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# Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English

Leaving Certificate English Syllabus



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## *Foreword*

The Minister for Education and Science has asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to revise the subject syllabuses for the Leaving Certificate programme in the context of the national programme of curriculum reform currently in progress. This process of revision is being implemented on a phased basis.

These Teacher Guidelines have been developed in association with the revised Leaving Certificate English syllabus, through the NCCA course committee, as an aid to teachers in the implementation of the new course. The Guidelines are intended as both a permanent resource for teachers and a resource for use in the in-career development programme for teachers, sponsored by the Department of Education and Science.

These Guidelines are not prescriptive. They provide suggestions for teachers in relation to teaching practice. Particular attention is paid to aspects of the new syllabus which may not be familiar to teachers, in terms of content or methodology.

The Guidelines are published jointly by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Department of Education and Science.



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## Preface

The new syllabus in English aims to build on the best practice of the past in seeking to develop students' competence in language and their appreciation of literature. However, this syllabus attempts to re-orientate English by emphasising certain areas of study.

These are:

### **In Language**

1. Accuracy and appropriateness in language use both oral and written.
2. Thinking skills: analysis, inference, reasoning, synthesis and evaluation.
3. Advanced reading and writing skills: composing in and interpreting a range of genres

### **In Literature**

1. The comparative study of literary texts.
2. Reading unseen verse.
3. Approaches to film

While some of these areas e.g., thinking skills and general linguistic accuracy, have always had a role they now have a profile which should make for significant changes to the subject in the classroom and the manner in which it will be examined. Other areas, particularly in the literary domain, are new and bring perspectives which add further to the innovative stance of this syllabus.

The Teacher Guidelines will deal with these areas of emphasis and innovation by outlining methodological approaches and indicating how they will be examined.

## *Introduction*

These guidelines assume a basic level of literacy in students entering the mainstream Ordinary and Higher Level Leaving Certificate Programmes. Most students will have had about fourteen years of mother-tongue education and it is not unreasonable to expect a certain competency at this stage. Consequently the guidelines focus on developing the advanced reading and writing skills that students need for entering adult life. The Leaving Certificate English Syllabus groups these skills under five categories of language use: the informative, the argumentative, the persuasive, the narrative and the aesthetic. These guidelines suggest approaches to developing students' comprehending and composing in all of these areas.

The approach adopted throughout is to suggest appropriate classroom methodologies for teaching these language skills. Each of the language categories is given specific treatment through the analysis and discussion of representative texts. Classroom approaches to developing reading and writing skills based on modelling techniques and a variety of learning activities are exemplified. The texts used come from a range of sources and touch on real issues in our world. In this way these guidelines attempt to rescue student language development from the artificial world of 'school literacy' (reading and writing on irrelevant subjects and decontextualised exercises on skills) and to embed it in the various literacy demands of everyday life.

In a culture that emphasises visual and oral texts and reduces and abbreviates written texts, it is no mean challenge to develop advanced reading and writing skills in students. Many read little, write less and consequently have lost respect for language and the way they use it. If this is to be changed and advanced competencies and understandings nurtured, then the students must experience the significance and power of language in their own personal and social contexts.

Literacy development equated with the teaching of minimalist, functionalist skills will not achieve such an ambitious aim. These skills must be seen as elements for study within an integrated approach which begins with an encounter with real texts dealing with significant issues. To be successful, literacy development must be contextualised within meaningful experiences of language. These guidelines are based on precisely such an approach.

The Language Resource Materials which accompany these guidelines will further develop and supplement the strategies suggested here to ensure that all aspects of literacy development are covered.



*Section One*

**FOUNDATIONS**



‘The limits of my language are the limits of my world’

## 1. RATIONALE OF SYLLABUS

The revised syllabus is based on five fundamental ideas about language and language development. These will be briefly outlined here.

### 1. Language, identity and power

Language is the chief means by which we make sense of our experience. Language gives us a sense of personal and cultural identity, enables us to relate to each other and empowers us in multitudinous ways from engaging in gossip to rejoicing in poetry. If we lack expertise in language we become vulnerable to the power of those who are proficient in language. Language gives power in more ways than one, it can liberate but it can also imprison.

### 2. Language, meaning and values

Language is neither a transparent medium nor a neutral instrument of communication. Language in use is value laden; it carries within its structures and choice of words an implicit statement of the writer's or speaker's social and moral outlook. However, meaning in 'language in use' is not fixed but is always an area of interpretation depending on the context and point of view of the specific users. Think about the contrasting range and nuances of meaning which the term 'Irish' carries when used by such different individuals as an Irish-American, an Ulster Unionist, or a person from the Gaeltacht.

### 3. Language as shape

Language does not reflect reality like a mirror; language creates its own view of reality. Language is dynamic and depending on a variety of factors puts specific shapes on reality. These language shapes can be called genres.

The role of English is to develop students' ability to comprehend these genres in all their diversity, understand and appreciate how they work and so come eventually to compose in them. In that way the students themselves will be interpreting, making meanings and learning to communicate effectively.

### 4. Critical literacy

This syllabus seeks to develop a critical literacy in students. This is a stance relative to texts, no matter what their source or pedigree, which takes its stand in questioning texts, in challenging their authority and problematising their apparent and accepted statements. In this way it is hoped that an authentic dialogue can take place between students and texts which will generate significant personal meanings and enrich the students' lives. Critical literacy encourages students to see texts not as statements of closure or as answers but as opportunities for dialogue and speculation.

### 5. Language awareness

To use language most effectively students need to develop an understanding of how language actually works to create meanings; they should be able to reflect on their own language use and that of others. Therefore students must have a language that talks about language, a meta-language; lacking this students remain embedded in words and instead of controlling words the words are controlling them.

## 2. GENERAL APPROACH

### I. Comprehending and composing

The study of English as outlined by the syllabus consists in developing students' understanding and skill in these two broad domains of activity.

#### Comprehending

This term is inclusive of a range of receptive skills. It denotes the ability to:

- Read, listen and view as appropriate
- Understand texts at literal and inferential levels
- Interpret and evaluate texts
- Question texts
- Understand how texts work
- Identify their genre

#### Composing

This term is inclusive of a range of expressive/communicative skills. It denotes the ability to:

- Speak, write and shape texts as appropriate, e.g., explore experiences in a range of genres, give expressive shape to personal viewpoints
- Imitate models appropriately and creatively
- Shape texts in various genres
- Research and prepare relevant materials
- Develop a process approach to composing texts within the various genres. This would mean developing strategies in the areas of pre-writing, drafting, redrafting, editing and proof-reading.

**FOCUS NOTE:**                    **“Making it real will make it happen”**

In developing these skills students must encounter as far as is possible materials and subjects which interest them and give a sense of the real world. Growth in expertise in the use and understanding of language is only achieved when the students feel they are engaging in real acts of comprehension and composition and not simply 'practising' or participating in 'dummy runs' of language use. Making it real is one the most difficult challenges an English teacher faces.

## II. General approaches and methodologies for developing language skills

Basic steps recommended:

### Pre-reading

Create context and then present text(s) in specific genre.

In choosing texts to suit a class teachers should ask two questions:

- Will the content or viewpoint of this text interest the class?
- What comprehension and composition skills can be taught through the encounter with this text.

This means that before any texts are introduced there would be a general preparatory session focused on the general topic of the texts. Students should be encouraged to air their views, speculate, question and raise issues and problems. The texts are then introduced as contributions to this class discussion.

### Reading

Discuss and analyse as is appropriate to the class. It is important that teachers explicitly teach the comprehending skills itemised in the syllabus. Students need to be shown how to read texts for a variety of purposes. While context and contents have been stressed the teaching must emphasise ultimately the process of interpreting and making meaning. Students need to be introduced to a variety of 'text attack skills' which develop their ability to read in an advanced manner. See Resource Materials, Section A.1. for further commentary on reading skills.

### Re-reading

The art of reading is in re-reading. Students should be given some assignments which demands a close re-reading of the text for a variety of purposes. Such purposes could be related to interpretations or details in the text or might arise from the contexts of either critical literacy or language awareness. The vital consideration is that the students feel that the re-reading has a real purpose.

### Post reading . . . preparation for writing

Use chosen text(s) or aspect of text(s) as stimulus and model for the students' own composition assignment. Outline model clearly; indicate characteristic aspects of language use and structure within the model of the genre. (Teacher should present text written by self or student to reinforce the model.)

## Composing

*'I can't write without a reader. It's precisely like a kiss...you can't do it alone'*  
(John Cheever)

Give assignment and engage students in the processes of

- **Pre-writing:** brainstorming, class/group discussion, research, reflecting on the nature of the challenge posed by the model/genre proposed.
- **Drafting:** writing freely to get a flow of ideas underway; trying out paragraphs, viewpoints, testing different angles and approaches, arranging in a preliminary structure relating to the genre, consulting with peers and teacher.
- **Redrafting:** deciding on best arrangement of content and ensuring structure is cohesive, writing in register needed, finalising paragraphs and adapting and shaping to genre.
- **Editing:** Rereading to ensure that there is clarity of thought and appropriateness of language in all aspects of the text.
- **Proof-reading:** Rereading to check on punctuation, spelling and grammar.

**FOCUS NOTE:** “The processor is mightier than the pen!”

Word processing computer programmes have enormous potential for the teaching of composition and they should be availed of when and if possible. The process approach to writing advocated here requires much rewriting which can become tedious. The word-processor's facilities enable students to engage in much redrafting, editing and proof-reading which is where the focus in composing ought to be. The final copy is a real text and gives the student a sense of authorship and achievement.



## Evaluating Composition

It should be made clear to the students what criteria of evaluation will be employed in relation to any composition they write. At all times it must be remembered that the student is learning to write and to compose and therefore respect for the student's own creativity should be given priority as is deemed appropriate. Whereas, for example, the criteria might be strictly applied in the context of such genres as reports and formal letters, more discretion would be required in the context of poetry and personal narrative.

Evaluation may not always entail giving a grade. But it always does entail giving more than just a grade in terms of commentary and response. Positive feedback in the form of some dialogic comment reassures the student that communication is taking place.

### 3. NEW PERSPECTIVES

#### I Text and Genre

The concepts of text and genre are fundamental to this syllabus. While these terms have been usually associated with literary criticism they have in contemporary language studies broadened their meanings. They can now be used to refer to any communicative product, oral, written or visual. Letters, reports, newspaper articles, political speeches, films, poems, novels, etc., can all be described as texts and treated as exemplars of a specific language genre or a combination of genres.

This should not be taken to mean that all texts are of equal value. An advertisement for chocolate and a Shakespearean sonnet can both be described as texts because they are both linguistic events or language artefacts. This does not imply that they are of equal cultural status.

All texts are produced within certain genres. A genre can be defined as a form of language use, a language-shape created by a specific communicative situation. Any communicative situation is influenced by a number of factors which vary in their operations and effects.

These factors are:

- (i) The speaker/writer ..... WHO?
- (ii) The receiver/audience ..... TO WHOM?
- (iii) The purpose of the communication ..... WHY?
- (iv) The relationship between (i) and (ii) ..... WHAT CONTEXT?

These factors will determine the following attributes of a text:

- vocabulary and register . . . the kind of words used.
- syntax . . . the organisation of the words within the sentences.
- style . . . the overall management of the language.
- tone . . . the stance and attitude of the writer/speaker.

- structure . . . the internal organisation of the text.
- format . . . the external layout of the text.

This can be illustrated as follows

1. The linguistic attributes of a letter are determined by whether it is either
  - a letter of condolence
  - or, a letter of application for a job
  - or, a letter to a personal friend

Each of these letters can be described as a different genre largely determined by its social context.

2. The linguistic attributes of an argumentative text will be determined in a similar way depending on whether it is either,
  - a legal argument
  - or, a scientific argument
  - or, a political argument
  - or, a private argument

Again each of these can be seen as constituting a different genre with its own necessary conditions to be observed if communication is to be effective.

**FOCUS NOTE:**                   “**Genres are means not masters**”

While genres are significant in shaping effective communications in society they are neither absolute in their elements nor mutually exclusive. Language is always evolving and genres change and develop; likewise within any one text there can be a mixture of genres present. Furthermore creative writers in a variety of areas continually adapt, change and develop genres in their attempts to adequately render their experiences into words. However, for students learning to write in preparation for entering adult society basic competence in a number of communicative genres is essential. This does not mean a submissive encounter with a rigid linguistic formula but rather dialectical interaction between students' experience and socially approved genre structures and forms. Genres are best seen as forms of structural scaffolding which help the student to organise and define but do not determine the voice, quality or content of the final text.

**Exemplar Activity**

Identifying the genre of texts and outlining their linguistic attributes.

Read the following text:

*The door of a car banged open and a man about seven feet high and four feet wide jumped out of it, took one look at Agostino, then one long stride, and grabbed him by the throat with one hand.*

*'How many times have I gotta tell you cheap hoods not to hang around where I eat?' he roared. He shook Agostino and hurled him across the sidewalk against the wall. Chick crumpled up, coughing.*

*'Next time,' the enormous man yelled, 'I sure as hell put the blast on you, and believe me, boy, you'll be holding the gun when they pick you up.'*

*Chick shook his head and said nothing. The big man gave me a raking glance and grinned. 'Nice night,' he said and strolled into Victor's.*

*I watched Chick straighten himself out and regain some of his composure. 'Who's your buddy?' I asked him.*

*'Big Willie Magoon,' he said thickly. 'A vice squad bimbo. He thinks he's tough.' 'You mean he isn't sure?' I asked him politely.*

*He looked at me emptily and walked away. I got my car out of the lot and drove home . . .*

### **Commentary**

This is a dramatic narrative, full of action, surprise and threat. It has an ironic viewpoint and humorous tone which adds further interest. It is written to entertain a general audience and is typical of the genre of the American detective thriller.

The attributes of the language of this genre are evident throughout this extract, e.g.,

- Lively physical verbs . . . *banged, jumped, grabbed, hurled, crumpled.*
- Exaggerated description . . . *Seven feet high and four feet wide.*
- American words, idioms and slang . . . *hoods, sidewalk, I sure as hell, put the blast, buddy, bimbo, lot.*
- Quick, short dialogue.
- American names . . . *Chick, Agostino.*
- Straightforward syntax and sentence structure.

Now read the following extracts and identify the genre of each one by applying these questions:

- Who wrote this text . . . what kind of writer . . . poet, novelist, scientist, reporter, student, etc.?
- For whom was it written . . . what audience was targeted?



- Why was it written . . . to inform, to persuade, to narrate, to instruct, to entertain, a combination of these?
- What are the main linguistic attributes of this text? What kinds of words, register, syntax, and structure does it have?

**Text A**

*. . . After the seaweed factory the Way turns inland and briefly follows the edge of the limestone terrace, below which is a gully, sheltering a lush and profuse growth of wildflowers and orchids. Soon a boreen is met that curves around to meet the white sandy beach at Port Mhuirbhigh. In the distance the stone fort of Dun Aonghasa can be seen rising from the clifftop on the far side of the island. Inis Moir is only 0.75 km (0.5m) wide at this point, and it is said that during a storm in the seventeenth century the sea came over the southern cliffs and briefly bisected the island.*

**Text B**

*When Hubert and I were children and after we grew up we lived at Temple Alice. Temple Alice had been built by Mummy's ancestor, before he inherited his title and estates. He built the house for his bride, and he gave it her name. Now, the title extinct and the estates entirely dissipated, Temple Alice, after several generations as a dower house, came to Mummy when her mother died. Papa farmed the miserably few hundred acres that remained of the property. Mummy loved gardening. On fine days she would work in the woodland garden, taking the gardener away from his proper duties among the vegetables. On wet days she spent hours of time in the endless, heatless, tumbling down glasshouses, which had once sheltered peaches and nectarines and stephanotis. One vine survived – she knew how to prune and thin its grapes, muscatels. Papa loved them.*

(Text A: From a walks' guide book: Text B: From an autobiography)

<p><b>See Language Resource Materials, Section A.2, for More exercises on genre.</b></p>
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This type of reflection and analysis leads to a richer sense of what is known as language awareness.

## **II. Language Awareness/Knowledge about language**

These terms refer to the aim of developing in students a reflective capability about their own use of language and the language use of others. It is common for mother-tongue users to have little awareness of how they make meaning in their own language. In general they instinctively respond to a communicative need. This shows that they have internalised the rules and processes of making meaning in words. These rules and processes can be described as grammar; learning a mother-tongue involves unconsciously internalising the grammar of a language. Developing language awareness means helping students to become conscious of what they already know about language and then attempting to build on that.

The raising of language awareness does not imply a study of grammar in the traditional prescriptive way. The traditional 'dry-as-dust' approach to grammar, the decontextualised study of

the rules of syntax and punctuation, sentence construction, parsing and analysis, has been shown to be detrimental to the development of fluency in the writing of composition and clearly would be equally so in an oral context.

Language awareness development is predicated on the study and understanding of language in use in real communicative or expressive contexts. These guidelines advocate strongly a text-based approach, which foregrounds how meaning is created through actual usage in specific texts.

**What should students know about language?**

They should know:

- how language works, how words are selected and organised in patterns to make meaning in a variety of contexts
- how language use is largely determined by social, cultural, political values and structures
- how to talk about language use in an appropriate terminology by developing what is called a meta-language i.e. a language to talk about language use.

In specific terms this means developing an understanding and a facility with such terms and concepts as: context, text, genre, audience, tone, style and register. These terms and concepts describe the situation which produced the text, the social and cultural structures which were operative in shaping the text. This has been described as constituting what is called macro-language awareness. But since this is an awkward phrase the term *context awareness* will be substituted for it in these guidelines

Also students need to understand and be able to use such terms and concepts as: syntax phrase, sentence, paragraph, thesis, tense, parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives . . .), punctuation marks (capitals, full stops, commas). This has been described as constituting what is called micro-language awareness, knowing and understanding how the ‘nuts and bolts’ of a specific text are actually working to create meaning. Instead of micro-language awareness, the phrase *text awareness* will be used here.

In attempting to develop language awareness teachers should try to abide by the basic methodological principle of seeing students’ own texts as the most suitable and appropriate resources on which to focus. This does not exclude using other texts but the emphasis should be very much the other way.

**Exemplar activity**

Using a student's text to develop language awareness.

**ESCAPE.**

*There is a man more feared than God in our world today; A man with the intelligence of Flipper the Dolphin, Skippy the Kangaroo and Bubbles the Chimp collectively; the government seek him out, the F.B.I. cannot find him and the Kilally Gardai are up for assault. A top marksman, fluent in two and a half languages he has five known identities. A computer expert with a flair for the unknown. He is regarded as an incalculable liability, a risk to society and a dangerous enemy.*

*You may ask, why? What has this man done? And why can no-one find him? The answers my friend are simple. No one can find him because once spotted he disappears as fast as dog food under a rottweillers nose. The betrayal of a trust is why he is a wanted man. Loyalty was thrust aside when he realised blackmail was were the money was made.*

*What knowledge he has annihilates civilisation. The only man to uncover the greatest cover up. However, he still remains as cool as a fridge and as controlled as a microwave, the ultimate kitchen utensil.*

*A warrant for two million has made a tasty morsel. The papers call him Mr. Z, but that's only because Mr. X already exists.*

*You probably wonder how I know so much and why I am telling you. It is because this man owes. He owes me more than he thinks. He believes his true identity is a mystery but only I know. I live with him. Sneaking and skulking about at night does not go unnoticed. I know everything. Why shouldn't I?*

*When he is sitting under the kitchen table at six-thirty the enemy pounds down the stairs. Its still dark outside and I am about to put an end to this abominable behaviour. Taking apart spy headquarters where my son escapes to is amazing. I never knew the limits of a six-year-old's mind.*

*The delusions of his imagination are way beyond comprehension. He has travelled through space on an exercise bike. Did a round trip of the world from under the sink. He has discovered Atlantis in the bathtub and lives life with more energy than he burns.*

*Yesterday King Kong paid us a visit and broke the lamp shade. Last week Godzilla came to tea and broke a mug.*

*While I put him back to bed that morning he told me of the great adventures he had had with the FBI when they called at five o'clock. My son has escaped all the troubles of the world and visited the great monuments of life. He has never left the grounds of our home.*

### Commentary

This composition is quite typical of much writing produced at Senior Cycle level: it is fluent and displays a certain liveliness in approach and style. However, as there is no audience or genre specified it is difficult to assess its overall quality. It initially appears to lack unity and cohesiveness (i.e. effective linkages within sentences, paragraphs and overall text).

Questions that could be asked about this text to develop *context awareness*:

- *Who is the writer? Is it the student herself or has she adopted a deliberate, authorial voice for a particular end in mind?*
- *What particular audience is being addressed?*
- *What genre is being used? Narrative or non-narrative?*
- *What context of communication is envisaged?*

There are no definite answers to these questions: this is to be expected since the student offers no specifications of any kind. One could speculate and suggest that it is a type of popular journalism aimed at a general audience, an attempt at ironic humour in a magazine piece.

Having established some possible answers about this piece of writing some further work could be done by focusing on the issue of *text awareness*. A specific area of the text could be selected for analysis. Here the first two 'paragraphs' will be considered.

**FOCUS NOTE:**      **“ This is a re-reading exercise without the red pen ”**

It is important that this approach is not seen as a negative, correcting exercise. On the contrary it is meant to focus on what the student has created in the text by the manner in which he/she has used language along with suggesting ways of making it even more effective.

*There is a man more feared than God in our world today. A man with the intelligence of Flipper the Dolphin, Skippy the Kangaroo and Bubbles the chimp collectively. The Government seek him out, the F.B.I. cannot find him and the Kilally Gardaí are up for assault.*

*A top marksman, fluent in two and a half languages he has five known identities. A computer expert with a flair for the unknown. He is regarded as an incalculable liability, a risk to society and a dangerous enemy.*

Questions could focus on such topics as:

- Use of the third person . . . *man, he, him* . . . What is the impact of this . . . ?  
Makes the figure depersonalised and remote . . . is this useful in the context of the whole composition? What does it achieve . . . a comic, ironic effect perhaps?
- Sentence length and sentence linking . . . generally short.. no linkages . . . What effect is achieved . . .? Some of the sentences are unconventional in having no verbs . . . should this be changed? Does it give a sense of lightness and movement which contributes to the playful quality of the writing?
- Paragraph structure . . . short lists of descriptive phrases . . . little internal cohesion . . .  
What role are these ‘paragraphs’ playing?
- Punctuation . . . could it be revised to ensure more intelligibility?  
Tense . . . use of the present tense . . . what effect? Is it maintained?

These questions seek to point out what is achieved by writing the text in this way: thus the student is encouraged to reflect on her use of language, her selection of words and her implicit decisions about a variety of things and whether it is worth considering alternative approaches which might make the text more effective.

What is important for students to learn in this work is that the social context, genre and audience largely determines what is most appropriate and effective in the areas of register, of syntax, of sentences. In this particular example it is difficult to assess the success of the piece since the context is not specified. This also makes it difficult to actually assess the composition on any specific criteria since it is not clear why it was written and what purpose it was meant to achieve.

<p><b>See Resource Materials, Section A.3. for more exemplars of students’ texts.</b></p>
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### III. Critical Literacy

As indicated in the rationale (p.8) this new perspective focuses on developing students critical thinking skills applied to a range of texts in a variety of genres. Developing students ability to think critically has always been central to literary study at Leaving Certificate level. Critical literacy is a development of that traditional emphasis and an enlargement of its scope.

#### What are critical thinking skills?

In popular parlance the term ‘critical’, has become identified with a negative response or appraisal; this is an unfortunate reductionist interpretation of the term. In the present context the term ‘critical’ involves the following components and activities:

- Identifying and challenging assumptions in texts.
- Recognising the centrality of context and culture in determining the way texts

represent and shape experience.

- Imagining and exploring alternatives in all contexts.
- Developing a reflective scepticism relative to absolute and general statements.

**FOCUS NOTE:** “Effective thinking is not given, it is acquired”

These are advanced thinking skills and will need to be approached in a progressive and developmental manner. Successful learning of these skills will take time; it will involve giving students confidence in their own perceptions and speculations and introducing them to a series of strategies for comprehending and interpreting texts.

