

The Lumber Room & The Nightingale and the Rose



**O Level
English Literature**

**Model Answers
Key Quotations and Explanations
Answer Writing Skills
Key Vocabulary**

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O Level English Literature – Short Stories Resource Book

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PREFACE

When attempting critical commentaries students encounter a number of challenges. In my resource book series I attempt to provide guidelines which would assist students to become better writers and better literary critics. The model answers will help students understand the structure, the vocabulary and register, the collation of information and other aspects of commentary writing which are important.

The quotations with explanations will ensure that their understanding of the texts is not a narrow one, where the students find it difficult when they encounter questions that they haven't prepared for. These explanations enables them to apply their understanding depending on the question – therefore, whatever question they are faced with, they are able to easily select and apply these quotations along with the deeper understanding which they gain from the explanations.

The vocabulary section is built based on the themes and characters of the text. When analyzing a particular text, it is imperative that the student is familiar with the words that are necessary to clearly articulate the nuances of the themes that appear in the text. If the student can absorb the language which revolves around the text, understanding the text and expressing his opinions and evaluation of it will be made that much easier.

The Nightingale and the Rose

1. Love is not as half as useful as logic. Do you agree? Discuss in relation to the story (2016).

The Nightingale and the Rose was written by Oscar Wilde in the late 1800's. The story, adopting the genre of a fairytale, deals with theories on aesthetics, rationalism and the concept of idealistic love. The student in the story embodies rationalism and concludes that 'love is not as half as useful as logic,' after being rejected by the professor's daughter. I do not agree with the statement. In my opinion, love and logic are both useful and should be guided by each other. In this essay I will explore the character of the student and the girl who are blinded by logic and materialism, and I will elaborate on the self-sacrificial love of the nightingale, whose love which saw no logic, ended up in the gutter.

The student is characterized by his obsession of knowledge. He is referred to as the 'student' to imply his pursuit of facts. In the first few paragraphs, the author makes it obvious that the student's understanding of philosophy is not useful in overcoming the struggle he faces; obtaining a red rose in order to receive the girl's affection. His logic is useless and ironically, is impractical, as it does not help him find a red rose. The student's excessive attachment to intellectualism has caused him to become callous towards human emotions and he has lost touch with his feelings. By placing reason over everything, feelings and emotions are devalued and seen merely as an impediment to informed and sound judgment. Consequentially, the student has become alienated from his feelings, and fails to understand the 'logic' behind human interactions and relationships. His logic-based mind compares human relationships to theoretical formulas or something such as a transaction, which is the logic behind consumerist society. Therefore, he believes that offering her a rose will guarantee her love or even obsession for him.

'Oh for want of a red rose is my life wretched'

He fails to understand beyond the transaction. This quotation characterizes him as shallow and naïve. He is unaware of the fickleness, the flaws and the selfishness of individuals. When he is bluntly refused by the girl, his philosophy and knowledge fails to reveal to him that it is not love which betrayed him, but it was the girl who never really loved him. He also fails to realize how he was not in love with the girl, but was selfishly seeking his own satisfaction of being the object of her love. His intellectualism blinds him to the fact that neither of them had any love between them. His logic was useless in dealing with human relationships.

He throws the flower away because for him it has no value. It can be thrown away without any meaning. There was no sacrifice behind his desire for the girl. He desired her. Not loved her. The nightingale loved the boy and sacrificed herself for his happiness. He is completely blind to the fact that the flower which was a symbol of love and hope for him was birthed by the sacrificial death of the nightingale. His narcissism does not allow him to see beyond his interests. Therefore, the symbol of hope born out of love perfected by death, ends in the gutter without any value because neither the student nor the girl are able to understand or embrace it.

The girl embodies materialism. She exalts logic over human relationships, which is why she chooses jewels over roses, saying,

'Everyone knows that jewels cost more than flowers.'

When considering which boy she wants to be with, her logic behind it is the profit she can make out of it. Materialism depends heavily on logic. The fact that she is the professor's daughter highlights

this link between logic and materialism. Similarly to the student, the girl is detached from her feelings and emotions as she sees more value in material possessions than in human beings. The value of a person has diminished in her eyes and her logical mind and materialism has blinded her to what constitutes true, meaningful human relationships. Her logic may seem useful in amassing wealth, but she does not understand what meaningful relationships are.

