

Theme – ‘Home Before Night’, ‘The Plough and the Stars’ and ‘The King’s Speech’

Full list of questions, organised by type: Theme or Issue

Questions which focus on key moments / dramatic or interesting moments in texts:

1. “Important themes are often expressed in key moments in texts” Compare how the authors of the three comparative texts studied by you used key moments to heighten your awareness of an important theme.
2. “There are key moments in a text when a theme comes sharply into focus” Discuss.
3. “The dramatic presentation of a theme or issue can add greatly to the impact of narrative texts”
4. “Exploring a theme or issue through different texts allows us to make interesting comparisons” (70)
5. (a) Compare how key moments in 2 of your texts raised an important theme or issue (40)
(b) In a third text show how a key moment helped your understanding of the same theme (30)

Questions on what you’ve learned from studying this theme (personal & universal insights)

1. “Studying a theme or issue enables a reader to form both personal and universal reflections on that theme or issue” Discuss in relation to two or more texts.
2. “A reader’s view of a theme or issue can be either changed or reinforced through interaction with texts.”

3. “A theme or issue explored in a group of narrative texts can offer us valuable insights into life”

4. “The comparative study of a theme or issue allows the reader to gain a variety of viewpoints on that theme or issue”

(a) Describe the viewpoint on your chosen theme in one text you have studied.

(b) Compare the viewpoint on the same theme in your other two texts. (40)

5. “The study of a theme or issue can offer a reader valuable lessons and insights.”

(a) Identify and discuss at least one valuable lesson or insight that you gained through the study of a theme or issue in one text on your comparative course.

(b) Compare at least one valuable lesson or insight that you gained, from studying the same theme or issue (as discussed in (a) above), in two other texts on your comparative course. The valuable lesson or insight may be the same, or different, to the one discussed in (a) above.(40)

Questions on the extent to which the issue is resolved:

1. “In many texts, a theme or issue may not be resolved to the complete satisfaction of the reader” Discuss

2. (a) Discuss the extent to which a theme or issue is resolved to your satisfaction in one text on your comparative course.

(b) Compare the extent to which the same theme or issue is resolved to your satisfaction in two other texts on your comparative course.

Structuring your answer

You should aim to write on **three points** in your essay.

Introduction

- Name the texts and the authors.
- Clearly state the theme you have studied.
- Give your response to the question and list the subheadings which you believe answer the question.

Paragraph One

- Discuss the first text under the first subheading.

- Begin with a general statement about the subheading: : “Jack, the central character in ‘Home Before Night’ struggles to escape the confines of a world in which he does not feel he belongs.”
- Use a key moment or moments to support your point.
- Include relevant quotation.

Paragraph Two

- Discuss the second text under the first subheading, comparing and contrasting it to the points you made about the first text.
- Begin with a general statement about the subheading in which you outline the main differences/similarities: “Nora, the central character in ‘The Plough and the Stars’ also struggles to break free from a world in which she feels she does not belong.” Make sure that your statement explains how the subheading answers the question.
- Qualify/refine this statement by saying to what extent this is true in each of the texts. “Nora, however, finds it harder to escape her world than does Jack.”
- Compare and contrast with the points you made in the first paragraph.
- Use key moments and quotations to support your points.

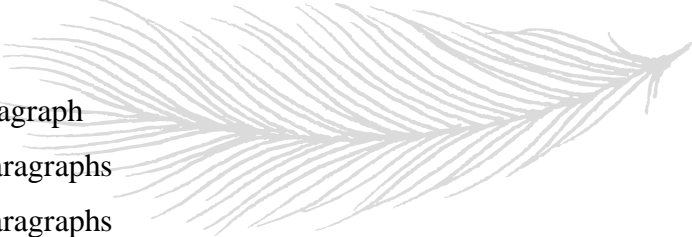
Paragraph Three

- Discuss the third text under the same subheading.
- Begin with a general statement in which you outline the main similarities/differences between all three texts.
- Use key moment/s and quotation to support your points.
- End this last paragraph with a statement which once again links all texts under the subheading and explains how the points made have answered the question.

Overview

- ✓ Your essay should be eleven paragraphs in length.
- ✓ Remember, some of the paragraphs may be quite long, but this is not a problem.
- ✓ Conclusion should refer back to the question and reflect on what you have learned through your study of the theme.

