

A level English Literature: Analysing Prose

Flying Start

If you haven't already you should read one of the following novels in preparation for your coursework this year and do the two tasks below:

Ali Smith: [How to Be Both](#)

Hannah Kent: [Burial Rites](#)

Kazuo Ishiguro: [Never Let Me Go](#)

Ruth Ozeki: [A Tale for the Time Being](#)

Zadie Smith: [NW](#)

Kamila Shamsie: [Home Fire](#)

N. B. If you have just joined us, this may be the first time you have seen this reading list. Don't worry - the openings are given below - these may help you to make your choice and then you can do task A now anyway and do task B when you have completed reading the novel.

Analysing the opening of your text

"There are of course, many ways of beginning a novel. ... A novel may begin with a set-piece description of a landscape or townscape that is to be the primary setting of the story, the 'mise-en-scene' as film criticism terms it. ... A novel may begin in the middle of a conversation... It may begin with an arresting self-introduction by the narrator...A novelist may begin with a philosophical reflection – or pitch a character into extreme jeopardy with the very first sentence... Many novels begin with a frame story which explains how the main story was discovered, or describes it being told to a fictional audience"

(David Lodge: The Art of Fiction)

Lodge suggests that the main function of a novel's opening is to draw the reader in. It will tell the reader something about the narrative which is to follow.

For example it might:

- Give the reader clues about the kind of story they are about to embark upon
- Suggest themes and ideas which are to be important
- Set out the subject of the story
- Introduce a problem to be solved
- Introduce characters and so on

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Your task is two fold:

(a) Please write a 500-750 word analysis that answers the following question:

How does the opening of your chosen novel establish the world of the novel? (either see extracts below or use the first page of the novel you chose from the coursework reading list)

In your answer you should make detailed reference to the ways in which the author creates the setting, the character and the atmosphere .

You need to include, where relevant, points about

- the setting,
- the character or narrative voice
- the atmosphere

You will also need to give supporting evidence and explanations and analysis of how meaning is created.

(b) Please also write a brief summary (no more than 200 words) of what you think the novel is about and achieves that.

In completing task A the following may be useful:

Some sentence starters:

The opening establishes a world of (turmoil)

There is a feeling of (violence)

The opening creates a (disturbing) world in which...

The beginning of the novel seems to suggest that

It seems the character inhabits a world in which...

The narrator seems to be...

The following is an example of a couple of paragraphs on *Wide Sargasso Sea* that a student wrote at the beginning of the course last year.

It may help to guide you as to the style of writing. Notice how they make a general point about atmosphere/ feeling and then explain how this atmosphere is created through the language of the passage.

The world introduced in the opening of 'Wide Sargasso Sea' is one at breaking point—it is tense, unpredictable and ruthless. The impersonal pronoun "they" is repeated throughout the opening, conveying a sense of isolation. The narrator is aware of many groups of people that surround her, yet she feels distant from all of those groups. She does not identify with anyone. This sets up a sense of isolation and a conflict between the many groups of people. The lack of names leaves the reader filling in the blanks to work out who "they" are, creating a sense of confusion, and that there is much unknown in this world.

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The writer employs juxtaposition to heighten the fear the characters are living in. The stark contrast in the list “my father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed—all belonged to the past” increases the impact of the last item, as it is unexpected. The list form also puts the emotion fear on the same level as the absence of actual people, portraying how concepts and feelings are just as real as tangible things. This emphasises how scary the world of the book really is to the characters.

The opening extracts are included below, (you may use more of the opening but no more than the first page and perhaps into the next if that is a more natural break if you feel that would be useful.)

DO NOT WRITE ON MORE THAN ABOUT A PAGE - this is intended as a close reading task so the extract should be short

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HOW TO BE BOTH

ALI SMITH

<https://soundcloud.com/whsmith-2/ali-smith-reads-a-chapter-from-how-to-be-both>

Depending on your copy the opening might be this one or the one on the next page, this is an interesting aspect of the novel that there are two different versions of it. One begins with the George narrative, the other begins with Francesco. You only need to analyse the opening of the one yours starts with (but if you like you could do both!)

Consider this moral conundrum for a moment, George's mother says to George who's sitting in the front passenger seat.

Not says. Said.

George's mother is dead.

What moral conundrum? George says.

The passenger seat in the hire car is strange, being on the side the driver's seat is on at home. This must be a bit like driving is, except without the actual, you know, driving.

Okay, You're an artist, her mother says.

Am I? George says. Since when? And is that a moral conundrum?

Ha Ha, her mother says. Humour me. Imagine it. You're an artist.

This conversation is happening last May, when George's mother is still alive, obviously. She's been dead since September. Now it's January, to be more precise it's just past midnight on New Year's Eve, which means it has just become the year after the year in which George's mother died.

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HOW TO BE BOTH

Ho this is a mighty twisting thing fast as a

fish being pulled by its mouth on a hook

if a fish could be fished through a

6 foot thick wall made of bricks or an

arrow if an arrow could fly in a leisurely

curl like the coil of a snail or a

star with a tail if the star was shot

upwards past maggots and worms and

the bones and the rockwork as fast

coming up as the fast coming down

of the horses in the story of

the chariot of the sun when the

bold boy drove them through

his father told him not to and

he did anyway and couldn't hold them

he was too small and weak they nosedived

crashed to the ground killed the crowds

of folk and and a fieldful of sheep beneath

and now me falling upward at the

rate of 40 horses dear God old

Fathermother please spread extempore

wherever I'm meant to be hitting

whatever your target (begging your

pardon) (urgen) a flock of the nice fleecy just to cushion (ow) what the

just caught my (what)

on a (ouch)

dodged a (whew) (biff)

(bash) (ow)

(mercy)

wait though

look is that

sun

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KAZUO ISHIGURO: NEVER LET ME GO

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as "agitated," even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I am boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying "calm." I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it.

