## Text: Carrie’s War

by Nina Bawden

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ESSAY QUESTION 1A

“Carrie’s War is not primarily about the second world war. It is about Carrie getting caught up in private wars between individuals.” Discuss with close reference to the text.

Helpful hints:

✓ In the introduction explain that Carrie and Nick were evacuated to Wales and that the events would not have happened if they had not been evacuated. The war is the reason for Albert, Nick and Carrie to be together in a village away from their parents.

✓ Revisit the part of the text where Carrie gives her reactions to the photograph of her mother in uniform, (Chapter 3). Quote to support your view, and refer to the distancing relationship between Carrie and her mother.

✓ The war also features when Mr Evans’ son, a soldier, returns on leave. How important an episode do you think this is?

✓ Explain that the bulk of the book is about Carrie being caught up in the estranged relationship between Samuel and Dilys. How relevant is World War 2 to the split in the family? You may need at least two paragraphs here to describe Carrie’s own war.

✓ Describe the degree to which Carrie feels haunted by the part she played as go-between between brother and sister. Most of the adults she knows in the village are directly involved in the Evans-Gotobed antagonism. Evacuation means she is isolated and cannot talk to anyone about her problems. To what extent do you feel Carrie’s predicament can be attributed to the absence of adult support, because of war?

✓ In your conclusion give your views on the extent to which war is central to the book.
ESSAY QUESTION 1B

Mr Evans dislikes Hepzibah Green and feels she has power over Dily's Gotobed? What is your opinion of Hepzibah and her power? How important is she to Carrie's War? Support your views with close reference to the text.

Helpful hints:

✓ Start with a general introduction to Hepzibah. At the start of the book Carrie tells her children that Hepzibah is not ordinary. Comment on how Hepzibah spans the full stretch of the book and helps the adult Carrie to come to terms with her childhood experiences.

✓ Revisit page 41 to see what Aunty Lou says about her. Does she think Hepzibah has special powers?

✓ Comment on Mr Evans’ view of Hepzibah. Look closely at parts of Chapter 6. Explain why his view might be coloured by his attitude towards his sister and the extent to which Hepzibah and Druid’s Grove present an alternative lifestyle and even religion that challenge Mr Evans.

✓ Comment on Albert’s attitude to Hepzibah. He describes her as a witch in Chapter 6. What do you think he means? What do you think about Hepzibah’s knowledge of medicines and her love of stories, like the history of the skull? Look for evidence of what Nick thinks of Hepzibah.

✓ Revisit the part of the book where Carrie encounters Hepzibah on the stairs and tries to reconcile the various opinions she has heard about Hepzibah.

✓ What is your opinion of how Hepzibah behaves after Mrs Gotobed dies (Chapter 11)? Does it differ from that of Mr Evans’ view of her?

✓ What is your impression of Hepzibah at the end of book, thirty years later? Has your attitude towards her changed?

✓ In conclusion, return to the question and sum up your views on her character and importance.
ESSAY QUESTION 1C

What do you learn about evacuation from a study of Carrie’s War?

Helpful hints:

✓ Revisit Chapter 2 where evacuation is described. How much information were adults given about where their children were going?

✓ Reread the description of the “cattle auction” in the hall. What feelings do you think this episode creates in Carrie, Nick and Albert?

✓ Consider Nick. Is he well looked after or badly treated? Is he happy? Look closely at the text and give a description of Nick’s evacuation. Do you feel he was damaged by the experience?

✓ Now consider Albert Sandwich’s war. Was it a positive experience for him? Look closely at what Hepzibah says about Albert's relationship with Hepzibah and Mister Johnny after the war ended.

✓ Why does Carrie have such a traumatic war compared to Nick and Albert? Whose fault is it that she becomes the go-between in the estranged relationship between Samuel and Dilys?

✓ Describe Carrie’s isolation. Most of the adults she knows in the village are directly involved in the family antagonism. Evacuation and the estrangement from her parents means she cannot talk through her problems. To what extent do you feel Carrie’s predicament can be attributed to the absence of adult support?

✓ Conclude by describing the evacuation of Nick, Albert and Carrie and explaining the extent to which Nick, Albert and Carrie’s wars were positive or damaging experiences.
ESSAY QUESTION 1D

Carrie has three separate experiences on her birthday - her mother’s present; the celebrations at Druid’s Grove and the meal with Mr Evans and Aunty Lou. Explain how each of these episodes reflects the characters of the participants, and describe Carrie’s response to each.