Structure



Introduction – 1 paragraph
Subheading 1 – 3 paragraphs
Subheading 2 – 3 paragraphs
Subheading 3 – 4 paragraphs
Conclusion – 1 paragraph

You should aim to write on **three points** in your essay.

Below is an outline of some the **subheadings on THEME** which you may wish to consider for your three texts:

- Characters wish to escape a world in which they do not feel they belong
- Characters need the support of those around them if they are to escape
- Accepting reality, however unpleasant, can help a character's chance of escape
- The author's treatment of the theme influences our view of that theme
- The ending of the text gives us an insight into the theme

Subheading One

In each of the three texts, the central characters wish to escape a world in which they do not feel they belong.

Jack in HBN is desperate to escape the life his parents and his circumstances have mapped out for him. He is deeply sensitive about his illegitimacy and would give anything to escape what was regarded at the time as a dubious start in life. He is unable to do so, however, as his mother brings it up at every opportunity. When she has had a few drinks on a day out, she tells strangers on the train that her neighbours warned her about taking a child when she didn't know 'where he was got or how he was got'. When Jack is older and hoping to escape the stigma of his birth and the poverty of his upbringing as a result of having won a scholarship to secondary school, his hopes are dashed by his mother boasting about her goodness in adopting Jack 'when his own didn't want him'.

Like Jack in HBN, Nora Clitheroe does not feel she belongs in the world in which she lives and is keen to escape her circumstances. She hates living in a tenement and does all she can to escape the confines of this impoverished, crowded, communal way of living. In Act 1,

before we even meet Nora, we hear her opinions. Mrs Gogan complains that Nora has said she wouldn't like to 'spend her last hour' in a tenement, let alone live her life there. Unlike Jack, who dreams of escaping to a world that is outside his own, Nora attempts to create her own world in her two tenement rooms. She has a lock put on the door in an effort to lock out the world she despises, and does everything she can to make her little home somewhere she can feel comfortable and happy. As Nora is an adult, she has a little more control over her world than does Jack in HBN and is, initially at least, in a stronger position to escape the aspects of it she finds unbearable. However, this backfires when she burns the letter from General Connolly. Despite Nora's best efforts, she cannot keep the outside world at bay forever. Captain Brennan calls to summon Clitheroe to the meeting and a frightened Nora begs Jack not to open the door to Brennan's knock. She tells him to "Pretend we're not in", and begs him to "forget everything tonight but our two selves".

Jack in HBN and Nora in TPATS both want to escape the world in which they live, but Jack has the advantage in that his circumstances are not as desperate as Nora's and, as a reasonably educated young man, he possesses a power to change his life in a way she does not, despite her strength of character.

Bertie in TKS also longs to escape a world in which he feels ill-suited to take his place. At first glance, his situation may not seem comparable to that of Jack in HBN or Nora in TKS as he is a member of an incredibly wealthy, powerful family which reigns over a quarter of the world's population. Nonetheless, Bertie is as miserable in his world as are Jack and Nora in theirs. He is required to play a public role, despite having a serious speech defect, and he can do nothing to escape this fate. He wants to live a life out of the spotlight, but that is impossible, given his position.

Bertie's agonised attempt to make a speech at the Wembley Exhibition shows just how unhappy he is in his world. As Duke of York, much is expected of him but he is incapable of taking his place in the world of power and politics.

For various reasons, Jack in HBN, Nora in TPATS and Bertie in TKS have not enough power to successfully escape the confines of the worlds they find restrictive and undesirable. The difference is that Jack and Bertie do eventually achieve a measure of success, unlike Nora,

who we see at the end of the play in an even poorer tenement room having lost her husband, her baby and her mind. Jack, as he grows up, finds in the theatre “the door he would escape through”, and Bertie –despite finding his royal duties onerous and ever-increasing – accepts his role and learns to speak in public with a reasonable level of competency.

Questions which focus on key moments / dramatic or interesting moments in texts:

1. “Important themes are often expressed in key moments in texts” Compare how the authors of the three comparative texts studied by you used key moments to heighten your awareness of an important theme.

This question lends itself perfectly to an ‘opening, key moment and ending’ approach to the theme.

