

Section One: Reading [40]

Read carefully the following passage and then answer the questions that follow.

The following extract is adapted from a blog written by the popular young Irish writer, Claire Hennessy. Her first book was written when she was only twelve years old and published shortly before her fourteenth birthday. Since then, she has written nine books for young adults. At present, she is also a director at the Big Smoke Writing Factory, where she teaches creative writing to aspiring writers.



So what does an ordinary day hold for this talented and successful young writer? And how does she fit everything in?

A Day in the Life

Early morning

Posted 7:20 am

It's Monday: the start of the week, bright and optimistic. Alarm number one goes off. I grumble and switch it off. Alarm number two is the 'no-nonsense out-of-bed-you-get' beeping alarm that I cannot ignore. Then out of bed I get and switch on my computer. As it powers up, I make a large mug of milky tea. This is my version of a 'power-up' and it is utterly crucial in the mornings: I don't feel ready to face the day until there's a bucket or two of tea running through my veins.

Beginning the workday

Posted 9:00 am

On an ideal workday this is what happens: I write 1,000 words of a project, usually of whatever novel I'm working on. Occasionally a short story sneaks in there – it all depends on how close to a deadline this is, mind you! I'm not allowed on the Internet until I've finished that. 'It's all about sticking at it,' I tell myself repeatedly. 'You just have to keep going with it.'

What actually happens today: it's early in the morning and the Internet is calling, so I minimise the Word screen 'only for a moment', I tell myself, to check my Twitter feed and

my email. My Inbox is full of spam emails, ‘Congratulations, you’ve just won 1 million euro!!!!’ Suddenly, time has slipped away and I’m on my third mug of tea, hitting the Word Count button on the toolbar in Word in the hope of a miracle.

An extra incentive

Posted 12.05pm

My yoga class on a Monday morning gives me an extra incentive to get my writing done quicker. I wish I could say that after class I leave feeling refreshed and super-creative, ready to re-approach my writing with a revitalised brain and greater sense of oneness with the universe. In truth, I’m mostly wondering whether my ‘tree’ pose will ever improve. After yoga, I go back to the computer for a while – ideally for writing, more often for email-checking and more tea.

Big Smoke Writing Factory

Posted 2:20 pm

After lunch with a friend I head into the *Big Smoke Writing Factory* on Hatch Street. I’m one of the directors of the organisation and I work with two other directors and a great team of interns to run classes, both our own and ones with guest facilitators. We organise student readings and workshops for other organisations and we try to make sure that our students are learning what they need in order to develop as writers. I spend the afternoon preparing for my creative writing class in the evening. One of the things I enjoy the most about teaching creative writing is that you never teach the same thing twice. Even if it’s a beginners’ class, it’ll never go quite the same way as it did with the last group you had. As delightful as I imagine it must be to appear in a classroom at the designated hour and recite off all the things one needs to know about writing, it’s far more enjoyable to continue to develop and grow as a teacher, the same way that you’re growing as a writer.

Creative writing class

Posted 6:35 pm

I can be a bundle of nerves about a lot of things, but never about teaching my creative writing class. Teaching class is different from doing an author visit to a school, where the students want to know about my experience, my books and how I came up with this character or why that character didn’t end up with another character... that’s its own kind of fun. It’s still exciting when someone picks a character and goes ‘That’s just like me!’ or ‘I completely get that!’, but with a more general class, I move beyond talking about what works for me. In my classes, I help aspiring writers to discover their own strengths and weaknesses and what way of writing suits them best.

End of the day

Posted 9:50 pm

What happens at the end of my day depends on my general energy levels and how much

writing I managed to get done in the morning. So tonight I spend some more time writing. I'm going to be honest, some days I don't write. I kick myself for it, but some days are too busy with urgent things that make immediate demands of you, the way an ongoing writing project often doesn't. The great thing about working as a writer is that it's difficult to let 'real life' take over entirely. Even as I write this, my 'work-in-progress' window is open, reminding me that as well as all the other things in my life, there's something important that needs my time and attention. When I leap back into the world of the story, that's when I remember that the days write are better than the ones that I don't. Tonight it's painful! I have revisions to make, story-lines to alter and I realise that I've completely contradicted the entire plot of the story and need to toss three chapters of a novel in the bin. More often than not, though, my day is like that Noël Coward line: 'Work is more fun than fun'. That's why I do it, I think – what better reason?

