

МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ И НАУКИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ
ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОЕ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ БЮДЖЕТНОЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЕ
УЧРЕЖДЕНИЕ ВЫСШЕГО ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ
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Кафедра английской филологии

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«ABOUT A BOY» BY NICK HORNBY

*Утверждено редакционно-издательским советом университета
в качестве практикума для домашнего чтения*

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Практикум ориентирован на организацию самостоятельной работы студентов-бакалавров при обучении на основе ФГОС ВПО.

Целью практикума является расширение активного словарного запаса студентов, а также комплексное развитие навыков как устной, так и письменной речи.

Практикум состоит из биографии автора, 12 секций и приложения. Каждая из секций содержит комментарии, объясняющие многое из повседневной английской жизни, идиомы и аллюзии, непонятные русскому читателю, что позволяет студентам овладеть языковым материалом в полном объеме и способствует лучшему пониманию текста.

Задания на транскрибирование обеспечивают фонетическую расшифровку лексических единиц и расширение активного и пассивного словаря.

В каждой секции предлагаются вопросы, которые помогут студентам сосредоточить внимание на концептуально важных в содержательном плане моментах.

В практикуме присутствуют и задания, направленные на развитие творческих способностей студентов, на активизацию их фоновых знаний о различных музыкальных направлениях и музыкантах, фильмах и актерах.

Приложение содержит литературно-критический материал по темам, исследуемым автором в произведении.

Практикум предназначен для студентов I–III курсов филологического факультета очной формы обучения направления «Филология» по дисциплине «Углубленный практический курс основного иностранного языка», осуществляющих планомерную самостоятельную подготовку к занятиям по домашнему чтению с книгой Ника Хорнби «About a Boy».

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Nick Hornby. Biography

Nick Hornby was born in Redhill, a small town south of London, in 1957. His parents divorced when he was 11. He graduated from Cambridge University and taught English to foreign students while reviewing for magazines including *Time Out* and *the Literary Review*.

Hornby has been married twice. He and his first wife have one son, born in 1992, who has autism. Hornby's second wife is producer Amanda Posey. They have two sons, born in 2003 and 2005. Hornby's sister, Gill, is married to writer Robert Harris.

His book about Arsenal Football Club called *Fever Pitch* was published in 1992. It won the *William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award* and was adapted as both a play and a film. When he turned to fiction, he continued to explore male obsessions, crises and weaknesses. His first novel, *High Fidelity* (1995), is the story of an obsessive record collector. It was adapted as a film in 2000.

His second novel, *About a Boy*, published in 1998, is about two "boys" – Marcus, an awkward yet endearing adolescent from a single-parent family, and the free-floating, mid-30s Will Freeman, who overcomes his own immaturity and self-centeredness through his growing relationship with Marcus. Hugh Grant and Nicholas Hoult starred in the 2002 film version. In 1999, Hornby received the *E. M. Forster Award* of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

His novel, *How to Be Good* (2001), examines contemporary morals, marriage and parenthood. Part of the money he earned with his next book, *Speaking with the Angel* in 2002, was donated to TreeHouse, a charity for children with autism, the disorder that affects Hornby's own son. He was editor of the book, which contained twelve short stories written by his friends.

His most recent books are *31 Songs* (2003), which celebrates songs of great significance to the author, and *A Long Way Down* (2005), a novel which was shortlisted for the 2005 *Whitbread Novel Award*.

Hornby has always been a popular writer; his achievement, especially with his later novels, has been to write fiction that has a mass appeal and is taken seriously by critics.

Hornby released his latest novel titled *Juliet, Naked* in September 2009. On the same wavelength as his first novel *High Fidelity*, the book is about a reclusive 1980s rock star that is forced out of isolation when the re-release of his most famous album brings him into contact with some of his most passionate fans. This synopsis was revealed to *The Guardian* newspaper as part of "What not to miss in 2009: books".

Several of Hornby's books have made the jump from page to screen. Hornby wrote the screenplay for the first, a 1997 British adaptation of *Fever Pitch*, starring Colin Firth. It was followed by *High Fidelity* in 2000, starring John Cusack; this adaptation was notable in that the action was shifted from London to Chicago. After this success, *About a Boy* was quickly picked up, and

released in 2002, starring Hugh Grant. An Americanized *Fever Pitch*, in which Jimmy Fallon plays a hopelessly addicted Boston *Red Sox* fan who tries to reconcile his love of the game with that of his girlfriend (Drew Barrymore), was released in 2005. Johnny Depp purchased film rights to the book *A Long Way Down* before it was published.

In 2009, Hornby adapted an autobiographical memoir by the journalist Lynn Barber for the screen as *An Education*, a feature film starring Peter Sarsgaard and Carey Mulligan. He was nominated for an Oscar for writing the screenplay.

Section 1

Chapters 1–3 (p.p. 1–16)

I. Read Ch. 1-3. Use the following comments for better understanding.

Title: *About a Boy* echoes the title of the Nirvana song ‘*About a Girl*’. Nirvana – massively popular band in the early 1990s, ‘cool beyond words’ for many people, the chief exponent of ‘grunge’ music. Particularly cool was Kurt Cobain, the lead singer.

p.1 – *He couldn’t understand it.* – Although this chapter (and future chapters) are technically in the past tense, Hornby signals to us that much of the action is happening in the present tense by using the informal ‘couldn’t’ and ‘you’d’ and so on. These thoughts are going on *now* in Marcus’ head. Hornby wants the reader to feel that he is right *inside* the boy’s head but at the same time *outside* it. The discrepancy between what Marcus is thinking and what the grown-up reader is thinking is the main source of the comedy.

p.1 – *weird* – a popular informal word meaning someone or some situation which is strange, bizarre, unlike most people or situations. It is used by school children to comment on children who don’t behave like other kids: ‘that’s weird!’, and by grown-ups to define people outside their own group (as, for example, Fiona will be outside Will’s group.) It is used from the point of view of the ‘normal’ person, and so usually implies criticism or mockery.

p.1 – *You’d think if you’d peed with someone you ought to keep in touch with them somehow* – Marcus is being absolutely serious; but the thought for anyone else is surely ridiculous and therefore comic. Standing side by side with someone and peeing as a reason for continuing a relationship brings the trivial and the serious into an absurd connection. We are expected to laugh at the discrepancy. But at the same time we must feel sorry for Marcus, lonely and longing for companionship, whose most significant moment with Roger has been peeing with him. (In other words, the comedy in this novel works by establishing a three-way relationship between the author, the reader and the character who is thinking aloud for our benefit.)

p.2 – *pepperoni* – Italian pepper sausage

p.2 – *OK* – is used frequently in conversations throughout the novel. Hornby is simply employing the word as people use it in daily life. It means ‘nothing special’, ‘not-good-not-bad’, ‘I can’t be bothered to say more’. In fact it is close to ‘normalno’ in Russian. (It can also be used more enthusiastically, or as a sign of agreement, but the ‘nothing special’ sense is common.)

p.2 – *the other channel* – TV channel (an argument over which programme they would watch)

p.2 – *There’s an everything problem* – One of Hornby’s typical and often comic devices is to make his characters play around with the English language.

'Everything' is a noun used here as an adjective. Of course, it is not 'correct' but it is linguistically lively and sums up very effectively Fiona's situation.

p.2 – *I dunno* – 'I don't know' when said by someone who is bored or irritable

p.2 – *kind of* = *kinda* – (spoken) a vague but popular and useful phrase for someone who does not know exactly what he thinks or feels. Teachers will tell students *never* to use this phrase in writing because it indicates muddle and confusion. But Marcus *is* muddled and confused.

p.3 – *bloke* (Br E) – colloquial for 'man'

p.3 – *The first day of the school holidays* – in England the school term ends in the middle of July

p.4 – *Holloway* – is an inner-city district in the London Borough of Islington. It has a multicultural population and is one of the most densely populated areas of London.

p.4 – *to zap through the channels* – to use the remote control to switch quickly through the channels

p.4 – *a fish that nobody could see the point of; he didn't think that would remind his mother of anything much* – another example of Hornby's wry humour. Fiona feels *herself* to be very like a fish at the bottom of the sea that seems to have no reason to live. Probably she hates a programme that defines her own existence so precisely. Marcus cannot imagine himself into Fiona's inner life as we – grown-up readers – can. But at the same time we see that Marcus is a kind boy who wants to protect his mother.

p.5 – Will is reading a 'life-style' magazine, and answering a questionnaire intending to find out how cool he is: how fashionable, stylish, rich and self-consciously up-to-date. Hornby mocks Will for thinking so much about his image; he is not free, he is a kind of slave to what others decide is 'cool behaviour'.

p.5 – *Ecstasy* – the street name for a banned drug, very popular with young people at art parties. Will has taken it in order to 'join in' with younger people.

p.5 – *Labour* – In 1993 the Labour Party had been a minority in Parliament since 1979. However, by this time the Conservative Party which was governing the country had become very unpopular. Regular Conservative voters were announcing that at the next election they would vote Labour. Suddenly it was *fashionable* to support the Labour Party. Will was not interested in politics, but he knows what is fashionable.

p.5 – *polenta and shaved parmesan* – polenta is rather a boring Italian commmeal dish, a kind of heavy 'kasha'. 'Shaved parmesan' means tiny scrapings of this expensive hard cheese. Suddenly in London it was very *fashionable* to eat simple peasant food – and to pay a very high price for it. Will is proud of the fact that he has paid so much money for such a cheap and boring dish.

p.5 – *had sold his Bruce Springsteen albums* – Springsteen spoke for youthful exuberance in the early 1980s. Will wants to be fashionable and the novel takes place in the late 1990s. In fact, Will is much less interested in listening to the

songs than in being a cool music consumer. (Other people would keep their old favourites from pleasure or nostalgia. Will does not believe in nostalgia.)

p.5 – *a goatee* – a beard formed by a tuft of hair on the chin. The goatee became fashionable in the 1990s, when it was popularized by the musicians, actors and sport heroes of the day.

p.6 – *Sub-zero, dry ice, Frosty the Snowman* – Will, according to the questionnaire, is ‘very cool’. Or even extremely cold, as he reminds himself – for here he is playing with different senses of ‘cool’.

p.6 – *Snoop Doggy Dogg* – American rappers who were very popular at the time the book was written. Again, ‘very cool’ but often very ‘un-pc’!

p.6 – *to go round the twist* – to go crazy

p.7 – *East Enders* – a popular BBC television soap opera set in the East End of London. It does not deal with the glamorous rich, but with ordinary, working-class Londoners. The BBC has used the serial to explore many social problems and controversial issues, while ensuring that the stories are still entertaining.

p.7 – *Clutter!* – a standard informal word for all the things which contribute to untidiness. It can also be used metaphorically – ‘the clutter in Mary’s life’ suggests that Mary has many things inside her head which she has not yet sorted out.

p.7 – *a bit washed out* – feeling weak and looking tired

p.7 – *to burn the candle at both ends* – to start working early and to go on working late – with no rest

p.7 – *sodding* – irritating (rude slang, impolite, taboo)

p.8 – *non sequitur* – ‘it does not follow’ (Latin). A remark which is ridiculous because it is not connected to the previous argument. Will considers the statement ‘Barney’s lovely’ to be nonsense, and a contradiction of what was said before.

p.8 – *skint* (Br E) – without any money

p.9 – *Godfather? Church and things... Adoption if you’re killed in an air crash?* – The real role of the godfather is to take responsibility for the child’s religious upbringing. But in today’s secular world many people are asked to act as a godparent, in the sense of someone who will be a special adult friend to the child, and indeed look after him or her if the parents die. There is absolutely no legal obligation to do so, but many children are told, ‘If anything happens to Mum and Dad, don’t worry, I (your godparent) will look after you.’ It is, at least, a comforting story.

p.10 – *monogamy* – the practice of being married to only one (husband or wife) person at a time

p.11 – *some kids, he knew, got taught by their parents at home* – It is legally possible in Britain for parents to teach their children themselves rather than send them to school. It is not easy – parents and any individual tutors they employ have to teach the National Curriculum as if they were a school. But there are parents who are convinced that schools are not good for their children. Fiona is the sort of person who would know such parents.

