

A Level English Literature

Get ready for Literature...



Welcome to A Level Literature - you have chosen an excellent A Level!

Why is there such a gap between GCSEs and A-levels? Well, A-levels are – as their name suggests – advanced qualifications, and so require much more of you as the student. They require you to gain a deeper understanding of the texts that you study. There is a lot more independent work required like reading about the author's life and how this may have influenced the text; reading texts that are not on the examination syllabus in order to gain a deeper understanding of the context or writer's that may have influenced the writing of the novel that you are studying.

Dr Ellerby, head of history at Dorset's Parkstone grammar, says: *"GCSE is often highly structured with very specific requirements for homework, whereas at A-level there is a greater expectation for taking the initiative in going beyond the set reading and utilising the library to read around and consolidate."* Roughly speaking, for GCSE exams you can just learn the content. At A-level you actually need to **understand** it.

The internet is a great source for reading other people's interpretations of text – use these to formulate your own response – Remember the beauty of Literature is that there is never a right or wrong answer as long as you can justify your point of view!

Get into the habit of using your time effectively, and organise yourself so you know when you have deadlines and when you're going to do your work, then A-levels will seem much easier and less of a jump than expected. Particularly during the pressure points when you have non-examined assessment or exams, being organised and motivated from the start will ensure that you're really prepared, and not too stressed.

At any point during A-levels, if you're finding it hard, or are struggling with the workload, then it's always worth seeking advice and support. Your form tutor, subject teachers, and head of year are a good place to start, and the earlier you talk to someone about any difficulties that you're having, the sooner they can be resolved.

This pack is designed to get you thinking as an A level student – the activities will enable you to think as a critical reader and share your thoughts with others in your class.



Tips – Green are essential, blue are desirable!

- Twitter - follow writers and academics who blog about literature
- Start to read the set texts as soon as you are given your reading list – remember to be successful you will need to read them a few times before the exams in order to have a really good understanding – If you have not been given this information ask someone in your English department.
- Download electronic copies of your set texts on your device and make notes on it which you can then print
- Download the audio book of the text – Listen and read at the same time
- Get an understanding of what Marxism, feminism etc. are and how they help our understanding of literature
- Historical reading of specific periods in history – Victorian period, Renaissance, Romantic period etc.
- Create a profile of an author you will be studying
- Challenge the teacher with something that you have read
- Library – Google books, school library, university libraries, local libraries
- Download an app called Pocket (available on Android and Apple devices) – keeps all your reading saved in one place
- Write a weekly reflection of what you have learnt each week – These notes can build up to some great revision notes.
- Listen to talks on literature and grammar to widen your understand of the subject. This enables you to see what other people’s perspectives are. You can listen to them online or download the app. Follow these links to get you started:
 - <https://www.ted.com/topics/literature>
 - <http://blog.ed.ted.com/2014/05/29/be-a-better-writer-in-15-minutes-4-ted-ed-lessons-on-grammar-and-word-choice/>

“There are worse crimes than burning books. One of them is not reading them.” - *Ray Bradbury*



**You're off to great
places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain
is waiting,
So... get on
your way!**

Dr Seuss



The Poetry Café (The Poetry Place)

22 Betterton Street

London WC2H 9BX

Email: poetrycafe@poetrysociety.org.uk

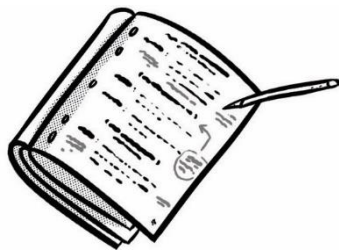
Telephone: 020 7420 9888

In the evening the atmosphere is busy and vibrant with poetry readings, slams, music, or book launches happening nearly every night.

For newcomers, or those wishing to read, Poetry Unplugged is London's premier open mic session where people who have never read a poem in public can do so for the first time, or experienced poets can try out something new.

<http://poetrysociety.org.uk/poetry-cafe/>

**BRITISH
LIBRARY**



A visit to the British Library is a great experience – you can tour the beautiful grounds and architecture or explore the extensive range of resources. It is the second largest library in the world. The British Library home to the Sir John Ritblat Gallery: Treasures of the British Library, where some of the most significant world treasures can be seen for free, including: Magna Carta, Shakespeare's First Folio, Lewis Carroll's manuscripts of Alice's Adventures Under Ground, Beatles lyrics handwritten by John Lennon, and drawings on pages from Leonardo's Da Vinci's Notebook. The best part is that is free!

<http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/quickinfo/facts/>

<http://www.bl.uk/whats-on>



Watching your favourite texts come alive in front of your eyes beats no other experience. The characters, the interpretations...

The Globe Theatre – London

This replica of the Shakespeare's 16th century theatre, reconstructed just 200 yards from its original site, is the brainchild of American actor and director Sam Wanamaker. Built in wood and thatch, using techniques from 400 years ago, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre opened in 1996. Although it is not an exact replica, it is close, and plays are performed in the open-air, rain or shine. The thrust stage, and the fact that cheap standing tickets are available for every performance, create a raucous relationship between actor and audience that makes it unlike any other London Theatre. Visitors can also tour the theatre and spend time at the adjacent Shakespeare's Globe Exhibition and in January 2013 the Globe expanded to include an indoor candlelit Jacobean theatre, the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, next door.

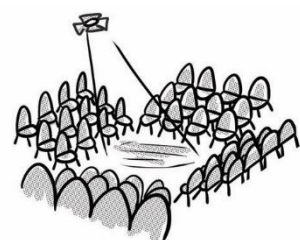
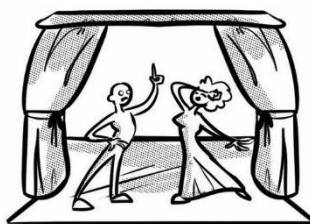
<http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/whats-on>

Royal Shakespeare Company

Stratford-upon-Avon is a beautiful town and is full of a rich history and is the 16th century birthplace of Shakespeare. You can explore the history behind Shakespeare's writing then go and watch a performance of one of his plays.

Definitely worth a visit and would really enhance your study and appreciation of the Great Bard!

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/home.html> <https://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/?from=mdd>



SHAKESPEARE

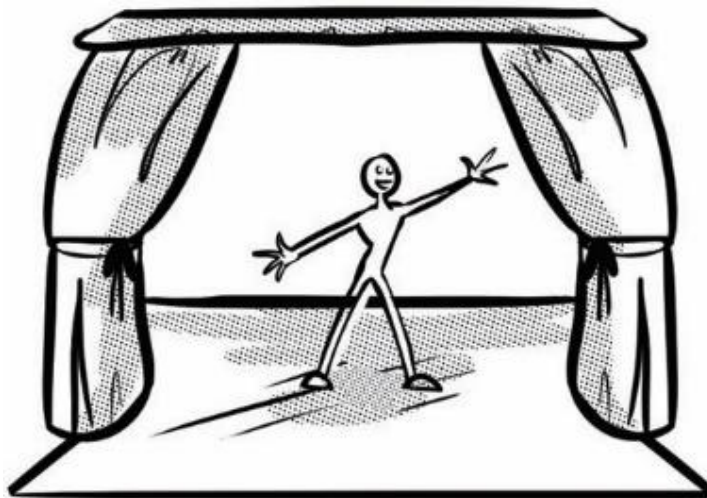
After Christmas you will be studying a Shakespeare play ready for your A level examinations. Shakespeare is an important element of our cultural and literary heritage so it is really important that you familiarise yourself with the great Bard and his writing.



Why do we still study Shakespeare today?

