11) to explain how the lack of 'schooling' (p.10) poor, rural children receive leaves them with 'half-cooked ideas in [their] head[s] […to] act on and live with' (p.11) as adults. Yet Halwai overcomes this disadvantage by teaching himself to read and write and by eavesdropping on everyone around him, through which he 'learned a lot about life, India, and America—and a bit of English too' (p.47).

© Dominique Amendola

Even after he has secured a position as a driver for the Stork in Dhanbad, Halwai must withstand constant abuse and humiliation. The Stork regularly strikes him with 'sharp blow[s]' (p.71) on his head and makes him massage the smelly, 'old, flaky skin' (p.72) on his feet for an hour or so every evening. The other servants in the house belittle, ignore and 'glare' (p.76) at him. He is forced to 'sleep on the floor' (p.67) without a blanket or pillow and made to wash the dogs 'on [his] knees' (p.78). Even Mr Ashok humiliates and abuses Halwai, from small indignities like making him wear a maharaja costume to asking Halwai to make a profound sacrifice and sign the false confession. Halwai expresses how intense the latter experience was for him

Themes

Authors use themes, symbols and motifs to give their work more meaning and to make their novels about more than just the events they describe. A theme in a work of fiction can be described as a central message or idea or topic in that work. A sophisticated text will usually explore several interrelated themes. The White Tiger *is a work of* ***social commentary*** *and so its main themes highlight problematic aspects of Indian society, including the master-servant relationship (and how this relationship dictates an individual's power, identity and freedom), corruption and morality, and inequality and injustice. While each theme will be discussed individually in this section, remember that each one often overlaps or interweaves with other themes; for example, both the master-servant relationships and the corruption and morality described in the novel are framed and influenced by the social and economic inequality and injustice of Indian society.*

> *'The White Tiger* wasn't written to ingratiate itself with readers anywhere. It was meant to provoke. It was not meant to be bed-time reading.'
>
> **– Aravind Adiga**

In literary terms, a work of **social commentary** is a text that deliberately aims to expose and critique one or more aspects of a society, such as its political, economic, religious or cultural practices or norms. Writers engaged in social commentary have usually identified specific problems or failings in a society to which they wish to draw attention through their writing. Ultimately, of course, they hope that raising awareness of these problematic aspects will inspire change and result in these failings being addressed and remedied. Societies are collections of human beings with different and changing needs and interests and so they regularly experience conflicts and tensions. As a result, works of social commentary are a common form of literature and there are many examples, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which critiques unrestrained statism (government control), and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which critiques apartheid and racial injustice.

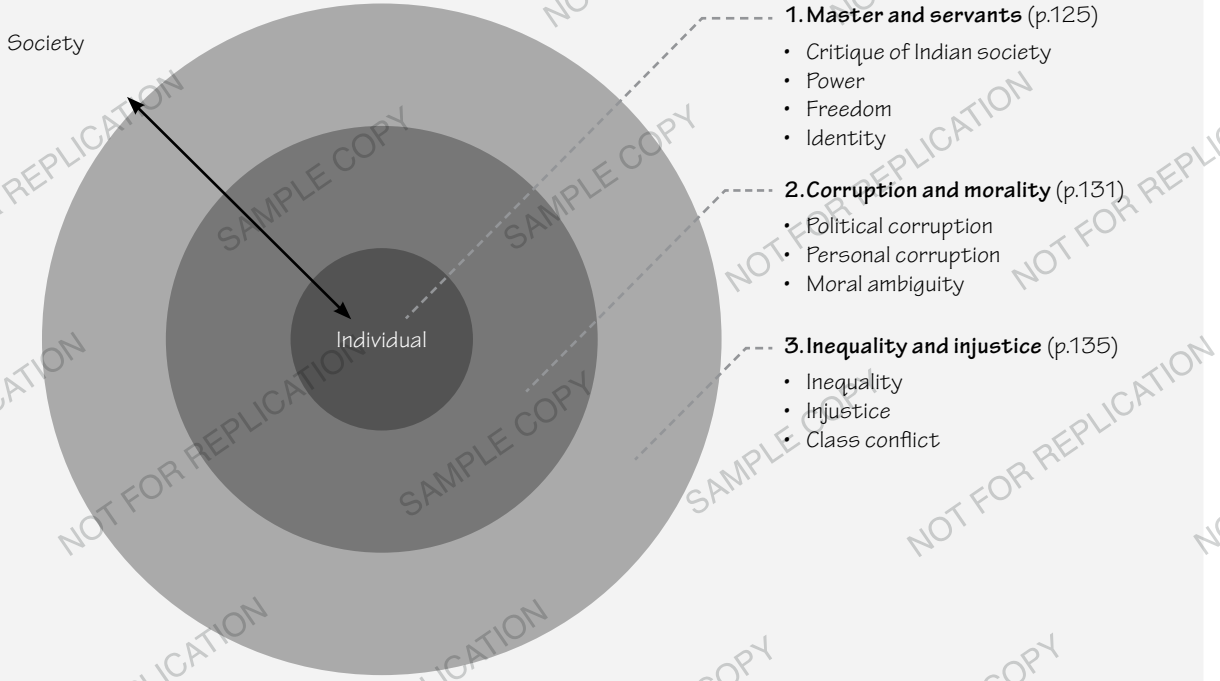

Illustration of the interwoven, encircling themes in **The White Tiger.**

1. Masters and servants

The literary theme of 'masters and servants' explores the dynamics of power, control, and dependency between individuals of different social and economic standings. Authors like Aravind Adiga typically use this theme to expose and critique the inequalities inherent in master-servant relationships, and to examine how these relationships shape an individual's power (i.e. the effect that having power over others 'or being powerless' has on a human being), freedom (i.e. the effect that imposing constraints on others 'or struggling for autonomy and agency' has on a human being) and identity (i.e. the effect that playing the role of 'master' or 'servant' has on a human being's sense of self, and connections with others). As Adiga explains, 'In India, most middle-class people have servants. They have someone to drive their car. A lady will come in to sweep your floor and then to mop it. They will also have a servant to do the cooking and someone to take care of the children. Life is structured in such a way that you have to have these servants. When I first moved back, it was very difficult for me. I couldn't cope with the idea of having a servant, so I did everything myself and this made me kind of stick out. Through sheer incompetence and not fitting in, I lived not as a middle-class person should. I was often doing things that a much poorer man would do, and I got to see life from a very different perspective. *The White Tiger* [was] born out of that clash between my native middle-class background and the new kind of life I had'. Accordingly, Adiga uses the experiences of the protagonist, Halwai, to examine the nature of master-servant relationships throughout the novel.

