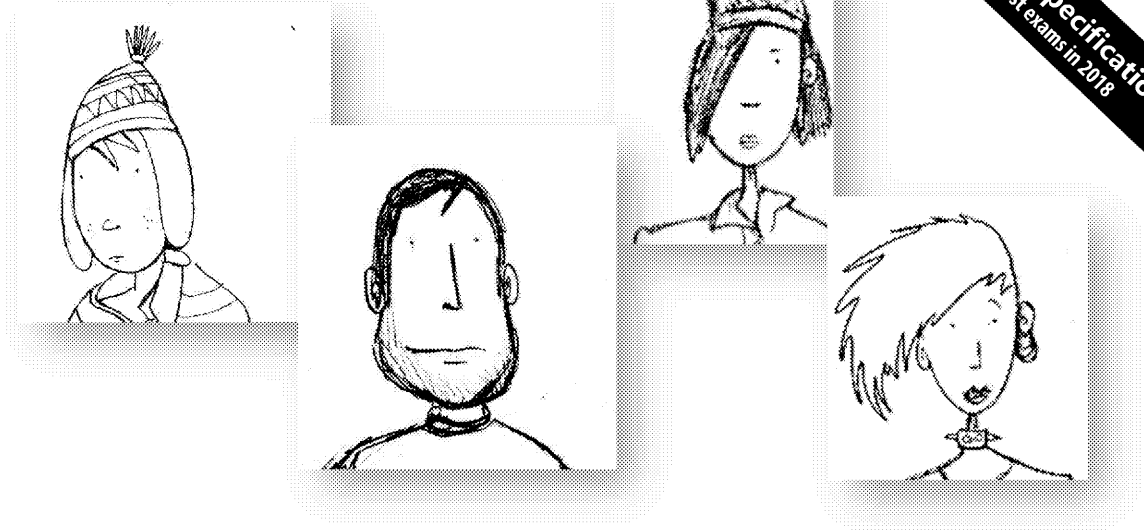


**2017 specification**  
first exams in 2018



# ***About a Boy***

Activity Pack for CCEA GCSE  
English Literature

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# Teacher's Introduction

This resource is an Activity Pack for students who are studying *About a Boy*, Nick Hornby's novel, for their CCEA (5110) GCSE **Unit 1: The Study of Prose – Section A: Novel** examination. It can be used in conjunction with the text in class and the pack is structured so that different activities are available for each of the Chapters. Each activity links to the assessment objectives relevant for the CCEA GCSE English Literature examination. Teachers can use the activities after reading each Chapter in class, or may choose to adapt or use ideas from it in relation to their own scheme of work.

## Remember!

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

Please note that context is not examined for CCEA English Literature. The pack begins with some research activities based around students' understanding of the novel's context, as an awareness of this is useful in order to help students prepare for AO1 – creating and understanding arguments. Please be advised that it is at the teacher's discretion how best to use these activities. You may find it beneficial to use these activities with your class, or perhaps only for higher-ability students.

CCEA also does not award marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar for this exam; therefore, the activities in this pack do not address these skills.

The pack begins with a short biography task for students to familiarise themselves with the Nick Hornby's background. There is a short 'thinking activity' which encourages students to consider the benefits of using two different perspectives in a novel. There is also a reminder of PEE which relates specifically to *About a Boy* so that students are aware of the importance of using this technique when writing about the novel. The pack then contains a short summary for every couple of Chapters and focuses on each Chapter, offering a variety of engaging activities for students which can be used after reading each Chapter. Activities develop note-making skills, skills of analysis, and use of PEE (including encouraging students to make their own interpretations from the language used) amongst other skills.

The tasks also include the use of visual, drama, descriptive writing and passage-based activities, alongside interspersed sheets which focus on theme, narrative stance, writer's techniques and their effects, such as imagery including similes and metaphors. There is a helpful 'Organise, Plan, Structure' sheet which will encourage students to become focussed on writing a response.

After the chapter activities there is a light-hearted 'Knowledge Check' quiz, followed by activities which focus on themes such as family life, mental illness, bullying and love and marriage. There are also activities which look at structure and events in the novel, before the pack moves on to activities which are linked more to the expectancies within the examination, such as the use of PEE when describing characters and a writing activity focusing on Marcus.

The pack explores essay writing with a few more activities such as how to write an introduction to an essay, and tips for planning and writing under exam conditions.

Some activities have been differentiated to meet the needs of a range of different learners. Those activities which are more suitable for lower-ability students are marked with a ✨ symbol, while those that are more suitable for higher-ability students are marked with a ★ symbol.

Finally, the text edition referred to throughout this pack is: ***About a Boy*** Nick Hornby Penguin; 2002 ISBN 0-141-00733-8

## Free Updates!

Register your email address to receive any future free updates\* made to this resource or other English resources your school has purchased, and details of any promotions for your subject.

\* resulting from minor specification changes, suggestions from teachers and peer reviews, or occasional errors reported by customers

**Go to [zzed.uk/freeupdates](http://zzed.uk/freeupdates)**

February 2018

## Assessment Objectives and Exam Info

The novel *About a Boy* is an assigned set text for CCEA English Literature, Unit 1. The exam assesses assessment objectives 1 and 2; therefore, this activity pack will focus on these AOs are:

**AO1** Respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail and support interpretations

**AO2** Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentational and contextual settings

- ✓ This is part of an external examination worth **20% of GCSE marks**.
- ✓ *About a Boy* is examined in **Unit 1: The Study of Prose – Section A: Novel**.
- ✓ The exam is **1 hour 45 minutes** long. You should spend **1 hour** on this section.
- ✓ There is a choice of two essay questions, from which you **choose one**.
- ✓ It is a closed book examination.

### Language Notes

*About a Boy* can be used as a text for Controlled Assessment tasks in CCEA English Literature, Unit 1: The Study of Written Language. This guide has been written to meet the requirements of the exam, although English Language teachers will find it useful as it explores:

- reading and understanding texts
- developing interpretations of writers' ideas and perspectives
- evaluation of linguistic, structural and presentational features to achieve effective communication

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## Pre-Reading Activities

### Activity 1: Nick Hornby Mini Biography Cloze Task

Memoir  
fiction  
book

Cambridge  
lives  
Redhill, Surrey

journalist  
teacher  
17th April 1957

poet  
bestseller

Nick Hornby was born in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
He completed an \_\_\_\_\_ degree at \_\_\_\_\_  
University. He works and \_\_\_\_\_ in Highbury, North London.  
He has had a number of different jobs, including English teacher  
and \_\_\_\_\_ music critic for *The New Yorker*.

He started as a \_\_\_\_\_ with features published in *The Sun*  
and *The Independent*. His best known books are the internationally successful  
*Fidelity*, *About a Boy* and *How To Be Good*. His football biography  
and *About a Boy* have been made into popular, successful films  
as Colin Firth, Hugh Grant and John Cusack.

In 1991 *Fever Pitch* won the William Hill Sports Book Award.  
*How To Be Good* was named the UK's favourite work of fiction  
Awards.

### Activity 2: Cultural Background *About a Boy*

The novel is set in London between 1993 and 1994. Make some notes using  
the following questions as guidelines for your research:

- What were the important events which took place during this time?
- Who was the Prime Minister?
- Who were Nirvana?
- What happened to Kurt Cobain, the singer?

### Activity 3: Thinking Activity: Before Reading

Before you begin reading, consider and then discuss this question with a partner:

- Why would a writer choose to structure their novel from two different points of view? What effect do you think that this would have?
- Be prepared to feedback your ideas to the rest of your group.

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## Activity 4: Point, Evidence, Explain

Before you attempt the activities in this pack, you should be aware of the writing technique of:



**Point**      Make a point.



**Evidence**      Use a quotation to support the point you are making.



**Explain**      Explain how the quote supports the point which you want to comment on the language used in the text.

Read the PEE structure below. It's a basic example in relation to *About a Boy*.

**Point:**      *Marcus is a sensitive boy.*

**Evidence:**      *'he was worried that the trouble in the soaps would remind his mum of her own life.'* (p. 4)

**Explain:**      *This line shows how Marcus is sensitive enough to think about the problems that could have on his mum.*

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# Chapters 1-4: Meeting the Characters

Chapters 1–4 introduce us to the main characters, Marcus, and Will. We learn that his mother and father have recently moved to London and that Marcus' parents are separated. His personality is revealed through dialogue with his mum and it is clear that this is not his family. A lot is revealed about Will's character in these first few chapters, which contrast to the characters of Marcus and his mum.

After reading Chapter 1, answer these questions in full sentences. The first one is a starter question.

## Activity 5: Chapter 1: Introduction to Marcus

The reader is introduced to Marcus and his mum in this chapter. His mum has had numerous boyfriends but none of her relationships have worked out so far.

- Whose perspective is Chapter 1 from?  
*The opening chapter is from Marcus' perspective.*

Are there any funny parts in this chapter which stand out to you?

- What are they?
- Why are they funny?
- Discuss your ideas with a partner – do you have similar or different ideas?
- Where have Marcus and his mum moved to?
- What is your initial impression of Marcus' mum?

## Extension Activities

Using pp. 3 and 4 of Chapter 1 pick out the words which Marcus uses to describe his feelings. Sort them into what you interpret as being negative or positive. Note down the page number.

Negative	Positive
'(...) and so far it had been pretty boring' (p. 3)	'More happened, and this was the first time' (p. 3)

Think about how you have felt when something big has happened in your life, such as relocating to a new home or going through a change in situation. Write down your feelings when you had to make this change. Can you relate to Marcus?

Negative feelings which you had	Positive feelings which you had

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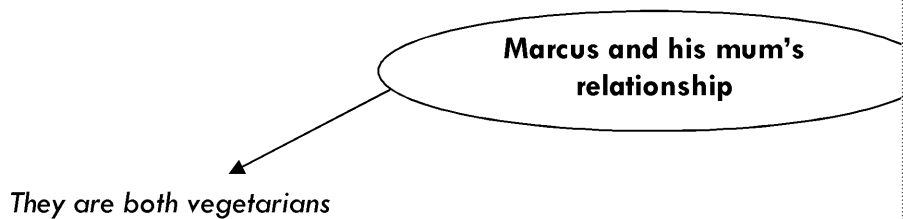
**Activity 6: Marcus' Character**

After reading Chapter 1, make a list of bullet points to describe Marcus. Use evidence from the text to support each of your points. An example has been provided:

Point about Marcus	Evidence (quotation from the text)	
Marcus is sensitive	'(...) he was worried that the trouble in the soaps would remind his mum of the trouble she had in her own life.' (p. 4)	This line shows that Marcus is sensitive to his mum's feelings, despite the fact that she may have been the one who was troubled.
Marcus is thoughtful		

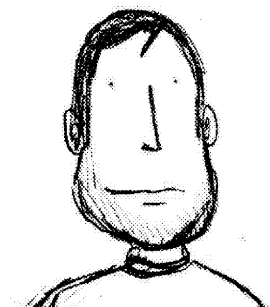
**Activity 7: Marcus and His Mum**

What impression do you get of the relationship between Marcus and his mum? Read over Chapter 3 again to get some ideas. Use a spider diagram to record your ideas, like this:



**Activity 8: Chapter 2: Introduction to Will**

The reader is introduced to Will who is a complete contrast to Marcus.



**Visual Activity**

After reading pp. 5 and 6, draw and label what you know about Will. Try and include all of the things which make him 'cool'. For example, you may want to draw and label his eyes, hair, and clothes.

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 **Extension Activity: Will's character: Finding the Evidence**

Find a quotation from Chapter 2 for each point to show that the following things are true. Use the table below to record your answers. The first one has been done for you.

Point	Evidence	
Will values possessions	'He owned more than five hip-hop albums' (p. 5)	The more things Will has, the more he values them.
Will's image and appearance are important to him		
Money is also important to him		

Write down *three* more things which you have learnt about Will from this Chapter.

Point	Evidence	

 **Activity 9: Culture**

In Chapter 2, Will says, 'You didn't have to have a life of your own anymore. You could just peek over the fence at other people's lives...' (p.6)

Think of a soap you have watched in the past and note down some ideas for a discussion about what you think Will's views are in this quote.

