

# SCOTTISH SET TEXT GUIDE

National 5 English

# Sailmaker

- ▶ Understand, analyse and evaluate the text of *Sailmaker*
- ▶ Think more deeply about the plot, characters and themes
- ▶ Pick up grade-boosting tips for the Critical Reading paper

**David Thomas**

Series Editor:  
Carolyn Cunningham

 **HODDER  
GIBSON**  
LEARN MORE

# Contents

Getting the most from this guide .....	4
<b>1</b> Introduction .....	5
<b>2</b> Context .....	9
<b>3</b> Study and revision .....	13
3.1 Dramatic techniques .....	15
3.2 Plot and structure .....	24
3.3 Characters and relationships .....	52
3.4 Themes .....	65
<b>4</b> Approaching the Critical Reading paper .....	69
4.1 Critical Reading Section 1: Scottish text .....	69
4.2 Critical Reading Section 2: Critical essay .....	81
<b>5</b> Round-up .....	86
<b>6</b> Answers .....	94
<b>7</b> Glossary .....	96

Copyright: Sample material

# Getting the most from this guide



This is a guide to help you to study the play *Sailmaker*. It is aimed at helping you to prepare to answer on *Sailmaker* for the Scottish text section of the SQA National 5 English Critical Reading paper. It will tell you what to expect in that section of the examination and how best to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the play. It will also give you advice on how to use *Sailmaker* for the critical essay section, if you decide to use it that way. But remember, to do that you would need to have prepared the works of another Scottish writer from the set text list. The Scottish text section is compulsory.

This study guide will use and refer to the Hodder Gibson text *Sailmaker Plus* (published 2008, ISBN 978 0 340 97303 5). This edition has the complete text and includes an interview with the writer, Alan Spence, as an introduction. It also contains very interesting and helpful notes and study activities. All page numbers referenced in this guide align to this edition.

Watch out for the following features used throughout this guide, which will help you focus your understanding of the play:

## Glossary

This box will highlight and define key words, for example techniques used in *Sailmaker*.

## Exam tip

Top tips to help you maximise your chances of success in the exam.

## Target your thinking

This feature appears at the start of every chapter. It will help you focus on key ideas which will be important in the chapter.

## REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

This feature appears at the end of each chapter. It will help you reinforce your learning by reminding you of key elements of the text and/or how to approach the exam.

## Build critical skills

You will see this feature at various points in each chapter. The questions in this box will encourage you to think deeply, and to analyse and explore the text more fully.



# 1 Introduction

## Target your thinking

- How should I use this study guide?
- How can *Sailmaker* be used for the National 5 English Critical Reading question paper?
- What things should I revise?

## How to approach and revise the text

The likelihood is that you will have studied the play in class with your teacher. You may well have volunteered to take a part and read aloud to the class. This is a good thing as plays are meant to be performed – both seen and heard. If there is an opportunity to see *Sailmaker* performed live on stage, take it. Nothing is quite like a live performance and you will be experiencing the play in the way that the writer intended you to.

Having said this, it is important to remember that an actor or a theatre director will study and learn about the play in the same way as you are. Just as you need to know the play well for your exam, they need to know the play well to prepare their performance. And that all starts with looking closely at the words put down on the page by the writer. This guide will help you to look carefully at the words of the play.

## How to use this study guide and how not to use it

The comparison made above – about you investigating the play in the same way that an actor or director would do – is perhaps a useful one to bear in mind when using this study guide. A director deciding how best to stage a scene, or an actor weighing up what is going on in a character's mind, will involve thinking and discussion. You too will have to do some thinking:

- What do you think are the important moments in the play?
- What are the themes of the play?
- Do you feel sympathy for Davie as the play goes on or do you lose patience with him?
- Do you agree with all the things Alec says to him? Or Billy, for that matter?



