The following pages consist of teacher’s notes and classroom support sheets for *Whose Life is it Anyway?* by Brian Clark. These resources are to help students who are studying *Whose Life is it Anyway?* as part of the OCR GCSE English Literature specification. These pages can be freely downloaded and printed out as required. This material may be freely copied for institutional use. However, this material is copyright and under no circumstances can copies be offered for sale. The publishers gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce copyright material.
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Studying a Play

Reading a novel is primarily a private activity whereas a play is written to be performed by one group of people for another. When students study the text of Whose Life Is It Anyway? for the OCR Drama Unit, it should always be remembered that it was written for thirteen actors to perform to a theatre audience. The more actively the text is read (and performed) with other people, the more fully it will be understood and its impact on the stage enjoyed. Each time students read (and perform) the play, they should think about the dialogue and how it should be said by each character in each situation, and about the significance of actions described in the stage directions.

OCR Drama Exam Tasks

Candidates have to choose one question to answer from a choice of three. The first of the three choices will always be extract-based. The extract is usually one to two pages in length and the question focuses attention directly on the extract (by referring to ‘this moment’ or ‘this extract’ or by using the word ‘here’). These questions do require an understanding of the whole text, but close attention to the extract printed in the paper remains the key requirement for successful answers.

At least one task will be set which focuses on a broader topic than the extract-based task. Questions often ask for a response to a character or a relationship, not just in the style of a neutral character study where you show what you think of the character and why, but more as a weighing up of what the character adds to the impact of the play.

The Drama Unit is the only exam which can offer an imaginative/re-creative task in which candidates can write in role as one of the characters. Questions of this type will not necessarily always be set but they often appear as the third choice. These empathic questions are a popular and successful option for many candidates who enjoy the opportunity to think and feel as a character at a particular moment in the action of the play, as a change from more the more conventional essay approaches.

How to Use these Web Support Sheets

These sheets are designed to support students’ study of Whose Life Is It Anyway?. They can be worked through by students on their own, but they will also be helpful in a group or class context. The sheets provide:

- memory-joggers about the characters and the development of the plot
- activities to help students appreciate the impact of some key scenes
- activities to help students evaluate characters and relationships
- activities to help students understand the main issues of the play
- revision ideas and advice on tackling the exam questions.

Page references in these resources refer to the Heinemann Plays edition of Whose Life is it Anyway?, as prescribed in the OCR GCSE English Literature specification, ISBN: 0435 232878.
Try to complete these activities without looking at the text to begin with (to see how much you can remember) and then check the text to see if you are right. This will also help you build up your notes.

Name check

Activity 1

Apart from Ken, the central character and patient, there are twelve other characters who appear onstage (although we do hear about other significant characters like Ken’s fiancée and his parents). Of these twelve, six could be described as ‘medical’ staff and six as ‘legal’.

1 Organise these 12 names into two categories, headed ‘medical’ or ‘legal’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anderson</th>
<th>Philip Hill</th>
<th>Peter Kershaw</th>
<th>Gillian Boyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kay Sadler</td>
<td>Andrew Eden</td>
<td>Michael Emerson</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare Scott</td>
<td>Paul Travers</td>
<td>Barr</td>
<td>Millhouse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Organise each list into a rough ‘rank’ order with the highest ranking member of staff at the top of each list. For example, ‘Medical’ would have Dr Michael Emerson at the top. There is scope for argument here and several characters could have equal status.

3 Where possible, decide whether each character is with or against Ken in his fight for the right to die. Once again, there is scope for argument here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical</th>
<th>Name and job</th>
<th>For or against?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal</th>
<th>Name and job</th>
<th>For or against?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Activity 1 answers

#### Medical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and job</th>
<th>For or against?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Michael Emerson, Consultant Physician in charge of the Intensive Care Unit</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Richard Barr, Consultant Psychiatrist at another hospital</td>
<td>For (but with reservations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Paul Travers, Consultant Psychiatrist</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Clare Scott, Junior Registrar</td>
<td>For (eventually)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Gillian Boyle, Medical Social Worker</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Anderson, Ward Sister</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Kay Sadler, Probationer Nurse</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, Ward Orderly</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Legal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and job</th>
<th>For or against?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Justice Millhouse, Judge</td>
<td>For (eventually)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Peter Kershaw, Ken’s Barrister</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Andrew Eden, the Hospital’s Barrister</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Philip Hill, Ken’s Solicitor</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Activity 2**