 **Extension**

Read this passage (from pp. 6 and 7):

*There was almost too much to do. You didn't have to have a life of your own anymore. You could just peek over the fence at other people's lives, as lived in newspaper columns, films and exquisitely sad jazz or tough rap songs.*

- What kind of lifestyle does Will lead?
- What comments do you think that Hornby is making about culture at this time?
- How do you think that culture has changed between now and 1998?

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## Activity 10: Will's Lifestyle

From the description of Imogen and John's house (p. 7), how do we picture Will's home to look?

Think of three words to describe how you picture Will's home to be.

<i>Clutter</i>	<i>Disgrace</i>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Imogen &amp; John</b>		
<i>Dirty</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## Extension Activity

What are the differences between Will and John's lives? In what ways has Will's lifestyle changed?

## Activity 11: Contrasting Characters

After reading Chapters 1 and 2 you have been introduced to the characters of Marcus and Will.

There are a number of differences between them. Tick which statements you agree with below. If there are any sentences which are incorrect, provide a correct version.

- Will is 12 and Marcus is 36.
- Marcus behaves like a typical youngster.
- Will reads the 'right' magazines and goes to the 'right' clubs.
- Will is a serious character whereas Marcus seems frivolous.
- Marcus listens to Mozart.
- Will is immature.
- Marcus has never owned a pair of trainers.

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 **Activity 12: Using PEE - Describing Will**

Complete this PEE paragraph about Will. You will need to think about what quotation shows about his character:

**Point:** .....

**Evidence:** '(...) being men's mag cool was as close as he had ever come to

**Explain:** This line shows  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

Now, working in a pair, write your own PEE paragraph about how Will does has no ambition. Remember to comment on the words in your quotation to help

**Point:**

**Evidence:**

**Explain:**

Be prepared to read out your PEE paragraph to the rest of your group.

 **Extension**

Who does Will rely on for money? How do you think that this has affected Will?

 **Activity 13: Introducing the Themes of the Novel**

You have just read the first two chapters and someone has asked you what themes are in the book.

 **Remember!**

a theme is a topic which runs throughout the text. The writer usually explores characters and ideas in relation to that topic throughout the novel.

For each theme below discuss and record your ideas about how they have affected the reader so far. You may want to consider them (comparing and contrasting the characters of Marcus and Will:

- Responsibility
- Families
- Upbringing
- Class

 **Activity 14: Media Entertainment**

Will relies on a lot of media entertainment to get him through the day (p. 6). The novel was written in 1998 so you will see that some of the media described is dated.

Make a list of all of the entertainment which can 'distract' someone throughout the day (you can include what Will describes too). The first one has been done for you.

1. TV (Will watches daytime TV when most people his age are at work)

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 **Extension Activity**

Is there more or less media entertainment available today? Make a list of entertainment.

 **Activity 15: Chapter 3: Marcus**

Marcus is a complex character: he is a deep thinker.

In Chapter 3 there are some descriptions which give the impression that Marcus is mature yet he is still a young boy at the same time. Pick out four quotations to show Marcus as a mature character in this way. For each quotation, write down how it suggests Marcus's maturity.

Mature Marcus	Marcus as a young boy
<p><i>'He'd still be who he was, and that, it seemed to him, was the basic problem.'</i> (p. 11)</p> <p><i>This line shows Marcus' sensitivity and self-awareness – characteristics which usually develop with age and maturity.</i></p>	<p><i>'He could tell from the look on his face that the clock was wrong.'</i> (p. 11)</p> <p><i>The clock is a childlike object. Marcus is a boy, despite his maturity.</i></p>

 **Extension Activity**

Read the passage from Chapter 3 (p. 13) below:


(...) but the wrong trousers, or the wrong haircut, or the wrong shoes which sent them wild with excitement. As he was usually wearing the wrong trousers, and his haircut was wrong all the time, every day didn't have to do very much to send them all demented.

Marcus knew he was weird, and he knew that part of the reason he was weird was because his mum was weird.

- 1) In the paragraph above highlight the different things which make Marcus weird.
- 2) What do the last two sentences in the paragraph above suggest about Marcus's character?
- 3) How does Hornby use humour in this paragraph? How does he also make Marcus's character more relatable?
- 4) Which word is repeated for effect in the last two lines, and why?

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 **Activity 16: Parenting**

As you read the extract below think about how Marcus presents his mum's behaviour towards him. You can highlight key parts of the text if you like:

She was always telling him that only shallow people made judgements on the basis of clothes or hair; she didn't want him to watch rubbish television, listen to rubbish music, or play rubbish computer games (she thought they were a waste of time) which meant that if he wanted to do anything that any of the other boys were doing he had to argue with her for hours. (p. 13)

Discuss these questions with a partner before answering them:

- 1) What do you think about Marcus' mum's opinions?
- 2) What kind of impact do you think that she is having on Marcus?
- 3) Do you have any criticisms of Marcus' mum?

 **Extension Activity**

Complete the table below by expanding on the quotations provided with your own ideas. What is Marcus saying in these quotes? Also provide the effect that these quotes have on the reader. The first row has been completed for you.

Quotations	My ideas	
<i>...he had learnt that some hard things became softer after a very little while. (p. 12)</i>	<i>Marcus is thinking about his parents' separation and realises that although it was painful and hard to accept, things had become easier over time.</i>	<i>The effect shows how his attitude becomes more experienced to grow up.</i>
<i>He usually lost, and she was so good at arguing that he felt good about losing. (p.13)</i>		
<i>It wasn't so bad in Cambridge, because there were loads of kids who weren't right for school... (p.14)</i>		
<i>He knew what she was doing and why, and he hated her. (p.16)</i>		

 **Activity 17: Chapter 4: Will's Character**

**Will**

What does this quotation suggest about Will's lifestyle at times? Comment on your response.

He was browsing, filling up the time (...) (p. 17)

Use PEE to complete this point about Will's character:

**Point:** Will does not want to have any responsibility or commitment:

**Evidence:** '(...) she told him about her kids straightaway; he wanted to throw the table over and run.' (p. 19)

**Explanation:**

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## Extension Activity

In the following table, support the first impressions of Will with a suitable quotation from the text. In the third column, summarise what impression this gives you of Will's personality. In the bottom of the table for you to write your own impression of Will.

Will's character	Quotation	
Rude		
Coward	<i>When they met again she told him about her kids straight away; he wanted to throw his napkin to the floor, push the table over and run. (p. 26)</i>	Th ff am
Smooth and sleazy		
Easily bored		
Heartless		

## Activity 18: End of Chapter 4: Women as 'Inventions'

Work as a group and name a few inventions that we use in everyday life.

- The telephone
- 1) What do most of these different inventions have in common?
  - 2) Does Will's description of single women as 'the best invention [he] had' seem insensitive?
  - 3) What does this reveal about his *attitude towards women*? Discuss in your group.

### Discussion Points

On page 20, Will says: '*Maybe children democratized beautiful single women*'. What does the word 'democratize' mean and how does it relate when applied to the text?

What do we discover about Marcus' personality by reading the first three chapters? Why have you arrived at this conclusion?

On page 28, Will states, '*Maybe children democratized beautiful single women*'. What does the word 'democratize' mean and how does it relate when applied to the text?

What do we perceive about Marcus' personality by reading the first three chapters? Why have you arrived at this conclusion?

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## Activity 19: Writer's Techniques: Simile and Metaphor

### Simile

A simile is a way of comparing one idea with another by using the words 'like' or 'as'. We normally use similes to animate our descriptions so that the reader can picture what we are expressing more effectively. For example, read the sentence: 'He was as immobile as a statue.' We all know that most statues are made out of solid, unmoving material, so comparing a man to a statue the impression that he is immobile is given. If we had just read 'He was immobile' we would have given us the same depth of imagination.

Similes are used frequently throughout *About a Boy* so make sure you are aware of them in the novel. The more similes you recognise, the easier it will be to get to grips with the novel as they are used for effect.

Read the following extract from Chapter 3:

*What was there to laugh at? Not much, really, unless you were the kind of person who had a permanent lookout for something to laugh at. Unfortunately, that was exactly the kind of person most kids were, in his experience. They patrolled up and down the street for sharks, except that what they were on the lookout for wasn't flesh but the wrong haircut, or the wrong shoes, any or all of which sent them wild with laughter.*

Highlight the simile in this extract. What are the effects of Marcus using this simile?

Think of a simile to effectively describe Marcus. For example, 'At school, Marcus was like a ...'. If it helps, make a list of keywords that you know about Marcus so far.

### Metaphor

A metaphor is a technique used to compare one idea with another *without* using 'like' or 'as'. Metaphors aren't as literal as similes and we normally use metaphors to create a more powerful image. If you read the sentence, 'the sky was full of stars' it sounds very factual, whereas 'the sky was a blanket of stars', it creates more emotion. Comparing the starry sky to a blanket and the reader now has to consider the extra associations attached to that word.

Metaphors aren't used as frequently as similes in the novel, but it's worth keeping an eye out for them. They are also useful language tools when answering a creative writing question.

Read the following extract from Chapter 35:

*'Yeah, people like that.'*

*'They won't be around forever.'*

*'Some of them will, some of them won't. But, see, I didn't know before it was that job, and they can. You can find people. It's like those acrobatic displays. What acrobatic displays?'*

*'Those ones when you stand on top of loads of people in a pyramid. It doesn't matter who they are, does it, as long as they're there and you don't let them go away and get someone else.'*

*'You really think that? It doesn't matter who's underneath you?'*

*'I do now, yeah. I didn't, but now I do.'*

(pp. 270–271)

- How does Marcus use an acrobatic display as a metaphor in this passage?
- How is it effective?

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# Chapters 5-8: 'In the Line of

In this chapter Marcus' mum's depression becomes progressively worse and affecting Marcus. His attempt to make friends is unsuccessful as the bullies Will attends a single parents' support group called SPAT and creates a makeshift family. Will has no conscience about his decision to pretend to be a single father and has sex with any available women. Will and Marcus meet for the first time and their relationship begins to develop.

## Activity 20: Marcus' Life

### Marcus

Discuss this question before feeding back to the rest of the class:

- How does Hornby's juxtaposition of Will's actions in Chapter 4 with Marcus' depression at the start of Chapter 5 make Will's actions seem worse?

### Marcus at School

For this activity, you will need to reread the section which focuses on Marcus at school.

In pairs, prepare your answers to the questions below for a class discussion.

- What are Marcus' new school friends like? Find one or two quotations to support your answer.
- Why do you think that Marcus is friends with them? Again, support your answer with evidence from the text.
- How does Hornby present bullying in this chapter? What makes the text so effective?
- Why do Mark and Nicky want to stop being friends with Marcus?

## Activity 21: Will

### Chapter 6: Will goes to SPAT

In this chapter we discover that Will has a 'history of pretending.' (p. 32)

Discuss the following in a pair:

- What kinds of things does Will pretend to do?
- Why does Will only pretend to do these things rather than actually do them?

## Extension Activity

Read this extract:

*(...) which had, according to the stickers in its window, been to Chessington Adventure and Alton Towers; Will's car, a new GTi, hadn't been anywhere. Why not? He couldn't think of any reason why not, apart from the glare of the sun. He was a childless single man aged thirty-six and therefore had never had the time or the money to waste miles and miles to plunge down a plastic fairy mountain on a tea-tray.*

What are the pros and cons of having children, do you think? Remember to complete this table.

Pros of having children	Cons of having children
	<i>It's hard work – as Will says, it's not just the friends and their houses...</i>

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## Activity 22: Will and Women

### Group Discussion

What impression does Will create of the SPAT group members? Why are they

- At the end of this chapter Will finds out about how each female member of the SPAT is a single (pp. 35–37). What impression is created of men at the end of the chapter?

## Activity 23: Chapter 7: Marcus

### Bullying Drama Activity

Reread the bullying scene in the newsagent at the start of this chapter (pp. 35–37). You are going to turn it into a script for either a film or drama production.

Who are the characters in this scene? List them.

You could start the scene like this:

*Marcus enters the shop.*

*Mr Patel: How's your lovely mum, Marcus?'*

*Marcus: (as he walks over to the magazine rack) She's OK.*

- Complete the scene
- Practise the scene in small groups, ready for a short performance.

