**Studying novels**

Whenever you approach a novel, it is worth considering some of the following aspects for study:

**NARRATOR**

**GENRE**

**SETTING**

**CHARACTER**

***Never Let Me Go***, a novel written by Kazuo Ishiguro and published in 2005

**Part 1: Chapters 1-3**

Consider the effects of the **NARRATIVE VOICE** used in the text.

What are the key characteristics of Kathy’s narrative voice in the first three chapters?

(Useful quotations can be found on pages 15-16, 18, 26 and 35)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Feature of her voice | Two brief quotations where we see this | Effect on the reader? |
|  |  |  |
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Spend some time researching the key characteristics of the three **GENRES** listed below.

Look for evidence in the novel of the features we identify together, and find two quotations to demonstrate them.

* **Dystopia**

Key features:

Evidence from text that would help to place it in this genre: (pages 3, 4, 5, 13, 31)

* **Science fiction**

Key features:

Evidence from text that would help to place it in this genre: (pages 3, 36, 28-9)

* **Memoir/autobiography**

Key features:

Evidence from text that would help to place it in this genre: (pages 8, 13, 36)

**Think and discuss:**

Which genre(s) do you find most applicable to the text? Does this affect the way we read and respond to it?

The presentation of **SETTING** is also important in the opening chapters. What impressions are we given of Hailsham?

Give a quotation to demonstrate each idea you have, and make a note of the effect you think it has on the reader.

(Useful quotations can be found on pages 5-6, 13, 16, 18, 23, 30-31, 34)

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Key **CHARACTERS** emerge in the opening chapters. Each is presented as an interesting individual, but many can also be seen to represent certain attitudes and ways of responding to the world that the novel depicts.

What is the significance of the following characters? Select the best quotations for demonstrating your ideas.

* Tommy (see pages 9-10, 12-13, 20-22)
* Miss Lucy (see pages 26-30)
* Madame (see pages 30-36)

**Chapters 4-6**

**What are the effects of the narrative style upon the reader?**

* Kathy’s reasoning for writing the story (trying to arrange memories) emphasises her limited time – makes us invest emotionally, and creates tension. Page 37
* The resulting retrospective flashback structure and non-chronological, digressive style make her unreliable, which humanises her. Pages 41, 45, 49
* So does her specificity and realism in terms of geographical/cultural references – makes the world credible. Pages 49, 64-5, 69
* Direct address tends to group us with Kathy in this world, as if only possible audience could be clones. Page 67
* Idiomatic and juvenile register reminds us how prescribed and limited Kathy’s existence has been, and that she will never lead an adult life as we understand it. Pages 37, 44

**How are settings expanded upon, and with what effects?**

* Hailsham:
  + Events that take place (like visits from Madame, sales, exchanges and health lectures) are unnerving. Pages 38, 40-42, 67-8
  + The status that the school seems to have is intriguing. Page 43
  + Geographical isolation from the outside world is puzzling and unsettling. Page 66
  + The nearby woods seem to play a symbolic role as well as establishing an atmosphere. Pages 49-50
  + The setting seems synonymous with certain attitudes, such as acceptance (Pages 40, 69) and emotionlessness. (Pages 70, 73)
* Norfolk – the ‘lost corner’ of England – signifies potential for escaping society’s constraints. Pages 65-6

**What could each of the following characters represent in the world presented?**

* Miss Emily – her attitude to her role, her physicality, her emotional state – Pages 39, 43-4, 45
* Miss Geraldine – subject of students’ desires (Ruth’s pretence about special relationship and gifts - parent fantasy?) and anxieties (the ‘secret guard’ plot - fear of threat from the outside world) – Pages 19-20, 49, 51
* Ruth – wilful detachment from reality as survival strategy – her confidence is reassuring to others and becomes a source of social power – need to sustain fantasties can explain her need to conquer/control Tommy, the questioner and non-performer – Pages 46-8, 51-5, 58-60