Answer the following **three** questions:

1. From your reading of the above extract, do you think that the writer, Claire Hennessy, has an enviable lifestyle? Explain your answer with reference to the text. (10)
2. What evidence can you find in the above extract to suggest Claire Hennessy is a good teacher and mentor? Give reasons for your answer. (15)
3. Would Claire Hennessy's style of writing in the above extract encourage you to read more of her work? Explain your answer with reference to the text. (15)

Sample Answer to Question 1:

Option A (Answer:- Yes)

Note: This is a ten mark question, so you would be expected to write two well-developed points - two paragraphs in other words - in your answer. You may wish to include a brief introduction and/or conclusion, but remember that these do not count as well-developed points. They are merely a summary of the main points you will include / have included.

Plan:-

Freedom to set own timetable

Working at what she loves

I think that the writer, Claire Hennessy, has a most enviable lifestyle in which

she is her own boss and spends her days doing what she loves.

It is a good idea to get into the habit of making the first sentence the topic sentence of your paragraph. The rest of the paragraph should support the point made in your topic sentence.

The most attractive aspect of Claire Hennessy's life, I believe, is that she sets her own timetable and – for the most part – works when she wants to do so. She admits that there are very often times when she elects to go online and chat to friends on Twitter or email rather than get down to her current project. As she can catch up on the work at another time of the day or night, this does not seem to be a problem

and makes her day-to-day routine seem most appealing. Similarly, she is free to go to yoga class in the middle of the working day, and can meet friends for lunch before heading off to her afternoon session in the 'Big Smoke Writing Factory'.

Link phrases such as 'another reason' make your answer flow well and appear structured. Again, notice the way in which the topic sentence makes the point: 'working at what she loves', and the rest of the paragraph backs this up with evidence from the passage.

Another reason that I feel Claire Hennessy's lifestyle is so enviable is the fact that she is working at what she loves. Her positive attitude towards her writing and teaching shines through this passage. Of writing, she says, 'the days I write are better than the ones I don't'; and when

discussing her classes she says, 'One of the things I enjoy the most about creative writing is that you never teach the same thing twice'. The phrase 'enjoy the most' implies that there are many other aspects of the job she finds almost equally rewarding. For her, classes are never dull but even after all this time are 'still exciting'. I think it must be very pleasant indeed to find your job so stimulating.

It would be difficult not to feel slightly envious of someone who says of her job that 'Work is more fun than fun!' I think Claire Hennessy is very fortunate to have found her niche in life.

If you have time, a very brief conclusion can wrap your answer up neatly. Remember that you should never introduce a new point in your conclusion, and you should not simply repeat the same wording as you used in the introduction. Vary your vocabulary.

We came across the word 'niche' in the 2010 JC Reading section of Paper 1. Learn and use new vocabulary.

1. From your reading of the above extract, do you think that the writer, Claire Hennessy, has an enviable lifestyle? Explain your answer with reference to the text. (10)

Sample Answer to Question 1:

Option B (Answer:- No)

Note: You are free to agree or disagree with the idea that the writer's lifestyle is enviable. However, it is quite hard to disagree as Hennessy positively gushes about how much she enjoys her work. Nevertheless, you might say that it is not a lifestyle YOU would like and there are certainly aspects of it that the writer admits are less than perfect. This answer is based more on personal response than is the first answer, and I think it is a little weaker as a result. It is usually best to stick to the passage as much as possible when selecting evidence to support your points. This is not the answer I would choose to write in an exam situation, but it is a valid option so I thought it only fair to include it here.