## Extension Activity

Read this short extract:

*She was funny, his mum. She was all for talking. She was always on at her things, but he was sure she didn't really mean it. She was fine on the surface, but he knew that if he went for the big stuff then there'd be trouble, especially now she'd been ill. She never cried about nothing. (p. 40)*

Discuss these questions with a partner – you can make some notes to feed back to the class.

- 1) What kinds of things are the 'little things' that Marcus' mum is fine with?
- 2) What, do you think, is she reluctant to talk about?
- 3) Why is Marcus' mum's illness getting worse?

In Chapter 7, Marcus asks his mother, 'what sort of sick' (p. 41) and makes her feel worse. What 'kind of sick' do you think his mum has? Is her illness physical or mental?

What kind of problems/anxieties does Marcus' mum have which could lead to depression? Discuss your ideas and make a bullet-point list.

- *She is a single mother.*

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## Activity 24: Chapter 8: The Picnic

Why does SPAT exist? What are its aims and who does it support? Do you have any other support groups which exist? What do they do?

### Marcus and Will Meet

Will's first impression of Marcus:

*(...) to deal with a teenager (if that is what Marcus was – it was hard to deal with a strange frizzy bush of hair, and he dressed like a twenty-five-year-old who had just come off: he was wearing brand-new jeans and a Microsoft T-shirt). (p. 49)*

What is Will's first impression of Marcus? What do the words 'he dressed like a chartered accountant' suggest (p. 49)?

Marcus' first impression of Will:

*Marcus looked Will up and down, taking in the trainers, the haircut and the clothes. He added cruelly, 'Nobody does. Only old people.' (pp. 49 and 50)*

What is Marcus' first impression of Will? Comment on his words, 'Only old people' and 'up and down'.

Will thinks that he's well equipped to deal with teenage boys, so why does he change his mind?

*He didn't mind. He was better at hiding and seeking than he was at talking. It was a worse way to spend an afternoon than making small children happy. (p. 50)*

How does Will come across as being like a child on this picnic? Consider his actions and their differences, how he behaves and who he chooses to spend time with.

Throughout the text there is a lot of 'inner dialogue' from the characters of *About a Boy*. Describe what they think and what they feel through this inner dialogue. How does each character feel? In the chart below, find quotes to describe the emotion. In the first column, write one word to describe the emotion.

Anger	Marcus is angry at his mother	
	Will attempts to seduce Suzie	
	Marcus is trying hard to make friends	
	Will is anxious about the SPAT meeting	

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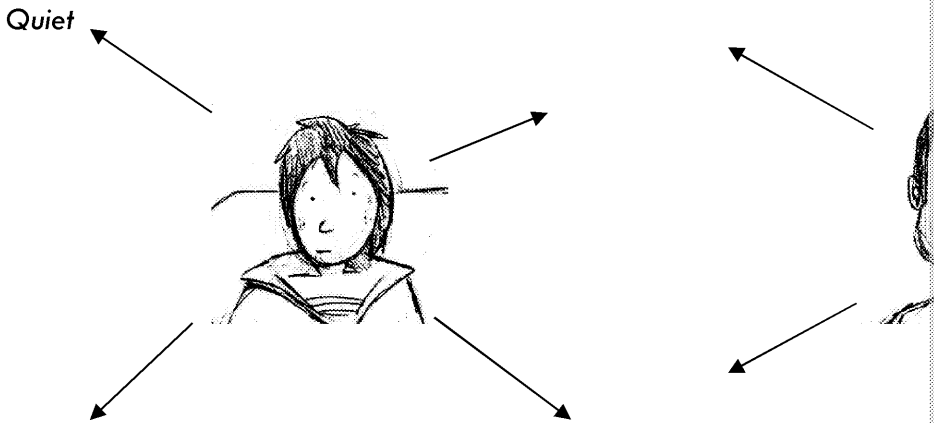


**Activity 25: The Characters So Far**

Think about and record what we know about Marcus and Will so far from the novel. You can also draw out how you picture each character. Don't forget descriptions on p. 49 to help you.

Can you pick out any of aspects of their personalities which may clash when they meet?

Are they similar in any ways, or are they completely different?



**Activity 26: Themes**

Despite the light-hearted tone of the novel, Hornby explores two serious themes in *About a Boy*. Complete each spider diagram below with the following ideas:

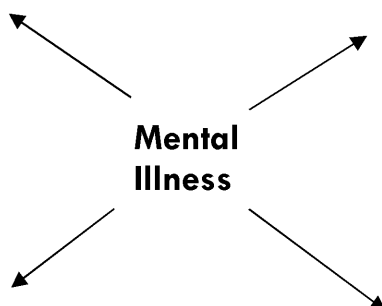
Do you have any thoughts on how each theme is presented in society? For example, do you read about anything relating to either topic in your local or a national newspaper? How was it dealt with?

How does Hornby present each theme in the novel so far? Which characters are involved in each theme? How does each character cope with their experiences?

**Remember!**

Include your own ideas and possibly your experiences in relation to each theme. Each diagram should be full of ideas ready to feed back to the rest of your class.

*Marcus' mum suffers with depression and she doesn't want to talk about it to Marcus*



**Bullying**

*The negative effects of bullying are sometimes felt on the local news*

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## Activity 27: Imagery

Writers use imagery to create particular images or scenes in the reader's mind and similes can be used to create vivid imagery as well as other linguistic techniques.

In Chapter 5, Will says that 'He wanted to tear out his tongue and grind it into the floor with his foot' (p. 18). If we hadn't read the previous sentence, what would you have done? If you wanted to 'tear out your tongue' what would you have been like? You would have probably said something silly or inappropriate that would have made Will laugh. However, instead of just saying 'Will felt embarrassed about his mistake', Harper Lee uses words such as 'tear' and 'grind' to create a vivid image in our heads that captures Will's feelings. This type of description provides the reader with a deeper level of understanding.

In the table below are some simple sentences that require further description. If you find it difficult to expand your description, try taking the sentence apart and describing each word separately. Think about a list of things which relate to each of these words.

For example:

*Stacey was extremely **shy** around her **new** schoolmates.*

Extract the keywords you think are most important:

- Shy – alone, sits away from other people, isn't very forthcoming, avoids eye contact
- New – scared, excited, lonely, apprehensive

Now try creating a sentence with some of the ideas you have come up with using the keywords:

*Her eyes were **glued to the floor** as she made her way to an **empty** seat in the **class**.*

Try it for yourself:

Quotation	Extension
Mark's Maths class was <b>dull</b> and <b>boring</b> .	
The flowers in the vase looked like they were <b>dying</b> .	
Sian was <b>extremely tired</b> after running for so long.	

## Activity 28: Chapter 6: Descriptive Writing Task: The SPAT Venue

In Chapter 6 at the bottom of p. 41 is a description of the SPAT venue. The 'supermarket brand' (p. 33) which are dispensed in 'paper [cups]' (p. 34) and 'desolate' (p. 33) What images do these descriptions create?

Re-write this paragraph and use adjectives to make the situation livelier and more engaging.

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## Chapters 9-12: Illness

The reader soon discovers how seriously ill Marcus' mum is when she attempts to commit suicide. She is angry and upset. Marcus' mum has to stay in hospital. Marcus and his mum's relationship becomes more strained when she returns home. Marcus concludes that two isn't a family and that they need more people in their family unit. We learn just how low Will is prepared to go when he prepares a car seat for his pretend son.

### Activity 29: Use of Language in Chapter 9

Chapter 9 moves from a light-hearted scene at the park to a tense ending.

How does Hornby's use of language create tension for the reader in this passage?

*Afterwards he thought he could recall being nervous, too, but he must have been too nervous to be nervous, because there wasn't anything to be nervous about. Then he put the lid on the box, and a new part of his life began, bang, without any warning.*

You may want to highlight keywords and phrases in the passage. Use quotes to support your ideas.

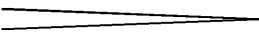
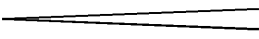


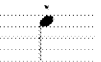
*(...) he knew the moment he walked in that it was something he'd have to live with for the rest of his life.*  
(p. 58)

What is the impact of Marcus' mum's suicide attempt on him?

### Activity 30: The End of Chapter 9

Composers use certain markings when they are writing music to direct the musician to play in a certain way. For example, a composer may want to increase the speed of the music or they may want a particular note to be played louder or more quietly.

In the chart below are a few of the many markings that composers use when writing music.

	<b>Diminuendo</b>	Gradually make the music quieter
	<b>Crescendo</b>	Gradually make the music louder
	<b>Half-Rest</b>	Pause for the value of half a note
	<b>Whole-Rest</b>	Pause for the value of a whole note
	<b>Staccato</b>	Play the note for half its original value. Notes are written one after another in a sequence and used to create a sense of urgency.
<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>Forte</b>	Play loud
<b><i>p</i></b>	<b>Piano</b>	Play quiet

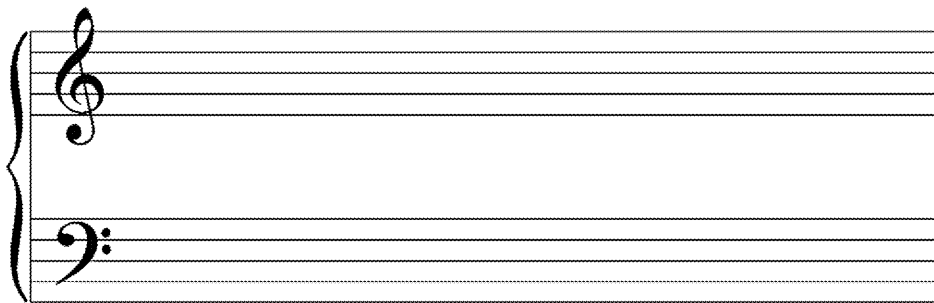
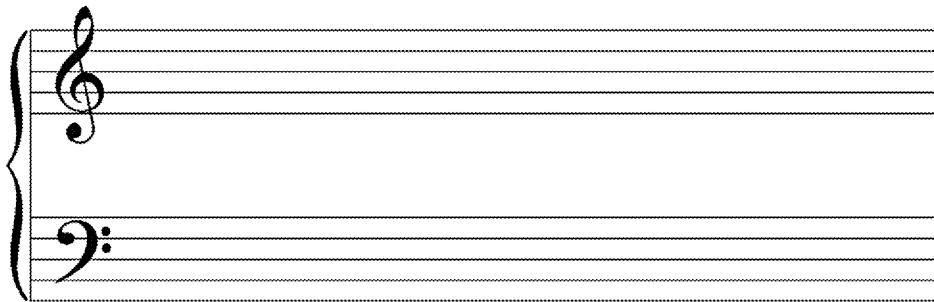
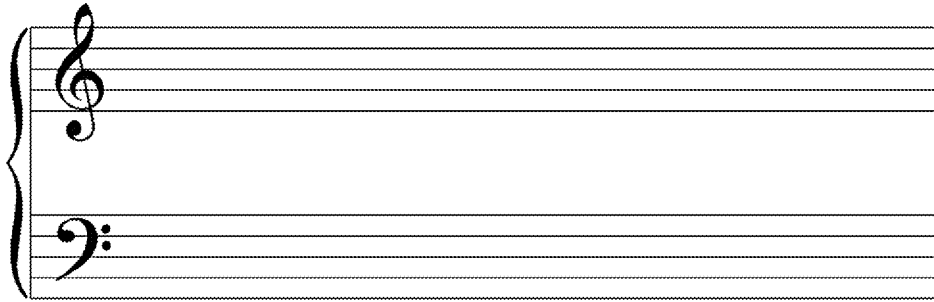
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When Marcus discovers his unconscious mother in Chapter 9, sound is used to try to imagine the awful moment when Marcus opens his front door. Reread about Marcus' silent ascent of the stairs, the shock as he sees his mother on the sofa and rushing about.

Imagine you are writing a piece of music for this dramatic scene that is going to be played. Read the page and use the symbols to recreate the scene how you want it to be. Write your signs in the blank space. If you like, you could even match your chosen symbols to the scene it best relates to.



 **Extension Activity**

Write down the emotions Marcus may be feeling as the same scene unfolds.

- How he thinks that he saw his mum at the pond
- His feelings as he goes up the stairs
- His feelings when he sees his mum on the sofa

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## Activity 31: Events in Chapter 10

What are the main events in this chapter? List them.