**What is the symbolic significance of the following objects?**

* The pencil case – private possessions, identity, parent fantasy, the power balance in Ruth’s and Kathy’s relationship and their respective attitudes to their existences as defined by the system – Pages 56-60, 63
* The Judy Bridgewater cassette – the students’ health, cover image (rebellion), title (true bonds), Madame’s reaction (sadness about the world), Ruth stealing (? – later mentions Keffers taking her collection away) and replacing with compensatory gift – symbolic of Hailsham’s approach to the students? Part of a system that denies them meaningful human identity but attempts to assuage guilt with apparent humanity – pages 66-75.

**Chapters 7-9**

Oppositions presented in the text help us to understand the values of the society depicted, how we react to it, and how different characters respond to living in it. Use the table below to record ideas.

* Deception (of others and of self) – p. 81-2, 84-5, 88, 90, 92, 94, 96-8, 100-3, 106-7
* Honesty (with others and with self) – p. 77, 79-80, 87, 103, 105-7, 109

*(suppression and concealment of emotions, pretence, fantasy...* ***vs****. earnestness, openness, truth-telling)*

* Acceptance (of what is presented to you) – p. 77, 80, 83, 87, 101, 108-9
* Rejection of it – p. 76, 87, 89, 91, 106

*(assimilation of what is taught, refusal to ask questions, silences...* ***vs.*** *questions, rebellion, outbursts)*

* Creation – p. 77, 80, 83, 87, 101, 109
* Destruction – p. 83-4, 86

*(the production of artwork, the preoccupation with sex but not for reproduction...* ***vs.*** *‘unzipping’, donating)*

* Protection (of others) – p. 85, 102, 104, 108-9
* Betrayal (of others) – p. 85, 101-2

*(Selflessness, self-sacrifice, nurturing of others...* ***vs.*** *selfishness, sacrifice of others, nurturing of oneself)*

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Example of this concept being manifested in text – by whom, when and where? Quote to show. | How does Ishiguro encourage us to react? |
| **Deception (of others and of oneself)** |  |  |
| **Honesty (with others and with oneself)** |  |  |
| **Protection (of others, or of oneself)** |  |  |
| **Betrayal (of others, or of oneself)** |  |  |
| **Acceptance (of what is presented)** |  |  |
| **Rejection (of what is presented)** |  |  |
| **Creation** |  |  |
| **Destruction** |  |  |

**Part 2**

**A new setting and a new stage**

* Why is the time at the cottages a significant stage in the lives of our central characters?
* Can you think of a life-stage in our world that might be seen as an equivalent?

Under each of the headings below, consider how the time at the cottages is presented as similar to the equivalent life-stage in our world. Then, under each heading, note the ways in which it subtly differs - and consider WHY this is.

***Similarities Differences***

* Friendships and socialising
* Leisure and study
* Romance and sex
* Aspiration and dreams
* The quest for identity

**Think and discuss:**

Why might Ishiguro wish deliberately to invite comparison between our world and the one he is depicting?

**Part 2**

**How does Ishiguro convey the impact of science on the society he depicts?**

In your group, prepare a presentation on an allocated chapter, providing the class with ideas to help them to answer the question above. Use the questions and page references supplied to guide you, but feel free to go beyond them.

Chapter 10

1. What is the significance of the essays, and of literature? p. 113
2. How are the cottages symbolic, as a setting? p. 114-17
3. What is the significance of new characters, such as Keffers and the veterans? p. 117, 120
4. What is the significance of the emulating of television mannerisms, and Kathy’s reaction to it? p. 118-122

(Where else has the motif of performance arisen? Which characters stick to the script, and which don’t?)

