

External assessment 2022

Stimulus book

English & Literature Extension

General instruction

- Work in this book will not be marked.

Stimulus 1

Zooplankton

I am Charlie's DVD copy of *Gi-Ants 3: The Beekeepers Return*. I am made from polycarbonate, pressed into a precise dual-layer mould that stores 7.8 GB of data. The microscopic grooves on the surface of my disc include the feature film, a director's commentary (which nobody really listens to for an animated movie) and a silly music video that has the animated characters singing karaoke to '80s pop hits.

But really, I should start at the beginning. Before I was heated polycarbonate goo, I was crude oil that was dredged from sand in Alberta, Canada. Really, if you want to go back even further, you could trace my history to the algae and zooplankton that died in the ocean millions of years ago.

But I'm going off-track. I became a 'thing' in the eyes of people when I was pressed into DVD shape and sold at a supermarket. There are hundreds of thousands of other copies just like me.

After being purchased by Charlie's mum for \$19.99, I was ceremoniously shoved into a Christmas stocking in 2004. Charlie (then seven years old) seemed happy with my existence; although there was a lot of other plastic he received on that same day, so it took a while for him to fully acknowledge me.

Charlie's mum suggested he watch me in the dying days of the summer holidays. 'Watch that DVD I bought you instead of kicking your brother!' she yelled, her hair a little frazzled.

Charlie and his younger brother, Darius, seemed pretty engaged with me during that first viewing. They watched the movie the whole way through, with only the occasional pause to resume the kicking war that had defined the summer. At one stage, their father joined them, and then Mum too, and a few chuckles were had. Then back to the shelf next to the DVD player I went. There were one or two viewings over the next year, but Charlie would lose interest halfway through.

I was moved to the bookshelf in Charlie's room during a cleanout two years later. His mum carried me up and placed me between a superhero sticker book that had all of its stickers still inside, and a plastic mini-keyboard. Charlie didn't seem to notice I was moved there, because I stayed untouched for three more years.

I was donated to an op shop with a bunch of other DVDs, toys and video games by Charlie's mum during the massive cleanup of 2012. The plastic cracked and slapped as it jostled in a large black garbage bag used to carry us all. We were sorted, priced and placed on shelves. This time I was \$3.50. Woo-hoo. I had a few scratches and DVDs weren't really as popular. I sat with my plastic brethren (some of us go way back, to the zooplankton days) ready to be reused by another family.

Tina was a four-year-old girl who watched me on repeat on her portable DVD player for pretty much all of November 2012. I had never felt this ... needed ... in all my life. But my scratches got the best of me, and unfortunately the portable DVD player did not have the sufficient technological rigour to play me without skipping. Tina moved on to a different disc.

And I was back at the charity shop. Now it was 2015, and no one really used DVDs anymore. I was placed on the shelf one last time; my new price was 50 cents. I was purchased, but my new home spent more time using streaming media than any DVDs. Perhaps that meant less of the ancient goo of algae and zooplankton needed to be used, which made me happy. I didn't ask to be a DVD after all. But I noticed this family bought a lot of other plastic things — new phones every year, encased in plastic and glass.

Next stop ... landfill. Okay, well there were a few steps involved and I'm simplifying things. My new owners (I didn't bother to learn their names since it was only a short stay and they never bothered to watch the film) tried to do the right thing. They placed me in the recycle bin. I thought that meant that I would be broken down into microplastics, retreated, reheated and recycled into coffee pods or something like it. At least, I would be useful again. That's what everyone thinks is what happens in recycling, right?

Well ... not quite. It's always more complicated than that. All of the cardboard and plastic accompanying me was sorted this way or that way. It turns out that my plastic-coated paper artwork could be broken down and recycled. The disc? Smashed into little pieces. The case? Same. But these little pieces ... well they couldn't be reused. A couple of issues: not enough recycling centres, too much plastic to process, the plastic grade deteriorates quite a bit through recycling, and there aren't enough products using those lower-grade plastics. So, it was time to be sent to the earth again. This time as landfill.

I was smashed together with other former-ancient organisms. A sea of hard plastic compacted together. A large pit was dug from the ground, and we were dumped inside. The pit was sealed, because otherwise there could be adverse affects on the surrounding environment. Cool, I thought. At least I won't hurt anyone. But that also means I will stay this way forever. No exposure to the elements, no chance to biodegrade (even though the company said my parts were biodegradable). Stuck here forever.

I could have been so many things, but instead I was a DVD. I wonder if I was really needed in the first place. I could have just had a happier life as the ghost of fossils, deep in the sands of Alberta. Perhaps.

Stimulus 2

Too Clever By Half

Kane's entrance to the office was predictably late, loud, and clouded by cigarette smoke. 'Ladies. Hope you're well. Bit of sunlight out there for once it seems.'

