



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts *The Spinning Heart* by Donal Ryan

The Spinning Heart by Donal Ryan is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2027 and 2028. It may be used part of the Comparative section.



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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.
- *The Spinning Heart* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.

Before you read (Teacher Guidance)

1. Title Exploration

Write the title *The Spinning Heart* on the board. Ask students to write a few sentences or sketch an idea in response to: *What might this title suggest about people, emotions, or life?* Prompts: What could a “spinning heart” symbolise? Invite a few volunteers to share their interpretations.

2. Inference and Research

Give pupils images below or similar ones. Have them speculate and discuss what period in history may be suggested by them. Students could research the crash of the Celtic Tiger and discuss the impact this time may have had on families.



3. World of the Character

Divide the class into small groups. Ask pupils to create a mind map exploring: What life might be like for someone living in rural Ireland after the economic recession (job loss, community, pride, frustration, etc.) Prompt pupils with questions such as: What kinds of jobs might exist there? How might people feel about money, family, or the future? What social or emotional struggles could exist in a small town?



Reflect and Respond

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel.

1. Creative Rewriting Task

Students rewrite a short section of the extract from the father's point of view, or imagine a short interior monologue of what he might be thinking when Bobby visits. Prompt could be provided for those who need it: What might the father think or feel when Bobby visits him? Is he aware of Bobby's hatred, and how does he justify his own behaviour?

2. Class Debate: Victim or Villain?

Split the class into two sides:

- Side A: argues that Bobby is a victim of his father and of circumstance.
- Side B: argues that Bobby's bitterness and cruelty make him unsympathetic.

Allow time for preparation (using quotations), then short exchanges between sides.

3. Descriptive Essay

Ask pupils to write a descriptive essay that captures a decaying or changing place — a town, a home, or a landscape — and use it as a metaphor for human emotion or memory.

4. Speech/Talk

We've forgotten how to listen to people who feel left behind.

Give pupils the prompt above and have them write the text of a speech they would give to a youth or community group on the importance of empathy and understanding in modern society.

5. Short Story

Have pupils write a short story set in a small community where economic or social change has divided people. They should use first-person narration to reveal conflicting emotions or loyalties.

6. Personal Essay

Some people survive by growing hard; others by keeping their hearts open.

Give pupils the prompt above and have them write a personal essay discussing how people cope with loss, hardship, or disappointment. They should draw on their own experiences or observations.