

Activity 3: Close Study of *The Children's Bach* by Helen Garner

Sentence structure, rhythm, meaning and identification of point-of-view

In this activity, students analyse Extracts A-D and:

1. Identify and distinguish between simple, compound and complex sentences using the colour code suggested.
2. Make between six and nine analytical/evaluative comments regarding the use of sentence structures and the third person omniscient point-of view, using Word's track changes feature.

The sample extract is provided here to support you.

SAMPLE EXTRACT: Philip visits Athena. a) simple sentences in blue; b) compound sentences in green; and c) complex sentences in orange.

He should have rung up first, **but** he didn't have the number **or** the last name, **and** anyway that was the way he did things. The back of the house was shabby, **and** the jasmine, whose smell he remembered from the night visit, seemed the only thing holding it together, **but** someone had already been working in the garden **and** had left neat piles of weeds all along the path to the lavatory. A row of children's tracksuit pants, frayed **and** dripping, hung on the line, **and** the bins stood with bricks on their lids at the foot of the concrete steps. All the doors **and** windows were open.

He made a lot of noise going in, to warn her, **but** the music - an orchestra, a cello - was on so loudly that she wouldn't have known if an army had marched in the back door. The passage was cool; a telephone sat on the lino. He stopped at the door through which the music poured. She was lying on her back on the floor with her eyes shut, her knees bent **and** her arms spread out. One foot kept the beat **and** her torso **and** her head rolled from side to side. Her face flickered **and** blurred like that of someone making love: a laugh relaxed into a smile, then into vagueness as her head turned; she took a gasp of air **and** let it out, **and** all the while she rolled in time to the music, small rolls this way **and** that, as if she were floating on the water **and** being lightly bobbed by a current.

He turned **and** walked quickly back to the kitchen, **and** sat on a chair **and** waited. The piano was open **but** he did not touch it straight away. He was holding his breath with embarrassment **and** curiosity.

Sample extract: Philip visits Athena –insert between 6 and 9 comments for either of the following: a) sentence structure; b) evidence of their person omniscient narrator

He should have rung up first, **but** he didn't have the number **or** the last name, **and** anyway that was the way he did things. The back of the house was shabby, **and** the jasmine, whose smell he remembered from the night visit, seemed the only thing holding it together, **but** someone had already been working in the garden **and** had left neat piles of weeds all along the path to the lavatory. A row of children's tracksuit pants, frayed **and** dripping, hung on the line, **and** the bins stood with bricks on their lids at the foot of the concrete steps. All the doors **and** windows were open.

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He turned **and** walked quickly back to the kitchen, **and** sat on a chair **and** waited. The piano was open **but** he did not touch it straight away. He was holding his breath **with** embarrassment **and** curiosity.

Rosie Kerin 6/5/2015 12:18 AM

Comment [1]: Compound sentence follows his logic, justifying why he is turning up to see Athena unannounced.

Rosie Kerin 6/5/2015 12:13 AM

Comment [2]: Evidence of omniscient narrator (POV)

Rosie Kerin 6/5/2015 1:02 AM

Comment [3]: This complex sentence provides a detailed description of the garden, with a side reference to his memory of the scent on his last visit - significant because this was when it became apparent that he and Athena were attracted to each other. (Might also be regarded as compound-complex)

Rosie Kerin 6/5/2015 12:14 AM

Comment [4]: Simple sentence focuses emphasis on openness of house as he enters without knocking

Rosie Kerin 6/5/2015 1:04 AM

Comment [5]: This is an example of a compound sentence created by combining two clauses (simple sentences) with a semi-colon.

Rosie Kerin 8/5/2015 6:48 PM

Comment [6]: This complex sentence captures the detail he takes in with his gaze. It creates intimacy and a strong sense of his interest in Athena.

Rosie Kerin 8/5/2015 6:47 PM

Comment [7]: Compound sentence with a string of actions, almost as if he is a child, suggests he is vulnerable and this is strengthened in the remainder of the paragraph with use of the words 'did not touch' and 'embarrassment'.

Rosie Kerin 8/5/2015 6:47 PM

Comment [8]: This is a simple sentence. The use of a simple sentence that echoes the notion of the breath being held - short and controlled.

