The Cone-Gatherers by Robin Jenkins

**In this extract from the opening scene of the novel, Neil and Calum are returning to their hut after a day of cone gathering.**

“This wood,” said Neil, “it's to be cut down in the spring.”

“I ken that,” whimpered Calum.

“There's no sense in being sorry for trees,” said his brother, “when the more men than trees being

struck down. You can make use of a tree, but what use is a dead man? Trees can be replaced

5 in time. Aren’t we ourselves picking the cones for seed? Can you replace dead men?”

He knew that the answer was yes the dead men would be replaced after a war the population

of the world increased but none would be replaced by him to look after his brother he had

never got married though once he had come very near to it that memory often revived to turn his

heart melancholy.

10 “We'd better get down,” he muttered. “You lead the way, Calum, as usual.”

“Sure, I'll lead the way, Neil.”

Delighted to be out of this bondage of talk, Calum set his bag of cones firmly round his shoulders,

and with consummate confidence and grace began the descent through the inner night of the great

tree. Not once, all the long way down, was he at a loss. He seemed to find holds by instinct, and

15 patiently guided his brother's feet on to them. Alone, Neil would have been in trouble; he was as

dependent on his brother as if he was blind; and Calum made no attempt to make his superiority as

climber compensate for his inferiority as talker. Every time he caught his brother's foot and set it on a

safe branch it was an act of love. Once, when Neil slid down quicker than he meant and stamped on

Calum's fingers, the latter uttered no complaint but smiled in the dark and sucked the bruise.

20 It was different as soon as they were on the ground. Neil immediately strode out, and Calum,

hurrying to keep close behind, often stumbled. Gone were the balance and sureness he had shown

in the tree. If there was a hollow or a stone or a stick, he would trip over it. He never grumbled at

such mishaps, but scrambled up at once, anxious only not to be a hindrance to his brother.

When they reached the beginning of the ride that divided a cluster of Norway spruces, Neil threw

25 over his shoulder the usual warning: to leave the snares alone, whether there were rabbits in them

half throttled or hungry or frantic; and Callum gave the usual sad guilty promise.

During the very first day in the woods they had got into trouble with the gamekeeper. Callum had

released two rabbits from snares. Neil had been angry and had prophesized trouble it had come next

evening when Duror, the big keeper, had been waiting for them outside their hut. His rage had been

30 quiet but intimidating. Neil had said little in reply, but had faced up to the gun raised once or twice

to emphasise threats. Calum, demoralised as always by hatred, had cowered against the hut, hiding

his face.

Duror had sworn that he would seize the first chance to hand them out of the wood; they were in

It, he said, sore against his wish. Neil therefore had made Calum swear by an oath which he didn't

35 understand but to which Neil was the most sacred on earth: by their dead mothe,r he had to swear

never again to interfere with the snares. He could not remember his mother, who had died soon

after he was born.

Now this evening, as he trotted down the ride, he prayed by a bright star above that there would be

no rabbits squealing in pain. If there were, he could not help them; he would have to rush past, tears

40 in his eyes, fingers in his ears.

Several rabbits were caught, all dead except one; it pounded on the grass and made choking noises.

Neil had passed it without noticing. Calum moaned and dismay at this dilemma of either displeasing

his brother or forsaking a hurt creature. He remembered his solemn promise; he remembered too

the cold hatred of the gamekeeper; he knew that the penalty for interfering might be expulsion from

this wood where he loved to work; but above all he shared the suffering of the rabbit.

Questions

1. Explain how Neil’s speech and actions reveal the hierarchy between the two brothers. 3

2. “ Delighted to be out of this bondage of talk” Explain fully what the writer means by this. 2

3. By referring closely to lines 12 – 23, analyse how the writer's use of language highlights the contrast between Calum in the tree and on the ground. 3

4. By referring closely to at least one example from lines 41 - 45 explain how the writer's use of language revealed Calum's inner turmoil. 2

5. “The Cone Gatherers” is set during the Second World War. With reference to such features as setting, characterisation and narrative in this extract and elsewhere in the novel, explain the impact of war. 10

