Comparative Study

Texts

- ***Small Things Like These*** — **Claire Keegan**
- ***Sive*** — **John B. Keane**
- ***The Shawshank Redemption*** — **Frank Darabont (Dir)**

Summary of the Three Texts

Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan

The novel tells the story of Bill Furlong, a coal and timber merchant living in New Ross, County Wexford in the 1980s, who confronts troubling questions about how girls and women are treated in the town's controversial convent.

The story opens with a short chapter that establishes the time and place of the story. A brief overview of Furlong's childhood follows. Son to an unmarried mother, he grew up living in her employer's (Mrs Wilson, a wealthy Protestant widow) house. He was bullied at school because he has never known his father. Mrs Wilson offered him some protection – growing up in her house was pleasant, and he has warm memories of that part of his childhood. The story then changes to the present as it explores Furlong's life with his wife Eileen and their five daughters. The family are preparing for Christmas. They attend the annual lighting of the Christmas tree lights, make Christmas cake and write letters to Santa Claus.

The tone of the novel darkens as Furlong makes his first visit to the town's convent. Rumours abound in the town that the institution is a Magdalene Laundry or a mother and baby home. Furlong enters the convent without permission and finds a number of young girls and women being kept in appalling conditions. He discusses what he has seen later that evening with Eileen, but she is keen for him to not talk about the subject. Shortly afterwards, Furlong makes a return visit to the convent and discovers a young woman, Sarah, locked in the coal shed. He is thrown into a crisis as he listens to the Mother Superior's unconvincing explanation about how the young woman was locked in the shed. Sitting together, Mother Superior coaxes Sarah into lying that she had been playing a game of hide and seek with the other women and had been accidentally locked in the shed. Furlong does not challenge Mother Superior's unlikely account – but the experience has a profound effect on him, and it will motivate him as the story progresses.

Furlong and his family attend Mass together. Afterwards they return home and put up their Christmas tree. Furlong decides to visit Ned, who worked with his mother for Mrs Wilson, and who Furlong grew up with. Ned is not home and instead the door is opened by a family friend. She remarks on the striking resemblance between Furlong and Ned. This moment leads to an epiphany for Furlong – his father is Ned.

The final part of the story sees Furlong act decisively to help Sarah escape the convent. He takes Sarah to his family home, even though he knows that Eileen is against any involvement with the girls and women in the convent. He notes that there may be 'a world of trouble' in his house for his decision but at the same time he considers that it would have been worse to do nothing 'which he would have had to live with for the rest of his life'. The novel ends uncertainly, as we never see Eileen's reaction, find out what happens to Sarah or see if Furlong has to face any other serious consequences.

Sive by John B. Keane

The play tells the story of an arranged marriage between a schoolgirl named Sive and an elderly local farmer called Seán Dóta. Sive lives with her uncle Mike and his wife Mena, as well as her

grandmother, Nanna Glavin. Sive's parents, who she never met, are deceased. The play is divided into two acts. The first act has three scenes; the second act has two scenes. Each scene takes place in the kitchen of the Glavin farmhouse. The play is set in a remote, though unnamed, part of 1950s Ireland.

The play opens with an argument between Nanna Glavin and Mena. Sive comes home from school. She asks Nanna about her parents. Nanna tells Sive that her father was killed in a mining accident in England soon after her birth. The local matchmaker, Thomasheen Seán Rua, calls to the house to see Mena. He says there has been an offer of a match for Sive from Seán Dóta. Initially Mena dismisses the idea, saying that Sive would never agree to the match. Thomasheen tells her that Seán Dóta will pay £200 to marry Sive and will take Nanna to live with them too. Mena agrees to attempt to convince her husband Mike to consent to the match. Mike is horrified at the suggestion of an arranged marriage between Sive and Seán Dóta. However, he changes his mind when Liam Scuab calls to see Sive. Liam is a cousin of Sive's father, who Mike blames for abandoning Sive's mother while she was pregnant. Mike hates the Scuab family. His fear that Sive will marry Liam prompts him to agree to the arranged marriage.

In Act 1 Scene 2 Thomasheen brings Seán Dóta to the Glavin farmhouse to meet Sive. There is awkward small talk between the schoolgirl, who has still not been told about the marriage, and the farmer. Mena concocts a ploy to allow Seán to be alone with Sive. She sends Sive on an errand to a neighbour's house. Seán insists on walking her, much to Sive's disgruntlement. Sive returns home upset. She tells Nanna that Seán tried to put his hands on her.

In Act 1 Scene 3 Pats Bocock, a travelling tinker-man and his son, Carthalawn visit the Glavin farmhouse. They sing songs mocking the arranged marriage. This upsets Mena and Thomasheen, although it delights Nanna. Thomasheen and Mena threaten Nanna with the county home (a state-run institution for poor and vulnerable people). Sive returns from school and finds that Mena is uncharacteristically tender with her. Mena tells Sive that she is lucky to have the offer of a match with Seán Dóta. Sive declares that she would rather never be married than marry Seán Dóta. Mena turns on Sive, telling her that she is fortunate to have any match, given that her father was not married to her mother. She tells Sive that she will have to leave school immediately and that her childhood is over.

In Act 2 Scene 1 Liam Scuab begs Mike and Mena to call off the wedding between Sive and Seán Dóta. Mike and Mena chase Liam from the house, threatening him with violence. Nanna then enters the action. She pleads with Mike to change his mind and to allow Sive to marry Liam instead. Mike is furious with this suggestion, claiming that Liam is as untrustworthy as his cousin (Sive's father). Nanna argues with Mike, but he refuses to change his mind.

In Act 2 Scene 2 Pats Bocock hands Nanna a letter from Liam to give to Sive explaining that he would like to marry her as soon as possible. Mike questions Nanna about Pats Bocock's visit. She admits that he gave her a letter, though she claims it is a letter of farewell rather than a proposal. He promises to deliver the letter to Sive and to keep it a secret. However, Thomasheen discovers the letter and makes Mike read it aloud. On discovering its contents, Thomasheen burns the letter. Mena and Sive arrive home from town. Sive, wracked with anxiety and dread, says she has no appetite and goes to bed early. Mike drinks bottles of stout with Thomasheen. Seán calls in to check the wedding is still going ahead. Pats Bocock and his son also call to the house, singing satirical songs about the wedding. The atmosphere is transformed when Mena discovers that Sive is missing from her room. Pats claims that he saw a girl running across the bog when he was on

his way to the house. Liam Scuab enters, carrying Sive's body and asks for a cloth to dry her hair. He says that Sive took her own life by drowning herself in the bog. He roars at Mena that she is responsible for Sive's death. Mike says that he is going to find a priest to bless Sive's body. Liam angrily agrees to go with him. The play ends with Nanna bowing her head over Sive's body and weeping.

The Shawshank Redemption by Frank Darabont (Dir)

Andy Dufresne, a banker, is wrongly convicted of the double murder of his wife and her lover. He is given two life sentences at Shawshank Prison in Maine, USA. He becomes friendly with Ellis 'Red' Redding, a popular prisoner who is known for smuggling objects into prison. Andy asks Red to get him a rock hammer, so he can take up his old hobby of rock collecting and shaping. The prison itself is a cruel and dangerous place. Andy is the target of sexual assaults by a gang known as 'The Sisters'. Andy, Red and some other prisoners help to tar the roof of the prison. While carrying out the work, Andy overhears the leader of the guards, Byron Hadley, complaining about having to pay tax on his inheritance. Andy approaches Hadley and offers to help him. Hadley accepts Andy's help and this means that Andy is favoured by the guards. The next time Andy is assaulted by 'The Sisters', Hadley and the guards take revenge on them, sending their leader ('Bogs') to a hospital.

The warden, Norton, offers Andy a position working in the prison library, because he thinks that Andy can help him, and the other guards, with financial issues. Andy accepts the position in the library and turns it from a sad, underused library into a blossoming, buzzing place.

Norton begins a programme where prisoners work on infrastructure outside the prison walls. He accepts bribes from local businesses who fear that prison labour will undercut their business. Andy hides the money away in a bank account under a fake name, helping the warden launder money for many years. In 1964, an excitable young man named Tommy Williams is sent to Shawshank. It comes to light that Tommy knows the person who actually killed Andy's wife and her lover. Andy informs the warden of the evidence and asks for support with an appeal. Norton refuses to help Andy as he does not want to lose his services. He has Tommy killed and Andy put in solitary confinement for two months.

Andy tells Red about his dreams of life outside the prison. He hopes to open a small hotel and run a fishing boat in Zihuantanejo, a Mexican coastal town. Andy tells Red that if he ever gets out of Shawshank, he should go to a place in Buxton in Maine to retrieve a package buried under an oak tree.

The next day, Andy doesn't come out of his cell for roll call, having escaped through a hole he has been digging with the rock hammer for many years. He poses as the fake person in whose name all of Norton's money has been deposited, takes the money and flees to Mexico. In the process, he also tips the police off to Norton's shady business dealings. When the authorities go to arrest the warden, he shoots himself.

After 40 years, Red finally makes parole and visits the place in Buxton that Andy told him about. He digs up a box full of money and a letter from Andy telling him to come to Zihuatanejo. He does and the two friends reunite.

A. Theme: Hope

Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan

The exploration of the theme of hope greatly adds to our understanding of a text. *Small Things Like These*, a novel by Claire Keegan, is a story where the theme of hope can be seen in many interesting ways. Hope, or its absence, marks the lives of all characters in New Ross, Wexford in the 1980s. The protagonist, a coal and timber merchant named Bill Furlong, has immediate and tentative hopes for his five daughters. He wishes to raise them well, see them through school and witness them move on to university. Furlong also has more elusive hopes. Raised only by his unmarried mother, he has held onto a life-long hope of discovering the identity of his father. More broadly, he also hopes to help the girls and young women he has discovered working in the town convent, which he suspects to be a Mother and Baby Home. But these hopes collide with his plans to see his daughters progress through the religious-run school system. His wife, Eileen, argues that Bill should not do anything to upset the hugely influential nuns who run the convent. The theme of hope is explored throughout as Bill Furlong must decide if he is willing to risk the stability of his family life to help the vulnerable, oppressed and lonely women of the convent.

Key Moment 1

The opening section of the novel mixes hope with hopelessness. Ireland of the 1980s, as depicted by the novel, lacks any sense of hope or optimism. Bill Furlong sees the extent of poverty and unemployment while on his rounds delivering coal and firewood. He notices 'the dole queues were getting longer' and people struggling to pay for heat or electricity. Some resort to 'sleeping in their overcoats'. More hauntingly, Furlong sees a 'young schoolboy drinking milk out of the cat's bowl behind the priest's house'. Life outside the town of New Ross is similarly downbeat. Furlong listens to the radio and hears 'young people were emigrating, leaving for London and Boston, New York'. Furlong's observations of the world around him contrast with the world he has built with his wife, Eileen, and their five school-going daughters. Bill and Eileen are full of hope for their children. Furlong's attention is 'fixed on providing for his girls' who are 'showing promise at school'. Bill feels a 'deep, private joy that these children were his own' as he sees them displaying manners and an even temperament. He tells Eileen: 'aren't we the lucky ones?' The theme of hope is underlined in the moments that Furlong spends with his daughters. They are symbolic of both the innocence and hope of youth, as well as the pride and ambition of parents. They provide a welcome respite from the overarching grimness of Ireland in the 1980s and offer the novel its first notes of hope.