© Luis Cruz Azaceta

Critique of Indian society

Adiga set out to critique the deep-seated inequalities in Indian society in the novel. By describing the master-servant relationship from Halwai's viewpoint, he challenges readers to empathise with those who are marginalised — invisible and voiceless — in Indian society. Accordingly, he deliberately makes Halwai a poor man from an insignificant rural village who possesses unusual intelligence, wit and ambition. As he notes, 'it tends to be a stereotype in Indian literature […] that the poor are either absent entirely or, if they're present, they're present as sentimental stock figures — weak, helpless figures who need your protection as a middle-class person. A sense of humour and the capacity for vice are privileges accorded only to the middle class in Indian literature by and large'.

© Michael Lang

The new castes: 'Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies.'

Viewed from Halwai's perspective, Indian society is one in which the ruthless and venal masters take what they want from others and use violence to keep it. He believes the corruption and violence seeped into Indian society to fill the power vacuum left by the British in 1947. He blames 'those politicians in Delhi' (p.63) and compares the advent of Independence to a zoo being abandoned by its keepers: '[T]he cages had been let open […] and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law' (pp.63-4). Halwai uses excessive eating/the act of gluttony to symbolise the taking of more money and resources than are needed or deserved, and the expanding belly that results from excessive eating to represent this greed: 'Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies' (p.64). He uses the example of what he believes must have happened to his father to illustrate how this chaotic, lawless society then replaced the 'orderly' (p.63) caste system. He believes his father would have inherited the family sweet-making shop, but a member of some other caste 'must have stolen it from him with the help of the police' (p.64). As his father did not have the determination or ruthlessness to fight back, he was simply 'eaten up' (p.64).

The Rooster Coop: 'Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many.'

Halwai expands on his critique of Indian society by introducing his metaphor of the 'Great Indian Rooster Coop' (p.175). He compares the subjugation and compliance of the poor to the way the chickens packed into the cages in a market in Old Delhi 'do not rebel [nor] try to get out of the coop' (p.173), even though their conditions and futures are bleak. He explains that the poor know that there is nor rule of law or police force to protect them or their families from being brutally tortured and killed by the masters should they resist their circumstances. Throughout the novel, he offers examples such as 'what the Buffalo did to his domestic servant' (p.66) and the

© Sergey Shenderovsky

rickshaw-puller who tried to vote being brutally beaten and 'stamped back into the earth' (p.102) to demonstrate the consequences of rebellion or escape. Halwai suggests that the oppressive system has become so entrenched and dependable that it is now 'the basis of the entire Indian economy' (p.175).

Halwai also uses this understanding of Indian society to justify his own actions. When the masters are so freely corrupt and violent and the entire society is set up to maintain their wealth and advantage, including innocent servants being put 'behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters' (p.169), the only way to escape a life of poverty, servitude and exploitation is to be equally corrupt and violent and to 'grow a belly' (p.231). Indeed, when Halwai reflects on his actions at the end of the novel, he frames them using the master-servant perspective and describes his 'break out' (p.320) or escape as a necessary and 'need[ed]' (p.320) adjustment or rebalancing of the 'Rooster Coop' (p.320) of Indian society, which needs weak 'masters like Mr Ashok […] weeded out' (p.320) and replaced by 'exceptional servants' (p.320) like him.

Class-based resentment: '[W]hen your driver starts to read about Gandhi and the Buddha […] it's time to wet your pants.'

Author Adiga also uses the master-servant conflict that simmers throughout the novel to suggest that the use of violence by the masters is inherently unstable and ultimately unsustainable. He uses descriptions of the popularity of *Murder Weekly* magazine and the unruly behaviour of the 'hordes [...] pouring in from the Darkness' (p.269) to Delhi after the election to illustrate the pent-up frustration and desperation felt by the servants and to suggest how feasibly such feelings could lead to acts of violent crime in response. He also uses Halwai's discussions with the booksellers and his imagined conversation with the city of Delhi to discuss the possibility of a violent uprising and '*blood on the streets*' (p.220) if the dignity and agency of the servants is not restored. As he explains, 'the servant-master system implies two things: One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich—a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, the servant has access to the master—the master's money, the master's physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low. Even though the middle class—who often have three or four servants—are paranoid about crime, the reality is a master getting killed by his servant is rare. But it's on its way… What is stopping a poor man from committing crimes like those that occur in Venezuela or South Africa? You need two things [for such crimes to occur]—a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment. We have the divide, but not the resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life. For them, getting angry at the rich is like getting angry at the heat […] But I think we're seeing what I believe is a class-based resentment for the first time.'

© Subrat Behera

'What is stopping a poor man from committing crimes like those that occur in Venezuela or South Africa?'

– Aravind Adiga

Power

Through Halwai's experiences, the novel critiques the power dynamics between masters and servants. The masters, represented by Mr Ashok and his family, wield immense power over their servants, treating them as mere tools for their convenience rather than as individuals with their own identities and aspirations. This relationship is marked by a profound lack of empathy and a sense of entitlement on the part of the masters, who see their servants as expendable. By contrast, the servants, represented by Halwai, experience a dehumanising loss of dignity and agency that contrasts sharply with the physical proximity and intimacy of the relationship needed by their roles.

