



Year 13 Literature

The Handmaid's Tale

Name: _____

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> Learning Journey | 3 |
| AQA Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing Mind Map..... | 4 |
| AQA Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing: | 5 |
| The Handmaid's Tale Knowledge Organiser | 9 |
| The Handmaid's Tale Knowledge Organiser | 10 |
| Gileadean Vocabulary | 11 |
| The Handmaid's Tale – Two & Three Tier Vocabulary..... | 12 |

The Handmaid's Tale Learning Journey



Is it apt to refer to the novel as dystopian?



How does Atwood choose to open the novel?



Is Serena Joy a character that we can feel sympathetic towards?



How might the Feminist theory of the 'male gaze' apply to the novel?



How does Atwood use memories and stories to present female characters of the past?



How is the birthing process depicted?



What were Atwood's intentions in her presentation of religion?



What connections can you make between the novel and *The Female Body*?



What is the role of Aunt Lydia?



Assessment Point:
Paper 2, Section B:
Social divisions.

Is Moira a source of strength for Offred?



Assessment Point:
Paper 2, Section B – 'Moira's resistance is futile rather than heroic.'



Is Offred a victim of the totalitarian regime or a passive bystander?



How far is Janine a casualty of the system?



How far is the convention of love affairs prevalent when exploring elements of PSPW?



How can I make effective choices for Section C?



Assessment Point:
Paper 2, Section C:
Choice of task

Assessment Point:
Paper 2, Section C – Ambiguous Endings



How far do you agree that the endings of PSPW works are always ambiguous?



How can we apply mob mentality to the Salvaging?

How reliable is Offred's narrative?



Key Term

- Neologism
- Protagonist
- Bildungsroman
- Unreliable narrator
- Epigraph
- Totalitarian
- Allusion
- Autocratic
- Regime
- Ideology
- Extremism
- Oppression
- Theocracy
- Patriarchy
- Anti-feminism
- Puritan
- Tyranny
- Symbolism
- Speculative fiction
- Dystopian
- Disillusioned
- Dissident
- Transcendent
- Irony



AQA Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing:

<https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7716-7717-TO-HMAID.PDF>

Text overview - *The Handmaid's Tale*

Overview:

Given the central political concerns of the text (democracy in the USA has been brutally overthrown and replaced by the totalitarian Republic of Gilead), it should be clear why *The Handmaid's Tale* has been included as it looks at elements of political and social protest writing. The novel was partly written in response to the rise in Christian fundamentalism and the growing right-wing views held in the USA in the 1980s. During this period there was a fear amongst liberal thinkers about the potential repressive treatment of women if the parties that represented these conservative views were to come to power.

It is also important to remember that Atwood was very mindful of restrictive political and religious ideologies across the world and some of her observations are incorporated into the novel, for example the coercive practices of those in power in the Eastern Bloc countries before the fall of the Berlin wall and the ascendancy of the Ayatollahs in Iran who sought to suppress women. Although the USA under Obama is not the same as the USA under Reagan, there are still many in the West who hold extreme right wing values and the political instability across the Middle East can hardly make readers feel more secure in regard to the treatment of the powerless by the powerful. As a consequence, the issues raised in the novel still resonate today.

In a world in which a Pakistani school girl can be shot for wanting an education, where the rights of women in some countries have been completely eroded by the religious laws under which they live, where the right to freedom of speech has come under an intense spotlight and where issues surrounding a government's right to gain access to and control the private lives of its citizens are current and potent, then the study of this text should lead to interesting and thought-provoking debates concerning the contexts of production and reception.

Ultimately the text concerns itself with the consequences of religious extremism and fanaticism, particularly in relation to the rights of women, but it also explores many other issues to do with personal freedom, morality, government control and Orwellian surveillance. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a chilling vision of a world in which the state regulates sexual relations, condones male violence against women, suppresses female sexuality and leaves no place for human love.

