National 5 English

Scottish Text Drama Study

Bold Girls

Revision Booklet

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**Understanding the Plot**

On the surface, ‘Bold Girls’ is a simple play which follows the events affecting four women (Marie, Cassie, Nora and Deirdre) in Belfast over a single day and night. The play has only one act which consists of four scenes. Below is a summary of the events of these four scenes.

**Scene One**

In the opening scene we are introduced to each of the four main characters. Marie is a widowed mother of two young boys and at the start of the play is doing her laundry. She is joined by her best friend and neighbour Cassie and Cassie’s mother Nora. Cassie is trying to convince Marie to join her at a club. Their conversation is interrupted when Deirdre (who until this point has been outside in the rain) knocks on Marie’s door and asks for shelter. As the women watch an episode of ‘Blind Date’ we notice tension between Cassie and her mother. This increases when they talk about Cassie’s beloved father Sean who Nora claims was violent. Additionally, we are given a negative first impression of Deirdre who ignores many of the questions she is asked. Nora even suggests that she may be on drugs! This negative impression continues when she takes a shower without asking and then steals Marie’s clothes and money belonging to Cassie.

**Scene Two**

This scene is set in the club and reveals more about the personalities of each of the characters. When Marie wins the chance to play ‘The Price is Right,’ she has to be convinced to leave her seat as she does not like attracting attention. This is very different from Cassie who wears quite revealing clothes and dances in a way which attracts attention. As Marie is playing, Cassie and Nora argue again. Nora is unhappy with the way her daughter is dressed and is behaving. She does not think she is acting in appropriate way for a married mother. Cassie thinks that her mum is hypocritical as she did not act in the same way towards her brother Martin when he fathered an illegitimate child. Cassie’s soliloquy in this scene reveals the fact that she was very unhappy as a child because she thought she was treated differently from her brother. Moreover, as she dances with Marie, Cassie reveals that she is dreading the release of her husband from jail. When the women are all seated again, Deirdre (who is a waitress in the club) re-enters wearing the clothes and earrings she stole from Marie. Marie asks for the earrings back as they were a present from her husband Michael but allows Deirdre to keep the clothes. Cassie thinks that Marie is being too soft and confronts Deirdre herself. The young waitress suggests that she has seen Cassie cheating on her imprisoned husband in the back of a car. Cassie is very angry at this point and has to be held back as she tries to attack Deirdre.

**Scene Three**

Scene three mainly consists of the conversation which takes place between Marie and Cassie as they wait for a taxi outside the club. Cassie reveals just how unhappy she is and tells Marie of her plans to escape. She reveals that she has saved £200 and plans to leave even if it means having to leave her children behind. We learn that Cassie feels that living with Nora has meant that she has taken on the role of the main mother figure to her children. At the end of the scene we learn that Deirdre has found a knife and used it to destroy a roll peach polyester Nora had earmarked for a pair of curtains. This perfectly sets up the final scene.

**Scene Four**

Scene four is the story of three huge conflicts. First, Cassie and Nora fight about Sean. Cassie continues to defend her father as Nora remembers the beatings he gave her. They also disagree about Cassie’s husband Joe. During the fight, Cassie reveals her intention to leave and is devastated to discover that her money has been stolen. After Nora departs, Cassie becomes frustrated by Marie’s apparent happiness and shares a hidden truth- the fact she had an affair with Marie’s husband Michael. Marie responds furiously and throws Cassie out of her house. At this point, Deirdre comes into the house holding the stolen knife. She reveals that she is Michael’s illegitimate child and demands to be told the truth about her father. Marie, who has lost all of her previous tranquillity, disarms Deirdre and uses the knife to destroy the picture of her husband which had symbolised her love and devotion towards him. She tells Deirdre that she is unable to tell the truth about Michael as she did not fully know him herself and had created a false ideal image. Deirdre returns the stolen money and tries to return Marie’s clothes. Marie refuses to take the clothes back and invites Deirdre to stay for breakfast.

Beneath this surface, there is a play which has meaning far beyond the domestic soap opera which is played out. To have a full understanding of the play it is necessary to look more closely at the characters, themes and historical context of the play.

**Historical Context**

* ‘Bold Girls’ is set in Belfast during ‘The Troubles’- a conflict in Northern Ireland which lasted from 1968 to 1998.
* The conflict was about the position of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom.
* Unionists, the mostly Protestant majority, wanted to stay a part of the United Kingdom.
* Republicans, the mostly Catholic minority, wanted to leave the United Kingdom and join with the Republic of Ireland.
* The conflict was often very bloody and violent. This was mainly because of fights between rival paramilitary organisations (armies not controlled by the state).
* The main Unionist paramilitary organisations were called the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) and UDA (Ulster Defence Association). They violently opposed Irish unification.
* The main Republican paramilitary force was the IRA (Irish Republican Army). They wanted the full withdrawal of the British and Irish unification.
* More than 3600 people were killed during the Troubles.
* Up to 50,000 people were physically maimed or injured.
* British troops were sent to Northern Ireland to restore order.
* Extreme violence was an everyday reality for many in Northern Ireland during this historical period.
* The conflict ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998. While the divisions remain, the organisations involved agreed to try to achieve their aims in a democratic and non-violent way.