Chapter 11

1. What does Kathy feel shame about? Is she alone in this? What underlies her anxiety? p. 126, 131-2, 134
2. Why are there “two Ruths” and why does Kathy claim to accept this? p. 127-8
3. What topics are never spoken about, and why? p. 130-1
4. How is the depiction of Kathy’s and Tommy’s bond developed here? p. 132-5

Chapter 12-13

1. Why is there both fascination AND fear about the idea of ‘possibles’? p. 136-8, 144
2. What does the character of Chrissie illuminate about the perceptions of Hailsham? Do we envy or pity Hailsham students more? p. 139, 143, 151
3. Why are fantasies a feature of this time? p. 140-2, 149
4. How is the motif of performing parts (and suppressing genuine emotion) continued here? With what effects? p. 144-6, 148, 150, 152-3

Chapter 14

1. How is the motif of performance and pretence extended here? p. 155, 158, 161-2
2. What do the settings of the office and the Portway Studios Gallery represent? How do they alter the students’ perception of Ruth’s ‘possible’? p. 156-7, 159-161
3. Try to explain the group’s reaction(s) to the first sighting of the ‘possible’ (p. 157) and the second (p. 162-4). Where else has toilet/’poo’ imagery arisen, and why? p. 15, p. 91, p. 269
4. How are we made more aware again of the love between Kathy and Tommy? p. 155, 165

Chapter 15

1. What does the finding of the cassette seem to symbolise? And the fact that Kathy finds it, not Tommy? (Consider what the tape symbolised, for Kathy: familial bonds) p. 168-171
2. How do the settings of the shop (p. 169) and the cliff edge (p. 171) heighten the poignancy of the chapter?
3. What seems to be occurring to Tommy throughout this chapter? (p. 171-7) Who do you feel he is thinking about, and how do you interpret Kathy’s response?
4. How could be explain Kathy’s and Tommy’s sexual urges (p. 178-80), Kathy’s reaction to Tommy’s advice, and Ruth’s changed behaviour (p. 180-181)?

Chapter 16-17

1. What is the symbolic significance of:
   * The cassette (p. 182, 189)? What could we infer here? (look back to p. 129)
   * Tommy’s drawings – both the activity and the actual product (p.184-5)?
   * The essays (p.194)?
2. Why is there so little communication within the group about the Norfolk trip? (p. 183-4) and why, in its aftermath, might Ruth also want to forget about Hailsham? (p. 187 and 199)
3. What evidence is there of:
   * Ruth fearing losing Tommy to Kathy and manipulating situations? (p. 190-1, 196-7)
   * Kathy suppressing her true feelings? (p. 190-2)
   * Tommy accepting affection offered, rather than expressing it? (p. 184-5, 191-2)
4. Why is the motif of water used and how can it shape our view of events? (p. 194) Looking back, where else has water imagery been used, and with what effects?

**Part 3**

**Changes and developments**

The retrospective narrative now arrives in the recent past. Glance back at the first pages of the text and consider how everything you have now read and discussed alters the way you respond to the start of Kathy’s narrative.

**How does Ishiguro present changes in characters and relationships to enhance his depiction of this world?**

In terms of characterisation, the final part presents some significant shifts.

In your pair/three, find two quotations in Part 3 that demonstrate how your given character seems to have changed over the course of the events in the narrative. Find one quotation from earlier in the text to contrast with this.

Ch 18: Laura – faded (contrast with earlier ebullience) – p. 205-207

Ch 19: Ruth – giving (contrast with earlier selfishness) – p. 227-229

Ch 20: Kathy – claiming (contrast with earlier self-denial) – p. 238-240

Ch 21: Madame – jaded (contrast with earlier stoicism) – p. 248-250

Ch 22: Miss Emily – resigned (contrast with earlier missionary zeal) p . 261-264

Ch 22/3: Tommy – defeated (contrast with earlier rage) p. 269-70, 276-9

In each case, look back and ask yourself the question below:

*What does this change contribute to our view of the world depicted and its impact on individuals?*

The relationships between the central three characters are also subject to an important shift in Part 3.