Key Moment 2

The theme of hope appears as the Furlongs begin planning their Christmas celebration. They visit the town to see the annual switching-on of the town's Christmas lights, the unveiling of the nativity and the display of a 'handsome Norway spruce' Christmas tree in the town square. There is a 'pipe band and carol singers' as well as the local publican, Mrs Kehoe, 'out with a stall, selling slabs of gingerbread and hot chocolate'. The family returns home and together they make the Christmas cake. The atmosphere is upbeat, positive and hopeful. The girls write their letters to Santa Claus, under the careful eye of their parents who advise them on hand-writing and practicality. They are allowed to stay up late, drink Ribena and enjoy 'slabs of soda bread…. buttered and spread with Marmite or lemon curd'. Bill and Eileen, so rarely free of routine and obligation, even find time to have some Bristol Cream sherry and discuss the Christmas presents that they might buy each other. Eileen is 'well pleased' that Bill has noticed her admiring a 'pair of navy, patent shoes and matching handbag' at Hanrahan's, a local clothes shop. Bill, meanwhile, humbly asks for a novel or a

dictionary 'for the house, for the girls'. Humdrum wishes are expressed alongside the seasonal ones, as Eileen comments that she has been 'putting something away into the Credit Union every week' and they should be able to use the money to buy new windows for their house. The Furlongs' hopes for each other, their girls and for the Christmas season are palpable in this chapter.

The theme of hopes takes on further nuance when we consider Furlong's memories of his childhood Christmases. The smell of lemon rind from the Christmas cake provokes a memory of his own mother 'in that fine old kitchen' and how she used to 'put what was left of the lemon into one of the blue jugs with sugar to steep and dissolve overnight and had made cloudy lemonade'. More poignantly, the sight of his daughters writing Christmas letters makes him recall sending letters away as a child, 'asking for his daddy or else a jigsaw puzzle of a farm in five hundred pieces'. It is noted with a devastating simplicity that 'neither Santa nor his father had come. And there was no jigsaw'. Furlong's hopes, so sincerely expressed for his family, are framed by the experience of never having his own realised. This sense of hope and hopelessness, closely bound together, is present throughout the novel, and it is what makes the theme of hope so rewarding to study.

Key Moment 3

It is the absence of hope, rather than its presence, which most quickly strikes readers as the novel's focus shifts from the town to the convent. Run by the Mother Superior of the Good Shepherd order of nuns, the convent is a 'powerful-looking place on the hill at the far side of the river with black, wide-open gates and a host of tall, shining windows, facing the town'. This ominous description provides a foretaste of the enforced misery which lies within the convent. The convent is portrayed in ambiguous terms. There is speculation around town that it is a training school, a Magdalene Laundry and a Mother and Baby home. The local chatter and gossip about the convent is given credibility when Furlong visits to make a fuel delivery. He finds 'more than a dozen young women and girls, down on their hands and knees with tins of old-fashioned lavender polish and rags, polishing their hearts out in a circle on the floor'. Shockingly, one of the girls asks him if he can help her escape as far as the river. 'All I want to do is drown meself,' she says. Readers sincerely hope that Furlong will now question an authority figure and get an explanation as to the harsh treatment of the young women and girls. However, this key moment takes a deflating turn when one of the nuns discovers Furlong talking to the girl. The nun brusquely questions Furlong about his arrival at the convent: 'was it you that was out on the lawn, upsetting the geese?' Furlong 'feeling strangely chastised, took his mind off the girl' and accompanies the nun out to check the fuel delivery. In this brief interaction Furlong misses the opportunity to question that nun and to help the young women and girls. His meek response adds a sense of hopelessness to the novel.

Key Moment 4

The theme of hope gets fresh impetus when Bill Furlong visits the convent for a second time. Following a shocking discovery, he eventually inspires hope in readers when he tactfully challenges Mother Superior. He is shocked to find a girl locked in the coal shed. She is 'just about fit to stand' and is unable to tell if it is night or day. She pleads with Furlong to ask the nuns about her baby, who's 'fourteen weeks old. They've taken him from me now but they might let me feed him again, if he's here. I don't know where he is'. Rattled by her revelation, Furlong is bewildered when Mother Superior opens the door of the convent. She greets him with an incongruent smile and thanks him for coming. In doing so, Mother Superior wrongfoots Furlong, who had been anticipating a confrontation with the nun. Instead, Mother Superior empathises with the 'poor girl' and instructs Furlong to come in for a cup of tea. He resists, but she tells him authoritatively: 'You'll come in…I'll have it no other way'. Mother Superior asks the girl how she came to be in the coal shed. The girl replies, preposterously, that she had been playing hide-

and-seek with the other women. The dark irony of a young woman who has been locked away from society supposedly playing a game of hide-and-seek is not lost on Furlong, who senses that Mother Superior 'wants him gone'. However, her discomfort emboldens him and, amidst the lies, secrecy and deception, he starts to feel a 'queer, new power'. He deliberately outstays his welcome, making idle talk with Mother Superior, who becomes increasingly uncomfortable with his presence. She attempts to antagonise him by remarking that Polish and Russian sailors had been in town this week importing coal for his business. 'You don't mind bringing the foreigners in,' she goads. Furlong bats away her causal xenophobia by saying 'hasn't everyone to be born somewhere…sure wasn't Jesus born in Bethlehem'. Mother Superior is appalled by the comparison and decides she has had 'more than enough' of Furlong. The newly assertive Furlong reiterates the theme of hope in the novel. He is slowly gaining confidence that he can challenge Mother Superior and the reprehensible treatment in the convent.

Key Moment 5

The theme of hope emerges again in the novel as Bill Furlong finally discovers the identity of his father. He decides to visit Ned, who worked alongside Furlong's mother, Sarah, in the home of Mrs Wilson, a wealthy Protestant widow. Bill lived in Mrs Wilson's house with his mother, and Ned lived there too. In a brief flashback scene Furlong recalls a previous visit to Ned just after the first of his five daughters was born. Furlong remembers drinking 'two small bottles of stout and wound up asking Ned if he knew who his father was'. Ned told Furlong that his mother 'never did say', though he alludes to the many visitors to Mrs Wilson's house over the years. 'God only knows,' said Ned, before quickly emphasising the positive life that Furlong had, 'didn't you have a decent start here, and aren't you getting on rightly'. The novel then returns to the present-day as Furlong approaches Mrs Wilson's house, where Ned still lives. However, a woman opens the door and explains that Ned is 'no longer there, that he'd gone into hospital more than a fortnight back…and was now convalescing' in a nursing home. The woman invites Furlong into the house and comments that he looks like a relative of Ned's. 'I can handy see the likeness,' she says, before asking: 'Is Ned an uncle of yours?' Furlong is 'unable to find a reply' such is his shock as he realises that Ned is his father. He turns down the offer of coming into the house and instead sits in his lorry 'for a good half hour or more, going over what the woman had said'. Furlong has spent his life hoping to find his father. The revelation stuns him, while simultaneously he wonders how he had never figured it out himself. His memories of Ned are warm and loving, recalling 'how down-hearted Ned had been in himself after Furlong's mother had passed away, and how they had always gone to Mass and eaten together, the way they stayed up talking at the fire at night'. The theme of hope is underlined by what Furlong calls Ned's 'act of daily grace' as he allowed him to feel like he came from 'finer stock' by not revealing that he was his father. Furlong wonders why 'were the things that were closest so often the hardest to see?' Furlong will never know why Ned did not confirm that he was his father, but the fact that Ned quietly acted like one when he 'polished his shoes and tied the laces…bought him his first razor and taught him how to shave' is significant for him. Far from never knowing his father, Furlong knew him better than he could ever have imagined. Ned's actions are inherently hopeful, as his simple, quiet acts of kindness supported Furlong through his bumpy younger years.

Key Moment 6

The theme of hope is reiterated in the novel's uplifting ending. It is Christmas Eve and Furlong has completed his work for the festive period. He feels 'a bit freer now' and goes for a walk into town to collect his wife's Christmas present. He buys a bag of chips and has a soft drink before he finds himself wandering around the town 'back down to the river and on towards the bridge'. He considers 'why he had not gone back to the comforts and safety of his own home' before

resolving that 'his day was filling up now, with something else'. This is the confirmation that he is planning on returning to the convent. He reaches the coal-house and opens the door to discover Sarah locked inside once again: 'Everything was just as he'd feared although the girl, this time, took his coat and seemed gladly to lean on him as he led her out'. He helps her out of the convent grounds back through the town towards his home. Furlong considers if this moment represents 'the best bit of him' and feels a surge of positivity: 'never once in his whole and unremarkable life had he known a happiness akin to this'. He takes Sarah to his family home, even though he knows that Eileen is against any involvement with the girls and women in the convent. He notes that there may be 'a world of trouble' in his house for his decision but at the same time he considers that it would have been worse to do nothing 'which he would have had to live with for the rest of his life'. The novel finishes in a hopeful way, as Furlong reflects that 'his fear more than outweighed every other feeling but in his foolish heart he not only hoped but legitimately believed that they would manage'. Furlong's decision to bring Sarah home may cause her a lot of trouble, too – but there is no doubting the sincerity of his actions, or Sarah's consent to them. Ultimately, Furlong's intervention expresses the theme of hope in a positive and moving way.

KEY NOTES

- The opening section of the novel mixes hope with hopelessness. Ireland of the 1980s, as depicted by the novel, lacks any sense of hope or optimism. Bill Furlong's sees the extent of poverty and unemployment on his rounds delivering coal and fireword in New Ross, County Wexford.
- Furlong's observations of the world around him contrast with the world he has built with his wife, Eileen, and their five school-going daughters. Bill and Eileen are full of hope for their children.
- The couple's hopes for each other, their girls and for the Christmas season are palpable in this chapter. They attend the annual 'switching on' of the Christmas lights, make Christmas cake and write their letters to Santa Claus.
- The theme of hopes takes on further nuance when we consider Furlong's bittersweet memories of his childhood Christmases.
- Furlong's hopes, so sincerely expressed for his family, come with the experience of never having his own realised. This sense of hope and hopelessness, closely bound together, is present throughout the novel, and it is what makes the theme of hope so rewarding to study.
- It is the absence of hope, rather than its presence, which most quickly strikes readers as the novel's focus shifts from the town to the convent. Furlong fails to question the nuns about their treatment of the young women and girls at the convent.
- The theme of hope gets fresh impetus when he visits the convent for a second time. Following a shocking discovery, he eventually inspires hope in readers when he tactfully challenges Mother Superior.
- Furlong is shocked to find a young girl called Sarah locked in the coal shed but Mother Superior plays down the discovery. Undeterred, he deliberately outstays his welcome, until the head nun has enough of him. The newly assertive Furlong reiterates the theme of hope in the novel. He

is slowly gaining confidence that he can challenge Mother Superior and the reprehensible treatment in the convent.