Plan:-

Can't escape - finds it hard to discipline herself

Lonely - works on her own

I do not believe that the writer, Claire Hennessy, has an enviable lifestyle as she never seems able to fully escape her work and seems to find it difficult to discipline herself enough to stick to a regular timetable.

In the section 'Beginning the working day', Hennessy admits that she struggles to resist the lure of Twitter and email chat and often does not get down to work until much later than she had originally intended. Her little lecture to herself, 'It's all about sticking at it... You just have to keep going with it', makes her work sound like a chore that she must force herself to do rather than something she enjoys. Later in the blog, in the section headed 'End of the day', Hennessy says that she is once again getting down to some writing, over twelve hours after she began her working day! Because she works from home, it must be very hard for the writer to make a distinction between work and free time. I think this is a most unattractive aspect of Hennessy's life.

Another reason that I would not like the sort of lifestyle described in this blog is that it could be quite a lonely existence. By its nature, writing is a solitary activity and while Hennessy does interact with other people in the course of her

teaching, it seems that the majority of her working hours are spent alone in front of her computer. I would find such a routine extremely dull as I enjoy being around other people in school and could not see myself sitting on my own for long periods of time, always feeling under pressure to respond to the open 'work-in-progress' window.

Although Hennessy appears quite happy with her lifestyle, I could not imagine getting any enjoyment from such a blend of pressure and solitude.

2. What evidence can you find in the above extract to suggest Claire Hennessy is a good teacher and mentor? Give reasons for your answer. (15)

Sample Answer to Question 2:

Note: Unlike the first question, this question does not ask you what you think but asks you to find evidence to prove a point with which you have been presented. That means you must agree that Claire Hennessy is a good mentor and teacher.

As this is a fifteen mark question, you would be expected to write three well-developed points.

*Plan:- Positive about her work
Always learning and developing
Focuses on her students' needs*

I believe that the evidence in the extract shows that Claire Hennessy is an excellent teacher and mentor.

The first thing that struck me about Claire Hennessy is how positive she is about her work. She clearly loves being a teacher and helping others to find their way in the world of creative writing. Her language when she discusses her classes is unfailingly positive. Phrases like 'One of the things I enjoy the most about teaching...', and 'It's still exciting...', show how well-suited Hennessy is to teaching as she seems to take great pleasure in helping others to learn.

Hennessy's focus is the students and their needs. She says that the aim of the

creative writing classes and workshops is to see that the participants 'are learning what they need in order to develop as writers'. Hennessy puts them first and does not simply tell them what works for her as a writer but tries to ensure that the students are able 'to discover their own strengths and weaknesses and what way of writing suits them best'. I believe that this

Using link words or phrases at the start of paragraphs make your answer flow well and appear structured.

approach is part of what makes her an excellent teacher and mentor.

Finally, I think Claire Hennessy's open admission that she too is learning all the time shows what an honest, hard-working and open-minded teacher she is. She is not the sort of teacher who goes into a classroom and recites prepared lessons by rote, but is instead someone who responds to the day-to-day challenges of each lesson. Indeed, she says that it is 'far more enjoyable to continue to develop and grow as a teacher' than it would be to repeat the same material day in, day out. I think her students are very fortunate to have such a committed, flexible teacher who is always striving to learn and improve.

3. Would Claire Hennessy's style of writing in the above extract encourage you to read more of her work? Explain your answer with reference to the text. (15)

Sample Answer 3:

Note: This is a question about STYLE. As in Question 1, you are free to agree or disagree here. However, as always, you should be careful if you decide to disagree and choose to speak negatively about Claire Hennessy's writing style. Simply saying that you thought her blog was 'boring' will not get you a high grade. In fact, it is a good idea to avoid the word 'boring' altogether as it tends to get teachers' backs up!

Whether positive or negative, each point must be fully developed and supported by quotation from and/or close reference to the passage.

Option A (Answer:- Yes)

Plan:- Relatable - has the same ups and downs as most people

Humorous - 'bucket or two of tea' etc. etc.

