

Task for *The Simple Gift*

Reading and engaging with the text

Chapter	Questions on content	Questions and activities on language
1. Champagne Billy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Billy feel towards his home and neighbourhood? How do you know this? • What makes Wentworth Creek special to Billy? • Describe Billy's experience of running away from home on the freight train. • Consider the poems 'Keep warm', 'Men' and 'Sport', comparing the way Ernie and Billy's father are represented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically, a list of adjectives should be punctuated using commas. However, in 'Longlands Road' there is an absence of commas in the line, 'I throw one rock on the roof of each...' What is the effect of this choice? • The first poem to include a perspective other than Billy's is 'Keep Warm' by Ernie. What do the speech marks indicate about this poem compared to all the others in the chapter? • Explain how Herrick uses contrasting imagery in 'Wentworth High School' and 'Westfield Creek' to paint a picture of Billy's education. • Most poems in this chapter are written in present tense, which gives the reader the feeling that they are journeying with Billy as he leaves Bendarat. However, one poem serves as a flashback to Billy's childhood. Account for the placement of the flashback within the sequence of poems. • Notice that the first and last poem in this chapter include notes. What effect do these notes have on the way each poem is read?

<p>2. Bendarat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does it surprise you that Billy heads to the library of Bendarat? Justify your response. • How does Billy cope with being homeless? • Draw a map of Bendarat based on Billy's recounting of his experience in this chapter. • How do Billy's initial encounters in this new place compare with his final encounters in Wentworthville? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Dawn is fog-closed and cold.' How does the first line in the poem 'Bendarat' function as a symbol for Billy's entrance to the new town? • There is a striking absence of stanzas in many of the poems in this text. However, 'The Librarian' stands in contrast to this. What is the effect of having multiple stanzas in this poem and what does it reveal about this initial experience in Bendarat? • After the interaction in 'The Librarian', all subsequent poems in this chapter begin with the personal pronoun 'I' or the possessive 'I'm'. Consider the opening lines in 'Lunch', 'The Motel Bendarat', 'Night' and 'Eating Out' and explain what image of Billy emerges.
<p>3. Caitlin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose three words to describe the persona of Caitlin. Provide an explanation of why you chose those words by using evidence from the poems in this chapter. • Explain how our expectations are subverted in relation to 'hunger' in the poem of the same name. 'Now I'm a normal seventeen-year-old girl.' Do you think Caitlin's claim is accurate? Consider the reflections on being a teenager from the initial activities completed in this unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first time we hear from Caitlin is in the poem 'Caitlin and mopping'. Note all the repeated words and the frequency of their use. What image of Caitlin emerges from the frequency of repetition in this poem? • Isolate all the language Billy uses to describe Caitlin in the poem 'Billy'. What do you notice about his words and what does this tell you about his initial impressions of Caitlin? • Explain the effect of the formatting of the text and the placement of the business card in 'Business'.