The nightingale, as opposed to the student and the girl, embodies perfect love; but she is too quick to believe in the student's love which results in her sacrifice becoming wasted. She offers up her life for the student's happiness, believing that he is the ideal lover of whom she has been singing day and night. She is naïve to believe so, not realizing that the student desired the girl, not loved her. However, it is her sacrifice of love which creates the red rose, offering the student an opportunity to win over the girl's heart. Her love is then useful, as it brings hope to the student. Moreover, the nightingale sings of a love that is perfected by death, which seems unreasonable, but has a deeper meaning. Her love places the other person above her own interests; even her own life. She dies to her selfishness in order to offer her love to the student. This act of pure selflessness generates the hope for the boy in the form of a flower. Even though she believes his intentions too quickly, her love is able to create something beautiful. Therefore, her love is the most useful thing in the story. But she lacked the logic to see through the shallow love of the boy, resulting in the symbol of her perfect love being thrown in the gutter.

Therefore, the story explores how perfect love is found only in real selfless sacrifice of one's self for the other, and how this love can lose all its value and be disregarded when offered to those who fail to realize the true value of it; those who take that love for granted will never value it. Therefore, love needs to be guided by logic.

2. Attitude towards love of the present society are reflected in the short story. Discuss with reference to The Nightingale and the Rose.

The short story was written by the British writer Oscar Wilde in the late 1800's. It was a time which saw the rise of rationalism, science and reason. The writer was critical about the society's obsession of intellectualism and materialism. In this answer I will explore how the student and the girl embody excessive intellectualism and materialism to the point where it blinds them to their humanity and love.

The student is blinded by his intellectualism and fails to comprehend the nature of human love. At the beginning of the story, he is portrayed in a rather melodramatic light. He 'flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.' This line reveals the dramatic nature of his behaviour. The student is knowledgeable and well-read in all philosophical works. However, his book knowledge does not help him find a red rose. This suggests the inability of theoretical knowledge to generate much hope when it comes to love. He is unable to rely on his academic knowledge. Even when the nightingale sings, he fails to see the beauty and the meaningfulness in its song. Instead, he criticizes it saying that the notes 'do not mean anything.' This cynical and excessively critical attitude displays his obsession with facts and details, to the extent that he fails to appreciate the beauty and meaning behind the singing. Ironically, it is the singing of the nightingale which generates the flower which becomes his main hope in claiming the girl's love. In his ignorance, he does not see this. His cynicism can be seen as a symptom of the present society where people have lost touch with their feelings as they are more obsessed with reason and science. This disposition tends to blind people from a sound understanding of love.

Even when he finds the flower, he muses over its 'long Latin name.' This implies his obsession with knowledge over the beauty of the flower. For him, the flower does not appear beautiful by virtue of its beauty. Rather, it is seen merely as a means to an end. The rose is a tool he wants to use in order to obtain the attention of the girl. This is why, when he gets bluntly rejected by the girl, he throws the flower into the gutter without a second thought. Once the flower does not get him what he selfishly desires, he has no use of it. The student does not understand the value or meaning behind the red rose as he is unaware of the sacrifice of the nightingale. This reflects how people tend to take love for granted and how they fail to see the sacrifice which is required to create something beautiful such as perfect love, which is symbolized by the red rose.

The girl embodies materialism which is another dominant symbol of modern society. Materialism is a threat to human values as it places material possessions over humanity. The girl desires a red rose and agrees to accompany the student if he is able to offer her one. It is clear then that her idea of love is that it is a tool for her to obtain the materialistic things which she desires. When the chamberlain's nephew offers her real jewels, she shows no reluctance about breaking her promise, or about choosing another individual as her lover. It seems very casual, as if she was making a rational choice about which investment is more profitable. She says that

'Everybody knows that Jewels cost far more than flowers.'

The girl is blinded by her materialism, and is unable to correctly assess what love is. Her attitude and logic in selecting her partner reveals her detachment from her emotions and from the true meaningfulness of human relationships. The character of the person is of little significance to her. It is the wealth of the chamberlain's nephew which attracts her. The silver buckle in his shoe is one of the yardsticks she uses to compare the two potential lovers. When the student comes to her with the rose, she is 'winding blue silk on a reel and her little dog was lying at her feet.' The silk, an

expensive material, stands as a status symbol, suggesting her upper-class preoccupations. The little dog is also another material possession for her, a costly pet to maintain. Taking all these into consideration, it is evident that the girl is characterized by her excessive desire for material things as well as maintaining her bourgeois image. This is applicable to the present society as well, where consumerism and individualism is rampant and dictates their dispositions.

The nightingale is the one who displays perfect love. In a world which venerates logic and material prosperity over meaningful, self-sacrificial love, her symbol of love, the rose, is thrown unceremoniously into the gutter and a 'cart-wheel went over it.' The nightingale suggests that true love is perfected in death. Her actions reveal that it is pure selfless sacrifice which causes this kind of love to grow. Metaphorically speaking, it is this letting go of self-interest, or in a manner of speaking, dying to your own self, which makes perfect love possible. It removes your selfish interests out of the equation and places the other above all else. While the nightingale offers this kind of rather idealistic love to the world (the student), the world is not ready to accept, understand or to embrace her perfect love as people are blinded and trapped by their selfishness.