Relaxed style, easy to read, uncomplicated vocabulary

Claire Hennessy's style of writing in the extract given would definitely make me want to read more of her writing as this piece is **relatable**, **humorous** and **written in a straightforward, relaxed way**.

This brief introduction outlines the three points that I will be developing in the rest of the answer.

The first thing that appeals to me about Hennessy's writing is how easy it is to relate to the experiences she details. Like all of us, she has ups and downs in her day and I think there are few people who could not identify with her grumbling at the first alarm clock ringing before finally giving in to the 'no-nonsense out-of-bed-you-get' of the second one. Similarly, I found myself nodding along in agreement as I read of her unequal struggle with the attractions of the internet and online chatting when she should have been working. I think that anyone who can tap into those experiences that so many of us share is likely to create characters I could believe in and relate to.

Hennessy's descriptions of these and other little occurrences in her daily life is humorous and quirky. She says that she is unable to function without a 'bucket of tea' running through her veins in the morning, and her reference to the spam email assuring her that she has won '1 million euro!!!!' made me smile. A writer who can present her anecdotes in such a light-hearted manner is probably going to use a similar style when writing her fictional pieces, and I am generally drawn to humorous writing, not least because it provides a much-needed escape from the dreariness of school text books!

The question asked if Claire Hennessy's style would encourage you to read more of her work, so you should refer to this in every paragraph.

The final aspect of Hennessy's style that appeals to me is that her writing is relaxed and straight-forward and her vocabulary uncomplicated while at the same time managing to capture the essence of what she wants to say in a creative and interesting way. I was particularly taken with her description of the aforementioned 'bucket of tea' being a much-needed 'power-up' in the morning, and I enjoyed the idea of the writer being like a video game character whose lifeline increases dramatically after the infusion of morning tea. I imagine that Hennessy's light-hearted, no-nonsense style would make her fiction very easy and enjoyable reading. I would definitely take the opportunity to read more of her work in the future.

Option B (Answer:- No)

Plan:-

Little to spark the imagination - mostly facts

Topics covered here are of little interest to young people - yoga, work etc.

Overly focused on herself and how she feels about everything

Claire Hennessy's style of writing in this extract does not appeal to me and would be unlikely to encourage me to read more of her work.

The blog entries are written in a rather factual, uninteresting way. Hennessy begins by telling us about her alarm clocks waking her up and then moves on to say 'Then out of bed I get and switch on my computer'. Next we hear that she likes to drink several cups of tea and check her emails. There is nothing in her narrative to spark my imagination and make me inclined to read on in this blog, let alone inspire me to read other examples of her work. I enjoy sci-fi, fantasy and adventure novels for their exciting story-lines, vivid descriptions and dynamic characters. Therefore, a writer who tells us about almost every moment of her dull, daily routine such as, 'I'm on my third mug of tea', and 'I minimise the Word screen', is unlikely to capture and hold my attention.

Another aspect of Hennessy's writing style which I find unappealing is that she discusses events that are of little or no interest to me, centring as they do on mainly adult experiences. I cannot imagine why I would ever want to read about a stranger's yoga classes, lunches with friends and the delights or otherwise of teaching creative writing classes. I know that Hennessy is a successful author of books for young adults, but I suspect that her novels may focus on a teenage version of the same sort of mundane life she describes in her blog and that would leave me cold.

The question asked if Claire Hennessy's style would encourage you to read more of her work, so you should refer to this in every paragraph, explaining why it would or would not do so.

The final reason for my being unlikely to read more of Claire Hennessy's work is that I think she is overly-focused on herself. Of course, a blog is meant to centre on the life of the person writing it, but at the same time I would have liked to have learned a little

bit more about the other people she interacts with every day. Not one other person is mentioned by name, and there are no interesting anecdotes about any of the students or what they are writing. Reading this blog makes me doubt that Hennessy would be able to create a wide range of varied characters in her work and this also makes me unlikely to seek out her work in the future.