- The theme of hope emerges again in the novel as he finally realises that Ned is his father. The theme of hope is underlined by what Furlong calls Ned's 'act of daily grace' as he allowed him to feel like he came from 'finer stock' by not revealing that he was his father. Ned's actions are inherently hopeful, as his simple, quiet acts of kindness supported Furlong through his bumpy younger years.
- The theme of hope is reiterated in the novel's uplifting ending as Furlong helps Sarah to escape the convent. The novel finishes in a hopeful way as he reflects that 'his fear more than outweighed every other feeling but in his foolish heart he not only hoped but legitimately believed that they would manage'.

Sive and *Small Things Like These*

The theme of hope is depicted in complex, uplifting and heart-breaking ways in John B. Keane's much-loved play. *Sive* is the story of an ill-fated arranged marriage in Ireland in the 1950s. Sive, the eponymous schoolgirl, is arranged to be married with Seán Dóta, an elderly local farmer. Swayed by Dóta's offer of money, Sive's guardians – Mike and Mena Glavin (her uncle and aunt) – agree to the marriage proposal.

As with the novel, there are competing hopes at the centre of the play. Sive hopes to be married to Liam Scuab, her childhood sweetheart. She hopes too to finish her education and perhaps get a job or go onto further study. She also hopes to find out more about her deceased parents. In opposition to Sive's hopes, though, are the hopes of Mike and Mena Glavin. Mike hates Liam Scuab because he is a cousin of Sive's father. Mena hates Sive and her grandmother, Nanna Glavin, and is willing to sell the girl to the highest bidder so she can enjoy both the profits of the deal and – in her view – the reward of ridding Sive from her home. **In common with the novel, the play deals with the theme of hope in nuanced and interesting ways.**

Key Moment 1

The play, like the novel, seems an unlikely place for the theme of hope to prosper. Living conditions in Kerry in the 1950s are even more challenging than in New Ross in the 1980s. All of the action takes place in the Glavin home, described by stage directions as 'poorly furnished'. It is a small, cramped home with a fire and a 'large black kettle' in the corner, an 'enamel bucket of drinking water on the table' and few other objects. Poverty is widespread in Keane's play. It has a debilitating effect on the characters' lives, and a corrosive impact on their morality. Sive has clear hopes for the future, continuing her education despite Mena's scornful dismissal that she should give up her studies and go to work. Mena rants bitterly about Sive, claiming that she should be 'out working with a farmer…instead of getting your head filled with high notions'. There is a blatant tension between Sive's hopes for a fulfilling, interesting life, and Mena's hopes to get rid of Sive. The local matchmaker, Thomasheen Seán Rua, approaches Mena with an offer to arrange a marriage between Sive and Seán Dóta, an elderly, relatively well-off local farmer. The matchmaker entices Mena with a promise of £200, as well as the added bonus of having her long-standing rival, Nanna Glavin, out of the home too. He says that Seán Dóta would agree to take Nanna into his home too – as long as he can marry Sive. Mena's initial reluctance gives way to a hearty approval, as

she considers both the money and chance to live without Sive and Nanna. 'Years I have suffered with the two of them, always full of hate for me,' she says. **The social hopelessness seen in Keegan's novel is mirrored in Keane's play. However, there is a sharp contrast between Bill Furlong's heartfelt and selfless hopes for his daughters and Mena Glavin's malignant, self-interested hopes to force Sive into an unwanted marriage.**

Key Moment 2

As in the novel, the theme of hope appears early in the play. Mike Glavin quickly moves to dispel Mena and Thomasheen's plan to marry Sive off to Seán Dóta. Mike is initially appalled by the prospect of such an arranged marriage. He has hopes for Sive and her career. He tells Mena: 'She is different. She has book-learning. She will turn a deaf ear to match-making'. Mike's opposition to the marriage becomes more forceful when he hears that Seán Dóta is Sive's suitor. He says: 'Even when I was a boy Seán Dóta was a man…what young girl would look a second time at him'. Mena's attempt to entice Mike with money are met with fierce resistance as he says that he cannot let Sive waste her life. 'It would be like tossing the white flower of the canavaun on to the manure heap,' he says. Mike's wishes for Sive, though ultimately unrealised, reinforce the theme of hope in the play. **This fraught version of hope stands in contrast to the simple, uplifting version seen in the opening of the novel, in which the Furlong family spend tender moments preparing for Christmas together.**

The most innocent expression of the theme of hope in the play is seen in the relationship between Liam Scuab and Sive. Liam visits Sive's home to arrange a meeting later that night. Sive tells him that she will come 'if I can, but if I don't come at the time, don't wait'. Liam answers her romantically: 'I'll wait till the crack of dawn, anyway'. The pair discuss the topic of arranged marriage and agree that it is a 'horrible' idea. Liam tells Sive that he loves her and that he could not contemplate an arranged marriage with someone else. 'I would marry nobody but you, Sive, I love you. How would I marry anybody but you!' Liam and Sive's hopes to marry each other are threatened by Mike. Liam, whose cousin is Sive's deceased father, is unwelcome in the Glavin home. Mike sees Liam, and all the Scuabs, as 'the one breed' and warns him to 'keep away from Sive'. However, Liam hopes to marry Sive. He says: 'I am after Sive and nothing more than that. I love her'. The theme of hope, so purely expressed in the love between Liam and Sive, takes on a greater nuance as we learn of Mike's opposition to Liam. This scene highlights competing and opposing hopes in the play: Mike wishes to keep Sive away from Liam, while Liam wishes to marry Sive. **This tense treatment of the theme of hope is different to the novel, where hope is shown in such a brutal, heart-breaking way, as Bill Furlong's hopes for Christmas when he was a child were unrealised.**

Key Moment 3

The theme of hope is expressed with the same sense of melancholy in the play as it is in the novel when Seán Dóta meets Sive for the first time. He calls to the family home along with Thomasheen in a transparent attempt to engender an unlikely chemistry between the schoolgirl and the elderly farmer. Sive tells them that she is reading a book of 'poetry and verses'. Thomasheen makes a self-pitying reference to his own childhood and his lack of education while Seán Dóta explains that he does not like poetry and does not trust poets who are 'filled with roguery and they have the bad tongue on top of it'. Seán recites an awful, hackneyed poem 'for the girl' which only emphasises his cluelessness about one of Sive's keenest interests. He attempts to impress Sive with his reference to 'buying a motoring car' and then insists on walking her down the road on an errand. Sive resists his attempts to spend time with her, commenting: 'there is no need for Mr Dóta to come with me'. Sive's pleas are ignored by Seán. Soon after she returns home in a state of panic. She tells Nanna that Seán Dóta attempted to put

his hands on her but she managed to reject his advances: '…he made a drive at me! He nearly tore the coat off me'. Sive's innocence and the utter incompatibility of the mooted marriage is highlighted as she says to Nanna: 'He frightened the life out of me. I never expected it'. Dóta is painfully unsuited to Sive. His clumsiness with words and actions accentuates the sense that a huge injustice is being done to Sive, particularly when he is compared to the charming, committed and sincere Liam Scuab. There is a sense of hope slowly fading for Sive, as the audience realises that Seán Dóta will not be easily dissuaded from his desires, making her marriage to Liam seem increasingly unlikely. **This calls to mind how the hopes of the young women and girls in the convent are quietly extinguished when Bill Furlong fails to stand up to the nuns on his first visit. The theme of hope in the play, as in the novel, is nuanced by the mendacious actions of less prominent but still significant characters**.

Key Moment 4

The theme of hope returns when Liam Scuab visits the Glavin household and declares his love for Sive. Mike and Mena are immediately hostile to Liam. Liam asks to see Sive but Mena tells him that she is not in the house. Liam says that he saw her bicycle outside the house and that she is home. 'Are you making a liar out of me in my own house?' snaps Mena. She threatens that she will 'get the tongs' to Liam unless he leaves the house. Liam plainly declares his feelings for Sive: 'I love her!' The tension escalates when Mike arrives home. He greets Liam with a surly: 'What do you want, Scuab?' Undeterred, Liam asks to speak with Sive so that he can ask her about her rumoured marriage to Seán Dóta. Mike and Mena rubbish Liam's questions and denigrate him for believing the outlandish idea that Sive is to marry Seán Dóta. Mena calls him a 'fool' who believes the 'grunting of pigs' while Mike claims that Liam is 'going farther from sense with every word'. Liam boldly asserts that the couple are treating him 'like a child' and demands to know the truth about Sive. His relentless questioning of the couple demonstrates his genuine hopes for marrying Sive. However, there is a hopelessness in Mike and Mena's stubborn refusal to allow him to see Sive. Worse, there is a sense of despondency in their violent threats against him. Mena says she will burn him with tongs and 'put streaks on you worse than a raddle-stick' while Mike says he will 'take the whip' to him. In desperation, Liam says that he will leave Sive alone if the couple will agree to not give Sive 'to that rotting old man with his gloating eyes and trembling hands'. There is a palpable feeling of both hope and hopelessness in this scene. Liam's hopes for Sive are so heartfelt that the audience is swept along on his romantic optimism. **The theme of hope, as seen in the novel when Bill Furlong finds the courage to confront Mother Superior, is likewise seen in the play when Liam Scuab stands up to Mike and Mena. Both Bill Furlong and Liam Scuab inspire hope in the readers through their selfless actions.**

Key Moment 5

Unlike in the novel, where Ned's quiet actions reiterate the theme of hope, the play features a character who wants to destroy someone's hopes. Sive's hopes of learning more about her deceased mother and father quickly turn to despair. Mena Glavin, sensing an opportunity to ruin Sive's confidence and self-esteem, tells Sive that her father was a terrible man. 'Your father was never a father,' she says. Mena then claims that Sive's mother 'died with the shame' of having a child without being married. Mena's version of events is false, but it is plausible to Sive because she has no other real knowledge of her parents, and it is likely that her mother would have been outcast for having a child outside of marriage. Mena turns 'unaccountably vexed' and tells Sive that her father 'was nothing. He was no father. He had no name. You have no name'. Mena is desperate to convince Sive that her arranged marriage to Seán Dóta is the best option for her. She urges Sive to get married, telling her hurtfully: 'You are a bye-child, a common bye-child – a bastard!' Sive is upset and tries to walk

away from Mena but she 'pushes her back in her chair'. Mena asserts her dominance over Sive and tells her that 'there will be no more school for you' because school is a place for 'children'. She tells Sive that she is a woman now and that she must accept that she has 'come to the age' where she 'will have a mind for a room of her own'. Mena heartlessly tells Sive that her childhood is over, that her father was incapable, her mother was full of shame and that she will get no better offer than Seán Dóta's proposal. **The theme of hope is depicted in a harsh and unforgiving way as Mena uses her authority over Sive to crush her hopes of marriage to Liam Scuab and portray her as a source of shame for her family. In contrast, the theme of hope is depicted in an uplifting way, as it is revealed that Ned is Furlong's father and that he has quietly mentored him through his life.**