**Critical literacy: What is it in practice?**

From the viewpoint of critical literacy

- Texts are seen as language constructs which are embedded in specific cultural assumptions and practices.
- As a result texts participate in ways of structuring society, in attributing significance and power to particular groups and activities and possibly disempowering others.
- Therefore texts seek to position the reader, to persuade the reader to see the world in a particular way.
- Critical literacy enables the reader to resist the ‘persuasiveness’ of a text, perceive from whence it is coming in terms of values and assumptions, enter into dialogue and ultimately assess these values and assumptions.

In a specific way approaching texts from a critical literacy viewpoint involves asking these three broad questions:

- Why was this text written?
- How was this text written?
- What other ways of writing this text are there?

Each of these general areas of inquiry divide into an array of more precise questions which will emerge in the exemplars that follow.

**Exemplar 1: Names, syntax and inequity**

Applying the three guide questions to the following simple text let us see what is the outcome?

**In Memory of Daniel and Mrs. Harrington**

(This inscription is written underneath a large crucifix which was donated to a church in the late nineteenth century.)

1. Why was the text written?  
To commemorate and honour two people (husband and wife) who had died.
2. How is the text written?

It is written in a rhetorical, declarative phrase which communicates effectively although it is not a complete sentence. However if we look more closely at the selection and ordering of the words, at the construction of the text, some interesting patterns become evident.

- The man is given a personal name (*Daniel*), the woman is not; she is identified only in her relationship (as wife) with him, i.e. *Mrs. Harrington*. The reader could speculate on why the woman's personal name was not used? Is it because she only had significance and status in her role as the wife of Daniel? The text positions the reader to see her in this way.
  - The same stance is reinforced by the syntax (the word order) of the inscription. Daniel is placed before his wife thus emphasising his precedence and power.
  - Since the cultural context of this text is the late nineteenth century in Ireland these attributes of the relationships between the sexes within marriage is not surprising.
  - What this short analysis demonstrates is how the language use and the construction of the text is a direct reflection of those attributes and the value systems they incorporate.
3. Are there other ways of writing this text?  
Consider the following options.  
Which of these would have been acceptable and unacceptable to Daniel?  
Which would be acceptable and unacceptable today?
    - In Memory of Mrs and Mr Harrington
    - In Memory of Daniel and Mary Harrington
    - In Memory of Daniel Harrington and Mary O'Shea, Husband and Wife.
    - In Memory of Mary and Daniel.

Each of these (and others that could be imagined) embody in their selection and ordering of words a view of the roles of men and women in society and the source of their identity and status. It would be a useful exercise to explicate these views in more detail.

### **Exemplar 2: Identifying structures of power in word usage**

As indicated earlier a text carries either explicitly or implicitly, statements about structures of authority and power in society. These statements will be reflected in the way words are used in a text. A useful way of looking at a text from this perspective is as follows:

- Who in the text are active, take initiative, and make decisions,
- What kind of words are associated with these people?

- Who in the text appears as passive victims, as being powerless and manipulated?
- What kinds of words are associated with these people?
- Are people treated as individuals or as members of a group?
- How are these groups identified?
- What assumptions lie behind the attribution of identity to these groups?
- What set of beliefs inform this article?
- How could these beliefs be challenged?

Consider the following article in the light of these questions

### **Sexualisation and pre-teen girls**

*All of popular culture – magazines, books, films, videos, fashion and pop music – sends out the message that sex is the most important thing in life and being sexy and sexually available is the only way for a girl to be successful in youth terms, to be ‘cool’. And the girls who are getting the message – from the latest fashions and video releases – are now two, three, four years short of adolescence.*

*Which raises many questions. Why is this happening now when the public are more aware and anxious about child sexual abuse than ever before? What happens to the dynamics of child abuse when children have the warped ideas about sex that popular culture now gives them. Where do such trends originate? And the burning question for parents what effect is this trend likely to have on girls? What about the psycho-sexual development as they move into their teens and beyond?*

*The short answer is we don’t know. This is a new trend which has not been researched but it seems likely that it is connected to the upsurge in the poor body image and eating disorders now being experienced by girls as young as eight. For the first time in history, children’s earliest sexual imprinting is coming not from a living person, or their own fantasies, but from a mass-produced, technologised and de-humanised version of sexuality . . .*

*Though our culture is saturated with sexual imagery, that does not mean that anything goes. On the contrary, the range of that imagery is depressingly narrow and repetitive. Anybody who criticises popular culture risks being dismissed as reactionary and out of touch but it is the culture itself which is reactionary. Music videos, for example, do not push any limits; many of them just bring the clichéd imagery of pornography into the mainstream. And feeding such imagery to young girls does not break any boundaries – rather, it helps to maintain a mainstream social order . . . Naomi Wolf, author of *The Beauty Myth* contends that it is no accident that such images have proliferated in the era when women have made legal and political advancements.*

(Adapted from an article entitled, ‘Spice Girls, Sexualisation and pre-teen girls’ by Ms.Áine McCarthy published in *The Irish Times*, January 20th, 1997)

**FOCUS NOTE:**      “Power hides in pronouns: inequity lurks in verbs”



In use, grammar and syntax are not neutral, instrumental, linguistic skills. Their specific use in any text is a reflection of the cultural beliefs and social structures within which a writer lives and works. It is appropriate in this context to remember, ‘Language has you, before you have language’.

It should be clear from this how the two new perspectives of language awareness and critical literacy are interdependent: language awareness is essential for developing the reflective stance of critical literacy and in turn critical literacy gives rich moral, social and political perspectives to language awareness.

### **Exemplar 3: The significance of cultural context**

In attempting to comprehend texts developing an awareness of their cultural context is vitally important. Without some knowledge of the Elizabethan view of the role of the monarch it is difficult to appreciate Shakespeare’s history plays or indeed some of the great tragedies; likewise if we do not know that Yeats lived in a time of revolutionary change in Ireland much of his work loses its impact.

In the light of the above comment it is of interest to look at the following poem:

*The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood  
This Eastertide call into the mind the men,  
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts,  
should  
Have gathered them and will do never again.*

Initially read without a context it suggests a sense of the loss of youth and the sadness of separation and possibly death. What might have been is opposed to what inescapably is now the reality. A reader aware of the tradition of poetry might be able to identify the characteristic style of a period and the particular poetic voice. However the poem takes on added dimensions of pathos, tragedy and imaginative perspectives when the title is added and its particular cultural context given.

#### ***In Memoriam (Easter, 1915)***

*The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood  
This Eastertide call into mind the men,  
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts,  
should  
Have gathered them and will never do again.*

Edward Thomas

Now the poem has a keener edge. The contrast between the romantic landscape created here, (springtime, Easter, flowers, lovers, richness of life) and the landscapes of the battle fields of the First World War creates a memorable and moving impact. So by locating the poem in its historical moment its world impacts on ours with an increased energy. So it can be with all texts approached from the critical literacy perspective.

**Exemplar 4: Narratives and closure**

The manner in which narratives conclude (achieve closure) reveals how an author views the world, and can also indicate the cultural assumptions, social structures and political beliefs in which the narrative is embedded.

It has been said that most novels before the twentieth century ended in marriage, (implying, one assumes, that the lovers lived happily ever after): whereas most novels in the twentieth century begin with marriage and go on from there. This admittedly generalised comment does, however, point to a major cultural and social shift in relations between the sexes and the nature of marriage, reflected in narrative fiction and its modes of closure. For example, contrast the endings of novels by most eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists (Fielding, Austen, Dickens, and perhaps Eliot) with some of the fiction of this century, (Joyce, Lawrence, and Bellow) and the point has some merit.

In Frank O'Connor's *The Guests of the Nation*, the shooting of the two English hostages, Belcher and Hawkins, is a powerful statement on the dehumanising impact of war and extreme nationalism. Furthermore it destroys the stereotypes of the English and problematises the position of the Irish rebel which had been a staple element in nationalist propaganda. (This is one interpretation of the story. Are there other interpretations?)

It is a useful exercise to imagine a series of alternative endings to this story and then consider the respective impact each of these might have on the substance of the story. In this way the choice which O'Connor made ultimately is thrown into relief and the apparent intention of his construct made evident.

Possible closures:

- Belcher and Hawkins fight and are shot accidentally.
- Noble sides with the hostages and helps them to escape. Noble is court-martialled and shot for his action.
- The narrator and Noble plot to shoot Feeney and allow the hostages to escape. They leave the nationalist movement and emigrate.
- Noble visits Hawkins' mother and they become good friends.

Each of these options could be explored from a variety of perspectives, e.g.,

- How does it affect the focus of the story?
- Is it true to the social and cultural context?
- Is it romantic/realistic?
- Is it true to the characters?
- Is it forced on the story?

**Exemplar 5: Interpretive positions**

In this context of narrative constructs and closures worthwhile illustrative work can be done with myths and fairy tales. Since most students will be familiar with versions of these narratives it would be interesting as a model of critical analysis to compare versions and point to changes of emphasis in the different versions which would reflect different social and cultural assumptions.

The original version of the mythical story of Oisín, Niamh and Tír na nÓg is concerned with the issue of human mortality and the desire for immortality. It considers the realities of ageing and death and accepts their inevitability in human life. The story in its original narrative shape and closure expressed this position. However with the arrival of Christianity the closure of the story was adjusted to give voice to a belief in the next life: Oisín is converted to Christianity and dies happily.

It is therefore possible to look at this legend and interpret it from a variety of positions. The interpretation that is made depends on the point of view of the reader. Here are some possible stances:

- Psychological position: It is a story about coming to maturity. In Freudian terms it shows an individual psyche moving from the pleasure principle (escape, self-indulgence, pleasure, individuality) to the reality principle (duty, service, responsibility, application, work.)
- Feminist position: As usual in patriarchal societies this story shows a woman as the temptress. She is exhibited as beautiful and dangerous, remote from the real world, ever present to serve male needs and bereft without the male. The woman is mainly passive, makes no significant decisions and therefore is seen as just a prop in the context of the hero's actions.
- Christian position: Oisín was for many years a victim of pagan beliefs which provided no answers to the fundamental life questions. His conversion to Christianity saved his soul and enabled him to die contented in his new faith, sure of salvation and eternal life.

Adopting different perspectives on texts enables students to see how a variety of meanings can be found within them. This will hopefully encourage them to reflect and become aware of their own interpretive position and realize the relative nature of it. It should also emphasise that a text does not hold a specific decided meaning: meanings are generated through the encounter between the reader and the text. The need for dialogue is the vital component in establishing any meaning.

**Exemplar 6****Visual/Verbal Texts**

The approach of critical literacy is applicable to all texts, aural, written or visual. Its application to visual texts is most significant for the comparative study of film in the new syllabus. This will be considered more fully later in the section on film. Here a number of introductory comments will be applied to some visual materials, e.g. cartoons and illustrations. Many teachers will be already familiar with this from their teaching of the media in the Junior Certificate Course.

Like written texts, all visual texts are deliberate constructs. The political cartoon is a special genre or type of text. It combines visual and verbal aspects. It is recognised by its style of drawing

(caricature) and its reference to current events. Its purpose is generally humorous and satiric. In examining political cartoons the following aspects should be considered:

- Visual aspects: Persons present, their caricatured representation and details of clothes and setting.
- Verbal aspects: Use of slogans, comments and speech bubbles.
- Context: Socio-political and media contexts. e.g. Details of actual events and where did it appear

Consider the following cartoon in the light of this:



### 1. Visual Aspects

*Caricatures:* The figures are readily recognisable as country and city folk. The simplified version of their appearance emphasises details which suggest a particular character image for each of them. The countryman is heavy and stolid, attired in the traditional garb of sheepskin coat, tweed hat and walking stick. He looks robust and healthy. Opposite him the city dwellers are spare and angular; the man's earring, stubbed face and ponytail associate him with a loosely identifiable social grouping such as the eco-warriors. The facial expressions convey their opposing attitudes very well. What kind of reply, for example is the farmer likely to make to the question?

The background against which the encounter takes place is vaguely rural but is quite deliberately plain and sparse.

### 2. Verbal Aspects

The words in a political cartoon reinforce and anchor the meaning of the visual text. Here, the ironic position of the 'environmentalists' is presented through their comic inability to recognise that which they seek to protect for others and their view that the environment is something exclusively rural. How does this irony affect our perceptions of them? Are they likely to be very effective in their crusade?

What is the standpoint of the cartoonist here?

### 3. Political and Media Context

This cartoon appeared in the British satirical magazine *Private Eye* in the late 1980s during an upsurge in awareness of the importance of the countryside and a growing tension between attitudes of the city and country dwellers.

**FOCUS NOTE:** “Critical literacy does not replace traditional approaches to texts but offers an additional perspective on them”

The critical approach to texts is not meant to replace the focus in English studies on developing personal response, imaginative involvement and aesthetic appreciation of literature. It is to be seen as giving a further dimension to study which helps the student to see how texts are culturally located and therefore equips them to read and respond to the created world in the text with more understanding and empathy. Authors do not write in a cultural vacuum and readers do not read in a cultural vacuum; developing an awareness of this and its significance for interpreting texts is most enriching for the study of language and literature. In the context of the new comparative studies approach this is of particular importance.

## *Section Two*

### APPLICATIONS

**METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES FOR TEACHING COMPREHENDING AND COMPOSING SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF LANGUAGE.**



‘There is not just one literacy, there are many literacies in today’s world’

## 1. THE LANGUAGE OF INFORMATION



**See Resource Materials, Section B.1.**  
**for commentary and reflection on writing in the genres of information from:**  
**Mr. Dermot Gilleece, Sports Writer**  
**Mr. Tom Humphries, Sports Writer**  
**Mr. Jim O'Donnell, Asst. Director of The Institute of Public Administration**  
**Dr. Brendan McWilliams, The Irish Metereological Service.**

Within this category of language the various genres make rigorous demands on writers. The maximum information must be communicated in the minimum of words; the language must be transparent and accurate and the structure of the text must be clarity itself. This is the ideal. In practice the objectivity and impersonality aimed at by these genres can be diluted by personal or factional interests. The genres within this category range from civil-service/business memos and reports, to impassioned accounts of sports to accessible scientific commentaries.

### **Text A: Factual Newspaper Report**

Michael Foley: *The Irish Times*, 4th October, 1995

*The number of people from the Republic visiting Northern Ireland has increased significantly since the cease-fire and is expected to grow 35 per cent this year. For the first six months of 1995, the number of visitors to the North rose by 18 per cent. However, the number of tourists - excluding business travellers and people visiting friends and relations - is up by 63 per cent.*

*Ms Margaret O'Reilly, head of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) Dublin office, said inquiries to the office in Nassau Street increased by 148 per cent in the four months following the cease-fire. Reservations increased by 155 per cent, the first time they have outstripped inquiries . . .*

*Ms O'Reilly said she was not surprised. The tourist board had been concentrating on the southern market and there was also a feeling that something was going to come out of the peace process.*

*There were many inquiries throughout the summer of 1994, but they only translated into reservations and visits after the cease-fire was announced. 'There is a feeling people are making up for lost time. The people who come into the office say they have never been to Northern Ireland, or have not visited for over 25 years or more.' That curiosity is reflected in the type of holiday people have been taking, she said. So far, the most popular destinations have been Belfast and the Glens and the Giant's Causeway in Antrim.*

*Ms O'Reilly predicted that this autumn and winter visitors from the Republic would consider other holiday options, such as hill walking holidays and bird watching breaks. Industry sources in the North noted that most holiday-makers from the Republic booked short breaks at first, but this summer there had been a new trend with families taking their main holiday in Northern Ireland.*

## Comprehending

This report could be usefully employed in teaching students a number of skills specified in the syllabus, e.g. identifying gist, specifying details.

### Skills

### Method

Giving the gist of a passage: i.e. the general subject and viewpoint

- (i) Create context of N.I. situation., discuss briefly and then read text.
- (ii) Give task: write a headline or title for this passage.  
Students re-read text for this purpose
- (iii) Indicate the meaning of gist. Show that it can be ascertained by answering these two questions:
  - (a) what is the topic of this text?
  - (b) What is the writer saying about it?

Specify details

Give question: what reasons does the passage give for the increase in visitors? Ask students to mark phrases/sentences which they see as reasons. Indicate to students that they are looking for causes and therefore they can check their choice of phrases by putting 'because' in front of each and seeing whether it makes sense or not. The students could then list the causes given and write a summary paragraph

Analysing the genre

Show how the report can be analysed into sections and into different kinds of sentences and statements

Three sections in the passage:

Pars. 1-4. General statements supported by statistics and illustrations.

Pars. 5,6. Specific reasons and quotes

Pars. 7, 9. Classification, illustrations

Style

Impersonal and formal  
Tone: Neutral, objective



Register: Tourism/business, e.g. reservations, brochures, popular destinations, breaks, holiday options.

Critical literacy

Students could be asked to reflect on the reasons for this text being written at a particular time (after the first IRA ceasefire). What would be the likely effects of such a report? Would they see it as an entirely disinterested account? What evidence could they use to support their viewpoint?

This is a good example of effective, informative writing where facts are presented with the minimum of words. The evidence to support the general assertion is presented in a succinct and varied manner to hold the interest of the reader.

The report provides a model which students could imitate.

### Composing

Students could now be given the following assignment:

- Write a report on a relevant and significant topic of their own choice, e.g. TV programmes, pop-music, sports, discos, attitudes of students,
- The report should be short, 3-6 paragraphs in length, based on some actual research.
- Structure the report in the following manner:
  1. Summary title
  2. General assertion with some supporting evidence
  3. Give either reasons or causes for the opening statement
  4. Conclude with evaluative comment.
- Make a presentation of the report to the class.

*Evaluation:* In evaluating the assignment the four elements of the model could be used as assessment criteria. Likewise since such writing is usually for a public audience, close attention should be paid in assessment to accuracy in syntax, spelling and punctuation.

The four elements of the model also provide a diagnostic grid which will point to difficulties that the students might have in writing in this genre and which the teacher can focus on in future work in the area.

### Text B. Formal Public Statement

An extract from the Introduction to *Discovering Ireland's Woodlands* published by Coillte, 1992

*The existing forest estate is approximately 400,000 hectares. To maximise this resource, Coillte's long term aim is to ensure that an internationally competitive timber processing industry is developed in Ireland. Coillte will play a major role in this by developing itself into a broadly based forest products business.*

*While the primary objective of Coillte is to manage its forests on a commercial basis, it also provides public recreational facilities. This book provides details of Forest Parks, picnic sites and forest walks. All persons entering upon lands referred to in this book do so entirely at their own risk and Coillte Teoranta shall not be liable for any loss, damage, injury or fatal accident occasioned by the negligence, wrongful act or default of the company, its servants or agents or howsoever caused.*

*The full enjoyment of the woodland depends on the consideration shown by each person to others and to everything in the forest. Take care of the trees and plants; do not light fires in the forest areas and take special care with cigarettes and matches.*

*Coillte has adopted a policy of not providing litter bins in the forest and has asked people to co-operate by taking home their litter. The public have been very co-operative to date with this policy.*

*In order that you can enjoy your visit to the forest, motor cars and especially motor bikes are not permitted and should be left in the car park. The use of bicycles, especially mountain bikes is not permitted either.*

*While Coillte allows pony-trekking only in its forests under permit it does not allow pony-trekking in areas frequented by pedestrians.*

*Camping and caravanning are allowed only at designated sites in Currahchase and Lough Key Forest Parks.*

*Visitors are reminded that some forest areas detailed in this book may have to be closed at times during certain forest operations in the interest of public safety.*

*Forests are biological systems, they reach maturity and are harvested. The character of some sites in this book could be altered by clearfelling operations and may be permanently closed to the public.*

*We hope that this book will help you to enjoy your visit to the forest and encourage you to explore this great renewable natural resource.*

### **Commentary**

This text is of interest in that it shows language sharply focused to achieve specific purposes:

- to make a statement of policy
- to outline objectives
- to give instructions
- to issue warnings.

### **Comprehending**

The text could be used to teach a variety of comprehension skills e.g. identifying structure and format: summarising: finding significant details; awareness of register.

I

**Skill**

**Methodology**

Summarising

- (i) Create context. Present passage
- (ii) Divide passage into sections: give title to each section.
- (iii) Ask students for a summary of what is permitted and what is not permitted in the forests.  
Indicate that the following is the procedure you wish them to adopt:
  - (a) Identify appropriate section
  - (b) Mark and number the relevant paragraphs/sentences
  - (c) Select the relevant sentences and divide them under the two following headings: DO: DON'T
  - (d) Write two paragraphs summarising the findings.

Awareness of register

Present students with the following binary options in relation to the style and register of the text:  
 personal/impersonal  
 informal/formal  
 conversational/legalistic  
 statements/orders  
 simple/complex  
 specific/general  
 tone uniform/tone changes  
 active verbs/passive verbs

Ask them to select which ones they think describe the language of the passage. (This may have to be preceded by the teacher modelling the exercise in relation to some exemplary sentences, e.g. Please walk on the paths/Keep off the grass. We would appreciate if you would respect our property/Trespassers will be prosecuted.)

This can be described as a legalistic register composed of precisely defined instructions, commands and warnings.  
 Typical sentence/phrase structures: passive verbs, technical phrases, complex syntactical structures  
 Characteristic phrases:  
*All persons entering. . .*  
*. . . shall not be liable. . .*  
*take care. . .*  
*Do not...*  
*In order that . . .*  
*Are allowed. . .*

The tone of the passage varies between earnest exhortation, direct command and mild persuasion.

Critical literacy

- 1. Invite the students to formulate questions that they might put to the writer of this text.
- 2. Ask the students to speculate about the assumptions of value in this text. Suggest to them that it is an authoritative/directive text.

From what social/economic/cultural structures does the writer derive his /her authority? How is this evidenced in the language? Ask them to underline words and phrases that reveal these structures.

A worthwhile exercise on a text like this is to invite students to rewrite a section in a less legalistic style and discuss the change in impact that results

### **Composing**

Students could now be asked to write:

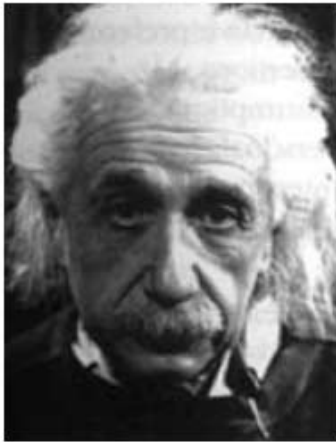
1. Instructions and warnings related to the use of any common object.
2. A series of formal instructions reflecting their understanding of school policy relative to some aspect of student behaviour.

*Evaluation:* The policy of evaluating in relation to certain specific criteria based on the model, as recommended in the previous exemplar, should also be followed in assessing this assignment.

Materials for further study of this type of text are readily available e.g.:

- rules for entry to competitions
- rules for playing games
- instructions for using different types of equipment
- official documents and public announcements
- media materials of all kinds, newspapers, radio and television.

## 2. THE LANGUAGE OF ARGUMENT



$$E=mc^2$$

**See Resource Materials Section B 2. for commentary and reflection  
on writing in the genres of argument from:  
Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, Former Taoiseach of Ireland.  
Prof. David Gwyn Morgan, Law Dept. U.C.C.**

*'The aim of argument . . . should not be victory, but progress'* (Stefan Joubert)

An argument for many is identified with a 'quarrel'. This means an unrelenting refusal to accept the opinion of the other and a total refusal to change an iota of one's own viewpoint. Generally students do not encounter in their normal lives adequate models of argument, therefore, it is not surprising they find the skills of argument difficult to learn. Also, the skills required are abstract and need focus and discipline to manage them; selecting evidence, structuring thought and achieving coherence are higher-order thinking skills, involving discrimination, evaluation and synthesis. Furthermore, students find it difficult to use vital link words and phrases, e.g., because, therefore, on the other hand, which are essential for successful argumentation. Because it cannot be assumed that students will naturally develop this capacity, teaching argument needs to be approached in a structured manner to introduce the students to the processes of logical thought.

The text below departs in its approach from the overall methodological strategy adopted in these guidelines. This approach was chosen to emphasise the need to introduce logical structures of thought to students, otherwise they cannot be expected to comprehend or compose within these genres with any great degree of success.

### **The basics of argument**

There are two kinds of argument which should be introduced to students, deductive and inductive. These should be distinguished from statements of opinion which can also take deductive and inductive forms. Perhaps it is best to see argument and opinion existing on a continuum as indicated overleaf as it is sometimes not easy to ascertain when and where they evolve into each other.

