

A. Social Setting

The social setting of a text tells us something about the time and place where it is set. While the time and location of the action of the text is usually straightforward, other parts of social setting are more difficult to work out. Students of the social setting mode should examine many aspects of texts. The role of **social class** is important as it tells us about the opportunities that people had or were denied due to their position in society. We should look for differences between social classes in our studies. It is also important to examine who holds **power** in society. This means looking at who is involved in making any big decisions, and who is not. A person's **gender** can have a huge impact on his or her life. We should look carefully at the roles of men and

women, as well as boys and girls, in all of our texts. People's beliefs play a fundamental role in shaping society. Some people hold strong religious beliefs, while others believe more in **law and science**. These different beliefs have major consequences for the social settings of stories. Each text displays a set of **social values** too. Characters discuss issues that they feel to be important and this reveals what is permitted, and what is not, in the world of the text. Finally, we should reflect on the role that **popular culture**, like music, has in a society. Music is used to celebrate, remember, connect and bring relief to people. Without music, life would be very different and much less colourful.

Never Let Me Go

The novel *Never Let Me Go* is set in England in the late 1990s. The story is narrated by 31-year-old Kathy H. who tells the story of her childhood in a series of flashbacks. **Kathy grew up in Hailsham, a home for young clones. When the clones are old enough, they are released and must serve as either 'carers' or 'donors'**. Carers look after people who have donated their organs, while donors are expected to perform up to four donations before death.

The premise (idea) behind the novel sounds very far-fetched. However, the author Kazuo Ishiguro wants people to think about **the rights and wrongs of scientific advances**. He creates a world that is futuristic, yet recognisably modern. **Social class, power, gender, religion, science, social values and culture** all have a clear impact on the characters. The passing of time has shown that Ishiguro's prophecies were not so unbelievable: to date, more than 20 different species of animal have been cloned. This naturally raises the question of how long it will take before a human being is cloned too.

Social class

Clones who are brought up in Hailsham are considered to be from a higher social class than other clones. In the opening chapter, Kathy recalls caring for a donor who wants to hear all about her childhood in Hailsham. The donor does not like talking about his own childhood in another care home for clones. Instead, he wants to fantasise about growing up like Kathy, who concludes that this was when she 'first understood, really understood just how lucky' she and her friends had been to grow up in Hailsham. It is quite a charming place with ponds and paths and 'a tranquil atmosphere'. The students play rounders, hang around a pavilion and ride horses. **This life of privilege creates expectations.** Kathy remembers hearing one of her guardians (who were a combination of teacher and foster parent) scolding the students after they'd behaved badly: 'we were all very special, being Hailsham students, and so it was all the more disappointing when we behaved badly'.

The comfortable lives of Hailsham students are a source of envy for students from other institutions. **When they finish their schooling at Hailsham, Kathy, Tommy and Ruth move to the Cottages, a halfway house for the students before they begin their work as donors and carers.** Here they meet the veterans Rodney and Chrissie, who believe that Hailsham students could get special treatment because of their higher social class. Chrissie asks Ruth if it is possible for Hailsham students to get a deferral (delay) on their donations. Ruth says that she heard ‘that this was something you could do if you were a Hailsham student. You could ask for your donations to be put back by three, even four years’.

However, while the students at Hailsham are treated better than clones in other homes, they still belong to the lowest social class. As a youngster, Kathy and her friends notice that Madame, who has founded Hailsham with Miss Emily, is afraid of the clones. Later she finds out this is because Madame and the guardians ‘are afraid of you’. Kathy tries to help Ruth find her ‘possible’. **A possible is a human who resembles a specific clone and from whom the clone’s DNA may have been copied.** They track down a woman working in an office but are disappointed to learn that Ruth has not been cloned from her. Ruth becomes irate and explains that they are only fooling themselves into believing they are related to respectable people: **‘They don’t ever, ever, use people like that woman ... we’re modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, as long as they’re not psychos ... look down the toilet, that’s where you’ll find where we all came from’.**

Power

Power is in the hands of adults and older people in the novel, while younger or less experienced people are in very weak positions. **The students have very little power.** They cannot leave

Hailsham until they are old enough, and they have very little contact with the outside world. Guardians encourage the students to build a collection of their own artwork which might be taken away by Madame, who runs Hailsham, and hung in her Gallery. Students get compensation for their creations in the form of ‘tokens’ which can be used to buy things from ‘sales’ (when boxes of bits and pieces are brought in from outside for a jumble sale). This shows clearly how the guardians in general, and Madame in particular, are influential and powerful figures. Students must produce art to be displayed in a distant gallery, and they receive little more than ‘tokens’ in return. We later learn that the guardians insisted upon the artworks so that they could prove to the wider world that clones deserved humane treatment. Miss Emily, one of the guardians, explains to Kathy and Tommy that the pieces of art were to ‘prove that you had souls at all’.

The students also face a lot of restrictions when they become adults. They graduate from Hailsham only to be sent to the Cottages. The Cottages are run by Keffer, an aloof and grumpy caretaker. **The residents don’t have any say in how the Cottages are run.** Kathy is allowed to leave, but only if she is ‘back by the day and the time we entered Keffer’s ledger book’. Kathy and her friends have learned to depend on the guardians. Even though Kathy is an adult at the Cottages, she still feels like a child. She explains: ‘If you’d told me then that within a year, I’d not only develop a habit of taking long solitary walks, but that I’d start learning to drive a car, I’d have thought you were mad’. The powerlessness of the students is best summed up by Tommy. He is prone to outbursts when he notices that he has no say in his life, such as when he and Kathy return from Madame’s house following the revelation that there are no deferrals. Kathy stops the car and Tommy gets out and flies into a rage. Kathy remembers seeing Tommy ‘raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out’.

Gender

At times, men and women have stereotypical roles in the novel. For example, Kathy and Ruth are good carers and this fits with the common idea that women should do the care work in society. Men like Tommy are not good at caring, but perform well as donors. **This fits with the stereotype of men as poor care workers and very useful manual workers.** It is also worth noting that Hailsham is run by Miss Emily and Madame and that most of the guardians are women. This seems to further underline the 'caring' role of women in society.

Friendships break down along gender lines, with girls and boys rarely mixing at sports or forming friendships. This isn't surprising as boys and girls are segregated at Hailsham and friendships develop according to these restrictions. Girls stay talking to each other, while boys go off and play football. Kathy recalls spending long nights chatting in her dormitory with the five other girls. She becomes very close to Ruth who is a dominant character in Hailsham and who makes up stories about the students and their guardians. At one point, Ruth takes an old rumour of a plot to kidnap the guardian Miss Geraldine and builds an entire world around it. She expects 'six to ten' girls to join her group of 'secret guards' who would keep Miss Geraldine safe from harm. Kathy remembers keeping a 'list of people we knew to be in on the plot – guardians and enemies whom we declared sworn enemies'. **This imaginary world is a safe one for the girls. None of them, apart from Kathy, can reach out of it and be friends with boys. Therefore, we can see that the social setting reproduces gender norms.**

Tommy is the boy who features most in the novel. At first, he seems hot-headed. He is a target for bullies at Hailsham. A group of boys gather to pick teams for a game of football and even though Tommy is known to be the best player, they ignore him and don't pick him. Tommy explodes in a fit of rage and the boys

tease him while a group of girls laugh at him from a distance. This is a classic stereotype about boys: they are expected to hide feelings of hurt and disappointment. Worse, when they express themselves, they do so in a messy way, and are ridiculed for doing so.