Key Moment 6

The ending of the play, unlike the novel, portrays the theme of hope in the most downbeat of ways. It is the night before Sive's wedding to Seán Dóta. Mike and Thomasheen are drinking the porter that has been bought for the wedding. Mena enters the room 'hysterically' to report that Sive has gone missing from her bedroom. Pats Bocock, a 'travelling tinker man' who has been visiting the Glavin home with his son Carthalawn, says that he saw a girl running 'across the bog near the end of the cutaway where the deep holes do be'. Liam enters the house carrying Sive's body. He says that he saw Sive running across the bog 'but she would not stop. She took her own life…the poor tormented child'. Sive's suicide means that she cannot be buried on consecrated ground. At the time of the play, the Catholic Church condemned those who took their own lives. Mike panics 'stupidly, idiotically' and says that he is going to look for the priest. 'She must have the priest…Holy ground…she must be buried in holy ground,' he says. Sive's untimely death is symbolic of a gloomy, hopeless culture, where girls and women are subject to relentless restrictions, judgement and negativity. Liam Scuab articulates the hopelessness felt by both the audience and the characters as he attacks Mena for causing Sive's death. 'You killed her!...you heartless wretch that hunted the poor little girl to her grave'. Mena is truly humbled for the first time in the play and 'retreats, shocked' as Liam clenches 'his fist' in fury, though he does not strike her. The sense of young hope and love between Liam and Sive is emphasised for a final time as he 'begins to dry Sive's hair with a cloth, lovingly and with care'. **The theme of hope is expressed in a painful way at the end of the play. This contrasts with the ending of the novel, where Bill Furlong's rescue of Sarah imbues the novel with a strong sense of the power of hope.**

KEY NOTES

- **The play, like the novel, seems an unlikely place for the theme of hope to prosper. Living conditions in Kerry in the 1950s are even more challenging than in New Ross in the 1980s.**
- **There is a sharp contrast between Bill Furlong's heartfelt and selfless hopes for his daughters, and Mena Glavin's malignant, self-interested hopes to force Sive into an unwanted marriage.**
- **As in the novel, the theme of hope appears early in the play.** Mike Glavin has high hopes for Sive and her career. He tells Mena that she cannot be married off at her young age: 'She is different. She has book-learning. She will turn a deaf ear to match-making'.
- Mike's wishes for Sive reinforce the theme of hope in the play, though

he has to argue with Mena to convince her to give Sive a chance of a better life. **This fraught version of hope stands in contrast to the simple, uplifting version seen in the opening of the novel, where the Furlong family spend tender moments preparing for Christmas together.**

- The theme of hope, so purely expressed in the love between Liam Scuab and Sive, takes on a greater nuance as we learn of Mike's opposition to Liam. There are competing and opposing hopes in the play: Mike wishes to keep Sive away from Liam, while Liam wishes to marry Sive. **This treatment of the theme of hope is different to the novel, where hope is shown in such a heart-breaking way, as Bill Furlong's hopes for Christmas when he was a child were unrealised.**
- **The theme of hope is expressed with the same sense of melancholy in the play as it is in the novel when Seán Dóta meets Sive for the first time.** His attempts to strike up a rapport with her are painfully misjudged. Worse, he makes unwanted physical advances towards her, causing Sive to run away in fright. **The sense of hopes fading, as seen in Sive's reaction to Seán Dóta's unwanted advances, has an eerie similarity with the hopes of the young women and girls in the convent when Bill Furlong fails to stand up for them on his first visit.**
- The theme of hope returns when Liam Scuab visits the Glavin household and declares his love for Sive. Mike and Mena laugh off Liam's questions about Sive's marriage to Seán Dóta. Later, they threaten him with violence. Liam is undeterred and is willing to leave Sive alone, if the Glavins will agree to cancel her marriage with Seán Dóta. **Both Bill Furlong and Liam Scuab inspire hope in the readers through their selfless actions in standing up to authority figures.**
- The theme of hope is depicted in a harsh and unforgiving way as Mena uses her authority over Sive to crush her hopes of marriage to Liam Scuab and portray her as a source of shame for her family. **In contrast, the theme of hope is depicted in an uplifting way in the novel as it is revealed that Ned is Furlong's father and that he has quietly mentored him through his life.**
- **The ending of the play, unlike the novel, portrays the theme of hope in the bleakest of ways**. Liam enters the house carrying Sive's body. He says that he saw Sive running across the bog 'but she would not stop. She took her own life…the poor tormented child'. **The theme of hope is expressed in a painful way at the end of the play. This contrasts with the ending of the novel, where Bill Furlong's rescue of Sarah imbues the novel with a strong sense of hope.**

The Shawshank Redemption, Small Things Like These and *Sive*

The theme of hope is explored in challenging and fascinating ways throughout *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont. This celebrated film tells the story of Andy Dufresne, a respectable, unassuming banker wrongly convicted of murdering his wife and her lover. Condemned to two life sentences, Andy is sent to the brutally unforgiving Shawshank prison, where he attempts to retain his innate belief in the power of hope in the face of daily threats, violence, intimidation and blackmail.

The film, like the other texts, revolves around competing hopes: will Andy Dufresne maintain his hopeful disposition or will his true nature be stamped out by the oppressive regime of Shawshank prison? **The tension and struggles of the central character call to mind the challenges faced by Bill Furlong in the novel and Sive in the play, both of whom face major challenges to see their hopes realised.**

Key Moment 1

The opening of the film, to an even greater extent than the novel and as much as the play, showcase a person's hopes being coldly crushed. Andy Dufresne, accused of double murder, is on trial in a Maine courthouse. Flashbacks from the night of the crime reveal that Andy was at the scene with a gun and a bottle of bourbon. However, he tells the emotive, probing District Attorney (lawyer) that he 'mostly wanted to just scare them'. Assured of his innocence, Andy is softly spoken, polite and even a little detached when questioned by the lawyer. Andy hopes, and arguably expects, to be exonerated of the charges. **Like Bill Furlong in the novel, who has simple hopes for his daughters' futures, and Sive in the play, who has such ordinary hopes for her future, Andy demonstrates the reasonable hope that he will be believed by the court. However, as in both the novel and play, the film depicts hopes and hopelessness side-by-side.** The lawyer notes that Andy's gun, and the one used to kill his wife and her lover, were the same calibre, something he sarcastically calls a 'fantastic coincidence'. Andy, unruffled by the jibe, calmly agrees with the lawyer. Using the same arch tone, the lawyer says that Andy's claim to have thrown his gun into a river before the murders took place is 'convenient'. Andy pushes back at this point with a succinct rebuttal: 'since I am innocent of this crime, sir, I find it decidedly inconvenient that the gun was never found'. Andy's calm and measured responses to the robust questioning speak of his hopes that he will be found not guilty. However, his manner counts against him, as he is found guilty and the judge remarks: 'you strike me as a particularly icy and remorseless man Mr Dufresne. It chills my blood just to look at you'. Andy appears shocked at the verdict; it is as if he cannot understand how his sincerity could be mistaken for deceitfulness. In that single moment, it seems as if all hope is lost for Andy. **Much like in the novel and the play, which both depict a sense of social hopelessness, illustrated by widespread poverty and lack of opportunity, the film opens with a key moment that shows a blatant miscarriage of justice. All three texts, therefore, open with characters who are hopeful but who face conditions that endanger those hopes.**

Key Moment 2

Unlike in the novel and the play, the theme of hope is expressed in a more unambiguous way in the film. Andy, Red and some of the other convicts are assigned to tar the roof of the prison license-plate factory. Andy overhears one of the prison guards, Hadley Byron, complaining about the tax he has to pay on a $35,000 inheritance he has received following his brother's death. Andy, with his background in banking, approaches Byron and startles him by asking: 'Mr Hadley, do you trust your wife?' Byron is infuriated by this provocative question and threatens to throw

Andy off the roof, only to stop when Andy explains that 'if you do trust her, there's no reason you can't keep that $35,000'. He tells Byron that he can avoid tax on his inheritance if he gifts it to his wife. Andy offers to help Byron with the paperwork, in return for a small payment-in-kind (which means to receive goods in payment rather than cash). He says: 'I'd only ask three beers a piece for each of my co-workers…I think a man working outdoors feels more like a man if he can have a bottle of suds…'. Red and the other men are stunned at Andy's audacity. Andy, though, demonstrates a new way of seeing the world, inspiring the other men with his hopeful outlook on life. Red remarks: 'We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and felt like free men'. **Andy, like Bill Furlong who enjoys an uplifting pre-Christmas evening with his family, provides a moment of genuine hope for his fellow prisoners. There is a different feel to Mike Glavin's hopes for Sive, though in all three cases characters wish for the best for others.**

The theme of hope continues to illuminate the film, as Andy successfully applies for government funding to redevelop the prison library. Both the prisoners and the warden are dismissive of Andy's plans to revamp the library using public funding. Andy, forever hopeful, explains to the warden that he will send a letter each week to the Senate (state parliament) asking for money. Warden Norton tells him condescendingly that he can write the letters 'if it makes you happy. I'll even mail 'em for you'. We learn that Andy wrote a 'letter a week…and got no answers. But still he kept on'. Six years later Andy finally gets a reply from the Senate, including a $200 cheque to redevelop the library and a 'charitable donation of books and sundries'. The guards and prisoners are stunned that Andy has persevered for so long with a seemingly lost cause, and that he has been successful. Hope is the essence of Andy Dufresne's character, however, and his establishment of a well-stocked library to provide education and respite to the prisoners is a testament to his belief that good things can happen through hard work, determination and some luck. **This somewhat romantic treatment of the theme of hope stands in contrast to its depiction in the novel, where Furlong's hope at Christmas time is tempered by his bittersweet childhood memories, and in the play where Liam Scuab's hopes of marrying Sive collide with Mike Glavin's hopes to keep him away from her.**

Key Moment 3

The theme of hope in the film is more nuanced as Brooks, an elderly convict who works with Andy in the library, is told he will be released from prison. Brooks is terrified of being free; when he learns that he is allowed to leave he takes one of the inmates hostage in the hope he will be convicted of a new crime and have to stay in prison. 'It's the only way they'll let me stay,' he reasons. Red explains that Brooks wants to stay in prison because he is institutionalised. He explains to his friends: 'These walls are funny. First you hate 'em. Then you get used to 'em. After long enough, you get so you depend on 'em. That's institutionalised'. The sorrow of Brooks' release from prison is symbolised by his decision to set Jake, his pet bird, free. 'I can't take care of you no more. You go on now. You're free,' he says. This gesture, like Brooks' release from prison, should be a cause for celebration. However, the film demonstrates the complex nature of hope as Brooks struggles to adjust to life on the outside world. Brooks writes a letter to his old friends in prison, and we hear him read the letter over the scenes he writes about. He tells them about his job in a supermarket, where the manager gives him a hard time; he mentions his trips to the park after work to feed birds 'thinking Jake might show up and say hello, but he never does'. He writes about his 'trouble sleeping at night' because of his bad dreams where he feels like he's falling. In a dramatic and upsetting moment, Brooks inscribes his name on the beam in his bedroom and then takes his own life. On hearing the news Red remarks: 'he should have died in here'. In a way, of course, something of Brooks did die in prison, and his release did not fill him with hopes for the future but dread for facing the unknown. **This complex treatment**

of the theme of hope calls to mind the novel and the play. The girls and young women in the convent hope that Bill Furlong will help them, but he is incapable of doing so at this point. Sive's hopes of marriage to Liam Scuab are threatened when Seán Dóta comes to her home and makes a horrible attempt to woo her with his hackneyed poetry, promises of car ownership and blatant aggressiveness.