Rosie Kerin 6/5/2015 12:12 AM

Comment [9]: Evidence of omniscient narrator (POV)

Extract A: Vicki moves out of Elizabeth's and in with the Fox family (pp. 58-59)

So Vicki came to live with the Fox family at Bunker Street. They moved the junk out of the small room behind the kitchen; it overlooked the vegetable garden and the shed and the rabbit's cage and the Hills Hoist and the European trees, thick with new leaves that grew along the banks of the Merri Creek. Athena and Vicki painted the room yellow. 'It'll be like a chicken in an egg,' said Vicki. Elizabeth thought the yellow was rather ochreous, but in her relief she kept her opinion to herself. She went home on the tram and was surprised to find a small lack in herself, a blankness where the unwelcome responsibility had been. She flung the pink quilt out to air over the windowsill and went into the city to buy herself a pair of shoes.

Early in the morning Vicki lay with the striped sheet over her nose. Billy was on the loose in the house, a forlorn seeker. Her stamped and shuffled down the hallway, in and out of rooms. He puffed and hummed as he went, he tested his voice in a series of light screams, he lapsed again into his grieving, wailing cries. He stopped outside her door. She lay still. He laughed under his breath and shoved at the door with his shoulder, grunted and gave a breathy screech, and wandered away again on dragging feet towards the room where his parents would be sitting up in their big bed reading like two figures in a tomb.

Extract B: Dexter is back from Sydney and arrives at the swimming pool (pp. 129-130)

The afternoon changed its colour. The wind dropped, people raised hands to their eyes, the screaming children paused for breath, the water flattened and turned brassy. Dexter paid at the turnstile and ploughed through the herd of dripping midgets.

'Here's Dad!' shrilled Arthur.

There was no one with him. She must be at home, getting the tea ready or taking clothes off the line before it started to rain. Vicki saw Dexter scoop up Arthur in his arms, saw Arthur struggle to be put down, panicking lest his friends see his father treat him like a baby. She kept her hand round Billy's wrist and waited for news. Dexter seemed to be coming very slowly towards her, with the twisting boy in his arms. People were scrambling out of the water and running away to their towels. The remaining heads, breaking the slate's meniscus, looked like the victims of a massacre...

...He came up the steep concrete levels to the wall against which she sat, and put Arthur neatly back on his feet. The boy was red: he hitched up his bathers and turned his back. The dry wind gasped and began again. The girl and the man stared at each other. Dexter's eyes seemed to have darkened and fallen back into his head. Something important is happening in this family, thought Vicki, and I am part of it now, whether I like it or not.

Extract C: Athena returns home (pp. 160-162)

She walked down the sideway. The car was not there. There was nobody home. The windows were closed, the kitchen was airless, the bathroom floor was flooded, the sink was greasy, the table was piled with papers and dirty plates, the rubbish bin overflowed in the corner, and pizza boxes, screwed into stiff wands, lay around it. Athena put down her bag and walked from door to door. In Vicki's room she smelled vomit. The children's room was still warm. The big bedroom had been stripped and the mattress was half off its base.

She opened the front door and sat down on the step. The cement was dry and already hot. She watched ants crawling over the hose. She noticed that the window panes of the house opposite reflected events which were not taking place in the quiet street: the passing of trucks, of a car, of a bunch of cyclists. She thought carefully about this, turning her head, and worked out that the house-front opposite must be tilted at such an angle that its windows reflected the highway half a mile away, behind her own house, beyond the creek.

She got up and started work.

She opened every window and every door. She carried the newspapers and the pizza boxes down to the bottom of the yard and lit a fire in the incinerator. She turned on the taps of the washing machine and poked the sheets down into the water. She stood in the rubbish bins, trampled their contents down, and lugged them up to the street for tomorrow's collection. She filled a bucket with boiling water and scrubbed the hardened food dribbles off the cupboard doors. She washed, she washed, she washed. She tended the incinerator, and when the fire burned low, she kept it going with hunks of wormy timber off the disused rabbit cage. She plunged her hands into the lavatory and carved its stains away. She mopped the kitchen floor and covered it with sheets of newspaper. She got down on her hands and knees and scraped the mould out of the shower and tugged clumps of hair out of the plughole. She emptied the fridge and set a pan of boiling water inside its ice-clogged freezer.

Extract D: Nominate your own passage.

Select a passage somewhere between the lengths of Extract A and Extract C, type it out in the same format. Colour code and analyse the passage, consistent with the samples provided above.

Enter your selected extract providing page numbers for reference.