**Think about each of these questions, then make brief notes supported with relevant quotations:**

pages 209-12

Why do you think...

1. ...Kathy becomes Ruth’s carer?
2. ...Kathy feels that Ruth doesn’t fully trust her?
3. ...Ruth wishes to visit Tommy?

pages 217-226

How do you react to...

1. ...Kathy’s and Tommy’s interaction on the journeys to and from the stranded boat?
2. ...Ruth’s physical frailty and her reliance on the others for help?
3. ...Kathy’s decision to stop at the poster?

pages 227-232

Can you explain...

1. ...Ruth’s sudden declaration and request?
2. ...Tommy’s reaction and leave-taking from them?
3. ...The reduced tension between Ruth and Kathy after this?

Pages 233-240

How is the relationship between Kathy and Tommy presented now? Consider:

1. What they do and don’t talk about
2. The sexual dimension
3. Tommy’s drawings

Pages 276-280

Looking carefully at language and imagery, think about how the ending of Kathy’s and Tommy’s relationship shows:

1. The enforced suppression of emotion in this world
2. The destructive impact of this world on human relationships
3. The advantages and disadvantages of submitting to your prescribed role

The difference between donors and carers is emphasised in the final conversations between Kathy and Tommy.

Looking back at Part 3 as a whole, think about how Ishiguro subtly exposes the system as horrifying for all involved.

Carers: pages 203-6, 223, 238, 276-7

What makes a ‘good’ carer? Why is it not surprising that Kathy is particularly adept at it?

Donors: pages 218, 221-3, 231-2, 235-6, 271-6

How are donors viewed and treated? How do they feel about their role? Why is Tommy a ‘good’ donor?

The philosophy behind the system: pages 253-267

* What did Hailsham represent in the context of the society depicted?
* Are we encouraged to judge its intentions positively or negatively?
* How could you argue that the efforts of Madame and Miss Emily were futile, their values redundant?
* In the context of these ideas, what is the significance of Kathy writing this novel?

Our final impression of the world Ishiguro depicts is affected by his presentation of settings and use of \**symbols\**.

Complete the grid below with your partner:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Setting | Quotation(s) | What this might signify about the world depicted |
| Roads p. 204, 216, 267  *\*poster\** |  |  |
| Hailsham  p. 207-9, 221  *\*clown/ balloons on Welsh beach\** |  |  |
| Dover  p. 209 (and p. 17) |  |  |
| Marshland  p. 212, 219-220  *\*stranded boat\** |  |  |
| Kingsfield  p. 214-5, 233, 274 |  |  |
| Littlehampton  p. 243-6  *\*items in the house\** |  |  |
| Remote Scotland  p. 258-9 |  |  |
| Fields  p. 269, 281-2  *\*debris and rubbish\** |  |  |

**Whole text: Recurring imagery and motifs**

Ishiguro uses recurring imagery to build up motifs that can be seen to have symbolic significance in the text.

**Motif:** *Water*

**Useful pages to re-visit:** 13-14, 17, 25, 64, 113, 146, 160, 162, 171, 184, 198, 208, 212, 215, 220-1, 239, 242, 261, 268, 277, 280

**Best quotations:**

**How does this imagery relate to the world depicted, and the experiences of the characters in the text?**

**Motif:** *Performance, role-playing, scripts*

**Useful pages to re-visit:** 9-11, 15, 45-6, 56-7, 59, 73, 76, 102-3, 107-8, 119, 122, 128, 152, 158, 165, 188, 216, 246-7

**Best quotations:**

**How does this imagery relate to the world depicted, and the experiences of the characters in the text?**

**Motif:** *Humans, animals, robots*

**Useful pages to re-visit:** 12, 35, 75, 107, 115, 117, 125, 137, 184-5, 223, 230, 236, 243, 249-50, 256, 261, 267, 271, 276, 279

**Best quotations:**

**How does this imagery relate to the world depicted, and the experiences of the characters in the text?**