Talking about the play, Rona Munro said:

‘I don’t think the battles women fight, or the daily struggles they have in much of Belfast, are particularly different from those in any other area with bad housing or high unemployment- except that guns make a difference to everything. But this isn’t a story about guns. It’s the story of four bold women.’

Munro is saying that her play has a message which is relevant in many places. She is also saying that the characters are more important to the story than the setting. It is therefore important to examine each of these four characters in greater detail.

Characters

The two families:

Marie

Michael (deceased)

Sean (deceased)

 Nora

Michael Junior

 Brendan

Joe (in jail)

Cassie

Martin (in jail)

Deirdre

Brian

Teresa

is outside of the families but claims to be Michael’s illegitimate daughter. She looks a lot like him so this claim is easy to believe.

**Characterisation**

The men and children of the play are given no lines. We see them only from the perspective of the women. It is therefore important to develop a deeper understanding of these four characters.

Character Profile

Marie

Biography:

Marie is a widowed housewife with two children. She works in a poor job and struggles for money. Despite this, she appears to be very happy and always makes sure her house is welcoming for visitors.

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| Observation | Evidence | Analysis |
| Even before Marie speaks, we are given a very positive impression of her by the stage directions. It is immediately clear that she makes the most of what little she has. She is a good mother and a good hostess. | ‘toys that are new and gleaming and flashing with lights and have swallowed up the year’s savings.’ | Marie puts her children before herself. In order to make sure that they have the latest toys, she is willing to sacrifice all of her savings. |
| ‘It’s pots and pans and steam and the kettle always hot for tea.’ | This tells us that Marie is a frequent hostess. She ensures that no guest will go without refreshments. |
| ‘it’s furniture that’s bald with age and a hearth in front of the coal fire that’s gleaming clean.’ | The age and condition of the furniture tells us that Marie does not have much money. However, she makes the most of this by making sure that everything is clean and tidy. This tells us that she is skilled in domestic chores. |
| Marie looks upon her dead husband Michael with an admiration which matches religious devotion. | ‘There is a small picture of the Virgin on one wall, a large grainy blow-up photo of a smiling young man on the other.’ | Marie’s large picture of Michael is a centrepiece on the stage. The fact that it is bigger than the picture of the Virgin Mary suggests that she places him on a pedestal like an icon. It tells us a great deal about Marie’s priorities in life. |
| Indirect characterisation suggests to us that Marie is naïve and worships a false idol. | When trying to convince Marie to go to the club, Cassie says to Nora:‘Sure he was hardly here when he was alive.’ | The idealised view of Michael held by Marie is not shared by other characters. This suggests to us that she is possibly delusional and may become very unhappy when confronted with the truth. |
| Marie is kind, caring and motherly. When Deirdre knocks on the door, she is unable to ignore her visitor and is willing to let her stay. | ‘You better sit down by the fire’ | Even when confronted by a complete stranger, Marie is unable to turn her away. Instead she invites her in and shows concern for her well-being. |
| ‘Well you wouldn’t have me turn her out on the street in a towel would you?’ | Even after Deirdre has exploited her hospitality, Marie remains considerate. |
| Marie is shy. She does not enjoy being the centre of attention.  | ‘Oh I hate standing out in front of everyone.’ | When she wins the chance to play ‘The Price is Right,’ Marie is very reluctant to go up as everyone will be looking at her. This shows that she prefers to remain in the background. |
| ‘Feel a bit like the last meat pie in the shop out here, Cassie.’ | As Cassie dances extravagantly, Marie is sent to get her by Nora. Her movements are cautious and she is unhappy that everyone is looking at them. This further shows her reluctance to take the spotlight. |
| Marie is a good friend. | When Cassie reveals that she is afraid of what will happen when her husband is released from jail, Marie reassures her by saying:‘I’ll be just across the road, I won’t let you go crazy. You just see what you’ll get if you try it.’ | Instead of being shocked by Cassie’s revelations, Marie is very supportive. She shows that she will be there even when times are tough. |
| ‘I don’t know how you coped with all Joe’s carry on. I don’t. You were the martyr there, Cassie. | Marie offers a sympathetic ear for a troubled friend. She reassures her friend that her suffering is not imagined. |
| Marie’s selfless, gentle and caring nature is also evident in her treatment of animals.  | ‘she’s worried she won’t be out of her bed to feed the sparrows their crusts first thing’ | This shows how selfless Marie is. Instead of going to bed after getting home late, she scatters crumbs for the birds as she is worried she will sleep in. Her first thoughts are never for herself. |
| ‘She wouldn’t tread on a spider if she found it in her shoe.’ | Cassie’s observation again highlights how caring Marie is. Even when it is an inconvenience, she is not willing to treat other beings with anything other than complete care and affection. |
| Marie is a positive character who is able to put a positive spin on even poor circumstances. | When Cassie asks why she is so happy, Marie says:‘I’ve a lot to be thankful for. I’ve my kids, my job, a nice wee house and I can still pay for it.’ | Although she is impoverished and struggling to cope financially, Marie is thankful for what she has. While she has to suffer, she is pleased that she is still able to provide for others. |
| Despite her apparent positivism and delusional nature, Marie is very self-aware.  | ‘I know nothing at all. That’s the only story I’m fit to tell you about, about nothing at all… Except being brave and coping great and never complaining and holding the home together.’ | Marie is fully aware of the way others see her. It is clear from this that her apparent ignorance is an intentional construct which she has built to save herself from complete misery. |