Present day society valorizes the individual and the consumerist culture encourages self-love. These values are embodied by the student and the girl, while the nightingale and the rose embodies perfect selfless love. In present society, then, it is clear that this form of perfect love is not practical or profitable. It ends up crushed, in the gutter.

QUOTATIONS

The Nightingale and the Rose.

1. *'...all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.'*

'...my heart will break.'

'...he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.'

The student possesses theoretical knowledge about the world. Philosophy is concerned with the meaning of life and about the human experience in the world. These theories tend to become increasingly pedantic and removed from practical knowledge. This is the case with the student. The author does not give him a name but identifies his character by what he stands for: a 'student' who is excessively concerned about book knowledge. The above quotations suggest a number of points.

Firstly, it reveals the hubris of the student. He is pompous and loves to boast about his knowledge. This self-absorption or narcissistic tendency blinds him to his deficiencies. He fails to be self-reflexive because he is overly obsessed about his intellectual faculties. For the student, his preoccupation with his books and esoteric theories overpower any other desire of his. Even his desire for the girl proves to be extremely fragile as he abandons this feeling after being rejected once. It is his books that seem to be his only recourse as he promptly returns to studying his 'great dusty books.'

Secondly, the student is of the misguided belief that his philosophical knowledge would be useful in finding a red rose. The story revolves around the absurdity of the student who fails to understand the gap between abstract, theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge which requires more concrete action. His rationale is that because he possesses these philosophical secrets, the red rose should be easy to obtain. When he realizes that this is not the case, he is broken and breaks down in a fit of disbelief at his bad luck.

Thirdly, the student fails to take concrete action because he has no experience in dealing with the reality of the world. The author shows the reader how detached the student is from real life. He has become so absorbed in his abstract knowledge that he fails to function sensibly and rationally in reality. When he requires a rose to please his lady, he would rather be perplexed at why his philosophy cannot assist him and wallow in his self-pity.

Finally, the author depicts the student as a typical romantic lover in a fairy-tale. This is rather satirical in light of the whole story. Whereas, in fairytales, the love is actualized at the end of the story, in this text we encounter a quite different denouement (ending). The dramatic lover is rejected. Therefore, the dramatic representation at the beginning of the story is satirical, and exposes the hypocrisy of the student who professes to passionately desire the girl. The author repetitively portrays the student as having a hypersensitive and temperamental personality, which would suggest how out of tune he is with his own emotions. He has no experience in dealing with his feelings in a mature way, and they overwhelm him.

2. -'It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the market-place. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.'

-'Yet Love is better than Life'

**-'Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise,
and mightier than Power, though he is mighty.'**

The nightingale is the symbol of perfect love in the story and she muses on what she understands love to be. At the beginning of the story, she declares the above thoughts about love. The story was written in the backdrop of material prosperity that was enjoyed by Britain mainly due to the expansion of the Empire. Materialism – the obsession about material prosperity over human relationships and humanity in general – was rampant and amongst the upper-middle class and upper-class, this lifestyle became more and more pronounced (very noticeable). In this context, the poet uses the nightingale to emphasize how love is not something that cannot be bought or measured by materialistic possessions. He uses several highly valued objects such as emeralds, opals and pearls to indicate the priceless value of love.

This quotation is more relevant when juxtaposed with the words and intentions of the girl who represents shallow upper-class ideas about love.

The nightingale offers himself as a sacrifice because she thinks that a life without love is not worth living. She also compares love with philosophy and power and places it above both.

3. '...everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers.'

The professor's daughter's understanding of love is twisted. Her views contrast with the nightingale's, who speaks of sacrifice and offers herself willingly for the love of the student. The girl made a promise to the student. But when he presented the rose, she breaks her promise without any qualms (guilt), and quite rudely rejects the student. This shows the reader that she lacks integrity and that her word does not stand. She will always keep moving from one material possession to the next. For her, the ideal lover is not measured by his character or his love for her. Her judgment is based upon the profitability of the partner she selects. The human qualities of her lover are irrelevant to her. What she desires is the material possessions that her partner possesses. This reveals the deprecation of humanity and the shallowness of the girl. It also reveals her inability to appreciate the beauty of a flower because she is distanced from the natural world and is obsessed about the material world.

