The Child in Time

'The Committee and The Handbook

'Set in a Post-Thatcher, authoritarian England of the near future ... author, Stephen Lewis, helps create a definitive Childcare Handbook, which will be the blueprint for bringing up the next generation. It is a liberal nightmare of Victorian values choreographed by Orwell.' Tony Parsons

What do you consider to be the importance of the Committee and the Childcare Handbook in the novel?

Group 1: What is their importance in the narrative structure of the novel?

- How does McEwan use 'Stephen's year, the committee year' (p.34) as a device?
- What role do the committee sessions have in McEwan's exploration of time and memory in the novel? 'A roomful of people did not lessen his introspection ... so much as intensify it and give it structure.' (p.10)
- How does the ending of the committee link with the beginning of Stephen's 'recovery'. (p.156)
- How is the Childcare Handbook used as a structural device throughout the novel? Consider the role of the extracts at the beginning of chapters. How do they connect with the narrative?

Group 2: How do they fit into McEwan's vision of British Society?

- What impression is created of the political and academic world of the committee? What is Stephen's place within that world? (p. 76)
- How does McEwan use the committee to expose the corruption within the Government? What role does Morley play in this? (p.161 - 2) How does this event link with Mr Lewis' cynical view of the committee's work? (p.88)
- What is the outcome of the Childcare Handbook scandal? What does this episode suggest about the government, the media and the British public? (p.181)
- What is the significance of the fact that Charles Darke 'wrote the manual under his leader's supervision.' (p.201)
- What are the Prime Minister's motives in linking Charles to the project? (p. 188)

Group 3: In what ways do they contribute to the novel's central theme of childhood?

- What sort of values are outlined in the 'Authorised Childcare Handbook'? (p. 161)
- What comparisons can be made between the parenting received by the 'children' in the novel and the kind of parenting which is advocated by the writer of the handbook?
- How does Charles' regression illustrate the damage done when children are treated 'like small adults.' (p.93) See p. 202.
- In what way is Charles' involvement in the handbook 'a perfect illustration of Charles' problem.' (p. 204)

Use the above prompts to help you to prepare a short spoken presentation for the other groups.

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