p.12 – *Macaulay Culkin* – is a child star who played the chief part in the comic film *Home Alone* which was released in 1990. He acts the part of a young boy who is incidentally left behind when his parents go to France, and who has to deal with burglars. Marcus is about the same age as the boy hero, so he can easily identify himself with the child actor, Macaulay Culkin.

p.12 – *Glastonbury* – the site of an annual rock music festival where people camp in tents in a large muddy field. Fiona as an old hippy was particularly attracted to it.

p.13 – *Joni Mitchell and Bob Marley* – singers who were particularly popular with the Hippies (like Fiona) in the 1960s and 1970s.

p.14 – *Gameboy* – a handheld children’s computer for playing games

p.14 – *Cambridge* – Marcus often compares Cambridge and London. The comparison is from his point of view – other people with other interests would come to different conclusions. The chief difference is that Cambridge is a town of 110,000, with a high proportion of academics. London is huge, varied and seems to be much more anonymous. You are on your own, without a community.

p.15 – *quiet during registration* – In English schools pupils go at the beginning of the day to their ‘own classroom’ where their class teacher ‘takes the register’ – i.e. marks down in the register of names of those present and those who are not.

p.15 – *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* – a novel by Ken Kesey (1962) subsequently adapted as a notable film by Milos Forman. It concerns a man who stands up against the idea of madness in an asylum for mental patients. The film discusses what is crazy and what is brave individual behaviour. Ms Maguire chooses to ask questions in such a way that she becomes an ally of the class against Marcus. Marcus is therefore in the same predicament as the hero of the film.

p.16 – *potty* – crazy or silly (a childish word)

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 1. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious* (adj.) – *seriously* (adv.) – *seriousness* (n.). Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

serious (1), survived (6), wondered (7), decency (14), registration (15)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

row, apparently, weird (1), pepperoni, vegetarians (2), wandered (3), questionnaires (5), hypothermia, treasured, adult, exquisitely, clutter (7), fathom, compound (8), euphoric (9), domesticity, monogamy (10), luminous, dinosaur, basic (11), boomerangs (12), patrolled, demented (13), sighed (15)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. расстаться, разойтись (о родителях) (1)
2. привыкнуть к чему-либо (1)
3. поддерживать отношения (1)
4. упустить суть дела (2)
5. кроме, не считая ..., не говоря уже о ... (3), (12)
6. воспринимать что-то серьезно (6)
7. увлекаться чем-то (6)
8. подглядывать (за чужой жизнью) (6)
9. справиться с самолюбием (10)
10. судить, выносить суждения (13)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. He *didn't mind*, but it was weird if you thought about it. (1)
2. He kind of hoped it was, because then it *would all get sorted out*. (2-3)
3. The pizzas arrived and they ate them straight out of the boxes. (4)
4. He found the *remote control* down the back of the sofa and *zapped through the channels*. (4)
5. He *earned* more than forty thousand pounds a year (five points), and he didn't have to work very hard for it (five points, and *he awarded himself* an extra five points for not having to work *at all* for it). (5)
6. Now John and Christine had taken the Jessica *route to oblivion*, he had no use for them whatsoever. (9)
7. What was there to laugh at? Not much, really, unless you were the kind of person *who was on permanent lookout for* something to laugh at. (13)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, practise pronouncing them.

split (1), shaken (1), meant (3), blew, shrunk (3), grown (5), strewn (7), to leap (9), woke (11), taught, to shoot (12), bound (14)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Nirvana, the song 'About a Girl'. Kurt Cobain
2. "Home Alone 1", "Home Alone 2" (3)
3. "Honey, I Blew Up the Kid", "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" (3)
4. Bruce Springsteen (5)
5. Snoop Doggy Dogg (6)
6. Glastonbury, hippy (12)
7. "One Flew Over Cuckoo's Nest", Milos Forman (15)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch.1

1. Why did Rodger leave Fiona?
2. What do you think annoyed Marcus in his mother's requirements?
3. What did Marcus' mother mean by speaking about two different sorts of life? Why did he so often compare London with Cambridge?
4. What kind of life did Marcus prefer?
5. What films did the boy see? What are the films about? (Have you seen them? Do you like them?)

Ch.2

1. How cool was Will Freeman?
2. What kind of music did he listen to?
3. Did Will work? What was his occupation, if any?
4. Why does Christine, Will's friend, say he's a worry to them?
5. What made Will feel frustrated during the visit to his friends?

Ch.3

1. Why did Marcus wake up frustrated?
2. Why does Marcus want to be Macaulay Culkin?
3. Why does Marcus hate the school?
4. Did his mother understand him?
5. What happened on his second school day?

Section 2

Chapters 4–6 (p.p. 17–37)

I. Read Ch. 4-6. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.17 – *Pinky and Perky* - puppets of two piglets in a children's television series of the 1960s. They are often remembered – as a joke – by adults who were small children then.

p.17 – *The Guardian...the Mail* – By choosing to read *The Guardian* Angie is letting us (and Will) know that she is probably intelligent, articulate with left-wing political views. *The Daily Mail* is, by contrast, a daily newspaper for not very intelligent people with right-wing views.

p.19 – *Angie's beauty was not irrelevant to his decision to reassess his affinity with children* – This is an example of how Hornby uses English to maintain a comic tone even when the events are sad. The phrase uses formal, pompous languages to explain that 'Angie's beauty influenced his decision to think again about whether he and children could get on together'. Besides the formality we have a typical use of understatement – 'not relevant' means 'very relevant' or 'strong influence'. This is Will thinking, but not in Will's words. Inside Will's head we can hear him thinking, 'She's so beautiful and sexy, I really want her,

but I can only be her boyfriend if I change my mind about not liking children.' By using the language which is not Will's, Hornby is laughing at his plans and changes of the plan.

p.20 – *Julie Christie* – a beautiful (and intelligent) actress whose career began in the 1960s and who continues to act, mostly in films. (She starred Lara in the western version of *Dr Zhivago*.)

p.23 – *fling* - brief affair which is not serious but enjoyable.

p.25-26 – *she'd let him put a variety pack in the supermarket trolley* – most breakfast cereals come in large cardboard boxes. You have to finish the contents of one box before starting the next. A variety pack contains 6 little packs containing different cereals (all made by Kellogg's). *Coco Pops* is a cereal found in one of these packets, and is probably the most popular of all six flavours.

p.28 – *nerd* – the kind of person who is obsessively interested in (for example) computers or timetables or mathematical problems; who cannot communicate with other people except by talking about his own narrow view of life, and who is mocked for being boring and also weird.

p.28 – *geek* - means much the same as 'nerd'

p.28 – *Oi! Fuzzy! Give us a song!* – 'Oi' is an exclamation meaning 'You there, you listen to me!'

p.28 – *Ginger! Chris Evans! Speccy!* – mocked for having red hair, glasses and an alcohol problem, often mocked in the press

p.29 – *Tupac? Warren G?* – American rappers who were very popular at the time the book was written

p.30 – *Marcus knew all the stuff about sticks and stones and names* – This alludes to the saying: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me".

p.31 – *...used a Durex, even in the days before you had to* – 'Durex' is the brand of a condom, the male contraceptive. When the contraceptive pill for women became widely available in the 1970s, many men stopped using a condom. However, when AIDS appeared in the late 1980s, men were advised to use condoms anyway, because they prevented the transference of the HIV virus from one person to another. Will in his early days, before AIDS, was always careful and used a condom even if his current girl-friend said she was 'on the pill'.

p.32 – *soup kitchen* – a place where free food is offered to the poor, usually run by volunteers. Will liked to imagine doing something useful – so long as he did not actually have to do it.

p.32 – *VSO – Voluntary Service Overseas* – a large international charity that sends volunteers to work in backward countries. Many British people have been volunteers in this or in other organizations, either for short periods or for two or more years. Consequently, although Will cannot imagine being a VSO volunteer

he knows enough about it to feel, at some level, that perhaps he can pretend he is that sort of person.

p.32 – *SPAT* – a fictional organization. SPAT is a pun in two senses: ‘spat’ as the past tense of ‘spit’ – presumably as abuse towards men; and ‘spat’, a colloquial word for a noisy argument - presumably reminding the mothers of their earlier life.

p.33 – *to frogmarch* - прием подавления сопротивления при аресте (четыре полицейских несут человека за ноги и за руки лицом вниз)

p.33 – *a beaten-up B-reg 2CV* – a very small French car, battered and damaged, and at least eight years old

p.33 – *Worzel Gummidge* – a living scarecrow in a children’s story. Aunt Sally was a wooden painted figure who also came alive. TV films were made of the stories

p.35 – *Lorena Bobbitt* – famous in 1993 when she cut off her husband’s penis with a kitchen knife while he was asleep in Virginia, USA. The angry women at SPAT obviously sympathize with her

p.36 – *...he came out...* – he announced that he was gay (a homosexual)

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 2. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.) – seriously (adv.) – seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

vaguely (17), irrelevant (19), appalled (21), contemptuously (23), deceit (36)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

browsing, withering (17), wrestle (18), affinity, realm, blemish, obesity (20), throes (21), cliché, hitherto, disguise (22), grotesquely (23), stomachs (25), handicapped, lousy (26), hilarious (28), swapped (29), missiles (30), whim, volunteered (32), fraud, vehicle, disinfectant (33), conspiratorial (34), nutritionist (35), ingenious, treachery (36)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. как оказалось (17)
2. переоценить свое отношение к детям (20)
3. установить контакт, наладить отношения (20)
4. брать быка за рога (22)
5. быть поглощенным чем-то (27)
6. болтун, хвастун, задира (27)

7. вытягивать шею, чтобы лучше рассмотреть (28)
8. он забыл, о чем думал (29)
9. идти на все (32)
10. выдать себя (34)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. She was, as he knew she would be, met with *a withering look of contempt* and a mumble which indicated that she was *wasting* the assistant's valuable *time*. (17)
2. He *was so relieved* that he felt like being generous. (23)
3. When was the last time he had been in a position *to bestow forgiveness*? (24)
4. When you were *having trouble with* Lee Hartley and his mates, it *hardly mattered* whether your mum *was going round the bend* or not. (27)
5. If it *didn't work out*, then he'd just have to try something else. *It was no big deal*. (32)
6. If there was a chance of meeting someone like Angie, however, it had *to be worth a try*. (33)
7. Will was becoming so depressed about his sex that he decided to *redress the balance*. (36)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, practise pronouncing them.

saw, caught (17), to tear, grind, hidden (18), winning (19), to strike (20), swung (21), bought (22), forgotten (23), to choose (25), leaning, sat (27), spreading (28), sunk (29), hanging, fallen, hit (30), to dream (32), to drive, set, smelt, led (33), dig (34), wearing (35)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. The Science Museum (London) (21)
2. The Natural History Museum (London) (21)
3. Mike Leigh (22)
4. English nicknames – Ginger, Speccy (28)
5. Rap (American rappers – Tupac, Warren G) (29)
6. Body Shop (35)
7. Robert De Niro (36)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch.4

1. What was Will's way of making an acquaintance? Was Will awkward? Why didn't Angie accept his way?
2. Speak on Will's idea of parenthood (when he was drunk and sentimental).
3. How serious was Will when having a relationship with women-mothers?
4. What caused Will and Angie's relationship breakage?
5. Why does Will feel superior?

Ch.5

1. What (dis)advantages did Marcus find in his mum's crying?
2. What did Marcus do on his way to school?
3. Speak on his friends at school – Nick and Mark.
4. Why did Nick and Mark turn their backs on Marcus? What explanation do they give?
5. Why do you think Marcus gave up struggling? How did he try to wait till the humiliation was over?

Ch.6

1. Why didn't Will feel a parent?
2. What investigation did Will make into his friends' and acquaintances' family lifestyles?
3. How different was Will's idea of being part of a single parents' group?
4. Why was Will depressed by what he saw in the centre? What topics did the SPAT members dwell upon?
5. How well did Will cope with the frustration of being in the SPAT centre?

