



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

The Weight of Water by Sara Crossan

The Weight of Water by Sara Crossan is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Junior Cycle English Examination in 2026 and 2027.

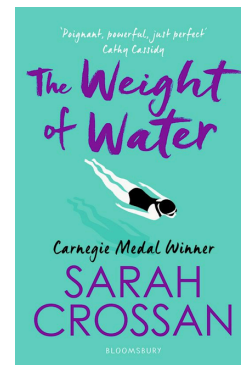


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Please note:

- 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 Weight of Water* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or 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)

Pre-reading Activities - Discussion Starters:

1. Exploring the title

Ask pupils to write the novel's title in the middle of their page. They should do a mind map of the connotations of the wording in the title. Based off this, in pairs they should discuss what they think the novel will be about.

2. Soundtrack starter

Ask students: If you had to choose one song to capture the feeling of moving to a new country, what would it be and why? Let a few share their choices and explain connections using lyrics from the song.

3. Identity web

Give each student a blank page with "Identity" in the middle. Around it, they jot down words/phrases that describe what makes up someone's identity (e.g., language, family, hobbies, religion, nationality). In small groups, compare webs and discuss: Which aspects of identity feel most important? Which might cause conflict when moving to a new culture?

4. Storytelling through poetry

Discuss with pupils what free-verse poetry is. Ask them why this style of poetry might lend itself to storytelling.

**Extract**

Background: this extract is from chapter one and two of the novel. The protagonist, Kasienka, and her mother arrive in the UK from Poland.

Leaving Gdańsk Główny

The wheels on the suitcase break
Before we've even left Gdańsk Główny.
Mama knocks them on some steps and
Bang, crack, rattle-
No more use.

There are
plastic bits
Everywhere.

It's hard for momma carrying a suitcase
And a bulging laundry bag.
It's hard for Mama with everyone watching.
She's shy about the laundry bag,
An old nylon one
Borrowed from Babcia.
Tata took all the good luggage
When he left us
When he walked out
On mama and me.
'There are clean clothes in it'
Mama reminds me like this were something
To be proud of.
And she won't let me carry a thing
Except
my own
small bag.

'You guard out passports, Kasienka.
Good girl, Kasienka.
And the money.
We'll need those pounds.
Mind the money and the passports.
Good girl, Kasienka.'

Mama prattles as I scuttle along
behind her
Dodging business suits and
backpacks.
There is no one to recognise Mama
In the crowded station.

But all the same, she is shy
About that laundry bag.

'Now keep close, Kasienka.
Keep close,'
Mama mutters as we leave Gdańsk Główny
And step aboard a bus for the airport.

While I cling to the belt of her coat,
Too old for holding hands,
Even if she had one free.

Stansted

We weren't on a ship.
Immigrants don't arrive on
Overcrowded boats anymore,
Swarming wet docks like rats.
It isn't 1920 and it isn't Ellis Island-
Nothing as romantic as a view of
Lady Liberty
To welcome us.

We flew into Stansted.
Not quite London
But near enough.

At immigration we queue
Nervously and practise English in our heads:
Yes-thank-you-officer.
I know I am not at home
When talking makes my tummy turn
And I rehearse what I say
Like lines from a play before opening my mouth.



Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

The following may be completed in written or oral format,
as individuals or as part of a group activity.

1. First impressions

After reading, ask students to create a short character profile of Kasienka or Mama including words to describe her personality, her feelings at this point in the story and evidence from the text. Students then compare their profiles in pairs seeing if they agree on how she comes across?

2. Verse style

Encourage students to consider how the style of this novel differs from others they have read. Guide them to work in pairs and highlight or list features of the verse style (short lines, white space, rhythm, simplicity etc.). Ask them to consider why the author has chosen this style to tell Kasienka's story?

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Story continuation

Guide students to working independently on developing the ending to chapter two based on how they imagine it playing out. Allow them to be as creative as possible while trying to keep to the verse style used by the author.

2. Big questions wall

Construct and put up a "Question Wall" with prompts:

- What does it mean to belong?
- Can you ever leave your past behind?

Allow students to write answers on sticky notes. Note that those just reading the extract can answer based on first impressions, while readers of the full novel can bring the whole novel's perspective. Provide time for the students to discuss the answers collectively as a class.

3. Techniques analysis

Guide students to find an example of where the author uses onomatopoeia and simile and annotate what it makes them think or feel. Direct students to write a paragraph analysing how Crossan uses language to create imagery for the reader.

4. Emotion exploration

Yield space for students to explore all of the emotions they see in the scene. Instruct students to work in pairs to find quotations to support each of these. Students then to use this to create a mood board or an illustration based on the first two chapters. They should explain their choices to their partner.