**Argument**                      ←—————→                      **Opinion**

Objective	Subjective preferences
Facts	Assertions
Demonstrable evidence	Assumptions
Impersonal	Personal
Interpretation	Interpretation

**Deductive argument**

Choose a straightforward topic e.g., the shape of the Earth

Present the following:

- (i) This is an example of a Deductive Argument.
  - 1. *All the planets in the solar system are spheres.*
  - 2. *The earth is a planet in the solar system.*
  - 3. *Therefore the earth is a sphere.*
  
- (ii) A deductive Argument has a specific logical structure.
  - 1. States a general principle. e.g. *All the . . .*
  - 2. Makes a specific statement *The earth . . .*
  - 3. Deduces a conclusion from 1. and 2. *Therefore . . .*
  
- (iii) The examples in the following illustrate this pattern of thought.

**Activity:** Identify which of these are opinions and explain your choice

(a)	(b)
<i>All islands are surrounded by water.</i>	<i>All teachers are stressed</i>
<i>Valentia is surrounded by water.</i>	<i>Mary is a teacher.</i>
<i>Therefore it is an island.</i>	<i>Therefore she is stressed.</i>

©

*People who watch much television have a short concentration span.*  
*Sean watches television for eight hours a day.*  
*Therefore Sean has a short concentration span.*

- (iv) These are logical structures. They illustrate a correct reasoning structure which does not necessarily mean that what they say is actually right. One can have the correct structure and yet be in error. e.g.

*All tigers are cats  
Our pet is a cat  
Therefore our pet is a tiger.*

Although the structure of this is correct this argument is false because the conclusion does not necessarily follow. (The category ‘cat’ is larger than that of ‘tiger’; it includes other kinds of cats. The argument assumes they are identical.)

**Activities:**

A. Students could be asked to compose in this model – some true and others false. A selection of these could be analysed under the following headings:

- Is this an argument or an opinion?
- Is it logically correct?
- Is it true?

e.g. What is wrong with the following?

*Some nurses are women  
Mary is a nurse  
Therefore Mary is some woman!*

B. Insert the missing sentence/ logical step in the following:

- (i) All transition year students in this school study films,  
Deirdre is a transition year student,  
.....
- (ii) All Tipperary hurleys are made from ash-wood.  
.....  
This hurley is made from ash-wood.
- (iii) .....  
John is a prisoner.  
He is impatient for his freedom

**Inductive Argument**

**Exemplar:** *Proving the Earth is round*

*There are many reasons for asserting the earth is round. Photographs of the earth from space show it to be a sphere. If one travelled across the earth always moving in a straight line and in the same direction one would return to the exact place from which one began. Finally in looking in any direction one’s view is limited by horizon which suggests the earth is curving away equally on all sides. From these three facts one can conclude that the earth is round.*

As the above illustrates, an inductive argument is based on specific items of evidence and instances from which a conclusion is drawn. It is based on an analysis of the evidence, which reveals a

definite pattern which can then be synthesised as a conclusion or stated as a principle. (It is the kind of reasoning most commonly used by scientists and lawyers.)

An inductive Argument usually has the following structure:

1. Statement of thesis/proposition/question
2. Evidence presented . . . exemplars, items
3. Conclusion.

**An example of inductive argument:**

*If one observes in winter that a number of oak trees lose their leaves then it is reasonable to conclude that all oak trees lose their leaves in winter.*

But inductive reasoning can be false as well. One piece of contrary evidence can undermine the conclusion and show the pattern to be inaccurate. Ask the students to suggest some evidence which might challenge the conclusions made in the inductive arguments above.

To be effective, both Deductive and Inductive Arguments must be based on proven facts and demonstrable evidence.

**Opinion**

Opinion is the expression of a viewpoint based on assumptions, subjective reasons and interpretations.

But opinion can be either well informed and coherent or it can be ignorant and incoherent. Coherent opinion will take one of the argumentative forms outlined above, e.g.:

***Opinion in a deductive form:***

- Question: Who is the best player of recent years on the Irish soccer team?
- Principle: *The best player in a team is the one who scores the most goals*
- Specific instance: *John Aldridge has scored the most goals*
- Conclusion: *Therefore John Aldridge is the best player on the Irish team.*

***Opinion in an inductive form:***

- Thesis: *County Clare is the most attractive county for tourists*
- Reasons: (Because) - *It has unique and beautiful scenery, e.g. The Burren*  
 - *It has a great tradition of Irish music*  
 - *Its people are friendly and hospitable*
- Conclusion: (Therefore) *Clare is the most attractive county for tourists.*



***Incoherent Opinion***

Incoherent opinion is a series of assertions of viewpoint lacking logical structure, relevant details and appropriate information, e.g.

*I think Roy Keane is the best player. He comes from Cork and he plays for Man. United. He earns a lot of money and is nice to his family.*

**Composing**

Students can be given assignments to compose simple inductive arguments and deductive arguments about a range of topics. e.g.

*What is the most entertaining programme on television?*

*Irish men are unsophisticated.*

*Irish women are exploited.*

It is important for the teacher to model the procedures initially. Choose the first topic, i.e.

Procedure for deductive reasoning:

1. Find the principle: *The most entertaining programme on T.V. is the programme with the biggest audience*
2. State the specific: *The Late Late Show has the biggest audience*
3. Conclude: *Therefore The Late Late Show is the most entertaining . . .*

Procedure for Inductive reasoning:

1. Advance thesis; *Glenroe is the most entertaining show.*
2. Find evidence: *Many people watch it every week  
It has interesting characters  
There is always a good story to it  
It raises important social issues  
It can be most amusing*
3. State the conclusion: *Glenroe is the most . . . . .*

A fundamental exercise in considering all argument is to distinguish fact from assertion, and evidence from opinion. The above exemplars could be usefully analysed for this purpose.

**Exemplar:** Evaluating an argument

**Text A.:** *Why demonise adoption?*

Ms. Aileen Clifford, *The Irish Times*, October 1995

*In the past 20 years the subject of unmarried mothers has been scrutinised by the media -with consequent changed attitudes. Before that it was treated as a sad sociological fact; a shameful, shadowy topic. With the founding of Cherish in 1972 the human face of single motherhood emerged. Later its founder, Maura Richards, wrote her book Two to Tango. Others subsequently began to tell their tales. Stories emerged of how women had given up, aborted, kept hidden and had fostered their babies, all culminating in The Snapper, where the subject is treated, albeit warmly, as hilarious comedy.*

*It's a long way from Two to Tango to The Snapper involving huge attitudinal changes; from shame, guilt and hardship to family support, State back-up and an acceptable way of life. The stigma now firmly sits on the single girl who has her baby adopted. It is she about whom people now whisper - 'she's given up her child?' . . . 'won't she regret it?'*

*Adoption has fallen out of favour for a number of reasons. For a start, it's had a bad press. We hear too little about the many adoptions that have been sensitively arranged, too little about the many happy adoptive parents and their well-adjusted children in stable homes.*

*Stories of the other kind abound; the baby snatched at birth by the forbidding nun, the infant's last glance at its birth mother. The airwaves are filled with them and I would not want to trivialise the pain suffered by the birth mothers, only to emphasise the impact all this has on the single girl considering having her baby adopted today. All she hears are adult adoptees talking of their obsession with their past, endlessly in pursuit of a resolution to the quest for their identity. Or tales of the birth mother haunted by the day she last saw her child; the searing pain, the sense of loss.*

*The result is that when the caring professions try to liaise with the pregnant teenager or single mother, she will often have little time for all the options they present. She is keeping her child and that's it.*

*How much bonding is involved in the physical act of giving birth? The perception is that there is nothing like the great surge of maternal love that fills one when one holds one's new-born baby but many mothers, including myself, believe this is a much hyped event. It is the rearing and nurturing of a child that creates that bond. Would it not be better to downplay the wrench felt on separation and the regrets of the single mother and stress instead the good future that in most cases lies ahead for a child with adopted parents?*

*And what of young girls who now keep their babies? While it may be a nine-day wonder to have a baby, it's not much fun for the Sharons of Barrytown in the years that follow, 'stuck in with a kid' on a Saturday night when everyone else is on the town. No fun but loads of resentment - and that's what many young single mothers feel when their baby passes the cuddly stage. It's not something they'll ring Gay or Pat or Marion about but their friends sense it; know how much they'd love to be back at school or at work; to be free; to be young again.*

*When does one hear stories of adopted children being the subject of neglect or sexual abuse? Rarely. Sadly one does hear of children sometimes suffering in the family unit formed by the unmarried mother.*

*While one hesitates to employ the cold economic terms of supply and demand where human life is concerned, there are, on the other hand many childless couples anxious to adopt whose hopes will never be realised. In 1979 a well-known adoption society in Munster arranged*

*adoptions for 83 babies. Last year there were only 12 and it has a long waiting list of couples.*

*Think of the enormous cost to the Exchequer - the single mother's allowance of approximately £74 a week, the medical cards, subsidised crèches, fuel, milk, clothing allowances. No male politician would dare question this. To do so would invite outrage from women's organisations throughout the land. No doubt even this viewpoint will be seen as reactionary by those who aspire to the so-called liberal agenda but isn't it time to abandon these labels and ask what is actually best for people?*

*Not for a moment am I arguing for a return to the veil of secrecy era that once shrouded adoption, leaving the painful trail we're hearing so much about now. Adoptive parents are now encouraged to answer their child's questions about where he or she came from. The birth mother too may now well have a say in the type of family she'd like for her child. Photographs may even be exchanged and contact with the adoption society maintained with a view to a possible meeting at a later stage. Highly skilled social workers now monitor the triangular relationship involving adoptive parents, birth parents and the child involved. No steps are taken without careful counselling and thoughtful consideration of the psychological implications involved.*

*With that in mind, it is time to put adoption back on the agenda.*

### Comprehending

This article is well structured as an inductive argument, makes a strong statement of values and presents a variety of forms of evidence. It combines a personal viewpoint with much objective evidence, a balance not easily managed. In style it is a mixture of the formal and informal.

### Skill

### Methodology

	Create context for discussion on adoption.
Outline the stages of the argument	<p>Introduce article. After initial reading(s) ask for gist and general response.</p> <p>Ask students to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Find general statement of author's view (her thesis).</li> <li>2. Select some paragraphs which present supporting evidence. Identify kind of evidence contained in these paragraphs, e.g. facts. anecdotes, examples, illustrations. Give each paragraph a title. (Are there opinions here as well?)</li> <li>3. Provide conclusion.</li> </ol>
Identify the reasoning structure	<p>Finally ask students to write a summary in the following form:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thesis statement</li> <li>2. Three sentences presenting individual points of evidence.</li> <li>3. Conclusion.</li> </ol>

Identify assumptions and values

Ask for a list under the headings **For** and **Against**, tabulating the author's viewpoint on media reporting.

### Composing

The students have seen the model of an inductive argument which they should now imitate. They could try an assignment where they oppose the viewpoint on adoption expressed in this article.

Alternatively another context of general interest could be chosen for the assignment but the model of inductive reasoning must be followed i.e.,

1. Statement of thesis/position/point-of-view
2. Presentation of evidence . . . facts, anecdotes, exemplars, reference.
3. Conclusion . . . restatement of thesis more emphatically.

*Evaluation:* The use of this structure should be mandatory and could be used to provide some criteria for the evaluation of the students' writing. Ideally students should be encouraged to apply these structures to their own writing of argument and evaluate their own work in this area of composition.

**Exemplar:** Distinguishing between argument and opinion

### Text B: Brooks: the cringe factor

*The Tribune Magazine*, 11th May, 1997

*If Garth Brooks was a colour he would be a slightly soiled shade of white, the result of a decade of unhealthy compromises with the music industry. He attracts so much corporate sponsorship that, as one observer said, he is no longer a musician but an advertising hoarding. Hardly a square inch of him is not a celebration of some major country music industry, such soul and decency as his music ever had washed away in a torrent of bank notes.*

*This wouldn't matter (well maybe just a little) if Brooks was any good, but he is to country music what Enid Blyton was to heavy metal. He has homogenised the best and most essential of human emotions, love, hate, anger, regret and joy, and uses them as a speculator use shares - as a means to an end, as beads on an abacus, but never as an excuse to say something important. Country music often loses the threads of its message in a haze of self-pity; with Brooks it disappears under a fog of self-importance.*

*Which is a great pity. There are battalions of great country singers throughout the world who deserve closer attention but who suffer from being tarred with the same brush of Brooks. Unfortunately, as the most universally popular of the new wave of country singers, Brooks is the public face of a movement, his sheer size blotting out the greater claims of people like Alan Jackson, Randy Travis and Lyle Lovett. It used to be that when you heard one country singer, you heard them all; its not that way any more, but you'd never know. Brooks' catch-all mediocrity is so ever-present that it clouds the genuine greatness that exists in the less successful but infinitely more entertaining layers below him.*

*Garth Brooks and Lyle Lovett are both country singers, but there the similarity ends. Lovett is something of a genius, a creator of beautiful melodies, a raconteur in the best traditions of the word. He is also funny, but you could search Brooks' music for years and you would never come close to humour.*

*There is 'Friends In Low Places', of course, a tiresome song (which we will almost certainly hear more of as the concerts draw nearer), funny to the sort of person who laughs at the final light, query on Questions And Answers but an abomination to the rest of us. It is the work of a man who towers about the world in his*

*blandness; the sooner his concerts are over and he has moved on to inflict himself on the rest of the world, the better.*

### **Comprehending**

Some Topics for discussion

- What are the key-words or phrases which carry the main message of the text?
- Draw a line from one key-word to the others and see the pattern that emerges.
- Identify the overall thesis here. Summarise it in one sentence.
- What evidence is cited to support this thesis? What kind of evidence is it, facts, anecdotes, examples?
- What conclusions is stated?
- Is it a coherent text . . . or can any incoherence be identified?
- What is the genre of this text? Is it an argument or an expression of opinion? How can this be established?
- Why was this text written? To provoke response/to express frustration/to express anger/to sell the newspaper.
- What values and assumptions are implied in this text?

### **Composing**

Write an article for a popular magazine supporting or opposing the viewpoint of the above text.

### 3. THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION



**See Resource Materials, Section B.3.  
for commentary on the genres of persuasion from,  
Ms. Nuala O Faolain, Journalist  
Mr. Martin Drury, Director of The Ark  
Mr. Martin Turner, Cartoon Artist**

*'Most people have ears, but few have judgement; tickle those ears, and, depend upon it, you will catch their judgements ,such as they are.'* (Lord Chesterfield)

Although argument and persuasion are similar they can be usefully distinguished from one another. While they both have the purpose of convincing someone, of changing someone's mind on an issue, they tend to use different approaches and techniques. This does not mean that they are mutually exclusive. In the main, argument will rely on rational, logical approaches while persuasion will use non-rational approaches such as suggestion, sensationalism and other manipulative techniques. The language of persuasion is powerfully present in the world of the media, politics and advertising. It is the characteristic language of those who seek to achieve or to retain power in some field.

Teaching approaches to this area will need to focus on the techniques which make texts effective as modes of persuasion.

#### **Approaches to teaching persuasion:**

The success of a persuasive text depends largely on the quality of understanding the writer/speaker has of the outlook and attitudes of the audience. A persuasive text must focus precisely on a selected target audience and this focus will determine the content and form of the text. Persuasive

texts are dramatic forms in which feelings, images and words are so shaped that they manipulate the emotions and imaginations of the audience in a way that brings about agreement and consent.

**Exemplars:** Comparing persuasive texts.

Read Text A and Text B. They have very different purposes but they both use similar techniques to persuade the reader to follow a particular course of action. Note down any similarities.

**Text A: Don't Burn Down The Home**

*During the 19th century there was great poverty in Ireland. Many thousands of families struggled to make a living from the land. They were hard pressed to pay the unjust rents demanded of them. The penalty for failure to pay was eviction. The soldiers arrived, drove young and old onto the road and, as the evicted family looked on, burned their dwelling to the ground. Winter cold and rain and hunger lay ahead. Famine and death were rampant.*

*One evicted man, as he watched with his family their cabin go up in flames, was heard to say: 'They may reduce our house to ashes; they cannot burn down our home'. Home was his family bonded by love and by faith in God, fire-proof against attack by an alien military power.*

*That was many years ago. Now warring invasions from abroad are no more. We have our freedom. Our government doesn't throw us onto the roadside and burn down our houses. They propose to do worse. They are on the rampage to destroy our homes, our marriages, the happiness of children, by letting the monster of divorce loose in our land. Despite our NO and the glaring evidence that divorce is a plague they are bent on the destruction of family life.*

*They presume to know better that God, better than the Church, better than the generations of Irish people for whom the family, the Church and the Word of God were sacred. The Pope told us: 'The Family is the true measure of the greatness of a nation'. The campaign to destroy the family by divorce is the measure of the corruption of the leadership of a country.*

**Say NO to divorce; say YES to God.**

**Text B: Shaw breathes a new life into Eliot classic . . .**

*Following a hugely successful, sell-out run on Broadway, Fiona Shaw and Deborah Warner return to Ireland to present their breathtaking staging of T.S. Eliot's epic poem of modern civilisation, *The Waste Land*. In this unique theatrical interpretation, Fiona Shaw takes her audience through Eliot's complex poetic landscape in one swift, electrifying and unforgettable burst. The poem makes use of a rich variety of voices and situations and Shaw gives each of them a vital and immediate presence on-stage. First performed in an old discotheque building, at the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels (1995), *The Waste Land* was seen in *The Magazine Fort*, Phoenix Park during the Dublin Theatre Festival, later that year. Since then Warner & Shaw have taken the production to Paris, Montreal and New York, where it has been greeted with standing ovations and rave reviews.*

*For anyone with any interest in great writing illuminated and clarified by superb acting and directing, *The Waste Land* is a must.*

1. Having read the two texts consider and discuss these questions . . .

- Who is the implied audience for each text?
- Who wrote the text and why?
- Is it a coherent and effective text?
- Would it persuade one to a course of action? Why? Why not?
- To what genre of persuasion does each text belong?

General itemisation of some persuasive techniques:

- **Tone:** the attitude of the writer to an audience; much variety possible: could vary from the intimate and ingratiating to the inspirational and hortatory. e.g. advertisements tend to use the ingratiating, politicians the inspirational.
- **Images and anecdotes:** used either as evidence or to impress and leave a lasting emotional trace. e.g., consider appeals for charity and aid for Third World countries.
- **Sensational details:** capture and retain attention, e.g., Headlines of newspapers, news reports, political speeches when attacking opponents.
- **Rhythm and repetition of language:** reinforces the viewpoint of the author . Frequently the author invents a memorable phrase. Famous examples of such phrases would be:  
*'I have a dream'*.  
*'We shall overcome'* (Martin Luther King)  
These are memorable because of their attractive rhythm and succinct form. In contemporary society, the television 'sound-byte' and the advertising jingle are exemplars of this technique in action in a more ephemeral way.
- **Humour and wit:** these create a sense of bonhomie and fellow-feeling between speaker/writer and audience. In this way they tend to win over the audience to the point-of-view being expressed. Humour and wit can take many forms, jokes, asides, anecdotes, quick caricatures, ironic comments, etc.

All these are directed towards the emotions and imagination. They aim at channelling feelings in a particular way . Because the audience feels good about what is being said they tend to be sympathetic towards the view point expressed. Logical argument may be a part of a persuasive text but it is generally a framework for the rest.

**Exemplar:** Analysing a persuasive text.



**Extract from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.**

Mark Antony's Forum speech to the Roman mob.

*Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;  
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.  
The evil that men do lives after them,  
The good is oft interred with their bones;  
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus  
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;  
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,  
And grievously hath Caesar answered it.  
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest, -  
For Brutus is an honourable man;  
So are they all, all honourable men, -  
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.  
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:  
But Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And Brutus is an honourable man.  
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,  
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:  
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?  
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept;  
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And, sure, he is an honourable man.  
You all did see that on the Lupercal  
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?  
Yes Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And, sure, he is an honourable man.  
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,  
But here I am to speak what I do know.  
You all did love him once, not without cause:  
What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?  
O Judgement! Thou art fled to brutish beasts,  
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;  
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,  
And I must pause till it come back to me . . .*

**Comprehending****Skill**

Awareness of audience

**Methodology**

Create context of the challenge facing Mark Antony, e.g. hostile mob, blood-thirsty, generally poor, downtrodden and irrational.

How does his speech show an awareness of these factors?  
How does he win their sympathy?

- (i) Insists that he is just like them.
- (ii) Bribes them with a memory of good times and the promise

- of money from Caesar's will.  
(iii) Language full of sensational detail.

Images and anecdotes	Ask students to identify an image (a picture created in their mind) of Caesar. What feelings was Mark Antony trying to create with the image they have chosen? Why these feelings? How many stories are present here which create feelings about Caesar? What kind of feelings are aroused?
Repetitions	Trace the use of the phrase 'honourable men' throughout the speech. What happens to its meaning and impact as the speech progresses?
Logical structure	In a previous speech Brutus proposed that Caesar was ambitious. Show how Mark Anthony by his detailed evidence, based on his interpretation of certain events, demonstrates the falsity of Brutus' proposal.

(Other extracts from Shakespeare which could be usefully analysed in this area would be: *The Merchant of Venice*: Act 3 Sc.i, lls.55-75 (Shylock's Speech 'I am a Jew . . .') *Macbeth*: Act 1 Sc.vii, lls.36-72. (Lady Macbeth's speech to Macbeth)

*Evaluation*: Like a successful argument an effective persuasive text must be coherent. While its logical structure need not be perfect it must clearly not be contradictory. More important for successful persuasion are the emotional and imaginative elements. These must have a unity of tone and an apparent inevitability which gives a convincing dramatic direction to the text. Furthermore the impression the speaker/writer makes on the audience is vital.

### Composing

Students choose their own topic, preferably some issue about which they hold strong views. Write a short article or speech about this topic. The intended audience must be clearly identified, e.g., teachers, parents, the class, the general public.

The composition should take the following outline form:

- Statement of purpose
- View point of writer
- Images or anecdotes to create feelings about the issue
- An Interpretation of these to support the viewpoint taken
- Conclusion

### Methodological Suggestion

It is useful for the teacher to give a specific model such as the following to reinforce the students understanding of the genre. Alternatively this could be done as a joint project in the class.

Topic Chosen: The exploitation of the Amazonian Indians by Multinational companies.

Audience:	Young people generally
Statement of Purpose:	To highlight what is happening to them and to recommend action
Viewpoint:	What is happening to them is unjust
Illustrative Images/Anecdotes	Loss of culture and knowledge. e.g. ancient cures for a range of diseases; unique languages and cultures lost; loss of knowledge about plants, trees, insects and animals. Attitudes of exploiters, e.g. destroy whole communities for profit . Young men and women turned into slaves or confined to reservations where they live short lives of misery and degradation.
Conclusion:	Boycott the outlets and products of multinational companies involved in such activity.

**FOCUS NOTE: “How do I know what I mean until I see what I say?”**

Sophisticated areas of composition like argument and persuasion are challenging for many students. Much encouragement for rough drafting to work out personal ideas and viewpoints should be given. Writing should be encouraged as a way of thinking about and exploring issues. The genre form should be introduced as a way of helping to put coherent and effective shape on their thinking and writing. The inevitable tensions here can be both frustrating and creative and teachers will need to be sensitive in their handling of this encounter, particularly in their evaluative commentary. Frequent attempts at the forms (or shortened versions of the forms) is the best way to cultivate growth; the resultant familiarity with the forms will enable students to reflect and analyse the strengths and inadequacies of their writing.

### 3. THE LANGUAGE OF NARRATION



See Resource Materials Section B.4.  
for commentary on writing narratives by  
**Ms. Eilis Ni Dhuibne**  
**Mr. John McGahern,**  
**Mr. John Quinn**  
**Fr. Jerome Kiely**

*'We live immersed in narrative . . .'* (Peter Brook)

Students will be familiar with many of the genres within this category. Anecdotes (gossip and 'sca') are integral to conversations, various narrative genres, e.g., romances, thrillers, soap-operas, are regularly encountered either read in books or on film and T.V. Almost certainly students will have been writing 'stories' as part of English since primary school. There is therefore a modicum of expertise which can be built on and developed.

#### **Approaches to teaching narrative**

Students know and expect that a story must have action and that this action must be shaped into a beginning, a middle and an end; in other words it must have a story-shape. However, while they may know this and it can be of enormous benefit in reading any narrative work, this does not imply that they can actually shape a story in a coherent manner. The following approach focuses on developing a sense of structure.