People still talk about Shakespeare and study his plays because:

- He wrote plays that are enormously rewarding to act and direct
- His characters are endlessly interesting and impossible to reduce to a simple formula
- His language, though now difficult, is subtle, richly varied, and eloquent (this includes the Sonnets, of course)
- The plots of his plays still speak to the experiences of a modern world (think of the recent teen movies *Ten Things I Hate About You* from *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Get Over It* from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*)
- His plays survive translation, and are performed around the world
- He's just an amazingly good writer.



TASK

Research and choose one of Shakespeare's sonnets and then write a response to it – what does it mean? Can you comment on the Historical context? Can you analyse it?

CHALLENGE: Can you write a modern day response to it? What would an audience say in return?

Sonnet 18

William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee



My sonnet



Short Story Response: Joseph Conrad - The Lagoon

“The white man rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed at the wake of the boat. At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal.”



TASK

Read the short story Lagoon by Joseph Conrad and prepare a response to the text using the following question as your basis: **How is the setting of the lagoon the perfect embodiment of the illusory world of man's actions?** What does this question mean? Can you annotate the text?

Research the following elements:

- Characterisation
- Setting
- Context
- Narrative voice
- Writer's methods (language / linguistic devices / tone)



Joseph Conrad

The Lagoon

The white man, leaning with both arms over the roof of the little house in the stern of the boat, said to the steersman--

'We will pass the night in Arsat's clearing. It is late.'

The Malay only grunted, and went on looking fixedly at the river. The white man rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed at the wake of the boat. At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal. The forests, somber and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final. Nothing moved on the river but the eight paddles that rose flashing regularly, dipped together with a single splash; while the steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semicircle above his head. The churned-up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur. And the white man's canoe, advancing up stream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had for ever departed.

The white man, turning his back upon the setting sun, looked along the empty and broad expanse of the sea-reach. For the last three miles of its course the wandering, hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon, flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east - to the east that harbors both light and darkness. Astern of the boat the repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skipped along over the smooth water and lost itself, before it could reach the other shore, in the breathless silence of the world.

The steersman dug his paddle into the stream, and held hard with stiffened arms, his body thrown forward. The water gurgled aloud; and suddenly the long straight reach seemed to pivot on its center, the forests swung in a semicircle, and the slanting beams of sunset touched the broadside of the canoe with a fiery glow, throwing the slender and distorted shadows of its crew upon the streaked glitter of the river. The white man turned to look ahead. The course of the boat had been altered at right-angles to the stream, and the carved dragon-head of its prow was pointing now at a gap in the fringing bushes of the bank. It glided through, brushing the overhanging twigs, and disappeared from the river like some slim and amphibious creature leaving the water for its lair in the forests.

The narrow creek was like a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and somber walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests.

The men poled in the shoaling water. The creek broadened, opening out into a wide sweep of a stagnant lagoon. The forests receded from the marshy bank, leaving a level strip of bright-green, reedy grass to frame the reflected blueness of the sky. A fleecy pink cloud drifted high above, trailing the delicate coloring of its image under the floating leaves and the silvery blossoms of the lotus. A little house, perched on high piles, appeared black in the distance. Near it, two tall nibong palms, that seemed to have come out of the forests in the background, leaned slightly over the ragged roof, with a suggestion of sad tenderness and care in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads.

The steersman, pointing with his paddle, said, 'Arsat is there. I see his canoe fast between the piles.'



The polers ran along the sides of the boat glancing over their shoulders at the end of the day's journey. They would have preferred to spend the night somewhere else than on this lagoon of weird aspect and ghostly reputation. Moreover, they disliked Arsat, first as a stranger, and also because he who repairs a ruined house, and dwells in it, proclaims that he is not afraid to live amongst the spirits that haunt the places abandoned by mankind. Such a man can disturb the course of fate by glances or words; while his familiar ghosts are not easy to propitiate by casual wayfarers upon whom they long to wreak the malice of their human master. White men care not for such things, being unbelievers and in league with the Father of Evil, who leads them unharmed through the invisible dangers of this world. To the warnings of the righteous they oppose an offensive pretence of disbelief. What is there to be done?

So they thought, throwing their weight on the end of their long poles. The big canoe glided on swiftly, noiselessly and smoothly, towards Arsat's clearing, till, in a great rattling of poles thrown down, and the loud murmurs of 'Allah be praised!' it came with a gentle knock against the crooked piles below the house.

The boatmen with uplifted faces shouted discordantly, 'Arsat! O Arsat!' Nobody came. The white man began to climb the rude ladder giving access to the bamboo platform before the house. The juragan of the boat said sulkily, 'We will cook in the sampan, and sleep on the water.'

'Pass my blankets and the basket,' said the white man curtly.

He knelt on the edge of the platform to receive the bundle. Then the boat shoved off, and the white man, standing up, confronted Arsat, who had come out through the low door of his hut. He was a man young, powerful, with a broad chest and muscular arms. He had nothing on but his sarong. His head was bare. His big, soft eyes stared eagerly at the white man, but his voice and demeanor were composed as he asked, without any words of greeting--

'Have you medicine, Tuan?'

'No,' said the visitor in a startled tone. 'No. Why? Is there sickness in the house?'

'Enter and see,' replied Arsat, in the same calm manner, and turning short round, passed again through the small doorway. The white man, dropping his bundles, followed.

In the dim light of the dwelling he made out on a couch of bamboos a woman stretched on her back under a broad sheet of red cotton cloth. She lay still, as if dead; but her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom, staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. She was in a high fever, and evidently unconscious. Her cheeks were sunk slightly, her lips were partly open, and on the young face there was the ominous and fixed expression - the absorbed, contemplating expression of the unconscious who are going to die. The two men stood looking down at her in silence.

'Has she been long ill?' asked the traveler.

'I have not slept for five nights,' answered the Malay, in a deliberate tone. 'At first she heard voices calling her from the water and struggled against me who held her. But since the sun of to-day rose she hears nothing - she hears not me. She sees nothing. She sees not me - me!'

He remained silent for a minute, then asked softly--

'Tuan, will she die?'

'I fear so,' said the white man sorrowfully. He had known Arsat years ago, in a far country in times of trouble and danger, when no friendship is to be despised. And since his Malay friend had come unexpectedly to dwell in the hut on the lagoon with a strange woman, he had slept many times there, in his journeys up or down the river. He liked the man who knew how to keep faith in council and how to fight without fear by the side of his white friend. He liked him - not so much perhaps as a man likes his favorite dog - but still he liked him well enough to help and ask no questions, to think sometimes vaguely and hazily in the midst of his own pursuits, about the lonely man and the long-haired woman with audacious face and triumphant eyes, who lived together hidden by the forests - alone and feared.



The white man came out of the hut in time to see the enormous conflagration of sunset put out by the swift and stealthy shadows that, rising like a black and impalpable vapor above the tree-tops, spread over the heaven, extinguishing the crimson glow of floating clouds and the red brilliance of departing daylight. In a few moments all the stars came out above the intense blackness of the earth, and the great lagoon gleaming suddenly with reflected lights resembled an oval patch of night-sky flung down into the hopeless and abysmal night of the wilderness. The white man had some supper out of the basket, then collecting a few sticks that lay about the platform, made up a small fire, not for warmth, but for the sake of the smoke, which would keep off the mosquitos. He wrapped himself in his blankets and sat with his back against the reed wall of the house, smoking thoughtfully.

Arsat came through the doorway with noiseless steps and squatted down by the fire. The white man moved his outstretched legs a little.

'She breathes,' said Arsat in a low voice, anticipating the expected question. 'She breathes and burns as if with a great fire. She speaks not; she hears not - and burns!'

He paused for a moment, then asked in a quiet, incurious tone--

'Tuan ... will she die?'

The white man moved his shoulders uneasily, and muttered in a hesitating manner--

'If such is her fate.'