The quotation also exposes how the sacrifice of the nightingale is reduced to nothing in front of materialistic individuals who cannot understand the value of such love. On the other hand, it stands as a warning or perhaps a desperate cry about how the world we live in is not ready for such idealistic love. The world seems to be more concerned about the 'cost' or 'value' of objects as well as humans.

4. She is all style without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others... what a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good!

The student criticizes the nightingale's singing, oblivious to the fact that it is her singing and sacrifice which will eventually get him the red rose. This irony exposes the hypocrisy of the student who is unable to see the value and beauty of the nightingale's singing. While he laments over the fact that

his philosophy is unable to provide him with a red rose, he criticizes the only thing which actually provides him the red rose.

Oscar Wilde wrote this story during a period where rationalism and philosophy was gaining momentum and the idea that creative arts does not do any practical good was widespread. However, Oscar Wilde believed otherwise and through the story he tries to focus upon how the arts are important.

It is ironic that even though he accuses the Nightingale's singing having no use, it is the student's philosophy which had no practical use when it came to looking for a red rose. This reveals how the student's perception is flawed due to his obsession with philosophy; he has become blind to love. He does not understand the language of the nightingale.

5. She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl.

She sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and maid.

She sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

The nightingale sings of the birth of love, the maturity of the same and then the love that transcends death. This can be taken literally, as in the sacrifice of the nightingale. It can also be taken metaphorically. Love that is perfected by death can be interpreted as the love that is completely selfless. By dying to one's selfish desires and interests, one can love another person perfectly. It is in that metaphorical death to self that this selfless love is made possible.

The above quotation suggests another point about ideal love. The boy and girl find out love in their hearts, but their love is not mature enough to be perfected by death. The love of the man and maid has evolved and it is full of passion in their souls. However, it is in the next stage that love becomes fully realized and transcends death, suggesting how love requires time and experience of the world to come to its fruition. The boy and girl seem to be incapable of understanding the love that doesn't die in the tomb; it is the man and maid, whose passion in their souls comes to completion, that are able to take their love to the highest point of selflessness.

6. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name.

The student picks up the red rose for which the nightingale sacrificed herself. Even though he realizes the beauty of the rose that is not his focus. He is more interested in the long Latin name which is given to the rose. The Latin name suggests the scientific term for the classification of the rose type, again suggesting the obsession the student has with knowledge over beauty and aesthetics.

The Lumber Room

1. Write an analysis of the aunt's character in the Lumber Room, discussing her contribution to the central theme of the short story.

The Lumber Room, written by Hector Hugh Munroe who is popularly known by his alias Saki, is a story which exposes the failure of adults to understand the world and the mind of the child. Written in 1890's, critics say that the story reflects some of the harsh experiences that the author faced himself at the hands of his strict aunt. In this essay I will explore how the Aunt is characterized as a foil to Nicholas and how she reflects the adults who strive to discipline children through fear, consequentially suppressing their creativity.

The author portrays the aunt as malicious and vindictive. She derives pleasure out of the misery of the children. This sadistic pleasure is evident through her peculiar punitive choices which are administered with the purpose of willing the children into submission. She organizes an expedition for the other children with the sole purpose being to punish Nicholas. The irony is that the expedition is not planned for the other children to enjoy. She is manipulative and tries to impose humiliation and terror instead of joy and friendship.

A few decent tears were looked for on the part of Nicholas when the moment for the departure of the expedition arrived.

It is not good values or sound character that she wants to instill in Nicholas, but a fear that forces him to submit to her authority. The rebellious and frivolous disposition displayed by Nicholas threatens the power that the aunt wields. This makes her restless and she subjects Nicholas to even more intense maltreatment.

The aunt shows no love or kindness toward the children. In fact, she is rather hostile and domineering, depriving the children of childhood delights such as strawberry jam. Nicholas mentions that there were four jars of strawberry jam in the cupboard and the aunt, who is in a tricky position because of Nicholas' shrewdness, does not refute the statement because that would've proven that she lied to the children. She denies them such things even when there's plenty of supplies. It is evident that this is not a disciplinary act, but more of a cold-hearted and insensitive decision which shows a hidden animosity towards the children.

Moreover, while she is prompt to organize 'punitive expeditions' to manipulate a child's feelings, she fails to observe or listen to their grievances. Bobby, according to Nicholas, has told her twice that his boots are too tight but she does not even remember this. It is obvious to the imaginative reader that going on an expedition with tight boots that cut into your feet is not enjoyable.

You often don't listen when we tell you important things.

The aunt's mind is set on antagonizing and terrorizing the children to such an extent that she forgets and fails to attend to their day to day needs. This lack of communication is typical of authoritarian parenting where the parent-figure wields authority and arbitrarily sets rules without any explanations. The children are treated as lacking intellectual skills and their voices are not given any importance.