Key Moment 4

The film, like the novel and the play, inspires hope in readers when an important character stands up to an authority figure. In Darabont's text, Andy Dufresne's belief in the transformative power of hope motivates him to take risks which may endanger his safety. He is sent to solitary confinement as punishment for locking himself in the warden's office and playing Mozart over the public announcement system. On his release, he chats with the other prisoners at the mess hall, telling them it was the 'easiest time I ever did' because he had 'Mr Mozart to keep me company'. Red wonders how Andy could have been allowed to listen to music in solitary confinement. Andy taps his head and heart and tells the men he had the music inside of him, where it's 'the one thing they can't confiscate'. Andy says that the men need music, or things that they care about, so that they do not forget 'there are things in this world not carved out of grey stone. That there's a small place inside of us they can never lock away, and that place is called hope'. Red tells Andy that 'hope is a dangerous thing' that has 'no place' in prison because it can 'drive a man insane'. This moving scene deals with the theme of hope in an explicit way. Andy advocates an optimistic and romantic version of hope, even in the most dire of circumstances. Red opposes Andy's ideas, considering resignation to be more useful to the prisoners. **Andy goes further than Bill Furlong and as far as Liam Scuab in his expression of hope. Bill gently questions Mother Superior, while Liam and Andy directly challenge people in authority. In these key moments all three texts deal with the theme of hope in an uplifting way, making readers believe in the essential good nature of some characters, and the possibility there can be a happy ending for people even in the most unlikely of circumstances.**

Key Moment 5

As in the novel and in contrast to the play, the film features a character who inspires hope in others. Andy Dufresne is released from two months in solitary confinement following his threat to stop working on the corrupt accounts that Warden Norton has set up for the prison to hide evidence of the bribes he regularly accepts. Red meets him in the prison yard; Andy tells him of his dream to 'live the rest of my life' in Zihuatanejo in Mexico, a 'warm place with no memory'. He hopes to open a small hotel and take his guests out fishing on the Pacific Ocean. He tells Red: 'I didn't shoot my wife and I didn't shoot her lover. That hotel, that boat…I don't think that's too much to ask.' Red tells Andy that he is talking of 'pipedreams' because Mexico is 'way the hell down there and you're in here and that's the way it is'. Andy agrees with Red but then says, enigmatically: 'I guess it comes down to a simple choice: get busy living or get busy dying'. Red is unnerved by Andy's intensity and fears that Andy is about to take his own life. At roll call the next morning it is discovered that Andy's cell is empty, prompting a frantic manhunt. The warden questions guards and Red and then accidentally uncovers Andy's escape route when he slams a rock against a poster of 1950s' movie star Racquel Welch that is hanging on the wall in Andy's cell. The rock punctures a hole in the poster and unveils the tunnel that Andy has dug from his prison cell. A flashback scene unfolds, where we see Andy make his escape from his cell. He burrows through a tunnel and smashes open a waste pipe. Red says: 'Andy crawled to freedom through 500 yards of shit-smelling foulness I can't even imagine'. Andy exits the waste pipe and starts to run through a low river outside the prison walls. The music rises as the storm crescendos overheard. Andy rips off his prison clothes and raises his hands to the sky,

a free man. The theme of hope is conveyed in the most gloriously optimistic way in this scene, as Andy's hope of freedom overcomes the corruption of the criminal justice system. **This uplifting scene is more explicitly hopeful than the revelation that Ned is Furlong's father, while it is a blatant contrast with the almost overwhelming hopelessness showcased in Mena Glavin's attempt to destroy Sive's hopes of marriage to Liam Scuab.**

Key Moment 6

The ending of the film, in common with the novel and in contrast with the play, depicts the theme of hope in an inspiring way. Red faces the parole board for the third time in the film. Previously, he told them what he thought they wanted to hear; this time he tells them what he really thinks when they ask him if he has been rehabilitated. 'I look back on myself the way I was, a young stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I wanna talk to him…I wanna try talk some sense to him…but I can't. That kid's long gone and this old man is all that's left. I gotta live with that,' he says. Red appears to be without hope of being paroled, as he had so many rejections over the years. This leads to his frank and unfiltered attitude: 'Rehabilitated? It's just a bullshit word. So you go on and stamp your form sonny and stop wasting my time. Because to tell you the truth, I don't give a shit.' Remarkably, Red is released from prison. He struggles to adapt as a free man and seems to be in danger of following Brooks' doomed fate. However, before his prison escape, Andy makes Red promise that, on his release, he would find go to a hayfield in Maine and dig up a package that Andy has left for him. Red keeps his promise to Andy, and he finds a box with money and a letter inviting Red to Mexico. The letter provides an epiphany for Red, who recalls words that Andy told him earlier in the film: 'get busy living or get busy dying. That's goddamn right,' says Red. He buys a bus ticket for his trip to meet Andy in Mexico and his outlook on life is boundlessly hopeful. Red sits on the bus for Mexico and in a voiceover he expresses his optimism: 'I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been,' he says before repeating 'I hope…'. The final scene of the film shows Red walking across a deserted beach in Mexico. He is greeted by Andy who, as promised, is restoring an old boat. The two friends embrace, free in person as they are in spirit and a perfect expression of the theme of hope. **The contrast with the hopeless ending of the play is striking. However, there is a similarity with the final scene of the novel, as the theme of hope is displayed in a positive way.**

KEY NOTES

- **The opening of the film, to an even greater extent than the novel and as much as the play, showcases a person's hopes being coldly crushed.** Andy Dufresne is on trial in a Maine courthouse, accused of the double murder of his wife and her lover.
- **Like Bill Furlong in the novel who has simple hopes for his daughters' futures and Sive in the play who has such simple hopes for her future, Andy demonstrates the reasonable hope that he will be believed by the court. However, much like in the novel and the play, which both depict a sense of social hopelessness illustrated by widespread poverty and lack of opportunity, the film opens with a key moment that shows a blatant miscarriage of justice.**

- Andy inspires the other prisoners with his hopeful outlook on life as he convinces the guards to provide three beers each for them in return for helping one of the prison guards, Byron, to avoid paying inheritance tax. Red remarks: 'We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and felt like free men'. **Andy, like Bill Furlong who enjoys an uplifting pre-Christmas evening with his family, provides a moment of genuine hope for his fellow prisoners. There is a different feel to Mike Glavin's hopes for Sive, though in all three cases characters wish for the best for others.**
- The theme of hope continues to illuminate the film as Andy successfully applies for government funding to redevelop the prison library. **This somewhat romantic treatment of the theme of hope stands in contrast to its depiction in the novel, where Furlong's hope at Christmas time is tempered by his bittersweet childhood memories, and Liam Scuab, whose hopes of marrying Sive collide with Mike Glavin's hopes to keep him away from her.**
- **The theme of hope in the film, as in the novel and the play, is complicated**. One of the inmates, Brooks, struggles to adapt to life outside prison and ultimately takes his own life. **This counter-intuitive treatment of the theme of hope – where freedom from prison is more frightening than prison itself – calls to mind the novel and the play.** The girls and young women in the convent hope that Bill Furlong will help them, but he is incapable of doing so at this point. Sive's hopes of marriage to Liam Scuab are threatened when Seán Dóta comes to her home and makes a horrible attempt to woo her with his hackneyed poetry, promises of car ownership and blatant aggressiveness.
- **The film, like the novel and the play, inspires hope in readers when an important character stands up to an authority figure**. Andy Dufresne is sent to solitary confinement as punishment for locking himself in the warden's office and playing Mozart over the public announcement system. **Andy goes further than Bill Furlong and as far as Liam Scuab in his expression of hope but all three characters demonstrate the theme of hope in an uplifting way.**
- The theme of hope is conveyed in the most gloriously optimistic way in Andy's escape scene. **This uplifting scene is more explicitly hopeful than the revelation that Ned is Furlong's father, while it is a blatant contrast with the almost overwhelming hopelessness showcased in Mena Glavin's attempt to destroy Sive's hopes of marriage to Liam Scuab**.
- **The ending of the film, in common with the novel and in contrast with the play, depicts the theme of hope in an inspiring way.** Red is finally released from prison and joins Andy in Mexico. The two friends embrace, free in person as they are in spirit and a perfect expression of the theme of hope. **The contrast with the hopeless ending of the play is striking. However, there is a similarity with the final scene of the novel, as the theme of hope is displayed in a positive way.**

Sample Answer: A. Theme: Hope

1. (a) Discuss how an interesting interaction between two or more characters, at a pivotal moment in one of the texts on your comparative course, revealed important insights about a theme or issue in that text. Develop your response with reference to your chosen text. (30)

(b) In the case of at least two other texts you have studied on your comparative course, compare how an interesting interaction between two or more characters, at a pivotal moment in each of these texts, revealed important insights about the same theme or issue you discussed in part 1 (a) above. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (40)

(a) *Small Things Like These*, a novel by Claire Keegan, features many interesting interactions between characters that reveal important insights about the theme of hope. Perhaps the most memorable is the confrontation between fuel and timber merchant Bill Furlong and the head of the local convent, Mother Superior.

One of the pivotal moments in the novel is when Bill Furlong makes his second fuel delivery to the local convent, which is rumoured to be a Mother and Baby Home. Bill hopes for a routine visit; previously he had discovered girls and young women who appeared to be terrified of the nuns, frightened into a pacified obedience and seemingly living without any hopes of ever escaping the convent. However, Furlong's second visit shocks him. He finds a girl called Sarah locked in the coal shed. She is 'just about fit to stand' and is unable to tell if it is night or day. She pleads with Furlong to ask the nuns about her baby, who's 'fourteen weeks old. They've taken him from me now but they might let me feed him again, if he's here. I don't know where he is'. The woman exemplifies both the theme of hope and its absence: she hopes to see her baby again, although she is not optimistic. The girl's hopes, and those of Bill Furlong, are tested *in extremis* when Mother Superior opens the door of the convent. She greets Furlong not with surprise or shame, but with a kind of sinister benevolence. This part of the pivotal moment seems to reveal the scarcity of hope for the girls and young women in the convent.

