



# STONE COLD KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

## Context – Stone Cold was written by Robert Swindells and was published in 1993.

**Robert Swindells** – Robert Swindells is an English writer who was born in Bradford on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1939. He served in the Royal Air Force, before becoming a primary school teacher. It was at this time that he began writing novels, which he later took up full time. Swindells has stated that he feels 'constantly aware of the presence of injustice in the world', and that he tries to 'point out various manifestations of injustice...which exist in our society.' He draws upon these ideas in *Stone Cold*.



**London** – The majority of *Stone Cold* is set in London in the United Kingdom. London is the capital and largest city in the UK, and is populated by approximately 14 million people. Swindells makes reference to a number of areas in London, and in particular the London Borough of Camden, in the north west of inner London. Camden is an important location on the London canal network, as well as being an important street market and tourism venue.



**Homelessness** – Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and in a relatively wealthy country like the United Kingdom, homelessness is all too frequent. The latest data (2016) shows that on any given night, there were an average of 4,134 people sleeping rough in the UK. This has risen every year since 2011. Remember this is on any given night, so the number who slept rough over the course of a year is likely to be many times more. A study by the Evening Standard showed that more than 7,500 people slept rough in London at some point in 2015. This included 880 under 25s.



**The Armed Forces** – The British Armed Forces are the military services responsible for the defence of the United Kingdom. They include the British Army, the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, and the Royal Air Force. Service members can be discharged from service for a variety of reasons. A dishonorable discharge (DD – language more often used in the US military) is handed down for an offence that the military considers to be exceptionally poor conduct. Some members are also discharged on physical/ mental health grounds.



## Main Characters – Consider what Swindells intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

**Link** – Link is the lead protagonist in *Stone Cold*, although Link is not actually his real name – he coined the nickname after seeing a sign for *Thameslink* on his way down to London from Bradford. Link is forced to leave home aged 16, after being mistreated by his mother's partner: Vince. He becomes homeless after his sister is also unable to support him. Link is generally a kind and sensitive character, although he is not very streetwise and makes some poor decisions.

**Shelter** – Shelter is the antagonist in *Stone Cold*. He is a former army sergeant-major, who it is assumed been discharged on some sort of mental health grounds. He embarks on a mission to rid the country of homeless people, which he calls 'dossers' and 'garbage.' His failure to accept his removal from his army role leads him to believe that he is doing his country a service, and is signing them up as 'recruits' for his own army – 'The Camden Horizontals.'

**Quote:** "I was now one of them now – poised at the top of that downward spiral."

**Quote:** "I never forget a face, and our next meeting will prove far more amusing for me than for them"

**Ginger** – After a few awful nights on the streets, Link meets Ginger, who is streetwise and friendly towards Link. He provides companionship for Link, which is something that many homeless people do not have. When Ginger disappears, Link immediately begins to question Ginger's loyalty and suggests that it was a bad idea to get too close to someone – this emphasises the loneliness and isolation of being homeless. Ginger's disappearance also shows how little people care about the homeless – Link has to persevere to find answers.

**Gail** – Gail walks into Link's life immediately after Ginger departs it. From Link's description, Gail is depicted as pretty, intelligent, yet vulnerable. Although Link promises that he will never allow himself to become close to someone again, he soon finds himself sticking close to Gail and sharing his knowledge of life on the streets. His strong desire for companionship once again highlights how desperately isolating life on the streets is. It eventually emerges that she is an undercover reporter, shattering Link's hopes once more.

**Quote:** "I should've known it was being with Ginger that was making things easy for me, but I didn't."

**Quote:** "Gail was in tears by now, and so was I. It ended with her shoving a wad of banknotes in my hand."

## Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

**Invisibility** – Link opens the novel by describing himself as one of the 'invisible' people, and this is a theme that runs throughout. It is clear in the behaviour of his family (who each assume that the other members of the family will help Link out) of the general public (almost all of whom do nothing to help Link, and the vast majority of whom ignore his presence altogether) and even of the police (the police do very little initially to help find Ginger and the other victims of Shelter, assuming that they have just simply 'moved on.'



**Cruelty and Exploitation** – Link's already bleak situation is significantly worsened by the cruelty and exploitative actions of others. For example, when he first moves to London, he is exploited by the landlord 'Ratface', who provides him with poor living conditions in exchange for high rent and inflexible payment dates. He is then robbed by a fellow homeless person, under the threat of violence. The squalid conditions in Captain Hook's barge (that he makes a great deal of money from) is another example of exploitation.



