



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

Leonard And Hungry Paul by Rónán Hession

Leonard And Hungry Paul by Ronan Hession 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).

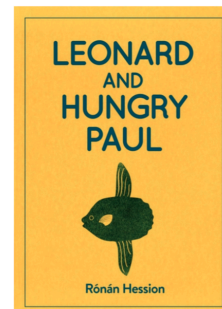


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Please note:

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



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for this Text

Before you read... (Teacher Guidance)

1. Walking Debate

Give students various statements related to the extract to consider during a walking debate. Encourage pupils to defend their ideas and change their minds where appropriate. Some examples of statements could include: quiet children are misunderstood, parents shouldn't fuss over adult children, children who prefer games to sports are missing out on something important, you can tell a lot about a person based on the hobbies they had as a child.

2. What Makes a Good Friend Mind Map

Put pupils into small groups and encourage them to discuss and mind map the qualities of a good friend or good friendships. Instruct pupils to do a gallery walk and look at their peers' ideas. Ask students to tick the qualities they most agree with during their gallery walk. Discuss the most and least popular qualities as a class.

3. Kindness Inventory

Have students list five ordinary household objects that could show someone is kind, for example: a bird feeder, a lunchbox, a blanket, a handwritten note etc. Ask pupils to choose one object and write a two-sentence explanation of how it might reveal kindness in a family or friendship.



Extract

Background: This extract is from chapter one and two of the novel and describes the nature of the two main characters, Leonard and Hungry Paul.

Leonard was raised by his mother alone with cheerfully concealed difficulty, his father having died tragically during childbirth. Though she was not by nature the soldiering type, she taught him to look at life as a daisy chain of small events, each of which could be made manageable in its own way. She was a person for whom kindness was a very ordinary thing, who believed that the only acceptable excuse for not having a bird feeder in the back garden was that you had one in the front garden.

As sometimes happens with boys who prefer games to sports, Leonard had few friends but lots of ideas. His mother understood with intuitive good sense that children like Leonard just need someone to listen to them. They would set off to the shops discussing conger eels and have a deep conversation about Saturn's moons on the way back; they would talk about tidal waves at bath time, and say goodnight with a quick chat about the man with the longest fingernails in the Guinness Book of World Records. But Leonard grew up at a time when quiet, imaginative children did not yet enjoy the presumption of innocence. His mother often found herself having to take his side against ornery teachers who complained that they found it impossible to get through to him. With patient maternal endurance she would sit by herself at parent-teacher meetings explaining that, like his late father, he 'just lacked a Eureka face'.

Even into his thirties, Leonard's mother still liked to fuss over him, buying his favourite ham for lunch—the one with fewer veins running through it—leaving tea by the bedside for when he woke up, and ironing well-meaning creases into his jeans, which Leonard would quietly iron out later. He repaid her thoughtfulness by keeping her company through her later years and generally including her in the uncrowded bandwidth of his life.

Chapter 2

Hungry Paul emerged from the bathroom, wearing a white fluffy bathrobe tied with a white belt, tracksuit bottoms and flip flops with some tissue paper stuck to them. There is much pleasure in relief and, as Hungry Paul noticed Leonard, he welcomed him with genuine warmth.

'Hi Leonard. They sent you up. Great, great. How are things?'

'Good thanks. What's with the bathrobe?' asked Leonard.

'Ah, I have begun training in the martial arts – how do I look?'

'You look like the real thing all right. What has brought this on? It's not like you to do something violent.'

'Oh, I haven't changed my mind about violence, but the martial arts are more about stillness in action. Calm in the midst of combat. It certainly is physical, but the mind remains still and peaceful. There is no mental violence; no ill will, which is the worst part of violence. And besides, it's judo, so there's no punching in the face or anything like that.'

'And how do you feel about rolling around with Neanderthals? I thought you didn't like people touching you, never mind twisting your limbs into a figure eight?'

'Well there is that. I actually thought it might help me with my personal space issues. As you say, it is one of the more intimate combat sports hence we wear sleepover gear rather than, say, black tie. But to be honest, there is also my personal fitness to think of. Can't very well tackle a black belt if I can't even tackle stairs without panting.'

(Rónán Hession, *Leonard and Hungry Paul*, 2021, chapter 1).



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. Character Snapshot

Ask students create a short “character snapshot” of Leonard using the extract only.

They should note:

- Three things we learn about Leonard’s personality
- Two things we learn about his relationship with his mother
- One question the extract makes them curious about

2. Language Analysis

Display the quote, “cheerfully concealed difficulty”. Ask pupils to write an analysis paragraph answering the question *how is Leonard’s mother described in the extract?*

3. Creative Task- The Missing Scene

Remind pupils that the extract drops the reader straight into a moment between Leonard and Hungry Paul. Have pupils create a short script imagining what happened just before this scene.

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. Personal Response

Give pupils the prompt question below and have them write a personal response exploring their opinions of the text. Question: What impression do you get of Leonard’s mother from this extract? Do you think she is a good parent? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

2. Reflective Response

Encourage pupils to think about the presentation of the two quiet, gentle characters who don’t always fit the expectations of others. Guide them to write an extended response answering the question: How does the extract explore the idea of quiet or imaginative people being misunderstood? Do you think the world today treats quiet people differently?

3. Letter Writing

Have pupils write a letter from Leonard’s mother to one of his teachers who claims Leonard “*is difficult to reach*”.

The letter could show:

- Her protective and kind nature
- Her understanding of Leonard’s imaginative mind
- Her irritation or confusion at the teacher’s complaint
- Her unique, humorous way of expressing herself

4. Narrative Response

Have pupils create a narrative piece detailing a day in the life of one of the extract’s characters.