However, Tommy proves to be much more open-minded and thoughtful than this first incident indicates. **His early friendship with Kathy shows that he is not the stereotypical boy who can only be friends with other boys.** Tommy also wrestles with the truth about his existence as a clone from an early age. He is the first to learn from Miss Lucy that the art collections are, in fact, unimportant. She tells him: 'At least one person ... believes you're a very good student, as good as any she's ever come across, never mind how creative you are'. At the Cottages he comes up with a very believable theory about why the Hailsham guardians had insisted that the students created artwork. He tells Kathy that it is possible for Hailsham students to get deferrals on the basis of their art. Tommy believes that the artwork will help Madame 'decide for herself what's a good match and what's just a stupid crush'. In other words, Tommy is suggesting that if they can prove to Madame that they really love each other, they may get a deferral. **In this way Tommy is far from the stereotypical boy he appears to be at first; instead, he is an inquisitive and independent person.**

Religion

Religion plays a major role in most societies. However, the novel is set at a time when science has more influence on society than religion or law. Kathy and Tommy discover the truth about the cloning programme when they visit Madame and Miss Emily. They find out that following the Second World War, there was huge pressure to find a way of saving the sick and injured. **This pressure was combined with major advances in science. However, little thought was given to the morality of these scientific advances.**

Miss Emily explains: ‘After the war, in the early fifties, when great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn’t time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions’. People were more concerned about what was possible than what was moral. In this context, the clones were dehumanised and largely forgotten about. Instead, people were concerned ‘that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease’. As a result, students like Kathy, Ruth and Tommy were ‘kept in the shadows’.

Miss Emily explains that she was part of a group who wanted to treat the clones in a kinder way. This group, along with Madame, set up Hailsham to show people that ‘if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being’. **This shows that morality played some role in society, and this is further highlighted by the Morningdale Scandal.** Miss Emily explains that a doctor in Scotland tried to engineer clones with ‘enhanced characteristics ... superior intelligence, superior athleticism’. This caused a huge controversy as the doctor went ‘far beyond legal boundaries’. Support for homes like Hailsham declined. Miss Emily explains that Hailsham ‘lost our sponsors, one after the other, in a matter of just over a year’. **This clearly demonstrates that morality and law play some role in the social setting of the novel. However, we see that it often comes second to science.**

Social values

The social values in the novel are quite liberal. Relationships and sex are discussed openly by guardians and students. However, they are not spoken about in terms of love, trust or affection. Instead, they are another part of the donation programme. They are spoken about because they must be spoken about. Students are raised

to be donors and there is no point in having this programme in place if the students contract sexual diseases. Kathy recalls that, from the age of 13, the guardians gave the students ‘proper lectures about sex’. She admits feeling ‘pretty confused about this whole area’, but notes that it was ‘hardly surprising ... given we were barely sixteen’. **Miss Emily is crucial in explaining the moral side of relationships to the students.** She teaches them that they should not be ‘ashamed of their bodies’ and should enjoy the beautiful gift of love ‘as long as both people wanted it’. However, alongside this liberal talk, the students face a number of restrictions. Boys and girls are not allowed to visit each other’s rooms after nine o’clock and most areas of Hailsham are ‘out of bounds’ at night.

These restrictions change at the Cottages. The residents (now adults) are able to see whoever they like and nobody goes ‘around talking about it like it was a big event’. Tommy underlines this more mature and thoughtful attitude when he finds Kathy looking at some pornographic magazines. He does not try to make her feel bad. Instead he notices that she appears ‘sad’ and ‘a bit scared’. He asks her if she is ok. Kathy later explains that she looked through the magazines in the hope of finding her ‘possible’. It is another poignant scene which highlights the students’ desire to find out where they come from. They long to have their own heritage.

Not everybody has such a relaxed attitude towards relationships. For example, Ruth tells Kathy that Tommy would never have any interest in her because he ‘doesn’t like girls who’ve been with ... well, you know, with this person and that’. This is a lie. We later see Ruth and Tommy have their relationship. However, it is a key moment which reveals that **the social values of the novel are diverse.**

Culture

Music is a small but crucial part of life in the novel. The song which gives the novel its name,

‘Never Let Me Go’ by Judy Bridgewater, is hugely significant for Kathy. As an 11-year-old it was a song that ‘really got to me’. She remembers not actually listening to the song properly at all. Instead, she just waits for ‘that bit that went: “Baby, baby, never let me go”...’. Kathy used to imagine the song was about a ‘woman who’d been told she couldn’t have babies, who’d really, really wanted them all her life’. She imagined that the woman, somehow, manages to conceive and ‘holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing’ the song. Looking back, Kathy knows that this is not what the song is about, but she also knows that this does not matter: ‘the song was about what I said, and I used to listen to it again and again, on my own, whenever I could’. On one occasion, while singing the song

‘holding an imaginary baby to my breast’, Kathy was discovered by Madame. ‘It might even have been one of her sobs that had come through the song to jerk me out of my dream,’ she says. **This is an incredibly affecting part of the novel and a key moment whose significance is only truly revealed at its end.** Madame explains that she felt bad for Kathy when she saw her singing the song: ‘When I saw you dancing that day, I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, more efficient. More cures for the old sicknesses ... But a cruel harsh world ... I saw you and it broke my heart’. **Music is the prompt for all of these ideas and recollections. As such, its impact on the social setting of the novel is undeniable.**

KEY POINTS



- The novel *Never Let Me Go* is set in England in the late 1990s.
- It is a futuristic, yet recognisably modern version of England.
- Social class, power, gender, religion, science, social values and culture all have a clear impact on the characters.
- The author Kazuo Ishiguro wanted people to think about the rights and wrongs of scientific advances.
- Clones who are brought up in Hailsham are considered to be from a higher social class than other clones.
- The students play rounders, hang around a pavilion and ride horses.
- This life of privilege creates expectations. Kathy remembers hearing one of her guardians (who were a combination of teachers and foster parents) scolding the students after they’d behaved badly: ‘we were all very special, being Hailsham students, and so it was all the more disappointing when we behaved badly’.
- The comfortable lives of Hailsham students are a source of envy for students from other institutions.
- Chrissie asks Ruth if it is possible for Hailsham students to get a deferral (delay) on their donations. She says that she heard ‘that this was something you could do if you were a Hailsham student. You could ask for your donations to be put back by three, even four years’.
- In fact, students at Hailsham come from the lowest social class.
- Ruth explains that they have fooled themselves into believing they are related to respectable people: ‘They don’t ever, ever, use people like that woman ... we’re modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, as long as

they're not psychos ... look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from'.