Section 3

Chapters 7–9 (p.p. 38–58)

I. Read Ch. 7-9. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.38 – *a fiver* – a five-pound note

p.38 – *only three children allowed in at the same time* – Although Marcus hated such little signs, sometimes shopkeepers put informal notices in the window to stop children stealing sweets or causing the kind of trouble from which Marcus suffers.

p.39 – *They liked his mother here* – Many British Pakistanis work in small local shops. Fiona, when young, had travelled to Pakistan, probably as part of a hippy adventure, and now she makes a point of being friendly to them.

p.39 – *Oi, Mohammad* – Mr. Patel comes from a Muslim country. So the boys call him 'Mohammad' as a name of casual contempt. 'Oi' is an exclamation meaning 'You there, you listen to me!' It's what a policeman might say to a naughty boy.

- p.42 – *Regent's Park* – one of the big London parks
- p.42 – *tant pis* – a French expression best expressed by a shrug and 'so much the worse'. You can't do anything about the situation. It is milder than Marcus' version, 'tough shit'.
- p.42 – *a weirdo* – a strange and rather threatening person
- p.43 – *vasectomy* – a permanent birth control method for a man in which certain fine tubes connecting the testicles and the penis are cut and sealed
- p.45 – *she's a cow* – she's unpleasant and stupid and ugly
- p.46 – *C.S. Lewis fan* – C.S. Lewis wrote a famous book for children called *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, in which four children squeeze into a large wardrobe, and find they can go through it into a magic land. If Will's friend knew the story, he would know at once that Will was simply 'borrowing' another story.
- p.47 – *It's a famous song and I live off the royalties* – '*Santa Super Sleigh*' is a fictional song, but Hornby probably has in mind a song like '*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*' which was composed in 1939 by an American advertising executive, for children. That song is still in copyright, and an entire company has been set up to manage the profits. The law on royalties, at least, in Britain, states that a work remains in copyright for seventy years after the writer's death. So Will can go on receiving money all his life if the song remains popular.
- p.47 – '*Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Polka Dot Bikini; How Much is that Doggy in the Window?*' – famous novelty songs. These songs may take the form of a parody, or a comedic take on current events. Many use unusual lyrics, subjects or instrumentation. Novelty songs are frequently unexpected hits. Some artists made successful careers out of novelty songs.
- p.48 – ... *the Mappets. And Des O'Connor. And the Crankies. And Bing Crosby* – popular 'Saturday night' TV variety acts
- *And David Bowie...* – a cool singer
 - *ZsaZsa Gabor...* – a famous actress, born in Hungary
- p.48 – *he hated making his living from Val Doonican* – Val Doonican represents the sort of sentimental popular music played at Christmas time which is in the same tradition as Will's father's song.
- p.48 – *MC Hammer* – a rapper; *Paul Weller* – a cool lead singer of the British band '*The Jam*'. Often political (left-wing)
- p.50 – *he read Time Out and iD and Face and Arena and NME* – magazines devoted to popular contemporary culture, which Will uses as his sources of information on fashions in music
- p.50 – *She's going nuts* – She's going mad
- p.50 – *off colour* – not completely well, mildly ill. Will notices that Marcus speaks in the same irritable voice as his own father, when Will and others used to pretend that his father was not very ill. All this conversation is about the way that grown-ups sometimes want to deceive themselves. They would rather not know the truth.
- p.51 – *a game of rounders* – a child's version of baseball

p.52 – *He drew the short straw* – He (the imaginary Ned) was unlucky because he looked like Will.

p.52 – *Oh, he could have done worse* – Suzie is certainly not going to tell Will at this stage that he is a handsome man. But this typical understatement implies that he is good-looking.

p.54 – *Stargazer machine in the kebab shop* – the kind of money-in-the-slot gambling machine that is found in shops, cafes and pubs where people might be tempted to waste their money. The shop sells fast food, hamburgers, kebabs and other popular foods.

p.58 – *willies* – ‘willy’ is a childish word for a penis

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 3. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious* (adj.) – *seriously* (adv.) – *seriousness* (n.). Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

roughly (41), inadequate (45), merciless (50), mysteriously, memorable (57)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

shivering, cartoons (40), duvet (41), weirdo (42), obscurely, convey(44), requisite, pervert, thespian (45), ascertained, genuinely, presumption (46), awkwardly, extinguished, vigorous (49), belligerence, vulnerable (50), muster, consequence (51), mournful (52), vomit, ambulance (57), nostrils, swords (58)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. вдруг, внезапно (42)
2. попросить подвезти (45)
3. терять лицо (репутацию) (46)
4. ему пришло в голову (46)
5. жить за счет авторских отчислений (47)
6. именно в этом и было дело (48)
7. начать (завязать) отношения (49)
8. смерить взглядом с головы до ног (49)
9. хандрить (50)
10. сложить два и два (54)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. He went back to school wondering whether he'd been *making a fuss about* nothing. (38)

2. You'd better *keep out of their way*. (40)
3. I just know that we're *not doing each other any good*. (43)
4. You'll have *to toughen up*. (44)
5. Every day for the last eighteen years he had got up in the morning with the intention of *sorting out his career problem once and for all*. (48)
6. I would have read about it. *I'm not that out of touch*. (51)
7. It was probably just about *to die from a heart attack* or something; it was *just a coincidence*. (54)
8. He might have known he'd *grass him up*. (56)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, practise pronouncing them.

lying (40), bet (46), to seek, shown (49), beaten (51), burst (51), drew, to bite (52)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Regent's Park (42)
2. Michael Jackson (47)
3. David Bowie (48)
4. ZsaZsa Gabor (48)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch. 7

1. What things carried on as normal? What remained the same?
2. How did the depression tell on Marcus' mum?
3. Did Marcus frequently happen to be with the SPAT lot? Did he like it?
4. Why does his mum say they are not doing each other good?
5. Marcus didn't feel guilty about their relationship, did he?

Ch. 8

1. Suzie advises Will to toughen up. Why does she give him such advice?
2. Why do you think Will proceeded wearing an image of an unhappy single father?
3. What was his hesitation about his further scenario?
4. How did Will make his living? Had Will ever wanted to find a job? What did he think could suit him?
5. Did Will try to strike a rapport with Marcus? Did he succeed?

Ch. 9

1. What incident happened in the park? Why was Marcus afraid?
2. Did Will grass Marcus up? Why not?
3. Whom did Marcus see on the path?
4. What did they see when they returned home? _____
5. Why did it shock Marcus?

Section 4

Chapters 10-12 (p.p. 59–77)

I. Read Ch. 10-12. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.61 – *a good disease-of-the-week film* – another example of Hornby playing with the language. People who laughed at quickly changing fashions, especially in restaurants, started using the phrase ‘flavour-of-the-month’, with the implication that each month the favourite flavour would be different. This phrase was adapted for any situation that could change because of fashion. So when Will wondered ‘what do you tell a kid whose mum has just tried to top (kill) herself?’ he could have sounded very heartless, asking cheerful questions as though Fiona’s suicide attempt was simply fashionable, like a ‘disease-of-the-week film’. (Fortunately, Suzie heard this question as though it came from a man in real distress. In fact, he was not exactly heartless, but he was detached, an outsider.) This is a long explanation of one minor linguistic allusion/joke. Hornby invents hundreds.

p.61 – *waiting for a shot* – a shot is an injection; in this case of anti-rabies vaccine

p.62 – *You had to live in your own bubble* – This is a key paragraph. Is Suzie right? Is Marcus right to be reassured? Is Will right – and if so, which parts of his thought are right?

p.66 – *Two wasn’t enough, that was the trouble* – a key paragraph, perhaps the most important in the book. If Fiona had ‘dropped off the edge’ (died and therefore fallen out of the family home), Marcus would have been alone. Marcus has to work out ‘how to make a family grow’.

p.67 – *Groundhog Day* – is a comic film in which the hero finds himself repeating the same day over and over and over again. Fiona watches it as a pure comedy but Marcus responds only to the many would-be suicides scenes, as the hero tried to escape his predicament by killing himself. The ‘suicides’ in this film are also comic, but Marcus cannot forget the reality, the ‘puke and the shouting’.

p.71 – *paternity leave* – a period of time a father is allowed to be away from work after the birth of his child so that he, his wife and his baby can spend private time together. Mothers have longer maternity leave. John is the kind of man who really likes spending time with small children – and is therefore even more unsatisfactory than most ‘friends’ of Will.

p.71 – *Countdown* – a TV quiz show, full of stupid questions and jokes, which became a cult programme for idle people like Will

p.72 – *media pages of ‘The Guardian’* – *The Guardian* is a national daily newspaper which has a section once a week advertising jobs in media. In Britain, unlike Russia, all jobs in health, education, the BBC and other state-funded institutions *must* be advertised nationally. People regularly move house

to get a more interesting or better-paid job; and employers are always searching for the best talent. The culture of 'inviting' someone to take a particular job is now almost gone in Britain – and in the majority of cases it would be illegal. You can see the kind of jobs that Will is looking at: jobs for editing professional magazines or tourist brochures. These jobs are advertised nationally, and hundreds appear each week in the 'Media Guardian' pages.

p.72 – *he even enclosed a CV, although it only just ran on to a second page* - CV (curriculum vitae), a document giving details of your education and qualifications and jobs you have had in the past. You have to send your CV to the appointments committee that will choose the successful applicant whenever you apply for a job. Numbering his two pages 'one' and 'three', Will sends to his potential employers only his personal information and information on his education. This makes his CV quite useless.

p.74 – *a brass-rubbing sort of child* – instantly understandable for English readers, but difficult to explain. (It is not important since the point is that Marcus is not the kind of child who enjoys this activity.) Brass-rubbing means producing a special kind of picture from designs based on mediaeval church art.

p.74 – *coolometer* – Will's invented word for an instrument which would show how 'cool' he was

p.75 – *in loco parentis* – (Latin) a legal term meaning 'in place of the parent'

p.75 – *Brent Cross* – This is a place in North London where there is an enormous shopping centre. The centre is such an attraction that it has become better known than the place after which it is named.

p.75 – *Blue Peter* – the long running BBC TV Children's programme. Will thinks that when children are too old for this programme – at around, say, 12 – they should go to sleep and only wake up when it is time to go to the Employment centre and 'sign on' as unemployed. In this fantasy, Will still cannot imagine anyone *choosing* to work. Collecting a small amount of unemployment pay and being bored would be better than working in his view.

p.75 – *the token sops to teens* – 'sop' means 'soft and comforting food for an invalid' – which is here used metaphorically as something soft and sentimental to please teenagers. Australian soup operas about teenagers and 'chicken dippers' which are bits of chicken, fried and then dipped in a spicy sauce are both popular with 'young people' – i.e. teenagers. 'To pass as' means 'to be just about good enough for, but actually rather bad'.

p.75 – *Hey, say what you mean, Marcus. Don't beat around the bush.* – 'To beat around the bush' means to speak without saying exactly what you mean because you are embarrassed, especially about money. In this case Will is being ironic for Marcus has been *extremely* direct: '...either we'll have to go somewhere cheap or you'll have to treat us'. Marcus does not recognize irony, and so he cannot see that Will is teasing him.

Some readers think that Marcus is being 'cynical and manipulative'. This is misunderstanding. Marcus is desperate to help his mother, but he knows no way

of speaking other than absolutely directly. Will knows that he would have paid anyway – of course he would, given the circumstances – but he finds Marcus’ directness rather comic. So, as often, they misunderstand each other.