Cassie

Cassie is an extroverted mother of two. She is the daughter of Sean and Nora, the brother of Martin and is married to Joe. She admires her dead father and despises her husband. Her desperation to escape Belfast reveals a lot about her character. Unlike Marie, she is not a natural mother. Moreover, she has had a number of extra-marital affairs, including one with Marie’s husband Michael.

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| Observation | Evidence | Analysis |
| Cassie is not naturally motherly. This is one reason why she struggles to fit into a society in which women are valued for being good mothers. | Cassie scares Michael Junior by describing what will happen to him if he keeps eating a tub of raspberry ice-cream syrup:‘I’ll tell you what happens to all those men that drink whiskey and all those wee boys that drink raspberry ice-cream syrup; their intestines get eaten away and their stomachs get eaten away and all the other bits just shrivel up and die.’  | Here, Cassie uses fear as a controlling device. This shows that she is willing to achieve her goals using methods which may hurt the child. These are not qualities we associate with good motherhood. |
| Cassie is insensitive and can seem uncaring. | In scene one, Nora says:‘God forgive me for bringing a child into the world with a heart of flint and a tongue to match.’ | This metaphor portrays Cassie as a cold person who is incapable of sensitivity or sympathy. The fact that her own mother is saying this reveals a negative aspect of her personality. |
| Cassie does not agree with the values of a society which values men over women. | ‘Oh so should I just get back in my box and wear bin liners till he’s out should I?’ | Cassie objects to her mother’s belief that she should not wear revealing clothes in the absence of her husband. She likes looking good and wants to grab the attention of others. |
| ‘Do you know that you never put a plate of food in front of me before he had his.’ | Cassie was hurt by the clear favouritism showed to her brother Martin. She knows that society values men over women but does not accept these values. |
| Cassie is very confident and enjoys being the centre of attention. | When Marie informs her that everyone is watching her dance, Cassie says:‘Let them.’ | Cassie is very different to Marie. While Marie is uncomfortable with attention, Cassie thrives on it.  |
| Cassie is forthright and confrontational. | When Marie fails to confront Deirdre over the thefts, Cassie takes it upon herself to do so:‘I hope you’ve not taken a fancy to anything else that’s caught your eye, like my handbag.’ | Cassie refuses to act in any way which may be considered weak. She is annoyed by Marie’s submissiveness and feels that protecting her friend is her duty. |
| Cassie is selfish. | ‘I could leave her the children.’ | Cassie is so desperate to escape that she is even willing to leave her own children behind. This again shows that she is not a kind and caring mother. |
| Cassie views herself in a negative way. | ‘Heart like a Brillo pad, that’s me.’ | In both of these quotes, Cassie shows that she does not have a high opinion of herself. She sees herself as being unkind, uncaring and lacking in humanity. |
| ‘I’m just wicked.’ |
| Cassie is not a good friend. | ‘That’s what I’m telling you Marie. We were both lying to you for years.’ | Cassie has not only betrayed Marie but has kept this information to herself. She deliberately tries to destroy Marie’s happiness out of jealousy as she herself is deeply unhappy having learned that her money has been stolen. |

Nora

Nora is Cassie’s mother and the wife of the now dead Sean. She was unhappy in her marriage but loves her son Martin dearly. Her relationship with her daughter is at times very tense. She is obsessed with home improvements.

