



Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve

Study Guide for GCSE

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Teacher's Introduction

How to Use This Study Guide

Dannie Abse's *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve* appear on the GCSE WJEC specification (Unit 2b: English/Welsh/Irish Literary Heritage prose). The novel does not contain individual chapters but sections of the text are referred to here by page numbers; for example, pp. 1–16 denotes the first section. For this Study Guide only, eight sections have been created. The novel also contains useful information about the author Abse himself, therefore I have decided against repeating biographical information in this guide.

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

Unit 2b: Contemporary Drama and Literary Heritage Prose

Individual texts in context

This paper requires study of a contemporary drama text and a prose text from the English/Welsh/Irish literary heritage. It will require candidates to answer two questions on each text. In each case the first question (part (i)) will require close reading of an extract. The second question will offer a choice of tasks (parts (ii) and (iii)) relating to the text as a whole.

Assessment Objectives

Below are the assessment objectives for this specification. Learners must demonstrate their ability to:

- AO1 – Respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and support interpretations
- AO2 – Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings
- AO3 – Make comparisons and explain links between texts, evaluating writers' different ways of expressing meaning and achieving effects
- AO4 – Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts; explain how texts have been influential and significant to self, and other readers in different contexts and at different times

Key Features of the Resource

- AO1: The key events: plot summary
- AO1: Key characters and why they are important, their characteristics, characterisation techniques used by the author, and relationships in the novel
- AO2: Detailed commentaries on key themes, literary techniques, interpretations, contextual influence and important quotations for every chapter
- AO2: The author's choices of language, structure and form across the novel as a whole and how these choices affect the reader
- AO2: Analyses of key ideas, themes and settings across the novel and why they are important
- AO2: Literary terms and using them in essays

Assessment Objectives Corresponding to Elements of the Resource

Key Feature	AO1	AO2	AO3	AO4
Plot summary	✓			
Characterisation	✓			
Relationships	✓			
Setting		✓		
Themes	✓			
The writer's use of language		✓		
Form		✓		
Structure		✓		
Context			✓	
Key term glossary		✓		
Further reading				✓

Please note the page references throughout this resource refer to the following edition:
Dannie Abse, *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve*, Library of Wales, 2006, ISBN 978-1905762-25-5

ZigZag Education would like to thank Lewis Gilliard for providing the original character and scene illustrations.

L Mcalroy and T Baird, April 2022

Plot Summary

Plot – the events that occur and are related to each other in a work of literature, or

The novel begins on a specific day in 1934 (1st June) in summer, remembered as a 10-year-old narrator, Dannie, and Keith Thomas. They are 'enemies' at first and Keith who call Dannie names because he is Jewish. Very soon, however, the boys become adventures together. We follow the lives of Dannie and Keith as they mature into sorrow for the first time.

Dannie has an active imagination and he has recurrent daydreams which feed on the political world and on what is happening around him. Dannie's childhood memories of peacefulness of life growing up in south Wales as well as the idiosyncrasies of local life. His memories and daydreams are also coloured by the onset of war in Europe; for example, at the train station, he imagines a train carriage filled with skeletons and a voice over the crackling loudspeaker, shouting: 'All change at Auschwitz'.

Keith and Dannie's adventures lead them to meet with some interesting characters. In the novel, a big man approaches them in a lane, offering them ice cream. The man leans on his shoulder before walking away. Dannie jokes that Keith now has the Black Curse but afterwards, the boys believe it is a direct result of the Black Curse. Keith's father is a drunk who swears to stop drinking after Mrs Thomas dies, he recommences the same night. Later, Keith has a covert sexual relationship with their maid, Phyllis.

In 1934, Keith and Dannie visit Barry Island alone and have a wonderful time until a man in the same carriage has an epileptic fit in front of them. The man wets himself and spits blood, scaring the boys and spoiling their day. These events are described against the backdrop of world events (striking men shot dead in the streets of America, Hitler's 'scream of rage' posing on a London platform 'talking about Dad and Mam, Wilfrid and Leo, me and my friends', Dannie is born into a Jewish family, and both local and global events force him into an awareness of his identity). His friends Philip and Sidney ask him what it's like to be Jewish; Philip adds that Jews have long noses. Later that day, Dannie asks his Uncle Isidore what it's like to be Jewish.

In 1938, aged 14, Dannie and a group of four friends become infatuated with Lydia, an older girl than Dannie and who has learning difficulties, is also a love rival and forces Dannie to write a letter for him. Dannie becomes Lydia's boyfriend in 1939. They arrange a date for Lydia to meet her friends but she doesn't turn up. Nancy is invited to tea one evening at Dannie's house but she mistakenly believes that Nancy is his girlfriend. When Nancy is in hospital, Dannie tells Lydia that she finds Keith attractive.

Later, having passed their final school exams, the boys hitchhike to Ogmere for a holiday. They are picked up by Henrietta, the wife of a rich, older man, Mr Gregory, who gives them permission to stay. Mr Gregory goes away on business and Keith spends much of the holiday swimming and sunbathing. He falls in love and tells Dannie that he is going to sleep with Henrietta so the boys must purchase condoms in Bridgeton. On Mr Gregory's return, the boys overhear Henrietta talking about Keith as an infatuated boy. The boys return to Cardiff in the Gregory's Daimler. In 1939, the likelihood of war in Europe has now invaded Poland. A week later, the British government declares war against Germany. The prospect of war has been a constant subtext of the novel; not only in the Cardiff community.

During an air raid, Keith refuses to shelter under the stairs with the maid, Phyllis, and is killed by a bomb she survives but Keith is killed.

The novel closes on Dannie's 18th birthday as he contemplates a park empty of people.

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Section One: pp. 1–16

Summary

Primary-school days: Dannie is 10 years old and his memories of friendship with Keith in 1934 are narrated in random fashion, with time shifts or flashbacks. Keith is his best friend. Dannie is invited to Keith's house for tea and the reader is presented with descriptions of life in the two households. Keith's father is an alcoholic and his mother is a nurse. Dannie's home is busy but 'lovely' (p. 3). Some of the boys' childhood adventures are described. Keith's mother dies (p. 14) and the boys can't help but relate this tragic event to an elderly, leering stranger who offers them ice cream. Dannie rebuffs the man but Keith's pathetic face leered at us and he lisped something like 'You in't understand' (p. 15). The boys watch a Wales versus England rugby match and feel a sense of loss when Keith's mother dies the next day. Keith's death is linked to the Black Curse. When drunk, Keith's father shouts 'We're damned, damned' to reinforce the notion of Keith's emotional vulnerability; as a 10-year-old boy, Dannie is left with words at face value.

Analysis

In the opening pages we discover that it is an older Dannie who narrates and creates a sense of Cardiff through the experiences of his 10-year-old former self. As Abse uses the past tense, the 10-year-old Dannie can know or see, yet the author creates a particular, childlike use of language and narrative style. For example, the first exchange of dialogue between Keith and Dannie creates a sense of immediacy because it is not reported. It also has a humorous effect of childhood with which many readers can identify. Abse presents children's talk as untagged dialogue:

'How old's your mother?'

'Thirty.'

'Mine's forty.'

'Mine's fifty.'

'Mine's sixty-three.'

'Mine's ninety.'

'Mine's hundred and ninety.' (p. 2)

For each example, indicate that Dannie is presenting the speech as untagged dialogue to de-

The exchanges between Keith and Dannie are lively and the sense of immediacy and tense is used ('Mine's'). As Dannie narrates everyday occurrences from his childhood, they are imbued with symbolic significance through a high concentration of poetic connotation and form. For example:

Near the White Wall, I was born in a small house, boasting. I knew the paper-stuffed animals, the brass, the clock, the ferns. Always there was too much light, there was too much noise, there was too much familiarity. Always there were visitors. Lovely.

Everyday things like paper flowers take on significance because of their resurgence in the narrator's memory of being 'ten years high' (p. 2). Abse repeats the word 'Always' here: as a poet, he has a strong sense of the sound of language and, here, 'Always' is emphatic and resonant in tone. It also serves to intensify the notion of a childhood which, for the narrator, seemed to go on and on.

Debate Prompt

Find examples in the text that indicate that Dannie is implicitly described with Dannie's home.

Moreover, this extract reveals how Abse presents characteristics of the Welsh diaspora, which compliments the nostalgic mood and evokes a sense of belonging in the character.

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Page	Quotation	Analysis
3	<i>Always there was too much furniture in the room. Always there was too much noise and familiarity. Always there were visitors. Lovely it was.</i>	The use of the adverbial phrase 'too' negative statement but here it is used and through the use of 'always' denotes the business of a secure home life. The 'it was' reinforces this notion and the contrast Dannie's home environment.
15	<i>And then I heard perhaps what I was waiting for: I heard Keith Thomas whimpering upstairs.</i>	Keith's grief is conveyed by means of which creates a vivid image of the child's pain to be seen.
16	<i>Then Keith cried and I wanted to kiss him. But I cried.</i>	The 10-year-old Keith does not know the impact of such a personal loss. Dannie that it's his fault but his tears similarly, Dannie is unable to comprehend cry with empathy.

Key Terms

Contrast: the two boys have very different home lives.

Implicit: the text makes certain ideas and meanings understood without expressing meanings directly.

Time shift / Flashback: disruption of the chronological sequence of a narrative with

Untagged dialogue: dialogue without information about who is speaking and how follows the quotation marks.

Active Learning Task

In the novel, Abse's characters often use varieties of English, including Yiddish and Welsh (as well as English spoken in Wales). Design a mini-dictionary where you can keep varieties of English in everyday life: you should give the variety and the Standard English usage. Examples: *innit*, whatever.

Practice Essay Questions

1. Look at how 10-year-old Keith speaks and behaves in pages 1–16. What does this tell us about his feelings?
2. Read pages 1–2 closely. How does the author create mood and atmosphere?

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Section Two: pp. 16–33

Summary

Dannie is questioned by school friends about his Jewishness. He teases his brother Leo about being in love with his girlfriend and is hit for his meddling. Uncle Isidore, who is not really an uncle but a man with no particular talent, comes to visit and Dannie's parents compare him with Uncle Isidore. Dannie asks Uncle Isidore about Jewishness and they share a knowing smile. Leo is chased around the table by his father and Dannie elaborates on the facts when Wilfred. Wilfred tells him Old Testament stories. We are told about a typical day including a routine visit to the synagogue. Through Abse and Gwennie's story we learn about the realities of mining and unemployment. The rain falls heavily on Wales.

Analysis

This section introduces one of the main themes in the novel: Jewish identity. Dannie is forced to question his Jewishness because it singles him out amongst his friends. Leo reads the first line from Manley Hopkins' poem, 'Pied Beauty', 'Glory be to God for dappled things', which is repeated several times and is implicitly connected to the narrator's sense of identity. Through reference to the Manley Hopkins poem, Abse seems to be saying that things are never simply 'this' or 'that' but are many things at once. In the same way, individuals have many aspects. The significance of 'dappled' is revealed gradually for Dannie. At the synagogue, he listens to an unusually animated Rabbi Aaronowich and is reminded of the poem 'though, then, I didn't know what "dappled" meant' (p. 30). This quotation also shows the narrator has no fixed viewpoint: Dannie's narration shifts between his viewpoint in place, to a more distant perspective and even, at times, to a first-person omniscient Dannie who remembers what his younger self did not know.

In the synagogue, Dannie describes how he and his friends would fidget and giggle, which held no meaning for them: 'We stood up when the congregation stood up and sat down' (p. 28). However, this Saturday, the Rev. Aaronowich's sermon is unusually lively and attracts Dannie's attention. He observes the men praying and feels the weight of history bearing upon them.

Their naked faces showed history plainly, it mixed in their faces like ancient patterns of over-refinement and paradoxical coarseness. One received a hint, even as the others, of the unbearable core of sensual suffering. (p. 30)

The 11-year-old boy thus becomes a part of the service and by implication, bears witness to their suffering.

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Page	Quotation	
19	'Our third son, Dafydd Morgan,' says my mother, 'is no good. Won't do any work.' 'Just like Uncle Isidore,' exclaim my father and mother, in unison, lifting up their hands hopelessly.	Although Dannie's parents are talented Uncle Isidore, the negative impact on the boy is significant.
21–22	'Uncle?' I asked. 'Well?' 'Uncle, what's it like to be Jewish all your life?' I asked. 'It's all right,' he said, and for a moment we smiled at each other.	Dannie has been questioning his Jewishness but does not see himself as being different from his family. Here, he shares a moment of connection with Uncle Isidore, conveyed through language.
25	'Climb the wall for dappled things'.	Leo reads Dannie a poem ('Pied Beauty'). This line is part of a section where the harshness of the world is contrasted with its beauty. The community identity is shown as fixed and uniform.
32	'Bastard.' I liked that word. I used it on my brother Wilfred. 'You big bastard,' I said affectionately. Astonished, he made me promise not to speak it again. So I looked it up in a dictionary.	The 10-year-old Dannie takes pleasure in saying the word 'bastard' without knowing its meaning.

Key Terms

Jewishness: in this section, Abse deals with the history of Jews in exile: 'Thousands of the men as they leaned' (p 30).

Narrative mood: the atmosphere established by a writer to influence the psychological involvement of the reader. Narrative voice, tone and setting are key elements that create the narrative mood.

First-person omniscient narration: a form of first-person narration in which the narrator knows the story and knows every aspect of the story being told.

Active Learning Tasks

1. Photocopy pages 28–31 and read them closely. Underline any words and phrases that create mood and atmosphere.
2. Annotate the page with any ideas, thoughts and feelings you have about the Jewishness and how this impacts on mood and atmosphere.
3. Decide which words and phrases have the strongest effect on you as a reader. Identify the techniques and literary devices you can identify.
4. Discuss your favourite words and phrases with your partner.
5. Read 'Pied Beauty' by Gerard Manley Hopkins and write a paragraph which explains why it is so important in this novel.

Practice Essay Question

1. Look closely at how the author presents religion in this section. How does this create mood and atmosphere?

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Section Three: pp. 33–5

Summary

Dannie makes friends with Keith and gives him one of his frogs; Dannie keeps the sick frog for himself and feeds it cough medicine. The boys go on a trip to the beach. They have fun swimming and sunbathing, listening to gramophone records of the day on the beach. On the return journey, a man on the train has an epileptic fit which traumatises the boys, who do not understand what is happening. This spoils the day for Dannie and when he gets home, he finds that his frog has died. He buries it but he goes on to associate its death and its slimy surface texture with events of the day and with death in general. He tells his mother about his grandfather when he asks his mother not to bury him. There is a thunderstorm and Dannie

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Analysis

This section is important because Abse pulls into focus what until now seemed like random childhood memories and occurrences. He makes connections between themes already developed: childhood, innocence, naivety, personal hardship, loss and grief, with increasing references to a boding 'elsewhere', such as the rise of fascism in Europe. The notion of anticipation and dread is evoked and explored through the boys' lived experiences in and around Cardiff.

Analogy: a comparison that are in some way similar to the incident or event being described. The text creates an analogy between the boy's experience of having an epileptic fit and the boy's experience of having an epileptic fit.

During a breakfast discussion involving Leo, Wilfred, Dannie and their mother, the and everyone seems to speak at cross purposes. This technique serves to present For example, Leo's comment, 'Terrible!' follows Wilfred's remark, 'It's very good to achieve a humorous effect even though the reader is aware that Leo is responding

Dannie gives Keith one of his frogs and they become friends again. Dannie's reminder source of worry to him and by association, the theme of a wider worldly 'sickness' crop up in this section. The boys go on a trip to Barry Island. They swim, eat, play records on the beach. The verbal jousting initially exchanged between the two boys 'So what?' six times with a final 'So what what what?' punctuating its climax (p. 33). childish taunts help build the pace of the text, ultimately moving it 'to an almost' also serves to mirror the boys' mood.

In contrast with the peaceful imagery of the boys having fun at the beach, Abse indicates that something bad is going to happen through the repeated use of a rhetorical question, thus creating tension and suspense. The narrator interrupts the action the future: 'How were we to know what would happen before the day was over?' (p. 37) and, since the narrator is so conscientious, the reader assumes that something is going to happen. Abse goes on to widen the sense of anticipation through the reference to dreadful occurrences elsewhere in the world.

At one point, Dannie looks up 'at an immobile aeroplane in the very blue sky'. Her thoughtful moment, evoking a peaceful Sandy Beach at a specific moment in July simultaneously pierces the tranquil scene:

With the torture of burnt trees in halcyon English woods; Captain Roehm shot dead in Austria, and a man called Hitler screaming: 'I beat down the rebels and spring up. I gave the order to burn out the tumours [...]' (p. 38)

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In this section, Abse also makes reference to popular songs of the day, which the Songs are quoted extensively throughout the novel and they bring with them glimmers of hope. The song titles mentioned here seem to enhance an apparently relaxed and thoughtful atmosphere, but the certitudes of childhood defy a future that's looming.

Abse further accelerates the rhythm and pace of his prose when presenting the epileptic fit on the train by repeating formal elements such as the quick-fire exchange between Dannie, the rants of politicians, popular song lyrics, as well as repetition of words and onomatopoeic 'Rum tumpty tum', which recurs eight times and is capitalised at the beginning (p. 42). The man's seizure terrifies the boys because they do not recognise epilepsy. Dannie, however, recognises it. We are given to understand it has affected Keith more deeply because Dannie and Keith doesn't speak afterwards.

Back in Cardiff, Keith runs off, traumatised. After supper, he finds his frog slimy and links the concept of 'death' with the memory of Keith's mother dying, with the death of the 'man who wet his trousers on the train' (p. 48). Here, Abse utilises motifs from popular culture to create the confusion in Dannie's mind. For example, the rum-tumpty-tum which Keith and Dannie made fun of earlier, so they were 'like big lemons', 'orange footballs', now becomes the swelling of the dead frog's belly in Dannie's mind. As the frog becomes the rhythm of the train where they witnessed a man having an epileptic fit.

Get bigger and bigger, bigger and bigger, rum tumpty tum, rum tumpty tum, rum tumpty tum, bigger and... (p. 48)

While Keith seemed to be more traumatised by the occurrence on the train, Abse's imagination seizes upon events and tries to work through them afterwards. As they go to bed, everything he sees or hears, he tries to make sense of things by creating narrative. Dannie goes to bed and continues to work through events of the day. The pace slackens and Abse's prose becomes anodyne: 'like big footballs, a voice said. Like the world another answered' (p. 50).

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Page	Quotation	
40	<i>The aeroplane tuned the skies, and my frog was dying. 'Like big footballs,' I said. 'Like the world,' said Keith. And the thought silenced us.</i>	Abse's narrative is composed of memories overlap. In this section, he describes a trip to the beach with the boys' antics. The narrative is told from the size of a woman's uncontrollable giggling from an omniscient viewpoint elsewhere. When the boys' dialogue after the trip, the tone is heavier and significant.
41	<i>Rum tumpty tum went the train, from the engine sat down on the grass like a grey ghost.</i>	This image works symbolically, as, in this section, the train becomes almost tangible. Mussolini, Oswald Mosley, Europe keep penetrating like a grey ghost.
47	<i>[...] and he was never strong even as a baby, and everybody thought he would die except one clever woman doctor who prognosticated he had chicken-pox, not small-pox, and it was bad enough with Leo talking so much about politics, and it was a disgrace that he stood on a soap-box in Llandaff Fields for the family had always been Liberals, and Jews should always be Liberals, for a grandfather, olavosholam, used to say, all extremes were bad, and a curse on Hitler and Oswald Mosley, and that I should wash my hair and get all the sand out of it. 'You're not listening,' she said.</i>	Here Abse reinforces the theme of Dannie as always fussing, chaotic and busy. He mixes reported speech and present tenses, reflecting Dannie's mother's chaotic life and topics as she simultaneously thinks out loud.

