



**2017 specification**  
first exams in 2018

## ***About a Boy***

Gifted and Talented Pack for  
GCSE CCEA English Literature

[zigzageducation.co.uk](http://zigzageducation.co.uk)

**POD  
8462**

Publish your own work... Write to a brief...  
Register at **[publishmenow.co.uk](http://publishmenow.co.uk)**

Follow us on Twitter **[@ZigZagEng](https://twitter.com/ZigZagEng)**

# Contents

Thank You for Choosing ZigZag Education.....	ii
Teacher Feedback Opportunity.....	iii
Terms and Conditions of Use .....	iv
Teacher’s Introduction.....	1
Exam Information .....	2
Activity Types.....	3
Important Events.....	4
Characters .....	15
Language.....	27
Structure .....	34
Form.....	42
Themes .....	48
Ideas.....	58
Interpretations .....	63
Teacher’s Notes and Suggested Answers .....	71

# Teacher's Introduction

This resource is designed for students studying *About a Boy* for GCSE CCEA English Literature Unit 1: The Study of Prose, Section A: Novel. The activities are designed to cater for bright and talented students aiming for grades B–A\* in their Literature examination.

## Remember!

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

In order to stretch more able students and to help them achieve an A\*, the resource is divided up into key areas as opposed to chapters. The resource covers the following key areas of the novel as a whole: important events, characters, language, structure, form, themes, ideas and interpretations. Within each key area, you will find a range of the following activities: reminder tasks to enable students to recall the key points; comprehension tasks to enable students to demonstrate clear and advanced understanding; application tasks to enable students to apply their knowledge of the novel to a new situation or an unseen extract; analytical tasks to enable students to analyse literal and abstract meanings; evaluation tasks to enable students to evaluate and demonstrate individual interpretations; and synthesis tasks to enable students to formulate new, creative and individual ideas. At the end of each key area, there will also be an exam-style question with an annotated response to show students the best way of achieving an A\*. The different types of activity listed above will be signposted with an icon (see 'Activity Types').

Although the resource itself is generally aimed at A and A\* grades, certain activities are signposted as being specifically for A\*. There are also specific tips for the examination and/or how to gain an A\*. These are highlighted with stars to alert students to read and/or copy into their books.

In order for teachers (and students) to have flexibility, this resource is designed to be 'dipped into', as opposed to working through it chronologically. Some tasks can be completed while teaching the novel, and others are designed to be used once the whole novel has been read. The pack is also an excellent revision and homework resource.

There is a glossary and a recommended reading list at the end of the resource to be used by both teachers and students if required. There is also a 'Teacher's Notes and Exemplar Answers' section at the end of the resource which in some cases provides correct answers, but in other cases should just be used for guidance and example answers only. I hope you will find this resource most useful and, more importantly, I hope it challenges students to be creative and think independently. Finally, I hope you enjoy teaching Nick Hornby's novel *About a Boy*.

February 2018

## 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)

## Exam Information

This pack is intended for students studying *About a Boy* for GCSE CCEA English Literature, which is examined as part of Unit 1 – The Study of Prose. The table below gives more details of the assessment objectives that are assessed.

Literature Unit	Assessment Objectives
Unit 1: The Study of Prose Section A: Novel  Students will have one hour to answer from a choice of two essay questions.  This is a closed book exam.	<i>AO1: Respond to texts and select and evaluate relevant details and support interpretations</i>  <i>AO2: Explain how language and literary forms contribute to writers' purposes and settings</i>

Please note that context is not assessed for this exam; therefore, the activities in this pack do not cover the novel's social, historical and cultural background.

### Language Notes

*About a Boy* can be used as a text for Controlled Assessment tasks in GCSE English Literature. It has been written to meet the requirements for English Literature, although English Language is also 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

#### Assessment details:

- Unit 3, Task 2: The Study of Written Language
- Controlled Assessment: one task from the task bank. Any Literature text is acceptable.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



## Activity Types

Activity Type	Explanation
Reminder	To enable students to recall the key points
Comprehension	To enable students to demonstrate clear and advanced understanding
Application	To enable students to apply their knowledge of the novel to a new situation or an unseen extract
Analytical tasks	To enable students to analyse literal and abstract meaning
Evaluation tasks	To enable students to evaluate and demonstrate individual interpretations
Synthesis tasks	To enable students to formulate new, creative and individual ideas
Exam-style question	To enable students to practise answering higher-tier questions and to understand what an A* response looks like

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



The following key events from the novel are jumbled up. Your job is to put them in order in which they happen using the numbered list on the next page.

Once you have worked out the correct order, write the chapter in which they happen.

Will meets Angie	Rachael's son Ali apologises to Marcus	
Marcus and Ellie travel on the train together	Fiona tries to kill herself	W b t
Ellie and Marcus become friends	Marcus is told he has to go on a picnic with Suzie (Fiona's close friend)	M
Will meets Fiona thinking that Rachael will be there to give him support	Ellie and Marcus are arrested	
Marcus thinks he has killed a duck in the park	Will finds out that Marcus truanted from school	
Marcus and Will meet each other for the first time at the SPAT picnic	Will meets a woman called Rachael and falls in love at a New Year's Eve party	M ar
Marcus sees Ellie again and Ellie begins to accept Marcus	Fiona is taken to hospital in an ambulance	
Fiona discovers that Marcus is visiting Will regularly	Marcus tries to blackmail Will into going out with Fiona	
Fiona confronts Will about his lies about Ned	Will accepts an invitation to Fiona's Christmas dinner	V

#### Essay Tip!

Remember, your essay should always move through the events in the novel chronologically so that you can understand the overall structure.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....
- 5. ....
- 6. ....
- 7. ....
- 8. ....
- 9. ....
- 10. ....
- 11. ....
- 12. ....
- 13. ....
- 14. ....

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



# INSPECTION COPY

15. ....
16. ....
17. ....
18. ....
19. ....
20. ....
21. ....
22. ....
23. ....
24. ....
25. ....
26. ....
27. ....

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



**How did you do?**

Without looking at your copy of the novel do the following: go back to your copy have placed the events in the correct order.



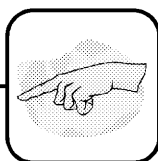
Look at the following three important events in the novel (one from the beginning, middle and one from the end) and answer the comprehension questions.

Write full answers using small, integrated quotations and remember to use the point when explaining your answers.



### Fiona Tries to Kill Herself

- ☞ What does this event tell us about Fiona's relationship with her father?
- ☞ What does this event tell us about how Fiona feels about her father?
- ☞ Why is this event important in terms of our understanding of the novel?
- ☞ Which of Hornby's ideas emerge during this part of the novel?



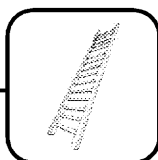
### Ali threatens Marcus

- ☞ What does this event reveal about Ali's feelings about his father?
- ☞ What does Hornby show us about human nature through this event?
- ☞ How is the character of Marcus explored through this event?
- ☞ Describe Ali's character.



### Will offers to help Marcus to fit in

- ☞ What does this event tell us about Will?
- ☞ How is the character of Marcus explored through this event?
- ☞ What does this event tell us about life as a teenager living in a boarding school?
- ☞ What ideas and themes does Hornby draw our attention to through this event?
- ☞ Discuss whether you think the need to fit in today for teenagers is any different from what it was in the period in which the novel is set.



### Going Further...

Pick another three events that you see as the most important in the novel and write about them, analysing the main ideas that emerge through these events.



#### Essay Tip!

In the time you have in an examination you will not be able to cover all the important events in the novel. You should write about the events you can analyse in the most depth to reach the highest marks.

AO1

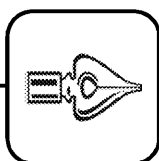
# IMPORTANT EVENTS



## Getting Started

Try these starter activities to get you thinking about important events in the novel.

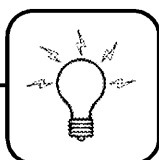
- Speak for five minutes about what you see as the most important event in the novel and why.
- Pretend you are a main character, stand up and tell the class what you think are the most important events in the novel and why.
- In pairs, pretend one of you is Nick Hornby while the other is Will. Discuss what you think are the most important events in the novel and why.
- In groups, perform one of the key events, such as the SPAT meeting.



## Application

Imagine you are Will going to a SPAT meeting for the very first time. Write a short speech about the most important event in the novel, and answer the question that follows.

- How would you be feeling? Using Will's way of thinking, write a short speech down as if you were Will and discuss in pairs.



## Tips

- Use small, integrated quotations from the whole novel.
- Comment on the ideas that Hornby conveys through Will's character.
- Comment on other key events where the search for a parent is a key theme.
- Try to use the following words and phrases: parenthood, family, childhood, conditioning.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



# IMPORTANT EVENTS

## Literal vs Abstract Meaning: Getting that A

Look at the following example and then try filling in the table on the following page.

Notice how the C-grade response looks at the literal meaning, whereas the A-grade response looks at a less obvious, more abstract meaning.

Tip: Use this phrase in examinations for a B grade.

Tip: Use this phrase in examinations for an A grade.

Event	C Grade (Explain)	B Grade (Explore)	A Grade (Evaluate)
'Will found himself working Marcus's visits into the fabric of his day'	Marcus visited Will in the day.	It also shows that Marcus's visits were important because they happened every day.	A fabric of material proper sense understood. A deeper perhaps that visits were allowed to his everyday became regular to made a noticeable

Tip: Link in the novel



### Calling All A\* Students

For an A\*, the tip is to evaluate and give a personal response. There is help on how to do this in the next activity.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Literal vs Abstract Meaning: Getting that A

Event	C Grade (Explain)	B Grade (Explore)
Ellie and Marcus are arrested		
Will meets a woman called Rachael and falls in love		
Ellie breaks a shop window with a cardboard cut-out of Kurt Cobain		
Ellie and Marcus become friends		

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



# INSPECTION COPY

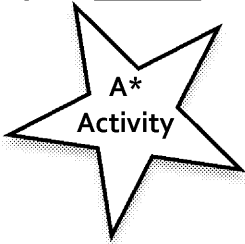
Event	C Grade (Explain)	B Grade (Explore)
Will meets Angie		
Marcus visits Will for the first time		
Marcus thinks he has killed a duck in the park		
Marcus and Will meet each other for the first time at the SPAT picnic		
Fiona confronts Will about his lies about Ned		

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



AO1  
AO2

# IMPORTANT EVENTS



When you are evaluating and thinking of a personal response event has on the reader and/or you. How does it contribute to learning and how we/you see the world? Say why you think it has been done for you.

