



CHAPTER 2

EDWIN MORGAN



Homework

One of the skills that will be demanded of you on the course is the ability to work independently. To help you with this, try the activity below.

Task

Write an infographic about Edwin Morgan. It should be a piece of biographical research using the resources below. The main purpose is to give key information about the man and his poetry in a graphic form.

Online resources

- <http://tinyurl.com/pf3zeon>, from the BBC, provides a useful survey of Morgan's works.
- www.edwinmorgan.com has a helpful biography for students.
- Edwin Morgan Archive at the Scottish Poetry Library (edwinmorgan.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk) contains a timeline of his life.
- <http://tinyurl.com/l3eedb>, also from the BBC, contains a useful audio feature allowing you to listen to the material.

Once you have completed the homework, narrow your blurb down to **three** key facts about Morgan. Share these with your partner.

Texts

There are six poems in this collection. Morgan's poems here deal with people, places and animals. On first inspection, these might appear to be quite different, but when we look closer, we see the interconnections.

People

'**In the Snack-bar**' deals with the isolation of disabled people. To highlight this, Morgan describes an old man struggling to find his way to the toilet in a café in Glasgow.

'**Good Friday**' deals with alcoholism and religion. The poet achieves this by describing the reflections of a man on a bus. The setting for this poem, like '**In the Snack-bar**', is Glasgow.

'**Trio**' is also set in Glasgow. It, too, deals with religion, but it is more positive in its outlook than the other two poems as it also deals with another aspect of Glasgow life – friendship.

Places

'**Winter**' is the first of the poems to deal with a place. It is also set in Glasgow and it deals with the idea of things changing. Like the others, it has a very recognisable setting within Glasgow – Bingham's pond near Great Western Road at the back of the Pond hotel.

'**Slate**' is very different from the others in terms of its setting in time and place. Like '**Winter**', it deals with the theme of change and nature. This setting is no longer Glasgow, but the actual creation of another part of Scotland – the Isle of Lewis.

Animals

'**Hyena**' is the only poem in the collection to deal with an animal – a hyena. When we think of these creatures, we think of hateful scavengers, but Morgan sees value even in a hyena and forces us to see it differently. The themes are: death, life and survival. The setting for the poem is now very far from Glasgow – Africa.

'In the Snack-bar'



Textual explosion!

This way of adding notes to a text helps you to figure out how it works.

Read the opening section of the poem and the comment boxes below.

'In the Snack-bar'

Alliteration on the letter 'c' amplifies the sound and the onomatopoeia on 'clatter' conveys the idea of an annoying, resonating, high-pitched sound.

'Clatter' is onomatopoeic. High pitched. Irritating. Would draw attention.

A cup capsizes along the formica,
slithering with a dull clatter.

A few heads turn in the crowded evening snack-bar.

An old man is trying to get to his feet
from the low round stool fixed to the floor.

The onomatopoeic 'slithering' suggests the cup's snake-like movement along the bar and the present participle slows the action.

Use of the indefinite form 'An' suggests the narrator has no relationship with him.

Present participle slows down time and examines the process of him trying to get up. It is happening very slowly.

In lines 1–3 we have the explanation for the fallen cup. Dropped by an old man who is struggling to regain his footing.

Despite the clamour, no real attention is drawn. 'A few' suggests some people do notice it even in the 'crowded evening' snack-bar. The old man is isolated.

Task

In pairs, fill in the blanks below using the TQE technique for lines 7–11.

Line 6 has already been done for you.

Technique (T)	Quotation (Q)	Effect (E)
Line 6 Thematic variation	'slowly'	Stretching out the action by placing the word 'slowly' at the start of the sentence
Line 7 Transferred epithet	'Dismal hump'	
Line 8 Present participle		Slows down time
Line 9	'stands ... stained'	Sounds like sigh
Line 10 Simile		
Line 11 Alliteration	'sways slightly'	

Textual explosion!

Lines 12–21 are have been deconstructed for you below.



This section of the poem in lines 12–21 adds to the pathos of the old man as we discover that not only is he hunchbacked, he is also blind and 'half paralysed'. We are allowed to observe the events in the café, as the narrator responds to the man's request to go to the toilet. The narrator plays two parts in the poem: he tells the 'story' of the poem and he also takes part in that story.

What next?

The next section describes their journey to the toilet. It reminds us of the stranger who helped Jesus to carry his cross on the road to Calvary. Here, the journey is downwards, though, as if descending into hell rather than ascending into heaven.

The narrator finds it difficult to communicate with the old man who is unable to communicate fluently. They both make it to the toilet. Here, the narrator waits for the man. It is clear that the man depends completely on other people to do even the most basic of things.

Google search 'Calvary'. What effect is Morgan trying to achieve by using this reference?

Task

At the end of the poem, the narrator helps the old man onto a bus where the conductor also struggles to communicate with the old man. This means that his disability makes it difficult for both him and others. It is a problem with a double edge.

The final part of the poem returns to the thoughts of the narrator, who reflects on the meeting and, in doing so, engages the reader.

Finally

What would you have done in the narrator's situation?

Questions

Read lines 1–24 of the poem again and answer the questions below.

Try to answer questions 1–3 in pairs.

1. Identify the main theme and give a reason to show how you know this. (2 marks)
2. Show how any two examples of the poet's language highlight this theme. (4 marks)
3. What is the effect of each of the words 'staring', 'hanging' and 'fumbling'? (3 marks)

In this part of the examination paper you will also be asked a final question which can be tackled as a series of short answers; it does **not** have to be a mini essay. We will look in more detail at this type of question later. Right now, just read the question below.

4. By referring closely to this text and at least one other poem by Morgan, show how he creates characters with whom we sympathise. (8 marks)

Possible answers

Markers' meeting

Once you have completed the questions, skim read the answer key below. Then swap jotters with your partner. Each of you should apply the answer key to your partner's written answers.

How many marks would you gain? How many would you lose? Try to work out why you lost marks.

1. Disability and its effects on those who are disabled and non-disabled/selfish people/lack of concern for others/the (unexpected) problems faced by disabled people/dangers for disabled people/lack of proper facilities for disabled people.
2. In the early part of the poem the narrator describes events at a distance/he is physically separated from the old man/he is closer now/he is touching the old man/talking to the old man.



