



Rewarding Learning

ADVANCED
General Certificate of Education
2011

English Literature

Assessment Unit A2 2

assessing

The Study of Prose – Theme Based

[AL221]



MONDAY 23 MAY, MORNING

**RESOURCE BOOKLET
FOR SECTION A ONLY**

1 War: *The Things They Carried*

True war stories do not generalize. They do not indulge in abstraction or analysis.

For example: War is hell. As a moral declaration the old truism seems perfectly true, yet because it abstracts, because it generalizes, I can't believe it with my stomach. Nothing turns inside.

It comes down to gut instinct. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe.

This one does it for me. I've told it before – many times, many versions – but here's what actually happened.

We crossed that river and marched west into the mountains. On the third day, Curt Lemon stepped on a booby-trapped 105 round. He was playing catch with Rat Kiley, laughing, and then he was dead. The trees were thick; it took nearly an hour to cut an LZ for the dustoff.

Later, higher in the mountains, we came across a baby VC water buffalo. What it was doing there I don't know – no farms or paddies – but we chased it down and got a rope around it and led it along to a deserted village where we set up for the night. After supper Rat Kiley went over and stroked its nose.

He opened up a can of C rations, pork and beans, but the baby buffalo wasn't interested. Rat shrugged.

He stepped back and shot it through the right front knee. The animal did not make a sound. It went down hard, then got up again, and Rat took careful aim and shot off an ear. He shot it in the hindquarters and in the little hump at its back. He shot it twice in the flanks. It wasn't to kill; it was to hurt. He put the rifle muzzle up against the mouth and shot the mouth away. Nobody said much. The whole platoon stood there watching, feeling all kinds of things, but there wasn't a great deal of pity for the baby water buffalo. Curt Lemon was dead. Rat Kiley had lost his best friend in the world. Later in the week he would write a long personal letter to the guy's sister, who would not write back, but for now it was a question of pain. He shot off the tail. He shot away chunks of meat below the ribs. All around us there was the smell of smoke and filth and deep greenery, and the evening was humid and very hot. Rat went to automatic. He shot randomly, almost casually, quick little spurts in the belly and butt. Then he reloaded, squatted down, and shot it in the left front knee. Again the animal fell hard and tried to get up, but this time it couldn't quite make it. It wobbled and went down sideways. Rat shot it in the nose. He bent forward and whispered something, as if talking to a pet, then he shot it in the throat. All the while the baby buffalo was silent, or almost silent, just a light bubbling sound where the nose had been. It lay very still. Nothing moved except the eyes, which were enormous, the pupils shiny black and dumb.

Rat Kiley was crying. He tried to say something, but then cradled his rifle and went off by himself.

The rest of us stood in a ragged circle around the baby buffalo. For a time no one spoke. We had witnessed something essential, something brand-new and profound, a piece of the world so startling there was not yet a name for it.

Somebody kicked the baby buffalo.

It was still alive, though just barely, just in the eyes.

"Amazing," Dave Jensen said. "My whole life, I never seen anything like it."

"Never?"

"Not hardly. Not once."

Kiowa and Mitchell Sanders picked up the baby buffalo. They hauled it across the open square, hoisted it up, and dumped it in the village well. Afterward, we sat waiting for Rat to get himself together.

"Amazing," Dave Jensen kept saying. "A new wrinkle. I never seen it before."

Mitchell Sanders took out his yo-yo. "Well, that's Nam," he said. "Garden of Evil. Over here, man, every sin's real fresh and original."

How do you generalize?

War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead.

The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance, that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat. You stare out at tracer rounds unwinding through the dark like brilliant red ribbons. You crouch in ambush as a cool, impassive moon rises over the nighttime paddies. You admire the fluid symmetries of troops on the move, the harmonies of sound and shape and proportion, the great sheets of metal-fire streaming down from a gunship, the illumination rounds, the white phosphorus, the purple orange glow of napalm, the rocket's red glare. It's not pretty, exactly. It's astonishing. It fills the eye. It commands you. You hate it, yes, but your eyes do not. Like a killer forest fire, like cancer under a microscope, any battle or bombing raid or artillery barrage has the aesthetic purity of absolute moral indifference – a powerful, implacable beauty – and a true war story will tell the truth about this, though the truth is ugly.

