Introduction

This study guide is meant to support students in England and Wales preparing for GCSE exams in English and English literature. It may also be helpful to the general reader who is interested in the writing of Sylvia Plath. If the guide is used as preparation for a written exam, then all the activities suggested here may be done in writing or orally, as students and teachers wish. Some of the activities here can be used also for assessment in speaking and listening, in original writing and in wider reading.

The guide is too long to read from start to finish, and I hope no one would ever want to. Use the headings to find the bits you need, **as** and **when** you need them. If you are a teacher, look for the many prompts for activities. Most can be done in speech or writing or using Internet technologies. If you are using this guide on a computer system, then you ought to open the application software you think most helpful for various tasks, as you see the need for it.

The author

Sylvia Plath is most well known for her poetry, which was published in two volumes, *Colossus* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965) that was published posthumously (after the writer's death). Her novel *The Bell Jar* (1966) has echoes of her own life, as it records a young woman's descent into mental illness and suicidal tendencies. Sylvia Plath was born in 1932 near Boston Massachussetts. As an American student at Cambridge University she met Ted Hughes, whom she married in 1956, though they later separated. In 1963 Sylvia Plath took her own life. For many years Ted Hughes refused to comment on their relationship, but shortly before his death, in 1998, he published a series of poems on the subject in *The Birthday Letters*.

What happens in *Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit*?

Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit is a short story written in 1955. It was published in Sylvia Plath's posthumous collection *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* and other prose writings (1978). If you have not yet read the story, then do so before you read this summary!

In a very simple way the title is well chosen – for the first part of the story is about Superman and the second about the snowsuit. But this also shows that the story begins with pleasant fantasy and ends in unpleasant reality. And there is no Superman to rescue the narrator – only Uncle Frank to help her accept what has happened.

The story tells how the narrator (whose name never appears) plays games in which she makes up adventures for Superman. Later she is invited to the birthday party of a wealthy spoilt child, Paula Brown. Paula is proud of her birthday present, a blue snowsuit from Sweden. Some time later, Paula is playing tag in the snow when another child pushes her and she falls into an oil slick, which ruins her snowsuit. Paula blames the narrator and the other children also join in the accusation. Although her Uncle Frank believes her, the narrator has no happy ending to her story – everyone is convinced that she is to blame for the damage to the snowsuit.

The themes of this story

This is a story in which ideas are very important – perhaps more than the characters.

Scapegoats

The story shows how ready some people are to shift the blame for their own actions onto someone else. This has an obvious relevance to the story's wartime setting. In Europe the Nazi party encouraged Germans to blame Jews and communists for the past problems of the country. In the USA many citizens were imprisoned for the duration of the war because they had Japanese or German parents. Yet many of these were patriotic Americans, who wished to fight for their country. The narrator's family seems to have a German background. Her father is called Otto. And when her uncle speaks of Germans in America being put in prison, her mother says she is glad he didn't live to see what is happening in the USA.

In the story we see how one person becomes a scapegoat almost by chance – if the narrator had not joined in the game with Paula and the others, she could not have been blamed for the accident to the snowsuit. But once the finger of blame is pointed at her, everyone else joins in. Paula is supposedly unpopular, but no child wants to be held responsible for the damage to the snowsuit, and all readily join in condemning one person. Perhaps Paula knows that she is not popular enough to get away with blaming Jimmy. Perhaps she is frightened of telling her parents that it was largely her own carelessness that caused her to fall. (The reader sees that Paula is at fault for wearing her precious snowsuit while running around near an oil slick.)

Even David, who has appeared as the narrator's friend, is ready to confirm the "official" version of events. The grown ups are ready to believe this, as only the narrator denies it. Uncle Frank appears to be the one person who believes her, but even he feels he must satisfy the other grown-ups by paying for a new snowsuit.

If you have never been accused of something you did not do, you are very lucky. If you are a teacher or parent, you have perhaps blamed someone in the same way that the narrator here is blamed. To decide what this idea means in the story, you might consider these questions:

- Do all the children know that the narrator did not push Paula? Are they perhaps unsure of what really happened? Try to find evidence for your answer.
- Why should all the children take the side of a child that "nobody…really liked"? How sure are we that the narrator is right in giving this measure of Paula's unpopularity?
- How good, in your view, are adults at knowing which children are truthful and which ones are more dishonest?

