To Every Thing There Is a Season  

In Alistair MacLeod's short story, "To Everything There Is a Season", the author depicts the anxieties and reservations of the narrator's transition between childhood and the adult world. The story allows the reader to understand the importance of change in one's life. As an adult, the narrator reflects back on how he saw the world as an 11-year-old boy. The story is about a Christmas Day and what occurs during the weeks preceding it. By seeing the experience through the author's eyes, the reader can understand the turmoil and conflict of the narrator who feels he is trapped in between two worlds; childhood and adulthood.

Literary Elements:

**Bildungsroman:** A novel which traces the spiritual, moral, psychological or social development and growth of the main character from childhood to maturity.

**Pathos:** The quality in a work which evokes pity or sadness

**Simile:** A simile helps us to see things in new and unique ways. It is a comparison between two apparently dissimilar items which uses *like* or *as*. They are deceptively simple and can have more significance than is initially evident.

e.g. *Her eyes were like beacons in the night compelling him towards her.*

Here, a young woman’s eyes are compared to beacons which guide lost sailors at sea. Thus the implication is that the young man feels he has found safety in the young woman he is moving towards. He is no longer floundering and lost.

**Characterization:** The development of a character’s personality through:

a) What the character says  
b) What the character thinks  
c) What the character does  
d) What others say about him/her  
e) Descriptions by the author

**Metaphor:** A literary technique in which a word or phrase that ordinarily means one thing is used to describe something else, suggesting that some common quality is shared by the two:

‘*a heart of stone, the mother was a tigress when it came to her children’s safety.*’

As well as painting vivid pictures for the reader, *metaphors* help to make abstract ideas more concrete, add emotion, and show the writer’s feelings and attitudes.

**Allusion:** A reference to something from history, a literary work, religion, myth etc.
The title of the story, ‘To Everything There Is a Season’ is an allusion to a passage from Ecclesiastes; part of the Old Testament Bible.

The title provides the reader with a hint as to what the story is about:
‘To Everything There Is a Season’ = There is an appropriate or proper time for everything.

To every thing there is a season,
    and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
    a time to be born, and a time to die;
    a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
    a time to kill, and a time to heal;
    a time to break down, and a time to build up;
    a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
    a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
    a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
    a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
    a time to get, and a time to lose;
    a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
    a time to rend, and a time to sew;
    a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
    a time to love, and a time to hate;
    a time of war, and a time of peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - Ascribed to King Solomon (King James Version, 1611)

(The piece was set to music in 1952 by Pete Seeger in his song *Turn!, Turn!, Turn!* Check out the classic version of this song from the 60s band "The Byrds" at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ga_M5Zdn4&feature=kp)

**Vocabulary:** Define each of the following and write it in a sentence of your own.

proverbial liberties mummers perpetuation voluminous

**Skill Development:** Using the prescribed format (SICA), explain the significance of the following quotations:

A) “My brother lets him go and we move across the winter landscape like figures freed from a Christmas card.” (p 305)

B) “Yet I am not so much surprised as touched by a pang of loss at being here on the adult side of the world. It is as if I have suddenly moved into another room and heard a door click lastingly behind me. I am jabbed by my own small wound.” (p 305)

C) “‘Every man moves on,’ says my father quietly, and I think he speaks of Santa Clause, ‘but there is no need to grieve. He leaves good things behind.’” (p 305)