Event	EXAMPLE A* (evaluate and demonstrate individual responses)
Will asks Marcus to pretend to be his son and accompany him to Rachael's to meet her son	<i>Through Will's actions, Hornby is able to show that people are uncomfortable with the truth due to the way it is presented or unfairly by others. While Hornby sometimes points out the importance of honesty, it is also important to say that Hornby shows the reader that the harshness and their criticism can make someone feel so insecure that they may feel that lying may at least be a temporary situation. This shows that people are feeling from others to conform to how others expect them to be.</i>
Fiona tries to kill herself	
Marcus finds and reads the suicide note	
Will finds out that Marcus truanted from school	
Marcus and Ellie travel on the train together	
Fiona does not accept that Marcus is unhappy and forbids him to visit Will again	
Rachael's son Ali apologises to Marcus	
Fiona discovers that Marcus is visiting Will regularly	
Fiona and Will discover that Marcus is at a police station	

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



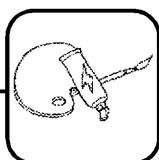
AO1

# IMPORTANT EVENTS



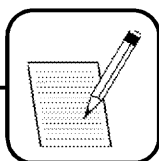
## Get Creative with Drama

- In groups, perform one of the key events, such as the
- As a class, stage a *Jeremy Kyle Show* where the key characters report about their irresponsible actions.
- In pairs, report a key event in the style of the 10 o'clock news.



## Get Creative with Art

- Storyboard one of the key events.
- Create a collage of six of the key events in the novel.



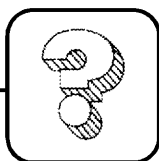
## Get Creative with Writing

- Write your own quiz based on the key events (write questions, include the correct answer, an answer that could be a wrong answer).
- Write up one of the key events for a very young child using the conventions of fairy-tale characters to retell the events (e.g. the evil wolf, Marcus is the hero, Suzie is the helper, Fiona is the witch).



## Get Creative with Media

- Design your own soundtrack for the key events in *Abraham Lincoln* (e.g. with love, searching for love, sadness, isolation, alienation, loneliness, frustration could be used to represent the events in the novel).
- Turn the soundtrack into a quiz, where students have to guess to which song the event belongs.



## What have you learnt?

- Write postcard-sized revision notes on six key events.
- Create a spider diagram showing everything you have learnt about the events.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way to write the essay or answer the question underneath.

How important is the meeting of Will and Marcus for the first time in the novel?

Discourse markers are used to show that you are moving through the novel in chronological order

*From the moment that Will and Marcus encounter one another in Chapter Eight the novel shows us the meeting of two separate worlds. In these worlds are so different from one another that the SPAT picnic 'Will was in the back with Marcus and a weird kid, who was humming tunelessly.' From this point Hornby shows us how Marcus begins to experience a new way to look at the world and see things. Will was like an invitation for him to search for a way to be. However, it is not only Marcus who experiences this. Similarly, Will's first encounter with Marcus announces to Will his need to be accepted by someone who lives in a different world from his own. For both characters, it is like an exposure to a completely different world of a completely different kind of life. And what follows in the novel has much to do with how these worlds intermingle and get on. In fact, this meeting gives the characters of Will and Marcus a great importance and makes their relationship one of the main foci of the novel. Through it, Hornby also shows how Will's and Marcus's relationship is not something which is static in the novel but something which develops and grows throughout. By Chapter 10 'Will found himself working Marcus's visits into the fabric of his day'. Hornby reveals the merging of these separate worlds/lives and how they begin to intermingle.*

Discussion of characters, despite it not being a character-based question

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





AO1

# CHARACTERS



## Getting Started

Match the following quotations with the correct character.

Quotation
'Do you mind me having boyfriends?'
'Yeah, right. It's me who's the fantasist. I wanted to believe you had a son, so I let my imagination run riot.'
'Just because you come round here for a cup of tea after school doesn't mean I can stop your mum from...doesn't mean I can cheer your mum up.'
'You should go and see him. Tell him what you think of him. I would. Jerk. I'll come with you if you like.'
'They're definitely my favourite animal. Well, second favourite. After dolphins. They're definitely my favourite bird, though.'



## Going Further...

- Draw a timeline for each character and plot the key moments.
- Fill in the table on the following page for each character you need to.



## Further Still...

Design a quiz for the rest of the class based on your favourite character.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Character	Detailed description	What they are like at the beginning	What t
Marcus			
Will			
Fiona			
Suzie			
Ellie			
Rachael			
Angie			

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



The following questions can either be discussed or answered on paper. Remember, to answer, you need to include tiny quotations throughout for an A\*.

### Marcus

---

- 'On the way home, though, it all started again, in the newsagent's round the corner' (p. 38). What does this mean for Marcus?
- 'For the first time since his mother had started crying, he wanted to cry too, but any good, but he had no idea that it worked both ways.' What is going on in this chapter trying to show about Marcus and his overall situation? (p. 43).
- 'Some things carried on as normal.' (p. 38). What might this mean for Marcus?
- 'But something was going to have to give.' (p. 40). Why does Hornby state this? What does it mean at this stage in the story?
- It is mother and son at the beginning only – how is their relationship explored in Chapter 7?
- Pick out five moments in the novel where Marcus's feelings of alienation are explored.
- What are Marcus's feelings at school/about being at school?
- Why does Marcus keep visiting Will?
- Describe how Marcus feels about Ellie for the majority of the novel and compare this to near/at the end. What does this tell us about his character at the end?
- How does Marcus's character develop in the novel?
- At the start of Chapter 7 what in your opinion would this mean for Marcus: 'Some things carried on as normal' – What does this tell us about him?

### Will

---

- What does the following quote say about Will's character? 'Will first saw Annie when he didn't see her – in Championship Vinyl, a little record shop off the Holloway' (p. 6)?
- 'He couldn't say that the need for change burned within him terribly fiercely' (p. 6). What does this tell us to say about Will here?
- What do pp. 6–7 tell us about Will's character?
- How is Will's character explored at the start of the second chapter?
- How is Will's consciousness explored? How is it revealed to the reader?
- Discuss Will's character – what kind of person is he?
- How does Will's ancestry affect his disposition?
- Pick out as many examples as possible from the novel where Will's character is explored.
- Describe some of the positive attributes of Will's character.
- What is the author trying to suggest by the following: 'On the debit side, there was a lot of head-shaking, eye-rolling and bitter laughter for a man with no apparent sense of humour' (p. 6)?
- What kind of music does Will like to listen to? And what does this tell us about his character?

## Fiona

---

- 'He'd done it again. He'd been thinking of one of his mum's songs, a Joni Mitchell song'
- What might be the significance of mentioning Joni Mitchell in the novel? The text mentions her a few times throughout the novel; why does Hornby do this? What does this say about Fiona?
- What sort of person is Fiona?
- How does Fiona feel about being a mother to Marcus?
- Why is this central to your understanding of her character?
- Is she a good mother? Would you say she sees herself as a good mother?
- What does the description of the characters in the hospital waiting room tell you about the novel? What is the writer Hornby trying to make us think about her?
- How do the characters in the hospital waiting room resemble/echo Fiona at the beginning of the novel?
- Is Fiona's character the same at the end as it is at the beginning? Does her character change over the novel?
- Give examples of Fiona's lack of sympathy to her son's feelings about his new situation.
- Describe Fiona's situation at the end of the novel. Has it changed from the beginning?

## Suzie

---

- How and where is Suzie introduced in the novel? Is this significant?
- What is Suzie's role and purpose in the novel?
- Is she important? What is her function? What purpose does she serve?

## Rachael

---

- How does Rachael's character differ from Will's?
- What is Rachael's function/purpose in the novel?
- What sort of person is Rachael? Is she different to Will?
- Where does Rachael live and what is her house like?

## Angie

---

- Describe how and where Angie is introduced in the novel.
- Describe some of Angie's attributes which attract Will to her (pp. 17–20).
- Why is Angie's relationship to Will 'an entirely happy arrangement'? (p. 21)
- In your opinion what role or purpose does Angie play in the novel?

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Ellie

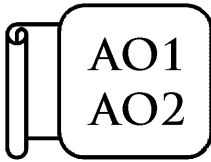
---

- What does the following quote mean? Discuss. ‘...and then he was thinking Ellie loose on his dad. Ellie was like a guided missile in school...’ (p. 232). What is a guided missile?
- Describe Ellie’s character in the novel.
- Describe Ellie’s relationship to Marcus in the novel. What does Marcus see in Ellie? What does Ellie see in Marcus?
- How does Marcus feel about Ellie’s taste in music?
- What is the significance of Ellie’s breaking the shop window?
- Marcus thinks he killed a duck by his action in the park and much later in the novel he breaks a window – what does this say about both characters? Discuss the similarity between the two actions.
- In what way does Ellie’s behaviour/actions change when she comes face-to-face with Marcus whose window she breaks? What does this tell us of Ellie’s character / situation?
- Does Ellie’s character change / develop in the novel? If so, in what way?

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





# CHARACTERS

Read the following extract and answer the questions, which increase in difficulty. Be sure to find this quote in the novel on (p. 6) and read further to answer the questions.

*Will wondered sometimes – not very often, because historical speculation was very often – how people like him would have survived sixty years ago. Perhaps something of a specialised grouping; in fact, there couldn't have been anyone because sixty years ago no adult could have had a father who had made his*

1. What do we learn about Will's character, his life and his situation from the extract?
2. What do we learn about life in 1993? How does it differ from sixty years ago?
3. Why do you think the writer decided to write about Will this way?
4. How does the above description of Will differ from the life of the other characters in the novel?



## Calling All A\* Students

How does the writer use punctuation in this passage to enhance the description of characters and their emotions?

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED

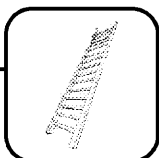


## Literal vs Abstract Meaning: Getting that A

Fill in the following table, which has partly been filled in to

Quotation	Literal Meaning	
<i>'...the party's gone on too long and I want to go home' (p. 65).</i>	<i>The fun of the party she was at had ended and Fiona needed to leave.</i>	Perhaps to Marcus of being responsible care of saying st – perhaps break a Marcus suggest better i from na
<i>'Will wrestled with his conscience, grappled it to the ground and sat on it until he couldn't hear a squeak out of it.' (p. 143).</i>		
<i>'All of a sudden you became better-looking, a better lover, a better person.'</i> (p. 21).		

