



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

Bog Child by Siobhan Dowd

Bog Child by Siobhan Dowd is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2026, 2027 and 2028, 2029 and 2030).



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Definitions Publishers

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *Bog Child* covers themes which could be considered sensitive and controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



Scan the QR code or [click here to access a Getting Started with Guide for this Text](#)

Before you read... (Teacher Guidance)

These activities help students connect with the historical and social context of the Troubles and distinguish between personal and political experience. Adapt as appropriate for your class.

1. Visual Timeline

Guide students in co-creating a timeline of key events in the Troubles, drawing on prior learning in History. Use this to activate and check background knowledge.

2. Role on the Wall

Use a body outline to contrast a teenager's daily life (inside) with external pressures of the time (outside). This highlights the interplay between personal and political contexts.

3. Self-Reflection

Facilitate a discussion on external pressures facing today's teenagers and strategies to respond. Consider digital tools (e.g. Mentimeter, Wooclap) or a collaborative poster to capture perspectives.



Extract

Background: This is extract from Chapter one of *Bog Child*. It is set in 1980s Northern Ireland, during the Troubles. It follows 18-year-old Fergus whose brother is on hunger strike and whose discovery of a child's body in a bog forces him to confront both personal and political conflict.

They'd stolen a march on the day. The sky was like dark glass, reluctant to let the light through. The only sound was the chudder of the van skirting the lough. The surface of the water was colourless. The hills slumped down on the far side like silhouettes of snoozing giants.

Fergus yawned. It was still before five as they turned off up the mountain road. Uncle Tally chewed on nothing as the tyres lumbered over the ruts. Fergus cradled the flask of sweet black tea. There'd been no milk in the fridge that morning.

"Too early for you, huh?" mocked Uncle Tally, changing gear.

"Too right," said Fergus. "When I go running, it's not dark like this." His throat was furred up. The words came out stretched by a yawn. "It's unnatural being up before the birds."

They approached the border checkpoint and the van slowed. The soldier by the hut stood with a rifle but did not move. He was young-looking and pale, with freckles. He waved them on, tipping the butt of the gun, and they drove past without having to stop. Uncle Tally laughed. "I could have a truckload of Semtex for all that wee squaddie cares," he said.

Fergus grunted. "Yeah," he said. "Deus would be delighted."

Deus, Latin for "God", was the local nickname for a rumoured bomb-maker, said to be active thereabouts.

"So he would."

"Only you'd be going in the wrong direction. We're leaving the Troubles, Unk, not joining them."

Uncle Tally thumped the wheel. "So we are. We're in the free state now. Free as a bloody bog-frog." They both laughed like clowns. Going over the border always had that effect. Without your knowing it, your jaw-bone would stiffen and adrenalin pump through your veins as the checkpoint approached. Then, when you were through, hilarity would erupt at the relief.

The van turned up onto a steep road with grass growing up the middle. The gorse got yellower as they climbed, the sky brighter. "The border. Even a nun would be nervous crossing it," suggested Fergus.

(Siobhan Dowd, *Bog Child*, 2008, p. 3).

Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidelines)

These prompts are designed to support close reading and personal response. They may be used orally or in writing, individually or in groups.

1. Guide students to consider how the description of the sky and hills shapes the tone of the extract.
2. Discuss how dialogue contributes to characterisation and narrative flow. Extend by inviting students to reflect on the role of dialogue in their own creative writing.
3. Explore how Fergus' yawning, tiredness, and complaints reveal aspects of his personality and possibly his life circumstances.



Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

These activities extend engagement with the extract and invite creative and personal responses. Use individually, in pairs, or in groups.

1. Parallel Journeys

Students draft the opening of a story about another young person crossing the border. Encourage contrasting moods (fear, excitement, dread) and mirroring of descriptive style.

2. Border Poem

Invite students to write a free verse poem using personification and similes to animate the landscape, drawing on lines such as “The hills slumped down...”.

3. Soldier's Voice

Students write a monologue from the soldier's perspective, reflecting on duty, fear, and routine.

4. Personal Response

Prompt students to recall a moment of tension and release (e.g., exam, performance). Use the structure of the extract—build-up, peak, release—as a model.

5. Collaborative Story-Building

Groups take turns adding 100 words to continue the story. Rotate pages until complete, then read aloud and compare interpretations.