Genre and setting:

The Handmaid's Tale is clearly identifiable as dystopian fiction, with obvious links to other dystopian texts such as *1984* and *Brave New World*. It is perhaps worth comparing it to these and to more recent publications, such as *The Hunger Games*, in terms of political and social protest writing. *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in a futuristic world where an ultra-conservative Christian movement has seized control in what is now the USA and has imposed on the population a totalitarian regime based on its version of some aspects of the Old Testament. The use and abuse of religious texts for political ends is a key element of the genre. Central to the regime is the adoption of the Old Testament's representation of women, finding in it justification for the legitimising of handmaids in those marriages where women are unable to conceive. Atwood sets her story in a world, so much like our own, where mismanagement of the planet, industrialisation, the over use of chemicals and

birth control in Caucasian societies has affected the ability of many human beings to procreate. The desperation of those with power to reproduce (thereby increasing their power and status) leads them to exploit ordinary women as national resources, to reduce them to no more than 'walking wombs' as a way to consolidate their power.

Power and control:

This is a novel about power politics; it is about who has the power to do what to whom. Ultimately Gilead controls its citizens through fear and violence. It has constructed a very strict, segregated social structure with clear rules and expectations and those who do not perform as they should or who break the rules in any way are punished – severely. There are ritual executions of homosexuals, Roman Catholic priests and Quakers and anyone who disobeys the laws of Gilead. Every day male bodies are left hanging on the wall as a way to instill fear into the populace and to remind them of what will happen to transgressors.

All people in Gilead are categorised according to their gender and their social role. They wear clothes that represent that role and every aspect of their lives is dictated by it. Men wear military uniforms to convey their power and physical strength; the women wear colours that identify who they are, most notably in relation to child-bearing and the domestic sphere. Offred's red dress signals that she is fertile and a handmaid belonging to a Commander. The handmaids have no power beyond that of being able to reproduce. Their lives are not their own; they have no individuality. They are restricted in their movements and their vision is curtailed by their absurd and debilitating costumes, a long red dress with white wings around the face. Handmaids are also deprived of language, prevented from communicating freely with other handmaids and can only use a limited range of empty phrases when they speak to each other. Offred is greeted by Ofglen with the words: 'Blessed be the fruit' to which she offers the stock reply "May the Lord open".

Women in Gilead are subjugated in every way. In the novel's backstory, the narrator tells us that on taking control the regime seized female financial assets, removed their children from second marriages, split up their families and took control of their bodies. In the narrative present women are forbidden to read (with the exception of the aunts who use that privilege to control other women and are in turn used by the men as instruments of control). Even wives have to follow the rules set forth by the regime, not least housing their husbands' handmaids in their home and enduring the indignity of The Ceremony each month.

There is a climate of fear and paranoia in Gilead, created by the regime and perpetuated by its military forces ironically named, the Angels, the Eyes of God and the Guardians of the Faith. Citizens witness and take part in public executions and punishments. When individuals are no longer deemed useful they are shipped to the radioactive Colonies to die an agonizing death.

As well as the social, political and military systems that are in place to control citizens of Gilead, one of the most insidious methods of enforcement practised by the regime is its regulation of language. In a country where certain words are banned, where new words have been invented to describe the rituals and ceremonies in which citizens are forced to participate, where reading and writing are outlawed and where the terrifying practices of social organisation are given names based on biblical language, it becomes clear why the Commander and Offred's rebellion is symbolised by the playing of Scrabble. Offred's ability to own and manipulate language during the game is a rare moment of empowerment within a regime that has not only taken her job, her husband and her daughter but also her name. Her desire to laugh when the Commander first asks her to play Scrabble is telling: "I

want to laugh, shriek with laughter, fall off my chair.” she loves the game because it is forbidden, something he “can’t do with his Wife”, something which the regime would punish.

Oppression and the oppressed:

Women are the most obviously oppressed group in the novel – they are used for domestic service, reproductive purposes, prostitution, to control other women or are sent to clear up nuclear waste as the regime sees fit. Some women may have a slightly more privileged or powerful position but all have their lives dictated and controlled by the men who run Gilead.

In general, men have more status than women in the world of the novel but their lives are still governed by rules and strict codes of conduct. The ultraconservative religious laws govern every aspect of life, yet at the heart of the regime is corruption and hypocrisy. The most powerful of the ruling elite have freedom to flaunt the rules but even they can push the boundaries too far. The Historical Notes suggest that the architects of Gilead, of which Offred’s Commander was one, were toppled by new pretenders to their thrones in the “Great Purge”. Corrupt totalitarian regimes only breed corruption and terror and no-one is ultimately safe.

