



15 EMC Approaches to

Never Let Me Go

by Kazuo Ishiguro



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centre

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TEACHERS' NOTES

Never Let Me Go – 15 EMC Approaches provides 15 activities to support students in getting to know, exploring, and critically analysing this novel. The material does not offer a chapter-by-chapter approach, but provides a range of stand-alone activities to develop students' ability to analyse the novel in detail, including ways to explore key passages. Activities have been chosen with the particular aim of developing students' independence and confidence in discussing, reflecting and writing about language and style; structure; form and narrative voice; character; themes; and setting. Consideration has also been given to some of the wider contexts of *Never Let Me Go*.

The activities are therefore designed with the assumption that the students will already have some familiarity with the plot and main concerns of *Never Let Me Go* and for that reason they may be more suitable for after reading or well on in the reading process. Some activities are intended to challenge more able groups and students, giving them the chance to reach the highest grades and refine their critical understanding of the text. There is also plenty of scope for differentiation of learning embedded in the activities.

All references to *Never Let Me Go* are from the Faber and Faber edition (2005).

Teachers' Notes on Specific Activities

1. Exploring Contexts: Dystopian Fiction (page 8)

Students may already have some familiarity with dystopian fiction in their reading of various Young Adult series and their film adaptations, such as *The Hunger Games*. You could begin by eliciting what they already know, before looking at some more literary examples.

Students could also be encouraged to independently read one (or more) of the three dystopian novels listed and compare them with *Never Let Me Go*.

In many ways the novel sits rather awkwardly in the dystopian genre. It certainly shares some characteristics: scientific advances; loss of freedom; responding to contemporary debates regarding cloning and biotechnology. However, Ishiguro has said in interviews that the dystopian elements were the last piece of the jigsaw, a device to allow the novel to address its core concerns of love and mortality. We must also acknowledge that Kathy and her friends do not really rebel in any serious way (although their search for a deferral and Tommy's impotent final tantrum might be usefully explored with this in mind). Again, in interviews, Ishiguro has said that he was not interested in writing a story about slaves who rebel and escape; he is more interested in the human condition and the ways in which we accept what fate has given us.

3. Exploring Contexts: The Cloning Debate (page 13)

There is a lot of scope to adjust this activity according to the ability and interests of your class. Some debate topics are more challenging than others and some can be omitted if necessary. You can also arrange to have the discussion/debate in pairs, small groups and/or as a whole class.

For a more active approach, you could put a DISAGREE sign in one corner of the classroom and an AGREE sign in the opposite corner. Students can stand at an appropriate point on the spectrum between the two signs. You could then ask differentiated follow-up questions. Following a discussion, you could also ask if they wanted to change their position, based on what they have just heard.

5. A Debate on the Novel (page 20)

Less able or less confident classes can be given time to prepare their position – perhaps for homework. Students could also conduct the debate in larger groups.

6. Exploring Character (page 22)

Answers to the card sort activity:

Kathy	Tommy	Ruth
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The narrator of the novel– Has been working for a long time as a 'carer'– A very kind and loving person– A strong sense of right and wrong– Struggles to show much emotion about their life– Remains (mainly) strong throughout– Passively accepts their fate, even more so than the others– Very good at their job– Intelligent and inquisitive– Remembers Hailsham particularly fondly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Picked on by other children at school– Finds it difficult to control emotions– Not very creative– Can be quite sullen; others think they are 'dull'– Has tantrums, especially when a child– Sociable with fellow donors– Wants to avoid their 'fate' perhaps more than the others (<i>a strong argument can be made for both Ruth and Kathy here as well</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Seeks desperately to fit in with others at The Cottages– Not as pre-occupied with Hailsham and the past– Frequently dishonest– Leader of the Secret Guard at Hailsham– Learns the value of love and friendship (<i>a strong argument can be made for both Kathy and Tommy here as well</i>)– Can be overbearing and manipulative– A dominant character– Becomes less confident as the novel progresses– Rather withdrawn and despairing by the end– Throws away their collection of art by fellow students– Tries to make amends for selfish behaviour at the end– Proud

