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The Handmaid's Tale
BY MARGARET ATWOOD



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Table of Contents

Pre-Reading	
Author.....	4
Theme.....	6
Purpose.....	10
Genre.....	12
Theme.....	14
Summarization.....	16
Theme.....	18
Section I: Night	
Setting.....	20
Imagery.....	22
Section II: Shopping	
Historical Background.....	24
Tone.....	26
Simile.....	30
Imagery.....	34
Section III: Night	
Syntax.....	40
Point of View.....	42
Section IV: Waiting Room	
Writing.....	44
Irony.....	50
Metaphor.....	52
Humor.....	56
Section V: Nap	
Relating Literature to Life.....	58
Section VI: Household	
Writing/Drawing.....	60
Comparison and Contrast.....	62
Imagery.....	66
Section VII: Night	
Poetry.....	68
Writing.....	70
Section VIII: Birth Day	
Comparison and Contrast.....	72
Figurative Language.....	74

Section IX: Night	
Juxtaposition	76
Section X: Soul Scrolls	
Flashback.....	78
Diction	82
Characterization	86
Section XI: Night	
Comparison and Contrast	88
Section XII: Jezebel's	
Writing.....	92
Point of View	94
Section XIII: Night	
Imagery	96
Section XIV: Salvaging	
Relating Literature to Life.....	98
Section XV: Night	
Inference	100
Wrap-Up	
Section Titles	102
Review Puzzle.....	104
Motif	106
Symbolism	108
Theme.....	112
Debate.....	118
Writing.....	120
Quotations	124
Concept of Style.....	126
Relating Literature to Life.....	134
"I Am" Poem.....	136
Appendix	
Terms and Definitions.....	138
Small Group Learning.....	140
Procedures for Small Group Work	142
Small Group Evaluation Sheet.....	143
Student Roles in Group Discussions	144
Newspaper	145
Style	147
Writing Poems	147
Dramatization of Scenes in the Novel	150
Directions for a Debate	151

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Author****Objective:** Research regarding the author**Activity**

Find out as much as you can about the life and times of the author, Margaret Atwood. Below is a list of themes that frequently appear in Atwood's writings. In your research, try to identify the factors that motivated her to write about those themes, and write a few paragraphs that focus on biographical events that influenced any of her writings.

- the social myths of femininity
- the social and economic exploitation of women
- women's relationships with one another and with men
- the ways that art portrays women's bodies
- environmental issues
- human rights concerns
- the dangers of biotechnology
- Canada's national identity
- Canada's relationships with the United States and Europe

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Theme

Objective: Learning about the sources of utopian and dystopian thought

Activity

The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopian novel—a story about the future, in which that future has become much more bleak than people in our own time would have imagined. Dystopian writers tend to have highly pessimistic views about the way that society, in general, treats its most vulnerable members, and about the ways in which those in power tend to treat those out of power.

One of the earliest writers along this vein of thought was Nathaniel Hawthorne. Chapter 1 of his novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, asserts that two of the first building priorities for a new community are a jail and a graveyard. In other words, Hawthorne believed that not only would every community face death, but would also have people breaking laws almost constantly.

Hawthorne's negative views about the way most people behave come, in large part, from his experiences living at the Brook Farm Commune. Communes were farming communities that were set up to give people a chance to withdraw from society and live a peaceful, pastoral lifestyle. These were popular in the early 1800's thanks to the Transcendentalist movement in America, which believed in the possibility of a utopian, or perfect, society. Thinkers like Hawthorne and Herman Melville, who wrote *Moby-Dick*, formed the beginning of the Anti-Transcendentalist movement, which held that human behavior was such that a perfect society was impossible.

Research one or more of the following people and places associated with utopian and dystopian thought. Prepare a brochure, poster, or collage to go along with your presentation.

- Henry David Thoreau
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Brook Farm
- Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Herman Melville
- George Orwell
- Aldous Huxley
- Margaret Atwood