Rebellion:

If oppression and control are key elements of political and social protest writing then so is rebellion. The reader does not witness a whole scale rebellion that brings about the overthrow of Gilead during the main action of the novel, although we do know from the Historical Notes that the regime does come to an end. Nevertheless there are attempts at protest and rebellion throughout the novel. Offred tells us that when the regime took over she had tried to rebel by attempting to escape with her family to Canada and she reports that many others attempted the same. The Commander and Offred rebel against the rules as set down by the regime by engaging in their secret relationship. The brothel where Moira works, although state run, is a rebellion against the lifestyle the Commanders are supposed to be leading. Serena Joy, desperate for Offred to become pregnant, orchestrates her illicit relationship with Nick seemingly suspecting that her husband is infertile. A previous occupant of Offred’s room rebelled by scratching the slogan *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* into the woodwork and in doing so communicates her message of protest to those who follow her. Women, and men, in Gilead break rules to facilitate pregnancy and hope they won’t be discovered. There is also the organised rebellion conducted by the Mayday resistance movement and the Underground Femaleroad. Perhaps the most significant rebellion though is Offred’s inner rebellion, her refusal to forget the past, her maintaining her power to think and feel, her refusal to be silenced and ultimately her remembering and recording her story on tape.

The politics of feminism:

While Atwood is clearly on the side of women in this novel, she is also critical of the feminist movement of North America in the second half of the twentieth century which in some ways she suggests led to the counter movement of the extreme right and the formation of Gilead. Offred’s mother and her friends are criticised for their blinkered vision, their pro-abortion stance, their insistence on sexual freedom, their failure to embrace the views of a range of women thereby alienating the pro- life campaigners (whose voices are represented by the aunts who are most savage in their attacks on their fellow women). Although there is some sympathy shown for Offred’s mother, the greatest sympathy is for Offred who herself is more open to different views and who cares about men and women. In telling her story, Offred embeds the stories of many women

becoming their unsung champion. She keeps alive her mother and Moira, recreating their voices in her narrative.

Resolution:

There is some ambiguity about what happens to Offred after she steps into the van at the end of the main narrative and the ambiguity can lead readers to consider the ending unsatisfying. The Historical Notes can also provoke strong reactions in readers. In the Notes, Atwood implicitly criticises academia and the way in which it processes and reports on events of the past. Having just lived with Offred through her harrowing narrative, readers may well feel that Professor Pieixoto's analysis of her situation lacks the emotion and empathy that her story deserves. In their analysis of history Pieixoto and his colleagues seem detached from human suffering. There is a sense too that history has taught human beings nothing and that the suppression of women goes on, albeit in a covert way. Pieixoto shows little interest in Offred and is critical of her for not revealing more about the Commander. He does not seem interested in her fate and, in renaming her story, he, like the male oppressors of Gilead, attempts to take away her voice.

