

## Text 1

***The Nesting Ground* is a creative non-fiction piece by Saint James Harris Wood, published in *The Sun* magazine. In this extract, a prisoner describes the swallow population living on prison grounds and the authorities' attempts to eliminate the birds' nests.**

After fifteen years in prison I was beginning to assume my life couldn't get any more lopsided and annoying, but now some cruel functionary has started a war against the local swallows.

Each day at dawn and again during the fading light of dusk I watch the hardy little birds hurtle by the hundreds across the sky, coasting and whipping about in unison, exercising perhaps or catching bugs or flying just for the joy of it. They wheel through the air like drunken, feathered acrobats, breathtaking and beautiful.

American cliff swallows have been coming here to San Luis Obispo, California, for probably a thousand years, flying up from Argentina, I'm told. The California Men's Colony is in the middle of their nesting ground. Once here, they industriously search out globs of mud and build nests that resemble tiny desert igloos. As if the prison existed for their convenience, the swallows make their lairs in a central area we call the "plaza": a couple of trees and some sickly grass surrounded by a three-story-tall catwalk made of steel girders. Staff and convicts march through the plaza each day to go to work, school, the library, and so on, while above us, in the niches and nooks of the steel beams, the birds construct nests three to four inches apart — a few thousand of them. The prison is like an aviary of sorts, except the swallows are free and the humans are trapped.

The swallows perform their complicated aerial gyrations with a grace that's alien to our clumsy human world, and without crashing into each other and falling to the ground like Icarus, or me.

[...]

But now, while the swallows are out hunting, some deranged prison bureaucrat has decided to destroy their nests and cover the steel girders with nets to discourage the birds from returning. Watching the crews break up the nests and put up the nets is aggravating; the dauntless birds already have to deal with hurricanes, hungry hawks, foxes, and a multitude of other natural threats.

[...]

Soon our swallows come back to find their nesting spots destroyed, and they are outraged for an entire day. Since they often seem quite mad to start with, it is disturbing to see them really lose their temper. They hunt that night as usual, taking out their fury on the bugs, but the fluidity and poetry are gone. Their evening feast is gory and tumultuous instead of elegant.

**Explain one** technique the writer uses for effect in the following line:

“The swallows perform their complicated aerial gyrations with a grace that’s alien to our clumsy human world, and without crashing into each other and falling to the ground like Icarus, or me.”

The writer uses contrast in this line in order to bring out the clumsy/rough nature of humans. The writer juxtaposes two contrasting actions, the gracefulness of the birds with the clumsiness of the humans in order to really bring out the other. He also mentions Icarus as it is a well known story of a boy who fell from the sky, using this to contrast with his idea of the graceful birds. This gives the audience a good understanding of just how graceful the swallows are.



**Question 1b** (3 marks)

**Analyse** the narrator’s description of the birds and what his observations reveal about him.

To me it seems as if the writer is a soft-hearted, caring and observational person. We see this in the lines like “they wheel through the air like drunken, feathered, acrobats, breathtaking and beautiful” this helps bring out the prisoner’s softer, more human side. This is a contrast to what people usually see prisoners as - tough and mean hearted - and shows us that these prisoners do care and admire things. That is especially seen in the case of the narrator and why I believe him to be a soft-hearted, caring and observational person.

**Comment** on how the narrator's voice-over (2:05–2:47) complements the action.



The narrator (2:05-2:47) gives us a glimpse into the thoughts of the common prisoner that has been imprisoned in shawshank. It provides us with an insight into those prisoners and what they are feeling. There is a montage of the prisoners that is going on as the narrator is narrating the feelings of the prisoners. His slow yet descriptive imagery and description of how the prisoners felt and comparison of the events happening to a “beautiful bird flapped into our cage and made those walls dissolve” really giving us an understanding of how this music made the prisoners feel.



**Question 1d** (3 marks)

**Justify** the significance of this scene in Andy's conflict.

We can see that Andy seems to be a prisoner. He probably does not want to be there and in order to show his distaste/rebellion against being held there he decides to go against the rules and play music. I believe that the music as well as the accompanying montage and narration sets the climax of the story, or the point from which it will all get better.

Text 1 is an article by a prisoner talking about how he is unhappy with the way the officials have behaved with the birds by tearing down their nests. While Text 2 focuses more on a rebellious prisoner named Andy who has got access to the loudspeakers and played Opera Music. Text 1 and 2 both happen to be texts based around prisoners, however, they have been presented through different mediums, with different intentions and have produced, similar yet slightly different effects on the audience.

Both of these texts talk about hope, however they present it in slightly different ways and have slightly different effects. Text 1 hints at hope, with the mention of birds. It talks about how free the birds are to fly about and build their nests. It reminds the prisoner of the outside world and the amount of freedom they had when they were normal citizens. In the first paragraph itself he states that: "I thought my life couldn't get any more lopsided and annoying, that was until some cruel functionary started a war against the birds". He tells us that his life was nothing to be happy about, and by suggesting that it was made worse by this "war" it hints that the birds were something good happening to him. I believe that these birds were showing him hope of a better and free life. However in text 2, we are shown a clip of a prisoner (Andy) who has managed to get a hold of a vinyl and play it for the rest of the prisoners. This creates a sense of hope especially during (2:05-2:47) when there is narration and a montage. This makes the sense of hope obvious to the audience as the narrator explains to us how the prisoners felt in that moment, really connecting the audience to the sense of freedom and hope that Andy gave to those prisoners in that moment. So as we can see, the both show hope, but symbolised it in different forms. One used birds and their free nature, talking about how they flap their wings and fly about free of life's troubles. While the other showed us hope through music, giving us an insight into the freedom that these men felt when they had been showed something that conveyed feeling, emotion and expression that they had probably never felt while being trapped in that prison.

Another point which I feel these texts both touch on are the more human, softer sides of the prisoners. Text 1 shows the vulnerability and sensitivity of the prisoner in lines like "the dauntless birds already have to deal with hurricanes, hungry hawks, foxes and a multitude of other natural threats." This line shows us that the prisoner is able to care and show feelings for something a depiction that is not commonly shared by the general public - viewing these prisoners as tough and incapable of emotion. The second text, showcases the prisoners feeling inspired by just some music. This music creates a sense of unity and hope for the prisoners, but also show them again, as humans with human like emotions. As an audience, the ability of these texts to depict these people as human, helps us empathise with them more as we are better able to connect to their situations, and relate to the feelings that these characters have possessed.

To conclude, I personally feel that out of the two texts, text 2 brought out that feeling of hope more than text 1. It used music, montage and narration in order to really give an understanding of what the prisoners felt in that moment, and provide the audience with that feeling of hope for the prisoners. However, they both displayed hope in their own ways as well as depicted these prisoners as normal human beings that were just like us in order to connect to our emotions as the audience.

(TASK 1e)

## Texts 1 and 2

**Compare and contrast** how the writer and filmmaker portray prisoners.

(Approximately 350 words)