'No, Tuan,' said Arsat calmly. 'If such is my fate. I hear, I see, I wait. I remember ... Tuan, do you remember the old days? Do you remember my brother?'

'Yes,' said the white man. The Malay rose suddenly and went in. The other, sitting still outside, could hear the voice in the hut. Arsat said: 'Hear me! Speak!' His words were succeeded by a complete silence. 'O! Diamelen!' he cried suddenly. After that cry there was a deep sigh. Arsat came out and sank down again in his old place.

They sat in silence before the fire. There was no sound within the house, there was no sound near them; but far away on the lagoon they could hear the voices of the boatmen ringing fitful and distinct on the calm water. The fire in the bows of the sampan shone faintly in the distance with a hazy red glow. Then it died out. The voices ceased. The land and the water slept invisible, unstimulating and mute. It was as though there had been nothing left in the world but the glitter of stars streaming, ceaseless and vain, through the black stillness of the night.

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death - of death near, unavoidable and unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him - into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.

A plaintive murmur rose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air round him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences. He stirred like a man waking up and changed his position slightly. Arsat, motionless and shadowy, sitting with bowed head under the stars, was speaking in a low and dreamy tone.

'... for where can we lay down the heaviness of our trouble but in a friend's heart? A man must speak of war and of love. You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life! A writing may be lost; a lie may be written; but what the eye has seen is truth and remains in the mind!'



'I remember,' said the white man quietly. Arsat went on with mournful composure.

'Therefore I shall speak to you of love. Speak in the night. Speak before both night and love are gone - and the eye of day looks upon my sorrow and my shame; upon my blackened face; upon my burnt-up heart.'

A sigh, short and faint, marked an almost imperceptible pause, and then his words flowed on, without a stir, without a gesture.

'After the time of trouble and war was over and you went away from my country in the pursuit of your desires, which we, men of the islands, cannot understand, I and my brother became again, as we had been before, the sword-bearers of the Ruler. You know we were men of family, belonging to a ruling race, and more fit than any to carry on our right shoulder the emblem of power. And in the time of prosperity Si Dendring showed us favor, as we, in time of sorrow, had showed to him the faithfulness of our courage. It was a time of peace. A time of deer-hunts and cock-fights; of idle talks and foolish squabbles between men whose bellies are full and weapons are rusty. But the sower watched the young rice-shoots grow up without fear, and the traders came and went, departed lean and returned fat into the river of peace. They brought news too. Brought lies and truth mixed together, so that no man knew when to rejoice and when to be sorry. We heard from them about you also. They had seen you here and had seen you there. And I was glad to hear, for I remembered the stirring times, and I always remembered you, Tuan, till the time came when my eyes could see nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the one who is dying there - in the house.'

He stopped to exclaim in an intense whisper, 'O Mara bahia! O Calamity!' then went on speaking a little louder.

'There's no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil. I loved my brother. I went to him and told him that I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice. He told me: "Open your heart so that she can see what is in it - and wait. Patience is wisdom. Inchi Midah may die or our Ruler may throw off his fear of a woman!" ... I waited! ... You remember the lady with the veiled face, Tuan, and the fear of our Ruler before her cunning and temper. And if she wanted her servant, what could I do? But I fed the hunger of my heart on short glances and stealthy words. I loitered on the path to the bath-houses in the daytime, and when the sun had fallen behind the forest I crept along the jasmine hedges of the women's courtyard. Unseeing, we spoke to one another through the scent of flowers, through the veil of leaves, through the blades of long grass that stood still before our lips: so great was our prudence, so faint was the murmur of our great longing. The time passed swiftly ... and there were whispers amongst women - and our enemies watched - my brother was gloomy, and I began to think of killing and of a fierce death. ... We are of a people who take what they want - like you whites. There is a time when a man should forget loyalty and respect. Might and authority are given to rulers, but to all men is given love and strength and courage. My brother said, "You shall take her from their midst. We are two who are like one." And I answered, "Let it be soon, for I find no warmth in sunlight that does not shine upon her." Our time came when the Ruler and all the great people went to the mouth of the river to fish by torchlight. There were hundreds of boats, and on the white sand, between the water and the forests, dwellings of leaves were built for the households of the Rajahs. The smoke of cooking-fires was like a blue mist of the evening, and many voices rang in it joyfully. While they were making the boats ready to beat up the fish, my brother came to me and said, "To-night!" I made ready my weapons, and when the time came our canoe took its place in the circle of boats carrying the torches. The lights blazed on the water, but behind the boats there was darkness. When the shouting began and the excitement made them like mad we dropped out. The water swallowed our fire, and we floated back to the shore that was dark with only here and there the glimmer of embers. We could hear the talk of slavegirls amongst the sheds. Then we found a place deserted and silent. We waited there. She came. She came running along the shore, rapid and leaving no trace, like a leaf driven by the wind into the sea. My brother said gloomily, "Go and take her; carry her into our boat." I lifted her in my arms. She panted. Her heart was beating against my breast. I said, "I take you from those people. You came to the cry of my heart, but my arms take you into my boat against the will of the great!" "It is right," said my brother. "We are men who take what we want and can hold it against many. We should have taken her in daylight." I said, "Let us be off;" for since she was in my boat I began to think of our Ruler's many men. "Yes. Let us be off," said my brother. "We are cast out and this boat is our country now - and the sea is our refuge." He lingered with his foot on the shore, and I entreated him to hasten, for I remembered the strokes of her



heart against my breast and thought that two men cannot withstand a hundred. We left, paddling downstream close to the bank; and as we passed by the creek where they were fishing, the great shouting had ceased, but the murmur of voices was loud like the humming of insects flying at noonday. The boats floated, clustered together, in the red light of torches, under a black roof of smoke; and men talked of their sport. Men that boasted, and praised, and jeered - men that would have been our friends in the morning, but on that night were already our enemies. We paddled swiftly past. We had no more friends in the country of our birth. She sat in the middle of the canoe with covered face; silent as she is now; unseeing as she is now - and I had no regret at what I was leaving because I could hear her breathing close to me - as I can hear her now.'

He paused, listened with his ear turned to the doorway, then shook his head and went on.

'My brother wanted to shout the cry of challenge - one cry only - to let the people know we were freeborn robbers that trusted our arms and the great sea. And again I begged him in the name of our love to be silent. Could I not hear her breathing close to me? I knew the pursuit would come quick enough. My brother loved me. He dipped his paddle without a splash. He only said, "There is half a man in you now - the other half is in that woman. I can wait. When you are a whole man again, you will come back with me here to shout defiance. We are sons of the same mother." I made no answer. All my strength and all my spirit were in my hands that held the paddle - for I longed to be with her in a safe place beyond the reach of men's anger and of women's spite. My love was so great, that I thought it could guide me to a country where death was unknown, if I could only escape from Inchi Midah's spite and from our Ruler's sword. We paddled with fury, breathing through our teeth. The blades bit deep into the smooth water. We passed out of the river; we flew in clear channels amongst the shallows. We skirted the black coast; we skirted the sand beaches where the sea speaks in whispers to the land; and the gleam of white sand flashed back past our boat, so swiftly she ran upon the water. We spoke not. Only once I said, "Sleep, Diamelen, for soon you may want all your strength." I heard the sweetness of her voice, but I never turned my head. The sun rose and still we went on. Water fell from my face like rain from a cloud. We flew in the light and heat. I never looked back, but I knew that my brother's eyes, behind me, were looking steadily ahead, for the boat went as straight as a bushman's dart, when it leaves the end of the sumpitan. There was no better paddler, no better steersman than my brother. Many times, together, we had won races in that canoe. But we never had put out our strength as we did then - then, when for the last time we paddled together! There was no braver or stronger man in our country than my brother. I could not spare the strength to turn my head and look at him, but every moment I heard the hiss of his breath getting louder behind me. Still he did not speak. The sun was high. The heat clung to my back like a flame of fire. My ribs were ready to burst, but I could no longer get enough air into my chest. And then I felt I must cry out with my last breath, "Let us rest!" "Good!" he answered; and his voice was firm. He was strong. He was brave. He knew not fear and no fatigue ... My brother!'

