

English and  
Communication  
*Sunset Song*  
**Higher and Intermediate 2**

6161



October 1999

HIGHER STILL

# English and Communication

Literary Study

*Sunset Song*

Higher and Intermediate 2

Support Materials



These Support Materials were developed by City of Glasgow Council in association with the higher Still Development Unit

## **CONTENTS**

**The following support notes are presented, for convenience of use, in 5 individually paginated parts as follows:**

- 1. A NOTE FOR TEACHERS AND LECTURERS (8 pages)**
- 2. AN INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS (4 pages)**
- 3. SECTION 1: READING THE NOVEL (10 pages)**
- 4. SECTION 2: STUDYING THE NOVEL (46 pages)**
- 5. SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL (15 pages)**



**A NOTE  
FOR  
TEACHERS AND LECTURERS**



## **A NOTE FOR TEACHERS AND LECTURERS**

TEXTUAL REFERENCES IN THESE SUPPORT NOTES ARE TO THE EDITION OF *SUNSET SONG* PUBLISHED BY CANONGATE – EITHER SEPARATELY, OR AS THE FIRST PART OF THE TRILOGY, *A SCOTS QUAIR*. THE TEXT IS VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL TO THE EDITION PUBLISHED BY LONGMAN IN THE HERITAGE OF LITERATURE SERIES, ALTHOUGH PAGE NUMBERS ARE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. *[TEXTUAL REFERENCES TO THE LONGMAN EDITION ARE INDICATED BY ITALICISED PAGE NUMBERS WITHIN SQUARE BRACKETS.]*

The support notes are not prescriptive: they offer a variety of ways of approaching the novel and could be adapted to meet the needs of a range of students tackling the Literary Study unit at Intermediate 2 and/or Higher.

As a result of using these notes to support their study of the novel, students should be able to undertake a number of tasks based on or related to aspects of its thematic concerns and/or its literary/linguistic features:

- writing critical essays
- engaging in textual analysis
- participating in group discussion
- making an individual presentation
- writing imaginatively or expressively.

It is not necessary, and may not even be desirable, to use the text in all of these ways. Teachers and lecturers should use their knowledge of the abilities, aptitudes and progress of their students to make judgements about the selection of appropriate tasks. While advice is provided for each of these tasks (and examples for some of them), the primary purpose of literary study – appreciation of the text itself – should never be obscured by too great a concentration on any one of them or by an attempt to cover too many of them.

The notes are designed for use by students and, after a brief Introduction, are arranged into three main sections, each of which is explained briefly below.

### **AN INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS**

The intention here is to encourage students to find out for themselves about Grassie Gibbon. All that is envisaged is some brief research, some preliminary reading of background material that will furnish enough information to get students started. While intended to be reasonably free-standing, the introduction provided here could obviously be adapted or supplemented if required.

## **SECTION 1: READING THE NOVEL**

This section is laid out according to the chapter headings of the novel. It is meant to be used in conjunction with a reading of the novel – either entirely at home or (as is probably more likely) partly in class and partly at home. Under each of the chapters headings, a series of questions is used to encourage an awareness of underlying themes and ideas and the significance in relation to these of selected incidents, characters, literary/linguistic techniques and approaches.

While the primary purpose of this section is to facilitate intelligent reading of the text, the questions contained in it could usefully serve other purposes – revision, ‘catching up’ by absent students, group and class discussion of answers and responses.

By the end of this section, students should have a good knowledge of the novel as a whole, and of its overarching concerns.

## **SECTION 2: STUDYING THE NOVEL**

This section requires students to explore the novel in greater depth and detail by focusing closely on some of its key features – characterisation, themes, structure and style.

Through a series of worksheets, students are expected to re-read selected parts of the novel from a particular perspective or with a particular remit. Students should be encouraged to explore beyond the minimum requirements of completing the worksheets. Unlike Section 2, boxed spaces are included in this section to allow for the possibility of photocopying and issuing complete packages of its various sub-sections for completion by students. The alternative would be to instruct students to leave the spaces blank and write their responses separately in jotters or folders.

At first reading, the range of work in this section may seem daunting, especially to students at Intermediate 2 level. Not all of the suggested questions and tasks, however, require equal attention. Teachers and lecturers should make this clear to students and guide them towards those areas of study that best fit their needs.

By the end of this section, students should have a detailed knowledge of selected aspects of the novel, and of a range of supporting textual references.

### **SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL**

Students will respond to *Sunset Song* in a variety of ways. The purpose of this section is to suggest to them how their responses might usefully be harnessed to the requirements of unit and course assessment.

#### **(a) Critical Essays**

The writing of critical essays for the purposes of unit assessment and, ultimately, in the context of course assessment, will almost certainly prove central to the work students undertake in relation to the novel.

Throughout their study of *Sunset Song*, there will be numerous opportunities for students to prepare for and engage in the writing of critical essays. For example, in Section 2 of these support notes, students are given the opportunity to write several 'mini-essays'. Teachers and lecturers might decide to replace some of these with more substantial tasks that could lead to the writing of critical essays that would meet the evidence requirements of unit assessment. Some examples are given in Section 3 of appropriate critical essay tasks and topics.

These could **not** be used for summative unit assessment, since it is unlikely that they would remain 'unseen' (a mandatory evidence requirement), but they might be used in a number of other ways:

- as formative tasks to improve the critical essay writing skills of students (as well as their ability to understand, analyse and evaluate a literary text)
- as a homework task to encourage independent study
- as practice, time-controlled essays in preparation for course assessment in the external examination.

Quite deliberately, no attempt has been made to provide students with a comprehensive list of critical essay topics: firstly, to allow for topics that are relevant to the areas of work actually undertaken by students and given emphasis by teachers and lecturers; secondly, to ensure that questions set for summative unit assessment are genuinely unseen.

#### **(b) Textual Analysis**

Two sets of textual analysis questions are included. They are designed to exemplify how close analysis of key parts of the novel may illuminate some of its characteristic features and concerns. Teachers and lecturers will be perfectly familiar with this approach and have their own views about which parts of the novel could profitably be scrutinised in this way.

Questions requiring close analysis could be used in several ways. For example, having already studied or at least read the text, students could be given such questions as a formative assessment exercise to help emphasise to them

- first, that competence in analysis is a key criterion in the writing of critical essays
- second, that deployment of analytical skills in response to a seen text does help with the deployment of the same (or very similar) skills in response to an unseen text.

Alternatively, students could be set a textual analysis task **prior** to having read a particular part of the text. Work of this sort, if completed under controlled conditions, could be used to help with estimating likely attainment in the relevant part of the external examination paper.

Teachers and lecturers should also keep in mind other links that might usefully be established to reinforce the pivotal role of seen textual analysis as a preparation for both critical essays and unseen textual analysis. For example, students might be given an unseen passage related thematically or stylistically to *Sunset Song* (e.g. an unseen extract from a Grassic Gibbon short story such as *Clay* or *Greenden* or from one of the later novels in the trilogy, *Cloud Howe* or *Grey Granite*). Here again, the emphasis would be on the analysis of literary and linguistic features of an unseen text, some of which might have been studied in class in relation to *Sunset Song*.

### **(c) Group Discussion**

As a methodology, group discussion will feature prominently in the work of most teachers and lecturers. It will also be an approach that is familiar to most students. If, however, the study of literature is to be used as a context in which to develop and assess group discussion skills, then this must be made clear to students. Careful planning will be required to achieve a balanced and sensibly integrated approach to the concurrent delivery of each of the two component units. Some suggestions are made about appropriate areas for focused discussion.

