



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts 'All the Lights We Cannot See' by Anthony Doerr

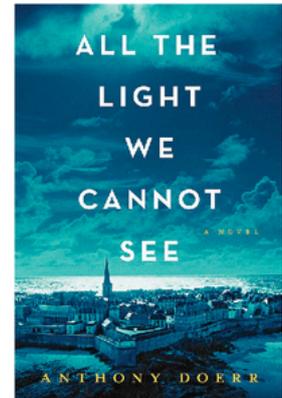


Image courtesy of Scribner

Please note: *All the Lights We Cannot See*

by Anthony Doerr is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2025 and 2026. It may be used as part of the Comparative Study at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons or as part of a unit of learning
- Students may wish to complete some tasks individually or in pairs/groups
- Tasks might be completed orally and/or in written format
- Students may also wish to engage in a think, pair, share activity for some tasks.

Making connections with the continuum of learning



Students should be able to:

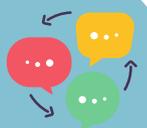
Approach narrative texts from a variety of critical viewpoints e.g. analyse and compare texts under such categories as gender, power and class and relate texts from different periods and cultures. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.12)

Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)

Evaluate and critically respond to texts, identify and analyze the form, structure and style of a text and show an understanding of how all these elements constitute its genre. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.14)

Pre-reading discussion:

"We learn many interesting lessons from Anthony Doerr's exploration of resilience and resistance in *All the Light We Cannot See*."



Discuss this statement with your classmates, considering the need for resilience in young people today growing up in a modern world.



Possible pair/group work:

Before and after reading the text, discuss the following quotes with your peers. Note whether your opinion of the characters/quotes changes having read the text in full.

"Doing nothing is as good as collaborating."
- Madame Manec

"You know the greatest lesson of history? It's that history is whatever the victors say it is."

- Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel

"Sometimes the eye of a hurricane is the safest place to be."
- Etienne LeBlanc

"Open your eyes and see what you can with them before they close forever."
- Werner Pfennig

Possible activities

Paper 1

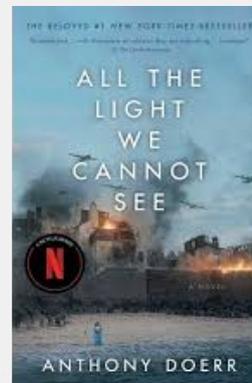
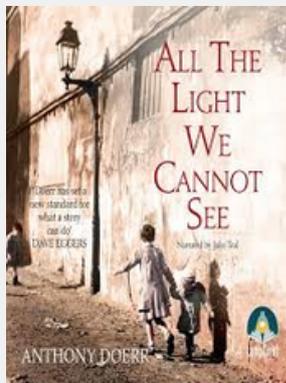
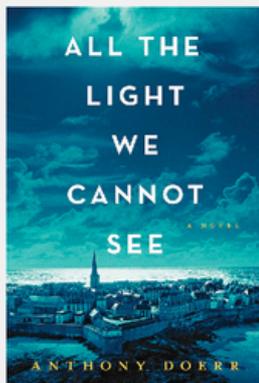
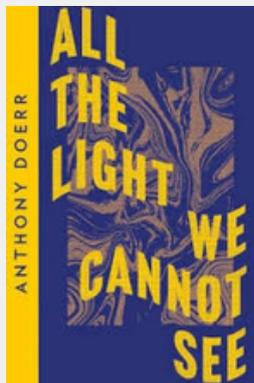
- Discuss the concept of human resilience and the impact of war on individual lives using *All the Light We Cannot See* for reference where necessary. How does the novel use its dual narratives and detailed descriptions to critique or explore the moral complexities of war and survival?

Possible questions that may support the comparative study

- Contrary to what the title might suggest, *All the Light We Cannot See* explores light more so than darkness. Is this true?
- How does Doerr's narrative structure highlight the similarities and differences between Marie Laure and Werner in *All the Light We Cannot See*?
- *All the Light We Cannot See* demonstrates that war brings out the best and worst in humanity. Discuss.
- Explore the forms of courage demonstrated in *All the Light We Cannot See*.
- Who deserves our sympathy in *All the Light We Cannot See* and why?
- "Don't you want to be alive before you die?" Explore the value and meaning of human life as evinced in *All the Light We Cannot See*.
- No character from *All the Light We Cannot See* is totally monstrous, just as no character is totally pure. Do you agree?
- *All the Light We Cannot See* posits that strength must come from within. Discuss.
- "Open your eyes and see what you can see with them before they close forever." To what extent do characters exhibit this sentiment in *All the Light We Cannot See*?



Brief visual discussion



Analyse the four examples of book covers from various editions of *All The Light We Cannot See*. Discuss your thoughts and observations in pairs or small groups.

Some prompts for discussion:

- Similarities and differences
- Use of colour
- Intended audience
- Possible predictions based on the cover

Social commentary in the novel



All the Light We Cannot See provides profound social commentary, inviting reflection on themes of war, resilience, and morality. Literature often serves as a lens to critique societal values, explore historical events, and examine the complexities of human behavior, and this novel is a compelling example.

Set during World War II, the dual narratives of Marie-Laure, a blind French girl, and Werner, a young German boy, reveal the profound human cost of conflict. The novel critiques the dehumanising effects of war and the ideologies that strip individuals of their humanity. It explores themes of indoctrination, survival, and the enduring power of small acts of kindness.

Through richly detailed prose and deeply empathetic storytelling, *All the Light We Cannot See* transcends its historical setting to offer timeless insights into morality, the human condition, and the ways individuals navigate adversity in a fractured world.