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| Nora is fiercely protective of her family. | ‘“I’m that boy’s mother-in law, and before you take him you’ll have to answer to me.”’ | As Joe is being arrested, Nora bravely confronts the soldiers taking him even although she is risking her own safety. Cassie describes her as ‘lioness’ and this highlights just how much she cares about her family. |
| Nora is caring. | As Cassie complains about Deirdre taking a shower, Nora says:‘That child needs help from someone’ | Although Deirdre is acting in a way which does not invite sympathy, Nora is able to see that she is a troubled young woman. |
| She spends lots of money on fruit for her imprisoned son and son-in-law. | She wants to ease the suffering of family members even although it comes at an expense she can hardly afford. |
| Nora is old-fashioned. | In Nora’s house, the men are always served their food first. | Here, Nora shows that she thinks that the job of women is to make life comfortable for the men in their lives. She is unable to sympathise with Cassie’s complaints as she does not feel that women should put themselves ahead of others. |
| ‘You’ve a job to do bringing up that family and making a decent home for you and your man, so get on with it.’ |

Deirdre

Deirdre is a sixteen year old girl who is desperate to learn the truth about her father Michael. She has not had a good life. Her mother neglects her and the male role models in her life are either absent or violent.

Roles played by Deirdre in the play:

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| A conventional character | * With a past.
* With a present.
* With a purpose.
* With typical characteristics of a teenager.
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| A ‘ghost’ | * She resembles Marie’s dead husband.
* She wears clothes which forces Marie to remember her past.
 |
|  A parasite | * She exploits Marie’s kindness and hospitality.
* She steals literally and metaphorically from others.
* Defines herself in relation to other people.
 |
| A catalyst | * Reveals the past.
* Forces confessions.
* Uncovers the ‘truth.’
* Destroys dreams.
* Changes the mood of the play.
 |
| A link | * Links Marie’s home and the violence and crime outside.
* Links the past and the present.
* Between the present and the future.
 |
| An observer and a commentator | * On the physical setting.
* Evoking mood and atmosphere.
* As a spy or a detective.
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| Observation | Evidence | Analysis |
| Deirdre is an outsider. | Stage directions:‘Deirdre is not in this room, she’s crouching on all fours on her own talking out of darkness in which only her face is visible. She is wary, young.’ | While the other characters are safe and warm in Marie’s home, Deirdre is trapped outside. She is on ‘all fours’ which makes us think of an animal. It makes us think that she lonely and frightened. |
| Deirdre is determined. | ‘I’m wet, I’m cold. I want to get inside. There’s burning making the sky black. The sky’s full of rain and the sound of the helicopter. I want to get inside. Can’t keep me out.’ | While this underlines Deirdre’s outsider status as an outsider who is exposed to the harsh outside world, it also reveals more about her personality. Her repetition of ‘I want to get inside’ makes her ambition very clear. She wants to invade the comfortable domestic world represented by Marie’s home. The final line shows that she will stop at nothing in her attempts to achieve this. |
| Deirdre lacks basic manners and courtesy. She is also a thief. | She does not thank Marie for her hospitality and takes a shower without asking permission. Moreover, she steals Marie’s clothing and earrings as well as Cassie’s two hundred pounds. | This perhaps suggests that Deirdre is self-centred as she wants takes what she wants without thinking about the possible consequences. It may also suggest desperation. She is so weary of her second rate life that she is willing to involve herself in criminal activity to escape the harsh reality of the outside world. |
| Deirdre is destructive. | ‘I need a knife. A wee blade of my own… A wee bit of hard truth you could hold in your hand and point where you liked.’ | Deirdre’s determination is apparent in her willingness to destroy obstacles to the truth in a violent way. She believes that a knife empowers her and gives her the chance to get the truth on her own terms. |
| ‘She looks at the broad, smooth stretch of material then starts to slash at it, ripping it, trampling it till she’s breathless.’ |
| Deirdre is cunning. | ‘It was in a car. A blue car.’ | As the pressure is turned on her, Deirdre subtly lets Cassie know of the power she possesses. She knows of the affair between Cassie and Michael and is willing to use this knowledge for her own purposes. |
| Deirdre is neglected and abused. | ‘She’ll have locked me out.’ | Deirdre’s mother is guilty of terrible neglect. Instead of worrying about the whereabouts of her sixteen year old daughter, she is willing to leave her locked out when the streets are a warzone. Moreover, she continues to live with a man who is abusing her daughter physically |
| When she is asked who bruised her, Deirdre says:‘Just the fella she’s got living with her just now.’ |

**Relationships between the Characters**

1. **Marie and Cassie**

From the start of the play, we are made aware of the close relationship between these two characters. Cassie is willing to ask Marie a deeply personal question about her underwear and even helps deal with the behaviour of Michael Junior. The closeness of this relationship is further revealed when Cassie confides her fears about the release from prison of her husband Joe in Marie. There are no barriers between the two characters and Cassie even reveals her desire to escape Belfast even if it means leaving her children behind. Beneath the surface of this seemingly close relationship though, there is a story of betrayal. Cassie is jealous of her friend’s ability to appear happy despite her poor quality of life and reveals a hidden secret- her affair with Michael. This causes a huge change in their friendship and Marie screams at Cassie to get out of her house.