Did you know?

This section alludes to events which would come to a climax within two years: it started the Spanish Civil War; Mussolini believed he had finished the Abyssinian campaign; his first steps toward the Second World War by marching into the Rhineland; the Means Test, Hunger Marchers, Mosley Rallies, a National Government and so on.

Active Learning Task

How different would it be if someone else told the story of the beach trip or the train journey? Rewrite one of these scenes from a different perspective as a personal diary entry.

Practice Question

- How does Abse create mood and atmosphere in his description of Dannie and the boys on the beach? (pp. 37–43) from 'Wonderful, wonderful,' I muttered to myself to: My sea. In your response, you should also consider how Abse creates mood and atmosphere through events beyond the boys' immediate environment.

Tip: start by making a note of key words and phrases. Look carefully at the language Abse has chosen: does Abse use particular language features to enhance meaning? Does he use repetition, metaphors, similes, personification, onomatopoeia, etc.

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Section Four: pp. 51–7

Summary

The narrative shifts forwards and back in time as the tragicomic, 'Two-fisted' Bertie is introduced (p. 52). The omniscient narrator recounts a day in 1934 during the family are assembled in the shade of an apple tree in Dannie's garden, plotting to get rid of the 'wild' Bertie.

Uncle Bertie's behaviour calms down after he has Aunt Cecile's portrait painted. Dannie reveals that the new meekness is in fact due to a boxing match Bertie had with Killer Williams (p. 61). Young Dannie is asked to call on Mr Thomas to see the doctor. Dannie unwittingly discovers Mr Thomas' relationship with Bertie's mother. Dannie recalls Mr Thomas' funeral and Keith's grief over the death of his mother is evoked.

Analysis

This section begins with a reference to the present: 'Last weekend I had to go to Northampton' (p. 51). This gives a sense of perspective to the events described as the narrator's intrusion into the text in the present implies that these events have happened in living memory. The interruption also serves to authenticate the narrative as lived experience. The narrator here is older than the 18-year-old Dannie who closes the novel in 1942 since he remembers Bertie's son Clive, who 'had been killed in France during the last war' (p. 51). These shifts in point of view add to the sense of the narrative presenting a series of random memories (as opposed to a carefully crafted and considered piece of prose). Later in the text, the narrator provides the year 1951 for this encounter (p. 64).

The narrative shifts forward and back in time to present Bertie. In this way, the character whose only son was killed in the war is introduced to the reader before 'wild Bertie' are related. This technique serves to endear the character to the reader, making him more than one-dimensional in the reader's mind. Abse goes on to present Bertie as a buffoon as it is gradually revealed that he has broken his brother-in-law Isaac's jaw attempting to defend the family's honour (p. 56). Abse uses irony here to emphasise that Isaac, who has called him 'a big empty-headed swindler', is 'family' by birth and by choice (p. 54):

'Oh no,' said Aunt Cecile, throwing down her cards. 'You didn't hurt him?'

'Hurt him! Me! I hurt your brother Isaac! Are you mad?'

'What happened?'

'Oh, [...]. I didn't hurt him at all; but I don't like a young man insulting the family.'

'What did he say?' asked Leo.

'Say? He called me a big empty-headed swindler.'

'But what has he got to do about the family?' inquired Mr Ford.

'Well,' said Uncle, 'I'm a member of the family aren't I?' (p. 54)

Irony is also created here through the assembled group's lack of reaction to the substance of Isaac's insult or, indeed, to Bertie's tirade generally, implying that the gathered folk agree with Isaac's description of Bertie and have become used to his larger-than-life behaviour.

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The narrator recalls occasions further in the past when he visited the Thomas' home. From an omniscient viewpoint, Abse presents details of the younger Mr and Mrs Thomas when they visited them:

The house knew. Rain on the roof, snow on the roof, sunlight in a cascade above with voices. And far away, the kitchen clock ticking, ticking. The house knew of the man, certain of himself, his future. (p. 68)

Abse uses repetition of the verbal motif 'the house knew' to indicate this change. It becomes a symbol for collective memories otherwise consigned to oblivion and, through personification, it is as if the house who 'knew' narrates: 'Voices never leave a house'. The narration back to young Dannie through continued reference to the 'house', which is the mood becomes sombre once again:

I stood in the hall and it was a dark house. (p. 69)

Page	Quotation	
51	<i>Last weekend I had to go to Northern Ireland.</i>	Abse opens this section with a simile. This device allows Abse to contrast the worn-out character in the present with the contrast of what he has been in his life character he once was.
51	<i>Clive had been killed in France during the last war [...]. It was good to see Uncle and Aunt after all those years.</i>	Abse surrounds the time of the war. The comment about Clive's death in the last war' implies that this is the end of the Second World War.
67	<i>There had been other times, long before, when the lights were lit behind the curtains, and from outside, in the street, you could hear Mrs Thomas' fine delicate voice singing, 'Drink to me only with thine eyes'. Drink to me. I stood in the hall knowledgeable with what alcohol can do to a man.</i>	Abse uses <i>intertextuality</i> where there is a reference to another text. Here, with the song implying a light-hearted love for her husband the mood becomes more somber.

Key Terms

Intertextuality: the interdependent relationship between literary texts, and how one text influences the reader's interpretation of the other. Abse's novel is littered with pieces of other texts, the quoted text enhances the mood he is creating.

Personification: the attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects, ideas or concepts, in a figurative or non-literal sense.

Active Learning Task

Think of a person who has made a big impact on you. Use different media to describe your first meeting with them, or describe a situation involving that person. Try to use specific characteristics to make the person seem larger than life like Uncle Bertie.

For example, you could draw the character on A3 paper and annotate the drawing for your peers. Alternatively, you could make a collage, assembling features from pictures. Again, you should be prepared to present your character to your peers.

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Section Five: pp. 71–92

Summary

It is 1938: Dannie is 14 years old and has an increased awareness of international events. There is a memorial meeting for Leo's friend, Jimmy Ford, in the October Hall; Jimmy was part of the International Brigade to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Mr Thomas' presence at the proceedings. Dannie and his friends are infatuated and hang around Lydia in anticipation of his appearance.

Analysis

Dannie is now 14 and the narration of events surrounding international political events such as the Spanish Civil War becomes more searching and detailed. At the same time, Abse clearly conveys the matter-of-fact attitude of teenager Dannie to whom war is still something described to him by Leo in articles, stories and poems in the *Left Review* newspaper. In this way, and with some irony, while Dannie is shown to feel strongly about the war, the tone of his thoughts implies to the reader that he does not fully comprehend it.

If I was bigger perhaps I could go to Spain. It was worth fighting for. Maybe the memorial meeting for me. It was very sad all these young men dying. (p. 78)

Through the description of Jimmy Ford's memorial meeting, Abse contrasts the urgency and political ambitions of the local activist with lived consequences:

Mrs Mary Ford walked in, just as the speaker was thumping the table, making the water shake in the glass as he shouted, THERE WITHOUT SACRIFICE, and she joined her mother-in-law quickly. The speaker momentarily his rhetoric, hesitated, and his voice seemed spent. (p. 73)

Abse emphasises the pathetic nature of war by describing how the life of an ordinary young Cardiff man who liked sardines on toast can be cut short. He achieves this by using the device of the **vignette** to describe Jimmy Ford's final moments:

Jimmy with his free hand pulled out the peseta notes from his pocket. It was the only thing he could give away, but though he spoke, no words came [...]. An hour later the small wind blew some peseta notes across the blind quiet grasses skirting the empty road. (p. 75)

Mr Thomas is present at the memorial meeting and is anxious to leave by 'the door marked Exit' in the process (p. 76). With 'disenchanted sadness' (p.79), Mr Thomas' presence at the proceedings with memories of his own personal loss:

Mr Thomas cried. Tears were streaming down his face and he walked away marked [...]. (p. 79)

Moreover, the recurring motif of 'the door marked Exit' takes on symbolic significance as a way out of the October Hall, but symbolising Jimmy Ford's abrupt 'exit' from the war.

Teacher's Tip

Remember: in your response, as long as you give clear reasons for your comments you can't go wrong. Your ideas about the text may be different from other people's judgements, so have confidence in your own opinions.

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Page	Quotation	Analysis
80	<i>I turned round, still with my finger pressing the nipple of Clytemnestra</i>	Here, Abse plays with the notion of innocence. Dannie remembers his five-year-old self in contemplation, innocently pressing the nipple. The old Dannie touches the nipple again now, but he understands its significance, perhaps; he is no longer innocent in terms of sexuality. The presence of the home is also an allusion to the family. The word 'nipple' indicates a degree of pretentiousness. It also indicates his ignorance of 'Aristotle, Son of Aristotle?' (p. 65).
91	<i>'Perhaps she won't turn up,' said Bob. 'I refuse to wait for a woman,' I said.</i>	The dialogue exchanged between Dannie and Bob conveys the boys' uncertainty in themselves. The boys become increasingly anxiety-ridden, ending their date altogether from the cinema and their date altogether.
92	<i>I put my finger again on the nipple of Clytemnestra, the murderess. [...] I heard Leo's voice from the stairs saying, 'What the hell's the matter with you?'</i>	This is the third time Dannie has pressed the nipple in this section. While still 'innocent' in the same sense of questioning and thus an awakening through a more detailed description of the nipple, it is explicitly compared with 'honey-haired

Active Learning Task

In many ways, the Spanish Civil War was a dress rehearsal for the far bigger conflict the world soon afterwards: World War II.

In the novel, the character Jimmy Ford enlisted in the British Battalion of the 15th International Brigade. The novel describes his involvement in the brutal Battle of Brunete.

Carry out research on the Internet and create a newspaper front page reporting on the Battle of Brunete in 1937.

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Section Six: pp. 92–155

Summary

Lol declares to Dannie his infatuation with Lydia Pike. He insists upon Dannie helping him to write her a love letter and then denies his intention of posting it. Despite being told that Lol is harmless, Dannie remembers how dangerous Lol can be: when Dirty-face's dog is killed by a car, Lol reacts violently, pummelling the dead dog with his fists.

In November 1938, Wilfred and Leo discuss violent actions taken against Jews in Germany. Wilfred narrates the story of the 1938 youth Herschel Grynszpan who assassinated Ernst von Rath, the Third Secretary of the German Embassy, in Paris. The following morning, Lydia Pike becomes Dannie's girlfriend and they share their first kiss. Dannie is now 15. Dannie's mother is believing her to be Dannie's new girlfriend. Later, Nancy has her appendix and Lydia has her period at hospital. Dannie daydreams about being a surgeon.

Dannie visits Rabbi Aaronowich to deliver a parcel; the rabbi calls Dannie 'Moses' and Christianity. Dr Aaronowich's estranged son Jack comes to call on his parents' wedding, Dannie stays with Uncle Bertie, Aunt Cecile and his cousin Clive who meet. Bertie comes up with a money-making plan involving a Mr Simon. He runs his business deal by shooting the family's pet cat dead in a fit of temper in front of them.

Analysis

The world beyond Cardiff is shown to touch increasingly upon everyday life in the characters of Leo and Wilfred. As Jewish homes in Germany are smashed, syndynamited', Wilfred and Leo consider events:

'It can't happen here,' said Wilfred.

This in Cologne, Lubeck, Leipzig, Breslau, Stuttgart.

'It's unlikely to happen here,' said Leo.

This in Hanover, Hamburg, Constance, Reichenberg.

'Supposing it did?' asked Wilfred.

This in Germany.

'No, it wouldn't happen here,' said Leo. (p. 103)

**Kristallnacht
Broken Glass**
On the night of 9–10 November 1938, a series of orchestrated attacks took place across Germany and Austria in retaliation for the assassination of Ernst von Rath by Grynszpan. Jewish homes and businesses were looted and staff at the German Embassy in Paris were killed.

By making the characters express uncertainty here, Abse shows the extent of the heightened fears of the wider Jewish community. Wilfred narrates the story of Grynszpan's assassination as a news story in fictional form, this allows the reader to engage with events in a more intense or emotional way.

Dannie's taste for history (including them as well as inventing them) is expanded upon when he imagines a historical scene 'as Wilfred had related it' (p. 128). Dannie, Keith and Lydia are in hospital. Once at the hospital, Dannie notes 'like a memory' the 'antiseptic' which 'permeated the Casualty Department, revealing his literary leanings (p. 132). After the

Between fragments of conversation I saw myself, self looking upon another self, a young, white-gowned, white-masked surgeon. (p. 133)

This extract serves to illustrate how Abse knowingly blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality. The novel is semi-autobiographical in that many of the details presented are indeed from Abse's own past. Here, this self-reflective gesture mirrors real-life events since Dannie is both a doctor and a writer.

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Dannie and Keith's relationship is developed in this section. As 15-year-old boys, their preoccupations shift towards girls (Lydia and Nancy) and they are shown to take a more profound interest in international political issues. Abse reveals the awkwardness of youth as the boys are shown to teeter between childhood and adulthood; Keith smokes cigarettes expertly but swiftly hides a cigarette behind his back when a teacher approaches; 'Bloody Tory' Keith swears, once the teacher is out of hearing. Keith's uneasy relationship with his father is alluded to when he asks Dannie: 'Can you still have an Oedipus complex if you haven't got a mother?' (p. 139).

When Dannie visits Rabbi Aaronowich, he is compelled to listen to the distracted rabbi's ramblings on the difference between Christianity and Judaism. The rabbi rambles over the Jewish concept of God:

[...] for we Jews, Michael, there cannot be a Son of God, except in the sense that God has a son of God'. (p. 140)

Yet the rabbi's ramblings, 'seriously broken, half alien, half Welsh', seem more directed at his son Jack, 'because of his marriage to a non-Jewish woman' (p. 141). 'Absalom, my only son', Dannie realises that the persistent visitor who is ringing the doorbell is indeed their estranged son Jack. According to the Bible, Absalom was King David's third son and his father.

Page	Quotation	Analysis
92	If Modigliani had painted him, he would have just looked about normal.	Abse refers to wider cultural references (in this case, the famous elongated faces of the modern painter Modigliani) throughout the poem. The comparison has a humorous effect in that Modigliani is renowned for his elongated portraiture with extreme allusion to this technique, creating a vivid image in the mind of the reader. 'no neck worth talking' (p. 139).
93	'Don't you know, Lol? – there's a war going on.' He looked at me incredulously. We sat there awhile looking over the rooftops at the distant Bristol Channel shimmering in the sun [...]. Below us the dark primitive quarry with its rusted stone jutting in and out savagely. Stone abandoned, cold, cruel, ancient . . .	Abse frequently uses juxtaposition to mark things. Here, he compares the 'primitive' by means of the environment they observe. The contrast between the 'war going on' and the 'dark primitive quarry' highlights the harshness of the environment.
104	'Who is Grynshp?' asked imploringly. 'No one,' said Leo, 'but a condition of the world.' 'I'll try and explain to you,' said Wilfred.	The story of Grynshp is a reference to Wilfred. In terms of structure, the poem is as a vignette. A vignette is a complete piece of writing which contains no plot. It is like a scene in a cinema which serves as a backdrop for an event, allowing the reader to get the whole story. The poem goes on to create a moment.

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Active Learning Task

1. In the centre of an A3 or A4 sheet of paper, write a word that has meaning 'father'. Circle the word.
2. Brainstorm words connected with your central word and create a mind-map.
3. Take one idea from your mind-map to write about, for example, a theme, or complement the idea (for example, if you chose 'religion' as an idea, you could write about a religious festival).
4. Now, take 10 minutes to sit quietly and visualise your image (you can close your eyes if you like).
5. Choose a form for your writing, for example, a poem, a description, a monologue, a rough draft. You could describe a scene, a character, even another planet, but make it come alive for the reader. For example, if you focus on a character, you could describe their personality. The aim is to show details of the person or scene through details.
6. Leave your rough draft to one side and come back to it another day.
7. Read your draft out loud. Discuss with your peers how well it works to express your idea.

Practice Essay Question

1. How does Abse create mood and atmosphere in the narrative about Grynsh?

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Section Seven: pp. 155–184

Summary

August 1939. Dannie's parents and his brother Leo return from a trip to London. Dannie and Keith have finished their exams and hitch-hike a ride to Ogmere by the sea for their holidays. The boys are eventually picked up by Mrs Henrietta Gregory, in a chauffeur-driven Daimler, who takes them directly to her white house which is 'crowned by a green Moorish undulating roof' (p. 163). There, the boys meet Henrietta's older husband, Raymond, 'glass in hand', with a face as 'red as a lobster' (p. 163). Mr Gregory invites the boys to tea. It is revealed that Mrs Gregory is 'flirting' after a nervous breakdown following her father's death. Keith, already believing himself to be in love with 'a woman', interprets her fragility as only a man twice her age' (p. 165). Mr Gregory gives the boys permission to call leaving in the Daimler the next evening. Keith is infatuated by Mrs Gregory holiday with her 'shopping, walking or riding'; he calls her Henry (p. 166).

The onset of war is evoked during a bus journey to Bridgend to buy contraceptives (Keith is afraid to ask for them in the end). Mr Gregory returns and the boys see less. They overhear the married couple talking about Keith's infatuation for Mrs Gregory and her discomfort with the situation: 'I'm no good as a mother-substitute,' she said (p. 170).

The Germans invade Poland and the boys have to return home because of the war. The section ends with a declaration of war announced by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain at 11.15 am on 3rd September 1939: '[T]his country is at war with Germany' (p. 184).

Analysis

Dannie and Keith's trip to Ogmere reveals the boys in adolescent mode; away from family and local community, Keith falls in love, spending all of his time with the older woman. In this infatuated encounter, a gap is created between the lived experiences of the boys and the world; Keith's preoccupation with love implicitly makes him seem more emotional than he is. For example, when he declares his intention of sleeping with Mrs Gregory, Dannie doesn't understand [...] 'You don't know what love is' (p. 178). Abse puts the boys' infatuation into perspective when they travel to Bridgend to buy contraceptives for Keith but return with 'two packets of condoms and some razor blades' (p. 184).

Having to make do with his own company much of the time, Dannie discovers a depth of powerful peacefulness within himself. An older Dannie reflects:

It was more than the freedom and beauty of the sea and skies, more than being alive. Something moved across the land as a benediction. It is hard to explain the colour no one had ever seen. Only I felt a great exultation and a holiness I never experienced once before. I was given the power to do enormous good. (p. 184)

Indeed, both Dannie and the older woman, Mrs Gregory, laugh at Dannie when they read from Miguel Hernandez' poem, 'Gather this Voice'. Here, Abse implies that the boys are wrapped up in themselves and in immediate gratification to relate to the distant 'balconies' of Spain (p. 178). We are shown that the poem echoes in Dannie's mind as he sits on the beach with two for a glass of lemonade and as the hot, sultry and still weather presages disaster.