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED

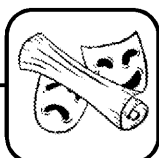


### Going Further...

Discuss your abstract interpretations with a partner and see if different.

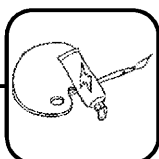
AO1

## CHARACTERS



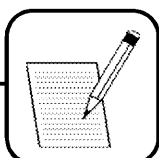
## Get Creative with Drama

- Hot seat members of the class while they are in role as a character.
- Improvise a SPAT reunion party 20 years after the one they were in.
- Stage a radio show or TV talk show where characters are interviewed.
- As a class, assume the role of one of the main characters and discuss a controversial issue you want to discuss, e.g. what should happen to stop the SPAT from doing their homework.



## Get Creative with Art

- Create a collage for one of the characters, looking for words and images that describe that character.



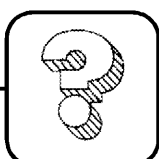
## Get Creative with Writing

- Write a monologue for either Fiona or Will and, if you are confident, perform it for your Speaking and Listening Assessment for GCSE English.
- Write a speech for Marcus persuading his class to vote for him as school captain.
- Imagine you are one of the main characters and write an email to your friend about your friendship with Marcus.



## Get Creative with Media

- Design Marcus, Fiona or Ellie's Facebook profile page.



## What have you learnt?

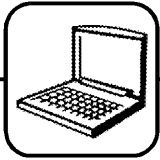
- Write postcard-sized revision notes for each character.
- Create a spider diagram showing everything you have learnt about each character.

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



AO1  
AO2

# CHARACTERS



## Media Related Words and Meanings

**Ambiguity/ambivalence:** can mean being two things at the same time or having different sides to one's character.

- Which of the characters in the novel do you think these words describe? Who is the most ambiguous and why.

**Benevolence:** can mean being kind and doing good deeds for others or being thoughtful towards the needs of other people.

- Which of the characters do you think is the most benevolent? Present to the class.

**Euphoria:** can mean happiness, joy, excitement, exhilaration and feeling on top of the world.

- In pairs, find three quotes from the novel which show the characters experiencing euphoria and explain to the class what it means to be euphoric.

**Façade:** means when a person has an appearance, which is usually different from their true nature.

- Discuss in pairs and present to the class this concept in relation to a character in the novel.

**Protagonist:** A protagonist is often the main character in the story – he/she is the advocate or prime mover.

- Discuss in pairs and present to the class who the protagonist is and why.

**Antagonism:** means having hostility between people or feeling opposition to something; related words include friction, opposition, dislike and conflict.

- Is there any antagonism between the characters in the novel? Refer to at least any two characters and present to the class.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



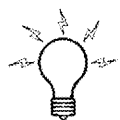
The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way to write the essay or answer the question underneath.

Language  
analysis

How does Hornby present Will in *About a Boy*?

The character of Will Freeman is introduced to us by Hornby who starts off by describing Will as a cool guy. 'How cool is Will Freeman?' This way of presenting the character is rhetorical – meaning that the author is not really asking the question but instead, setting up a way of presenting Will to be in the position to judge Will's credibility as the cool guy. Will appears to be on the surface. It makes us think about how the character sits alongside our understanding of the other characters we have been introduced to thus far. Through Will we see a very different person's lifestyle. From the start of the novel we are shown how separate a situation Will's is in contrast to that of Marcus's and Fiona's while a similarity is shared through the idea and theme of isolation and alienation that all three characters experience. The writer describes Will as 'cool' as having '...slept with a woman he didn't know' and that '...he had spent more than three hundred pounds on a jacket...' which suggests that perhaps Will may not be as cool as some others as he thinks he is and hints at his self-perception as a spoiled lazy character. Moreover, the writer's use of a system in brackets may suggest that Will may even want to be himself points due to how pleased he is with his current life. It is as if he would award himself the title of 'cool' for doing the things that he did if he could.

Link to key  
ideas  
presented in a  
sophisticated,  
concise way



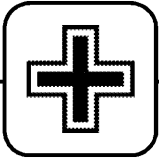
Tips on how to gain an A\*

Remember to include analysis of concrete and abstract meaning and include analysis of structure and link to the important theme.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





## Extension

- **Character Arc / Character Development**

Often stories can contain different kinds of arc. Character development or changing behaviour in the story is often an example of this is the **Change Arc** where often in a story a character can change and develop within the particular story. For example, a character of a story can be naïve, which can change during the course of the story. They can gain experience and knowledge about their particular character. This can often be seen in a particular story – for example, where they can change from a character who is an unlikely average person into a hero. The **change arc** is a journey and about how a protagonist may change from a character who is much more special. For example, like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* meant to show us that a certain hidden strength was always there, but discovered, but the character had needed to undertake a journey for it to be seen. However, by the end of the story the character becomes something quite special.

Another kind of arc is **the Growth Arc**. In this kind of character development, often the protagonist or main character has to overcome himself (e.g. weakness, fear, the past etc.) in order to achieve something himself happening in the story – that is, his beating an opponent. This results in him becoming 'a fuller, better person'. In this kind of arc the protagonist is able to overcome or beat something that he has struggled with. The struggle which is related to weakness, fear, the past etc. is related to having to beat opposition to himself from outside. This results in his becoming a more complete and more full and superior person. He remains similar to what he was – he has just upgraded himself. The protagonist or main character sees things in a different way. This results in changing his role or persona. This results in his not actually being what he was at the start but just different. Though there is no inner resistance or anything, rather he simply increases his status or position, or finds he has a talent and adopts a different career path.

**Given this information:**

- Which of the following characters (see next page) do you think have a character arc?
- Discuss how some of the characters change and develop over the course of the story.
- Whose character would you say changes and develops the most from start to end?
- Discuss the character's separate and intertwined journeys.
- Describe this in relation to main as well as other characters.
- For example, is Will's character 'steadfast' throughout the story? What changes take place?

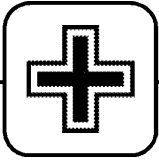
Think about, and discuss this in relation to the following characters:

**Will**  
**Marcus**  
**Fiona**  
**Rachael**  
**Angie**  
**Suzie**  
**Ellie**

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





## Character or Personality Traits: What is a trait?

What is a **character trait**? A character trait describes a certain personality, actions, behaviour. It is therefore a characteristic to make up a person's character.

**Some words which describe examples of character traits:**

Active	Articulate
Amiable	Aspiring
Benevolent	Brilliant
Capable	Clear-headed
Discreet	Disciplined
Elegant	Faithful
Firm	Genuine
Helpful	Honest
Imaginative	Individualistic
Logical	Loyal
Modest	Neat
Orderly	Passionate
Rational	Romantic
Sensitive	
Sentimental	

List two traits within any three main characters in the novel.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



AO1  
AO2

# LANGUAGE



## Getting Started

Try these starter activities to get you thinking about important

⇒ Define the following:

- adjective
- noun
- verb
- adverb

⇒ Define the following:

- sensory language
- metaphor
- simile

⇒ Define the following:

- irony
- oxymoron
- hyperbole
- symbol



## Application

⇒ Read through pp. 5–7 of the novel and pick out examples of the figures of speech defined in the previous activity.

⇒ An oxymoron is a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms are put together (e.g. faith unfaithful kept him falsely true – any examples of this in Hornby’s novel? In pairs list the



## Tips

① Copy out or photocopy the section and use a colour code to highlight each feature in it.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Answer the following questions to demonstrate your understanding of the writer of the novel.

1

Basic

1. What kind of language is used in the text: formal, colloquial?
2. Describe the tone of the language at the start or opening of the novel.
3. What nouns are used to describe the characters at the beginning of the novel? How do these nouns change?
4. What is the effect of the nouns used for the majority of the characters at the end of the novel?
5. What tense is being used on the first page opening? First person?
6. How does the tense being used by the author Hornby influence the atmosphere? Discuss this in relation to the setting and the characters.

2

Advanced

1. Describe how language is being used in the novel.
2. What is the purpose of the dialogue?
3. What is it trying to convey? Why?
4. How is the dialogue used?
5. What does it achieve?
6. What do you think the dialogue sets out to achieve?

3

Extension

- How does the writer use dialogue to show the contrast between the characters?

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED

Read the extracts below and fill in the table.

Quotation	Literal Meaning	
<p><i>'...because it seemed to Will that Fiona was a peculiarly contemporary creation, with her Seventies albums, her eighties politics and her Nineties foot lotion...'</i> (p. 111)</p>		<p>Will cha wh fro exis tied ora wa</p>
<p><i>'There would always be one more last straw. Ellie was killing Katrina, and Marcus was killing Fiona...'</i> (p. 258)</p>	<p>The straw is never finished and Katrina and Marcus were attacking Fiona.</p>	
<p><i>'So Christmas was the season of anger and bitterness and regret and recrimination, of drinking binges, of frantic and laughably inadequate industry...'</i> (p. 124)</p>		

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



# INSPECTION COPY

Quotation	Literal Meaning	
<i>'He was in the process of wondering whether the British Gas Wildlife Photographer of the Year Exhibition could possibly be any duller than it sounded, when the telephone rang.'</i> (p. 75)		
<i>'That would be like forgetting when England had won the World Cup...'</i> (p. 194)		
<i>'A social historian of the future would probably be able to date the room to within a twenty-four hour period.'</i> (p. 195)		
<i>'Life was, after all, like air.'</i> (p. 256)		

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





AO1  
AO2

## LANGUAGE



### Getting Started

- Share your interpretations from the previous activity with
- Find more quotations which can be analysed in terms of meanings either from the same passage or a different one



### Going Further

- Answer one of the following mini essay questions based on the text:
  - How does Hornby use dialogue to present characters?
  - How effective is Hornby's description of Fiona's home?



### Extension

- Find as many examples as possible where the writer uses symbolism
- Discuss why symbolism might be used and how effective it is

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



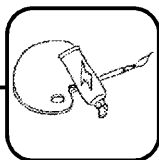
AO1

## LANGUAGE



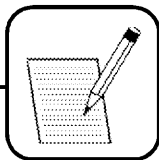
### Get Creative with Speaking and Listening / Drama

- Design a game of language Taboo to help the class learn
- Perform a dramatic version of Marcus and Ellie's train journey dialogue between them – use as much direct speech as possible
- Act out bits of dialogue from each of the characters in the novel and the class guess the character.