Anyway, I'm not making any big claims for myself. I know carers, now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If you're one of them I can understand how you might get resentful—about my bedsit, my car, the way I get to pick and choose who I look after. And I'm a Hailsham student—which is enough by itself sometimes to get people's backs up. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the other privileged estates. No wonder she has a great record. I've heard it said enough, so I'm sure you've heard it plenty more, and maybe there's something in it. But I'm not the first to be allowed to pick and choose, and I doubt if I'll be the last. And anyway, I've done my share of looking after donors brought up in every kind of place. By the time I finish, remember, I'll have done twelve years of this, and it's only for the last six they've let me choose.

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RUTH OZEKI: A TALE FOR THE TIME BEING

If you haven't already get the blipper app and scan the QR code or watch this video of it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7vpb7UPK6E>

Hi!

My name is Nao, and I am a time being. Do you know what a time being is? Well, if you give me a moment, I will tell you.

A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be. As for me, right now I am sitting in a French maid café in Akiba Electricity Town, listening to a sad chanson that is playing sometime in your past, which is also my present, writing this and wondering about you, somewhere in my future. And if you're reading this, then maybe by now you're wondering about me, too.

You wonder about me.

I wonder about you.

Who are you and what are you doing?

Are you in a New York subway car hanging from a strap, or soaking in your hot tub in Sunnyvale?

Are you sunbathing on a sandy beach in Phuket, or having your toenails buffed in Abu Dhabi?

Are you a male or a female or somewhere in between?

Is your girlfriend cooking you a yummy dinner, or are you eating cold Chinese noodles from a box?

Are you curled up with your back turned coldly toward your snoring wife, or are you eagerly waiting for your beautiful lover to finish his bath so you can make passionate love to him?

Do you have a cat and is she sitting on your lap? Does her forehead smell like cedar trees and fresh sweet air?

Actually, it doesn't matter very much, because by the time you read this, everything will be different, and you will be nowhere in particular, flipping idly through the pages of this book, which happens to be the diary of my last days on earth, wondering if you should keep on reading.

And if you decide not to read any more, hey, no problem, because you're not the one I was waiting for anyway. But if you do decide to read on, then guess what? You're my kind of time being and together we'll make magic!

Home Fire

Kamila Shamsie

Isma was going to miss her flight. The ticket wouldn't be refunded because the airline took no responsibility for passengers who arrived at the airport three hours ahead of the departure time and were escorted to an interrogation room. She had expected the interrogation, but not the hours of waiting that would precede it, nor that it would feel so humiliating to have the contents of her suitcase inspected. She'd made sure not to pack anything that would invite comment or questions – no Quran, no family pictures, no books on her areas of academic interest – but, even so, the officer took hold of every item of Isma's clothing and ran it between her thumb and fingers, not so much searching for hidden pockets as judging the quality of the material. Finally she reached for the designer-label down jacket Isma had folded over a chair when she entered and held up, one hand pinching each shoulder.

'This isn't yours,' she said, and Isma was sure she didn't mean *because it's at least a size too large* but rather *it's too nice for someone like you*.

'I used to work at a dry-cleaning shop. The woman who brought this in said she didn't want it when we couldn't get rid of the stain.' She pointed to the grease-mark on the pocket.

'Does the manager know you took it?'

'I was the manager.'

'You were the manager of a dry-cleaning shop and now you're on your way to a Phd programme in sociology in Amherst, Massachusetts?'

'Yes.'

'How did that happen?'

N-W

Zadie Smith

I

The fat sun stalls by the phone masts. Anti-climb paint turns sulphurous on school gates and lamp posts. In Willesden people go barefoot, the streets turn European, there is a mania for eating outside. She keeps to the shade. Redheaded. On the radio: I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me. A good line – write it out on the back of a magazine. In a hammock, in the garden of a basement flat. Fenced in on all sides.

Four gardens along, in the estate, a grim girl on the third floor screams Anglo-Saxon at nobody. Juliet balcony, projecting for miles. It ain't like that. Nah it ain't like that. Don't you start. Fag in hand. Fleshy, lobster-red.

I am the sole
I am the sole author

Pencil leaves no mark on magazine pages. Somewhere she has read that the gloss gives you cancer. Everyone knows it shouldn't be this hot. Shrivelled blossom and bitter little apples. Birds singing the wrong tunes in the wrong trees too early in the year. Don't you bloody start! Look up: the girl's burnt paunch rests on the railing.

...

Ash drifts into the garden below, then comes the butt, then the box. Louder than the birds and the trains and the traffic.

...

Where's my cheque? And she's in my face chattin breeze. Fuckin liberty.

Burial Rites

Hannah Kent

PROLOGUE

THEY SAID I MUST DIE. They said that I stole the breath from men, and now they must steal mine. I imagine, then, that we are all candle flames, greasy-bright, fluttering in the darkness and the howl of the wind, and in the stillness of the room I hear footsteps, awful coming footsteps, coming to blow me out and send my life up away from me in a grey wreath of smoke. I will vanish into the air and the night. They will blow us all out, one by one, until it is only their own light by which they see themselves. Where will I be then? Sometimes I think I see it again, the farm, burning in the dark . Sometimes I can feel the ache of winter in my lungs, and I think I see the flames mirrored in the ocean, the water so strange, so flickered with light. There was a moment during that night when I looked back. I looked back to watch the fire, and if I lick my skin I can still taste the salt. The smoke.

It wasn't always so cold. I hear footsteps.