Repetition: 'inch by inch' painfully slowly.

Word choice: 'drift' uncoordinated.

Simile: 'like a landscape'. The area is amplified as if he is crossing expanses of land.

List of the man's hazards: 'spilt sugar', 'slidy puddle', 'table edges', 'people's feet', 'slow dangerous inches'.

List of the man's perceptions: 'hiss', 'hamburgers', 'wet coats'.

Task

Become an examiner (groups of four)

Re-read the last thirteen lines of the poem, then create three questions of your own. These might be on:

- Understanding (of the extract)
- Analysis (of the techniques used in the extract and their effects)
- Evaluation (of the impact of their effectiveness on the reader)

You should also create a marking scheme.

Themes

These are the main **concerns** of the text – the **issues** raised in it. They represent why the writer chose to write it to draw the **wider aspects** of the text to the attention of readers.

Task

Read the themes below. Then try to identify specific parts of the text that show the theme being examined.

- Disabled people in society. Do we do enough to help them?
- Their dependence on wider society.
- Their steadfast refusal to give in to fate.
- The difficulties faced by disabled people.
- The lack of real communication between the rest of us and people who are disabled.

TQE exercise

Techniques	Effects
word choice	used to gain our sympathy for the old man
word order	used to slow down the action
repetition	to evoke sympathy for the man as the difficulty of his movements is described
caesura	to slow the action to put us in the old man's position
allusion	Christ
imagery	creates sympathy for the old man. Simile: 'like a monstrous animal caught in a tent'. Shows the views of others in the snack-bar.
narrative stance	We, as readers, realise that he is in a terrible condition. As such, we feel sorry for him as we see the events, not through their eyes, but through the eyes of the more humane observer/narrator. The poem starts in the third person then shades into the use of the first person in line 16 to show the narrator's gradual interest being absorbed by the events and the man. At first detached, he is later sympathetic to the old man's plight. The attitude of the narrator changes as the poem develops from pathos and empathy to admiration and this tracks the journey of the reader through the poem as we absorb his growing emotional attachment to the man.



Now, in pairs, find examples of these techniques from any part of the poem and write their effects using the TQE technique you used earlier. Remember, this stands for: Technique, Quotation, Explanation/Effect. Here is an example to get you started:

Word choice is often used by Morgan to gain the sympathy of the audience for the man in the poem (T). In line 4 for example, he uses the words 'old man' and 'trying to get to his feet' (Q). It is not a 'young' man who is struggling to find his feet; it is an 'old' man. Our automatic reaction, normally, would be to hurry to the aid of the man as the idea of supporting the weak, frail or elderly is simply part of our moral DNA. In addition to this, the poet's use of the present participle 'trying' conveys the idea that we are watching the process of the man's attempts to regain his footing and that he is not being entirely successful. He is struggling. Who will help? (E)

Question

The 8-mark question

By referring closely to this text and at least one other poem by Morgan, show how he creates characters with whom we sympathise. (8 marks)

You can answer this kind of question in bullet points, or write a number of linked statements, or even write a mini essay, although our recommendation is that you use bullets as this can be done more quickly under examination conditions.

Key words in the question:

The identification of **effective language techniques** to create **characters** with whom we **sympathise**.

Up to 2 marks can be achieved for identifying elements of **commonality** as identified in the question. A further 2 marks can be achieved for **reference to the extract given**. An additional 4 marks can be awarded for similar references to **at least one other text/part of the text** by the writer; so, 2+2+4 = 8 marks.

Let's begin by looking at the most likely poems to choose for this question. Which **two** would you choose?

Thinking aloud ...

'In the Snack-bar' is the chosen text so you have to find at least one other. 'Trio' certainly contains characters with whom we might sympathise. Although 'Good Friday' contains a character, it might be difficult to argue that he is worthy of sympathy, although it is certainly possible.

Let's stick with 'In the Snack-bar' and 'Trio'.

Task

What techniques are used in the extract to gain our sympathy for the disabled man? Write these down.

Now think about 'Trio'. What techniques are used to draw our sympathies for the trio?

Examples of a bullet point approach and a mini essay approach are given below, but don't read through them until you have completed these tasks.

Bullet point approach

'In the Snack-bar'

Some suggestions (Any FOUR for 4 marks)

By referring closely to this text and at least one other poem by Morgan, show how he uses language effectively to create a character(s) with whom we sympathise.

- The man is so frail, he has to be helped to the toilet. Emphasised in the simple sentence, 'I take his arm.'
- Word choice: 'take' shows the power of the narrator and the lack of such power on the part of the old man. Or 'clings', which suggests the old man's desperation.
- Punctuation: 'Give me – your arm – it's better,' also shows his frailty as he gets more support/balance this way.
- Imagery/simile: 'A few yards of floor are like a landscape' shows how even the simplest things are amplified for the man because of his condition.
- Point of view is used to put the narrator (and us) in the position of the old man, who is concerned with the smallest things as they can all harm him: 'spilt sugar' on which he can slip, or 'table edges' on which he can injure himself, or even 'people's feet' on which he might trip.
- Metaphor of journey/biblical imagery to the toilet is like Christ's journey to Calvary. Also a symbol of the journey through life.

Bullet point approach

'Trio'

Some suggestions (Any FOUR for 4 marks)

By referring closely to this text and at least one other poem by Morgan, show how he uses language effectively to create a character(s) with whom we sympathise.

- Imagery of light, 'the Christmas lights' adds cheer and contrasts with the dark night.
- Word choice: The man is 'young' and the women are also young, 'a girl'. They have their whole lives in front of them.
- Humour: Their 'gifts'. These make us like them. The guitar to play music and cheer people up. The little dog in its brightly coloured coat and the Christmas baby, a symbol of new life.
- Allusion: 'a young man and two girls' are compared to the Magi. Metaphor of journey. Also a symbol of the journey through life.

OR

'the girl on the inside carries a very young baby,' also refers to the birth of Christ and conveys sympathy through word choice. The baby is 'very young', a newborn.
Metaphor of their collective breath forming one single form, 'a cloud of happiness'.