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 4. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.) – seriously (adv.) – seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

circumstances (59), casualty (61), resourceful (71), fiercely (73), concession (77)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

styrofoam, apoplectic, appropriate (60), vagrant (61), derelict (62), chef, gladiators (68), incredible (70), achievement, drown, frequented (71), unsavoury, brochures (72), acute (73), malevolent (74), embark, contemporary (75)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. (попытаться) совершить самоубийство (61)
2. остановить такси (63)
3. остаться в одиночестве (67)
4. ты же можешь четко выражать мысли (69)
5. иметь в своем распоряжении (71)
6. часто посещать, наведываться (71)
7. получить письмо с отказом (72)
8. быть отвлеченным чем-то (73)
9. сделать уступку (77)
10. перемазать (77)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. Will knew *it wasn't the point*, but he was surprised that Marcus *had worked it out* quite so quickly. (59)
2. “*Has anyone got any change? I want to get something from the machine*”. (60)
3. *It made no difference for them* if they were roaring at passers-by in the street or abusing nurses at *a hospital casualty department* – it was all just business. (61)
4. She'd drink her tea, and tonight they'd *get a takeaway* and watch TV, and they would *feel as though it were* the beginning of a different, better life. (66)

5. But then *he couldn't stand it* anymore, and he turned the film off with the remote. (68)
6. "I'm sorry, Marcus, *I'm still not with you*". (69)
7. Occasionally, when *the mood took him*, he *applied for jobs* advertised in the media pages of the *Guardian*. (72)
8. Suddenly, *belatedly*, he got it. (76)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

fighting, bitten (61,) might (62), wound (67), fed up (68), driving (69), drawn (73), feeling, falling (75)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Squash (71)
2. A game of pool (71)
3. Soho (74)
4. Brent Cross (75)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch.10

1. What made Will think for the first time that Marcus was a smart boy?
2. Describe the appearances and feelings of the people in the waiting room.
3. Why does Marcus say his mum was not like those people? Why does Marcus hate the very idea that his mum was or looked like the rest of those in the waiting room?
4. Comment on Will's philosophy of 'living in one's own bubble'.
5. Why do you think Suzie turned out to be the most efficient of all the people when they found Fiona after the suicide attempt? What accounts for Suzie's instant reaction?

Ch.11

1. Why did it occur to Marcus that her suicidal attempt would reflect on him? What did Marcus' mother try to explain to her son in the suicidal letter?
2. How much did the world change for Marcus after his mother had tried to commit suicide?
3. What troubled Mark after his mum had come back from hospital?
4. Why was Marcus so deliberate and careful to select a video to watch with his mum?
5. Why did the film get Marcus angry? How far do you think Marcus is right about the ads of the films, the texts on the video boxes?

Ch.12

1. Why wasn't filling evenings never a problem for Will? Which were the fillers? What was the problem with the daytime?
2. Why couldn't Will put life and a job together?
What jobs did Will find suitable for himself? Which ones did he look for? Why do you think he received rejection letters from employers?
3. Did Will consider any chance of 'entering' Marcus and Fiona's family?
4. Why do you think Will was so careful about finding something for Marcus to do on Saturday?
5. What car seat did Will buy for Ned? How did he practically expose himself before the shop assistant? What did Will do to back his lie about Ned's car seat?

Section 5

Chapters 13–15 (p.p. 78–102)

I. Read Ch. 13-15. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.79 – *Planet Hollywood* – this is a real place that advertises itself as 'London's top restaurant for kids.' It has a 'cinema theme' and thousands of noisy children. Obviously Will hates the idea of going there.

p.80 – *nice dangly earrings someone had sent her from Zimbabwe* – English readers would instantly understand this. Fiona supports all kinds of radical good causes. It is typical that she knows someone in a poor African country who has sent her local jewellery, and typical that she wears it proudly. Marcus does not understand the 'message' but Will understands perfectly well. He would say, 'She's keen on ethnic culture, which is not at all cool'.

p.83 – *mushroom omelette...swordfish steak* – This is a comic scene in which their cultural differences are obvious in their choosing of food. – Marcus is a vegetarian like his mother, but he likes French fries (chip potatoes) like any boy; Will chooses the expensive 'sophisticated' dish; Fiona chooses pasta or macaroni with a sauce made of herbs and a salad of green leaves – the simplest cheapest dish, although she spends a long time making her choice.

p.84 – *some silly fat Tory woman* – (Tory - Conservative). In the Conservative governments of both Mrs. Thatcher (1979-1990) and John Major (1990-1997) much emphasis was put on 'family values'. They announced that parents should discipline their children; children should be obedient, hard-working, wait for sexual experience until they were married, etc. The problem was that the country was full of children of divorced parents who were therefore being damned by politicians for something for which they were in no way responsible. It was like going back to the 1950s and earlier when children were condemned for being 'illegitimate'. The 'silly fat Tory woman' is probably a reference to Ann Widdecombe who spoke on questions of social security at the time.

p.85 – *John Major* – Prime Minister of Britain in 1990 - 1997, i.e. at the time when the novel was set

p.86 – *a Kramer vs. Kramer kind of thing* – ‘*Kramer vs. Kramer*’ was an American film about a divorce in which the parents were very antagonistic and fought for custody of the child.

p.88 – *Mother Teresa and Florence Nightingale* – Will is thinking in clichés, as so often. Both women are popular examples of women who were always eager to help people in need. Mother Teresa (1910-1997) worked among the poverty-stricken in Calcutta. Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was a pioneer of modern nursing; her famous contribution came during the Crimean War of 1854-1857. They were both tough, uncompromising, super-efficient women; Will thinks his charitable ‘good-works’ style will be different.

p.91 – *James Ellroy thriller* – James Ellroy is a well-known American crime writer. His books are noted for their dark humour, dense plotting and a relentlessly pessimistic worldview. They are therefore suitable novels to fill up his plotless and pointless life.

p.96 – *the wooden floors* – most floors in English houses are made of wood completely covered with a carpet or linoleum. (They are not painted as in Russia.) Rich and fashionable people have in the last 20 years redecorated their homes with fine new wooden floors which are now ‘sealed’ with a special varnish to keep the clean light look of freshly cut wood. Expensive small rugs decorate the floor but most of the bare wood can be seen.

p.98 – *Saved yourself all the hassle* – avoided all the problems and complications

p.100 – *a wally* – (slang) a silly helpless person whom other people laugh at

p.102 – *Neighbours* – a popular Australian soap opera

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 5. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.) – seriously (adv.) – seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

wreck (79), appreciate (80), obvious (84), sincerity (89), penetrate (93)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

contrary, reckoned (78), Leicester (80), queue (81), swordfish (83), self-conscious (85), licence, vs = versus (86), contemplate (88), guarantee, urge (90), excruciating, launch(v) (91), paraphernalia, latter (92), daft (94), anagram (95), personality, hassle (98), introvert (99), eventually (100), routine (101)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. значить, быть важным (78)
2. узнать, разузнать что-либо о ком-либо (78)
3. Почему тебя беспокоит, что я ношу? (79)
4. переодеться (79)
5. стоять в очереди (81)
6. рассердиться на кого-либо (85)
7. отделаться, избавиться от мыслей (86)
8. в чьих-то интересах, от лица кого-то (91)
9. выведывать, вынюхивать (92)
10. Тебя третируют? (99)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. "You don't want to *look like an old bag* there." (79)
2. They were the only people that spoke English *in the whole queue*. (81)
3. But they don't tell you *in advance*. (82)
4. You're *making us self-conscious*. (85)
5. You know, a sort of *I-want-to-find-out-who-I-am malarkey*. (86)
6. While Marcus was gone, Will tried to think of a story that would *account for* the complete absence of anything *Ned-related*, but there was nothing. (91)
7. *What business is it of yours?* (92)
8. Marcus *ignored him* and *started poking around* the flat. (96)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

leaving (78), drunk (78), known (78), wearing (80), spoke (81), heard (82), might (82), sat (82), forgotten (83), grew (86), felt (87), upset (87), sleeping (88), chosen (89), gone (91), shrunk (96), met (97), kept (101)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Bob Marley (79)
2. Bruce Willis (79)
3. Janet Jackson (79)
4. Harrison (the Beatles) (79)
5. Tom Cruise (82)
6. Nicole Kidman (82)
7. Michael Keaton (Batman) (82)
8. 'Kramer vs. Kramer' (film) (86)
9. Einstein (87)
10. Clint Eastwood (92)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch.13

1. Why was Marcus bothered that his mum should look pretty on the visit to *Planet Hollywood*? Why was Will so greatly surprised that Marcus had also chosen *Planet Hollywood* to go to?
2. Why do the three of them go at last to another restaurant?
3. What was the most important thing for Marcus – the place, the food or the thing that Fiona and Will could start talking?
4. What accounts for Marcus' desire to push Fiona and Will to a talk? Describe Marcus' desire to inveigle Will and Fiona into a conversation?
5. What plans was Marcus plotting?

Ch.14

1. Describe the evening Will spent at Fiona's. Say what surprised him about Fiona.
2. What did Will realize while listening to Fiona? Do you notice that Will started to realize that people other than him were vulnerable and touchy?
3. Why do you think Will was eager to go back to his former life?
4. How did Marcus guess Will had made up the story of his fatherhood? Did Will panic at the idea that Marcus could tell the truth?
5. Why does Marcus blackmail Will?

Ch.15

1. How did Marcus want to use the information he possessed? What plans did he plot?
2. What things did Marcus see in Will's flat? What did Marcus like/dislike about Will's flat?
3. What is Marcus' point in going to school? Render the conversation between Marcus and Will.
4. Was Will eager to receive Marcus at his place? Why?
5. Describe Marcus' fear of coming home. Why couldn't he tell anyone about that?

Section 6

Chapters 16–18 (p.p. 103–133)

I. Read Ch. 16-18. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.104 – *counsellor* – someone who is paid to listen to people's problems and provide support and advice

p.104 – *real stuff on East Enders and The Bill* – 'East Enders' is a soap opera, while 'The Bill' is a police serial. Although they have to be entertaining, both series are unlike the glamorous soap operas from Mexico which are so popular. They try to depict real unglamorous problems of ordinary people.

p.104 – *that skirted round* – that avoided by going round the edge

p.105 – *He works for Cambridge Social Services* – ‘Social Services’ are provided by local authorities to help people with problems outside the education or health service: for example, children with parents who cannot look after them and who are put with foster families, old people who cannot easily get out of their houses, people with mental problems who need to be observed, homeless people. Will thinks that there is ‘another country’ or another world where people who work in social services meet people with Fiona’s hippy idealism, and also people with ‘natural’ health remedies who love Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. They are completely different from Will who likes to watch stupid TV programmes and go shopping and hates being involved.

p.106 – ...*sorry dog’s dinner* – unpleasant complicated and muddled situation

p.107 –...*bring back National Service* – These are Will’s confused thoughts: ‘I’m not a frightening person so I am surprised the boys ran away. People say that teenagers have lost respect for adults. Therefore many adults mutter to themselves that National Service (compulsory military service) is the proper discipline for them and should be restored. I think that perhaps I half-agree with them. On the other hand, I *am bigger* than these boys, and most sensible people would run away if confronted with someone bigger.’ The passage is comic because Will is thinking like an innocent 15-year-old who suddenly remembers that he should sound stern and grown-up to himself, and disapproving of ‘young people’. National service was established after the Second World War but abolished in the late 1950s. Older people who disapprove of badly-behaved teenagers often assert that Britain would have no such problems if we were ‘to bring back National Service’. The phrase has become a cliché of a particular attitude to young people.

p.111 – ‘*Did you see Thund...*’ – Will was about to say ‘*Thunderbirds*’, a popular children’s science-fiction programme with puppets in the 1960s when Will was a boy.

p.112 – *a natural high* – is the feeling of intense pleasure which drug users claim is the reason why they take drugs. Non-drug-users talk of a natural high, an intense emotion of pleasure, which comes from – for example – making someone else happy.

p.123 – *November the nineteenth* – The Christmas season starts earlier and earlier each year, so Will has to listen to his father’s hated song in the middle of November.

p.124 – *drinking binges* – excessive drinking of alcohol when one drinks heavily not each day but, for example, once a week. The implication is that such drinkers are not alcoholics, but they can have very nasty headaches and think ‘what a waste of time!’ the next day.

p.124 – *Spirograph* – a geometric drawing toy with plastic gears and pencils as its component

p.124 – *Batmobile* – the technologically fantastic car of comic hero Batman. Models of this car were popular presents for children in the 1960s.

p.124 – *Bob Dylan* – famous American folk singer with a strong political content to many of his songs, especially his songs supporting the civil rights movement in the 1960s. *Blood on the Track* – Bob Dylan’s album released in 1975. Most of the lyrics on the album revolve around headaches, anger and loneliness. The songs are usually seen as inspired by Dylan’s personal turmoil, particularly his divorce from Sara Dylan.

p.124 – *a stiff drink* – a strong alcoholic drink

p.125 – *a supermarket tannoy* – ‘tannoy’ is the trade mark of a sound-amplifying system

p.125 – *...the unexorcizable ghost of Christmas past* – Will is never able to experience Christmas without being haunted by the ‘ghost’ of his father’s song being played around him in shops and in the street. This is about ‘pact with the devil’ that Will has with his father and his life. The success of his father’s song means that he has lots of money and can live the lazy life he likes so much, but the price that he has to pay is having to accept that he has not achieved anything and the song that haunts him is a constant reminder of the pointlessness of his life. His obsessive ‘marking out units of time’ is a futile coping strategy to give his life meaning. He only escapes his father’s ghost, and finds happiness, by abandoning his ‘units of time’ and accepting the random flow of human relationships and life. Hornby is comparing him to Scrooge who also had to learn a similar lesson by being haunted by the ghost of Christmas past.

p.126. – *dosh* – money

p.127 – *I got hold of the wrong end of the stick* – I misunderstood

p.129 – *sod’s law* – (also known as Murphy’s Law). A comic ‘scientific law’ that states that things will go wrong if it is possible for them to go wrong. According to sod’s law, if you drop a piece of bread and butter it will land butter-side down. Will’s point is that most sexy people are boring; Fiona – who is not at all sexually attractive to Will – is somehow interesting. (So it is not a very good example of sod’s law: Will is asking why sexy people can’t be interesting as Fiona is.)

p.131 – *landlord* – a man from whom you rent a room or a flat (and who therefore has some power over you)

p.131 – *seventy-five squillion people in the world* – ‘squillion’ is, of course, an invented word following ‘million’ and ‘billion’. Will is not interested in accuracy.