## Exemplar

Read the following text

### *The Muddy Road.*

*Two monks, Tanzan and Ekido, were on a journey back to their monastery. They came to a muddy road. A beautiful woman stood by the side of the road afraid to cross lest her long robe might get destroyed. Tanzan asked, 'May I help you to cross?' The woman gladly agreed. Tanzan took her in his arms and carried her across the road. The monks continued on their journey.*

*As they neared their monastery Ekido said to Tanzan, 'You know that it is against the rules of our order to even look at a woman. But you have taken a woman in your arms, felt her body against yours and smelled her perfume. It is my duty to report you to the abbot.' Tanzan replied, 'Ekido, my friend, I left the woman behind me at the side of the road, she is obviously still with you'.*

## Comprehending

Initially read, enjoy and discuss as imaginative literary experience.

Some suggested approaches:

- What image(s) does this story leave?
- What impression does each of the monks leave?
- Which one would be the easier companion?
- What tensions and questions are raised by this fable?
- Is Ekido on a moral journey as well as a physical one?
- What would be a contemporary context for such an event?

This would be a most interesting text for exploring and presenting in drama.

## Skill

## Methodology

Identifying structure

Ask students to divide story into three separate scenes.  
Discuss basis of selection.  
Indicate that the scenes are linked by the structural device of a journey.  
This gives the story its shape.

Elements of narrative

Outline the elements of narrative, e.g. action, character, setting.  
Apply these to the story. Decide which is of most significance.  
It will become clear that the story creates its meaning predominantly through action. The characters are types and the setting is of little significance.

Identifying the genre

Discuss the purpose of the story.  
Why was it written in this form - to give a moral message?  
Stories with this purpose are called fables or parables.  
They are a form of short story in which the whole impact of the story derives from one piece of action.

## Composing

Using the Model:

### Activity 1

Students might be given an assignment to write a narrative using some elements of the fable form. Thus they could write a narrative which takes its structure from a journey or perhaps write a story which has a clear moral message to it. (These stories could be either based on their own experience or imagined.)

These are not the only options available and teachers will have to decide themselves with each student group which aspect of the model text might be worth imitating. The students should not be expected to imitate all aspects of the model in the one written task.

The following attempts at fables are outcomes from the approach outlined above. These could be usefully discussed with students on their degree of effectiveness or otherwise as fables.

#### 1.

*Two young teachers, Deirdre and Maeve were drinking in a bar. A young student from their school was drinking there as well. Maeve went and reprimanded the student for drinking and insisted that he should leave. Deirdre sat quietly enjoying her drink.*

*Afterwards Maeve said, 'Why didn't you support me? I think our duty as teachers demanded that we should do something.'*

*Deirdre replied, 'Yes, I'm a teacher, but I am also more than a teacher. I leave my role behind me in school but you bring it everywhere with you.'*

#### 2.

*Two blacks, Thomas and James, met a white man on a narrow river-bridge which allowed only room for one person to pass. Although the white-man had already started across James rushed onto the bridge and forced him to go back. Thomas waited and invited the white man to cross; he did so and graciously thanked Thomas for his courtesy.*

*When Thomas arrived James angrily said, 'You have betrayed your race by submitting to that man. You know how they have treated us for centuries. Why didn't you exert your freedom by opposing him?'*

*Thomas replied, 'I celebrated my freedom by making a choice, you made no choice.'*

### Activity 2.

The idea of a journey as a basic structuring device is found in many narratives. Arising from this insight it would then be possible to choose a line of development related to either character or events or settings and ask the students to adapt the fable accordingly. So for example they could attempt any one or more of the following:

- Prolong the dialogue or action

- Add character(s)
- Change the narrative viewpoint
- Create setting.

Thus students should come to see that by introducing these changes the genre of the fable is being left behind and it is developing into the short story genre and therefore allowing for richer interpretative possibilities.

At this point a useful technique is for the teacher to suggest and demonstrate some exemplar lines of development. The following is a suggestion for developing the fable mainly along the lines of action and character.

*Ekido reports Tanzan to the abbot. The abbot who dislikes Tanzan banishes him from the monastery for a year. During that year three events occur to Tanzan which decide his future . .*

Students could be invited to choose the three events and work out their effect on Tanzan. Again the teacher could suggest some options:

*Tanzan could meet with some experiences that further undermine his trust in human beings.*

Or

*He could meet with experiences which renew his faith and give him real inspiration and confidence.*

Or

*He could meet the beautiful girl again and where would that lead him . . . ?*

*Finally Tanzan could return to the monastery and encounter Ekido and the abbot...How would the story end? . . . Ask for suggestions.*

The importance of this kind of exercise is that it shows all narratives are constructed shapes based on an author's explicit or implicit intention to either create particular impacts, or give a specific view of reality or explore possibilities of experience. Changing any aspect of a narrative, be it character, scene, structure, or ending can change the whole significance of a narrative. Reflect on how the following suggestions would affect these specific texts:

- Introduce girls into *Lord of the Flies*.
- Hamlet weds Ophelia . . .
- Gar makes peace with his Dad in *Philadelphia, Here I Come*.
- Consider the impact of similar changes in any text being studied and then consider the text as it is . . why did the author make the choices he/she did?

### **Developing descriptive skills**

In this area, students writing tends to be inadequate in its lack of concrete, selected and interpretative detail. This is particularly so in the case of setting and character. Not enough details are given for the reader to visualise character or place. So the action of the story takes place in a vague setting and with shadowy, unrealised characters. As a result the reader soon gets bored for there is little for the imagination to feed on. Apt descriptive details are an integral element of successful narration for they give substance and individuality to the world being created.

### Some approaches to developing descriptive skills.

Much of this work can be successfully done in the context of reading the literary texts which have been chosen for study. Aspects of those texts can be used to teach the relevant skills.

Describing, like all language functions, is dependent on context. Students could be asked initially to suggest the genre of the following descriptions.

**1.** *Gardai have appealed for information about a 16-year old girl missing from her home since February, 9th. Jane Marie Mullins is 5ft.4ins tall, of slim build and pale complexion, with red-brown shoulder length hair. She has three earrings on each ear, and a butterfly tattoo on her right forearm. When last seen she was wearing a black shirt and jeans.*

Genre: Missing Person notice in newspaper.

This description is factual. It describes physique, appearance and clothes. There is no attempt by the writer to create the kind of person Jane might be although readers may make their own inferences from some of the details given. Nevertheless, these inferences will be both subjective and generalised.

**2.** *Although he does not know it, Mr. Hilditch weighs nineteen and a half stone, a total that has been steady for more than a dozen years, rarely decreasing and increasing by as much as a pound. Christened Joseph Ambrose fifty-four years ago, Mr. Hilditch wears spectacles that have a pebbly look, keeps his pigeon coloured hair short, dresses always in a suit with a waistcoat, ties his striped tie into a tight little knot, polishes his shoes twice a day and is given to smiling pleasantly. Regularly, the fat that bulges about his features is rolled back and well kept teeth appear, while a twinkle livens the blurred pupils behind his spectacles. His voice is faintly high-pitched . . .*

(Extract from William Trevor's *Felicia's Journey* (1995), Chapter 2, p.6)

Genre: Portrait of fictional character.

This is a description which gives information but much more besides. The details given suggest something about the person, his habits, values and outlook. In addition the description stimulates an affective response in the imagination of the reader, perhaps a mixture of humour, disgust and curiosity.

In contrast with the other description there is a quality of 'experience' about this which brings it alive.

### Comprehending

#### Skill

Recognising significant detail

#### Methodology

Ask student to choose, factual, physical details from Mr Hilditch and present them in the model of 'a missing person report'. Consider these and their effect.

Ask students to choose some details they consider significant for creating feelings.



Discuss these and their impact.

Ask them to write a short summary of their impression of this man. They could also consider the author's attitude to him.

## Composing

Students could be given the following assignments:

1. Select a well known character in public life. Describe this character in a short paragraph which is both factual and interpretative. It must include at least three details which create a sense of the impression this character makes on them.
2. Take the characters in the fable, *The Muddy Road*, and describe each one appropriately.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

'Everyone has a unique story to tell'

### Introduction

Within the genre of narrative a simple (if not altogether sustainable) distinction can be made between fictional narratives e.g., fables, short stories and novels, and non-fictional narratives, e.g. autobiography, biography and travel writing. The latter group's narrative structures will be based on real experiences in space and time. In autobiography, the narrative will tend to follow the chronological sequence of events in a person's life; in travel-writing it is the journey from place to place which will give shape to the narrative. This does not imply that the respective authors of autobiography and travel stories are somehow imprisoned by time and place. They are still free to select and reject events, to create the kind of experiences they wish to present in their narratives. As with all narrative forms the meanings in the text are a product of the particular selection of events and details which the author chooses in his/her work.

Autobiography is one of the most rewarding ways in which students can learn to write narrative successfully and also perhaps make discoveries of personal significance while doing so. Because they are being asked to write out of their own experience, something that students frequently consider insignificant, sometimes they can discover while doing this writing that, in Eliot's phrase, 'they had the experience but missed the meaning'. But because it is directly based on personal experiences it also will need careful handling by the teacher for obvious reasons.

Various strategies can be employed to show students that they have much to write about which is of interest.

### Comprehending

Initially, some short exemplars of autobiographical writing should be examined to discover how these writers created their texts. In engaging students with these texts the kind of analysis needed would be based on questions such as:

1. What events, persons, places and objects are present?

2. What has been left out?
3. Why these events, etc., and not others?

The following texts might be then read with such questions in mind.

### Exemplars of Autobiographical Writing

*1. I have a very firm earliest memory. I, the first born, was three and a half and my mother was expecting another child. I was constantly asking God to send me a new brother or sister. The 'me' was important because I loved receiving parcels and presents that I could open. I was outraged when the baby arrived, because all the attention shifted from me to this small red-faced thing in a cot. It was a great disappointment to me. I had been praying for this moment; and now here was this 'thing', wailing and wailing, and everybody was saying how beautiful it was. 'Honestly', I said, 'I would have preferred a rabbit!'. And I would have preferred a rabbit at that time because although my school friends had brothers and sisters I had wanted a rabbit for ages. For the next three years I wanted to send by sister back. When I think of the great friendship I have with her now I cringe at the thought of wanting to exchange her for a rabbit when I was three and a half years old.*

*Generally ours was a warm and happy home. My mother was very protective of us – so much so that it was something of a family joke. There was one occasion I remember particularly. When I was at the convent school the nuns used to bring us down from the school for swims on Killiney beach and my mother kept wondering if the nuns would be sure to get Maeve properly dry after her swim, because it would be terrible if she put on damp clothes and caught rheumatic fever...I remember my father saying in a most exasperated tone, 'Maureen, why don't you take an electric fire down to the beach and warm the child when she comes out of the sea?'*

*At the age of five I went to St. Anne's, a lovely little nursery school in Clarinda Park in Dun Laoghaire. It was run by a Mrs. Russell, who was one of those wonderful old women with white hair and a straight back that you always saw as somebody's grandmother in old films. She was terribly correct and very kind. There were two other ladies - her nieces, I think - both called Miss Bath. One was fat and one was thin; with typical childish cruelty we called them 'Hot Bath' and 'Cold Bath'. We didn't have a school uniform, but my great excitement was wearing a big bow on my head. The bow was ironed for me every morning and I went off to school looking like a cockatoo! I enjoyed my three years in St. Anne's.*

*My next school was a convent school in Killiney, Co. Dublin, run by the Order of the Holy Child Jesus. These nuns had come to Ireland after the war. It was said that they had come at the invitation of the then Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, because he was terrified that too many middle-class Irish girls were going to convents in England, where they might do that dreadful thing: they might meet someone of a different faith and possibly threaten their own faith and be lost to us forever! I don't know whether all this was true or not, but that is what we always believed.*

*The nuns were terribly nice and very innocent. They were somewhat like that Somerville and Ross's Irish R.M. coming over here, because they really had no idea what they were about at all. One of them, whom I have met since, used to say that 'one was either sent to the Gold Coast or to Eire on one's missionary duty'. You got the feeling that the Gold Coast might have been a better bargain, because we used to tell them all a pack of lies. They didn't understand the Irish language or its pronunciation; nor did they understand the importance of Irish in the school curriculum. Consequently, the first year that the Leaving Certificate examination was taken in that school I think nearly every student failed Irish. Irish teachers were brought in before the next year in order to sort that problem out.*

*All my school reports said that I was bright but lazy: I didn't stir myself enough. I was lucky, in that my mind was quick. I could understand things quickly and then I would spend the rest of the time in a daydream. There were some things I was very poor at - mathematics I didn't understand at all, and I am still practically innumerate - but I was fortunate enough to be at the top of the class.*

*However, in those days being at the top of the class wasn't nearly as important as being good at games. To have big strong arms and be able to hit the hockey ball miles down the pitch - that was real status. I didn't enjoy games. We all wore green uniforms tied in the middle and we looked like potato sacks of various sizes. I remember standing on the hockey pitch, my legs blue with the cold, hoping that all the action would remain at the far end and that I would not be called on to do anything. I was a real thorn in the flesh for the unfortunate games mistress who had to deal with me: full of sulks, refusing to vault the horse or hit the ball in case I did myself an injury.*

*But I enjoyed netball. I was very tall, even at the age of fourteen, which led the games mistress to believe that I had great potential on the netball team as a shooter. She figured that I was so tall that even if I just stood there, dreaming of the future and thinking my own thoughts, when the ball came into my hands it would be as easy for me to put it into the net as it was to throw it away. I was a great success. I was in the 1st VII team for netball for two whole years, which was lovely because we went out to other convents on Wednesday afternoons to play netball, and we had tea and buns afterwards. We won all our games and a lot of the other schools protested, saying that I was too old and could not possibly be under fourteen. I was, to use the modern parlance, a lethal striker.*

*Apart from hockey, the other thing I hated – we all hated it – was being dragged to the beach by nuns. They would say, 'Come on girls, show some school spirit'. It was very easy for them to say that when they had about nine thousand black petticoats on them and they didn't have to get into the icy sea and show some school spirit.*

MAEVE BINCHY.

## 2.

*The landscape that I grew up in was both ordinary and quite extraordinary. It had two very striking features. On one side was a vast expanse of water, 25 miles long by 10 miles wide: Lough Neagh. And when you turned your back on this great silvery plain there was another plain: an aerodrome which had been blitzed into an intimate landscape of trees and bushes. (Co. Tyrone is often referred to as 'Tyrone among the bushes'; and never more so than in Ardboe, my native place.) We lived in the little peninsula between the two places, with one tiny road leading out to the nearest small village and then on to the bigger town of Cookstown. The farms were very small and it was a poor district, but very beautiful. Very few families lived in this rural area and while the rest of the century moved on, we stayed in this very flat, hidden place, a place bypassed by almost everything else.*

*Lough Neagh played such an enormous role in our childhood that we never analysed it. It was like our parents, being there all the time. It dominated the whole landscape. Wherever you went you could hear the sough and hiss of the lough - without hearing it, as it were. If it stopped then the world would have come to an end. You only really heard it when you had been away for a while and had come back to realise how loud it was.*

*It was a magical place. The great cross of Ardboe stood on the only piece of high ground, surrounded by a graveyard. That was our playground, where we lay on the tombstones and climbed the walls of the old ruined abbey, keeping an eye out for King, the water bailiff. At that time the fishing rights were owned by a London firm, so all the local fisherman were classified as poachers. If the water bailiff was spotted, a bonfire was lit on the lough shore and the boats turned for home. It was exciting and hair-raising to watch King in his huge motor-boat come racing towards the small boats. If he caught them it was disaster because*

*he confiscated their lines and fined them heavily. For people who were struggling to make a living it was a nightmarish existence.*

*Eels were the chief crop of the lough. Every day during the season eels were caught and kept in tanks which were just slightly submerged below the water. We would, fascinated, looking down at those extraordinary pewter lengths combing in and out of themselves. We learned to skin eels when we were quite young, also to gut them and clean them. - something which invariably brought a shudder from people who didn't come from the lough shore. There is a prejudice against eels but in fact they are a great delicacy.*

*We learned to swim in the lough. The water was always cold and being fresh water it was not at all buoyant so you had to work quite hard to swim. We were in and out of the boats all the time but we didn't get out on the lough in boats often, because we would be in the way of working men and also because of a superstition that the lough claimed one victim every year. I suppose the fishermen didn't want to be tempting the lough with nice fresh young bait like us, but the days when you did get out on the lough were astonishing. As you went further out and watched the landscape recede from view, the lough became the world.*

*It was a unique way to grow up, living between those two great flat spaces of aerodrome and lough. Caught between them we were moulded and shaped into something, I think, which was entirely different than if had grown up in any other part of Europe . . .*

*. . . My sister Marie says that what she unequivocally loved about childhood was its physical and sensual quality. The beauty of our childhood was undeniable. It was so tranquil and a good deal of time it was golden. There was the endless sound pattern and routine of a small farm: the slow mooing of the cows on their way to the pasture and on their return in the evening; the jangle and jingle of a horse's leathers and reins and the clip-clop of hooves on the roads; the great rumble of the hay-lifter. All of those noises that I grieve for are the sounds of the corncrake and the cuckoo and the droning noise of machinery at harvest-time. Flax has disappeared too. I remember the mysterious look that the countryside had when the flax was growing - that extraordinary blueness. I loved too that acrid smell of rotting flax. Those smells, those sounds, are part of a way of life that has totally vanished.*

POLLY DEVLIN

### **Analysing the genre**

In looking at these versions of autobiographical writing certain characteristics can be noted.

- The authors write out of their own most immediate worlds and experiences.
- The sequence of the narrative generally remains faithful to the chronology of their lives.
- They select events which have an emotional charge for them, which left some trace in their memory. The event is described and then a comment is made on it.
- Basically out of the bric-a-brac of their childhood they recollect events and describe them in such a way that recreates the particular quality of their childhood experiences

Each of these extracts creates the sense of an unique world experienced by a child. Both authors are attempting to communicate a series of meanings and interpretations of their experiences as children.

In inviting students to write directly out of their own experiences it is essential that initial reading of pieces like the above is thoroughly done. In that way will they come to see that in the ordinary happenings of life there are experiences to be explored and meanings to be discovered which are worth writing about and which others would be interested in reading.

## Composing

Suggestions for helping students to get started on autobiographical writing

1. Ask the students to write down three objects or things that they remember from their childhood. It would be useful here if the teacher gave some examples from his or her own childhood just to demonstrate the ordinary, arbitrary and personal nature of the objects/things expected. Exemplary lists might be as follows:

- A picture of the Sacred Heart, a kitchen cupboard and a tricycle.
- A leaking tap, a mixing bowl, the corner of an old kitchen range.
- A button on a pyjamas top, a sad-faced doll, a tree stump.

If asked to do this exercise, the writers of the extracts above, might have written :

Maeve Binchy . . . *Hair-bow, hockey ball, medal.*

Polly Devlin. . . . *Eels, lake water, window.*

2. Ask the students to choose one of these objects and write a descriptive paragraph about it. Students could be encouraged to use as many senses as they can in describing their chosen object but this directive must be used selectively since it might produce artificiality in the writing.
3. Invite students to further develop their paragraph by either making a comment about the object they have described or by recording the feelings the object elicited in the past or elicits in them now.
4. Subsequently students could be asked to write on the next object in their initial list.
5. Finally students could be asked to link the two descriptive paragraphs together by an intervening, explanatory paragraph which perhaps sets the two of them in a broader context.
6. A similar methodology can be usefully employed in the context of autobiography by changing the focus from objects and substituting any of the following, persons, places, events.

## Exemplars of students' autobiographical writing

(i)

*I hated our school church at Mass-time. It was bright and gaudy. Everyone looked out of place. All the lights carefully positioned for effect would have done an art gallery proud. Behind and above the congregation was the organ gallery, full and blaring with an open-mouthed school girls' choir.*

*At night, alone, I visited the church. It was cool and aloof. The statues hid behind pillars and candles and flicked their light. It was ominous and quiet. Everything loomed. God seemed present. This was no startling discovery just a normal awareness.*

*All the colours accentuated in festivity were now blended with the background. Every noise sank back into the silence.*

(ii)

*A loose plank on the second last step of the stairs, still faithfully announces the early riser. Creaking with a lush sound of a plank full of history, of stories, unimaginable to the people who live there.*

*The worn carpet on the floor of the master-bedroom; warm, a joy to stroll across with bare feet. At Christmas it is the first battleground for new soldiers, a warm garden for a sister's doll.*

*The leaking tap in the ground floor toilet, drip, drip, drip through countless visits. The rusty stains on the sink could tell of many things. The false grandeur of the drawing room, not much used :behind the dresser the damp takes the paper off, and yet that room is warm.*

*The flag-stones on the hall floor ,marred and chipped from the stilettos of the fashion game. To the children the hall is a hostile place of 'How do you dos'. And when they have gone, toy cars and trucks cause havoc speeding through to another room. At Christmas, the only time the front door is opened, an Arctic world, where last year's toys are left to die.*

*At five in the evening the red tiles on the kitchen floor are covered in the day's dust. At six it is swept. It returns during the next day, the same dust, at the same hour, it will be always there. That kitchen, that house, my place is so warm. It can never change. I know it must.*

## 5. THE AESTHETIC USE OF LANGUAGE



See Resource Materials, Section B.5. for commentary on the genres of aesthetic writing from:  
**Ms. Eavan Boland**  
**Mr. Brendan Kenneally**  
**Mr. Hugh Leonard**  
**Ms. Paula Meehan**  
**Mr. Thomas McCarthy**

*‘Pleasure is by no means an infallible critical guide, but it is the least fallible’*  
 (W. H. Auden)

This category of language stresses that language can be an artistic medium. Words, like colour and shape in art and sound in music, can be used to create artefacts whose primary purpose is to give aesthetic pleasure, enrich imaginative perception and feeling and reveal insights.

In the past the encounter with this area of English has largely been confined to developing a critical stance relative to the literary genres traditionally associated with the aesthetic use of language, i.e., poetry, plays and novels. The approach was predominantly academic, emphasising detailed reading, re-reading and analysis; the understanding and knowledge thus gained was expressed in the essay form. While this remains important other approaches are advocated here which will give greater scope to students’ potential in this area. These alternative approaches have already been proposed in the context of the Junior Certificate syllabus so teachers will be familiar with them to some extent. For example

- Texts could be approached as events to be performed, interpreted and transformed in a variety of ways. Active methodologies engage the students with the experience of the text as art in a way that traditional methodologies find more difficult to achieve.
- Students’ response to texts could be given greater scope by developing the use of Response Journals and other such modes of personal response
- The craft of writing in the genres associated with this domain of language could be given greater emphasis.

**FOCUS NOTE: “Take literature out of the museum and put it at play in the workshop”**

By advocating these approaches to literature these guidelines are stressing the necessity of seeing literature as one of the arts, i.e. that students should experience it as a creative, pleasurable and expressive mode of experience. The traditional academic, critical approach, if mishandled, can deprive literature of its potential to excite, surprise and reveal. Susan Sontag, the American critic. (in her essay, *Against Interpretation*) has stated that academic approaches tame literature. She goes on to say, ‘*Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretations make art manageable and comfortable*’.



Within the confines of time and examination pressures some may feel that such notions are not applicable. This is a matter of opinion. But it is important that teachers recognise that these approaches have the potential to reanimate this whole area and enrich the reading of literature for themselves and the students. A balanced approach between the creative and the critical is clearly the most desirable option.

**The following are some suggestions for methodological approaches to the teaching of literature which emphasise the expressive and the imaginative.**

### 1. Fiction

The traditional approach to fiction (reading the text line by line over a period of months) does little to keep the novel alive as an interesting imaginative experience, whatever its potential might be for achieving other objectives. In the context of the new syllabus a more selective and managed approach to the reading of the fiction texts will be both necessary and desirable. The following suggestions give an outline of such an alternative approach.