Read this short extract of dialogue between Will and Marcus as Marcus is at the hospital and trying to reassure him:

*'She'll be ok.'*

*'Yeah. I suppose so. But... that's not the point, is it?'*

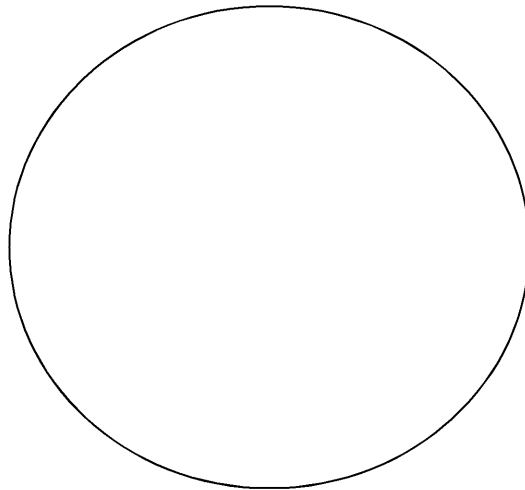
*Will knew it wasn't the point, but he was surprised Marcus had worked out the first time it occurred to him that the boy was pretty bright. (p. 60)*

- What does Marcus mean when he says that it's not the point that his mum is in hospital?
- Why is Will surprised by Marcus' response?

## Activity 32: Protection

There are two parts to this activity.

Will protects himself by surrounding himself with 'expensive casual clothes', 'furniture' (p. 62). Why do you think Will does this? What are they protecting him from? Make your own bubble by filling it with things that make you feel safe. Write about why these things make you feel that way.



Will describes how he lives in a dreamy alternative reality (p. 72) to everyone else. Choose one or more of the following boxes that describe Will's life effectively. Find quotes to support your choices.

Spontaneous

Structured

Disorganised

Controlled  
Dreamy

Exciting

Fake

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### Activity 33: Descriptive Writing Using Metaphor

Reread the scene from Chapter 10 where Marcus, Suzie and Will are sitting in a hospital waiting room. Now choose a character and rewrite the scene from that character's perspective.

It doesn't have to be long but you must try to include two metaphors. Remember to use 'as'. As an example, the opening has been written for you. You can choose to copy it or you can create a completely new paragraph.

As we entered the hospital waiting room there was an overpowering smell of disinfectant and coffee. I had never been to a hospital before but I knew I'd be there again. As we sat down in a vacant seat I looked around. *The waiting room was full of sad faces.*

If it helps, do some background research and find examples of metaphors or similes to use in your creative paragraph.

### Activity 34: Chapter 11: The Note to Marcus

In her note left for Marcus (which she wrote before she was found) his mum explains why she has chosen to commit suicide.

*A big part of me knows that I'm doing a wrong, stupid, selfish, unkind thing. It's not in fact. The trouble is that it's not the part that controls me anymore. It's about the sort of illness I've had for the last few months – it just doesn't let anybody else. It just wants to do its own thing. (p. 64)*

What is Marcus' mum trying to tell him about her illness? Use PEE in your answer.

Marcus experiences change

*He had always trusted his mother – or rather, he had never not trusted her. It would never be the same again. (p. 66)*

How has Marcus' relationship with his mother changed after her suicide attempt?

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## Activity 35: Chapter 12: Units of Time

Will perceives his days as being 'units of time, each unit consisting of about minutes.' (p. 71). He even wonders how 'his friends could juggle life and a If you did not have to go to school and could plan your day around Will's ' how would you spend it? Fill in the planner below:

07.30–08.00am
08.00–08.30am
08.30–09.00am
09.00–09.30am
09.30–10.00am
10.00–10.30am
10.30–11.00am
11.00–11.30am
11.30–12.00pm
12.00–12.30pm
12.30–01.00pm
01.00–01.30pm
01.30–02.00pm
02.00–02.30pm
02.30–03.00pm
03.00–03.30pm
03.30–04.00pm
04.00–04.30pm
04.30–05.00pm
05.00–05.30pm
05.30–06.00pm
06.00–06.30pm
06.30–07.00pm
07.00–07.30pm
07.30–08.00pm
08.00–08.30pm
08.30–09.00pm
09.00–09.30pm
09.30–10.00pm
10.00–10.30pm
10.30–11.00pm

- How easy did you find it to fill your day?
- Do you think that you would enjoy, or get bored of, doing the same thing?
- Why does Will not mind about having any job applications rejected?
- How is his situation different to most other people's?

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## Activity 36: Chapter 12: Will's Help

Read p. 73. How does Will suggest that he will help Fiona and Marcus?

- 1.
- 2.

What do both of these things have in common?

.....

How is Will attempting to solve Fiona and Marcus' problems?

## Activity 37: PEE

PEE is a useful tool for writing effective essays. It stands for 'Point', 'Evidence' and 'Explain' and should be kept at the forefront of your mind when responding to a question.

You'll get poor marks for just writing about your interpretation of the novel and even poorer marks for copying reams of quotations that you've taken from the text. You need to balance the two when making your points.

Follow the simple rules and look closely at the definition below

- Point**            Make a point.  
**Evidence**        Use a quotation to support the point you are making.  
**Explain**         Explain how the quote supports the point which you are making on the language used in the quote you have chosen.

You don't need to write hundreds of words of explanation and you don't need to make your point. Be selective with your example and don't think that you need a lot of words to explain your interpretation. Use a range of quality, accurate quotations as you can.

### Remember!

Keep your writing tidy

Cluttered writing isn't going to work in your favour. It doesn't matter if you think you've written well – if the marker can't read it, you are not going to get good marks. Keep it as

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## Chapters 13-16: Family and Single

Will takes Marcus and his mother out for a meal and Marcus spends the evening trying to get the pair of them to like each other so that Will can become part of their family. Will treats it like a case study. He thinks that it will be easy to 'help' them and realises that they don't need money thrown at them; they need stability – which he cannot provide. Marcus finds out about Will's 'big secret' and uses the information to stop letting him visit every day. Will gets used to Marcus' visits and soon learns to lie at school. He tries to help him by buying new shoes but soon realises that he cannot solve Marcus' problems.

### Activity 38: Chapter 13: Marcus' Perspective

The concept of 'family' is an important theme within the novel and Marcus has liberal views on what makes a family and how a family is defined. In Chapter 84, Marcus says that the 'Tory woman' is 'stupid'.

- What does the Tory woman say that aggravates Marcus?
- Why is this of cultural significance to the novel?

Think about:

- The year that the novel was set in
- The political party that was in power when the novel was set
- The ideas that were circulating around that period of time

Fiona tells her son, 'You're making it more difficult, not easier. You're making it worse.' What is she talking about and what is Marcus making worse?

### Activity 39: Chapter 14: Will's Perspective

What are Will's initial thoughts about Fiona (p. 87)? Use PEE in your response.

Marcus' mother is interested in 'alternative' things such as vegetarianism, aromatherapy and the environment.

What do these things suggest about Fiona? Make a bullet-point list that highlights her personality.

- She cares about world issues.
- 
- 
- 

What features of Will's personality cause both characters to clash?

- Will doesn't care about anyone but himself.
- 
- 
- 

Why did Will hate going for supper at Fiona's home?

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## Activity 40: Emotions

Think about some emotions that we feel in everyday life...

Write down or draw a visual representation of these feelings and describe emotions can make us feel.

For example:

Anger – *Makes people feel frustrated, anxious, unstable and uneasy irritated*

Sadness –

Fear –

Why do you think Will wants to avoid 'real life' and 'real emotions'?

## Extension Activity

*He was one of life's visitors; he didn't want to be visited.* (p. 93)

Will says that he is a 'visitor' to life. When you think of the word 'visitor' what

Think about the meanings behind each of these words:

- Tourist
- Alien
- Foreign
- Guest

Does the way Will lives his life represent that of a visitor to life or a member

## Activity 41: Chapter 15: Tension between Characters

Before rereading this chapter write the title 'Tension between Characters'

Part 1:

As you read make a set of notes about how tension develops between Will and Marcus. Consider what Marcus decides to do and how Will treats him when he visits. Add notes from the chapter too.

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## Extension

How does their relationship develop in this chapter? What does Marcus contribute to the relationship?

Part 2:

Read the following extract from Chapter 15 about Marcus' feelings:

*He'd never talked about it since the night it happened, and even then he hadn't. What he felt, all the time, every single day, was a horrible fear. In the weeks that came round to Will's after school was that he was able to put off going to school, he no longer climb the stairs at home without looking at his feet and remembering the night of Dead Duck Day. By the time he got to the bit where he had to put his key in the lock, his heart was thumping in his chest and his arms and his legs (...)* (p. 101)

What are the effects of 'Dead Duck Day' on Marcus?

## Activity 42: Chapter 16: Will's Perspective

Read the following quotation:

*(...) he could see he was serving some purpose in the kid's life at the moment. He served no purpose in anybody else's he was hardly going to die of compassion. It was still a bit of a drag, though, having some kid inflict himself on you. Will would be relieved when Marcus found a purpose to life somewhere else.* (pp. 103 and 104)

Using PEE, write down what kind of impact Marcus is having on Will.

## Extension

- In what ways has Will 'grown up' in this chapter, and in what ways hasn't?
- Which sensitive topic do Will and Marcus talk about in this chapter?

## Activity 43: Will and Marcus

Marcus is a moral and ethical individual as he follows many of his mother's principles. However, many of these things cause Marcus trouble in school and he struggles to fit in with his friends. To help Marcus 'blend in', Will buys him new trainers so that he can be part of the 'herd'. Answer the following questions and discuss your responses in a small group.

- 1) Is Will right or wrong to help Marcus blend in with his school mates?
- 2) Why do Will's attempts fail?
- 3) Describe how Will feels at the end of this chapter.

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## Activity 44: Narrative Stance

Narrative stance means where the author positions him/herself in the novel. You have heard about first person, second person and third person narration. The different narrative positions describe the distance of the author from the work of writing. If an author is writing in the first person they use first person pronouns 'I' and 'we'. The second person addresses the reader with the second-person pronoun 'you' and the third person pronouns include 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'.

*About a Boy* can be confusing because it changes between the different perspectives. Each chapter moves from Marcus' perspective to Will's.

In Chapter 3 Hornby sets the scene by using third person pronouns. He writes 'On his first day Marcus woke up every half-hour or so.' (p. 11) Hornby uses an omniscient perspective because it gives the impression that there is an all-knowing presence.

- Why do you think it may be important to use a third person perspective?
- What value does this have?

The book is also narrated from the viewpoints of Will and Marcus. No other characters are narrated to the reader; we only learn about other characters through dialogue or through the actions of Will and Marcus. Answer these questions:

- How does this form of narration affect what we know about the other characters?
- Is this a biased or unbiased viewpoint?
- What are the advantages of narrating from just Will's and Marcus' perspectives?

The **narrative structure** is the way in which the author chooses to lay out his or her story, which is conventionally used. Circle the correct description for the way that Hornby uses narrative structure. Copy the correct version into your notes.

- The story is told conventionally using the first person from Will's point of view. The narrative switches to Marcus' version of events.
- The story is told using alternative characters – the reader is introduced to Marcus first, then Will is introduced in Chapter 2. The story progresses with the characters alternating. The story is told using this alternating form.

The story is mainly told from Marcus' perspective. Occasionally the reader is introduced to Will's point of view. A lot of what we read throughout *About a Boy* concerns the emotions of Will and Marcus. These are written in the third person and are called *inner monologues*. They are like they are thought. Rhetorical questions are asked throughout the text, as if the author is speaking to the reader. For example, '...why didn't she wear clothes which looked like the ones she wore in Chapter 14, p 87).

The contrast between *personal* inner monologues and *public* dialogue with other characters gives the reader with a deeper insight into the personalities that drive the story's main events.

## Extension Activity

**A monologue is a speech in which the speaker expresses his or her thoughts to a single audience.**

Write a personal monologue which shows character growth for either Will or Marcus. What do you think about each character?

