Oide
Tacú leis an bhFoghlaim Ghairmiúil i measc Ceannairí Scoile agus Múinteoirí
Supporting the Professional Learning of School Leaders and Teachers

Senior Cycle English

Read and Respond
Colder Than Here
by Laura Wade

Colder Than Here by Laura Wade is included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examinations in 2027 and 2028. It may be used as part of the Comparative Study at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.

Image courtesy of Bloomsbury Publishers

Please note:
The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons. You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.

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Before you read... (Teacher Guidance)

These activities support students in exploring key concepts and historical contexts relevant to Colder Than Here prior to engaging with the drama. Adapt activities as appropriate for your class context.

1. Ask students to imagine a family planning an ordinary picnic in a highly unusual place.
Students are told that a mother has brought her daughter to a cemetery for lunch. Without knowing anything else about the play, students discuss what emotions, tensions or questions this situation immediately creates and what it might reveal about the relationship between the two people involved.

2. The Difficult Conversation Challenge
Invite students to reflect on conversations people often avoid having with family members. Students may discuss why certain topics can feel uncomfortable, why people sometimes avoid difficult truths and how different personalities might respond when faced with upsetting news.

3. The Comfort Zone Continuum
Place a statement in the room:
"It is always better to face difficult truths directly."
Students position themselves along an agreement continuum and justify their responses. This activity encourages students to begin thinking about how people react differently when confronted with uncomfortable realities.

Extract from
Colder Than Here, by Laura Wade.
In this opening scene, Myra brings her daughter Jenna to a burial ground shortly after learning that she is terminally ill. While Myra approaches the situation with calm acceptance, Jenna struggles to face the difficult reality of what is happening.

A burial ground in the West Midlands. Midday. Mid-September, almost autumn but still warm enough not to wear a coat or carry an umbrella. The site is young, the trees just a few years old and still spindly. There are no headstones – graves are marked by shrubs or trees with the occasional wooden plaque.

MYRA stands looking around her. She is noticeably thin but surprisingly energetic. She is suffering from advanced secondary bone cancer, but today has little pain.
JENNA, her daughter, aged 27, stands a little way off, a large picnic basket beside her. She wears mostly black, with a long stripy scarf.
MYRA: Here.
JENNA: Here?
MYRA: Yes, I think so. Don't you think so?
JENNA: I'm not– I don't know.
MYRA: I think here is good. Flattest bit. Under a tree– I like that, nice and shady. Let's say here.
MYRA indicates an area on the ground.
JENNA: Fine.
MYRA looks at JENNA. JENNA doesn't move.
MYRA: Yes?
JENNA: Fine.
JENNA looks around.
MYRA: Bring the basket over.
JENNA: You want to eat here?
MYRA: Yes**.**
JENNA: You want to eat. Here.
MYRA: Yes, let's eat, you'll eat here lots. It's out of the sun, it's…
JENNA: It's morbid.
MYRA: It's happening, Jen, come on.
JENNA brings the picnic basket over.
MYRA opens the basket and pulls out a large blanket, which she starts to shake out. JENNA looks away.
JENNA: Did you see the. Did you see the baby?
MYRA: No.
JENNA: There's a baby. Under some holly, a holly bush.
MYRA: That's lovely. Never dies, that's lovely.

Laura Wade, *Colder Than Here,* Scene *1*

Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

The following may be completed in written or oral format, as individuals or as part of a group activity.

1.The Picnic Symbolism Task

Throughout this scene, Myra carefully prepares a picnic in a place that Jenna finds deeply unsettling. Discuss:

- Why might Laura Wade choose a picnic as part of this scene?
- What contrast exists between an ordinary family picnic and the setting of a burial ground?
- What might this reveal about Myra's attitude towards death?

2. The Character Survival Game

Put four signs around the room:

- ACCEPTANCE
- DENIAL
- ANGER
- FEAR

Ask students: Which emotional state best describes Jenna right now? Which best describes Myra? Students physically move around the room and justify their choice.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the play.

1. **Family Dynamics**

Invite students to reflect on how difficult situations can affect communication within families. You may wish to guide students in considering:

- Why do people sometimes avoid difficult conversations?
- How do family members respond differently to challenging news?
- What tensions can emerge when people cope in different ways?

2. **Soundtrack the Scene**

Invite students to select a piece of music that captures the emotional atmosphere of this scene. Students should explain how their chosen song reflects the relationship between Myra and Jenna, the tension within the extract, or the emotions that exist beneath the dialogue.

3. **Direct the Performance**

Support students in stepping into the role of director by making decisions about how this scene should be performed on stage. Students may consider character movement, tone of voice, pauses, facial expression and how tension might be communicated to an audience.

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