**2011 Sample Answer**

1. (**a) Describe an occasion, in the early part of the novel, which reveals the close friendship between Alec and Jerry. (10)**

An occasion in the early part of the novel which I feel reveals the close friendship between Alec and Jerry is their meeting at the crossroads the night before they join the army. A conversation has taken place between Alicia Moore and her son and she has revealed that Frederick Moore is not his father. Alec, feeling **‘dispossessed in a sentence**’ and deeply upset leaves the house and walks towards the village.

As Alec draws near the village, he meets several people drinking, dancing and singing at the crossroads. Jerry Crowe is among them. He offers Alec a drink which at first he declines and soon, a series of significant conversations (war, Alicia, their love of horses, their friendship and women) evolves between both men. Alec expresses his surprise of Jerry enlisting in the British Army. Here we see a moment of tension as Jerry **‘spoke with such violence that my heart thumped against my ribs as if someone had hit me’**. However, quickly forgotten, he grips Alec’s knee tightly saying ‘**we’ll go together so’** highlighting their close friendship. The close bond between both men is again illustrated as Alec replies **‘We’ll go and be heroes together’.**

They drink and chat for a while and then decide to join the dance. Alec is not used to alcohol and falls down, drunk. As the villagers laugh, Jerry loyally comes to Alec’s defence **‘cut it out’** and they head off together, arm in arm, again highlighting their close friendship.

Finally, they both go for a swim as Jerry thinks it will sober them up. As they laugh and enjoy themselves, their conversations truly capture how comfortable they both are in each other’s presence. This unbreakable bond shows their mutual trust as they laugh and reminisce about the good old times.

I believe this meeting shows the loyalty and affection both young men feel for each other. Furthermore, it shows how comfortable they are exchanging confidences, especially as they have not seen each other in a long time.

**(b) Do you think that the relationship between Alec and his mother was good or bad? Give one reason for your answer. (10)**

Without doubt, Alec has a bad relationship with his mother. She seems to regard him as little more than a pawn in the deadly game she plays with her husband. She uses Alec to punish and hurt Frederick for her unhappiness in her marriage.

The dreadful relationship is clearly shown the night before Alec goes to war. Alicia has been pressing him to enlist as she feels that she will bask in the reflected glory of his heroism. She is deeply bitter that Alec has become like his father and is no kind of companion for her.

Alec refuses to go stating that that he does not **‘have any right to go and shoot people’.** Alicia reveals her true opinions as she calls her son a **‘coward’** for not enlisting. Alec refuses to rise to the bait, intensifying his mother’s anger. He tells her **‘father needs me.** **That is most certainly where my duty lies’**. In an act of unspeakable cruelty, Alicia tells Alec that Frederick Moore is not his father. Furthermore, she downplays the importance of their conversation by telling Alec she can **‘barely remember’** who his real father is. Her motive is to break the bond between Alec and Frederick.

I believe this incident shows the poor relationship that exists between Alec and his mother. She wants her own way and is prepared to hurt her son to succeed. She is also keen to send him to war so that she may be awarded the status of grieving mother of a dead soldier.

1. **What is your opinion of Frederick Moore, Alec’s father? Explain your answer. (10)**

I believe Frederick Moore is a weak, frail man who is beaten down by a miserable marriage and also, the sense that he is a failure in life. This is exemplified I the way Alicia, his wife speaks to him **‘Go and see to your work, old man’.** He serves as a foil to his wife in that he is kind and undemanding, but at the same time, he is not strong enough to stand up for himself. More importantly, he does not have the conviction to stand up for what he truly believes in.

Alicia is cruel, demanding and manipulative and Frederick bows to her wishes because of what he describes as a **‘terrible lethargy’** which sets in. An example of this is when Alicia deems Alec’s friendship with local, peasant boy, an unsuitable one. Frederick is submissive and tells his son **‘My boy, your mother’s right. It’s an unsuitable relationship’.**

As a reader, I sympathise with Frederick’s position as his unhappiness is clearly evident. He in tied to a loveless, distant marriage **‘I hope you never have to experience the humiliation of living with someone who is completely indifferent to you. Humiliation.’** He is powerless in the face of Alicia’s scorn and contempt.

It is hard not to feel sympathy for someone in such a position and I view Frederick Moore as a victim of circumstance. I now understand what Alec means, on the eve of his execution, that the news of his death may kill his father but that the older man ‘**may be better off dead’.**

**3. Answer ONE of the following: [Each part carries 30 marks]**

**(i) ‘During the course of the novel Alec learns many bitter lessons: about people, social position, duty, friendship, etc.’**

**Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer based on your reading of the novel.**

Yes I agree that Alec learns many bitter lessons about life during the course of the novel. Indeed, his view of life is so bleak; he faces his impending death calmly and without any apparent fear or sadness. One of the first lessons that Alec learns is that parents do not always love their children unconditionally. Alec’s father is a distant, withdrawn figure who has little involvement in his son’s life. He does not concern himself unduly with his son’s well-being, choosing instead to give in to his controlling wife’s demands.

His mother is cold and aloof. She too has little interest in Alec and instead she uses him as a shield between herself and the husband she despises. Largely ignored by his parents, Alec is more an observer than a participant in family life. He develops **‘the technique of listening to a fine art’** and sits quietly and miserably through many hate-filled malevolent conversations at meal times. Alec exists as simply a pawn in his parents **‘terrible game’.** This is indeed a bitter lesson for a young child to learn.

His loveless childhood affects Alec in a number of ways. I think he is emotionally withdrawn and generally unable to react to spontaneous overtures. When Bennett expresses his fondness for Alec, he is met with confusion and silence. Alec admits to himself that this is because, **‘in the life that I had known, spontaneity and warmth were unknown’.**

One of the harshest and most depressing lessons Alec learns is that good does not necessarily triumph over evil. His mother is a self-absorbed cruel woman. Frederick Moore is a kind but weak man but he is reduced to utter misery and loneliness by his wife’s implacable hatred and contempt. When Alec enlists, he finds himself thrown into a world where there seems to be no justice. Jerry is sentences to death for obeying his mother’s wishes and going to look for his father. Nothing Alec says or does can change the fact that Alec is going to die, but he still pleads with major Glendinning. When this fails, he asks the major where he learned to be so evil. The major replies **‘the world taught me. It will teach you’.** Alec however, never learns this lesson but instead remains true to his own values; loyalty, kindness and unselfishness.

It is admirable that, even in the face of such depressing and negative messages about love and life, Alec does not waver in his affection and loyalty towards his childhood friend.