- Power is in the hands of adults and older people in the novel while young or less experienced people are in very weak positions.
- Hailsham students must produce art to be displayed in a distant gallery, and they receive little more than 'tokens' in return.
- The students face a lot of restrictions when they become adults too. Kathy is allowed to leave the Cottages, but only if she is 'back by the day and the time we entered Keffer's ledger book'.
- At times males and females play stereotypical gender roles.
- Kathy and Ruth are good carers and this fits with the common idea that women should do the care work in society.
- Men like Tommy are not good at caring but perform well as donors. Again, this fits with the stereotype of men as poor care workers and very useful manual workers.
- Friendships break down along gender lines, with girls and boys rarely mixing at sports, or in terms of friendship.
- Tommy proves much more open-minded and thoughtful than he appears at first.
- His early friendship with Kathy shows that he is not the stereotypical boy who can only be friends with other boys.
- The novel is set at a time when science has more influence on society than religion or law.
- Miss Emily explains: 'After the war, in the early fifties, when great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions.'
- In this context, the clones were dehumanised and largely forgotten about.
- The Morningdale Scandal shows that morality played some role in society. Miss Emily explains that a doctor in Scotland tried to engineer clones with 'enhanced characteristics ... superior intelligence, superior athleticism'. This caused a huge controversy as the doctor went 'far beyond legal boundaries'.
- The social values in the novel are quite liberal. Relationships and sex are discussed openly by guardians and students.
- Kathy recalls that, from the age of 13, the guardians gave the students 'proper lectures about sex'.
- Miss Emily is crucial in explaining the moral side of relationships to the students. She teaches them that they should not be 'ashamed of their bodies' and should enjoy the beautiful gift of love 'as long as both people wanted it'.
- Not everybody has such a relaxed attitude towards relationships. For example, Ruth tells Kathy that Tommy would never have any interest in her because he 'doesn't like girls who've been with ... well, you know, with this person and that'. This is a lie. We later see Ruth and Tommy have their relationship.
- Music is a small but crucial part of life in the novel. The song which gives the novel its name, 'Never Let Me Go' by Judy Bridgewater, is hugely significant for Kathy.
- Kathy used to imagine the song was about a 'woman who'd been told she couldn't have

babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life'. She imagined that the woman, somehow, manages to conceive and 'holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing' the song.

- Madame explains that the sight of Kathy performing this song made her very upset. She could see that Kathy was just like the woman she was singing about because she was unable to have children.

Eclipsed and Never Let Me Go

The play *Eclipsed*, by Patricia Burke Brogan, is set in a Magdalene Laundry in Ireland. Most of the scenes take place in 1963, though the prologue (opening) and epilogue (closing) are set in 1992. It is the story of Cathy, Nellie-Nora, Mandy and Brigit, who are known as 'penitent women' because they are unmarried mothers. They live in an institution known as a 'laundry' and must clean and mend the clothes of bishops, priests and others within the Catholic Church. The women are supervised by Mother Victoria (known as the Mother Superior) and Sister Virginia (who is a 'white veiled novice'). Later, the women are joined by 17-year-old Juliet, who is sent over from the orphanage.

***Eclipsed* is a work of fiction but it shows readers a recognisably real world.** Magdalene Laundries were workhouses that operated in Ireland from 1765 until 1996. Unmarried mothers, along with other women seen as unfit for society, were known as 'fallen women' in Ireland. They were sent to laundries in order to 'redeem' themselves through lace-making, embroidery and laundry. They were held against their will for months, years, or in some cases, until they died. Additionally, the women were separated from their children who were sent to other institutions or else given up for adoption. Their birth mothers were not allowed to see them. Thousands of Irish women lived like this: they lost their freedom and their families, and they were outcasts of society.

As the play shows, the women were drawn

from the lowest social class and most of them came from poor families and had no education. They were also powerless; members of the Catholic Church decided what happened with their lives, and with their children's lives. As women, they were confined to menial roles in the world, while the men who fathered their children carried on their lives as normal. This all sounds like the women were in prison, and in many ways there were. However, we should remember that these women hadn't committed any crimes. Instead, they were the victims of a society that rejected and banished women who did not follow Catholic teachings on sexual morality or who were sexually assaulted. Much about the laundries remains unknown and even today there are women who lived in them looking for information about their lives. It is one of the saddest, darkest and most upsetting aspects of Irish history.

Social class

In 1960s Ireland, a person's social class had a major impact on his or her life. *Eclipsed* shows this quite clearly. The girls and women who ended up in the laundries were usually from poor families. Unlike the Hailsham students in *Never Let Me Go*, the women and girls in the laundries did not consider themselves lucky. We see that the women are from the lowest social class when Mother Victoria explains to Sister Virginia that 'no one wants those women!' Mother Victoria

claims that the women are better off in the laundry than outside with their families. 'We protect them from their passions! We give them food, shelter and clothing! We look after their spiritual needs.' **This reminds us of the students of Hailsham in *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy H. and her friends are cloned from people who have had very difficult lives. Her friend Ruth explains that if you want to know where they come from you should '... look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from'.** All of the women are known by their first names only, while the nuns who run the laundry have noble titles like Mother Victoria (also known as Mother Superior) and Sister Virginia. This marks the nuns out as more important than the lowly 'penitents'. **These names call to mind the founders of the school in *Never Let Me Go*, where the woman in charge was known as 'Madame'. Social class divisions can be seen in both texts. They work in subtle but powerful ways.** The women in the play are aware of their low standing in the social order, and how others live privileged lives. In an early scene, Brigit complains that the priests are treated to trips to Italy: 'Rome! Sunshine! Wine! And look at us!' The women laugh at the pomp and ceremony of the Catholic Church, mocking Mother Victoria's claims that the local priest is 'a Prince of the Church'. However, the women's position in society means that people mistreat them. Cathy escapes from the laundry. When she is brought back she tells how she was mocked when she got outside: 'A few children pointed at me, laughed, and called me names'. Women like Cathy were a target for such abuse because social class mattered in society. The people who abused her wanted to feel superior to her and to remind her of her inferiority. **There is a similarity and a difference here with the novel. No student wanted to escape Hailsham; it was a safe and loving place. However, people outside the institution viewed the students with disgust. This reminds us of the play.**

Power

The play is mainly set during the 1960s, a time when the Catholic Church had a huge influence on life in Ireland. Sister Virginia explains that 'nearly every mother west of the Shannon has a son studying for the priesthood'. Mother Victoria runs the laundry and the women are afraid of her. There is a constant cat-and-mouse battle between Mother Victoria and the women working in the laundry. *Eclipsed* shows us that power rested with people who worked for the Church. **This reminds us of the novel, where all of the people with power worked for Hailsham. In both cases, power is symbolised by an institution; in the play it is a church, in the novel it is a school.**

The power that people working for the Church had was enormous. The women live in fear that they will be sent to mental institutions. 'The Black Viper threatened the Big House on me,' says Brigit of Mother Victoria. 'She's the one that should be in there! Power mad! Money mad! More money-for-the-Bishop mad!' she adds. **This is in contrast to the novel where the people in charge of Hailsham encourage the students to produce art in order to prove that clones have souls and, as such, should be treated decently.**

Mother Victoria and Sister Virginia are, in fact, go-betweens for the really powerful people in Ireland at the time: bishops and priests. Mother Victoria demands that the women thoroughly clean the priest's clothes: 'I hope his Lordship's linen is ready,' she says to Brigit. She pressurises them to make sure 'his Lordship's shoes are clean and mended ...' and his 'buckles shone'. This shows us the level of deference that even a woman like Mother Victoria had to show to a priest. She refers to him as 'his Lordship' throughout the play, elevating the priest to a more superior status than her own, and certainly to that of the women in the laundry.

