



## Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

### *Once Before I Go* by Philip McMahon

*Once Before I Go* by Philip McMahon is a drama included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026, 2027 & 2028. It may be used as part of the Comparative at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.

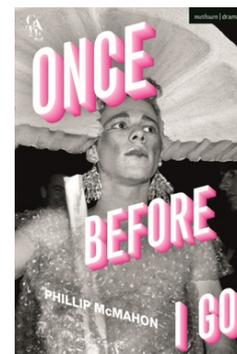


Image courtesy of  
The Gate Theatre

#### 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.
- *Once Before I Go* 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. Exploring the Context

Show pupils images of Dublin in the 1980s. Ask them to imagine what society might have been like just based on the pictures. Then, in small groups, have pupils research under the following headings: gender, sexuality, nightlife, culture. They should make notes and share facts with another group.



Images courtesy of DublinLive.ie

#### 2. Title Exploration

Write the title *Once Before I Go* on the board. Ask:

What does the title suggest to you? Who might be speaking? What might they be leaving behind? Does it sound hopeful, regretful, defiant?

Have students create a one-sentence hypothesis about what the extract might involve



## 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. Warm-up Discussion

In small groups, ask students to discuss:

- What are their first impressions of the characters?
- What themes or issues do they notice emerging?
- What dynamics exist between the characters?
- How does humour work here – what does it reveal or conceal?
- What kind of past might Lynn and Daithí share?

### 2. Creative Monologues

Have pupils write a monologue from the perspective of one of the characters (Jase, Lynn, or Daithí), set either just before this scene starts, or just after it ends.

Encourage students to include inner thoughts and motivations, hints about their backstory and emotional states they're hiding from others.

### 3. Text Analysis

Direct pupils to annotate the extract with a focus on: Language that implies emotion vs. language that masks it, power dynamics in the dialogue, how humour and sarcasm are used and shifts in tone.

## Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

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

### 1. Personal Essay

Have students write a personal essay on the theme: *There are people we never stop being connected to, even when years pass in silence.* Encourage them to reflect on a relationship in their life that continues to impact them, even if it's no longer active.

### 2. Short Story

Ask students to write a short story in which an unexpected visit from someone in the past reveals a long-buried truth. Instruct them to use dialogue, characterisation, and setting to create emotional depth and tension.

### 3. Discursive Essay

Ask students to write a discursive essay responding to the statement:

*We don't stop needing love, connection, or understanding – no matter our age.*

They should explore society's assumptions about age and relationships, using examples from real life, literature, or media.