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Page	Quotation	Analysis
155	<i>The mechanical voice of the loudspeaker floated disembodied across the station clock that had stopped long ago in the year 1933.</i>	This section opens with another vignette of 'hook-nosed ones' (and here, Abse uses the word 'hook-nosed' as if to emphasise their alienated status). The passage describes the train to concentration camps. The passage ends with the London train. Abse merges both worlds in the narration here, as if to merge Dannie's consciousness of happenings in Europe with real events in the reader's mind.
159	<i>A van crawled towards us and we stared at it belligerently. 'You wave it,' Keith said. 'I'm unlucky, I feel unlucky.'</i>	Throughout the novel, Abse uses foreshadowing to hint at Keith's tragic fate. Here, Keith's seemingly innocent remark forces his tragic role and foreshadows his death in love with Mrs Gregory.
164	<i>Henrietta's wife smiled vaguely, like a smile behind a glass.</i>	The character of Henrietta Gregory is fragile in her role as wife and fun-lover. Abse creates an impression of her fragility through the metaphor of a smile behind a glass. Keith's misfortune to fall in love with a woman with fragile mental health and yet even Keith's death is foreshadowed in 'Poor Henrietta' (pp. 191–192).

Active Learning Task

Role Play Interview (pairs)

This section includes a declaration of war against Germany by the British Prime Minister.

In pairs, you will interview characters from the novel about their reaction to the war. Choose any character from the novel and answer questions about how you feel about the war.

Example questions:

- Where were you when war was declared?
- Do you agree with the decision to go to war?
- How would you feel about enlisting (joining up)?
- How is your family coping?
- Food is being rationed – what will you miss the most?

Now think of some questions of your own and take turns to respond in role.

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Section Eight: pp. 192–2

Summary

This section opens with an air raid over Cardiff sometime after war is well underway, in the early 1940s. Abse initially describes the effect of war much as an interruption on everyday life: a film in the cinema is temporarily interrupted with an air-raid notice, people rush home in the dark, searchlights scan the sky and anti-aircraft guns can be heard in the distance. Dannie's brothers have enlisted: Leo is about to go off to camp and Wilfred is in India; his father listens to the *Germany Calling* on the radio while his mother alternately asks about her boy and her knitting and pretends 'that outside it was a lot of fun' (p. 194).

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Uncle Bertie demonstrates resilience during a raid by continuing with his game, falls 'across the road' as bits of plaster to drop from the ceiling above 'Germans' (p. 193). The Aaronowich family are reunited by war.

Mr Thomas persuades Leo to have another drink with him in the pub and stay. Meanwhile, his son Keith is killed when a bomb makes a direct hit on their home, the tram, oblivious to what he is about to discover. Dannie has his 18th birthday.

Analysis

In this section Abse's narrative becomes increasingly disjointed, jumping back and forth between scenes, beginning with an overview of everyday life in Cardiff and moving on to more particular characters. The random nature of the text now seems more deliberate and more intensively. We are shown glimpses of characters' lives; characters who have been introduced earlier. Dannie's parents, Leo, Uncle Bertie, the Aaronowich family, Mr Thomas, Phyllis. The war is shown to provide resolution for some (the Aaronowich family are reunited) and for others (brought about by the fragmented narrative, as well as the imagery of war which creates a sense of foreboding in the reader).

Abse uses short, snappy exchanges of dialogue once again (this device is used throughout the novel to show inner tension between his characters as Dannie's parents' disquiet for their sons).

'I remember in the last war...' began my father.

'You remember. You don't remember anything. Where are the boys?' my mother.

'Climbing Snowdon. What do you think?' barked father. (pp. 194–195)

Abse also uses personification to describe the restless, almost desperate state of the parents, with the knobs of the radio, desperate for news and missing their sons:

[W]ould be sent home to be done to and pursue the lives he had planned for himself.

No such voice spoke in the hurried room. (p. 194)

The narrative's point of view momentarily shifts to Leo who is about to return to his regiment. The tone takes a boyish turn, not generally associated with Leo in the novel, as he daydreams about his Moth aeroplane:

Chagall high, over the cardboard rooftops and the silly minute spires – over the fields looking like patched quilts, like eiderdowns. (p. 195)

Irony: This is a steep device and action significant.

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Abse's use of familiar, painterly imagery conveys Leo's love for the thrill of flying the older aeroplanes. They are presented in contrast with the more contemporary 'tubular monsters' (p. 195) or '[a]eroplanes that are becoming to look more like fish and less like birds every day' (p. 196).

Keith's life has been steeped in tragedy, from his encounter with the stranger in the lane aged 10 to his unrequited love for Mrs Gregory aged 16, and his ongoing anger and frustration with his alcoholic father. Abse has thus prepared the reader for Keith's unhappy fate but this does not detract from the sadness his death evokes in the reader. Indeed, Keith's anger and frustration is conveyed right to the end as, in response to Phyllis the maid calling his name, he brings his fists down 'again and again on the keyboard', transforming the music into a sort of gunfire' (p. 201). These details reveal so many continuing, unresolved issues in his character and perhaps make his death so much more poignant in its immediacy. Keith dies alone playing his piano.

When the title in red pay at let person device below S Eliot taken begin who

Page	Quotation	Analysis
192	<i>The trees stood to attention on the pavements, waiting, under a moon threading bare the soap-sud clouds.</i>	Abse's prose is infused with poetic imagery. In Cardiff in the midst of war, his cityscape is brought to life with the use of personification and the juxtaposition of phrases associated with war, such as the notion of 'threading'.
193	<i>'Swansea's 'aving it tonight.'</i> <i>'Barry's 'aving it tonight.'</i> <i>'Newport's 'aving it tonight.'</i>	This extract of dialogue neatly mirrors the meaningless exchanges in the first section of the novel, but with a more sinister significance as it resonates with the meaninglessness of war.
208	<i>I lit a cigarette, turned up the collar of my mackintosh, and strolled home that was never to be home again.</i>	Abse concludes his novel with a paragraph that can never be a home again. This is a novel whose form crosses generic boundaries and whose plot has no finite closure. As Keith watches the falling leaves: 'I was in a death agony' (p. 207). Like the falling leaves among millions but Abse's novel stands out to give colour and dimension to their fate.

Active Learning Task

Create a 1940s propaganda poster for the local community around the statement 'British' (p. 192).

You can use multimedia or a computer to create your poster.

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Quick Overview of *Ash on a Young*

Page	Section	Key themes	Analysis
1–16	1	Childhood – Abse presents childish banter accurately The boys meet a stranger and Keith's tragic fate is indicated through the Black Curse (p. 11); his mother dies (p. 16)	Dannie is the protagonist and Keith Thomas are enemies Dannie has tea at Keith's home introduced; Keith's mother cried.' (p. 16)
16–33	2	Social unrest: the 1930s Depression (vignette of Alur and Gwennie, pp. 29–33)	Uncle Bertie is introduced Dannie's parents (p. 19). A trip to the synagogue.
33–50	3	Outside looms; rise of fascism in Europe; death and loss	The boys go on a trip to the sea a man on the train has an accident the boys and spoils the day (p. 43). 'Elsewhere' is boding; the torture of burnt trees in Austria Captain Roehm shot dead in Austria, and a man's dead frog: he buried the seed).
51–71	4	Alcoholism of Mr Thomas (p. 67); Keith's sorrow (p. 70)	Kindness of mother (pp. 70–71) of narrative viewpoint (p. 68) mother's hypocrisy vis-à-vis Keith
71–92	5	Spanish Civil War; childhood coming to an end; Dannie's infatuation with Lydia Pike	Jimmy Ford's commemoration Dannie is 14. Dannie asks Lydia Dannie is concerned with her (pp. 81–92).
92–155	6	Grynszpan vignette; persecution of Jews in Germany; Uncle Bertie and Jewishness (p. 148) and on art	Grynszpan story (p. 102); Vignette of persecution of Jews; Lydia and Keith never quite make it out (p. 154); Lol's character development
155–192	7	Vignette of train taking Jews to their deaths (p. 155); war is declared	The Gregorys (p. 162); Keith's war is declared.
192–208	8	War-torn Cardiff; Keith dies	Lord Haw-Haw & Germany Keith alone; Leo and Wilfred

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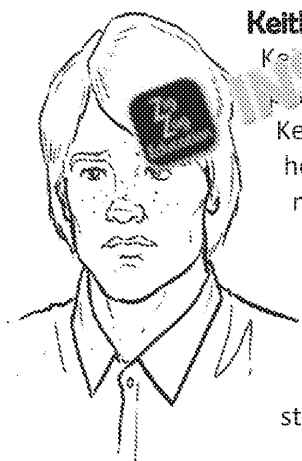


Characterisation

Characterisation – the process of creating and revealing the personality of a fictional character

Dannie

Dannie is the narrator and protagonist in the novel. He is Jewish and lives with his mother and two brothers, Leo and Wilfred, in Cardiff, south Wales. Dannie is the youngest brother and is a daydreamer with a very active imagination. He has many adventures with his best friend Keith Thomas. Dannie's memories about growing up in Cardiff are filled with stories of the Spanish Civil War as well as the rise of fascism in Europe and the outbreak of World War II.

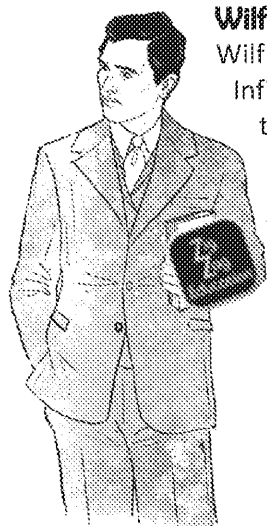


Keith Thomas

Keith Thomas is Dannie's enemy at the start of the novel but, when his parents move to the other side of the lane to Dannie, the relationship changes. Keith's life is tinged with tragedy: we learn this early on as he encountered a drunken Mr Thomas in the street (p. 4). Most of the key events narrated by Dannie, for example, the discovery of tea that Dannie discovers that other people's homes are not as secure as they seem, the stranger touches and who therefore receives the blame, and the fact that Keith falls in love with Mrs Gregory when the two boys go to school, are all part of his story. His relationship with his alcoholic father is damaged and he lacks the courage to provide his son with the love he needs. At the end of the novel, he still has an Oedipus complex if you haven't got a mother.

Leo

Leo is the middle son and is a solicitor. He is passionate about politics and is also a socialist who breaks with the Jewish tradition of adhering to liberal politics. Leo is shown to be rebellious when Dannie has an argument where the father chases Leo around the table; Leo picks up a bread and escapes. It is from Leo that Dannie learns about politics and the rise of fascism in Europe. Leo also reads poetry out loud to Dannie and the first line of the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem 'Pied Beauty' is repeated throughout the second section of the novel (pp. 10-11). 'Glory be to God for dappled things'. Leo's passion for life, including his political views and active appreciation of poetry, is shown to be important and influential in Dannie's formative years.



Wilfred

Wilfred is Dannie's oldest brother. He is a psychiatric medical student at the Infirmary. Dannie nicknames Wilfred 'Bastard' which Wilfred likes. He gives the reader the older brother's upright, responsible attitude (p. 10). He is a bit of a head and is opposed to superstitious (like his mother) and is more like Leo. He reads the *News Chronicle* while Dannie reads the *Daily Worker* (p. 35). Wilfred's role as storyteller is important to young Dannie who has a fertile and colourful imagination. He tells stories from the Old Testament at bedtime; he also tells Leo stories about his student training. Dannie overhears these stories and uses them in his own stories (p. 128).

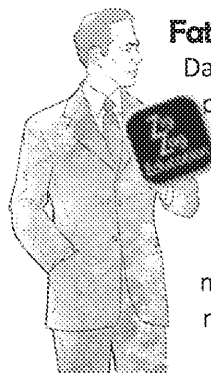
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Mother

Dannie's mother speaks Welsh and Yiddish. She is the centre of the household and sayings which, the narrator implies, are not usually taken very seriously by her sons as being an essential aspect of their mother. For example, young Dannie remembers sayings when the stranger approaches him and Keith: 'If you're a bad boy, I'll give you' (p. 11). Young Dannie's narration often presents his mother as chattering about issues related, as when Dannie returns from his day trip to the sea with Keith. Here, Dannie verbally links Dannie's suntan to Mrs Cohen's sunstroke, to Wilfred's whiteness due to too hard and having no sun, to Leo's politics and back to Dannie needing to wash his hair. This verbal effect makes the mother seem overbearing although her chief concern is to be for her sons' wellbeing and achievement. It is important to Dannie's mother that their sons become successful in the world and they worry about Dannie because he writes poetry: 'He can't earn a living by poetry' (p. 201).



Father

Dannie's father sometimes quarrels with his sons and has 'a habit of pronouncing' but we understand that this is because he expects great things. Dannie's father and mother are very proud of Wilfred and Leo, and they talk about their first two sons' achievements ('not just an ordinary Morgan, very clever') (pp. 18–19). However, they are shown to be disappointed in Dannie who 'won't do any work' (p. 19), even if their sense of hopelessness is softened in a certain manner by narrator Dannie. Father doesn't talk often but he shows his concern that Dannie may not achieve his matriculation (p. 122).

Uncle Isidore

Uncle Isidore 'was just an oldish, untidy man, a sort of beggar, who wouldn't work in the Library and forever played his violin' (p. 20). He is not really Dannie's uncle, but his father calls him 'uncle' and Dannie simply follows tradition. Throughout the novel, Dannie's parents refer to Uncle Isidore who becomes 'a sort of symbol' (p. 18). Uncle Isidore is an artist and is the only artist Dannie's family know, but Dannie's parents implicitly compare Isidore's art industry to their son's tendency to poetry.

Uncle Bertie, Aunt Cecile and Clive

Uncle Bertie is introduced as a larger-than-life character, his clumsiness rendered more prominent against the backdrop of Aunt Cecile, Leo and his friend Jimmy Ford playing cards under the shade of an apple tree while Uncle Isidore lies asleep in a deckchair and Dannie rests on the lawn (p. 52) in the heatwave of 1934. He gets involved in a boxing match after he meets Ken Williams. Williams challenges him to fight his 'big brother' Jake (p. 58). Uncle Bertie went missing in action in the early days of the war and, for some time, Bertie is expected to return.

Mr Thomas



Keith's father Mr Thomas is from a good family and had once been a successful man but became an alcoholic who 'sings and weeps in public: 'always afraid of losing his job' (p. 14). He walks past Dannie's house at night after the pubs close and Dannie overhears him saying: 'We're damned, the whole world is damned' (p. 9). After the drink when his wife dies, he resumes drinking the very same brandy which is considered scandalous by the neighbourhood, typified by Dannie's example: 'What sort of a future has little Keith with a father like that?' (p. 10). Dannie's relationship with Phyllis his housemaid but does not tell his sons about it. Dannie works it out for himself.

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Philip Morris

He is a painter – a local artist. Uncle Bertie employs the young Philip Morris to paint. Everybody notices how Uncle Bertie's behaviour changes afterwards: he becomes kinder. Later, the narrator reveals that his change in mood was due rather to an impending fight. When Williams challenges him to fight his older brother, Killer, Philip Morris acts as a protective shield when he spots Dirty-face approaching, striking the painter who is absorbed in capturing an outdoors scene. During Nancy Roberts' visit, she mentions the painter's name. Abse presents his characters in an awkwardly realistic way (in contrast to the use of 'assented' here) and Philip Morris serves to symbolise culture or art (in contrast to the embracing of everything as art):

'I believe you know Philip Morris,' Nancy Roberts said.

'Oh yes,' Leo assented (p. 125).

Dafydd Morgan

Old Dafydd Morgan is a neighbour and a non-Jewish friend of Dannie's parents. Dannie's older sons and his parents send their youngest son to Morgan but we don't get to find out if he engages in any activities. The scene is interrupted by Dannie's parents who only want to talk about the boy.

Dirty-face

Abse provides only the nickname Dirty-face for this boy whom Dannie and Keith are playing with. The boy who walks around pushing a pram, 'his dog following behind him' to avoid him (p. 7).

Active Learning Task: Building Character Profiles

As you progress through this study pack you will encounter important information about the characters. Print several copies of the next page. Put a different character's name on each copy. At the end of each chapter to record the important points about each of the characters.

If this is completed, by the time you have finished this study guide you will have a profile of each character in one place. This will be very useful for your revision.

An example of how to fill in a character sheet is included here.

Character Name: Dannie's mother		
Page	Character Comment	Key Quote
48	Loving and overprotective	'Don't you feel well, dear?' 'I'm all right.' 'Tummy-ache?' 'I'm all right.' 'You probably swallowed too much sea ice-cream.' 'I feel alright.' 'You've got a sunstroke. You should wear a hat.'
121	Interfering in her sons' lives	'I've asked your girlfriend to tea,' she said. 'I've put the yellow tulips in a vase.'
194	Vivacious	Mother picked up her knitting, pretended to be asleep, that nothing really was happening. She would ring and she would wake up.

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Character Profile Sheet

Character Name:		
Page/Chapter	Character Comment	Key Quotation

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Character Analyses

Dannie

He is the narrator and protagonist of the text. As the novel opens, Dannie is 'ten or 18 and is studying medicine at university. We learn that he is born into a Jewish family in Wales, with his father, mother and two brothers, Leo and Wilfred. Dannie narrates the story in a stream-of-consciousness style, skipping along like random memories, evoking both happy and sad aspects of Jewish life and a sense of belonging to two minorities, the Welsh and the Jews.

Ten-year-old Dannie loves his brothers 'best': their ideas and words fuel his lively imagination for daydreaming (p. 5). Even during childhood games, the influence of Leo and Wilfred is evident:

We [...] became Cowboys and Indians amongst the bushes and trees of the Park because my brother Leo said told me that Cowboys were Imperialists.) (p. 10)

Dannie's parents clearly love him very much but they think that their imaginative son is a bit of a dreamer. Since they are preoccupied with the worldly success of their sons, they are unable to obtain a secure career:

'There's a bit of my family in Wilfred and a bit of my family in Leo,' said Dannie. 'What about your family.'

'Like your family,' said mother.

'What are we goin' to do with him?' said father. 'He can't earn a living by pottering about.'

'It's a disease with him,' said mother.

[...] 'He's like Uncle Isidore,' she said, returning to the old conversation.

'Exactly like Uncle Isidore,' repeated my father. (p. 201)

They compare him with Uncle Isidore (not really an uncle) who 'didn't have a real living' (p. 20) and who has no occupation but lives as a poor tramp.

We learn about the lives of the characters Dannie comes into contact with through his eyes and over an eight-year period. Dannie's memories are infused with stories of the Spanish Civil War as well as the rise of fascism in Europe and the onset of World War II. Dannie's daydreams interrupt everyday events and as war becomes more imminent, the daydreams become more disturbing. While waiting on the train platform for his mother, father and brother Leo, Dannie visualises carriages loaded with Jewish people who turn into skeletons.

Dannie's best friend is Keith Thomas. Dannie doesn't always realise what is going on with Keith, but from his description, we can see that he can work things out. For example, when Dannie's girlfriend Lydia comes to meet them wearing lipstick, stockings and high heels, Keith, who is sexually aware, teases her. Dannie doesn't realise the significance of this but the reader does; he muses: 'Keith didn't seem to get on well with Lydia now as he had when he was around' (p. 131).