The least powerful people of all were the institutionalised women. The women in the laundry are aware of their plight and do their best to resist it. Led by Brigit, the women demand that

Sister Virginia give them the keys to the laundry so that they can all leave. Sister Virginia refuses, and instead offers them some chocolates as a way of saying sorry. 'Keep your bloody chocolates,' says Brigit before imitating Sister Virginia and then mocking her: 'You think that if you keep us all locked up that we'll forget about living!' Brigit's rage is a sign of her powerlessness. She knows she is trapped in the laundry and she knows there is nothing she can do about it. She attacks Sister Virginia, hoping to scare the young nun into freeing the women. **Here, Brigit reminds us of Tommy in *Never Let Me Go*, particularly the time when Kathy saw Tommy 'raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out' following the revelation that there were no deferrals.**

Gender

1960s Ireland was a place where gender roles were strictly defined and this is reflected in the play. *Eclipsed* shows us that women were second-class citizens at the time. The very existence of the Magdalene Laundry system shows that people believed it was okay to condemn and punish women who did not fit with a strict Catholic view of the world. Mother Victoria says: 'those women can't be trusted! They're weak, Sister! No control!' Her belief that women were to blame for their treatment can be seen as typical of the time. **It stands in contrast to the novel where the students are kept at Hailsham because their teachers care about them. It is also notable that Hailsham accepts boys and girls. The novel shows less gender discrimination than the play.**

Sister Virginia is a nun who does not do what is expected of women in 1960s Ireland. She is independent and critical of the institution she works for. She protests to Mother Victoria that the women are being neglected and she writes a letter of invitation to the bishop: 'You should see and speak to the mothers, who are locked in here. Out of the goodness of your heart ... allow them

weekly visits to the orphanage'. This is most unusual for any nun, as we see when Mother Victoria intercepts the letter and punishes Sister Virginia for her 'impudence'. As such, Mother Victoria performs her role as a complicit, obedient woman perfectly well, while Sister Virginia upsets society's expectations. **She reminds us of Miss Lucy in the novel, who reveals to the students that they are clones, and that they should not fool themselves into believing that they have the same opportunities as other people.**

Unlike the novel, where Tommy is a crucial figure and an example of how not all men are the same, there are no male characters in the play. However, men had a fundamental impact on the lives of the women in the laundry. John-Joe and Mr Persse took no responsibility for the pregnancies they were responsible for. Brigit points out the hypocrisy of 1960s Ireland when she says: 'Why aren't our lover-boys locked up too? One law for them and another for us!' Nellie-Nora has been abused by her former boss Mr Persse. She refuses to put on lipstick when the women are playing around with it. She describes how Mr Persse, the man she had a child with, used to force her to wear lipstick: 'he made me wear lipstick – and perfume. He wanted me to be like a city girl'. She becomes really upset at the memory. We later learn that Mr Persse signed Nellie-Nora into the laundry. This relationship is a clear example of how men had enormous control over women in 1960s Ireland.

Religion

The Catholic Church dominated life in Ireland in the 1960s and this is reflected in the play. Apart from the first and the last scenes, all of the drama takes place in a working Magdalene Laundry. The stage directions note that '*the nuns are dressed ... in an armour-like ... clothing with large black Rosary beads and long black leather belts*'. We never see Mother Victoria and Sister Virginia in

any other way, indicating the fundamental role that religion had in their lives. The nuns never meet people from outside the convent, showing that their lives were sheltered and restricted.

Most of the women in the laundry are signed in because they are single parents. They were a source of shame for their families in an Ireland that strictly followed Catholic Church teachings on sexual morality. The women, like the nuns, serve the Catholic Church too. They perform menial tasks like cleaning bed sheets, sewing buttons and shining shoes for priests. **Their lives provide us with an interesting similarity to the students in the novel. The women in the Magdalene Laundries and the students in the novel were put into institutions so the world would not have to look at them. Both the women and the students were a source of shame to their societies. However, a strong contrast emerges here too; the women were institutionalised in the name of religion while the students were institutionalised in the name of science.**

The legality of the Magdalene Laundries is not questioned in the play. Mother Victoria justifies the imprisonment of women by explaining that ‘they’ve broken the sixth and ninth Commandments’. Locking women up and making them work without pay is seen as quite a normal thing to do. It is not investigated by the authorities or exposed by the media. **By contrast, we notice that the schools set up for clones in the novel are shut down when their experiments go beyond the point of common acceptability.**

The play suggests that Ireland was at the very beginning of social change, however. The women highlight the immorality of their treatment. Cathy becomes very upset when Juliet tells her that her twins are growing up without her: ‘My babies making their First Holy Communion! I must see my babies!’ They are supported by Sister Virginia who prays for the women under her supervision. She wonders, ‘Am I being brain-

washed? Will I become de-humanised too, if I stay here long enough?’ Most tellingly, Mother Victoria acknowledges that the power of the Catholic Church may be in some doubt. She is disturbed by Sister Virginia’s attempt to contact the bishop to explain the dreadful conditions of the laundry. The stage directions say that she was ‘*puzzled and worried*’ and wondered quietly to herself: ‘My Lord Bishop, what is happening to our Holy Church?’ **This moral debate reminds us of the novel where objections to advanced cloning led to the closure of institutions within a year. However, the Magdalene Laundries continued their work for 30 years after these concerns were raised. This underlines the powerful influence that religion had on Irish society.**

Social values

Ireland was a very conservative country in the 1960s. Women were not supposed to have children outside of marriage. As punishment, they were cut off from men and from society in general. Brigit begs Sister Virginia for the keys to the laundry. She receives a letter telling her that John-Joe, the father of her daughter Rosa, is getting married: ‘He doesn’t know about Rosa! She’s his baby too ... I have to tell him!’ This segregation of women calls to mind the separation of boys and girls at Hailsham. However, it is much more severe because women who are not in institutions are able to make informed decisions about their lives, while boys and girls may not.

