

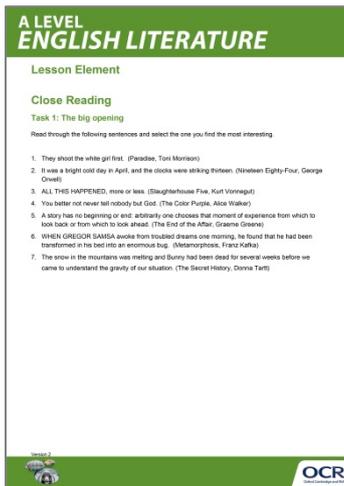
A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Lesson Element

Close Reading

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Close Reading' activity which supports OCR A Level English Literature.



Associated Files:

Close Reading Activity



This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

This exercise develops the skills of close reading that will be important throughout the course, as assessed by:

A02: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Subject content-

A level specifications require learners to develop judgement and independence as they:

- read texts in a variety of ways and respond critically and creatively;
- vary strategies for reading, including for detail, overview and gist depending on the texts being studied and purposes for reading them;
- synthesise and reflect upon their knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and ways of reading them.



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Task 1 The big opening

Give every student a selection of opening sentences from novels. There are a selection below:

- 1) They shoot the white girl first. (*Paradise*, Toni Morrison)
- 2) It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell)
- 3) ALL THIS HAPPENED, more or less. (*Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut)
- 4) You better not never tell nobody but God. (*The Color Purple*, Alice Walker)
- 5) A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. (*The End of the Affair*, Graeme Greene)
- 6) WHEN GREGOR SAMSA awoke from troubled dreams one morning, he found that he had been transformed in his bed into an enormous bug. (*Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka)
- 7) The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation. (*The Secret History*, Donna Tartt)

Students have three minutes to read the sentences and select the one they find the most interesting.

Every student needs to feedback and give ONE REASON why they selected that sentence.

Tally the votes to find the most popular sentence in the class.

Task 2

In pairs or small groups, students analyse the winning sentence.

You could leave this as an open task, or provide prompt questions such as:

- The main idea communicated
- Tone
- Perspective/voice
- Sentence type
- Any non-standard constructions
- Any unusual vocabulary
- Literary techniques
- Linguistic features

For each prompt, students should first identify the feature, and then explore the effect intended/achieved. Ask them to annotate the sentence with their ideas (providing the sentence on an A3 or A4 sheet would be useful for this purpose).



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Task 3 Development 1

In groups use the opening sentence of the winning novel to make predictions about what the rest of the novel will be like in terms of GENRE and STYLE, using precise evidence from the sentence.

Prompt Questions – Genre

What genre do you think this novel will be?

Again, if extra support is needed to answer this question, you could collaboratively create a list of genres with the class.

Is this novel...?

...Mainly about plot/mainly about character?

...Fast paced or slow?

...Set in the past?/present?/future?

...urban?/rural?

Prompt Questions – Style

Have students recap what they have identified regarding the style of the first sentence.

Use this to make predictions regarding the rest of the novel.

Will the tone be...

...serious?/funny?/ironic?/observational?

Based on any literary devices you have found so far, do you expect a simple prose style?/a lot of metaphor and imagery?

Based on the narrative voice of the first sentence, what predictions can you make about issues/features of the rest of the text – eg gender?/race?/social class?/nationality?

Narrative point of view - the main character?/a minor character?/third person?

Feedback and explore any differences in predictions. It is worth taking time to explore why groups may have come up with different (sometimes completely conflicting) predictions.



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Task 4 Development 2

Read the first chapter of the novel together as a class – with pairs annotating for a specific feature of genre or style as above.

If you chose the alternative route and had each pair or group working on a different sentence, simply provide each group with their opening section and have them read it together in their group, then work on their annotation together.

Pairs to feed back on their findings. Were the class' predictions correct so far?

If groups worked independently on different texts, you could set a homework task for them to prepare a presentation of their text and findings for discussion in a subsequent lesson. Following the presentations, the group could then vote on which opening they found the most intriguing, and why.

Task 4 Plenary

Do the class want to read the rest of the novel? Ask students to stand in a place on an imaginary line from the front of the class to the back, where their position represents their answer to the question.

Students right at the front really want to read the book, right at the back means they would hate to read the book, the middle of the room means they are completely ambivalent.

Pick students from different points on the line to justify their decision/standpoint.

This exercise could be used to help select course texts, or as a device to encourage students to explore reading more widely, in new genres from their usual diet.

Task 5 Further alternatives

You could vary this approach by selecting texts which would be considered part of the literary canon versus more 'pulp fiction', and then extend discussions to explore questions such as:

- What makes a text 'Literature'?
- Who decides whether a text is worthy of study?

You could even ask students to bring in the opening sentence and chapter of their favourite book, or of the last book they read, rather than providing the extracts yourself.



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Learner resource 1: First lines

- 1) They shoot the white girl first. (*Paradise*, Toni Morrison)
- 2) It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell)
- 3) ALL THIS HAPPENED, more or less. (*Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut)
- 4) You better not never tell nobody but God. (*The Color Purple*, Alice Walker)
- 5) A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. (*The End of the Affair*, Graeme Greene)
- 6) WHEN GREGOR SAMSA awoke from troubled dreams one morning, he found that he had been transformed in his bed into an enormous bug. (*Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka)
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Learner resource 2: Text extracts

Paradise, Toni Morrison

They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time, and the day has just begun.

