



## Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

### *The Elephant Man*, directed by David Lynch

*The Elephant Man*, directed by David Lynch, is a film included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2025, 2026, and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2028, 2029, and 2030).



Image courtesy of  
IMDB

#### 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.
- *The Elephant Man* 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 Watch... (Teacher Guidance)

#### 1. Mind map: What Makes Us Human?

In small groups, ask pupils to list qualities they associate with being human (kindness, intelligence, emotions, dignity etc). Once finished, lead a class discussion about their ideas and about whether someone's outward appearance hide their true personality.

#### 2. Title Prediction

Provide students with the film's title and have them think-pair-share ideas about what the film might be about based on the title alone.

#### 3. Visual Warm Up

Provide sample images of Victorian England your class. Ask pupils what these images might suggest about life in the 19th century and what might be difficult about living in that time.





## Extract

Below are stills from the film *The Elephant Man*.

A



B



C



D



Images courtesy of Studio Canal

Click [here](#) to watch a clip from the film. In this clip, we see John Merrick, a man called 'The Elephant Man' because of his physical deformities.

## Activities Based on Clip

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

### 1. Film Techniques

Direct students to identify the type of shot used in each still (close-up, mid-shot, long shot etc.) and guide them to explain how this shot choice highlights a particular person, detail, or moment.

### 2. Character Focus

Ask students to examine what is in the frame in still B and C. Have them discuss with a partner what they think is happening to the character.

### 3. Oral Debrief

After watching the clip, ask students to say (or jot down) a short phrase or word describing how they felt. In small groups or a class circle have pupils share these and discuss.

## Read and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the text. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

### 1. Historical Context

Have pupils research the historical context of the film: 19th-century London, “freak shows”, social attitudes to disability and difference at the time. In pairs or small groups, have pupils research and prepare a short presentation on what life might have been like for someone like Merrick during that period.

### 2. Newspaper Article

Ask pupils to imagine they are a journalist in Victorian London who witnessed the incident with John Merrick at the train station. Have them write a newspaper article describing the events, including:

- a headline and subheading
- description of the crowd’s behaviour
- quotes (invented) from witnesses
- their own subtle commentary on fairness, prejudice, or public empathy

### 3. Ethical Debate

Provide pupils with the following prompt and lead them in a class debate:

*Society has a responsibility to protect people who are different, even if the difference causes discomfort in others.*

### 4. Analysing Film Techniques

Have pupils identify one camera angle or shot that stood out to them. Ask them to explain how this shot helps create tension or sympathy for Merrick. Scaffolding could be provided through the following questions:

- How does sound (shouting, footsteps, crowd noise, music) influence the mood of the scene?
- What message do you think the director wants the audience to understand from this moment?

### 5. Personal Response

In this scene, we see John Merrick being taunted, surrounded, and chased. Have pupils write an extended personal response of at least one page in which they describe:

- What moment in the scene affected them the most,
- How the director uses sound, crowd behaviour, or camera angles to create tension.
- What this scene made them think or feel about the way society treats people who are “different”.