Mother Superior's blasé greeting wrongfoots Furlong, who had been anticipating a confrontation with the nun. Instead, Mother Superior empathises with the 'poor girl' and instructs Furlong to come in for a cup of tea. He resists, but she tells him authoritatively: 'You'll come in…I'll have it no other way'. Mother Superior asks the girl how she came to be in the coal shed. The girl replies, preposterously, that she had been playing hide-and-seek with the other women. The dark irony of a young woman who has been locked away from society supposedly playing a game of hide-and-seek is not lost on Furlong, who senses that Mother Superior 'wants him gone'. However, her discomfort emboldens him and, amidst the lies, secrecy and deception, he starts to feel a 'queer, new power'. He deliberately outstays his welcome, making idle talk with Mother Superior, who becomes increasingly uncomfortable with his presence. She attempts to antagonise him by remarking that Polish and Russian sailors had been in town this week importing coal for his business. 'You don't mind bringing the foreigners in,' she goads. Furlong bats away

her causal xenophobia by saying 'hasn't everyone to be born somewhere…sure wasn't Jesus born in Bethlehem'. Mother Superior is appalled by the comparison and decides she has had 'more than enough' of Furlong.

This confrontation between two important characters at a pivotal moment in the novel reveals many important insights about the theme of hope. The scene is an exercise in competing hopes; Bill Furlong hopes to apply some pressure to Mother Superior, while the head nun hopes to silence him by assuaging his concerns. As a student of this text I learned that hope is not something simplistic or trite in this novel, but something layered and nuanced. My understanding of the theme deepened because I empathise with both the girl Furlong finds in the coal shed and with Furlong himself. Their hopes are the readers' hopes too, and those who endanger those hopes, such as Mother Superior, provoke my anger at the injustice of their scandalous treatment.

(b) The final scenes of my studied play, *Sive* by John B. Keane and my studied film *The Shawshank Redemption* directed by Frank Darabont, offer interesting interactions between multiple characters, at a pivotal moment and reveal important insights about the theme of hope.

The final scene of the play is a pivotal one as it offers a devastating insight about the theme of hope. The scene involves many characters: Seán Dóta (Sive's reviled fiancée), Mike Glavin (Sive's uncle), Mena Glavin (his wife), Thomasheen Seán Rua (the matchmaker) and Liam Scuab (Sive's sweetheart). The most compelling interaction is between Liam and Mena, as it encapsulates the complexity of the theme of hope demonstrated by the play.

The pivotal moment takes place on the night before Sive's wedding to Seán Dóta. Mike and Thomasheen are drinking the porter that has been bought for the wedding. Mena enters the room 'hysterically' to report that Sive has gone missing from her bedroom. Pats Bocock, a 'travelling tinker man' who has been visiting the Glavin home with his son Carthalawn, says that he saw a girl running 'across the bog near the end of the cutaway where the deep holes do be'. Liam enters the house carrying Sive's body. He says that he saw Sive running across the bog 'but she would not stop. She took her own life…the poor tormented child'.

Liam Scuab articulates the hopelessness felt by both the audience and the characters as he attacks Mena for causing Sive's death. 'You killed her!...you heartless wretch that hunted the poor little girl to her grave'. Mena is truly humbled for the first time in the play and 'retreats, shocked' as Liam clenches 'his fist' in fury, though he does not strike her. The sense of young hope and love between Liam and Sive is emphasised for a final time as he 'begins to dry Sive's hair with a cloth, lovingly and with care'. Sive's untimely death is symbolic of a gloomy, hopeless culture, where girls and women are subject to relentless restrictions, judgement and negativity.

In contrast to the play, the final scene of the film provides a pivotal moment that inspires great and boundless hopes. It features just two characters: Andy Dufresne and his best friend Red, who has recently been released from Shawshank prison. Red struggles to adapt as a free man. He is isolated and confused outside of the prison, and it seems as if the film will demonstrate his faded hopes, like in the

play when Sive, aghast at her arranged marriage to Seán Dóta, takes her own life by drowning herself in a bog.

However, Red's interactions with Andy, as depicted in this pivotal scene, rejuvenate the theme of hope for the viewer as much as for the characters themselves. Before his prison escape, Andy makes Red promise that, on his release, he would go to a hayfield in Maine and dig up a package that Andy has left for him. Red keeps his promise to Andy, and finds a box with money and a letter that we hear Andy reading in voiceover, inviting Red to Mexico. This simple interaction does not even have the characters in the same country and yet it brims with intimacy. The contrast with the play is striking: Keane's stifling arrangement of a motley crew of characters in the Glavin household seems to squeeze the hope out of it, so many are the enablers of the marriage, so few are the moral objectors.

The letter provides an epiphany for Red, who recalls words that Andy told him earlier in the film: 'get busy living or get busy dying. That's goddamn right,' says Red as he returns to his guesthouse, in another memorable and uplifting scene. He buys a bus ticket for his trip to meet Andy in Mexico and his outlook on life is boundlessly hopeful. Red sits on the bus for Mexico and in a voiceover he expresses his optimism: 'I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been,' he says before repeating 'I hope…'. The final scene of the film shows Red walking across a deserted beach in Mexico. He is greeted by Andy who, as promised, is restoring an old boat. The two friends embrace, free in person as they are in spirit and a perfect expression of the theme of hope. This pivotal moment, which really is the combination of several fascinating, interlinked scenes, treats the theme of hope in its most benign and innocent way. Viewers do not even hear the two interesting characters speak in this pivotal moment – unlike in the play, where the dialogue brutally evokes the spiralling emotions and heartbreak of the scene. The difference between the play and the novel in these pivotal moments and the insights they reveal about the theme of hope are many, some glaring but some subtle.

B. Cultural Context

The cultural context of a text is the background or the 'world' of the text. Analysing the cultural context helps us to understand how individuals, groups and societies are shaped, and how they interact with each other. Studying the cultural context of a text allows us to examine issues such as gender, religion, and social class in order to consider the ways in which they have an impact on people's lives. Cultural context, then, is a study of society and how it affects the lives of its characters.

Small Things Like These

The novel is set over the autumn and winter of 1984 in County Wexford. The story is divided into seven chapters and follows Bill Furlong, a coal and timber merchant, as he prepares to spend Christmas with his wife Eileen and their five daughters.

The cultural context of the novel is strikingly bleak. Ireland in the 1980s was synonymous with unemployment, emigration and a limited sense of personal or political freedom.

The single most powerful cultural influence in the novel is the Catholic Church. The vast majority of characters are Catholics who attend weekly mass.

Gender plays an important role in shaping who has and has not got power in the cultural context of the novel. Most of the people in paid employment in the novel are men. Bill Furlong is his family's breadwinner and plays a pivotal role in their lives. In contrast, women are largely consigned to familial roles.

Ireland of the 1980s, as accurately depicted by the novelist, was a society of limited material wealth. The cultural context of the novel presents a country where there was little difference in terms of social status between the majority of its citizens. Because of this, if you were clearly a different social class to those around you, this could be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on where they landed on the social hierarchy.

This relatively short novel, with only a handful of characters, demonstrates the rich and complex cultural context of Ireland in the 1980s.

Gender

Gender plays a significant role in shaping who has and has not got power in the cultural context of the novel. Most of the people in paid employment in the novel are men. Bill Furlong is his family's breadwinner and plays a pivotal role in the lives of his wife Eileen and his five daughters. Furlong is a man whose life revolves around his job and his family. He takes great pride in his daughters, noting that he often 'felt a deep, private joy that these children were his own'. However, he appears ground down by his routines and responsibilities. Memorably, he describes his daily life as one of monotonous obligation: 'getting up in the dark and going to the yard, making the deliveries, one after another, the whole day long, then coming home in the dark and trying to wash the black off himself and sitting into a dinner table and falling asleep before waking in the dark to meet a version of the same thing, again.'

Furlong's quiet dissatisfaction with his life is mirrored in his discomfort with the way men behave around women. He occasionally lies awake at night, listening to the sounds of the street. He notices the bawdy, vulgar humour of drunk men, the sound of 'a sharp, hot whistle and laughter' as they return home from the pub. These sounds unnerve Furlong and reinforce his distrust of men. He worries about his 'girls getting big and growing up, going out into that world of men'. Most ominously, he has already noticed 'men's eyes following his girls'. In Furlong's mind, men are not to be trusted around women.

The principal female character is Eileen, Bill's wife, and she provides an insight into the role of women in the cultural context of the novel. Eileen works in the family home, carrying out domestic tasks and organising the lives of her daughters, her husband and the family in general.

The family returns home after watching the annual lighting of the town's Christmas lights. Eileen immediately starts to work. She said 'it was well past time they made the Christmas cake'. She enlists Bill and her daughters in the task, and as soon as they have finished, 'she took stock of the room and told the girls to clear down so she could get on, and start the ironing'. The family home is a busy place, with Eileen firmly at its helm. The girls go to bed, and Eileen immediately starts to work out what Christmas presents to get them. 'There's another job near done,' Eileen comments, after she decides to go to town the following day to pick up the presents. Her work extends beyond the physical and emotional labour of caring for five daughters. There is also the taxing organisational work of planning the family's future. Even though Bill earns the money, Eileen looks after it and thinks about how it can be best used to improve the lives of the family: 'I'm still putting something away into the Credit Union every week. We should get the loan and have the new windows in the front before this time next year'. Eileen's role as a carer and organiser is unrivalled in the novel. Like Bill, she has no real life outside of the family home – she has no real friends or hobbies. Readers are left with the impression of two dedicated, committed parents, whose roles within the family follow the predictable gender norms of that time in Ireland.

Religion

The Catholic Church holds enormous influence over the cultural context of the novel. The protagonist of the novel, Bill Furlong, was raised by his Catholic mother, Sarah, in a Protestant home. Sarah had 'fallen pregnant', as the degrading language of the time described it, while working as a domestic maid for Mrs Wilson, a wealthy Protestant widow. There was immense social stigma at that time if a girl became pregnant outside of marriage. Sarah's family 'made it clear they'd have no more to do with her', as her pregnancy was considered a source of shame not just for Sarah, but for them too. Furlong inherited this shame. He was targeted by bullies at school, who picked on him for being a child born outside of marriage: 'he'd been jeered and called some ugly names; once he'd come home with the back of his coat covered in spit'. Such was the power of religion in the cultural context of Ireland in the 1980s. Interestingly, as a young adult Furlong's religion became an advantage for him as he 'had developed good, Protestant habits; was given to rising early and had no taste for drink'.