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## Chapters 17-20: Families

Fiona finds out about Marcus' trips to Will's house and reacts like any mother would. It is clear to her that Marcus is really struggling in school, although it takes Will a long time to be torn because she wants to make her son happy and tries to get Will to cook, but he doesn't care enough. She tells Marcus this, but he is more persistent than she is. In Chapter 20, he turns up at Will's door once again. It dawns on Will that he has a responsibility; he just needs to be Marcus' friend. Marcus makes a new acquaintance, Will McCrae.

### Activity 45: Chapter 17: Marcus

*But of course there was no other Marcus, and he wasn't doing fine at all. His mum was just being blind and stupid and nuts. (p. 116)*

*The way he saw it the hospital stuff was more serious than the sweets and crisps, and no one should mix them in together. (p. 117)*

Study the two quotations above. They are from pp. 116 and 117. They are from different perspectives.

Using PEE describe how Marcus feels in each of these quotations.

### Extension Activity

*(...) at least it meant that someone understood what was going on. How much more, though, whom he'd known for two minutes, and not his mum, whom he'd known for his life? (p.116)*

Why does Marcus feel closer to Will than his mother at this stage in the story?

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## Activity 46: Chapters 19 and 20: Character Development

This section of the book is extremely important in developing the characters Will and Marcus. Will becomes more aware of his own actions and is a more confident person. Marcus begins to care. From the quotations below, explain the changes that both characters are going through and whether you think they are changes for the better or not.

Quotation	What it shows
<p><b>Marcus:</b> ‘It shut her up, and it made her cry. It did the job.’ (Chapter 17, p 122)</p>	<i>This line shows that</i>
<p><b>Marcus:</b> (to his mum) ‘Shouldn’t I have been allowed to make up my own mind?’ (Chapter 17, p 119)</p>	<i>This line suggests that</i>
<p><b>Will:</b> ‘Will wrestled with his conscience, grappled it to the ground and sat on it till he couldn’t hear a squeak out of it.’ (Chapter 20, p 143)</p>	
<p><b>Will:</b> ‘Marcus needed help to be a kid, not an adult. And, unhappily for Will, that was exactly the kind of assistance he was qualified to provide.’ (Chapter 20, p 147)</p>	

## Extension - Paired Activity

Reread this short extract.

- Who do you agree with in the argument between Marcus and his mum?
- What is happening to Marcus at this point in the novel?

*‘Shouldn’t I have been allowed to make up my own mind?’*  
*‘You can when you’re older.’*  
*‘Why aren’t I old enough now?’*  
*‘Because you don’t do your own cooking. I don’t want to cook meat, so you eat.’*  
*‘But you don’t let me go to McDonald’s either.’*  
*‘Is this premature teenage rebellion? I can’t stop you going to McDonald’s.’*  
*‘Really?’*  
*‘How can I? I’d just be disappointed if you did.’*  
*Disappointed. Disappointment. That was how she did it. That was how she did things.*  
 (pp. 119–120)

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## Activity 47: Chapter 18: Will's Background

Highlight keywords and phrases from the following quotations to pick out what shows about Will's background:

*(...) he would complain bitterly that the song had ruined his life, and say it was written it. (p. 124)*

*(...) Christmas was the season of anger and bitterness and regret and red drinking binges, of frantic and laughably inadequate industry (one Christmas he wrote an entire, and entirely useless, musical, in a doomed attempt to produce a durable). It was a season of presents by the chimney too, but even when he was glad to have swapped his Spirographs and his Bat-mobiles for a little present. (p. 124)*

*(...) he had made some kind of link between Marcus' childhood and his own. Will had been a nerdy kid with the wrong trainers; on the contrary, he had the right socks and the right trousers and the right shirts, and he had a hairdresser for the right haircut. That was the point of fashion, as far as he was concerned, it meant that you were with the cool and the powerful, and against the cool and the powerful, just where Will wanted to be, and he'd successfully avoided being bullied and enthusiastically. (p. 125)*

### Extension Activity

Writing task: Now write a short description about what we learn about Will from the text. Pick out and use some of the above quotations to help you, but remember that you can gain extra marks for this – the examiner wants to read your opinions and ideas.

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## Activity 48: Chapter 18: Families

Think about the two different families, Marcus and Fiona, and Will's family. They live at the opposite ends of the financial scale, what do they have in common?

Fill in the blank boxes with your own words and support your work with quotations from the text.

Once you have completed the exercise have a group discussion about what *didn't need to be dysfunctional*' (Chapter 18, p. 126).

<p>Marcus' family have very little money</p>	
<p></p>	<p>Both parents are unhappy with their lives</p>
<p></p>	

### Discussion Point

When Fiona finds out about Marcus' trips to see Will, she reacts like many people. She cannot see that Will is only trying to help Marcus. What makes Fiona react like this at school, and why can Will see that Marcus is struggling, even though he has only been there a few weeks?

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## Activity 49: Chapter 18: Will's Thoughts

At this point in the story, Will's thoughts are changing as he makes connections between his own family experiences of the past, and Marcus' current ones.

Read the following extract and discuss how Will has changed since the start of the story – be prepared to feed back your ideas to the rest of the class.

*(...) Will had grown up with money and Marcus had none, but you didn't know that. You were a bit of a dysfunctional. So what if Charles Freeman had killed himself with explosives and Fiona had tried to kill herself with National health tranquilisers?*

*Will didn't like the connection he had made very much, because it meant that he had to be decent in him at all he would have to take Marcus under his wing, use his own experience of growing up with a batty parent to guide the boy through to a place of safety. He didn't do that, though. It was too much work, and involved too much contact with people he didn't understand and didn't like. (p. 126)*

## Extension: Discussion Point

At the end of Chapter 18 Fiona tells Will, 'You can't shut life out' (p. 133). How does this apply to his life? Does Will choose to do this? What evidence is there in the text to support your answer?

## Activity 50: Chapter 19: Ellie McCrae

Create a mind map for the character Ellie McCrae. Use quotations from the text to support your own ideas:



Ellie McCrae

'scruffy, sulky  
Year 10' (p. 133)

## Activity 51: Chapter 20: Will and Marcus

At the end of this chapter Will tells Marcus:

*I'm not your father, or your uncle, or your stepfather, or anybody at all. I'm just a man who has to do with you. No headmistress is going to take notice of what I say, and neither is she, either. You've got to stop thinking I know the answer to anything, because I don't.*

What has Will become to Marcus? What kinds of things does Marcus admire in Will? Share your ideas with a partner.

## Extension

Reread the last paragraph at the end of Chapter 20 ('It was then (...) of all times...')

- What does Will realise about Marcus at this point, and how do you predict his relationship with Marcus will change?

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## Chapters 21-24: New Friends

Marcus is adopted by Ellie and Zoe and a friendship evolves between the three. Will learns to understand the concept of sarcasm and learns the appropriate response. He also learns to stand up for himself and at Marcus' suggestion, Will spends Christmas Day with Fiona and the other children. It is an awkward, but familiar, day and although there are some tense moments, it is a day that Will finds out about Dead Duck Day. It is an important part of the book for Will as he spends time with Rachel at a New Year's Eve party. However, he resorts to lies to try to impress her. This relationship also doomed to fail?

### Activity 52: Chapter 21: Marcus' New Friendships

#### Marcus

Marcus hasn't been able to make friends with anyone in school since he arrived. He has been continually bullied for being 'weird'.

In a pair, discuss and feed back to the rest of your group your ideas for the activity.

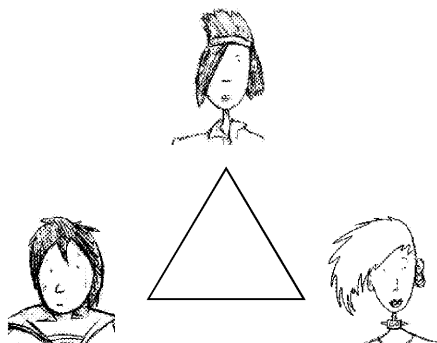
Why does Marcus end up being friends with the 'most famous' girl in school? Discuss. It will help to record your ideas like this:

- Both of them are seen as being 'different' in school. Marcus is...
- Therefore, they might be drawn to each other because...

### Extension

Think about this quotation:

*...he felt as though the three of them were a trio. Or maybe a triangle, with Ellie at the top and Zoe at the bottom.* (Chapter 21, p 152)



- Describe the differences within their relationship as if it were a 'trio' or 'triangle'. In the description of the triangle, Marcus places Ellie at the top.
- When you complete the table below, consider the meaning behind the relationship.

Trio	

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## Activity 53: Chapter 22: Changing Will

### Will

How does the following quotation show that Will is changing?

*Having decided with such unshakeable firmness that he would absolutely not be celebrating 25 December with Fiona and Marcus, it came as nothing of a surprise to find himself accepting an invitation from Marcus the following afternoon.*  
(p. 156)

Read the following quotation. What is it suggesting that Will is trying to do?

*On New Year's Eve he would make a resolution to recover some of his pride. Until then he would do as the Romans do, and smile at people even if he was angry.*  
(p. 160)

### Extension Activity: Chapters 22 and 23

We see some changes in Will's character in Chapters 22 and 23. Although there are some extracts which demonstrate an alteration in his behaviour and attitude, we have not seen any yet. Select **three quotations** which represent Will's character as we have known him to be. Write down **three quotations** to support his change in behaviour.

Up until this point, Will has been...

Behaviour	Quotation
Thoughtless	<i>When they met again, he was straightaway; he was on the floor, push the table over.</i>

In Chapter 22, Will becomes...

Behaviour	Quotation
More considerate	<i>Marcus showed him the enthusiasm that almost made him smile.</i>

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## Activity 54: Chapter 23: The Relationship Between Marcus and Will

### Marcus

Read the last page in Chapter 23 from 'All he did was make up a kid (...) to know Will in the first place?' (p. 170) Write a short paragraph about how Will presents the relationship between Marcus and Will at this point. Remember to include your response. You could begin it like this:

The end of Chapter 23 is important because...

### Extension

Predict how you think the relationship between Will and Marcus will develop.

## Activity 55: Chapter 24: Will Falls in Love

### Will

Will falls in love in this chapter. Read the following passage. Highlight any parts in it which shows his self-awareness:

*He was almost sure that Rachel was about to make him very miserable and he couldn't see anything he might have which might interest her.*

*If there was a disadvantage to the life he had chosen for himself, a life with its own and difficulty and detail, a life without context and texture, then he had it. When he met an intelligent, cultured, ambitious, beautiful, witty and single woman at the Eve party, he felt like a blank twit (...)*  
(pp. 171–172)

Write a short answer to this question using PEE:

In what way does Will develop in this chapter?

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## **Activity 56: Imperatives, Interrogatives, Declaratives and Exclamatives**

**Imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives** are all different ways of speaking. Each way adopts a different tone and we can tell a lot of things about the character's personality and emotional state when a sentence uses one of these different ways.

### **Imperatives**

An imperative is a command. It gives direction, orders someone to do something with authority.

Some imperatives are:

- You *must* go to your room.
- *Do not* go out later than 8pm.
- *Stand up* and leave the classroom.
- *Leave* your coat in the hall.

### **Interrogatives**

An interrogative is a sentence that is a question. Some interrogatives that may be used are:

- *Where* is the toilet?
- *How much* is that chocolate bar?
- *Are you* wearing a coat out?
- *Do you know* if the cinema sells popcorn?

### **Declaratives**

A declarative is a sentence that declares. A declarative may be used to state a point or simply to declare what the person is saying. Some declaratives are:

- *I like* a glass of red wine at night.
- *My English class* is at 10am.
- *The capital of Australia* is Melbourne.
- *I wish* I had a warm pair of socks.

### **Exclamatives**

An exclamative is a sentence that expresses strong emotion. An exclamative may be used to express anger, happiness, shock or passion. Some exclamatives may be:

- *I wish* I had hair like that!
- *You look* beautiful!
- *I didn't* see you there!
- *No, you* are not staying out that late!

You will see each of these used at some point in the novel, so make sure you note down on that particular sentence, or how it reflects the personality of a certain character.

### **Task**

Find examples in the novel of

- imperatives
- interrogatives
- declaratives
- exclamatives

For each, write down who it involves and what it shows about that character.

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## Chapters 25-28: Relationships

Strong relationships begin to form in this part of the novel, with Ellie admitting that she has a better understanding of Marcus' life than he previously thought and Will coming clean to Rachel about his relationship with Marcus. Marcus and Will also appear closer, with both characters showing a deeper passion for their female relationships. Will's admittance that a relationship with a girl is a huge step for his character. It illustrates his emotional growth and also a sense of responsibility for his existence. However, has Will changed completely or is he still shying away from it?

