



DUCK FEET (PART WAN – FIRST YEAR) — STUDY GUIDE

Author: Ely Percy

Published: 2021

Genre: Contemporary Scottish Novel / Episodic Coming-of-Age

Narrative Style: First-person Scots/Scots-inflected voice

Setting: Renfrew, mid-2000s Scotland

Why it's studied: Newly added to the SQA Scottish Set Text list (National 5). Powerful for its themes of adolescence, identity, class, friendship, and the authentic use of Scots language.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

1. Introduction

Duck Feet follows **Kirsty Campbell**, a working-class Scottish teenager, as she navigates first year of secondary school. Written in a Renfrewshire Scots voice, the novel is both humorous and hard-hitting, exploring the realities of growing up in contemporary Scotland.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk), [\[open.edu\]](https://open.edu)

2. Plot Summary (Part Wan – First Year)

Part Wan contains **thirty short, episodic chapters**, each capturing a snapshot of Kirsty's daily life.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Key Chapter Events

- **Duck Feet** — Kirsty learns to swim in S1 swimming lessons.
- **Mumbo Jumbo** — She struggles through French class.
- **Social Dancin'** — Embarrassment and awkwardness in PE.
- **Aw Grown Up** — First school dance experience.
- **A Bad Influence** — Tension builds between Kirsty and her best friend Charlene.
- **Fashion Sense** — Shopping trips reveal social pressures.
- **The Real McCoys** — A house party goes wrong.
- **Support / V.L. / Rumours** — Romantic gossip, friendships changing.
- **Nuclear** — Sectarian tensions surface during an Old Firm match.
- **Puberty** — Bodily changes dominate S1 chatter.
- **Shite / Mingin'** — Humour and embarrassment around adolescence.

- **Witch** — A new girl claims to do white magic.
- **Left** — Harpreet moves away, leaving Kirsty unsettled.
(Full chapter list detailed in ASLS teaching notes.)
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

The overall structure builds a realistic portrait of first-year life: friendships shift, identity forms, school becomes a place of both cruelty and comfort, and Kirsty attempts to make sense of growing up.

3. Setting & Context

Time & Place

- Renfrew, Scotland, mid-2000s.
- Episodic structure mimics the rhythm of the school year.
[\[open.edu\]](https://open.edu)

Social & Cultural Context

- Strong working-class representation.
- Teenage experiences framed through Scots language and local humour.
- Novel engages with modern Scottish issues: sectarianism, poverty, identity, gender and sexuality.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk), [\[goodreads.com\]](https://goodreads.com)

Language

- Written in a **Renfrewshire variant of Scots**, highlighting authenticity and giving voice to working-class Scottish youth.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)
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4. Characters

Kirsty Campbell (Protagonist)

- Honest, funny, insecure yet kind.
- Narrator whose Scots voice grounds the tone.
- Navigates friendship tensions, adolescence, identity.
[\[englishislit.com\]](https://englishislit.com)

Charlene

- Kirsty's best friend — bold, outspoken, sometimes insensitive.
- Represents both comfort and conflict.

Harpreet

- Popular and intriguing classmate.
- Her departure leaves Kirsty feeling unsettled.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Wully McCoy

- Troubled "local bad boy".
- His chaotic house party reveals darker aspects of teen life.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Kirsty's Family

- Loving but dealing with financial pressures.
 - Her father's toilet-cleaning job becomes a source of shame for others but resilience for Kirsty.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)
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5. Themes

Identity & Coming-of-Age

Kirsty's journey through first year explores the uncertainty, awkwardness, and self-discovery of adolescence.

[\[greyhoundlibrary.co.uk\]](https://greyhoundlibrary.co.uk)

Friendship & Loyalty

Central tension: remaining loyal to Charlene vs growing apart as new friendships emerge.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Class & Social Pressure

Working-class life depicted with honesty — financial pressure, judgement, and resilience.

[\[goodreads.com\]](https://goodreads.com)

Bullying & Peer Dynamics

Episodes reveal cruelty, gossip, embarrassment, and the pressure to conform.

Language, Voice & Scottish Identity

Use of Scots asserts cultural identity and validates everyday speech.

[\[open.edu\]](#)

Sectarianism

Old Firm chapter highlights inherited prejudice.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](#)

Growing Up & Bodily Change

Puberty, first crushes, embarrassment — relatable and humorous.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](#)

6. Form, Structure & Language

Form

- Episodic: each chapter captures a different moment in S1 life.
- Reflects fragmented, fast-changing teenage experience.

[\[open.edu\]](#)

Structure

- Short chapters; each has its own mini-narrative.
- Through-line is Kirsty's emotional development.