The influence of religion in the novel is encapsulated in the town's convent. Run by the Mother Superior of the Good Shepherd order of nuns, the convent is a 'powerful-looking place on the hill at the far side of the river with black, wide-open gates and a host of tall, shining windows, facing the town'. This ominous description provides a foretaste of both the enforced misery that lies within the convent and the pervasive power that Mother Superior and the nuns have on those people outside it. The convent is portrayed in ambiguous terms. On the one hand it is widely known that the nuns 'ran a training school…for girls, providing them with basic education. They also ran a laundry business'. However, such descriptions feel euphemistic to the town's inhabitants. Rumours abound that the convent is in fact a Magdalene Laundry, where 'girls of low character' are 'reformed' by cleaning bedlinen and handkerchiefs from 'dawn til night'. Another version has it that the convent is 'no better than a mother-and-baby home where common, unmarried girls went in to be hidden away after they had given birth'. The local chatter and gossip about the convent is given credence when Furlong visits to make a fuel delivery. He finds 'more than a dozen young women and girls, down on their hands and knees with tins of old-fashioned lavender polish and rags, polishing their hearts out in a circle on the floor'. Shockingly, one of the girls asks him if he can help her escape as far as the river. 'All I want to do is drown meself,' she says. Both inside and out, the convent highlights the importance of religion in the cultural context of the novel.

Mother Superior is symbolic of the fearsome power of religion in the cultural context of the novel. Furlong returns to the convent to make

a Christmas delivery of fuel. He is disturbed to find a girl locked in the coal shed. She is 'just about fit to stand' and is unable to tell if it is night or day. She pleads with Furlong to ask the nuns about her baby, who's 'fourteen weeks old. They've taken him from me now but they might let me feed him again, if he's here. I don't know where he is'. Rattled by her revelation, Furlong is bewildered when Mother Superior opens the door of the convent. She greets him with an incongruent smile and thanks him for coming. In doing so, Mother Superior wrongfoots Furlong, who had been anticipating a confrontation with the nun. Instead, Mother Superior empathises with the 'poor girl' and instructs Furlong to come in for a cup of tea. He resists, but she tells him authoritatively: 'You'll come in…I'll have it no other way'. She is blasé as Furlong apologises for bringing his dirty work boots across the pristine floors. 'Where there's muck, there's luck,' she tells him, nonchalantly. Mother Superior subtly emphasises the power of the church as she enquires about Furlong's daughters, remarking that she hopes to see them all studying in the Catholic school next door to the convent. Fiendishly, she remarks: 'it's no easy task to find a place for everyone'. Beneath the façade of friendship lies the steel of authority; Mother Superior is obliquely signalling to Furlong that he should not publicly talk about the girl in the coal shed or his family may face the punishment of exclusion from the town's 'good' school.

Social Class

A person's social class is clearly a marker of a person's power and influence in the cultural context of the novel. Though she does not appear in person in the novel, Mrs Wilson is the archetypal wealthy character. She lived in a large comfortable house and had two domestic workers: Sarah and Ned. She had a small library, as well as some livestock. She never had problems with neighbours as her land was 'well fenced and managed' and 'no money was owing'. She was driven by Ned to church on Sundays wearing her 'good hat'. Mrs Wilson is undoubtedly a generous character, giving 'Furlong a few thousand pounds to start up' when he became engaged to Eileen. Her money came from her husband's military pension and afforded her the confidence of social security as she 'didn't seem to care much for what judgements others passed but carried temperately along with her own life'. The town of New Ross is busy but certainly not prosperous. The economic outlook for the town is bleak: 'The shipyard company had closed and…the big fertiliser factory…had made several redundancies'. Small businesses too are suffering, and 'times were raw', but this inspires Furlong to 'keep his head down and stay on the right side of people, and to keep providing for his girls'. Concerns about money are ever-present in Ireland in the 1980s. Furlong himself, though running a relatively successful small business, has little more than enough to make it from week to week. He notices his lorry's engine is deteriorating. In order to replace it he will have to forgo something significant: 'the new windows that Eileen has her heart set upon for the front of the house would not be installed next year, or the year after'. More starkly, Furlong meets people who cannot afford to pay for fuel for their homes and they quietly ask him 'if what was owing could be put on the slate'. Furlong tries to help people who he knows are struggling, as he leaves 'a bag of logs at the doors of those who had given him the business, when they could afford it'.

In this difficult social situation, there is anxiety about having enough to survive. Furlong worries if he will be able to keep his girls studying at St Margaret's, 'the only good school in the town'. Later in the novel a publican, Mrs Kehoe, warns Furlong not to jeopardise his daughter's education by speaking ill of the nuns and their convent: 'Can't I count on one hand the number of girls from around here that ever got on well who didn't walk those halls'. The subtext to her remarks is clear: education is the way to maintain or improve social status in the cultural context of the novel.

KEY NOTES

- The novel is set over the autumn and winter of 1984 in County Wexford. The cultural context of the novel is strikingly bleak. Ireland in the 1980s was synonymous with unemployment, emigration and a limited sense of personal or political freedom.
- Most of the people in paid employment in the novel are men. Bill Furlong is his family's breadwinner and he plays a pivotal role in the lives of his wife Eileen and his five daughters. Furlong is a man whose life revolves around his job and his family. He takes great pride in his daughters, noting that he often 'felt a deep, private joy that these children were his own'.
- The principal female character is Eileen, Bill's wife, and she provides insight into the role of women in the cultural context of the novel. Eileen works in the family home, carrying out domestic tasks and organising the lives of her daughters, her husband and the family in general.
- The Catholic Church holds enormous influence over the cultural context of the novel. The protagonist of the novel, Bill Furlong, was raised by his Catholic mother, Sarah, in a Protestant home. Sarah was working as a domestic maid for Mrs Wilson, a wealthy Protestant widow, when she had 'fallen pregnant'. This degrading language signals the immense social stigma if a girl became pregnant outside of marriage. Mrs Wilson had no objection to Sarah raising Bill in her home and continuing to work for her.
- Interestingly, as a young adult Furlong's religion became an advantage for him as he 'had developed good, Protestant habits; was given to rising early and had no taste for drink'.
- The influence of religion in the novel is encapsulated in the town's convent. The convent is portrayed in ambiguous terms. On the one hand it 'ran a training school…for girls, providing them with basic education. They also ran a laundry business'. However, rumours abound that the convent is in fact a Magdalene Laundry or a Mother and Baby Home.
- A person's social class is clearly a marker of a person's power and influence in the cultural context of the novel. Mrs Wilson is the archetypal wealthy character. Her money comes from her husband's military pension and affords her the confidence of social security as she 'didn't seem to care much for what judgements others passed but carried temperately along with her own life'.
- The town of New Ross is busy but certainly not prosperous. Concerns about money are ever-present in Ireland of the 1980s. The economic outlook for the town is bleak: 'The shipyard company had closed and… the big fertiliser factory…had made several redundancies'.
- Education is the way to maintain or improve social status in the cultural context of the novel. Furlong worries if he will be able to keep his girls studying at St Margaret's, 'the only good school in the town'.

Sive and *Small Things Like These*

Overview

The play, by John B. Keane, is set in 'a remote, mountainy part of southern Ireland' in the 1950s. The town itself is referred to but never named or featured on stage. Each act and scene of the play takes place in the Glavin household, home to the protagonist Sive, her uncle Mike, aunt Mena and Nanna Glavin, who is Mike's mother. Their lives can be viewed as representative of how people lived in Ireland in the 1950s, keeping in mind that only two-fifths of people lived in towns that had a population over 1,500.

Ireland was one of the poorest countries in Western Europe during this decade. It suffered from an economic crisis brought about by declining agriculture, stagnant industries and mass emigration to England and America. Tariffs imposed on goods coming into Ireland made most material items unaffordable for the majority of citizens. The prospect of dying from tuberculosis or other diseases was relatively high. Material goods were scarce because people spent a high proportion of their income on food and clothing. Few people had cars, televisions or telephones. While the radio was widely used in society, the Glavins do not have one. The play takes place against this depressing backdrop of poverty and hardship – conditions which influenced the decisions of Keane's characters. **The cultural context of the novel, which is set 30 years later, is marginally more prosperous.**

In Ireland in the 1950s, religion was an accepted fact of everyday life. Schools were run by priests and nuns, and people went to mass each week. No priest or nun has a role in the play, though they are referred to at several important moments. There can be no doubt about religion's influence on the social mores of the time either. Each character acts according to religious orthodoxy, most notably in terms of intimate relationships. **This calls to mind the novel, where religion is the major social and moral force in people's lives.**

The cultural context of the play is an unforgiving place for women, who are stuck in 'traditional' roles as housewives and mothers, with little hope of ever following their ambitions. Nanna Glavin, Mena Glavin and Sive herself are all typical examples of the lives of women in Ireland at that time. Men's lives are based around work, or the lack of it, as seen in Mike Glavin's tenuous and scrappy approach to employment. **These features remind readers of the novel, where most men and women live conventional, stereotypical lives**.

Life in rural Ireland in the 1950s was tough, and the outside world did not have much influence. These are the social conditions of the play, and they explain how a tragedy like *Sive* could happen. **There are more similarities than differences with the cultural context of the novel, though a nuanced consideration of both proves rewarding for readers.**

Gender

As in Clare Keegan's novel, John B. Keane's play presents a cultural context that is largely patriarchal. Mike Glavin, like Bill Furlong in the novel, is the main breadwinner in the family home. The stage directions even go as far as to call Mike 'the man of the house' and note that his arrival means the women of the house 'must become alert' to his needs. However, this description reduces Mike to a stereotype. Although he holds the ultimate authority in the house, he consults with both Nanna and Mena before deciding to consent to the wedding of Sive and Seán Dóta. Initially, Mike is protective and proud of Sive and is aghast at the prospect of her arranged marriage. He tells Mena: 'She is different. She has book-learning. She will turn a deaf ear to match-making'. Mike's opposition to the marriage becomes more forceful when he hears that Seán Dóta is Sive's suitor. He says: 'Even when I was a boy Seán Dóta was a man… what young girl would look a second time at him'. Mena's attempt to entice Mike with money is met with fierce resistance as he says that he cannot let Sive waste her life. 'It would be like

tossing the white flower of the canavaun on to the manure heap,' he says. **Mike's wishes for Sive, though ultimately unrealised, demonstrate his holistic instincts and suggest an emotional depth to him not captured in the 'man of the house' description. This is reminiscent of Bill Furlong and his pride about his daughters in the novel.**

Liam Scuab offers an alternate version of men in the cultural context of the play. Unlike the other men in the play who claim to know what is best for Sive, it is only Liam who demonstrates genuine interest in her opinions and in her happiness. He visits Sive's home to arrange a meeting later that night. Sive tells him that she will come 'if I can, but if I don't come at the time, don't wait'. Liam answers her romantically: 'I'll wait till the crack of dawn, anyway'. The pair discuss the topic of arranged marriage and agree that it is a 'horrible' idea. Liam tells Sive that he loves her and that he could not contemplate an arranged marriage with someone else. 'I would marry nobody but you, Sive, I love you. How would I marry anybody but you!' Liam and Sive's hopes to marry each other are threatened by Mike. Liam, whose cousin is Sive's deceased father, is unwelcome in the Glavin home. Mike sees Liam, and all the Scuabs, as 'the one breed' and warns him to 'keep away from Sive'. However, Liam hopes to marry Sive. He says: 'I am after Sive and nothing more than that. I love her'. **Mike's hostile attitude to Liam reminds us of Bill Furlong's persistent suspicion of men in the novel. Their shared mistrust of men suggests that the cultural contexts of both the play and the novel are characterised by male dominance over women.**