### Activity 57: Chapter 25: Marcus

Answer the following questions:

- 1) How does the relationship between Marcus and Ellie develop in this chapter?
- 2) What do we learn about Ellie in this chapter?

### Activity 58: For and Against Activity

At the New Year's party, Ellie tells Marcus that she knows his mum attempted to take her own life. Marcus is confused by Ellie's conviction; he believes that his mother has him, and that it is his responsibility not to take her own life. **Who do you think is right?** To help you explore both sides of the argument, complete the 'for' and 'against' table below. You can do this in a small group, or on your own. Once you have completed your 'for' and 'against' table, you should strongly believe in and debate your beliefs with another classmate or class.

For	Against
<i>Fiona is her own person and she has the right to take her own life, regardless of whether she has a child.</i>	<i>Fiona is a mother and she has a responsibility before anything else, to protect her child.</i>

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## Activity 59: Chapter 26: Love

### Will

Will's **vulnerability** starts to appear in this part of the novel and we begin to gain insight into his insecurities and fears about falling in love.

### Task

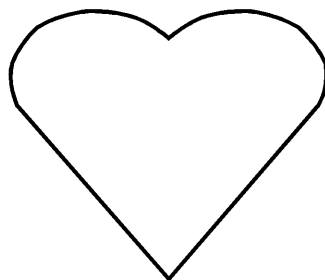
Find two quotes which represent Will's lack of confidence about being in love.

- 1.
- 2.

How would you describe 'love'? Compare your ideas in a pair – do your descriptions in any particular way?

Now you have your own interpretations of what love is, consider what may be true about 'love'.

<i>They may share more, emotionally</i>



<i>It's a</i>

## Extension Activity

### Will's Feelings

*He wanted Rachel to be his wife, his lover, the centre of his whole world, that he would see her from time to time, that she would have some kind of presence away from him, and he didn't want that at all. (p. 189)*

How do we know that Will is *really* in love and that this is not just a fling to fill the slots? Pretend you are Will and write a paragraph that supports the claim that he is in love. Use events from the chapter to help you, for example:

*I really fancy this woman. I haven't been able to get her out of my head since the Eve party. I haven't been able to eat anything apart from ingesting cigarettes.*

Either continue from this opening sentence, or create your own.

- Translate 'il ne sait quoi' to English; what does it mean? Explain how this feeling exists in Will's life.

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## Activity 60: Chapter 26: Changing Will

In Chapter 2 Will was proud of his 'clutter-free' home. Read the following Chapter 26:

*Will was grateful that his flat and her house would never get a chance to be like her house would be warm and welcoming, and his would be cocky and cold. He was ashamed of it. (p. 194)*

Why is he so ashamed of it now?

What does this say about the progression of his character?

## Activity 61: Chapter 27: Ali's Perspective

### **Marcus**

In the novel the reader only hears from Will and Marcus' perspective.

Rewrite the scene where Marcus meets Ali from Ali's perspective. This will help you understand other characters.

Consider:

- Ali's age
- His mother and father's divorce
- His mother's recent relationships with men
- His role in the family as an only son
- His defence in meeting new people
- Intrusion and conflict

## Extension Activity: Quotations - Chapters 25-28

Find quotations from Chapters 25–28 to support the following:

- Marcus is infatuated with Ellie
- Will wants his relationship with Rachel to be based on honesty
- Ellie defends Marcus
- Rachel forgives Will for lying about his relationship with Marcus

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## Activity 62: Themes

It's useful to group events together by theme. If an exam question asks you a particular theme in the novel, you'll be able to answer it straight away. In this activity, write down a few events under each theme heading. It may also help you to remember the chapter or page number along with the characters involved in the scene.

Theme	Related Events
Love	<i>Will tells Rachel the truth about Marcus not being his son. Will realises that a relationship cannot be based on lies.</i>
Conflict	
Growth	<i>Fiona learns to give Marcus more freedom and independence.</i>
Family	
Death	<i>Fiona attempts suicide because she isn't happy with her life.</i>

A few examples have been added to the table to get you started, but add your own. Having a selection of examples to choose from when answering a theme-based question will make your response easier. Plus, you can devote extra time to your writing.



### Remember!

*Grammar and Punctuation*

Even if you feel rushed for time, your writing shouldn't be. Remember to use punctuation where appropriate and split your response into logical paragraphs.

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# Chapters 29–32: Rules

Marcus begins to mature and his life begins to stabilise until Fiona starts crying. Her depression has returned. Will doesn't want to help Marcus because it's too much to take on, but can Rachel change his mind? Ellie illustrates her insensitivity with her reaction over Kurt Cobain. When the singer commits suicide on the day that Ellie and Marcus see his dad, Marcus realises just how unstable Ellie can be.

## Activity 63: Chapter 29: Marcus and Will

At the start of this chapter Marcus describes what has changed in his life.

- Record two changes and select appropriate quotations to support them.
- Comment on the language used in each quotation.

### Writing Activity: Marcus' Diary Entry

Imagine that you are Marcus at this point in the novel. Write a short diary entry in which Marcus begins to show signs of illness again. What are your thoughts and feelings about the situation? What are you planning to speak to Will about it?

## Extension

When Marcus asks for help, do you think that Will's response is helpful? Give your reasons. What does Will's behaviour show about him at this point in the novel?

## Activity 64: Chapter 30: Will's Relationships

### Will

What did Jessica mean when she told Will that he had had the chance with Fiona? Refer to the phrase 'sprinkle some salt on the ice' (p. 220) with regards to their relationship?

Think specifically about:

- The reaction between salt and ice
- Chapter 2 and the result of Will's 'personality quiz'
- Which characters have helped 'sprinkle some salt on the ice' with regards to Will? Note them down. How did they meet? What was Will's initial reaction to them?
- What kind of effect does each relationship have on Will?

## Activity 65: Chapter 30: Will and Rachel

Read the speech below which reveals Will's thoughts:

*People like Fiona really pissed him off. They ruined it for everyone. It was like they were floating on the surface of everything: it took skill and nerve, and when people were thinking that they were thinking of taking their own life, you could feel yourself being pulled down with them. Keeping your head above water was what it was all about for people who had reasons for living, jobs and relationships and pets, their heads were above the surface anyway.' (p. 221)*

Now answer the following questions using the passage above to help you:

- 1) Why does Will dislike Fiona so much at this stage of the novel?
- 2) What does Will describe as being reasons to live?

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**Rachel**

At the end of this chapter Rachel tells Will:

*The point is you keep going. You want to. So all the things that make a point. I don't know if you even realise it, but on the quiet you don't think about love things. (p. 226)*

Rachel tells Will how different things keep people going. What different things keep you going? Write down three things. Now discuss the things which you enjoy with the rest of the class.

**Activity 66: Chapter 31: Marcus' Feelings**

**Marcus**

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- 1) Why is Marcus so angry with his father at the start of this chapter?
- 2) When Marcus finds out that Kurt Cobain is dead he covers Ellie's eyes at the station. Why does he decide to do this? Is he trying to protect Ellie or himself? Discuss his actions.

**Activity 67: Chapter 31: Ellie**

When Ellie takes the bottle of vodka out of her bag, we can imagine that something big problem will unfold. Marcus thinks, 'Ellie wasn't actually a guided missile. You can't guide her.' (p. 238)

Look back through the novel and pick out **four** quotations that shows Ellie's character of **authority**..

Chapter 19  
*It's this sweatshirt. They don't want me to wear it, and now I'm not going to take it off. So there's going to be a row. (p 137)*



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## Activity 68: Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives

**Nouns, verbs and adjectives** are all features of language; they are the building blocks which combine to create a sentence.

- A noun is a 'naming word'
- A verb is an action or 'doing' word
- An adjective is a 'describing' word

Being able to identify and use these features to support your interpretation of an exam, especially if you want to attain higher grades. Don't feel daunted by this; being able to recognise simple features such as nouns, verbs and adjectives is not an easy task and earns extra credit.

**Nouns** are **naming** words. Think of nouns as labels that you attach to people and things. Nouns are extremely common and are used throughout *About a Boy*.

### Task

Find three different sentences which contain nouns, verbs and adjectives in *About a Boy*. Consider the language used.

For example: Are any adjectives used to describe the noun? What impression do you get?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

**Verbs** are generally used to describe actions. Verbs are fairly easy to identify. You can tell if a word is a verb by putting a 'to' in front of it. For example, 'dance' makes sense when you put 'to' in front of it – 'to dance'. The word 'table' does not. For example, 'to table' doesn't make sense, so it can't be a verb.

### Task

Verbs are also fairly common word types and are used on a regular basis throughout *About a Boy*. Find the verbs in the following extracts. If you feel confident you can attempt to find the quotation too.

- 1) 'Today he had convinced himself that he had to drive to Waitrose...'
- 2) 'You make me watch things where people jump from exploding helicopters and you complain about realism.' (Chapter 11, p. 69)
- 3) 'It doesn't matter how far you fall if it makes you think, does it?' (Chapter 12, p. 75)

**Adjectives** are **describing** words which give nouns more information. For example, in the sentence 'The table didn't match the chairs', you could use, 'the **brown** table didn't match the **red** chairs'.

Think of at least *three* different adjectives to describe each of the main characters in *About a Boy*.

- Will
- Marcus
- Fiona
- Rachel
- Ellie

How do adjectives that have been used help the reader to discover more about the setting?

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# Chapters 33-36: Growth

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Marcus' 'rose-tinted glasses' disappear when he sees how out-of-control Ellie makes life hard for herself, when all he wants to do is live an easy life. He is going to be the type of girl he'd want for a girlfriend, although they do but with the help of his father, Marcus learns that he doesn't need his mum and dad. Due to their unreliability as parents, he has learnt to become independent and has friends like Will and Ellie and Suzie who will all be there if some relationship becomes less independent as he learns a little about human emotion as he meets Rachel. The novel ends on a positive note and the reader can consider the novel as a *Boy* about Will, Marcus or both?

## Activity 69: Chapter 33: Relationships

### Marcus

*She just wasn't the right person for him.* (p. 247)

*Ellie didn't have to do what she had just done, and (...) she had brought it all she was in upon herself.* (p. 251)

How has Marcus' perception of Ellie changed at this point in the novel?

How is Ellie similar to Will? Consider how the characters are presented through paying particular attention to:

- Their personalities
- Their lifestyles
- Their behaviour in school

Find **two or more** quotes to illustrate the **similarities** between Ellie and Will.

## Activity 70: Growing Up

**Growing up** is a major theme that runs throughout 'About a Boy.' Using short point notes, comment on how Hornby portrays the theme of 'growth' in each character. How does each character develop as the novel progresses?

Marcus

Ellie

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 **Extension**

Now put the characters in a list, starting with who you believe has grown the most. Write down your answer.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

 **Activity 71: Chapter 34: Changes****Will**

Reread the opening to Chapter 34:

*Life was, after all, like air. Will could have no doubt about that any more. It seemed to be no way of keeping it out, or at a distance, and all he could do was live it and breathe it. (p. 256)*

How has Will's attitude to life changed as the novel progresses? Who has helped him?

Fiona's attitude has also changed:

*I haven't been a good mother to him,' she declared. 'I've let things slide, not noticing properly, and... I'm not surprised things have come to this. (p. 256)*

What is Fiona telling everybody at this point? What do you think that she has learned?

 **Activity 72: Chapter 35: Metaphor****Marcus**

*Those ones when you stand on top of loads of people in a pyramid. It doesn't matter who they are, does it, as long as they're there and you don't let them fall without finding someone else. (p. 270)*

Marcus uses the metaphor of an acrobatics display in this chapter.

- Sketch out a typical acrobatics pyramid display. You may want to find a picture to help you.
- What does the metaphor stand for?
- Why has Marcus decided to form a pyramid of people around him?

 **Activity 73: Chapter 36: Character Changes****Will**

What evidence can you find to show that Will has grown more vulnerable because of his love for Rachel?