Fantasy and reality

Superman first became popular in comic strips and radio broadcasts. These are ideal media for fantasy stories because there are few limits to what the writers can show or suggest. Sylvia Plath, writing in the 1950s, can be sure that the reader knows who Superman is. Nowadays, some readers may not know this. Apart from his unusual clothing (he also has a blue suit), Superman has enormous strength and can fly "faster than a speeding bullet". This is not an accidental comparison – he often has to do this to save someone from being shot.

Using the radio broadcasts as their starting point or inspiration, the narrator and David create their own dramas, including rôles for Sheldon. We do not know how inventive these games were. But the narrator gives us a sense of her imagination with her account of "making up dreams".

The war represents unpleasant reality. There is a perfect illustration of this when the children go to the cinema. They expect to see a delightful children's fantasy, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. But there is a supporting feature, which appears to be a US propaganda film. This shows how the Japanese torture and kill prisoners of war. It is not suitable for a child, and the narrator vomits in the toilet. (If the narrator is meant to be the writer, then in 1941 she would have been nine years old. Nowadays young children may well see violent or disturbing scenes in films and on TV programmes, but this would not have been so in the USA in the 1940s.)

At the end of the story, the fantasy is destroyed forever – the blue capes dissolve and vanish "like the crude drawings of a child." The narrator suggests that fantasy is for children only.

Man and Superman

Superman is a fantasy character. No real human being is much like him. But the narrator wanted to believe that her Uncle Frank **was** like him. Early in the story she lists Uncle Frank's special abilities: he was the strongest man David had ever known and he could perform conjuring tricks and acrobatic feats. In the original Superman stories, the hero spends much of his time living as an ordinary human being, Clark Kent.

When the narrator goes to the cinema the film about the Japanese horrifies her. It fills her mind as she lies in bed at night, and she is unable to make Superman come to the rescue: "No crusading blue figure came roaring down in heavenly anger". It is as if she knows Superman belongs in the fantasy world but not the real world, where the war is being fought out.

At the end of the story there is a situation that occurs in most *Superman* narratives – there is a wrong waiting to be put right. And Uncle Frank is faced with the chance to do this. The narrator tells him the truth, perhaps hoping that he at least will defend her reputation, or even perform some miracle to put things right. What is his response? To pay for a new snowsuit and hope that people will forget. He seems not to realize that ten years may seem a short time to him, but to a child it seems almost an eternity – this is longer than she has lived or can remember.

Material possessions and human values

In the west today many people have so much wealth as not to worry about particular material things. If we ruin our clothes, we just replace them. This story may make sense to readers from cultures where possessions are not seen as disposable. Perhaps you know older people who are more worried about such things, and worry about waste.

It also helps if you know about the situation in the story. During the war, Sweden was a neutral country. We do not know for certain if the snowsuit really came from Sweden, as the narrator adds, "she said". And we know that Paula does not always tell the truth. But the description of the snowsuit suggests that it is rare and expensive. And Paula evidently likes to have such special presents as a status symbol. Even today, some people (young and old alike) think that they **must** have clothes or cars of a certain kind, and look down on others who don't have these things. If the snowsuit really did come from Sweden, then it must have crossed the Atlantic by ship – a very dangerous voyage.

At the heart of the story is a simple contrast. Which is more important – a little girl's reputation and happiness or an expensive and impractical garment? It seems obvious to the reader, that all the people in the story get this wrong. Perhaps the children have some excuse, as their values reflect what they have been taught. But the grown ups in the story should know better. What is particularly alarming is their readiness to spread the story: "…the whole neighbourhood is talking about it."

In the developed world today the idea of private property is very important – in some ways our whole society depends on it. So we rightly encourage respect for others' possessions. But this can become exaggerated, and there is a difference between respecting what people need to live, and admiring luxuries.

Corruption and betrayal

The Nazi party led by Adolf Hitler understood the importance of teaching people things from an early age. They created special organizations like the Hitler Youth and encouraged children to wear uniforms and carry Nazi flags. This story suggests, in a more individual way, how children's attitudes can be changed. Because the narrator and her friend David want to act out adventures for Superman, they need a villain. Sheldon Fein is perfect for this. Because other boys bully him, he is ready to do what he is asked. But playing at evil becomes almost a habit – so that outside the Superman games he does really unpleasant and cruel things. Studies of adult criminals sometimes show that they were bullied or abused as children. Perhaps Sheldon is bright enough to understand that the narrator and David are using him. He does not stick up for her when Paula makes the accusation.