A rumor powerful and gentle, a rumor vast and faint; the rumor of trembling leaves, of stirring boughs, ran through the tangled depths of the forests, ran over the starry smoothness of the lagoon, and the water between the piles lapped the slimy timber once with a sudden splash. A breath of warm air touched the two men's faces and passed on with a mournful sound - a breath loud and short like an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth.

Arsat went on in an even, low voice.

'We ran our canoe on the white beach of a little bay close to a long tongue of land that seemed to bar our road; a long wooded cape going far into the sea. My brother knew that place. Beyond the cape a river has its entrance. Through the jungle of that land there is a narrow path. We made a fire and cooked rice. Then we slept on the soft sand in the shade of our canoe, while she watched. No sooner had I closed my eyes than I heard her cry of alarm. We leaped up. The sun was halfway down the sky already, and coming in sight in the opening of the bay we saw a prau manned by many paddlers. We knew it at once; it was one of our Rajah's praus. They were watching the shore, and saw us. They beat the gong, and turned the head of the prau into the bay. I felt my heart become weak within my breast. Diamelen sat on the sand and covered her face. There was no escape by sea. My brother laughed. He had the gun you had given him, Tuan, before you went away, but there was only a handful of powder. He spoke to me quickly: "Run with her along the path. I shall keep them back, for they have no firearms, and landing in the face of a man with a gun is certain death for some. Run with her. On the other side of that wood there is a fisherman's house - and a canoe. When I have fired all



the shots I will follow. I am a great runner, and before they can come up we shall be gone. I will hold out as long as I can, for she is but a woman - that can neither run nor fight, but she has your heart in her weak hands." He dropped behind the canoe. The prau was coming. She and I ran, and as we rushed along the path I heard shots. My brother fired - once - twice - and the booming of the gong ceased. There was silence behind us. That neck of land is narrow. Before I heard my brother fire the third shot I saw the shelving shore, and I saw the water again: the mouth of a broad river. We crossed a grassy glade. We ran down to the water. I saw a low hut above the black mud, and a small canoe hauled up. I heard another shot behind me. I thought, "That is his last charge." We rushed down to the canoe; a man came running from the hut, but I leaped on him, and we rolled together in the mud. Then I got up, and he lay still at my feet. I don't know whether I had killed him or not. I and Diamelen pushed the canoe afloat. I heard yells behind me, and I saw my brother run across the glade. Many men were bounding after him. I took her in my arms and threw her into the boat, then leaped in myself. When I looked back I saw that my brother had fallen. He fell and was up again, but the men were closing round him. He shouted, "I am coming!" The men were close to him. I looked. Many men. Then I looked at her. Tuan, I pushed the canoe! I pushed it into deep water. She was kneeling forward looking at me, and I said, "Take your paddle," while I struck the water with mine. Tuan, I heard him cry. I heard him cry my name twice; and I heard voices shouting, "Kill! Strike!" I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice - and I never turned my head. My own name! ... My brother! Three times he called - but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten - where death is unknown?

The white man sat up. Arsat rose and stood, an indistinct and silent figure above the dying embers of the fire. Over the lagoon a mist drifting and low had crept, erasing slowly the glittering images of the stars. And now a great expanse of white vapor covered the land: flowed cold and gray in the darkness, eddied in noiseless whirls round the tree-trunks and about the platform of the house, which seemed to float upon a restless and impalpable illusion of a sea; seemed the only thing surviving the destruction of the world by that undulating and voiceless phantom of a flood. Only far away the tops of the trees stood outlined on the twinkle of heaven, like a somber and forbidding shore - a coast deceptive, pitiless and black.

Arsat's voice vibrated loudly in the profound peace.

'I had her there! I had her! To get her I would have faced all mankind. But I had her - and--'

His words went out ringing into the empty distances. He paused, and seemed to listen to them dying away very far - beyond help and beyond recall. Then he said quietly--

'Tuan, I loved my brother.'

A breath of wind made him shiver. High above his head, high above the silent sea of mist the drooping leaves of the palms rattled together with a mournful and expiring sound. The white man stretched his legs. His chin rested on his chest, and he murmured sadly without lifting his head--

'We all love our brothers.'

Arsat burst out with an intense whispering violence--

'What did I care who died? I wanted peace in my own heart.'

He seemed to hear a stir in the house - listened - then stepped in noiselessly. The white man stood up. A breeze was coming in fitful puffs. The stars shone paler as if they had retreated into the frozen depths of immense space. After a chill gust of wind there were a few seconds of perfect calm and absolute silence. Then from behind the black and wavy line of the forests a column of golden light shot up into the heavens and spread over the semicircle of the eastern horizon. The sun had risen. The mist lifted, broke into drifting patches, vanished into thin flying wreaths; and the unveiled lagoon lay, polished and black, in the heavy shadows at the foot of the wall of trees. A white eagle rose over it with a slanting and ponderous flight, reached the clear sunshine and appeared dazlingly brilliant for a moment, then soaring higher, became a dark and motionless speck before it vanished into the blue as if it had left the earth for ever. The white man, standing gazing upwards before the doorway, heard in the hut a confused and broken murmur of distracted words ending with a loud groan. Suddenly Arsat stumbled out with outstretched hands, shivered, and stood still for some time with fixed eyes. Then he said--



'She burns no more.'

Before his face the sun showed its edge above the tree-tops, rising steadily. The breeze freshened; a great brilliance burst upon the lagoon, sparkled on the rippling water. The forests came out of the clear shadows of the morning, became distinct, as if they had rushed nearer - to stop short in a great stir of leaves, of nodding boughs, of swaying branches. In the merciless sunshine the whisper of unconscious life grew louder, speaking in an incomprehensible voice round the dumb darkness of that human sorrow. Arsat's eyes wandered slowly, then stared at the rising sun.

'I can see nothing,' he said half aloud to himself.

'There is nothing,' said the white man, moving to the edge of the platform and waving his hand to his boat. A shout came faintly over the lagoon and the sampan began to glide towards the abode of the friend of ghosts.

'If you want to come with me, I will wait all the morning,' said the white man, looking away upon the water.

'No, Tuan,' said Arsat softly. 'I shall not eat or sleep in this house, but I must first see my road. Now I can see nothing - see nothing! There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death - death for many. We were sons of the same mother - and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now.'

He drew a long breath and went on in a dreamy tone.

'In a little while I shall see clear enough to strike - to strike. But she has died, and ... now ... darkness.'

He flung his arms wide open, let them fall along his body, then stood still with unmoved face and stony eyes, staring at the sun. The white man got down into his canoe. The polers ran smartly along the sides of the boat, looking over their shoulders at the beginning of a weary journey. High in the stern, his head muffled up in white rags, the juragan sat moody, letting his paddle trail in the water. The white man, leaning with both arms over the grass roof of the little cabin, looked back at the shining ripple of the boat's wake. Before the sampan passed out of the lagoon into the creek he lifted his eyes. Arsat had not moved. In the searching clearness of crude sunshine he was still standing before the house, he was still looking through the great light of a cloudless day into the hopeless darkness of the world.



Final Thoughts...

Your Choice...



For your final task in class I would like you to find a poem that has been written by a poet who is in the literary canon (you may need to begin with finding out what the literary canon is and who is in it!)

Bring your chosen poem to our next lesson – Be prepared to tell us why you chose the poem and what you think the poem is about... Happy poem hunting!

