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/rufleth/e/endings.htm. This is worth reading and discussing.

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