List these twelve important moments in the order they happen in the play, numbering them 1–12:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ken loses his temper with Mrs Boyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Ken gets angry with Dr Travers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The Judge orders that Ken should be set free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Ken tells Dr Scott that she has ‘lovely breasts’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Dr Barr tells the Judge that he thinks Ken has made the wrong decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dr Emerson tells Ken that he will never walk again or recover the use of his arms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Dr Scott uses Ken’s first name – for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Ken tells Dr Emerson that he has decided ‘not to stay alive’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mr Hill and Mr Kershaw suggests a legal solution to Ken, called ‘Habeas Corpus’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Ken makes an impassioned case to the Judge about the dignity of choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Dr Emerson injects Ken against his will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Mr Hill asks Dr Emerson to discharge Ken and he refuses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Plot Check

### Activity 2 answers

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>Dr Emerson tells Ken that he will never walk again or recover the use of his arms (page 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H</strong></td>
<td>Ken tells Dr Emerson that he has decided 'not to stay alive' (page 22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K</strong></td>
<td>Dr Emerson injects Ken against his will (page 22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>Ken loses his temper with Mrs Boyle (page 29).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>Ken tells Dr Scott that she has 'lovely breasts' (page 35).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L</strong></td>
<td>Mr Hill asks Dr Emerson to discharge Ken and he refuses (page 40).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td>Ken gets angry with Dr Travers (page 50).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
<td>Dr Scott uses Ken's first name – for the first time (page 55).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
<td>Mr Hill and Mr Kershaw suggests a legal solution to Ken, called ‘Habeas Corpus’ (page 59).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>Dr Barr tells the Judge that he thinks Ken has made the wrong decision (page 71).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>J</strong></td>
<td>Ken makes an impassioned case to the Judge about the dignity of choice (page 73).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td>The Judge orders that Ken should be set free (page 75).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 3

All of the moments in the Plot check in Activity 2 (page 7), apart from ‘L’, involve Ken directly. Choose three of these moments and this time put yourself in his place.

Write a series of notes recording your thoughts and feelings as if you are Ken. For example, you might choose ‘B’ (Ken gets angry with Dr Travers, page 50), and the following could get you started:

- this is an impossible situation...how can I prove to this man that I'm not insane and that I'm not just depressed...I want to die because I feel that my life is over and it should be my decision...who can prove that they are sane enough to make this decision?
Answer the following questions about the plot of the play:

1. How long is it since Ken’s road accident?
2. How long was he unconscious after the accident?
3. What is his main injury and what is the main effect of this?
4. Why do the nurses have to turn him over every two hours?
5. What was his job before the accident?
6. What drug does Dr Scott prescribe?
7. Why does Ken refuse to take it?
8. Which two couples begin to date in the course of the play?
9. What happened to Ken’s fiancée?
10. What reason does Ken give the Sister for contacting Mr Hill, and what’s the real reason?
11. What suggestions does Mrs Boyle make to improve Ken’s quality of life?
12. What makes Ken feel ‘cold with embarrassment’?
13. Why is Ken incapable of making the decision to die – according to Dr Emerson?
14. What does Emerson need to keep Ken in hospital under the Mental Health Act?
15. Sister refers to two occasions when Ken ‘got excited’ and had difficulty breathing. What were these two occasions?
16. Which member of the medical staff is ‘free of guilt’ and ‘a tonic’ – according to Ken?
17. How do Dr Barr and Dr Emerson disagree about Ken’s ‘depression’?
18. What does Ken mean when he tells the Judge (twice) ‘dignity starts with…choice’?
19. Why does Emerson offer Ken a room at the hospital at the end?
20. What is Dr Scott’s final gesture and why does Ken resist this?
### Activity 4 answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  How long is it since Ken’s road accident?</td>
<td>Six months (page 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  How long was he unconscious after the accident?</td>
<td>Thirty hours (page 68).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  What is his main injury and what is the main effect of this?</td>
<td>Severed spinal chord (page 68). No movement or feeling from neck downward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Why do the nurses have to turn him over every two hours?</td>
<td>Incapable of any movement...turned to avoid bedsores developing (page 73).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  What was his job before the accident?</td>
<td>Teacher in an art school and a sculptor (page 27).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  What drug does Dr Scott prescribe?</td>
<td>Valium (page 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Why does Ken refuse to take it?</td>
<td>Many possible reasons. For instance: feels he doesn’t need it, he doesn’t want tranquilizing, he wants to keep his consciousness unimpaired as it’s all he’s got, he has decided he wants to die and is rejecting all forms of treatment, he is trying to exercise the right of choice (see discussions between Ken and Dr Scott pages 13–15, and Dr Emerson and Dr Scott pages 18–21).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Which two couples begin to date in the course of the play?</td>
<td>Dr Scott and Mr Hill (page 52). John and Kay (page 61).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  What happened to Ken’s fiancée?</td>
<td>Ken asked her not to visit him anymore (page 49).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 What reason does Ken give the Sister for contacting Mr Hill, and what’s the real reason?</td>
<td>To sort out compensation (page 24). To represent him in seeking his release and death (page 38).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 What makes Ken feel ‘cold with embarrassment’?</td>
<td>His sexual banter with the nurses (page 34).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Activity 4 answers (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13  Why is Ken incapable of making the decision to die – according to Dr Emerson?</td>
<td>Because he’s so depressed (page 41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14  What does Emerson need to keep Ken in hospital under the Mental Health Act?</td>
<td>The signatures of two psychiatrists confirming that Ken is too depressed to make a decision, with only one allowed from Ken’s hospital (page 44).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15  Sister refers to two occasions when Ken ‘got excited’ and had difficulty breathing. What were these two occasions?</td>
<td>The Sister is referring (on page 57) to Ken’s meetings with Mrs Boyle (page 30) and Dr Travers (page 51).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16  Which member of the medical staff is ‘free of guilt’ and ‘a tonic’ – according to Ken?</td>
<td>John, the Orderly (page 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17  How do Dr Barr and Dr Emerson disagree about Ken’s ‘depression’?</td>
<td>Dr Emerson argues that Ken’s depression is an illness. Dr Barr argues that Ken’s depression is not an illness but “reactive”, a natural response to the situation he’s in (pages 68–70).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18  What does Ken mean when he tells the Judge (twice) ‘dignity starts with…choice’?</td>
<td>Ken is emphasising one of the play’s central ideas: that individuals must have the power to make their own choices, or they are unable to control their own lives and thereby deprived of basic human dignity (page 74 and also see Activity 12).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19  Why does Emerson offer Ken a room at the hospital at the end?</td>
<td>Because he hopes that Ken will change his mind (page 76).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20  What is Dr Scott’s final gesture and why does Ken resist this?</td>
<td>She goes to kiss him (page 76). Ken resists for many possible reasons (see Activities 7 and 14).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Opening (pages 1–4)

At the start of a novel, the novelist can choose to establish plots and characters by telling the reader about them directly. At the start of a play, however, the playwright has the problem of engaging the interest of the audience while quickly and naturally establishing the situations and characters through what the audience sees and hears – and mainly through the medium of the dialogue (what the characters say to each other). Activity 5 should help you to think about how well Clark manages to do this in his opening.

Activity 5

Re-read the opening scene (up to John’s entrance on page 4) and answer the following questions:

1. What have you found out about Ken’s condition? E.g. can’t feel the effects of the massage…

2. How has Clark conveyed all this information in such a short space of time? E.g. uses the introduction of a new character (Kay)…

3. What have you found out about Ken’s attitude to his condition? E.g. compares himself to an object (a ‘skateboard’) – feels useless…

4. What do you make of Ken’s character so far? E.g. funny (compares the adjustable bed to a lift in a department store)…

5. How does Kay show her inexperience as a nurse? Why does Ken call her a ‘breath of fresh air’? E.g. uses her first name with a patient…

6. What do you think would engage the interest of an audience in this opening? E.g. details like Ken’s condition, his sense of humour, his banter with the nurses….
Ken and Mrs Boyle (pages 25–30)