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 6. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.)* – *seriously (adv.)* – *seriousness (n.)* Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

equivalent (103), existence (104), cowardice (106), rebellion (120), reluctantly (130)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

fabric, fatigue, liquorice, merely (103), counsellor, obscenity, disasters, caffeine, incongruous (104), eccentric (105), raucous, gravel (106), discernible, collided (110), munificence, indisputably (112), pursued, savages, molesting (115), premature (120), scowled (123), recrimination, cheques (124), dysfunctional, lunacy (126), custody (127), wafted (129)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. отпутивать (105)
2. заманить в ловушку (105)
3. выходить из себя (108)
4. быть в гармонии (ладу) с самим собой (112)
5. промочить что-либо насквозь (113)
6. догадываться (115)
7. мириться с чем-то (119)
8. иметь наглость что-то сделать (124)
9. взять кого-то под свою опеку (126)
10. неожиданно, буквально на ровном месте (130)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. Will *caught sight of the pair of* them in a mirror, and was shocked to see that they could easily *pass for* father and son. (110)
2. *It wasn't fair.* Just because his mum *was being dim*, it didn't mean that Will had the right *to have a go at* her about him. (117)
3. Marcus knew she'd say it, and he also knew he'd *take no notice*, but he argued anyway. (117)
4. "You just seem very keen *to be shot of him*." (127)
5. "But *I'm on my own*. There's just me. *I'm not putting myself first*, because there isn't anybody else." (133)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

swearing, bought, drinking (104), thrown (105), caught (109), stolen (112)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Murphy's Law (129)
2. Bob Dylan (124)
3. Slang (e.g. *dosh* – money) (126)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch.16

1. Why was it difficult for the two – Marcus and Will - to get along with?
2. Who does Will think of as “real stuff”? What does ‘real stuff’ imply for Will?
3. Does the author give to the reader the idea of Will and Marcus’ belonging to different worlds?
4. Why did Will advise Marcus to do something about his outside?
5. How did Will happen to make Marcus happy?

Ch.17

1. What is better for them all – to know the truth about the Will – Marcus relationship, Marcus-school stuff matter or have them kept in secret?
2. What quiet truths about his mum and her motherly job became known to Marcus?
3. What did Fiona call “a premature teenage rebellion”? Do you agree to Fiona’s view of life?
4. Why do kids often think one thing and do another? What was Fiona’s way to teach her kid rules and appropriate behavior?
5. What proves that Fiona belongs to the adult world and Will – to the world of teenagers? What does Marcus mean by saying Will knows things?

Ch.18

1. Why did Will hate Christmas? What was wrong about the programme “*One Hit Wonders*”?
2. What does Will mean by saying “*I got the wrong end of the stick early on*”?
3. Why was Will involuntarily interested in Fiona?
4. Did Will come to any conclusion on Marcus? Can you agree with Will’s idea that life is easy?
5. What couldn’t Fiona understand in Marcus? What did she demand from Will?

Section 7
Chapters 19–21 (p.p. 134–155)

I. Read Ch. 19-21. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.139 – ...*couldn't you just try keeping out of their way* – Of course, Mrs. Morrison should take bullying seriously and not give such unhelpful advice. But Marcus is, for most grown-ups as well as children, an irritating child. Meanwhile she is overworked and looking for the easy option. Marcus is miserable, but adult readers are expected to smile – a little wryly. This is how we all react when we can't solve an intractable problem.

p.140 – *truant* – a child who stays away from school without permission

p.146 – *skive...bunk off* – two standard colloquial terms for truanting

p.148 – *vending machine* – the kind of metal box where you put your money in the slot and take out chocolate, chewing gum, a can of drink, etc. They were introduced into many schools in the 1980s, because they made money for the company that set them up, and profits could be shared with the school. But they had a terrible effect on children’s diets, and now many schools have removed them.

p.14 – *grunge* – a style of popular music (*Nirvana*)

p.149 – *Bob* – here, Bob Dylan

p.150 – *a roadie* – a person whose job is moving equipment, driving, etc., for entertainers, especially rock musicians, when they are travelling

p.150 – *taking the piss (out of someone)* - (vulgar slang) ridiculing, jeering at someone

p.153 – *What are you lot staring at?* - Some readers wanted to know the difference between this question and ‘What are you all staring at?’ ‘All’ is neutral; someone might come up to a crowd in the street who are watching an acrobat and ask ‘What are you all...’ ‘You lot’ indicates contempt for the group who are being addressed.

p.154 – ...*why some actor was letting Noel Edmonds pour stuff over his head* – Noel Edmonds was a popular TV host who presented Saturday night quiz shows. These often included celebrities who were covered in food or sticky substances if they got the answer wrong.

p.154 – *brainwashed* – persuaded by the enemy, who has used psychological tricks and pressure, that the enemy’s cause is right. (During the Korean war, American soldiers captured by the North Koreans who later spoke sympathetically of their enemy’s cause were described as brainwashed – somehow the North Koreans had ‘got inside their brains’.)

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 7. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.) – seriously (adv.) – seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

survival (139), addicts (140), furious (142), precision (143), awfulness (154)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

sweatshirt (137), truant (140), guilty, ambling (142), metaphorically, transparently (143), bleached, Jesus (144), descent (145), octave (146), comprehensive (147), genuinely, trio, triangle (152), publicity (154)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. некоторое время назад (134)
2. начнем с того (134)
3. он завелся (139)
4. постепенно (140)
5. держаться от них подальше (139)
6. его просто достала (141)
7. выпустить пар (142)
8. не лезть в бутылку (146)
9. раздавить как козявку (150)
10. хватить храбрости сделать что-то (151)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. Marcus *was so locked into himself*, so obvious to everyone and everything, that *affection seemed to be the only possible response* the boy seemed to be asking for absolutely nothing and absolutely everything *all at the same time*. (143)
2. “Oh, right. I had *to nip out* and get something.” (145)
3. “It looked like you *were skiving*.” (146)
4. “That what you were supposed to do, and he *felt the thrill* of having done something right *for a change*.” (148)
5. Marcus didn’t want to think about what that might mean, so he didn’t *take any notice*. (151)
6. *Loads of kids* acted as if they were not scared, but *dropped the act* the moment a teacher said anything to them. (152)
7. They were right; *he did feel he’d been adopted*. (155)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

thought (134), shook (136), sitting (137), lit (145), drove (146), burst (148), split (152), spoken (153)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. *Manchester United* (138), *Nottingham Forest* (145)
2. Bob Dylan (149)
2. Harley Davidson (150)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch.19

1. Why didn't Marcus like the idea of his mum speaking to Will? What was the result of their meeting?
2. Why did Marcus try to talk to Ellie? Had she done anything wrong? What was it?
3. Whose portrait was there on Ellie's sweatshirt? Did Marcus know anything about Kirk O'Bane?
4. Did Marcus lose temper with Mrs. Morrison? Why? How did their conversation end?
5. What was Marcus thinking about walking down Holloway Road? Was he ready for the changes in his life?

Ch. 20

1. Why did Will love driving around London? Whom did he see in Upper Street? Did he feel affection and was afraid of it?
2. What favour did Marcus ask Will about when he came to him? Did Will know much about football?
3. Why did Marcus begin the slow descent towards panic after Will's questions?
4. Was Marcus ready to share his problems with his mum? Why not?
5. Did Will see what kind of help Marcus needed? Could Will provide it?

Ch. 21

1. Whom did Marcus bump into at the vending machine at school the next morning? Why did the girls laugh at him?
2. Did Will approve of Ellie and her friend? What were his reasons?
3. Did Marcus have the nerve to come up to Ellie and her friend again?
4. What impression did Ellie and Zoe produce when they came to Marcus' classroom at lunchtime?
5. Why did Marcus feel as if he had been adopted?

Section 8
Chapters 22–24 (p.p. 156–177)

I. Read Ch. 22-24. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.160 – *he would do as the Romans do* – an allusion to the proverb 'When in Rome do as the Romans so', which means 'When you are in a foreign country or in some unfamiliar environment you should follow the local ways of behaviour'

p.160 – *Nevermind* – the highly influential second studio album from the American grunge band, *Nirvana*. It was released in 1991.

p.161 – *Clive gave Fiona a Nick Drake cassette* – Nick Drake was an English singer of the early 1970s. The irony of this gift to Fiona is that Drake suffered

from depression throughout his life (often reflected in his lyrics) and killed himself from an overdose of antidepressants.

p.162 – *pillock...prank...wanker* – These are all slang words of contempt, but it is important to understand the context. Will is used to judging people according to how cool they are. People who dress or behave in ‘uncool’ ways are dismissed as useless, as ‘pillocks, prats, wankers’. Now he is beginning to understand that people like Marcus do not judge others as pillocks or prats. Not everyone makes the same judgments as Will.

p.164 – *sheet music* – printed pages of music

p.164 – *After they’d watched the Queen on TV (nobody wanted to apart from Lindsey’s mum)* – Every Christmas Day the Queen broadcasts to ‘her people’ (including the peoples of the Commonwealth). The speech is written for her, and each year it makes references to families, children, peace in the world and other sympathetic noncontroversial subjects. For British men and women (mostly women) who like to listen to the Queen, it’s fine; for others it is very boring. We, Russians, should not think that listening to the Queen is like listening to the President. The Queen has no political power – so she cannot say anything important or give us her own opinion about the world. The Prime Minister has political power and if he decides that he must address the nation, formally or informally, people will watch or listen because they are interested in the *substance* of his speech.

p.164 – *Clive rolled a joint* – ‘a joint’ (informal) – a cigarette that contains *cannabis* (a drug made from the *hemp plant* and usually smoked). Cannabis is illegal in most countries: *marijuana*.

p.165 – *International Velvet...Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* – Both are popular films for Christmas, but whereas *International Velvet* is a touching and sentimental film with a happy ending, *Indiana Jones* is an action-packed film full of horrors including child slavery. (Nonetheless, it is also a comic film and considered very suitable for children.)

p.168-170 – From the bottom of p. 168 to the end of the chapter, these pages are worth reading (perhaps, like a play) as they illustrate Hornby’s skill in exploring many different points of view at once. Will does not want to play with the toddler, Megan. Suzie begins to jeer at him. Six people speak. Where are your sympathies and why?

p.171 – *Laura Nyro* – a good example of something which should not be annotated. Read the sentence and you know all that you need to know for this book.

p.171 – *...the suspect, dippy happiness* – when people are in love they feel dreamy, dizzy, slightly mad (dippy), but the feeling may have no foundation, it may be untrustworthy (suspect)

p.171 – *a bag of grass* – a supply of cannabis

p.172 – *a blank twit, a cipher* – a stupid person with no ideas; someone with no personality, merely a number

p.172 – *ferocious bouncers* – a bouncer is a security man who throws (bounces) people out of clubs, restaurants, etc., if they make trouble, don't pay, or do not belong

p.173 – *il ne sait quoi* – (French) 'he doesn't know what' – i.e. 'a little something special'

p.173 – *arty movers and shakers* – refers to people who initiate projects, get things moving, have ideas that they try to put into practice; 'arty' is a slightly disparaging word meaning 'people interested in arts'. (Will calls them 'arty'; they would describe themselves as 'artistic'.)