### Get Creative with Art

- Draw, or create a poster for the SPAT picnic based on the novel
- Create a collage of all the language features used in the novel



### Get Creative with Writing

- Write a children's story using the descriptions of Marcus and Ellie
- Write a descriptive poem for one of the characters.
- Write an email / text message / Facebook conversation about the novel using as similar a style to Hornby's descriptions of the novel as possible

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way to finish the essay or answer the question underneath.

How does Hornby create tension prior to Ellie and Marcus meeting?

Through his use of language, Hornby creates tension between Marcus and Ellie prior to their meeting, revealing their opposite natures, which Hornby does by describing Marcus's feelings of doubt about Ellie. Now perfectly clear to him that, even though he knows Ellie was great ... he didn't want her to be his girlfriend. Hornby suggests Ellie's character as being too independent from Marcus and that she needed someone to do something doing dangerous and trouble-making things. This shows an important difference between them, indicating how familiar Nirvana and Kurt Cobain is to Ellie and how unfamiliar it still is to Marcus. How he hasn't really taken to Ellie's taste in music. 'Marcus tried to remember some of the words of songs on the Nirvana record that Will had given him. By doing this, Hornby shows the differences between the two of them. Ellie's trouble-making instinct is evident when she is annoyed to see a cardboard cut-out of Kurt Cobain in the record shop window, which symbolises or represents an 'imprisoned' Kurt Cobain who is the symbol of her rebellious spirit, and which symbolises youth rebellion.

Several techniques commented on, answers the question beginning with 'how'

Consistent analysis and reference to the writer's ideas

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



Question

How does Hornby use symbolism in *About a Boy*?



AO1  
AO2

# STRUCTURE



What is structure?

Structure refers to the sequence of events in the novel and how they are presented or exploited in a certain way. The structure links, therefore, the actions, key events and the development of themes and ideas.



Getting Started

Use the Internet or the introduction to the novel to answer the questions.

- The novel has a linear structure. What does this mean?
- The structure shows progress in time. What does this mean?
- Is the novel structured thematically? What does this mean?
- What structure does Hornby use to introduce the characters?
- Stories usually have a beginning, middle and end (equilibrium, crisis, equilibrium). In your own words, what is the beginning, middle and end of this novel?
- What is the overall conclusion to the novel?



Going Further

- Write the chapters which correspond to the overall structure in the table.

Section of the novel	Corresponding chapter
Marcus's dad has a new girlfriend	
Will decides that Fiona is not his type	
Fiona splits up with Roger	

**Essay Tip!**

Your essay should reflect the structure of the novel, no matter what type of question you are asked, whether it is a text or a theme question.

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Answer the following questions to demonstrate your understanding of how the development of the characters.

1

Basic – Advanced (these questions increase in difficulty)

1. List points in the early stages of the novel that reveal Marcus's sense of fitting in (for example, this could be through the writing or through Marcus's dialogue or actions).
2. Find five quotations for Marcus from the beginning of the novel that show him feeling isolated.
3. Now find five contrasting quotations for Marcus from the later part of the novel which show him to be feeling more comfortable and more secure.
4. At what point, or points, does Marcus begin to start to feel more relaxed in his surrounding after he had relocated to a new school?
5. In order – from earliest in the novel to the latest in the novel – list five characters other than Marcus change their behaviour from feeling alienated to being more secure.
6. Why does Hornby show a slow development from Marcus's initial alienation into their both feeling more secure?
7. Do you feel that the changes in both their characters are believable? Give your answer.
8. How does Hornby make Marcus, Will and Fiona's development believable?
9. Marcus, Will, Fiona: Why is Hornby's development of these characters to our understanding of the story as a whole?
10. At what points in the novel do you think Hornby makes the most effective order for the plot to unfold, and therefore to draw the most powerful themes and ideas?

2

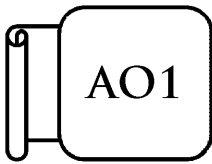
Extension

3

- Try to find out what the difference between plot and story is, and discuss it with the rest of the class.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



# STRUCTURE

Plot the points of Marcus's feelings of not fitting in and feeling confident and secure on the graph with a cross (X) and write a quotation next to it supporting your idea.

Feelings of not fitting in



Feeling secure and confident

Beginning

Middle

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT PROTECTED



Looking at the key events in the plot, analyse the relevance each one has and then analyse how the plot is manipulated by the structure (abstract n

Event in Plot	Literal Meaning	Abstr
Marcus hears of Fiona and Roger splitting up and at the same time we are told that Marcus has a tendency to be misunderstood.	<i>This is the start of the story; Marcus and Fiona are obviously central to the story and are needed for the rest of the events to unfold.</i>	<i>From the beginning, we get information: Marcus has split up with her boyfriend at the same time that Marcus is misunderstood. This is a result of the situation that Marcus is in at the beginning which is that he is with his single mother and he is so off-balance that</i>
Will meets Angie.		<i>Will's meeting Angie is significant as it shows single mothers, reminding us of the idea that Fiona is of course</i>
Will pretends he is a single father for the SPAT events.		
Marcus is bullied again, this time at the newsagents.		
The incident of the apparently dead duck.		

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



# INSPECTION COPY

Key Event in Plot	Literal Meaning	
Marcus finds his mum's suicide note resulting in his becoming even more protective of her.		
Marcus begins to orchestrate a plot to get Will and his mum together as he thinks it will save her.		
The idea of Will and his lifestyle as being empty is further explored.		
Marcus's friend Ellie finally begins to accept him.		
The novel ends with Will becoming more caring and taking Ali and Will out and with Marcus finally becoming a typical teenager who is now embarrassed by his mum.		

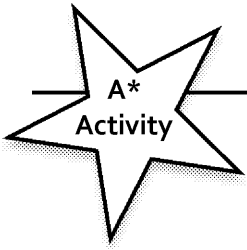
**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





AO1  
AO2

# STRUCTURE



## Evaluating the Ending of the Novel

There may be several different interpretations of the conclusion.

Read the final chapter and consider the different interpretations.

Quotation	Interpretation 1	Interpretation 2
<i>'Marcus was older than Ali now.'</i>		
<i>'How much would you have given for Marcus to be caught smoking with his mates a few months ago?'</i>		
<i>'The truth was that this version of Marcus really wasn't so hard to cope with.'</i>		
<i>'I used to want him to marry mum...'</i>		
<i>'But all three of them had to lose things in order to gain other things.'</i>		
<i>'I bloody hate Joni Mitchell.'</i>		

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



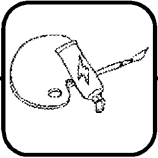
AO1  
AO2

## STRUCTURE



### Get Creative with Drama

- In groups, create three scenes which act out the beginning of the novel.
- Create freeze-frames from the key structural events and explain how they are from the beginning, the middle or the end of the novel.



### Get Creative with Art

- Storyboard the unfolding of events in the novel, with appropriate illustrations.
- Laminate and cut up your storyboard and have your partner explain the events to you (great for revision!).



### Get Creative with Media

- Watch the 2002 film *About a Boy* and explain the benefits of the different scenes in the film to the class using as many examples as possible.
- Explain the different types of narrative structure to the class.
- Watch the film version of the novel and discuss how the different narrative structure, and/or how the idea of progression in the novel is represented in the film (turn this into a creative writing exercise and write a critical review).

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way of writing the essay or answer one of the questions underneath.

Books with chapters can be structured by theme or by the correct order of events. Given this information, how is the book structured: thematically, chronologically or another way?

How are the chapters in the novel structured: thematically, chronologically or another way?

Confident start to the essay

Discussing important events in relation to structure

Succinct and seamless comment on the overall structure

*From the beginning of the novel we are introduced to two of the major characters in chapter one. Through this we see some of the major themes such as feeling out of place, alienation and parenthood / single motherhood. Characters are introduced: 'People quite often thought Marcus was a bit funny when he wasn't. He couldn't understand why his mum whether she'd split with Roger was a sensible question...' In addition, the novel appears to be telling a story chronologically, as from the beginning we are introduced to the fact that Fiona has just split up with Roger, her boyfriend, telling us that we are in the aftermath of something that has already happened. This lets us know that the story is being told chronologically. Following this, in chapter two we are introduced to Will for the first time to the character of Will. Here new themes are brought forward, such as Will's isolation, indifference and overall lassitude. In chapter three the chronological structure and thematic continuity is created by the return to the character of Marcus whose uneasiness about returning to home continues the theme of isolation and feelings of being out of place which was first raised at the start of chapter one. 'He couldn't believe he was going to be back there the next morning...'*



## Questions

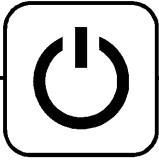
1. How is the opening of *About a Boy* different from the end? How effective is the contrast?
2. How does the author Nick Hornby introduce the characters?

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



AO1  
AO2

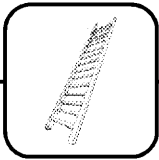
# FORM



## Getting Started

Form refers to the type of story being told. Define the following

- Autobiography .....
- Biography .....
- Anecdote .....
- Parody .....
- Ballad .....
- Monologue .....
- Epic .....
- Memoir .....
- Legend .....
- Myth .....
- Allegory .....
- Fiction .....



## Going Further

Fill in the blanks.

From the above list, *About a Boy* could be described firstly as

I think the writer may have chosen these forms because.....

.....

.....

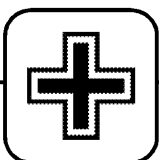
.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



## Extension

Use the Internet to find as many examples as possible of the following

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Read the following extract from *Little Manfred* (Michael Morpurgo, 2011) and analyse different interpretations of form.

*Manfred lived in my street, in my town, Regensburg. We went to the same school, on the same team. You could say we grew up like twin brothers who became best friends. Jutta, I was his best man. And when little Inga was born, I was made her godfather, the very same day.' This was only a few months before the war began. 'All right, the Kriegsmarine, the German navy, Manfred was at my side. And then we went on the same ship. The Bismarck. We could not have been more proud. We knew it was the German navy, the fastest in the world, thirty knots, 50,000 tons. Every man had to serve on her. It was a great honour and privilege to be chosen to sail in this ship.*

*To start with I was worried that Alex would interrupt him to ask some stupid questions, but I realised he was completely absorbed. Alex sat there crossed-legged, unable to move. I very soon found I was lost in his story myself.*

*'There were over 2000 men on board,' Walter went on, 'and every one of us knew that no world could beat us. We were young and full of — the word is bravado, I think — in the early days of the war. Our commander, Captain Lindemann, promised us that we would win. I believed him; we believed everything we were told.*

- What stylistic conventions of fiction does the extract show?
- In terms of allegory, what symbolic meaning does the extract have?
- Is there any similarity to *About a Boy* in terms of the way the narrative is being told?



