

An analytical approach to *Crooked Letter*, *Crooked Letter* by Tom Franklin – Struggling for identity and belonging

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf



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Larry Ott und Silas Jones sind seit ihrer Kindheit und Jugend auf schicksalshafte Weise miteinander verbunden. Die beiden Protagonisten gehen als Erwachsene getrennte Wege, werden jedoch aufgrund eines dramatischen Ereignisses wieder miteinander konfrontiert. Es beginnt für beide eine schwierige Zeit des Ringens um Identität und Zugehörigkeit. Der Roman *“Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter”* von Tom Franklin wird anhand ausgewählter Kapitel analysiert, wobei die Charakterisierung der beiden Protagonisten sowie die Entwicklung der komplizierten Beziehung zwischen Larry und Cindy im Mittelpunkt stehen. Mit abwechslungsreichen Methoden erarbeiten Ihre Schülerinnen und Schüler abiturrelevante Aspekte kooperativ, kommunikativ und kreativ im Unterricht.

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Competences and skills:

The unit contains texts and tasks that can be classified as level B2/C1 (*Europäischer Referenzrahmen*). By working with the different parts of *Crooked Letter*, *Crooked Letter*, students enhance their **reading skills**. Furthermore, they practise their competences in explaining and **analysing** texts when working with the extracts from the novel. Students improve their **speaking and presentation skills** by presenting oral characterisations and conversations in front of the class. When answering questions on the interview video, they also train **listening and viewing skills**. Creative writing tasks focus on the **writing competence** and the **vocabulary knowledge** of the students.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

CT Creative Task

C Comment

LVC Listening/Viewing comprehension

PR Presentation

RC Reading comprehension

T Working with a text

W Writing

D Discussion/debate

G Group work

P Working with a picture/cartoon

R Research

S Summary

VI Working with a video

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Identity, a sense of belonging, Larry Ott and me	M1	CT, PR, T, W
2: Who are they and where do they belong? – Silas Jones and Larry Ott	M2–M3	CT, G, RC, T
3: Complicated relationships – Larry and Cindy	M4	CT, G, RC, T, W
4: Not belonging anywhere and its consequences	M5–M7	D, G, RC, T, VI
5: All is well that ends well	M8	A, CT, D, RC, T, W
6: Written assignment	M9	A, W

Topic 2: Silas Jones and Larry Ott: who are they and where do they belong?

M2 Worksheet – *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*: part two and three

Pre-reading activity

1. **Think-Pair-Share:** In what way do childhood experiences influence our personality as an adult? Reflect on this question on your own, then share your thoughts with a partner. After this, talk about your ideas in a small group.

Reading comprehension



2. Read parts two and three of *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* (pp. 26–81). Then do the following tasks. Write down the answers.
 - a) Describe Silas's thoughts during and after the discovery of the dead body near the creek. (pp. 30/31)
 - b) Outline the connection between Larry Ott and Silas Jones as described in part two. (pp. 42–44)
 - c) Make a timeline of the major events in the two boys' childhood as narrated in part three. Illustrate each event with a caption.

Working with the text



3. What is Silas Jones like? What is Larry Ott like? Characterise one of the two protagonists based on parts two and three (pp. 26–81). Include evidence from the two parts to support your statements. You can use the grid and M3.
4. Use your smartphone to record a short presentation of your characterisation. Send your recording to your teacher or a student. Give each other feedback.

Creative task



5. Imagine that you have the chance to talk either with Larry Ott or with Silas Jones. What would you focus on in your conversation? Prepare the conversation with a partner.

M3 Language support

Character traits

Positive character traits	Explanations, definitions, synonyms
affectionate	warm-hearted
ambitious	having a strong will to succeed, to become rich, powerful etc.
confident	feeling sure about your own ability to do things and be successful
considerate	always thinking of other people's wishes and feelings, careful not to hurt or upset others; syn.: thoughtful
determined	having a strong will to continue trying to do sth. even when this is difficult
mature	having the quality of thinking and behaving in a sensible, adult manner
reliable	sb. who can be trusted to do sth. well; that one can rely on; syn.: dependable
responsible	if one can be trusted and relied on; syn.: reliable, conscientious
smart	intelligent
thoughtful	showing that you think about and care for other people; syn.: considerate
trustworthy	if one can be relied on to be good, honest, sincere; syn.: reliable, dependable

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Negative character traits	Explanations, definitions, synonyms
bad-tempered	often angry; in an angry mood
cowardly	lacking courage
dishonest	intending to trick people
disrespectful	lacking respect for sb./sth.

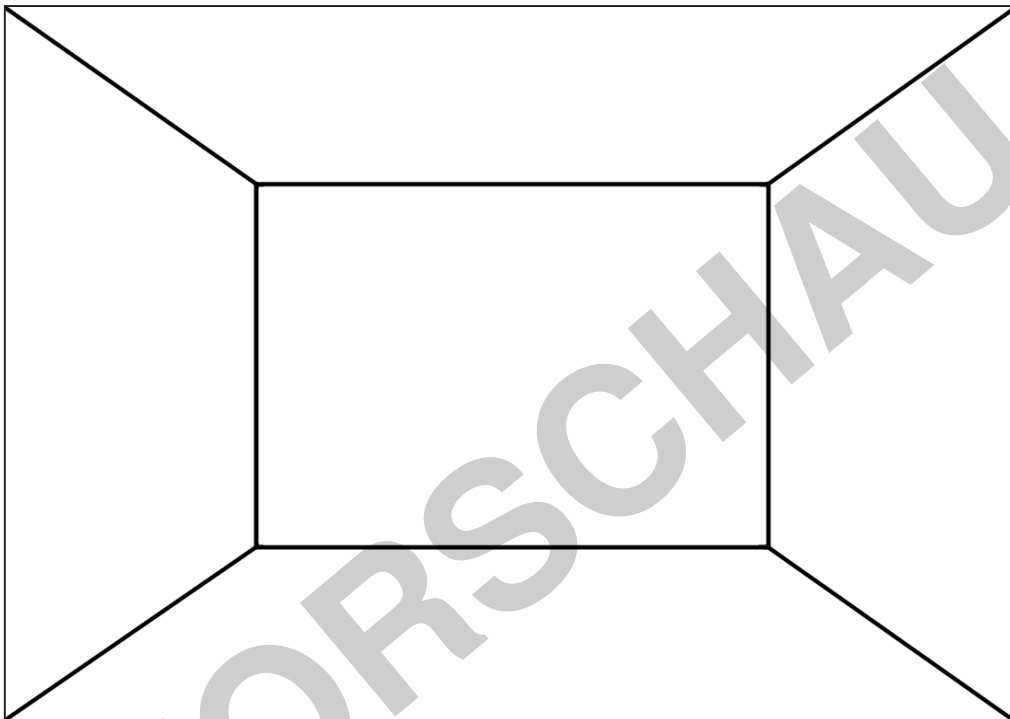
Topic 4: Not belonging anywhere and its consequences

M5 Worksheet – *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*: part nine

Pre-reading activity



1. In a placemat activity, discuss possible emotions and consequences of acute loneliness that an individual may experience.



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Reading comprehension



2. Read part nine of the novel (pp. 195–223). Point out the most important events in this part.

Working with the text and the video interview with Tom Franklin



3. Explain the following passages from part nine.
 - a) “Because of Larry’s past the women who shared her room were forever the furthest gone, those who wouldn’t be aware that a perhaps murder visited, those with no family, no one to complain.” (p. 196, ll. 30–33)