<p>4. The hobo hour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the way that Billy recounts the initial encounters with Old Bill shape our perspective of Old Bill’s character? • What are the parallels between Old Bill and the town of Bendarat? • Describe the developing relationships between Billy and Old Bill, and Caitlin and Billy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the average word length of lines in the poem ‘The hobo hour’? What is the cumulative effect of successive short lines? In your answer, consider the time that passes between the start of the poem and the end. • Typically, the poems in this text explore the thoughts and experiences of a particular persona. In ‘Rich town’ Billy recounts Old Bill’s words. What is achieved by this choice? • Account for Billy’s use of present continuous verbs in describing his dream in ‘Before my time’. • Explain the metaphoric use of ‘fragile’ in ‘Too early’. • There are a number of poetic devices used in the poem ‘Bendarat River’. Why is this unusual to see and why do you think it is evident in this particular poem? • What is achieved by the repeated use of ‘and’ at the beginning of many of the lines in ‘Happen’?
<p>5. Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare the experience of working at the cannery from Old Bill and Billy’s points of view. • Explain what is meant by the paradox ‘with nothing, you’re rich’. • What does Caitlin’s recount of her lunchtime conversation with her friends reveal about the teenage experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine Old Bill’s language in ‘That bloody kid’. How does it communicate his vulnerability? • There is vivid imagery in the poem ‘My hands’. Write down words or phrases that appeal to each sense. What does the language demonstrate about the experience? • Explain how Caitlin’s frustration is communicated through the poem ‘Caitlin’.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is Old Bill’s vulnerability shown in ‘Truth and Beauty’, ‘Old Bill’s Fall’ and ‘The House’? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at the organisation of the lines and stanzas in both ‘Lunchtime’ and ‘Grateful’. In what ways does the formatting reflect the moment experienced by the girls? Contrast the words that describe the way food and drink are consumed in ‘The picnic’ and ‘Truth and beauty’. What is revealed about Caitlin and Old Bill respectively? Explain the different effects in using the noun ‘fall’ in the title of the poem, and the continuous verb ‘falling’ in the line ‘and I’ve been falling ever since.’
6. Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What aspects of the teenager experience are communicated through the poems from Caitlin’s point of view? How can the reader tell that the friendship between Billy and Old Bill is getting stronger? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does contrast function in the poem ‘Comfort’? Comment on Caitlin’s use of sarcasm in the poems ‘Dinner’ and ‘The weekend off’.
7. The simple gift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is Caitlin so ashamed? What is the simple gift? Why does Billy purchase ginger beer? There are several accounts of people eating meals in this chapter. From your perspective, which meal has the greatest impact on the trajectory of the journey of the three characters? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In ‘The shadows’ Caitlin observes a moment of interaction between Billy and Old Bill. What is achieved by itemising each moment of the interaction in successive lines, i.e. ‘and Billy’s pouring coffee / and giving it to the man...’? How does Caitlin’s language in ‘The afternoon off’ demonstrate her sense of disappointment? What does the simile ‘as though he was visiting the moon’ reveal about Old Bill? What is achieved by the repetition of ‘It was like stepping into heaven’ in the poem ‘Heaven’?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you notice about the language in ‘Making love’? • This chapter is dominated by Caitlin’s voice, as evidenced by the number of poems from her point of view. What effect does this have on our understanding of the chapter?
8. Closing in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what Old Bill shares in the poem ‘Old Bill and this town’. How has his outlook shifted? • What situation disrupts the sense of stability Billy has established in Bendarat? • To whom and what does ‘So obvious and simple and so unbearably painful’ refer to? • Why does Old Bill say ‘I felt pride’ in the poem ‘Near’? • Even though Old Bill and Billy lie to authorities, the reader feels a sense of triumph in their ability to fool the welfare worker. Why is this so? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the effect of repeating the statement at the start and end of the poem ‘Nothing’s easy’. • How does Old Bill’s language paint a picture of him as a father in the poem ‘Old Bill’s long walk’? • How does the use of alternating points of view build anticipation in this chapter? • Old Bill describes a memory of his deceased daughter Jessie in the poem ‘To help people’. How is his language delicate? • Why is war used as a metaphor in the poem ‘War’ by Caitlin? • How effective are simple conjunctions such as ‘but’, ‘because’ and ‘and’ at communicating the internal struggles experienced by Old Bill in ‘Near’ and ‘All that knowledge’? • What do you notice about the pronouns in ‘Old Bill’s plan’?
9. Locks and keys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does Billy do after leaving the welfare office? • Why does Old Bill keep his hands in his pockets? • How does Herrick depict Old Bill as a father figure in this chapter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this chapter, Old Bill, Billy and Caitlin come to terms with life-changing news. Choose one of the poems from this chapter and experiment with the line breaks to enhance the drama of the moment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I reach behind for Billy's hand / and we walk inside.' Could the text have successfully ended at this point? Would you have been satisfied with this ending? 	
10. Old Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the project Old Bill decides to complete? • Why do Billy and Caitlin walk through Old Bill's house 'carefully, quiet, like in a museum'? • What lie does Caitlin tell her mum? • What meal do Billy and Caitlin consume in their first night at the house? • This chapter contains many images of domesticated adult life. Do these match your expectations for how Billy's journey would end? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the line breaks and description in the poem 'Measure' reflect the way Caitlin and Billy explore the house? • What is the effect of including the height marking names and dates? • Explain how the effect of the line 'I love Billy and I'm sure of him' would be different if 'him' was changed to 'it'. • Superlative adjectives are used to indicate the upper and lower limits of quality, e.g. best medicine, worst outfit. In the poem 'The best meal' how does the description of the meal experience support the judgment that it was the 'best meal'?
11. The hobo sky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does Billy vow to visit his carriage once a week? • How does Irene help Billy in this chapter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Billy's reflective mood communicated through the language in the poem 'Midnight'? • How does the imagery in the poem 'Respect' paint an idyllic suburban lifestyle? • Explain the significance of the recurring imagery of the Weetbix and milk breakfast scene. • How appropriate is the symbol of the sky in the closing poem of the chapter and text as a whole?