1. Teacher pre-reads texts and decides on the approximate amount of time/class periods that will be spent on the text. This will vary greatly depending on the text (its length and difficulty) and the ability of the students. However as a general guideline a text should be read as a whole over a period of a month or six weeks with as few breaks as possible. The teacher will have to decide also on the number of readings which will be done in class and the amount of private and silent reading that the students will do for homework and in class. Again, depending on the variables mentioned above the number of readings done in class during the first encounter with the novel might be about ten. These ten lively readings would focus on the most significant scenes and moments in the novel, e.g., moments of conflict, resolution, discovery, development, changes of character, setting of scene, thematic highlights and authorial comments. These readings should create a sense of a framework, a growing, meaningful context for a valuable communal sharing of the novel as well as hopefully stimulating interest for the private reading assignments which will take place between each class reading.

2. These private reading assignments should always be given with a specific purpose so that the students feel a sense of direction to their assignment, e.g. Write down the two most significant moments in your reading of this section: what character appeared here in a new light? How did you feel about the hero/heroine/anyone else's behaviour in this section? and so on.

3. It is here that the personal diary/journal of reading can be usefully employed. Students should be expected to note in their journal during each private reading their own responses as well as their comments on the purposes given for readings. In that way they will gradually build a record of their growing responses and understanding of the text and develop their own capacity for aesthetic reading...i.e. being able to read and maintain awareness of one's own responses. The nature of the comments in the personal journal are not meant to be academic and essayist in approach. ( They should never be the banal plot-summary). Such a stance is not excluded as a mode of response but initially it would be preferable if the comments were of a more informal personal nature. Typically early responses to a novel might be in the following form:

(i) *This opening section leaves me cold. The story is too slow moving and the long descriptions of the character of the woman really put me off. I expect it will be the usual romantic story . . . I wonder why reading this book is any more useful than looking at a video of it?*

or

(ii) *I felt sorry for the woman . . . she seems to be trapped in a difficult relationship . . . I hope she can get out of it . . . the situation reminded me of a film I saw recently . . .*

4. Having completed the first reading as described above different perspectives can then be taken on the text in subsequent lessons and partial re-readings engaged in to deepen the understanding of the students. These perspectives can be the usual ones of character, themes, conflicts and style or they can be more challenging ones such as attempting to answer such critical questions as:

- Why was this novel written?
- What was the author attempting to do or say?
- Why was it written in this manner?
- What is omitted from this novel ? i.e. Is there some aspect of the world of the novel you would like to have heard more about?

- Suggest alternative endings for the novel. Consider what the impact of these endings might be on the overall meaning of the novel. Now re-consider the actual ending and its possible significance.
- What does this say about the author's cultural, political and social stance?
- What questions could be put to the author?
- Is there any part of the novel that you would like to argue about?
- What are you finally left with having read this novel? What images, insights, ideas, questions have been foregrounded (emphasised) for you?
- How can you integrate the experience of reading this novel into your understanding of literature and life?

## 2. Poetry

### Performance and Interpretation

The American poet and novelist, Robert Penn Warren remarked some time ago, *All literature wants to be spoken . . . unless we recapture in classrooms the sounds of poetry then the teaching of literature is just on the slide.*

This implies that poetry as an experience of sound, rhythm and word textures should be repeatedly experienced . Poetry should always be orally presented by the teacher. An integral part of students coming to understand and appreciate the impact and artistry of a poem should be an oral 'performance' of the poem. This should not be seen as an optional and desirable extra after the poem has been 'understood' or explained but should be a normal part of the teaching/learning process of reading the poem in order to fully experience it. The act of articulating the poem will nurture insights and responses which a silent reading cannot elicit.

Various approaches possible;

- Teacher reads poem . . .
- Class is divided into groups (4-5). Each group prepares a reading of the poem if it is a short text or a reading of an extract(s) if it is a longer text.
- After the readings a discussion is held on the interpretations which were implicit in the readings of the various groups. Words emphasised, tone realised, mood created, etc., can be matters for reflection.
- After discussion on possible interpretations, groups re-form and revise their interpretation if needed and re-present their reading to the class.

This approach is neither an exercise in elocution nor an attempt to achieve an acceptable level of 'theatrical performance' . . . it is simply a methodological stance which attempts to ensure that poetry is given a stronger sensuous presence in the experience of students. It is a means of introducing students to the reality that reading poetry is of a totally different order from most of the other reading they will be doing in school.

### Approaches to Reading Unseen Verse

Some methodological suggestions.

The reading of unseen verse has been introduced into the Leaving Certificate Examination. Students therefore will need some specific guidelines in this area to equip them to cope with this new challenge.

They need to be aware that while verse uses grammatical and syntactical patterns to make meanings it also uses a range of other devices and techniques to give power and immediacy e.g. rhythm, tone, imagery, contrast, sounds and suggestion. All these are fundamental to the way in which any poem works. They create patterns in various ways which need to be recognised if the impact of the poem is to be fully realised. In other words in poems there is a series of meaning-bearing patterns in the language which change it from a communication medium to an aesthetic/artistic medium. Students must be shown that paying close attention to the words in all their dimensions is the best way of approaching verse.

Poetry works in a sensuous manner. It seeks not just to communicate ideas nor to give a message. It creates a series of powerful images/pictures/scenes in our imagination which interact in various ways and create sensations, feelings and experiences. Learning to read poetry means learning to interpret those scenes and experiences not at a literal level but at a level of ulterior meaning. Frequently students tend to be trapped at the literal level. If Seamus Heaney proposes to ‘dig with his pen’ the trouble is that students might take him literally! As Robert Frost asserted ‘the literal is the enemy of all of us’. Escaping from the prison of the literal can be achieved by adopting a methodology that has as its basic principle the practice of reading a poem many times; it is only by re-reading that the poem’s more subtle patterns of language and therefore of meaning and experience are disclosed and assimilated.

Ted Hughes defines verse as ‘language without banisters’. In verse words are so charged with meanings that they urge us to leave the ordinary meaning to the side and encounter new possibilities. In Paul Muldoon’s poem *Ireland*, the literal details bristle with suggestion.

### **Ireland**

*The Volkswagen parked in the gap  
But gently ticking over. You wonder  
if it’s lovers, or two men hurrying back  
Across two fields and a river.*

### **Commentary**

- This poem creates three/four separate images, the rural landscape, the waiting car, the lovers, the men. How are they related? How do they interact? What pattern do they make?
- Other questions which arise from the poem and which invite the imagination might be, Why is the car ‘ticking over’? Why are the men hurrying? There appears to be no definite answer possible to these questions. The poet can only wonder.
- Does the fact that the poem is entitled **Ireland** suggest an idea?

Perhaps the ambiguity and uncertainty in the poem relates to *Ireland* itself. One just could never be sure in Ireland at this time whether the waiting car was a love-nest or a getaway car.

Based on the above commentary, some useful approaches for students when encountering a poem might be as follows:

- A. Reflecting on images
  1. Summarise the main images/pictures the poem gives you.
  2. What do they suggest in terms of feelings and sensations?

3. Do the images make any pattern? e.g. Do they contrast or complement each other?
4. Does any meaning emerge from the pattern?

**B.** Asking questions

1. Write down some questions that arise from this poem.
2. Does the poet supply the answers in the poem? Re-read the poem with the questions in mind.
3. If not, speculate on why the poem raised the specific questions for you.

This poem by Wallace Stevens invites a different approach.

**Disillusionment of Ten o'clock**

*The houses are haunted  
By white night-gowns.  
None are green,  
Or purple with green rings,  
Or green with yellow rings,  
Or yellow with blue rings.  
None of them are strange,  
With socks of lace  
And beaded ceintures.  
People are not going  
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.  
Only here and there, an old sailor,  
Drunk and asleep in his boots,  
Catches tigers  
In red weather.*

**C.** Noting patterns in words/phrases

1. Note down some words, phrases which surprised/attracted you in the poem.
2. Re-read the poem looking for other words which might relate to your initial choices.
3. When you have some groups of words reflect on such questions as :
  - Do they make a pattern of any kind?
  - Does this pattern suggest or create any world of feelings or atmosphere?
  - What is the relationship between these different groups? Is there any conflict/contrast between them?

There are several interesting patterns in the poem: e.g.,

- patterns of colour words, *white, green, purple, yellow, red*
- patterns of negatives, e.g., *none, they are not*

- patterns of exotic and strange sounding words: e.g. *ceintures, baboons, periwinkles*
- contrasting figures: *ghostly, empty figures* v. *drunken sailor dreaming of adventure*

A further reading suggests that the ghostly figures have rejected colours, the exotic, the adventure of life: the sailor rejoices in the wonder and the energy of his dreams. Perhaps the poem is suggesting that without an energetic imaginative world a person is merely a 'ghost'.

It is generally true that at the heart of most poems tension(s) can be found. Applying this notion to the poems above it could be said that in *Ireland* the tension is generated between the image of 'the lovers' and that of 'the men hurrying'; in *Disillusionment* . . . the world of the white night-gowns contrasts sharply with the world of the dreaming sailor.

This idea of a central tension is a useful one for giving students some pathways into the reading of poetry. They could be encouraged to identify the tensions they find in a poem and show how these are created, interact and are resolved . . . if there is a resolution.

Such an approach would work well for this poem by Sean Dunne.

### Throwing the Beads

*A mother at Shannon, waving to her son  
Setting out from North Kerry, flung  
A rosary beads out to the tarmac  
Suddenly as a lifebelt hurled from a pier.  
Don't forget to say your prayers in Boston.  
She saw the bright crucifix among the skyscrapers,  
Shielding him from harm in streets out of serials,  
Comforting as a fat Irish cop in a gangster film  
Rattling his baton along a railing after dark.*

The tensions in this poem generate all the pathos, fears and hopes associated with exile.

The approaches and techniques suggested should not be seen 'as formulae for solving poems'. If used slavishly they will achieve little. They are best seen as reading strategies which if used selectively should help students to engage with poems. After that one can only hope . . .

### Approaches to the Writing of Verse

*'We need to ensure that literature is something that belongs to the students, not something that is distant and remote. One way of making it belong to them is to have them write it.'*

Kenneth Koch

*'If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it'*

Elmore Leonard

As in the previous categories of writing already considered, the same approach, the integration of reading and writing, can be utilised in encouraging students to write verse. An outline structure/ form is presented which they are invited to imitate in a general manner as best they can. As there is a large bibliography available in this area just one easily adaptable technique will be outlined here. It is largely based on the theory found in Kenneth Koch's book, *Rose, Where'd you get that Red?*

Koch suggests that it is useful to focus on the 'poetry idea' present within each poem. By 'poetry idea' he seems to mean that each poem has an experiential shape (a 'feeling shape') embodied in a language shape. Students should first become involved in the poem in the ways outlined above and they could then go on, helped by the teacher, to identify a feeling/language shape they might try to imitate.

For example take this well known poem by William Carlos Williams,

*This is just to say  
I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox*

*and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast*

*Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold.*

The feeling shape of this poem could be described as an apologetic stance laced with a dash of guilty pleasure. (Most students can relate well to this feeling shape!). The language shape is composed of three simple statements. The following are some verses that students produced imitating this poem.

*I ate  
slowly  
the last chocolate  
in the box*

*I know it  
was your  
favourite  
strawberry cup*

*I am sorry.  
I know now  
why  
you were saving it.*

*— — —  
I'm sorry  
I kissed your  
lovely girl friend*

*I'll try not  
to kiss  
her  
again*

There are many poems which can be utilised in this way. For example, Eavan Boland's poem *This Moment* has much to offer in the manner in which it captures a certain mood and atmosphere through a selection and arrangement of a series of charged sensuous images.

**This Moment**

*A neighbourhood.  
At dusk.*

*Things are getting ready  
to happen  
out of sight.*

*Stars and moths.  
And rinds slanting around fruit.*

*But not yet.*

*One tree is black.  
One window is yellow as butter.*

*A woman leans down to catch a child  
who has run into her arms  
this moment.*

*Stars rise.  
Moths flutter.  
Apples sweeten in the dark.*

A student's response was as follows:

**This Moment**

*A classroom.  
In a warm May day.*

*Three o'clock.  
Dust mites dance  
in the sunlight.*

*Pages rustle  
Shoes scrape.*

*Time to go....not yet*

*The bus for home  
slides past the window.*

### 3. Drama

The traditional methodology, the line by line reading of a play, has begun to decrease somewhat in the face of the opportunities presented by cassette and video resources. At least now the drama-script has a performance presence, a three dimensional quality, which is essential if its theatricality is to be appreciated. However, in these contexts the student is still playing the relatively passive role of a member of the audience – admittedly a role that it is essential to learn. Therefore, opportunities should be created whereby students can try to create interpretative presentations of parts (or all) of the drama text for themselves. Again this is a matter of process and stance, to foster ownership and insight in the students rather than to aim at a fully realised product. These objectives can be achieved in a variety of ways.

Avoid the practice of selecting students sitting in various corners of the classroom and read out (unprepared) lengthy pieces of text without too much understanding and effectively boring the rest of the class or inducing sleep. The methodology outlined earlier for performance in poetry can be used quite effectively if scenes for interpretation are preselected by the teacher. Once an initial grasp of the text has been established then a broad range of Drama-in-Education (DIE) techniques can be utilised to keep the participatory role of the students operative.

#### A selection of DIE techniques

##### Hot-seating

A student takes on the role of a character in the text and is questioned/interviewed by the class (also in some role) about various events in the text, e.g.,

- Horatio interviewed by curious courtiers:
- Banquo brought before a team of inquisitors;
- Iago brought before a court.

This kind of activity has to be well planned or it can deteriorate into triviality and guesswork. Students must have prepared worthwhile questions and the student in the character role must be reasonably familiar with the text although some guarded speculations are welcome.

##### Still/Freeze-frame

Students (in groups) are requested to choose a moment in a scene which they consider significant. The group is required to portray that moment as if in a video still. The remaining students attempt to identify the moment, its significance and the interpretation being presented.

This can be developed by using the technique of thought-tracking: the teacher goes to each member in the still and when he or she touches them the students must say what they are thinking as the characters in the scene. For example if a group were doing a still of a part of the opening scene of *King Lear*, e.g. the declaration of love and fealty by his daughters, then the student playing the role of Cordelia might say, . . . ‘I don’t believe them . . . what am I going to say?’ or Kent might say ‘Is my King losing his mind?’ or Regan might say ‘Now’s my chance to get it all from the silly old fool’.

##### Teacher-in-role/class-in-role

Context is created gradually and the teacher adopts a role arising from the text. In this role he/she attempts to persuade the students to also take on roles and play out some scenes arising from the text. e.g. Reminiscences of the villagers about Christy Mahon after he has departed: the gravediggers in *Hamlet* gossiping with their friends; Iago as an old man explaining his behaviour to fellow galley-slaves!



### **Semiotic perspectives**

This involves using signs and symbols to create meanings and interpretative perspectives. It is an area of rich potential for engaging the students' imagination in a three-dimensional manner. In the context of teaching drama and film it is of fundamental significance.

Students could be asked to focus on the sign systems that are used in drama, e.g. setting, costumes, props, sound, etc. They could be asked to undertake a variety of activities. e.g.

- What objects (props) would be appropriate in a scene?
- What item of clothing or object would they associate with a character?
- What image would they put on a poster for the play?
- What colours and shapes would they relate to each character?

Section Three

**NEW DEPARTURES**



‘Stories talk to one another, we must learn how to listen to them’

## 1. APPROACHES TO THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TEXTS

### Rationale

This approach was introduced to bring some variety to the manner in which texts are studied at Leaving Certificate level and to give students another perspective on literature's potential in their lives.

Although literary texts are aesthetic artefacts they can be gainfully approached from a range of other viewpoints, e.g., cultural, historical, social, which can enrich the understanding of literature's role and significance.

Studying texts comparatively from these perspectives invites students to interact with the different imaginative worlds encountered and to make discriminations and evaluations. Such study will reflexively focus back on the student's own world and raise her/his awareness of it.

### Modes of Comparison

For each Leaving Certificate Course three modes of comparison will be prescribed. This means that the texts chosen for comparative study must be studied under those particular modes (headings).

At **Higher Level** the Modes are:

- *A theme or issue*
- *A historical/literary period*
- *A literary genre*
- *The cultural context*
- *The general vision and outlook*

At **Ordinary Level** the Modes are:

- *Hero/heroine/villain*
- *Relationships*
- *Social setting*
- *Change and development*
- *Specific themes: love, race, prejudice, violence*
- *Aspects of Story: tension, climax, ending.*

While some of these modes are self-explanatory others need some elucidation:

## Higher Level

### *Theme/Issue*

Comparing texts on a prescribed theme(s). These would have to be themes which were pervasive and central to the texts chosen for study. e.g.

- Power: *King Lear, Antigone, Wild Swans, The Third Man* (F)
- Love: *Jane Eyre, Far From the Madding Crowd, City of the Mind, Room with a View* (F)
- War/violence: *How Many miles to Babylon, Fly Away, Peter, Henry V Dances With Wolves* (F)

### *Historical/Literary period*

Choose texts from different periods and compare them as products of their respective periods. This comparative mode focuses on the manner in which the dominant literary and philosophical ideas of a period are expressed in a text. Students should develop some understanding of how authors from different periods saw their art and their own role .e.g.

- *Jane Eyre is a product of the Romantic Movement. How is this evident in the text?*
- *In what way is Things Fall Apart a Modern text?*
- *What Victorian ideas about the novel are found in Great Expectations?*

### *A Literary Genre*

This mode focuses on the ways that texts tell their story. The following kinds of questions should be asked about the texts being studied:

- How is this story told? (Who tells it? Where and when is it told?)
- Why is the story told in this way?
- What effects do all these have?
- Is there just one plot or many plots? How do these relate?
- What are the major tensions in the texts? Are they resolved or not?
- Was this way of telling the story successful and enjoyable?
- How do the texts compare as stories?
- Is the story humorous or tragic, romantic or realistic?
- To what genre does it actually belong? Is it Romance, Thriller, Social Realism, Saga, Historical, Fantasy, Science-fiction, Satire?
- How do the experiences of encountering a novel, a play (performed), and viewing a film differ?

## Some options

Compare texts as tragedies.

- *Death of a Salesman, King Lear, The Remains of the Day, Antigone.*
- Compare novels:
- *Great Expectations, Huckleberry Finn and How Many Miles to Babylon?*

- Compare a novel, a play and an autobiography.e.g. *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me, An Evil Cradling* and *Things Fall Apart*.

### *The Cultural Context*

Compare texts focusing on social rituals, values, and attitudes. This is not to be seen as a sociological study of the texts. It means taking some perspectives which enable the students to understand the kind of values and structures with which people contend. It amounts to entering into the world of the text and getting some insight and feel for the cultural texture of the world created. This would imply considering such aspects as, the rituals of life and the routines of living the structures of society, familial, social, economic, religious and political: the respective roles of men and women in society, the position of children, the role and nature of work, the sources and structures of power and the significance of race and class.

### **Some Options:**

- *Cat's Eye, The Remains of the Day, December Bride, Cinema Paradiso (F).*
- *Huckleberry Finn, The Road to Memphis, Things Fall Apart, Othello.*
- *Hamlet, Philadelphia, Here I Come, My Oedipus Complex and Other Stories, My Left Foot.(F)*

### *General vision and viewpoint*

Compare texts from the standpoint of the view they offer on life. Is it optimistic or pessimistic? What aspects of life do they concentrate on and why. Evaluate the coherence of the viewpoints as presented in the texts. e.g.,

- *Huckleberry Finn, The Remains of the Day, Antigone*
- *Henry V, Fly Away Peter, Death and Nightingales.*

### **Ordinary Level**

#### *Hero/Heroine/Villain*

Compare the major protagonist(s) in chosen texts. This would include qualities, values, outlook of protagonist(s) and responses and evaluations of reader. e.g., *The Road to Memphis, Lies of Silence, The Silent People,*

#### *Relationships*

Compare central and significant relationships. Outline how each was significant and contrast the nature and quality of the relationships and their effects. e.g., *Philadelphia Here I Come, Fly Away Peter, Cinema Paradiso.*

#### *Social Setting*

Compare the social worlds of the texts. How do they compare in terms of attitudes and values in relation to such aspects of society as the respective roles of men and women, structures of power and matters of class

and race? e.g., *Cinema Paradiso/ My Left Foot* and *My Oedipus Complex and Other Stories, City of the Mind*.

*Change and Development*

Compare the changes (or lack of changes) that take place in either an important character or society or a relationship. What causes these changes and how do they contribute to the respective texts. e.g., *Fly Away Peter, How Many Miles to Babylon, Things Fall Apart*.

*Themes*

Compare the treatment of a similar theme which is of central significance in texts. e.g. Love: *The Homesick Garden, December Bride* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

*Aspects of Narrative*

Compare the techniques that texts use to create interest and pleasure for readers. e.g. *In Patagonia, Someone Who'll Watch over Me, The Third Man(F)*

**Exemplars of Comparative Study**

EXEMPLAR A Higher Level

TEXTS	COMP.1	COMP. 2	COMP. 3	COMP.4
	THEME	LITERARY GENRE	CULTURAL CONTEXT	HISTORICAL/LITERARY PERIOD
JANE EYRE	LOVE	NOVEL	SOCIAL CLASS: WOMEN'S ROLE	ROMANTICISM
FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD	LOVE	NOVEL	SOCIAL CLASS: WOMEN'S ROLE	LATE VICTORIAN
CITY OF THE MIND	LOVE	NOVEL	SOCIAL CLASS: WOMEN'S ROLE	CONTEMPORARY
A ROOM WITH A VIEW	LOVE	FILM	SOCIAL CLASS: WOMEN'S ROLE	LATE 20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Exemplar B - Higher Level

<b>TEXTS</b>	<b>COMP.1</b>	<b>COMP. 2</b>	<b>COMP. 3</b>	<b>COMP.4</b>
	<b>THEME</b>	<b>LITERARY GENRE</b>	<b>CULTURAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>HISTORICAL/LITERARY PERIOD</b>
KING LEAR	SOCIAL ROLE 'THE KING'	TRAGEDY	POWER STRUCTURES: MONARCHY	RENAISSANCE
REMAINS OF THE DAY	'THE BUTLER'	TRAGEDY	MASTER/SERVANT SERVICE AND DUTY	20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SECOND WORLD WAR: ENGLAND
DEATH OF A SALESMAN	'THE SALESMAN'	TRAGEDY	COMMERCIAL IMPERATIVES	MID 20 <sup>TH</sup> C. USA
THE THIRD MAN	'THE ROMANTIC WRITER'	TRAGEDY	THE RULE OF PERSONAL GREED	20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY POST-WAR EUROPE

Exemplar C - Ordinary Level

<b>TEXTS</b>	<b>COMP.1</b>	<b>COMP. 2</b>	<b>COMP. 3</b>
	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SOCIAL SETTING</b>	<b>HERO/HEROINE</b>
DEATH AND NIGHTINGALES	CONFLICT: COLONIAL	RURAL IRELAND	HEROINE
THE ROAD TO MEMPHIS	RACIAL	SOUTHERN U.S.A.	HEROINE
THINGS FALL APART	COLONIAL	AFRICA	FAMILY/TRIBE
DANCES WITH WOLVES	COLONIAL	WESTERN U.S.A.	HERO

Exemplar D Higher/Ordinary Level

<b>TEXTS</b>	<b>COMP.1</b>	<b>COMP. 2</b>	<b>COMP. 3</b>
	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SOCIAL/CULTURAL SETTING</b>	<b>GENRE/NARRATIVE</b>
HOW MANY MILES TO BABYLON	LOSS OF INNOCENCE	IRELAND	NOVEL
FLY AWAY PETER	LOSS OF INNOCENCE	AUSTRALIA	NOVEL
ANTIGONE	LOSS OF INNOCENCE	ANCIENT GREECE	NOVEL
THE THIRD MAN	LOSS OF INNOCENCE	VIENNA	NOVEL

## Methodological Approaches to Comparative Study

**FOCUS NOTE:** “Comparative studies should illuminate the unique world and the distinctive imaginative qualities of each text”.

Comparative studies of texts are not intended to reduce the aesthetic/imaginative encounter that lies at the centre of literature teaching. On the contrary they are intended to bring into relief the unique imaginative world that each text of quality and substance creates. By taking a variety of perspectives the human and moral texture of the world will be illuminated and students’ engagement with the specific experiences questions, dilemmas and tensions inevitably enriched and refined. In comparative approaches literary texts talk to one another and students can become involved in this conversation.

### *General considerations*

The objectives of comparative studies are:

- to encourage wider reading in different contexts
- to introduce different ways of looking at texts.

If these objectives are to be achieved, it is important that a different approach should be adopted in the classroom to emphasise the change in orientation.