When you focus on a particular moment in the play, particularly when you tackle an extract-based question in the exam, you must always try to place that moment in context. For instance, to understand Ken’s reaction to Mrs Boyle, think about the effect on his state of mind of the following:

- a) he has already decided that his life is not worth living
- b) he has been injected by Dr Emerson against his will
- c) he is reluctant to see Mrs Boyle and knows Dr Emerson has arranged it
- d) he likes the medical staff (like Kay) who treat him as a person, not a patient
- e) he is keenly aware of attractive female medical staff but knows that a physical relationship is now impossible.

Activity 6

Re-read the scene between Ken and Mrs Boyle (who only makes this one appearance in the play) and answer the following questions to help you establish why this is such a dramatic and important scene:

1. The suspense builds up gradually through this scene and the tone of the conversation becomes darker. Within a few minutes the dialogue moves from a cheerful greeting to anger, breathlessness and the Sister’s emergency application of the oxygen mask. Where can you find examples of Ken displaying the following rapidly changing moods? E.g. joking, self-pitying, flirtatious, decisive, irritated, aggressive, furious, distressed

2. Although she means well, Mrs Boyle’s meeting with Ken produces nothing but anger and hostility, even though the Sister calls her ‘a very nice woman’ and the stage directions describe her as ‘attractive and very professional in her manner’. Explain why the meeting goes so badly wrong and ends in such dramatic conflict. Is it Mrs Boyle’s fault?

3. The scene involves a very dramatic twist. What is Mrs Boyle’s purpose in visiting Ken and what is the actual result of this visit?

4. Ken meets Mr Hill soon after this scene to try to arrange his discharge (and death). How does the meeting with Mrs Boyle reinforce Ken’s determination to end his life?

5. How do the following remarks convey Ken’s sense of hopelessness?
   - ‘It used to be’
   - ‘Dr Frankenstein…has successfully made his monster’
   - ‘they should try painting me’; ‘I’d prefer the belly dance’
   - ‘How about an electrically operated hammer and chisel?’

6. How does Mrs Boyle compare with other medical staff – Kay or John, for instance? (This question focuses on character.)

7. Ken refers to Mrs Boyle’s ‘appalling so-called professionalism’. What does he mean by this and why does it upset him? (This question focuses on theme.)

8. Ken says ‘I am not human.’ What does he mean and how does the scene confirm Ken’s sense of powerlessness? (This question focuses on theme.)
Activity 7

All twelve of the moments listed in the Plot check in Activity 2 (page 7) are highly charged moments, designed to have an impact on an audience.

Choose the three moments that you feel are the most dramatic and memorable in the play and list some reasons for choosing them. For example, you might you choose ‘G’ (Dr Scott uses Ken’s first name for the first time, page 55) as a particularly moving moment in the play because (amongst other reasons):

- Ken is being treated as a person, not just a patient, and it makes him ‘feel like a human being again’
- it represents ‘another credit’ for Ken after Mr Hill has agreed to represent him and he can see a way out of his situation
- it shows Clare Scott’s increasingly personal involvement with Ken and his case and it confirms the sadness she will experience if he succeeds in securing his own death
- it is a bittersweet and complex moment for Ken because he is attracted to Dr Scott and enjoys flirting with her but (unlike Mr Hill) he will never be able to date her and develop this relationship and so this very attraction to her reinforces his determination to seek his own death.
Ken Harrison

You could see Ken Harrison as a strong individual battling against the forces of oppression, like the heroes of so many memorable plays, novels and film. It’s possible that you could see him as stubborn quitter, unable to accept or overcome his disabilities. Or you see him as both, or neither, or something else entirely. Ken is a fascinating and complex character who is likely to make a very strong impact on any audience and he presents an unusual challenge for any actor playing the role because he is bed-bound throughout the play and almost completely paralysed.

Activity 8

1. How do you react to the character of Ken Harrison?

   a. Choose from the following descriptions to demonstrate your own view of Ken and add any other adjectives which would also help.

