

Year 10 Reading Media Texts ('Bye Bye Baglady')

The following will help prepare you for your Year 10 English exam and provide valuable practice for the actual G.C.S.E. exam next year.

Paper 1 contains three questions. Showing understanding of media texts is question one.

In both your mocks and in the actual G.C.S.E. you will be able to study the texts in advance of the exam – but having a go at an 'unseen' text, and then going through it, will help you focus closely, making use of your own skills. You will learn how media texts influence readers and achieve their effect, how to select appropriate material and how to analyse the author's craft.

For this practice the text and task is the same for both Higher and Foundation Tiers – it is different in the actual exam! For Top and Second Set pupils there is an extension task at the bottom of the page.

Task :

Read the article 'Bye Bye Baglady' by David Pearson. Write about what we learn about Maggie and how David Pearson shows his admiration and sympathy for her.

Top Tips :

- You are asked two questions here – treat them separately
- The first question is simply asking for facts (objective). It's a 'What?' question! Read through each paragraph and jot down everything we discover about Maggie and her life.
- Avoid the subjective – i.e. do not include David Pearson's views – or anyone else's – including your own.
- Simply join the 'facts' together in one piece of continuous writing.
- Use your own words as far as possible (this proves that you actually understand the text!) – e.g. 'Maggie was a popular figure' rather than 'She already had a lot of friends...'.
• Summarise! Keep it short and to the point. You shouldn't need to write more than half a page of A4
- You could start '*Maggie was featured in a BBC documentary four years before her recent death. She.....*'
- The second part of the question is different – it's a 'How?' question! This is more demanding. A good answer here will gain you higher grades.
- Find examples of Maggie's life, experiences and character that invite sympathy or admiration
- Explain why David Pearson chose to write about these aspects of her life. Explain the effect of these examples
- Find examples in which the language used invites us to feel sympathy or admiration (e.g. the 'hunched' figure or 'the ache from the biting frost'). Show their effect!
- Comment on the headline, the sub-heading, Maggie's photograph – even the publication!
- Keep referring back to the two words 'sympathy' and 'admiration'.

Extension Activity :

Now read 'It has become fashionable to sleep rough on the streets' by Douglas Fraser. How were Bill Walker and Maggie's experiences different? Compare the ways in which 'Bye Bye Baglady' and this article are written and presented.

Section A - Media Texts

Bye Bye Baglady

David Pearson pays a personal tribute to Maggie Donnelly, whose life on the streets was featured in his documentary *Baglady* and who died last month



MAGGIE DONNELLY knew a lot about pain. She'd been trying to escape it for years. Not the epileptic blackouts, or the ache from the biting frost of a winter's night on the pavement that left her barely able to stand, but the pain of what had gone wrong in her life.

Baglady, a documentary I made about her for BBC1 in 1992 brought her story to millions of viewers. She already had a lot of friends before the film was shown, but after that even more Londoners responded to the squat hunched figure on the pavements around Charing Cross. Drivers would sound their horns and wave. People would bring books, food and money, but that was always spent on "cans" and the steady slide into a dark, cruel void.

Maggie was loved despite her vileness when lost in an alcoholic binge forever trying to forget the tragedy she blamed herself for—the death of a small boy in her care when she was a nanny years ago. He was scalded in a bath while she nipped downstairs to feed the family dog. She loved dogs. and later Chips and then Smudge got her the nickname of the 'Dogladv' on the streets.

She would often be seen in a cheeks hat bearing a slogan like 'I Like Sex—although the word sex' was partly obscured by her ineffective attempts to censor it with a discarded pen. She was funny, sad, enjoyed life. but lived one of extremes.

I remember the time a few years ago when I took my five-year-old daughter Emily to meet Maggie and give her some books on Christmas Eve. Maggie loved to read. She could quote from Shakespeare and had read *The Bible* several times, as well as endless trashy novels donated to her by commuters.

It was an incongruous sight—a young, cared-for girl alongside Maggie, who swayed gently but made an effort to be on her best behaviour. Emily still remembers Maggie's rejoinder that she should not end up like her, and that I should love my "bairns". Her simple humanity always made a deep impression.

Maggie loved children and dogs, although paradoxically, experiences with them were also her most painful memories—one of her dogs was put down after he bit a passer-by while guarding Maggie; another was stolen by a rough sleeper. It was her desire to discourage young people from a life of drink and the streets that made her decide to take part in *Baglady*.

Perhaps Maggie's lasting legacy is what she left us to think about. Before the film was shown, there was little challenge to the orthodoxy in the debate about the homeless. Often the presumption was that problems could be tackled by simply building more houses, that the homeless were homeless as a result of policies, or that they somehow deserved their lot. Maggie's story showed how much more complex the problems were, but also how worthwhile it would be to try and fix them.

The afternoon of her burial, as we walked up the grassy slope to where the open grave was waiting in a pretty, hidden corner of Peckham, my time spent with her seemed a long time ago. Maggie liked being in the fields but she was always drawn back to the streets and her love affair with alcohol. Now the earth, that had lain waiting under her paving stones in town, was all around her.

Dust to dust and ashes to ashes, and Maggie's boyfriend John—who had cared for her since the moved into a Drink Crisis Centre flat a year or two ago—gently threw a handful of soil onto her coffin. The uncomfortable roar of the streets that had dominated Maggie's life for so long gave way to the song of a cheery blackbird.

There isn't a lot of comfort when someone with so much life and so much pain dies at 46, but as one card on one of the several bouquets of flowers said: "Where you've gone, the pain will be over."

Source : The Big Issue