9. Ishiguro's Style (page 27)

Some typical features of Ishiguro's style include:

- Familiar or clichéd expressions
- 'Unimaginative' descriptions which lack any extensive literary or figurative techniques (such as similes and metaphors)
- Informal vocabulary
- Expressions indicating an apologetic and awkward voice
- References to memory and remembering
- Child-like perspective on the events and environment
- First-person narrator commenting on her own narration (meta-narrative)
- Expressions associated with the spoken mode; conversational tone
- Addressing an unspecified reader
- Standard English vocabulary and grammar contributing to a serious, rather polite tone

10. Memory and Narrative Structure (page 28)

Re-arrange the statements into chronological order – the answers.

Digressions from the core linear narrative abound in many chapters in *Never Let Me Go*, but none more so than Chapter 4 - a section of the novel which explores memory and remembering. At the beginning of this chapter, Kathy admits to an urge to 'order all these old memories' - and so, structurally, we see this process of remembering. Each of Kathy's memories seems to lead to another. A pervading idea is therefore brought into sharper focus: Kathy cannot let go of her past. Memories are all she has left as she approaches the end of her life.

(NOTE: Some of the ages below are approximate. In many ways, the process – discussion and forensic detective work – is more important than the end product.)

11. Kathy is playing in a sandpit. Ruth is angry with two other girls playing in the sandpit. (Kathy is 5 or 6)
12. Kathy and Ruth play together on Ruth's imaginary horses. Ruth tells Kathy she can be a secret guard. (Kathy is 7 or 8)
2. The impact of 'that day' when Madame is seemingly repulsed by the children. (Kathy is 8)
5. Roy J. tells Miss Emily that the students should receive compensation when Madame takes something away. (Kathy is 10)
6. Polly T. asks Miss Lucy why Madame took their things away. Miss Lucy responds by saying that she hopes one day it will all be explained. (Kathy is probably 10)
3. Tommy tells Kathy beside the pond about his odd talk with Miss Lucy. (Kathy is probably 13)
9. Kathy sees Miss Emily talking to herself in an empty classroom. Kathy is initially concerned that Miss Emily will tell her off. (Kathy is 13 or 14)
8. Ruth and Kathy disagree over some details regarding Miss Emily's long speeches. (Kathy is possibly in her mid 20s)
4. Tommy and Kathy discuss and recall the 'tokens controversy'. (Kathy is probably in her late 20s)
10. Kathy keeps thinking about Ruth. (Kathy is 31)
1. Kathy acknowledges she will no longer be a carer by the end of the year and realises the significance of her childhood at Hailsham. (Kathy is 31)

11. Narrative Voice: The First-Person Narrator – Answers (page 30)

First Person	Third Person
1. Tells the story using 'I'	1. Tells the story using 'he', 'she', 'they'
2. A character in the story	2. Is not a character in the story
3. Cannot tell the story from the point of view of other characters	3. Can tell the story from different points of view
4. Allows for only one view of the events which might be biased and is always subjective	4. Is not restricted to what one character knows
5. Intimate	5. Can enter the thoughts of different characters – or choose to stay outside them
6. Limited	6. Greater distance and detachment from the reader
7. A direct connection between the narrator and the reader	7. Can be all-knowing (omniscient)

12. Narrative Voice: Kathy's Narration (page 32)

You may find the following notes on the three extracts helpful.

Extract 1: Ishiguro is asking the reader to question the accuracy of Kathy's account here – and, therefore, in the novel as a whole. Kathy obviously privileges her own account and denies Ruth hers – but can we trust Kathy's judgement? As the story is written in the first person, we will never know what Ruth was thinking. In any case, given her fondness for Hailsham, Kathy is just as likely to elongate this memory as Ruth is to 'shrink' it. And, of course, underlying this novel is memory's fallacy – how sure can we be about the accuracy of memories of our own childhood?

