

**English and
Communication
Towards a Specialist Study:
Literature (H)**

5443

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HIGHER STILL

English and
Communication
Towards a Specialist Study:
Literature
Higher
Support Materials

TOWARDS A SPECIALIST STUDY: LITERATURE

TEACHER'S/LECTURER'S NOTES

This unit aims to introduce students to the task of writing a Specialist Study: Literature.

The approach centres on close reading of three extracts taken from a successful Higher review of a prose text. Having analysed these extracts as models of good practice, students then go on in an informed manner to attempt their own reviews.

- Each student selects two texts for review and discusses these with teacher/lecturer: one is agreed.
- Students read text and take notes using support sheet provided.
- Each student drafts two possible statements of intent and discusses these with teacher/lecturer; final statement is identified; plan is agreed/recorded.
- Students write first draft by agreed deadline and self assess using checklist provided.
- Teacher/lecturer discusses draft with each student paying particular attention to: **literacy; depth of textual knowledge; relevance to statement of intent.** Copy of draft is retained.
- Students redraft and final pieces are graded for inclusion in Folio.

Throughout, there is an assumption that the student has chosen a novel. If another literary form is chosen then the note-taking support sheet should be amended as appropriate.

STUDENT'S NOTES

The Specialist Study: Literature is an important element in your course. It is worth 15% of your final award.

In the Specialist Study: Literature you have to write about a text or texts which you have enjoyed and explain what it was about it/them that particularly impressed you. You are required to write no more than 1800 words.

The following advice will help you with this task:

Choosing a text

- Write about a novel or short story or play or poem(s) which **you** chose to read either this year or last - not one chosen for you by a teacher; not one you are doing just because a friend is doing it.
- Choose a text which you **genuinely** enjoyed - this will show when you write about it: it will also show if you're pretending to like it.
- Choose a novel or short story, poem or play which impressed you not just by the storyline but also **how** the story was conveyed by the author.
- Choose **two** possible texts and discuss them with your teacher/lecturer.

Possible texts

Final choice

As you are reading the text, think carefully about why you are enjoying it (or not). Many people think, “Oh, it was just a good story” - but you need to think more deeply than this. As you read, you may wish to take notes on the following, quoting or explaining examples where possible:

Plot

To what extent does the plot affect your enjoyment of the text?
Are there interesting events and consequences, unexpected twists?
Is your attention held throughout?

Themes

To what extent do the themes (ideas) affect your enjoyment of the text?
Are the themes important in general or to you particularly?
Are your own attitudes affected?

Setting

To what extent does the setting affect your enjoyment of the text?
In what ways do both time and place affect characters and their actions?
How is the setting made convincing?

Characters

To what extent do the characters affect your enjoyment of the text?
Are the characters interesting?
How are their characters conveyed - dialogue, actions, description?

Point of view

To what extent does the author’s choice of narrator affect your enjoyment of the text?
Does the narrator influence your views on characters, events?

Structure

To what extent does the structure affect your enjoyment of the text?
How is the story organised?
Does it have a chronological sequence?
Does it use flashback?

Mood

To what extent does the mood affect your enjoyment of the text?
What mood(s) are established, when and why?
What language techniques are used to create the mood(s)?

Symbolism/language

To what extent does the author’s use of symbolism and/or use of language affect your enjoyment of the text?
What figures of speech are particularly effective?

For your Specialist Study you should choose up to (but not more than) three of these features to write about. It's probably best if one of these is a theme or themes: the other two will depend on what impressed you and what you feel you can write about in depth.

Discuss your choices with your teacher/lecturer. Make up two possible titles after you have attempted the activity on the opening of the review of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*.

WRITING YOUR REVIEW OF YOUR CHOSEN TEXT(S)

The opening

It is important in the opening that:

- you convey your enjoyment of the text
- you say briefly what the story was about
- you state what areas of the text you intend to focus on in your review (your **stated intention**).