- The pattern to follow in each case is a TQE structure:
Point out the **technique** ... **Quote** an example ... **Explain** its use

Mini essay approach

In the poem 'In the Snack-bar', Morgan uses a variety of techniques to gain our sympathy for the main character, a disabled older man.

One such technique is that of using a simple sentence. This direct, uncomplicated way of describing the action indicates that the old man is so frail that he has to be helped to the toilet. In other words, he needs help with even the most basic of human needs.

Word choice emphasises the power of the narrator in the use of the active verb, 'take'. The opposite of this is also shown in another apposite word choice in the use of 'clings', which shows that the old man is very feeble.



Typically, Morgan also makes use of typography in order to press his theme, as the punctuation is also used to convey the frailty of the old man as he gets more support when he actually takes the arm of the narrator. His halting speech, too, draws our sympathy and this is emphasised through the use of the dashes: 'Give me – your arm – it's better'.

A simile, too, is used to demonstrate how even the simplest things are amplified for the old man because of his condition, making us feel sorry for him and so 'a few yards of floor are like a landscape'.

Morgan tries to put us in the position of the old man to appreciate his situation more clearly, so point of view is used to put the narrator (and us) in the position of the old man who is concerned with the smallest things as they can all harm him: 'spilt sugar' on which he can slip, or 'table edges' on which he can injure himself, or even 'people's feet' on which he might trip.

Finally, the metaphor of journey and the use of biblical imagery to describe the trip to the toilet is like Christ's journey to Calvary. It could also be a symbol of the journey through life. As Christ died for our sins in Christian belief, we the readers feel sympathy towards the man.

The metaphor of biblical journey is also used in 'Trio' in which 'a young man and two girls' are compared to the Magi who travelled to bring gifts to Christ. Our sympathies are also gained for the group as 'the girl on the inside carries a very young baby' which also refers to the birth of Christ and conveys sympathy through word choice. The baby is also 'very young'. In other words, it is a newborn.

Unlike 'In the Snack-bar', 'Trio' makes use of humour to gather sympathy for the trio of friends; their 'gifts' make us like them: the guitar to play music and cheer people up; the little dog in its brightly coloured coat; and the Christmas baby, a symbol of new life.

Like 'In the Snack-bar', 'Trio' uses imagery to draw out our sympathies. The trio bring light to an otherwise dark night. Under 'the Christmas lights' they add cheer to an otherwise cold night.

Word choice too is used to gain our sympathies. The man is 'young' and the women are also young, 'a girl'. In other words, they have their whole lives in front of them.

Finally, imagery is used (metaphor rather than simile this time) to create the impression of their collective breath forming one single form, 'a cloud of happiness' demonstrating that they are bonded together as friends, gaining our sympathies for them again.

Task

Write your own comment boxes in which you make three improvements to this mini essay.

'Good Friday'

In the last poem, we compared the old man's journey to that of Christ travelling to Calvary to be crucified on the Friday before Easter Sunday. This is the day on which Morgan has chosen to set this next poem. Specifically, it is set at exactly three o'clock, the hour at which Christ is thought to have died on the cross.

Task

What is the connection between the title and the poem?

Textual explosion!

This way of adding notes to a text helps you to figure out how it works.

Read the opening section of the poem and the comment boxes on the next page.

'Good Friday'

The time is too specific to be anything other than an ironic reference to the title. We expect a solemn religious content, but get the drunken ramblings of a man instead. Christians would be celebrating Christ's Passion at this point.

Three o'clock. The bus lurches

Word choice is appropriate. The sound of the word recreates the movement felt as the bus changes gears and turns a corner.

The bus and the drunk man move in a similar way, wavering on their (almost separate) journeys.

round into the sun. 'D's this go -'

Use of Glaswegian/Scots further helps to set the scene. Use of punctuation also recreates the slurred speech. The shortening of 'does' lengthens the sound of the 's' and the word 'this' becomes onomatopoeic, with the 'th' and 's' sounds adding to the slurring effect. The final dash shows the end of the speech as the man has to focus his attention on sitting down.

Dashes are significant here. They show the flow of the conversation is being interrupted.

The narrator is introduced as a fellow (sober) traveller. We, as readers, can sympathise as we may have been in this situation. It was not uncommon in Glasgow in the past.

he flops beside me - 'right along Bath Street?

Word choice. Uncontrolled. Not in full control of his movements. Gravity and the movement of the bus have seated him. He would also disturb the fellow passenger.

The question, started before he sat down, is now finished. Very rude.

- Oh tha's, tha's all right, see I've

The question does not appear to be answered by the narrator, perhaps trying to ignore the man, or he immediately answers his own question. The slurring continues with the shortened and repeated, 'tha's' shows his state of inebriation. He may also have retracted his question before the narrator has a chance to answer.

Easter eggs represent the stone covering the cave in which Christ's body was buried and from which he rose again after death. This is the central event in Christianity as it proved his Godhood. This astonishing event has been reduced to eggs being bought for children in this man's eyes. This is its significance now.

got to get some Easter eggs for the kiddies.

His reason for being here is explained and is even more incongruous with the title and man's condition - buying Easter eggs. This links again to the title.