### **(d) Individual Presentation**

It is not inconceivable that a student might wish to make a formal individual presentation on an aspect of *Sunset Song* or on a topic related in some way to the concerns of the text. As with group discussion, the main issue would appear to be how to handle the text in a way that allows for an integrated approach to the teaching of skills across outcomes and units. Again, some suggestions are made about possible topics.

### **(e) Imaginative and Expressive Writing**

The stimulus to engage in writing related in some way to the reading of the novel will occur more naturally to some students than to others. Clearly, it should be allowed for and encouraged, and, again, some suggestions are made about possible topics and approaches.

By the end of this section, students should have been assessed in terms of competence in literary study, the primary focus of their work in this unit. Assessments in other outcomes or units may be planned for and carried out – if judged relevant, appropriate and manageable.



**AN INTRODUCTION**

**FOR STUDENTS**



## AN INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

Lewis Grassic Gibbon is the pseudonym of the author James Leslie Mitchell who was born in 1901 in Auchterless in Aberdeenshire and died in 1935 in Welwyn Garden City in London. It was a short life, but one that encompassed a variety of interesting and formative experiences.

Using the notes provided in the edition of the novel you are using (and/or other sources), write a brief biographical note on the author, drawing attention to significant aspects of his experience.

It was also a very important and productive life in terms of the contribution it made to Scottish literature.

Find out what other works were written by Lewis Grassic Gibbon and write a brief note on his literary output and, if you can, on his place in the traditions of Scottish Literature.

Grassic Gibbon was born into a small community of crofters and farmers in the North East of Scotland. At that time, and during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there were many such small communities. While they laboured long and hard to secure their existence from the meagre lands that they farmed, at the same time they struggled to come to terms with social, economic and political changes that were beginning to overtake them.

Quite clearly, *Sunset Song* reflects Grassic Gibbon's background: portraying as it does a breed of men and women who loved the land, who were conscientious in their labour, but whose lives and communities were shattered by massive outside forces far beyond their control, to which they found themselves, on the whole, tragically unable to adapt.

To some extent, Gibbon seems to have had an ambivalent attitude to his background and to the changes that were affecting it. Although he retained a love for the land and its people, he began increasingly to question traditional values and customs. He grew to despise formal religion and education, and he questioned the traditional stereotypical view of the woman's role in society. He was also acutely aware of how the 'modern' preoccupation with materialism and progress (a direct consequence, in his view, of the march of 'civilisation') was beginning to destroy the hitherto stable and secure values of agricultural life and community.

There are echoes of all of these concerns throughout the novel. They form key components of its setting and contribute significantly to its underlying themes, but the novel is more than this. It is the poignant story of its central character, Chris Guthrie, as she struggles to come to terms with the changes that are occurring within and around her. It is almost as if, through Chris, the writer is attempting to examine the impact of change on the experience of an entire community and an entire generation.

To help you understand, analyse and evaluate Grassic Gibbon's achievement in *Sunset Song*, you are invited to work through a range of suggested activities, questions and tasks – presented in three sections as follows:

- SECTION 1: READING THE NOVEL
- SECTION 2: STUDYING THE NOVEL
- SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL

Each of these three sections could be tackled consecutively or concurrently as you work your way through the novel. If the latter approach is taken, your teacher or lecturer will explain to you how you might use these sections *selectively* in order to deepen your understanding of the novel and, at the same time, develop the skills you need: for example,

- to discuss key aspects of the novel
- to analyse some of its characteristic features
- to write about some of its central concerns
- to reach the standards required to be successful in unit and course assessment.

# **SECTION 1**

## **READING THE NOVEL**



## SECTION 1: READING THE NOVEL

The purpose of this section is to offer you some help with your first reading of the novel.

Basically, you are invited:

- **to question** the text and your own understanding of it as you work your way through its various parts
- **to discuss** your own particular readings of parts or aspects of it and compare them with the readings of others
- **to note** textual references and points of significance that you think may prove useful when you come to study and write about the text in more detail.

To help you do these things, in each of the novel's six sections, 10 questions (or groups of questions) are asked – not as a test of your understanding, but as a starting point for opening up your understanding. More (and different) questions could have been asked. Those that are asked may not even seem to you to be very good questions. If you can think of better ones, then you should ask them, either of yourself or, in the course of discussion, of others.

There are, of course, lots of ways to read a novel. Sometimes, for example, group readings (following the text as we listen to different people reading different parts of it) can prove most illuminating. After all, each of us reads (and makes meaning of our reading) in different ways and each of us, therefore, can usually learn something from the reading of others. At other times, however, and more commonly, we read silently, on our own, isolated, with just the guiding and prompting voice (this time an interior voice) of the narrator (or narrators) for company.

Whatever pattern of reading you adopt, it will be important, in this novel, to 'tune in' to the style in which it is written, to allow yourself to be influenced by the rhythms and tones of speech which carry its narrative (as well as the voices of its characters). You will soon find that this becomes fairly easy, provided you make the initial effort to read it as it is written and as, no doubt, the writer intended it to be read.

**PRELUDE – THE UNFURROWED FIELD**

1 Look carefully at the map of Kinraddie.

Why do you think this map has been included?

What does it suggest about the community of Kinraddie?

2 Gibbon begins his account of the Kinraddie lands by referring to “a Norman childe, Cospatric de Gondeshil”.

Why do you think he has chosen to begin his account at this stage?

What reference to earlier times is made?

3 After the slaughter at Dunnottar, what attitude did the Kinraddies have to political and social events?

4 When did this attitude change and why?

5 After the Reformation, what was the next most important change for the Kinraddie lands?

6 Look at the following references:

“Aberlemno’s Meikle Stane that was raised when the Picts beat the Danes”  
(p.1) [p.3],

“Wallace” (pp.2,3) [pp.4,5], “the creatures Johnson and James Boswell” (p.3) [p.5],  
“dour folk of the old Pict stock” (p.4) [p.6], “Cospatric’s castle” (p.5) [p.7].

What impression of the area do you think Gibbon is trying to give by including these references?

7 Pages 5–24 [pp.7–25] give basically a picture of the Kinraddie estate in 1911.

Make a brief note on each of the “nine bit places” and make sure you can identify them on the map. Also note the characteristics of the people who own them.

How does Gibbon identify the owners with their land?

8 In what ways does the content of this section of the novel relate to its title – *The Unfurrowed Field*?

9 How does this title relate to the title of the novel – *Sunset Song*?

10 Why do you think Gibbon has chosen to introduce his novel with this section?

## ***THE SONG – PLOUGHING***

1 Where is Chris Guthrie at the opening of this section?

Why has she gone there?

What makes her recall her life at Echt?

2 What impression do we gain of Chris's parents before their marriage?

How does their relationship develop after their marriage?

3 For what different reasons is John Guthrie angered by his wife when she refers to Jehovah

(p.29) [p.33] and by his son, Will, when he uses the term (p.30) [p.34]?

What does this tell us about John Guthrie?

Why do you think the author has chosen to use the word "Jehovah" and not "God"?

4 How does Chris feel about her life on the farm and the people she meets on the farm?  
(pp.32, 45–46, 47–48) [pp.35–36, 49, 51]

5 What aspects of reading and schooling does Chris enjoy and why does she enjoy them?

(pp.32–33, 43–44) [pp.35–36, 46–47]

What aspects does she dislike?

6 What does Chris begin to realise about her life and its events, and about people, in the course of this section? (pp.46, 58–59, 60–61) [pp. 49–50, 62, 64]

7 In what way is Chris influenced by her mother? (pp.31, 43, 60–61) [pp.35, 47, 64]

8 How would you describe Chris's relationship with Will, her brother?

9 Who or what, in your opinion, has the greatest influence on Chris during this period of her life? (Be prepared to justify your opinion)

10 What overall impression do we obtain of Chris in this section?

How is the title of the section related to Chris?