1. **Cassie and Nora**

Conflict is central to the relationship between Cassie and Nora. They are very different women who have very different beliefs. Central to their conflict is their differing memories of Sean. While Cassie idolises a man she remembers as a ‘lovely,’ ‘gentle’ man, her mother recalls the physical abuse she was subjected to. Cassie maintains that Nora brought the beatings upon herself as she would constantly nag her husband. They also disagree about Cassie’s husband Joe. While Cassie despises him, Nora remembers him as an ideal husband.

Cassie does not remember her upbringing fondly. She feels that she was taught only to be a second class citizen who was to look up to men. While her brother Martin was spoiled, she was constantly in trouble. She complains that he was always served dinner first as part of his clear role as his mother’s favourite. There appears to be some foundation in Cassie’s complaints. When Nora complains about Cassie’s revealing dress and failure to wear a bra, Cassie points out that she had no problem accepting Martin’s womanising ways. Nora denies that Martin fathered an illegitimate child despite being presented with obvious proof. It is obvious that there are double standards at work.

Another reason why Cassie resents Nora is the role her mother is playing in the upbringing of her children. She feels that Nora has stopped her from developing a close relationship with the children. This is revealed when she says:

 ‘Teresa turns to her before she turns to me and Brian’s getting all the washing and polishing and wee cups of ice cream to keep him smiling that Martin ever got.’

At the end of the play, Nora tries to force Cassie to admit that her dad was not a saint. The subsequent argument leads to a revelation which helps us to understand the poor relationship between the two women. Cassie tells her mum: ‘I never hated you… I just wanted you to make it happen different.’ From this it can be taken that Cassie resents her mum for not putting a positive slant on things in the way Marie does with her children. She even admits that her mother has had a tough life when she tells Marie, ‘Mummy’s heart is made of steel. She had to grow it that way.’

1. **Marie and Deirdre**

At first, Marie’s warmth towards Deirdre and willingness to overlook the theft seems bizarre. However, it is possible that she feels an obligation to the girl as it is clear that she resembles Michael. Moreover, she may see Deirdre as the daughter she never had. Deirdre, at first exploits this in a way which makes her seem contemptible. However, by the end of the play she has changed and is willing to give back what she has taken after a stressed Marie lashes out at her. On the final page Deirdre is invited to stay for breakfast and Marie tells her about the joys of feeding birds. This is a positive ending which leaves room for optimism. We feel that the future relationship between these characters represents hope for the future.

1. **Marie and Michael**

Marie idolises Michael and memories of their relationship help her to survive alone in a war torn environment. She believes that this relationship was built on trust, truthfulness and respect. When she explains her reasons for being thankful, she neatly surmises the role Michael plays in her life, ‘I’ve had better times with Michael than a lot of women get in their whole lives with a man.’

After the affair is revealed, there is a brief change in Marie’s view. Her destruction of the picture along with her failure to finish the story she tells her children and her reference to her husband’s ‘lying head’ suggests that her love and respect for him have been destroyed by the truth. However, she goes on to admit that she herself concealed the truth she knew about the inevitable fate shared by men like her husband. She concludes by saying, ‘I loved him. I can’t throw that away even now. I loved him.’

1. **Cassie and Sean**

Cassie tells her mother that she regards her decision to marry Joe as a mistake made someone too young to know better. She confides in Marie about her true feelings towards her husband when she says:

 ‘‘‘I tell you Marie I can’t stand the *smell* of him. The greasy, grinning, beer bellied smell of him. And he’s winking away about all he’s been dreaming of, wriggling his fat fingers over me like I’m a poke of chips- I don’t want him in the house in my *bed*, Marie.”’

This tells us why Cassie feels the way she does about her husband. Her reference to him ‘wriggling his fat fingers over me like I’m a poke of chips’ shows that he sees his wife as a possession and an object. He treats her without any respect as he believes that she is his personal belonging.

The full extent of this hatred is revealed in the final stanza when she reveals that she has been plotting to kill him to avoid the continuation of their marriage when he is released from prison.

1. **Cassie and Sean**

Cassie looks up to her father. He is the only male she seems to exclude from her general condemnation of the gender. Despite his obvious faults she remembers him as a kind, caring and gentle man who was driven to an early grave by the unholy alliance of Nora and Martin.

1. **Nora and Sean**

Nora remembers Sean as a violent drunk who made her life a misery. Her unwillingness to remember him in a positive way causes a great deal of conflict with her daughter.