Hopefully, this study guide will help you with your thinking. The intention is that it is 'another voice' to listen to about the play. A lot of the time, again hopefully, you will read bits and react with, 'Oh, yes, I thought that too.' Please do not think that this guide has 'all the answers'. It doesn't. It is just another voice to listen to, one that will help you to organise your thinking and revision for the exam.

## What is the SQA National 5 English Critical Reading paper?

The National 5 English Critical Reading paper has two compulsory sections:

- Section 1: **Scottish text** – you must answer a set of questions on the work of one Scottish writer from the set list. There are 20 marks available for this section. You should aim to spend 45 minutes reading the extract and answering the questions.
- Section 2: **Critical essay** – requires you to write one essay about a text that you have studied. This section is worth a total of 20 marks. You should aim to spend 45 minutes writing your essay.

In the Critical Reading paper you have to show what are called your critical reading skills. Now, what exactly are they, and how do you show them?

To demonstrate critical reading skills in your answers on *Sailmaker*, you have to be able to do two things:

- show that you have understood the play and its main themes
- show that you can analyse ways in which the writer has written the play.

The first part sounds fine – having read the play through you will be able to show an understanding of it. It is more the second aspect, analysis, that worries people. But, it's really nothing to be concerned about. Once you start to talk about the individual characters in the play – what they say and do – you are immediately analysing. You are making analytical comments about characterisation. If you can recognise when things are difficult between two characters – if they disagree about something, or someone feels hurt at someone else's actions – you have identified conflict, which is a dramatic technique. Again, you are analysing. We will cover the exam in much more detail in Chapter 4.

## What to expect in Section 1: Scottish text

In the first section of the National 5 Critical Reading paper, you will be given an extract from *Sailmaker*. This will be a completely random extract: there is no way of predicting or of knowing what the extract will be.

The plan is that as soon as you see it and start to read it, you will recognise it (right away). To recognise it immediately will give you a huge advantage. To think straight away 'Oh, I know this bit' and to have an idea which part of the play it comes from will really help when it comes to answering the questions, but it will also boost your confidence. So, the first thing is: get to know the play. This guide will help you do that.

## Getting to know *Sailmaker*

OK, so you know to expect an extract – a passage taken from somewhere in the play – which you will hopefully recognise. What next? What about the questions? There will be three or four questions just on the extract itself. Then, there will be one question on how the extract relates to the rest of the play. As mentioned above, these questions test two things: your knowledge and understanding, and your skills of analysis. What is the difference? We have had a quick look at what is meant by analysis already, but what about 'knowledge and understanding'? This is essentially what you have understood about the play: what happens (the story, the narrative) and the themes (the big overarching ideas of the play – what the writer wants you to think about as you are reading it or watching it being performed). This last point is important. Most people preparing for the exam worry about the detail:

- 'How can I remember absolutely everything that happens in the play, and which page it happens on?'
- 'How many quotations should I learn?'
- 'Do I need to know something about every character in the play?'

We'll deal with these questions and issues as we go, but, to begin with, it is much more important to have ideas in your head about these questions:

- What are the themes – the big ideas – of the play?
- What is the overall meaning, or message, of the play?
- What do I make of the main characters? Do they change or stay the same as the play goes on? How do I relate to them at different points in the play?

If you have ideas about these kinds of things in your head, it will be much easier to fit your knowledge and understanding into the questions, especially the final question. Because the intention behind the final question is to sample from your knowledge and understanding of the whole play, it will likely focus on a 'main idea' (a theme), or a main character, or the relationship between characters.

So, to recap. As you read the play, consider the following:

- What are the main ideas?
- What is happening to this character?
- How are these characters getting on together? Is there conflict? Why is there conflict?

We will explore all of these key ideas in depth in Chapter 3: Study and revision.

### REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

(Answers are given on page 98.)

- 1 What are the two main skills that you need to demonstrate in the Critical Reading paper?
- 2 Could the extract used in the Scottish text section come from anywhere in the play?



## 2 Context

### Target your thinking

- What would be useful to know about the background to the play?
- Should I mention background events in my exam answers?

