

A Level English Literature Transition Work

Love Through the Ages

Thinking Question: What are the similarities in all romantic relationships? Have romantic relationships changed over time?

Be prepared to discuss this in class. Consider relevant evidence and examples in your argument.

Task 1 – What is Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s relationship like? Answer in a paragraph with evidence from the text.

Thinking hard – could you complete the same task for Sheila and Eric?

Task 2 - Read a book with a focus on a romantic relationship. Be ready to discuss plot and character in class.

Thinking hard – can you make links to the “Macbeth” or “An Inspector Calls”? How are the relationships similar/different?

Task 3 – Read and annotate this poem “Unloving”.

Question – How is the relationship presented in this poem?

Thinking hard – can you link this poem to any other texts you have read on this theme?

Task 4 – bring your own poem on the theme of love to discuss in lesson. It can be from any poet/era.

Task 5 – “Romantic relationships are easier now than they have ever been.” Write an answer giving your opinion.

Unloving

Learn from the winter trees, the way
they kiss and throw away their leaves,
then hold their stricken faces in their hands
and turn to ice;

or from the clocks,
looking away, unloving light, the short days
running out of things to say; a church
a ghost ship on a sea of dusk.

Learn from a stone, its heart-shape meaningless,
perfect with relentless cold; or from the bigger moon,
implacably dissolving in the sky, or from the stars,
lifeless as Latin verbs.

Learn from the river,
flowing always somewhere else, even its name,
change, change; learn from a rope
hung from a branch like a noose, a crow cursing,

a dead heron mourned by a congregation of flies.
Learn from the dumbstruck garden, summer's grave,
where nothing grows, not a Beast's rose;
from the torn veil of a web;

from our daily bread:
perpetual rain, nothing like tears, unloving clouds;
language unloving love; even this stale air
unloving all the spaces where you were.

Modern Times: Literature from 1945 to Present Day

Thinking Question: does oppression still exist in our modern-day society?

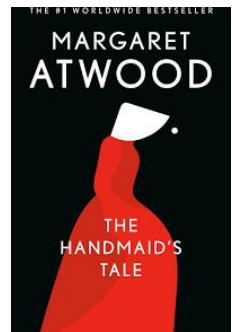
Be prepared to discuss this in class. Consider relevant evidence and examples in your argument.

1. The Handmaid's Tale

Read and annotate the extract below.

Explore the themes of individuality and gender.

This extract taken from The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood which was first published in 1985. This dystopian novel portrays the totalitarian society of Gilead, which has replaced the USA, where women's rights have been eroded. Handmaids exist solely for the purpose of reproduction, bearing children for elite barren couples. They are forbidden to work, vote or read and are given a name which includes that of the man with whom they are reproducing. Handmaids are only allowed to travel outside in pairs and, in this extract, Ofglen and Offred are on a shopping trip.



A group of people is coming towards us. They're tourists, from Japan it looks like, a trade delegation perhaps, on a tour of the historic landmarks or out for local colour. They're diminutive and neatly turned out; each has his or her camera, his or her smile. They look around, bright-eyed, cocking their heads to one side like robins, their very cheerfulness aggressive, and I can't help staring. It's been a long time since I've seen skirts that short on women. The skirts reach just below the knee and the legs come out from beneath them, nearly naked in their thin stockings, blatant, the high-heeled shoes with their straps attached to the feet like delicate instruments of torture. The women teeter on their spiked feet as if on stilts, but off balance; their backs arch at the waist, thrusting the buttocks out. Their heads are uncovered and their hair too is exposed, in all its darkness and sexuality. They wear lipstick, red, outlining the damp cavities of their mouths, like scrawls on a washroom wall, of the time before.

I stop walking. Ofglen stops beside me and I know that she too cannot take her eyes off these women. We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this.

Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom.

Westernized, they used to call it. The Japanese tourists come towards us, twittering, and we turn our heads away too late: our faces have been seen.

There's an interpreter, in the standard blue suit and red-patterned tie, with the winged-eye tie pin. He's the one who steps forward, out of the group, in front of us, blocking our way. The tourists bunch behind him; one of them raises a camera.

"Excuse me," he says to both of us, politely enough. "They're asking if they can take your picture."

I look down at the sidewalk, shake my head for No. What they must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face, my chin and part of my mouth. Not the eyes. I know better than to look the interpreter in the face. Most of the interpreters are Eyes, or so it's said.

I also know better than to say Yes. Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen – to be seen – is to be – her voice trembled – penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls.

Beside me, Ofglen is also silent. She's tucked her red-gloved hands up into her sleeves, to hide them.