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Keith Thomas

At the beginning of the novel, Keith Thomas is Dannie's enemy. He calls Dannie 'P' (p. 7). When Keith's parents move to the other side of the lane to Dannie, however,

Keith's childhood is marked by tragedy: the loss of his 44-year-old mother when he was 10, the alcoholism of his father. We are given to understand that his parents' marriage had been a bad one from the start:

'Blodwen fach,' he said hopelessly, 'it was good at the beginning, wasn't it? It was born?' (p. 14)

Sometime after Mrs Thomas' death, Keith's father begins a sexual relationship with a woman. The first time in years, Mr Thomas kisses his son affectionately, but Keith only responds with a cold stare (p. 70), which wipes the smile from his father's face.

Keith's moodiness throughout the novel is no doubt due to grief and an unhappy childhood. He is described by his father as 'fearless' (p. 198), but at the same time he is an outsider, perhaps because of the lack of a secure and consistent home life and the fact that he is Keith who talks to the shady stranger who offers them ice cream, and who is in love with a girl. For the 10-year-old boys, this touch becomes symbolic and Keith's life is now tainted. Moreover, it is Keith who reacts so strongly and fearfully to the man having an affair with his mother. It is 16-year-old Keith who falls for Mrs Henrietta Gregory.

On top of the major loss of his mother and his father's alcoholism, Keith continues to experience minor setbacks throughout the novel. For example, when Dannie pairs up with Lynn, they arrange for Keith to date her friend Nancy Roberts, but for one reason or another, this never comes about. Keith's love for Henrietta Gregory is ridiculed by both her and her husband, and as a result, Keith tells Dannie: 'I wish I had the power to know what everybody was doing exactly, without being there' (p. 188) and this is as close as he gets to expressing his pain and grief to his friend.

Ultimately, when the bombs start dropping on Cardiff, Keith refuses to seek shelter with Phyllis under the stairs:

'Don't be worried,' said Keith more gently. 'The raid's nearly over, I'm sure, it's all right unless a bomb's got our names written on it.' (p. 201)

Indeed, the bomb must have had Keith's name on it because Phyllis survives and

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Leo

Leo is the 18-year-old (in 1934) middle son and is a solicitor. His passion for life, and active appreciation of poetry, is shown to be important and influential in Dannie's life. Leo's brothers are first mentioned after young Dannie recounts a visit to Keith Thomas, which is interrupted when Keith breaks one of Dannie's nails: 'I went home crying to mother and she weaves in and out here, touching on memories of home, play and school interchangeably. The formative role played by Dannie's brothers is reinforced by Abse as he has the younger brothers best' (p. 5).

Leo is initially introduced by young Dannie as 'a revolutionary' who has taught him a protest song, and a communist alphabet song (p. 5). Introducing Leo through his perspective (that of a 10-year-old boy) and in his absence serves to indicate the level of influence Leo has on Dannie, intellectually as well as emotionally.

We first encounter Leo in chapter 1, where he is 'squeezing a black-head from his forehead' while he meets his girlfriend, Miss Davies (p. 18). Leo hits Dannie then bribes him to stop Davies at home. Later, Leo lies to his parents about meeting her: he prefers to tell them of a political meeting rather than to admit that he is going out with a non-Jewish girl (p. 22). This is significant in terms of the themes raised in the novel because as a young man with traditional Liberal political leanings of Jewish families at the time and yet drawn to a non-Jewish girl here on a personal level. Here, Leo's rebellious nature is also revealed as he stands with a bread knife as his father chases him around the table. While this episode might be seen as an act of violence, Abse renders the action harmless and even comical by having Leo post a letter to his girlfriend's letterbox once he has let himself out. This humorous effect is further emphasised when his mother comes home and young Dannie exaggerates: 'Leo chased dad with a bread-knife and you ought to operate' (p. 23). In this way, differences and angry outbursts in the family home are rendered as idiosyncrasies.

Through Leo, Abse knowingly has young Dannie in his innocence and ignorance narrate events taking place in a troubled European political climate. For example, when Leo is reading his *Daily Worker* one morning, he keeps muttering: 'Terrible, terrible' (p. 35). Dannie looks at Leo's paper 'to see what was so shocking' and sees an article about 'a man named Harry Pollitt being tried for sedition' and the Test Match results. Young Dannie who 'did not know what sedition was' concludes that 'Leo was silly' (p. 37). Later, in 1939, when narrator Dannie is 15, political references are more pointed. For example, when Nancy Roberts comes to tea, she picks up a copy of Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, the first authentic account of the Chinese Communist Party; it is understood that the book is Leo's.

Leo's zest for life is perhaps best typified by his appreciation of poetry and this is shown to have far-reaching effects on the aesthetic wonderings of the young Dannie. Leo reads aloud from the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem 'Pied Beauty' and as Dannie narrates events of a typical Saturday morning, he repeats the first line: 'Glory be to God for dappled things' (pp. 16–33) as if to emphasise the out of the ordinary nature of everyday things.

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Wilfred

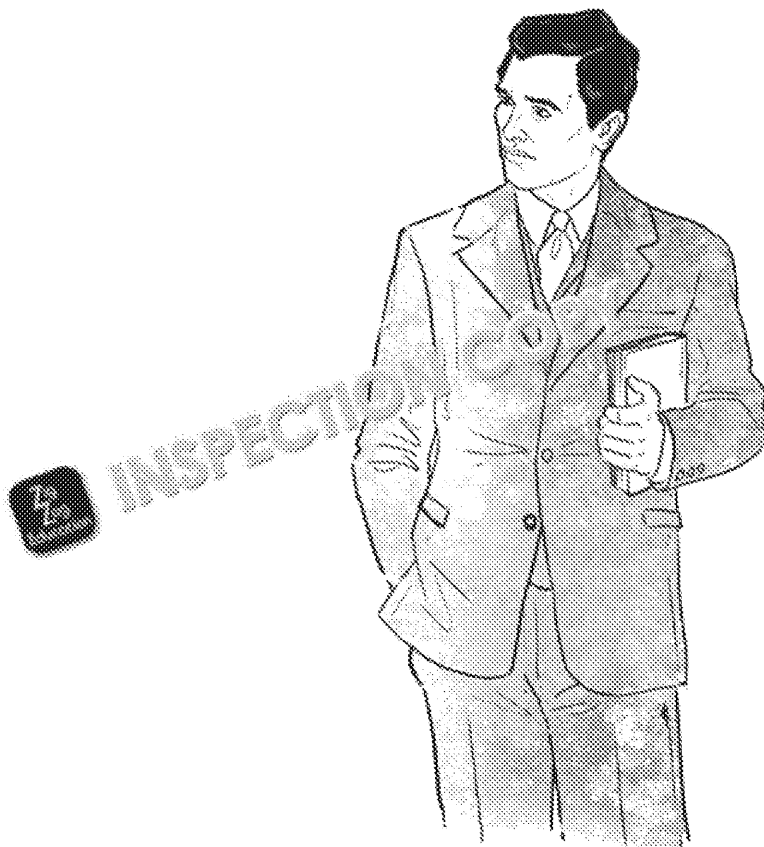
Wilfred is Dannie's oldest brother. He is a psychiatric medical student at the Cardn, nicknamed Wilfred 'Big Stiff', which Wilfred likes and which serves to evoke for the upright, responsible attitude (p. 9). Wilfred is shown to be rational minded and not superstitious (like his mother), imaginative (like Dannie) or passionate (like Leo). His father in that he has become a doctor according to his parents' wishes and is shown how radical politics make him a rebel in the domestic environment. Wilfred reads the more radical *Daily Worker* (p. 35). When their 'sort of third cousin' Sammy is neatly presents the differences between the two brothers through Dannie's second

Wilfred had told me all about America and Leo had too, so I didn't know what

The influence of the brothers on young Dannie is reflected throughout the novel. The calming influence because he tucks him in at night with stories from the Book of the hospital intended for Leo often reach Dannie's ears too and it is Wilfred who reads Herschel Grynszpan (pronounced 'Greenspan'): the Jewish youth who assassinated on December 17, 1938. The story of Grynszpan would be familiar to many contemporary readers who had lived through the Second World War (indeed, the characters Leo and Wilfred are contemporary 1938 newspaper coverage of events). In the context of the novel, it is a short piece within the whole text. Fourteen-year-old Dannie scans the newspaper for news about the person his brothers have mentioned by name in relation to increasing hostility against Jews in Europe. As Dannie reads aloud each successive measure, the reader experiences a youth overwhelmed by the sheer number of unexplained and shocking

'Jews afraid to return home... Jews hiding in the woods... in the fields... Fattening Infirm Jews and the Jewish aged turned out of the hospitals and old people's homes'

By presenting the events surrounding Grynszpan in story form, Wilfred endows the events with detail, allowing Dannie to engage with events in an imaginative and emotional way. Wilfred interprets events in a way his young brother might grasp and in a culture all too familiar. Of Jewish people in this period, Abse presents Grynszpan's story to the reader with the aim of experience a more direct and intense engagement with such 'real' events.



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Dannie's mother

Dannie's mother speaks English, Welsh and Yiddish. She is the centre of the household, resembles the hard-working stereotypical Jewish mother who likes to boast about her sons, to meddle in their lives and insist that they bring home Jewish 'little odd' in 15-year-old Dannie's view:

Sometimes she'd speak of 'Shiksies' whose only occupation, it would seem, was sons. Or: 'The modern girl doesn't wash – they put on the paint and the powder Soap.' (p. 111)

This implicitly hypocritical attitude is evident elsewhere in the text, for example when Dannie's cousin, is due to visit. Since Sammy is said to be 'very, very clever', they decide to invite Mr Thomas even though he has blamed the marriage's illness and subsequent death:

'A man without a woman in his life is driven to drink, I tell you [. . .]'

'He drank for me, he died,' said Dad.

'His wife was an invalid,' said mother.

'Why not long ago you said his antics killed her.'

'Think of the poor lonely man,' said mother. (p. 66)

The stereotypical Jewish mother is often characterised as having odd and sometimes overbearing love. An example of this in the novel can be seen when his mother invites 15-year-old Dannie to tea (she mistakenly believes that 'nice girl' Nancy Roberts is his girlfriend (p. 121)):

Mother took a fork and started to mash the bananas – before passing them on to me.

'Don't bother,' I said.

'Why,' said mother, 'you like them mashed.'

'Yes,' I protested, 'but I can do them myself.'

'I have practically to feed him,' said mother, and for the fourth time that afternoon I blushed scarlet. 'He's such a baby. . . He's so particular about his food . . . won't eat anything but chips.' (pp. 124–125)

Later, when war has broken out and their two older sons have enlisted, Dannie's father twiddles with the knobs on the radio trying to receive the Nazi propaganda programme *Germany Calling*, while Dannie's mother picks up her knitting: 'Pretending that outside it was all a dream, that nothing really was happening' (p. 194). However, the narrator indicates that, despite her efforts '[t]he world of happenings crept unobtrusively into the room':

'Politics, politics,' my mother sadly commented as she cleared the tea-table. (p.126)

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Dannie's father

Dannie's father sometimes quarrels with his sons and has 'a habit of criticising his sons. He doesn't understand that this is because he expects great things of them (p. 122). Both Dannie and Leo are very proud of Wilfred and Leo, and Abse reveals them as happy to talk about their fathers (not just an ordinary doctor'; '[a] solicitor, Mr Morgan, very clever') (pp. 18–19). Dannie does not approve of his youngest son's artistic leanings and despairs about his future, Isidore, an unsuccessful and unskilled artist.

Dannie's father doesn't talk often but he does become angry and outspoken when Dannie brings his girlfriend to tea. Dannie's father fears an interest in girls will prove to be a distraction for a son who should be preparing for final exams. Here, Dannie's father threatens his son: 'If you fail your matriculation, I'll break your neck' (p. 122) and goes on to reveal the central theme of the novel:

'... I work so hard so you may all have a chance. Be given the chances I never had. I want you to be able to pursue a richer and better life.' (p. 122)

Indeed, when Dannie's mother attempts to stand up for the boy, his father continues to be preoccupied with his children's scholarly and career successes:

'And he tells me he got 62 in Latin. He must get 102, then he can be pleased with himself.'

'All right, all right,' said mother, 'he's a good boy.'

'A good boy.' Dad stood up. 'All he thinks about is football and cricket. Write his homework. He'll become like Uncle Isidore!'

'Well, you couldn't write poems,' said mother.

'Who wants to?' shouted Dad. 'Does poetry make you any money?' (p. 123)

The above extract also provides an example of the verbal banter Abse has crafted. Throughout the novel, the couple engage in petty quarrels, with their children as witnesses. Both parents repeatedly despair about their young son's artistic tendencies and compare him to Isidore, yet here, it suits Dannie's mother to stand up for Dannie because she has invited Dannie's girlfriend as a guest. To some extent, Dannie's father conforms to the role of the pecked, subservient husband as Dannie's mother always tends to have the last word. However, young Dannie outlines a strategy his father has come to adopt:

Whenever Dad wished to defeat my mother in argument he would accuse her of gossiping. Having pulled out his trump card he would never say another word, but shut his jaw tight, deaf to any of my mother's protestations. (pp. 147–148)

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Uncle Bertie

Uncle Bertie is introduced at the beginning of the fourth section of the novel. The time as an older Dannie remembers visiting Uncle Bertie and Aunt Cecile in Presto Ireland. This shifting of narrator along with mournful imagery enhances the pitiful

Aft of the ship, a dead fish floated on the waves, poisoned by the warm water, seagulls gathered over it inquisitively but wouldn't touch it. Uncle Bertie said, 'Come and stay with us again,' and the ship's funnel blew its sorrowful warning. Uncle Bertie shook his massive grey head and his grey eyes watered a little. 'I'm hopelessly.' (p. 51)

The narrator informs us that Clive, Bertie and Cecile's only son, was killed during the war to conclude that this episode is narrated sometime after 1945 (the final section of the novel is set in 1942). Clive goes missing in action and at first his parents will not accept the shadow of his former self, the 'tired, old, crazy, wild Bertie' (p. 52).

Dannie recalls a day in 1934 during the heatwave when friends and family were playing cards. Uncle Bertie bursts in, angry, speaking in 'his special booming voice'. He presents Bertie as a blunderer and a buffoon over several pages as he tries to justify his behaviour to the attention of the group who, seemingly only too familiar with his angry outbursts, gradually revealed that he has broken his brother-in-law's jaw 'in three places' with his family's honour (p. 56):

'[...] I don't like anybody insulting the family,' Uncle Bertie boomed.

'What did he say?' asked Leo.

'Say? He called me a big empty-headed swindler.'

'But what did he say about the family?' inquired Mr Ford.

'Well,' shouted Uncle, 'I'm a member of the family, aren't I?' (p. 54)

To make up to his wife, Bertie has Cecile's portrait painted by local artist Philip Morris. 'The thing about Art' (p. 148). Young Dannie remarks on a definite change in Bertie's behaviour since the war; he is now finished; soon he realises his uncle's meek behaviour was due to an impending boxing match. Having hit Ken Williams, the man has challenged him to fight his older brother, Killer Williams, over eight rounds. During this time Uncle Bertie took to carrying a gun: 'You can never tell when you may meet a burglar' (p. 148). Bertie is shown to go from blunder to blunder, however well-meaning his actions may be. Indeed, it is Bertie who pays off Uncle Isidore's debts following his death (p. 149). He attempts to secure a business deal with Mr Simon but works himself into 'a fury of love for Art' and as the pet cat of Mr Simon unfortunately chooses this moment to knock over an ornamental vase, Uncle Bertie effectively ruins his chances with Mr Simon (p. 153):

Uncle Bertie stood for a moment, smayed, 'That was great Art,' he choked and then, suddenly, he pulled his gun out from the holster, shooting the cat dead. (p. 154)

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Mr Thomas

Mr Thomas is Keith's father and in many ways is the opposite of Dannie's father. Dannie has a modest background and works hard 'from morning to night' so his children might be able to 'pursue a richer and better life' (p. 122). Mr Thomas, on the other hand, comes from a wealthy background.

He had been a brilliant architect at one time, of a good family, and fortunate enough to have been employed by Tanner & Son. Now, he was always afraid of losing his position.

Abse reveals a weakness in Mr Thomas in his inability to take responsibility as a father. After Mrs Thomas' death, Mr Thomas begins a sexual relationship with his housekeeper. The nature of their relationship is implied through young Dannie's ironic narration of a 'pantomime' 'an animal cry' (p. 69). Keith Thomas is not aware of their relationship when he overhears them in the lounge, but Abse implies that for a moment Mr Thomas has a moment of understanding and happiness when he sees his son affectionately after spending time with him.

And then he did something he had not done for years: he bent down and kissed Keith's chin. It was a quick, almost smelt of stale alcohol and tobacco. Keith looked at him.

'Are you all right, son, all right, Keith boy?'

'I want my mother,' the boy said. 'I want my mother.'

Mr Thomas' face crumpled, the smile tragically fell from his look, and his mood turned hopelessly. (pp. 69-70)

Abse creates the impression for the reader that things might have been different if Mr Thomas had the courage to persist in his demonstration of affection for Keith and has no one but his father to care for him.

Ten-year-old narrator Dannie is invited to Keith Thomas' house for tea and company. When Thomas with the weeping, 'wobbly' drunk he encountered the day before:

'Darro,' he said, looking at me with spaniel eyes, 'you're damned too, little one.' (p. 4)

As this encounter occurs in the first few pages of the novel, it is important in creating the character of Mr Thomas in the reader's mind as well as indicating the lack of a positive paternal role model in his best friend's life. Ultimately, Keith is killed by a bomb and as Dannie watches the ambulance drive away towards the White Wall carrying his friend, Mr Thomas descends from a tram on his way back from the pub, nearly falling on the pavement:

'I'm... I am... a happy man.' He gave us a little bow and passed us. We didn't say anything. We heard him begin to whistle 'Roll out the Barrel' as he walked into the dark. (p. 206)



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Active Learning Tasks

1. These exercises are intended to help you to think about how the characters move through the key points in the novel.

Dannie

- a) You are telling your brother Leo about Keith's infatuation with Mrs Gregory. Write down your **thoughts** and **feelings**.
- b) You have just found out that Keith has been killed in a bombing raid. Write down your **thoughts** and **feelings** afterwards.

Keith

- c) You have just discovered that your father is having an affair with Phyllis. Write down your **thoughts** and **feelings** afterwards.
- d) Phyllis the maid has just gone to find shelter under the stairs during the air raid. Write down your **thoughts** and **feelings**.

2. These tasks are designed to make you think about the characters' motives, thoughts and feelings.

Mr Thomas' Diary

At the end of the novel, Mr Thomas gets off the tram drunk and unaware that his home has been hit by a bombing raid on their home. Imagine you are Mr Thomas and write his diary entry for the day. Think about what sort of language you think he would use, and how this best reflects his character.

- a) Imagine you are Mr Thomas and you have started having an affair with Mrs Gregory. Write down your **thoughts** and **feelings**.
- b) Now imagine you are Mr Thomas and you have just found out that your son has been killed in an air raid. Write down your **thoughts** and **feelings**.

Dannie's Letter

At Ogmire, when camping with Keith in the Gregory's grounds, Dannie spends most of his time with Mrs Gregory. Keith spends most of his time with Mrs Gregory.

- c) Imagine you are Dannie and write a letter to your girlfriend Lydia telling her about the situation.