As ever, Wendy spoke her mind without delay. 'What's this then, with the typewriters changing overnight? Not enough to keep you busy, Mr Kane, you have to invent new ways to slow us down?'

Kane laughed, 'Wendy, it's called a contract renewal. Those previous typewriters were leased, my dear, and our contract with a new company began today. I had the wherewithal to do it after hours so your day wasn't wasted, but no thanks for the boss I suppose.'

Wendy's eyes soured in reply while a 'hmpf' escaped her lips.

Kane turned his attention to Edith, who was already typing the financial logs of a new client. 'Can I have a word with you in my office dear?'

Edith coughed nervously as she sat at Kane's desk.

'Edith, I'll cut straight to it. I worry that perhaps you are too clever for secretarial work at an accountancy firm.' He contemplated through a wistful puff of another cigarette.

Clever. Edith knew the way that word could be weaponised, all too suddenly, to connote agendas and manipulations. Witches were once called 'clever'.

'I enjoy my work,' Edith said coolly.

'Indeed. You never make an ounce of fuss.' Kane's eyes tightened. 'Take this typewriter nonsense as an example. I'd half expect Wendy will be talking about it a decade from now, as the Great Scandal of 1961 and direct evidence of the corporate masters not knowing who does the real bloody work around here. But I won't hear a peep from you.'

Edith could sense the shadowed coding of Kane's compliments. 'I'm rather unsure of what you are alluding to, Mr Kane.'

'All kinds of information comes through this agency. Government contracts, business dealings ... accountants are entrusted with a responsibility to keep information protected.'

Edith couldn't fathom what the correct reply would be to Kane's stream of consciousness, so she remained tight-lipped.

'What can you tell me about the typewriters, Edith?'

Edith's sentences were being crafted, word-at-a-time. She stuttered, 'Well yesterday we had the Thompson & Sons typewriters, which were sometimes prone to ribbon jamming, and today you've replaced them with ...'

'Some of the typewriters were bugged, recording what was typed. Yours was one. Explain yourself, Edith.' Kane's eyes pierced through the haze of smoke.

She coughed again, nervously. 'Sir I haven't the foggiest idea, but that sounds awful. Bugged by whom?'

'That is a matter for the authorities to investigate. I suppose they should like to talk with you as well soon. But I wanted to offer you a chance to come clean to me before you face more serious consequences. They will be lenient if you cooperate, my dear.'

Edith winced. 'You cannot mean that I ...'

'You can be coy and clever till the sun goes down ... it won't get you anywhere. You never attend work parties, we don't know a shred about you besides what is on the payroll, and the other girls say you're very ...'

cold. And the typewriters clinch it. It adds up to something.'

Edith considered that no option available to her would convince Kane that she was not a spy. The way she had simply gone about her life appeared now to Kane (or should she say, Hansel) as a breadcrumb trail leading towards a witch.

'I suppose I would like to speak with the authorities, then, rather than you,' she offered defiantly. 'I imagine they'll be here any moment.'

'Too clever by half,' Kane said. He lit another cigarette. Edith was clever enough, actually. She knew that if there was corporate espionage, or leaking of government contracts to foreign agents, then it would be far too subtle for someone like Kane to pinpoint. He wouldn't even understand the layers of double agents and deep cover.

There was a knock at the door. Wendy cracked it open, and fresh oxygen poured in. 'Mr Kane, there are some government agents here to see you. Shall I let them in?'

Edith took the opportunity to remove herself as the trench coats entered.

Edith had been ignoring Wendy's incessant pleading about what was going on for more than an hour. She tapped away on the typewriter, watching Kane's door. Finally it opened, and the agents exited.

Kane ushered the two men through the corridor of desks with a jovial chuckle to his voice. 'All a bit of a mix-up, I suppose, but better to be safe than sorry, I always say.'

The men echoed his chuckle. The other women joined with Wendy and Edith's inquisitive voyeurism.

The two agents and Kane seemed aware of the eyes following them. Hands were shaken, and Kane turned towards his office after one last chortle. Eyes began to turn back to their work. But then Wendy caught a wink from one of the agents as he left. She returned it, nodded, and went back to typing.

Stimulus 3

Wobbly

There's a strange but kind of beautifully awkward moment that happens when you spot someone famous. Especially if you're a fan. The double take hits suddenly across your face and there's a stupor about you. Lips part slightly, but out of sync, as you slur and murmur while tapping at the person beside you. You look wobbly.

I seem to collect these moments.

In 2003 it was at the Park Westlin Hotel. There I was, lathered in sunscreen and resplendent in my holiday swimwear, pushing a nonsensically large pram with chatty toddlers towards the elevator. The Vasilakis family was ready to head to the pool for our morning swim.