The traditional approach to reading long texts, i.e. a linear reading, perhaps extending over months and accompanied by various forms of commentaries on all aspects of the text, is not appropriate. Texts for comparative study should be read relatively quickly and then returned to for more detailed selective readings, guided by the modes of comparison prescribed.

The modes of comparison should be seen as specific pathways through texts which will give a clear purpose to each re-reading.

### *Specific Approaches*

1. From recommended list choose group of texts mindful of class ability, interests and the prescribed modes of comparison which are to be studied.
2. From the texts (A, B and C) select one as the anchor text for the study, This text, Text A, will be the base from which to depart.
3. Read Text A reasonably quickly (two/three weeks). Generally it would be expected that students would do much of this reading, especially at these early stages, as assignments. These assignments could be quite directive to give the students a definite sense of purpose to their reading. Asking students to give summaries of the action in each chapter would not be an appropriate assignment. It would be preferable to request them to do one of the following:
  - In these chapters what events are significant for the main relationship?



- What conflicts emerged in these chapters?
- Which characters did you find of most interest. Whom did you like or dislike?
- What surprised you here?
- Did you find the world of the book attractive or not?

Clearly these questions can be given more focus in relation to specific texts.

The response journal could play a significant role here. It is not incumbent on the teacher to read every line of the text in class. In class discussion focus on the general impact of the text in relation to setting, action, tension/conflict and main characters.

4. Choose one comparative mode and do selective reading of text to highlight its significance.
5. Then read Text B. as above.
6. When Text B is finished choose another comparative mode and do selective reading of text to highlight its significance. This should be different from the mode examined relative to Text A. In that way the comparative modes can be used to give variety of approach and perspective to the texts and help to avoid predictability. Having studied A. and B. from different perspectives the texts can then be studied comparatively from the point of view of the two modes.

Approach Text C. in the same manner. i.e.

- Read for general impression and outline.
- Re-read selectively for relevant comparative mode.
- Compare with other texts on basis of chosen mode
- Compare with other texts in all modes.

The time taken to study the comparative section of the syllabus should be at a maximum about 40 class periods.

### **Outline exemplar of Comparative Study based on some texts on the present Leaving Certificate Course.**

(This is merely an exemplar to illustrate the kind of commentary and knowledge that would be expected in this context - this comparative option using these texts is not available for the course in 1999-2001)

**Texts selected:** *King Lear, Wuthering Heights, Lord of the Flies.*

**Comparative Modes:** *Theme, Literary genre, Cultural Context.*

## Theme/Issue

The Concept of Nature/Human Nature/Civilisation

### *King Lear*

Nature, wild, barbarous, instinctive . . . seen as destructive

v.

Nature, humanised and moral . . . seen as creative and nurturing.

### *Wuthering Heights*

Nature a source of freedom and power . . . elemental and amoral . . . essential for living at depth . . . ambiguous in impact

v.

Nature tamed into artificiality and urbanisation . . . inadequate and shallow.

### *Lord of the Flies*

Human nature is savage and power driven . . . aims at domination. . . civilisation is a sham

v.

Human nature as control and awareness . . . weak and vulnerable . . . easily a victim of the lust for power

## Literary Genre

### *King Lear*

- Shakespearean tragedy: story of a moral hero causing destruction
- Poetic language and imagery
- Two plots; parallel meanings
- Much death and treachery, violent action
- Sacrificial resolution . . . awe and sympathy.

### *Wuthering Heights*

- Romantic novel of passion, desire and celebration
- Unique narrative structure, variety of viewpoints, complex chronology
- Lyrical statement of the author's vision
- Takes a melodramatic subject and energises it with poetic resonance
- Almost Shakespearean in its energy and intensity.

*Lord of the Flies*

- Modern novel
- Powerful and direct narrative line
- Variety of viewpoints adopted
- A novel basically of social realism with satiric intent
- Could be seen as an allegorical story with a definite lesson to teach
- Perhaps less purely imaginative and exploratory than the other texts considered.

**Cultural Context**

*King Lear*

- Medieval/Renaissance court: absolute power of monarch
- Family context; sibling rivalry brought to its extreme: no mother, no heir . . .
- Political intrigue, treachery and betrayal; desire for power excludes most other values
- Aristocratic context . . . However, the ordinary people play a small but usually significant role usually positive.
- Few details of the texture of the world are given, e.g. food, clothes, rituals of the day.

*Wuthering Heights*

- Nineteenth-century rural setting; Yorkshire Moors and its weather.
- Patriarchal world. where men hold sway economically and socially; role of women . . .?
- Issue of class of much significance: Earnshaws V. Lintons
- Issue of race: Heathcliff's origins
- Rituals of life much in evidence, social Life, religious belief

*Lord of the Flies*

- Late twentieth century/post nuclear holocaust
- Tropical island setting/public school boys shipwrecked
- Isolation of group essential ingredient of meaning
- Class difference most significant
- Rituals of life and customs subverted by context
- No female, no adults of significance present. Why?

## 2. APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF FILM

*'A film is a petrified fountain of thought'*  
Jean Cocteau

### Introduction

The study of a film as a comparative element is an option in the new English syllabus. The introduction of film study is an organic development from the media domain of the Junior Certificate and teachers should not feel completely unequipped to deal with it. Many will be quite adept in the area of visual literacy from their work on media studies in the Junior Certificate Syllabus so they will be familiar with some of the basic concepts and terminology needed in this field. e.g., framing, editing, cutting, variety of shots, camera angles, viewpoint and so on.

This section aims to give teachers a number of concepts, a vocabulary and an outline approach to film study which will equip them to teach film in the manner envisaged by the syllabus.

### The parameters of film study in the English Syllabus

The study of film as an academic subject or as a creative art form is a vast, developing field of studies. Likewise this field is the scene of much debate about the nature of film and the most desirable approaches that should be adopted for studying it. Because of this the field of film studies within the syllabus must be focused and limited.

In general film studies can be divided into five broad areas, which although separate are not distinct and frequently overlap in discussion and analysis. These five areas are:

1. Film as an institution: commercial, production and cultural perspectives
2. Film theory: philosophical, sociological and cultural perspectives
3. Film history: the nature of its development in all its aspects
4. The aesthetics of film: as an art form, genre, structure, medium
5. The technology of film: technical and media perspectives.

Within the syllabus the emphasis will be on developing an understanding of the aesthetics of film although this will inevitably entail the other areas playing some role. Furthermore the films selected will be narrative films and for the moment must be studied in a comparative manner with literary texts. Finally because of the realities of the classroom the films will be viewed in the form of video-cassette. It is acknowledged that this is not ideal since films achieve much of their impact from the size of the screen, the quality of the sound experience and the general communal context of their viewing. Obviously where an opportunity presents itself the film should be viewed in its original form, but while this is desirable it is not to be seen as essential in the present context. (Perhaps in the future with schools having installed audio-visual rooms some of the difficulties might be counteracted.)

These tight parameters may be irritating for some but such an innovation has to take cognisance of the fact that many teachers have not been trained in approaching film and therefore need initially a secure structure to follow if they are to take up this opportunity in their teaching.

## **Film as aesthetic/narrative**

All narrative genres share the common factor of story form. Film can be grouped under this heading with the other fictional genres and also with biography and travel writing. So while all these genres share a common structural core they differ in that they present their narratives in different kinds of discourse.

Discourse can be defined as a conventional structured means of communication.

The discourse of written fiction is composed of a language which communicates through using some or all of these conventions: characters, setting, plot, descriptions, dialogue, tone, atmosphere, mood, imagery and symbols.

The discourse of drama and the theatre can select from all the discourse of fiction but in addition uses: stages, actors, sets, lighting, movement, sound, colour, costumes.

The discourse of film can use all of the elements of discourse in fiction and drama but adds something totally unique: the camera and the form of discourse that it makes possible.

This does not imply that film is the most comprehensive form of narrative discourse. Each of the narrative discourses has its own distinctive potential as a form and each can achieve effects, outcomes and modes of exploration unavailable to the others. It is to highlight the distinctive potential of each of these narrative forms that a comparative approach is being introduced.

## **Approaching Film**

Since film has so much in common with other narrative forms it is obviously a useful way to initially explore film by focusing on these elements. Likewise since teachers will be familiar with these they provide a secure structure and sound familiar base from which to start, particularly in the context of comparative studies. These common elements are:

- Genre
- Themes
- Story/Plot/Action
- Characters
- Setting
- Point of View

## **Topics, issues and questions for consideration within each of the above:**

### ***Genre***

Conventional forms of literary fiction, romance, realism, thriller, etc., are equally significant in film studies because they place the text within a tradition of story-telling, suggest an interpretative perspective and facilitate an understanding of how and why the film was made in a specific way. Again there is much disagreement among theorists about the validity of the concept of genre, since some films can be classified under a number of genres, as is apparent from the classification below.

Despite this, such a classification has a definite value in providing a worthwhile educational approach.

In general terms a film genre can be described as a type of film which is characterised by certain conventions of action, setting, characters. The traditional Western tended to have some of these characteristics:

Characters: Cowboys, outlaws, American Indians, Saloon girls, stranger in town, the 'loner'.

Settings: Spectacular mountain or prairie landscapes; small towns; saloons; vast cattle ranches; romantic groves of trees; fast flowing rivers.

Action: Violent physical events; horse chases and gun-fights; discreet love interest.

Obviously various film-makers' use of the genre, the way they change and adapt it to suit their narrative purposes and so create meanings and interpretations, is a rich area for study and exploration.

Some film genres:

The Western: *Shane; The Searchers; Dances with Wolves; Unforgiven*

Science-fiction: *Star Wars; Terminator 1; Alien; E.T.*

Comedy: *Mighty Aphrodite; When Harry met Sally; The Full Monty*

Film-noire: *The Third Man; The Big Sleep; Miller's Crossing*

Disaster: *Titanic; Twister; Dante's Peak*

Adventure: *Indiana Jones films; Speed; Die-hard; The Fugitive*

Detective/thriller: *L.A Confidential; Reservoir Dogs; Fargo; I Went Down.*

Horror: *Interview with a Vampire; Scream; Cape Fear; Silence of the Lambs*

Romance: *A Room with a View; Casablanca; Sleepless in Seattle*

Biographical/life story: *Citizen Kane; Paris, Texas; Cinema Paradiso; Shine; My Left Foot; The Shawshank Redemption; In the Name of the Father*

Social realism/critique: *Secrets and Lies; Karla's Song; The Butcher Boy; Thelma and Louise; Witness*

Historical: *Michael Collins; Piano; Braveheart*

War: *Born on the Fourth Of July; The Deerhunter; The Crying Game.*

### **Themes:**

The subject focus of the film; questions arising in this area would be:

- With what issues does the film deal?
- What does the film say about these issues? How can this be demonstrated?

- What values are in conflict? Is the conflict resolved? How is it resolved?
- How are these issues and values represented and portrayed in the film?

e.g. *Michael Collins*: celebrates the heroism and power of Collins and reveals the tragic pathos of civil war: *Butcher Boy* looks at persecution and its sad consequences: *The Full Monty* focuses on unemployment and personal initiative.

### **Story/plot/action:**

Within any narrative a valuable distinction can be made between story and plot.

- Story: the series of actions and events that occur in a narrative.
- Plot: the specific organisation of these events within a given narrative.

It is quite possible to use the same events of a story and organise them in a different way, e.g. in a biographical account the events will generally be the same but it is possible to give a different order to the events by not following chronological order.

Generally in the films prescribed for this course the narratives will for the most part be relatively conventional or classical in their plot following the basic pattern of beginning, middle and end.

Another aspect of narrative of great moment in film is the manner in which the story is told. Appropriate questions here might be:

- Who is telling the story?
- Are there one or more narrators?
- Is the narrator a character in the film or someone outside the film?
- How is the story told? What techniques are used: actual pieces of writing (the start of *Star Wars*), voice-over (the start of *The Third Man*), flashbacks (*The Pawnbroker*)?

This question raises the whole context of editing in film, the art which decides on the sequence of shots, images, and scenes which will constitute the final narrative shape of the film. This will be considered in more detail later. (cf.p.92)

### **Characters:**

In most novels characters are usually the focus of the action, so it is in film as well. But in the context of film there is a danger that the actor/actress playing a role becomes identified with the character portrayed, e.g. Leonardo DiCaprio is Romeo, Liam Neeson becomes Michael Collins. This is a context in which the powerful illusion of realism which film creates becomes evident, the constructed fiction becomes fact. The most useful way to assess character is through noting values, attitudes, outlook, relationships, changes and developments and observing how these are presented in terms of the film's discourses of image and sound.

***Setting:***

Setting involves the physical/social/cultural context and the manner in which it is created and portrayed. What is selected? What is omitted? What is emphasised? What is repeatedly shown? What changes in the course of the film? Is there a relationship between characters and setting? Finally consider the ‘why’ of all these questions. In *The Deerhunter* two settings are starkly contrasted, the ritualised world of a traditional wedding and the mayhem of the Vietnam war. Likewise in *Witness* the bustle of urban life captured in a traffic jam is placed in stark contrast to the rhythm of the Amish community with its horse-drawn buggy.

***Point of View:***

While this occurs in texts other than films e.g. narrative point of view in novels, it has a specific edge of significance within film since one is literally seeing the world created from the view point taken by the camera. While most frequently films adopt an objective point-of-view, in the sense that the world is not shown from the perspective of any one character within the film this is not always the case; sometimes the point of view of a specific character is taken in film and it is important to be aware when this occurs.

Relevant questions here might be:

- *What way is the point of view managed in the film? Does it change? How and why?*
- *How is it determining what is seen?*
- *Does the point of view limit and control your vision in any way?*
- *If the point of view is that of one of the characters what does it reveal about the character at that time? Is the character happy, angry, nervous, in love, sad?*

These then are the common elements shared by all narratives. Now the specific characteristics of film narratives must be considered in some detail.

**The Specific Discourse of Film**

The original meaning of the term ‘photography’ is ‘writing with light’. This is a useful concept to start with . . . the film-maker could be seen as an artist who writes/composes the film text with a camera. Some attempts have been made to equate film-making with using language, e.g., a shot as a word or a sentence, a sequence of shots as a paragraph, etc. These ideas, while useful, are somewhat too forced and theoretical to be of real value and it would be preferable to see the camera and the film as a distinctive, mode of creating meaning and telling a story.

In studying film, while it is valid to use the knowledge of literary narratives as a basic starting point with students for generating response and discussion it is vital that the distinctive art of the film is eventually emphasised.

Film is predominantly an audio-visual mode of discourse, telling its stories through images and sounds. Ingmar Bergman remarks, ‘the primary factor in film is the image, the secondary factor is the sound, the dialogue, and the tension between these two creates the third dimension’. While various forms of language are present, dialogue, monologue, narrative and commentary – they are generally of less importance. There are many famous moments in films, powerful narrative



sequences entirely without words. e.g. the brutal murder in the shower in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the shooting of Harry in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, and the erotic dance scene in the barn in Peter Weir's *Witness*.

**FOCUS NOTE:** “The camera never lies . . . well, if you believe that . . .”

Film is unique among the arts because it creates an illusion of reality which is easily taken to be reality itself. Students uninitiated into how films work can unreflectingly accept the images shown as being simple, innocent reflections of the real world. Nothing is further from the truth. Films construct their own reality. The camera may not lie but it certainly has its own specific way of seeing and presenting the world and therefore of creating particular patterns of meaning. To understand film narrative it must be realised how the camera is used to shape and manipulate time and space and so create a text which has to be read and interpreted like any other text. How does the film-maker create an illusion of reality? What are the elements of film discourse?

### **Some elements of the discourse of film**

These elements comprise the repertoire of materials/techniques which the film-maker has at his/her disposal . . . the vocabulary of the camera).

For the present purpose these will be categorised under four headings: *Mise-en-Scène*: literally what is in the space of the scene, in terms of place, objects and people.

*Composing and Image*: how the camera presents, constructs, interprets the scene to achieve particular effects and meanings. Issues pertaining to shot, speed, frame.

*Sound*: the use of a variety of sounds - verbal, musical, natural and artificial as integral elements of the film narrative

*Editing*: arranging in the most effective sequence the camera shots and images to produce a coherent narrative.

### **Mise-en-Scène:**

The theatrical elements of film: sets, props, lighting, colour, costumes, actors, movement. These are the elements of a cinematic scene that exist independently of the camera.

These scenes are deliberate constructs and contribute to every aspect of the film narrative, creating character, advancing the story, suggesting interpretations, etc. In viewing films with students teachers should indicate how this is so by selecting what they consider are significant scenes and analysing them fully in themselves and in the context of the whole film. The following are general guidelines which indicate the aspects on which students' attention might be focused:

*Sets and props*: (cf. Setting, above)

Useful questions in this context are:

- How does the real/natural or artificial context created relate to character, action, themes?
- Does the organisation of materials/objects suggest any significant meanings?

Consider the impact of the following:

- The size and structure of the Empire's space ships in *Star Wars*
- The locked doors in *As Good as it Gets*
- The empty mansions of Vienna in *The Third Man*
- The varied house interiors in *The Full Monty*
- The vast prairies and isolated towns in *Paris, Texas*.

*Does the Mise-en-scène have any symbolic or iconic dimensions?*

This is a more difficult question for later. Iconic perspectives enter a film when scenes are reminiscent of famous cultural images found in art, sculpture, other films, etc . . . For example, images ranging from Christ's Last Supper, Hitler's Nuremberg rallies, to a two-person shoot-out on the town's main street in a Western can all bring a sub-text which enriches many films through ironic parallel and contrast.

*Lighting:*

Brightness, shadows and darkness can carry an amount of meaning. What kind of lighting is present throughout the film and in various scenes? Whereas *The Third Man* is all subdued light, *A Room with a View* is on the whole full of brightness with some significant contrasting moments. What does this say about the world of the film and the meanings inherent in that text?

In general terms these would be points to note:

High-key lighting: . . . brightly lit . . . suggest a feeling of space, of openness, of freedom

Low-key lighting: . . . dim and shadowed . . . suggests eerie and ominous moods

Front-lit: . . . faces illuminated . . . suggests openness and innocence

Bottom-up/half lit: . . . suggests threat and deviousness.

Quite clearly all the resources of lighting while being powerful ways of narrating a story, raising an audience's interest and keeping its attention can also have strong symbolic resonances. They can be used to create a specific interpretation of an experience or of a character or portray a definite interpretation of the world. For example in *The Star Wars Trilogy*, the world of the Empire is seen in hard, metallic lighting or in shadowy terms; in contrast the world of Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker et al. is bright and open.

*Colour:*

Similar to lighting in its use; it helps to reveal character and relationships, create moods and atmosphere, emphasise tensions and rich symbolic perspectives.

Bright colours suggest a sense of openness and confidence; on the other hand they could also be employed to suggest the artificial and the superficial. Dark colours can suggest a sense of threat and foreboding, a sense of sadness and loss. As with all texts, the context will point to the pattern of meanings to which the colours are contributing . . . this is a vital factor to be kept firmly in mind

. . . Other variations to watch out for; muted colours, colour contrast and the use of colours to suggest the nature of the relationships between characters.

In *Star Wars*, dark, muted colours, sharp shapes, uniformity and hard textures are associated with the evil Empire of Darth Vader, while bright colours, variety of shapes and size, and soft textures characterise the world of the hero Luke and his merry band of companions. Although the film *Casablanca* is in black and white there is a famous scene in which the pattern of Ilse's (Ingrid Bergman's) dress is identical with the pattern of Rick's (Humphrey Bogart's) tie and the two characters are standing beneath an awning of a similar pattern. This use of pattern and colour suggests that their love is still alive even though they won't admit it to each other.

**FOCUS NOTE:**

“Red needn't mean danger . . .”

Colours and lighting in all their variety mean nothing in themselves . . . it is only when they are seen in a specific context that they take on patterns of meaning which point to interpretative possibilities. Like all discourses or codes it is largely specific usage and cultural perspective that determines relevant and appropriate meaning.

The same kind of close analysis can be applied to the other aspects of mise-en-scène mentioned above as is deemed appropriate and necessary for understanding how the film is working. Finally mise-en-scène is, as has been said, about ‘the theatrics of space’ and how that space has been organised for the camera. The placing of characters in a set, their costumes, positions, movements and gestures, as well as how light plays about them may tell us more than any dialogue.

**Composing an Image**

In coming to show students how films work this is of fundamental importance. The camera presents an image and composes a view of the mise-en-scène. This is the key difference between film and drama. The following are a selection of terms that will be useful in approaching this area.

*Shot:*

This is the single image that appears on the screen before the film moves/cuts to another image. Unlike a photograph, a shot can include movement of many kinds, e.g. the characters can move or the camera itself can move changing the viewers perspective by perhaps moving closer or further away. Such a change can be most dramatic, e.g. a person walking towards the camera may generate a sense of expectation or fear. Different kinds of shot (of which there are many) can be used to create a whole range of different effects. Familiarity with the major terms like, *close-up*, *middle*, *long* (*establishing*), *sweep*, and some appreciation of the effects they can achieve is necessary.

Shots can focus on certain aspects of a scene to give emphasis, generate narrative energy, create atmosphere and mood. Consider the following examples, the timer on a bomb, the strands of a breaking rope, the eyes of lovers, rain drops on a windscreen.

Another aspect of shot which is clearly of significance is the *speed* of the shot. Is it at normal, fast, slow or any variations of these? Many film-makers tend to slow down significant dramatic moments, e.g. of disaster, of death, of dream, of love, of victory in order to achieve emphasis.

Likewise, fast film speed is the constant source of comic effects. What other effects could it achieve?

*Frame:*

This refers to the manner in which the screen frames/shapes/organises the camera's field of vision; how within the frame of the screen the camera presents its view of the mise-en-scène. Whereas a wide frame is more suitable for westerns and epics a tighter frame is better for love-stories and various kinds of melodrama, e.g. thrillers and horror. The kind of questions that are useful for exploring this area are as follows:

- At what angle does the frame show the scene? High (viewing from above); Low (viewing from below); Normal (viewing at eye-height); Canted (viewing from an unusual angle)
- What kind of distance does the frame keep from its subject? Does the subject fill the whole screen? How is the frame arranged around the subject?
- Is the frame organised to achieve certain effects. What is given emphasis? What is in the foreground, in the background.? In what kind of perspective are the elements in the scene presented?.

*Sound:*

The domain of sound within a film can be categorised under three headings:

- Human voices: monologues, dialogues, voice-overs, overheard conversations, etc.
- Noises of all kinds: natural sounds of nature, sounds of people or machines
- Music: dramatic possibilities for creating mood and tension.

As emphasised earlier, film is a combination of image and sound. While viewing a film we may or may not be conscious of the musical accompaniment of many scenes . . . but nevertheless it is working powerfully within our experience by setting a mood, building up anticipation, generating excitement and creating emotional contexts. Most people will be aware of the musical clichés that signal, the villain waiting to pounce, the rescue craft arriving, the monster arising from the depths or the entrance of the powerful ruler. But music can be used much more subtly than this. Music contributes significantly to the rhythm of a film, to the sense of movement within the film and also to its narrative pace and shape. In *Dances with Wolves* the visual excitement of the buffalo hunt is given added intensity by the pounding musical score which accompanies it. Consider such possibilities as – music facilitating transitions from one scene to another; musical motifs related to different characters and locations; the significance of the theme-music and its presence or absence in scenes.

Likewise with other sounds: think of the possible dramatic impact of a sudden scream, the wild sounds of a storm, the gentle lapping of waves on a beach, the cry of a sea-bird. As with the music, sound motifs can be associated with certain characters and places and add to the dramatic effects of a scene. In *Star Wars* the laboured breathing of Darth Vader comes over as a threat; in Hitchcock's *The Birds*, any sound associated with a bird becomes an occasion of terror; finally the absence of sound, the sound of silence, can also be used to achieve powerful effects.

*Editing:*

The editor's role is to take all the film that has been shot and by judicious selection construct sequences that build into scenes/episodes and finally link all the episodes into a sustained narrative. Deciding on what shots to include and in what sequence to put them in to create the most powerful impact in terms of feeling and story line is a vital part of creating a successful film. This linking of scenes by an editor is frequently described by the term, *montage*. This is a way of showing, rather than telling an audience what is happening. Through skilful editing a *montage* can manipulate an audience into seeing the world from a particular viewpoint. For example, consider this sequence of shots/images in Weir's *Witness*.