### What is context?

The **context** is the background to the play: where and when it is set; what was happening in the world at that time; how people lived their lives.

### The historical context: Scotland's industrial central belt

I have always felt that when you read a book, you can't help but compare the experiences that are described in the book with the experiences that you yourself have had. This is true of even a fairy tale or a fantasy novel far-removed from your world. So, you have the experience of the characters in the book (or play) and you have your own experience, side by side. *Sailmaker* describes the Scotland that I grew up in. I don't think it is quite the place you are growing up in. It is more that of your parents or (eek) your grandparents. I was brought up in what is called the central belt of Scotland where people gathered from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries onwards to find jobs in the big industries: steelworks, factories, mining etc. For a long period, the car factories, tyre factories, jute mills, mines etc. provided work for huge numbers of people. But this situation didn't last forever. *Sailmaker* describes what happened when these places of mass employment closed down, in particular what happened to the people. When I grew up adults were, to some extent, defined by the job they did. It was a case of, 'Oh yes, her dad is a joiner' (or policeman, farmer, etc.). Perhaps it's different now. We keep being told that in the future we'll all have to change jobs many times in a lifetime – we'll have to retrain, learn new skills etc. But I think it is still largely true that your job gives you identity. It tells people something about you. It defines who you are. With Davie in *Sailmaker*, this is absolutely the case. The fact that he is no longer a sailmaker seems to have affected him to such an extent that he has lost his identity. He hates being referred to as a 'tick man'. You might say that Davie's troubles come mostly from the fact that he simply does not have enough money to heat his house and put food on the table – and you would be right – but his loss of identity, through loss of work, has definitely had a big impact on him. He no longer knows who he is.

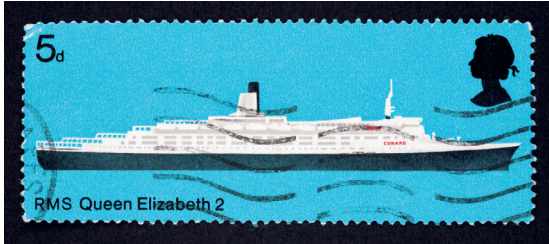
#### Glossary

**context:** the setting in time and place that makes up the background of the play



My own father was a time-served tradesman. He was a car mechanic, but he used to refer to himself as an engineer. As a young man he did other jobs outside of work on cars, but they all called on the skills he had learned as an engineer. He had a friend, also an engineer, who used to visit us. He, like Davie, had worked in shipyards. His stories of working on these huge ships used to fascinate me: the huge crowds of men heading for the docks on a Monday morning (just like the huge crowds heading for

the football match on a Saturday afternoon); the fact that he had travelled to India to repair the engines of ships out there. I had a book from the Ladybird series called *The Ship Builders*. I stared at pictures of the flash of welding guns, and huge rivets. I read of strange jobs like the 'loftsman' (who made templates out of paper or wood for sections of the ship's hull), or the 'plater' (who used the templates to make huge steel plates). It



▲ QE2 postage stamp

was a glimpse into the adult world where your job was who you were.

One day my dad's friend gave me a set of postage stamps. It featured famous ships over the ages. My favourite was the most recent, the QE2. This was the latest and most modern cruise liner which had not long been launched. It was seen as an incredible engineering achievement (just like the highly advanced, and beautiful, 'supersonic' aeroplane Concorde). I wondered at all the different trades and skills that had gone into the making of this ship. It was amazing.

So, the play *Sailmaker* deals with an important time in the story of Scotland: the time of big industry and skilled engineers. Tradesmen who had a high level of craft and who took great pride in their work but who were ultimately cast aside as the industry disappeared and the shipyards closed. As Davie says:

'It chucked me! The chandlers ah worked for shut doon. Ah got laid off. That was it. Nothin else doin. Nae work. Naebody needs sailmakers these days.'