## ***THE SONG – DRILLING***

1 How long has passed since we last met Chris at the Standing Stones?

Why and when do you think Chris comes to the Standing Stones?

2 What effect has Jean Guthrie's death had on Chris (pp.62–66) [pp.65–68] and on the rest of the family?

3 How is the controversy regarding her future continued for Chris during this section? (pp.85–86 etc.) [pp.88 etc.]

4 How has Chris's relationship with Will altered? (pp.66, 101–102) [pp. 69, 103–104]

5 How has Chris's attitude to her father developed in this section? (in particular, pp.72, 91, 103–104, 105–106) [pp.75, 93, 105, 107]

6 How does Chris feel about Ewan Tavendale? (pp.86–87, 100) [pp.89, 102]

7 What "third" Chris is hinted at on page 74 [ p.71]?

How does the last sentence of the middle paragraph on page 74 [p. 71],

"And faith! no more than a corpse he'd hold if she didn't...",

throw light on Chris's character?

8 How does Blawearie affect John Guthrie? (p.78) [pp. 75–76]

9 How would you describe the relationship between Will and his father? (pp.78, 79, 81–82, 101–102) [pp.80, 82, 84, 103–104]

10 What impressions are given in this section of what life was like for the people of Kinraddie and of their beliefs and attitudes?

Look, for example, at the references to

the "old reaper" (p.67), [p.70]

the "dour red clay" (p.75), [p.78]

the party at Chae's

the discussions about education (pp.85–86) [p.88], politics (pp.94–97) [pp.96–100]

and religion (p.99) [p.101],

the 'gossip' (throughout).

***THE SONG – SEED TIME***

1 How does Chris react, at first, to death of her father and why? (pp.108–113)  
*[pp.109–114]*

2 What steps does Chris go through until she comes to a full realisation of what her father meant to her?

3 What is the full significance of John Guthrie’s will for Chris? (pp.117–118)  
*[pp.118–119]*

4 What does Chris come to realise about the Land and how does this affect her decisions?  
(pp.118– 120) *[pp.119–121]*

5 Look at the following references:

“Had Marget and she been daft as that?” (p.121) *[p.122]*

“maybe folk there were who felt for the sea” (p.122) *[p.122]*

“but she didn’t feel affronted” (p.129) *[p.129]*

“How funny were folk!” (p.138) *[p.138]*

What do they suggest about the ways in which the character of Chris is developing?

6 Chris’s marriage to Ewan Tavendale is another major step in her life.

How does Ewan react to Chris’s marriage plans? (pp. 142–143) *[pp.142–143]*

Why is their marriage soon the “speak” of Kinraddie?

Is the marriage all that Chris had hoped it would be? (pp.142, 146–147, 172, 174)  
*[pp.142, 146, 171, 173]*

How important is it to our understanding of Chris (and to Chris’s own understanding of herself) that she has become Chris Tavendale? (p.176) *[p.175]*

7 What impression of Chae Strachan and Long Rob is given in this section of the novel?  
(pp.130–135, 145, 157–160, 162–164) *[pp.130–135, 145, 156–160, 162–163]*

8 What evidence can you find in this section of the novel of gradual changes that are taking place in the life-style and attitudes of the people of Kinraddie?

9 How does the singing of Scots songs (pp. 165–166) [pp.164–165] affect Chris and why does she feel this way?

10 Can you see any links between the way this section of the novel ends and the way it began?

How is the end of *Seed-Time* linked to the opening paragraph of *Harvest*?

***THE SONG – HARVEST***

1 In this section of the novel, the forces of change and the destructive forces of 'civilisation' climax in the outbreak of the 1914–18 war.

What is the attitude of Chris and Ewan to the war?

2 What makes Ewan change his mind and how does Chris cope with it?

3 How does Ewan change as a result of his training at Lanark?

4 How does Chris manage to come to terms with this alteration in Ewan's character both whilst he is at home on leave and whilst he is away in France?

5 At this point in the novel, where do your sympathies really lie, with Ewan or with Chris?

Can you give good reasons for your answer?

6 How is Ewan re-united with Chris and what is the significance of this reunion?

7 When Will returns to Blawearie, what opinions regarding Scotland does he now hold?

8 Why doesn't Chris agree with him?

9 What social and economic impact does the war have on the area of Kinraddie?

10 What advantage does the author gain by making Chae Strachan the narrator for the section outlining the main social and economic changes?

## ***EPILUDE – THE UNFURROWED FIELD***

1 Why did the Mutches do a “moonlight” (p.243) [p.242]?

What happened to old Pooty?

What kept old Gordon busy, and how did his own daughter, Maggie Jean, get the better of him?

Why do you think Grassic Gibbon is using part of this final section of the novel to provide the reader with such details?

2 “We have seen how the novel is flanked at the beginning and at the end by the half-serious, half-mocking account of life in the nine croft-farms of Kinraddie” (J.T. Low, *Sunset Song*, Longman, Heritage of Literature Series) [p.270]

How would you describe the tone of the *Epilude*?

3 How would you compare (or contrast) the author’s description of people and events in Kinraddie in the *Epilude* with his description of them in the *Prelude*?

4 Why is the *Epilude* also entitled *The Unfurrowed Field*?

5 In this section of the novel, the people of Kinraddie continue to be shocked by Chris:

“...it showed you the kind of creature Chris Tavendale was” (p.245) [p.244]

“a common bit quean like the Tavendale widow” (p.252) [p.251]

What is your reaction to her as she is presented in the *Epilude*?

6 What sort of person does Colquohoun, the new minister, turn out to be?

7 How does he shock the people of Kinraddie?

8 Is there anything that he and Chris seem to have in common?

9 Does his sermon at the memorial service at the Standing Stones have any bearing on your understanding of the theme(s) of *Sunset Song*?

10 How appropriate, in your opinion, are the words with which the novel ends: “...you can do without the day if you’ve a lamp quiet-lighted and kind in your heart.”?

## **SECTION 2**

# **STUDYING THE NOVEL**



## SECTION 2: STUDYING THE NOVEL

There are lots of approaches you could take to the study of any novel: you could, for example:

- try to summarise the main events of its plot or ‘story’
- make notes on some of its main features
- compile a comprehensive list of key quotations, references and cross-references
- find out more about the novel’s setting in time and place
- read some of the author’s other works (to deepen your understanding of the world of *Sunset Song*, for example, you could read some of Grassie Gibbon’s short stories in *A Scots Hairst*)
- consult biographical or critical works
- prepare ‘starter-papers’ that will set up group or class discussion of some of its features (different students could prepare different ‘starter-papers’ on different features)
- discuss and compare your impressions of the novel’s various features and qualities with the impressions of other students.

All of these approaches are useful, but they should be seen as no more than a means to an end. There are two dangers you should try to avoid:

- reading so much about the novel that you lose sight of the novel itself
- taking so much account of the views of others that you lose confidence in your own reading of the novel.

Remember, what other people write about the novel represents the reading they have made of it. While this may be helpful, it can be no substitute for your own reading. Ultimately, it is your reading that matters – to you personally as a reader (your confidence in your reading, the pleasures and satisfactions you derive from your reading). It will also matter to others (teachers, lecturers, examiners) who may require evidence of your ability to read with understanding and to analyse and evaluate what you have read.

This section invites you to explore the novel in greater depth by focusing closely on some of its key features – characterisation, themes, structure and style.

