*Question 1*

*Reservoir 13 comes in 13 chapters, each chapter covering one year. Time in the chapters is marked by the cycle of the seasons in nature and by (often related) communal traditions, including well-dressing, the Spring Dance, Guy Fawkes or Bonfire Night, the Cardwell cricket game, Harvest Festival, Mischief Night, Christmas Pantomime . . . Document this timing technique and discuss the comments on these traditions in the text.*

In *Reservoir 13*, the cycle of seasons in nature and communal traditions help signify time, but more significantly reveal an image of how a community develops and changes across the thirteen years of the novel. Because it begins with the disappearance of Rebecca Shaw, this event acts as the reference point of change. The community’s evolving perceptions and attitudes towards their traditions across each chapter show how individuals (and the community as a large) develop out of this trauma.

A prime example of this can be seen in each chapter’s treatment of New Years. In many chapters, fireworks are explicitly used to signify this event. Each display of fireworks takes a different form as the years go on, and reactions to them reveal much about what that year will look like. In chapter 1, Rebecca Shaw has just disappeared and, as the new year turns, fireworks are set off from across the valley; we are told that no one in the girl’s community “came out to watch” (3). In the following chapter, the fireworks again are set off across the valley, but this time some have come to watch. This shows how the community is slowly developing after Rebecca’s disappearance the year before. By chapter 5, fireworks are displayed “on the television in the pub” while “people are dancing in the streets outside” (109), showing a greater distance from the disappearance.

Importantly, once fireworks have become a signifier for the new year and their relationship to the disappearance of Rebecca, their absence equally tells us something new. In Chapter 9, we see a more private picture of Rohan and Lynsey dancing to start the new year, but no mention of fireworks. The cycle is somewhat broken, revealing a new perspective on how the community has developed since Rebecca’s disappearance. But with the reintroduction of unenjoyed fireworks in Chapter 12 – “there were fireworks going up from the towns beyond the valley but no one in the village even lifted their heads to look” (287) – we are brought back to the emotions of Chapter 1, showing just how influential the disappearance remains for many in the community all these years later.

Though fairly consistent, other traditions are also marked by a level of interruption caused by the volatile community. For example, the Christmas pantomime is a yearly event meant to bring the community together and many locals love to perform in it. However, while the village hall was being refurbished, the performance needed to be canceled as the “church council felt it would be inappropriate” to hold it at the church “given the tone of recent productions.” In other words, these traditions, though fairly solid, are subject to the community’s innerworkings. Nevertheless, some traditions are more solid than others; the Cardwell rivalry normally leads to a competition each year (even in the rain, they switch to playing darts), though the results change depending on the year.  
 This looks different with the descriptions of nature throughout the novel. Events in nature move with a level of consistency unavailable to the community who must deal with their lack of closure (on a large scale with the disappearance of Rebecca Shaw, and on a more individual scale seen in personal narratives). This is emphasized by the repetition of natural events occurring in the community’s ecosystem each year. For example, the swallows are always said to return in April and leave by September, while the badgers regularly hibernate in the beech trees and come out to make noise at night after their hibernation is over. But the community changes in and around many of Nature’s consistencies. On page 101, while the swallows leave for their winter migration (as they always do), we simultaneously see changes to the life of James Broad whose parents separate. Additionally, on page 313, the swallows’ arrival are accompanied by helicopters that trigger emotions rooted in the lack of closure beginning with the disappearance of Rebecca in Chapter 1.