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Active Learning Tasks continued

3. These exercises are designed to help you think in character and find alternative views about the text.

Choose either (a) or (b)

(a) Dannie's Mother and Lydia Pike

In the novel, Dannie's mother is quite outspoken about her mistrust of Gentiles and is too concerned with their appearance and making eyes at (her) boys. Dannie says she has invited his girlfriend over for tea, because Lydia is not Jewish. Of course, Dannie's mother has made a mistake and has invited Nancy Robert. Dannie's mother finds out that he is going out with Lydia Pike.

Get into pairs and each take the part of one of the characters: Dannie's mother or Lydia Pike. Use your character's words and actions throughout the novel to inform your responses.



Debate Prompt

Once you have thought of some ideas, start a debate arguing your character's position on life in Cardiff.

Take turns to make a point

- Try to speak like and use the same language as your character

(b) Dannie and Keith

When Keith falls for Mrs Gregory, Dannie implicitly disapproves of Keith's choice.

Get into pairs and each take the part of one of the characters: Dannie or Keith. Use your character's words and actions, and the relationship between them developed in the novel to inform your responses.



Debate Prompt

Once you have thought of some ideas, start a debate arguing your character's position on life in Cardiff.

- Take turns to make a point
- Try to speak like and use the same language as your character

Now choose either (c) or (d)

(c) War

In the novel, war is never very far from the narrator's consciousness. Dannie is a revolutionary and at one point Dannie asks him why he doesn't enlist in the Spanish Civil War, like his friend Jimmy Ford who was killed in action.

Get into a group of five and think about how Dannie's family would react to a memorial service. The family group consists of Dannie's mother, Dannie's father, and Dannie.

Allocate roles to your group of five and think about how each character would react to this cause.

You can write down some points to help you if you like. When doing the presentation, consider your character's position and how they would think and feel.

(d) Dannie's Presentation

In the novel, Dannie confronts prejudice directly and has to come to terms with the period that saw the mass murder of millions of Jewish people.

Prepare a short presentation (no longer than 10 minutes) where you will argue about being Jewish in the late 1930s.

You can write down some rough notes to help you if you like. When doing the presentation, consider your character's position and how Dannie would think and feel.

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Active Learning Tasks continued

4. Using Point/Evidence/Explanation when writing essays for your exam


It is important to be concise and present your points carefully, and not spend too long on one thing, in order to develop a good argument. A technique that can help you do this is PEE.

Here's a reminder of PEE:

P: Point **E: Evidence** **E: Explanation**

It is important to use this when you are writing about texts. For example, if you are asked 'How is Dannie's mother presented in the novel?' then you should use the structure of PEE in your answer.


Here's a more detailed explanation with an example:

P: Point	Dannie's mother is presented as being suspicious of outsiders, particularly non-Jewish girls, and is very critical and judgemental in her opinions.
E: Evidence	Use the quotation from Section Six:  <i>Sometimes she'd speak of 'Shiksies' whose only occupation was to make sheep's eyes at her three sons. Or: 'The modern girl does not use the powder – what they need is Lifebuoy Soap.'</i> (p. 193).
E: Explanation	Your comment could be something to the effect that: This shows that Dannie's mother is out of touch with modern life and youth culture. Although it is clear that she loves her sons because of her protective nature, it also shows that she is quite afraid of their coming into contact with non-Jewish girls, which is ridiculous because the family lives in a non-Jewish community.

Now, imagine that you take away the PEE scaffolding:

Dannie's mother is presented as being suspicious of outsiders, particularly non-Jewish girls. In Section Six, the narrator comments that 'Sometimes she'd speak of "Shiksies" whose only occupation was to make sheep's eyes at her three sons. She goes on to say that "[t]he modern girl does not use the powder – what they need is Lifebuoy Soap.'" This shows that she is out of touch with modern life and youth culture. Although it is clear that she loves her sons because of her protective nature, it also shows that she is quite afraid of their coming into contact with non-Jewish girls, which is ridiculous because the family lives in a non-Jewish community.

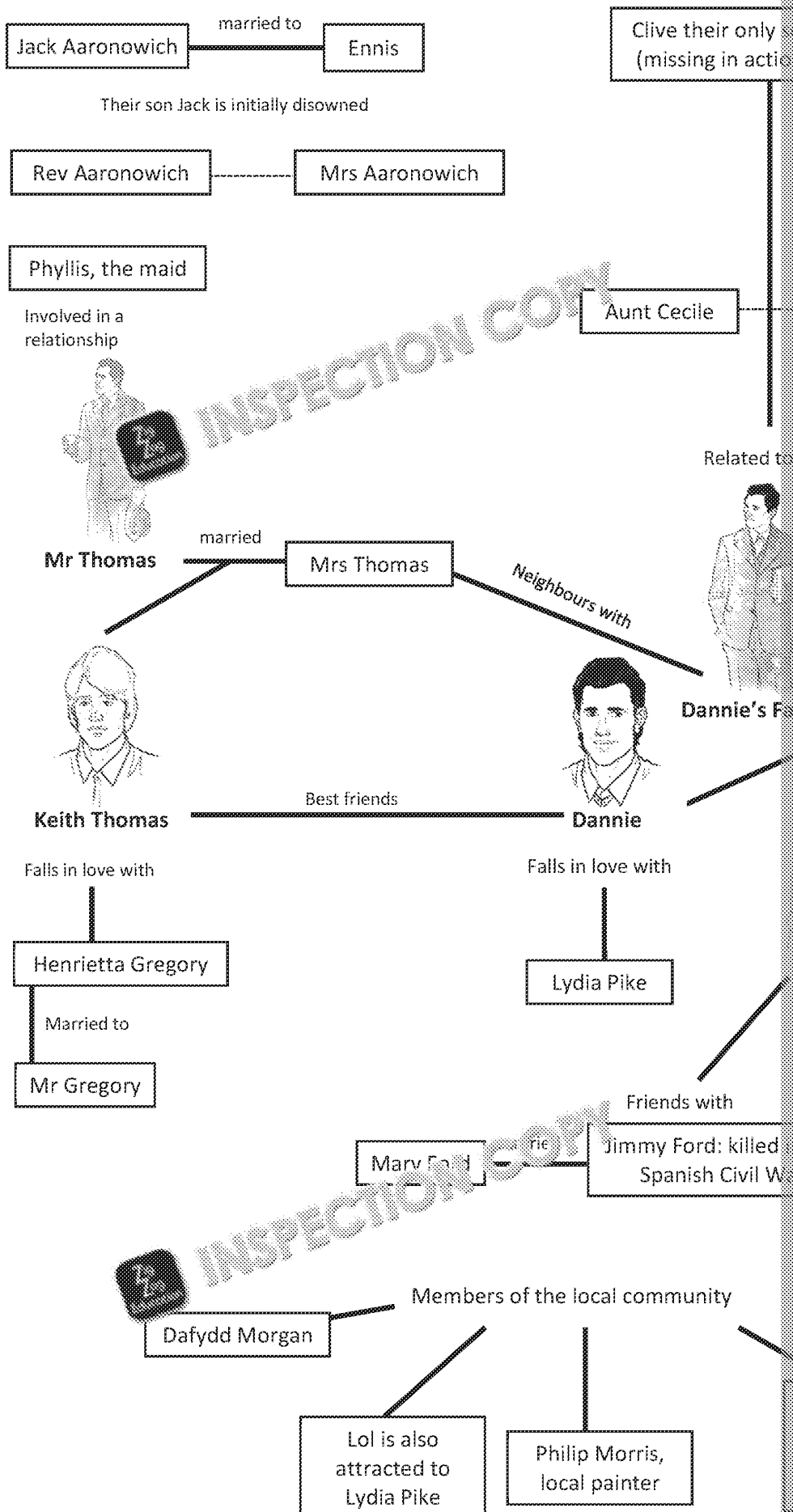
This is only one small piece of an argument; however, by following this pattern, you can make more succinct points with analysis using PEE. For example, you could answer 'How is Dannie's mother presented in the novel?' like this:

P:	Dannie's mother's critical nature is shown in the way she nags her husband and gossips about her neighbours.
E:	<i>My father switched on the wireless. Mother said: 'Where are they both? Really, they should be home; that's where they should be . . . What do you expect? They should be home. . . . What do you expect?' (pp. 193–194).</i>
E:	Here, Dannie's mother 'prattles on', complaining about her sons' whereabouts as he tries to listen to information about the war on the radio (p. 194). This is in a critical or judgemental way, but because of her change from one subject to another, she neatly gets across the idea that she is fearful for her sons and anxious about the prospects are threatened because of the war.
P:	She also demonstrates hypocritical behaviour when she decides to invite Mr Thomas to dinner to make a good impression because Mr Thomas is middle class and 'educated'.
E:	 <i>'Mr Thomas was an educated man and Sammy would enjoy meeting him. . . . Socrates and Plato' (p. 65).</i>
E:	Abse uses irony and humour to show how Dannie's mother changes her opinion of the situation. Since she wants to impress their distant cousin, Sammy, she changes her opinion of Mr Thomas' behaviour now. When Mrs Thomas died, Dannie's mother said, 'What sort of future has little Keith with a father like that?' (p. 66), but Dannie acknowledges her change of mind: "'Think of the poor lonely man'" said Dannie to her to be narrow-minded because, although she expresses strong views, she changes her opinions to suit the situation.

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Character Relationships: Mind Map



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Relationships

Below are brief analyses of the novel's key relationships.

Dannie and Keith

The two boys have starkly contrasting home lives, with Dannie's that of a close and fractious Jewish family and Keith's marked by the tragedy of his mother's death and bitterness and alcoholism. Initially enemies at school, they become the best of friends the next street from Dannie's. The novel traces their path to adolescence, sharing the death of Keith's mother which profoundly affects Dannie also. For example, the customs that include not walking on the cracks of the pavement (which will ensure 'ladies' [p. 34] when older), not picking dandelions (to avoid wetting their beds during goodnight to everyone and everything in the house) and going to bed. This reveals the certainty in their lives after the tragedy suffered by Keith. The boys' fear during the passenger (who they believe is dying or has died) provides another example of their close bond. When Dannie's frog dies afterwards, he first links it with the mother, and then with 'the man who wet his trousers in the train' (p. 48), pondering

By the age of 15, they have grown to share a sincere if immature interest in girls. One of the key events that Dannie narrates involve Keith: for example, it is on a visit to Dannie discovers that other people's homes are different; it is Keith whom the story therefore, receives the Black Curse, and it is Keith who falls in love with Mrs Grey on a camping trip. Dannie is also Keith's only confidant concerning his broken relationship. Keith asks Dannie at one point, 'Can you still have an Oedipus complex if you haven't got

Dannie and Leo

Their relationship has the typical dynamic of the big brother–little brother relationship and receives a clout for his pains; for example, when Dannie taunts Leo about love, he hits him against the wall and leaves him with a 'bruise like an egg' (p. 10). When he thinks that Megan is at their door, he bribes Dannie with a penny to stay quiet. He provides cultural information for Dannie, as when he reads him the Hopkins poem in the first section, which will prove a major influence in kindling Dannie's interest in political events.

Leo and his parents

Leo's relationship with Megan is a source of serious contention with his parents, referred to as a *shickse*, a derogatory Yiddish term for a gentile woman. Despite this, Leo feels the need to lie when his mother interrogates him about where he is going, to a 'political meeting' (p. 22). Leo raises a serious point about the lack of privacy in the family when he spills the beans about Megan. The subsequent altercation between Leo and his father, who uses a bread knife, illustrates that the entire family living together is a source of sporadic tension and conflict. Despite this, Leo's father is happy to bring his son to Mr Morgan as a

Dannie and Wilfred

Dannie's oldest brother, Wilfred, tries to steer his rather esoteric sibling toward the world of medicine. (Coincidentally, his recently acquired preoccupation with death, Dannie asks him 'what things' (p. 31).) Wilfred tells him 'it's very good to be a doctor' (p. 35) before Dannie meets a man who presented at the hospital convinced that he was dead, even after a doctor told him he could still bleed. Wilfred is adopting a more constructive role than his parents, encouraging his brother's interest in a worthwhile career while also playing to Dannie's fertile imagination. This occurs later in the novel when Wilfred narrates the story of von Rath's assassination in great nuanced detail, again appealing to Dannie's imagination. Wilfred also adopts the same oath to swear not to repeat the word 'bastard' (p. 32).

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Uncle Isidore and Dannie

Dannie's mother and father bemoan his similarity to the aimless Uncle Isidore, who collects a half crown weekly from relations, reads at Cardiff's Central Library and who refuses to work. Dannie, on the evidence of his narrative, seems ambivalent about the comparison, which are that his parents believe their third son will not match the psychiatrist) and Leo (a solicitor). Isidore seems to have shown Dannie affection in moments of kinship between Dannie and Isidore, such as when he praises Isidore as a 'gentleman' (p. 21) and asks Isidore about Jewish identity:

'Uncle, what's it like to be Jewish all your life?' I asked.

"S all right," he said, and for a moment we smiled at each other. (p. 22)

This apparent unspoken bond between man and boy, however, seems fleeting on reflecting back on Uncle Isidore's life he notes 'Even though he died of kidney trouble doesn't seem very much' (p. 19), adding 'that no one cried when Isidore died. This illustrates that many – if not most – relationships in life consist of moments, and it is these moments that make them significant.'



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Settings

The novel is set in South Wales and the sense of place permeates its language, the 'Welshness' is a source of pride in the novel. The sense of belonging binds characters together, it even provides a sense of comfort in kinship, as with the soldiers of their positions in Spain: 'To be born in Cardiff and to meet a man from Newport'. The narrative is filled with vivid descriptions of the environment, and often Abse enhances a mood:

The sheets were hung in a row and the convex wind blew and puffed out their billowed out, proud and pompous, waiting to be decorated with medals of sun over the washing-line, over the patch of grass and the fading sunflowers. (p. 25)

Here, Abse creates a sense of the characters' sadness for the reader through just describing Mrs Aaronowitch washing. Elsewhere, Abse evokes the sense of despair by unemployed men:

Others lounged at corners, in doorways, smelling of wet mackintoshes, listless depression in the valleys and the orator thumping his fist – they only went on higher into the rain – then the bus arrived. The red-coloured bus arrived and conscious of the rain, the dampness seeping right through to their souls, the green dress pulled off it, the pulleys stopped and a girl trembling near the coal movement under her heart. One of the queue had a fit of coughing – spat from fluid, mixed with coal and blood. All the people in the queue watched his com prisoners they filed through the pin-striped rain into the red-coloured bus, ten 1934. (p. 26)

The sense of community appears threatened here through lack of means. The rain but gradually disperses individuals in their misery. Abse conveys a sense of lameness away from their beloved home country to find employment: '[g]oing to an alien different and disliked' (p. 27).

Practice Essay Question

1. How does Abse create mood and atmosphere in his description of unemployed men 'Others lounged at corners...' [p. 26]]?

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Themes

Theme – an idea central to the understanding of a literary / an artistic work.

You may be asked to write about the themes in your exam. You will need to think of these themes to the reader. A theme is an idea that the author wants to get across.

Childhood (Bildungsroman)

The novel conforms to the Bildungsroman genre in the sense that it traces the coming of Dannie, into adolescence and adulthood. Events are presented to the reader in retrospect so the novel takes the form of a double narrative: events are narrated in retrospect so as if the young narrator would and sometimes from the older Dannie's viewpoint. This narrative device is explicit at times, for example, when introducing Uncle Isidore:

I don't think I've told you about him. I'd like to tell you. Of course, he's dead now. But he was a sort of symbol really. You know, my parents still live in the house he grew up in. I left home. (p. 18)

The following quotation neatly indicates how the narrator sometimes takes an older Dannie could not remember:

When I was born my brother Wilfred bought me a Comic Cuts to read. I couldn't see if I was real. I was. (p. 28)

Set against the backdrop of social unrest, the rise of fascism and war, the novel explores themes of independence, the influence of his family and friends, sexual awakening and the political enlightenment and ambition. The novel begins when Dannie is 10 years old and takes an autobiographical style, skips along light-heartedly from one memory to the next.

Dannie's experiences are those of an average boy. He has a school friend, Keith, who is alternately friend and enemy; he explores the meaning of death when Keith's mother dies; he learns about family strife, of the existence of girls, of the wider world, and of Spain.

Politics, Social Unrest and War

In many ways, the novel traces narrator Dannie's political awakening in the face of social and political unrest and upheaval. His brothers are at the source of his political education. Young Dannie describes as a 'revolutionary' and whose political influence touches him long before he is able to understand why (p. 5):

We [...] became Cowboys and Indians amongst the bushes and trees of the Park because my brother Leo had told me that Cowboys were Imperialists) (p. 10)

The very first sentence in the novel alludes to 'peace' in boy association, preparing the concept, or 'war': 'June the first was our day of peace, our day of peace' (p. 1). Dannie and his brothers are presented as a 'constant campaign of masterful vilification' (p. 1). To vilify someone is to make comments about them that are harsh and unfair. This language here is at odds with the language preceding it, which is the language of a young boy. Again, this prepares the reader for the theme of war that will continue to develop.

Aged 15, Dannie's evocation of events in Europe becomes more piercing. The threat is now more imminent for the community. Abse presents such events in what reads like a news report, as if across the pages much like the persecutory actions are spreading across Europe:

In every part of the Reich, synagogues were set on fire or dynamited. Jewish shops were ransacked. Individual Jews were arrested, hounded or baited by bands of Nazis. They were smashing up all Jewish shops [...]. This in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Nuremberg. 'It can't happen here,' said Wilfred.

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This in Cologne, Lubeck, Leipzig, Breslau, Stuttgart.

'It's unlikely to happen here,' said Leo.

This in Hanover, Hamburg, Constance, Reichenberg (pp. 102–103).

Popular culture pervades the novel by means of *intertextuality*. Abse's text is littered with songs and poems of the time. In each case, the reference merges with the main text to create a sense of resonance in terms of historical context for the reader. For example, the poem by Hernandez connects the literary with the lived experience for the narrator (and, because it obliges Dannie to reflect upon the words he reads in relation to his poem, it seems to indicate that, for Dannie, consciousness of world events through literary choice of texts quoted, Abse also indicates that he believes that art can be a form of escape. The poem would also explain narrator Dannie's disdain for Keith's choice of poem, Shakespeare's 'Summer's Day', as being pedestrian and even 'as alive' (p. 169) in its irrelevance.

Art and Imagination

Art takes on some seemingly conflicting aspects in the novel. There is the artist, painter Philip Morris, who creates conventional works of art: he paints portraits and landscapes from life. When Uncle Bertie pays Philip Morris to paint his wife Cecile, Bertie then becomes obsessed by art:

Everything he liked, he described as Art, Great Art, whether it was a motor-car or merely Aunt Cecile's cooking. (p. 148)

For Uncle Bertie, who is implicitly uncultured and brutish, art is everything and he is ridiculed by the narrator:

It was then the cat, who had jumped up on to the sideboard, unfortunately knocked the china, shattering it on to the floor. Uncle Bertie stood up dismayed. 'That was a cat,' he suddenly drew his gun out from the holster, shooting the cat dead. (pp. 153–154)

Ironically, however, he is shown to be astute in his blunt observations because he sees everything he surveys into art through his imagination. A routine trip to the hospital to see Dannie performing an operation in his imagination. Abse prepares the reader for this from the first pages of the novel. For example, when he goes to Keith's house for tea, he is sensitive to the differences between his friend's house and his own home: 'Perhaps the past remains of previous tenants' (p. 2). The protagonist narrator also gives an impression of his own home when he goes on to describe his own home:

I knew the paper flowers, the Sunday suits, the stuffed animals, the brass, the clutter, there was too much furniture in the room. Always there was too much noise and there were visitors. Lovely it was. (pp. 2–3)

When Dannie and Keith travel to Gomorrah, Dannie seems to undergo a cathartic feeling of spiritual release brought about by an intense emotional experience:

I wrote my name in the sand and watched the waves erase it, and I thought of things, the meaning of the world, its mystery and motion. (p. 174)

Dannie's literary interests are ridiculed by Keith and Henrietta Gregory when he reads the suffering of Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. The wider social and cultural context is lost on the reader and this creates a contrast between Keith's physical and in-the-moment consciousness of things in the world, beyond his immediate environment. Indeed, when reading a poem aloud, the protagonist narrator calls out: 'For God's sake, shut up Keith's choice of poem (a Shakespeare love sonnet) is corny, predictable and superficially reflective of Keith's infatuation with the married woman (p. 169). Keith does pose a problem for the narrator implies that it is toiled over and provides no meaningful emotional outlet. 'The wrong notes of Rachmaninoff' (p. 112).