      Intelligent  Witty  Entertaining  Brave  Articulate
      Unselfish  Flirtatious  Frank  Determined  Stubborn
      Self-pitying  Defeatist  Insensitive  Offensive  Ungrateful
      Cynical  Short-tempered  Miserable

   b. Where in the play does he clearly display the qualities you have chosen?

      ___________________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________________

   Note:

   There is a great deal of scope for personal response here and you must make your own case. For instance, in Act One alone, Ken likens himself to a ‘skateboard’, a ‘compost heap’, ‘scrap’, ‘an ocarina’, a ‘vegetable’, Dr Frankenstein’s ‘monster’ and part of the ‘décor’. Is this ‘self-pitying’, ‘honest’, ‘entertaining’ or all of these or something else entirely? Your reactions and your reading of Ken’s character might be very different from other people’s and you must have the confidence to argue your case, based on the detail of the play.
Dr Emerson

The following ‘hot-seating’ activity assumes that you are working in a whole class situation. Your teacher may choose to vary the delivery of this activity.

Activity 9

Imagine that you are Dr Emerson in the ‘hot-seat’. Answer all of the following questions as Dr Emerson, staying in character throughout:

1 Why did you inject Mr Harrison even though he refused permission?
2 What did you make of Dr Scott’s reasons for not injecting Mr Harrison?
3 Why won’t you agree to discharge Mr Harrison even though he is a voluntary patient and wants to be discharged?
4 Why do you think Mr Harrison is incapable of making his own decisions?
5 What do you hope to achieve by keeping Mr Harrison in hospital?
6 Why were you so keen to use the staunch Catholic Psychiatrist from Ellertree to provide the second signature needed to detain Mr Harrison?
7 What were you suggesting when you warned Dr Scott that there would be a post-mortem if Mr Harrison were to die suddenly?
8 Have you ever felt that you might be abusing your power as Head of the Intensive Care Unit?
9 What do you think of Mr Hill and of lawyers generally?
10 Why did you offer to keep Mr Harrison at the hospital after the Judge’s decision had gone against you?

Add other questions that you would like ask Dr Emerson (and then try to answer them).

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Three key characters (continued)

John

Unlike Ken and Dr Emerson, John is a minor character who has no real effect on the central action of the play but you can argue (as with several other minor characters) that he brings a great deal to the play and sheds new light on Ken’s situation in a variety of ways.

As you track down the items below and re-visit the moments involving John, don’t just make up your mind about the kind of person he is but ask yourself: why has Clark included him in the play?

Activity 10

What memories about John and his involvement in the play do the following items bring to mind:

- anatomy lesson
- going professional
- xylophone
- sterilising the instruments
- measles
- the Barbados Club
- dancing
- tennis umpire
- free of guilt
- that miserable bugger

Activity 11

Try and find support for as many of the following statements as you can about John’s role in the play by referring to particular speeches, details or moments:

1. like Ken, he finds Kay very attractive
2. unlike Ken he is able to act on his impulses
3. like Ken he is a creative person (music/art)
4. unlike Ken he can express his creativity
5. like Kay he relates to Ken as a human being
6. unlike Kay he refuses to take the hospital, his job and Ken’s condition seriously
7. unlike other members of the medical staff, he is a free spirit and feels no guilt about Ken’s condition
8. he is prepared to question the morality of spending so much money to support life artificially
9. his liveliness and sense of humour lighten the tone of a serious (and potentially miserable) play.
Three key themes

The Dignity of Choice

The title takes the form of a question and although the story engages us with the characters in a moving and personal way, this is also a play of ideas that forces us to confront some very basic questions about the life and the power to choose.

Activity 12

1 Which characters in the play seem to you to hold the following views?
   A Only the Doctors have the knowledge and skill to make decisions about their patients.
   B The laws of the state are there to protect individual rights.
   C It’s cruel and an abuse of power to deny people control over their own lives.
   D Severely injured people are too depressed to be able to make rational decisions.
   E Severely injured people usually come to accept their disabilities and find a new way of life.
   F It’s degrading to use technology keep a person alive against their will.
   G It’s wrong that the developed world spends so much keeping people alive artificially when children in developing countries are dying of easily treatable diseases like measles.
   H It would be a relief if Ken could recover the use of his arms long enough to make the choice to take an overdose.
   I Life is God-given and therefore, it’s a sin to commit suicide.
   J Ken is a rational man in complete control of his faculties and therefore his individual choice must be respected and he should be ‘set free’.