## Chapter-by-Chapter Summary – Alongside key quotations.

<b>Chapters 1-2</b>	Link describes himself as one of the 'invisible people', and explains how little people care about the homeless. He discusses how he descended into homelessness, beginning with his dad running off with a receptionist a couple of years before. Link doesn't blame his father for his problems though - Link blames his abusive stepfather: Vince. He explains the awkwardness of seeing someone you know when you are begging for money. In Shelter's first ominous message, he talks of how he will clean the streets of dossers, turning them into men. He states that he sick of the 'scruffy blighters' and has a 'plot' to clear the streets of them.	"We were a family you know as happy as most, till Dad ran off with a receptionist in 1991, when I was fourteen". 
<b>Chapters 3-5</b>	Link realises that his ragged appearance is making him more and more unemployable. He goes to his sister's house for Christmas, but is called a disgrace and a scrounger by Vince, and is bought a sleeping bag by his mum and sister. Link decides to use the money that he has left to move to London and make a fresh start. However, after renting a basic room from 'Rat-face', he realises that he has two weeks to find work, or he will be homeless again. Rat-face comes for the rent 3 days early, which Link cannot pay. He is forced to move out, and realises he is now homeless. Meanwhile, Shelter hunts for recruits, pleased by how easily he gets them to follow him. He kills his first victim: 'I put him out of his misery.'	"You're going to find yourself living among hard, violent people, some of whom are deranged. You're going to be at risk every minute, day and night... There's nowhere you can run to, because nobody cares." 
<b>Chapters 6-8</b>	Link has a terrible first night on the streets-he is punched by a toilet attendant, has his place in a doorway stolen by another homeless person, and is then robbed of his last meaningful possession – a watch that his mum bought him. After a few uncomfortable nights, Link meets Ginger. Ginger begins to show Link the ropes. Link describes to the reader the horrors of being a homeless person. Meanwhile, Shelter's mental instability is further revealed as he explains that he has stored the body under the floorboards. He then kills a 2 <sup>nd</sup> victim, a young homeless girl.	"You won't sleep unless you're dead drunk or zonked on downers. And if you are, and do, you're going to wake up with bruises on hips, shoulders, elbows, ankles and knees – especially if you're a bit thin from not eating properly."
<b>Chapters 9-11</b>	Ginger and Link spend the last of their change on a bed for the night at 'Captain Hook's.' Link is introduced to Ginger's friends, who he feels strangely jealous of. Link feels extremely isolated and disappointed when Ginger leaves him to meet more friends. Ginger fails to return, and a Big Issue vendor tells Link that Ginger was seen talking to a man. Link then meets Gail, who he plans to leave, but she persuades him to help her. Shelter explains how he targetted Link and Ginger: Laughing Boy 1 and 2. He waited for them to separate, before convincing Ginger that Link had been hurt in an accident. Back at the flat, he kills, Ginger.	"I never forget a face, and our next meeting will prove far more amusing for me than them." 
<b>Chapters 12-13</b>	Link begins to fall for Gail, even momentarily stops noticing the cold and the hunger. Link decides that he wants to find a job to help give a house to Gail. Shelter redoubles his efforts to get 'Laughing Boy 2:' Link. He knows that Link is now with Gail, so waits for them to separate.	"The Camden Horizontals I've christened them" 
<b>Chapters 14-15</b>	Shelter explains how fools two prying police officers into believing that he is harmless. However, Link persists in trying to find out what happened to Ginger – the police do not seem interested. With Gail, he watches Shelter's house. When Gail is gone, Shelter invites him in. Link's initial complacency dissolves when Shelter tries to kill him. He is saved at the last moment by the police and Gail. Gail reveals that she is in fact a TV reporter researching homelessness. Link laments how, even in prison, Shelter will receive better treatment than him.	"Yeah but like – justice was done, right? Was it, though? Shelter gets life, which means he gets a roof, a bed and three square meals a day. I don't".

## Swindells' Literary Devices

<b>Dual Narrative</b>	Telling the story from the viewpoints of both Link and Shelter creates a comparison and tension.
<b>Similes</b>	"Here was a hard, streetwise kid, cagey as they come, and he followed me home like a 3 year old."
<b>Colloquial Language</b>	'You might be spotted by a gang of lager louts on the lookout for someone to maim.'
<b>Short, sharp sentences</b>	"So, you lie listening. You bet you do. Footsteps. Voices. Breathing, even. Doesn't help you sleep."

## Features of Thriller Novels

<b>Suspense, Surprise and Anxiety</b>	The two seemingly distinct narratives in <i>Stone Cold</i> draw closer, and closer together, making the reader feel anxiety for poor Link!
<b>Climax</b>	Thrillers generally build towards a key moment, in which all of the suspense built over the narrative are released in one scene. This is the case when Shelter attempts to murder Link.
<b>Plot Twists and Cliffhangers</b>	A plot twist is when the narrative changes from what the reader would expect (e.g. Ginger's murder). Cliffhangers are also used to keep the reader interested.