### Calling All A\* Students

This activity prepares you for writing an essay in the exam. No matter what grade you achieve, to get an A\* you must demonstrate analytical skills and show multiple, integrated quotations, using tiny, integrated quotations.

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





Fill in the table which allows you to demonstrate your own interpretation of form (allegory or a mixture of all three).

Quotation	Interpretation of form being used	Example
<p><i>'Will wondered sometimes – not very often, because historical speculation wasn't something he indulged in very often – how people like him would have survived sixty years ago.'</i></p>	<p>This could be seen as a combination of fiction and allegory.</p>	<p>Although the Hornby's de in life is so question – the lifestyle different to men did no all day and a man need assertive – generally be Hornby is a comment u between life that of the</p>
<p><i>'The centre depressed him. He hadn't set foot inside a place with classrooms and corridors and home-made posters for nearly twenty years, and he had forgotten that British education smelt of disinfectant.'</i></p>		

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



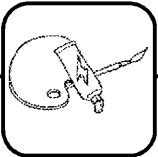
AO1  
AO2

## FORM



### Get Creative with Drama

- Act out one of the scenes of the story with or without costumes.
- Create freeze-frames that illustrate the key ideas or messages.



### Get Creative with Art

- Storyboard six of the main scenes for a child under the age of 10.
- Laminate and cut up your storyboard and have your partner act out the scenes (great for revision!).



### Get Creative with Media

- Find a film or cartoon clip which illustrates a similar idea to the story.
- Look for symbolism in the film version and present your findings.



### Get Creative with Writing

- Write a short one-page story about someone you know experiencing some of the things that Marcus does, i.e. being gifted and talented. You could make the story about yourself or someone you know.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way to write the essay or answer the question underneath.

Some aspects of *About a Boy* are allegorical. How do you respond to this?

**First Paragraph**

Concise introduction showing understanding of the question

Through the setting of the story of a teen struggling to come to grips with his new life in London and with living with his mother who is separated from his father, Hornby allows the reader to interpret the boy's life/situation as a microcosm; a smaller version of contemporary life. Taking this into account, we can interpret many things happening in the story, the characters, the events, the actions of the characters and so forth, can be seen as being allegorical and having a deeper, symbolic meaning.

**Second Paragraph**

Analysis of the characters and how they are allegorical

Links with the writer's ideas and themes and the use of language (dialogue) and structure

Evaluation and consideration of effects

Looking first at the characters, we see that they are representative of real people in the world. For instance, the boy represents a child somewhat isolated and displaced by his parents Fiona and Clive who are separated from each other. Fiona is the single parent perhaps. Then there is Will, an indolent, self-satisfied recluse/yuppie with too much time on his hands, indicative of others of his ilk, being seen from that time more and more often. There is also the setting which is London which makes the story and situation all believable even though it is fiction...



**Question**

Whose point of view is the story being told from: the boy's, the mother's, the father's, or the narrator's?



## Getting Started

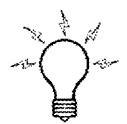
- 👁️ List as many different themes as you can think of in the novel.
- 👥 Compare your list with a friend.
- 👁️ Find a quotation for each theme.
- 👁️ Make a list of themes that are explored in Hornby's novel.
- 👁️ Is there a specific theme that the book begins with?
- 👁️ In your opinion what is the most important or strongest theme?



## Application

**Mundane** – can mean boring, dull, monotonous, uneventful and

- 👁️ Keeping this in mind, think about what it means to have a mundane life.
- 👁️ Discuss this concept and meaning of this word in relation to the novel.
- 👁️ Does Hornby discuss any of the characters' lives as having a mundane life? If so, in which different parts of the novel does Hornby discuss Will's life and Fiona's life as being mundane?
- 👁️ Try and find them and describe them.
- 👁️ Describe the idea of the mundane in relation to certain aspects of the novel.
  - **Will's life**
  - **Marcus's life**
  - **Fiona's life**



## Tips

- 📌 Use a colour code to identify each theme or underline a word in the passage.

AO1  
AO2

# THEMES

Fill in the table to show that you understand the main themes in the novel.

Theme	Key Chapters	Key Characters	Key Quotations
Parenthood			
Alienation/ Isolation			
Mundanity			

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



Theme	Key Chapters	Key Characters	Key Quotations
'Not fitting in'			
Romance/love			
Depression			

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED

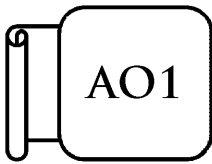


# INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



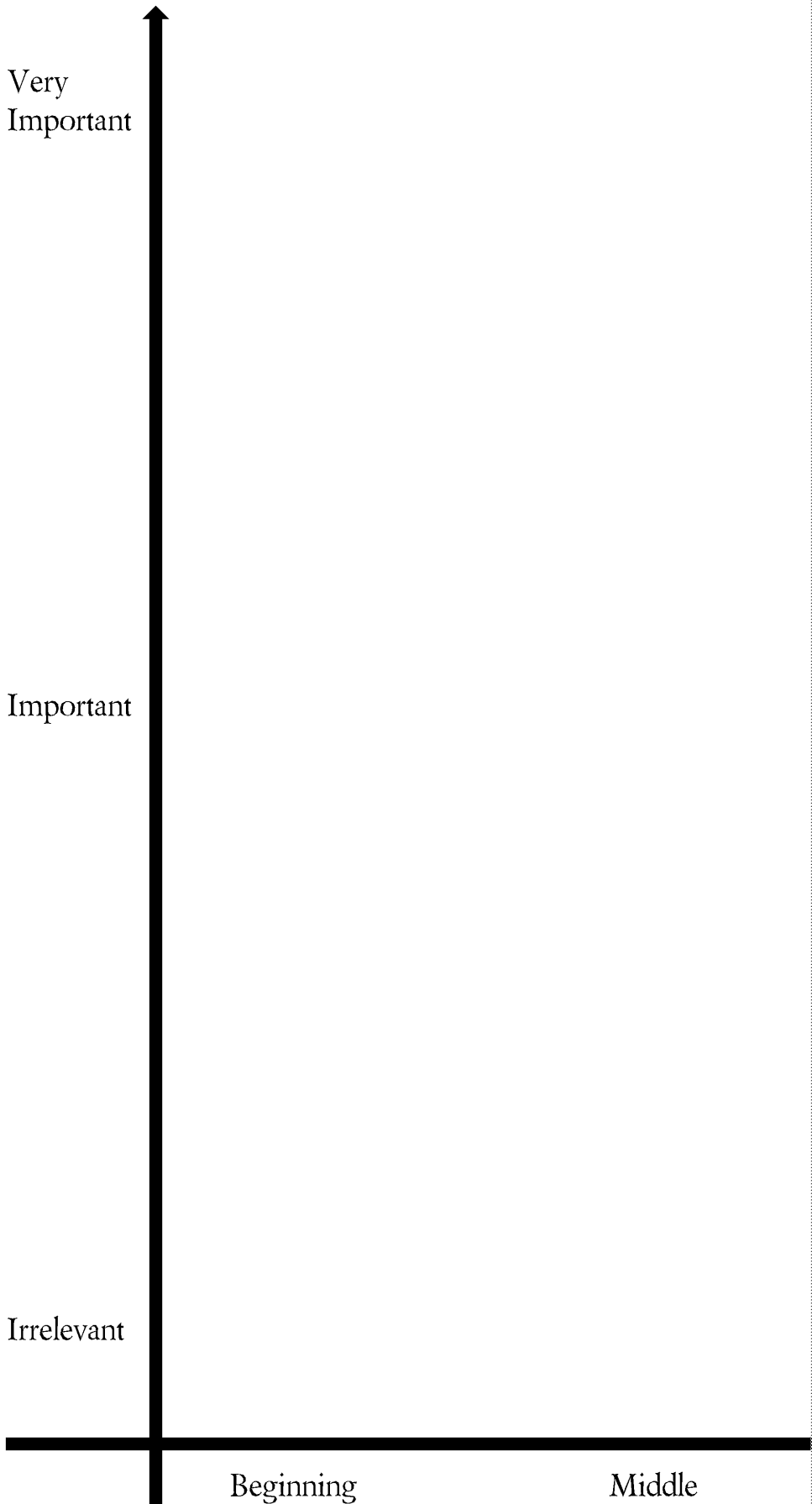
Theme	Key Chapters	Key Characters	Key Quotations
Sympathy			
Acceptance			
Bullying			
Guilt			



AO1

# THEMES

Choose any theme from the novel and trace its development on the graph, using interpretation.



INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



Answer these questions which prompt an analysis of the themes in terms of the text. Note that within each set of questions, they increase with difficulty from B to A\* and include integrated quotations in your answers.



### Parenthood

1. How well does Fiona deal with her situation as a single parent?
2. How well does Marcus deal with his situation as someone who is being looked after?
3. What does Ali's reaction to Will being his possible stepfather tell us about his relationship with Rachael?
4. Why is parenthood an important theme in the novel?



### Bullying

1. List the incidents of bullying that take place in the novel.
2. Discuss some of the ways Marcus is affected by being bullied. Present to the class.
3. Explain why certain people feel the need to bully others in the novel. Present to the class.
4. Why is bullying an important theme in the novel?
5. Even when bullying is not happening in the story, how does it affect the characters? Present to the class.



### Romance

1. How does the novel explore the idea of romance? Does it change over the course of the novel to the end? Give at least three answers.
2. Do you think romance is the most important theme in the novel? Discuss in pairs and present to the class.
3. Who do you think is the most romantic character in the novel? Present to the class.



### Acceptance

1. Name more than four characters in the novel who you think have a lack of acceptance.
2. How important is the theme of acceptance in the novel?
3. Discuss why a lack of acceptance for the individual has led to the current situation. Why is this still a big issue in the world today. Give at least three examples.

AO1  
AO2

## THEMES



Calling All A\* Students  
Pause for thought!