p.174 – *Robert had pre-media roots* – Will is wondering why he, of all Robert's former friends has been invited to this party which is full of TV and film people. He decides that it's because he is enough of a deadbeat (a useless person, not successful in any career) to show Robert's new friends that Robert had a dreary life before he got into the media world (pre-media roots), but also that he, Will, looks attractive and intelligent enough to be acceptable at the party. This is an example of Will being charmingly honest with himself.

p.176 – *run-of-the-mill* – ordinary

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 8. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives where possible, e.g. *serious* (adj.) – *seriously* (adv.) – *seriousness* (n.)

invariably (156), curiosity (158), coincidence (159), mischief (168), annihilate (174)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

burrow, bosom (156), abandoned, technique, lunatic, revert (158), misapprehension, constituent, righteous (159), loathe, contemptible, squabbling, groovy (160), elucidate (161), parental, sashaying (162), doughnut (164), baguette (174), indulgence (175), woes (176), ambiguity (177)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. он вдруг подумал (156)
2. всеми силами (156)
3. понимать намек (159)
4. следовать всеобщему настрою (160)
5. здравый смысл возобладал (160)
6. прибавить репутации (161)
7. довольствоваться чем-то (171)
8. копаться в памяти (172)
9. да упокоится он с миром (173)
10. общаться, поддерживать отношения (173)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. So he would spend Christmas *in the bosom of a family* – not his family, because he didn't have one, but *a family*. (156)
2. "I'm obviously not *one hundred percent convinced* that I want to come to your house for Christmas." (158)
3. *It wasn't much of a compensation* for the long years ahead. (163)
4. The audience on the sofa looked *appalled*. (170)
5. Will fell in love on New Year's Eve, and the experience *took him completely by surprise*. (171)
6. What could he *reel her back* with? (174)
7. Will had *at least managed to introduce some friction into the conversation*. (176)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken* – *to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

beginning (156), let (156), given (157), wore (160), struck (161), chosen (162), tore (168)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. He would do as the Romans do (proverbs) (160)
2. *pillock ... prank ... wanker* (slang) (162)
3. *Led Zeppelin* (174)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch. 22

1. Why wasn't Will trying to think about Christmas?
2. How did Marcus manage to persuade Will to come and spend Christmas round theirs?
3. Who were the guests at the party? Was Will surprised to find out the world like this?
4. Comment on the presents the guests exchanged.
5. Why did Will realize that Marcus was really a good boy?

Ch. 23

1. How did the party go on?
2. What was the row about?
3. Did it change the atmosphere of the party?
4. Why did Will feel awkward when Suzie came?
5. Was Marcus against Will's decision to leave? How did he protect him?

Ch. 24

1. Why did the feeling of love take Will by surprise? Had he ever wanted to fall in love?
2. Where did he meet Rachel? What did they talk about?
3. What happened to be the most interesting thing about Will's life?
4. What did Will tell Rachel about Fiona and Marcus?
5. Why did Rachel's story seem round-of-the-way to Will?

Section 9

Chapters 25–27 (p.p. 178–203)

I. Read Ch. 25-27. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.180 – *something that looked like Coke and smelt like trifle* – ‘trifle’ is a popular English pudding, made with cakes, fruit, cream and sherry (a fortified wine). Eating a portion of trifle is the only other occasion on which Marcus has smelt sherry which is why he thinks of trifle.

p.187 – *let's-cut-the-crap* – let's ignore all this rubbish/nonsense and get down to the real matter. (‘Crap’ is a common word for ‘shit’.)

p.191 – *an unimaginable cross between Siouxsie of the Banshees and the Roadrunner* – that's what Will imagines Ellie looks like. The rock bands mentioned here – as you can guess – were notorious for their aggressive behaviour. Hornby is giving a quick guide to readers who know the bands, but you are free to make up your own image of Ellie.

p.200 – *maybe the crying had been a bit of a red herring* – ‘a red herring’ is a common idiom meaning something which seemed significant but turned out to be unimportant

p.202 – *mooched around* – slang/colloquial for ‘wandered around, did nothing, hung around’

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 9. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.)* – *seriously (adv.)* – *seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

cruising (180), mutuality (191), threaten (200), unsubtle (201), creatures (203)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

cretin (179), consequence (180), cautious (181), arcade, sirens, grotesque (186), efficacy, ostentatiously, swivelled (188), calorific, ingesting, reciprocation (189), minutiae, profundities, oblivious (190), disastrous, canary (192), scornfully, miaow (193), nudged (194), adolescence (195), scenario (196), psycho (198), blubbing (199), pattern (201), deficient (203)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. скорчить рожу (179)
2. поэтому, как следствие (180)
3. расхотаться (181)
4. продолжать делать что-либо (183)
5. неправильно понять (186)
6. почувствовать нутром (189)
7. признак зрелости (190)
8. протестовать, демонстрировать неуважение к (192)
9. выскользнуть из (198)
10. произвести слишком сильное впечатление (203)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. *You were miles away*, if you were laughing, and *he did now think of it all in terms of distance*. (180)
2. Marcus had never had *a proper talk* with someone of his own age before. (181)
3. Marcus wasn't at all sure that he did, but *he was given no choice*. (184)
4. Don't you ever have conversations where someone *took a wrong turn* at some point, and then it goes on and on and it becomes too late *to put things right*? (186)
5. Finally, Marcus *swivelled his eyes away from* the TV screen, and Will could see *they were shining with fascination and pleasure*. (188)
6. Will shook his head, a gesture that Marcus missed because *his eyes were still glued to the video screen*. (191)
7. Will *launched into* his own version of a giggling fit. (193)
8. That *cheered Marcus up on end*; he was perfectly happy to go back to Rachel's, he decided. (199)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

shaking (178), hanging (180), smelt (180), lead (183), bound (185), shining (188), won (194), saying (203)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. *Robocop* (188)
2. *Godzilla* (188)
3. Michael Jordan (195)
4. Pamela Anderson (195)
5. ‘red herring’ (idioms) (200)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch. 25

1. Was Marcus surprised to meet Ellie at Suzie’s New Year’s Eve party? Who else was there?
2. Why had Marcus been worried about his mum? Was it Will who asked him to watch her out?
3. Who offered Marcus a proper drink for the first time in his life? Did the boy like it?
4. Read this discussion about suicide and parents’ responsibilities. Do you agree with Ellie or with Marcus? Why was Marcus enjoying his proper conversation with Ellie, even though the topic was miserable?
5. What did Ellie show Marcus and why? Comment on the sentence “There were no rules here, and he was old enough to know that when you went to a place, or a time, with no rules then things were bound to be more complicated.”

Ch. 26

1. Why did Will tell Rachel that Marcus was his son? How did Marcus react to this?
2. Did Will want Rachel to become his girlfriend? Why did he call Marcus “a twelve-year-old Doctor Love”?
3. How did Marcus explain to Will that he wanted Ellie to be his girlfriend? What did the conversation in the video games arcade create in Will and Marcus?
4. What conversation did Will and Marcus have when they were about to go to Rachel? Why did they both find it absurd?
5. Comment on their visit to Rachel. In what way was Ali different from Marcus?

Ch. 27

1. Comment on the talk between Ali and Marcus. Why did Marcus leave without anyone noticing it?
2. Where did Will find him? Did it all end well?
3. How did Marcus come to realize why nice women like Rachel and Suzie might love Will?
4. When did Marcus practise a trick he had learnt from Will? Was he a success?
5. What happened at the newsagent’s? Comment on the situation.

Section 10

Chapters 28–30 (p.p. 204–228)

I. Read Ch. 28-30. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.205 – ...*a gerbil* – is a small rodent, often kept in a cage as a pet by children

p.213 – *toasting crumpets under the grill* – a crumpet is a kind of baked pancake about a centimeter thick. It is made with special dough that produces an open spongy texture when it is baked. Before a crumpet is eaten, the top surface is heated under the flame of a grill until it is very hot and brown. On such a surface butter easily melts and slides through the surface holes down into the spongy interior. The pleasures of buttering a crumpet are *exactly* as described on page 214.

p.215 – ‘*We don’t have second years.*’ ‘*Year whatever it is. Year eight.*’ – When Will was at school, children aged 12 were called ‘second years’ because they were in the second year of their secondary school. In the 1980s the naming was changed. Five-year-olds are now in Year 1 (the first year of full-time schooling) so twelve-year-olds are in Year 8. As usual, Will is trying to tell a story about his friend as *an analogy* for his own situation towards Marcus; and as usual Marcus interrupts by seeming to miss the point. But he has a point: Will lived in the days of ‘second years’ so he is now a grown-up, not another twelve-year-old. The analogy won’t work.

p.218 – *James Dean and Marilyn Monroe and Jimi Hendrix* – film actors and singers who died young (Dean in a car crash, Monroe and Hendrix by overdose)

p. 222 – *David Cronenberg* – a Canadian film director. He is one of the principle originators of the ‘body horror’ genre, which explores people’s fears of bodily transformation and infection.

p.222 – *The Wasp Factory* – the first novel written by Scottish writer Iain Banks, published in 1984. Told by a 16-year-old Frank Cauldham, it describes his strange childhood and contains considerable violence.

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 10. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.)* – *seriously (adv.)* – *seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

assault (204), erroneous (206), predictable (213), irrelevant (217), precisely (225)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

smitten, enthused (204), karate, romances, tormented (v) (205), exhibit, envisaged, grimaced (208), emanating, precursors (209), crumpets (213),

tranquilizers, obtuse (215), vertigo (220), reverie, buoyant (222), dilating (223), unencumbered (224), ploughed (225)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. собственной персоной, (а именно) (205)
2. с чистой совестью (207)
3. сильно желать чего-либо, ждать встречи с чем-либо (208)
4. поосторожнее (209)
5. быть (выглядеть) грустным (216)
6. растопить лед непонимания (в отношениях) (220)
7. непреодолимое желание (220)
8. у него свело ногу (222)
9. удержать (222)
10. неожиданное везение (224)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. And he said it *with such sincerity*, and with such a complete *absence of self-pity*, that for the first time ever Will *was tempted to hug him*. (205)
2. Either you *lied or you told the truth*, it appeared, and that *in-between state* was *pretty tricky* to achieve. (206)
3. “You shouldn’t *beat yourself up about it*”.(209)
4. It was nice, *in a way*, *contemplating* all the things he could have meant when he’d said *she was at it again*.(213)
5. It wasn’t noisy crying – his eyes just *filled with tears* and they started *to stream down his cheeks* – but it was still *embarrassing*. (218)
6. *Keeping your head above water* was what it was all about, Will *reckoned*. (221)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

smitten (204), fell (210), thought (210), singing, lost (221), keeping (221), sat (225)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Jean-Claud Van Damme (205)
2. “*Mission Impossible*” (215)
3. James Dean (218)
4. Marilyn Monroe (218)
5. Jimi Hendrix (218)
6. David Cronenberg (222)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch. 28

1. Why was Will tempted to hug Marcus after their conversation?
2. Comment on Will's words: "Either you lied or you told the truth, it appeared, and that in-between state was pretty tricky to achieve". (206)
3. What was his conversation with Rachel about? Was it difficult for Will?
4. Where did Rachel invite Will after the meal? What did he feel?
5. What did Will understand after his conversation with Rachel?

Ch. 29

1. Did anything happen during the next 3 or 4 weeks?
2. Did Marcus's mum start crying again? What was different this time?
3. Who did Marcus go to for advice and help?
4. What did his conversation with Will result in?
5. Comment on Marcus's meeting and talk with Ellie.

Ch. 30

1. What did Will feel when Marcus asked him to do something about Fiona?
2. Why did people like Fiona really annoy Will?
3. Was his relationship with Rachel weird? In what way?
4. What happened one evening?
5. Comment on Rachel's words about her life and her feelings.

