



SCOTTISH SET TEXT GUIDE

National 5 and
Higher English

The Cone-Gatherers

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

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Getting the most from this guide

This guide is designed to help you work towards getting the best possible grade in your English examination. It contains a wealth of useful information, not only on the novel *The Cone-Gatherers* itself but also on improving your exam techniques. Using this guide to accompany your study of the novel will help you to greater success in your English examination.

This guide uses the Canongate 2012 edition of *The Cone-Gatherers* by Robin Jenkins, ISBN: 978-0-85786-235-8. All page numbers align with this edition.

It is important that you use this guide throughout your reading and revision – in fact, Chapter 2: Context will help you get to grips with the novel before you even begin to read it.

As you read the novel, referring to Chapter 3: Study and revision will enhance your understanding of literary features such as plot, structure, characterisation, theme and language.

When you have finished reading the novel, the guidance and advice given in Chapter 4: Approaching the Critical Reading paper will support your revision as well as strengthening your understanding of the text. You may be aware that *The Cone-Gatherers* is one of the 'crossover' texts in the English Critical Reading paper: this means that it is an option in National 5 and Higher Scottish text sections of the examination paper. Candidates at both levels may decide to use this novel in their responses to the critical essay section of the examination paper. This section of the guide is helpfully divided into National 5 and Higher pages, giving detailed advice on how to deal with the Scottish text and critical essay sections for each level.

The following features have been used throughout this guide to help you gain the most from your study of the novel:

Target your thinking

You will see this feature at the start of every chapter or main section. It contains questions that provide a focus for what you will learn in that chapter.

Build critical skills

This feature appears throughout the guide. It will help you to analyse and explore aspects of the novel in greater depth.

Key quotation

This feature will draw your attention to quotations that are important in conveying key aspects of the text.

Glossary

This feature highlights and defines key words used in the novel and in this guide.

Exam tip

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

REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

You will see this feature at the end of each chapter. It contains questions that will help you to firm up your knowledge of the novel and/or your understanding of exam techniques.

1 Introduction



Preparing to study *The Cone-Gatherers*

There are many different ways of studying the novel and each individual will have a preferred way of approaching a piece of literature. Some will read the text in its entirety before attempting to reflect on its themes, characters and all of the aspects that make it a piece of memorable literature. Others will work through the novel chapter by chapter in the classroom, making notes and discussing particular aspects of the text. Whatever way you read and study the novel, it is important to remember one thing: you must gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the text and develop your analytical skills in order to do well in the examination.

Using this guide as a companion to your study of *The Cone-Gatherers* will undoubtedly help you to acquire the depth of knowledge and understanding needed to successfully answer the Scottish text questions and write effective critical essays. It is also worth remembering that basic study techniques – such as highlighting, making notes, creating mind-maps, etc. – are useful in reinforcing your knowledge of a text. It goes without saying that this guide is meant to support your reading of the novel, not replace it. It is important to develop your own thoughts and feelings about the novel as you read it, rather than just memorising the information given in this guide.

The world in which *The Cone-Gatherers* is set is very different from that of the present day. The novel is a work of fiction with characters and events generated in the imagination of its author, Robin Jenkins. The novel draws upon various influences in Jenkins' life – in particular his experiences as a conscientious objector during the Second World War – and it is important to have a knowledge of these influences to fully appreciate the text. In this guide, the **Context** chapter will provide you with information about Jenkins' life and ideas; the historical, social and cultural influences prevalent at the time of the Second World War; and how this background may have shaped the novel. This section can be read before you begin reading the novel and will also be helpful during your revision.

Study and revision

As your reading of the novel progresses, you can refer to this guide's notes on several literary features. The **Study and revision** chapter is divided into four sections: 3.1 Plot and structure, 3.2 Characterisation,

3.3 Themes and 3.4 Language features and analysis. Each section can be read in tandem with the novel or when revising, allowing you to enhance your understanding of these aspects of the text. For example, the section on characterisation contains detailed notes on the main characters; in the plot and structure section, you will find useful synopses of each chapter as well as commentary on key events.

When you have finished reading the novel, Chapter 4: Approaching the Critical Reading paper will provide you with lots of guidance on how to apply your knowledge of the novel in an examination context. This section of the guide will help you with all aspects of revision: it contains everything you need to know about the tasks you will face in the Critical Reading examination paper.

For Scottish text questions, there is specific guidance on successfully decoding and answering the different types of questions you will encounter in the examination. Sample answers to questions are provided and these will give you a clear idea of the level of response needed for success. There are also examination-style questions that give you an opportunity to practise your skills and show off your knowledge of the text.