David is presented as the narrator's friend. He is not mentioned in the account of the accident to the snowsuit, and he seems not to have been there. (The narrator mentions "a couple of kids" – and we know of three at least: Paula, Jimmy and Sheldon. Later she refers to "the rest of them".) But David is ready to carry his mother's message to the narrator's family.

The characters in the story

The narrator

It is tempting to read this story as autobiography, but this would be a mistake. (Whether the things in it really did happen is a question we can never answer. But it should make no difference to the way we read the story, so long as we accept that it tells a general truth – people do make false accusations, and innocent people are sometimes blamed for things they have not done.)

On the other hand, Sylvia Plath clearly does use her own experiences to tell the story. The chief character is a girl, who recalls the outbreak of war while she was a child. She is an imaginative person, who prefers inventing dramas to more social or athletic games. And we never learn her name – the one person to speak directly to her calls her "honey".

In many ways her experiences are not very unusual. Mostly she recalls quite pleasant things, though the adult writer understands better than she did as a child what she and David were doing to Sheldon. For example, she wins a prize at school – but this seems of little importance in the story. One terrible event occurs almost through chance – she is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Her "crime" does not seem really serious. But her experience of false accusation is described in such a way that most readers will identify with it.

David Sterling

David at first appears as a rather admirable character. He is independent of the other children not because he is unpopular, but because he shares the narrator's imaginative impulses, and wants to help create the *Superman* dramas. Perhaps there is a hint that he is more realistic than her, as he finds it harder to see Uncle Frank as Superman in disguise. (*Incognito* is an Italian word, which means "unknown" or "unrecognised"; it is used to refer to people who hide their real identity, as Superman does under the alias of Clark Kent.)

But David is not able to keep faith with his friend. When the word goes out that he has ruined the snowsuit, David has the task of bringing his mother's suggestion to the narrator's family.

Sheldon Fein

Sheldon is something of a stereotype. He is described as a "sallow (sickly or pale) mamma's boy" whom the other boys despise a weakling. Although the story is written to show the narrator as an innocent victim, there is not much sympathy for Sheldon. He is so weak he is quickly corrupted into the cruel torturer of flies. He waits for Jimmy to back up Paula's accusation, then adds his voice to theirs in saying: "You did it".

Paula Brown

Paula is another stereotype – the unpopular child whose parents indulge her. She wears clothes that are decorative but unsuited to the rough and tumble of children's games. And she shows off her possessions at parties, where the other children are more or less forced to admire them. Why she makes her accusation is not completely clear. There are various possible reasons:

- She is afraid her parents will blame her for ruining the snowsuit, so she points at the nearest person she can blame plausibly (believably).
- She thinks she can become more popular by attacking someone else's character.
- She knows that the narrator does not really like her, and this is a chance for revenge.
- She knows that Jimmy pushed her but is afraid to blame him.
- She is unsure who pushed her, so chooses the most likely person.

List these in the order you think most likely and add any other reasons you think of.

Mother

The narrator's father has died before the start of the story and she lives with her mother and uncle. She is obviously already a very independent child. Her mother barely appears in the story, and never seems decisive or effectual. She says she is happy her husband didn't live to see what things in the USA have "come to", rather than wishing him alive to fight for the country as Uncle Frank is about to do. And later she tells the narrator off for not admitting to spoiling Paula's snowsuit. She says she believes her daughter, but the claim is unconvincing.

Uncle Frank

We do not know how Frank is related to the narrator. Is he the brother of her mother or her late father? But he is certainly affectionate and protective towards his niece. He swings her into the air, and when he speaks there is "a big love in his voice". She obviously loves him and likes to think that Superman is lodging in her home, disguised.

The setting – time and place

In this story, both time and place are very important. Time can be seen in two ways – historical time and time in the narrator's life.

Historical time

The narrator tells us directly that the events in the story take place in wartime. The opening of the story is the phrase: "The year war began…" Throughout the story there are reminders of the war:

- Uncle Frank is "waiting to be drafted" (to join the armed services).
- Sheldon pretends to be a Nazi, while his Uncle is a prisoner in Germany.
- There is a war film showing with *Snow White*.
- The narrator wins a prize for drawing the best Civil Defence signs.

As well as the references to the war, there are other details, which tell the reader the historical context. It is early enough for flying to be seen as exciting and mysterious. It is after the release of *Snow White* – Disney's first feature-length animation, from 1937. And it coincides with radio broadcasts of Superman adventures.

Time in the narrator's life

We can also understand time in terms of a person's life, with its various stages. This story marks the end of childhood as a time of trust and innocence. Adults are no longer powerful people who can make things right or save the narrator from trouble – they are seen to be as powerless as children. In fact here it is children who have more or less manipulated the adults into believing their version of events.