The aunt is unimaginative and denies creative freedom to the children. Rather than fostering the creative imagination of the children under her care, she removes all such opportunities. This may reflect how adults tend to drill discipline into children rather than allowing them to embrace and express their uniqueness and creativity. Even the food the aunt serves them is dull and lacks

diversity and creativity: bread-and-milk. While Nicholas is rummaging through the treasures in the lumber room, he comes across a teapot which is moulded in the shape of a china-duck. The snout of the teapot is made out to be the beak of the duck. Nicholas is fascinated by this imaginative piece of kitchenware, and compares it to the boring and dull tea pot they use in the nursery.

She was a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration.

The aunt occupies herself with 'self-imposed sentry duty' in order to find fault with Nicholas. This shows how narrow-minded and unimaginative she is. Even her punishments are just walks on the beach or a missed carnival which shows a lack of creativity. When she falls into the water tank, Nicholas outwits her and silences her, even daring to call her the Evil One. When Nicholas comes across the tapestry he sees a 'living, breathing story.' He perceives aunt's house to be 'bare and cheerless,' and is drawn towards the lumber room which is full of wonderful colours and many creative antiques. The older generation, represented by the aunt, often fails to understand the need for creativity in the child's world.

As opposed to the 'childish discernment' displayed by Nicholas, the aunt is described by the narrator as 'older, wiser and better.' However, the reader comes to realize that this is a sarcastic comment which is subverted in the story. A prevailing myth is that adults are by default wiser and more mature than children. The author challenges this idea through the character of the aunt which comes off as petty and childish, but also lacking in their creativity, empathy and imagination.

It is evident in light of the above essay that the author uses the aunt to represent certain adults who fail to imagine the child's world and so treat them as hostile creatures. The adults seek to limit the child's creativity to impose a warped sense of discipline in them which doesn't give prominence to values and character, but instead glorifies blind obedience and submission. In the process of doing so, they stifle the wholesome growth of children. The author brilliantly portrays how one child manages to elude the heavy hand of the adult but also reminds the reader that his escape will not last long as the aunt is still in control over them.

2. “In The Lumber Room despite ill-treatment, Nicholas remains happy.” Support your answer with examples from the text.

The short story *The Lumber Room* is written by Hector Hugh Munro in the 1890s. According to many critics the story reflects some of the experiences he had to go through as a child at the hands of his harsh aunt. It is a story of a young boy who has a resilient mind and an unyielding and daring spirit. Through his joy and courage, he remains optimistic/hopeful and does not allow the aunt to crush his spirit.

The aunt is portrayed as a vindictive and malicious character who terrorizes the children and seeks to submit them into obedience through fear and shame. Her punishments are not meant to teach them good values or build their character. They rather instill fear in the children. She is obsessed about her authority over them and feels threatened when Nicholas refuses to be intimidated by her. She is in the habit of planning trips not for the enjoyment of the children, but to shame and deprive a ‘guilty’ child of a fun-filled day in the name of discipline. Making them feel shameful and remorseful satisfies her; this is quite sadistic.

In the case of Nicholas, he has no reprieve from her wrath as he defies her disciplinary action and openly and fearlessly challenges her. Therefore, he is treated with further animosity and has to bear the brunt of her anger. While the other children would not dare speak up against her ill-treatment, he spoke up bravely; he knew that this would guarantee him an extra serving of her punishments, but he was crafty enough to use it for his own advantage.

The aunt deprived the children of simple pleasures such as strawberry jam for tea even when there were four jars of it. She lies about the jam and even the breakfast they routinely eat is just bread and milk, which does not sound appetizing. Nicholas mentions how the aunt ignores their grievances;

You often don't listen when we tell you important things.

Bobby's boots were too tight for him and she was told twice about it, but she takes no notice of it. He has to go for the outing with the boots cutting into his feet; an experience which is painful.

While the aunt's ill-treatment of the children is evident, Nicholas' unyielding and unbroken spirit stands out as he is able to maintain an optimistic attitude. It is his courage which allows him to keep his spirits up even in a house full of such miserable practices. He challenges the aunt and proves that ‘older, wiser and better people’ can be wrong, and goes to the extreme of putting a frog in his food. Even though it seems rather radical, it is quite creative and daring – it is this unyielding spirit which allows him to stay optimistic and happy.