For critical essay revision, there is detailed guidance on how to 'read' and choose suitable questions, as well as advice on planning and writing effective essays on the novel. Again, there are practice essay questions and samples that will help you to produce your best work.

Some final advice

As you can see, there is a great deal of useful guidance in this book. However, the most important thing to remember is that it is *your* knowledge and understanding of the novel that are being tested. It is therefore important to think carefully about the novel and come up with your own ideas, rather than memorising and rewriting details from this guide. You need to demonstrate that *you* have engaged with the text and that *you* can appreciate Jenkins' craftsmanship. This means that it is always useful to ask yourself questions about the novel as you are reading: you might ask why a character acts in a certain way or how the setting influences a particular event. If you do this, there is no doubt that you will enjoy the novel much more and will be able to answer examination questions much more effectively.

2 Context



Target your thinking

- What does 'context' mean?
- How did Jenkins' life influence his writing?
- How did political, cultural and historical influences shape Jenkins' creation of the novel?
- Does the novel conform to a particular literary genre?

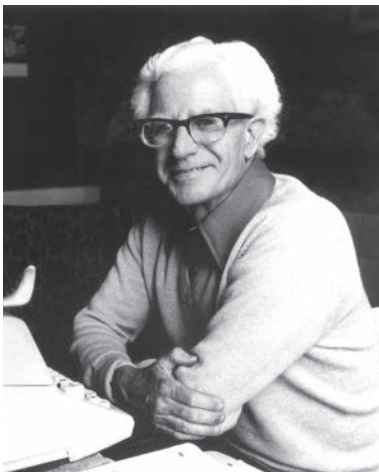
Glossary

literary context: where the text sits in relation to literary genres or literary traditions and how the writer might have been influenced by other writers and works of literature.

What does 'context' mean?

If you look up the word 'context' in a dictionary, you will probably find a variety of definitions, all of which encapsulate the general idea of 'being related to or connected to something greater'. However, 'context' can also be used in the study of literature – '**literary context**' has a fairly specific definition.

It is often very helpful – and interesting – to think about how the text might have been influenced by events in the writer's life and by the social, cultural and historical background of the text's setting or of the time period during which it was written. You will not have to answer directly on context in the examination but having a knowledge of the novel's context will ensure that you have a greater appreciation of features such as characterisation and theme. You will then be able to respond to Scottish text questions and critical essay questions in far greater depth.



▲ Robin Jenkins at his writing desk

Robin Jenkins's life

Robin Jenkins was born on 11 September 1912 in Cambuslang, on the outskirts of Glasgow. His given name was actually John Jenkins, but he used the name Robin for the publication of his first novel (in 1951) and it became his writing name from that point onwards. His early life was a difficult one. One of four siblings, the premature death of his father when Jenkins was only seven years old meant that the family were no strangers to poverty: perhaps this is one reason why his writing is often concerned with characters who have to endure hardship and poor social conditions.

Fortunately, Jenkins found an escape route by winning a bursary to Hamilton Academy. He was a bright child who did well at school and, with the help of another scholarship, went on to

study literature and history at Glasgow University. He graduated in 1936 and married a year later. His political views were left-wing and the onset of the Second World War in 1939 reinforced these views. He registered as a **conscientious objector** as soon as war began.

At that time, conscientious objectors were often ostracised and many were given difficult and dangerous jobs to do. Jenkins was sent to work in forestry operations in Argyll. This was an experience that influenced his writing of *The Cone-Gatherers* – just as the poverty of his childhood influenced many of his other novels. However, he was careful to explain to his readers that although he ‘did once gather cones...there was no sinister Duror skulking among the trees’, the characters and events of the novel were all a product of his imagination.

After the war, he taught English and history in several Scottish secondary schools, spending time in the East End of Glasgow and at Dunoon Grammar School. His teaching spells in Scotland were interrupted by time spent teaching abroad. He had previously taught in Afghanistan and Spain, and in the 1960s he spent four years teaching in Borneo (accompanied by his wife and children). All of these experiences were a fertile source of inspiration for his writing. On his return to Scotland, he once again taught in Dunoon until his retirement.