The Handmaid's Tale Knowledge Organiser

| The Handmaid's Tale | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Key Concepts | A03: Context | Key characters: | PSPW Terminology |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dystopian fiction Speculative fiction Feminism Anti-feminism Religious oppression Conformity and rebellion Isolation Sex and gender Love Sacrifice Oppression Injustice Patriarchy/male dominance Puritanism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaganism and American New Right – right-wing Christian groups, sometimes fundamentalist, with concerns about abortion, homosexuality, <u>contraception</u> and pornography. Very popular in Southern states 'Bible Belt'. Puritans – descendants of the first English settlers in New England. A very conservative Christian <u>faith based</u> society eschewing modern society, and technology, and with very clear gender roles and expectations. Women were seen as inferior to men – pious, <u>modest</u> and confined to a domestic world. Environment – many concerns about global issues and their detrimental and destructive effects on humanity and the planet <u>e.g.</u> nuclear testing, climate change, pollution, pesticides etc. Anti-feminist backlash (and second-wave feminism) – in the 1980s an anti-feminist backlash challenged the second-wave feminist movement and ultimately sought to reject it, seeing it as a threat to traditional family values amongst other things. Atwood was deeply concerned by the anti-feminist backlash. CanLit – Although <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> was written whilst Atwood was living in the US, it can be interpreted as being Canadian Literature; presenting the more powerful US as suffering wars and disasters, and seeking to control its citizens. Canada, the US's nearest northern neighbour, can be viewed as more peaceful, <u>calm</u> and liberal in this context. Feminist Criticism – <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> can be viewed as a seminal feminist literary text as it challenges patriarchy and presents women as fully-rounded characters with complex lives, relationships (with each other and with men) and emotions. Marxist Criticism – Marxist critics would view this novel as being about inequality and oppression because of the capitalist society represented in it, where people are shaped by the circumstances they live in a result of political, economic, religious, <u>educational</u> and social ideologies forced upon them. Psychoanalytic criticism – critical analysis that focuses on the importance of the subconscious, dreams, unacknowledged <u>desires</u> and sexuality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offred – the protagonist and narrator; a Handmaid who dresses in red. She is named 'Offred' to indicate that she belongs to Fred, a Commander. We never <u>learn</u> her real name. Moira – Offred's friend. Rebellious and non-conformist. A feminist. Ofwarren/Janine – A Handmaid. An obedient adherent of the system. Commander (Fred) – The patriarch of the house. High ranking and important. Serena Joy – The Commander's Wife. Dressed in blue. Ofglen – A Handmaid. Offred and Ofglen are assigned with each other to go shopping. Rita and Cora – Marthas. Women of low status who are servants to the Gileadean elite. Dressed in green. Luke – Offred's husband before the regime change. Nick – The Commander's chauffeur. | <p>Dystopia Theocracy Totalitarian Post-modernism <u>Ecriture feminine</u> Ideology Feminism Anti-feminism Dissidence Theology Religious oppression Parody Patriarchy Propaganda Satire Tyranny Institution</p> <p>Gileadean vocabulary</p> <p><u>Salvaginas</u> <u>Pravvaganzas</u> <u>Pornomarts</u> <u>Unbaby</u> <u>Compucheck</u> <u>Particution</u> Soul scrolls The Colonies <u>Econowives</u> Jezebels Winged Eye Unwoman <u>Compudoc</u></p> |
| A02 Formal and Structural Features | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neologism Speculative fiction Self-conscious narrator Unreliable narrator Epistolary narrative Epigraph Allusion Metafiction Portmanteau Symbolism Allusion Flashback Pun Motif Paradox Irony | | | |