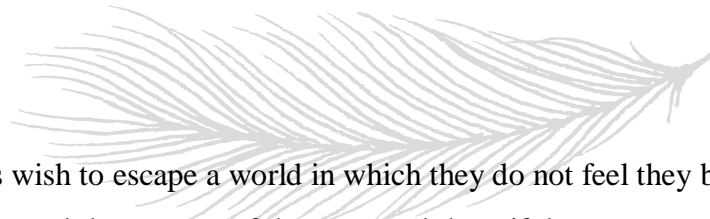
1. “Exploring a theme or issue through different texts allows us to make interesting comparisons” (70)

Areas from which comparisons might be drawn:

- role of plot/events in exploration of the theme
- contribution of significant characters
- author’s approach – comic, tragic, metaphorical, unusual, and so on
- narrative structure – early stages, key moments, resolution
- language, imagery, use of symbols
- visual and aural effects

Etc.

You could use any of the suggestions above, but you could also use the subheadings we discussed.



- Characters wish to escape a world in which they do not feel they belong
- Characters need the support of those around them if they are to escape
- Accepting reality, however unpleasant, can help a character's chance of escape
- The author's treatment of the theme influences our view of that theme
- The ending of the text gives us an insight into the theme

1. Comparing reasons people feel the need to escape is interesting.

Jack and Nora feel restricted by poverty and lack of opportunity.

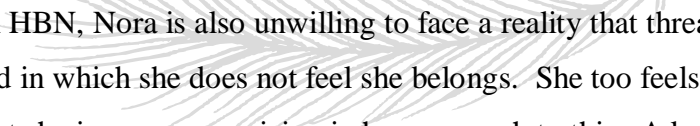
Bertie feels restricted by pressure and limitations of royal life / duties

2. Characters who accept reality and are willing to make some kind of compromise in their desire to escape have a better chance of achieving that escape.

Jack in HBN is initially unrealistic: key moment: belief that attending Presentation Brothers College would change his life and that he would be like one of the boys from his beloved 'Magnet' comic. To him, Presentation College seems a similar place to Greyfriars – the fictional English public school in 'The Magnet' – and a million miles from the schools and classmates he is used to. Greyfriars pupils are either Bullies (villains) or Chaps (heroes) and Jack has high hopes of being one of the Chaps.

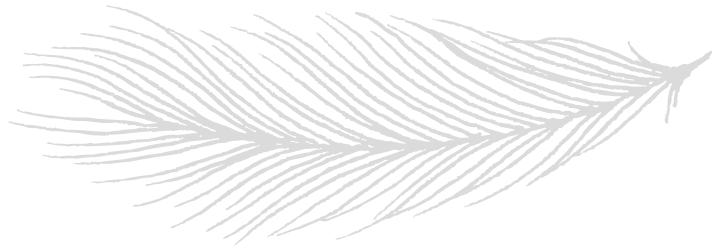
However, Jack's dream of escaping his working class life in this way is unrealistic and his hopes are dashed when his father accompanies him to school on the first day.

The other boys mock Da's obvious poverty and Jack lashes out in anger, punching one of them. He realises he is one of the Bullies rather than the Chaps and his sick realisation that he cannot escape the reality of his life is compounded later that day when the principal refuses to allow Jack to sell raffle tickets lest he be led 'into temptation'. Because the reality does not live up to Jack's dream and he is unwilling to accept this, his years in Presentation Brothers College are miserable and unproductive ones and do little to improve Jack's chances of escaping his background.



Like Jack in HBN, Nora is also unwilling to face a reality that threatens her escape from a world in which she does not feel she belongs. She too feels she deserves a better life but she is uncompromising in her approach to this. A key moment which shows this clearly is the revelation that she has burned the letter from General Connolly telling Clitheroe of his promotion within the ICA. (Give some detail about this key moment.) Like Jack in HBN, Nora's over-reaction to anything which threatens her quest for a better life actually damages her chances of achieving her goal. She cannot keep the harsh reality of the outside world at bay any more than can Jack in HBN and her bitter hurt and pain on discovering this only drives a further wedge between her and Clitheroe. (Give some detail here if you like.)

Bertie in TKS also wants to escape the restrictions of the world in which he lives. In his case, it is the ever-tightening net of royal duties and responsibilities. He does not face up to this reality at first and, like Jack in HBN and Nora in TPATS, he lashes out angrily and bitterly when it is suggested that he face the inevitable. A key moment which shows this clearly occurs when Logue and



www.aoifesnotes.com