

KS3 Exam: Extract from *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindells

If you think sleeping rough's just a matter of finding a dry spot where the fuzz won't move you on and getting your head down, you're wrong. Not your fault of course - if you've never tried it you've no way of knowing what it's like, so what I thought I'd do was sort of talk you through a typical night. That night in the Vaudeville alcove won't do, because there were two of us and it's worse if you're by yourself.

So you pick your spot. Wherever it is (unless you're in a squat or a derelict house or something) it's going to have a floor of stone, tile, concrete or brick. In other words it's going to be hard and cold. It might be a bit cramped, too - shop doorways often are. And remember, if it's winter you're going to be half frozen before you even start. Anyway you've got your place, and if you're lucky enough to have a sleeping bag you unroll it and get in. Settled for the night? Well maybe, maybe not. Remember my first night? The Scouser? 'Course you do. He kicked me out of my bedroom and pinched my watch. Well, that sort of thing can happen any night, and there are worse things. You could be peed on by a drunk or a dog. Happens all the time - one man's bedroom is another man's lavatory. You might be spotted by a gang of lager louts on the lookout for someone to maim. That happens all the time too, and if they get carried away you can end up dead. There are the guys who like young boys, who think because you're a dosser you'll do anything for dosh, and there's the psycho who'll knife you for your pack. So, you lie listening. You bet you do. Footsteps. Voices. Breathing, even. Doesn't help you sleep.

And don't forget the cold. If you've ever tried dropping off to sleep with cold feet, even in bed, you'll know it's impossible. You've got to warm up those feet, or lie awake. And in January, in a doorway, in wet trainers, it can be quite a struggle. And if you manage it, chances are you'll need to get up for a pee, and then it starts all over again. And those are only some of the hassles. I haven't mentioned stomach cramps from hunger, headaches from the flu, toothache, fleas and lice. I haven't talked about homesickness, depression or despair. I haven't gone into how it feels to want a girlfriend when your circumstances make it virtually impossible for you to get one – how it feels to know you're a social outcast in fact, a non-person to whom every ordinary everyday activity is closed. So. You lie on your bruises, listening. Trying to warm your feet. You curl up on your side and your hip hurts, so you stretch out on your back so your feet stay cold and the concrete hurts your heels. You force yourself to lie still for a bit, thinking that'll help you drop off, but it doesn't. Your pack feels like a rock under your head and your nose is cold. You wonder what time it is. Can you stop listening now, or could someone still come? Distant chimes. You strain your ears, counting. One o'clock? It can't be only one o'clock, surely?

Section A

1. Read from line 6 to the end of the second paragraph. List four things we learn about sleeping rough.
2. Focus on paragraph 3. How does the writer use language to present how uncomfortable life on the streets is?
3. You need to think about the whole of the source. The text is about a nameless narrator living homeless on the streets in a city.
How has the writer structured the source to interest you as a reader?
You could write about:
 - What the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
 - How and why the writer changes focus as the source develops
 - Any other structural features that interest you as a reader
4. Focus this part of your answer on the final paragraph of the source.

A student said, 'The character puts across the difficulties of life as a homeless individual well'

To what extent do you agree with the student.

In your response, you could:

- Consider your own impression of homeless life
- Evaluate how the writers shows the characters difficulties
- Support your responses with reference to the text

Section B

Write a narrative about a young person who is alone at night.