**Marking Scheme**

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| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | 2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **3** | * Candidates should explain that Neil is the leader of the two brothers. He makes decisions for Calum and takes responsibility for his care. * “to look after his brother he had never got married” the fact that Neil has to look after Callum implies he takes responsibility for Calum's care. * “we'd better get down” Neil decides when the brothers will finish gathering cones for today. * Neil is“dependent on his brother” in the tree, but Callum does not see himself as superior because of this * once on the ground Neil “immediately strode out” leading the way back to the Hut * when they reach the snares Neil has to give Callum a reminder “to leave the snares alone” * when Duror confronted the brothers about the rabbits freed from the snares, Neil protected his brother and “faced up to the gun” whereas Callum “cowered against the Hut” |
| **2** | 2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone. | **2** | * Calum finds talk a form of “bondage” a word which implies to be chained or bound by restrictive ties. * his childlike brain often cannot follow complex ideas within conversations and he becomes confused and anxious. |
| **3** | Candidates should analyse how the imagery gives insight into Duror’s feelings.  2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **3** | You should explain that Calum in the tree is agile and confident whereas Calum on the ground is clumsy and unsure.  Possible answers include:  Calum in the tree:   * “with consummate confidence and grace” implies Callum is able to move with effortless skill through the trees he is sure of his ability in this environment * “Not once all the long way down was he at a loss” the use of “not once” and “all the long way down” emphasises the extent of Calum's assuredness and skill * “find holds by instinct” the word “instinct” implies aptitude and natural intuition as if Callum was born to be in the trees * “every time…act of love” in the trees Calum is able to care for his brother in some small way   Calum on the ground:   * “Stumbled” implies clumsiness and lack of coordination * “gone were the balance and sureness” – “gone” implies a complete lack of confidence and grace * “if there was a hollow or a stone or a stick” repetition of “or” elongates the list, increasing the number of obstacles ready to trip Callum * “scrambled” suggests an anxiousness to Calum's movements |
| **4** |  | **2** | * “pounded” hard movement implies desperation * “choking” connotations of suffocating and gasping. The rabbit was suffering greatly * “moaned” incoherent noise suggesting Callum cannot help but vocalise his pain over the rabbit's plight * “solemn promise” the word solemn implies Calum understands the promise was serious and important * repetition of “remembered” emphasises Calam is reminding himself of the reasons he must not act * “expulsion” suggests banishment or rejection * “shared the suffering” alliteration Callum feels a kinship with the rabbit he feels its pain |
| **5** | Candidates should explain the impact of war referring to such features as setting, characterisation and narrative.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone.  Candidates can answer in  bullet points in this final question,or write a number of linked statements. | **10** | Up to 2 marks can be achieved for identifying elements of commonality as identified in  the question  A further 2 marks can be achieved for reference to the extract given.  6 additional marks can be awarded for discussion of similar references to at least one other poem by the poet.  In practice this means:  Identification of commonality (2) (e.g.: theme, characterisation, use of imagery, setting,  or any other key element…)  from the extract:  1 x relevant reference to technique/idea/feature (1)  1 x appropriate comment (1)  (maximum of 2 marks only for discussion of extract) from at least one other text/part of the text:  as above (x3) for up to 6 marks  OR  more detailed comment x2 for up to 6 marks  Thus, the final 6 marks can be gained by a combination of 3, 2 and 1 marks depending on  the level of depth/detail/insight.  The aim would be to encourage quality of comment, rather than quantity of references.  Commonality:   * War is felt both at home and away * war instigates great change * war contributes to the downfall of Duror * war is terrible and evil   Extract:   * The wood is being cut down to producing more effort * the war is impacting the landscape despite being fought elsewhere * in order to replant the forest Calum and Neal are employed to gather seeds * Neil highlights men are risking their lives and dying at war   Elsewhere:   * Because of the war, Lady Runcie Campbell is alone to run the estate * Neil sees the war as an opportunity - there might be equality * Duror uses the war to justify his hatred of Callum * the war serves as a backdrop to remind us that there is evil in the world * the war has added to Duror’s instability   Many other references are possible. |