The conservative social values of the play are best shown by Juliet, who has been sent to the laundry because she is an orphan. She has spent most of her life in an orphanage and now feels that she cannot live outside an institution. ‘I’d hate to live out there!’ she says. Juliet is also terrified of men, claiming that most men are bad people. ‘Men are oversexed!’ she says. She has had a terrible experience with a man who

‘grabbed me here! Pushed me against the wall. Said he’d murder me – break my neck if I moved’. Juliet’s experience shows that relationships were feared rather than cherished. **This contrasts quite glaringly with the liberal social values of the novel, particularly when Kathy and her friends move to the Cottages. They are free to have relationships with whoever they like and there is no real fear or judgement.**

Culture

As in the novel, music played an important part in people’s lives in 1960s Ireland. The women in the laundry are obsessed with the American singer Elvis Presley. He is a fantasy figure for them. Dreaming of Elvis allows them to escape the oppressive world of the laundry. They imagine that Elvis appears at a party they have thrown in Paris for Mandy. Nellie-Nora imagines the singer and Mandy running away together: ‘They dance all the way to the airport and fly off to Hollywood’. The music of

Elvis means a lot to them too. They break into song throughout the play and the lyrics show us the world as the women wish it really was. They dream of having someone who will say ‘Kiss me, my darling, be mine tonight’. **This is similar to the novel where the song, Judy Blackwater’s ‘Never Let Me Go’, also allows Kathy to explore her fantasies.**

However, music is also used to highlight the hurt and pain of the women. Kathleen Ferrier sings ‘He was despised’ in both the opening and closing scenes of the play. The lyrics of this song seem to reflect the lives of the women in the laundry: ‘He was despised. Despised and rejected. Rejected of men. A man of sorrows ... and acquainted with grief’. The song is about Jesus’ attempts to spread the gospel, but it explains the lives of the women very accurately. **It creates a very poignant atmosphere at both the beginning and ending of the play, much like Madame’s reaction to Kathy listening to the Judy Blackwater song. As with the novel, music has multiple meanings in the play.**

KEY POINTS



- Social class was of huge importance in the Ireland of the play.
- Girls and women sent to the laundries were mostly poor. This is similar to the novel. Ruth explains that the students were ‘modelled from trash’.
- The women who ran the laundries had noble titles, ‘Mother Victoria’ and ‘Sister Virginia’, while the women kept in the laundries were known by their first names only. This shows their low social status.
- In the novel, the school is run by ‘Madame’, a title which also suggests importance.
- The women in the laundries, like the clones in Hailsham, were figures of disgust for people outside the institutions.
- The Catholic Church had a lot of power in 1960s Ireland.
- People who worked for the Catholic Church, like those in Hailsham, enjoyed great power over people’s lives. In both cases, the powerful figures work for a big institution.
- The nuns who ran the laundries decided what would happen with the women’s lives. They used this power to scare them into doing what they wanted. By contrast, the teachers at Hailsham encouraged the students to develop their art.
- Bishops and priests are the most powerful figures in the play. They are the only ones that the nuns are worried about.

- The women in the laundry are completely powerless. This can be best seen when Brigit leads a revolt against the nuns. Her rage reminds us of Tommy in *Never Let Me Go*.
- Unmarried men and women in 1960s Ireland lived strictly segregated lives. The Magdalene Laundry system, where women were locked away from society, was a clear example of this.
- Women in the Magdalene Laundry were blamed for their plight. They were told that they were weak and untrustworthy.
- Institutions were also a feature of life in *Never Let Me Go*. However, they allowed people to mix more freely and were much less judgemental.
- Sister Virginia does not conform to the role of a stereotypical nun. She is the conscience of the play and points out the injustices of the laundry system. She reminds us of Miss Lucy in the novel, who was frank and honest with the students.
- There aren't any men in the play. However, the play shows us that men had a significant role in society, taking no responsibility for pregnancies.
- Men like John-Joe and Mr Persse are shown to be abusive and selfish in the play, in contrast to Tommy in the novel.
- Brigit points out the hypocrisy of Irish society. Women were punished for having children outside of marriage, but men weren't.
- Nellie-Nora explains the pressures she was put under by Mr Persse.
- In the play, the Catholic Church dominates life in 1960s Ireland.
- People who serve the Church are expected to be intensely committed and loyal. This is shown by their clothing and by their lack of interaction with people outside the laundry.
- Single mothers, like the women in the laundry, are forced from public view. This reminds us of the clones in the novel. However, the play shows us that the women were locked up for religious reasons, while the clones were hidden away for scientific reasons.
- Nobody of authority questions the legality of the laundries. This contrasts with the novel where eventually objections to the legality of the homes were raised.
- There is a hint that the dominance of the Catholic Church is fading. The women are highly critical of their treatment. They also win support from Sister Virginia, whose actions unnerve Mother Victoria. This is a similarity with the novel. However, a key difference is that the homes in the novel were shut down within a year, while the Magdalene Laundries lasted another 30 years in Ireland. This highlights the strength and control of the Catholic Church in Ireland.
- 1960s Ireland was a deeply conservative place. Relationships were closely monitored and had to follow Catholic Church ideas about the family.
- The separation of men and women reminds us of the same process in the novel. However, the separation is more severe and less justifiable in the play as it is adults rather than children who are kept apart.
- The attitude towards relationships was quite negative in 1960s Ireland. This is best shown by Juliet who has been abused by a man and is terrified of having a relationship.
- Music was really important to people in 1960s Ireland. Elvis Presley offered the women an escape from their drab and oppressive lives in the laundry, much like it did for Kathy in Hailsham.

- Music also underlined the reality of life for the women. 'He was despised' is sung in the opening and closing scenes of the play, creating a very poignant atmosphere. This is matched by the novel when Madame explains her sorrow at seeing Kathy sing 'Never Let Me Go' while holding an imaginary baby.

Winter's Bone, Never Let Me Go and Eclipsed

The film *Winter's Bone*, directed by Debra Granik, tells the story of Ree Dolly. Ree is a young woman who must find her missing father, dead or alive, in order to save her family home. Jessup Dolly, Ree's father, failed to turn up for a court appearance. This sets off a dramatic chain of events. Jessup used the family home as a bond to secure his release on bail. A bondsman (debt collector) tells Ree her family will be evicted from their house if Jessup is not found. Ree is ignored, threatened and assaulted as she seeks to track her father down. At the same time, Ree must take care of her younger brother and sister, as well as her mentally ill mother. Ree's search takes place in a social setting that is violent, disturbing and in many ways hopeless.

Set in a rural mid-western area of the United States known as the Ozarks, Ree faces many challenges and disadvantages. Most of the characters live in poverty. Few people have work that is legally permitted; many work in the illegal drugs trade. Powerful men dominate the community, using violence to get what they want. People with mental health issues are sidelined. Traditional gender roles are common. Women are expected to do the housework, while men make the big decisions. Traditional music connects people as songs are passed down the generations. Religion has surprisingly little influence, though people are spiritual. **This is very different to the social setting of *Eclipsed*, which shows a country largely controlled by the Catholic Church.**

The Ozarks are an old-fashioned place. It is hard to tell when the film is set: old ways are common, there is little technology and no real

sign of development. **This contrasts with *Never Let Me Go*, where science has advanced so much that the text appears to be set in the distant future.**

Social class

Winter's Bone explores the issue of social class in the United States. **Unlike the novel or the play, the characters from the film all belong to the same social class: the rural poor.** The opening scenes show the hardships faced by some of America's poorest people. Ree's brother and sister sleep on the couch because they have no beds. Their breakfast is fried potatoes; they will have the same food for dinner. They face a long walk to school, and we see that Ree and her siblings wear clothes that do not fit them. We get the impression that their clothes are passed down from generation to generation. Ree's family struggle to afford basic things, like food and heating. Sonny, her brother, watches admiringly as their neighbours, Blond Milton and Sonya, skin a deer in preparation for eating. 'Maybe they'll share some of that with us,' he says. Ree is angered by the idea that her family should beg for food: 'Never ask for what oughtta be offered'. Later, Sonya calls to the house with fresh meat and firewood. Ree gratefully accepts these things. She is poor but she is also a very practical person. **In the novel, Ruth explains that the students are from the lowest social class and that if they want to find their families they should 'look in the toilet'. Ree, like Ruth, understands that social class has a big impact on a person's life. However, Ree**

differs from Ruth because she is not ashamed of her social class. Neither Ree nor Ruth are snobbish characters unlike Mother Victoria in the play, who looks down on the women in her charge as being from a lower social class than her. Mother Victoria coldly condemns the poor women in the convent: ‘no one wants these women!’ she thunders.