Task

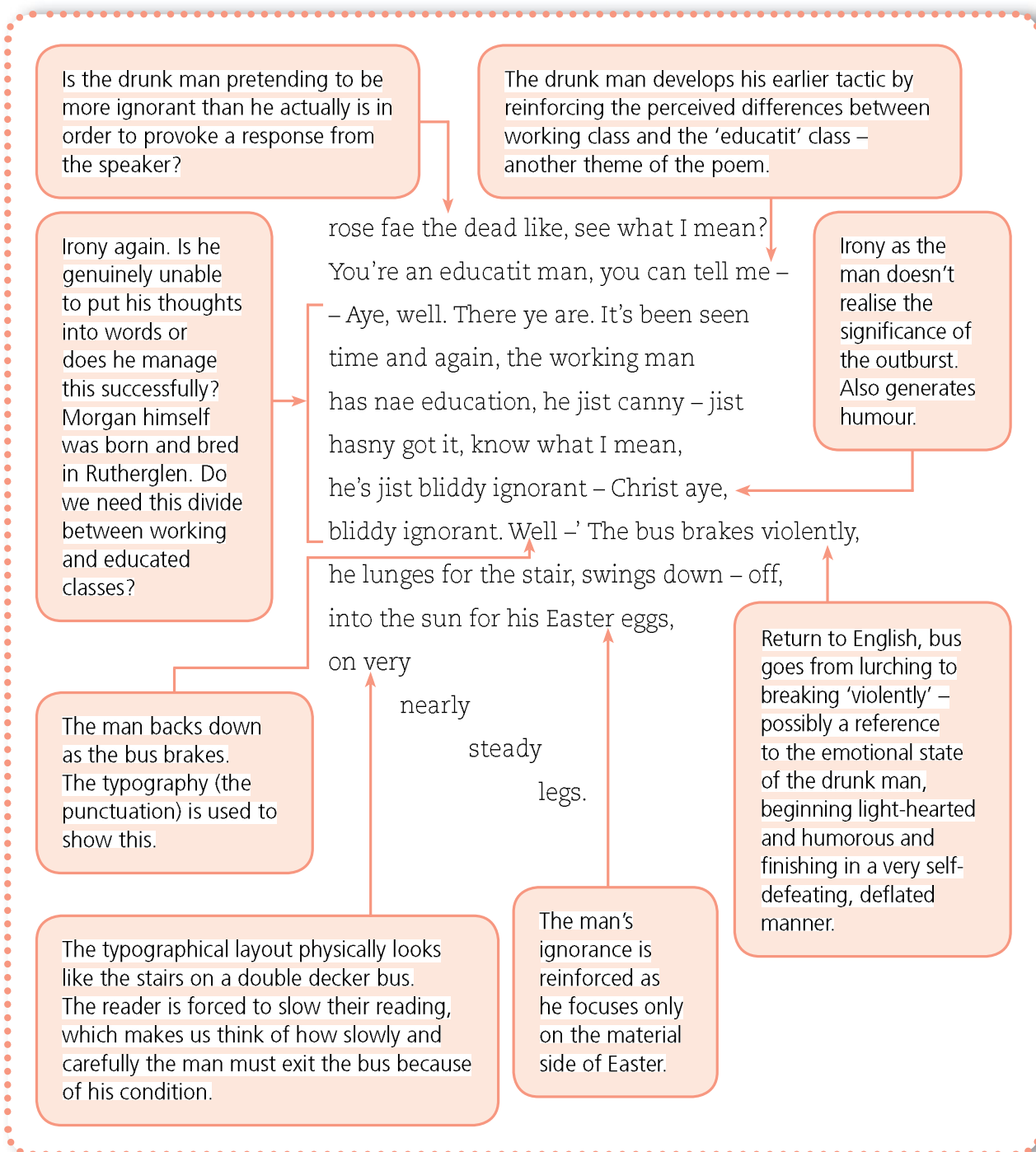
Now you try to do the same, in pairs, with the next ten lines of the poem from, 'I've had a wee drink ...' to 'see what I mean?'

You might wish to comment on some of the techniques identified already, such as the use of word choice, dashes, understatement, irony and repetition. Use the TQE technique. The first one has been done for you.

Technique	Quotation	Explanation
Line 6 Understatement	'wee drink'	Irony effect – he's had much more than a small amount to drink
Line 7 Irony	'funny day'	
Line 8 Word choice	'celebrating'	
Lines 9–10 Repetition		
Lines 13–16 Dashes		

Commentary

In the next section of the poem, the drunk man mentions his lack of education and he uses this to justify his lack of understanding of Easter. His circular journey, like Christ's own journey to Calvary, ends with him leaving the bus unsteadily, heading 'into the sun'.



Research

What were the main stages in Christ's journey to Calvary? What are the similarities to the journey in this poem? What are the differences?

Read the next section on themes and techniques and then try to show where these themes/techniques appear in the poem specifically.

Task

Themes

- Education
- Working class versus educated 'middle' class
- English versus Scots
- The role of alcohol in Scottish society
- Religion

Techniques

Word choice: use of Scots versus Standard English.

Punctuation: used to stop and start the conversation to mimic both the man's fractured speech and the stop-start motion of the bus.

Irony: Christ's journey to Calvary was punctuated by stops as he tried to recover his strength for the next phase of the journey. This was the reality of the Passion. The man's journey is very different, although his destination is Bath Street, which is one of the highest points in Glasgow. This suggests that the direction of travel was upwards.

Symbolism: references to the sun could be literal as they drive into the sunshine. It was also reported that when Christ died on the cross, the former bright sunshine turned to darkness. The reference could also refer to the son of God, that is, Christ himself.

Typography: concerns anything on the page except the words. The layout of the last four lines actually looks like the stairs of a bus.

Repetition: to suggest the man's drunkenness.

Narrative stance: on the surface, this is a drunken conversation, but we realise that the narrator never replies. As such, it is really a monologue, an account of the man's reflections spoken to himself, as if he is having a conversation with himself on the journey.

'Trio'



The third poem in the collection, 'Trio', shares a similar setting to those already covered – Glasgow and specifically, Buchanan Street with its bustling shops. The setting in time is never given for 'In the Snack-bar', but there is a very specific setting for 'Good Friday' (Easter) and for 'Trio' – Christmas.

The religious thread is clear through all three poems. In the case of 'Trio', the theme is of celebration, ironically, because religion does not matter – the message is that we should take pleasure in the simple things in life.

Morgan uses the motif of journey in all three poems. In this case, the journey reminds us of that of the Magi – the three wise men who travelled to Bethlehem to bring gifts to the newborn Christ. These have been replaced by one man and two young women. Their 'gifts' are not the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the biblical story, but a guitar, a very young baby and a chihuahua.



Task

Don't look at the answers below. What does the title of the poem makes us think of?

- The number three, which suggests completeness in Hebrew thinking
- A musical trio
- The Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The word order is altered in the opening lines:

'Coming up Buchanan Street, quickly, on a sharp evening

A young man and two girls,'

The normal order would be:

'A young man and two girls [are] coming up Buchanan Street, quickly, on a sharp evening,'

The changed order emphasises their movement up Buchanan Street. This is further emphasised by the adverb 'quickly', as they are trying to stay warm because it is a 'sharp evening'.

The sentence structures are then repeated with some variation in the lines:

'The young man carries a new guitar in his arms,

the girl on the inside carries a very young baby,

and the girl on the outside carries a chihuahua.'

