



## Exploring Senior Cycle Comparative Studies *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan

**Please note:** *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2025.

This opening extract and accompanying questions may be used to explore General Vision and Viewpoint and Cultural Context at Higher Level or Social Setting at Ordinary Level.



### Background to the novel:

*Small Things Like These* is set in the Irish town of New Ross, Co. Wexford in 1985. In a community controlled by the Catholic Church, coal and timber merchant Bill Furlong is faced with a crisis during the busiest time of the year. The following extract is taken from the opening of the novel.



*In October there were yellow trees. Then the clocks went back the hour and the long November winds came in and blew, and stripped the trees bare. In the town of New Ross, chimneys threw out smoke which fell away and drifted off in hairy, drawn-out strings before dispersing along the quays, and soon the River Barrow, dark as stout, swelled up with rain.*

*The people, for the most part, unhappily endured the weather: shop-keepers and tradesmen, men and women in the post office and the dole queue, the mart, the coffee shop and supermarket, the bingo hall, the pubs and the chipper all commented, in their own ways, on the cold and what rain had fallen, asking what was in it – and could there be something in it – for who could believe that there, again, was another raw-cold day? Children pulled their hoods up before facing out to school, while their mothers, so used now to ducking their heads and running to the clothesline, or hardly daring to hang anything out at all, had little faith in getting so much as a shirt dry before evening. And then the nights came on and the frosts took hold again, and blades of cold slid under doors and cut the knees off those who still knelt to say the rosary.*

*Down in the yard, Bill Furlong, the coal and timber merchant, rubbed his hands, saying if things carried on as they were, they would soon need a new set of tyres for the lorry.*





## Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons or as part of a unit of learning
- Students may wish to complete some tasks individually or in pairs/groups
- Tasks might be completed orally and/or in written format
- Students may also wish to engage in a think, pair, share activity for some tasks.



### Support your answers with reference to the text.

- In your opinion, what is the atmosphere in the opening scene? How does this impact on us as readers?
- Is the general vision of life optimistic, pessimistic or both?
- What view of family is given? Is the family atmosphere nurturing or is it dysfunctional?
- What view of society does the author offer us as readers?