Jenkins continued to write throughout his teaching career, producing 30 novels and two collections of short stories. His most famous novel is *The Cone-Gatherers*, which has been praised in Giamatti’s introduction as ‘a profound exploration of the loneliness, fear and heroism hidden in the ancient heart of Man’ (page vii). Many of his other novels have won critical acclaim: *The Changeling*, *Fergus Lamont* and *The Thistle and the Grail* in particular have consolidated his position as a writer of great power and imagination. In 1999, he was awarded the OBE. He was further honoured in 2002 when his contribution to literature and Scottish culture was recognised by the Saltire Society, which awarded him the Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun Award.

On his death in February 2005, he was aged 92. Many people lamented the passing of a writer who was described as ‘the greatest Scottish novelist of the modern age’. His novels explore universal concerns such as morality, the conflict of good and evil and the human condition. The literary craftsmanship and great imaginative scope of his writing continue to captivate readers in Scotland and far beyond.

conscientious objector:

a person who refuses to serve in the armed forces or complete military service during wartime because of moral or religious reasons.

Setting in time and place

The Cone-Gatherers was first published in 1955, some ten years after the Second World War. However, the novel is set during the time of the Second World War (1939–45) and, as previously mentioned, Jenkins had direct experience of forestry work as a conscientious objector during

3 Study and revision



3.1 Plot and structure

Target your thinking

- What are the main events of the novel?
- How are the main characters affected by key incidents?
- How do these key incidents lead to the climax of the novel?

Plot

The following chapter summaries explore the main events of the novel in more depth.

Chapter 1

The novel begins with the brothers, Neil and Calum, high up in a larch tree in the woods of the Runcie-Campbells' Lendrickmore estate. They have been gathering the cones that will provide seed to replace trees being cut down for the war effort. The younger brother, Calum, is physically disabled – he is described as 'a hunchback' – but is completely at home in the trees and loves nature. Neil, the elder brother, is far less comfortable in the trees than Calum and is deeply dissatisfied with the social divisions and inequality brought on by the class system at that time.

When returning to their impoverished hut that evening, the brothers come across an injured rabbit caught in a snare placed by Duror, the estate's gamekeeper. Calum is deeply distressed at the rabbit's injuries, but his deep compassion will not allow him to end its suffering. Neil insists that they leave the rabbit for Duror, as they have already provoked the gamekeeper's anger by interfering with other snares. Neil also makes it clear that he is not happy with the brothers' short-term removal to the Runcie-Campbell estate, saying that he would far rather be back at Ardmore forest where they normally work.

Unseen by the brothers, Duror watches them with hatred, his gun aimed at Calum. Duror harbours a particular hatred for Calum: he is repelled by Calum's physical deformity and regards the brothers' presence in the woods as a pollution and defilement of a space that had been a refuge for him. Duror follows the brothers as they return to the hut and

obsessively watches them for some time. His mental deterioration and inability to accept Calum's physical imperfections are revealed through his secret approval of the Nazis' use of concentration camps. Duror finally leaves, thinking bitterly of the brothers' peaceful lives set against the carnage of the war.

This chapter is important in setting the context of the novel. Immediately, we know that the events are set in a time of war and Neil's complaints also introduce the themes of social inequality and class. The opening chapter also introduces us to the conflicting characters of Calum and Duror, providing a glimpse of Calum's innocence set against Duror's obsession.

Build critical skills

Calum's goodness is established early in this chapter. Write down a list of quotations or actions that show this aspect of Calum's character.

Chapter 2

After leaving his vigil outside the hut, Duror is stopped by Dr Matheson. The doctor drives Duror to the estate gates. The conversation in the car is mostly one-sided, with the doctor hopeful of supplementing his wartime rations with some venison from Duror. Duror is distant throughout the conversation and when the doctor asks about Duror's wife, Peggy, Duror says little. Peggy has been bedridden for 20 years, having been paralysed not long after marrying Duror. In that time, she has 'grown monstrously obese'.

When the doctor drops him off, Duror is reluctant to return to his house. He realises that he is losing control of his mind: Peggy's disability, the frustrations of the past 20 years and his obsessive hatred of deformity have been exacerbated by the arrival of the cone-gatherers in his sole place of refuge. When he reaches the house, he upsets Peggy and her mother, Mrs Lochie, by remaining distant. Peggy loves him and wants him to spend time with her, but he finds it impossible to get over his physical revulsion for her. Her mother keeps house for the couple, but is finding it increasingly difficult to meet the demands of looking after someone with a disability. Duror avoids conflict with both women by going outside to attend to his dogs.

When he learns that Lady Runcie-Campbell wishes to organise a deer hunt for her visiting brother, Duror realises that forcing the cone-gatherers to participate in the hunt could be a means of removing them from the estate. He believes that Calum will become a 'drivelling obscenity' when confronted with a butchered deer and that Lady Runcie-Campbell's disgust will result in the brothers' dismissal.