It is hard for anyone in *Winter’s Bone* to move social classes. Ree’s life as a poor person living in rural America is almost impossible to change. At 17 she has left school and there is no prospect of her going to college. In her town, some people work in farming but there are few job opportunities. Indeed, many people earn their money making and selling drugs, in particular methamphetamine (crystal meth). For those who do not want to break the law, joining the army is a popular option. Ree watches the student soldiers practice their drills at her former school. Later, she goes for an interview and a sergeant asks Ree why she wants to join up. She tells him that she is interested in the ‘forty thousand dollars I get for signing up’. She explains that she needs the money to look after her family. The sergeant gently advises her to stay home for now. ‘It’s going to take a lot of backbone and a lot of courage to stay home, but that I think is what you need to do right at this point,’ he says. Ree understands that she cannot join the army. Her family depends on her to survive. There is no one else in her house who can bring in a salary, or who can look after children. In all three texts, then, the characters are prevented from building a better life for themselves because of their social class. Rodney and Chrissie wrongly believe that Kathy gets special treatment because she was raised in Hailsham. This is false, though, and Kathy faces the same restrictions as Rodney and Chrissie because they are clones. Meanwhile, in *Eclipsed*, the women in the Magdalene Laundry are treated terribly by Mother Superior, who thinks they do not deserve basic respect and rights because of their low social class.

Power

The social setting of *Winter’s Bone* has very clear divisions between powerful and powerless people. The most powerful person in the community is Thump Milton. He is an elusive (hard to find) man. Though never fully explained, it seems that Thump plays a major role in the local drug trade. Ree needs to talk to him as she believes he knows what has happened to her crystal meth-cooking father. However, Thump’s wife, Merab explains why he will not talk to her: ‘Talking just causes witnesses. And he don’t want for any of those’. Thump is so powerful that nobody is allowed to talk to him unless he asks for a conversation. Clearly, he knows what happened to Jessup, and most likely he had a vital say in his disappearance. His power is built on violence. Merab warns Ree that she should not call to the house again. ‘I want you to listen to me, child. You need to turn around, and get yourself on home,’ she says. **Powerful men like Thump rule through fear. He is completely different to Madame and the guardians in the novel *Never Let Me Go*. They care for their students and encourage them to create artworks to show people that they have souls. Thump is similar to Mother Victoria in the play, who also gets her power from the fear she makes people feel.**

The most powerless character in the film is Ree’s mother Connie. She suffers from an unnamed mental illness and does not speak in the film. She seems to live inside her own thoughts. She does not react when Sheriff Baskin calls to the house looking for Jessup. Instead, it is left to Ree to deal with the bad news. ‘You better just tell me,’ she says. Ree has replaced her mother as head of the household. However, she is not entirely comfortable with this role. Later, when Ree learns that the family will be evicted within a week, she appeals to her mother for advice: ‘Can you please help me this one time? Mom? Mom, look at me’. Connie looks vaguely at Ree but she says nothing. It is a heartbreaking scene which

highlights Connie's powerlessness. In terms of social setting, there is little understanding for people in the Ozarks who have mental health problems. It is a society where such issues are simply not talked about. Connie is powerless because she has problems with her mental health. **She reminds us of Tommy in the novel, who feels powerless when he learns that deferrals do not exist for clones. In *Eclipsed* Brigit also feels powerless when her escape plan is thwarted by Sister Virginia, who refuses to hand over the keys to the laundry. All three characters have the same feeling of being powerless. The difference between them is that Connie is powerless because she is unwell, whereas Tommy and Brigit are powerless because they are under the control of institutions.**

Gender

The social setting of *Winter's Bone* puts very tight restrictions on people because of their gender. Men and women are shown in traditional and old-fashioned roles. Women are expected to do the household work and have very little independence, while men run businesses and make big decisions. Ree calls over to her friend Gail to see if she can help with the search for Jessup. Gail is holding a baby in her arms and is relieved to see Ree and not her husband's parents. 'Them two watch me like I done something wrong,' she explains. Her husband, Floyd, complains that Gail is talking about his parents: 'Would you hush your mouth about them. They put a roof over your head ain't they?' In the social setting of *Winter's Bone*, women are meant to be grateful for the most basic of supports, and they are also expected to keep their opinions to themselves. Floyd is a stereotypical father with an outdated view of the world. He sees parenting as a woman's job, and he enjoys the control he has over his wife. Gail asks Floyd if she can borrow the truck. He

refuses but gives no explanation. 'He never says why not to me, Ree. He just says no,' says Gail. Ree is disappointed to see her friend let a man tell her how to live her life. 'It's different once you're married,' says Gail. Though Floyd and Gail are young, they follow the social norms of the past. **Gail reminds us of Kathy and Ruth in *Never Let Me Go*, two women who work as carers, a role traditionally viewed as a female role. This is similar to the women in the Magdalene Laundry, who are expected to clean for bishops and priests.**

The people with the most influence in the Ozark community are all men. This is the case for people in official roles, like the army sergeant, police officer and bondsman, as well as unofficial roles, like the heads of the household and those in charge of the local drug business. Ree bravely challenges all of these powerful people throughout the film. For example, she takes on Thump Milton in order to find her father. She surprises Merab by calling to Thump's house. 'Ain't you got no men could do this?' says Merab, clearly showing that the drugs trade is controlled by men in the Ozarks. Refusing to be put off, Ree calls back to Thump's place again. This time she is met by a raging Merab, who along with her sisters, badly beats Ree before taking her to a barn. Ree's uncle Teardrop arrives and is alarmed to see that she has been assaulted. 'No man here touched that crazy girl. I put the hurt on her. Me and my sisters, they was here too,' explains Merab. Major decisions are made by men in the film. Merab and her sisters do the dirty work of beating Ree up but they do not get to decide what happens to her. Teardrop says: 'she's about all the close family I got left, so I'll be collecting her now and carrying her on out of here to home. That suit you, Thump?' he asks. Thump agrees to let Ree go but only if Teardrop agrees to vouch for her in future. 'She's now yours to answer for,' says Thump. This scene highlights the stereotypical role of men in the social setting of the Ozarks. They are

in charge of women's lives. **This role for men is very different to the main male character in *Never Let Me Go* – Tommy.** As a teenager he was hot-headed but he developed into a sensitive and thoughtful man. The men in the Ozarks have more in common with two of the men mentioned in *Eclipsed*. John-Joe and Mr Persee never actually appear in the play, but both men had a major negative influence on women's lives.