His creativity and craftiness in devising a plan to enter the lumber room gives him purpose and motivation. He perceives the house as ‘bare and cheerless,’ and in contrast, is delighted with the treasures in the lumber room. When he enters in and muses about the tapestry, he sees it as a ‘living and breathing story.’ His creativity and imagination feeds his curiosity. He occupies himself in the world of the tapestry, and contemplates about the stag, the wolves, the huntsman and how he has only two arrows left in his quiver. Entering into this world of his imagination seems to be a coping mechanism he uses to escape the grim reality which he faces at the aunt's house.

Even though the aunt claims to be ‘older, wiser and better’ than the children, Nicholas continues to challenge her assumption; by the end of the story the readers are quite convinced about the narrator's sarcasm in the statement. The aunt comes off as petty, vindictive and authoritarian. Nicholas' intelligence and shrewdness allows him to challenge her, and his wit gives him the

opportunity to prove her wrong. When she tries to outsmart him, he is one step ahead of her and manipulates her movement in such a way that she puts herself on 'self-imposed sentry duty.' This ability to outwit his aunt is another reason why he is able to be optimistic in such conditions.

THE WORDS ACADEMY

The Lumber Room

1. *'...the older, wiser, and better people had been proved to be profoundly in error'*

'but Nicholas knew, with childish discernment that such luxuries were not to be over-indulged in.'
(Last Paragraph)

The story subverts stereotypes about adults and children. Adults are generally understood to be more mature, intelligent and wiser than children just because they are older. The author challenges this belief throughout the story through the characters of the Aunt and Nicholas. It is revealed that the Aunt believes she is 'older, wiser and better' than Nicholas. At the beginning of the story Nicholas devises a plan to prove her wrong. As the story progresses we understand that Nicholas outsmarts the aunt. We are also reminded that Nicholas possesses what the writer identifies as 'childish discernment.' As opposed to this wisdom on the part of the child, the Aunt's behaviour comes off as petty, vindictive and utterly immature. She seeks to inflict psychological pain in the children and seems to derive pleasure out of it. Her wisdom is questioned because she is more focused on regaining her sense of authority over the children (because she feels threatened by Nicholas) rather than disciplining them with pure intentions in a reasonable way. Therefore, it is evident that the above quotation appears in the text as a sarcastic comment about the Aunt's character. She is older, but neither wiser nor better than Nicholas.

2. *'He told you twice, but you weren't listening. You often don't listen when we tell you important things.'*

Nicholas informs her aunt that Bobby won't enjoy the outing as expected because his boots are too tight. The aunt's ears are deaf to the children's complaints. She does not notice the important things such as tight boots that are causing pain to a little child; she is more intent upon finding faults with the children so that she can invent punishments to make them feel guilty and powerless. The aunt is rather cold-hearted and distant, bitter and hostile; she enjoys the power she wields over the children. The fact that she doesn't listen to what the children have to say is evidence that she is an authoritarian parent-figure. Her interactions with the children are predominantly one-sided. The children are voiceless and their opinions, thoughts or feelings are neglected or shunned.

3. *'She was a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration.'*

The aunt lacks creativity and imagination. It can be argued that she represents adults who as children were not given the creative freedom and were subjected to harsh and unreasonable disciplinary measures. As opposed to Nicholas, who is brimming with creative energy and imaginative brilliance, the aunt is snugly and smugly comfortable in her little bubble of a kingdom where she is the queen; she terrorizes the children and controls their food, lodging and behaviour (though Nicholas causes few cracks in her system with regards to his behaviour). These narrow-minded, parochial and stagnant ideas of the aunt represent adults who fail to understand the capacity of children. They lack the imagination to realize the potential and the needs of a child's mind. They focus on shallow understandings of discipline which rigorously limit the creative potential and inhibit the growth of their imagination. The aunt is incapable of entering the world of Nicholas. She is blinded by her condescension, apathy, and obsession with authority as well as her lack of self-esteem.

4. 'self-imposed sentry-duty'

The author adopts a humorous tone in his description of the aunt's behaviour; he satirizes her obsession of outsmarting Nicholas. Nicholas shrewdly leads her to believe that he would attempt to sneak into the gooseberry garden: the 'forbidden paradise.' She takes the bait and positions herself strategically so that she can have a clear vision of Nicholas' entry to the garden. The irony is that Nicholas achieves exactly what he wants, but reaches it in such a way that the aunt imposes the tedious task of observing the garden entrance for an extended amount of time on herself. The word 'sentry-duty' captures how this is usually an undesirable 'duty' which requires energy and time; but the aunt falls for Nicholas' trap and enthusiastically does the duty, allowing Nicholas enough time to enjoy the pleasures in the lumber room.