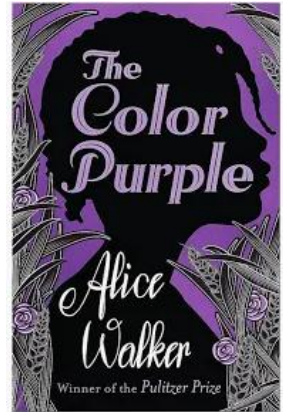
The interpreter turns back to the group, chatters at them in staccato. I know what he'll be saying, I know the line. He'll be telling them that women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation.

2. The Color Purple

Read and annotate the extract below.

Explore the themes of power and oppression.

Set in the early 1900s American South, Alice Walker's epistolary novel The Color Purple explores the intersecting traumas of racial and patriarchal oppression through the life of Celie. Written as a series of letters, the narrative charts Celie's transformation from absolute powerlessness to finding her own identity and independence, a journey fuelled by a network of resilient Black women. By celebrating female solidarity as a vital tool for survival, the novel stands as a foundational text in feminist literature. The following extract captures a critical turning point between Celie and her defiant daughter-in-law, Sofia, who serves as a foil to Celie's passive endurance.



Harpo brought Sofia to see me. She is a big girl, strong and healthy-looking, with a wide, handsome face and thick, dark hair. She stood right up to Harpo and didn't look down for nothing. She look like a grown woman that never text no life time of troubles. She look like she wallow in it. When she speak, her voice come out deep and clear, not sounding like a little girl at all.

Harpo look at her like he don't know what to do. He try to act big, puff out his chest, but Sofia just look at him like she see right through him. After she left, Harpo sat on the porch steps for a long time, looking real miserable. He come inside and say to me, Celie, what am I going to do? Sofia don't mind me. She do whatever she want to do. If I say go here, she go there. If I say cook turnip greens, she cook standard peas. How I'm gonna make her mind?

I look at Harpo. I look out the window at the fields. I think about how Mr. _____ treat me. I think about how he beat me when he feel like it, and how I just freeze up and take it till it's over. I think about Sofia, how she big and strong and walk like she own the earth. Every time I think about Sofia I want to cry. I think bout how Harpo suffer. She don't look like she suffer. She look like she wallow in it.

I say, Beat her.

I say it cause I'm a fool, I think. Cause she smart and big and strong and do whatever she want. I tell him beat her because she me. Because I can't do nothing about my own life, I want to see somebody else get brought down low too. Harpo look at me real serious. He nod his head. He thank me, and then he go on back outside to wait for her.

A few days go by, and then I see Harpo walking across the yard. He got a big blue-black puff under his left eye, and his lip looks split open on one side. He look like he been in a war, but he trying to act like nothing happened. He trying to keep his head up, but every time he blink, you can tell that eye is hurting him bad. He don't look at me when he pass by the kitchen window.

Mr. _____ see him too and he start laughing. He say, What happened to you, boy? You look like you run face-first into a mule. Harpo don't say nothing. He just mumble something about a loose board in the barn and keep on walking toward the well. But everybody know a loose board don't leave a fist-sized bruise right on a man's cheekbone.

Later that afternoon, I am sitting out on the porch with my sewing when I see Sofia walking up the path. She ain't walking fast, she just walking steady, with her head held up high. She look solid as a rock. When she get closer, I can see she got a few scratches on her arms, but her face is completely clear. She look right at me, and her eyes look like two hot coals.

She come up the steps and she stand right over me, blocking out the sun. She look at me for a long time before she say anything. She look at me and sigh. You a lowdown dog is what's the matter, she say.

I look down at my hands. I can't look her in the eye. My heart is beating so hard I think it's gonna burst right out of my chest. My throat feels tight and dry, like I swallowed a handful of sand.

Sofia say, Harpo tried to beat me the other night. He came home all puffed up, trying to act like Mr. _____. He reached out and grabbed my arm and tried to hit me with a piece of wood. But I hit him back, Celie. I hit him with everything I had. I fought him until he couldn't fight no more. No man is ever going to beat me. Not my daddy, not Harpo, not nobody. I spent my whole life fighting my brothers and fighting to stay alive, and I ain't about to start letting a boy like Harpo lay a hand on me.

She stop talking and just look at me, waiting. Then she say, But what hurts me the most is knowing you told him to do it. Harpo told me. He said he asked his stepmother what to do, and she told him to beat me. Why you do that, Celie? What I ever do to you but try to be friendly?

I start to cry. The tears just come spilling out, running down my face and dripping onto the fabric in my lap. I'm a fool, I say. Ancoz I'm a fool I thought you was one. I thought because I have to take it, everybody else have to take it too. I didn't know no better.