The perspective/point of view is of a narrator observing events in the present from higher up Buchanan Street as the trio approaches him/her.

Mood/tone is boisterous:

'Wait till he sees this but!'

The three are clearly on their way to visit someone. This is revealed as they pass the narrator and continue to climb Buchanan Street. They all have things to show 'him' – the person they are visiting.

Textual explosion!

This way of adding notes to a text helps you to figure out how it works.

Read the opening section of the poem and the comment boxes below.

'Trio'

Cold and warmth, as well as dark and light, are contrasted.

Coming up Buchanan Street, quickly, on a sharp evening
a young man and two girls, under the Christmas lights –

'Under the Christmas' suggests they are being observed/protected. Christmas represents the birth of Jesus. The Magi – the three wise men – followed a star [Christmas lights]. Again, the idea of a current journey paralleling a biblical one is important in this poem as is the idea of the religious and the material.

Links back to the idea of a musical trio and reminds us of the wise men bearing gifts for Jesus.

The young man carries a new guitar in his arms,
the girl on the inside carries a very young baby,

Reminds us again of Jesus, drawing parallels between present and past.

The travellers carry gifts, but they are different from those of the wise men. They are modern gifts and full of life – literally in the case of the baby. The little dog is clearly a gift for someone, who will plainly be delighted.

and the girl on the outside carries a chihuahua.
And the three of them are laughing, their breath rises

Their breath has become one thing and rises to heaven almost as a visual prayer – something tangible you can see.

The earlier metaphor is developed into the idea of a cloud of joy – again a fitting prayer at this time of the year.

in a cloud of happiness, and as they pass
the boy says, 'Wait till he sees this but!'
The chihuahua has a tiny Royal Stewart tartan coat like a teapot-holder,

Continues idea of the past and present, the high and the low, the serious and the fun. Alludes to the Stewart kings of Scotland and exemplifies the two sides to Christmas. Simile contrasts with the grandeur of the old Scottish kings.

Focus shifts to the second gift – the baby. White symbolises purity and innocence. The technique of synecdoche is used as the eyes and mouth are used to describe the whole baby – it is full of life and joy. Simile is then used to compare the baby's features to wedding cake decorations, again taking up the idea of celebration.

the baby in its white shawl is all bright eyes and mouth like favours
in a fresh sweet cake,
the guitar swells out under its milky plastic cover, tied at the neck

The third gift – the guitar. Swelling suggests 'pregnancy' or birth and the milky plastic cover links back to the baby. Together the images suggest life and vibrancy – the end of one year and the beginning of another.

with silver tinsel tape and a brisk sprig of mistletoe.

Another example of the juxtaposition of the grand with the ordinary, but this time the reference is to classical Greek mythology as opposed to the Bible. These lines are all about love. Orpheus rescued his lover Eurydice from Hell in the past, while in the present both baby and dog are well loved, too.

Orphean sprig! Melting baby! Warm chihuahua!
The vale of tears is powerless before you.

Ironical reversal. Biblical metaphor for life's problems, yet it is powerless before the joy of life.

This is the real message of the poem. Whether we believe in God or not, simple joy and happiness put us in charge of our own fate.

Whether Christ is born, or is not born, you
put paid to fate, it abdicates
under the Christmas lights.

After alluding to the Bible and Greek legend, Morgan describes the day-to-day trials of life as 'monsters'.

Monsters of the year

Military imagery is used now to show the defeat of the life's trials.

go blank, are scattered back,
can't bear this march of three.

The perspective, until this point, has been of an observer looking down at the approaching trio. They have now reached and passed the narrator.

– And the three have passed, vanished in the crowd

The military imagery is now developed into the idea of a shield of laughter that protects them against life's challenges.

(yet not vanished, for in their arms they wind
the life of men and beasts, and music,
laughter ringing them round like a guard)
at the end of this winter's day.

Scottish text questions

Read the questions below and then the sample responses. Finally, judge, in pairs, how well they answer the questions.

Questions

1. In lines 6 and 7, an atmosphere of happiness is created. How is this continued in lines 8–10?
2. What are the themes of this poem as expressed in lines 16–19?

Possible answers

1. The exclamation mark at the end of the expression, 'Wait till he sees this but!'
 - Word order. Placing 'but' at the end of the sentence adds to the excitement.
 - Use of colloquial language conveys happiness as he thinks about the reaction his gift will bring.
 - The image of the chihuahua, a tiny dog, with its equally tiny tartan coat, makes the reader (and perhaps the narrator) smile.
 - Bright colours of the 'Royal Stewart' tartan.
 - The incongruity of the 'Royal' tartan on such a small dog.
2. The 'vale of tears' is a metaphor for the challenges life throws at us. Morgan is arguing that in the face of this trio, life's tribulations are weak and 'powerless'. As such, they 'abdicate[s]' or resign in the face of the joy and happiness of the trio. Here, fate or life's difficulties are likened to a king who gives up his throne.

Task

Try this next task in pairs.

1. Using your own words, explain the meaning of lines 20–27.
2. Now turn to Chapter 5 for a sample critical essay on 'Trio' with comments. Again in pairs, use the supplementary marking grid on pages 165–66 to grade this piece of writing and to evaluate its strengths. What are its main strengths? Provide **two** areas for improvement. Specifically refer to each part of the marking grid to justify your mark. Once you have done the task, read the expert commentary on page 152.

Possible answers

1. Life's challenges have been described as abdicating kings. They are now seen as mythical monsters. Like the monsters of myth, who are often defeated by heroes (like Orpheus earlier in the poem), fate has no response to the trio. It goes 'blank'. After this, it is 'scattered back' like a defeated army, as it is unable to withstand, ironically, the 'march of three'.

At this point, the trio passes the narrator and has 'vanished' in the crowd of Christmas shoppers. The reason the narrator appears to contradict himself in the next line is that they have not vanished from memory.

Laughter, joy, happiness and camaraderie will protect us from everything the world has to throw at us is the message/theme.

Task 

Each of the poems so far has made use of an internal narrator – someone who takes part in or observes or reports the actions in the poem. Write a brief outline of the main effects of the use of this device in each of the three poems. You may wish to have a scan through the commentary below to start you off.