To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. At its core, perhaps, war is just another name for death, and yet any soldier will tell you, if he tells the truth, that proximity to death brings with it a corresponding proximity to life. After a firefight, there is always the immense pleasure of aliveness. The trees are alive. The grass, the soil – everything. All around you things are purely living, and you among them, and the aliveness makes you tremble. You feel an intense, out-of-the-skin awareness of your living self – your truest self, the human being you want to be and then become by the force of wanting it. In the midst of evil you want to be a good man. You want decency. You want justice and courtesy and human concord, things you never knew you wanted. There is a kind of largeness to it, a kind of godliness. Though it's odd, you're never more alive than when you're almost dead. You recognize what's valuable. Freshly, as if for the first time, you love what's best in yourself and in the world, all that might be lost. At the hour of dusk you sit at your foxhole and look out on a wide river turning pinkish red, and at the mountains beyond, and although in the morning you must cross the river and go into the mountains and do terrible things and maybe die, even so, you find yourself studying the fine colors on the river, you feel wonder and awe at the setting of the sun, and you are filled with a hard, aching love for how the world could be and always should be, but now is not.

Mitchell Sanders was right. For the common soldier, at least, war has the feel – the spiritual texture – of a great ghostly fog, thick and permanent. There is no clarity. Everything swirls. The old rules are no longer binding, the old truths no longer true. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, love into hate, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery. The vapors suck you in. You can't tell where you are, or why you're there, and the only certainty is overwhelming ambiguity.

In war you lose your sense of the definite, hence your sense of truth itself, and therefore it's safe to say that in a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true.

From: © The Things They Carried, Copyright 1990 by Tim O'Brien

2 Women in Society: *The Illusionist*

The Illusionist by Jennifer Johnston - Unfortunately due to copyright restrictions the extract cannot be reproduced. The extract begins in the middle of page 99 with the opening sentence: "The fox came back." The extract finishes on page 102 at the end of the first paragraph, with the phrase "...we ate our meal in a painful silence."

3 The Outsider: *The Butcher Boy*

But it didn't matter for me and ma we were great pals after that any chance I got I said well ma do you want any messages up the town sometimes she did and sometimes she didn't but I always made sure to ask her anyway. She gave me my dinner and says Francie if you ever have a sweetheart you'll tell her the truth and never let her down won't you?

I says I will ma and she says I know you will son and then we'd just sit there for hours sometimes just staring into the firegrate only there never was a fire ma never bothered to light one and I wasn't sure how to go about it. I said what fire do we want its just as good sitting here staring into the ashes.

I don't know what night it was I think it was the night the town won the cup da had to be left home it was one of the railwaymen dropped him at the door. I stood on the landing but all I could hear was mumbling and coins dropping on the floor. I was going back into the room when I heard something breaking I wasn't sure what it was but it sounded like glass. Then I heard da cursing the town and everybody in it he said he could have been somebody hadn't he met Eddie Calvert who else in the town had ever met Eddie Calvert who else in the town even *knew* who Eddie Calvert was? Who? he said, Who? He shouted at ma: Do you hear me talking to you?

She mustn't have said anything for the next thing he was off into the speech about his father leaving them when he was seven and how nobody understood him he said she lost interest in his music long ago and she didn't care it wasn't his fault she was the way she was then he said she was mad like all the Magees, lying about the house from the day they married never did a hand's turn why wouldn't he go to the pubs she had never made a dinner for him in his life?

Something else broke crockery or something and then ma was crying: Don't blame me because you can't face the truth about yourself, any chances you had you drank them away!

It went on a long time I was just standing there listening to it all I knew I should have gone down but that's no use now is it I didn't did I? I didn't go down and that's that. I was trying to listen to the cars going by on the Newtown Road and saying to myself: I can't hear anything in the kitchen now it must be all over.

But it wasn't all over and when I stopped listening to the cars I'd hear him: God's curse the fucking day I ever set eyes on you!

The next day we got out of school early on account of the town winning the cup and when ma seen me at the back door she got all flustered and started making jokes and all this. Then she got her purse down off the window and says here Francie, there's sixpence – why don't you go on round to Mary's sweetshop and buy yourself a quarter of dolly mixtures? No ma I says, I won't buy dolly mixtures but I *will* buy two Flash Bars and a macaroon bar if I can can I? Of course you can she says. Now go on go on and her face was red and patchy and hot like she'd been sitting bent over the fire only there was no fire. It was a pity but Mary's was shut so I had to come back and tell ma. I wanted to see if I could still get keeping the sixpence. But when I tried to open the door it wouldn't. I knocked at the window but all I could hear was the tap ssssss. Ma must be up the stairs I said whistling and rolling the tanner round in my hand wondering would I get the Flash Bars after all or maybe six cough-no-more black toffees. Then I heard a clatter I thought I'd better get in the window to see what that was I thought maybe Grouse Armstrong or someone was in stealing the sausages again but when I got into the kitchen who's there only ma standing there and a chair sideways on the table. What's that doing up there ma I says it was fuse wire belonging to da just dangling but she didn't say what it was doing there she was just stood there picking at her nail and going to say something and then not saying it. I told her Mary's was shut could I still keep the sixpence she said I could Yee *ha!* I said and bombed off out to the border shop to get six cough-no-mores but then when

I got there I said two Flash Bars and a macaroon please. When I got back ma [unclear] and
up in the chair by the dead fire for a minute I thought she was shivering with the cold. [unclear]
she looked at me and said: You know you were only five pounds weight when you were
Francie.

