

English Literature Fifth Form to Lower Sixth Transition

This unit has focussed on the unseen paper – this is 20% of the A Level grade and uses the skills that you develop across the course.

Section One: The Wasteland, by T.S Eliot

Over the past couple of weeks students have been reading this seminal modernist poem and looked into the context behind it.

1) The poem can be found here:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47311/the-waste-land>

2) Students have read around the context of the poem, drawing on information from this document: they read it and made notes.

<https://www.symbiosiscollege.edu.in/assets/pdf/e-learning/tyba/English/ModernismBackground-5.pdf>

We focussed in particular on parts one and two of the Wasteland. Students prepared their ideas for these questions during the week for an online discussion together.

3) Part One Questions: Burial of the Dead

1. How many voices can you find in this section? Who are they? What is the effect of this use of polyvocality?
2. Research the allusions (biblical, literary) used in this section. Why do you think they are used? How do they add meaning to the poem?
3. What are the main themes in this section of the Wasteland? Give evidence to support your answer.
4. Having read the Introduction to Modernism document, in which ways can we understand The Burial of the Dead as a modernist poem?
5. Why do you think the image of drowning is repeated throughout this section of The Wasteland?
6. What is the significance of the title? Who are we burying exactly?

7. Eliot's vision for modern society is a fairly bleak one. A society in which the aspiration to live according to a system of belief of shared values has broken down. What do you think could be the reasons or factors behind what Eliot sees as the breakdown of society?

8. If contemporary society is broken, how do we fix it, according to Eliot?

4) Part Two Questions: A Game of Chess

- 1) Why do people play chess? Why do you think Eliot names this section so?

Lines 77-84

1. Read these lines again. Where are we? Who is being described? How do you know?
 - *The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne/The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it*

The line is taken directly from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Antony's friend Enobarbus describes the arrival of the Egyptian queen by river: *'The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, burned on the water...'*

2. Why do you think Eliot uses such a description? What is he expecting of his readership?
3. We are in a room with this woman. What is the room like in these lines?

Lines 85-93

- *'From satin cases poured in rich profusion...Stirring a pattern on the coffered ceiling.'*
4. Now read these lines. Note the subtle way the imagery has changed here. What's the impression you get of the room now?

Key line- *'lurked their strange synthetic perfumes, / Unguent, powdered, or liquid'*

Line 96

- *'In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.'*

5. Suddenly the room doesn't appear to be what it was a few lines ago. What's changed? And what do you think Eliot wants to say about modern life?

Lines 97-103

- *'Above the antique mantel was displayed...Jug Jug" to dirty ears.'*
6. There's a tapestry on the wall which depicts the rape of Philomel. Briefly research this myth. What happened to her and why did she turn into a nightingale? Who are these 'dirty ears' do you think?

Line 104

- *'And other withered stumps of time'*
7. The withered stump is Philomel's tongue. But Eliot also describes 'others'. Our own perhaps. What's the connection Eliot is making between her muteness and our modern-day condition?
 8. How does the tapestry link to that image in *Burial of the Dead* – a heap of broken images?

Lines 111-120

- *'My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me...You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember Nothing?'*
9. We change time and location (again), this time to a couple who are speaking. How would you describe each of these people?
 10. What's happening to the structure of the poem now? Why?

Lines 124-126

- *'I remember/Those are pearls that were his eyes/Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'*

Another reference to Shakespeare, this time the *Tempest*, where Ariel describes a dead sailor: *Those are pearls that were his eyes. Nothing of him that doth fade.'*

11. Eliot is asking you a question. What is it?
12. These lines connect with *Burial of the Dead*. Firstly, the Phoenician sailor, and secondly, the image of the living dead. How do you think they connect?

Lines 130-133

- *What shall I do?/I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/With my hair down, so/What shall we do tomorrow?/What shall we ever do?*

13. How is this exchange an example of the modern-day virus of ennui?

Lines 136-138

The hot water at ten/And if it rains, a closed car at four/And we shall play a game of chess/Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

14. Again, these lines sum up the modern condition for Eliot. How so?

Lines 139-165

'When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said...What you get married for if you don't want children?'

15. Where are we now? Who is speaking? And what are they talking about? How would you describe their relationship? And what impression of society are we getting from this conversation?

Lines 165-172

'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME...Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.'

16. 'It's time,' isn't just a barman/woman calling for people to leave the pub. It means something else as well. What, exactly, is it time for?

17. The last line is again taken from Shakespeare, this time *Hamlet*. They are the last words Ophelia says before she kills herself (by drowning, incidentally). Why do you think Eliot uses this reference?

Overall, how does Eliot expand on the themes of Burial of the Dead?

5) Students were asked to read at least one modernist novel from the list below. You can find online versions of them here.

If you're interested, below are a few famous novels written in the interwar period. If you don't have a copy at home, feel free to use the links here.

A Clergyman's Daughter, George Orwell; <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200011.txt>

Brave New World, Aldus Huxley; http://scotswolf.com/aldoushuxley_bravenewworld.pdf

A Passage to India, E.M Forster; <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/61221/61221-h/61221-h.htm>

Put out More Flags, Evelyn Waugh;

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.224545/page/n17/mode/2up>