**Irony**

- It is ironic that Will begins to miss Marcus after he has changed. Why do you think this is?
- When Hornby writes about Marcus: 'he had developed a skin – the kind of skin that you can't scratch' (p. 277) What does this mean? Why is it ironic?

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## Activity 74: Character Growth

### After Reading

What evidence do you have to support who you believe has grown the **least**? Write a short paragraph and remember to use references from the text.

Who do you believe has grown the **most** throughout the novel and why? Remember to support your ideas.

Having studied the novel, use your knowledge of Marcus and Will to decide who is still a man and who is still a boy. Why do you think this? Support each of your answers.

Will – Boy/Man		Marcus
Interpretation	Quotation	Interpretation
Will's personality has changed...		In the last part of the novel Will says that Marcus has...

### Extension

What does Will mean when he says 'all three of them had to lose things in order to grow' (p. 278)? Think about one thing each character may have lost in order to grow.

Character	Lost	
Will		
Marcus		
Fiona		

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## Whole Book Activities

### Activity 75: Knowledge Check Quiz

- 1) Who are the two main characters in *About a Boy*?
  - Ellie and Zoe
  - Bill and Ben
  - Marcus and Will
- 2) Where have Marcus and Will's mum moved to?
  - Stratford-Upon-Avon
  - Glastonbury
  - Cambridge
- 3) Why does Marcus have a hard time at school?
  - Because he can't spell
  - Because he struggles to make friends
  - Because he wants to stay at home with his mum
- 4) Who is Will?
  - Marcus' father
  - A bachelor
  - A tramp
- 5) What does SPAT stand for?
  - Single people all together
  - Stick people all together
  - Single parents – alone together
- 6) Who does Will have a crush on?
  - Fiona
  - Suzie
  - Sandy
- 7) What does Marcus call the day when his mum attempted suicide?
  - 'Dead Dismal Day'
  - 'Dead Duck Day'
  - 'Dragging on Day'
- 8) What do Marcus and Will watch in Will's house?
  - *Neighbours*
  - Scary movies
  - *Countdown*
- 9) What does Marcus discover about Will?
  - That he has a secret family
  - That he is not the single parent who he pretends to be
  - That he has a secret identity
- 10) What do the school boys think of Marcus?
  - His school bag
  - His new trainers
  - His school tie
- 11) Who does Marcus become friends with?
  - Nellie
  - Ellie
  - Lenny
- 12) Which word best describes Marcus?
  - Caring
  - Studious
  - Rebellious
- 13) Which band is Ellie a fan of?
  - Iron Maiden
  - Ice Maiden
  - Nirvana
- 14) Who does Will have a crush on?
  - Ellie and her friends
  - Father Christmas
  - Marcus and his friends
- 15) Who does Will fall in love with at a New Year's Eve party?
  - Fiona
  - Madonna
  - Rachel
- 16) What is the name of the boy who Marcus befriends?
  - Kurt
  - Bert
  - Ali
- 17) What makes Marcus feel safer?
  - Knowing his mum is there
  - Being surrounded by different people
  - Being with Ellie
- 18) Where does Marcus go to see his dad?
  - To see his dad's house
  - To see a band
  - Abroad
- 19) How has Marcus changed by the end of the story?
  - He is wearing decent trainers
  - He is less dependent on his mum
  - He is clingy
- 20) How has Will changed by the end of the story?
  - He has become a father
  - He mourns his son
  - He wants to be a single parent
- 21) What is one of the main themes of the book?
  - War
  - Growing up
  - Racism

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**Quiz Answers**

- 1) Who are the two main characters in *About a Boy*?
  - *Marcus and Will*
- 2) Where have Marcus and Will moved to in London from?
  - *Stratford-Upon-Avon*
- 3) Why does Marcus have a hard time at school?
  - *Because he struggles to make friends*
- 4) Who is Will?
  - *A bachelor*
- 5) What does SPAT stand for?
  - *Single parents – alone together*
- 6) Who does Will live with?
  - *Suzie*
- 7) What does Marcus call the day when his mum attempted suicide?
  - *'Dead Duck Day'*
- 8) What do Marcus and Will do at Will's house?
  - *Countdown*
- 9) What does Marcus discover about Will?
  - *That he is not the single parent who he pretends to be*
- 10) What do the school boys think of Will?
  - *His new traits*
- 11) Who does Marcus become friends with?
  - *Ellie*
- 12) Which word best describes Will?
  - *Rebellious*
- 13) Which band is Ellie a fan of?
  - *Nirvana*
- 14) Who does Will fall in love with?
  - *Marcus and Ellie*
- 15) Who does Will fall in love with at a New Year's Eve party?
  - *Rachel*
- 16) What is the name of Will's dog?
  - *Ali*
- 17) What makes Marcus feel safer?
  - *Being surrounded by different people*
- 18) Where does Marcus go to see his dad?
  - *To see his dad's house*
- 19) How has Marcus changed by the end of the story?
  - *He is less dependent on his mum*
- 20) How has Will changed by the end of the story?
  - *He has become a better person*
- 21) What is one of the main themes of the book?
  - *Growing up*

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## Activity 76: Themes

Circle which of the themes below are in *About a Boy*

friendship	growing up	violence	mas
love	hate	bullying	ang
racism	loneliness	death	truth
family	mental illness	culture	depr
isolation	single parenting	suicide	dece

Now, look at the themes which you have circled. In a pair, rank each theme important in terms of each theme's importance in the novel. Give reasons for Now group some themes together with the characters. For example: the characters following themes throughout 'About a Boy.'

friendship	growing up	isolation	
bullying	Marcus	love	
loneliness	family	culture	single par

Now group some themes together for:

- Will
- Fiona

## Extension

Record any themes which link to both

- Will and Marcus
- Marcus and Fiona

## Activity 77: Themes: Family Life

In Chapter 18 Will compares his own family background with that of Marcus following extract and highlight any comparisons which Will makes between family backgrounds:

*But there was more than a whiff of the Freeman household in Fiona's sense of hopelessness and defeat and bewilderment and straightforward Will had grown up with money and Marcus had none, but you didn't dysfunctional. So what if Charles Freeman had killed himself with ex and Fiona had tried to kill herself with National health tranquilisers? the connection he had made very much, because it meant that if he had at all he would have to take Marcus under his wing, use his own experience with a batty parent to guide the boy through to a place of safety. (p*

- 1) Make a **bullet-point list** of the similarities which Will makes between backgrounds. You could start it like this:  
*Will says that Marcus' household is similar to Will's old family home: hopelessness and defeat and bewilderment and straightforward lunacy*
- 2) Are there any other **themes** in this passage?

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## Activity 78: Themes: Mental Illness

Fiona suffers from depression and she attempts to describe how she feels in a letter to Marcus:

*A big part of me knows that I'm doing a wrong, stupid, selfish, unkind thing. The trouble is that it's not the part that controls me anymore. This is about the sort of illness I've had for the last few months – it just doesn't tell anybody else. It just wants to do its own thing.* (p. 64)

- What is Fiona attempting to tell Marcus about her illness?

**Read Suzie's reaction to Fiona's suicide attempt:**

*Fiona! How could you do this?* Suzie screamed. *'You've got a kid here!'* (p. 58)

### Discussion

How do you feel about Fiona's actions? To what extent are her actions justified?

**Read the following quotation. What does Will mean when he refers to 'the point'?**

*Those two words were 'the point.' As in, 'What's the point?'; 'I don't see the point...'* (p. 221)

**Now read the effects which Fiona's actions have had on Marcus, highlighting the key words.**

*What he felt, all the time, every single day, was a horrible fear. In fact, the first time he came round to Will's after school was that he was able to put off going to his room no longer climb the stairs at home without looking at his feet and remembering the Day. By the time he got to the bit where he had to put his key in the lock, he was thumping in his chest and his arms and his legs, and when he saw his mother or cooking or preparing work on the dining table, it was all he could do to get through something.* (p. 101)

- What impact has Fiona's actions had on Marcus?

## Activity 79: Themes: Bullying

Marcus is regularly bullied at school until he befriends Ellie. Why do you think he is a bullying target? Consider his appearance, his behaviour and how he has changed at school only recently.

**Read the passage in which Marcus is bullied in a newsagent:**

*The next thing he knew they were all in there, crowded in really close, and they were laughing at him again. He was sick of that sound. If no one laughed again in the whole of his life, he wouldn't care.*

*'What you singing, Fuzzy?'*

*He'd done it again. He'd been thinking of one of his mum's songs, a Joni Mitchell song, but it had obviously slipped out again. They all started humming tunes and nonsense words every now and again, prodding him to get him to turn round and tried to concentrate on what he was reading.* (p. 39)

Using PEE, write two paragraphs about how Marcus is bullied, using the extracts. Highlight effective quotations and think about how you will use them, before writing.

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Reading the passage below, compare this with Will's own childhood experience.

*(...) he had made some kind of link between Marcus' childhood and his own. Will had been a nerdy kid with the wrong trainers; on the contrary, he had the right shoes and the right socks and the right trousers and the right shirts, and he had a hairdresser for the right haircut. That was the point of fashion, as far as Will was concerned, it meant that you were with the cool and the powerful, and against the odds, just where Will wanted to be, and he'd successfully avoided being bullied and enthusiastically. (p. 125)*

- How did Will behave differently to Marcus?
- Why did Will choose to behave this way? Make some notes on how Will's social advantage did he have?
- Using the above passage, sketch and label how you expected Will to be at school.

### Extension

Discuss how and why things become different for Marcus at school when he meets Will.

### Activity 80: Themes: Love and Marriage

#### Will in Love

Discuss Will's attitude to love and marriage before and after he meets Rachel. Use as many page references as possible to support your ideas. For example you could refer to p. 9 for Will's attitude to marriage at the start of the novel and pp. 274–275 for how much he has changed after meeting Rachel.

Create a set of notes like this:

#### Will before he falls in love

*He's shallow – he plans to meet single mothers and become a 'supportive figure' when really he will take advantage of them. (Use last paragraph – p. 24)*

#### Will after he falls in love

#### Marcus and Will

Reread the following extract:

*The conversation in the video games arcade at least had the virtue of creating a link between them: they had both confessed to something they wanted, and they had both said when all was said and done, not entirely dissimilar. (p. 191)*

In what ways has Marcus and Will's love for Ellie and Rachel made them close friends?

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## Activity 81: Themes: Isolation and Being an Outsider

### Marcus as an Outsider

The theme of being an outsider/outcast links with Marcus closely – especially

- Read the following dialogue between Marcus and Will in which Will questions Marcus about how he is given a hard time at school.

*'Do people give you a hard time?'*

*Marcus looked at him. How did he know that? Things must be worse than people knew even before he had said anything.*

*'Not really. Just a couple of kids.'*

*'What do they give you a hard time about?'*

*'Nothing really. Just, you know, my hair and glasses. And singing and dancing.'*

*'Oh, just... sometimes I sing without noticing.'*

*Will laughed.*

*'It's not funny.'*

*'I'm sorry.'*

*'I can't help it.'*

*'You could do something about the hair.'*

*'Like what?'*

*'Get it cut.'*

*'Like who?'*

*'Like who! Like how you want it.'*

*'This is how I want it.'*

*'You'll have to put up with the other kids, then. Why do you want your hair cut?'*  
*'Cos that's how it grows, and I hate going to the hairdresser.'* (p. 99)

Rewrite this scene as dialogue for a script before acting it out. Don't forget to think about the actor such as how to say certain lines, facial expressions, etc. Perform the scene for your group. You also need to be aware of how to lay out a script. You can find more information on page 54.

WILL: (watching Marcus closely) Do people give you a hard time at school?

MARCUS: Not really. Just a couple of kids.

### Will as an Outsider

Will deliberately chooses to be an outsider and distances himself from life in any way. This makes him insensitive to others: *'No problem was his problem'*

Read this short extract from later in the novel. At this point Will has chosen his own system.

*He'd been an idiot then, but at least he'd been an idiot with an idea, some idea, now he was hundreds of years older, one or two IQ points wiser, and also alone. He'd rather be an idiot again. He'd had his whole life set up so that it was his problem, and now everybody's problem was his problem, and he'd be the only one of them.* (pp. 242–243)

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What are the pros and cons of Will rejecting being an outsider and becoming a table:

Pros of Will not taking part in life	Cons of Will
He is protecting himself from situations and people who might hurt him.	He has not had many a boy in many ways.

