

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Harry Miller's Run by David Almond and Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)



1. Explore it

Read the passage from the book below, thinking about what is happening and the characters you meet:

We walk down the street to Harry's. Mam lets us in with a key. By now, just about everything's gone. The floors are bare. There're no curtains at the windows. He's sitting in the front room in a great big armchair with a box full of papers on his lap and the Zimmer frame standing in front of him. There's a little table with boxes of tablets on it. He looks all dreamy but he manages to grin.

"How do, petal," he says.

"How do, Harry."

Mam bends down and kisses him. She pushes some hair back from his brow. She says has he washed this morning, has he brushed his teeth, has he had breakfast, has he...

"Aye," he says. "Aye, hinny, aye."

He stares at me like he's staring from a million miles away.

"It's the little runner," he says at last.

"Aye, Mr Miller."

He reaches out and touches the T-shirt. His hand's all frail an' trembly.

"Great North Run?" he says.

"Aye, Mr Miller."

"I done that."

"Did you really, Harry?" says Mam. "And when was that?"

He reaches towards me again.

"How old are ye, son?"

"Eleven."

"That was when I done it. When I was eleven."

Mam smiles sadly at me.

"Must've been great," she says.

"It was bliddy marvellous, pet."

He closes his eyes. Mam lifts the box from his lap. It looks like he might be dropping off to sleep, but he jumps up to his feet and grabs the Zimmer frame. He leans forward like he's ready to run.

"It's the final sprint!" he says.

He giggles and drops back into the chair.

"Tek nae notice, son," he says. "I'm just a daft old maddled gadgie."

He looks at the box.

"Them'll need to be gone through," he says. "Ye'll help us, hinny?"

"Course I will," says Mam.

He sighs and grins, and stares past us like he can see right through the walls.

"I can see the sea, mates!" he says. "We're nearly there!"

And he falls asleep and starts to snore.

What do you think is happening here? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences?

Think about the character of Harry, and his conversation with Liam and his mum. What do you think you know about them? What can you tell about the relationship with one another? How would you describe each of them? What words in the text influence your descriptions?

Now think about the setting. Where and when do you think the conversation is happening? What clues are there to this? What clues do you have to where the story is set? How does the author manage to convey this? What do you think might have happened before this point? What makes you think this?

Now, think about how the extract is written: do any parts really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like best? Why? Do they look or sound interesting? Do they help you make a picture in your mind? Think about how this extract makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the passage, or ask someone to read it to you. What do you see in your mind as the text is read aloud? When you have a clear image, take a pencil and a piece of paper and draw what you see in your imagination. If you don't have paper to hand, the back of an old letter or envelope will do.

If you have coloured pencils, felt tips or crayons to hand, you might also think about how you could use colour to bring the scene to life.

Go back to the text and think about which words and phrases helped you make your picture. Did you draw Harry, Liam and Mam, separately or together? Where were they? Did you draw Harry or Liam taking part in the Great North Run, in the past or present day?

3. Talk about it

- Why do you think Harry **'stares at me like he's staring from a million miles away'** when Liam appears in his running gear?
- Why do you think Mam **'smiles sadly'** at Liam when Harry recounts his running days? Do you think she believes Harry did complete the Great North Run? Do you? Why? Why not?
- What clues do you have to Harry's state of health, physical and mental? How do you think this relates to Mam and Liam's visit?
- Why do you think **everything's gone. The floors are bare. There're no curtains at the windows?** What do you think might be happening?

4. Imagine it

Harry calls himself a **'daft old maddled gadgie'**, tells Liam to **'tek nae notice'**. Yet he is also clear on the emotion and detail of what happened and **'stares past us like he can see right through the walls'**. Why do you think he puts himself down in this way? Do you think we should listen to the opinions and memories of older people? What do you think their years of experience may have to offer us?

Try to talk with a grandparent, great-grandparent or an older relative or friend about life when they were the same age as you are now. Prepare a set of questions to ask them, asking them to recall what their life was like at your age, and what they have learned since they were at primary school. Perhaps you could interview them and record their answers, writing up the conversation like a magazine interview. If you can't talk to them face to face, you could do this over the phone or via email.

5. Create it

What do you think you might remember of your primary school days when you reach Harry's age? Is there something you especially like doing or are proud of? Maybe a sporting, musical, artistic or academic achievement, or something funny, exciting or otherwise memorable?

Write about it as if you are looking back from later in life, capturing key details and how you felt about what happened. Think carefully about how to share your anecdote with someone who will be younger than you and may not know what life was like in 2020.

When you've finished writing, give your work to someone else in your home to read. What did they learn about your early life from reading it? Could they see and feel what it was like to be there?