The Handmaid's Tale Knowledge Organiser

| Plot summary | Suggested further reading |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offred is a Handmaid in the totalitarian and theocratic Republic of Gilead, a state that has replaced the USA. Due to dangerously low reproduction rates, Handmaid's are assigned to bear children for elite couples that have trouble conceiving. Offred serves the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy, a former gospel singer and advocate for 'traditional values'.• Offred tells the story of her daily life, frequently slipping into flashbacks, from which the reader can reconstruct the events leading up to the beginning of the novel. In the world <u>before</u> Gilead, Offred had an affair with Luke, a married man. He divorced his wife and married Offred, and they had a child together. Offred's mother was a single mother and feminist activist. Offred's best friend, Moira, was fiercely independent. The architects of Gilead began their rise to power in an age of readily available pornography, <u>prostitution</u> and violence against women – when pollution and chemical spills led to declining fertility rates. Using the military, they assassinated the president and launched a coup, claiming they were taking power temporarily. They cracked down on women's rights, forbidding women to hold property or jobs. Offred and Luke took their daughter and attempted to flee the border into Canada, but they were caught and separated from one another, and Offred has not seen her daughter or Luke since.• <u>After</u> her capture, Offred's marriage was <u>voided</u> and she was sent to the Rachel and Leah Re-education Center, called the Red Centre by its inhabitants. At the <u>center</u>, women were indoctrinated into Gilead's ideology in preparation for becoming Handmaid's. Aunt Lydia supervised the women, giving speeches extolling Gilead's beliefs that women should be subservient to men and solely concerned with bearing children.• Once assigned to the Commander's house, Offred's life settles into a restrictive routine. She must ensure the Ceremony in which the Commander reads to the household from the Bible and has sex with Offred. The first break from her routine occurs when she visits the doctor and he offers to have sex with her to get her pregnant, suggesting the Commander is infertile. After a ceremony, the Commander sends his gardener and chauffeur, Nick, to ask Offred to come to see him in his office. They play Scrabble(forbidden) and lets her look at old magazines. At the end of these secret meetings, he asks her to kiss him.• During one of their shopping trips, Ofglen reveals to Offred that she is a member of 'Mayday', an underground organisation dedicated to overthrowing Gilead. Meanwhile, Offred begins to find the Ceremony feels different and less impersonal now that she knows the Commander. Their <u>night time</u> conversations start to touch on the new order that the Commander and his fellow leads have created in Gilead.• Offred is still not pregnant, so Serena suggests that Offred have sex with Nick secretly and pass the child off as the Commander's. Serena promises to bring Offred a picture of her daughter if she sleeps with Nick and Offred realises Serena has always know her whereabouts. The same night, the Commander takes Offred to a secret club called Jezebels, where the Commanders mingle with prostitutes. Offred sees Moira working there. The Commander takes Offred upstairs and they have sex in an old hotel room.• Soon after, Offred returns from Jezebel's late at night, Serena arrives and tells Offred to go to Nick's room. Offred and Nick have sex. Soon they begin to sleep together frequently. Offred becomes caught up in the affair and ignores Ofglen's requests to gather information from the Commander. One day, all the Handmaid's take part in a group execution of a supposed rapist, supervised by Aunt Lydia. Ofglen strikes the first blow. Later, she tells Offred that the so-called rapist was a member of a Mayday and she hit him to put him out of his misery.• Shortly thereafter, Offred goes out shopping, and a new Ofglen meets her. This new woman is not part of Mayday, and she tells Offred that the old Ofglen hanged herself when she saw the secret police coming for her. At home, Serena has found out about Offred's trip to Jezebel's, and she sends her to her room, promising punishment. Offred waits there, and she sees a black van from the Eyes approach. Then Nick comes in and tells her that the Eyes are really Mayday members who have come to save her. Offred leaves with them, over the Commander's futile objections, on her way either to prison or to freedom—she does not know which.• The novel closes with an epilogue from 2195, after Gilead has fallen, written in the form of a lecture given by Professor <u>Pisixoto</u>. He explains the formation and customs of Gilead in objective, analytical language. He discusses the significance of Offred's story, which has turned up on cassette tapes in Bangor, Maine. He suggests that Nick arranged Offred's escape but that her fate after that is unknown. She could have escaped to Canada or England, or she could have been recaptured. | <p>Articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aliens have taken the place of angels – The Guardian• Is Margaret Atwood a feminist? – Jezebel Magazine• No Balm in Gilead for Margaret Atwood – The New York Times• Rachael Carson's Silent Spring 50 Years On – The Guardian• Reviews from the 1980s – The Huffington Post• Science fiction is really about now – The Guardian• Six reasons to read Margaret Atwood – BBC Radio 4 Book Club <p>Revision guides:</p> <p>York Notes for A-Level – The Handmaid's Tale Hodder Study and Revise for A/AS Level – The Handmaid's Tale</p> <p>If you love <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>, you will probably enjoy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fahrenheit 451 – Ray Bradbury• Animal Farm and 1984 – George Orwell• Brave New World – Aldous Huxley• The Power – Naomi Alderman• The Age of Miracles – Karen Thompson Walker• Station Eleven – Emily St John Mandel• Vox – Christine <u>Dalcher</u>• Never Let Me Go – Kazuo Ishiguro• The Heart Goes Last – Margaret Atwood• Oryx and Crake – Margaret Atwood• The Testaments – Margaret Atwood |