The phrase 'sentry-duty' also suggests an important detail about the aunt. She is an authoritarian. She demands blind discipline from her minors. The invocation of army related discipline in the word 'sentry' suggests how she strips away any individuality of the children and expects them to become submissive and silent under her control. This reflects a wider adult community which advocates this same redundant and detrimental disciplinarian type of parenting which controls the child's access to creativity and imagination. It is not true discipline which is expected; it is blind obedience.

5. 'that region that was so carefully sealed from youthful eyes'

The lumber room is a symbol. It is the title because the whole story revolves around this symbol. What does it symbolize? In a lumber room you find paraphernalia which are forgotten; unused furniture, antiques that aren't needed and other sorts of useless things. However, this particular lumber room is filled with long-forgotten stuff which Nicholas finds extremely stimulating and intriguing. This house is governed by the aunt who represents unimaginative adults who do not understand the mind of a child. This type of adults tend to conceal creative and imaginative ideas from children as well as youthful eyes as the quotation states. The lumber room is then a symbol of creativity and imagination. It is 'so carefully sealed' which implies a fear about the children finding out this place. Creativity and imagination are the birthplace of social change, or any change for that matter. Without these, no one would be able to change anything. Therefore, it is a symbol of how people in authority try to control the access that youths have into creative, innovative and disruptive ideas because this would take away their power.

6. 'To Nicholas it was a living, breathing story.'

'Nicholas sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene.'

The tapestry is the first object of delight in the lumber room which is described by the writer. Nicholas' reaction to this piece of creative art reveals his creative spirit. Unlike his aunt, who chose to lock up the tapestry and let it gather dust and dirt, Nicholas possesses a strong imagination which allows him to perceive a 'living, breathing story' within the art. He also is a keen observer and absorbs the little details such as the wolves that are circling the hunter, the two arrows left in his quiver and the distance of the stag from the hunter. Nicholas considers the house 'bare and cheerless' and the lumber room as a place full of 'wonderful things for the eye to feast on.' The aunt tried hard to prevent the children from entering this room full of creative works, but we realize that it is the kind of experience – full of creativity and imagination – that Nicholas requires to feed his mind on. When this experience of engaging in creative and imaginative exploration is suppressed Nicholas reacts by rebelling against the harsh treatment of the aunt.

7. *'Twisted candlesticks in the shape of snakes'*

'Teapot finished like a china-duck'

'Carved sandalwood box...little brass figures, hump-necked bulls, and peacocks and goblins, delightful to see and to handle.'

'Large square book... full of coloured pictures of birds.'

Listed above are the objects Nicholas witnesses inside the lumber room. These objects reflect the main themes of the story. Imagination and creativity: these things are essential for human beings. In fact, they are what makes us human. Without an imagination, one cannot be empathetic; without being empathetic you cannot fully realize what it means to be human. The aunt is unable to empathize with the children and therefore she continues to terrorize them. However, as Nicholas observes the objects, he is delighted at the artistic creativity in them. Each object stands in contrast to how the aunt has arranged the house.

Each object is associated with an animal. This suggests the wildness of nature and is symbolic of the natural instinct of children to be free and wild in their childhood ways. These objects of creativity and wildness are locked up in the room, just like the wildness and creativity of the children are locked up and controlled by the aunt.

Goblins are also indicated in the story. These creatures are fictional and created by imaginative story writers. Think for a moment. If you have the capacity of imagining realities that are not factual, what good would that be? It is the birthplace of change! Without imagination society would not progress or get better in any way. It will remain in its oppressive ways and injustices. Without an imagination, there will be no one to challenge these oppressive rules and regulations. Through imagining a better reality, we are able to implement change and new ways. The older generation typically tends to be reluctant to breakdown the systems they built. But the new generation will through their ability to imagine, create new realities and change the world we live in. How should the aunt have managed this? She should have fostered their creativity! But she should have guided the children to absorb good values. This would in turn guide the children to understand what it truly means to be human, and the changes they bring to the world would be characterized by these honourable values. Teach your children values over rules.

8. *Aunt often tells me that the Evil One tempts me and that I always yield.*

The Evil One is the Devil. In Christian culture, the Devil (also known as Satan or Lucifer), tempts people so that they would fall into sin (it is both ironic and comical that it is the aunt who has 'fallen' into the rain-water tank – this is also an indication of how the aunt has failed to make the house and garden safe for children. If a child fell into the water tank when it is full, no one would have known). The aunt is an authoritarian figure who is obsessed about her control over the children. When she seems to lose this control, she feels extremely threatened and resorts to shameful, petty and vindictive methods in order to instill fear and shame in the children. The concept of the Evil One can be seen as another tool of control which she uses to perpetuate fear in the psyche of the children. The story reveals to us that the aunt 'often' tells Nicholas about how he has failed to resist the Evil One, possibly mentioning the consequences for his sins. She uses fear as a method of controlling the children. Ironically, it is the aunt who fails to resist the Evil One as she lies to the children and treats them harshly without love or kindness.