In childhood, time can be measured in school years, and the narrator does this, referring to the fifth grade, for example. We can see that she is small and light enough for Uncle Frank to swing her in the air (although he is very strong, so this may not tell us much).

Another way that the narrator signals a sense of time is by referring to the sports and games the children play (baseball, dodge-ball, Chinese tag). We see this also in the way Frank teaches her ju-jitsu and the way he addresses her "my favourite trooper" and "honey".

Place

The setting of the story is in the eastern USA, near Boston (which is mentioned by name). Although the USA has entered the war, it is being fought far away in the Pacific and Europe. The children learn about Civil Defence but there is no hint that the war will interfere with their security. The real dangers come from within themselves.

Sylvia Plath's technique

Viewpoint

In this story everything is seen through the eyes of the narrator. This may make us accept all her judgements. But Sylvia Plath hints sometimes that things are more ambiguous. For example, we are told that Paula is unpopular – but we see that Jimmy and Sheldon and others play with her. And when she accuses the narrator, the others take Paula's side.

The portrait of Sheldon is very unsympathetic. His physical weakness and obesity are presented in negative terms, as if they are his own fault.

Obviously this story could be retold from the viewpoint of other characters in it – and the story would seem very different. How would Sheldon, or Paula or Uncle Frank tell it?

In terms of grammar, this means that the first person pronouns (*I, me*) and possessives (*my, mine*) appear frequently in the text.

Speech and dialogue

In the early part of the story there is little speech – just one statement from the narrator's mother. When Paula ruins her snowsuit, the writer gives the exact words spoken. Here she repeats the childish accusation: "You did it". Later the narrator inverts this expression: "I didn't do it" and repeats it several times.

In the final part of the story, as she talks to her mother and uncle, the narrator gives us a more detailed account of the conversation, using direct speech. This gives a sense of Uncle Frank's closeness to his niece.

Language

Sylvia Plath tries here to show us the thoughts of a nine year old. Do you think that she writes like a child? Can you find things in the text that suggest that an educated adult wrote this story? You might consider:

- The structure of sentences – most are simple or compound sentences, but sometimes you find things like the sentence beginning: "The fire bell would ring…"
- The lexicon (vocabulary choices) – do you know the meaning of words such as: "kaleidoscope", "flaunted", "sallow", "incognito", "foreboding", "organdie", "ju-jitsu" and "colossal"? (English borrows many of these words from other languages.)
- Control of grammar – for example verb tenses and pronoun forms.

British and US English

Sylvia Plath was brought up in the USA, and her writing sometimes shows a preference for American forms. English is now an international language, though it exists in many varieties, which reflect particular countries, cultures or other organizations. Differences between US and UK or British English are well known to those who study languages. If you look closely at this story, you may find some examples of US English, but there are not that many. They include "recess", "movies", "tag", "overshoes" and "airplane". Can you find any others?

Simile and metaphor

The story is full of word pictures.

Some of these are similes (which make an explicit comparison): "the blood beat in my ears like a slack drum" and "wiped away like the crude drawings of a child" – explain the effect of these similes, and any others you can find.

More often, though, Sylvia Plath uses metaphors (where the comparison is implied): "the threat of war was seeping in everywhere", "hair tied up in sausage curls" and "the colossal blackboard of the dark."

Sometimes as in the penultimate (last but one) sentence of the story we find simile and metaphor together. And many of the comparisons make demands on the reader's knowledge.

Here are some examples. Try to explain what they mean. Below you will find suggestions for what the writer might have intended in writing them:

1. "The airport was my Mecca, my Jerusalem."
2. "My flying dreams were believable as landscape by Dali."
3. "…a breathless sense of having tumbled like Icarus from the sky…"

Suggested meanings:

1. Mecca and Jerusalem are holy places to which Muslims and Jews make pilgrimages. For the narrator, the airport was a place that she hoped one day to visit to see the planes more closely.
2. Salvador Dali was a famous Spanish painter. His best-known work is in the style known as surrealistic. It is highly realistic in its detail but puts things into arrangements which seem impossible or which confuse the scale of different things. Sylvia Plath's comparison is ambiguous. At first, it might seem that such a landscape is unbelievable. But seeing is believing – the paintings of Dali, like vivid dreams, may seem wholly believable to some spectators. So the meaning of the comparison depends on the reader.
3. Daedalus was a famous inventor in Greek myth. King Minos of Crete kept him prisoner with his son, Icarus. Daedalus made wings with which he and Icarus escaped. But Icarus flew too near the sun, and the wax in the wings melted, so he fell to his death. The comparison here is quite a loose one, as the narrator falls from the sky but lands safely.

