

## Task for The Garret: Don Watson

### Activity 4: 'Hellcat, 12, locked away' article

The purpose of this activity is to analyse a newspaper article using the Appraisal system. The article titled 'Hellcat, 12, locked away' and the accompanying photograph can be found on page 149 of *English Elements 4* (2004).

The following is a summary of the article, which is about a young girl who was finally imprisoned after being arrested 40 times during what is described as a 'year-long crime wave.' To the right of the headline is a photograph showing the girl throwing a brick through a shop-front.

This article appeared in the Brisbane *Sunday Mail* on 26 January, 2003, even though the original crimes were committed in Bristol in the United Kingdom. The *Sunday Mail* later recycled a modified version of this story as part of its law and order campaign against what it described as 'child outlaws' in Queensland. The ABC program *Media Watch* exposed this tactic by the *Sunday Mail* on 14 June, 2004.

The article is structured as a typical newspaper story, a series of one-sentence paragraphs.

- Paragraphs 1–3 detail some of the girl's previous criminal behaviour. The writer, Sinead McIntyre, uses the judgemental words 'hellcat', 'thug' and 'notorious' to refer to the girl.
- Paragraphs 4–7 describe the girl's court appearance and give more information about her offences. The language is more objective but readers are told that the girl 'was brought handcuffed' to court. Readers are also told that the girl's mother and her husband have travelled to the court hearing from Bristol where they live in a 'smart, three-bedroom, terraced house'. The relevance of this information is not clear; perhaps the writer wants to suggest that the girl comes from a 'good home' but has wilfully turned her back on it.
- Paragraphs 8–9 detail more of the girl's crimes against property ('smashed the window of a house') and police ('leaving him bleeding and needing stitches').
- Paragraphs 10–14 tell readers that the girl had previously been sent to a home in north Wales for 'difficult children'. The writer now reveals that the girl is mentally impaired ('a mental age of eight') and 'suffers psychiatric problems'.
- Paragraphs 15–16 explain that the girl's mother first took her to a psychiatrist when she was two years old and that the girl needs 'medical help'.
- Paragraphs 17–18 refer to the magistrate's judgement that the girl should be imprisoned to protect the public and to give assistance to the girl.
- Paragraph 19 explains that the girl will be released in six months.