Religion

The social setting of *Winter's Bone* is one where religion plays no role at all. There are no churches in the village or religious symbols in people's homes. No local priest appears to comfort the Dollys when their father goes missing, or later when he is confirmed dead. It can be said that the people are spiritual rather than religious. Every home has wind chimes, as well as collections of stones, usually piled one on top of the other. They are rocks collected from walks around the local mountains. Meanwhile, Ree wears a shark tooth necklace. Over a thousand years ago, shark teeth were used by people in the Ozarks as tools for carving wood and food preparation. They were also used as weapons such as daggers. These symbols suggest that the characters feel a connection with nature and with their ancestors. It is what gives their lives meaning. It is also what sustains them. Ree teaches Sonny and Ashlee to shoot. They kill two squirrels and take them home for dinner. Sonny is reluctant to help with gutting the squirrels. Ree tells him he needs to get over his fears. 'There's a bunch of stuff that you're going to have to get over being scared of,' she says. Hunting for food is what Ree's ancestors did. She proudly continues this tradition and teaches it to the next generation. Far more than religion, it is ancestry and nature that guides people in the Ozarks. **On a related note, religion plays even less of a role in the novel *Never Let Me Go*. Instead, people**

look to science to give their lives meaning. As Miss Emily explains: 'After the war, in the early fifties, when great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions'. People were more concerned about what was possible, than what was moral. The play, by comparison, shows a society that is under huge religious influence. The Magdalene Laundries were a Catholic Church institution. The two nuns who run the laundry are only ever seen in religious dress. The stage directions note how they wore '*an armour-like...clothing with large black Rosary beads and long black leather belts.*'

The weak role of religion in the social setting of the film can be further seen in how the dead are treated. Merab and her sisters call to Ree's house. 'We'll take you to your daddy's bones. We know the place'. Ree is taken, wearing a hood, to a forest. Merab and one of her sisters get into a rowboat with Ree and they row out onto a pond. Merab stops the boat and points into the water: 'You're gonna need to reach down and tug him up.' Ree puts her arms into the water and recoils at what she feels. At the second attempt she grasps her dead father's hand. Merab offers her a chainsaw: 'Well, how else you gonna get his hands?' Ree suddenly understands that she will need proof for the bondsman and the sheriff that her father is dead. But she cannot bring herself to cut her father's hands off. Merab starts the chainsaw and grimaces as she chops off one of Jessup's hands. Ree lets go of his body. 'Why'd you let go? You're gonna need both hands, or sure as shit they'll say he cut one off to keep from going to prison,' says Merab. Ree plunges her hands into the pond again. Merab cuts off the second hand. Finally, her father's body is allowed to sink into the water in peace. 'Let it go,' says Merab.

This is a shocking and moving scene that reveals a lot about the social setting of *Winter's Bone*. Religion plays no role in the

characters' decision-making. Jessup's body is given no respect. He is referred to as 'bones'. He is not allowed a proper funeral or burial. Merab and Thump merely want to cover up their involvement in his murder. Similarly, in the novel, there was no religion and little morality during the Morningdale Scandal, when it emerged that a scientist was trying to create clones of superior intelligence. In the play however, religion is used to justify the imprisonment of innocent women. Mother Victoria explains that the women in the laundries 'have broken the sixth and ninth Commandments' and so they cannot be allowed out in the world. In her eyes, breaking these Commandments is the same, if not worse, as breaking the law of the land. Interestingly, in all three texts a lack of morality causes characters to act in upsetting ways.

Social Values

The social values shown in the film are very conservative (old-fashioned). All relationships in the film are between a man and a woman rather than any same-sex relationships. And they are all married. In the Ozarks, marriage is an important part of social life. It creates security for men and women who live in a part of America that is poor and without many prospects. However, the relationships are tense and unappealing. For example, Teardrop is rude and threatening to his wife Victoria, telling her to 'shut up' when she suggests he help Ree to find Jessup. He snaps when she tries to reason with him: 'I said shut up once already with my mouth'. Victoria and Teardrop then have an argument off-camera in the backroom. Victoria comes back with money and advice for Ree. 'Teardrop says you best keep your ass real close to the willows, dear,' she says. Victoria and Teardrop's marriage shows the conservative social values of the Ozarks. Men control the household, often through violence, or the threat of it. **The social values of the novel**

are much more liberal. They talk openly about sex and relationships, led by Miss Emily who teaches students they should not be 'ashamed of their bodies' and should enjoy the beautiful gift of love 'as long as both people wanted it'. The social setting of the film has more in common with the play, which depicts an extremely conservative society. In *Eclipsed* women are locked away in a Magdalene Laundry and are forbidden from communicating with men.

Social life in the Ozarks is also very conservative. Ree and Teardrop go to a bar to get information about Jessup. American flags hang inside and outside the bar. Indeed, one customer is wearing a leather waistcoat with an American flag on the back. In addition, the band plays traditional country and western music. It could be said that this is a typical conservative bar, where people are proud, loyal and defensive of their country, and listen to old-fashioned music. Ree challenges the conservative order of things. She stands up to Blond Milton when he tries to trick her into believing her father was killed in a crystal-meth lab explosion. 'Goddamn you! You must think I'm a stupid idiot,' she shouts at him. Blond Milton offers to adopt Ree's younger brother Sonny, but not her sister, Ashlee. In the Ozarks, boys are seen as useful but girls are seen as trouble. Ree refuses this offer and spits on the ground in disgust at Blond Milton's underhand ways. She is mentally and physically strong. She does things differently to most people in her community. **The social values that Ree must deal with are incredibly different to the ones we see in the Cottages in *Never Let Me Go*, where residents are able to see who they want and nobody goes 'around talking about it like it was a big event'. The social values in the film remind us more of those in the play, though they work in different ways. People in the Ozarks are definitely under pressure to act in traditional ways. However, none of them are subject to the trauma of being locked away from friends and family. This is what faces**

Juliet in *Eclipsed*, and it has a huge effect on her. She has been locked in an institution for most of her life. She fears rather than cherishes relationships.

Culture

Culture plays a crucial role in the social setting of *Winter's Bone*. The tone of the film is set in the opening scene, where 'Missouri Waltz' plays over shots of the Ozarks. The music connects the characters to the setting. Indeed, the opening song (and several others) are sung by Missouri musician and storyteller Marideth Sisco. Music connects people to the land in *Winter's Bone*. Music also connects people to each other. Ree and Gail go to a traditional music session (known as a picking session). The songs are about the local area. They are played by musicians of all ages on guitars, banjos and violins. The songs are passed from generation to generation, as is a love of music. This is shown to us in a beautiful but

subtle way during the film's final scene. Sonny and Ashlee take Jessup's banjo out for Teardrop to play on their front stoop. He is nervous, though, and stops playing soon after he begins: 'I was never good like your daddy was,' he says. A moment later, Ashlee picks up the banjo and happily strums it. She will inherit Jessup's banjo, and his love of music. In one gesture, music is passed from father to daughter. **Music is equally important in the social settings of the novel and the play. In *Never Let Me Go* music was a way of escaping. Kathy listens to her favourite song repeatedly and imagines the story of a woman having a child. In *Eclipsed*, music is also a way of escaping. The women sing Elvis songs to relieve the boredom and misery of life in the laundry. Nellie-Nora imagines Elvis and Mandy running away together: 'They dance all the way to the airport and fly off to Hollywood'. In the film music is used to bring people together and to connect with the land, rather than to escape.**

KEY POINTS



- All of the characters in the film belong to the same social class: the rural poor. This is in contrast to the novel and the play both of which have a mix of social classes among their characters.
- Ree and her family symbolise the struggles of the rural poor in America. They have little money to buy clothes, food, furniture or even to heat their homes.
- Ree is poor but also practical. She gives out to Sonny for considering asking for food. 'Never ask for what oughtta be offered,' she says. But she later accepts food when a neighbour, Sonya, calls over.
- Ruth from the novel and Ree from the film are alike in that they both understand social class has a huge impact on their lives. Ree is different to Ruth, though, because she is not ashamed of her social class.
- In contrast to Ruth and Ree, Mother Victoria in the play is a snobbish character. She looks down on poor people and dismisses them as unwanted and unloved.
- Social class prevents people from taking opportunities in the film. There are few opportunities for work or study; many people make money from making and selling drugs.