Gileadean Vocabulary

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Salvagings | Neologism formed of 'salvation' and 'savaging', as well as 'saving'. The execution process where the female audience participate, it is presided over by the Aunts. Handmaid's are required to sit near the stage. It's one of the processes used by the Gileadean state to hold and exert power. |
| Participation | A neologism compiled of 'execution' and 'participation'. This is a specific type of execution or 'salvaging' in Gilead. It involved the execution being carried out by a group of Handmaid's. |
| Prayvaganzas | Neologism formed out of 'prayer' and 'extravaganza'. |
| Compuchek | The machine used to punch in pass numbers at the security barriers. |
| Compubite | Machines that register token numbers for purchases in shops. |
| Compudoc | Information recorder at doctor's surgery. |
| Pornomarts | Pornography supermarkets from the time before Gilead. |
| Birth Day | The ceremony where all Commanders' Wives and Handmaid's witness the birthing process concerning one of their number. There are usually between 25-30 women. Like a Salvaging, it depends on status. Reflecting the Ceremony, the Commander's Wife lies as though she is giving birth, taking this position to symbolise her dominance. |
| Unbaby | A new baby that because of physical mutation or health problems, dies shortly after birth due to their defects. |
| Red Centre | The Rachel and Leah re-education centre where Handmaid's learn Gileadean ideology and are retrained by the Aunts into their enforced new roles. |
| Emerge Van | Contains equipment for doctors to aid the birth process if the birth proceeds abnormally. |
| The Wall | Where the executed prisoners of the regime are hung on hooks for the whole population to witness. No one is allowed to pass the wall, which is heavily guarded, without permission. This building used to be the university. |
| Soul Scrolls | The franchise of shops where five different prayers (for health, wealth, a death, a birth and a sin) are printed out by machines on paper rolls which can be purchased. |
| Underground Femaleroad | The resistance system in Gilead which helps people to escape the regime. Its members offer to harbour fugitives called "safe houses". |
| Unwoman | Any female remanded to the Colonies to serve in clean-up crews removing toxic wastes. |
| Econowives | A jargon term for working-class women who lack maid service and thus must "do everything." |
| The Colonies | The forbidding territories, contaminated by pollution and radioactive waste, where Unwomen and some homosexuals get sent to. Those that get sent to the Colonies often die quickly from sickness from the poor living conditions, most die after 3 years. Being sent to the Colonies is regarded as a fate worse than death. |
| Jezebels | A brothel in Gilead, where prostitutes dress in forbidden attire for the pleasure of officers and senior officials. |
| Winged Eye | The symbol representing the secret police of Gilead, the Eyes, who travel in threatening black vans. |