'Don't hurt your brother, George!' I said while looking in the pram pockets for a mint.

The elevator doors popped and there she was. Melody Rhode. Big sunglasses, big hat, small beach towel, smaller bag. She looked simultaneously immaculate and low-key. Even through her sunnies I could tell we'd locked eyes and she knew she'd been recognised. And the slow-motion dance began. Like a clown on roller skates holding a tray of fine china, my body quavered back and forth. I was prevaricating whether I should act cool and pretend I didn't recognise her, or genially bow and acknowledge that a presence like hers *owns* this elevator and I'd humbly take the next one.

Instead of choosing either, I fumbled and slurred a half-spoken 'Oh hello' as I hurled the oversize toddler truck into the lift. It either took 10 seconds or a year, I can't quite remember, but I can remember Melody smiled at me and my boys.

These were the days before smartphones, you see. My little mobile was only good for playing the *Ladders* game or making a call. Selfies didn't exist and asking for an autograph on the only paper I had around me (a tatty old *All the Goss* magazine) felt too cheap for Australian music royalty.

What was the appropriate thing to do? Afford the queen silence.

'BOYS!' I yelled. 'Shush, Tom!' I thought maybe the cacophony of little child vocalisations would somehow upset Melody's aura. She'd clearly come to this hotel to relax. How *dare* they talk about *Puddle Penguin*. Of course, this hallucination was solely in my mind, because the regal goddess beside me kept smiling at the boys.

How can lifts take this long? Did we enter a time warp? Is saying 'hello' going to ruin her day? Should I belt out her tune *Under My Stars* and hope she joins in? How can it be we're down to level seven already?

'Love your music,' I said like a giddy schoolgirl. Internally I was mocking myself. What a stupid thing to say. She beamed with the same kind of radiance in her music videos. 'Oh, thank you so much.' Of course she was like this. Her grace was beyond the clumsiness of my mere mortal mum mumbling.

'Your sons are adorable! This hotel has a great pool,' she said. I *died*. That she could lie so beautifully. Of course my sons were adorable but they were also hellish monsters at that age, and Melody Rhode just chose to see the good.

I said thank you, told her I listened to her third album on repeat every single night when I was 18, and that I would never be able to forget this day in my life. It was embarrassing.

In 2019 it was at a hotel, again. I guess it's where celebrities congregate, but you never really think it will be *your* hotel. I'd flown up to see George ... he was settling into a new job. I decided I'd have a nice sit-and-scroll on my phone in the hotel lounge while I waited for George to pick me up for dinner.

I'd like to think that as I've grown older I've become more cool, calm, collected. Ha! One second of spotting a celebrity and I was a gawky fangirl again.

I was in my dinner dress, waiting to drift down to the lobby, feeling fabulous. The elevator doors popped open and there he was. Alright, off the socials and still fabulous; he wasn't in performance mode yet. Oh the stream-of-consciousness word vomit had a hold of me again. Mihika Acharya, influencer superstar extraordinaire was standing in front of me. Of course, I recognise him because that's the way Mihika's style tutorials always begin.

No pram this time, no frizzy hair and daggy swimsuit. In fact, I looked all dolled up and Mihika was just in jeans and a T-shirt. But that didn't stop the same sensation. The weightlessness. The clown inside of me slowing down and speeding up at the same time. Eye contact. My pulse raced and what I wanted to do was just wildly gush over how much I loved him. Wait until Tom hears about this!

My phone was in my hands, itching with possibility. Awkward silence and silly little elevator smiles.

Would I dare ask? How was this happening again? Have I not matured at all?

'You're incredible!' I blurt. 'I'm sorry.'

'Thank you honey. *You* are incredible. You look amazing!'

I *died*. 'Oh thank you so much. I've learned so much about styling from you. My son Tom and I love watching your videos ... your music, your tutorials. He's not going to believe me.'

'Well let's take care of that! How about a selfie?'

Radiance. Grace. And I'm still just a mere, mortal, mumbling mum. 'Oh, I ... that would be incredible!'

'What's your name, hun?'

'Sophia.'

He kindly took my phone and set us up for a selfie as the elevator descended. 'Well, Sophia, you are a star.' He snapped the selfie as he said his iconic catchphrase, 'Shine, baby, shine!' Then, to my surprise, he hit the video record button. 'Hi Tom, it's Mihika Acharya, your favourite stylist, just chilling with your amazing mum, Sophia! Come and see one of my shows!'

As Mihika returned the phone, I held it as though it was a fragile and exquisite artefact.

'Oh thank you so much,' I gushed. I felt a little less embarrassed this time, but still wobbly.

Beautifully awkward. Bring on the next celebrity spotting.



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