Halwai's descriptions of the contrasting behaviour and attitudes of the family members suggest that the Stork and Mukesh Sir are typical landlords or masters and act as foils to Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam.


© Mithun Dasgupta

world' (pp.220-1). He personifies the city and imagines she is equally angry about what has happened to her people: '*Speak to me of civil war,* I told Delhi. *I will*, she said. […] *Speak to me of blood on the streets*, I told Delhi. *I will*, she said' (p.220).

Class conflict also becomes the theme of his discussions of poetry with the Muslim bookseller. Halwai declares that 'the history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor' (p.254), which the rich have been winning, of course. In this context, he describes poetry as the writing of compassionate wise men that 'when understood correctly [contains] secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old brain-war on terms favourable to himself' (p.254). The conflict between the rich and the poor is also vividly depicted in Halwai's description of the aftermath of the election and the invasion of 'hordes of [the Great Socialist's] supporters pouring in from the Darkness' (p.269), whistling, driving and doing 'what they want' (p.269) across the city. Their unruly behaviour is an expression of their pent-up frustration and anger being released after they have won what they hope will be a significant political victory against their rich oppressors.

'I'm an optimist on the future of India; I think young Indians want real change and are determined to reduce the corruption and misgovernance that are the root causes of poverty in India. We have seen dramatic reductions in poverty in parts of India that have good governance — in the southern state of Kerala, for instance — and I think that if young Indians step up the pressure on the political system, poverty can be slashed in the coming decade. But time is running out.' **– Aravind Adiga**

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, shapes or colours used to represent something else, usually an abstract idea or quality. Symbols usually represent something else by association, resemblance or convention, and provide subtle clues to the deeper layers of meaning in a literary work. There are numerous symbols used in The White Tiger, *including the White Tiger, the Rooster Coop, the Black Fort, the Rearview Mirror and the Chandeliers. In this section, we examine some of the more prominent symbolism used by Adiga in the novel.*

The White Tiger

The white tiger serves as a powerful, multifaceted symbol for Halwai's aspirations, struggles, and ultimate transformation in the novel. The animal is introduced as a symbol of uniqueness and rarity. This symbolism is presented by the school inspector during his surprise visit. He describes a white tiger as 'the rarest of animals—the creature that comes along only once in a generation' (p.35) and, impressed with Halwai's 'intelligen[ce], honest[y] and vivacious[ness]' (p.35), the inspector compares him to a white tiger in the jungle of 'thugs and idiots' (p.35) that surround him in Laxmangarh. From this moment on, Halwai sees himself as someone rare and unique — different from the other villagers — and destined for greater things, i.e. able to escape the fate of his social class.


©Montu Chitrakar

The white tiger is also a symbol of power and freedom. It has the strength, ruthlessness and cunning to hunt and kill its prey without hesitation, doubt, or guilt. This aspect of the animal becomes important to Halwai when he considers what it will take to escape his fate and break out of the Rooster Coop. As he tells Jiabao, 'only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters — can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature. It would, in fact, take a White Tiger' (pp.176-7).

After Halwai visits the caged white tiger in the National Zoo in New Delhi, the creature becomes a symbol of his own feelings of entrapment and his desire to break free. When a sign asks him if he is able to imagine himself in the cage, he thinks '*I can do that — I can do that with no trouble at all*' (p.177). Later, as he watches the tiger pace up and down, Halwai realises that he has been distracting and numbing himself to tolerate his servitude in the same way that the animal has been 'hypnoti[s]ing himself by walking like this [since] that was the only way he could tolerate this cage' (p.276).

Ultimately, the white tiger becomes a potent symbol of Halwai's inner resources and personal transformation. As he wrestles with his fear and hesitation about killing Mr Ashok, Halwai begins to sense the creature in his consciousness. When his thoughts calmly justify stealing the red bag, his reflection in the rearview mirror changes and he sees 'long beautiful eyebrows curving on either side of powerful, furrowed brow muscles [and] black eyes […] shining below those tensed muscles. The eyes of a cat watching its prey' (p.244). Two days later, when he sits on the pavement lost in confusion, Halwai notices '[p]aw prints' (p.259) in the concrete that lead him to a slum and the realisation that his oppressors will never stop abusing and exploiting him. A few days later, he visits the zoo with Dharam and, from the moment the tiger's eyes meet his and he faints in front of the cage, Halwai feels that the creature has become a part of him for good. His fear and hesitation about killing Mr Ashok immediately disappear, and he is quietly determined not to '*live the rest of [his] life in a cage*' (p.278).


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After he has killed Mr Ashok, Halwai fully embraces his new identity by openly calling himself 'The White Tiger' (p.3) and his company 'White Tiger Drivers' (p.301). He also begins to live like a white tiger, keeping to himself and working alone in his office each night. As he explains to Jiabao, 'A White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous' (p.302). Even his optimistic vision for the future is to start a 'school full of White Tigers, [who will be] unleashed on Bangalore!' (p.319).

The Rooster Coop

The Rooster Coop is a powerful symbol of the oppressive social and economic structures that trap the lower classes in India. Halwai compares the way the poor have been coerced and trained 'to exist in perpetual servitude' (p.176) to the way chickens are kept in the poultry market. Introducing the symbol as 'the greatest thing to come out of [India] in the ten thousand years of its history' (p.173), Halwai relates the way the lower classes are economically trapped in a cycle of poverty and servitude, unable to escape their predetermined fate, to the way the chickens are kept in cramped, confined spaces, awaiting their inevitable slaughter: 'Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench—the stench of terrified, feathered flesh' (p.173).