By the end of this section, you should have a detailed knowledge of these features of the novel, and of a range of supporting textual references.

## CHARACTERISATION

Perhaps the greatest strength of this novel is the creation of vivid, powerful characters. Gibbon's distinctive prose style, giving voice to the Scottish character, creates memorable, powerful characters such as John Guthrie, Long Rob, Chae Strachan. Their portrayal as warm, dour, proud and complex individuals also reflects Gibbon's ambivalent attitude to his background, and their eventual fates highlight his concerns about the destruction of traditional values and the natural rhythms of life and community.

Yet it is the central character, Chris Guthrie, who is the dominant interest of the novel. The novel traces her growth and development from childhood to womanhood. She is a complex character. We see revealed her uncertainties as an adolescent; her confused feelings towards her parents; her love of the land yet her desire for intellectual development through education and perhaps a life away from the community of Kinraddie.

In studying the characters of the novel, you should keep in mind that they are not real people. Although they are credible figures with whom we can empathise, their reality is no more than the fictional reality of characters in a novel. It will not be enough, therefore, to be able to describe them. Grassie Gibbon does that!

Your task is to understand them in the context of the fictional world they inhabit, to analyse their role and to evaluate the effectiveness of the techniques used by the writer to portray them. In other words, you will study Grassie Gibbon's **characterisation** and the contribution it makes to the overall meaning and impact of the novel.

In this section, you are invited to study a selection of the novel's principal characters. Study of the minor characters will also prove useful, for it is through them, as much as through the principal characters, that Grassie Gibbon appears to be developing certain aspects of the novel's main themes.

### Minor Characters

Through the minor characters, Grassie Gibbon reveals a great deal about the time and place in which the novel is set. He also appears to use them to develop aspects of the novel's plot and themes.

Make a brief list of some of the minor characters in the novel whom you found interesting.

Is there any humour in Grassie Gibbon's presentation of minor characters?

Is there any evidence of tragedy in the lives they lead?

Show how, taken together, these minor characters provide a rich and vivid impression of the community of Kinraddie.

Do these minor characters have any bearing on any of the novel's main themes?

## **LONG ROB, CHAE STRACHAN, EWAN TAVENDALE**

Long Rob, Chae Strachan and Ewan Tavendale are more substantial characters, whose significance is summarised by Robert Colquhoun in his speech in the *Epilude*. You should note that all three are killed in the war.

### **Long Rob Of The Mill**

What picture of Rob emerges from the *Prelude*? (pp.18–20) [*pp.19–21*]

Comment upon his behaviour during the fire. (pp.88–90) [*pp. 91–92*]

What is Rob's first reaction to the war? (p.192) [*p.191*]

How and why do things become more serious? (pp.194–197) [*pp.193–195*]

What is Rob's explanation for his behaviour? (pp.206–207) [*pp.204–206*]

Why do you think Rob eventually joins up? (p.232) [*pp.229–230*]

What happens at this point to suggest Gibbon's opinion of the character? What is that opinion?

What phrase on p.231 [*p.228*] do you think best sums up the character of Long Rob of the Mill?

What function does Rob play in the novel with regard to the theme of religion? (Give a couple of references if you can.)

## Chae Strachan

Look at how Chae is described in the *Prelude*. (pp.10–12) [pp.11–13] What do we learn about him as a character here that is reinforced throughout the novel?

How do the folk of Kinraddie generally react to Chae's socialist beliefs? (Give a couple of examples if you can.)

In the light of what you have read of him before this point (pp.191–192) [p.190], how does Chae's reaction to the outbreak of war strike you?

Which aspects of Chae's character are emphasised during his return to Kinraddie on leave from the war? (pp.200–208) [*pp.199–206*]

What other purpose does this section of the novel have? (pp.200–208) [*pp.199–206*] Or, to put the question another way, what is Chae's role as a character in this section of the novel?

Towards the end of the novel, Chris refers to Chae as being “like one coming from a far, dark country...a voice in the dark.” (p.240) [*pp.237–238*]  
In what ways could these words be said to summarise Chae's role at this point in the novel?

### **Ewan Tavendale**

Ewan plays a strange part in the novel, being largely invisible for the first half, then appearing to play a major role before disappearing again.

Look at how Ewan is described *physically*. (pp. 87, 100, 124, 127–128) [*pp.89, 102, 124–125, 127–128*] What impression of Ewan does this physical description create?

Does the physical description of Ewan correspond in any way to his character?

What is it about Ewan that, in your opinion, Chris finds attractive?

Prior to enlisting as a soldier, how would you describe Ewan's relationship with Chris and his attitude to life as a husband and as a farmer?

What does the manner in which he enlists as a soldier reveal about Ewan's character and about his relationship with Chris? (pp.210–213) [*pp.208–211*]

Why do you think Ewan treats Chris the way he does when he returns from military training in Lanark? (pp.221–229) [*pp.219–226*]

What does Chae reveal to Chris about the circumstances of Ewan's desertion? (pp.236–240) [*pp.234–237*]

Does Chae's account shed any light on the character of Ewan and his behaviour towards Chris prior to going to France?

Write a 'mini-essay' in response to **one** of the following questions:

- What is the role in the novel of Long Rob of the Mill **or** Chae Strachan **or** Ewan Tavendale?
- What light is shed on the character of Chris through her relationship with any one of them?
- How might these three characters, taken together, be said to represent some of the traditional and admirable qualities of the Scottish character?

## THE GUTHRIES

At the heart of *Sunset Song* are the various members of the Guthrie family – the relationships they have with one another and with the community, the contribution they make to the novel’s unravelling narrative and themes, the influence they have on the development of the character of Chris.

### Will Guthrie

In what way could Will’s suffering at the hands of John Guthrie be said to come from the same source as Jean’s suffering? (p.30) [p.34]

In the beating scene, what phrase gives the clue that the beatings will soon end? (p.42) [p.46]

What change in the balance of power between Will and his father is evident on page 65 [p.68]? Why do you think this has come about?

Which of his father’s characteristics does Will seem to have inherited? (pp.81–82) [pp.83–84]

What does his reaction to his father's sense of loss suggest about Will's character? (p.92) [p.94]

What explanation can you offer for the manner in which Will leaves Blawearie, gets married to Mollie Douglas and emigrates to the Argentine? (pp.101–103) [pp.103–105]

When Will returns to Blawearie, how has he changed? (pp.214–218) [pp.212–216]

Could Will Guthrie be said to have any symbolic significance in the novel? Think, for example, about his comment on Scotland. (p.216) [p.214]

## Jean Guthrie

How would you describe Jean's experience of life and her attitude to life before she met John Guthrie? (p.27) [p.31]

Based on her early experience, what advice does she offer Chris? (p.27) [p.31]

Is there any evidence later in the novel that Chris follows her mother's advice?

What is it about John Guthrie that Jean seems to find attractive?

There appears to be a degree of happiness in the early days of their marriage. What happens that begins to put a strain on their marriage? (pp.28–29) [*pp.32–33*]

In what way might the birth of the twins be said to mark a turning point in relationships within the family? (pp.33–35) [*pp.37–39*]

Look carefully at the penultimate paragraph of page 64 [*p.67*], “And not until days later...”  
Why do you think the writer structures this paragraph in the way he does?

Could Jean Guthrie be said to have any symbolic significance in the novel? Think, for example, of her influence on Chris, her attitude to the land and to education, her role as a woman.

Write a 'mini-essay' on the extent to which either Jean Guthrie **or** Will Guthrie could be described as a symbolic characters in *Sunset Song*.

