

The Handmaid's Tale: (d) The role of reality in the novel

☞ refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

❖ Lesson focus:

- To examine how 'realistic' the novel is, and how important this might be.

❖ Opening exercise:

- Each student writes down, in secret, three things about themselves.
 - Two should be true and the other one invented (though it should be something that *could* be true or is something that they would *like* to be true).
 - Each reads out their three statements in turn, and the rest of the class tries to guess which is the 'untrue' statement.
 - There could be discussion about whether the 'untrue' information tells us as much about the person as the 'true' information.
 - Or just different information?
- ☞ (Structure and methods of narration in *The Handmaid's Tale*)

❖ Textual examination:

- Each student chooses a chapter of the novel.
 - Make sure that they all choose different ones, perhaps avoiding the 'Night' chapters.
- ☞ (*The Handmaid's Tale* > Synopses and commentary)
- They should each find two events/details which are part of reality as the reader experiences it, and one example of something which we do not fully understand.
 - (Eg: in Ch.19, an example of the former could be the detail of the breakfast, and the latter could be the Birthmobile.)

❖ Discussion ideas:

- Do you notice any difference in the ways familiar and unfamiliar ideas are written about by Atwood?
- Students should decide how convincing/likely the unfamiliar items are.
- They could give each one a score, or debate the pros and cons of each.

- Do students of different gender or background have different reactions?

❖ Recreative task:

- Write a newspaper article from the future which reports on an event or development which is either dystopian or utopian in nature.
 - Try to make the idea as convincing as possible.

❖ Critical task:

- 'It is essential to the power of the novel that Atwood's examples of oppression are closely based on real events.'
 - How far do you agree with this assertion?
- ☞ (Social / political context of *The Handmaid's Tale* > Atwood's use of actual historical events)

❖ Extension task:

- Research one of the specific areas of context which Atwood uses in the novel.
 - You could present your findings to the class.
- Link your findings to *The Handmaid's Tale* and explore why Atwood has used that particular reference.
- ☞ (Religious / philosophical context of *The Handmaid's Tale* > Religious perspectives in *The Handmaid's Tale*)
- ☞ (Social / political context of *The Handmaid's Tale* > Political satire in *The Handmaid's Tale*)
- ☞ (Social / political context of *The Handmaid's Tale* > Atwood's use of actual historical events)
 - NOTE: Atwood has written about endings at: <http://users.ipfw.edu/ruffleth/e/endings.htm>. This is worth reading and discussing.