Helpful hints:

✓ Reread the section about Carrie’s mother's birthday parcel. Consider how distant a figure Carrie’s mother is now. Trace Carrie’s emotions from her receipt of the parcel to the discovery that the dress is too small. Look closely at the reasons for her disappointment. What does this suggest about Carrie’s relationship with her mother?

✓ Revisit the birthday celebrations at Druid’s Grove. Several people combine to make this a joyous celebration for Carrie. Look closely at each participant’s contribution. Taking each person at a time, explain how their characters are reflected in their actions.

✓ Revisit the scene where Mr Evans and Aunty Lou are waiting for Carrie on her birthday. Explain how the episode gets off to a poor start because Carrie is late and when she arrives she is still on a high from Druid’s Grove. How does Mr Evans react? Note how Aunty Lou deflects attention from Carrie by antagonising Mr Evans by talking about lipstick and the dance at the American base.

✓ How much do you feel Carrie enjoys the celebration in the shop? To what extent do the two birthday celebrations symbolise the tensions between the brother and sister?

✓ Look closely at how the chapter ends. Conclude by considering the extent to which Carrie has enjoyed her birthday.
ESSAY QUESTION 1E

The story is told as a flashback. How does this affect the reader’s responses to the text? Do you find it an effective technique?

Helpful hints:

✓ Study the opening paragraph of the book. The mood is one of nightmare. Note that the paragraph is indistinct in that the reader is not shown specific details about what the episode is that haunts Carrie. Think of words to describe the mood. Does it make you want to read on? Why? Why does it suggest the story will be about?

✓ Revisit the opening section of the book where Carrie is reminiscing about her experiences as a child. At which part does the mood darken? Find the short paragraph where the children were frightened and note the word Nina Bawden uses three times in that paragraph. What does this suggest about the intensity of their mother's experience over thirty years ago? How does this affect the reader's response and expectations?

✓ Read carefully and quote from the paragraph where Carrie refers to the terrible thing she did thirty years ago. Why do you think the vocabulary she uses is so vague? Why do her children not ask her to flesh out the details? What is the mood of this section? What affect does it have on the reader?

✓ Consider what difference it would make to the reader if the novel started at Chapter 2.

✓ Conclude by referring back to the question and explaining how effective you find the use of flashback and what responses it creates in the reader.
ESSAY QUESTION 2A

Mr Evans is an important character in the book. As a reader, describe your responses to Mr Evans as your relationship with him develops.

Helpful hints:

✓ Before we meet him Aunty Lou gives us clues as to what he is like. Describe the picture she creates.

✓ Consider how he is first introduced. What impression did you form of him?

✓ Look at how he treats the children. What do they think of him?

✓ Revisit Chapter 8 where Hepzibah gives some of the background to the bad relationship between Samuel and his sister. What does his attitude to Dilys suggest about his character?

✓ What does Mr Evans’ treatment of Aunty Lou suggest about him? Why does she not tell him she is leaving to get married?

✓ Consider Mr Evans’ relationship with his son. What does this suggest about him?

✓ How does Mr Evans after the death of his sister? What is your impression of his response? What do you learn of him from his response to Carrie when she gives him Mrs Gotobed’s message?

✓ Do you feel sorry for Mr Evans at any point? When? Explain why?

✓ What do we learn about Mr Evans when Carrie’s children visit Druid’s Bottom. Look closely at what Hepzibah says are the real reasons he died. How do you feel about him at the end of book?
ESSAY QUESTION 2B

The relationship between Carrie and Mrs Gotobed takes time to develop. Identify and discuss any events or conversations which you consider to be significant milestones in their growing relationship. To what extent is Mrs Gotobed responsible for damaging Carrie?

Helpful hints:

✓ What are we told about Mrs Gotobed before we meet her? Study Chapter 6 to glean information.

✓ Revisit the text to see Aunty Lou, Albert and Hepzibah think of Mrs Gotobed. Support your views with evidence from the text.

✓ Carrie does not meet Mrs Gotobed until April. Why do you think Nina Bawden chose to use suspense here?

✓ When we do, eventually, meet her, what impression does she create on Carrie? Study Chapter 7 for clues.

✓ How do you think Carrie responds to Dily’s description of Samuel?

