



Unit 6

Being homeless

Cross-curricular – Literature

- 1 How big a problem is homelessness in your area? What do you think are the major causes of homelessness?

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- 2 Read the comments about a book called *Stuart: a life backwards*. Would these comments encourage or discourage you from reading the book? Why?

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A revealing and moving biography. No one can fail to be touched by this life of a homeless person.

1 There are numerous types of homeless person. There are those who were doing all right beforehand, but have suffered a temporary setback because their marriage didn't work out. Or their business may have collapsed. (1)..... Self-confidence is their main problem and, if the professionals can get hold of them in the first few months, they'll be back at work or at least in settled, long-term accommodation within a year or two.

2 (2)..... For women, it is usually violence or madness that has brought them to this condition. They are better at coping with financial failure and betrayal, or their expectations are more self-effacing.

3 Then there are the ones who suffer from chronic poverty, brought on by illiteracy or social ineptness or what are politely called 'learning disabilities'. (3)..... They move from garden shed to bedsit, shelter to hostel to garage to friend's sitting-room floor. They are never quite able to rise above their circumstances,

4 Right at the bottom of this heap are the people such as Stuart, the 'chaotic' homeless. The chaotic are beyond repair. When Stuart was first discovered, crouched on the lowest subterranean floor of a multi-story car park, the regular homeless wanted nothing to do with him. (4).....

5 What unites the chaotic is the confusion of their days. (5)..... Beyond their own governance, let alone within the grasp

of ours, they are constantly on the brink of raring up or breaking down. Charity staff fuss especially hard over these people because they are the worst face of homelessness and, when not the most hateful, the most pitiable extremity of street life.

6 All chaotic people have good and bad periods, but Stuart genuinely appears to have turned over a new leaf. He has separated himself from the street community, got himself on to the council housing list, renegotiated his court fines and begun paying fortnightly instalments, and bought himself a discount computer.

7 (6)..... Many of Stuart's old friends would rather die than take a shower and pay debts, and quite a few do: malnutrition, liver or kidney failure or both, hypothermia. Rough sleepers have a life-expectancy of forty-two years. (7)..... In the great bureaucracy of the police and social support services, everyone is patting their backs at Stuart's extraordinary return from this medieval existence towards respectability and secretly waiting for him to grab the nearest meat hook and run amok.

- 3 Read the extract from the book and decide which sentences a–h fill the gaps (1–7). There is one extra sentence you do not need.

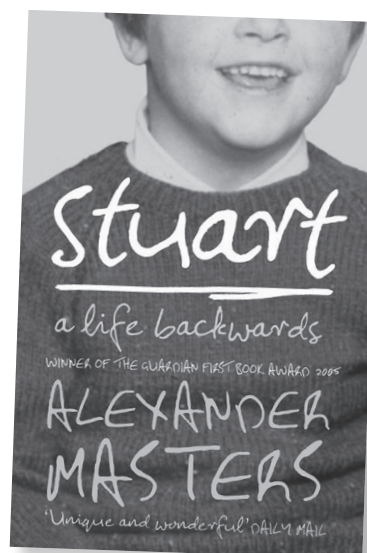
- a None of this is normal.
- b The chaotic are not always poor, even if they are on the streets.
- c Cause and effect are not connected in the usual way.
- d Or both.
- e They called him 'Knife Man Dan'.
- f They are thirty-five times more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the population.
- g They may be just ill or blind or deaf or dumb.
- h Men outnumber women ten to one on the streets.

WORD BOOSTER

Match the words and definitions.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1 self-effacing | a in a state of disorder |
| 2 chronic | b behave uncontrollably |
| 3 chaotic | c modest |
| 4 governance | d control |
| 5 run amok | e long term |

Highly recommended!
This is an important read – it asks sensitive questions about how we deal with homelessness...



- 4 What do you think the writer is trying to say by using these words or phrases in the text and sentences a–g?

- 1 just (paragraph 3)
- 2 beyond repair (paragraph 4)
- 3 the regular homeless (paragraph 4)
- 4 everyone is patting their backs (paragraph 7)
- 5 medieval existence (paragraph 7)

- 5 What do you think is the best way to deal with people who are homeless?

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