Below is an example of the opening of a Higher Review. In order to judge whether it is a good opening or not, answer the questions which follow:

In his *Barrytown Trilogy* (*The Commitments*, *The Snapper* and *The Van*), Roddy Doyle brilliantly explored family life through various members of the Rabbite family. These three novels combined comedy and pathos to such effect that they established the author as a major new talent. Reading these novels and watching the film versions were excellent preparations for enjoying *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* in which Doyle maintains the Barrytown/Dublin setting but focuses on a different family. This time he switches the narrative point of view to that of a ten year old boy - Patrick Clarke - growing up fast and discovering new aspects of childhood as each day passes. The novel was valued so highly that it won the Booker Prize in 1993 and it certainly shows the author at his best.

Paddy Clarke is darker than any of the *Trilogy*, but like the earlier work it has a realism which helps to explain Doyle's success. Through this realism, created by his use of first person narrative and dialogue, the reader can rediscover some of the forgotten tragic and comic areas of childhood. These three main areas are: children's lack of understanding of parental relationships; the cruelty and viciousness of children; and the importance of status in childhood.

- (a) Quote any words and phrases which show that the student enjoyed or was impressed by the text(s) and the author. Is the student's view convincing?
- (b) What information does the student convey about the story? Does he convey enough to 'put you in the picture'?
- (c) On what techniques and areas of the text is the student going to focus?

The main part

It is important in the main part of the Review that:

- you begin each section with a topic sentence that uses the words of your stated intention
- you quote or explain sections of the text and analyse the techniques used by the author
- you continue to show your personal response by using appropriate adjectives and expressions
- you link each section with appropriate words/phrases.

Below is an example of one part of the main section of the review of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*. Evaluate its effectiveness by answering the questions which follow:

Another enjoyable aspect of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* is the author's ability to use dialogue in order to convey realistically how cruel children can be to each other. There are at least twelve examples in the novel of such cruelty, and more involving Paddy's father, as well as cruelty at school from a teacher. In all of these scenes, Paddy does not reveal explicitly how the cruelty affects him. He seems to take it for granted - cruelty is just another aspect of childhood like getting muddy and wearing jeans.

The cruelty is often physical (Sinbad - Paddy's brother - suffers most in this respect) but is more commonly verbal and emotional. Midway through the novel, a street football match takes place and an argument begins over the score. Aiden, one of Paddy's friends, is acting as pretend commentator,

“- Really, the referee will have to take control of the situation.
- Shut up, you.
- I'm supposed to talk. It's my job.
- Shut up; your dad's an alco.”

The last comment is carefully and deliberately chosen to hurt. Aiden's father is indeed an alcoholic and the children have no qualms about using this to make him suffer even in this trivial little squabble. They have not yet learned the 'rules' of civility. The cruel abuse of Aiden and his brother Liam puts them in physical danger in other parts of the novel. They are stoned by Paddy and his friends while climbing a tree, and later Aiden is almost left to drown in a deep mud-filled hole at a building site. As he sinks, Paddy and his friends discuss his fate,

“- Can you drown in mud
- Yeah.
- No.
- Say it louder, I whispered - So he can hear.”

To the reader, the dialogue, with its flat, matter-of-factness, is comic. We know that Aiden will survive. At the same time, Doyle again manages to convey children's cruelty - sadism in this case - through Paddy's final whispered instruction. The dialogue captures

children's speech excellently: it is simple in terms of word choice, syntax and sentence structure and the realism created adds impact to the cruelty.

Cruelty in *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* is often a product of the ongoing fight for status between the children in the novel. This fight for status is....

- (a) Pick out the topic sentences in the extract. How well do they match the student's stated intention?
- (b) What aspect of the novel does the student focus on in this section. What technique(s) are analysed?
- (c) Quote any words or phrases which convey the student's personal response.
- (d) Explain the ways the student links this section of the review with the preceding section and the one that is to follow.

The conclusion

If necessary, you make clear your feelings about the text as a whole.

Below is the conclusion of the review on *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*. In order to judge whether it is effective or not, answer the questions which follow:

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, then, is a superb novel which succeeds in realistically conveying childhood. Through the novel, the reader can look back on his own childhood and remember incidents which mirror many of the narrator's. Doyle's economical techniques - spare dialogue and use of 'simple' first person narrative - are supremely effective in conveying a child's view of life. The reader can, as a result, almost take a step back and rediscover himself.

To what extent has the student met the two requirements indicated above?