- A horse-drawn buggy being driven by two bearded, darkly dressed Amish farmers
- Close-up of the farmers' faces
- Camera pulls back and the buggy is shown holding up a line of cars
- Long shot of buggy being crowded by an articulated truck
- Final shot shows buggy waiting at traffic light while traffic swirls about it.

This montage clearly underlines the major theme of the film, the contrast between the values of traditional Amish culture and those of contemporary civilisation.

Many who go to films are quite unaware of editing; the film seems to move in a seamless series of images and the continuity is not disrupted in any obvious way. This continuity editing, symptomatic of many classical films, involves most sophisticated skills which are essential to making the narrative flow easily. Typical techniques would be:

- Using *establishing shots*: to start a scene or sequence: these shots create a sense of location, focusing on a town, a landscape, outer space or a specific context of action.
- Using *shot/reverse shot*, to capture the encounter between two people or a person and an object, focusing on one initially and then cutting to the other and so to and fro between them as the encounter develops.
- Using different modes of transitions(*cuts*) between shots and scenes.
  - *Fade-in or fade-out*: an image is darkened or lightened so that it disappears.
  - *Iris-in or Iris-out*: a new image appears as a growing circle in the middle of the old image or the old image shrinks and disappears into the new image.
  - *Wipe*: a line moves across an image to clear one shot and introduce another
  - *Dissolve*: a new shot is briefly superimposed on a fading old shot.

As with all aspects of films these techniques need to be critically examined to consider why they were used and what effect they actually achieve. Relevant issues here would be:

- Pace and rhythm of the narrative: by a judicious selection of shots and cuts the editor can create a specific mood or atmosphere. Quick cutting and short, tightly focused shots can create intense excitement and a sense of tension, e.g. car chases, etc. On the other hand slow, lingering shots again focused on details such as shoes, eyes, weapons, hands, door handles, can also create tension.
- In establishing shots is any statement made about the world and the characters in it? Are characters at home in this world or are they at a loss? Is the location benign or threatening? How is the feeling created?
- Is the continuity of the narrative always smooth or is it disrupted by unusual shots or cuts? Why is this done . . . to create a sense of unease, to make a comment on a character or event, to remind the audience of something?
- What kind of shots are dominant in the film? Why is this? What effect does this choice of shots achieve?
- What relationship is there between the time within the sequence of shots and images and the real time in which the characters live? What is selected for slow, detailed presentation, what is dealt with quickly, and what is omitted?

**FOCUS NOTE: “Techniques are servants to interpretations”**

Knowing about these techniques is necessary. But this is not an end in itself. Understanding how the techniques are used to construct a specific view of the world, to give an interpretation of reality must be the ultimate outcome of film study.

**The Overall Analysis of Films.**

The final outcome of studying a film should be that students feel in a position to discuss it as a narrative experience in the same terms as they discuss a play or a novel and that they should have some appreciation of how the film’s discourse was managed to create its particular impact. In simple terms they would need to understand the film as a text that has been deliberately shaped to achieve certain ends and create a particular view of the world.

So for example having studied *The Third Man* students might be able to point out the following about it . . .

*Setting:*

Post-war Vienna; a place of ruined buildings, hidden dangers and frightened people. Black and White used powerfully to suggest the sense of post-war moral desolation, faces half-lit, dark interiors, sudden abrupt transitions, unusual angled shots create a sense of dislocation and unease; huge shadows loom like ghosts suggesting the presence of great evil forces looming over a helpless and wayward humanity: sounds are used to suggest a quality of hollowness and emptiness, voices echoing in big buildings and sewers.

*Atmosphere:* A sense of distrust and betrayal; also a sense of people imprisoned, helpless

victims of great evil powers. Created through repeated shots of furtive glances, iron bars, etc. An abiding pattern of people making errors, e.g. getting names wrong, languages not being understood, lies being told.

*Narrative Genre:* The Thriller: much action, brave hero, arch-villain and beautiful, utterly loyal woman, poetic justice at the end. In terms of film-genre it is within the tradition of the film-noir.

*Characters and Values:* Holly Martin, the writer of romantic westerns, who loses his illusions about life and ends up a sadder, wiser man. He is the character at the heart of the action; all the action orbits about his decisions. It is also a moment of personal moral crisis for him since he has to decide between loyalties to an old friend, Harry Lyme, and his sense of morality in a world which appears to have cast off any sense of morality. Harry Lyme challenges him in the famous scene on the fairground's big wheel when he asks 'What do you believe in?' Harry Lyme, is a person who has become cynical about the value of everything except his own comfort and survival.

*Themes:* A powerful pessimistic statement about the potential effects of war on people and civilisation. Also questions the conflict between real heroism and romantic heroism and demythologises war. Typical of the writing of the novelist Graham Green who wrote the script.

*Theme Music:* The Harry Lyme theme. A haunting tune, played on the zither, reminiscent of fairgrounds and barrel organs. It creates moods of pathos, nostalgia and of threat depending on how it is played at various moments in the film.

### **Approaching Film in the Classroom**

Because of the association between film and entertainment students can adopt a certain attitude to the viewing of film which can militate against worthwhile discussion and analysis taking place subsequently. To avoid such outcomes the viewing of a film should be guided by some basic methodological practices:

*Previewing:* Place film in context of either its social and cultural setting, or its main themes or its genre. The comparative perspective and prescribed modes of comparison within the syllabus facilitates this.

*Viewing:* In an ideal world the film would be seen initially by the students in its totality so that they could experience its overall imaginative impact and become involved in its atmosphere and narrative tensions. Alternatively the film will have to be viewed as a series of episodes, perhaps on two or three consecutive days which can be fitted into the available class time. After this initial encounter and resultant general discussion a more focused, specific approach should be taken.

1. Select a series of short significant episodes which will fit into the class time available and essentially focus the study of the film on these episodes. This may mean (approx.) 10-15 mins. viewing time followed by 20-25 mins time for discussion and analysis. In relation to *The Third Man* perhaps the following episodes might be selected for detailed study:
  - Holly's arrival and opening scene in the cemetery
  - First meeting between Holly and Harry (the cat scene)

- Meeting in the fairground
  - Meeting in the cafe
  - Chase in the sewers
  - Final scene in the cemetery.
2. Each episode should be viewed with some specific purposes in mind . Ask the students to watch out for specific things or to seek the answers to set questions. e.g. How characters are presented and viewed, costumes and props, the use of light and shadow, certain camera angles, sound sequences, etc.
  3. After each episode discuss the developments that have taken place and ask for observations on how the narrative has been developed in relation to characters, relationships, and overall narrative flow. Focus on particular moments of the film. If thought appropriate a particular shot/image could be chosen for exemplary analysis.
  4. The personal journal could obviously be employed usefully in this context for students to record their developing understanding or otherwise of what the film is attempting to do. In the journal jottings about all aspects of the film should be present.
  5. Ideally the study of the film should be rounded off with the students seeing the film as a whole.

*Post-viewing:* Consider film under the topics and headings outlined above and relate to other films and texts.

### Comparative Study

Since film can only be studied in a comparative manner with a written text the following exemplar is given as typifying the approach that is required in this context:

A Comparative study of *Hamlet* with *The Third Man*.





***Social/cultural context:***

*Hamlet:* Medieval/Renaissance Denmark, where the Elizabethan dictat of revenge morality conflicts with Christian values. The court in chaos owing to the death of the King and the re-marriage of the Queen to the late king's brother, Claudius. Hamlet, the supposed heir to the throne, is thrown into a moral dilemma by the injunction of his father's ghost to avenge his murder by his brother. The court at Elsinore is a place of political intrigues, changing loyalties and betrayals. The family context adds a dimension to the intensity of the action . . . Hamlet has a complex love-hate relationship with his mother whom he feels has betrayed him and his late father, by her marriage to Claudius. The Danish court is in a state of moral and political crisis and Hamlet is faced with the responsibility of resolving the crisis.

*The Third Man:* Post World War Two Europe. Western traditional moral values in question after the horrors of the war. The Christian/Humanist tradition is being undermined by the ideologies of Fascism and capitalism. Vienna, the site of past greatness, is a city in ruins where the ordinary people, powerless victims of the conflict strive to survive physically and spiritually. There are also those who live well from the opportunities that wars present to the unscrupulous. Holly Martin, an American writer of romantic pulp-Westerns, comes to Vienna to mourn the death of his old school pal, Harry Lyme. He is soon embroiled in a series of relationships and moral dilemmas which will challenge him more realistically than any of his fictional heroes are ever challenged.

***Literary/Film genre:***

*Hamlet:*

Classic Shakespearean Tragedy, where a person of potential or actual great moral and human stature becomes involved in a set of circumstances which eventually leads to his death. However, as the context of the hero becomes more complex, his self awareness develops so that his humanity increasingly evokes the sympathy of the viewer/reader and the final outcome is both a cause of sadness and admiration (As Aristotle commented 'tragedy evokes in the audience pity and awe').

*Hamlet* is a poetic tragedy in five acts that reflects on a range of issues but predominantly on death, sexuality and the nature of personal moral responsibility. Through action, dialogue, physical conflict and reflective soliloquy it dramatises the plight of an individual who defines his own situation when he proclaims, 'the time is out of joint/O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right'.

*Hamlet* as a theatrical experience contains much that is potentially melodramatic: the appearance of ghosts, adultery, many killings and violent outcomes but Shakespeare manages to use all these items in a manner which imaginatively animates them so that their sensational dimension contributes to richer dimensions of meaning and experience. e.g. the father's ghost brings dramatic intensity but it also brings questions about life, death and after-life which trouble everyone; Ophelia's suicide while it is a moment of extreme pathos raises questions about the plight of the vulnerable and the innocent trapped amongst those in a battle for power. Because it is written in verse the imagery and symbolism contribute powerfully to the impact of the play. Throughout the characters' speeches but particularly those of Hamlet there are patterns of repeated images which create a distinctive atmosphere e.g.: repeated references to prisons, gardens, diseases and other worlds.

*The Third Man:*

A relatively modern film combining the genre of narrative thriller with film noir. Like *Hamlet* it has abundant melodramatic elements but it manages generally to give these elements a richer symbolic resonance, e.g. the final chase in the sewers is exciting but says a great deal about the character of the villain and the capacity for evil in humanity; likewise the final scene (which contains the most total snub in the history of cinema) makes a statement about the meaning of love and loyalty in a world where such values appear to be under threat.

The main characters are to some extent stereotypes of the thriller genre ,e.g. the naïve American hero, the arch-villain, stylish but deadly, the beautiful vulnerable woman, loyal and loving despite all. It would be a good subject for discussion to speculate about this trio of characters and the same trio who play similar roles in *Hamlet*.



As in *Hamlet*, the world of *The Third Man* is given a particular atmosphere by presentation of a series of images, e.g., patterns of bars and windows, shadows, indulgent costumes and personal mannerisms.

Other areas of comparison worth considering in these texts could be:

- narrative shape and structure
- the role of women
- the use of comedy and humour.

*Section Four*

**FIRST DRAFT EXAMINATION QUESTIONS**

## 1. DRAFTS OF QUESTIONS ON COMPARATIVE STUDIES

### A. HIGHER LEVEL

#### Themes and Issues

1. “The dramatic presentation of a theme can greatly add to the impact of literary texts.” Discuss this statement in relation to your study of texts in a comparative way.
2. Comment on how your understanding of a theme or issue has been informed by your reading of texts in a comparative manner.
3. Outline your views on the relationship between the themes and issues which literary texts address and the creation of significant characters.
4. Show how a theme or issue affects the narrative shape or structure in two contrasting texts.
5. “The language and imagery chosen by the author are important expressions of theme.”

Discuss this statement in relation to texts you have studied in a comparative mode.

#### Literary Genre

1. Contrast your experience of reading a novel with that of attending a play or seeing a film.
2. Who tells the story in the texts you studied? Contrast the viewpoint of the narrators and their attitude and relationship to the other characters in the texts.
3. Discuss the narrative approach of the texts you have read. Which story did you find the most convincing and enjoyable and why?
4. Comment on the texts you have studied in relationship to their being either realistic or romantic in their viewpoint. Which kind of writing do you enjoy most?
5. In relationship to either your understanding of comedy or tragedy compare the texts you have studied as exemplars of those literary genres.

#### Cultural Context

1. Compare the rituals of relationships in some selected texts.
2. Comment on the relative social status of men and women in texts.
3. Discuss where power and influence reside in the cultures in texts.
4. Comment on the significance of race or class in the texts.

## **B. ORDINARY LEVEL**

### Heroes Heroines and Villains

1. Compare the behaviour of two of the leading characters in the texts you have read.
2. Which heroes or heroines did you admire most in the texts you studied? In your answer refer to at least two characters from different texts.
3. Villains, heroes and heroines can be either stereotypes or original and individual in their behaviour. How would you classify those in the texts read by you?
4. Heroes/heroines usually face serious challenges. What was the nature of the challenges the characters in the texts faced? Were there similarities in the way they approached these challenges?
5. What were the central values of the main characters in the texts read? Contrast their respective value-systems. Which of them did you find most interesting?

### **Social Setting**

1. Contrast the social setting of two texts under at least two of the following headings: place and time; general value systems and beliefs; characteristic rituals and behaviour of the people.
2. Would you have liked to live in the social world created in the texts read? Describe and comment on one you think you could possibly live in and on one which you might find uncomfortable.
3. Did the setting of the texts detract from or add interest to the overall impact in your view? How important was the particular setting for making the text successful in telling its story and putting across a particular viewpoint?
4. Which aspects of the setting of the texts did you find either most interesting or most significant? Explain your choices?

### **Relationships**

1. Taking two or more of the texts you studied, compare the relationships which were of most interest to you.
2. Describe and comment on the importance of one relationship in each of the texts.
3. 'Some relationships are creative some are destructive.' Choose a relationship from each of the two texts and compare those two relationships in the light of the above statement.
4. Describe one relationship in each of your texts. In each of the relationships choose the person you felt most sympathetic towards and compare the behaviour and attitudes of these characters.

## 2. QUESTIONS ON UNSEEN POETRY – ORDINARY LEVEL

### 1. ADVICE TO MY SON

The trick is, to live your days,  
 as if each one may be your last  
 (for they go fast, and young men lose their lives  
 in strange and unimaginable ways)  
 but at the same time, plan long range  
 (for they go slow: if you survive  
 the sheltered windshield and the bursting shell  
 you will arrive  
 at our approximation here below  
 of heaven or hell).

To be specific, between the peony and the rose  
 plant squash and spinach, turnips and tomatoes;  
 beauty is nectar  
 and nectar, in a desert, saves –  
 but the stomach craves stronger sustenance  
 than the honied vine.

Therefore, marry a pretty girl  
 after seeing her mother;  
 show your soul to one man,  
 work with another,  
 and always serve bread with your wine.  
 But son,  
 always serve wine.

*Peter Menke.*

Read this poem slowly and carefully a number of times. Try to think about the pictures it makes and the feelings that those pictures give you. Don't be worried if you cannot catch the full meaning of the poem; just talk about the parts that have most meaning for you.

- Q.1 In lines 1 - 10 what line(s) give you the most powerful picture? Outline the picture and the feelings and ideas it brings. Is there any other place in the poem where those same feelings can be found? Write about those lines.
- Q.2 In your view does this poem give a sad view of life or a happy view of life or a mixture of the two? Explain your answer by selecting some lines to illustrate your view point.
- Q.3 How would you describe the way the poem uses words? Choose from the following the phrases that describe the poem best for you: a) like a friendly chat, b) like a sermon, c) like a serious message, d) like a song, e) like a set of friendly instructions. Choose some words and phrases from the poem to support your opinion.
- Q.4 Some phrases from the poem are like 'wise sayings' or 'proverbs' e.g. 'plan long

range', 'beauty is nectar'. Pick out some other phrases like this and talk about what they bring to the poem.

**2 JULY DAY SPECTACULAR**

I sit in the third row of  
gray rocks upholstered  
with lichen. Light pours  
from the flues of heaven  
on a thirty mile stage-set;  
and there, by the footlights  
of breaking water,  
oystercatchers,  
going through their old routines,  
put on their black-and-white minstrel show  
watched by a bandmaster pigeon  
with built-in epaulettes.

*Norman MacCaig.*

- Q.1 Read this poem a number of times and then decide how the poet is feeling about what he sees.
- Q.2 Choose some of the following words which you think would be appropriate to describe the scene in the poem as the poet presents it: lively, serious, dull, monotonous, entertaining, light-hearted. Could you suggest another word to describe the poet's viewpoint?
- Q.3 The poet is describing a seaside scene. To what does the poet compare it and what is the impact of that comparison?
- Q.4 Pick out some words in the poem which you found interesting and/or surprising and talk about them.

**3 SPRING RACE**

The chestnuts have it.  
One before all the rest  
in that line of twelve where the road swings by Foley's farm  
his hitched limp green rags  
to every spiked twig it owns  
and the rags life,  
thicken in moist light,  
fan upon fan. Translucent.  
As new ghosts, they own no shade.  
Beyond, the spread corduroy of spring plowing.  
and lambs shouting into the morning.

*Kerry Hardie*

Read this poem a number of times until you can imagine clearly the scene being presented in terms of place, events and time of the year. Note down your own response to the poem, i.e. what images/feelings/ideas did it create in you? Then respond to the following questions.

- Q.1 In her description of the coming of Spring the poet uses some unusual words to

describe things. Pick out the words you found unusual and write about their effect in the poem.

- Q.2 There is a strong sense of a particular place in this poem. What details and references are important in your view for giving this sense of place?
- Q.3 What picture does the title of the poem create for you? What lines in the poem keep the same picture going?

**4 EILY KILBRIDE**

On the north side of Cork city  
where I sported and played  
On the banks of my own lovely Lee  
Having seen the goat break loose in Grand Parade.

I met a child Eily Kilbride  
Who's never heard of marmalade,  
Whose experience of breakfast  
Was coldly limited,

Whose entire school day  
Was a bag of crisps,  
Whose parents had no work to do,  
Who went, once, into the countryside,  
Saw a horse with a feeding bag over its head  
And thought it was sniffing glue.

Brendan Kennelly

- Q.1 In your view why did the poet write this poem?
- Q.2 How does the poet feel about Eily? Choose at least two from the following list of descriptive words which you think describe the way he is feeling: sad, angry gentle, happy, shocked, uncaring, frustrated. Explain your choices.
- Q.3 The first verse includes a line from a popular and well-known song about Cork 'On the banks of my own lovely Lee'. Why is that line included here?
- Q.4 What part of Eily's experience would you see as the most upsetting? Explain your choice by describing the kind of picture it gives you and the feelings related to it.



## 5 DID ANYTHING HAPPEN AT THE FIELD TODAY, DEAR?

The photograph shows  
 the frozen horror of that moment in time  
 the airship  
 booming into flame  
 the people  
 tiny  
 running to and fro arms  
 raised in fright  
 and looking closer we can see  
 one person  
 unconcerned  
 walking from the field  
 not having noticed the panic  
 behind him  
 striding  
 hands in pockets  
 head bowed in thought  
 he walks away  
 admiring the splendid polish  
 of his boots

*Richard Hill*

Read this poem a number of times and when you feel you have some sense of it attempt the following questions.

- Q.1 There are two different viewpoints on a certain moment given in this poem, i.e. what the 'people' saw and what the 'person' saw. Describe what each of these saw according to the poem. What feelings and ideas do these two pictures give?
- Q.2 Who do you think is talking to whom in the title of the poem? Explain how the title hints at what the poem is about.
- Q.3 Select from the poem about four phrases which for you carry the main impact of the poem. Explain your choice.
- Q.4 From the list below choose the phrase which is very close to or very different from your own reading of the text and explain your choice:
- The two different viewpoints make the airship disaster seem more sad and tragic
  - The presence of two viewpoints means that the readers attention is drawn away from the airship disaster.
  - The poem makes people seem insignificant and unimportant.

## 6

## POT ROAST

I gaze upon the roast,  
 that is sliced and laid out  
 on my plate  
 and over it  
 I spoon the juices  
 of carrot and onion.  
 And for once I do not regret  
 the passage of time.  
 I sit by a window  
 that looks  
 on the soot-stained brick of buildings  
 and do not care that I see  
 no living thing - not a bird,  
 not a branch in bloom,  
 not a soul moving  
 in the rooms  
 behind the dark panes.  
 These days when there is little  
 to love or to praise  
 one could do worse  
 than yield  
 to the power of food.  
 So I bend  
 to inhale  
 the steam that rises  
 from my plate, and I think  
 of the first time  
 I tasted a roast  
 like this  
 It was years ago  
 in Seabright.  
 Nova Scotia:  
 my mother leaned  
 over my dish and filled it  
 and when I finished  
 filled it again.  
 I remember the gravy,  
 its odour of garlic and celery,  
 and sopping it up with  
 pieces of bread.

And now  
 I taste it again.  
 The meat of memory  
 The meat of no change.  
 I raise my fork in praise,  
 And I eat.

*Charles Peters*

This is a poem which uses food and the memory of food in an interesting way. While sitting at a meal a person starts remembering other meals . . . read the poem a few times and jot down whatever it suggests to you. Then respond to the following questions and proposals.

- Q.1 'There are feelings of warmth and love here but also feelings of coldness and death' What do you think? In your view which finally is the dominant feeling in the poem?
- Q.2 Since this poem describes eating there should be sensuous words present in it. Select some words which created for you a sense of rich tastes, textures and scents.
- Q.3 At the end the poet raises 'his fork in praise'. Why does he do this? Is he praising food, meat, his mother, himself or what?
- Q.4 'Poems can add rich meanings to the ordinary events of life '. Would this be true of this poem?

**7                    RUNNING ON EMPTY**

As a teenager I would drive Father's  
Chevrolet cross-country, given me

reluctantly: 'Always keep the tank  
half full, boy, half full, ya hear?'

The fuel gauge dipping, dipping  
towards Empty, hitting Empty, then

- thrilling - 'way below Empty,  
myself driving cross-country

mile after mile, faster and faster,  
all night long, this crazy kid driving

the earth's rolling surface,  
against all laws, defying chemistry,

rules, and time, riding on nothing  
but fumes, pushing luck harder

than anyone pushed before, the wind  
screaming past like the Furies...

I stranded myself only once, a white  
night with no gas station open, ninety miles

from nowhere. Panicked for a while,  
at standstill, myself stalled.

At dawn the car and I both refilled. But,  
Father, I am running on empty still.

*Robert Nicholls*

This poem apparently tells about an incident from the poet's teenage years. Read it few times and try to get a clear picture of what actually happened. Having read it note down any words that interest/surprise you or any ideas, images and feelings it raised and then respond to the following proposals and questions.

- Q.1 'The poem is full of a sense of movement and risk'. Where in the poem can you find these feelings? How is the language used to give that sense of movement?
- Q.2 Why did the poet take such pleasure in 'running on empty'? Choose some words and phrases which suggest his reasons.
- Q.3 What feeling does the last line create? Choose from the following the words which match the line's impact on you: sad, happy, defiant, hopeless, helpless, angry, arrogant, bitter.

#### **Questions on Poetry: Higher Level**

- (a) Philip Larkin's poems focus vividly, if unemotionally, on ordinary things, but his coldness towards them leaves us pessimistic and depressed.
- (b) UNSEEN

#### **TEA AT THE PALAZ OF HOON**

Not less because in purple I descended  
The western day through what you called  
The loneliest air, not less was I myself.

What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?  
What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?  
What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,  
And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.  
I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw  
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;  
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

*Wallace Stevens*

#### **QUESTION**

Under the headings of tone and imagery compare this poem with any poem by Philip Larkin.

Or

Say whether you think this poem offers us a different or similar experience (view of the world) to that found in the poetry of Philip Larkin. You may refer to one or more of Larkin's poems.

- 2 (a) Many of Eavan Boland's poems observe our violent history in a vivid and moving way; in spite of this, she does not take sides except to mourn the hurt. Discuss.
- (b) UNSEEN

### FUTILITY

Move him into the sun -  
Gently its touch awoke him once,  
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.  
Always it woke him, even in France,  
Until this morning and this snow.  
If anything must rouse him now  
The Kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds -  
Woke once the clays of a cold star.  
Are limbs so dear achieved, are sides  
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?  
Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
To break earth's sleep at all?

*Wilfred Owen*

### QUESTION

Discuss how this poem in its choice of subject and its use of imagery expresses the poet's belief in the futility of war.