2 Which of the above views does the play encourage you to share?

3 You may recognise the final view as the Judge’s decision. What are your final feelings at the end of the play as the lights ‘snap out’ into darkness? E.g. sad, relieved, triumphant, disappointed, hopeful (like Dr Emerson) that Ken will change his mind.
The Dignity of Choice

Activity 12 answers

A Dr Emerson (pages 20, 65, 69).
B Mr Hill (pages 65–6).
C Ken (page 73).
D Dr Emerson (pages 68–9).
E Mrs Boyle (page 27).
F Ken (page 74).
G John (page 16).
H Dr Scott (page 51).
I The ‘staunch Catholic’ psychiatrist at Ellertree Hospital (page 44).
J Mr Justice Millhouse (page 75).
Professionalism

The play makes it very clear that caring for people with severe injuries is a very difficult job particularly when your patient is as challenging as Ken Harrison. Doctors, nurses, medical social workers and orderlies obviously need to care for their patients but can they do their job effectively if they become too emotionally involved?

Ken has typically strong views on this subject. When Kay tries to avoid personal questions by changing the subject or asking a question back (page 10), Ken calls it ‘being professional’ and concludes ‘I don’t want any more of that, it’s horrid.’

Activity 13

1. Place the following quotations in context. To help you do this you should focus on who says the quotation, to whom, when, about what, and why. Try to do it from memory first and then look them up to make more detailed notes.

   A. ‘That’s nice, but don’t let Sister hear you say that.’
   B. ‘Ours was an objective, his a subjective decision.’
   C. ‘I’m always warning my nurses not to get involved.’
   D. ‘Dr Emerson is as involved with Mr Harrison as if he were his father.’
   E. ‘You and the doctors with your appalling so-called professionalism, which is nothing more than a series of verbal tricks to prevent you from relating to your patients as human beings.’
   F. ‘…we have to remain relatively detached in order to help…’
   G. ‘Detach yourself. Tear yourself off on the dotted line that divides the woman from the social worker…’
   H. ‘The very exercise of your so-called professionalism makes me want to die.’
   I. ‘You called me Ken.’
   J. ‘As I have a stainless steel heart, it’s easy to keep it sterilised of emotion.’
   K. ‘Well I should think that’s just about the one way past her defences.’
   L. She turns and moves to Ken as if to kiss him.

2. Based on these quotations, what feelings about the carer-patient relationship does the play leave you with.
Three key themes (continued)

Professionalism

Activity 13 Answers

A  Ken after meeting Nurse Sadler, warning her that Sister would not approve of using first names (page 2).
B  Dr Emerson reminding Dr Scott that they make decisions based on detached medical judgements, not feelings (page 19).
C  Sister to Doctor Scott on the problems caused by emotional involvement with patients (page 23).
D  Dr Scott to Sister, pointing out that involvement is often unavoidable, even for someone as experienced and professional as Dr Emerson (page 23).
E  Ken, irritated with Mrs Boyle because she is treating him as a patient, not a person (page 29).
F  Mrs Boyle, in reply to Ken, pointing out that medical staff have to keep their distance from patients in order to do their job (page 29).
G  Ken, now very irritated with Mrs Boyle, suggesting that it's unnatural for any profession to suppress natural human feelings and responses (page 29).
H  Ken, now furious with Mrs Boyle's refusal (or inability) to treat him as a human being and pointing out the irony that the professional detachment which she thinks will help, actually makes him feel like less of a human being and confirms his determination to seek his own death (page 29).
I  Ken, delighted with Dr Scott, that she has used his first name and is therefore less professionally detached from him (page 55).
J  Sister to Mr Hill, confirming that she has overheard his earlier remark suggesting that she has no feelings (page 60).
K  Dr Scott confirming that the Sister does have feelings and that Ken's praise of the Sister's work, has affected her (page 64).
L  Dr Scott losing her professional detachment completely, after the judgement (page 76).
Desire

In a frank exchange with Dr Scott (pages 33–5), Ken tells her that he still has ‘a man’s mind’ and still feels ‘tremendous sexual desire’, even though he knows he can never again enjoy a physical relationship. He has just ended his engagement and can only observe as other relationships (between John and Kay, and between Dr Scott and Mr Hill) develop around him.