## **John Guthrie**

John Guthrie seems to be a character who is divided – not only between tradition and modernity, but also, within his own personality, between his natural urges and his strong religious beliefs.

What early evidence is there of conflicting aspects of his personality? (pp.28–30) [*pp.32–34*]

What explanation does he offer for his anger at finding Chris in a semi-naked state as she helps with the washing of the blankets? (p.60) [*p.63*] What may be another, more sinister, forbidden reason for his anger?

What happens later, after the death of Jean Guthrie, to confirm our view of the darker side of Guthrie's personality? (pp.72, 108–109) [*pp.75, 109–110*]

John Guthrie is not a monster. He has admirable qualities which Grassie Gibbon may hold to be representative of Scots people at their best. What are some of these qualities?

Think, for example, about:

- his dealings with other people (pp.36, 40, 56) [*pp.39–40, 44, 59*]
- his attitude to Chris's education
- his commitment to working the land (pp.67–68, 75–76) [*pp.70–71, 78*]
- the content and terms of his will (pp.117–118) [*pp.118–119*]

Write a 'mini-essay' in response to **one** of the following questions:

- Could John Guthrie be described as a tragic figure?
- How important is the character of John Guthrie to any one of the novel's main themes?

### **Chris Guthrie**

Chris is a complex character with both real and symbolic importance in the novel, and with several strands to her. The following aspects of her character could profitably be studied.

#### ***Chris – as a ‘split’ character***

Chris sometimes feels divided between the ‘Scots’ Chris, derived from her mother, and the ‘English’ Chris, derived from her father.

Look at page 32 [pp.35–36]. How is the internal conflict described here?

This part of the novel also deals with the difference between the Scots and the English language. What is this difference?

Look at the anecdote of the Inspector. (pp.32–33) [pp.36–37]. Notice that he is English. Can you suggest a reason for his inclusion of the story?

The description of Chris at college on page 44 [p.48] seems to summarise the split. Can you find a quotation to identify each Chris?

The two sides of Chris derive from her parents. What do you take to be Jean Guthrie's influence on Chris? (p.27) [p.31]

After the death of her father, Chris makes a decision. (pp.119–20) [pp.119–121]  
What is this decision and why does she make it?

What experience does she then have that seems to justify her decision? (p.122) [pp.122–123]

### **Chris – as a woman**

At the start of the novel, Chris appears as a young innocent girl, but we soon see her develop, first in knowledge, then in experience, not always in a very pleasant way. Look at the following pages. What do they reveal of Chris's growing awareness of her own sexuality?

Page 39 [p.43]

Page 46 [pp.49–50]

Page 51 [p.54]

Pages 69–71 [pp.72–74]

Page 91 [p.93]

Page 137 [p.137]

**Chris – as wife (and mother)**

Although they are very attracted to each other, Chris's marriage to Ewan seems ill-fated from the start.

Is there any evidence of this during their visit to Dunnottar? (pp.125–129) [pp.125–129]

What does Chris's reaction to her pregnancy reveal about her feelings towards her marriage? (p.176) [p.175]

What developments take place in the relationship between Chris and Ewan from her desire for a second child (p.210) [p.208] to his departure for France (p.229) [p.226]?

How important are the final paragraphs of *Harvest* in revealing Chris's feelings about her marriage to Ewan? (p.241 [p.238])

### **Chris – as a maturing character**

Look back over the notes you have so far made about Chris. Can she be said to gain in maturity as the novel progresses? As a preparation for answering this question, note down some useful references and quotations pinpointing the changes that take place in her thoughts and feelings:

- at key turning-points in her life
- in the relationships she forms with other characters
- through other influences on her development.

#### **Key turning points**

#### **Key relationships**

#### **Key influences**

### **Chris – as a symbolic character**

In certain respects, Chris is very similar to other members of the Kinraddie community. In other respects, however, she is essentially different from them. You could, for example, think of her as a timeless figure, as a creature of the land, as symbolising Scotland or Scottishness. The following questions may help you to think more deeply about Chris and her significance in the novel.

Why is it that Gibbon places Chris so regularly at the Standing Stones?

After the visit from the lawyer from Stonehaven, Chris is described as “stricken and frightened” by a “knowledge that had come on her”. (pp.119–120) [*pp.119–121*]  
What has she come to realise and why is this an important realisation?

Is there any significance in her singing of “The Flowers of the Forest” at her wedding?

Does Gibbon’s portrayal of Chris have any other thematic or symbolic significance that you have not so far mentioned?

**Chris – as a figure of the past, the present and the future?**

In the final section of the novel, we are given only brief glimpses of Chris (mainly through the eyes of the community), but these brief glimpses are quite revealing: for example, “folk said that Chris Tavendale alone shed never a tear” (p.258) [p.256]

Write a ‘mini-essay’ on the appropriateness and effectiveness of Grassic Gibbon’s presentation of Chris in the *Epilude*.

## THEMES

It is impossible entirely to separate off consideration of a novel's themes from consideration of its characters and incidents. It is equally impossible not to be at least aware of a novel's themes as we follow the various stages of its unfolding 'story'.

Indeed, one of the markers of quality in a work of fiction is that it requires us to respond both emotionally and intellectually to the characters, events and issues of the fictional world into which we are drawn, and to make judgements about that world. As we are moved and challenged (and enriched) by our reading, we cannot but be aware of the broad thematic concerns of the fiction, and of the significance of these concerns for our own 'real' lives.

Sometimes, the thematic concerns of a novel are made explicit – through the dialogue or thoughts or actions of the characters, for example, or through the observations and comments of the narrator. At other times, they may be implicit – almost like threads running through the tapestry of the novel and, at the level of deeper meaning, often serving to hold it together.

In *Sunset Song*, there appear to be several permeating, interlinked and often overlapping themes. You are invited to think about four of them:

- the importance of a sense of 'community'
- the nature of 'religion'
- the impact the larger, 'outside' world
- the response of individuals and communities to 'change' and to the notion of 'progress'.

## Community

Although the community of Kinraddie is made up of individuals, some of whom are admirable, such as Long Rob, it also has a kind of collective character, which is a mixture of traits.

What are the two main big set-piece events in the novel in which we see the community operating in a cohesive and supportive way? What positive features of the community are evident on these occasions?

Can you list other occasions on which the community is seen in its best light and explain in what way? (for example, pp.85, 87-90, 109) [*pp.87, 89-92,110*]

Show how each of the following references casts an unfavourable light on the community.

Page 73 [*p.76*]

Pages 85–86 [*pp.87–88*]

Page 102 [*p.104*]

Pages 193–197 [*pp.191–195*]

Write a 'mini-essay' on the appropriateness of the fate of the community as it is described in the *Epilude*.

## Religion

We have already seen Grassie Gibbon's view of religion, in his depiction of what it does to John Guthrie, and in his view of Long Rob, the only avowed atheist in the novel. For the rest, his view of religion is mostly conveyed through the character of the ironically named Rev. Gibbon.

What is cunning about the strategy he adopts in his sermon in order to get elected as minister of the parish of Kinraddie? (p.55) [p.58]

What light is shed on Grassie Gibbon's treatment of the theme of religion by the Rev. Gibbon's subsequent behaviour and attitudes both in and out of the pulpit? (for example, pp.58, 74, 83, 160, 192–197, 251) [pp.61, 76–77, 85–86, 159, 191–195, 249–250]

Look carefully at what Chris says about the Scots and religion. (p.217) [p.215]  
Does Grassic Gibbon's treatment of the theme of religion in *Sunset Song* lead you to agree or disagree with Chris's assertion?