Here are some authors to get you started:

- Christina Rossetti
- William Wordsworth
- John Keats
- William Blake
- Phillip Larkin
- Sylvia Plath
- Alfred Tennyson



TASK

In the next few weeks you will begin to study your first A Level set text novel. Use the following guided reading document to make your first initial read and annotations of the text. Ideally, you need to be 5 chapters ahead in each lesson.

The Handmaids Tale

Epigraphs

Genesis 30:1-3 is one of several passages that make clear that in patriarchal Hebrew times it was perfectly legitimate for a man to have sex and even beget children by his servants (slaves), particularly if his wife was infertile. It is unknown how widespread was the custom described here, of having the infertile wife embrace the fertile maidservant as she gave birth to symbolize that the baby is legally hers. Atwood extrapolates outrageously from this point, as is typical of dystopian writers: it is highly unlikely that the puritanical religious right would ever adopt the sexual practices depicted in this novel; but she is trying to argue that patriarchal traditions which value women only as fertility objects can be as demeaning as modern customs which value them as sex objects. She makes clear that this is a *reductio ad absurdum*, a theoretical exercise designed to stimulate thought about social issues rather than a realistic portrait of a probable future by comparing herself to Jonathan Swift, who in *Modest Proposal* highlighted the hard-heartedness of the English in allowing the Irish masses to starve by satirically proposing that they should be encouraged to eat their own children. It is not so obvious what the application of the third epigraph is to this novel. It seems to say that no one needs to forbid what is undesirable. **Can you interpret it any further?**

Section I: Night

Chapter 1

Read the first sentence. What can you tell about the period just from this sentence? People generally sleep in gymnasiums only in emergencies, after disasters. But this "had once" been a gymnasium, which implies that it was converted to its present use a long time ago. Some major change has taken place, probably not for the good. What is suggested by the fact that the immediate supervisors of the girls are women but these women are not allowed guns? What is suggested by the fact that the girls have to read lips to learn each others' names?

Section II Shopping

Chapter 2

The setting has shifted. It is now much later. What is suggested by the fact that the narrator observes "they've removed anything you could tie a rope to?" Note the play on the proverb "Waste not, want not." What is implied by the sentence, "Nothing takes place in the bed but sleep; or no sleep"? "Ladies in reduced circumstances" is a 19th-century expression usually applied to impoverished widows. How does the narrator use this pun? In the gospels, Martha was one of two sisters. She devoted herself to housework while her sister Mary sat and listened to Jesus. The irony here is that Jesus praised Mary, not Martha; but the new



patriarchy has chosen Martha as the ideal. What is suggested by the existence of "Colonies" where "Unwomen" live? What are the crimes the Martha's gossip about in their "private conversations"?

Chapter 3

What evidence is there on the second page of this chapter that the revolution which inaugurated this bizarre society is relatively recent? What evidence to reinforce that idea was presented in the opening chapter?

Chapter 4

The automobile names are all biblical. Can you guess from the context what an "Eye" is? "Some of you will fall on dry ground or thorns:" see Mark 4:1-9. We will learn eventually that the narrator's name is "Offred." Her partner is named "Ofglen." How do the names of Handmaids seem to be formed? How are we informed that this society is under attack? The place name "Gilead" features as a sort of ideal land in the Bible, in Numbers 36. It is mentioned many other times in the Bible as one of the twelve traditional divisions of the land of the Hebrews. But Atwood was probably thinking of Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" This verse is famous because of its use in the old Black spiritual: "There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul." In this Christian context, Gilead becomes the source of healing: Jesus Christ. One can imagine a fundamentalist group calling itself Gilead because of these associations; but the original context in Jeremiah (the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians) causes considerable irony. It may even be that Atwood was thinking of that verse when the narrator is not allowed to have hand lotion ("balm"). Baptists have a long-standing tradition of local control and individualism. Can you guess at the function of the black-painted vans? What power does Offred have over men, powerless as she is? How traditional is this kind of power? Has the elimination of pornography stopped women from being regarded as sex objects?

Chapter 5

What is Gilead's attitude toward higher education? Why is it ominous that the number of widows has diminished? Examine the passage that begins "Women were not protected then." This is the heart of the ideology that underlies the founding of Gilead. What is its essential rationale? Analyze the narrator's attitude toward the freedoms of which she speaks. Analyze the play on words in "Habits are hard to break." The clothing store name "Lilies" is derived from Matthew 6:28. "A land flowing with milk and honey" is a common biblical phrase, often used to describe Canaan, the "Promised Land." What is the women's reaction to the pregnant woman? "All flesh" originally means "all of humanity" (see Isaiah 40:5) but here is given a more literal sense as the name for butcher shops. How are the Japanese women different from the women of Gilead? Is Atwood idealizing them? What do you think the point of the contrast is?

Chapter 6

What is the function of the Wall? Why have the doctors been executed? The rule that the



evidence of one single woman is not adequate is based on Islamic tradition. What is significant about the shift to the present tense in this passage, "Luke wasn't a doctor. Isn't"?

Section III: Night

Chapter 7

To what time can Offred travel in her imagination that can be called "good"? The narrator's pun on "date rape" depends on the fact that "rapé" means "grated" or "shredded" in French; a date is a fruit, of course. Be careful not to leap to the conclusion that Atwood is mocking the concept of date rape; her attitude is far more complex than that. But why is this reference especially appropriate to the present context? What was the narrator's reaction as a little girl to her mother's participation in the burning of pornographic magazines? What relevance does this memory have to her present situation?

Section IV: Waiting Room

Chapter 8

What is "Gender Treachery?" The passage on the etymology of the term "Mayday" is correct. During World War II, the opening rhythmic pattern from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was interpreted as the Morse code for "v" (dot dot dot dash), and used to symbolize "victory". What do we learn about Offred's family in this passage? If a miscarried fetus may or may not be an "Unbaby" what would an "Unbaby" seem to be? "All flesh is grass" (Isaiah 40:6) is a quotation from the Bible meaning that all humans are mortal. Why does Aunt Lydia use instead the saying "all flesh is weak?" Does she really mean *all* humans? How about women? How is Offred's silent correction a reply to her comment? Why does Offred envy Rita her access to the knife? Why is she startled at the end of the chapter when she realizes she has called the room "mine"?

Chapter 9

What feelings does she have as she looks back on the early days of her affair with Luke? Note that a posting lasts two years. This will be important later.

Chapter 10

Why are the words to the hymn *Amazing Grace* now considered subversive? Who did Aunt Lydia blame for the "things" that used to happen to women? What sorts of memories does she keep returning to in this chapter?

Chapter 11

What do we learn about the Handmaid system during the scene at the doctor's office? "Give me children, or else I die." (Genesis 30:1). Deuteronomy 17:6 requires that for a couple to be stoned to death on account of adultery there has to be two witnesses to the act.



Chapter 12

To what were women vulnerable in bathrooms "before they got all the bugs ironed out"? What does this mean: "I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely"? The old sexist society was said to reduce women to mere physical objects. Has this changed? What does Offred suggest by saying of the attempted kidnapping of her daughter "I thought it was an isolated incident, at the time"? If Offred was parted from her daughter when she was five and she is eight now, the separation must have happened three years ago. Since at eighteen months the pattern of change was not clear to Offred, the revolution which established Gilead must have been quite recent. It is difficult to believe that such a thorough transformation of society in such a short time, but it is important to remember that this is not a realistic novel, but a satirical dystopia. What associations are aroused by the tattoo on Offred's ankle? She is remembering scenes from the end of World War II, in which women who dated the Nazi occupiers had their heads shaved in public. What two meanings of the word "compose" is she playing with in the last paragraph?