(p. 16)

## The Boys' Brigade

At the start of Act 2, Alec talks about going to religious youth organisations (Christian Endeavour, The Band of Hope etc.). In the period around the time the play was set, when leisure time was maybe a bit different for young people than it is nowadays, it was common for young people to attend youth groups, many of which were associated with the local church. When Alec describes his experiences at Christian Endeavour, Davie reminisces about being in the 'B.B.' (The Boys' Brigade). As a boy, I too was a member of the B.B. The organisation was started by Sir William

Smith in Glasgow in 1883. It spread all over the world and, interestingly, Baden Powell started the Scouts as an off-shoot from The Boys' Brigade.

Looking back on my own time in the B.B., yes, we sang hymns and had to polish the brass buckles of our uniforms, but mostly I remember playing football and cricket, camping in the middle of nowhere, helping an old man with his garden, buying sweets from the tuck shop – all good memories. The B.B. motto 'Sure and Stedfast' sums up the values the organisation tries to teach young people. 'Stedfast' is the old way of spelling the word 'steadfast', which means standing firm and reacting solidly to difficulties. It is used perhaps ironically in the play. Davie sings the words of the famous B.B. hymn 'Will your anchor hold' at the start of Act 2, and we have doubts in our minds about whether he has managed to apply them in his own life:

'Will your anchor hold

In the storms of life

When the clouds unfold

Their wings of strife'

(p. 34)

A ship's anchor is the central symbol of The Boys' Brigade badge. It is still on the badge today. An anchor is meant to hold a ship (or anything else) firmly in position. Reading the play, we ask ourselves, has Davie drifted in life, rather than staying firm and secure.

'Sure and Stedfast' – these are good values. And 'Will your anchor hold' is a great, rousing hymn. I have it in my head just now.

## Sectarianism in Glasgow

The play makes reference to religious sectarianism in Glasgow at the time when the play is set. This is not the place to examine sectarianism in any detail, but there are a few things you should know. The word 'sectarian' describes something that has come about as a result of association with, or membership of, a group. In this case, the groups have a religious basis: Catholics and Protestants. In Glasgow, religious groupings have of course long-standing links with the two big football teams: Catholics are often associated with Celtic, and Protestants with Rangers. There are many symbolic emblems and historical figures attached to both Catholic and Protestant groups. A simple example is colour: the Rangers football kit is traditionally blue and Celtic is green. This comes up as a discussion between Alec, Ian and Billy early on in the play. The Protestant King William of Orange, who is a revered figure for some Protestants, is probably hinted at in the name of Davie's cousin, Billy.



▲ The Boys Brigade badge showing the Motto

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BACKGROUND

Background is interesting. Of course, you should be thinking of these things as you read or watch the play. But background is not really relevant in your exam. Your answers should be based on the play itself, your analysis of it and your ideas in response to it. Remember that.

### REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

(Answers are given on page 98.)

- 1 Why did the population grow in the central belt of Scotland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
- 2 Why do you think a ship's anchor was chosen as the badge of The Boys' Brigade?



# 3 Study and revision

In Chapter 3 we will cover the play **scene** by scene. You will find a commentary on what happens, key moments of conflict, and essential information on characters and themes in each of the scenes of the play. We will also look in detail at the following, using examples from the play:

- plot
- structure
- language features
- characters and relationships
- themes.

## Glossary

**scene:** the acts of a play are divided into scenes which contain and describe short periods of action

## Synopsis: what happens in *Sailmaker*?

Here is a capsule summary of the play – the outline of **Act 1** and Act 2, if you like. It will help to remind you of the events of the play and which order they come in. Following on from this is a more detailed tour of the play (Chapter 3.2): a commentary which takes you into every scene.