Does the attitude and approach of the new minister, the Rev. Colquhoun, cast any new light on the theme of religion?

### **The Outside World**

One of the most interesting aspects of *Sunset Song* is its portrayal of a community radically affected by the forces of the outside world.

What six outside influences on Kinraddie are mentioned in the first five pages of the *Prelude*? What differentiates the first three of these influences from the second three? (pp.1–5) [pp.3–7]

What is suggested about the outside world's attitude to Kinraddie and the attitude of the people of Kinraddie to the outside world by events following the fire at Peesie's Knapp? (pp.95–97) [pp.97–99]

What is the attitude of Chris and Ewan to the outbreak of war? (p.186) [p.185]

How do other characters in the novel react to the news of the war?

Apart from the war, what other aspects of the outside world affect the community of Kinraddie?

How well does the *Epilogue* show the extent to which Kinraddie has been changed by external forces?

## Change

Throughout the novel, there is a great deal of turmoil – both within the community and within the lives of individual characters as they struggle to come to terms with the changes that are taking place around them.

What evidence is there in the *Prelude* to show that change is nothing new in Kinraddie?

Paraphrase the sermon of the ‘poor old brute from Banff’ insofar as it is relevant to our understanding of the theme of change. (pp.53–54) [p.57]

Chris appears to adopt a consistent attitude to change throughout the novel. How would you describe her attitude? (for example, pp.61, 119) [pp.65, 120]

How is Chris's attitude to change later personalised? (p.146) [*p.146*]

Why is the destruction of the woodland a significant contributor to the theme of change?

On Chae's tour of Kinraddie, the loss of the woodland is not the only change. What fundamental and irreversible economic change do we see beginning to take place? (p.204...) [*p.202...*]

In the process of change, some things seem to endure. How is this evident in Chris's response to Will's assertion that Scotland is dying? (pp.216–217) [pp.214–215]

What accelerated process of change is depicted in the first half of the *Epilude*?

How relevant is the Rev. Colquhoun's sermon in the *Epilude* to our understanding of Grassie Gibbon's treatment of the theme of change?

“This is a novel that questions the whole concept of ‘progress’ in modern society.”  
Write a ‘mini-essay’ setting out your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the above statement.

## STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Understanding the structure of a novel is essential to understanding the movement of its narrative and the development of its themes. Not all novels follow a straightforward linear time-line, with each event following the previous one in chronological order. Quite often, for example, a novelist will make extensive use of ‘flashbacks’ in order to provide essential background information and/or to give the reader insight into the mind of a particular character.

In *Sunset Song*, Grassie Gibbon sets out his ‘story’ in six clear sections: a Prelude and an Epilogue, each entitled The Unfurrowed Field; and, between them, the Song (Sunset Song) itself, divided into four phases, each corresponding to a season of the agricultural year. Such a deliberately sequenced structure

The Unfurrowed Field

Ploughing

Drilling

Seed-time

Harvest

The Unfurrowed  
Field

clearly highlights the basic theme of change, reflecting the annual cycle of life on the farm and, at the same time, metaphorically, the changes and developments within the life of Chris.

At the beginning of each of the four main sections of ‘The Song’, we find Chris analysing and reflecting on her experiences and thinking back to what has happened in the past. At the end of each section she returns to the present.

The two sections of the novel that differ from the main sections, the *Prelude* and the *Epilogue*, deal mainly with the community as a whole, not the individuals within it. Both present a survey of the parish of Kinraddie by a narrator. Structurally, Gibbon ensures that the reader can compare Kinraddie now with what it was in the past. The theme of change is thus again clearly highlighted – many small farms replaced by fewer larger ones; traditional agricultural life replaced by modern industrial life.

There is clearly a certain completeness and roundedness to the chosen structure of the novel, an obvious patterning, a rhythm even, that is intended to support and complement the development of both character and theme.

The style in which the novel is written contributes to this sense of completeness.

Think, for example about:

- the writer's choice of words
- his blending of Scots and English
- his use of images and landscape
- his allusions to times past and present
- his flowing sentence structures and his subtle shifts of narrative.

All of these (and more) combine to create a distinctiveness of voice that seems to speak to us, to draw us in to the very heart and soul of Kinraddie.

It is almost as if, in reading *Sunset Song* we are listening to a 'spoken' novel, presented not in the style of formal written English, but through the distinctive voices of a variety of (mainly local) speakers. Their style of speech differs in structure and syntax, reflecting the more loose and flowing patterns of conversation still found to this day in the north-east of Scotland. It is as if Gibbon is trying to capture not so much the dialect or vocabulary of the people, but the 'tune' of their voices. This distinctive spoken style is a key feature of the novel, giving it an authentic feel while, at the same time, creating realistic, complex characters and communities. The language used also highlights some of Gibbon's essential themes. The use of English and the use of Scots, for example, clearly indicate the cultural divisions within Kinraddie – one reflecting attachment to the traditional life of the past; the other, movement towards modernity and mechanisation of farms.

Why do you think both the *Prelude* and the *Epilogue* are entitled *The Unfurrowed Field*?

Do you find any cause for optimism in either of these two sections?

How might the titles of the four sections of *The Song* be taken to refer to different stages in the life of Chris?

Could each of these four titles be understood to have any other significance (for example, as references to the experience of the Kinraddie community, or as indicating a more universal truth)?

The Standing Stones feature at the beginning and end of each section of *The Song*. What is their symbolic significance?

What does visiting the Standing Stones allow Chris to do?

In the *Epilogue*, the main action concerns the erection of a war memorial. Why is the use of the Standing Stones appropriate for this purpose?

The narrator of the main part of *The Song* usually sticks very close to Chris, and we learn of her thoughts more than those of any other. How does the way we are given Chris's thoughts differ from the way we are given, say, Long Rob's?

What technique does Gibbon occasionally use to attempt to make Chris's experience universal? How does it do so? (for example, p.63) [p.66]

The use of a restricted narrator can often present a writer with the problem of supplying the reader with sufficient information. How does Grassie Gibbon attempt to overcome this problem? (for example, p.73) [pp.75–76]

What is the most noticeable feature of the sentence structures used in the novel?

What effect is created, for the most part, by the adoption of this style?

How does Gibbon's method of writing direct speech reinforce this effect?

Read the central paragraph on page 71 [p.74]. Can you suggest another effect created by the use of what seems to be Grassic Gibbon's preferred type of sentence structure?

Give some interesting examples of the writer's use of Scots words in the novel, and comment on the effects created by them in the contexts in which they are used.

## **SECTION 3**

# **RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL**



### SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL

This section is concerned with your responses to the novel as a whole (or to particular parts or features or aspects of it) and with how these responses may be shaped and expressed in ways that are appropriate for assessment.

It is worth stressing that the responses that matter are **your** responses, not the responses that show what somebody else thinks about the novel or what some critic has said about it. There are no ‘correct’ responses or answers. Whether your responses, therefore, are similar to or different from the responses of other readers will not be important. What will be important is that your responses are **valid** and can be substantiated with relevant evidence from the novel.

The basic requirement is that – having read and studied the novel – you should be able to talk or write about it sensibly (and relevantly) in response to various assessment tasks or questions.

Suggestions are made in this section about **five** different types of activity or context or task in which opportunities for assessment may occur:

- writing critical essays
- engaging in textual analysis
- participating in group discussion
- making an individual presentation
- writing imaginatively or expressively.

Clearly, the most important assessment task is the one specified as the outcome of the Literary Study unit – *Respond critically to imaginative texts* – which, as unit evidence requirements make clear, must take the form of the writing of critical essays.