Section V: Nap

Chapter 13

What do you think about her comments on boredom as erotic? Offred lets herself go back in time to when she was in training with Moira. Does anyone blame women for being raped today? How has Offred's attitude toward her body changed? What do her dreams about her husband and daughter have in common? What does she mean by saying at the end of the chapter "Of all the dreams this is the worst"?

Section VI: Household

Chapter 14

The mention of a Montreal satellite station reminds us that Atwood is a Canadian, but Montreal is evidently outside of the territory controlled by Gilead. The endless war, always on the brink of victory, is very reminiscent of the war depicted in Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. What other locales seem to be on the edge of Gilead? You should be able to gradually construct a rough map of its territory. "The Children of Ham" is a designation for African-Americans. We are finally told that the narrator is called "Offred," though it isn't her real name. Why are we never told her real name? Why was the family warned not to look too happy when they are trying to escape Gilead?

Chapter 15

Why is the Bible kept locked up? In what era were Bibles routinely sequestered from the general population? Note the series of unflattering phallic images Offred runs over. What is the point of the joke in saying "One false move and I'm dead." The passages the Commander is reading from the Bible are Genesis 8:17 and 30:1-8. The section beginning "For lunch" uses Matthew 5:3-10 (emended) to switch scenes back in time. When we return to the scene in the sitting room, the Commander has just read Genesis 30:18. The scene ends with Second Chronicles 16:9. Why is this verse chosen as the ritual ending of all Bible readings?



Chapter 16

Although this chapter depicts what is clearly the most sensational aspect of Gilead society, it is important not to use it to condemn the novel as "unrealistic." Refer back to the note on the third epigraph of the novel. Even the perfume has a biblical name, "Lily of the Valley," from The Song of Songs 2:1. Why is women's pleasure in sex no longer valued?

Chapter 17

What is her reaction to Nick's coming to fetch her?

Section VII: Night

Chapter 18

What hope keeps Offred alive?

Section VIII: Birth Day

Chapter 19

In thinking about the missing cushions, Offred is referring to 1 Corinthians 13: 13. What are the odds that any baby will be seriously deformed? What has caused this situation? The name of Jezebel, the wicked wife of King Ahab, is sometimes used as a label for any shamelessly wicked woman. Some women have argued strongly for natural childbirth, but others see this as a step backward. And many positions in between are advocated. Atwood points out that it was modern medicine that first made pain relief possible during childbirth. Anaesthetics used during childbirth can be harmful to the infant, but they can also be very beneficial for the mother.

Chapter 20

Birthing stools were once in widespread use and have been reintroduced by women who argue that giving birth in a sitting position is both more natural and more comfortable. Do you know the real source of the quotation, "From each according to her ability; to each according to his needs"? (It has been slightly but significantly altered.) How valid is the use of sadistic porn films by the Aunts to argue against the old society? "Take Back the Night" originated as the slogan of Women Against Pornography, but has developed in more recent years into an anti-rape slogan. What themes of the women's movement is Atwood blending together here? What do you think her attitude toward them is? It may be difficult to imagine now, but in some feminist circles in the seventies a woman who chose to bear a child could come under considerable pressure from other feminists, like Offred's mother. What are the main tensions between Offred and her mother? These distinctions are part of the crux of the novel, which is about a society which reacted to the older feminists by repression and which the younger women did not sufficiently combat. Why did she rebel against her mother as a young woman? How does she feel about her mother now?



Chapter 21

What do we learn in this chapter about how an "Unwoman" is defined? The reference to a "women's culture" at the end of the chapter refers to certain kinds of feminists who have argued that women possess superior values and could build a superior society. What is Offred's attitude toward this idea?

Chapter 22

In what way is Moira a "loose woman"?

Chapter 23

How does Offred try to defend herself against her terror when she first enters the study? Playing scrabble seems like an absurdly trivial form of transgression; why is it significant in this setting? Why does she lie about her reaction when the Commander asks her to kiss him?

Section IX

Chapter 24

How does Offred interpret Aunt Lydia's teachings about men? What do you think of this idea? What does the story about the death camp commander's mistress convey? In ancient medicine, hysteria was a disease of women, caused by unnatural movements of the womb. How does Offred describe the sound of her beating heart?

Section X: Soul Scrolls

Chapter 25

Why does Offred want Serena Joy's shears? What do these occasional dark comments tell us about the state of her mind underneath her usual bitterly sarcastic narrative? Women's fashion magazines such as the Commander shows Offred were once the target of fierce criticism from feminists. What does she say these magazines offered? How do the pictures of the women impress her? "My wife doesn't understand me" is such an old cliché as uttered by men trying to start an affair that it has become a joke.

Chapter 26

A British expression says that a pregnant woman has a "bun in the oven." How have her feelings changed toward the Commander? How have his feelings changed toward her?

Chapter 27

Loaves and Fishes refers to a miracle story told in the Gospels. Note how the memory of the ice cream store leads Offred to thoughts of her daughter. The Soul Scroll machines are most obviously like Tibetan prayer wheels, which are turned to activate the prayers inside them; but they are also reminiscent to the old Catholic practice of paying priests to say prayers for



the repose of the dead. What do Ofglen and Offred see immediately after they have revealed their true views to each other?

Chapter 28

Why did Moira criticize Offred for "stealing" Luke and how did Offred defend herself? "Discothèques" nightclubs with recorded rather than live music originated in France. The name was soon abbreviated to "disco." The main feature of the book of Job is intense suffering. Why would a totalitarian dictatorship prefer computer banking to paper money? Note the statement by the newsstand clerk that sex-oriented enterprises can never be gotten rid of entirely. She turns out to be right later. The law prohibiting the ownership of property by women reinstates the law as it stood in the 19th century and earlier. Many of the extreme aspects of Giladean culture have actually existed in the past. In the passage which begins "Remembering this, I remember also my mother," note how anti-porn and abortion riots are blended together, though her mother must have been against porn and for abortion. Her opponents in the abortion demonstrations must have been her allies in the anti-porn demonstrations. Why did Offred find her mother embarrassing when she was an adolescent? How has her attitude changed now? Why was Offred afraid to ask Luke how he really felt about her losing her job?

Chapter 29

"Pen Is Envy" is of course a pun on Freud's "penis envy," the notion that women who want to be like men are neurotic. When the Commander says of the previous Handmaid who killed herself "Serena found out," What does this mean, and what is Offred's reaction?

Section XI: Night

Chapter 30

There is a traditional Jewish prayer for men which thanks God for not having made them women. This prayer is satirized and parodied in this chapter.

Section XII: Jezebel's

Chapter 31

What has changed about the holidays the Fourth of July and Labor Day? Why would Offred like to be able to have a fight with Luke? Taliths are the prayer shawls worn by Jews. "Magen Davids" are Stars of David, symbols of Judaism. How do you imagine Serena Joy's offer of the picture affects Offred? Explain.

Chapter 32

"You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs" is a paraphrase of Napoleon justifying the carnage he caused in attempting to build his empire. When a character in fiction uses it, it almost always indicates the speaker's ruthlessness.



Chapter 34

Arranged marriages seem hopelessly exotic to many Americans, but in Western civilization they were the rule rather than the exception until a couple of centuries ago. Evaluate and respond to the arguments that the Commander at the Prayvaganza makes against the old dating and marriage system.

Chapter 35

React to Offred's comments on love. In the next to the last paragraph, what does Offred mean when she says she has been "erased"?

Chapter 37

What is the Commander's rationale for the existence of places like Jezebel's? How does he misunderstand when Offred asks him "Who are these people?"

Chapter 38

"The Underground Femaleroad" is of course a pun on the old "underground railroad" along which escaped slaves were smuggled to freedom. What kind of work do the women in the Colonies do? What does Moira say the advantages are in working at Jezebel's over being a Handmaid?