Extract 2: Ishiguro is cleverly suggesting Kathy's loneliness and isolation. We have to work this out for ourselves as she gazes wistfully into shop windows for a 'copy' of her lamps, knowing she will never buy one. Kathy is not prepared to acknowledge her own rather profound yearning for intimacy and human contact. Why? Well, Ishiguro would no doubt argue that it is human nature – we would rather not acknowledge or face up to our own acute insecurities.

Extract 3: In this crucial and incredibly moving moment in Kathy's life – the last time she saw Tommy – Ishiguro completely moves the narrative away from any interiority. Kathy's narration is a straightforward account of physical actions and description: especially the gradual, rather forlorn, disappearance of Tommy. Kathy's heart must be breaking – both when it happened and later as she recalls the moment. She certainly does not admit this directly, or reflect on the memory for long. Perhaps some memories, Ishiguro suggests, are too painful to bear.

13. Language, Form and Structure: The 3 Point, 3 Minute Challenge (page 33)

This activity is designed to get students thinking quickly, on their feet, as they may have to do in an exam. It can be adapted to make it an even quicker activity (1, 1, 1). Some of the cards are more challenging than others, so there are plenty of opportunities for differentiation here. You could do it with the clock ticking, to add a game-like quality.

14. Close Analysis: Tommy's Final Tantrum (page 35)

You could do an alternative version for the 'Talk for 30 Seconds' activity as a team game. Divide the class into two larger teams. Individually, the students must talk for 30 seconds – without any notes – about their own quotation. They will try to earn as many points as they can for their team. If time is short, you could select just a few students from each team to talk.

- Award three points if the student manages to talk about their quotation for the full 30 seconds.
- Award up to three further points if the student makes some particularly insightful comments about their quotation.
- Deduct one point for each hesitation.
- Deduct one point for each repetition of an idea (repeating quotations is acceptable).

15. Close Analysis: The End of the Novel (page 38)

Find the missing quotations – suggested answers:

2. 'the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing'
3. 'it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call.'
4. 'to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be'
5. 'I went past field after flat, featureless field'
6. 'like the debris you get on a sea-shore'
7. 'where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up'
8. 'though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control.'

1. EXPLORING CONTEXTS: DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Never Let Me Go has much in common with the genre of **dystopian fiction**. In 1516, Thomas More published a work of fiction called *Utopia*, in which he describes an island's perfect, ideal society. Since then, writers have been equally interested (more so in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) in creating and exploring dystopias. The word literally means 'Bad Utopia', so a dystopian novel will be the opposite of Thomas More's island – unpleasant, nightmarish and often cruel.

Recent young adult fiction such as *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* belongs to the dystopian genre.

Understanding the features of this popular genre might help you to understand what Ishiguro is trying to achieve in his novel.

- Read the extracts on page 9. Each is taken from the opening of an influential twentieth-century dystopian novel:
 - *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley, in which members of the World State are genetically engineered in laboratories and subsequently brainwashed to fulfil different roles in society.
 - *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell, in which the government exercises control over every aspect of citizens' lives.
 - *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood, which is set in an oppressive society run by Christian fundamentalists.
- In pairs, based on your reading of these short extracts, list what you think could be some of the key features of dystopian fiction.
- Read the list of features of dystopian novels on page 10 and compare with your own.
- Now apply these features to *Never Let Me Go*, using the table on page 11 to help you. To what extent would you agree that it is a dystopian novel? In what ways does it seem different? Why?
- Finally, reflect on what Ishiguro himself has said about the book when interviewed. Why might a dystopian novel be an effective way of exploring these ideas? Do you think exploring a dystopian society was his primary purpose?

