

## STAGE 1 ENGLISH

### ASSESSMENT TYPE 1: TEXT ANALYSIS

The novel *About a Boy*, written by Nick Hornby explores significant issues which are highlighted within a humorous context. Techniques such as irony, ridiculous situations and vivid imagery encourage the audience to laugh while simultaneously incorporating and challenging the reader to think about serious issues such as mental health and relationships. Two sections from this text that illustrate this well are both the Dead Duck and Godfather scene from the novel.

An important technique in developing the humour within *About a Boy* is irony. Irony is humour based on opposites and contradiction, which makes us laugh due to the sometimes mismatched characteristics of specific situations. An example of this is the Dead Duck scene, where the hilarity of Marcus killing a duck with a loaf of bread foreshadows the solemn event of Fiona's attempted suicide. The initial humour of Marcus killing the duck is slapstick, which is evident when the text states *"Marcus couldn't believe it. Dead. A dead duck. OK, he'd been trying to hit it on the head with a piece of sandwich, but he tried to do all sorts of things, and none of them had ever happened before"*, and when Will says *"That's not a sandwich, that's a bloody French loaf. No wonder it keeled over"* which contrasts with the swiftly changed tone of Fiona's attempt to kill herself, shown when the novel asserts *"His mum was half on, half off the sofa: her head was lolling towards the floor. She was white, and there was a pool of sick on the carpet."* This makes the audience think about the seriousness of the issue of mental health, as this event is so unexpected. Irony is also evident within the Godfather scene, where Christina and John ask Will to be the godfather of their daughter. This is ironic as the audience has already been informed of Will's one-dimensional and petty personality along with his dislike for children. This is evident when the text states *"any desire for a family of your own yet?" said John. "I would rather eat one of Barney's nappies."* And when the novel says *'we've always thought you have hidden depths,' said John. "Ah, but you see I haven't. I really am this shallow.'* The sarcasm of Will's tone highlights the true irony in a person who clearly despises children being asked to be a godfather.

Another important technique in displaying the humour within *About a Boy* is ridiculous situations. These are situations within the storyline that are unexpected, impossible, silly or embarrassing. This technique is evident in the Dead Duck scene, as the chances of Marcus hitting and killing the duck are near to impossible, and the method which he does this is ludicrous; throwing a rock-hard

baguette into the pond for kicks. It is also humorous that Marcus believes he was not at fault for this tragedy, which is evident when the text states *"How come he managed to pick a duck that pathetic? There must have been something wrong with it. It was probably just about to die from a heart attack or something."* Another aspect that makes the Dead Duck day ridiculous is that Will's sole purpose in being with Marcus and Suzie was that he was masquerading as a single parent - when in fact he had no child at all. The Godfather scene also displays humour through ridiculous situations, shown through Will's reaction to being asked to be a Godfather. This is evident when Will replies *"Godfather? Church and things? Birthday presents? Adoption if you're killed in an air crash?... Listen. I'm touched that you asked. But I can't think of anything worse"*. This is humorous as it is not a regular response to an ordinarily humbling request, making the situation ridiculous.

The final important technique in developing humour within *About A Boy* is vivid imagery. Imagery is used to create an amusing or ridiculous picture in our minds. This technique is evident within the Dead Duck scene, where the audience pictures the image of the duck Marcus killed floating solemnly on the surface of the water. *"Will, Suzie, Megan and Marcus stood on the path at the edge of the lake, staring at the dead body floating in the water."* This is humorous as it provides a vibrant illustration which aids in generating a ridiculous scene.

Hornby has cleverly used humorous techniques to keep us entertained and thinking concurrently. These three techniques are very effective in their aim of amusing the audience, although personally I believe irony was the most successful humorous technique used within the novel as it is used frequently as it is unfailingly funny.

Word count 777 words.