Sofia look at me crying, and her face start to soften up a little bit. The anger go out of her eyes, and she just look real tired and sad. She sit down on the bench across from me and looks at the pile of scraps on the floor.

Let's make quilt, she say.

I wipe my face with the back of my hand. I got a heap of cloth, I say. So us sit down and sew.

We work on the quilt for a while in silence, just the sound of the needles going through the cloth. Then Sofia look up and say, Celie, how you stand it? How you stand him lifting his hand to you and treats you like you dirt under his feet?

I don't look up from my stitching. I say, I don't know how not to stand it. It's all I ever known since I was a little girl. You fight, you get hurt worse. I just think about something else. I make myself like a tree or a stone, and I just wait till he get tired and go away.

Sofia shake her head, and her jaw look tight. That ain't no way to live, Celie. A tree don't feel nothing, but you a human being. When a man try to beat you, he trying to kill who you is inside. If you let him do that, you might as well be dead anyway. You got to fight back. Even if you lose, you got to let him know he been in a fight.

I look at her big, strong hands moving the needle through a piece of old yellow dress. I say, I ain't built like you, Sofia. I ain't got that fire in me. I'm scared.

Sofia stop sewing. She reach across the quilt and she lay her hand right over mine. Her hand feel like a giant big hard hand, but it feel good. It feel warm and heavy, like a shield. She say, You ain't got to have my fire, Celie. But you got to know you worth fighting for. From now on, you and me, we choices. If Harpo or Mr. _____ try to cross either one of us, they gonna have to face both of us. We patch our lives together just like this cloth.

I look down at her hand on mine, and for the first time in a long time, the tight feeling in my chest start to loosen up. I look at the scraps of red and yellow and blue wool between us, and I say, We'll name this pattern Sister's Choice.

3. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Read and annotate the extract below.

Explore the theme of control and isolation in the extract.

*Set in a 1950s psychiatric hospital, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* chronicles the high-stakes battle of wills between Randle P. McMurphy, a rebellious, anti-authoritarian gambler, and Nurse Ratched, the cold, tyrannical head of the ward. Narrated by Chief Bromden—a long-term Native American patient who pretends to be deaf and dumb—the novel uses the clinical hospital setting as a microcosm for a wider, oppressive social machine that strips individuals of their independence to force them into conformity. The following introductory extract takes place shortly after McMurphy is admitted to the ward.*



My name is McMurphy, buddies, R. P. McMurphy, and I'm a gambling fool. He walked directly into the center of the day room, his boots making a loud, ringing sound against the floor, a sound we hadn't heard in a very long time. He was a big, broad-shouldered man with a cap of red hair sticking out from under a stained gray felt hat, and he had a scarred, crooked nose that looked like it had been broken in a dozen different saloon brawls.

He looked around at all of us sitting in our plastic chairs, completely still, watching him. He didn't look infected by the gray, quiet sickness of the ward at all. He looked like he'd just stepped off a logging truck or out of a gambling hall, full of the smell of the outdoors and sweat and wide-open spaces.

He stopped in front of Billy Bibbit and reached down, grabbing Billy's limp hand and shaking it so hard Billy's whole arm vibrated. Glad to meet you, buddy, McMurphy boomed. His voice was huge and deep, filling up the corners of the room where the silence usually lived. What's the matter with this place, anyway? Is everybody dead? You all look like you're lined up for a funeral.

Billy's face turned bright red, and he looked over his shoulder toward the glass station where the Big Nurse sat, watching everything through her large window. Billy swallowed hard and tried to get his hand back, but McMurphy was already moving on to the next man, laughing a big, loud, barking laugh that made the chronic patients on the far side of the room lift their heavy heads.

You see, McMurphy said, winking at us, they told me this was a place for crazy people, but you guys don't look any crazier than the guys I was working with on the prison farm. In fact, you look a whole lot safer. Back there, a man would steal the boots right off your feet while you were sleeping. Here, you all look like you're afraid to even look a man in the eye. Who's the boss of this outfit, anyway?

Just then, the door to the glass station opened with a small, sharp click. Nurse Ratched stepped out onto the linoleum floor. Her white uniform was so heavily starched it didn't even rustle when she walked; it just moved like a solid sheet of ice. Her face was smooth, calculated, and perfectly calm. She didn't look angry; she looked like an expensive machine that had been turned on to perform a specific job.

She stood at the end of the day room, her hands folded over her clipboard, looking at McMurphy. The loud, warm air he had brought into the room seemed to hit her white uniform and instantly freeze. The laughing stopped, the boots stopped ringing, and the room slid right back into that heavy, orderly silence.