Activity 14

1 Place the following quotations in context. To help you do this you should focus on who says the quotation, to whom, when, about what, and why. For example, quotation E is said by John when he is flirting with Nurse Sadler.

A ‘Have me on the floor Sister please.’
B ‘From where I’m lying, if you can make it at all – even with your right hand – it would be heaven.’
C ‘..each part carries on bravely yearning for a woman in a white coat.’
D ‘It will calm me and soothe me and make me forget for a while that you have a lovely body.’
E ‘I’m an expert in anatomy.’
F ‘You have lovely breasts.’
G ‘It’s surprising how relaxed a woman can become when she is not in the presence of a man.’
H ‘I’ve only a piece of knotted string between my legs.’
I ‘I now engage in sexual banter with young nurses…then they leave the room and I go cold with embarrassment.’
J ‘…she’s a young healthy woman. She wants babies – real ones.’
K ‘I hope my surrogate self behaved myself.’
L ‘…if I cannot be a man, I do not wish to be a medical achievement.’

2 How do these quotations help you to understand Ken’s feelings?

3 What do they add to the impact of the play (in terms of sadness, humour, contrast)?
Desire

**Activity 14 answers**

A Ken, indulging in sexual banter with the Sister (page 2).

B Ken, talking to John and bemoaning his inability to enjoy any form of sexual activity, even masturbation (page 5).

C Ken, flirting with Dr Scott (page 7).

D Ken, complimenting Nurse Sadler and then realising he has gone too far (page 9).

E John, flirting with Nurse Sadler (page 17).

F Ken, complimenting Dr Scott (page 33).

G Ken, registering the sad fact (to Dr Scott) that women no longer respond to him as a sexually active male (pages 34–35).

H Ken, acknowledging (to Dr Scott) that he is not capable of sexual activity (page 34).

I Ken, acknowledging the fact (to Dr Scott) that he still feels desire and can think and talk about sex, but this leads to the sexual banter which can embarrass both him and the nurses (page 34).

J Ken to Dr Travers, explaining the reasons why he told his fiancée not to visit him anymore (page 49).

K Ken, wittily suggesting (to Dr Scott) that he sees Mr Hill as both his legal and romantic representative – but also suggesting the underlying sadness and frustration that he can’t date Dr Scott himself (page 54).

L Ken explaining to the Judge that he no longer feels like ‘a man’ and therefore wishes to die (page 74).
Drama graph

Activity 15

Take a large piece of paper and construct a graph that follows the action of the play and shows what you think are the most dramatic moments in the play.

You could use the Plot check moments (page 7) as a starting point but you need to make your own decisions. Invent your own headings for the left-hand side of your graph and try to work out the passage of time along the bottom. For example:

Key:
1 Ken meets Kay
2 Dr S prescribes Valium

Unforgettable
Edge of Seat
Powerfully Gripping
Gripping
2
Attention-Grabbing
1
Interesting

Watchable

Time Passing …

Day 1……..
Act One

Act Two
Ken quotation quiz

Activity 16

Try to fill in the gaps in these quotations from memory and then decide to whom Ken is speaking, when, about what and why the quotation is important in the play. For example:

“You said: ‘Were you a teacher?’ You should have said; ‘________________?’”

The missing words are ‘Are you a teacher?’ Ken is speaking to Kay in the opening scene and pointing out that she is not behaving in the ‘professional’ way expected of the medical staff. She has been too honest in her original question because she knows that Ken can no longer be a teacher and therefore uses the past tense. She has also introduced herself using her first name so she is demonstrating her inexperience but Ken prefers her approach because she is being more natural, personal and honest, and is not tiptoeing around his problems. Ken hates the ‘professional’ approach because (as he later tells Mrs Boyle) it makes him feel inhuman and makes him want to die. He thinks Kay, by contrast, is a ‘breath of fresh air.’

1 ‘You mean you only grow the ______________ here – the ______________ store is somewhere else.’