✓ Even though it is their first meeting, she uses Carrie as a messenger. Find evidence from the text that suggests Carrie’s response to her.

✓ Study Carrie’s response to Mrs Gotobed in Chapter 9.

✓ Why did Carrie deliver Mrs Gotobed’s message, despite Albert’s advice?

✓ How does Carrie respond to the situation Mrs Gotobed creates by not leaving a will where it can be found? Is Mrs Gotobed in any way responsible for Carrie throwing away the skull, and the girl’s subsequent guilt feeling?

✓ Conclude by referring back to the question and summarising the relationship between Carrie and Mrs Gotobed and the extent to which it damaged Carrie.
How significant are parent-child relationships to an understanding of *Carrie’s War*?

Helpful hints:

- **Start by discussing the opening of the book.** Evacuation means Carrie is separated from her mother and almost has to take on the adult role of protector of Nick. Find examples to support your views.

- **To what extent are Mr Evans and Aunty Lou substitute parents for Carrie and Nick?**

- **Describe the relationship between the children and their mother when she visits in Chapter 3.**

- **Comment on how Carrie feels about her mother when she receives her birthday present.** How important a figure is Carrie’s father in the book?

- **To what extent are Carrie’s dilemmas caused by not having a parent-type figure in whom she can confide and who would give her advice?** Why is this not the case for Nick?

- **Mr Evans is a father himself.** How pride is he of his son? Look at the section of the book where Frederick returns, (Chapter 9). Give evidence from the text of how close father and son are. Do you think they will be together after the war? Justify your view.

- **Examine at the end of Chapter 14 when we see Carrie’s behaviour after the fire.** Why did neither she nor Nick talk to her mother about her concerns?

- **Reread the section of the book when Carrie returns to the village thirty years later.** Note the part her children play in helping their mother confront the past. What does this episode contribute to the theme of the parent-child relationship?

- **Conclude by summing up your views on the significance of the parent-child relationship to the book.**
ESSAY QUESTION 2D

Discuss the importance of the relationships between brothers and sisters in *Carrie's War*.

Helpful hints:

- **✓** In your opening, describe the relationship between Carrie and Nick. Use evidence from the description of the train journey to illustrate the age difference and the extent to which Carrie looks after Nick.

- **✓** Reread the section of the book where the “cattle auction” of children takes place. Look for evidence of where Carrie controls Nick’s behaviour. Find examples of Carrie’s protection of Nick.

- **✓** Describe the relationship between Samuel Evans and Dilys Gotobed. Look at Aunty Lou’s comments in the tenth paragraph of Chapter 4 where she explains the history of Mr Evans’ attitude to his sister.

- **✓** Look closely at Chapter 6 and describe what you learn about Mr Evans’ attitude to his sister.

- **✓** Revisit the scene in Chapter 7 when Carrie meets Mrs Gotobed. Comment on what the old lady says about her brother. Even at the first meeting Mrs Gotobed uses Carrie as a go-between to deliver a message to him after her death. What does her action suggest about her relationship with Samuel?

- **✓** Revisit Chapter 8 where Hepzibah talks of the bad relationship between brother and sister. Explain how their divisions are rooted in the past.

- **✓** After Dilys dies, is there any change in Samuel’s attitude towards Dilys? Look closely at the conversation Carrie has with Mr Evans when he talks about the envelope, the photo and the ring. What does it reveal about the relationship between the brother and sister?

- **✓** Conclude by revisiting the question and summarise the importance of the sibling relationships in the book.
ESSAY QUESTION 2E

“A major theme of Carrie’s War is the relationship between the past and the present.” Discuss this claim with close reference to the text.

Helpful hints:

✓ The book starts with a flashback. Explain what this implies about childhood experiences haunting and damaging adults thirty years later. Why, after all this time, do you think Carrie returns?

✓ Explain Carrie’s involvement in the estranged relationship between Samuel Evans and Dilys Gotobed, thirty years ago.

✓ Revisit the start of Chapter 4 where Aunty Lou talks of Mr Evans’ attitude to his sister. Comment on how this contributes to the essay topic.

✓ Reread Chapter 8 where Hepzibah gives some of the background to the bad relationship between brother and sister. Explain how their divisions are rooted years back in the past.

✓ Revisit the opening paragraph of Chapter 15. Comment on how Carrie’s guilt feelings have lessened slightly, but quote from the paragraph to prove the level of her distress.

