Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Pigeon English

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Plot

- Harrison Opoku (Harri), 11, has moved from Ghana to an estate in London with his mother and sister Lydia. His father, baby sister and grandmother are still in Ghana.
- When a boy is stabbed to death outside a chicken shop, Harri and his friend Dean play detectives to find the killer, collecting 'evidence'.
- Harri dodges the local **gang**, the Dell Farm Crew, and makes friends with a pigeon, which speaks in short sections of the novel.
- Harri gets closer to the truth about the killers, and in the end he is stabbed and killed by a **gang** member.

Themes and context

- **Innocence** and growing up, violence and **gangs**, identity and belonging, friendship and family.
- Stephen Kelman published it in 2011. It was inspired by the murder of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor in 2000.

Form

- Told by Harri in a lively voice mixing Ghanaian English and London slang, which shows his **innocence** against the violent world around him.

How to get top marks

- Use Harri's voice. Seeing knife crime through a child's eyes makes the danger more shocking.
- Write about the pigeon as a symbol of hope, freedom or protection, and be clear about why you think so.
- Write about the immigrant experience through what Harri notices and doesn't understand.

Key terms

Innocence	Not understanding or being touched by the harsh world.
Narrative voice	The way the narrator speaks.
Dramatic irony	When readers understand dangers the narrator does not.
Gang	A group that uses violence and fear, such as the Dell Farm Crew.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Where has Harri moved from?
2. What crime do Harri and Dean investigate?
3. What is the local gang called?
4. Which animal speaks in parts of the novel?
5. How does the novel end?
6. Which real event inspired the novel?
7. How does Harri's narrative voice show his innocence?
8. Who lives with Harri in London?

Answers

1. Ghana
2. The stabbing of a boy
3. The Dell Farm Crew
4. A pigeon
5. Harri is stabbed and killed
6. The murder of Damilola Taylor (2000)
7. He mixes playful slang and childish excitement with serious events
8. His mother and sister Lydia

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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