Section 11

Chapters 31–33 (p.p. 229–255)

I. Read Ch. 31-33. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p.230 – *some sort of DIY thing* – DIY – do-it-yourself; making or repairing things for your home instead of paying someone to do them for you

p.230 – *painting or grouting or one of those Scrabble words* – he can't remember the exact term, but he thinks it is an odd sounding word like the words which can be successfully used in games of Scrabble (the board game in which the players construct crosswords)

p.233 – *King's Cross* – the name of a main railway station, from which trains go to the north (including Cambridge which is not very far north.) The area around the station is also known as King's Cross, and is not far from Marcus' home.

p.236 – *Open University* – This is a university, founded in 1968, which provides courses only for external students who study at a distance. Most students are older than thirty; some are in their eighties. Because they mostly study part-time, it takes five or six years to obtain a first degree, but the standard is very high.

Students read at home, write essays which they post to their tutors, listen to special programmes on the BBC, watch videos, use the internet and sometimes go to summer schools or monthly tutorials. Many people enroll for shorter courses than a full degree – this seems to be what Fiona is doing.

p.240 – *John Major's shirts* – Another joke with the reader. John Major was Prime Minister in 1990 - 1997. It seems that his wife once remarked that her husband habitually tucked his shirt inside his underpants. (His wife was a pleasant quiet woman, and, if she said this, she certainly did not intend it to be taken up by the press.) Cartoonists loved this detail, and the cartoonist in *The Guardian* always portrayed John Major standing with bare legs and his shirt tucked into his underpants. Fiona reads *The Guardian* and certainly disapproves of the Conservative politics of John Major. So she starts talking to Will (who has never thought about politics) assuming that he knows all about Major's dressing habits, which were turned into a form of mockery. Will is completely bewildered. This is another example of how each cultural group assumes that its ideas belong to everyone.

p.241 – *in Man United away shirts* – *Manchester United* is one of the Premier football clubs. They wear different coloured shirts for Home and Away matches, and their supporters imitate them.

p.243 – *a bottle of house red and a Four Seasons* – The house red is a basic red wine, which is sold by the restaurant much cheaper than the named wines and vintages on the wine menu. 'Four Seasons' is the name of a particular kind of pizza

p.245 – *cabbie was listening to GLR* – the taxi driver was listening to Greater London Radio, the BBC's regional station for London

p.246 – *He had never had any kind of intuition or empathy or connection in his life but he had it now* – This is a significant moment for Will, and you could try to decide why it has happened at this point in his life.

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 11. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *serious (adj.) – seriously (adv.) – seriousness (n.)*. Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words.

ridiculously (229), injustice (230), indicative (244), emergency (247), particularly (253)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

blindfolds (236), rummage (238), vehicle, lengthy (240), tetchiness, existential, pseud (241), parenthood (242), ulterior, malarkey, pertinent (244), gauze (245), intuition, empathy (246), contagious (248), ventriloquist, boutique (251)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. яростно, в ярости (230)
2. научить кого-либо уму-разуму (230)
3. напустить кого-то на кого-то (232)
4. поворотный момент в чьей-то жизни (242)
5. вот-вот, на грани (243)
6. повседневные дела (244)
7. обычное дело (246)
8. быть бдительным, быть начеку (250)
9. задержать преступника (253)
10. сойти с рельсов, слететь с катушек (254)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. The *chances* of it happening to even one of them were *pretty slim*, and even if it did, it couldn't be Marcus. (229)
2. "He'd been *asking for* you. I think *he's a bit doolally* at the moment". (230)
3. Fiona wanted to come to King's Cross with Marcus, but he *managed to talk her out* of it. (233)
4. She *rummaged around* in her bag and *produced* a bottle of vodka. (238)
5. "Oh, no. Not every time, anyway. I'll *weed out the rubbish*." (240)
6. If Rachel arrived *breathless and apologetic* at this second, he could stand up, *make the introductions*, tell Rachel that Fiona *was just about to* explain *the root cause of her misery*, and then *shove off*. (241)
7. The policemen thought *this was funny*, which Marcus *took as a good sign*, although it made Ellie very angry indeed: she told them they were *patronizing*, and they looked at each other and *laughed a bit more*. (252)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken – to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

winning (229), to swear (231), cut (232), beaten (232), to blow (233), felt (235), holding (235), lit (239), shook (242), stuck (243)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. A game of Scrabble (230)
2. John Major (Prime Ministers of Great Britain) (240)
3. Uma Thurman (246)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch. 31

1. What were Marcus' ideas about the end of the winter? Did he believe in star signs?
2. What did his mum tell him when he returned home? Why did the phrase "*He's having this big think about his life ...*" make Marcus so angry?
3. When did Marcus begin to change his mind about going to see his dad? Why?
4. Did Fiona see Marcus off? How did he manage to talk her out of it?
5. How did Marcus get to know about Kurt Cobain's death? How did he try to keep Ellie from learning about it?

Ch. 32

1. What was Will's plan for him, Rachel and Fiona? Did it work?
2. Did Fiona cry again? What worried her?
3. Why did Will and Fiona go to Pizza Express on Upper Street? Did it turn out easier than he could have anticipated?
4. Did Will learn much about Fiona?
5. What news did they hear in the taxi? Why was Will fearful?

Ch. 33

1. What was Marcus thinking about in the train? Why did he realize that Ellie wasn't the right person for him?
2. How did Ellie remind him of Will? Did he begin to understand her much better?
3. Why did Ellie jump off the train at Royston? What did she do at a record shop?
4. How did the policemen treat them at the police station? What did Marcus feel?
5. Who came to the police station? Comment on the conversation.

Section 12
Chapters 34–6 (p.p. 256–278)

I. Read Ch. 34-36. Use the following comments for better understanding.

p. 258 – *Ditto* – The expression means 'repeat that', often appearing in scripts as double dots under a part of the line above. Katrina says 'This is the last straw', a proverbial expression: 'It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back'. She means that Ellie has finally driven her to total exasperation, and she will...she will ... (But what can she do? Throw Ellie out of the house?) Fiona says 'Ditto' meaning 'I repeat that...what Marcus has done is the last straw for me.' And then Katrina is realistic and makes a joke.

p. 261 – *University of Life sweatshirt* – It has a message such as 'I was educated at the University of Life'. A popular phrase for those who believe that experience is far more important than formal education.

p. 261 – *It's something we're trying here. You know, criminals face-to-face with victims of crime* – Calling the criminal to account by making him face his victim is used in cases such as Ellie's (criminal damage) or in cases of theft from houses. The courts have to decide whether both the criminal and the victim will benefit. So far it seems to be remarkably effective in teaching criminals to think about what they have done, and in getting them to apologize directly to the victim.

p. 262 – *doppelganger* - a German word meaning someone who is so much like you that he or she seems to shadow you and understand your mind. Normally used in sinister circumstances but here in a comic situation

p. 264 – *Was Royston law the same as 'LA Law'? Will wondered.* – Fiona, in her anxiety, starts talking like a criminal in an American film: 'We're willing to cut a deal' which is something no English person would say, and certainly not to an English policeman

p. 273 – *a Paul Smith suit or pair of Raybans* – 'cool' clothes that Will had used to protect himself from real emotions

p. 274– *He'd taken them to Arsenal* – a famous football club in London, of which Hornby himself is a famous fan

II. Write out the proper names of the characters as they appear in Section 12. Make brief comments on what you learn about them.

III. (A) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean. Form derivatives, e.g. *seriously* (adj.) – *seriously* (adv.) – *seriousness* (n.). Look up idioms, proverbs or sayings with these words

absorption (257), contribution (265), measure (268), explosion (274), privilege (275)

III. (B) Transcribe and practise pronouncing the following words as they are given in the text. Make sure you know what they mean.

chew (256), chaos, hennaed, feisty (257), figurative (258), accomplice, civility (260), pomposity, exploiting (261), weapons, barmy (263), narcotics (264), dynamic, focused (266), accident (269), pyramid (270), angles (271), enclosure (274), rhetorical, insecure, Einstein, pityingly (276), tiny, brusque (277), robust, naked (278)

IV. Find the English equivalents to the following in the text; use them in the sentences/situations of your own.

1. на расстоянии (256)
2. неуправляемый (257)
3. это последняя капля (258)
4. близкие по духу (260)
5. взывать к кому-то (263)

6. заключить сделку (264)
7. начать новую жизнь (264)
8. в ее логике было слабое место (266)
9. закончиться (о претензиях) (267)
10. решить, заключить (273)

V. Translate in writing. Pay special attention to the underlined words and phrases.

1. Something about now was *reminding him of* then; there was the same sense of *unpredictability* and *absorption* and *chaos*. (257)
2. *It was kind of ironic* that this strange and lonely child could somehow *make all these connections*, and yet *remained so unconnected himself* (259)
3. Will had *to hand it to* her: once she had decided *to fight for* her child *she was unstoppable, however wrong-headed the decision*, and *however inappropriate the weapons*. (263)
4. *It* only really *worked*, he realized, if *you were convinced* that being you wasn't so bad *in the first place*. (266)
5. "Because you can't stand on top of mum and dad if they're going *to mess around* and *wander off* and *get depressed*". (271)
6. Will *was suddenly seized with the desire to* pour his boiling-point fast-food coffee down the front of Marcus's shirt. (275)
7. Will knew then, *beyond any shadow of a doubt*, that Marcus would be OK. (278)

VI. Find the following irregular verbs as they are used in the text. Give the four forms of these verbs (e.g. *shaken* – *to shake, shook, shaken, shaking*). Be sure you know their meaning, pronounce them.

rang (256), wearing (261), broke (262), stood (263), bound (264), caught (264), fell (269), kept (374), become (275), lost (278)

VII. Google additional information on the following. Make a report or a presentation on the chosen topic.

1. Julio Iglesias (262)
2. The Empire State Building (268)
3. *Arsenal* – a football club (274)

VIII. Questions and points for discussion. Use the words and phrases from ex. IV-V

Ch. 34

1. Who decided to go to Royston? What did you learn about Ellie's mother?
2. How did their relations develop on the way to Royston? Comment on their conversation.
3. Speak on the atmosphere at the police station. What happened when the owner of the record shop came?

4. How did Fiona behave protecting Marcus? Did Will appreciate it?
5. Describe their visit to the bar. What ideas occurred to Will?

Ch. 35

1. Why did Marcus feel sorry for his father? Why did he stop being that kind of dad any more?
2. Comment on Marcus's stay with his dad and Lindsey.
3. What were Marcus's ideas about a pyramid?
4. Was Marcus sure that everything would be all right?
5. How did Marcus's visit to his dad end?

Ch. 36

1. Why did Will feel as if he were a chick?
2. Where did he take Marcus and Ali most Saturdays now?
3. Why was Marcus older than Ali now? Was it strange for Will to miss the old Marcus?
4. Comment on Marcus's attitude to family life. Was it easy for Will to argue with him?
5. When did Will understand that Marcus would be OK?

Discussion

1. Watch the film "*About a Boy*". Speak about its merits. Compare the book with the screen version.
2. See Supplement and make reports on the suggested topics. Use the active vocabulary you have learnt.
3. Speak on the main characters of the book:
 - Marcus
 - Will
 - Fiona

Supplement

Social Contexts

1) Names

Many Russian readers wonder if there is any significance in the names of the main characters. Practice varies from author to author, but English readers will certainly respond to some names as clues to the status of the character. First, there are hundreds of recognized English first names – the British cannot understand why Russians have so few. Fashions change from generation to generation, so the choice of first name can sometimes help us to identify, in life and in literature, when the action takes place. Even more important is the whole question of class: some first names are associated with people from, say, the upper middle class, or the northern working class. Novelists who are interested in social realities will therefore pick names that seem to fit the character's social position. However, many names are neutral, allowing novelists to choose a name that they just happen to like.

For most of his characters Hornby has selected names which will be found among the educated middle classes around 1993 – which means for Will and his friends, names which were chosen for them in the late 1950s. Will's full name is William. (In Britain we do not have a range of diminutives which are available for a variety of situations. Some names have one or two diminutives, but if you choose to be known by one of them, that becomes your personal name.) Another diminutive of William is Bill, but Will is intensely annoyed when someone wrongly calls him Bill. He is *not* Bill, he is Will. William and Bill are more or less socially neutral; Will is definitely a name for people who are comfortably middle-class or higher. Fiona, Suzie, Rachel are middle-class names, Fiona in the novel may be a single mother with very little spare money, but her parents (if fictional characters can have parents) were not poor. Marcus is a name given to middle-class boys whose parents probably have intellectual interests. Lee, his tormentor, has a working-class name. (Hornby is not being anti-working class; he knows that someone called Lee is going to find Marcus weirder than someone called – say – Rupert, which is a name socially close to Marcus.)