2 ‘I get the tablet and you get the ______________.’

3 ‘I specifically refused permission to ______________ and you didn’t listen.’

4 ‘If you were human, if you were treating me as a human, you’d tell me to ______________.’

5 ‘I am in your power. To hell with a morality that is based on the proposition that ______________.’

6 ‘...doctors dole out information like a kosher butcher gives out ______________.’

7 ‘Can’t you see what a trap I am in? Can anyone prove that they are ______________? Could you?’

8 ‘He’s a ______________ doctor and won’t let a patient die if he can help it.’

9 ‘... I must restate that the ______________ starts with his choice.’
Ken quotation quiz

Activity 16 quotations completed

1 ‘You mean you only grow the ______ vegetables ______ here – the ______ vegetable ______ store is somewhere else.’ (page 11)

2 ‘I get the tablet and you get the ______ tranquillity ______.’ (page 14)

3 ‘I specifically refused permission ______ stick that needle in me ______ and you didn’t listen.’ (pages 22–3)

4 ‘If you were human, if you were treating me as a human, you’d tell me to ______ bugger off ______.’ (page 29)

5 ‘I am in your power. To hell with a morality that is based on the proposition that ______ might is right ______.’ (page 35)

6 ‘…doctors dole out information like a kosher butcher gives out ______ pork sausages ______.’ (pages 47–8)

7 ‘Can’t you see what a trap I am in? Can anyone prove that they are ______ sane ______? Could you?’ (page 51)

8 ‘He’s a ______ good ______ doctor and won’t let a patient die if he can help it.’ (page 71)

9 ‘…I must restate that the ______ dignity ______ starts with his choice.’ (page 74)
Tackling an exam question

Look back at the section on Key Scenes (pages 13–15) which deals with Ken and Mrs Boyle. Re-read the scene (pages 25–30 in the text) and plan an answer to this extract-based exam question using the ideas in the Key Scenes section:

**Explore the ways in which Clark makes this such a dramatic and important moment in the play.**

Now read these extracts from a six-paragraph answer written by a student called Jenny and decide how well you think she is doing before reading the Examiner’s comments.

**Jenny’s First Paragraph**

The title of Brian Clark’s play, ‘Whose Life Is It Anyway?’ introduces the key issue in the play and suggests that there are conflicting views. Ken Harrison, the main character in the play and the victim of a road accident which has left him paralysed from the neck down, represents one side of the debate. On the other side is Mrs Boyle, a minor character who is ‘a medical social worker.’

**The Start of Jenny’s Second Paragraph**

Clark creates a dramatic scene in the way he portrays Ken’s frustration with Mrs Boyle building up to a climax when he becomes aggressive, loses control of himself and shouts at her. When they are first introduced, the atmosphere is calm and relaxed which is clear when Ken jokes about her doing a ‘belly dance’ to cheer him up. Their casualness and ease is also demonstrated through the stage directions (‘cheerfully … smiling’ which suggest that they are relaxed). However, this does not last long...

**The Start of Jenny’s Fourth Paragraph**

Ken and Mrs Boyle’s conversation is very important as it sums up the key issues in the play. What leads to Ken’s frustration is the fact that people in authority make him feel powerless to have a say on the one thing he thought he had control over – his own life...

**Examiner’s Comments**

Jenny writes very fluently and has a good understanding of the play. Her first paragraph opens confidently and begins to put the extract in context by introducing the two characters involved. It is a little too vague and generalised (even for an introduction) in that it doesn’t explain the ‘key issue or the debate’ and how these relate to the extract. In the second paragraph though, Jenny really gets into her stride. She focuses on the wording of the question (‘Clark…dramatic’), she fits well-selected quotations into her sentences, she understands that stage directions are an important part of the action of a scene and she begins to analyse the dramatic development of the scene.

Similarly, the fourth paragraph focuses on the question (‘important’) and the key issues of the play as a whole (like ‘control’), although there is a need to show how these key issues emerge from this particular extract by looking closely at the detail. It’s hard to tell, of course, from these brief extracts, but Jenny seems to be well on the way to a very good answer especially if she can avoid over-generalising and anchor her ideas to the detail of the extract (as she does in her second paragraph).