✓ About ten paragraphs before the end of the book Carrie’s older son suggests how his mother’s childhood experiences have affected her later in life. Comment on the significance of this, in terms of linking the past and the present.

✓ To what extent is the past reconciled with the present at the end of the book? Is Carrie’s war finally over?
WRITING TASKS: CARRIE’S WAR

TASK 1: The opening paragraph of the book is a powerful piece of writing. Read the text carefully to see how Nina Bawden has created a sense of nightmare. Look closely at the adjectives used to describe her legs and her sandals. Read the description aloud to grasp the full impact of the sounds and the short vowels. Note the vocabulary used to describe the yew trees. Describe the atmosphere created. Find a simile and comment on its effectiveness. Find some personification and some repetition. Try writing a nightmare paragraph of your own. Choose a different situation, but try using some of the techniques Nina Bawden has demonstrated to make your writing vivid.

TASK 2: Imagine the skull is now on show in the local Museum. Produce a notice to be displayed beside the skull which conveys to a visitor the key points of the Hepzibah’s story, (see Chapter 5). Use bullet points if you wish.

TASK 3: Carrie discovers Aunty Lou has told Nick about her marriage. Revisit the end of Chapter 13 and write a playscript of the scene where Aunty Lou and Nick talk about her marriage. Why does Aunty Lou not include Carrie in her secret? Do you think she was right?

TASK 4: Imagine you are Hepzibah. Write her diary entry for the day when Mr Evans came to take an inventory of Mrs Gotobed’s possessions. Think carefully about the kind of person she is and make sure you write in role.

TASK 5: Imagine Carrie has written to Albert Sandwich after she has seen the fire to explain her feelings of guilt. Write the letter you think he would send her as a reply. Consider the relationship between them and make your writing convincing.
DRAMA ACTIVITIES: CARRIE’S WAR

ACTIVITY 1
Imagine Mr Evans discovered Aunty Lou as she was packing to leave with Major Cass Harper. Ask the pupils to divide into pairs and then act out this imaginary scene. Watch and appraise each other’s performances.

ACTIVITY 2
Working in small groups, ask the children to imagine they are part of a television outside broadcast company reporting live on the Fire at Druid’s Bottom. Divide into groups and rehearse and perform a short news filmed on location.

ACTIVITY 3
Ask the children to act out the scene when Albert tells Hepzibah and Mister Johnnie that he has bought Druid’s Bottom. Compare and appraise each group’s performances.

ACTIVITY 4
Invite the children to take turns sitting in the ‘Hot-seat’ at the front of the class, fielding questions in the role of Carrie. Invite specific questions about the Druid’s Bottom fire.

ACTIVITY 5
Act out the scene where Carrie and Albert Sandwich are reunited. Compare and discuss performances.
GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES: CARRIE’S WAR

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1

Aunty Lou says Mr Evans has hardened in his attitude to his sister and that he won’t let bygones be bygones. Do you think he is right? Is there a point at which you should put the past behind you and start again?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2

Even as a forty-two year old woman, Carrie is haunted by guilt for something she did when she was twelve. Do you think this is likely?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3

Why does Nick not return to the village with Carrie and her children? How important is Nick to the book as a whole? Would you like him as a brother? Give your reasons.

DEBATE MOTION 1

This House believes that Albert Sandwich was correct when he described childhood as a handicap because children have no power.

DEBATE MOTION 2

This House believes Mrs Gotobed is correct when she says being afraid is a waste of time.
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

FICTION

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit by Judith Kerr
Goodnight Mister Tom by Michelle Magorian
I am David by Anne Holm
Fireweed by Jill Paton Walsh
War Boy by Michael Foreman
Children of the Blitz by Robert Westall
Stones in the Water by Jo Napoli

POETRY ANTHOLOGIES

Lines in the Sand – New Writing About War and Peace by Mary Hoffmann, Rhiannon Lassiter and Jane Ray
Oxford Book of War Poetry by Jon Stallworthy
In Time of War edited by Anne Harvey
Blood and Roses – British History in Poetry compiled by Brian Moses

NON-FICTION

The Diary of Anne Frank
World War II Eyewitness Guide
The Blitz - At Home in World War 2 Stewart Ross
The Second World War Usborne
World War Two – Causes, Course and Consequences Simon Adams
Britain at War 1939 - 1945 Pitkin