

Theme: Novel Experience / **Source:** Extract from: *About a Boy* by Nick Hornby (1998)

How cool was Will Freeman? This cool: he had slept with a woman he didn't know very well in the last three months (five points). He had spent more than three hundred pounds on a jacket (five points). He had spent more than twenty pounds on a haircut (five points) (How was it possible to spend less than twenty pounds on a haircut in 1993?). He owned more than five hip-hop albums (five points). He had taken Ecstasy (five points), but in a club and not merely at home as a sociological exercise (five bonus points). He intended to vote Labour at the next general election (five points). He earned more than forty thousand pounds a year (five points), and he didn't have to work very hard for it (five points, and he awarded himself an extra five points for not having to work at all for it). He had eaten in a restaurant that served polenta and shaved parmesan (five points). He had never used a flavoured condom (five points), he had sold his Bruce Springsteen albums (five points), and he had both grown a goatee (five points) and shaved it off again (five points). The bad news was that he hadn't ever had sex with someone whose photo had appeared on the style page of a newspaper or magazine (minus two), and he did still think, if he was honest (and if Will had anything approaching an ethical belief, it was that lying about yourself in questionnaires was utterly wrong), that owning a fast car was likely to impress women (minus two). Even so, that gave him . . . sixty-six! He was, according to the questionnaire, sub-zero! He was dry as ice! He was Frosty the Snowman! He would die of hypothermia!

Annotations: At the beginning of chapter 2 Will, the "grown-up boy", is first introduced by the boxes he ticks in a personality quiz.. **1** cool – (slang) excellent, first-rate **4** Ecstasy – drug **5** Labour – in 1993 Labour was the opposition party; the income of £ 40,000 was three to four times the average **7** polenta – cornmeal boiled in water; shaved parmesan – slices of parmesan (both are served in Italian restaurants) **8** Bruce Springsteen – Am. rock-and-roll singer (* 1949), goatee – small chin beard trimmed to a point (Germ. Spitzbart) **11** ethical- moral **13** hypothermia – abnormally low body temperature

Assignments:

- 1) Use Will's answers to the questionnaire (l. 13) to portray him. (Use your own formulations in the answer.)
- 2) Several words and phrases are related to temperature. What is Hornby's intention? What is the irony of calling Will "Frosty the Snowman"?
- 3) Draw on your knowledge of this extract and that of the opening paragraphs of the novel (which you should know) to say how these beginnings can be developed into an (interesting) story.



screenshot featuring Hugh Grant and Nicolas Hoult