Key quotation

Duror: 'Hidden among the spruces at the edge of the ride...stood Duror the gamekeeper, in an icy sweat of hatred, with his gun aimed all the time at the feeble-minded hunchback grovelling over the rabbit.'

Build critical skills

In Chapter 2, we are given some important details about Duror's life and character. Write down all of the things we learn about Duror.

3.4 Language features and analysis

Target your thinking

- What does the term 'language features' mean?
- How does Jenkins use word choice and imagery to create mood or atmosphere?
- How are language features used to create a more vivid impression of the novel's settings and characters?

When demonstrating your knowledge and understanding of the novel – particularly in the Scottish text section of the exam – you will be expected to **analyse** and **evaluate** how the writer uses language to establish various aspects of the novel. For example, you may be writing about how language is used to convey aspects of setting or characters; to create atmosphere or mood; or to establish narrative points of view. If you are answering on *The Cone-Gatherers* for the Scottish text section of the exam paper, it is likely that you will be referring to techniques that require you to look at the finer details of language such as the writer's use of word choice or imagery. However, if you choose to write your critical essay on *The Cone-Gatherers*, you are likely to be taking a more holistic view of the novel and will consider broader aspects such as characterisation, setting, symbolism, plot and structure.

Glossary

analyse: to break something down into its constituent parts in order to understand how it is made or how it works. Analysis in literature means to examine a text in detail and gain an understanding of *how* the writer has used different literary techniques to create an effective piece of work.

evaluate: to assess the effectiveness of something. Evaluation in literature means to consider how effectively the writer has achieved what he or she set out to achieve.

This means that when you are discussing *The Cone-Gatherers* as a piece of literature, it is important to show that you are aware of it as a crafted piece of work – a literary text created by a writer who has taken care in using words, sentence types and language techniques in the creation of a memorable story. Discussing a novel is about far more than simply saying *what* happens in it – you need to be able to critically appreciate the novel by saying *how* the writer has created the various aspects that make it memorable.

Language features in *The Cone-Gatherers*

You may be wondering exactly what is meant by 'language features'. You are likely to be confronted with this term when you are studying the novel and when you are responding to exam questions, so you will need to know what these features are before you can identify and comment on them. The list below gives some of the more common features of language Jenkins uses to create effects in the novel. These are features that you are likely to be discussing in your analysis and evaluation of *The Cone-Gatherers*:

- word choice
- imagery
- symbolism
- pathetic fallacy
- point of view
- dialogue

Further information on these and other language features is contained in the Glossary of literary terms at the back of this guide.

Word choice

Words are the most versatile tool in a writer's toolkit. They are one of the basic building blocks of language. By choosing words with specific **connotations**, a writer can influence how we perceive important textual elements such as characters, setting, atmosphere and tone. In *The Cone-Gatherers*, Jenkins uses description not only to tell the story but also to help us 'see' the people, places and events he describes: word choice is an effective component in these descriptions.

The information in Section 4.1 of this guide offers more developed guidance on how to deal with this language feature in the exam, but it is worthwhile examining some specific instances of where Jenkins uses word choice to create specific effects in the novel.

Glossary

connotations: the ideas suggested by a word; this is slightly different from the literal meaning (or denotation) of the word.

Examples of significant word choice

Look at the words used in the description of Erchie Graham's hurried journey to ask for the brothers' help:

He had now to traverse a great Sargasso of withered leaves. Every step was a slither, and took him over the boots; one step was particularly unlucky, it landed him waist-deep in an ice-cold concealed pool. A few yards off stood a dead Chili pine, with the ground beneath littered with its fragments, like ordure.

It is clear that Jenkins wishes to show how difficult this journey is for the elderly Graham and how tricky the landscape is to navigate. For this description, therefore, he has chosen certain words to show the awkwardness of the journey. These words and their connotations are given below:

- *Sargasso* – a sea in the Atlantic Ocean that has no land boundaries and is filled with masses of floating seaweed. It is the spawning ground of several eel species. It is difficult to navigate the Sargasso Sea, and seaweed and eels are both slippery: this choice of word (imagery is also being used here) suggests the ground is tangled and slippery to move across
- *withered leaves* – suggests decay and dampness, rotten ground that makes it hard to move
- *slither* – implies danger caused by sliding and slipping movement
- *unlucky* – gives a sense of an ill-fated journey
- *ice-cold* – suggests something inhospitable and dangerous
- *concealed* – hints at something menacing and lurking under the surface
- *dead* – suggests a threatening barren landscape
- *fragments* – suggests breakage and fragility, decay
- *ordure* – means dung or refuse, and this suggests the rottenness of the tree as well as the landscape

It is easy to see that the connotations of these words make Graham's journey seem like a particularly difficult one. If Jenkins had not chosen these words with great care, we would not have had such a clear impression of Graham's struggle to reach the brothers and the setting in this part of the woods.