My aim was always to write a story about how love and friendship fitted into people's lives, particularly as they started to realise that life is short.

You can see this interview here (checked October 2016):

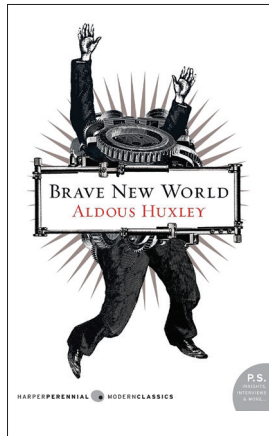
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCB59pPG7k>

I didn't want to write anything that could be mistaken for a 'prophecy'. I wanted to write a story in which every reader might find an echo of his or her own life.

You can see this interview here (checked October 2016):

https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/477/kazuo-ishiguro

Brave New World

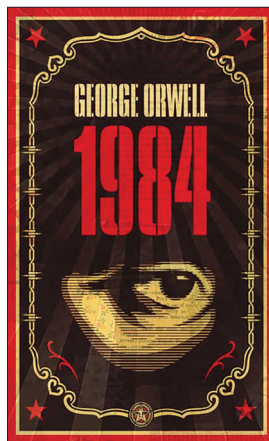


A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.

[...] Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory [...]

‘And this,’ said the Director opening the door, ‘is the Fertilizing Room.’

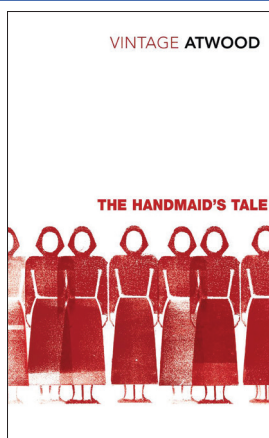
Nineteen Eighty-Four



It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him [...]

On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

The Handmaid's Tale



We slept in what had once been the gymnasium [...] We had flannelette sheets, like children's, and army issue blankets, old ones that still said U.S. We folded our clothes neatly and laid them out on the stool at the end of the beds. The lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts [...]

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi-darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hand across space.

Some Typical Features of Dystopian Novels

1. Set in a society run by an oppressive authoritarian state which has full control over every aspect of people's lives. Note, for example, the unsettling patrolling 'Aunts' in *The Handmaid's Tale*.
2. Set in the future, or an alternative present. Note, for example, the 'old ones that still said U.S.' in *The Handmaid's Tale*, or the 'squat' building of 34 storeys in *Brave New World*.
3. The future is a place of technological and/or scientific advances – suggested, perhaps, in the shiny, metallic laboratory in *Brave New World*.
4. There is no individuality or individual freedom. This is frequently achieved through propaganda (note the slogans at the beginning of *Brave New World*) or surveillance (noteworthy in the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* extract). In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, even having rebellious thoughts is considered a crime.
5. An individual or a group rebel, or attempt to rebel, against the state. This might be suggested in *The Handmaid's Tale* extract as the characters hold hands in the dark.
6. There is a moral or ethical debate in the dystopian novel: what makes a 'good' society? What sacrifices should citizens make? In *Brave New World*, for example, everybody is always happy – but at what cost?
7. Dystopian novels may well be set in the future, but they are actually concerned with dominant social issues and debates at the time of writing. They are often read as warnings about where a society is heading. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is concerned by the rise of totalitarian (all-powerful) political states; *Brave New World* warns its readers of the advances in science and genetic engineering, as well as a society driven by buying, possession and so on.

Typical dystopian feature	Yes	No	Maybe	Key passages and moments from <i>Never Let Me Go</i> + further comments
Set in a society run by an authoritarian state				
Set in the future or an alternative present				
The future is a place of technological and/or scientific advances				
There is no individuality or individual freedom				
An individual or a group rebel, or attempt to rebel, against the state				
There is a moral or ethical debate about the best way to run a society				
Concerned with dominant social issues and debates at the time of writing				