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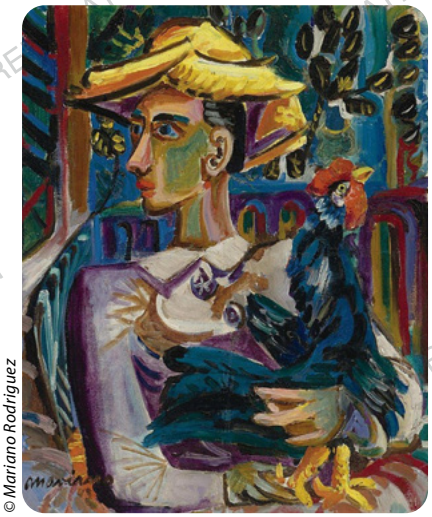
Halwai highlights how the chickens 'know they're next [but] do not rebel' (p.173) to describe how the poor have been socially and psychologically conditioned to accept their plight. The lower classes in India do not typically resist their social conditions. They appear to have internalised their oppression to the point where they even believe it is their natural state. Alluding to the way gangsterism, violence, coercion and economic exclusion have built on the foundations laid by the caste system, Halwai sardonically notes that, as a system of oppression, the Coop has become so entrenched now that the 'trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy' (p.175). Almost incredulously, he recalls how 'not once did the thought of running away [or] *tell[ing] the judge the truth* cross [his] mind' (p.177) after he had signed the false confession, and simply explains, 'I was trapped in the Rooster Coop' (p.177). Likewise, when he struggles to understand his motives for looking after Mr Ashok, he just shrugs and confesses, 'We [servants] are made mysteries to ourselves by the Rooster Coop we are locked in' (p.187). Similarly, when the other drivers mock him for trying yoga, Halwai interprets their behaviour as an expression of the internalised conditioning to which they have been exposed. He ruefully notes that the 'Rooster Coop was doing its work. Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs. Yes, that's the sad truth, Mr Premier. The coop is guarded from the inside' (pp.193-4).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When the fortune-telling chit admonishes Halwai to respect the law or face eternal damnation, he compares the reminder to 'the final alarm bell of the Rooster Coop' (p.248). It is a telling reference that shows how Halwai has come to consider religion and the law to be just aspects of the social and economic structures used to oppress the lower classes.

Once he has '*broken out of the coop*' (p.320), however, Halwai's attitude towards it appears to shift significantly. By the end of the novel, he seems to consider the Rooster Coop an almost necessary symbol of natural social order and stability. He suggests that the coop (i.e. society) 'needs […] exceptional servant[s]' (p.320) like him to replace weak 'masters like Mr Ashok' (p.320) to maintain the right balance and stability between the two 'sides' (p.320) of masters and servants, which is why he 'will never get caught' (p.320).

Important quotations

Quoting from the novel to illustrate your argument creates a good impression with your marker as it shows you are familiar with the novel and understand how to support your argument with evidence from the text you are studying. In this section, key quotations are offered and are accompanied by suggested explanations where necessary.

Masters and servants (power, identity and freedom)

- **'I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in Darkness.'** (p.14)
  This quote reflects Halwai's personal transformation. He uses these terms to differentiate his current state of success and empowerment ('Light') from his past life of poverty and servitude ('Darkness'). This dichotomy highlights the vast disparities between the rich and the poor and the stark contrast between Halwai's past and present.

- **"'You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals — the creature that comes along only once in a generation?" I thought about it and said: "The white tiger." That's what you are, in *this* jungle.'"** (p.35)
  Early in the novel, Halwai is identified as a 'white tiger' by a school inspector, symbolising his uniqueness and potential to break free from his social constraints. It underscores the theme of individual identity and exceptionalism amidst widespread oppression and servitude.

- **'Even as a boy I could see what was beautiful in the world: I was destined not to stay a slave.'** (p.41)
  This quote is Halwai's response to a verse of poetry ('*They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world*.' (p.40)). He considers the ability to see beauty in even the ugliest of environments as a sign that a person has an appreciation for elegance, artistry and the finer things in life, which he believes shows an aptitude and desire to improve themselves and pursue a better life. He suggests that this ability is part of what distinguishes him from others in his village, who may be more resigned to their circumstances because they are blind to the potential of the world.

- **'Catch 'em young, and you can keep 'em for life. […] This fellow will last thirty, thirty-five years. His teeth are solid, he's got his hair, he's in good shape.'** (p.66)
  By reducing Halwai to his physical attributes — his teeth, hair, and overall condition — the Stork's words illustrate the dehumanisation of servants. They are evaluated not as human beings with dreams and desires but as commodities whose value is determined by their ability to perform labour. It also signifies how servants are often recruited at a young age and are expected to remain in their roles for decades, without any opportunity for upward mobility or personal development.

- **'Is there any hatred on earth like the hatred of the number two servant for the number one?'** (p.77)
  This quote captures the internal competition and animosity among servants, which prevents them from uniting against their masters.

- **'And so I saw the room with *his* eyes; smelled it with *his* nose; poked it with *his* fingers — I had already begun to digest my master!'** (pp.78-9)
  This quote is significant because it captures the early stages of Halwai's transformation. It illustrates his figurative assimilation of his master's identity, foreshadowing his rebellion and reflects his growing discontent with his subordinate position.

- **'From the start, sir, there was a way in which I could understand what he wanted to say, the way dogs understand their masters.'** (p.111)
  Halwai reflects on his intuitive understanding of Mr Ashok's wishes or needs, highlighting the ingrained nature of servitude among the lower class.

- **'Free people don't know the value of freedom, that's the problem.'** (pp.117-8)
  Halwai reflects on the ignorance of those who have never experienced oppression, contrasting this with his own yearning for freedom.

- **'At that moment I looked at the rearview mirror, and I caught Mr Ashok's eyes looking at me: and in those master's eyes, I saw the most unexpected emotion. Pity.'** (p.122)
  This moment illustrates a rare instance of empathy from Mr Ashok towards Halwai, revealing the complex human emotions within the master-servant relationship.

