

Intertextuality and the context of reception: *The Handmaid's Tale* - chapter 30 by Margaret Atwood

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Lesson plan

Resources

- ❖ **Resource A** – Extract from Chapter 30
- ❖ Highlighter pens
- ❖ **Resource B** – *The Handmaid's Tale* film clip

Learning objectives

- ❖ To consider the character of Offred and her state of mind in chapter 30 of the novel
- ❖ To study Offred's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer

Starter activity – using the Lord's Prayer

- ❖ Students try to recite or write down the Lord's Prayer. (They will soon establish there are many slightly different variations of this.)
 - You may wish to watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biQI2CHwfJA> for a traditional version and some added cuteness!
- In what circumstances do we hear the Lord's prayer used?
- In what frame of mind / situations do people use the prayer? (discuss the use of the prayer as a comfort in times of trouble, as a learning/teaching device, etc.)

Intro – recapping the plot so far

- ❖ Quickly recap the events leading up to the end of chapter 30 of the novel (e.g. Offred's former life with her husband and child; her new life with the Commander and his wife; the new turn her relationship with the Commander is taking; her attraction to Nick; and her memory of her attempted escape with Luke, etc.)
- How would we describe Offred's mental state at the end of chapter 30?

- Why do we think Offred turns to prayer and in particular to the Lord's Prayer?

Main activity 1 – paired highlighting task

- ❖ Read the extract from Chapter 30 [**Resource A**]
 - Working in pairs with two different highlighters, students try to work out what bits of text are from the prayer/the Bible, and which bits are Offred's additions, changes, and musings
 - Watch the film clip [**Resource B**] to check/confirm.

Main activity 2 – group discussion and annotation

- ❖ For each changed bit, students are to annotate the significance of the difference.
 - Do a couple of examples as a whole class to begin with. For example:
 - Why 'My God' instead of 'Our Father'? ('My' sounds more personal/individual than 'Our' but 'God' sounds less personal and more authoritative than 'Father'. Is it linked to the whole issue of child-bearing?)
 - Why does Offred add 'which is within'? ('Which' is less personal than 'who'. Does this also show she does not believe in heaven as a real place? Is she looking for some inner peace instead?)
 - Students work in groups to continue discussing and making notes on the differences
 - Feedback some of the main ideas.

Main activity 3 – individual close analysis writing

- ❖ Working individually, students choose a quotation in which they consider the change to be significant in revealing something about Offred's character or state of mind

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- Write a point-example-explain paragraph to analyse this closely
 - Encourage students to use 'the language of possibility' to suggest tentative interpretations
- You may wish to model an example (eg. When Offred prays, 'I wish you would tell me Your Name, the real one I mean', she perhaps reveals a close association between knowing someone personally and knowing their real name, which might reveal her longing for a return to her old name and identity. With few real friends in her life, Offred could be said to be looking to God for a close relationship.)
 - Share some examples.

Plenary

- ❖ Class mind map: What does the prayer reveal about Offred and her state of mind?

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Resources

Resource A

I pray where I am, sitting by the window, looking out through the curtain at the empty garden. I don't even close my eyes. Out there or inside my head, it's an equal darkness. Or light.

My God. Who Art in the Kingdom of. Heaven, which is within.

I wish you would tell me Your Name, the real one I mean. But You will do as well as anything.

I wish I knew what You were up to. But whatever it is, help me to get through it, please. Though maybe it's not Your doing; I don't believe for an instant that what's going on out there is what You meant.

I have enough daily bread, so I won't waste time on that. It isn't the main problem. The problem is getting it down without choking on it.

Now we come to forgiveness. Don't worry about forgiving me right now. There are more important things. For instance: keep the others safe, if they are safe. Don't let them suffer too much. If they have to die, let it be fast. You might even provide a Heaven for them. We need You for that. Hell we can make for ourselves.

I suppose I should say I forgive whoever did this, and whatever they're doing now. I'll try, but it isn't easy.

Temptation comes next. At the Center, temptation was anything much more than eating and sleeping. Knowing was a temptation. What you don't know won't tempt you, Aunt Lydia used to say.

Maybe I don't really want to know what's going on. Maybe I'd rather not know. Maybe I couldn't bear to know. The Fall was a fall from innocence to knowledge.

I think about the chandelier too much, though it's gone now. But you could use a hook, in the closet. I've considered the possibilities. All you'd have to do, after attaching yourself, would be to lean your weight forward and not fight. Deliver us from evil. Then there's Kingdom, power, and glory. It takes a lot to believe in those right now. But I'll try it anyway.

Resource B – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/470/The-Handmaid%27s-Tale~section-11-ch-30-Night>