© *The Butcher Boy* by Patrick McCabe published by Picador Publishers 1993 ISBN 9780330328746. Reproduced
with the permission of Marianne Gunn O'Connor Creative Agency (Electronic rights)

4 Childhood: *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

There was a huge brown suitcase under our parents' bed. It was like leather but it made a noise like wood. There were creases on it. When I rubbed it hard a brown stain came off my hand. There was nothing in it. Sinbad got in. He lay down like he did in bed. I closed it over.

—What's it like?

—Nice.

I got the clasp on one side and shoved it in; it made a big click. I waited for Sinbad to do something. I did the other one as well.

—What's it like now?

—Still nice.

I went away. I stamped my feet on the floor, bang bang on the lino, and I got the door and I swung it so there'd be a whoosh and closed it with just less than a slam. My da went mad when we slammed doors. I waited. I wanted to hear Sinbad kicking, crying, scratching his hands on the lid. Then I'd let him out.

I waited.

I sang as I went down the stairs.

—SON YOU ARE A BACHELOR BOY—

AND THAT'S THE WAY TO STAY-EE-AY—

I crept back up; I got over the creaks. I slid to the door. It was brilliant. But suddenly I was up on my feet, through the door; I was scared.

—Sinbad?

I pushed down the lock thing to release the clasp. It sprang out and hurt my hand.

—Francis.

The other one wouldn't come up, the lock thing. I pulled up a corner of the lid but it only came up a small bit; I couldn't see anything. I got about two fingers in but I couldn't feel anything and I scraped the skin. I kept the fingers there so air would get in, but then I felt teeth on them, I thought I did.

I heard a whimper. It was me.

I closed the door after me, so nothing could follow. I held onto the banister all the way. It was dark in the hall. My da was in the living room but the television wasn't on.

I told him.

He just got up; he didn't say anything. I didn't tell him I'd locked it, just that I couldn't unlock it. When he got into the hall he waited for me.

—Show me, he said.

He followed me up the stairs. He could have easily gone quicker than me but he didn't. Sinbad would be alright.

—Alright in there, Francis?

—He might be asleep, I said.

My da pushed and the lock clicked out. He lifted the lid back and Sinbad was still in there, wide awake; his eyes were open. He turned on his stomach, pushed up, stood up and stepped out. He didn't say anything. He stood there. He didn't look at us or anything.

Da thought he was great because he could sit in the same room as the television and never look at it. He only looked at The News, that was all. He read the paper or a book or he dozed. I watched the cigarette burning nearer and nearer to his fingers but he always woke up on time. He had a chair of his own. We had to get out of it when he came home from work. Me and Sinbad and our ma with the babies on her lap could fit into it. There was one day it was raining out, lashing; we all sat in the chair for ages just listening to the rain. The room got darker. There was a nice smell off my ma, food and soap.

When I called Sinbad Sinbad he wouldn't answer. Me and Kevin got him and gave him a dead leg on each side for not doing what we told him. He was crying but he didn't make any noises. I had to look at his face to see that he was crying.

—Sinbad.
He closed his eyes.
—Sinbad.

I had to stop calling him Sinbad. He didn't look like Sinbad the Sailor now any more. His cheeks were flatter. I was still way bigger than him but it didn't matter as much. I could kick in fights but the way he went scared me. He let me give him a hiding and then he just went away.

He didn't want the night-light on any more. When my ma turned it on before she turned off the main light he got up and turned it off. The light had been for him. He'd picked it. It was a rabbit that went red when the bulb inside him was on. The room was completely dark now. I wanted to turn the night-light back on but I couldn't; it was Sinbad's. I'd never needed it. I'd said it was stupid. I'd given out about it, said I couldn't sleep with it on. For a week my ma turned on the light and Sinbad turned it off. He turned off the light and I was trapped in the full dark.

Da had Sinbad. He was holding one of his arms, standing way over him. He hadn't hit him yet. Sinbad's head was down. He wasn't pushing or pulling to get away.