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Active Learning Tasks

Create a Personal Mind Map of Themes

- Take a piece of A3 paper and, in the centre, write down any one of the themes.
- Make a mind map by brainstorming ideas about this theme that are connected to it.
- Draw lines to connect ideas and put them into themes or categories (see example of a completed mind-map with your peers).

Example: Art and Imagination

Some ideas include: favourite books; drawing; the smell of paint; getting messy; drawing a famous musician; singing to my favourite songs; my appearance and fashion; making a guitar; watching the clouds go by; drawing in the sand; graffiti; doodling, and so on.

I might then create links between *practical experience* (playing guitar, drawing, etc.) (acting, fashion) and *personal or private experience* (doodling, the smell of paint, etc.).

Theme Development

As you progress through this study pack you will encounter important information on each page. Print out the copies of the next page. Put a different theme name on each of the copies. Take notes at the end of each chapter to record the important points about the theme and develop it.

If this is completed, by the time you have finished this study guide you will have all the information in one place. This will be very useful for your revision.

An example of how to fill in a theme sheet is included here.

Theme: Jewishness		
Page	Theme Comment	
5	Here, in the opening pages of the novel, Abse connects seemingly unrelated ideas as if to mimic the stream of consciousness of the 10-year-old narrator protagonist. However, Dannie's family's Jewishness is inextricably connected to their Welshness. Just as the candles symbolise holiness and unity for the boy, the confusion of languages that surround him reflect his inherited culture.	It was two candles, holiness, could see English, as well.
22	Dannie grapples with his sense of identity after being teased by boys at school for being a 'Jewboy' (p. 7). He doesn't understand why Jewishness singles him out but when he asks Uncle Isidore about what it's like being Jewish 'all your life', rather than use words to describe what simply is a condition of their lives, the two of them share a moment of knowingness and solidarity.	'Uncle, your life "S all right we smile
30	In that red globe the oil of Jewish history burned, steadily, devotedly, in its blood? Blood of the ghettos of Europe.	The people never for narrator to even interwar events

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Theme Development Sheet

Theme:		
Page	Theme Comment	

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Ideas and Messages

Death, Loss and Grief

Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve pivots on two tragedies: one universal, the other personal. On a personal level, Keith's mother, Mrs Thomas dies early on in the novel. Her death is foreshadowed by an odd occurrence: a 'big man' touches Keith and the boys believe he has been cursed when Keith sees the man again at a rugby match (p. 10). Keith seems to attract bad luck as the novel progresses and ultimately dies in a bombing raid.

The boys witness a man having an epileptic seizure on the train and momentarily of Dannie's frog becomes symbolic for personal loss as the young Dannie grapples. Moreover, Abse indicates an inadequacy in Dannie's mother in dealing with the growing son:

'Mam, do you always think about dead things?'

'Why?'

'Oh I just wondered.'

'What a funny boy you are, you don't want to think about dead things.'

'Why not? Keith's mother is dead, isn't she? Keith thinks about her.'

'Perhaps you ought to go to bed and lie down.' (p. 49)

It is significant that Dannie's mother is uncomfortable discussing the subject of death. Highly imaginative, he connects the idea of burying the dead with the notion of putting his dead frog and therefore, in his imagination, the frog will grow, just as the apple the frog grew:

[T]he dead frog's belly would swell. Get bigger and bigger, rum tumpty tum, bigger, bigger and... (p. 48).

As the boy gets older, he becomes more aware of events going on elsewhere in the world through lively discussions and also through the impact of international events on his community. While fighting in the Spanish Civil War and Dannie's 18-year-old cousin Clive dies. Herschel Grynszpan takes a nominal German life and countless Jewish lives are taken as the war progresses, countless, nameless, ageless others die in Europe as attacks against Jews progress, and countless Jews are driven to their dreaded destinies by train (Section 7 – p. 155). Dannie contemplates so many falling, dead leaves. Here, Abse evokes a collective, only helplessly observe:

Those that came down unhindered, straight down the vertical rope of air were without protestation, a quick, easy, silent journey to earth everlasting. But the others, so lightly, so sadly to earth shouted in their death a lamentable leaf-vocabulary. I was in an autumn afternoon, their death was a leaf-fall. (p. 207)

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Religion and Prejudice

Abse is both a Welshman and a Jew, and Dannie's understanding of Jewishness, is a theme in the novel which is set in a historical period where the mass murder of Jews took place.

As a child, Dannie is taunted with being a 'Jewboy' (p. 7); he is forced to consider since it singles him out amongst his friends as being different in some way. Since the insult, it takes on a negative aspect. In this way, Abse creates the sense of common communities by presenting the Welsh Jewish community as both Welsh and as Jewish, the Jewish population as being integral to the local Jewish community. For example, she gives a sense of insider and outsider when she disapproves of her sons consorting

Sometimes she'd speak of 'Shiksies' whose only occurrence, it would seem, was sons. (p. 111)

While this implies a prejudice from within, Abse is at pains to present a variegated picture, reminding of the line from the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins which Leo reads in section two: 'in a new glory be to God for dappled things' (p. 26). Abse is implying beauty in diversity. Moreover, Abse reveals prejudice within the Jewish community in the presentation of local attitudes to the rabbi's son who has married a Gentile:

It had caused a scandal amongst the Cardiff Jewish community who, with their pencils darkly the character of Jack Aaronowich. (p. 144)

However, Abse evokes a positive idea of the Jewish community through his description of events of a typical Saturday. Through the characters of Uncle Isidore, Rabbi Aaron, Dannie is also shown to reflect with warmth on the nature of Jewishness in terms of the synagogue, the narrator is confronted with 'a hint of that unbearable core of sensuous words what his 11-year-old self 'could not have named' but 'knew':

Thousands of years of faith leaned with the men as they leaned – these exiled, dangerous ghetto and in dismayed beauty. Their naked faces showed history, dark eyes that infinite, that mute animal sadness, as in the liquid eyes of fugitives.

Young Dannie is growing up in a time where there is a radical rise in anti-Semitism against Jews in Germany. The boy becomes aware of the plight of Jews in Germany through Wilfred and Leo, who reinforce in him a sense of personal connectedness. On 14, he picks up a newspaper and scans reported persecutions against Jews in Germany much like a long list. Dannie is looking for the name of Grynszpan whom his brother

'Who is Grynszpan?' I asked imploringly.

'Not a person,' said Leo, 'but a condition of history.' (p. 104)

Here, Leo seems to be saying that Grynszpan's actions can not be understood without the historical events and actions surrounding the assassination against the German Chancellor, indeed 'a condition of history' and Leo fulfils his obligation by telling Dannie Grynszpan's

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The Writer's Use of Language

Language and Prose Style

Abse is a poet and his prose text overflows with poetic imagery. His imagery is not just decorative; he uses it to connect characters with place and to connect local events or actions with wider social and culture:

In Queen Street, an ex-miner played an accordion, a tombstone in one of his hands, and he walked insistently across the rainy street: give, give, give, give, give. The traffic light was red. The reflection rubbed off the wet surface of the road and a blue-green smudge used to be a sign.

The use of the metaphor 'tombstone' creates a terrifying image since it heralds the death of a man, probably through silicosis. Abse's repetition of 'give' provides a sense of the man begging in order to survive.

Abse employs the past tense throughout from the start of the novel: 'June the first was our wedding day' (p. 1), but he creates a sense of immediacy and presence for the reader through his use of the present tense:

'I'll cut you into pieces,' said Keith.

'I'll split your lip,' I answered.

'I'll cut your ears off,' Keith said.

'I'll put your eyes out,' I said.

'Shut up you podgy Jewboy,' said Keith.

'Podgy son of a whisky man,' I said.

Keith slowly came towards me with his penknife ready.

'Fight like a Great Britain,' I said. (p. 6)

It is fresh and lively and its easy familiarity gives the reader a way in to the text without feeling disorienting. Indeed, at the start of the novel and in a self-referential moment, Abse makes an appeal which carries beyond the boundaries of the page and the novel:

Cariad, clean heart, listen to me, this is my beginning. Let me start again (p. 1).

'Cariad' is a term of endearment in Welsh, comparable to 'darling' or 'sweetheart'. It alerts the reader to the limits of the narrative mode; it may also serve as an authorial device to implicitly the author's voice that has intruded the text. The author's desire to 'start again' suggests struggling to present his memories in a meaningful way to a loved one or 'Cariad'.

Dialogue

Abse's novel is written in a rambling, discursive style that is complimented by the exchanges between characters are concise, snappy and often off-the-wall and often humorous. For example, a scene in Dannie's family home has several characters talking at once:

'A man came into Casualty last night, saying he was dead.'

'Go on,' said Leo, looking down from his paper.

'He was dead, he was dead.'

'Who?'

'The patient.'

'What did you give him, a bottle of aspirins?'

'I've got a headache,' said my mother [...]

'It's time we had a National Health Service,' Leo said [...]

'Was he dead?' I asked.

'Your sandwiches are ready [...]' (pp. 35–36)

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While the dialogue here seems to treat quite a serious topic dismissively (the man Abse's overlapping dialogue effectively creates an odd atmosphere in line with the novel's style). The reader is quite likely to respond to Wilfred's account of the man with some sympathy as he is embedded in an absurd situation. In other words, the form matches the content.

The dialogue exchanged by 10-year-old Dannie and Keith in Sections One and Two is in a nonsensical, short and snappy style of children's speech:

'Her knickers are showing,' Keith said.

'She's got big breasts,' I whispered.

'Like big lemons,' volunteered Keith.

'Like big oranges,' I said.

'Like big electric bulbs,' Keith said. (p. 39)

Abse mirrors this technique in the final section of the novel but here, in contrast to the earlier dialogue, the reader:

'Swan's a winging it tonight.'

'Barry's a winging it tonight.'

'Newport's a winging it tonight.' (p. 193)

In comparison with some of the earlier exchanges between the young boys, this dialogue is more serious (note the harsh sounds of "winging it tonight"). While the men's talk is presented in a similar style, the nonsensical nature of the boys' language is transformed and the men's dialogue is more serious, reflecting the war-torn events around them.

Style

Tragicomic elements run throughout the novel, most notably through the characters of Keith, Mr Thomas and Uncle Bertie. Abse develops themes (such as death and loss, childhood, social unrest and war) through the lived experiences of these primary characters. In this way, the words and actions of a given character take on tragic significance, whether explicitly, as with Uncle Bertie whose unemployed status is somewhat explained (he is his own worst enemy), or implicitly, as with Keith, which is alluded to from the first section of the novel when he is the victim:

I lost Keith as the crowd pushed their way out into Westgate Street; but later, in the churchyard. Keith was morose and melancholy. 'I seen him,' he said. We walked on, I left him to have tea I shouted, 'You'd better watch out, the Black Curse.' He went into the house. (p. 13)

Abse creates depth in his presentation of mood and atmosphere by contrasting the light-hearted dialogue with an air of gravity in terms of society and culture. For example, Abse's description of the beach in Section Three switches between a description of Dannie and Keith at play and a description of social unrest elsewhere in the world:

Even as Keith and I played on the beach at Barry Island, all day long elsewhere there were branches of black smoke sat in the windless blue-hot skies. (p. 30)

As the scene on the beach continues, the boys' banter becomes infused with this serious mood as the light-hearted, playful mood suddenly changes:

'Like big footballs,' I said.

'Like the world,' said Keith.

And the thought silenced us. (p. 40)

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Active Learning Task

Abse uses pieces of other texts, such as songs and poems, to connect his story to various historical events. This is called *intertextuality*.

- In pairs, choose two popular songs (one each) and use the Internet to print out the lyrics of the songs. Make sure that the song lyrics are not offensive and are appropriate for school. You do not need to like the songs – you can choose songs that you find annoying.
- Stick the printed lyrics onto a sheet of A3 paper, leaving plenty of space around them.
- Annotate the lyrics to indicate any feelings, mood and atmosphere that come across in the songs.

Your task is to create a connection between the songs by finding common themes. If there is no obvious connection. For example, if both lyrics evoke a feeling of despair, this is a common theme. Similarly, if the songs are about one particular experience, this is a common theme. You can come up with your own connections.

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Form and Structure

Form – the type of text used by a writer (e.g. novel, short story, ballad, poem).

Narrative voice

The novel is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, Dannie, from a point of view that spans a 10-year period, since at the close of the novel Dannie is 18. Indeed, Abse's narrative point of view whereby the character-narrator both presents his own perspective and provides information that needs to be known about other characters, actions and events:

In the valleys, thirty miles from Cardiff, the rain fell absently across the town square and the queue at the bus stop surface. It started singing into the rain – the rain that stretched itself across the blind windows, the rain that pattered on the wet umbrellas, the rain that dived into the slagheap – the chapel of voices together, ever rising higher into the rain. (pp. 25–26)

Debate

The novel is written in a style that is unconventional and benefits from its experimental nature.

Structure – the organisation of a narrative, or its framework.

Structure

Abse uses time shifts extensively in the narrative, both flashbacks and flash-forwards. Dannie introduces Uncle Bertie in Section Four of the novel, and the narrative proceeds to a point in time: 'Last weekend I had to go to Northern Ireland' (p. 51). This passage opens up a flashback to a time after 10-year-old Keith and Dannie's ruined beach trip in Section Three. The reader is presented with the story in chronological order and the effect is initially disorienting. For example, the reader learns of the war as a past event and Dannie's cousin Clive's death before the character has been killed during the last war' (p. 51). Uncle Bertie's story spans over 12 pages and it is a passage that Abse provides the reader with a sense of orientation in terms of chronology.

That was yesterday. But I remember him as a young man: strong black hair and a white shirt, standing on the deck of the ship in the Irish Sea, between the grey waters and the grey skies, in the middle of the night.

Events in the novel are narrated in retrospect (through the use of the past tense in Section Four) and the narrator's point of view shifts forwards and backwards in time in line with the narrative. Dannie's transition from childhood to young adult is presented.

The fragmented narrative may prove disorientating for the reader at first as the story moves from one time to another. However, events in the novel are essentially presented chronologically, and this certainly creates a sense of cohesion. Abse also creates cohesion through his prose style, namely his use of poetic imagery, and through dialogue. This allows the reader to get a feel for what his characters are thinking at a given time, and their relationship to the wider cultural and historical context.

The story of Grynshpan is not directly narrated by Wilfred but it resembles an emblematic vignette, a complete piece of writing which characteristically contains a self-contained scene in cinema which serves to highlight a character or an event, allowing the audience to see the whole story. Abse draws the reader in by going on to create a highly descriptive and detailed scene.

Practice Essay Question

1. Form and structure are very important elements of the novel and Abse uses them to develop meaning.

Find examples in the novel which indicate a shifting point of view and describe how this affects the reader's response to **either** themes **or** characterisation in the novel.

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Context

Many readers originally believed that *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve* was an autobiography of real people's names, real world events and the Cardiff in which he grew up but the novel spans an eight-year period and traces the rise of fascism in Europe, social class and war. The novel is littered with references to popular cultural texts of the time, mainly Welsh. These texts have political resonance within the novel; for example, the quotations on pages 73 and 177:

*'Singing I defend myself and I defend my people when the barbarians of crime
hooves of powder and desolation' (p. 73)*

The Spanish poet Hernandez was enlisted in the forces fighting against General Franco who came to power during the Spanish Civil War and he died in prison aged 31 in 1942. In the novel, he reads his poems aloud and through such references, Abse strengthens the connection between art and political engagement and life. Abse's inclusion of a popular football chant hummed by an embarrassed Dannie during a memorial service for Jimmy Ford (and alongside an uneasy tension between everyday events in peace-time Cardiff and war-torn Cardiff) is out of place here when, ironically, it is probably more relevant to an average 11-

Abse includes many dialect words in the novel and this serves to compliment the 'dappled' texture of the communities he writes about. Indeed, the notion of community is fluid as minority groups merge and separate according to context and circumstances. All of the characters belong to one or more minority groups: the Welsh community is contrasted with the 'alien' English (p. 27), the Jewish community is prejudiced against both locally and internationally, and Leo and his activist friends are contrasted with traditional liberal supporters.

In a comical and warm description of Uncle Bertie window-shopping with young Leo, a sense of Jewishness between man and boy when he describes how Bertie 'stared at the window until a policeman took notice of him:

We shuffled away with Uncle Bertie muttering, 'If you want to buy a vatch, you buy a vatch, get away from my bloody vinder!'

'Remember to Send the Veddin Present,' I said, and we smiled at each other.

The use of dialect words creates a sense of authenticity for the reader as characters use Welsh words and phrases to address one another: "You're a bunch of ladies' me added knowingly. "Women... *Ach y fu.*" (p. 85)

On a local level, Abse describes men who are unemployed and obliged to move away from England, in search of work. He also uses irony to present the fate of unemployed people like Alun who want to follow the family tradition and yet who are likely to die. The ex-miner who has resorted to playing an accordion in the street for money is 'tombstone music on his lungs (p. 32); this neatly sums up the experience of unemployment to pay a death-price to gain a livelihood:

And Gwennie was thinking how one-third of a miner's life had to be spent at sunset. She didn't want Alun to get silicosis like her father and her grandfather in the morning hearing Alun coughing and gasping for breath. Only a week ago soap-box orators saying that four miners were launched into eternity every day and a thousand were impaired every year. A hazardous calling, the orator had said. Gwennie. (p. 27)

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Debate Prompt 1

Abse uses vignette (a short internal narrative without a plot) to explore historical context beyond the viewpoint of the main narrator Dannie. How effective is this device in enabling the author to expose wider cultural and historical issues?

Abse's indirect description of unemployment, through its effect on secondary character imagery, only serves to create a more emotional impact on the reader. Abse uses Alun and Gwennie's troubles, as a narrative device; he uses this device in the same way in the same story, when Wilfred narrates the story of Grynszpan in Section Six.

Debate Prompt 2

In your group, discuss working conditions of miners and the life choices miners faced as described in the quotation provided from page 27 on this page.

Active Learning Tasks

1. In pairs, discuss the present-day economic depression and its consequences in your experience. What do you know about the economic depression? What impact did depression have on your lives, if any? What about people you hear about or in your local area?
2. Make notes and prepare a short, spoken news report based on your knowledge locally and further afield. You may like to record your news report.