 **Activity 82: Themes: Growing Up**

Reread pp. 119–122 (from ‘In the next few days’ to ‘It did the job’) and then do the following:

- In what ways is Marcus beginning to question Fiona?
- How does he challenge her?
- How does Fiona respond?
- Whose arguments do you agree with, and why?
- Does Marcus have his own views, or Fiona’s views?

What does Will’s thought mean ‘Marcus needed help to be a kid, not an adult’?

 **Activity 83: Themes: Friendship**

Will and Marcus’ friendship develops alongside the story as they begin to help each other:

Use the quotation below to describe how the friendship between Will and Marcus has developed by Chapter 16 of the novel:

*(...) he could see he was serving some purpose in the kid’s life at the moment, but no purpose in anybody’s life at the moment, and as he served no purpose he was hardly going to die of compassion fatigue.*

**You can use this guide to help you if you want to:**

P: Will and Marcus’ friendship has developed at this point in the novel because...

E: ‘.....  
.....’

E: This line shows...

 **Extension**

Write two paragraphs about the friendship between Marcus and Ellie using...

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## Activity 84: Themes: Popular Culture

Hornby uses many different cultural references throughout *About a Boy* assuming the reader will know them and their associations. For example, Will reads men's magazines and takes them seriously. What kind of magazines are these and what do they tell us about Will's personality?

- Time Out
- id
- The Face
- Arena
- NME

Find out who **Joni Mitchell** is.

- Which characters like Joni Mitchell?
- Why do you think that Marcus likes Joni Mitchell?
- What does Marcus say about her at the end of the novel?

## Extension

Who were Nirvana? What do you think that the symbolic significance of their suicide is in the story?

- Find some more pop and cultural references throughout the novel. What do you think?

## Activity 85: Events in the Novel

Below are some of the most **important events** in the novel. For each of the events below complete the table to show the effect which it has had on both Marcus and Will.

Event	Effect on Marcus	Effect on Will
'Dead Duck Day'	<i>The effect of 'Dead Duck Day' on Marcus is....</i>	<i>The effect of 'Dead Duck Day' on Will is....</i>
<i>Will buys Marcus a pair of trainers</i>	<i>The effect that Will had on Marcus by buying him a pair of trainers is... However...</i>	<i>The effect that Marcus had on Will by buying him a pair of trainers is...</i>
<i>Will and Marcus fall in love with Rachel and Ellie</i>		

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## Activity 86: Structuring your Writing

A simple way to structure your writing is to remember that it must have a beginning and an end. The middle section of your essay is the most important as it will contain your developed ideas, supported by quotations.

Planning a response is vital if you want to write using a clear structure, whether using a simple plan of bullet points or a mind map can be used as guidance when writing.

Read the following exam question:

**About a Boy explores the relationship between the two central characters. How is the theme of *change* represented through these relationships?**

Approaching the question:

- 1) Highlight the keywords in the question.
- 2) Using bullet points or a mind map, jot down all of the thoughts and ideas in relation to this question. For now, it's important to get them down. If you can't remember a point, use the page number to help you.
- 3) Are all the points which you have made relevant to the question? (In relation to Will and Marcus.)
- 4) Now read the example outline below: remember that you could have your own points in relation to the text!

### **Beginning: Introduction** **Write a couple of lines.**

- Change is an important theme in *About a Boy*, and is important in relation to how Will and Marcus develop
- Change is important because the reader shares the experiences which Will and Marcus go through and observes how much they have developed by the end of the novel.
- Change is represented through the growth of Will and Marcus throughout the novel.

### **Middle: Main body of the essay** **Use PEE to develop each of your points.**

- The relationship between Marcus and Will doesn't get off to a great start and Marcus' initial resistance creates tension.
- A bond is created when Fiona attempts suicide and Will attempts to 'help' her, but Will's behaviour as his actions are for selfish, self-gratifying reasons; however, this leads to changes which follow in the novel.
- Marcus and Will begin an awkward relationship consisting of tea, biscuits and conversation.
- Outline some important 'learning' events in the book that neither would have known about and that lead to a change in behaviour. For example, Will learns to walk with a pair of trainers and that a relationship cannot be based on lies. Marcus, a teenager and more importantly, learns the art of sarcasm!
- Include how Will develops on an emotional level and Marcus 'learns' how to be a friend.
- Explain how these events trigger changes in character behaviour.

### **End: Conclusion** **Sum up thoughts using a couple of lines.**

- Summarise the changes from the main body of the essay.
- Sum up how changes in Will and Marcus' relationship lead to vital changes in their relationships – for example, between Marcus and Fiona, Marcus and Eli.
- Extract a quotation from the final chapters that summarise the theme of change.

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## Activity 87: Use of PEE when Describing Characters

It's important to use PEE when writing about *About a Boy*. For example, if you were to write about how Will is presented at the start of the novel then you should use the structure of PEE to help you write an answer.

Here's a reminder of PEE:

**Point**

**Evidence**

**Explain**

Here's an example:

**P: A point is made.**

Will is introduced as being 'cool' in Chapter 2.

**E: Evidence – a quotation is provided to support the point.**

'How cool was Will Freeman? This cool (...)' (p. 5)

**E: Explain – a comment is made in some more detail, maybe on a particular part of the quotation.**

The narrative is written so that the reader is aware of Will's viewpoint – it is important that the reader sees Will as being 'cool', a bit like a teenager.

Here's the writing without the PEE scaffolding:

Will is introduced as being 'cool' in Chapter 2. 'How cool was Will Freeman? This cool (...)' (p. 5) The narrative is written so that the reader is aware of Will's viewpoint – it is important that the reader sees Will as being 'cool', a bit like a teenager.

This paragraph provides a part of a response to the question: 'How does Will Freeman change in the novel?'

Write the paragraph for the following point about Will, including your own explanation.

**Will prefers to be a loner in society at the start of the novel.**

**P:**

**E:**

**E:** This shows...

Now write a PEE paragraph about Will using this quotation as evidence:

*(...) the only reason for having children, as far as Will could see, was so that you would be useful when you were old and useless and skint (...)* (p. 8)

**P:**

**E:** '(...) the only reason for having children, as far as Will could see, was so that you would be useful when you were old and useless and skint (...)' (p. 8)

**E:** This shows...

Now think of an example where Will develops in the novel. For example, think of a time when he starts to interact with Marcus.

Write your own paragraph in answer to the question 'How does Will change in the novel?' Use a point, use a quotation to support your point, and remember to provide your own explanation.

**P:**

**E:**

**E:** This reveals...

Remember that this question would require you to give examples of how Will changes as the novel progresses. In order to do this you would need to consider and record:

- How Will is presented at the start of the novel
- Changes which Will experiences
- What he is like at the end of the novel (including how his thoughts and feelings change)

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**Remember!**

Pace yourself. Don't rush. You'll miss out important points which you want on important marks. This is where planning comes in handy!

**Activity 88: Organise, Plan, Structure**

Organising yourself in an exam takes practice and preparation. Although it is impossible to structure a response in the time limit that you are given, it is a valuable process and it will help you later on when you write your response. You don't have to write a lengthy page of notes, just a few bullet points will do.

Take 10 minutes at the start of your exam to plan and you will make writing yourself.

Practise planning your response with a few past paper questions. Imagine your question:

Consider the ways in which Hornby presents the relationship between Will and Marcus. To what extent do you agree that *About a Boy* is exploring the ways in which

The first thing you can do is underline all the words that are important to you.

Consider the ways in which Hornby presents the relationship between Will and Marcus. To what extent do you agree that *About a Boy* is exploring the ways in which

Now reword the question in your head. What is it really asking you? It may be:

How is *change* represented in the characters of Will and Marcus?  
OR

Marcus and Will's relationship goes through some changes in *About a Boy*.

Don't panic when you see the long question. **Focus on keywords** and restructure the question so that it makes sense to you.

Reword a few example questions below:

- How does Nick Hornby present the themes of love and conflict in his novel, *About a Boy*?
- Will and Marcus both go through a series of changes in the novel. Which character goes through the most significant change? Support your answer with reference to the text.
- Read pp. 111 to 112 and answer the following questions:

What does this extract suggest about Will's feelings towards Marcus? How does Nick Hornby use language to suggest that Will feels this way? Remember to support your response with reference to the text.

- Read pp. 64 and 65. Now answer the question below.

What is your reaction to this extract? Think about how the scene is presented. Consider the language used to create different effects.

Once you've made sense of these questions you may want to jot down a few ideas. Remember to do this so you don't lose any ideas you may have for your response. For example:

How does Nick Hornby present the themes of love and conflict in his novel, *About a Boy*?

- Love is gained through friendship – Marcus and Ellie, Will and Marcus
- Loving relationships – Will and Rachel
- Initial conflict between Will and Marcus grows into mutual respect and understanding
- Conflict between Fiona and Marcus – relationship needs to be rebalanced
- Surface conflict between Ellie and her mother, but there is love between them. However, there is a lack of respect for her mum. Again, this hasn't been covered yet of

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**Activity 89: Writing Activity: How Does Marcus Change as the**

You are going to practise using PEE by writing the beginning of an answer to the question: 'How does Marcus change as the novel progresses?' Here is a possible paragraph about Marcus which uses PEE:

- P:** In Chapter 1 the reader learns that Marcus is quite sensitive despite being a boy.  
**E:** '(...) he was worried that the trouble in the soaps would remind his mum of her own life.' (p. 4)  
**E:** This line shows that Marcus is aware of his mum's feelings – he is considering certain things which could upset her.

Now you are going to come up with another paragraph about what Marcus is like. Here are some possibilities:

- Marcus has problems in his life
- Marcus is unusual, not a 'typical' teenager
- Marcus dresses in an eccentric way

Make some notes about how Marcus changes as the novel progresses. Try to use bullet points. Choose one of your points and write it up as a PEE paragraph.

**Extension**

In what ways is Marcus different by the end of the novel? Discuss and compare.

- His appearance
- His behaviour

**Activity 90: Revising PEE**

To write well and develop your points, you need to be confident when using quotations. Copy and complete this practice page for PEE. Different parts are missing:

- 1) Will thinks that Marcus is strange when they first meet.

'.....'

This line shows .....

- 2) Will is immature at the start of the story.

'.....'

This reveals .....

- 3) Will .....

'(...) she told him about her kids straight away; he wanted to throw his table over and run.' (p. 19)

This line shows .....

**Now make up your own PEE paragraphs for the following two points:**

- Fiona suffers from depression
- Marcus admires Ellie at school

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# Writing Essays

## Activity 91: Writing Essays: Planning

An essay can be divided into parts:

- Planning
- Introduction
- Main part
- Conclusion

Before you plan an essay, you should underline and examine the keywords. How is the theme of **growing up** presented in *About a Boy*?

This is not a passage-related question, but if it was, you should annotate the question.

- Jot down any immediate ideas in relation to the question above.
- Using your ideas, brainstorm a plan – if it helps, number your points in relation to the question.
- Can you quickly find any quotations relevant to your ideas? Remember a quotation to support every point which you make – so five points would need five quotations.

## Activity 92: Writing Essays: Introductions

An introduction

- is short therefore do not spend a lot of time writing one
- addresses the focus of the question

Make sure that you acknowledge the focus of the question and outline the main points to make (if you have written a plan before writing, this should be straightforward).

You can also introduce your ideas and arguments. If you have some information and/or some **cultural background** to the novel, you could include this; but resist the temptation for demonstrating your contextual knowledge in this exam. Only use background information relevant to your **argument**.

Use the advice above to write a short introduction to the question: 'How is the theme of **growing up** presented in *About a Boy*?'

## Extension

Swap your introduction with your partner. Read each other's work before commenting and one **target for improvement**.

## Activity 93: Writing a Conclusion

After writing the main part of your essay your conclusion should:

- be short
- concise (like your introduction)
- sum up each of your main points
- refer back to the question

Now look at an essay which you have written in response to *About a Boy*. If you have not yet, look at a sample essay from your teacher which does not have a conclusion.

- **Summarise** what the main point of each paragraph is (except the introduction).
- **Either:** Write your own conclusion which **sums up** the main points in response to the question.  
**Or:** Read the essay's conclusion – check that it sums up all of the main points effectively.

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