In realistic novels names do not usually symbolize temperaments or roles in the plot; they can only be socially suggestive. And most names are socially neutral, for example John and Christine, the names of Will's friends whom we meet in the first chapter – although Barney and Imogen, their children, are definitely names chosen by educated parents.

Since surnames cannot be chosen, very little significance can be attached to them, unless they are deliberately comic (as in Dickens' novels). In *About a Boy* very few surnames are used. 'Freeman' is a common surname and so is Morrison, the name of the head teacher; McCrae is a Scottish name, but Scottish names are as widespread in England as Ukrainian surnames are in Russia. Perhaps 'Freeman' suggests a 'free man', but to the English ear it is just a name with no special meaning.

2) Marcus at school

Marcus is bullied for being odd. Bullying is probably no more prevalent in England than anywhere else, although we know it varies widely from school to school. Even in the same area one school will have reputation as a place where bullying goes unchecked, whereas in the neighbouring school it is virtually unknown. No doubt the role of the head teacher and the social culture of the school affect what goes on in the playground. Will remembers learning to bully in order not to be bullied (125) as though terrorizing other distressed children was an inevitable part of school life. On the other hand, Marcus is singled out because he is odd, as though ordinary children had nothing to fear.

Cambridge is a smallish town (about 110,000 inhabitants) with a substantial academic community that includes many eccentrics. Marcus would have found more children like himself in his class, and a greater understanding of their oddities than in a large inner-city London school where pupils have to make and share a common culture in order to live comfortably together.

Most schools have a simple uniform, partly because it is easier to control the wilder excesses of someone like Ellie if there are basic rules. The kind of elaborate and expensive clothes, which many Russian girls wear to school, are discouraged or forbidden; teachers would explain that such clothes are not appropriate for school where pupils are supposed to be concentrating on studying, not on showing off their charms to the opposite sex. Regulations about make-up, ear-piercing and so forth depend on the individual school and are made clear to parents at the beginning of their child's school career. (It is not too difficult to impose a uniform on an eleven-year-old who is just beginning his life at secondary school. The arguments and rebellions come later.)

Marcus joins a computer club. Most schools organize clubs during the 'lunch hour' in the middle of the day, or 'after school', from 3.30 or 4.00 p.m. onwards. Sometimes the arrangement is informal (for example, when an enthusiastic teacher sets up a chess club), sometimes the activity is built in to the school curriculum, such as weekly rehearsals for a school choir or orchestra, or for a drama society that produces an annual play. Marcus' school will almost certainly have a special computer room, where a teacher organizes a computer club during the lunch period. Normally these clubs are free, but parents may be asked to contribute to the costs of materials, excursions, etc.

3) Parents and children

Will joins a (fictional) society for single parents (SPAT). Since millions of single parents in Britain struggle to make lives for themselves and their children, societies like SPAT are common. One characteristic of the British is that they love setting up self-help societies where victims of a particular disaster can meet to discuss and share their difficulties. We have hundreds of societies for single parents, for stay-at-home fathers, for parents with children suffering from various illnesses or disabilities, for

people who can't read, or who are alcoholic or gambling addicts... as well as book groups and yoga groups, and groups who organize their own film or theatre club. These societies are started by one or two people who want to find others in a similar situation or who share their interests. Nobody has to join, while those who do so quickly find that they are taking on some responsibility. Each organization is run and paid for by the people who are members, although once established, some of these societies can apply to the government for a small grant. Will as a man is an unusual visitor to, and then member of, SPAT, but he apparently qualifies as a single parent, so there is no reason why he should not be accepted by the others.

You may feel that Marcus has to be very independent for a twelve-year-old. He travels to Cambridge by himself, and learns to negotiate his part of London with very little help from the grown-ups. Such is part of the reality of being a child with a single parent in London today. Note, however, that even Will knows that babies and small children are surrounded by safety regulations. In Britain wearing seat belts is compulsory, and providing special seats for children until they are old enough to use adult ones is also compulsory. No respectable parent would fail to buy a seat for his own car, both because he cares for his child, and because if he fails to fit one he could easily be prosecuted. (Children are sometimes sneaked into cars where there is no special seat for a short journey and held by parents who *are* wearing a seat belt.)

4) Suicide

Among developed Western countries, Britain has lower than average suicide rates which have not changed much since Hornby wrote his novel: about 11 men and 3 women per year, per 100,000 of the population. In any one year this means that about one per cent of deaths are by suicide. (Russia has a much higher rate, especially among men.)

Hornby's interest in suicide does not, therefore, reflect a great surge in suicide rates, particularly since in the novel it is the women who discuss the idea or attempt to kill themselves. However, statistically, more women than men make *unsuccessful* attempts at suicide, attempts which may be deliberately unsuccessful. Taking an overdose of painkillers or other pills that can be easily bought at the chemist with a good chance that someone will find you before you die seems to be one way in which depressed women cope with their unhappiness. Marcus is right to worry about his mother's crying.

Among Hornby's middle-class generation, (those who, like Will Freeman, were in their mid-thirties in 1993 when the novel is set), the problem of the woman trying to bring up a child or children on her own was not new but it had new features. Divorce was uncommon until about 1970 when the law changed to make it much easier, and divorce rates soared. Inevitably more and more children became victims of family break-up throughout the seventies and eighties. At the same time, more and more women with higher education were seeking jobs where previously they would have given up work, at least for some years, while having their children. So, by the mid-1980s women, especially those with a university degree,

were having children later and later. Often the first child was born when the mother was over thirty, by which time she had perhaps been promoted in an interesting and responsible career. Having children meant giving up an income and exciting adult work or handing one's baby to other people to look after. These adjustments were not easy even with a happily-married couple; if the marriage broke down, the woman could find herself much poorer, with no prospect of continuing in her former job, struggling to care for children who needed her all the more because of the divorce, and very isolated. (All this was – and is – true, even if the father did his best to keep in contact with his children.) Hence among educated mid-thirties women in 1993, frustrated single parents was a significant part of the community. Hornby is interested in how they manage to pick themselves up from the catastrophe that has hit them and how they re-organize their lives. In this sense Fiona's response to the situation is extreme but, as Rachel admits, others have considered suicide. The number who actually kill themselves is tiny, and probably more to do with their underlying temperament than any outward circumstances; but the situation that drives them to do *something* is very familiar to Hornby's readers.

In this novel the lives of the fictional characters are shadowed by the lives of music stars, several of whom committed suicide. Marcus reflects on the difference. (234-235)

5) Drugs

Both Will and Clive smoke cannabis (referred to in this novel as 'a joint', 'grass', 'a spliff', 'being stoned'.) Cannabis, although illegal, is widely used by older teenagers and students on a casual basis, at parties, among friends, but most people have stopped smoking it by the time they are in their thirties. Certain types of people (in fact, people like Will and Clive, middle-class, relaxed, and keen to show that they are cool) may continue to use cannabis into middle age. When Clive says '*It's not drug-taking...it's just normal...*' (166) he means that he makes a big distinction between heroin and crack-cocaine, which are dangerous on the one hand, and cannabis on the other. He is thinking: 'Cannabis is safe, is non-addictive, is the kind of harmless pleasure that we enjoy the way other people enjoy a glass of wine.'

Cannabis is so easily available in Britain, that among all the characters in this novel except Lindsay's mother, it would be accepted, even though it is illegal. Most people would agree with Clive about its effects. On the other hand, Fiona and the other mothers are anxious that if their children smoke cannabis, they might be led on to experiment with 'hard' drugs like heroin.

6) Parties

Apart from the meetings and picnics and evenings in restaurants, Hornby describes the events of Christmas Day and two New Year's parties. In England Christmas is a holiday for families, hence Will has no plans for the day until Marcus invites him to spend Christmas with Fiona and himself. Estranged husbands and wives may meet together for the sake of their children, although

Clive's readiness to bring Lindsey and Lindsey's mum is unusual. Will's reflections on p. 159-160 include the wary 'to strive for pleasantness and harmony once a year wasn't an entirely contemptible ambition.'

New Year's Eve parties are popular, but many people are by this time so exhausted by their long Christmas holiday that they crawl into bed and miss the coming of the New Year. There is no set pattern to such parties. Will happens to know Robert who has invited him to a party, which includes a full sit-down meal. Suzie invites everyone she knows round for drinks and talk and light refreshments of the kind you can eat while standing up. Robert will not invite children to his party; Suzie includes them all.

Themes

(1) One major theme in *About a Boy* is the decline of the nuclear family, and what might take its place:

Two wasn't enough that was the trouble.
He'd always thought that two was a good
number, and that he'd hate to live in a family
of three or four or five. But he could see the
point of that now: if someone dropped off the
edge, you weren't left on your own.

Marcus also observes 'I just don't think couples are the future' (284). *About a Boy* suggests an alternative to traditional families/couples in an extended network of friends and acquaintances, crossing age boundaries. The random ways in which strangers become part of each other's lives is important here and offers a cautiously optimistic outlook on the perceived alienation and lack of extended family experienced in contemporary life. The novel also comments on parenthood and its difficulties, and suggest that 'parenting' may be less about biological parentage than about caring for someone. Marcus observes 'I can't believe how crap my parents are', but this means less to him when he has other people to fall back on.

(2) Like Hornby's earlier books, *Fever Pitch* and *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy* can also be seen as a commentary on modern masculinity – in the sense that both Will and Marcus have to grow up, change, and gain a sense of responsibility for and involvement with others. The novel suggests that there is a bond between Will and Marcus because they are both men: 'Will understood devious men:' (138). Will begins the novel with a lack of affect, not caring particularly for anyone and nor affected by their problems, 'What good were real feelings anyway?' (150). When Hornby notes that 'To all extents and purposes he *was* a teenager' (57), this is partly because of his exclusively personal outlook on the world, partly because his cultural interest seems younger than his age-group. Will is forced to recognize that once he enters people's lives, he cannot maintain his pose as observer: 'He had imagined entering their world, but he hadn't foreseen that they might be able to penetrate his' (101). An important moment in the novel comes on p.117 when Will finds out that Marcus has been bullied at school: 'Sometimes Marcus sounded as

though he were a hundred years old, and it broke Will's heart' (117). This is Will feeling genuine emotion on Marcus's behalf, a sign that his attitude has definitively changed even if he remains in denial of that change.

(3) A third related theme develops with increasing insistence in the second half of the novel: that learning to interact with other people makes life more dynamic, with greater possibilities for both joy and grief. Marcus begins the novel bewildered by grown-up behaviour, and shut off in his new school. In every charter he *learns* something, often something seemingly small which has much wider ramifications.

Even though what they were talking about was miserable, Marcus was enjoying the conversation. It seemed big, as though you could walk round it and see different things... His mum must have conversations like this with Suzie, conversations where each thing the other person said seemed to lead you on somewhere. (182-183)

Will has to learn to be responsible, but he rarely expresses this idea to himself. Like Marcus he has sudden moments of revelation which he can then brood over: 'Will couldn't recall having been caught up in this sort of messy, sprawling, chaotic web before; it was almost as if he had been given a glimpse of what it was like to be human. It wasn't too bad, really; he wouldn't even mind being human on a full-time basis' (264-265).

Structure and Narrative

The chapters alternate between Marcus' point of view and Will's point of view. Although technically in the 'third person', both stories are told almost exclusively from the point of view of either Marcus or Will. These accounts bring them very close to the reader: each of their narratives is a comment on what is happening *now*, in the present, with passages looking back to the recent past.

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Содержание

Nick Hornby. Biography.....	3
Section 1.....	5
Section 2.....	10
Section 3.....	14
Section 4.....	18
Section 5.....	22
Section 6.....	25
Section 7.....	29
Section 8.....	32
Section 9.....	36
Section 10.....	39
Section 11.....	41
Section 12.....	44
Supplement.....	48
Reference List.....	53

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