Section XIII: Night

Chapter 40

Why does Offred feel she has to make up stories about what happened between herself and Nick?

Section XIV: Salvaging

Chapter 41

Why does she say on the bottom of page. 268 "I told you it was bad"?

Chapter 42

Why are the crimes not described as "Salvagings"?

Chapter 43

Why does Ofglen attack the "rapist" so fiercely?

Chapter 44

Why does Offred tell her new companion that she met the former Ofglen in May?



Chapter 45

"She has died that I may live" is of course a parody of "He died that we may live," a central Christian doctrine referring to Christ's crucifixion as a source of salvation for believers.

Section XV: Night

Chapter 46

How does Nick reassure Offred when the black van comes? Note the offhanded, ambiguous, but emotionally loaded nature of the last line of Offred's narrative, typical of her.

Historical Notes on The Handmaid's Tale

This is the real end of the story, of course, told as a parody of a scholarly symposium. Note the date, two centuries from now. The title which Offred's narrative has been given resembles those of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: "The Knight's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Tale." Most dystopias end with a heroic conspiracy or uprising leading to the destruction of the evil government which has oppressed everyone. The jarring shift to pretentious scholarly jargon, while amusing to scholars, may be off-putting for most readers; but Atwood is trying to avoid fatalism and sensationalism at the same time. She is also parodying the ponderous, self-conscious attempts of scholars to be humorous. There is a long tradition of "nowhere" names in utopian fiction. "Utopia" means "nowhere" and Samuel Butler called his utopia "Erewhon." The Chair comes from the University of "deny" which is in the country of "none of it." But Gord Turner of Selkirk College comments further on these place names:

The Northwest Territories in Canada as an area has been associated with two large native groups--the Dene (read "Denay") in the Western Arctic and the Inuit in the Eastern Arctic. In fact, the Northwest Territories through referendum (already held) will be divided into two massive land areas known as Denendeh and Nunavut. "Nunavut" means "Our Land" to the Inuit.

So it's quite likely that Atwood meant the University of Denay to be coloured by the Dene and its massive land claims in the 1980s and the huge area to the East of the Mackenzie River Valley known as "Nunavut." That she changed the spelling of "Nunavut" to "Nunavit" is also interesting as "Nuna" still means "land" and "vit" may mean "our land."

Anthropology has traditionally been carried out by whites on minorities. Here an evidently Native American scholar has as her specialty studying whites, a deliberately ironic twist. Other names suggest that this conference is in fact dominated by Native Americans. It is difficult to see what Krishna (the erotic lover in Hindu mythology) and Kali (the also erotic avenging demon slaying goddess) have to do with Gileadean religion, though that may be Atwood's point. Scholars tend to read what they already know into what they are less familiar with. Certainly plenty of scholars have analysed Krishna as a Christ figure. The reference to the "Warsaw Tactic" is more grim: the Nazis walled up the Warsaw Jews in the ghetto and proceeded to starve most of them to death. The reference to Iran is of course the most pointed, because of that nation's conservative Islamic revolution which involved strenuous



demodernising and drastic restrictions on the freedom of women. The Iranian example is one of the main inspirations of this novel. Given what Professor Pieixoto has to say about the discovery of "The Handmaid's Tale," how drastically would America seem to have changed between the end of the last chapter and now? Anthropologists are famous for their refusal to judge the societies they study. What do you think is Atwood's reaction to this striving for objectivity in the case of Gilead? How do you feel about it? William Wordsworth famously defined poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity." Note the allusion. Many details about the Gilead society's policies are revealed here. Atwood takes the opportunity to point to current tendencies which could lead in the direction depicted in the novel. The speaker's jibe at Offred's education is not a comment on women, but the smugly superior observation of a South American mocking the inadequacies of North America, clearly much fallen from its previous dominance. Note the Canadian references in this section. "Participation" would

seem to be a scholarly term formed out of "participant execution" to label what Gilead called "salvaging." Gord Turner points out a parallel term promoted by the Canadian government: "participation" for "participant action." Prof. Pieixoto's talk is of a type familiar to literary historians: the attempt to connect the author of a text with some historical person known from other records, particularly in Medieval studies. But for us, the identification is irrelevant, it is the knowledge that Offred survived and the rebellion eventually triumphed that matters. The final call for questions is traditional, of course, but also serves here as an invitation to further discussion of the issues Atwood has raised.



TASK

Your second set text that you will study with me will be *The Great Gatsby*. Use the following guided reading document to make your first initial read and annotations of the text. Ideally, you need to be one chapter ahead in lessons.

The Great Gatsby: GUIDED QUESTIONS

The following questions are a combination of comprehension/knowledge level questions and interpretive level questions.

CHAPTER ONE

1. How does Nick describe himself at the beginning of the novel?
2. How does Nick describe Tom Buchanan?
3. Who is Jordan Baker?
4. What is Gatsby doing when Nick first sees him?
5. Describe the ambiguity in Nick's initial descriptions of Gatsby.
6. How does the tone of Nick's description of Tom reveal Nick's feelings about Tom?
7. How would you describe Daisy's state of mind during dinner? What does she say and so that helps reveal her inner conflicts?
8. Nick thinks that, given the state of their marriage, Daisy should leave Tom, but it is clear to him that she has no intention of doing so. What indication is there that Tom and Daisy are closely linked despite their marital difficulties?
9. What indications are there that the green light will have a powerful emotional significance to Gatsby?

CHAPTER TWO

1. How does Nick meet Tom's mistress?
2. How does Myrtle react to Tom's arrival?
3. Describe George Wilson. How does he react to Tom's arrival?
4. How does Myrtle behave as the party progresses?
5. Describe the setting of the valley of ashes where George and Myrtle live. What aspects of the setting imply that it is intended to have a symbolic meaning as well as a literal one?
6. How does Fitzgerald describe Myrtle Wilson? Does her physical appearance reflect her character in any way?
7. Compare the setting of the party in this chapter with the setting of the party in Chapter One.
8. Why does Tom attach Myrtle at the end of the party? How does this exemplify Fitzgerald's description of Tom in Chapter One?



CHAPTER THREE

1. Describe the two ways in which Nick differs from the other guests at Gatsby's party.
2. What does Nick think of Gatsby when he first meets him?
3. Describe the events and atmosphere of the party.
4. What does the owl-eyed man in the library find extraordinary about Gatsby's library?
5. What does Nick learn about Jordan Baker after he has spent some time with her?
6. Why does Fitzgerald describe the party (in the passage beginning "By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived") in the present tense?
7. How does Nick characterize the guests at Gatsby's party? What do his characterizations tell us about how Nick feels about most of these people? What sense of life in the Jazz Age do we get from the description of this party?
8. Describe the ambiguity in Gatsby's character that strikes Nick.
9. Describe two incidents involving automobiles in this chapter. What role do automobiles seem to play in the novel so far?

CHAPTER FOUR

1. What does Gatsby tell Nick about himself?
2. What accomplishments of Meyer Wolfsheimer's does Gatsby describe to Nick? How does Nick react?
3. According to Jordan, what did Daisy do on her wedding day? Why?
4. Why does Gatsby want to have tea with Daisy in Nick's house? Why doesn't Gatsby ask Nick for this favor himself?
5. What does Tom do when he and Daisy return from their honeymoon?
6. Aside from the improbability of his story, what other evidence is there that Gatsby is lying when he tells Nick about his background?
7. What does Gatsby's friendship with Meyer Wolfsheimer imply about his own background?
8. How does Daisy behave after Gatsby goes overseas? What does her behavior show about her feelings for Gatsby?
9. After Jordan tells Nick the story of Gatsby and Daisy, Nick says that Gatsby "came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor." How does the metaphor of birth help explain what Gatsby's behavior had meant to Nick up to then?
10. With Jordan in his arms, Nick thinks of a phrase: "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy and the tired." How do you think this phrase reflects on the events of the novel so far? Do you think that Gatsby would agree with the phrase?