Discuss the statements that relate to the key themes in the novel, either with

Theme	Statement	Interpretations
Parenthood	The idea of parenthood is central to our lives and our culture. There are many different issues generated by parenthood in culture that are complicated. For example, some of these include the effects of divorce on the child and the situation of the single parent.	
Bullying	No matter who one is or what one becomes in life nearly everyone experiences some form of bullying – it is part of life. It often begins at school and continues to take place in our adult lives.	
Mundanity	What does this mean exactly?	

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





Theme	Statement	Interpretations
Romance	Though attitudes to romance change depending on the era it is an important function in most people's lives in society.	
Acceptance	Life is often all about acceptance.	
Depression	Many people in society suffer from depression. Depression can come from many different sources. Fiona who suffers from depression has the situation of being a single parent to deal with which she may have brought upon herself.	
Guilt	Guilt is something that many feel when they are in an insecure position.	

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



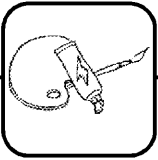
AO1  
AO2

# THEMES



## Get Creative with Drama

- Play theme charades.
- Create freeze frames to illustrate themes.



## Get Creative with Art

- Using pen and pencil design and draw a specific scene from the novel. Once completed, discuss the role of the characters in that scene. Once completed, discuss the role of the characters in that scene.
- Look through books in your library and find images that illustrate the theme of the novel from the 1990s – how is it different to today? List what might be different.



## Get Creative with Media

- Find songs that have the same theme/themes as the novel.
- Look for film or television clips that illustrate the same theme (reality shows always have conflict).



## Get Creative with Writing

- Write a piece of creative writing based on any of the themes.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way of writing the essay or answer the question underneath.

Discuss some of the different themes Hornby presents in *About a Boy*. How does he present them?

Reference to the question

One of the themes in the novel is the mundanity which exists especially in Will's life but also in Marcus', which is presented to the reader through the plot of the story.

A method used by the writer

From the very first time we are introduced to the character we are given details of his shallow and mundane existence. 'The bad news was that he hadn't even met with someone whose had appeared on the style pages of a newspaper or a magazine...' Much of this stems from his lifestyle, which is one of doing nothing for a living but living off the royalties of his father's hit song Super Sleigh: 'My dad wrote a song. In nineteen eighty-eight. It's a famous song, and I live off the royalties.' In fact, Will's mundane life is often at the centre of the story, which in some ways reflects a life bereft of purpose as if having just moved to a new area. As both Will and Marcus find much time to be alone and have this in common, they find themselves sharing much time together.

Insightful and original

the mundanity of both not really having much to do with their lives since both are in a sense out of place in the world. In addition to the mundanity in the lives of both Will and Marcus, the same theme is woven into Fiona's life.

Considering the effects

as she also finds herself in a day to day situation that doesn't seem to change but goes on forever. This is revealed through her daily depression which never goes away and her situation of always having to look after Marcus which seems to just go on and on.



Question

How does Hornby evaluate the theme of parenthood in *About a Boy*?

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



Fill in the cloze activity from below to help you recall the main ideas in *About a Boy*.  
When we talk about the writer's ideas, we are referring to concepts, such as \_\_\_\_\_ that the writer wants us to consider. Therefore, \_\_\_\_\_ of the novel.

Ideas are \_\_\_\_\_ by themes, characters, language and structure. Ideas can be interpreted in different ways, as long as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ interpretations.

In *About a Boy*, some of the ideas include the situation of Marcus being representative of \_\_\_\_\_ in society. Another idea is the concept of \_\_\_\_\_ and exists within us all, this \_\_\_\_\_ nature/nurture debate. Another idea is the exploration of \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_ who symbolise the situation of many in society. The spread of feminism and its expansion in Britain during the period the novel is set in is \_\_\_\_\_ the most prominent ideas, however, is the idea of \_\_\_\_\_ live our lives giving rise to the question of why this is so important. This \_\_\_\_\_, which means Hornby's ideas aren't specific to a \_\_\_\_\_ . In this respect, all readers can \_\_\_\_\_

*About a Boy*.

**Keywords**

Ideas	Parenthood	Place	Time
Understanding	Characters	Microcosm	Marcus
Conveyed	Acceptance	Symbolic Represents	London
Isolated Innate	Universal	Situation	Postmodern
Depends	Time	Rebellion	Life

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Some Points and Questions for the Student to Consider

- List and discuss five main ideas that the novel discusses.
- How does the author reveal Marcus's view of his mother?

Here we shall look closer at the ideas associated with isolation/alienation and acceptance.



**Alienation/Isolation**

1. Describe the ways in which Hornby makes Will seem an alien.
2. Why do you think the novel begins with Marcus and Fiona?
3. Which characters other than Will do you consider to be alienated and why? What idea about the world and society is being conveyed by Hornby?
4. 'One morning his mother started crying before breakfast. Morning crying was something new, and it was a bad, but significant.'
5. As the novel unfolds, Marcus gradually becomes more alienated. How does Hornby try to convey this?



**Acceptance**

1. Discuss some of the ways the idea of acceptance plays a part in the novel.
2. Why does Hornby write, 'They didn't do *each other* any good'?
3. Name some of the events or moments which reveal the extent of Fiona's and Marcus's situation of alienation to one of good.
4. How does Hornby involve ideas about **acceptance** and **alienation** in Chapter 34 and how does this link with the overall telling of the story?
5. Discuss in pairs and present to the class whether you think the novel is about **alienation** or one of **acceptance** in society.



**Calling All A and A\* Students**

This activity is based on close analysis and evaluation which, if you don't know, will develop your critical thinking skills.



**Calling All A and A\* Students**

Can you think of another literary text where the idea of light and dark is used to present the ideas being presented?

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



## Interpreting the Title of the Novel

*About a Boy* is a significant title and relates to something belonging to and representing it was written in. You won't be expected to explicitly include ideas relating to this as this is not one of the assessment objectives. However, it might be useful to think about it to help you form some original and insightful arguments about the text (AO1).



## Getting Started

1. What is the real meaning of the book's title?
2. Discuss why you think Hornby chose it.

Research your answers using the Web.



## Going Further

1. How important is Nirvana's music in the book?
2. The story in the book is set in 1993. Discuss in pairs in what ways the book indicates and represents the culture of the time.
3. Why do you think Kurt Cobain is so important to Ellie and the book?
4. 'He wasn't a fraud. He was Robert De Niro.' What is your opinion from Chapter 6?

Use quotations to support your answers.



## Extension

1. In addition to Nirvana's music, what other types and examples of music are mentioned in the novel and what effect do they have on your interpretation?
2. Why does Hornby mention the actor Macaulay Culkin in Chapter 6? How does this convey? Discuss this in pairs.



## Get Creative with Drama

- Create a dramatic performance that illustrates the battle of fitting in and that of being accepted or belonging.
- Play charades whereby you convey one of the writer's main ideas.



## Get Creative with Art

- Create a collage of the idea of parenthood or bullying.
- Create a collage of all the ideas in the novel.
- Create a collage of all the ideas associated with a character.



## Get Creative with Media

- Create a PowerPoint of all the important ideas in the novel.
- Look for film or television clips that illustrate the idea of **acceptance/belonging**.
- Look for stories in the news that illustrate acts of acceptance or alienating someone by bullying.



## Get Creative with Writing

- Write a creative piece of writing based on any of the writer's ideas.
- Write a review of the novel for a magazine that looks critically at what to do and say with his novel.

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED

The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way to finish the essay or answer the question underneath.

Write about the ways Hornby uses the characters to express ideas.

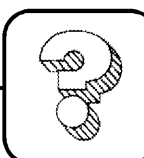
Hornby uses his characters to express several ideas in the novel. One of the first is that Marcus and Roger are used to show the idea of how difficult it is to be a single parent. 'He didn't think he'd get used to this business. He had quite liked Roger. Three of them had been out a few times; now, apparently, he never see him again.' This shows Marcus's situation is unstable and indicates Hornby's idea of how single parenting can lead to a child's confusion.

Clear structure to the essay

In Chapter 2, when the character of Will is introduced, Hornby uses the idea of 'Freeman' as a metaphor to depict the effects of someone living a life of freedom without much responsibility. Later on, Hornby shows that this lifestyle does not always work well. 'Will looked at me and said, "suggesting what I think you're suggesting?" "I'm not suggesting anything." "... You're suggesting that I've been ... for your son." This shows that Will's unusual lifestyle is open to all kinds of suspicions.

Impressive understanding of the characters' roles embedded in the response

Later in the book, through Fiona's suicide note, we see her in a depressed and apathetic state, the feelings associated with being a single parent in a postmodern world are reinforced. 'I feel flat and there doesn't seem to be anything to look forward to...' Through this, Hornby shows us what it might feel like to be in Fiona's situation. This is an extension of Marcus's. From this, we are made to understand their predicament.



Question

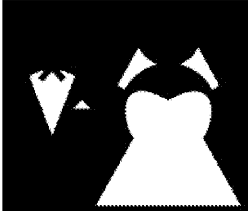

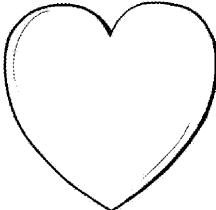

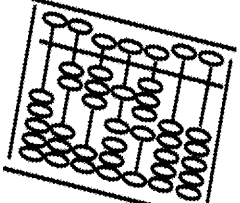

In what way does Will symbolise the essence of the age the book is set in?

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





The novel could be interpreted in several ways by different people with different images in the table below. What type of interpretation do they link to? Use the page.

Image	Type of Interpretation
	
	
	
	
	
	

Words/Phrases

Negative

Postmodernism

Humanist

*Coming of age*

INSPECTION COPY

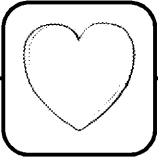
COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



AO1  
AO2

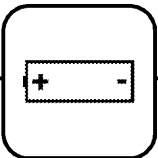
## INTERPRETATIONS

The following questions could be seen as mini essay questions. They aim to have a firm understanding of the interpretations of the novel. Remember to use quotations and explain your answers in as much depth as possible.



### Humanist Interpretation

- What is a humanist and what do they believe about...
- Why might a humanist find this story difficult to accept...



### Positive and Negative Interpretations

- Do you see the story as positive or negative or both?



### Calling All A and A\* Students

Multiple interpretations are needed for the higher grades. The more you see things and explain them the higher the grade you can achieve.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



Look at the information in the following three boxes.