Women in the cultural context of the play, like those of the novel, live difficult and largely powerless lives. Nanna Glavin provides a fascinating example of women in the cultural context of the text. Nanna does not enjoy much power in society – she does not even leave the family home during the play. However, she has some influence in the family home and adds nuance to the patriarchal cultural context. Nanna is fiery, articulate and assertive, as her frequent cutting comments about Mena demonstrate. She is also robust in questioning her son about Thomasheen's unexplained visits to the house, commenting wryly that 'there is a hatchery of sin in this house'. Nanna's breathlessly sharp and candid questioning of Mike highlights her domestic authority. She argues with Mike that it is wrong for Sive to be forced into marriage with Seán Dóta. 'Poor Sive! What are ye doing to her? Is there no heart in you at all?' Mike argues back that the marriage is 'for the best'. Nanna is not impressed by his point and says that Sive is in love with Liam Scuab and that 'there is a sweet thing in their love'. Mike argues that Liam Scuab's cousin was in love with Sive's mother, but that he left her alone with a baby. Nanna notes sagely that 'all men will find words to save themselves'. She sums up the role of women in the social setting when she says: 'women must pay for all happiness. That is their sorry shape, God help us'. Mike is uncomfortable with Nanna's plain and sincere words because he knows that she is right. Nanna refuses to back down, claiming that Sive 'is for sale like an animal'. Mike has no real answer to her and goes to the stables to shave, remarking to himself that at least 'there will be no nagging there'. This key moment highlights the limitations of a woman's power in the cultural context of the play. Nanna's arguments carry substantial moral weight, but her influence is ultimately limited to how much she can sway Mike Glavin. **This is different to the novel. Eileen is a housewife too, but there is more of a sense of partnership with Bill than of her simply being told what to do. She takes charge of important things inside and outside the home. Bill asks for and listens to her opinions. In contrast the cultural context of the play suggests that men listen to women under duress, with little enthusiasm for their thoughts and outright hostility to their disagreements.**

Religion

The role of the Catholic Church is as visible in the cultural context of the play as it is in the novel. Religious belief, especially around

the importance of marriage, provides the background to the story. Sive is a source of shame to her family as her mother was never married, and her father left the town for England before she was born. Mena uses Sive's status as a child born outside of marriage to advocate for her arranged marriage with Seán Dóta. She argues that Sive will never find another man to marry her as she can 'put no name on her father'. She aims to convince Mike Glavin to assent to the marriage by highlighting Sive's apparent undesirability in the cultural context. 'What better can she do? Who will take her with the slur and the doubt hanging over her?' says Mena. Mike struggles to rebut her argument, which only adds weight to Mena's point of view and reinforces the sense that Catholicism is a major factor in the cultural context of the play. Naturally, this calls to mind the key moment in the novel, when Sarah Furlong is rejected by her family when she becomes pregnant outside of marriage. Both cultural contexts, Ireland in the 1950s and Ireland in the 1980s, share this callous, judgemental and senseless treatment of women. There is a particular cruelty to the societal shunning of Sive, who is judged not for her own actions but for those of her parents. **Both cultural contexts prioritise marriage as the foundation of family life. Those who do not conform with this religious belief are shamed by society.**

Further proof of religion's influence in the cultural context of the play can be seen in the final moments. It is the night before Sive's wedding to Seán Dóta. Mike and Thomasheen are drinking the porter that has been bought for the wedding. Mena enters the room 'hysterically' to report that Sive has gone missing from her bedroom. Pats Bocock, a 'travelling tinker man' who has been visiting the Glavin home with his son Carthalawn, says that he saw a girl running 'across the bog near the end of the cutaway where the deep holes do be'. Liam enters the house carrying Sive's body. He says that he saw Sive running across the bog 'but she would not stop. She took her own life…the poor tormented child'. Sive's suicide means that she cannot be buried on consecrated ground. At the time of the play, the Catholic Church condemned those who took their own lives. Mike panics 'stupidly, idiotically' and says that he is going to look for the priest. 'She must have the priest…Holy ground…she must be buried in holy ground,' he says. This shows the power of religion in the social setting of the play. It causes Mike to worry more about the shame of the burial than the shame of his treatment of Sive. Liam gives Mike a 'scalding look' and tells him: 'Go for the priest then!' **The influence of religion in the cultural context of the play reminds readers of the novel, where the convent's foreboding appearance and Mother Superior's supercilious (behaving as though one is better than others) demeanour, repeatedly demonstrate Catholicism's stranglehold over Ireland at that time.**

Social class

As in the novel, social class has a significant role in deciding who has power and who does not in the play. Seán Dóta is a well-off bachelor farmer who plans to use his comparative wealth to secure an arranged marriage with Sive. Local matchmaker Thomasheen Seán Rua comes to the Glavin household with news of the proposal. He attempts to convince Mena that it makes sense to marry Sive off in exchange for £200. He explains that Seán Dóta has a lot of money. 'He have the grass of twenty cows. He have fat cattle besides and he have the holding of money,' he says. Money confers social status and power on the otherwise pitiful and unimpressive character of Seán Dóta. It is notable in this cultural context that a man with money is treated so obsequiously by the Glavins and Thomasheen. The matchmaker fawns over Seán Dóta when he visits the Glavin family home in a lacklustre attempt to engender some chemistry between the bachelor farmer and the unassuming schoolgirl. He calls Seán Dóta 'as deep as a well', 'as wise as a book' and 'as sharp as a scythe'. Such descriptions of Dóta are absurdly generous. Seán Dóta is a halting, diffident man with no evident emotional intelligence. **Students will note the**

obvious similarity with Mrs Wilson from the novel, who is another wealthy character in an impoverished cultural context. However, the difference between how they use their money is glaring. The former uses his money for personal gain and in a morally dubious way. Mrs Wilson, by contrast, is notably generous in her gifting of money to Furlong before he married Eileen.

Poverty in the cultural context brings out the worst in people, unlike in the novel, where economic hardship is countered by a general sense of social solidarity for the less well-off. Liam Scuab tells Mike and Mena that the arranged marriage is the joke of the town. 'In the village the public houses are full with the mockery of it,' he says. However, the promise of £200 from Seán Dóta means that Mike and Mena are willing to be laughed about in the town. Mike's earlier agonies about the marriage give way to a sycophantic support for the nuptials as he merrily drinks porter paid for by Seán Dóta on the eve of the wedding. Seán notes that there is a celebratory atmosphere in the house. Mike cheerily declares: 'so well we might, it being the night it is!' Seán Dóta 's money buys him a social status that others, such as Mike and Mena, find irresistible. It reflects a cultural context where there is so much poverty that people are willing to sell off their family members to have a more comfortable material life. **The contrast with Bill Furlong's generosity and understanding towards the poor is sharp.**

Like the novel, most of the characters in the play are from the same social class. The Glavins are poor, rural people, who struggle to have enough money to survive. From the beginning the poverty of the social setting can be seen. Stage directions describe the Glavin home as 'poorly furnished'. It is a small, cramped home with a fire and a 'large black kettle' in the corner, an 'enamel bucket of drinking water on the table' and few other objects. Nanna Glavin, mother of Mike and grandmother of Sive, sits secretly smoking a pipe. Mena Glavin enters and the two women immediately start to argue. Nanna says that she lived 'in a happy home before you came into it!' Mena argues back, telling Nanna she had no need to get married. 'I had my fortune…I could have done better if I bided my time'. Nanna dismisses Mena's claims, laughing that she came out of a 'cabin' and used to 'drink yeer tay out of jam pots for the want of cups'. The rivalry between the women runs through the play. Their fights over status and social class are central to their disagreements. Mena, in particular, is worried about social status. She feels threatened by Sive. She is worried that Sive might gain a full education and possibly make a better life for herself. Mena wants Sive to give up her education and start work. 'Out working with a farmer you should be, my girl, instead of getting your head filled with high notions,' she says. **The Glavins, in the play, remind readers of the Furlongs in the novel. Both families face challenges due to their social status. Social class anxiety is expressed through the education system in the novel – people who go to the 'one good school' in the town are regarded as having a higher status than those who do not.**

KEY NOTES

- The play, by John B. Keane, is set in 'a remote, mountainy part of southern Ireland' in the 1950s. **The cultural context of the play bears many similarities with that of the novel**: the dominance of men and the oppression of women; the influence of the Catholic Church; and the advantages or disadvantages conferred by social status that feature in Keegan's text can be seen again in Keane's.
- **As in Keegan's novel, Keane's play presents a cultural context that is largely patriarchal.** Mike Glavin, like Bill Furlong in the novel, is the

main breadwinner in the family home. The early stages of the play show Mike to be a man of more depth than the stereotypical 'man of the house'. **Mike's wishes for Sive, though ultimately unrealised, demonstrate his holistic instincts. This is reminiscent of Bill Furlong and his pride about his daughters in the novel.**

- **Mike's hostile attitude to Liam Scuab, who seems to genuinely love Sive, reminds us of Bill Furlong's persistent suspicion of men in the novel. Their shared mistrust of men suggests that the cultural contexts of both the play and the novel are characterised by male dominance over women.**
- Nanna Glavin provides a fascinating example of women in the cultural context of the text. She robustly challenges Mike about the marriage between Sive and Seán Dóta. Nanna's arguments carry substantial moral weight, but her influence is ultimately limited to how much she can sway Mike Glavin. **This is different to the novel, where Eileen has no economic power as a housewife, but is a respected and equal partner in her marriage to Bill Furlong.**
- **The role of the Catholic Church is as visible in the social setting of the play as it is in the novel.** Mena uses Sive's status as a child born outside of marriage to advocate for her arranged marriage with Seán Dóta . **Both cultural contexts prioritise marriage as the foundation of family life. Those who do not conform with this religious belief are shamed by society.**
- Further proof of religion's influence in the cultural context of the play can be seen when Sive dies by suicide. At the time of the play, the Catholic Church condemned those who took their own lives. Mike panics and says that he is going to look for the priest as he wants to make sure Sive can have a religious burial. **Religion's influence in the cultural context of the play reminds readers of the novel, where the convent and Mother Superior's behaviour repeatedly demonstrate Catholicism's stranglehold over Ireland in the 1980s.**
- Social class has a significant role in deciding who has power and who does not in the play. Seán Dóta is a well-off bachelor farmer who plans to use his comparative wealth to secure an arranged marriage with Sive. **This calls to mind the character of Mrs Wilson from the novel, who is also wealthy in an impoverished cultural context. However, she uses her money in a generous way as she helps the young Bill and Eileen before they marry.**
- There is so much poverty in the cultural context of the play that people are willing to sell off their family members to have a more comfortable material life. Mike and Mena do not mind arranging Sive's marriage in exchange for £200 and being the laughing stock of the town, as long as they get their money. **This is unlike Bill Furlong, who is not a wealthy man but is always willing to help the poor.**
- **Like the novel, most of the characters in the play are from the same**