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section I: Night

Setting

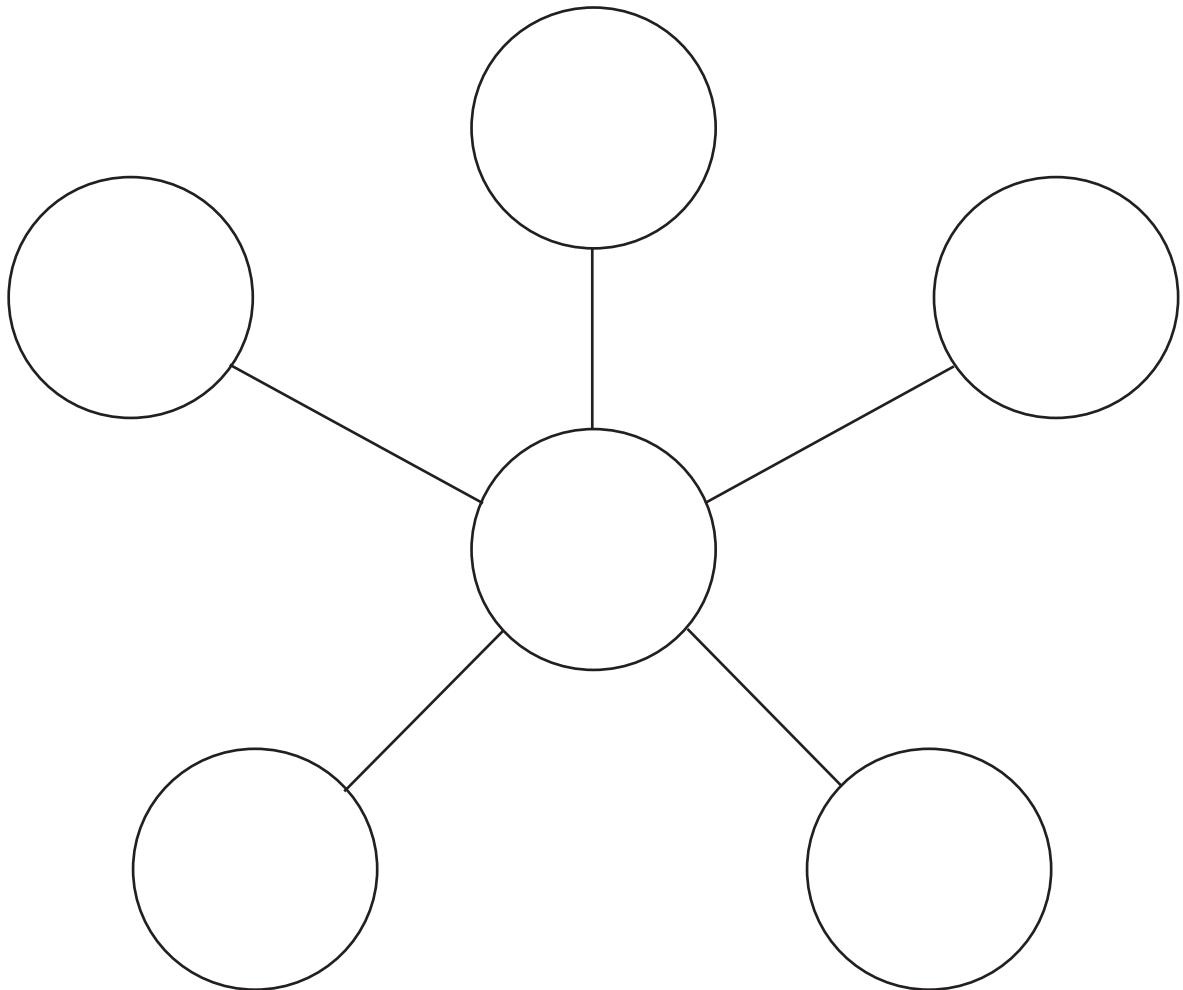
Objective: Visualizing and representing descriptive imagery

Imagery is one of the most powerful literary devices throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*. Consistently, Atwood uses imagery to reflect the themes of isolation and desperation the Handmaid feels in her new existence.

Effective description engages all five of the reader's senses. In the opening section, the narrator describes the gymnasium in which she and four other women slept while they were being "educated" by the new regime of Gilead.

Activity

In the diagram below, write in the middle circle, the mood or tone that you sense from this section. Assign each of the five circles on the outside of the diagram to one of the five senses. List at least one image for each sense that contributes to the mood.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Section II: Shopping**Imagery**

Objective: Analyzing and responding to imagery

Activity

Look at the description of the Commander's Wife's face on page 15. Notice how the details are written to make her face a clear reflection of her personality.

Starting with the oval below, draw the Commander's Wife's face. Make sure your drawing reflects her personality.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section IV: Waiting Room

Metaphor

Objective: Analyzing and interpreting the use of metaphor in literature

Activity

Metaphor can be one of the most powerful literary devices, because two dissimilar objects are placed in direct comparison, to make a point. If you walk into a very cold room, you might exclaim, "This room is a meat locker!" This does not mean that hooks are hanging from the ceiling, holding up sides of beef—just that you would like the thermostat to be turned up.

