

Assessment task 2 (Receptive): Formal literary essay

'Helen Garner creates family relationships and homes that appear mundane, yet under the surface ripples begin to emerge suggesting that those characters are lurching toward pain or regret.'

Discuss this statement, drawing on your knowledge and understanding of *The Children's Bach*, as well as the following extracts from other works by Helen Garner.

Your essay must be between 750 and 1,000 words.

The assessment rubric should be consulted before commencing the essay, ensuring criteria are addressed and word limits observed

Extracts from Garner's work for use in Assessment task 2

From *Monkey Grip* (Helen Garner, 1977)

In the old brown house on the corner, a mile from the middle of the city, we ate bacon for breakfast every morning of our lives. There were never enough chairs for us all to sit up at the meal table; one or two of us always sat on the floor or on the kitchen step, plate on knee. It never occurred to us to teach the children to eat with a knife and fork. It was hunger and all sheer function: the noise, and clashing of plates, and people chewing with their mouths open, and talking, and laughing. Oh, I was happy then. At night our back yard smelt like the country.

It was early summer.

And everything, as it always does, began to heave and change.

It wasn't as if I didn't already have somebody to love. There was Martin, teetering as many were that summer on the dizzy edge of smack, but who was as much a part of our household as any outsider could be. He slept very still in my bed, jumped up with the kids in the early morning, bore with my crankiness and fits of wandering heart. But he went up north for a fortnight and idly, at the turning of the year, I fell in love with our friend Javo, the bludger, just back from getting off dope in Hobart: I looked at his burnt skin and scarred nose and violently blue eyes. We sat together in the theatre, Gracie on my knee. He put his hand to the back of my head. We looked at each other, and would have gone home together without a word being spoken; but on our way out of the theatre we met Martin rushing in, back from Disaster Bay. Decorously, Javo got on his bike and rode home.

From [Penguin Books](#)

From *Postcards from Surfers* (Helen Garner, 1985)

He selects a serrated knife from the magnetised holder on the kitchen wall and quickly and skilfully, at the bench, makes himself a thick sandwich. He works with powerful concentration: when the meat flaps off the slice of bread, he rounds it up with a large, dramatic scooping movement and a sympathetic grimace of the lower lip. He picks up the sandwich in two hands, raises it to his mouth and takes a large bite. While he chews he breathes heavily through his nose.

'Want to make yourself something?' he says with his mouth full.

I stand up. He pushes the loaf of bread towards me with the back of his hand. He puts the other half of his sandwich on a green bread and butter plate and carries it to the table. He sits with his elbows on the pine wood, his knees wide apart, his belly relaxing on to his thighs, his high-arched, long-boned feet planted on the tiled floor. He eats, and gazes out to sea. The noise of his eating fills the room.

My mother and Auntie Lorna come up from the beach. I stand inside the wall of glass and watch them stop at the tap to hose the sand off their feet before they cross the grass to the door. They are two old women: they have to keep one hand on the tap in order to balance on the left foot and wash the right. I see that they are two old women, and yet they are neither young nor old. They are my mother and Auntie Lorna, two institutions. They slide back the wire door, smiling.

'Don't tramp sand everywhere,' says my father from the table.

They take no notice. Auntie Lorna kisses me, and holds me at arms' length with her head on one side. My mother prepares food and we eat, looking out at the water.

From [Penguin Books](#)

From *This House of Grief* (Helen Garner, 2014)

Farquharson between his guards was weeping soundlessly, without shame, his mouth gaping, his eyes locked on hers. A great knotted current of agony surged back and forth between the dock and the witness stand: a flood of terrible compassion. Something was happening to Gambino's voice. It dissolved, it thickened, it throbbed and took on colour; it rose and fell in octaves, like a chant. "It was dark. It was so dark. I was running up and down the paddock, trying to ring 000, but I was so hysterical I couldn't press the numbers properly. Stephen was in the water. Rob was standing in front of the car with his arms crossed. He was soaking wet. He wasn't doing anything. He was like in a trance."

All Farquharson's barrister Peter Morrissey wanted from Gambino, in cross-examination, was her assurance — which she gave earnestly and without hesitation — that Farquharson had loved his children very deeply. He was such a softie with them that the role of disciplinarian had fallen to her.

Gambino left the stand with a wad of wet -tissues held to her cheek. As she stumbled towards the exit, Farquharson's head swung to follow her, and I caught the full blast of his distress. His face was ravaged, beseeching: his teeth bared, his cheeks streaming. The doors thumped shut behind her. Masonry, glass and timber could not muffle the rending sobs and cries that echoed in the cold hall outside.

From [The Australian, 16 August 2014](#)