## Glossary

**act:** the main sections that a play is divided into

## Act 1

- Alec (now about to go to university) takes us back in time to when he was 11. His mother has just died and he now lives alone with his father, Davie, a 'tick man' who used to be a skilled tradesman (a sailmaker).
- Alec's favourite thing is a model yacht, which is in need of repair. He shows it to his cousin Ian, saying that Davie will soon fix it up. Ian's father (Billy) paints it very quickly and skilfully for Alec. Davie never gets around to repairing the boat.
- Davie struggles to cope following the death of Alec's mother. He struggles to do much in the way of cooking or providing meals. He also drinks and gambles, both of which upset Alec. Alec is not impressed when Davie asks him to place a bet for him with the (illegal) bookmaker.
- It is clear that Davie has money problems and has ended up borrowing money from the bookmaker in an attempt to clear debt. Billy is more practical than Davie and offers to sort out the situation with the bookmaker by applying some direct pressure on him. This plan backfires and Davie is beaten up and robbed by the bookmaker's heavies. Davie loses his job.

### Act 2

- Alec is now going to church-based youth groups at the Mission and it is clear that he has found some success and security in religion. His cousin Ian does not understand Alec's enthusiasm here. But, we learn that Davie was in The Boys' Brigade when young and he shows signs of remembering knowledge and values he learned when part of that organisation. But things go wrong for Alec here when his faith and beliefs are challenged one night at the Mission. He is filled with doubt and does not go back.
- Davie encourages Alec's education, recognising that he missed opportunities there himself.
- When he passes his entrance exam and goes on to the selective school, Alec starts to drift away from Davie and takes his life in a different direction, towards university. Billy and Ian are a contrasting pair here: they stay close, working together and eventually moving to another city to find jobs when the factory closes.
- Davie loses yet another job when the factory where Billy had secured him employment closes. Money remains a real problem for Davie and he cannot afford to properly heat and light his house. He borrows money from Alec's school bursary as a last resort. However, he still trusts in luck and has a small gambling win. He celebrates by going out drinking, spending some time in the company of a woman, Peggy. He returns to further conflict with Alec who passes judgement on Davie's drinking and the poor state of the house. The conflict comes to a head when Alec asks Davie about the woman he has been with. He goes too far with this and Davie hits him.
- The play comes to an end with Davie and Alec trying to keep warm in the freezing house by burning the contents of the Glory Hole (a cupboard which contains objects from their shared past). They burn Davie's sailmaking tools and finally, Alec's (still unrepaired) yacht. Davie hopes to be rehoused and to have a fresh start in life, but Alec announces that he intends to move out to a student flat.

### REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

(Answers are given on page 98.)

- 1 Can you summarise the main things that happen in the play in ten brief bullet points?

## 3.1 Dramatic techniques

### Target your thinking

- What is meant by the 'themes' of the play?
- What are the main dramatic techniques used by Alan Spence in this play?

### Key concepts and dramatic techniques for analysis

First, we will take a look at some language and dramatic techniques that you will need to have an understanding of in order to successfully analyse the play: theme, atmosphere, conflict, setting, stage directions, structure, flashback, foreshadowing, dramatic irony and symbolism.

#### Theme

When reading a play (or a novel or a poem, for that matter) you try to follow what is happening, what is being said etc. Your focus is on keeping up with what is going on, with trying to understand it. In this way, you know that *Sailmaker* is about a father and son from Glasgow who are trying to cope with the fact that their wife and mother has died, and that the father has lost his livelihood and really his direction in life. You could tell someone, or write in an exam, that this is what *Sailmaker* is about. And you would be right. However, can you go a bit further with your understanding of it? Can you start to think in terms of the ideas which might be behind the events of the play and what the **characters** say to each other? You could say that, since the play is about what happens to a father and his son, one of the themes of the play is father-and-son relationships. Or, more widely, family relationships. Also, knowing that their wife and mother has died, it would be reasonable to suggest that one of the key themes is loss (we will cover loss in more detail in Chapter 3.4).