CHAPTER FIVE

1. Gatsby suggests a spur of the moment trip to 'Coney Island' or a swim in his pool. What does this tell us about him and how he is feeling?
2. What does Gatsby offer Nick in return for Nick's cooperation in inviting Daisy to his house? How does Nick react and why?
3. How does Gatsby change when he knows that Nick will invite Daisy?
4. Comment on Gatsby's appearance and behaviour before Daisy arrives at Nick's.
5. What is the meeting between Gatsby and Daisy like initially?
6. Gatsby accidentally knocks Nick's clock. How is this symbolic?
7. How are Daisy and Gatsby different when Nick returns to the house after a half an hour?
8. What are Gatsby's feelings by the end of the chapter?
9. What does Gatsby reply when Nick asks him how he makes his money? Why does Nick find that significant?
10. What is Gatsby's dialogue like in this chapter? What does it tell us about Gatsby?
11. Why do you think Daisy sobs when Gatsby shows her his shirts?
12. What is the weather like in this chapter? How does it reflect on the emotional climate of Gatsby and Daisy?
13. In this chapter, Gatsby's dream seems to be fulfilled. What indications are there, though, that reality cannot satisfy his dream?

CHAPTER SIX

1. When does James Gatz change his name? Why?
2. What is Daisy's real response to the party, according to Nick?
3. What does Gatsby tell Nick he wants Daisy to do?
4. Plato held that reality was an imperfect reflection of an ideal, permanent realm. With this in mind, what would you say Nick means when he says that "Jay Gatsby sprang from his Platonic conception of himself?"
5. How is the comparison of Gatsby with Christ ("he was a son of G-d... and he must be about His Father's Business") ironic? If the comparison with Christ were to continue through the book, what would happen to Gatsby?
6. Tom, Mr. Sloane, and a young lady visit Gatsby and the lady invites Gatsby to come to dinner with them. What does Gatsby's response tell us about his social sensitivity? What connection, if any, do you think this scene might have with Gatsby's love of Daisy?
7. What is Gatsby's view of the past? When Nick says that Gatsby "wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy," what do you think he means?



8. At the end of the chapter, Nick describes Gatsby kissing Daisy in Louisville five years before. What is Gatsby giving up when he kisses her? Why?

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Why does Gatsby stop giving parties?
2. When does Tom first realize that Daisy loves Gatsby?
3. Why is Myrtle Wilson upset when she sees Tom and Jordan?
4. Why does George Wilson lock Myrtle in the bedroom?
5. How does Gatsby characterize Daisy's voice? What do you think he means by this?
6. Why does Gatsby lose Daisy during the confirmation at the Plaza? Could he have done anything to win her, do you think? If he could have, why doesn't he?
7. Why does Tom insist that Daisy go home with Gatsby? What do you think this tells us about Tom's character and his relationship with Daisy?
8. What indications are there at the end of the chapter that Tom and Daisy are going to stay together despite his philandering and her love for Gatsby?
9. At the end of the chapter, Gatsby is standing alone, looking out at Daisy's house. Where else in the novel does he do this? How is this different?

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. What does Gatsby tell Nick the night of the accident? Why?
2. Did Gatsby want to go to Oxford?
3. How does George Wilson spend the night after the accident?
4. What evidence had Wilson found that his wife was having an affair?
5. What would you say is the principal reason for Daisy's appeal to Gatsby?
6. How is Nick's attitude toward Gatsby ambivalent even at the moment when he says goodbye to him?
7. What do the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg symbolize to George Wilson? What is significant about this symbol?
8. How do you think Wilson got Gatsby's name? Does any evidence in this chapter point to a particular person?
9. How does Nick characterize Gatsby's state of mind before he is killed?

CHAPTER NINE

1. What is the motive publicly given for Wilson's murder of Gatsby?
2. What does the telephone call from Chicago tell us about Gatsby's business?
3. What does Klipspringer want from Nick? How does Nick react to this?
4. Why is Gatsby's father so proud of him?
5. What does Tom confess to Nick when they meet that fall? Does he regret what he has done?



6. Nick says that “this has been a story of the West, after all.” What do you think he means by that?
7. How does Nick characterize Tom and Daisy at the end of the book? What has each of them “smashed” during the course of the novel?
8. At the end of the book, Nick imagines what the continent must have been like when it was first seen by Dutch sailors. How does this contrast with the environment described in the novel?
9. What does the green light symbolize at the end of the novel?

NOVEL AS A WHOLE

1. Discuss Nick Carraway’s character. How reliable is he as a narrator? What aspects of his character make him an effective narrator?
2. Why is first-person narrative an effective and appropriate way of telling this story?
3. Discuss the title of the book. In what way is Gatsby “great”?
4. An epigraph is a quotation at the beginning of a work that reflects on that work. How does the epigraph to *The Great Gatsby* reflect on Gatsby’s story?
5. How does Fitzgerald use Gatsby’s parties to present a satirical portrait of the Roaring Twenties?
6. Compare and contrast the character of Daisy and Myrtle Wilson.
7. Discuss the relationship between Nick and Jordan Baker. How does it reflect, if at all, on the story of Gatsby and Daisy?
8. Discuss Fitzgerald’s use of the automobile in this novel. What do you think might have made the automobile an appealing symbol to Fitzgerald in the early 1920s?
9. Contrast the setting of the valley of ashes with that of East Egg and West Egg.
10. Describe the gradual revelation of Gatsby’s character. What do we learn about him and when? Why is this an appropriate way of learning about him?
11. Gatsby’s tragedy is that he chooses the wrong dream (Daisy). Has he been corrupted by society? Or is his choice an indication that he is part of the corruption?



Useful Websites

www.universalteacher.org.uk

This website contains comprehensive and interesting guidance about how best to read and discuss a wide range of texts, both individual and paired. A brief but helpful history of English literature, from Middle English to the late 20th Century, is also included.

www.sparknotes.com

This site has basic, but very useful notes on a huge range of commonly studied texts, with chapter synopses, character analyses, themes and motifs, essay ideas, and suggestions for further reading. It is a very useful site indeed.

www.bibliomania.com

Study notes on a very wide range of texts, with notes, suggested essay titles, and guidance on further reading (you need to register to access the material, but at the time of access there appeared to be no charge).

www.novelguide.com

The site contains detailed discussion of a wide range of novels old and new, with relevant background material.

www.s-cool.co.uk/topic_index.asp?subject_id=4&d=0

Some quite basic, but very helpful and reassuring advice on how best to approach the study of literature, notes on how to study poetry, and on a few individual texts.

www.shakespearehelp.com

A very detailed listing of resource material on Shakespeare, his life, times and plays, particularly useful for advanced learners.

www.englishbiz.co.uk

A site geared towards pre-A-Level learners, but it does contain good and practical advice on planning, organising and writing critical and other sorts of essays.

<http://www.litcharts.com/>

Comprehensive guide on lots of texts with detailed study notes.

www.palgrave.com/skills4study/html/index.asp

This site is designed for university learners, but also helpful at A Level. Discusses a range of study skills, including how to structure and write good literature essays.

www.literaryhistory.com

The material here is advanced, but useful and thought-provoking. A wealth of resource material is offered on a huge range of writers, old and modern.

www.victorianweb.org

This site contains very detailed and advanced material – mostly resource-based – on writers from the 19th and very early 20th centuries. Well worth a visit if you are studying a text from this period.

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/>

They publish a great magazine called e-magazine – Ask your teacher if your school has a subscription.



MY NOTES