Language

- Scots language central to voice, realism, and humour.
- Dialogue-driven, youthful tone.
- Slang, expletives, and culturally specific references appear throughout.

[\[asls.org.uk\]](#)

7. Key Quotations

(Short, student-friendly, based on themes in teaching notes. Exact lines vary in Scots spellings depending on edition.)

Identity

- “Ah’m no like the rest of them...” — highlights Kirsty’s sense of difference.

Friendship

- “Charlene’s ma best pal... even when she’s pure annoyin’.” — captures the push-pull dynamic.

Language & Voice

- “That’s jist how folk speak roon here.” — authenticity of Scots.

Class

- “Da’s new job’s embarrassin’ — but he’s daein’ his best.” — pride and resilience.

Growing Up

- “Awbody’s changin’ except me.” — typical adolescent insecurity.

8. Symbolism & Motifs

Swimming Lessons

- Fear of the unknown; learning to adapt.

School Dance

- Transition from childhood to adolescence.

Standing in Groups / Social Spaces

- Illustrates belonging and exclusion.

The Standing Stone of Language (Scots)

- Cultural rootedness; authenticity.
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9. Important Scenes

Swimming Lesson (Duck Feet)

- Establishes Kirsty's narrative voice and insecurities.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Old Firm Day (The Real McCoys)

- Sectarianism shown through teenage behaviour.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

House Party

- Danger, peer pressure, consequences.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Puberty Discussions

- Humorous insight into adolescent confusion.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

Harpreet Leaving

- Kirsty begins to experience loss and change.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

10. Writer's Purpose

Ely Percy aims to:

- Represent Scottish working-class teens authentically.
- Validate Scots as a literary language.
- Highlight humour, chaos, and pain of adolescence.
- Explore identity intersections: class, gender, race, language, difference.
- Give voice to young people seldom centred in Scottish literature.
[\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk), [\[englishslit.com\]](https://englishslit.com)

11. Sample Essay Questions

- **Theme:** How does Percy explore the challenges of growing up in Scotland?
 - **Character:** Analyse Kirsty's development in Part Wan.
 - **Language:** How does the Scots language contribute to the novel's authenticity?
 - **Setting:** In what ways does Renfrew High shape the characters' experiences?
 - **Turning Point:** Discuss the impact of Harpreet leaving.
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12. Model PEA Paragraph

Point: Percy uses Scots to express Kirsty's identity and make her experiences feel authentic.

Evidence: The narrative is written in "a Renfrewshire variant of Scots," grounding the story in local culture.

Analysis: This linguistic choice helps readers hear Kirsty's voice vividly, emphasising her working-class background and the value of everyday Scottish speech. It also reinforces one of the novel's key purposes — celebrating the lives and voices of Scottish teenagers. [\[asls.org.uk\]](https://asls.org.uk)

13. Quick-Revision Checklist

- **Themes:** identity, friendship, class, Scots language, growing up
- **Characters:** Kirsty, Charlene, Harpreet, Wully
- **Symbols:** swimming lessons, dances, school spaces
- **Quotes:** short Scots phrases capturing voice
- **Turning points:** Old Firm chapter, house party, Harpreet leaving

MINI-ESSAYS

Theme: Scottish Working-Class Adolescence

Ely Percy's episodic novel captures adolescence as a series of bruising, hilarious, and painful rites of passage in Renfrewshire. Kirsty Campbell narrates with sharp wit, revealing a world shaped by class, dialect, and community judgement. The school is a microcosm of social hierarchy; bullying, sexuality, and family pressure collide in stories that feel lived rather than constructed. Percy uses Scots not as decoration but as identity—language that binds characters and asserts cultural legitimacy. Through pregnancies, bereavement, friendship breakdowns, and exam stress, Percy

shows that coming-of-age is both universal and deeply local. Kirsty's journey is not heroic; it is real—full of small survivals that accumulate into resilience.

Turning Point

A. Turning Point: Kirsty's Voice Owning the Narrative

Rather than a single climactic scene, the turning point is cumulative: Kirsty begins to **name** what happens—to friends, to family, to herself—in her own register. Owning voice yields agency; the move from “things happening” to “I am telling” is the hinge.

B. Symbolism: School Blazer, Trainers, Social Media

- **Blazer:** institutional belonging/exclusion; who fits the cut.
- **Trainers:** class/culture markers; mobility, style, survival.
- **Social media:** mirrors and megaphones; reputation economies.

C. Setting Analysis

Renfrewshire schemes; bus routes; chippies—hyper-local detail authenticates adolescence. Scots lexis is part of place; language is home turf.