Practice Essay Question

1. Consider the importance of historical context for the novel as a whole.

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Key Term Glossary

alliteration	the recurrence of the same consonant sounds at the beginning of words in close proximity to one another.
allusion (lit.)	a brief reference to a well-known cultural artefact, often used to support a theme.
analogy	a comparison between things that are in some way similar.
anaphora	a rhetorical device involving the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of sentences or clauses.
asyndeton	the omission of conjunctions in a line of poetry that results in a more direct and powerful expression, increasing the poetic impact of the text.
characterisation	the process of creating and revealing the personality of a character.
elliptical phrase	a phrase or clause in which one or more words are omitted on the assumption that they are already clear.
enumeration	the listing of things for rhetorical effect.
epizeuxis	use of repetition in an emphatic manner.
extended metaphor	a metaphor that is developed throughout the course of a text.
first-person omniscient narration	a form of first-person narration in which the narrator is all-knowing and knows every aspect of the story being told.
foreshadowing	a literary device which hints at a future event or events.
form	the type of text used by a writer (e.g. novel, short story, poem).
hyperbole	exaggerated use of language for rhetorical or comic effect.
indirect interior monologue	a monologue in which the speaker serves the function of a character, an event, or a guide or presenter of information.
intertextuality	the interdependent relationship between literary texts, where one text can influence the reader's interpretation of the other.
juxtaposition	a rhetorical device involving the placement of two literary elements side-by-side, generally to illustrate a contrast between them.
linguistic deviation	the spelling or pronunciation of words or the structure of sentences that does not conform to the accepted norm or standard.
metaphor	a figure of speech in which one thing is stated to be another, based on an association or similarity of meaning between the two.
motif	a recurring literary element (e.g. image, object, word/phrase) in a text that contributes to a theme and helps to create a narrative mood.
narrative mood	a feeling or atmosphere established by a writer to influence the emotional involvement of the reader. Narrative voice, tone, and style are all used by authors to create narrative mood.
non-sequitur	a statement that does not bear any logical relationship to what precedes it.
Oedipus complex	Freud's term for the necessary stage in the psychosexual development of a male child where the male child subconsciously wishes to sleep with his mother and to have his father with intense hostility as a rival for her affection.
onomatopoeia	a poetic device in which words and phrases are used to imitate the sound of an object or action.

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personification	the attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects or ideas, in a purely figurative or non-literal sense.
repetition (lit.)	the repetition of certain phrases, words or clauses for emphasis.
semantic field	a set of words linked to a specific subject or concept (e.g. weather, nature).
simile	a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, using 'like' or 'as' to show an association or similarity of meaning between the two.
speaker tags	the information about who is speaking and how it is said, usually placed before or after quotation marks.
structure	the organisation of a narrative, or its framework.
symbolism	in literature, the use of a literary element that combines a concrete image with a literary symbol has a literal meaning in itself, but it can also have a symbolic meaning within the text.
synecdoche	the use of a part for when a part of something is used to represent the whole.
telegraphic sentence	a short sentence of five words or fewer.
theme	an idea central to the understanding of a literary / an author's work.
time shift / flashback	disruption of the chronological sequence of a narrative to refer to past events.
untagged dialogue	dialogue without information about who is speaking and how it is said, or follows the quotation marks.
verisimilitude	the element of credibility or truth in a work of fiction.
vignette	a short, evocative description or account.

Some illustrations of key terms applied to the text:

Key Term	Example from Text
Alliteration	<i>As we pass him the sparrows, that excitedly scurry about him timidly</i> (p. 79)
Foreshadowing	<i>How were we to know what would happen before the day we met?</i>
Juxtaposition	<i>'They've got a lot of armaments,' I said. 'Ay, an' we've got our Navy,' said Dai fiercely. The bus stopped to let an old man climb aboard. The conductor helped him up, like a flag.</i> (p. 181)
Metaphor	<i>In Queen Street, an ex-miner played an accordion, a tombstone on his lap.</i>
Personification	<i>[T]he Rhondda Valley naked, her breasts in green dress pulled over her head.</i>
Simile	<i>Like prisoners they filed off into the pin-striped rain</i> (p. 26)
Symbolism	<i>Mr Thomas waited through the door marked Exit</i> (p. 76)

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Further Reading

- Abrams, M H (ed.), *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace
- Forster, E M, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harvest / HBJ Books, 1956).
- Head, Dominic, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950–* University Press, 2002).
- Lodge, David, 'The Novelist at the Crossroads', *The Novelist at the Crossroads Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1971).
- Sinfield, Alan, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* (Oxford: Black

Web:

- Brustein, William I and Ryan D, 'Anti-Semitism in Europe Before The Holocaust', *Science*, 25: 1, pp. 35–53. Available at: zzed.uk/11472-Brustein
- Brain, J, 'The Great Depression'. Available at: zzed.uk/11472-Brain
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Other texts by Dannie Abse:

- *Some Corner of an English Field*, Hutchinson, 1956
- *O Jones, O Jones*, Hutchinson, 1970
- *There Was a Young Man from Cardiff*, Hutchinson, 1991
- *The Strange Case of Dr Simmonds & Dr Glas*, Robson, 2002

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Answers

Section-by-Section Analysis

Section 1 (pp. 1–16)

Debate Prompt

Dannie:

- He describes his home life in the following way: 'Always there was too much furniture, too much noise and familiarity. Always there were visitors. Lovely it was.' (p. 3)
- He describes himself as 'be[ing] in a race steering from the back seat' (p. 3) when on the road, which suggests he is relaxed in his family's company.
- He describes the rules of the house by saying 'there were more "don'ts" than "do's"', adding 'And throughout all this my mother's been mean' (p. 7). Clearly Dannie was repeatedly possibly denied.

Keith:

- Keith says to Dannie to leave his house as soon as possible after eating his dinner.
- The description of Keith's father suggests things are tense for Keith at the family home: 'used to say that he had whisky instead of blood running through his body' (p. 4).
- Dannie's mother suggests that there are problems with Keith's family: 'Mother used to put up with, and her with a weak heart and swelling of the ankles. All his doing, his father doesn't do.'" (p. 9)
- When Keith's mother dies his father says that their marriage 'was good at the beginning' (p. 14). This rather suggests that Keith was an unwanted child, at least as far as his father is concerned.
- Keith is heard 'whimpering upstairs' (p. 15); he cries after telling Dannie how 'the boys'.
- These points indicate Keith being ill at ease at home compared with Dannie.

Active Learning Task

Open-ended task – personal responses required.

Practice Essay Questions

1.
 - Keith speaks abruptly and quite curtly, indicating tension and defensiveness within his home life. An example is when he tells Dannie that he is free to leave their house after dinner.
 - His cruel trick with the handle of the washing machine crushes Dannie's nail. As a result, Dannie's anger and frustration, probably at his father, which is being displaced onto Dannie, is shown when he uses a penknife against Dannie because he is angry at Dannie shouting in the street next door. This is a sign of frustration at his loud and angry father. The racist insult 'Podgy Jewboy' (pp. 6–7) is a reference to anti-Semitism more generally, but the reader cannot be sure at this point if it is evidence of anti-Semitism in British society more generally.
 - The fight between the two boys after school seems to signal the end of hostility between them. 'Thomas became my greatest friend' (p. 9). Perhaps the fight has got most of the hostility out of them.
2. Read pages 1–2 closely. How does the author create a sense of atmosphere here?
 - There is a **semantic field** associated with peace and calm ('day of peace'; 'intermittent hostilities of school term time').
 - In describing Keith's home (although, strictly, Dannie's), Abse creates a **semantic field** of 'strange smell': 'something "is there something burning?"'; 'the others sniffed'; 'the air of the past remains of previous tenants'; 'sniffed and sniffed'. This creates an impression of a house full of activity and the smell of home.
 - A busy, bustling mood and the atmosphere of a talkative environment are created through untagged dialogue (e.g. 'How old's your mother? ... Mine's hundred and ninety').

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Section 2 (pp. 16–33)

Practice Essay Question

1. The complex presentation of religion creates shifts in mood and atmosphere through Dannie 'What's it like to be Jewish?' (p. 17), this reflects the fact that he and the other preconceptions and prejudices regarding Jews: these include Jews not believing in God, they pray and having 'different' blood that 'makes their noses grow' (p. 17). This is shared among the group of his peers. However, Dannie is able to dismiss Philip as 'silly, because to be Jewish' (p. 17). Dannie is revealing an awareness of the parochial nature of his beliefs. There is no sense of menace or active discrimination surrounding the boys' words. However, the preying on Dannie's mind is clear a little later at home, when he repeats the same theme (in the immediate context) that 'Philip was silly asking me what it was like to be Jewish' (line 100).

Later, Dafydd Morgan's observation about attending synagogue ('Pays, I always think about the synagogue. The connections do you know?' [p. 19]) reflects the stereotype of the Jewish community. Later, Morgan recycles a slightly more generic stereotype about the Jews when Dannie and Philip, as generally an industrious people (p. 20).

Religion is also treated with a sense of irony, as when Dannie recalls Wilfred's observation of the weather in Cardiff: 'It will be dry everywhere, except of course in Cardiff' (p. 20).

The service in the synagogue is made to sound like a necessary routine, one Dannie must attend (p. 28). Dannie's description of the formality of the service, read in Hebrew with some of the unusually optimistic tone of the Rev Aaronowich, creates an uplifting mood. However, the focus on the red globe (a ceremonial oil burner) which in Dannie's mind symbolises the Jewish people. He also identifies in the swaying male congregation with 'their long incantations' (p. 28). These observations lend a more contemplative mood to the chapter.

Active Learning Tasks

1. Some examples include:
 - The explosion in the pit is accompanied by a sombre mood: 'pitifully', 'painfully', 'disfigured' (p. 28).
 - 'shouted mother laughing' (p. 28): a radical shift in mood to boisterous happiness.
 - 'the chant of the Hebrew prayer' (p. 28): the use of auditory imagery helps bring a religious atmosphere.
 - 'raising his hands, eyes round, mournfully direct' (p. 29): the description of the narrator a little, and suggests that young Dannie understands the partly true nature of the narrative.
 - 'The darkness had weight but the weight had stillness' (p. 31): this gives a very contemplative atmosphere of the empty synagogue.
2. Some examples:
 - 'It seemed natural that the prayer book wasn't in English, but written and told from right to left' (p. 28). This suggests that a sense of being different from other people; it also suggests that Dannie, with his British education, struggles to think in Hebrew.
 - 'In that red globe the oil of Jewish history burned, steadily, devotedly' (p. 30). This suggests Judaism as something precious and imperilled.
 - 'The fusty smell of sabbaths centuries old' (p. 30). This conveys the idea of Jewish traditions, with little concession made to the modern world.
3. Some literary devices include:
 - Emphatic repetition for emphasis (anaphora), e.g. 'Breakfast, breakfast...' (p. 28).
 - Allusion, e.g. to the Latin phrase 'amo, amas, amat...' (p. 28); 'the red globe of Esau', etc. (p. 30).
 - Irony, e.g. 'Obviously, one couldn't speak to God in English' (p. 28).
 - Asyndeton – the omission of conjunctions in a sentence in order to heighten the effect, e.g. 'raising his hands, eyes round, mournfully direct' (p. 29); 'the oil of Jewish history burned, steadily, devotedly' (p. 30).
 - Hyperbole/exaggeration, e.g. 'My heart turned over beating fast' (p. 31).
4. Discussion task – personal responses required.
5.
 - Leo quotes the poem's first line several times: 'Glory be to God for dappled things' (p. 31).
 - In the poem, God's glory is revealed in observing the various things he has created. Dannie's close observation and analysis of people and events around him.
 - The poem contrasts changing nature with the unity and non-changing nature of God. As a Jesuit, this might suggest a view of God as single and indivisible, the view of God contrast with the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity.

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Section 3 (pp. 33–50)

Active Learning Task

1. One example could include:
 - The train scene: this clearly overwhelmed Keith, and students might want to consider the death of Keith's mother which is clearly highly relevant, as the boy would have witnessed this death. Also of interest may be Keith's lack of response to Dannie's point about 'trousers' (p. 143). Perhaps Keith has witnessed his drunken father doing precisely this, and even suffering a type of alcohol-induced seizure.
 - Keith would probably downplay his reaction to this episode, and might even not mention it, thus comforting a more distressed Danny.

Practice Essay Question

1. Some of the following points would be relevant content for an essay:
 - An upbeat and mildly surreal mood is created by Dannie's idiosyncratic observations: 'up to our ankles until we had no feet left'; 'drank pop, and the gas in our frothing seas' (p. 37)). In this section there is also use of a literary technique – known as the **non-sequitur** – where one statement does not bear any logical connection to the next: "So what?" "So what what?" I said. "So what what what?" said Keith. Dannie's reflection 'The aeroplane tuned the skies and my frog was dying' (p. 38).
 - Set and historical context: there is a leisurely atmosphere to the beach scene which reflects the more leisurely attitudes of the inter-war period. The description of 'touched their toes, flexed their muscles, jumped high into the air' (p. 38) while the 1930s, with the exercising craze of physical jerks and the use of wind-up gramophones such as Jerome Kern's 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes' and Hoagy Carmichael's 'Swanee Song'.
 - The beach is made to seem like an enclave of serenity compared to the forest elsewhere as a result of the heatwave. Abse creates a semantic field associated with fire (e.g. 'terrible jaws of flame'; 'the shrieking trees'; 'crashing of dead branches'; 'torture of burnt trees' [p. 38]). This is an example of foreshadowing, the event of the fire, the beginnings of Hitler's political career in Germany and the early events leading to the rise of other fascist parties.
 - The mood shifts to one of menace as Dannie reflects upon Oswald Moseley's phrase 'the financiers' (p. 39) and how this targets his family on account of their Jewish heritage, followed with the description of 'a woman with big breasts', wearing oversized knickerbockers: this is almost a perfect example of a risqué seaside postcard caricature, and the dialogue between Dannie and Keith that follows it returns a comical mood to the scene.
 - Repetition (anaphora) to focus the reader's attention on the schoolboy's preoccupations: 'big lemons', 'big oranges', 'big electric bulbs', 'big grapefruit'.
 - Repetition (anaphora) is a hallmark of the dialogue between Dannie and Keith: 'Ogmores best...' (p. 41)). This technique contributes to the upbeat and playful mood of the section, and the novel more generally.
 - The rhythm of the boys' playful language carries over into the episode where Keith has a seizure. Abse capitalises the onomatopoeic refrain for the sound of the train ('Choo choo') as a prelude to Keith's bout of screaming, which complements the boys' heightened emotions.

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Section 4 (pp. 51–71)

Active Learning Task

- For this task you could draw the character on A3 paper and annotate the drawing by writing down their features, characteristics and actions. Alternatively, you could make a collage, assembling features from pictures of different people, and then write down your character's features, characteristics and actions. You could then be prepared to present your character to your peers.

General pointer:

- Before you start, make a bulleted list compiling all the features, characteristics and actions of your character. You could then use this list to justify your first and current thoughts about each of these. If you prefer you can present your character to your peers first and then write down your thoughts.

	Initial impressions of the person	Presenting the person
Features		
Characteristics		
Actions		

- Uncle Bertie's clumsiness is a characteristic of a comical character, while Clive's death renders the novel tragicomic. He is both very different from and very similar to Dannie, who has experienced tragedy, which Dannie has not. One way in which a person can be different from you is if they represent or articulate something you have not or if they represent or articulate something you have not. If you can think of anyone you know who embodies these qualities, you could use them as a subject for this task.
- When presenting your character, bear in mind that in justifying the impact you have on your peers. This is where your powers of exaggeration come in. You could use your first and possibly biggest test.

Section 5 (pp. 71–92)

Active Learning Task

- General pointers for research:
 - For creating a newspaper front page, go to: zzed.uk/11472-newspaper for a free newspaper template.
 - There are many good online sources for information about the Spanish Civil War. A summary of the events leading to the battle and the importance of it can be found on the BBC website.
 - Remember: you are creating a newspaper article for readers from 1937, so be careful not to include expressions or references from your contemporary world.

Section 6 (pp. 92–155)

Active Learning Task

Responses will vary for this task, but here are some pointers for Task 5 ('Choose a form for your scene').

- Before writing your scene, make bulleted lists compiling:
 - a. the visual details of your scene; b. all the features, characteristics and actions you want to write about.
 - If writing a dialogue, first define clearly the other character, his/her relationship to you, being in the particular place, and what the focus of your discussion is going to be.
 - If writing an objective prose description (witness style) of your scene and/or character, consider what attention might be initially attracted to what is taking place, and why.
 - If writing a subjective monologue, consider the level of involvement you wish to have in the scene and activities taking place in the setting. Consider how you will manage the narrative.

Practice Essay Question

- Some of the following points would be relevant content for the essay:
 - The mood immediately prior to the narrative is one of urgency, as conveyed by the waiter's observation of how the pale, poor-looking young man had seen a man partaking of food for the last time' (p. 105) allows both Dannie and the reader to understand the controlled desperation that precedes the execution of an act with fatal outcome. His personal tragedy and its effect upon him ('He felt no fear now, only hate; no pity – only hate for the murderers of his parents' [p. 106]). Dannie and the reader are drawn into a lobby of the German Embassy, barely able to balance on the lush carpet, and of an unfamiliar pitch and inappropriate tone of his request to see the German diplomat. The description invests the assassin with real pathos. There is also a keen observation of Grynspan's delight, after shooting the ambassador, at seeing von Rath's blood on the floor. This comes to fear and loathe, a delight that cancels out the pain when the embassy

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Section 7 (pp. 155–192)

Active Learning Task

1. Role Play Interview (pairs)

Some examples of questions could include:

- To Dannie: Would you allow yourself to be conscripted into the war, or would you not?
- To Lydia Pike: How would you feel if Dannie was conscripted into the army to fight?
- To Dai Jones: What would be an alternative course of action against the Nazis?
- To Ap John, the chemist: What will be the effect of the war on general medical practice?
- To Leo: Will the war eventually turn Britain towards socialism?
- To Uncle Bertie: What would you do if you had the chance of five minutes alone with Hitler?
- To Uncle Isidore: Would you be interested in playing your violin for the troops?

Section 8 (pp. 192–208)

Active Learning Task

1. You can use multimedia or a computer to create your poster – responses will vary.

Whole-Text Analysis

Characterisation

Active Learning Task

1. One further example of how to fill in a character sheet is included below:

Character Name: Keith Thomas		
Page	Comment	Key Quotation
pp. 4–5	Cruel and combative	<i>'Put your finger by 'ere,' Keith said. I did so and he turned the handle and my nail went into mother.</i>
p. 16	Hurt and confused	<i>It was the first time I had seen him since the funeral. 'You killed my mother,' he said. 'I did not'. 'You did'. 'I didn't.'</i>
p. 39	Playful and curious	<i>'Her knickers are showing,' Keith said. 'She's got big breasts,' I whispered. 'Like big lemons,' volunteered Keith.</i>

Character Analyses

Active Learning Tasks

These exercises are intended to help you think about how the characters may feel at different points in the novel.

1. Dannie

- a) You could think about:
 - Your opinion of Mrs Gregory
 - How you imagine Keith must be feeling
 - Whether you could have done or said anything to help or for Keith
 - How you feel about Keith

General pointer: After being told about Henrietta's 'breakdown' (p. 176) and the situation, recognising that she is bored and the 'little boy' (p. 176) Keith's opinion of her is something of a mystery. However, you would concur with Keith's opinion that Henrietta Gregory certainly was beautiful' [p. 166]) and so he would also be in a difficult predicament.