Match the information up by drawing lines between the boxes as shown by

Box 1: Events in the Novel	Box 2: Concrete Meaning/Interpretation
Marcus increases his visits to Will.	Will, Ali and Marcus finally now get on with each other.
Marcus thinks he has killed a duck.	Keeping each other company Katrina and Fiona form a bond.
Will falls in love with Rachael unexpectedly.	Marcus lacks confidence and is an uncertain character.
Katrina and Fiona go to the police station.	Will needs to be with someone.
Will has started taking Ali and Marcus out.	Marcus is lonely and needs the company of others.

Write a paragraph elaborating on the three bits of information and use in...  
When you have finished, read the paragraph the person sitting next to you...  
technique.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Discuss how effective and plausible the interpretations of the novel are, then disagree or disagree with each statement by circling the appropriate number. Write for this, including quotations, below.



Disagree

Overall, the novel portrays a negative view of human nature.

1

Why do you agree or disagree? .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

The novel could be interpreted as being positive.

1

Why do you agree or disagree? .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

The parallels with real life and messages are the most prominent and important.

1

Why do you agree or disagree? .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

The novel is influenced by too many literary stories and lacks originality.

1

Why do you agree or disagree? .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





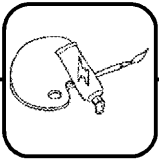
AO1

# INTERPRETATIONS



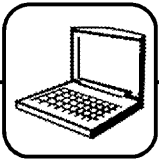
## Get Creative with Drama

- In groups of five, act out the first SPATS meeting where
- In pairs, act out Marcus's visit to Will's for the first time
- In pairs, one of you plays the role of a psychologist and the other Marcus. The psychologist pretends they are assessing Marcus from Cambridge. Act this out then give your conclusion



## Get Creative with Art

- Draw or create the similarities between Marcus's previous home surrounding it and his new home in London both containing



## Get Creative with Media

- Research a charity organisation of your choice and prepare a presentation where you inform the rest of the class about the charity, as far as possible about what they do for single parents.
- Look for stories in the news that illustrate acts of altruism (generous kindness and compassion).



## Get Creative with Writing

- Describe what you think Marcus's idea of heaven and hell is
- Write a letter to the author, telling him what you appreciate about the novel.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



The following essay question has been started for you to illustrate the best way of writing the essay or answer the question underneath.

*About a Boy* can be viewed as a coming of age drama.

### First Paragraph

Clear and succinct  
focus on the  
question

*About a Boy is a coming of age drama. The most obvious is that it deals with the boy's growth through the motions/stages of adolescent development from someone feeling out of place to becoming more normal and adjusted and growing up.*

### Second Paragraph

Focuses on one  
parallel at a time

*Much of the story deals with his trials and tribulations, how he transforms into someone more confident and mature after being out of sorts with everything in his life. It tells of his loss of innocence and how the story is constructed so that his environment provides the help him to grow and develop.*

**Create a Third Paragraph** where there is a full development of an idea with quotations, analysis and reference to characters, themes, structure and the writer's ideas

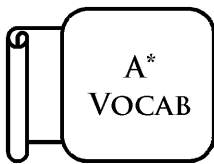


### Question

'*About a Boy* is a positive story.' How do you respond to this statement? How does Hornby use to lead you to your view?

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





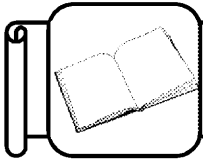
# GLOSSARY

Word	Definition
abstract meaning	a deeper meaning other than the most obvious meaning through close reading, imagining and inferring
allegorical/allegory	having an underlying or metaphorical meaning
ancestry	heritage, lineage, related to parents
altruism/altruistic	kind, selfless behaviour
analyse	look closely at the text
characters	people in the story, e.g. Fiona and Marcus
chronological order	in order of sequence and time
credibility	honesty, being believable or convincing
disequilibrium	disorder / unbalanced / middle of a story
displacement	being removed from somewhere where one belongs
equilibrium	calm / balanced / beginning of a story and often the end
evaluate	consider how effective something is / its value
form	the type/genre of story, e.g. fable, fiction
humanist	someone who believes in the value of human beings and or higher being
hybrid	containing things of different nature/origins
ideas	messages that the writer is trying to convey to the reader characters, themes
important events	key aspects, incidents and moments in the story
innate	from within
interpretations	how the story can be perceived by the reader
language	how the writer chooses to craft the story, e.g. certain words such as pathetic fallacy
linear	logical / in a line
literal meaning	the most basic, concrete and tangible meaning
metaphor	can be a figure of speech, figurative expression, comparison or word picture of something else. For example, 'broken home like a barnyard'. 'All the world's a stage' (Shakespeare, from As You Like It)
postmodernism /postmodern	Especially related to a period of time from the late 1960s to the late 1980s when old ideas and lifestyles were becoming mixed with the new and replacing them.
social class	the groups within society according to factors such as social status, how you live, the job you / your parents do, etc.
structure	how the story unfolds and also how each character, event, etc. fits into a whole
thematically	structured according to the different themes being presented
themes	ideas that run or recur throughout the story, e.g. parental expectations

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**





## READING LIST

### Suggested Books

<i>The Glass Castle</i>	Jeannette Walls
<i>Ham on Rye</i>	Charles Bukowski
<i>Eleanor and Park</i>	Rainbow Rowel
<i>The Mysteries of Pittsburgh</i>	Charles Chabon

### Suggested Websites

**Interview: Nick Hornby**

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/apr/23/fiction.shopping>

**Wikipedia**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

**Nick Hornby: Penguin Group**

<http://www.us.penguin.com/static/packages/us/nickhornby/interview.htm>

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED





## Teacher's Notes and Suggested Answers

### Important Events: Reminder

1. Will Meets Angie .....
2. Fiona does not accept that Marcus is unhappy and forbids him to visit Will again .....
3. Marcus is told he has to go a picnic with Suzie (Fiona's close friend) .....
4. Marcus and Will meet each other for the first time at the SPAT picnic .....
5. Marcus thinks he has killed a duck in the park .....
6. Fiona tries to kill herself.....
7. Fiona is taken to hospital in an ambulance.....
8. Marcus finds and reads the suicide note .....
9. Marcus visits Will for the first time.....
10. Marcus tries to blackmail Will into going out with Fiona.....
11. Will offers to help Marcus to fit in.....
12. Fiona discovers that Marcus is visiting Will regularly.....
13. Fiona confronts Will about his lies about Ned .....
14. Will finds out that Marcus truanted from school .....
15. Ellie and Marcus become friends .....
16. Marcus sees Ellie again and Ellie begins to accept Marcus .....
17. Will accepts an invitation to Fiona's Christmas dinner .....
18. Will meets a woman called Rachael and falls in love at a New Year's Eve party .....
19. Will asks Marcus to pretend to be his son and accompany him to Rachael's to meet .....
20. Rachael's son Ali apologises to Marcus.....
21. Marcus is threatened by Rachael's son Ali.....
22. Marcus's dad has an accident and asks that Marcus come and visit him in Cambridge.....
23. Fiona and Will discover that Marcus is at a police station.....
24. Will meets Fiona thinking that Rachael will be there to give him support.....
25. Marcus and Ellie travel on the train together .....
26. Ellie and Marcus are arrested .....
27. Ellie breaks a shop window with a cardboard cut-out of Kurt Cobain .....

### Important Events: Analytical Tasks

The following notes are guidance for showing students how to achieve a specific grade at another. It is worth noting that some students like to think of this exercise like building a comment (block) to get to the top grade; others prefer the phrase 'write a lot about a little' or 'extension'. It might be worth noting to students that in the examination it is the same as a paragraph. Some students can work with the grid method but then struggle to do it in form, so it might be worth modelling to students taking the information directly from the text in the form of a paragraph, to show that nothing changes, it is just in prose. Visual learners can work at a different grade, both in the grid and when practising writing in prose. This way, they can see they are working at/towards.

A **C-grade** answer gives a simple explanation. To show they are explaining, they can use simple sentences: this means that; this tells me that; this informs the reader that; this suggests that

A **B-grade** answer begins exploration. Explain to students that this means giving alternative interpretations. To move from a C grade to a B grade, students can be advised to use the following introductory sentences: the interpretation is; the writer might also be trying to show that; it could also show. The key is to show that there is more than one way of looking at it.

An **A-grade** answer analyses. Explain to students that this involves looking closely. To explain the zoom technique, whereby they select one word from the quotation they have and explain the meaning and effect of that word. To move towards an A grade from a B grade, students can be advised to use introductory sentences: if I look closer; looking deeper into this, I can see that; the word '...' is used to show that

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED



The example below demonstrates how to use the phrases.

Event	C Grade (Explain)	B Grade (Explore)	A Grade (Evaluate)
'Will found himself working Marcus's visits into the fabric of his day.'	Marcus's visited Will in the day.	It <i>also shows</i> that Marcus's visits were important because they happened every day.	A fabric is a piece of cloth in proper sense literally unless understood by its abstract meaning. A deeper understanding perhaps Marcus's visits were something that Will allowed to become a normal part of his everyday life so normal, frequent and regular that Marcus's visits hardly made a difference and was

Here is the same example, but in the form of a paragraph.

The quote 'Will found himself working Marcus's visits into the fabric of his day' means that Marcus's visits were important because they happened every day. A fabric is a piece of cloth in proper sense literally unless understood by its abstract meaning. A deeper understanding perhaps Marcus's visits were something that Will allowed to become a normal part of his everyday life so normal, frequent and regular that Marcus's visits hardly made a difference and was

### Important Events: Evaluation Tasks

It is worth noting that this activity should perhaps only be completed with students who have completed the previous activity, as it should be taught that evaluative comments come after the analysis. When evaluating, they can use the following introductory sentences: Hornby is trying to; Hornby does this because; the effect this has on me / the reader is; this is an effective technique because. Evaluating means imagining. Explain that they need to connect with the writer and literature. Do this and show an appreciation of what the writer is trying to achieve through literature.

### Characters: Reminder

#### Quotation

'Do you mind me having boyfriends?'

'Yeah, right. It's me who's the fantasist. I wanted to believe you had a son, so I let my imagination run riot.'

'Just because you come round here for a cup of tea after school doesn't mean I can stop your mum...' etc.

'You should go and see him. Tell him what you think of him. I would. Jerk. I'll come with you if you like.'

'They're definitely my favourite animal. Well, second favourite. After dolphins. They're definitely my favourite bird, though.'