WRITING YOUR REVIEW: ANSWERS

The opening

(a) *Quote any words and phrases which show that the student enjoyed or was impressed by the text(s) and the author. Is the student's view convincing?*

- “brilliantly”,
- “...to such effect that they established the author as a major new talent,”
- “...for enjoying *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*,”
- “The novel was valued so highly that it won the Booker Prize...and it certainly shows the author at his best.”

The student uses a clever mixture of his own and other critics' opinions here in order to convince the reader that both author and text are of some merit. This view is further reinforced by the mention of Doyle's earlier work, *The Barrytown Trilogy* which he claims to have both read and seen on film. The impression created on the marker is that he is dealing with a student who reads more than the minimum and appears to be genuinely interested.

(b) *What information does the student convey about the story? Does he convey enough to 'put you in the picture'?*

By comparing *Paddy Clarke and The Trilogy*, the student conveys a reasonable amount of information. The setting is Dublin and the focus is a family with the main character being a ten-year-old boy. The story will be about his 'growing up'. The novel is described as being “darker” than Doyle's earlier ones and cruelty and viciousness are given as examples in the text. The marker is given enough information to understand the story and the student's line of argument.

(c) *On what techniques and areas of the text is the student going to focus?*

In the second paragraph, the student states clearly that he is going to focus on the novel's realistic portrayal of three areas of childhood: children's lack of understanding of parental relationships; children's cruelty and viciousness; and the importance of status on childhood. He also clearly states that the techniques to be analysed are Doyle's use of first person narrative and dialogue. The actual title for the review was: *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle - a Study of Aspects of Childhood.

The main part

- (a) *Pick out the topic sentences in the extract. How well do they match the student's stated intention?*

The topic sentences are:

- “Another enjoyable aspect of ...how cruel children can be to each other.”
- “The cruelty is often...verbal and emotional.”

In both cases they clearly match the stated intention. The first topic sentence actually uses the words of the stated intention (“dialogue”, “realistically”, “cruel”) to emphasise the relevance of what is to follow.

- (b) *What aspect of the novel does the student focus on in this section? What technique(s) are analysed?*

The student states that he is to focus on children's cruelty to each other and on how Doyle uses dialogue to convey this. The quotations are quite short but are well chosen to show that the cruelty is both verbal and physical. The dialogue is analysed (briefly) to show its 'childish' simplicity. Reference is made to word choice, syntax (word order), and sentence structure. These should, perhaps, have been analysed in more detail.

- (c) *Quote any words or phrases which convey the student's personal response.*

- “**Another enjoyable** aspect...”
- “...captures children's speech **excellently**”

- (d) *Explain the ways the student links this section of the Review with the preceding section and the one that is to follow.*

At the beginning of the section, the student uses “another” which links with the previous paragraph where he has been analysing some other aspect - probably lack of understanding of parental relationships if he has kept to the order indicated in his introduction.

At the end of the section, the student leads into the next area by explicitly linking cruelty and the fight for status.

The conclusion

To what extent has the student summed up his views by (i) using the words of his stated intent and (ii) made clear his feeling about the text as a whole?

The student does use the words of his stated intent - 'realistically conveying childhood', 'look back on his own childhood', etc. are all mentioned in the opening. The student is careful to use the same words but varies his expression so that the opening and conclusion are similar but not identical.

His feelings about the text are made clear through words and expressions such as 'superb novel', 'economical techniques', and 'supremely effective'.

Use this checklist to ensure that you have ‘the basics’ right in your Review:

Secretarial skills

Have I:

- checked my paragraphing, sentences and punctuation?
- checked my spelling?

The opening

Have I:

- shown that I enjoyed the text?
- stated briefly what the text is about?
- made clear my statement of intent?

The main part

Have I:

- used appropriate topic sentences?
- quoted/explained sections of the text and analysed techniques?
- shown my personal response in appropriate words and phrases?
- linked the sections with appropriate connecting words and phrases?

The conclusion

Have I:

- used the wording of my stated intention in my conclusion?
- made clear my feelings about the text as a whole?

Planning page

It is an SQA requirement that you submit a draft title and an outline plan for your Review. You should also submit and your teacher/lecturer should retain a first draft of the Review itself, together with your draft title and outline plan.

Draft title and proposals

Opening

Main part

(a)

(b)

(c)

Conclusion

Signed _____(student)

Date _____

Signed _____(teacher/lecturer)

Date _____