Literary essay

An essay is a short piece of writing that presents and develops an idea. The purpose of writing an essay is two-fold. The first reason is to demonstrate an understanding of the text in question. The second is to show that you can write about a topic in a focused and sustained way. In other words, an essay is not a rambling, disjointed collection of your thoughts regarding a topic, but an integrated and interconnected discussion that develops a clear, convincing argument. This section offers some basic guidelines on writing a literary essay, two annotated examples from which to learn, and a selection of essay topics that you can use to practise essay writing.

General guidelines

- Keep your writing direct, simple and unpretentious — avoid over-complicated sentence structures and unnecessarily wordy descriptions.
- Write in the Present Tense using the active voice as this helps to ensure your argument is more immediate and convincing.
- Write using a formal tone and register (i.e. avoiding slang, colloquialisms, jargon and abbreviations) as a literary essay is a piece of academic analysis, not creative writing.
- Remember that any statements you make must be supported with concrete, suitable examples and evidence from the text.
- Pay attention to the required word length, if stipulated. (In Grade 12, your essay should be approximately 600 words in length.) There is no need to include a word count at the end of your essay unless you are specifically instructed to do so. You should keep your response as concise as possible as you may be penalised if your argument strays off the topic.
- Present your essay in a neat and tidy manner as sloppy work makes a poor impression and could cost you marks, particularly if your essay is illegible or difficult to read.

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Planning your essay

It is important to plan your **essay** thoroughly before you start writing your response. Doing so will improve your marks by helping you to clarify your ideas and to structure your argument logically. If you plan your essay properly, it can feel as if it almost writes itself.

Writing your essay

Common types of essay:

Argumentative — requires you to formulate an opinion or perspective regarding a topic, explain your reasoning and provide evidence from the text(s) to substantiate your stance. Task words for such an essay include: 'argue', 'comment on', 'motivate', 'criticise' and 'justify'.

Discursive — requires you to present a balanced or objective discussion of an issue or topic by identifying the information that is relevant to each of the different perspectives or opinions regarding the issue (e.g. both arguments and counter-arguments) and describing it in a logical, organised manner. Note that you may be asked to conclude your essay with an evaluation of the information and offer an opinion or be asked to provide a neutral summary of the most salient points. Task words for such an essay include: 'report', 'investigate', 'describe', 'discuss', 'explore', 'summarise', 'explain', 'illustrate' and 'distinguish'.

Analytical— requires you to evaluate an issue or subject by identifying the relevant information from the text(s) and re-organising it to create an appropriate response. Task words for such an essay include: 'analyse', 'assess', 'compare', 'contrast', 'examine', 'evaluate' and 'identify'.

Step 1: Analyse the question

The most important thing to do when writing an essay is to read and analyse the question carefully. You need to make sure you clearly understand what is being asked. This might sound obvious, but many people misread essay questions and write an essay that is not relevant to the question and lose marks as a result.

By way of illustration, consider the following example question: *Critically discuss to what extent the novel's message about inequality and injustice dominates and ruins Adiga's* The White Tiger *as a fictional experience.*

In this example, the task word is 'discuss', which means that you are being asked to provide details about, and evidence for or against, two or more different views or ideas.

Task words

The following list includes some of the more common task words used in essay questions and offers a suggestion on how to interpret them. These suggested interpretations should only be considered guidelines, though, and your response should always be tailored to the requirements of a specific question.

analyse: break down the issue or topic into its component parts and describe how each part interrelates with the others (you may also be asked to relate the parts to a central theme).

assess: measure the value or importance of one or more aspects of a particular subject and describe the outcome of your assessment (you may also be asked to relate your assessment to a central issue or theme).

argue: provide a logical case to prove a particular point or opinion (you may also be asked to relate your argument to a central issue or theme).

compare and contrast: identify both the similarities and differences between two or more things or people (you may also be asked to relate these people or things to a central theme).

discuss: provide details about, and evidence for or against, two or more different views or ideas (you may also be asked to decide which views or ideas seem stronger or more credible).

evaluate: assess the value or importance of one or more aspects of a particular subject in order to reach and present an overall judgement or conclusion based upon it.

examine: provide an in-depth investigation of a particular point and its implications (you may also be asked to relate the point to a central theme).

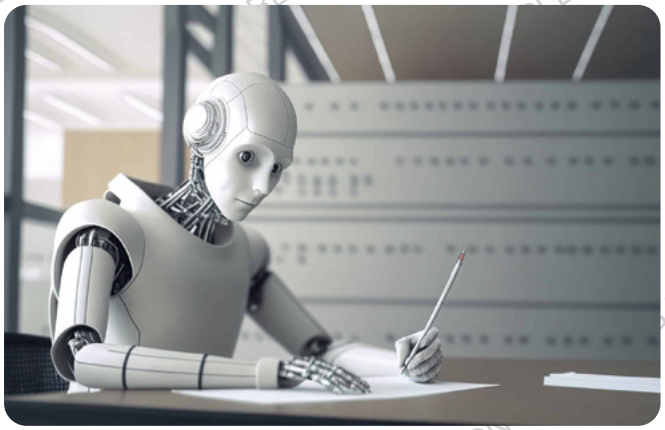
explain: describe how something works or show clearly how a particular conclusion is reached logically.

explore: consider an idea or topic broadly and present the related information in an organised manner, focusing on particularly relevant, interesting or debatable points.

identify: recognise the central characteristic(s) of a particular subject or issue and demonstrate how or why you reached this conclusion.

illustrate: provide a selection of examples from the text that describe or explain the specified topic or issue.

summarise: outline the most important points without providing any superfluous detail.