'Winter'

'Winter' begins the second group of poems in this collection dealing with the topic of places.

Commentary

The next poem in the collection, 'Winter', is set in winter. It, too, has a Glasgow setting – Bingham's pond near Great Western Road and next to the Pond hotel.

In common with many of Morgan's poems, the narrative voice is distanced from the occurring events, a kind of detached passer-by, thus allowing objective commentary, which allows him/her to reflect on the passing scenes.

The poem is a description of a pond scene. It makes reference to swans, the pond itself, woods and then shifts focus to the dual carriageway while finally ending with the narrator in his/her room considering the changing scenery of the pond.

The main theme is about decay, the passage of time and its effects on the natural world.

The key symbol is the use of the Bingham's pond as an enduring rural landscape within a cityscape as it has been in existence for around 130 years, yet by the end of the poem it too is subject to change.

Textual explosion!



This way of adding notes to a text helps you to figure out how it works.
Read the opening section of the poem and the comment boxes below.

'Winter'

The year goes, the woods decay, and after,
many a summer dies. The swan

Bingham's pond is on Great Western Road, Glasgow near the Pond hotel.

on Bingham's pond, a ghost, comes and goes.

The swan is literally moving across the ice and is metaphorically a ghost as it is fleeting and because of the shared colour.

It goes, and ice appears, it holds,

Alliteration 'stand ... surprised', 'bears boys'. Sound is also used in 'skates', 'take' and 'tracks' to recreate the sound of skating on ice.

bears gulls that stand around surprised,
blinking in the heavy light, bears boys
when skates take over swan-tracks gone.

Repeats the word in line 2 with a little variation. Double meaning. Could relate to death and colour changes. The colours of summer and the colours of winter.

After many summer dyes, the swan-white ice
glints only crystal beyond white. Even
dearest blue's not there, though poets would find it.

I find one stark scene

Human noises now enter the scene. This is a poem that is both visual and auditory. Note the sharpness of the consonants – 'stark ... scene ... cut ... cries'. Describes the harshness of this winterscape.

cut by evening cries, by warring air.

Deviant collocation. Suggests that the wind is violently blowing in all directions, as if fighting itself. Onomatopoeia on warring. Sounds like a fierce wind.

The muffled hiss of blades escapes into breath,
hangs with it a moment, fades off.

Here, Morgan refers to the language of drama. 'Fades ... scene', and reference to voices fading in and out suggests that changing season is like a play or film. Again, visuals and sounds are of key significance in conveying the theme of change.

Fades off, goes, the scene, the voices fade,

Lexical sets. These words all perform the same function. 'Fall, decay ... break ... disappear'. The idea is of change and decay.

the line of trees, the woods that fall, decay
and break, the dark comes down, the shouts
run off into it and disappear.

Now we shift to the human world which is changing too with light fading. Fog is personified as a human driver heading to the west of Scotland. The fog literally looks like a monster. Shifting grammatical categories. Monstrous is placed in an adverbial position in the sentence, but functions as a adjective. Could also be transferred epithet referring to fog.

At last the lamps go too, when fog
drives monstrous down the dual carriageway

Internal narrator is used again as detached observer.

out to the west, and even in my room

Repeated use of the words 'grey' and 'dead' represent the death of summer as season changes to winter.

and on this paper I do not know
about that grey dead pane
of ice that sees nothing and that nothing sees.

Questions

Individual/homework activity

1. Google search the line, 'after many a summer dies. The swan ...' You should find the following:
<http://tinyurl.com/nfandxm>
Read the 'summary' section and then write a paragraph linking the reference to Tennyson's poem to this poem. Try to explain the connection(s).
2. What is the purpose of the reference to Bingham's pond?
3. Explain the metaphor of the swan being a ghost in lines 2–3.
4. Lines 1–10 describe the changes on the pond. In line 10, Morgan writes that 'blue's not there,' – meaning the blue of the water – and then adds that 'poets would find it.' What do you think this means?
5. Lines 11–18 describe 'a stark scene', raucous with the sounds of skating, of screaming voices, of 'warring air' where the vicious winter wind blows in all directions as if is in a war against itself. The scene then changes as time passes and darkness takes hold, 'the woods that fall', perhaps with the wind or with the passage of time, and the skaters go home.
What technique is being used in the expression 'warring air'? What effect does it create? How effective is it?
6. The final sequence of the poem in lines 19–24 shifts the scene towards the 'dual carriageway' and even details the end of or changes to that more urban landscape with its 'lamps' which are being changed by the all-encroaching fog. The poem ends with the narrator's pessimistic musings about things ending in a pitiless way over which we have no control.
In lines 19–20, Morgan uses a technique to describe the fog. Name the technique and describe its effects.

'Slate'

'Slate' shares similarities with the previous poem, 'Winter'. It is also different in terms of its structure which is very well-defined in this poem, unlike all of the other poems in this collection. It is a sonnet.

Sonnet

Sonnets contain 14 lines. This one is based on a sonnet known as the Petrarchan sonnet. It was named after a Renaissance Italian poet who often wrote of his unrequited love for a lady named Laura. It has a particular rhyme scheme: ABBA CDDC EFG EFG.

It can be broken down into two parts: the octet (the first eight lines) and the sestet (the final six lines).

The octet is further broken down into two quatrains (two sets of four lines). In each quatrain, the first and fourth lines rhyme and the second and third lines also rhyme.

The function of the octet is often to present an issue to the reader in the first quatrain and then to develop it in the second.

The sestet contains two tercets (sets of three lines). The function of the sestet is often to comment on the issue arising in the octet and possibly to apply a solution to it.

The first sestet has another name – the *volta*, which is Italian for 'turn'.

Textual explosion!

This way of adding notes to a text helps you to figure out how it works.

Read the opening section of the poem and the comment boxes below.

'Slate'

Octet

Quatrain 1

Irony because it is the beginning of this poem. Short sentence stops the reader, making them think of the notion that is being suggested – that there is no beginning to life/world as it has always existed.

There is no beginning. We saw Lewis (A)

Locates the scene away from the urban settings of the last three to the island of Lewis. We is the first person plural suggesting that there is no single narrator. The voice here is collective. To whom does it belong? Ancestors? Is it like a Greek chorus acting as commentator on events others cannot see?