### Characters: Analytical Tasks

Quotation	Literal Meaning	Abstract Meaning
'... the party's gone on too long and I want to go home' (p. 65).	The fun of the party she was at has ended and Fiona needed to leave.	Perhaps these words in Fiona's story suggest that Fiona is tired of being a single mother and of having to always take care of her children, saying she needs a break of maybe a longer break - and she is at the point of suggesting that her Dad looked after him from
'Will wrestled with his conscience, grappled it to the ground and sat on it until he couldn't hear a squeak out of it.' (p. 143).	Will fought with something and pushed it onto the ground until it was completely dead.	Will managed to extinguish something that had started to care about Marcus temporarily put out of his mind
'All of a sudden you became better-looking, a better lover, a better person.' (p. 21).	One actually improved in every way.	If one decided to choose to be good and not exploited and mistreated in every way see you as good in every way

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Quotation	Literal Meaning	
<i>'...because it seemed to Will that Fiona was a peculiarly contemporary creation, with her Seventies albums, her Eighties politics and her Nineties foot lotion...'</i> (p. 111)	To Will, Fiona was a strange person.	Will could not understand her character at one moment and the next time the feeling was in order and she wanted to be loved.
<i>'There would always be one more last straw. Ellie was killing Katrina, and Marcus was killing Fiona...'</i> (p. 258)	The straw is never finished and Katrina and Marcus were attacking Fiona.	Ellie and Marcus continued to be angry by their actions to what they thought was right.
<i>'So Christmas was the season of anger and bitterness and regret and recrimination, of drinking binges, of frantic and laughably inadequate industry...'</i> (p. 124)	Christmas was a sad time with much drinking and an industry that was not adequate.	Christmas and even the family came from much use and came from Father and Mother having to work hard.
<i>'He was in the process of wondering whether the British Gas Wildlife Photographer of the Year Exhibition could possibly be any duller than it sounded, when the telephone rang.'</i> (p. 75)	Will thought the British Gas Wildlife Photographer of the Year Exhibition sounded dull.	Will's excitement that such an exhibition was uninspired and continued to be dull.
<i>'That would be like forgetting when England had won the World Cup...'</i> (p. 194)	It was like forgetting a football score.	Forgetting a complete score could not destroy the memory of the victory.
<i>'A social historian of the future would probably be able to date the room to within a twenty-four hour period'</i> (p. 195)	Social historians in future can record Ali's room in twenty four hours.	The way culture and society changed all the time for a year.
<i>'Life was, after all, like air.'</i> (p. 256)	Life and air are the same thing.	Will could not live without air to and he had to live.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Key Event in Plot	Literal Meaning	Abstract
Marcus hears of Fiona and Roger splitting up and at the same time we are told that Marcus has a tendency to be misunderstood.	<i>This is the start of the story; Marcus and Fiona are obviously central to the story and are needed for the rest of the events to unfold.</i>	<i>From the beginning, we are told that Marcus has a mum who is his only friend – whilst we are told that Marcus is often misunderstood, the reader is told of the situation at the beginning which is that his single mother mum and his relationship is off-balance that he is out of control.</i>
Will meets Angie.	Will meets a lady to take out.	<i>Will's meeting Angie symbolises a new life for mothers, reminding us and showing that Fiona is of course one herself.</i>
Will pretends he is a single father for the SPAT events.	Will lies.	This indicates how Will is willing to do whatever he wants and shows his character in the novel.
Marcus is bullied again, this time at the newsagents.	Marcus is bullied again.	Marcus's life is indicative of the struggles of a teenager which is one of being bullied.
The incident of the apparently dead duck.	Marcus thinks he has killed a duck.	This event shows Marcus's struggle in the novel to be clumsy and insecure, leading to uncertainty about his role.
Marcus finds his mum's suicide note resulting in his becoming even more protective of her.	The finding of her note makes Marcus more worried about his mum.	The event reveals the situation of Marcus's mum is someone who needs solid support. In his new life in London, the one person he can rely on is useless. Though not in the best way, Marcus is protective of his mum, which is a sign of a caring person.
Marcus begins to orchestrate a plot to get Will and his mum together as he thinks it will save her.	Marcus plots to get his mother and Will together.	This event shows how much Marcus loves his mum and how much he wants stability in her relationship for her will make her life better from wanting to kill herself as a result of her situation.
The idea of Will and his lifestyle of being empty is further explored.	Will has an empty level.	At certain points in the novel, Will is shown to be completely vacant of any real feelings. In the exploration of Will's life we also see a culture that would surround his lifestyle in many ways.
Marcus's friend Ellie finally begins to accept him.	Marcus gets accepted as someone's friend.	This event reveals how Marcus is finally properly adjusting to his new life in London.
The novel ends with Will becoming more caring and taking Ali and Will out and with Marcus finally becoming a typical teenager who is now embarrassed by his mum.	Will becomes a little more caring of others and a little less selfish.	This event shows how everyone has grown – it shows that all characters have achieved something better and more successful than they have been.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Structure: Evaluation Tasks

Quotation	Interpretation 1	Interpretation 2
<i>'Marcus was older than Ali now.'</i>	Marcus had aged more than Ali.	Ali was the younger of the two boys.
<i>'How much would you have given for Marcus to be caught smoking with his mates a few months ago?'</i>	It would be good to give a lot of money for Marcus to get caught smoking.	It was inevitable that Marcus would be caught smoking with his mates in the past.
<i>'The truth was that this version of Marcus really wasn't so hard to cope with.'</i>	There are different versions of Marcus's life in the novel.	Marcus at times had been hard to tolerate.
<i>'I used to want him to marry mum...'</i>	Marcus is unstable and changes too much regarding his choices for his mum.	To Marcus, his mum is too unready to get married.
<i>'But all three of them had to lose things in order to gain other things.'</i>	All three had to lose their material possessions to get other material possessions.	They all had to exchange things with each other.
<i>'I bloody hate Joni Mitchell.'</i>	This is an angry comment.	Marcus hates what his Mum likes.

**Form: Reminder**

*Direct the students to responding in a similar way to the following.*

From the above list, *About a Boy* could be described first as a work of fiction. I think this is because it is a good way to show the experiences of others within a certain social and cultural context. It gives the reader an approximate, yet insightful vision of how life really would have been like for a young boy in a novel during the time the novel is set in.

INSPECTION COPY

**COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED**



Form: Evaluation Tasks

Quotation	Interpretation of form being used	Explanation
<i>'Will wondered sometimes – not very often, because historical speculation wasn't something he indulged in very often – how people like him would have survived sixty years ago.'</i>	<i>This could be seen as a combination of fiction and allegory.</i>	<i>Although the story description of Will's brought into question the lifestyle of the to that of the 1930s legitimately stay home. Meaning that a man assertive – be the more active – and situation to communicate between life for me 1930s.</i>
<i>'The centre depressed him. He hadn't set foot inside a place with classrooms and corridors and home-made posters for nearly twenty years, and he had forgotten that British education smelt of disinfectant.'</i>	The centre makes Will feel sad. He hadn't been in one for long time.	The centre which can of school in general old fashioned, clinical sterile – somewhere and where others might

Form: Synthesis Tasks

Nouns

'Manfred lived in my **street**, in my **town**, **Regensburg**. We went to the same **school**, played **football** in the same **team**. You could say we grew up like twin brothers who became best friends. When he got married to Jutta, I was his best man. And when little Inga was born, I was made her **godfather**. We joined the navy on the very same day.' This was only a few **months** before the war began. 'All the way through our training in the Kriegsmarine, the **German** navy, Manfred was at my side. And then we found ourselves **serv**ing on the same ship.'

Adjectives

'Manfred **lived** in my We went to the same school, played football in the same team. You could say we grew up like twin brothers who became best friends. When he got married to Jutta, I was his best man. And when little Inga was born, I was made her godfather. We joined the navy on the very same day.' This was only a few months before the war began. 'All the way through our training in the Kriegsmarine, the German navy, Manfred was at my side. And then we found ourselves serving on the same ship.'

Simile/metaphor

'Manfred lived in my street, in my town, Regensburg. We went to the same school, played football in the same team. You could say we **grew up like twin brothers** who became best friends. When he got married to Jutta, I was his best man. And when little Inga was born, I was made her godfather. We joined the navy on the very same day.' This was only a few months before the war began. 'All the way through our training in the Kriegsmarine, the German navy, Manfred was at my side. And then we found ourselves serving on the same ship.'

Verb

'Manfred lived in my We **went** to the same school, played football in the same team. You could say we grew up like twin brothers who became best friends. When he got married to Jutta, I was his best man. And when little Inga was born, I was made her godfather. We joined the navy on the very same day.' This was only a few months before the war began. 'All the way through our training in the Kriegsmarine, the German navy, Manfred was at my side. And then we found ourselves serving on the same ship.'

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT PROTECTED



## Ideas: Evaluation Tasks

### Getting Started

1. **What is the real meaning of the book's title?**  
*About a Boy* refers to the Nirvana song 'About a Girl'.

### Going Further

1. **How important is Nirvana's music in the book?**  
It symbolises rebelliousness and by extension, a new age, which is one of postmodern confusion.
2. **The story in the book is set in 1993. Discuss in pairs in what ways the character reflects the culture of the time.**  
Ellie reflects the culture by being a figure of youthful rebellion. She is also female while the previous accomplishments of males were becoming increasingly manifest in the Nineties.
3. **Why do you think Kurt Cobain is so important to Ellie and how does she express this?**  
He is a symbol of youth and successful rebellion.
4. **'He wasn't a fraud. He was Robert De Niro.' What is your interpretation of this?**  
Will sees himself as very legitimately playing the part of an actor playing a great role.

### Extension

1. **In addition to Nirvana's music, what other types and examples of culture are discussed in the book? What effect do they have on your interpretation of the story?**  
Direct the student to Fiona's taste in music (Bob, Joni, Mozart), which shows she has a connection to the past, which includes Hornby's mention of her Eighties politics while she also has a taste for products of the Nineties revealing her to be postmodern. On the other hand, Will's more direct contemporary interest which is reflected in his character. All the cultural references in the novel reveals the postmodern experience of the time, i.e. Brent Cross, shopping mall, etc.
2. **Why does Hornby mention the actor Macaulay Culkin in Chapter 3? What is he doing there?**  
in pairs.  
Relates to *Home Alone* and avoiding the horrors of being at school and instead being in a house where a tutor teach him there.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT  
PROTECTED