Symbolism

Flying

In the story flying is a symbol of possibility and imagination. At the start, the narrator dreams of flying, and seems able to believe in her dreams. At the end, flight is no longer a possibility and the airplanes vanish with Superman's cape.

Clothes

The story contrasts two costumes – one is Superman's famous blue suit, with the red cape trailing behind; the other is Paula's powder-blue snowsuit. They seem to represent opposing ideas. Superman's costume is a symbol of justice and miraculous deliverance from evil. Paula's snowsuit comes to represent self-indulgence and petty materialism.

Structure

A good story has a beginning, a middle and an end, supposedly. Does this story follow the classic pattern? Look at this plan:

- Beginning: account of dreams
- Middle: playing at Superman
- Middle: Paula's birthday party
- Middle: the accident and the accusations
- End: the consequences, explanation of change.

Is this a good model of the structure of the story, or would you show it in some other way? Make your own diagram to show the structure of the story.

Attitudes

Attitudes in the text

In this story, we see very obvious attitudes displayed by the narrator, Sheldon and Uncle Frank. Give examples of some things that each of these (or any other character) thinks or believes.

Attitudes behind the text

If you study the text closely, you may have a sense of assumptions the author makes about the world, or of an outlook on life, which affects the way, she tells the story.

What are these attitudes or assumptions? If you find this question hard to answer, try this test. With which of the following statements do you agree or disagree? Sylvia Plath:

- Disapproves of Germans
- Likes aeroplanes
- Had a happy childhood
- Thinks life is on the whole unfair
- Thinks children are crueller than adults
- Thinks people are too easily influenced by others
- Thinks sports are silly
- Wishes Superman were real

Arrange these statements in order of probability. The first one should be the one you think **most** likely to be true. Give reasons for your view. At the end will be the statements you think **least** likely to be true. And in the middle may be some about which you lack the information to make up your mind.

Attitudes in the reader

As you read this story, how far do you think the author has understood what you like to read? Does Sylvia Plath tell the story with a sense of how the reader will respond to it, or does she simply tell it as she thinks it is or was?

The author

As you read this story, how conscious are you of the author? What, in your view, is she trying to do?

Is this story written to entertain, to earn money, to warn, to frighten, to teach, to amuse, none of these, all of these? What do you think is the author's reason for writing?

Comparison

This story is full of comparisons and contrasts. Here are some examples:

- The beginning and end (generally)
- Safety at home and danger abroad (the war)
- Superman's good blue costume and Paula Brown's bad blue snowsuit
- An animated fairy tale (*Snow White*) and a realistic war film
- Fantasy and reality
- Truth and lies

If you think this list is missing something, then add it. Choose the five most important areas of comparison or contrast and explain how they work.

Implied meaning

This story is mostly straightforward in its telling but there are some areas which are slightly ambiguous or about which we might like to know more. Here are some suggestions:

- The narrator's father – should we know more about him?
- Sheldon – what will he be like in the future?
- Uncle Frank – does he go off to war, and does he come back?
- Do people forget the narrator's offence, or does she stay an outcast?

Readers and readings

Reading the text

Say what you think the story means in a literal sense and in terms of theme, character and setting. Look at details of imagery, language and symbolism.

Reading the author

Try to explain what, in your view, the author wants us to think at various points. In doing this you should refer to her narrative methods.

Reading the reading

Be prepared briefly to explain your own understanding of the story, and how this changes while you are reading it for the first time, and also on subsequent readings, where you notice more.

Responding to the text

Ideas for writing

Before you write **anything** you should have in mind a sense of your subject, your purpose and your audience – for example your subject is health promotion, your purpose is to help smokers give up and your audience is people buying tobacco products in the UK. So what you write is a short warning to appear on the packaging of cigarettes and other tobacco products.

In schools, pupils sometimes write things (or are told to do so) without asking these questions first. This can be fun, but in real publishing (which may have big costs but also can make profits) there is usually more focus.

In writing this study guide, I have a very specific audience (or related set of audiences) in mind: students, teachers, trainee teachers and parents or tutors. If anyone else reads the guide, this is a bonus. The purpose is to help the students succeed in their work, while a second purpose is for them to enjoy some parts of it. I have other expectations – I do not expect ANYONE to read this from beginning to end in one sitting. It is set out in sections for users to dip into and pick and choose. (You will, anyway, so I may as well work with this, not against it.)