Or

Read the poem carefully. In your opinion, how successful is the poet in expressing his belief in the futility of war?

3

(a) 'By means of language that is elliptical and terse, linked to graphic images culled from the natural world, Shakespeare in his sonnets returns again and again to the themes that preoccupy him - love, death, the ravages of time.' Discuss, supporting the points you make by reference to the Shakespearean sonnets on your course.

(b) Unseen

### ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the shattering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries for them; no prayers no bells,  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, -  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.  
What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

*Wilfred Owen*

QUESTION

What attitude to war and death is conveyed in this poem? Discuss any two devices used by the poet to show his feelings on the subject.

Or

Point out some areas of similarity and contrast between this poem and one or more of those by Shakespeare on your course.

4

(a) 'The nuances of human relationships, garbed in language that is evocative and fresh, are significant features of the poetry of Seamus Heaney.' Discuss, drawing on your knowledge of the poems by Heaney on your course to support the points you make.

(b) UNSEEN

**ALL LEGENDARY OBSTACLES**

All legendary obstacles lay between  
Us, the long imaginary plain,  
The monstrous ruck of mountains  
And, swinging across the night,  
Flooding the Sacramento, San Joaquin,  
The hissing drift of winter rain.

All day I waited, shifting  
Nervously from station to bar  
As I saw another train sail  
By, the San Francisco Chief or  
Golden Gate, water dripping

From great flanged wheels.

At midnight you came pale  
Above the negro porter's lamp.  
I was too blind with rain  
And doubt to speak, but  
Reached from the platform  
Until our chilled hands met.

You had been travelling for days  
With an old lady, who marked  
A neat circle on the glass  
With her glove, to watch us  
Move into the wet darkness  
Kissing, still unable to speak.

*John Montague*

#### QUESTION

What are the dominant feelings in the poem? How are these feelings conveyed in the language?

5

(a) 'What fascinates the reader of Emily Dickinson's poetry is the oddness or eccentricity of her approach to her subject matter.' Discuss.

(b) UNSEEN

#### TEA IN A SPACE-SHIP

In this world a tablecloth need not be laid  
On any table, but is spread out anywhere  
Upon the always equidistant and  
Invisible legs of gravity's wild air.

The tea, which never would grow cold,  
Gathers itself into a wet and steaming ball,  
And hurls its liquid molecules at anybody's head,  
Or dances, eternal bilboquet,  
In and out of the suspended cups up-  
Ended in the weightless hands  
Of chronically nervous jerks  
Who yet would never spill a drop,  
Their mouths agape for passing cakes.

Lumps of sparkling sugar  
Sling themselves out of their crystal bowl  
With a disordered fountain's  
Ornamental stops and starts.

The milk describes a permanent parabola  
Girdled with satellites of spinning tarts.  
The future lives with graciousness.  
The hostess finds her problems eased,  
For there is honey still for tea  
And butter keeps the ceiling greased.

She will provide, of course,  
No cake-forks, spoons or knives.  
They are so sharp, so dangerously gadabout,  
It is regarded as a social misdemeanour  
To put them out.

*James Kirkup*

QUESTION (answer both)

- (i) Would you agree that the language and images chosen by this poet present the reader with a less than serious view of space travel? Support your points by detailed reference to the text.
- (ii) To what extent can this poem be read as a satire on mankind's preoccupation with manners? Support your view by quotation from the text.

6

- (a) 'Sensuousness and symbolism are characteristics of the poetry of John Keats.' Discuss (max. 500 words), using the poems by Keats on your course to illustrate the points you make.
- (b) Comment on subject matter and expression in the poem below. How does the style compare to that of Keats?

**MUSEE DES BEAUX ARTS**

About suffering they were never wrong;  
The Old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position; how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking  
dully along;  
How, when the aged are reverently passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree;



In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

*W.H. Auden*

### 3. DRAFT APPROACHES TO PAPER 1. LANGUAGE

These sample questions are representative of the format and approach of the Paper 1 in the new Leaving Certificate English Examinations.

#### Paper 1

Ordinary Level.

Time: Two and a half hours

*The General Topic of this paper is Relationships*

#### SECTION 1

Read carefully the following texts and then attempt to answer the questions as directed.

Answer Q.1 and Q.2 on one text.

Answer Q.3 on one of the other texts.

#### Text A.

Margaret Atwood, 'Buddy'

My brother had a job. He was two years older than I was, and now he was a Junior Ranger, cutting brush by the sides of highways somewhere in northern Ontario, living in tents with a batch of other sixteen-year-old-boys. This was his first summer away. I resented his absence and envied him, but I also looked for his letters every day. The mail was delivered by a woman who lived on a nearby farm; she drove it around in her own car. When there was something for us she would toot her horn, and I would walk out to the dusty galvanised mailbox that stood on a post beside our gate.

My brother wrote letters to my mother as well as to me. Those to her were informative, descriptive, factual. He said what he was doing, what they ate, where they did their laundry. He said that the town near their camp had a main street that was held up only by the telephone wires. My mother was pleased by these letters, and read them out loud to me.

I did not read by brother's letters out loud to her. They were private, and filled with the sort of hilarious and vulgar commentary that we often indulged in when we were alone. To other people

we seemed grave and attentive, but by ourselves we made fun of things relentlessly, outdoing each other with what we considered to be revolting details. My brother's letters were illustrated with drawings of his tent-mates, showing them with many-legged bugs jumping around on their heads, with spots on their faces, with wavy lines indicating smelliness radiating from their feet, with apple cores in the beards they were all attempting to grow. He included unsavoury details of their personal habits, such as snoring. I took these letters straight from the mailbox to the maple tree, where I read them over several times. Then I smuggled them into the cabin under my T-shirt and hid them under my bed.

I got other letters too, from my boyfriend, whose name was Buddy. My brother used a fountain pen; Buddy's letters were in blue-point, the kind that splotted, leaving greasy blobs that came off on my fingers. They contained ponderous compliments, like those made by others people's uncles. Many words were enclosed by quotation marks; others were underlined. There were no pictures.

I liked getting these letters from Buddy, but also they embarrassed me. The trouble was that I knew what my brother would say about Buddy, partly because he had already said some of it. He spoke as if both he and I took it for granted that I would soon be getting rid of Buddy, as if Buddy were a stray dog it would be my duty to send to the Humane Society if the owner could not be found. Even Buddy's name, my brother said, was like a dog's. He said I should call Buddy 'Pal' or 'Sport' and teach him to fetch.

I found my brother's way of speaking about Buddy both funny and cruel: funny because it was in some ways accurate, cruel for the same reason. It was true that there was something dog-like about Buddy: the affability, the dumb faithfulness about the eyes, the dutiful way he plodded through the rituals of dating. He was the kind of boy (though I never knew this with certainty, because I never saw it) who would help his mother carry in the groceries without being asked, not because he felt like it but simply because it was prescribed. He said things like, 'That's the way the cookie crumbles,' and when he said this I had the feeling he would still be saying it forty years later.

### Questions

1. How were the letters that Margaret's brother wrote to her mother different from the letters he wrote to herself? (paragraphs 1 and 2)
2. What is the author's brother's opinion of Buddy? (paragraph 5)
3. Write a short summary, (about 3/4 sentences) in your own words, of the character of Buddy.

### Text B.

Hugh Leonard 'Out After Dark'

Ambrose had put on weight and was pasty-faced. At school, he had been handsome in a sullen way, with limp blond hair and stork's legs that seemed all the longer because he wore the shortest trousers in the town. He was an only child, and his parents indulged him; he had the most pristine football boots, the pearliest-handled six gun and - what we all envied - a bushranger side-of-the-head hat with a chinstrap. He was the kind of superior boy I craved to be; now he seemed broody and dull. Holy God, in contrast, wore the confident smile a company director might bestow on a nervous stockholder. He was big, pink-faced and barrel-chested, with a full head of corrugated

white hair; he walked his dog with the air of a country gentleman. I liked Cloggy best of the three, for he had never been known to say a defamatory word about another being. He was small and brown-haired; he wore spectacles, and with age his face took on the worried, wrinkled appearance of a walnut. With them in the Queen's was a girl named Jo Ann, who came over to where I was sitting and asked if it was true that I had come home for good. After we had talked for a while, she looked back at Ambrose, Holy God and Cloggy. 'Aren't they a hoot?' she said. 'They invite me out for a jar so's people will think they're terrible men for women'. Then, fondly: 'God help me, I'm in shocking danger!'

The trio had in the beginning been a quartet, and the fourth member was named Rory Cafferky. It took me some time to find out what had happened to him. It was Rory who provided me with the adventure they preferred to enjoy at second hand, if at all. As young lads, they robbed orchards and, with even greater daring, hooted after girls in the street. Very occasionally, the girls would call their bluff by hooting back at them, whereupon Ambrose, Holy God and Cloggy would go red and hurry around the nearest corner, each blaming the others for making a show of him, while Rory would bravely stroll over to the girls whose turn it now was to scurry away.

His daring scandalised and fascinated the three. He acquired an invisible wheelbarrow which he trundled around Dun Laoghaire, asking ladies to hold shop doors open for him as he wheeled it through. Often caught off-guard, they did so and stared at him as, half stooped over and with fingers clasped around shafts that were not there, he would say 'Thank you' and go past them at a half run. Once, in the Carnegie Library, as an assistant paid him the ultimate compliment of saying: 'you can't bring that thing in here.' When he became tired of the invisible wheelbarrow, he abandoned it for a more elaborate toy. He would get off a bus with the others and, as they were about to start down Maine Road either for a walk on the pier or to see the picture of the Pavilion, he would say 'Excuse me a minute, lads', dip into his pocket and take out a key. With half of Dun Laoghaire looking on, he would jab it into midair and turn it. He then proceeded to open a door that only he could see. It was a heavy door, he grunted, strained and went red with the effort. By now a crowd had gathered. He raced in, took hold of a bellrope that was no more visible than the wheelbarrow had been, and gave it a single almighty tug. The great vibration of the bell caused him to reel for a moment, then he recovered, pitted his shoulder against the door, heaved it shut and used the key to lock it again. Ambrose, Holy God and Cloggy had watched the performance from the asylum of the porch of St. Michael's church, with Holy God intoning over and over, lest the other two forget, which was unlikely: 'We're not with him, we're not with him.'

### Questions

1. Why did the author like Cloggy the best of the three described in the first paragraph?
2. Outline how Rory differed from the others.
3. Write a short explanation (giving at least two reasons) why the friends of Rory behaved as they did at the end of the passage.

**Text C.**

**The Sky-divers**



1. Give your response to this photograph. You might consider such questions as: Are you glad you're on the ground? Do you envy them? Do you admire them? Do you think you could do it yourself?
2. Imagine you can see what one of these people is thinking. Give a brief account in the form of a dialogue with himself/herself what thoughts are there.
3. Describe in a short popular press report (inclusive of heading or caption for photograph and one paragraph report) what is occurring here.

**SECTION II**

Write a composition on one of the following:

1. Write an article for a youth magazine on the joys and sorrows of falling in love.

or

Write a letter to a friend in which you describe how a relationship in your life has recently ended.

2. Write a descriptive passage, as if it were a part of your own autobiography, about an interesting and unusual friend. Present this description so that at the end the reader knows about the appearance, behaviour, and beliefs of this person.

or

Write an argumentative conversation between yourself and a friend about a matter on which you disagree. First outline the topic and general content of the conversation. (There needn't be a solution to your disagreement, but both sides of the issue must be presented.)

3. Write about an activity, in the form of a magazine article or a radio talk, which you enjoy or would like to participate in which requires trust, co-operation and teamwork. Describe the activity and indicate its attractiveness for you.

or

Write a persuasive composition addressed to either your parents or guardians attempting to convince them that your plan to engage with some of your friends in a new dangerous sport (choose your own sport or activity) of which they disapprove is actually safe and worthwhile.

Leaving Certificate English

Higher Level

Proposed Format and Approach of Paper 1

Time: Two and a half hours

*The general topic of this paper is how power in various forms, social, political, scientific, etc., can affect people's lives.*

It is important that the texts in Section 1 are read and the appropriate questions answered before Section 2 is attempted. It is expected that your composition will reveal, directly or indirectly, some evidence of your reading, understanding and response to the texts in Section 1.

**Section 1.**

Read the following texts and then answer the questions as directed.

You must answer two question in this section as follows:

Answer a Q.1. on one text only

Answer a Q.2. on another text.

(A Q.1 and a Q.2 should not be answered on the same text.)

Text A

Old Tales

If one compares the female figures of contemporary children's literature with those of the traditional fairy tales, one realises that little has changed. The old fairy tales contain meek, passive, inarticulate women who are concerned only with their own beauty and are quite inept and useless. On the other hand the male figures are active, strong, courageous, loyal and intelligent. Nowadays fairy tales are hardly ever told to children. Television and stories invented for them have provided a substitute. But some of the most famous tales have survived and everybody knows them.

'Little Red Riding Hood' is the story of a girl, bordering on mental deficiency, who is sent out by an irresponsible mother through dark-infested woods to take a little basket full to the brim with cakes, to her sick grandmother. Given these circumstances her end is hardly surprising. But such foolishness, which would never have been attributed to a male, depends on the assurance that one will always find at the right moment and in the right place a brave huntsman ready to save grandmother and granddaughter from the wolf.

Snow White is also a silly goose who accepts the apple she is offered, although she has been severely warned not to trust anybody. When the seven dwarfs accept her as a guest, the roles reappear. They go off to work while she keeps their house clean, mends their clothes, sweeps and cooks and waits for their return. She too lives with her head in the clouds. The only quality she is

recognised as having is beauty. Since beauty is a natural gift, which is not affected by the will of the individual, this does her very little credit. She always manages to get into trouble, and in order to get her out of it a man must, as usual, intervene: Prince Charming, who will marry her according to rule.

Cinderella is the prototype of domestic virtues: humility, patience, servility and ‘underdeveloped consciousness’, and she is not very different from the female types described in everyday textbooks for primary schools and in children’s literature. She too does not move a finger to get out of an intolerable situation, swallows humiliation and oppression and has neither dignity nor courage. She also accepts being rescued by a man as her only resource, though who can say whether this latter will treat her any better than she has been treated up till then.

Female figures in fairy tales belong to two fundamentally different categories: the good, but useless, and the wicked. ‘It has been calculated that in Grimm’s fairy tales 80% of the negative characters are female.

However diligently one searches, it is impossible to find a female character who is intelligent, courageous, active and loyal. Even the good fairies do not use their own resources, but a magic power which has been conferred on them and which does good with no more logic than does evil in witches. A female character with humane, altruistic motivations, who chooses lucidly and courageously how she will act, is totally non-existent.

The emotional force with which children identify with these characters gives them great powers of suggestion, which are reinforced by innumerable concurring social messages. If it were a case of isolated myths which had survived in a culture which no longer accepted them, their influence could be ignored, but in fact our culture is saturated with the same values that these stories propagate, even if they are somewhat diluted and obscured. (580 words)

- Q.1. What is the major point being made by the author in this text. Outline the evidence she uses to support her point of view and comment on the coherence of the argument.
- Q.2. List in two summary paragraphs the attributes of the male and female stereotypes which the text highlights.

#### Text B.

#### The Milgram Experiment

Stanley Milgram, an American social psychologist, carried out an experiment in the United States in 1961, since repeated in many other countries with similar results.

Milgram’s collaborators approached twenty-to fifty-year-old passers-by in the street completely at random and asked for their help with a series of scientific experiments supposedly designed to test the relationship between learning and punishment. When one of these volunteers arrived at the agreed time at the research department of Yale University he would always run into a young man who had supposedly come for the purpose but who was in reality one of Milgram’s assistants. Dressed in a white coat as a symbol of authority, the research director then got the two to toss a coin for which role they were to play. One of them was supposed to be the ‘teacher’, the other the ‘pupil’. The toss was rigged so the Milgram’s assistant always won the part of the ‘pupil’. In the presence of the ‘teacher’ the assistant was then tied to a kind of electric chair and left with one

hand free for working a push-button, his means of responding to questions. The pupil would give a creditable performance of anxious unease and consternation when the director explained that each wrong answer would be followed by an electric shock. The teacher had previously been given a sufficiently unpleasant trial shock of 45 volts for his own information.

Then director and teacher went into the room next door. The doors were shut; the only contact with the pupil was through a microphone and loudspeaker. The teacher was then presented with a list of words which he was to read out for the pupils to memorise and repeat by means of certain sequences of push-button signals. Then the teacher took up his position at a switchboard with thirty levers for different current strengths, ranging from 15 to 400 volts, and descriptions ranging from 'slight shock' to 'danger, severe shock'. His instructions were that the current was to be increased with every wrong answer.

Of course the carefully tutored pupil did not really get any electric shocks but made his mistakes according to plan and worked a pre-recorded tape of his own voice. From 75 volts upwards he could be heard drawing in his breath with a hiss and stifling his groans; at 180 volts he screamed loudly, 'Stop'. After this he started to weep and to beg for mercy and eventually he howled wordlessly like an animal. From 300 volts upwards he no longer reacted at all, and the remaining questions were unanswered. But as no answer counted as a wrong answer, the teacher had to go on asking more questions and administering further shocks.

The quite appalling result was: in the United States 65 per cent of the volunteers continued to play their part of teacher right to the 450-volt limit in spite of the victim's earlier cries and his eventual silence. When this experiment was repeated at the Maxwell Planck Institute in Munich the result was 85 per cent. Since then the experiment has been repeated with a number of variations by critics and sceptics, and the statistics proved to be correct.

Discussion afterwards revealed that nearly all the volunteers had thought that the victim was unconscious or perhaps even dead. Most of them were profoundly disturbed by their own behaviour and could not understand it. Trying to find reasons for it they would say things like: 'I did not want to get anything wrong, to disturb the experiment.' They told themselves that the scientists must know what they are doing.

This compulsion 'to get it right' and the inability to criticise a nameless authority is not aggression but its biologically necessary counterpart, group loyalty and subordination. These traits, too, have become pathologically overdeveloped in humane society - as this experiment shows - to the point where established anonymous authorities like 'the state', 'science' or even 'the revolution' can make everything legitimate by way of a rubber stamp, white coat, or armband.

The picture we generally have of the human being and human society is wrong. Something inside us refuses to replace this idealised view of mankind with a more realistic one. Anything that upsets our idealised picture we describe as 'inhumane'. Auschwitz, the Congo, Bangladesh, Vietnam - it is always 'the others' or 'the exceptions' who would do such things, never the majority. But 75 per cent of Milgram's experiment is down in black and white. And 75 per cent cannot represent exceptions; on the contrary it represents normality.

(736 words)

Q.1. In your view what did the Milgram Experiment prove? Is there any way in which you think its approach and conclusions could be challenged or do you find it convincing in its proof?



- Q.2. Imagine you have been one of the ‘volunteer teachers’ and you actually turned up the power to 400 volts. Write a formal letter to your ‘victim’ attempting to justify and explain your action.

Text C.

How to Deal with Rebels

George Orwell in his *Nineteen Eight-Four* suggests that the reason the Russians used confessions was to prevent their victims from becoming martyrs. O’Brien, the inquisitor, says to his victim, Winston:

“The first thing for you to understand is that in this place there are no martyrdoms. You have read of the religious persecutions of the past. In the Middle Ages there was the Inquisition. It was a failure. It set out to eradicate heresy, and ended by perpetuating it. For every heretic it burned at the stake, thousands of others rose up. Why was that? Because the Inquisition killed its enemies in the open, and killed them while they were unrepentant. Men were dying because they would not abandon their true beliefs. Naturally all the glory belonged to the victim and all the shame to the Inquisitor who burned him. Later, in the twentieth century, there were totalitarians, as they were called. There were the German Nazis and the Russian Communists. The Russians persecuted heresy more cruelly than the Inquisition had done. And they imagined that they had learned from the mistakes of the past; they knew, at any rate, that one must not make martyrs. Before they exposed their victims to public trial, they deliberately set themselves to destroy their dignity. They wore them down by torture and solitude until they were despicable, cringing themselves with abuse, accusing and sheltering behind one another, whimpering for mercy. And yet after a few years the same thing happened over again. The dead men have become martyrs and their degradation was forgotten. Once again, why was it? In the first place, because the confessions that they had made were obviously extorted and untrue. We do not make mistakes of that kind. All the confessions that are uttered here are true. We make them true. And, above all, we do not allow the dead to rise up against us. You must stop imagining that posterity will vindicate you, Winston. Posterity will never hear of you. You will be lifted clean out from the stream of history. We shall turn you into gas and pour you into the stratosphere. Nothing will remain of you: not a name in a register, not a memory in a living brain. You will be annihilated in the past as well as in the future. You will never have existed.”

Winston wonders to himself why the regime has then bothered to torture him. O’Brien guesses his thought and answers:

‘You are a flaw in the pattern, Winston. You are a stain that must be wiped out. Did I not tell you just now that we are different from the persecutors of the past? We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us; so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him. It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be. Even in the instant of death we cannot permit any deviation. In the old days the heretic walked to the stake still a heretic, proclaiming his heresy, exulting in it. Even the victim of the Russian purges could carry rebellion locked up in his skull as he walked down the passage waiting for the bullet. But we make the brain perfect before we blow it out. The command

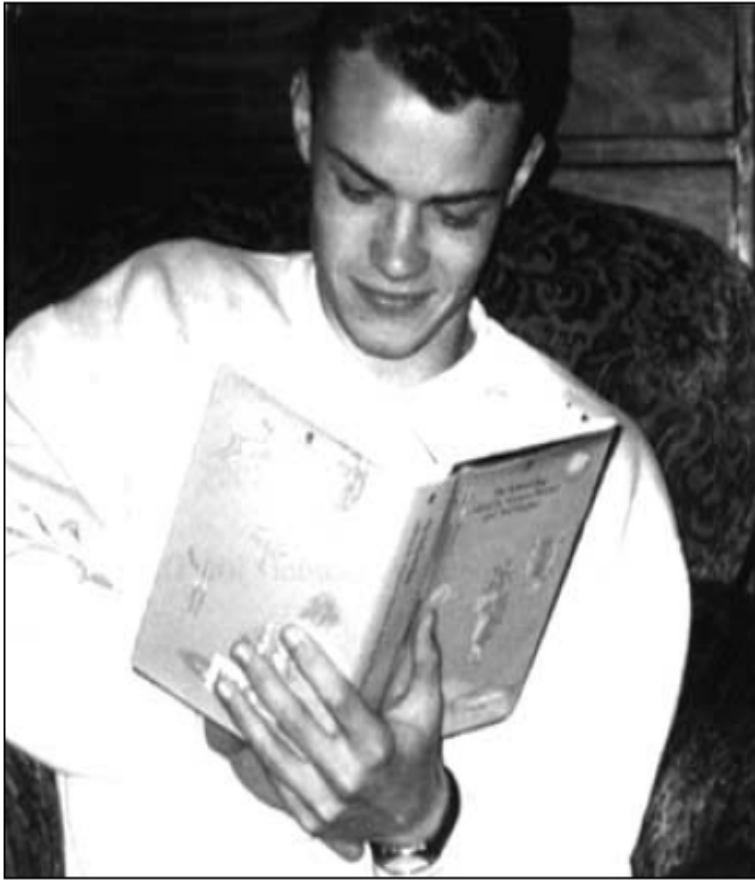
of the old despotisms was ‘Thou shalt not.’ The command of the totalitarians was ‘Thou shalt.’ Our command is ‘Thou art.’” (640 words)

- Q.1. How does O’Brien’s treatment of a rebel like Winston differ from the manner in which other powerful regimes treated rebels.
- Q.2. List some principles of practice and procedure which O’Brien might issue in the form of instructions to a person who is to shortly take over his position.

## **Section 2**

Write a composition one of the following topics.

1. Write a discursive essay for a serious magazine for young people in which you describe and reflect on the most powerful influences operating on young people today.
2. Write a narrative to explore an issue or situation found in one or more of the texts above. You must specify the particular issue or situation about which you are writing.
3. Compose an argument for a popular weekly journal on the need to eradicate gender bias in specific areas of society.
4. Compose a persuasive composition which seeks to establish the need for greater control of scientific experimentation .
5. Give an account of an event in your life in the form of an autobiographical sketch which reflects some central experiences on which the reading texts have focused. Explain clearly your choice of event.



‘Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.’

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