- b) You could think about:
 - How you feel at the time
 - How you imagine the future to be without Keith
 - Your opinion of Mr Thomas, Keith's father
 - How you feel about your friendship with Keith

General pointer: Much of this would be devoted to memories of the childhood and the fact that Dannie would be an element of guilt about your failure to rescue Keith from his streak of violence. Mr Thomas's failings as a father, and the strong sense that an important chapter

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Keith

- c) You could think about:
- How you feel about the affair
 - Whether your opinion of your father has changed
 - Your opinion of Phyllis
 - What you plan to do next

General pointer: As the pair of you finds it 'difficult to get on' (p. 198), the affair independence from your father, and confirm the general observation that his might also share the same view about Phyllis that you previously expressed about is a 'Gold-digger' (p. 131).

- d) You could think about:
- Your feelings about the war
 - Your feelings and thoughts as you hear the bomb approaching
 - How you feel about Dannie
 - How you feel about your father

General pointer: Thomas describes your behaviour during the raid as 'quite just as the piano and I feel so alone' (p. 198)). In the same vein, you initially lose interest in playing and annoyed by her interruption. You are thinking in a fatalistic way 'all right unless a bomb's got our names written on it' (p. 201). However, playing the fear at the back of your mind as the bombs approach.

2. a) You could think about:
- Whether you will tell your son Keith and how you think he might react
 - Your feelings for Phyllis
 - Your intentions for the future
 - What ways you think you should change your behaviour

Language

General pointer: The tone of your diary entries would combine guilt with fatalism (negative opinion of you), but there is also a sense in which the affair is convenient (you don't feel that you have much to lose. However, Keith's reaction after you kiss him 'want my mother' (p. 70)) has left you distraught. You'll be very hesitant (at least in the beginning).

- b) You could think about:
- What you feel about the way the neighbours think about you
 - How you feel about your life up until now
 - How you see the future without Keith
 - What you might have done differently
 - What you intend to do tomorrow and in the future

Language

General pointer: Your sense of isolation has been growing since your wife's death. The 'Memorial Meeting for Jimmy Ford' (p. 72) will still see negative associations and the tone of your writing will be bitter, and what you write will convey a real sense of time, imagine a future for yourself.

Dannie's Letter

- c) You could think about:
- How you feel about Keith told you about his feelings for Henrietta Gregory
 - What you think about Keith's intention to sleep with Mrs Gregory
 - How you feel about spending so much time alone
 - How you feel about Lydia

General pointer: You would raise the point that you feel a bit of a spare part, focusing his attention upon Henrietta. You might hope to gain Lydia's sympathy for her attentiveness when you next meet. You should conceal any jealousy you feel for her more attractive than you to the opposite sex ('His blue eyes and red hair and white teeth to a woman' [p. 172]). You might also share some of your feelings of elation with her. You would probably tell Lydia how you wished she could have been with you. You might also share Keith's nervousness in purchasing condoms, in order to sleep with Henrietta, with her. You are nearly as grown-up as he is pretending to be.

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3. a) **Dannie's Mother and Lydia Pike**

Dannie's mother and Lydia Pike could think about:

- What they think about Lydia's relationship with Dannie
- Why Lydia is / is not a suitable girlfriend for Dannie
- The things that are important to them now they are on the brink of war
- What it's like living in 1930s Cardiff for a woman

Example (Dannie's mother): You are worried about the fast-changing world and stability for your family. You believe, based on experience, that a Jewish girlfriend Dannie. You might point out that Lydia's attitudes towards love seem superficial. Lydia, "it's so manly" [p. 117]) and voiced to get attention. Also, you might think boys (Dannie: 'I wondered how other boys kissed her and which boys?' [p. 121]) recognise that Lydia's loyalty to Dannie is genuine.

Debate Prompt

Discussion task – responses will vary.

c) **Dannie and Keith**

Dannie and Keith could think about:

- Her opinion of Mr Gregory
- Her thoughts and feelings about Mrs Gregory's behaviour towards Keith
- Their attitudes towards getting involved with a married woman
- How others would react to Keith's infatuation

Example (Dannie): You might share the background you have gained from Sadie what she really thinks about Keith and yourself: that you are just boys and 'a man would agree that Henrietta is beautiful, but you disagree about her hating her' where Keith and Henrietta sleeping together is concerned, due to the risk of poisoning Keith that your friends would see his infatuation as a topic for humour, taking a joke about one of you being in love with Henrietta. Also, the fact that both of you do not see Keith in a romantic light ('... he was becoming too much for me. I'm not' [p. 187]) would tip the balance of the argument against her treatment of Keith.

Debate Prompt

Discussion task – responses will vary.

c) **War**

You might like to think about:

- How distant Spain would seem in the 1930s, both geographically and culturally
- Their attitudes towards politics
- Their feelings about fighting for a cause that doesn't directly affect them
- Their attitudes to war in general

Examples: Dannie's father: politically engaged, but would prioritise his sons' welfare; mother: believes that 'Jews should always be Liberals' as 'all extremes were bad'; communist versus fascist conflict as one between two extremes; Dannie: the one who asks 'Why don't you fight for Spain?' (p. 79), may agree with Leo standing up for his principles; Dr Loo: a commonsensical medical man, he would oppose the idea of war and would point out that his home would benefit from Leo's help.

d) **Dannie's Prejudice**

You might like to think about:

- How Dannie feels about his Jewish identity
- How he feels about having been taunted at school as a boy
- How his Jewishness sets him apart from his Gentile friends
- How he feels about what is happening to Jewish people in Germany

General pointer: As a child you were confused about the meaning of 'Jewishness' (p. 22). This confusion stems in large part from the teasing you have faced from fellow schoolboys and Dafydd Morgan's unsubtle sharing of information. You are also conflicted about Jewish religious ceremonies, being keenly aware of the oppressive nature of the synagogue environment. However, your home life is different. You think your friends stupid for imagining Jews must be very different from them.

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of your family's own prejudices, such as apparently accepting the definition of 'contemptible' (p. 20) on account of his idleness. Conversely, you are unswayed by the actions of Gentile girls. Your detailed memory of events in 1934 (pp. 38–39), when the boys began to assert themselves, shows the impact the persecution of your people has had. You retrospectively gain knowledge and insight into these events.

Settings

Practice Essay Question

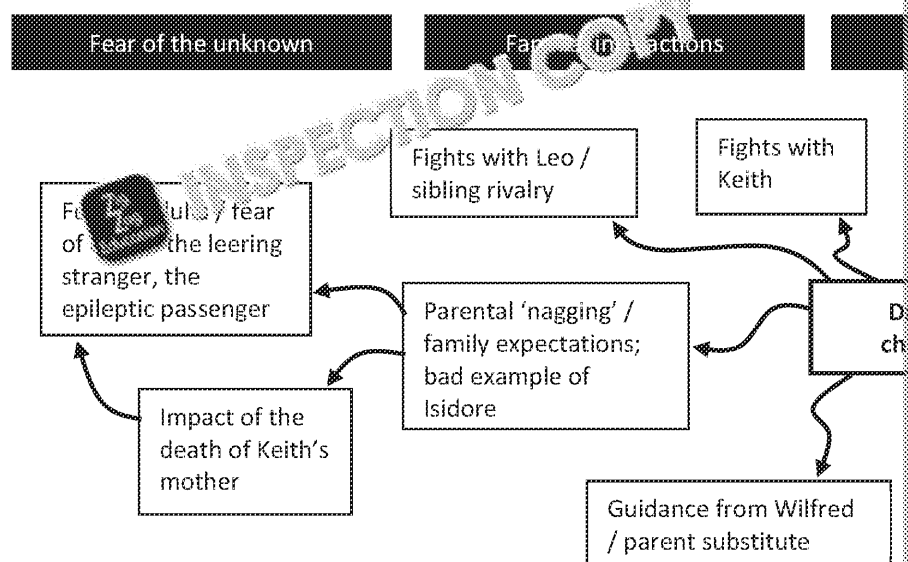
1. Begin by underlining key words and phrases (photocopy the extract).

- Examples:
 - Semantic field relating to ill health: 'listless'; 'dampness seeping right through'; 'yellow viscous fluid'; 'coal and blood'; 'convulsion of coughing' (p. 26).
 - Semantic field relating to dampness, with dampness also an extended metaphor for loss of hope and expectations and depression: 'wet rain'; 'kinoshes'; 'rain'; 'dampness'; 'fluid'; 'wet' (p. 26).
- Annotate the extract: write down any thoughts and feelings it creates for you. This is not a wrong answer but the more closely you refer to the language in the text, the more marks you will be awarded.
- Identify the negative connotations associated with the two semantic fields mentioned above. Consider the inevitable decline and loss of purpose in the community, of people growing old and misery.
- In your response, you should consider how Abse creates the image of the Rhondda Valley and the impact of this on the reader ('the green dress pulled off it'): is this a shocking image?
 - The image 'naked, bony, the green dress pulled off it' (p. 26) uses the metaphor of the Rhondda Valley, signalling its abuse both in terms of the coal mining industry and the health of residents) and its subsequent neglect (e.g. unemployment, no infrastructure).
 - The metaphor of 'a girl trembling near the coal-mine with a gentle flutter' (p. 26) again suggests that the Valley has been left barely alive by the exploitation of the miners. Conversely, the proximity of the mine also may indicate the 'girl's' need for protection. There is also an added inference for the reader to draw, that the women in the Valley have been left particularly vulnerable by the economic depression.
- Use your knowledge of the whole text to inform your response.
 - This scene complements the rise of communist sympathies in the 1930s, as seen in the novel; conversely, it helps explain the rise of the fascist narrative of the 1940s, 'strangled by the greasy fingers of alien financiers' (p. 39), as convenient to the government to be sought to bear the blame for economic decline.
 - The scene explains the exodus of young men from the area who were 'going to find their own tongue, their own language, their own customs' (p. 27) in search of a better life, the fragility of Welsh culture, and in particular language.

Themes

Active Learning Task

Sample mind map content for theme of 'Childhood'.



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Active Learning Task

Example of theme sheet for theme of 'Childhood'.

Theme: Childhood		
Page	Theme Comment	Key Quote
7	In the early interaction with Dirty-face, we get a sense of the children's exaggerated fear of anything out of the ordinary.	<i>Round the corner ambled a dog followed behind. 'Gosh' I said, 'there's Dirty-face.' We both hesitated. Then Dirty-face came.</i>
7	In the classroom, the children's natural sense of mischief and spontaneous need for fun is demonstrated.	<i>Somebody passed me a note that said 'I love with the Head.' I dipped my head and it was at the back of my head.</i>
11	We see evidence of the bogeyman effect of the use of far-fetched warnings by parents to try to get their children to behave.	<i>Mother had said something about giving you to the gypsies.'</i>

The Writer's Use of Intertextuality

Abse uses popular culture texts, such as songs and poems, to connect his story to wider culture. This is called *intertextuality*.

- In pairs, choose two popular songs (one each) and use the Internet to print out a version of the lyrics. Make sure that the song lyrics are not offensive and are appropriate for a school. Choose songs that you like the songs – you can choose songs that you find annoying.
- Stick the printed lyrics onto a sheet of A3 paper, leaving plenty of space around each song.
- Annotate the lyrics to indicate any feelings, mood and atmosphere that come to mind when you read the lyrics.

Your task is to create a connection between the songs by finding common themes. You may find no obvious connection. For example, if both lyrics evoke a feeling of desire, then this is a common theme. If both songs are about one particular experience, this is a common theme. See how many themes you can find.

No indicative content.

Form

Debate Prompt

- The narrative point of view in the novel is first-person omniscient, an uncommon choice. Discuss the pitfalls and benefits of Abse's choice.

First-person omniscient narration potentially offers the writer the best of all possible advantages:

- It allows the focus on the interior thoughts of the narrator-character plus a view of the world around them as well as contextual events. In this respect, first-person omniscient narration is more powerful than conventional third-person omniscient narration in not creating the same degree of distance between the reader and the main character(s) and allowing the reader to care more about Dannie.
- Readers are used to being told stories from childhood, and the omniscient narrator provides a sense of continuity rather than limited information being shared from a character's limited perspective.
- This form suits a story with a large scope like 'Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve', one with many characters, one that takes in world events and is not just about episodes of action.
- The form is more suitable for minor characters (such as Keith) are to be killed off, as it is impossible if Keith was a limited point-of-view narrator, but the details would be lost if he was a first-person narrator.

However, it has the following pitfalls:

- It can appear to affect narrative verisimilitude, or the element of credibility or realism. For example, when Dannie and Keith are at Barry Island, the narrator's recollection (clearly voiced from a period in the future) jars with the descriptions of beach life. A similar effect is achieved in the synagogue scene when, after joking around with Dannie, the narrator stares at the red globe and suddenly lists his older brother Wilfred's encounters with biblical figures and Marx and Freud, all of whom 'lived in that globe' (p. 30).
- There is a lot of description and summary in the novel, a focus on telling and less on showing. The vignette about Grynspan and von Rath (pp. 10-11) is a good example of Abse's subtle psychological observation is also present.

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The Writer's Use of Language

Active Learning Task

Responses will vary.

Ideas and Messages

Debate prompt

Discussion task – responses will vary.

Form

Debate prompt

Discussion task – responses will vary.

Structure

Practice Essay Question

1. Examples which indicate a shifting point of view:
 - The shift to omniscient narrator to describe the international events of 1914:
 - This places Dancy and Gwennie's coming-of-age experiences on the beach within a broader historical context. The narrative juxtaposition emphasises both the precious nature of their relationship and the fact that dramatic outcomes are now more likely for the pair in the near future.
 - The reference to Oswald Moseley, in particular, alludes to the parochial nationalism of the English – 'shouted Moseley...' [p. 39]), perhaps something felt keenly in adulthood. The references to the general strike in San Francisco, facile Anarchism and Mussolini also emphasise that the world is in crisis ('The noise fell over the city like a bomb' [p. 39]). The immediate threat to Jews posed by Nazism is symptomatic of a broader narrative of persecution.
 - The shift to third-person omniscient narration in the vignette about Grynszpan:
 - This embedded narrative is ostensibly narrated by Wilfred and it resembles a first-person account, though the events described have no direct connection with the novel's main narrative. It is not possible without the shift from limited first-person narration to third-person omniscient that it adds considerably to the impact of the themes of war and Jewishness.
 - The vignette succeeds in creating tension and a sense of urgency that Dancy and Gwennie feel quite equal, and it does so in the following ways:
 - by revealing the thoughts and doubts in Grynszpan's mind
 - by revealing his sense of being somehow separate from his own actions ('It was urgent.' Not like his voice at all.' [p. 108]; 'It was strange; and then it was as if he were somehow persecuted by the thick carpet that hinders his movement' [p. 108])
 - by showing the growing fear of the Embassy officials
 - by creating a 'slow-motion' atmosphere in the narrative after von Rappenstein fires his gun ('... everybody stopped thinking. They all appeared like figures in a tableau, pose eternally.' [p. 109])

Context

Debate Prompts

1. • The vignette succeeds in bringing the reader closer to the wartime intrigue than is reported in the media. Small details give the reader added insights into the parallel life of luxury still enjoyed by wealthy Parisians – 'the old lady's implicit understanding of the world as a Polish Jew, and the complicated world of the machinations of the beggar' [p. 108].
2. • The use of repetition ('A hazardous calling, thought Gwennie...' [p. 27]) for emphasis stresses the desperation of Alun ('A hazardous calling, thought Gwennie...' [p. 27]).
- 'She didn't want to get silicosis like her father and her grandfather' (p. 27) in connection with her health caused by coal mining adds emotional weight to Gwennie's fear.
- The final ironic refrain ('A hazardous calling, thought Gwennie.' [p. 27]) conveys the face of financial, political and cultural forces that conspire against the rights of the poor, such as her husband's.

Active Learning Tasks

1. Discussion task – responses will vary.
2. *General pointer:* Try to use emotional language and imagery to make your audience matter emotionally; for example, you may like to imitate some of Abse's techniques: busking ex-miner with a 'tombstone in one of his lungs' (p. 32), or the imagery of coal depression (p. 26 and p. 32).

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Practice Essay Question

1. General pointers:

- Make a note of significant historical events that are mentioned (e.g. 1930s unemployment, 'The Great Depression' – a worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II; persecution of Jews in Germany and Europe; war-torn Britain).
- Carry out some basic Internet research for at least two events to inform your research.
 - Anti-Semitism in twentieth-century Europe predated the Holocaust, which was a part of the indifference to the problems facing Jews across Europe in the failure of the Evian Conference to aid European Jewry of 1938, intended to appease Hitler, and the lack of accommodation by European countries to Jews fleeing persecution. As William I Brustein and Ryan D King, 'Anti-Semitism in Europe Before The Holocaust', *Science Review*, 2004, 25: 1, pp. 35–53. Available at: [zzed.uk/11472-Brustein](http://www.zzed.uk/11472-Brustein)
 - For an overview of the effects of the Great Depression in Britain, such as Jessica Brain, 'The Great Depression in Britain', Available at: [zzed.uk/11472-Brain](http://www.zzed.uk/11472-Brain)
- Link this new information to ideas, language, characterisation and imagery by showing how the novel to write about uses it.
 - Description of the redundant workers who need to seek employment in the wake of the effect of the Depression on Britain. See the quote from Jessica Brain's 'Industrial areas such as southern Wales, the north-east of England and parts of Scotland were affected due to the staple industries of coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding of the time suffering an economic hit. Jobs subsequently suffered and the areas which had flourished in the early 20th century were now suffering badly.'
- Make reference to the novel as a whole by showing how Abse presents and develops the story for the reader (e.g. violent actions are initially presented as phenomena taking place 'in the distance' to present the threat of war as being more imminent or near to hand?).

The aerial attacks begin near the novel's conclusion, with the bombing of Keith's home as an example. Other examples used to develop the onset of Britain's role in the war are:

- Chamberlain's announcement of war (p. 192).
- The air raid warnings on cinema screens (p. 192).
- Dannie's mother's anxious question: "'Where are the boys?' my mother asked" (p. 192).
- Leo's reflections on 'Going back after too short a leave to the Unit' (p. 192).
- Dannie's father avidly listening for radio broadcasts from Lord Haw-Haw (p. 192).
- Bertie's refusal to accept the fact of Clive's death at Dunkirk (pp. 196–198). Clive's death is touched upon in his conversation with Dafydd Morgan, who tells him 'Clive's dead, you're ill' (p. 197).
- Dannie's parents worry about 'Both boys [being] abroad' (p. 206), particularly about the battle soon.
- The Aaronowichs' discussion about the fate of the Jews, the 'Age of the V' and the shrapnel that hit their dustbin lid and the green flares of the enemy that lit the sky, both an acknowledgement of personal risk and a discussion of the war's progress (p. 206).
- The vivid imagery used to indicate the closeness of the enemy threat. Examples include:
 - 'The noise wailed inhumane' (p. 192). Sombre, admonitory, the noise of the war (p. 192)
 - 'In the distance the white fur of fire of the Ack-Ack guns touching and lighting the base' (p. 193)
 - 'Outside the green flares dropped, leaving the streets cut out in wood and shadow, arson, luminous' (p. 197)
 - 'Near the brook a few air-raid shelters... and a concrete turret came out of the ground, convalescent in the weak sunlight' (p. 206)

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