**Symbolism and Theme**

**Truth versus Escapism**

The main theme in ‘Bold Girls’ is the nature of the truth. While Marie, Nora and Cassie try hard to escape from the truth, Deirdre is desperate to discover it.

Each of the characters escapes reality in different ways.

Marie escapes reality in the following ways:

* By remembering the quality of her married life fondly. This is symbolised by the huge picture of Michael which dominates her living space.
* Feeding the birds. As birds have connotation of freedom and escape, it is clear that they symbolise Marie’s desire to flee from the truth. On the final page, she reveals that she admires the resourcefulness of smaller birds. They are the model by which she lives her life.
* Drink large amounts of alcohol.
* Keeping her house in good order. Houses and the inside represent safety from the outside world. By maintaining her home, Marie is able to block out the darkness of the outside world.

Nora escapes from reality in the following ways:

* Constantly decorating her house. The peach polyester symbolises her escape from everyday life as her attempts to secure it dominate her mind over everything else.
* Drinking large amounts of alcohol.

Cassie escapes from reality in the following ways:

* By telling herself that she will be able to escape Belfast using the money she has been saving.
* Affairs with men.
* Drinking large amounts of alcohol.

While Marie and Nora seem reasonably happy in consequence of their chosen methods of escape, Cassie’s honest assessment suggests that escapism is not successful in blocking out reality. She tells Marie that her affairs have not stopped her from getting ‘damp.’ The idea that escapism has not benefited her is continued when she says:

 ‘Grabbing onto some man because he smells like excitement, he smells like escape. They can’t take you anywhere except into the back seat of their car. They’re all the same.’

This perhaps suggests that escapism is not the answer. Does the truth bring happiness in the play though?

The bleak reality the characters are trying to escape is symbolised both by the colour grey and by rain in the play. At the start of the play Deirdre is caught in the rain. It is raining on Marie’s wedding day until she is taken to the home which she can make her own in order to escape this reality. In saying that her mode of escapism didn’t work, Cassie reveals that she was not sheltered from the rain.

Throughout the play, the truth is symbolised by the knife. Deirdre wishes to get one as she believes this will allow her to find out the truth. When she finds one and destroys Nora’s peach polyester, she sets in motion a series of event which lead to the truth being revealed.

Does the truth bring happiness?

Discovering the truth about Michael destroys Marie’s artificial reality. She is no longer able to comfort herself with her memories of her ‘perfect’ marriage and uses the knife to destroy his picture (the symbol representing this form of escape). For her, the truth is destructive.

Learning the truth about the unlikeliness of her escape makes Cassie deeply unhappy. She lashes out and destroys her friendship with Marie out of petty jealousy at her friend’s ability to be happy.

Deirdre is desperate for the truth but Marie is unable to provide her with the truth she wanted as her knowledge of Michael’s personality was flawed. The revelations she has set in motion by destroying the symbol of domestic bliss seems to have made everyone unhappy.

Therefore, Cassie’s reflections on the nature of the truth seem to be supported by the events of the final scene:

 ‘…he did always tell you the truth, but there’s only so much of the truth anyone wants to hear.’

Marie seems to agree with this when she tells Deirdre that she did not share the truths she knew with Michael and withheld the parts he would have found upsetting as they would have required him to change.

Therefore, in reflecting upon the truth, the play seems to suggest that the full truth is a destructive force which causes deep unhappiness. Only truths which will fall on welcome ears should be shared in order to maintain happiness.

**Theme of Isolation**

Despite Marie, Cassie and Nora appearing to be a close-knit group of women – they are actually incredibly isolated. They are all unhappy - escaping in their own ways as we previously looked at. Their isolation is shown primarily through their interactions and dialogue. They all feel complex emotions – anger, fear, sadness, depression – but they never communicate their feelings to one another. Because they never properly communicate with each other, tensions bubble under the surface, eventually leading to the explosive confrontations in Scene Four.

**The Role of Women in Society**

In the play, the respective roles of women and men in society (at the time of the play) are also considered.

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| --- | --- |
| **Men** | **Women** |
| Fight for justice. | Be good mothers. |
| Work to provide for their family. | To put the interests of the males in their lives before their own needs. |
|  | Care about the appearance of their home. |

While Marie and Nora fit with the expected role of women in society at this time, Cassie and Deirdre are excluded.

Cassie is excluded as she has been forced to stay at home by her personal circumstances. She is unable to create a happy household which will allow her to escape reality. Moreover, the presence of her mother stops her from developing her skills as a mother.

Deirdre is excluded from this as she has been denied the presence of a male who she can look up to as a child. She has not had the opportunity to develop the skills she will need to successfully integrate into such a society.