This quotation is evidence of how shrewd, astute and intelligent Nicholas is. He manipulates the situation to gain the upper hand in the situation, and serves the aunt the cold dish of revenge.

9. I know there are four jars of it in the store cupboard, because I looked, and of course you know it's there, but she doesn't, because she said there wasn't any.

This is a very important quotation as it reveals a number of things.

Firstly, it reveals the bitterness, callousness and cold-heartedness of the aunt. She deprives the children of little pleasures such as strawberry jam. There are four jars – more than sufficient. She lacks empathy and lacks a natural sense of love towards the children. She seems to derive a rather sadistic pleasure in denying children these little things they desire. It's as if she has something against them.

Secondly, it shows the intelligence and shrewdness of Nicholas who traps her aunt in such a way that she has to admit to lying. She decides to embrace the title of Evil One instead. This reveals her hauteur (pride). She will never admit to her mistakes.

10. The aunt maintained the frozen muteness of one who has suffered undignified and unmerited detention in a rain-water tank for thirty-five minutes.

The story is peppered with ironies. The culmination of it is in the last paragraph where the narrator observes how fates are inverted and rather than Nicholas being in detention, it is the aunt who feels like she was placed in 'undignified and unmerited detention.' The writer hints at how it is the aunt who was actually guilty of unkind, hostile and bitter behaviour and should be punished for treating the children in such a way. It also reveals how the aunt felt powerless at the hands of Nicholas in this instance as he trapped her in such a way that she had to admit to her lies about the jam jars if she were to punish Nicholas. This shows the intelligence and craftiness of Nicholas, who knew the character of the aunt well enough to know that she would never admit to her mistakes; especially to children. She is full of pride.

VOCABULARY – KEY WORDS
The Nightingale and the Rose

Student	Girl	Useful Phrases
Arrogant	Materialistic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The student is preoccupied/obsessed with his knowledge. He looks down on the nightingale with condescension, unreservedly criticizing her singing; his obsession with knowledge clouds his perceptions. He is blind to true love/beauty. She is materialistic; she is drawn to/attracted to wealth rather than her partner's qualities or features. She embodies the consumerist culture in society which demands people to compulsively buy material possessions. The student is portrayed as melodramatic and temperamental, and unable to regulate his emotions. The red rose which symbolizes true love is thrown in the gutter which reflects how people blatantly disregard/destroy love without perceiving its value. Both the student and the girl are detached from their emotions, and uneducated about how to form healthy human relationships.
Narcissistic	Proud	
Naïve	Shallow	
Intellectual	Opportunistic	
Self-obsessed	Curt/Rude	
Melodramatic	Apathetic	
Mercurial	Condescending	
Capricious	Nonchalant	
Whimsical	Lofty/alooof	
Self-absorbed	Insensitive	
Selfish	Nightingale	
Superficial	<i>Naïve</i>	
	<i>Gullible</i>	
	<i>Genuine</i>	
	<i>Sincere/earnest</i>	

The Lumber Room

AUNT	NICHOLAS	USEFUL PHRASES
Vindictive	Mischievous	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The aunt feels threatened by Nicholas' rebellious and confident nature. Parents should foster the creativity and imagination of a child. The dullness/drabness of the house reflects the character of the aunt. She deprives the children of freedom/imagination/creativity/little joys. She employs punitive methods which are detrimental to the healthy growth of a child's psyche. She is devoid of empathy and fails to take notice of their needs. She is rather sadistic; she enjoys terrorizing the children. The aunt represents adults who demand blind discipline and obedience from children. She is not concerned about their character or personality; she does not attempt to inculcate good values or principles in their lives. Nicholas is not intimidated by the aunt. He is resilient, rebellious and challenges her. He displays bravery/courage/resolve/composure. The aunt uses fear as a mechanism to force the children into submission. Nicholas defies her tactics and outwits her. He is defiant. The lumber room symbolizes imagination and creativity. The aunt denies the children these crucial needs. She is apprehensive of their ability to challenge her, but fails to contain Nicholas' rebellious nature. It is ironic that the aunt is subjected to undignified and unmerited detention, as she always did this to the children
Cold-hearted	Intelligent	
Callous	Shrewd	
Uncaring	Imaginative	
Paranoid	Creative	
Cynical	Tactful	
Authoritarian	Discerning	
Narrow-minded	Unyielding	
Unimaginative	Undaunted	
Dull	Resilient	
Malicious	Crafty	
Petty	Wilful	
Unreasonable		