

A Kestrel for a Knave - Session 2 Handout

The Beatles

A Day in the Life

1967

I read the news today, oh boy
About a lucky man who made the grade
And though the news was rather sad
Well, I just had to laugh
I saw the photograph
He blew his mind out in a car
He didn't notice that the lights had changed
A crowd of people stood and stared
They'd seen his face before
Nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords
I saw a film today, oh boy
The English Army had just won the war
A crowd of people turned away
But I just had to look
Having read the book
I'd love to turn you on

Woke up, fell out of bed
Dragged a comb across my head
Found my way downstairs and drank a cup
And looking up I noticed I was late
Found my coat and grabbed my hat
Made the bus in seconds flat
Made my way upstairs and had a smoke
And everybody spoke and I went into a dream

I read the news today, oh boy
Four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire
And though the holes were rather small
They had to count them all
Now they know how many holes it takes to fill the Albert Hall
I'd love to turn you

Lennon and McCartney

Extract 1:

[Mr Farthing] "I don't know, you always seem to cop it, don't you, Casper?"... 'I wonder why? Why do you think it is?' (p80/160)

Extract 2:

[Mr Farthing] 'What about the police? Have you been in trouble with them lately?'

[Billy] 'No, sir.'

'Because you've reformed? Or because you haven't been caught?'

'I've reformed, Sir.' (P82-3/160)

Mr Gryce's lecture (p55 - 58/160):

"The same old faces. Why is it always the same old faces?"

The messenger stepped forward and raised one hand.

Please, Sir.'

'Don't interrupt, boy, when I'm speaking.'

He stepped back and filled the gap in the line.

'I'm sick of you boys, you'll be the death of me. Not a day goes by without me having to deal with a line of boys. I can't remember a day, not one in all the years I've been in this school, and how long's that?... ten years, and the school's no better now than it was on the day that it opened. I can't understand it, I can't understand it at all.'

The boys couldn't understand it either, and they dropped their eyes as he searched for an answer in their faces. Failing to find one there, he stared past them out of the window.

The lawn stretching down to the front railings was studded with worm casts, and badly in need of its Spring growth. The border separating the lawn from the drive was turned earth, and in the centre of the lawn stood a silver birch tree in a little round bed. Its trunk cut a segment out of a house across the road, and out of the merging grey and black of the sky above it, and although the branches were still bare, and the white of the trunk against the dull green, and red and greys, hinted of Spring, and provided the only clean feature in the whole picture.

'I've taught in this city for over thirty-five years now; many of your parents were pupils under me in the old city schools before this estate was built; and I'm certain that in all those years I've never encountered a generation as difficult to handle as this one. I thought I understood young people, I should be able to with all my experience, yet there's something happening today that's frightening, that makes me feel that it's all been a waste of time... Like it's a waste of time standing here talking to you boys, because you won't take a blind bit of notice what I'm saying. I know what you're thinking now, you're thinking, why doesn't he get on with it and let us go, instead of standing there babbling on? That's what you're thinking isn't it? Isn't it, MacDowall?'

'No, Sir.'

'O yes it is. I can see it in your eyes, lad, they're glazed over. You're not interested. Nobody can tell you anything, can they, MacDowall? You know it all, you young people, think you're so sophisticated with all your gear [the word 'gear' is italicised] and your music. But the trouble is, it's only superficial, just a sheen with nothing worthwhile or solid underneath. As far as I can see there's been no advance at all in discipline, decency, manners or morals. And do you know how I know this? Well, I'll tell you. Because I still have to use this everyday.'

He brought the stick round from behind his back for the boys to have a look at.

'It's fantastic isn't it, that in this day and age, in this super-scientific, all-things-bright-and-splendiferous age, that the only way of running this school efficiently is by the rule of the cane. But why? There should be no need for it now. You lot have got it on a plate.'

'I can understand why we had to use it back in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Those were hard times; they bred hard people and it needed hard measures to deal with them. But those times bred people with qualities totally lacking in you people today. They bred people with respect for a start. We knew where we stood in those days, and even today a man will often stop me in the street and say "Hello Mr Gryce, remember me?" And we'll pass the time of day and chat, and he'll laugh about the thrashings I gave him.'

'But what do I get from you lot? A honk from a greasy youth behind the wheel of some big second-hand car. Or an obscene remark from a gang – after they've passed me.'

They took it then, but not now, not in this day of the common man, when every boy quotes his rights, and shoots off home for his father as soon as I look at him. ...No gets. ...No backbone ...you've nothing to commend you whatsoever. You're just fodder for the mass media!'

He slashed the stick in front of their chests, making the air swish in its wake, then he turned round and leaned straight-armed on the mantle shelf, skiving his head. The boys winked at each other.

'I don't know. I just don't know.'

He turned round slowly. The boys met him with serious expressions, frowning and compressing their lips as though they were trying their hardest to solve his problems.

'So for want of a better solution I continue using the cane, knowing full well that you'll be back time and time again for some more. Knowing that when you smokers leave this room wringing your hands, you'll carry on smoking just the same. Yes, you can smirk, lad. I'll bet your pockets are laden up at this very moment in readiness for break; aren't they? Aren't they? Well just empty them. Come on, all of you, empty your pockets!'

... The first stroke made him cry. The second made him sick.

Extract from James O'Brien Interview:

James O'Brien, author of How Not to be Wrong - <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/october/james-o-brien-how-not-to-be-wrong-interview.html>

"The first part is you admit that you're afraid and then you work out why," he says. "So since the age of 10, when I first started getting beaten by my headmaster at prep school, I have not been afraid of anything. That was my cradle, that's who I thought I was, the boy who got beaten more than any other in the history of the school – hell yeah!"

"And I spent 30 years of my life saying: 'It didn't do me any harm' and arguing on the telly and on the radio about why corporal punishment, if it was used sparingly and intelligently, was a wonderful way of disciplining young children."

"[But] I was really scared. I was broken. I'd get myself off somewhere alone at the age of 10, 11, 12 and I'd howl and I'd cry, and no one ever saw it. Then I'd march back in again and I was Jimbo, the boy that got beaten a lot."