



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

‘Knives Out’

by Rian Johnson

Please note: *Knives Out* by Rian Johnson is a film included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026 and 2027. It may be used as part of the Comparative Study at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.



Image courtesy of Lionsgate

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)

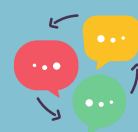
Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations. (Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)

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:

“In the world of film, we can always see a character’s resilience when faced with adversity. This will help to shape the audience experience of the film as an uplifting or disheartening one.”

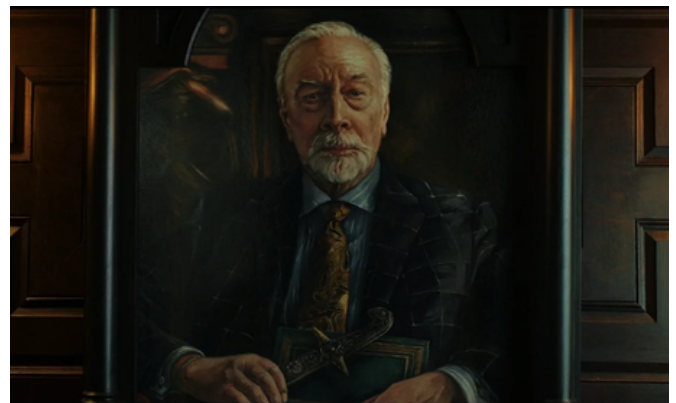
Discuss this statement considering how conflict, attitudes and perspective impact the narrative and the viewer’s experience of that film.





Possible pair/group work:

1. Examine the use of lighting and colour in the different scenes below. How does the visual style contribute to the mood and tone in the following scenes throughout the film?
2. Analyse the use of cinematography and mise-en-scène in these stills. Decide if they are successful in conveying the sense of privilege or isolation throughout the film. Consider character, facial expression, positioning, costume, and props used.

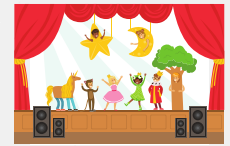




Some aspects of film include...

Mise-en-scène in film

Mise-en-scène, literally translates to “placing on stage” or “what is put into the scene.” In the context of film, mise-en-scène refers to everything visible on screen, including setting, stage design, and the arrangement of actors within scenes.



Set design: The physical environment, props, and objects visible in a scene.

Lighting: How light is used to create mood and draw the viewer to certain elements.

Costumes and make up: The items of clothing worn by actors.

Actors' positioning, gesticulation and movement: Directed and choreographed within the scene.

Composition: The arrangement of actors, props, and movement of the shot.

Social commentary in film

This film offers a lot of scope for social commentary in cinema. It encourages discussions around the film's themes and issues, its social and cultural context, general vision and viewpoint, relationships, and literary genre.



Social commentary is a powerful tool for filmmakers and writers, allowing them to engage audiences in meaningful discussions about the world around them. Through storytelling, they can highlight issues of class, privilege, and morality, inspiring reflection and encouraging audiences to question societal norms and values. Film provides a platform to critique power structures, challenge stereotypes, and explore the complexities of human nature.

Knives Out presents a sharp critique of wealth, entitlement, and the illusion of meritocracy. It contrasts the self-serving, morally ambiguous Thrombey family with Marta, a kind and hardworking immigrant nurse, using humor and mystery to expose deep-rooted class tensions. The film cleverly plays with the classic whodunit genre while weaving in modern social issues, forcing audiences to reconsider ideas of justice, fairness, and who truly deserves power and success.



Possible activities

Paper 1

- Discuss the themes of privilege, morality, and justice as presented in Knives Out. How does the film critique social class dynamics and the idea of fairness in the pursuit of truth?"

Possible questions that support the comparative study

- Identify one genuine and one manipulative relationship in the film. Are there key moments that highlight the true nature of these relationships? How do these dynamics affect the outcome of the mystery?
- As we follow the story of Marta, how is she in conflict with the world around her throughout the film? Does this change as the story progresses? How does her character challenge or reinforce traditional ideas of justice?
- Explore the theme of truth and deception in the film. How do different characters use lies or honesty to achieve their goals? How does the film comment on the power of integrity in a corrupt world?
- Discuss the theme of privilege in Knives Out. How do the Thrombey family members view their own success, and how does Marta's presence challenge their perceptions of entitlement and fairness?
- How does the film use flashback and perspective shifts to enhance the audience's understanding of the mystery and the motivations of its characters? What effect does this have on how we perceive the truth?
- This film highlights issues related to class, immigration, and family legacy. Discuss where these themes are emphasised in key scenes and how they shape the film's central conflict.