Word choice is also a language feature that can be used to create 'atmosphere' or mood. When the imaginative Roderick goes to the woods with the cake for Calum and Neil, he is caught up with the woods' atmosphere of mystery yet is slightly afraid of the menace he finds in the dim solitude. Jenkins creates a mood of mystery and menace by choosing certain words for the description of the woods. These words with strong connotations are highlighted in the following extract:

Therefore there was magic and terror. The wood was enchanted, full of terrifying presences. A knot in a tree glowered like a green face. Low-hanging branches were evil birds swooping with talons ready to rip his face and pluck out his eyes...Here were clusters of juniper, grey with fungus, jungles of withered willow herb, taller than himself, piles of dead leaves like graves...

Build critical skills

Try substituting some less descriptive words into the description of Graham's journey, such as 'stretch' instead of 'Sargasso' and 'hard' instead of 'a slither'. This should allow you to see how Jenkins' apt choice of words makes the journey seem much more vivid.

Build critical skills

Jenkins also uses word choice to give us a clear impression of characters. Choose descriptions of one or two characters and note how the writer's use of word choice conveys key aspects of these characters.

4 Approaching the Critical Reading paper



The Critical Reading paper

For both National 5 and Higher levels, the time allocated for this part of the exam is 1 hour and 30 minutes. The Critical Reading paper is divided into two sections – you should spend approximately 45 minutes on each. Each section is worth 20 marks, giving an overall total of 40 marks for this paper.

- Section 1: Scottish text – in this section, you will read an extract taken from one of the set Scottish texts and then answer some shorter questions on that extract and one longer question on the text overall.
- Section 2: Critical essay – in this section, you will write one critical essay on a text that you have previously studied from the genres of drama, prose, poetry, film and television drama or language.

Exam tip

The Scottish text is sometimes called different things such as the Scottish set text or Scottish textual analysis.

Selecting your texts

It is important to remember that both National 5 and Higher levels have rules that may affect your choice of section when writing on *The Cone-Gatherers*. You will be able to see these rules if you look at the front page of any National 5 or Higher past paper. If you have studied two or more of the texts specified on SQA's list of Scottish texts, you will have to think carefully when choosing your preferred text for each section.

The rules of the paper state that:

- you cannot answer on the same text in Sections 1 and 2
- you must answer on a different genre in each section

4.2 Critical Reading Section 2: Critical essay

Target your thinking

- How are critical essay questions structured?
- What topics could you be asked about?
- Why is it important to write a clear introduction?
- How can planning help you to produce a well-structured essay?
- What is the most effective way to use quotations and textual references?

Introduction to the essay

Section 2 of the Critical Reading paper requires you to write a critical essay. A total of 20 marks is available for this section. This is 50% of the Critical Reading paper and 20% of your overall mark.

Exam tip

Remember that you can write a Section 2 critical essay on *The Cone-Gatherers* only if you have studied a second writer or text (not prose) from the SQA Scottish text list and used that one for your Scottish text in Section 1. *You must not answer both the Scottish text and critical essay sections on the same novel or the same genre.*

There is no specified order in which you have to complete the sections, although most candidates prefer to answer the Scottish text questions before completing the critical essay. You should ensure that you allocate an appropriate amount of time to each section. Remember that you have 1 hour and 30 minutes for the whole paper, so you should allow approximately 45 minutes for the completion of each section.

Before you even begin to practise writing critical essays, it is important that you know the text really well and have a clear understanding of what is involved in choosing a suitable question for your text. As this study guide is focused on *The Cone-Gatherers*, detailed consideration will be given to **prose** questions. However, many of the general points made about the structure of critical essay questions, how to choose a suitable question and planning/organising your essay will also be useful when you are writing essays on other texts or different genres.

Glossary

prose: this is the 'ordinary' form of written or spoken language, one in which the language has no poetic structure and flows naturally without poetic techniques such as rhythm or rhyme. In literature, prose is normally associated with novels, short stories, essays and journalism.