Word choice suggests that care has been taken over the placing of the island. The alliteration adds to the idea of a lightness and delicacy about the handling. There is a slight contradiction, however, as, if there is no beginning then how has it come about that Lewis has been witnessed being laid down?

laid down, when there was not much but thunder (B)
and volcanic fires; watched long seas plunder (B)
faults; laughed as Staffa cooled. Drumlins blue as (A)

Imagery and two similes are used. Drumlins are oval-shaped hills formed under glaciers. They are described as 'blue as bruises' to convey their colour and the violence of their birth. Again, an unpleasant environment, devoid of human life. Note that the sense crosses from quatrain 1 to quatrain 2.

The environment at the beginning is hostile and savage. Raw energy. Basic elements. Earth. Air. Fire. Water. Is there a cruelty about the narrators who laughed as Staffa cooled? Their perspective is god-like, similar to pre-Christian Titans.

Quatrain 2

Imagery – 'grated' – sharp and violent action. Small pieces of the drumlin are being shred off the landscape. Nutmegs are being compared to the drumlins. The nutmegs are small and fragile compared to the grater, just as the drumlins are fragile compared to mother nature who is changing the landscape.

bruises were grated off like nutmegs; bens, (C)
and a great glen, gave a rough back we like (D)
to think the ages must streak, surely strike, (D)
seldom stroke, but raised and shaken, with tens (C)

Alliteration – repetition of the letter 's' provides these lines with a quicker rhythm that reflects the passing of time: 'ages'.

Sestet

Tercet 1

of thousands of rains, blizzards, sea-poundings (E)
shouldered off into night and memory. (F)
Memory of men! That was to come. Great (G)

Word choice: their hunger is said to be empty suggesting that it is not a real hunger or need that they have.

Tercet 2

in their empty hunger these surroundings (E)
threw walls to the sky, the sorry glory (F)
of a rainbow. Their heels kicked flint, chalk, slate. (G)

Oxymoron: the notion of apologetic praise contradicts one another. There is praise for the rainbow, suggesting the rains and thunder have ceased. This is significant because although the rain has stopped, there is regret for leaving the past behind and moving on to a new age.

Task

Carousel activity – this is where groups contribute collaboratively to the outcome of a task. In this case, each group will ‘carousel’ around each stanza/part to build a detailed picture of the poet’s purpose in each one. Divide the class into groups of four. Each group should deal with each stanza/part to allow for ideas to build.

1. What problem/issue is raised in the first quatrain?
2. Is it developed in the second quatrain?
3. Is there a ‘turn’ evident in the first tercet?
4. Is there a resolution in the final tercet?

Homework

There is also another sonnet form known as the English sonnet.

Research it online. How is it different from the Italian form?

‘Hyena’

Initial thoughts

A poem’s title often builds an expectation as to what its content will be about. Sometimes there is a clear connection between the title and its content; sometimes there are surprises!

‘Hyena’ is written as a dramatic monologue in the first person, and in the present tense. This form of poetry often makes unexpected revelations about the character being explored and this is certainly the case with the hyena.

Textual explosion!

This way of adding notes to a text helps you to figure out how it works.

Read the opening section of the poem and the comment boxes on the next page.



'Hyena'

Connotations of evil. A sinister animal. Savage. Loud, hysterical laughter, as if crazed. A scavenger. Hateful. Disliked.

Section 1

First person narrative mode used throughout the poem allowing the inner thoughts of the speaker (the hyena of the title) to be voiced. Disturbing image. To whom is it addressed? Readers? Prey? Tone established is of latent/nascent threat.

I am waiting for you.

Unusual collocation. Likened to a human traveller. The purpose behind this travel, however, is not sightseeing. Irony.

I have been travelling all morning through the bush
and not eaten.

Hunger is its driving force. We gather this by implication.

Mirrors the sentence structure of the opening line: subject – present participle verb. These stretch out time to show its patience/determination/resolve. 'Waiting', 'travelling', 'lying' form lexical sets. They all perform the same role – to draw out time.

I am lying at the edge of the bush

Image of a desolate, isolated and abandoned place. A kraal is an enclosure for keeping animals. The traces of civilisation have gone.

on a dusty path that leads from the burnt-out kraal.

Two comma splices in one short line. There should be three sentences here. The effect is to create the idea of the continuous movement of events and time suggesting growing desperation in this dry, arid, deadly environment.

I am panting, it is midday, I found no water-hole.

I am very fierce without food and although my eyes
are screwed to slits against the sun
you must believe I am prepared to spring.

Word choice suggests the animal is dangerous, further adding to the tone of threat and intimidation. This line tells the reader that this animal is always watching, waiting and prepared to attack its prey.

Section 2

Use of rhetorical question astonishes the reader. Inviting observation. False pride? Or posed to allow reader to gauge the hyena's true nature rather than the public image.

What do you think of me?



Answers his own question. Arrogance? Simile compares its exterior to the African continent. The commonality? Roughness. It is a tough animal in a tough landscape.

I have a rough coat like Africa.

Word choice. builds the image of a sly, methodical hunter.

I am crafty with dark spots

'Dark' could suggest evil.

Second landscape simile building on the earlier comparison. Fairly exact. Coat is rough and in tufts. Again the animal identifies with its environment; is in harmony with it.

like the bush-tufted plains of Africa.

Simile compares the hyena to raw potential energy just waiting to be released.

I sprawl as a shaggy bundle of gathered energy

Second simile compares the hyena again to the continent.

like Africa sprawling in its waters.

Repetitive simple sentence structures with variation in the verbs. Omission of full stops to suggest continuous action. Lexical sets 'trot' and 'lope' convey the movements. Final sentence personifies the animal as a hunter.

I trot, I lope, I slaver, I am a ranger.

Short, sharp sentence has impact when placed at the end of this section, reminding the reader that the hyena feasts on dead animals unflinchingly. 'I hunch my shoulders.'

I hunch my shoulders. I eat the dead.

Section 3

Echoes the opening of section 2. Rhetorical question. This question changes the topic of the monologue and thus lightens the mood of the poem.

Do you like my song?

When the moon pours hard and cold on the veldt

I sing, and I am the slave of darkness.