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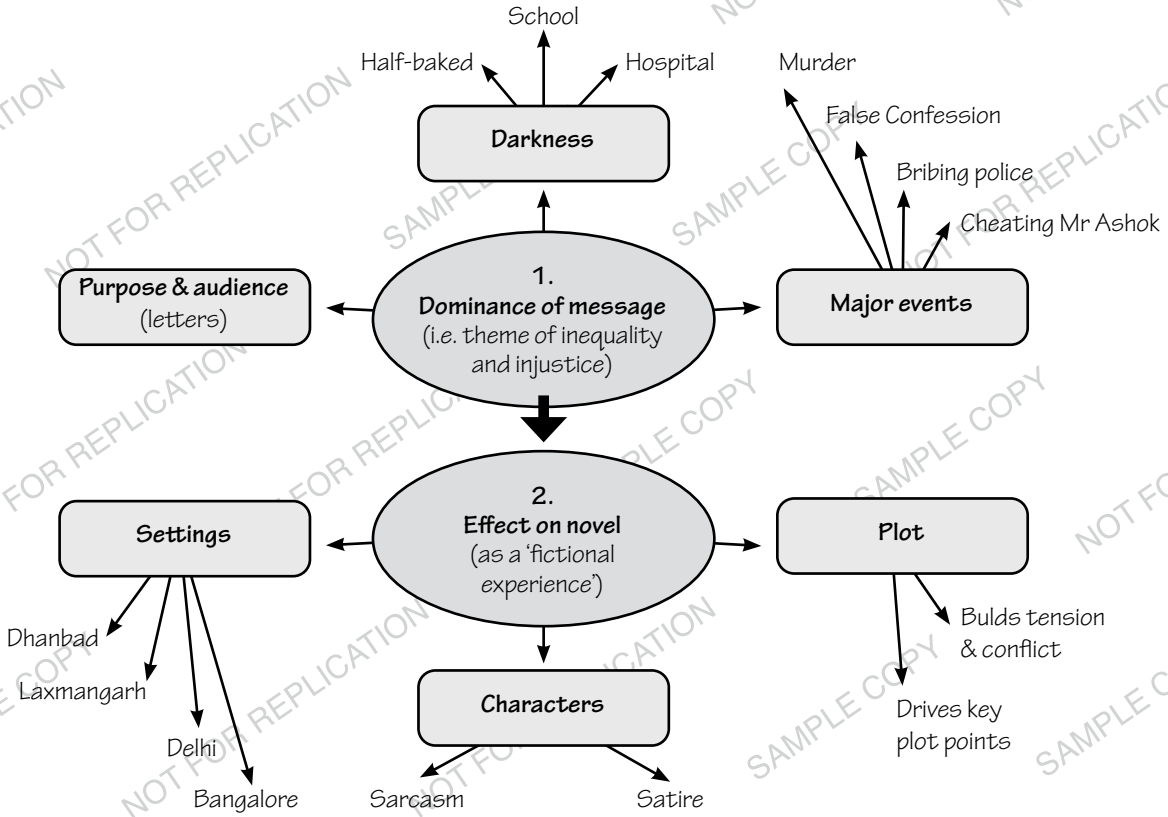
Once you have identified the task word, the second step is to consider the topic of the essay. The topic defines the theme or subject matter on which the essay should focus. Common topics include the characters in the text, their psychological motivations and relationships, the themes and motifs that inform and illuminate the text, and the author's use of language and literary techniques. In the preceding example, the topic focuses on the theme of inequality and injustice and requires you to (1) assess how dominant the theme is in the novel and (2) discuss whether this dominance harms the text as a work of fiction.

Step 2: Map your answer

You are no longer required to submit a plan with your essay and no marks are awarded for doing so; however, it is still highly recommended that you plan your response adequately. Plan your essay using any method you prefer. 'Mapping out' your response visually has been shown to be an effective way of generating, clarifying and linking ideas. An effective technique to use is a **concept map** (also known as a mind map or spider diagram). The following is a model concept map for the example question:



Concept maps/mind maps or spider diagrams are a way of visualising your ideas and linking these together. The slight difference between the two techniques is that, technically, mind maps are used to freely associate ideas and spider diagrams are used to organise and structure ideas into hierarchies. This minor difference makes concept or mind maps particularly useful for creatively generating or brainstorming initial ideas and spider diagrams best suited to linking related ideas together and organising and planning the argument of your essay. In practice, though, people use either of these techniques to accomplish their goals.

Both are easy and quick to make. Start by writing down your fundamental question or topic in the centre of a piece of paper and drawing a bubble around it. Next, write down the first idea that comes to mind (related to the main topic) in a space off to the side of the paper; draw a bubble around it and a line linking its bubble to the bubble around the main topic.

If your next idea is connected or related to that idea, write it down close to your first idea and draw a line between them. If the idea is not directly related, write it in a different space off to the side of the paper, and keep repeating this classification process with each idea you have.

By structuring and linking your ideas in this manner, you will create a visual map of them that you can use to plan the argument of your essay, prioritising the points you wish to make in each paragraph.

Step 3: Formulate your thesis statement

Once you have mapped your response, it is time to formulate your thesis statement. Your **thesis statement** is the most important part of your essay. It tells your readers how you will be answering the question and what your argument will be. Put simply, your thesis statement is how you might answer the essay question in one sentence. The rest of your essay should then argue the validity of your thesis statement convincingly. Your thesis statement should be included in both your introduction and your conclusion.

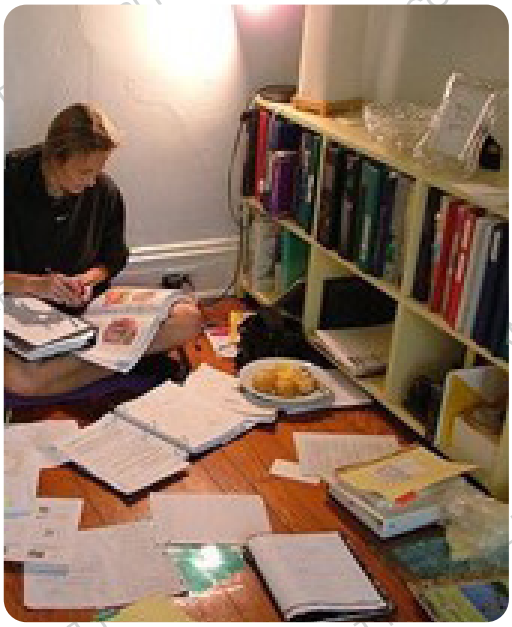
A **thesis statement** should accomplish three things:

- refer to the main topic (*inequality and injustice*);
- state the main point/thesis (*does dominate but does not ruin the novel*); and
- outline the body of the essay (*shapes Halwai's world and the major events of his life story, but plot, characters and settings function as work of fiction*).

