



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts *Barbie* directed by Greta Gerwig

Please note: *Barbie* directed by Greta Gerwig is a dramatic comedy film included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026 and 2027.

This extract and accompanying activities may be used to explore General Vision and Viewpoint, Literary Genre and Cultural Context at Higher Level or Social Setting, Relationships, and Hero, Heroine, Villain at Ordinary Level.



Background to the Movie:

Barbie is a toy doll that was created in 1959 by businesswoman Ruth Handler, who co-founded the toy company Mattel with her husband. The first Barbie doll debuted at the New York Toy Fair in March 1959. Handler didn't want Barbie to be portrayed only as a wife and mother, but also as a "career woman." Barbie sold 300,000 dolls in that first year and quickly became a household name and its success continued from there. Over the years, Barbie has changed and evolved. The toy company has made various attempts at diversifying the doll in terms of race, ethnicity, disability, body size, etc. to be more inclusive and more reflective of our diverse society. The topic of Barbie raises issues of identity, diversity, representation and bias and the 2023 release of the film Barbie has ignited much public conversation and social commentary on the topic.

Pre-watching Activities - Discussion Starters:

What was your favourite toy:

- when you were 3?
- when you were 5?
- when you were 7?
- when you were 9?
- when you were 11?
- now?

Why do you think children are given toys?

Are there 'good' toys and 'bad' toys? Explain your response.

Imagine you were given €50 to buy a toy for a 5 year old child. Conduct research to decide what you would buy for them and be prepared to explain your purchase.





Key Vocabulary

Match each of the following terms to its definition

#	Term	Answer	Definition
1	stereotype		An advocate of women's rights on the basis of equality of the sexes
2	misogyny		A widely-held set of fixed ideas or characteristics attributed to an individual or group – can be positive or negative
3	utopia		A system of society or government in which males hold power (over females)
4	perspective		Dislike, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women
5	heroism		Constructions made by textual choices which result in a version of reality
6	patriarchy		Point of view, attitude or way of thinking
7	representations		Use of humour, irony, exaggeration to ridicule social or human behaviours
8	feminist		Conduct which exhibits the fulfilment of a higher purpose or attainment of a noble end
9	satire		A story-telling convention eg. voyage and return
10	archetypal narrative		An imaginary community or society that possesses highly desirable or near-perfect living conditions

Questions to ask of a comparative text:

- What version of reality is represented? What is the preferred reading?
- What does this text assume about me? What response from me is sought?
- Is this like life as I know it/as I have experienced it?
- Whose perspective of the world is this? What other knowledge/perspectives exist which might not be represented?
- If this representation is not a realistic one, does it matter? How could people be affected by it – positively and negatively?
- How might viewers of this text be led to believe their life should be like this representation?
- How are members of certain groups represented?
- How does the text challenge or support society's values? (dominant or emerging values)
- What devices are employed by the text creator to construct meaning?





Viewing the opening of the film:

Complete the following as you view the film:

View the opening minutes of the film (0:00-2:45).

- What is the setting (time and place)?
- Who is speaking? What is said to set the scene for a satirical aspect to the film?
- Who are the characters and what are they doing initially?
- What causes the peaceful mood to alter?
- How do the characters react to the new arrival in their midst?
- Is this how you expected the film to begin?



Viewing a key moment: *I'm Just Ken*



[Click here to see the *I'm Just Ken* themed trailer courtesy of Warner Brothers Discovery.](#)

Activity:

Divide the class into pairs, triads or small groups.

Assign each group a different comparative mode.

Allow the students to watch, listen to or read the lyrics to 'I'm just Ken'

As they watch/listen/read, they discuss and take notes via:

- Placemat
- Cornell notes
- Dual coding
- Sketch notes or other

Each group then presents their thoughts to the class, the class listen, take notes and ask questions.





I'm Just Ken - Lyrics

Doesn't seem to matter what I do
I'm always number two
No one knows how hard I tried, oh-oh, I
I have feelings that I can't explain
Drivin' me insane
All my life, been so polite
But I'll sleep alone tonight
'Cause I'm just Ken, anywhere else I'd be a ten
Is it my destiny to live and die a life of blonde fragility?
I'm just Ken
Where I see love, she sees a friend
What will it take for her to see the man behind the tan and fight for me?
I wanna know what's like to love, to be the real thing
Is it a crime? Am I not hot when I'm in my feelings?
And is my moment finally here, or am I dreaming?
I'm no dreamer
Can you feel the Kenergy?
Feels so real, my Kenergy
Can you feel the Kenergy?
Feels so real, my Kenergy
I'm just Ken, anywhere else I'd be a ten
Is it my destiny to live and die a life of blonde fragility?
I'm just Ken
Where I see love, she sees a friend
What will it take for her to see the man behind the tan and fight for me?
I'm just Ken (and I'm enough)
And I'm great at doing stuff
So, hey, check me out, yeah, I'm just Ken
My name's Ken (and so am I)
Put that manly hand in mine
So, hey, world, check me out, yeah, I'm just Ken
Baby, I'm just Ken (nobody else, nobody else)