Writing a critical essay, however, will not be your initial response to *Sunset Song*. More likely, it will be your considered, measured and final response. Other responses that you make – thoughts that you have, insights that you gain, discussions that you engage in with other readers, analyses of parts of the text that you make – all of these will help you to prepare for the writing of critical essays.

At the same time, some of these ‘preliminary’ responses may be significant in themselves and quite capable of yielding evidence of achievement (or likely achievement) in other aspects of unit and course assessment.

For example, if you can make a competent analysis of parts of *Sunset Song* (a seen text), you will have shown that you possess at least some of the skills you will need to make a competent analysis of another text (an unseen text) in the external examination. Similarly, the discussions you engage in with other students of *Sunset Song* may offer ideal opportunities for the development and assessment of the skills required for the Group Discussion unit. Your study of the novel may also stimulate ideas that may prove useful when you are preparing for the Writing outcome of the Language Study unit or contemplating the possibility of undertaking study for the Individual Presentation unit.

Your teacher or lecturer will help you decide how and when your responses to *Sunset Song* may be best assessed.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

Group discussion seems the natural starting point for responding to the novel. It has several advantages: for example,

- it allows you to test your own views against the views of others
- it sharpens your thoughts and your powers of expression
- it helps to open up your understanding of the text.

However, if your skills in Group Discussion are to be developed and assessed in the context of your work on *Sunset Song*, then **extra** preparation will be required. Your teacher or lecturer will explain to you what this will involve.

The Group Discussion topics suggested below are designed primarily (but not exclusively) to make you think more deeply about aspects or parts of the novel that you have already studied. You should prepare for your participation in advance of the discussion: for example, by

- clarifying within your group the purpose of the discussion (and agreeing a format that might best serve the achievement of that purpose)
- acquiring all the information you need to support and strengthen your participation (making a few notes if necessary)
- reflecting on what makes for effective participation in group discussion, (reminding yourself of the Group Discussion Performance Criteria, if necessary)

Keep in mind that many of the questions you have previously considered in Sections 1 and 2 offer excellent opportunities for focused and detailed topics for group discussion. The topics suggested below may serve as a guide to formulating additional or alternative topics of your own.

### ***Group Discussion 1***

Read pages 63–65 [pp.66–68]:

From: “So long as that and so near as that...”

To: “...and Will reddened up and looked foolish.”

Discuss the following:

- 1 In what ways has the death of her mother affected Chris’s life?
- 2 What has been the reaction of John Guthrie to his wife’s suicide?
- 3 To what extent do you find this typical of his character?
- 4 With whom do you feel most sympathy during this extract – John, Chris, Will, or Dod and Alec? Give reasons for your answer.

The following additional topic for discussion might be considered.

Up to 1961, it was a criminal offence to commit suicide or to attempt to do so.

This was no longer the case after 1961, when the Suicide Act was passed.

However, to aid or advise someone to commit suicide today still remains a criminal offence, punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment.

Should the law be changed to allow people who wish to die to be helped, in certain circumstances, to do so?

### ***Group Discussion 2***

Read pages 85–86 [p.88]:

From: “Some folk at the tables laughed out at that...”

To: “...the poorest folk in Kinraddie!”

Discuss **one or both** of the following:

- 1 What are the various views on education expressed in this scene and to what extent do you agree with them?
- 2 How important is the theme of education in *Sunset Song*?

In responding to this question, you may wish to consider some or all of the following:

- the views expressed by various characters
- the struggle between the ‘English Chris’ and the ‘Scots Chris’
- Grassie Gibbon’s presentation of formal schooling
- differences in attitude and behaviour between ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’ characters.

The following additional topic for discussion might be considered:

What improvements would you like to see happening in your own school or college to enhance its ability to provide relevant and effective education?

Be prepared to consider all aspects of educational provision.

### ***Group Discussion 3***

Read pages 216–217 [pp.214–215]:

From: “And when he was alone with Chris that evening...”

To: “...she was welcome if she got any fun.”)

Discuss **one or both** of the following:

- 1 In paragraphs 2 and 3, Will talks of the Argentine and Chris is led to consider Scotland itself.

Discuss how the contrasting feelings of Will and Chris towards Scotland are revealed by examining such aspects as:

- sentence structure
- word choice
- narrative voice
- dialogue
- imagery

- 2 “It's dead or it's dying – and a damned good job!”

This is the view of Scotland expressed by Will.

In the light of Grassie Gibbon's portrayal of Scotland in *Sunset Song*, how far do you consider Will's view to be a fair view?

The following additional topic for discussion might be considered.

To what extent, in your opinion, could the Scotland of today be said to be “dead” or “dying”?

Be prepared to support your opinion with detailed evidence and examples.

## IMAGINATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE WRITING

Occasionally, there will be scenes or incidents or characters or issues in the novel that will so stimulate your thoughts or imagination that you may wish to use them as a starting point for a piece of writing. If the piece of writing you compose proves effective as an example of writing in a particular genre, it may well serve to meet the Writing outcome of the Language Study unit.

However, as with Group Discussion, if your skills in Writing are to be developed and assessed in the context of your work on *Sunset Song*, then **extra** preparation will be required. Your teacher or lecturer will explain to you what this will involve.

The topics for writing suggested below offer some examples of writing tasks that may arise quite naturally from the group discussions previously outlined. Others may arise from any other feature of your reading and study of the novel.

1 There are events in our lives which have a profound influence on us.

Write a reflective essay in which you consider the significance of one such event in your own life.

2 Between 1979 and 1990, suicide rates among young people went up by 30%.

Some people blame this on the increasing pressures being placed on young people.

Write an essay in which you examine the various pressures on young people and discuss what measures could be adopted to ease these pressures.

3 Write an essay reflecting upon the importance of education in your own life.

4 Education should be based on doing what you want to do, not on what you have to do.

Discuss.

5 “That’s all my life seems to be – rules, rules, rules!”

**EITHER**

Write a piece of fiction or a piece of drama in which these words are uttered by one of the characters.

**OR**

Write an essay reflecting on the part that rules play in your life.

6 “The only impressive thing about Scotland is the scenery.”

Discuss.

## INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION

Just as you may be stimulated to engage in writing by aspects of the novel, so also you may wish to consider making an individual presentation in some way related to it.

However, as with Group Discussion and Writing, if your skills in Individual Presentation are to be developed and assessed in the context of your work on *Sunset Song*, then **extra** preparation will be required. Your teacher or lecturer will explain to you what this will involve.

The topics suggested below represent only a few examples of areas you might consider suitable for oral communication.

### 1 “There’s more to Grassic Gibbon than *Sunset Song*.”

Using the above quotation as a title encapsulating the purpose of your presentation, you would require not only to have a sound grasp of Grassic Gibbon’s achievement in *Sunset Song*, but also to be familiar with a range of his other writing. The obvious texts would be *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite*, the subsequent volumes in the trilogy, *A Scots Quair*.

If you confined your research to these two additional texts, an interesting alternative title might be,

“Chris Guthrie – the full story.”

Reading a selection of Grassic Gibbon’s essays and short stories in *A Scots Hairst* would be an equally good preparation for a presentation under the original title.

### 2 “There’s no literature like Scottish literature.”

Your purpose here would be to introduce your audience to a representative range of the distinctive qualities and achievements of Scottish literature. Again, further reading and research would be required. A danger would be that you your presentation might attempt to cover too much. One possibility would be to confine yourself to Scottish literature of a particular region or genre or period.

A discussion of the distinctive qualities of the Scots language (in one of its regional varieties) might prove an interesting alternative topic.

3 “What does it mean to be ‘Scottish’?”