Over the stone walls and the mud walls and the ruined places

The repetition of 'and' slows the pace of the poem and adds to the more romantic tone of this stanza. The idea of the hyena on his solo nocturnal ventures.

and the owls, the moonlight falls.

There is both visual and auditory imagery here. Moonlight and the silver pelt=visual. The hyena's song=auditory. Creates a much more romantic image which contrasts with the earlier sterile images of dead, dusty plains.

I sniff a broken drum. I bristle. My pelt is silver.

This image of the hyena howling to the moon likens the creature to a wolf – perhaps showing what he would like to become and showing a self-loathing for his own species.

I howl my song to the moon – up it goes.

Tone of threat and menace returns with this question, the false sense of security created in stanza 3 is shattered with this line. A dangerous animal.

Would you meet me there in the waste places?

Section 4

It is said I am a good match
for a dead lion. I put my muzzle

Self-disparaging irony. Not really a good hunter. A scavenger.

Contrasting colour imagery. Lion is gold. Hyena is silver. Inferior.

at his golden flanks, and tear. He
is my golden supper, but my tastes are easy.

Deviant collocation. Crowd of fangs. Vampiric idea of draining life.

I have a crowd of fangs, and I use them.

Use of 'lolling' and 'long' and 'tongue' helps to simulate the action of the tongue rolling, hungrily, out of its mouth. Sinister end. The hyena appears to be laughing, but it is an evil snarl rather than a laugh.

Oh and my tongue – do you like me
when it comes lolling out over my jaw
very long, and I am laughing?

I am not laughing.

But I am not snarling either, only
panting in the sun, showing you
what I grip
carrion with.

Definitive answer to the question. Hyena reminds the reader that he is a killer, whose instinct is to survive on the death of others – irony.

Dead animals. Displaying his kill, prey, meat proudly – the theme of death is emphasised.

Section 5

I am waiting

Irony. Hyena waits for death in order to sustain his own life.

Repetition of 'for' builds the momentum and pace of the poem – the tone become increasingly tense as the poem reaches its climax.

for the foot to slide,
for the heart to seize,
for the leaping sinews to go slack,
for the fight to the death to be fought to the death,
for a glazing eye and the rumour of blood.

The repetition and balance of the words in this sentence are used to show the fine balance between life and death.

Lengthening sentences show the hyena nearing his prey.

Sinister and disconcerting image that the hyena is always watching and waiting for prey. Desecrating the remains of the dead – particularly eerie and threatening image. The poem ends on the image and theme of death – strong suggestion that the dead will return to dust and become part of the land, sea and wind, becoming part of Africa.

I am crouching in my dry shadows
till you are ready for me.
My place is to pick you clean
and leave your bones to the wind.

Questions

1. What do you know about hyenas?
2. Now re-read the first line of the poem. What are the surprises?
3. What unexpected facts are we made aware of in lines 1–9?
4. Stanza 2 in lines 10–17 sees the hyena compared to many things. Identify them and the effects of each comparison.
5. Stanza 3 in lines 18–25 begins unusually; in what way(s)? The last line in this section is sinister – explain why.
6. Stanza 4 in lines 26–38 continues the character exploration. There are clearly two sides to the hyena. Describe them.
7. Stanza 5 in lines 39–48 gives the impression that the attention of the hyena is now focused on the reader. How does Morgan achieve this effect?

Thematic mapping using Venn diagrams

In order to complete the final 8-mark question in the textual analysis part of the examination paper, you need to be able to identify the connections or commonality between some of the different poems in the collection. The question rubric usually asks you to consider an aspect(s) of the poem and then show how this/these relate(s) to at least one more poem by the same author. These 'maps' will help you to do this.

Now that you have read all of the poems, you need to complete each circle as fully as you can by using the carousel technique. This will mean dividing the class into groups of four. Each should then add as much information as possible for each of the poems.

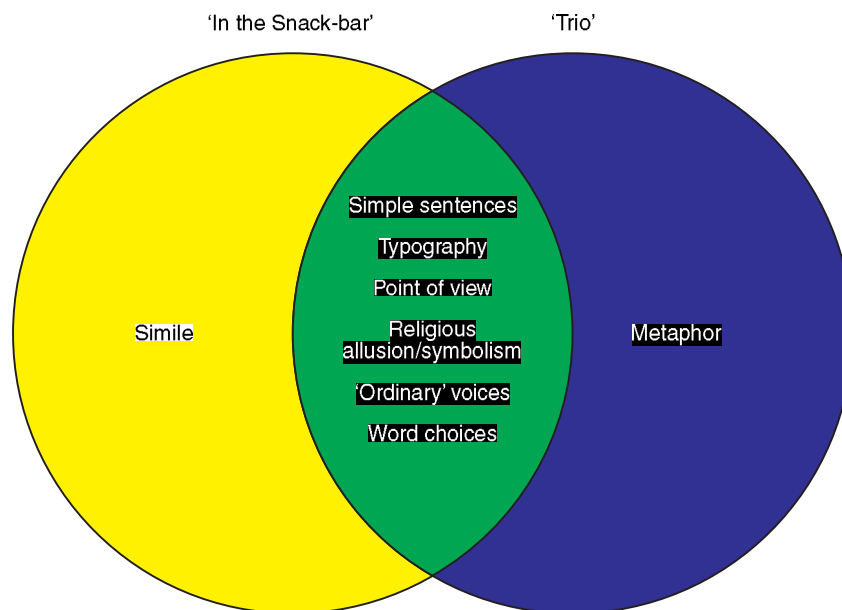
Questions

Consider the following question:

With close textual reference, discuss in what ways this poem shares similar themes to one or more poems by Morgan.

Question analysis – three-way Venn diagram:

1. Write down the keywords in the question.
2. Assuming that 'In the Snack-bar' is the chosen text, which other(s) might you choose? Justify your answer.
3. Complete a Venn diagram to show the thematic similarities. The example below for 'In the Snack-bar' and 'Trio' has been started for you.



Creating Venn diagrams in Word

See the link below for help and advice:

<http://tinyurl.com/na7s72t>

Use a three-way Venn diagram to show the similarities between 'Winter', 'Hyena' and 'Slate'.

Task