Robert Swindells combines hard-hitting subject matter (homelessness, racial intolerance, nuclear war) with page-turning story telling in his powerful novels for teenagers. He has won major awards and established himself as one of the most reliable but consistently surprising writers for young people.

THE BASICS
Born: Bradford, March 20th 1939
Jobs: Copywriter, Shop Assistant, Clerk, Printer, Engineer, Teacher, Author
Lives: West Yorkshire
First Book for young people: When Darkness Comes, 1973

THE BOOK
When *Stone Cold* won the 1994 Carnegie Medal, Robert had to contend with controversy and outcry as well as widespread acclaim. “What are we doing to our children?” moaned Rosemary Anne Sisson in the Daily Mail. “What are the panel of librarians who chose it thinking of?” raged Christina Hardyment in The Independent. The vast majority of critics, however, concurred with Nicolette Jones who wrote in the Sunday Times: “It is a novel that deserves its award, and it will make teenagers look into occupied doorways and think.”

Close Study of a Text:
This unit requires detailed analysis of the novel *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindells. It develops students’ understanding of how the ideas, forms and language of a text interact within the text and may affect those responding to it. The study of Swindells’ *Stone Cold* allows students to explore and respond imaginatively and critically to the ways meaning is shaped within novel form. Student’s will develop their understanding of how literary devices are used to communicate meaning, through an exploration of a relevant social issue- homelessness.

ROBERT SWINDELLS says “I am dedicated to the idea that we are all responsible for one another, and that we ought to conduct ourselves accordingly, doing no harm to any being. My work reflects this belief.”

LONDON *Stone Cold* is set in London and deals with the very real issue of homelessness in the UK. It is important to understand the context in which Swindells wrote *Stone Cold* but the issue can also be extrapolated upon.

HOMELESSNESS Robert researched *Stone Cold* by sleeping rough in London for three nights. “My exile from society was brief,” Swindells says. “So I do not claim to know what it is like.”
Overview of prescribed text, Stone Cold
REVIEW: STONE COLD

Stone Cold, winner of the 1994 Carnegie Medal, serves as a sinister warning to any young runaway and not just because there is a killer on the loose. Narrated by 17 year old Link, homeless and jobless in London after being driven out of home by a drunken, abusive stepfather, he vividly recounts the day-to-day experiences of a homeless person. Because he tells it like it is, his description of sleeping rough shatters any romantic notions: “So you pick your spot. Wherever it is... it’s going to have a floor of stone, tile, concrete or brick. In other words it is going to be hard and cold. It might be a bit cramped, too...shop doorways often are. And remember, if it’s winter you’re going to be half-frozen before you even start.”

If this was just another diatribe on the perils of sleeping rough, the reader’s interest would soon wane but it is far more gripping than that. The author alternates Link’s tale with that of an unknown serial killer preying on the homeless. You, the reader, see how closely their lives brush against each other and know it’s only a matter of time before they clash. Will Link be joining the other recruits in the cellar- what a deterrent that would be!

1. This review is a very positive recommendation for Stone Cold. How does the writer of the review encourage people to read the book? Do you agree with the review? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Do you think there are any negative qualities to Stone Cold? If so, what are they?
3. Imagine you have been asked to write a review of Stone Cold for students who have not read the book. Write the review, which should be at least one paragraph long. Try to include at least one quotation in your review. Perhaps use the plot summary on page 7 to help you.
Context

Understanding Swindells’ context and concerns is vital in understanding the message at the heart of his novel.
Context: Britain in the early 1990s

On 5 December 1990, the UK was enduring a cold snap and on the way was a fierce snowstorm that brought much of the country to a standstill.

Those hoping for a thaw could draw no respite from the music charts, where Vanilla Ice was just beginning his three weeks at the top, with Ice, Ice, Baby.

Such signs were ominous, for an economic chill had been descending for months and this led Chancellor Norman Lamont to stand up on that day and tell MPs that the UK was entering a recession.

Mr Lamont's speech hardly came as a shock. The country's GDP had just recorded its sharpest drop in 10 years and retail sales in October had fallen 1.1%, a much bigger drop than expected. Inflation was in double figures and interest rates were recently as high as 15%.

The political world was equally stormy. One of Britain's longest serving prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher, had only one week earlier bade a tearful farewell at Downing Street, handing the keys over to John Major.

After the boom of the 1980s, Britain's hangover was starting to kick in, with bankruptcies and repossessions mounting, and dole queues lengthening.

Activity

The notes above are from a BBC article entitled ‘Remember the last recession?’ Read the selection of comments at the bottom of the BBC report to get a sense of what the UK was like for people during this time period.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/7686531.stm

Stone Cold was published in Britain in 1994. Therefore, you need to research the major social, political and economic events that were happening in Britain around that time.
Use this to help you chart the development of key ideas in the text.
**Plot summary**

Link becomes homeless after a fight with his mother's boyfriend Vince. Thinking he is no longer safe in Bradford, he goes to London. He soon finds a room, but a fortnight's rent costs him two-thirds of his money. He looks for a job but no one will take him on as he has no experience and has only five GCSEs. Soon the landlord kicks him out and he is officially homeless. Now Link cannot get a job since he has no address and he cannot get an address since he has no job. Link is very afraid alone on the streets, but after a while he meets Ginger who is also homeless. Ginger teaches Link how to survive on the street and how to beg.

Meanwhile Shelter (real name unknown) is planning a mass murder of all the homeless people in London. Shelter served in the Army for twenty-nine years. He was discharged on medical grounds, but he claims to be as fit as a butcher's dog. Bewildered by his discharge, and without occupation, he takes his frustrations out on the homeless who make the streets look "manky". Shelter plans very meticulously. He starts small and tries not to create a pattern in his killings so he cannot be tracked down. By buying a flat and a cat he manages to lure many of the homeless to their deaths. By the time he encounters Link, Shelter has killed seven people. Seven homeless people.

Link and Ginger ask him for any spare change, but he replies "Change! I'd change you, me lad, if I had you in khaki for 6 weeks!". As they walk away they laugh at a remembered joke, yet Shelter thinks they are laughing at him. They become his targets – named Laughing Boy One (Ginger) and Laughing Boy Two (Link).

As Ginger is going to meet some friends, Shelter persuades him to come to his flat, saying that Link is there, lying down after an accident. Once there, Shelter kills Ginger. After some time, Link accepts that Ginger has vanished and that he is on his own again. Shortly after this, Link meets Gail, the best-looking dosser he has ever seen. Gail follows Link, asking him questions.

Link notices that something is "off" about Gail, but he does not know what. While Gail leaves him to make a phone call, Shelter invites Link into his flat and tries to kill him. Gail manages to save Link's life by calling the police, who catch Shelter in the act of attempted murder. At the end Link hears that Gail is a reporter who is undercover as a homeless person. Gail gives Link some money, but he considers throwing it away. Moreover Link thinks that it is unfair that Shelter gets a roof over his head and a hot meal and Link gets nothing – living in the cold, hungry. By contrast, he is on his own again. Gail's real name is Louise Bain.