Metaphor is one of the most commonly used literary devices. In Section IV, make note of the metaphors you see, the page numbers where they appear, and the point the metaphors are making. The first one has been done for you.

METAPHOR CHART

Example	What's the Point?
"Newspapers and coffee, on Sunday mornings, before she was born. There were still newspapers..."	The newspaper is a metaphor for the freedom that the narrator and her husband felt before they were forced to flee.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section VI: Household

Comparison and Contrast

Objective: Comparing and contrasting two works of satirical literature

Activity

The following passage comes from Chapter 6 of Book 2 of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Book 2 relates Gulliver's time in Brobdingnag, a country of giants. This passage describes the role that Gulliver had in the king's household, and his overall routine. As you read, highlight passages that describe Gulliver's role in the household. (Note: Glumdalclitch is the "nurse" assigned to take care of Gulliver while he is in Brobdingnag.)

I used to attend the King's Levee once or twice a Week, and had often seen him under the Barber's Hand, which indeed was at first very terrible to behold: For the Razor was almost twice as long as an ordinary Scythe. His Majesty, according to the Custom of the Country, was only shaved twice a Week. I once prevailed on the Barber to give me some of the Suds or Lather, out of which I picked forty or fifty of the strongest Stumps of Hair. I then took a Piece of fine Wood, and cut it like the back of a Comb, making several Holes in it at equal Distance with as small a Needle as I could get from *Glumdalclitch*. I fixed in the Stumps so artificially, scraping and sloping them with my Knife toward the Points, that I made a very tolerable Comb; which was a seasonable Supply, my own being so much broken in the Teeth, that it was almost useless: Neither did I know any Artist in that Country so nice and exact, as would undertake to make me another.

And this puts me in Mind of an Amusement wherein I spent many of my leisure Hours. I desired the Queen's Woman to save for me the Combing of her Majesty's Hair, whereof in Time I got a good Quantity, and consulting with my Friend the Cabinet-Maker, who had received general Orders to do little Jobbs for me, I directed him to make two Chair-Frames, no larger than those I had in my Box, and then to bore little Holes with a fine Awl round those Parts where I designed the Backs and Seats; through these Holes I wove the strongest Hairs I could pick out, just after the manner of Cane-Chairs in *England*. When they were finished, I made a Present of them to her Majesty, who kept them in her Cabinet, and used to shew them for Curiosities, as indeed they were the Wonder of every one that beheld them. The Queen would have had me sit upon one of these Chairs, but I absolutely refused to obey her, protesting I would rather die a thousand Deaths than place a dishonourable Part of my Body on those precious Hairs that once adorned her Majesty's Head. Of these Hairs (as I had always a Mechanical Genius) I likewise made a neat little Purse about five Foot long, with her Majesty's Name decyphered in Gold Letters, which I gave to *Glumdalclitch*, by the Queen's Consent. To say the Truth, it was more for Show than Use, being not of Strength to bear the Weight of the larger Coins, and therefore she kept nothing in it but some little Toys that Girls are fond of.

The King, who delighted in Musick, had frequent Consorts at Court, to which I was sometimes carried, and set in my Box on a Table to hear them: But, the Noise was so great, that I could hardly distinguish the Tunes. I am confident that all the Drums and Trumpets of a Royal Army, beating and sounding together just at your Ears, could not equal it. My practice was to have my Box removed from the Places where the Performers sat, as far as I could, then to shut the Doors and Windows of it, and draw the Window-Curtains; after which I found their Musick not disagreeable.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section IX: Night**Juxtaposition**

Objective: Analyzing and interpreting the effects of juxtaposition in literature

Activity

Interspersed among the other dreams in this section is a memory of a video made about the Holocaust—the attempt by the Germans, during World War II, to eradicate the Jewish people from the earth.

Juxtaposition refers to the placement of words, phrases, sentences, or actions in close proximity to others in the story. The term could also refer to the author's choice of order of events or the insertion of particular details within a story.

With a partner, do some basic research about the facts surrounding the Holocaust. Make yourselves familiar with the causes, motivations, and techniques used by the Nazi regime to attempt to destroy the Jews.

In a paragraph, explain why the author chose to insert this allusion to the Holocaust into Section IX of the novel. What is the purpose of this allusion? How does it relate to the other events of the section? How does it relate to other events in the novel? Be sure to use text evidence to support your answer.