Defining Scottish identity can be a complex business. Your purpose could be to disentangle and clarify the various strands (for example, historical, political, cultural) that are commonly understood to underpin the Scots’ sense of who they are. You may wish to debunk popular stereotypes or attempt to define nationhood or take a more personal approach to your own experience of what it means to be Scottish. You could look back to the history of Scotland, review the current Scottish scene or suggest a way forward for Scotland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

You will probably be familiar with questions such as:

- What effect is created by the writer's use of...?
- How is this idea/image continued in...?
- To what extent do you find the tone of this...?

They are typical of questions frequently asked in the context of close reading exercises in the Language Study unit and textual analysis exercises in the Literary Study unit. The activities are similar, and they require the deployment of similar sets of analytical skill. Analysis of text, therefore, may be seen as one of the key activities of language study and literary study. However, such an activity should not be seen simply as an end in itself. It is probably better seen as a means to an end, a methodology (a tool if you like), enabling us to unlock meaning by examining the techniques by which meaning is created. It also offers us one way of understanding (and explaining) why we respond to particular texts or the effects created in particular texts in the way we do – and, to a large extent, this is what is required of us when we respond to texts through the writing of critical essays.

While, therefore, textual analysis as a separate exercise on its own is not specified as a requirement of unit assessment, developing skill in textual analysis will be crucial to your success in the writing of critical essays, both internally and in the external examination.

You should also keep in mind that the analysis of a 'seen' text (in this instance, *Sunset Song*) will help you prepare for the analysis of the 'unseen' text which you will be required to undertake in the external examination.

Skill in textual analysis is, therefore, above all else a **useful** skill: for example, in helping us:

- to penetrate various layers of meaning
- to evaluate features of literary technique
- to substantiate our critical responses
- to prepare for external assessment.

The two sets of textual analysis questions offered here are designed primarily to illustrate how the analysis of key parts of the text may throw light on aspects of characterisation, theme, structure and style that are characteristic of the whole text. They may be adapted to include other questions that seem relevant to the particular passages. They may also serve as models for the construction of sets of questions on other passages.

It should be noted that the questions carry no marks. They are designed to develop your understanding and skill, not to test it.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS A

Read Pages 120–122 [*pp.121–122*]:

From: “And again that night she hardly slept, thinking and thinking till her head ached...”

To: “...or the parks sun-heavy with clover that waited your feet at evening.”)

### QUESTIONS

- 1 By referring to the language of the first sentence, show how Chris’s emotional state is conveyed.
- 2 By referring closely to two of the following, show how the writer effectively conveys the dispute between Chris and her Aunt and Uncle:
  - word choice
  - dialogue
  - imagery
  - sentence structure.
- 3 How effective do you find the simile “like a weasel” in conveying the image of the train?
- 4 Show how the 3rd paragraph (They were past Drumlithie...) reveals an important aspect of Chris Guthrie’s character.
- 5 Look at the following short paragraph (Because it was early in the day...)  
  
By referring to sentence structure and word choice in the description of the scholars, show how Chris’s feelings are revealed.
- 6 By close reference to the final paragraph, show how the language used to compare and contrast the sea and the land is fundamental to your understanding of Chris’s attitude to the land.
- 7 How does the decision that Chris makes in this section of the novel affect her fate in the remainder of the novel?

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS B

Read pages 230–232 [pp.227–229]:

From: “So, hurt and dazed, she turned to the land, close to it and the smell of it...”

To: “...not looking at her, he added *I’m away to Aberdeen to enlist the morn.*”

### QUESTIONS

1 “So, hurt and dazed...”

By referring to the language of the first sentence, state what impression of Chris is conveyed.

2 With the arrival of Long Rob, there is a change of mood.

How this is achieved?

In answering this question, you should refer to paragraphs one and two and comment on any two of the following:

- word choice
- action
- dialogue.

3 How do Long Rob’s circumstances exemplify the changes that have taken place in Kinraddie?

4 Look carefully at the paragraph beginning

“So the two went down to the park...”.

From an examination of the language used in this paragraph, show how sympathy for Long Rob is elicited.

5 By referring to sentence structure and word choice in the paragraph beginning

“And she never knew when and how in the days that followed...”

show how Chris’s change of feelings about Long Rob is revealed.

6 How effective do you find the simile used at the end of paragraph 5

“...like listening to an echo from far in the years at the mouth of a long lost glen.”?

7 Think about Grassic Gibbon’s presentation of Long Rob throughout *Sunset Song*.

Taking into account what is revealed about him in this section, in what ways do you consider Long Rob to be an important character in the novel?

## CRITICAL ESSAYS

The writing of critical essays is the one mandatory requirement of the Literary Study unit. The Evidence Requirements of the unit make it clear that the essay you produce for summative assessment of your competence in literary study must:

- be unassisted
- be written in the presenting centre in response to an unseen question without access to the text
- meet all of the performance criteria.

The differentiating features of the performance criteria are **emboldened** for Higher and *italicised within square brackets* for Intermediate 2 in the table below.

### *Understanding*

As appropriate to task, the response demonstrates **secure understanding** [*understanding*] of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the text(s).

### *Analysis*

The response explains **accurately and in detail** [*in some detail*] ways in which aspects of structure/style/language contribute to meaning/effect/impact.

### *Evaluation*

The response reveals **clear personal engagement** [*engagement*] with the text(s) or aspects of the text(s) and stated or implied evaluation of effectiveness, substantiated with **detailed and relevant** [*some relevant*] evidence from the text(s).

### *Expression*

Structure, style and language, including **use of** [*use of some*] appropriate critical terminology are deployed to communicate meaning clearly and develop a line of thought which is **consistently** [*generally*] relevant to purpose; spelling, syntax and punctuation are sufficiently accurate.

Clearly, the production of critical essays that meet all of these requirements will demand careful preparation. As pointed out at the start of this section, writing critical essays will most likely occur at a relatively late stage, after you have made a thorough study of the text and been given plenty of time and opportunity to develop your skills in the writing of critical essays. The work you undertake in Sections 1 and 2 is designed to assist your preparation.

The topics for critical essays suggested in this section are designed principally to give you practice in responding critically to the text in ways that are appropriate for unit and course assessment.

Your teacher or lecturer will be able to provide you with other topics.

## CRITICAL ESSAY TOPICS

1 Choose **one of the minor characters** in *Sunset Song*.

Give a brief account of his or her part in the plot.

Then go on to show how the character is used by the writer to give the reader insight into **one of the main characters**.

2 Discuss the significance of the title, *Sunset Song*.

3 The sea; the farmed land; the woodlands; the hills; the community – the setting of *Sunset Song* takes on an importance far beyond that of simply providing the characters with a background against which to act out their lives.

Discuss the contribution made by **one particular aspect of the setting** in *Sunset Song* to **one of the following**:

- the portrayal of character
- the development of theme
- the creation of mood or atmosphere.

4 There are many methods by which a novelist can create a character.

For example, through a narrator, a novelist can give the reader information about:

- what the character does
- what the character says
- what the character looks like
- what others say about the character.

Choose **one character** from *Sunset Song* and show how the novelist gives the reader an insight into that character mainly through **one of the above methods**.

5 Novels often portray an area of individual experience – and yet major themes of universal significance are explored.

Show how the novel *Sunset Song*, although dealing with individual experience, also explores a theme of universal significance.

6 *Sunset Song* presents us with many interesting characters.

No character, however, is more interesting than Chris Guthrie.

Analyse Grassie Gibbon's presentation of the character of Chris in order to show which aspects of her character you personally find most interesting and why.