They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obliged to stampede or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses, along with clean, handsome guns.

They have never been this deep in the Convent. Some of them have parked Chevrolets near its porch to pick up a string of peppers or have gone into the kitchen for a gallon of barbecue sauce; but only a few have seen the halls, the chapel, the schoolroom, the bedrooms. Now they all will. And at last they will see the cellar and expose its filth to the light that is soon to scour the Oklahoma sky. Meantime they are startled by the clothes they are wearing—suddenly aware of being ill-dressed. For at the dawn of a July day how could they have guessed the cold that is inside this place? Their T-shirts, work shirts and dashikis soak up cold like fever. Those who have worn work shoes are unnerved by the thunder of their steps on marble floors; those in Pro-Keds by the silence. Then there is the grandeur. Only the two who are wearing ties seem to belong here and one by one each is reminded that before it was a Convent, this house was an embezzler's folly. A mansion where bisque and rose-tone marble floors segue into teak ones. Isinglass holds yesterday's light and patterns walls that were stripped and whitewashed fifty years ago. The ornate bathroom fixtures, which sickened the nuns, were replaced with good plain spigots, but the princely tubs and sinks, which could not be inexpensively removed, remain coolly corrupt. The embezzler's joy that could be demolished was, particularly in the dining room, which the nuns converted to a schoolroom, where stilled Arapaho girls once sat and learned to forget.

Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell

Version 2



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It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a meter wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine, and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of pig-iron. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the Party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended.



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Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut

ALL THIS HAPPENED, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really *was* shot for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all their names.

I really *did* go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money (God love it) in 1967. It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces than Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground.

I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare, and we made friends with a cab driver, who took us to the slaughterhouse where we had been locked up at night as prisoners of war. His name was Gerhard Muller. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under Communism, and he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn't much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.

He sent O'Hare a postcard at Christmastime, and here is what it said:

"I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will."

I like that very much: "If the accident will."

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time. When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big.



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The Color Purple, Alice Walker

You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.

Last spring after little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say It too soon, Fonso, I ain't well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead, an all of these children.

She went to visit her sister doctor over Macon. Left me to see after the others. He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it.

But I don't never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She happy, cause he good to her now. But too sick to last long.



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The End of the Affair, Graeme Greene

A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer who - when he has been seriously noted at all - has been praised for his technical ability, but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me? It is convenient, it is correct according to the rules of my craft to begin just there, but if I had believed then in a God, I could also have believed in a hand, plucking at my elbow, a suggestion, 'Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet.'

For why should I have spoken to him? If hate is not too large a term to use in relation to any human being, I hated Henry - I hated his wife Sarah too. And he, I suppose, came soon after the events of that evening to hate me: as he surely at times must have hated his wife and that other, in whom in those days we were lucky enough not to believe. So this is a record of hate far more than of love, and if I come to say anything in favour of Henry and Sarah I can be trusted: I am writing against the bias because it is my professional pride to prefer the near-truth, even to the expression of my near-hate.



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Metamorphosis, Franz Kafka

WHEN GREGOR SAMSA awoke from troubled dreams one morning, he found that he had been transformed in his bed into an enormous bug. He lay on his back, which was hard as armor, and, when he lifted his head a little, he saw his belly – rounded, brown, partitioned by archlike ridges – on top of which the blanket, ready to slip off altogether, was just barely perched. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his girth, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

"What's happened to me?" he thought. It was no dream. His room, a real room meant for human habitation, though a little too small, lay peacefully within its four familiar walls. Above the table, on which and unpacked sampling of fabric swatches was strewn - Samsa was a travelling salesman - hung the picture which he had cut out of an illustrated magazine and had placed in a pretty gilt frame. It depicted a lady who, decked out in a fur hat and fur boa, sat upright raising toward the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm was encased.

Gregor's gaze then turned toward the window, and the dismal weather – you could hear the raindrops beating against the window gutter – made him quite melancholy. "What if I went back to sleep for another while and forgot about this foolishness?" he thought; but that was totally out of the question, because he was used to sleeping on his right side, and in his present state he couldn't get into that position. No matter how energetically he threw himself onto his right side, each time he rocked back into the supine position. He must have tried a hundred times, closing his eyes to avoid seeing his squirming legs, not stopping until he began to feel a slight, dull pain in his side he had never felt before.



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The Secret History, Donna Tartt

The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation. He'd been dead for ten days before they found him, you know. It was one of the biggest manhunts in Vermont history – state troopers, the FBI, even an army helicopter; the college closed, the dye factory in Hampden shut down, people coming from New Hampshire, upstate New York, as far away as Boston.

It is difficult to believe that Henry's modest plan could have worked so well despite these unforeseen events. We hadn't intended to hide the body where it couldn't be found. In fact, we hadn't hidden it at all but had simply left it where it fell in hopes that some luckless passer-by would stumble over it before anyone even noticed he was missing. This was a tale that told itself simply and well: the loose rocks, the body at the bottom of the ravine with a clean break in the neck, and the muddy skidmarks of dug-in heels pointing the way down; a hiking accident, no more, no less, and it might have been left at that, at quiet tears and a small funeral, had it not been for the snow that fell that night; it covered him without a trace, and ten days later, when the thaw finally came, the state troopers and the FBI and the searchers from the town all saw that they had been walking back and forth over his body until the snow above it was packed down like ice..

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