**Food and Drink as a Symbol**

In the play, food and drink symbolises the subordinate position of females in Irish society during this historical period. Men and boys are always served first and it is the role of wives and daughters to prepare and serve meals. This is symptomatic of the wider role of women who are expected to use their domestic skills to make a nice home for their husbands and children. Nora’s treatment of Brian suggests that this is a vicious cycle which is being repeated. Cassie objects to this and as such is excluded from the form of escapism shared by Marie and Nora who use their domestic duties as a distraction from the harsh world outside of their doors.

**Theme of Betrayal**

Colour is very important as a symbol in the play. We learn a lot about the characters from the colours they wear.

White is a positive colour which has connotations of purity, innocence, being angelic and of wedding dresses.

Red has more negative connotations. As it is associated with Satan and hell, it is seen to represent evil and sinfulness.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Wears White | Wears Red |
| Marie | Cassie |
| Deirdre |  |

As Cassie cheats on her husband and betrays Marie, she is wearing a red dress. The mentions of this dress earlier in the play hint at her fallen status as a sinner.

Marie wears white as she is pure and innocent. She is a character we are supposed to admire in consequence of her bravery and resourcefulness.

We are at first surprised that Deirdre is seen wearing white. Her initial acts suggest that she is not a character we should identify with. However, the full revelation of her character shows that she is blameless and is a victim of circumstance. The colour she wears hints that she is a character we should feel pity and sympathy for.

**Dramatic Techniques**

You should ensure that you’re are familiar with the dramatic techniques that Rona Munro uses throughout the play.

**Monologues**

Marie, Cassie, Nora and Deirdre all have monologues throughout the play.

**Marie’s monologues reveal:**

* she wanted to marry Michael desperately
* That marrying Michael marked a turning point in her life – she says that until she married Michael, her life had been “rain” but as soon she married him, the sun came out.
* The extent of violence in the community.
* That she clings to her vision of the “ideal” Michael

**Cassie’s monologues reveal:**

* Her strained relationship with her mother
* Her love of her father, Sean
* That she thinks women are treated unfairly and that they are taught to fulfil a certain role.
* Her disgust/anger at marrying Sean

**Nora’ monologue outside the club reveals:**

* That she is more perceptive than she appears to be
* A regret about how her life turned out
* She is resigned to her life now

**Deirdre’s monologues reveal:**

* A violent, aggressive personality
* That she feels trapped by Belfast, it is like a “prison”
* That she is an outsider
* That she is lonely
* That she will get the truth no matter what the cost

**Lighting**

There are over 20 different lighting cues.

Most of them are used to indicate a character monologue. The stage lighting would dull on the rest of the stage while the spotlight would focus on the character speaking. This helps to focus audience attention on the character but also helps to highlight the isolation the women feel.

The lighting cue during the club scene in Scene Two is markedly different from the other lighting cues – the “hard white light” serves to highlight how violence invades the lives of the women suddenly, without warning and how it is out of their control.

**Stage Directions**

The multitude of stage directions throughout the play are just as important in revealing character and theme as the dialogue.

Make sure you revise the table you completed in class about the stage directions and remember to use stage directions in your answers to the Scottish Set Text questions.

**Talking at Cross-Purposes**

**Talking at cross-purposes**

There is a lot of dialogue in the play and on the surface it seems that Marie, Cassie and Nora converse easily and freely. However, there are a number of points in the play where we hear the three women talking completely at cross-purposes with nobody really listening to what the others have to say.

Despite it appearing that the women are very close, Cassie comments that the best nights she has had at the club are when it has just been three of them alone, they are all essentially really lonely women, isolated by their fears and worries and unable to communicate to each other about how they are really feeling about life. This inability to communicate effectively leads to an explosive final confrontation between the women in Scene 4.

**Examples**

Scene 1 – p2-3 – the cross-purpose talking in this scene creates a humorous effect however it serves to highlight that the woman are not always listening to each other. Nora is concerned about the quality of her washing powder and her washing machine, Cassie is teasing Marie about her underwear and Marie is peeling potatoes.

Scene 2 – p22 – the women are observing a minute’s silence for a boy killed in an explosion. Cassie complains about her shoes hurting her; Nora is criticising the boy’s family for being out in public instead of mourning at home and Marie is trying to remember who the boy was. Again, the women are not listening to each other – at one point, Marie and Nora actually say the same line, one after the other – showing their lack of closeness.

Scene 2 – p42 – the women enjoy a night out a club. Marie is playing a The Price is Right-type game while Nora and Cassie watch on, trying to shout prices at her. In between them trying to help Marie, Nora is talking about the identity of the mother of her son’s child; Cassie is busy shouting advice to Marie, interrupted only by her resentful references to how her mother always fed her brother before Cassie. Neither women is listening to the other – highlighting a gulf in their relationship.