With some narratives you can add to the story (TV soap operas are designed to make this always a possibility). With others, the writer has already said all there is to say, and trying to extend the story can only harm it. Which kind of story is this one? The ending of this story does imply that there will be consequences in the future, but leaves this open. But there are things that one can reasonably do with such a narrative – either to explore particular situations and characters in it, or to adapt it into different forms.

Changing the form – drama

This story is well suited for making into a script for dramatic performance. It could easily be adapted for television or radio, and could even make a fair stage play, with some slight changes.

For this task, you can produce several linked pieces of writing:

- a letter to Sylvia Plath's publishers, seeking permission to adapt the work
- a pitch (proposal) for a TV or radio commissioning editor, explaining how you intend to adapt the drama for the new medium.
- an outline of the scenes and episodes into which you will divide the narrative (note that this need not stick to Sylvia Plath's sequence)
- one or more scenes, including the opening episode of your drama

Several students could work together to write the whole drama. If it is very good, you could even submit it to a production company for real performance. If you develop a stage play, then you could find a theatre company that wants to perform it. Make sure that you find out about the conventions (rules, agreed style) for setting out scripts for the stage or radio and TV (similar but not quite the same).

Diary

We have the narrator's view of the events in the story but how do they appear to other characters?

Perhaps some of them keep a diary. This is something many people do in reality as well as in fiction. We don't know about real diaries (they are private) but we know of fictitious diarists like Adrian Mole and Bridget Jones. Write a series of entries for diaries kept by one or both of these characters. These should be for dates before and after the accident with the snowsuit.

In doing this, you can adapt your style to the way you think the diary keeper might write. How do we know this? We don't exactly, but there are clues in the story.

Ideas for speaking

It is possible to combine writing and speaking by creating scripts and reading these aloud. But this section contains ideas for speaking without a script. For some tasks, you may want to have notes (as many real speakers do in situations where they need to recall a structure), cue cards or even an autocue. How do you do this? Put the cues into a text file on a PC. Change the font to a size you can read at a distance (say 72 point) and look at the screen while you speak. If you are being recorded onto videotape, then you can record with your camera beside the PC monitor, so you are looking into the camera, more or less. If you have a larger display (such as an interactive whiteboard, or a screen onto which you can project images from a PC) this is helpful. But you can also ask a friend to hold up cards on which you have written with marker pens!

Ideas for speaking work lend themselves to the use of computer technology and other audio-visual aids. For example, you can use presentation graphics software (such as Microsoft PowerPoint ™) to deliver or to support what you do.

Interview or "hot seat"

In this task a group of students each take on the identity or character of someone in the story or who might have an interest in what happens.

Other students are an audience who have a reason to listen to the first group. At the most basic, you can do this as if you are a studio audience listening to a broadcast discussion. But you could be a jury, or a committee with some powers to vote, or members of a parliament.

What are the situations in which this could occur?

Perhaps a broadcasting company is hosting a discussion on whether to start producing episodes of Superman for a modern-day audience.

Perhaps a government official is studying the attitudes of young people, especially their sense of social morality and attitudes to citizenship.

Can you think of other suitable situations?

Reading tasks

The guidance on this page should help you to read this text with understanding. For some exam courses you may wish to do assessed work in which you compare *Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit* with some other text, including prose texts written before 1900. Among texts with similar themes are various novels and short stories by classic authors. The following list has suggestions for texts that you could study together with *Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit*:

- Charlotte Brontë – *Jane Eyre* (episodes where Jane is treated unfairly)
- Charles Dickens – *Hard Times* (episodes where Stephen Blackpool is falsely accused)
- Charles Dickens – episodes in many novels depicting experiences of children (e.g. Paul and Florence Dombey, Pip, Oliver Twist, the Artful Dodger)
- Henry James – *The Turn of the Screw* (studies of innocence in children)

Other helpful Websites

Sylvia Plath

http://www.plathonline.com/ - Plathonline: new portal site

http://www.geocities.com/~emily777/PlathLinks.html - Sylvia Plath portal site

Free texts

http://promo.net/pg/index.html - Project Gutenberg site

GCSE literature

http://www.shunsley.eril.net/armoore/contents.htm#gcsewide - links to wide reading tutorials

http://www.devon.gov.uk/dcs/englishmedia/wider.htm - ideas for GCSE wide reading