—Christ almighty, said my da.
Sinbad had put sugar in Mister Hanley's petrol tank.
—Why do you do these things? Why are you doing them?
Sinbad answered him.
—The devil tempts me.
I saw da's fingers open their grip on Sinbad's arm. He held Sinbad's face.
—Stop crying now; come on. There's no need for tears.
I started singing.

—I'LL TELL MY MA WHEN I GO HOME—
THE BOYS WON'T LEAVE THE GIRLS ALONE—

Da joined in. He picked up Sinbad and spun him. Then it was my turn.

The first time I heard it I recognised it but I didn't know what it was. I knew the sound. It came from the kitchen. I was in the hall by myself. I was lying on my stomach. I was charging a Rolls-Royce into the skirting board. There was a chip in the paint and it was getting bigger every time. It made a great thump. My ma and da were talking.

Then I heard the smack. The talking stopped. I grabbed the Rolls-Royce away from the skirting board. The kitchen door whooshed open. Ma came out. She turned quick at the stairs so I didn't have to get out of her way, and went upstairs, going quicker towards the top.

I recognised it now. I knew what the smack had been, and the bedroom door closed.

Da was alone in the kitchen. He didn't come out. Deirdre was crying in the pram; she'd woken up. The back door opened and closed. I heard Da's steps on the path. I heard him going from the back to the front. I saw his shape through the mountainy glass of the front door. The shape broke into just colours before he got to the gate and the colours disappeared. I couldn't tell which way he'd gone. I stayed where I was. Ma would come back down. Deirdre was crying.

He'd hit her. Across the face; smack. I tried to imagine it. It didn't make sense. I'd heard it; he'd hit her. She'd come out of the kitchen, straight up to their bedroom.

Across the face.

I watched. I listened. I stayed in. I guarded her.
Nothing happened.

I didn't know what I'd do. If I was there he wouldn't do it again, that was all I wanted. I stayed awake. I listened. I went to the bathroom and put cold water on my pyjamas. To keep me awake. To stop me from getting cozy and warm and slipping asleep. I left the door ajar and listened. Nothing happened. I spent ages doing my homework so I could stay up longer. I wrote out pages from my English book and pretended I had to do it. I learnt spellings I hadn't been given. I got her to check me on them, never him.

—S.u.b.m.a.r.i.n.e.

—Good boy. Substandard?

—S.u.b.s.t.a.n.d.a.r.d.

—Good boy. Great. Have you more to do?

—Yes.

—What? Show me.

—Writing out.

She looked at the pages in the book I showed her, two pages with no pictures on them, and at the pages I'd done already.

—Why are you doing all these?

—Handwriting.

—Oh good.

I did it at the kitchen table, then followed her into the living room. When she was putting the girls to bed he was in the room with me, so it was alright. I enjoyed the writing out; I liked doing it.

He smiled at me.

I loved him. He was my da. It didn't make sense. She was my ma.

I went into the kitchen. I was alone. The noises were all upstairs. I slapped the table. Not too loud. I slapped it again. It was the right type of sound. It was duller though, hollow. Maybe it would be different from outside. In the hall where I'd been. Maybe he'd done that, smacked the table. When he was in a temper. That was alright. I did it again. I couldn't make my mind up. I was tempted. I used the side of my hand. She'd come out of the kitchen, straight up to their bedroom. She'd said nothing. She hadn't let me see her face. She'd started going faster before she got to the landing. Not because he'd slapped the table. I did it again. I tried to lose my temper and then do it. Maybe because he'd lost his temper. Maybe that was why she'd gone past me up the stairs, hiding. Maybe.

I didn't know.

I went back into the living room. He wanted to check my spellings. I let him. I got one wrong, deliberately. I didn't know why I did it. I just did it when I was doing it; I left out the r in Submarine.

I listened. I watched. I did my homework.

I came home at Friday lunchtime.

—I'm in the best desk.

It was true. I'd made no mistakes all week. All my sums had been right. I'd got through the twelve-times table inside thirty seconds. My handwriting was

—Much improved.

I'd put my stuff in my bag and walked up to the front of the room and across to the top desk. Henna shook my hand.

—See how long you can stay there now, he said. —Good man, Mister Clarke.

I was beside David Geraghty.

—Howdy-dooty.

—I'm in the best desk, I told my da later.

—Is that right? he said. —That's terrific.

He shook my hand.

—Put it there. Submarine?

—S.u.b.m.a.r.i.n.e.

—Good man.

Permission to reproduce all copyright material has been applied for.
In some cases, efforts to contact copyright holders may have been unsuccessful and CCEA
will be happy to rectify any omissions of acknowledgement in future if notified.