Scene 2 – p46 – later on the club, Nora recalls how she was assaulted by a soldier; Cassie flirts with a man opposite, Marie is reduced to making polite noises. The girls’ night out, far from being a bonding exercise, shows the distance between them to the audience.

**Bold Girls – 8 Mark Question**

Below is a list of possible focuses for the 8 marker question on Bold Girls

1. Relationships between characters
2. Conflict/violence (both between characters and the situation the women live in)
3. Dramatic techniques (monologues/lighting/stage direction)
4. Role of Deirdre (remember she is a catalyst – none of the action would occur if she didn’t appear in the play)
5. Isolation
6. Family relationships
7. Symbolism (knife/fabric/birds/tea etc…)
8. Domestic life
9. Role of men
10. Role of women
11. Loyalty and betrayal
12. Escapism/dreams/truth
13. Challenges/realities of everyday life

This list is not exhaustive BUT if you have a list of quotations/detailed references in relation to each, it will greatly improve your chances of doing well in the Scottish text section of the Critical Reading paper.

You should be able to write quotations/detail references in relation to each of these focuses.

**Answer hints and mark allocation for Scottish Text Questions**

1. Questions about “summarising” the events of the extract given – answer in own words; 1 mark per point made.
2. Analysis questions that ask you to look at character, dialogue, stage directions, lighting etc… - 1 mark for appropriate quotation from extract, 1 mark for appropriate explanation

**Answering the “8 marker”**

1. **Commonality** – make a general comment about the focus of the question across the play.

For example, if the “8 marker” question asked you about the relationship between Cassie and Marie – you would comment on how their relationship changes throughout the play. **2 marks**

1. **Primary Text** – a quote from the extract in the exam that relates to the focus of the question (**1 mark)** plus an appropriate explanation (**1 mark). 2 marks**
2. **Secondary Text** – a quote/reference to elsewhere in the play that relates to focus of the 8 mark question (**1 mark**) plus an appropriate explanation (**1 mark**). (**2 marks**)
3. Repeat stage 3.

**Scottish Set Text Practice Papers**

*This extract is from Scene 2 in the club. Cassie is dancing alone, and Nora persuades Marie to join her.*

*Marie crosses over and joins Cassie, who beams, applauding her. Marie starts shuffling cautiously from foot to foot.*

CASSIE: I’m telling you this is a great diet Marie, you really feel the benefit of the gin.

Marie: Well maybe you should go easy now Cassie.

CASSIE: Oh I’m a long way from being lockjawed.

*Nora is beckoning at them frantically.*

MARIE: Your mummy’s asking us to come and sit down.

CASSIE: The song’s just started.

*Marie glances round nervously.*

What? Are they all watching us?

MARIE: They are.

CASSIE: Let them.

MARIE: (*with a shaky laugh)* Feel a bit like the last meat pie in the shop out here, Cassie.

CASSIE: Well let them stay hungry. They can just look and think what they like.

MARIE: Cassie, what’s wrong?

CASSIE: Oh, I’m just bad, Marie, didn’t you know?

MARIE: No. I never knew that.

CASSIE: You remember that wee girl in Turf Lodge, the one Martin couldn’t get enough of She was a decent wee girl. She’s bad now. Ask my mummy.

MARIE: Have you had words?

CASSIE: He’s out in less than a year, Marie.

MARIE: *Martin!?*

CASSIE: Joe.

MARIE: I know. It’ll be all right Cassie.

*They stop dancing, they look at each other.*

MARIE: It’ll be all right, Cassie.

CASSIE: I tell you Marie, I can’t stand the *smell* of him. The greasy, grinning, beer bellied smell of him. And he’s winking away about all he’s been dreaming of, wriggling his fat fingers over me like I’m a poke of chips – I don’t want him in the house in my *bed*, Marie.

MARIE: You’ll cope.

CASSIE: Oh I’m just bad. I am.

MARIE: Don’t. Don’t say that about yourself.

CASSIE: I’ll go crazy.

MARIE: I won’t let you. You won’t get a chance Cassie, I’ll just be across the road, I won’t let you go crazy. You just see what you’ll get if you try it.

*Slowly Cassie smiles at her.*

(*Putting a hand on Cassie’s arm*). Now will you come and sit down?

Questions

1. Show how the playwright contrasts the characters of Marie and Cassie through their language and their actions in lines 1-14. **4 marks**
2. Explain how the dialogue in lines 15-38 reveals aspects of the relationship between Marie and Cassie. **4 marks**
3. Referring closely to the language of lines 27-30 show how Cassie reveals her attitude towards Joe. **4 marks**
4. The relationship between Marie and Cassie is central to Bold Girls. Referring briefly to the extract and in more detail to the rest of the play, explain how this relationship develops. **8 marks**