- The army offers people a way out of a difficult situation. But Ree is too poor to join the army and the sergeant advises her to look after her family instead of taking up a position that would mean her siblings have no-one to care for them.
- In all three texts social class places major restrictions on people's lives. The students in *Never Let Me Go* have no chance of a normal life as they must donate their organs to sick people. Similarly, the women in the Magdalene Laundry are prevented from having any kind of normal life as they are forced to do menial tasks and stay in the laundry.
- Powerful and powerless characters are a major feature of *Winter's Bone*.
- Thump Milton is the most powerful character. His power is based on fear and violence. He is a major player in the drug trade in the Ozarks.
- Merab prevents Ree from talking to Thump. Even though he knows what happened to Jessup, he does not want to talk about it.
- Ree's mother Connie is the most powerless character in the film. She suffers from an unnamed mental health issue and is unable to speak or communicate in any real way.
- Connie is unable to deal with the eviction. Instead, Ree must figure out what to do for the family. She appeals to her mother for help. But she gets none.
- Connie reminds us of Tommy in the novel who feels powerless when he finds out there are no deferrals. She also reminds us of Brigit in the play who is powerless to escape the Magdalene Laundry. Connie is different to those two characters, though, as she is powerless because of her mental health, while they are powerless because their lives are controlled by institutions.
- The social setting of *Winter's Bone* puts very tight restrictions on people because of their gender. Men and women are shown in traditional and old-fashioned roles.
- Ree's friend Gail is controlled by her husband. He refuses to lend her his truck and gives her no explanation. 'He never says why not to me, Ree. He just says no,' says Gail.
- Ree is disappointed to see her friend let a man tell her how to live her life. 'It's different once you're married,' says Gail.
- Gail reminds us of Kathy and Ruth in *Never Let Me Go*, two women who were expected to perform traditional female care roles. This is similar to the women in the Magdalene Laundry, who are expected to clean for bishops and priests.
- The people with the most influence in the Ozark community are all men.
- People in official roles, like the army sergeant, local Sheriff and the bondsman are all men.
- People in unofficial roles, like the heads of the household and those in charge of the local drug business, are men too.
- Ree takes on Thump Milton and surprises Merab by calling to their house. 'Ain't you got no men could do this?' says Merab, clearly showing that the drugs trade is controlled by men in the Ozarks.
- Later Merab and her sisters beat Ree and take her to a barn.
- They are discovered by Teardrop. Merab explains 'No man here touched that crazy girl. I put the hurt on her. Me and my sisters, they was here too'.
- In the social setting of the Ozarks this means that Teardrop cannot take revenge on Merab, because men cannot attack women.

- Teardrop takes Ree home, but only after he promises Thump Milton to vouch for her. 'She's now yours to answer for,' says Thump. This scene highlights the stereotypical role of men in the social setting of the Ozarks. They are in charge of women's lives.
- This role for men is very different to Tommy in *Never Let Me Go*, who developed into a sensitive and thoughtful man. The men in the Ozarks call to mind two of the men in the play, John-Joe and Mr Persse, who had a major negative influence on women's lives.
- Religion has only a small role in *Winter's Bone*.
- People in the Ozarks are spiritual rather than religious. They feel a deep connection to their land and to their ancestors.
- Ree wears a shark tooth necklace and teaches her siblings to shoot. She is aware of local traditions and customs and wants to pass them on to the next generation.
- In the novel people look to science rather than religion (or tradition) to give their lives meaning. Scientific advances can lead to some people taking risks and possibly breaking moral codes, as explained by Miss Emily.
- Religion plays a far more prominent role in the play. It informs every decision that the nuns make and they are so strongly influenced by religion that they are never seen without their religious garb.
- The weak role of religion in the film can be seen in how the dead are treated.
- In a harrowing and unforgettable scene, Ree is taken by Merab and her sisters to see her dead father's body in a pond. Merab tells Ree that she must cut off both of Jessup's hands or else no-one will believe that he is dead. Eventually, Merab takes a chainsaw to Jessup's hands.
- The complete disrespect for Jessup's body shows us that religion plays effectively no role in death in *Winter's Bone*. Similarly, it plays no role in the Morningdale Scandal either in the novel, where scientific advancement was put ahead of human dignity. By contrast, religion informs most decisions in *Eclipsed* but with very negative consequences.
- Interestingly, in all three texts, a lack of morality causes characters to act in upsetting ways.
- The social values of the film are very conservative.
- Marriage is highly valued in the Ozarks, even though it often leads to great unhappiness. There is a strong suggestion of violence in the family home, too, as seen by the way Teardrop talks to Victoria.
- This is very different to the novel where the characters openly talk about relationships, and respect within these relationships is common. It is more similar to the play, though the social values of *Eclipsed* are extremely conservative. Men and women are supposed to stay strictly apart before marriage. Women are severely punished if they have children before marriage.
- Social life is also very conservative. American flags are prominent in dark bars where bands play slow country and western music.
- Ree challenges the conservative order of things. Ree stands up to Blond Milton when he tries to trick her into believing her father was killed in a crystal meth lab explosion.
- The social values that influence Ree are very different to those we see at the Cottages in the novel, where residents live a free and liberal life. They have more in common with the social values of 1960s Ireland. However, the social values in the play ruin Juliet's

view of relationships. She fears rather than cherishes them.

- Culture plays a really significant role in the social setting of the film. The tone of the film is set in the opening scene, where 'Missouri Waltz' plays over shots of the Ozarks.
- Music brings people together, as seen when Ree and Gail go to a 'picking' session.
- Music is also a way of showing where you are from. We learn in the final scene that Jessup was a gifted banjo player. Ashlee happily strums the banjo in a symbolic moment that shows how music is passed from one generation to the next in the Ozarks.
- Music is equally important in the social settings of the novel and the play. In *Never Let Me Go* music was a way of escaping. Kathy listens to her favourite song repeatedly and imagines the story of a woman having a child. In *Eclipsed* music is also a way of escaping. The women sing Elvis songs to relieve the boredom and misery of life in the laundry.
- However, music in the film is about connecting people to each other and to the land, not escaping.

SAMPLE