Imagine you have just mapped your response to the example question and decide that *the theme of inequality and injustice does dominate the novel because it shapes Halwai's world and the major events of his life story, but it does not ruin it as a work of fiction when the plot, characters and settings are considered*. Then this is your thesis statement.

Step 4: Link your ideas together

Once you have completed your brainstorming and formulated your thesis statement, you are ready to structure your essay by linking your ideas together to form a logical, convincing argument.



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Your concept map/plan should already highlight the links between your ideas. Now you need to prioritise them and decide in what order to present them. A simple way to do this is to number each idea on your plan. Depending on the number of ideas you have, you may need to select only the most relevant.

Once you have prioritised and organised your ideas, you can structure your argument and essay. There are three distinct parts to an essay that you should keep in mind when structuring: the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

The introduction:

First impressions count! A strong, well-written and attention-grabbing introduction is critical. Your introduction should tell your reader what to expect from your essay. You need to state (i) what you will be arguing and (ii) how you will be arguing it. Be sure to include your thesis statement and a short 'preview' of what you will be covering in the body of your essay.

It is often a good idea to use key words from the topic question in your introduction as this shows that your argument is focused and relevant but avoid copying the wording of the question too closely because this suggests a lack of imagination.

While your introduction is the first thing your marker will read, it does not have to be the first thing you write. It often helps to write the body of your essay first so that you know what needs to be previewed when you write your introduction.

The body:

The body of your essay will be where you convince the reader of your argument by substantiating your thesis statement with analyses and examples from the text. The body will consist of several paragraphs (depending on your word count), each of which expresses one point, which you then explain and support with textual evidence.

When constructing the body paragraphs, it is useful to keep the **T-E-A model** in mind:

- **'T'** represents the **Topic** sentence of your paragraph. Just as a thesis statement summarises the main argument of your essay, a topic sentence summarises the main point of that particular paragraph. Remember, you should only be making *one point per paragraph*.
- **'E'** represents your **Evidence**, in other words, the examples you use from the text to support the point you are making. You should not rely on your examples to make your argument for you, however. These should rather illustrate or prove the point you have already made (in your topic sentence). Evidence can take the form of paraphrased examples in your own words or direct quotations from the text. If you choose to quote, make sure you do so accurately (*see next section*).

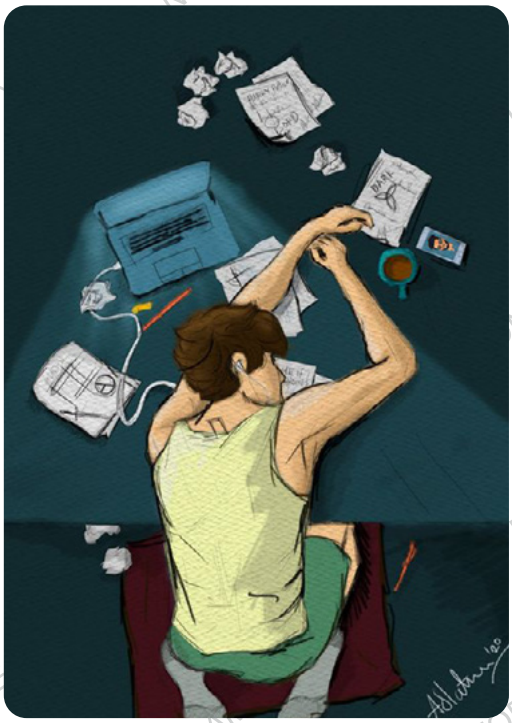
- **'A'** represents your **Analysis**, in other words, the explanation of how your point is relevant to your thesis statement and how it is illustrated by your examples. Keep asking yourself: *Is the point I am making relevant to my argument? Have I made it clear to my reader how this point relates to my thesis statement?*

Another important consideration to keep in mind is the linking of your paragraphs. Ensure that each paragraph follows on from the last in a logical manner and try to avoid sudden leaps from one disparate point to another, as this can be very jarring and negatively impact on the readability and flow of your essay.

The conclusion:

Your conclusion should provide a summary of your argument. Review the main points of your essay (perhaps considering the topic sentences of each of your paragraphs) and write three or four effective sentences that demonstrate how these points have proved the validity of your thesis statement.

Your conclusion should not simply restate your introduction, however. You need to demonstrate how your argument has progressed. Your conclusion is the last thing your marker will read before scoring your essay, so it should leave a good impression.



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Step 5: Proofread your essay

When you have spent a fair amount of time writing an essay, the last thing you may want to do is read through it again. Yet doing so will help you identify and correct any silly errors, spelling mistakes and typos that may have crept into your text — easily made mistakes that undermine the quality of your essay and can lead to the loss of important marks. A great habit to develop is proofreading every essay you write before you hand it in. If you do not correct avoidable mistakes, it will suggest to your marker that your attitude is careless. In the classroom context, you can even ask someone else to read through your essay for you, with fresh eyes and a fresh perspective. During an examination, make sure that you leave a few minutes at the end of your allotted time to read through your essay again before handing in your paper.

