



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

Girl on an Altar by Marina Carr

Girl on an Altar by Marina Carr is a drama included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026, 2027 and 2028. It may be used as a single text or part of the Comparative.



Image courtesy of The Abbey Theatre

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.
- *Girl on an Altar* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



Scan the QR code or [click here to access a Getting Started with Guide for this Text](#)

Before you read (Teacher Guidance)

1. Quotation Prediction

Give students a line from the text such as *“the smell of roasting meat curling up on the wind”* or *“Music. Sound of the Sea. The sky black, studded with stars, let some fall.”* Have them discuss the atmosphere created through these lines. Direct pupils to predict how a seaside setting at night could influence character behaviour.

2. Image Inferences

Display images related to the scene to pupils. Ask them to infer what sort of play this is, what genre it might be, and what conflicts may be shown.



3. Class Discussion

In pairs, instruct pupils to discuss the statement: parents always know what is best for their children. Have them come up with three reasons why they might agree and disagree with the statement.



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. Modern Retelling

Pair pupils and have them discuss how these issues shown in the extract might be shown through a modern lens. Hear ideas from different groups. Then, have pupils re-write part of the scene while set in modern times.

2. Script Writing

In trios, have students pick a gap to expand (e.g., the moment between Agamemnon's "Let her sleep" and Clytemnestra noticing wounds). Write a 2–3 minute scene that could sit between lines, keeping character voice consistent. Then, have pupils perform a two minute extract.

3. Analytical Essay Plan

Present pupils with the question: *How does Carr present power and vulnerability in this extract?* Direct them to identify lines of the text which support their ideas. They should create a plan to answer the question which includes: a thesis statement, three paragraph topics with 2–3 points/evidence each, and a brief conclusion.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

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

1. Reflective Essay

We were told it was for the greater good...

Give pupils the prompt above and ask them to write a personal essay exploring how people justify difficult decisions. This could be in family, school, politics or society. They should consider what such moments reveal about morality and loyalty.

2. Short Story

Have pupils write a short story that begins with the line: The sea was dark that night, and everyone seemed to be keeping a secret. They should use this as a springboard for a story about trust, betrayal, or sacrifice.

3. Descriptive Essay

Ask pupils to write a descriptive essay that captures a feeling of foreboding.

4. Speech or Talk

Have pupils write the text of a persuasive speech in which you argue for greater protection of young people in society.