#### Using clues to identify themes

There is no definitive list out there of the themes or key ideas of a play. So, try to have confidence in your own thoughts and reactions to the characters and events of the play. What you must be able to do, though, is justify your opinions. You do this through evidence – by detailed reference to the text itself. Keep your eyes open as you go through it. Look for clues as to what the themes or key ideas might be. These clues

#### Glossary

**character:** how a person is portrayed in a play: their thoughts, feelings and personality; what is distinctive about them



can come from all kinds of places. Even the title page, a 'cast list' which has basic information about the characters in the play, gives an indication of possible themes. There are four characters. They are all related. It would be fair to assume from this that the play is going to explore family relationships (as mentioned above). We are also told that Davie, the first character listed, is 'a former sailmaker'. This mention of Davie's job or, more accurately his trade, must be important for the writer to include it here. We might think that the fact that Davie has lost his job, his trade, is going to be significant. And so it proves to be. We have a hint here that a key idea or theme might be working life – how important it is to you, not just in terms of money, but also in terms of your identity, your sense of who you are. We learn much more about this idea as the play goes on, but it is here from the very start.

### HELPFUL HINT

The cast list can be a useful source of information about the characters and an indication of the themes present in the play.

The other thing you might notice from the cast list on the first page of the play is that the characters are all boys and men – there are no female characters. However, this changes on the very next page when Alec and Davie appear on stage and the first words of the play are spoken. Talking as an adult, Alec remembers the time when he was told by a policeman that his mother 'had taken a turn for the worse' (p6). On the same page (still back in time), his father Davie says:

'Ah've got a bit of bad news for ye son. Yer mammy's dead.'  
(p. 6)

Alec's mother does not appear as a character, but her shadow seems to hang over the play. Another theme occurs to us here: loss. As we read on, we clearly see that Davie and Alec have been hugely affected by loss.

Looking at the very first page of the play, we can't help noticing the **atmosphere** that the writer has created.

### Atmosphere

When you watch a film, television programme or play – or, if you read a play, novel, short story or poem – you will be aware of its atmosphere (we can also call this 'mood'). This is the general 'feeling' of it, how it seems to you. Is there a happy, optimistic or celebratory feeling? Or, is it the complete opposite? Is there **tension**? **Conflict**? Sadness?

How can you tell what the intended atmosphere is?

On stage, or in a film, atmosphere can be created by a lot of quite technical things: lighting, sound, music, scenery, digital effects etc. But when you are reading the play in a book, you can only go on what is

### Glossary

**atmosphere:**

the mood (or feelings) created by what is said or is happening in the play

**tension:** strong emotions are played out. Related to conflict

**conflict:**

disagreements or difficulties between characters



# 4 Approaching the Critical Reading paper

## 4.1 Critical Reading Section 1: Scottish text

### Target your thinking

- What kind of questions should I expect in Section 1: Scottish text?
- How should I approach the final question, which deals with the whole play?

## Introducing Critical Reading Section 1: Scottish text

The Critical Reading paper has two sections. For Section 1: Scottish text, you must answer a set of questions on the work of one Scottish writer from the set list. Remember, to head straight away for the *Sailmaker* extract. It will be near the beginning of the paper, in the Drama section. Once you have found the *Sailmaker* extract you don't need to look at any of the other parts of Section 1. Start to read the extract quickly, trying to identify, as you read it, where in the play it comes from. There are 20 marks available for this section. You should spend 45 minutes on this section.

### Example questions: set 1

Here is the extract from *Sailmaker* which appeared in the 2017 SQA National 5 English Section 1 paper. The passage comes first, then the questions. What follows is a guided commentary on the answers. So, try to answer the questions first and then compare your answers with what is written here. Hopefully, it will give you an idea of what to prepare for your exam and will help to clear up anything that you are unsure about. It is set out exactly as it will be in your exam. There is an instruction at the beginning which tells you an important rule of the question paper: if you answer on *Sailmaker* in Section 1, you must choose a different genre for the critical essay question (in other words, a poem, a novel or short story, or a media or language text).