Quoting correctly

Quoting correctly is a tricky skill to master but should not prove too difficult with practice. If you are ever uncertain about quoting, remember that you can also paraphrase examples from the text (i.e. write them in your own words). This option will ensure that you still support your argument with examples from the text but you will avoid losing marks because of quoting incorrectly (especially in an examination context). If you choose to quote from the text in an essay, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Quoting from the text is meant to support or illustrate your argument (i.e. the point you are trying to convey). Do not rely on the quote to make your argument for you. You need to be explicit about the significance of your quote and how it supports the point you are making.
- It is important to integrate your quote so that the entire sentence reads smoothly and coherently and is grammatically correct.
- Your quote must be copied accurately from the original text. Indicate where your quote begins and ends with the correct form of quotation marks and, if you must make slight changes to the quote so that it fits in grammatically with your own sentence, indicate these alterations with the use of square brackets.
- Use short quotations and only the word, words or lines that are necessary to support your argument. If you decide to leave unnecessary words out of the quote, indicate this with the use of ellipses and brackets […] where you have omitted words.

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Learn from your mistakes

Before you begin writing, it may be worth reviewing your past essays and taking note of any mistakes, or any advice you got from your marker(s). Keep these pointers in mind when writing your essay and actively try to improve on these areas. Before you start writing an examination, reflect on what may have gone wrong in the past or on any bad habits your marker(s) may have identified.

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Bad Habit Bingo Card

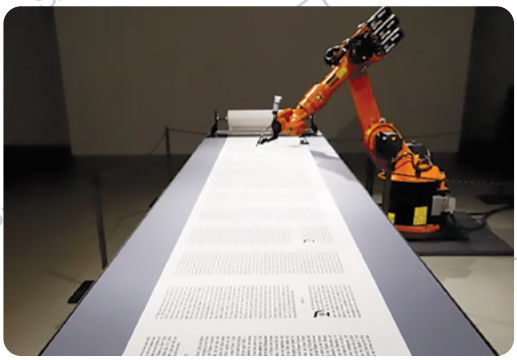
A fun way to identify some of the bad habits you may have developed. In the grid below, simply circle each of the habits in the grid that you recognise in yourself. The goal is to become more aware of these habits and work towards eliminating them.

Inadequate or no planning.	Giving up easily (e.g. incomplete answer or rambling to fill space).	Procrastinating.	Quoting incorrectly.
Mismanaging time and not finishing.	Making points without substantiating them.	Answering the question incorrectly.	Poor preparation.
Sloppy/untidy presentation.	Avoiding proofreading.	Using too many quotes.	Failing to explain the significance of a quote.
Excessive use of adverbs.	Failing to organise and prioritise ideas before writing.	Plagiarism.	Repeating the same phrases and cliches throughout essay.

Using online information and artificial intelligence chatbots

Remember that there are hazards and drawbacks to searching online for information or using artificial intelligence chatbots like ChatGPT, Google Bard and Bing. Anyone can post their ideas on the internet and these ideas may not necessarily be useful or even correct. A good deal of the free information related to literary texts online is quite poor. Likewise, artificial intelligence chatbots regularly 'hallucinate' and fabricate events and exchanges/quotes that do not occur in the actual text, as well as manufacturing the secondary sources and references they cite.

If you are tempted to use online resources, nonetheless, make sure that you evaluate and cross-reference every idea, every fact and every citation thoroughly before including it in your work. Also remember that you need to reference correctly every secondary source (website, forum, chatbot etc.) you include in your essay, both in the classroom and examination context. If you do not explicitly reference ideas that are not your own, you will be guilty of plagiarism, a form of intellectual theft that is highly likely to lose you marks and is, ultimately, a serious legal offence.



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Lastly, remember that your marker is interested in what you think regarding the topic or issue about which you are writing, not the ideas and opinions of a random internet source or chatbot, and will seek to reward your personal ideas the most highly — provided they are feasible and substantiated, of course.

Annotated essay examples

The following section features two example essays that have been written to meet the format and requirements of the IEB Grade 12 Literary essay. The essays have been annotated to emphasise the structural elements that have been used. These examples are provided for students to review and from which to learn. Please note that these example essays are offered as guidelines to the recommended formatting and structure of essays only and that students are encouraged to develop their written 'voice' (vocabulary, tone, point of view and use of syntax) by practising the skill of essay writing.

QUESTION 1

Read the following:

'The message about inequality and injustice is the dominant feature of this novel, and in a way, that ruins *The White Tiger* as a fictional experience. […] The novel is a **polemic** against inequality and injustice [rather] than a classic **bildungsroman** novel like those to which it has been compared.'

— Daniel B. Roberts

polemic: strongly critical opinion or argument.

bildungsroman: literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist, typically from childhood to adulthood (innocence to experience).

TOPIC:

Critically discuss to what extent the novel's **message** about inequality and injustice **dominates and ruins** Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a **fictional experience**.

[30]

Notes on the essay topic:

- This question requires you to consider how strong a presence the theme of inequality and injustice has in the novel.
- Your discussion should encompass both (1) the question of how dominant the theme is and (2) the effect the presence of the theme has on the novel as a 'fictional experience' (i.e. as a work of fiction).
- You will need to understand and define/describe (1) what the 'message' of the novel is and (2) what is meant by the term 'fictional experience'.
- Other key words include 'discuss', 'injustice', 'dominates' and 'ruins'. You should try to use some of these words in the essay itself.

	Essay:	Comments
Introduction	**The themes of inequality and injustice do dominate *The White Tiger* because these harsh realities of modern Indian society shape Halwai's world and dictate the major events of his life story, but the message of the novel regarding inequality and injustice does not ruin the work as a fictional experience when its plot, characters and settings are considered.** The message of the novel is introduced right at the start when Halwai explains he is writing to Jiabao to tell the Chinese Premier the 'truth about Bangalore' (p.6). Halwai wants to share his 'life's story' (p.6) so Jiabao will discover the honest reality about India, instead of reading the lies in the official, sanitised 'booklet' (p.5) the prime minister will give him. Thus, the message of the novel is that the vast majority of Indians are kept in extreme poverty and servitude by a brutal, cruel class of wealthy, corrupt 'thugs and politicians' (p.306).	Note the structure of the introductory paragraph: the thesis statement is indicated in **bold** (this is the main argument to which we will refer throughout the essay).

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