| The Handmaid's Tale – Two & Three Tier Vocabulary | | R | A | G |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Analogy | A parallel word, thing, or idea, used for comparison | | | |
| Allusion | An expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference. | | | |
| Bildungsroman | A novel in which the protagonist grows, learns and matures; a 'coming of age' narrative | | | |
| Censorship | The suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security. | | | |
| Counter-discourse | Resistance that takes the form of written or spoken communication | | | |
| Denouement | The final part of the story, the drawing together of plot strands at the end of a work of literature, a final resolution or revelation | | | |
| Didactic | Intended to teach, particularly moral values | | | |
| Discourse | Written and spoken communication; the French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault wrote extensively about the relationship between discourse and power | | | |
| Dissident | A person who opposes official policy, especially that of an authoritarian state. | | | |
| Double or doppelgänger | An alter ego who bears an uncanny partial resemblance to the self and reveals aspects of the self which have been repressed; in consequence, this 'double' seems both familiar and alien | | | |
| Dystopia | Anti-utopia, the opposite of utopia (an ideal imagined world); invented futuristic nightmare world based on current social, political, economic and environmental trends and warning against their possible disastrous implications | | | |
| Écriture feminine | Feminine writing, a term borrowed from French feminist theory about signs of gender in writing; it refers to highly metaphorical, often unpunctuated flowing writing which represents female body processes and emotional rhythms | | | |
| Elegy | A reflective work of literature in response to a death, a lament for the dead | | | |
| Epigraph | Quotation usually found at the beginning of a book, or chapter of a book | | | |
| Euphemism | A more pleasant or polite word or phrase used to conceal something unpleasant | | | |
| Fictive autobiography | The life story of someone written by him or herself, which is an invention of the imagination and not fact | | | |
| Flashback | Narrative technique which disrupts the time sequence by introducing an event or memory which happened in the past prior to the present action of the novel | | | |
| Genre | A type of literature, e.g. Historical romance, detective novel or science fiction | | | |
| Ideology | A set of ideas and beliefs found in a particular culture and in the texts produced by that culture | | | |
| Institutionalised | Establish (something, typically a practice or activity) as a convention or norm in an organization or culture. | | | |
| Irony | Covert sarcasm; saying one thing while meaning another; using words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning; saying something that has one meaning for someone knowledgeable about a situation and another meaning for those who are not; incongruity between what might be expected and what actually happens | | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Metaphor | Figure of speech in which a descriptive term, name or action characteristic of one object is applied to another to suggest a likeness between them, but which does not use 'like' or 'as' in the comparison | | | |
| Motif | A recurrent element which is significant in the overall structure of meaning in the text | | | |
| Narrative | A story or account of events, real or imagined | | | |
| Neologism | The name for a new word or phrase that may be in the process of becoming accepted into mainstream language | | | |
| Oppression | Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority; the state of being subject to oppressive treatment. | | | |
| Oxymoron | Two elements placed together that appear to be contradictory | | | |
| Palimpsest | Originally a manuscript on which the writing has been partially erased but is still visible when written over again (invaluable in historical research). It has come to mean a much amended and revised text | | | |
| Paradox | A statement that seems self-contradictory; something which seems absurd or unbelievable, yet which may be true | | | |
| Parody | A humorous or ludicrous imitation of a piece of serious writing or speech | | | |
| Patriarchy | A social system in which the power of men and women is unequal, with men holding more power in terms of government, property and inheritance etc | | | |
| Personification | Where human qualities are given to animals, objects or ideas | | | |
| Postmodern | As literary practice, refers to contemporary writing which self-consciously draws attention to its own rhetorical techniques and narrative artifice, so disrupting conventions of realism, commenting 'metafictively' on writing as process, challenging the borderlines between fact and fictions, and problematising the relation between creative writing and critical commentary | | | |
| Propaganda | Literature, often polemical, designed to persuade a reader or audience to adopt a given cause | | | |
| Protagonist | The central character of the novel or narrative | | | |
| Pun | The often-humorous use of a word or phrase to suggest more than one of its possible meanings, e.g. 'There is a bomb in Gilead' plays on the closeness in sound but difference in meaning between bomb and balm | | | |
| Puritan | A member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship. | | | |
| Repressive | (Especially of a social or political system) inhibiting or restraining personal freedom. | | | |
| Revolution | A forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system. | | | |
| Satire | Literature that explores vice or folly and makes them appear ridiculous; usually morally censorious | | | |
| Self-conscious narrator | Narrator who reveals to the reader that the story is a fabrication, and who comments within the text in the storytelling process in order to emphasise the gap between fiction and reality | | | |
| Symbol | Something that by association in thought comes to represent something else; often an object that represents something abstract, such as an idea, quality or condition | | | |
| Theocracy | A system of government in which priests' rule in the name of God or a god. | | | |
| Totalitarian | Relating to a system of government that is centralized and dictatorial and requires complete subservience to the state. | | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Tyranny | Cruel and oppressive government or rule. | | | |
| Hegemony | Leadership or dominance, especially by one state or social group over others. | | | |
| Stream of consciousness | A literary style in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue. James Joyce, Virginia Woolf are examples | | | |
| Disillusioned | Disappointment in someone or something that one discovers to be less good than one had believed | | | |
| Sardonic | Grimly mocking or cynical | | | |
| Archaic | Old-fashioned or out of common usage | | | |
| Pedantic | Excessively concerned with minor details or rules; over scrupulous | | | |
| Susurration | The indistinct sound of whispers or rustling | | | |
| Ignominious | Deserving or causing public disgrace or shame | | | |
| Beatitudes | Reference to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:311, a lyrical passage written in tight parallelism. Manipulative propagandists add "Blessed are the silent" | | | |
| Interpolation | The insertion of something of a different nature into something else | | | |
| Homage | Special honour or respect shown publicly; in history a public display of allegiance | | | |
| Ingratiate | Bring oneself into favour with someone by flattering or trying to please them | | | |
| Anachronistic | Historically inaccurate; belonging to another time period other than that being portrayed | | | |
| Feminism | The advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes | | | |
| Approbation | Approval or praise | | | |
| Transcendent | Beyond or above the range of normal or single human experience | | | |
| Reverie | A state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts; a daydream | | | |
| Surreptitiously | Behaving in a way that attempts to avoid notice or attention; secretly | | | |
| Utopia | An imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect. | | | |

