



Image courtesy of
Methuen



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

Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

The Great Wave by Francis Turnly

The Great Wave by Francis Turnly is a play included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2025, 2026, and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2028, 2029, and 2030).

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 Great Wave* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.

Before You Read (Teacher Guidance)

Pre-reading Activities - Discussion Starters:

1. Viewpoints

Give students quiet thinking time to consider the random statement “*A nation sometimes must sacrifice individual rights for national security.*” Use supports such as a feelings scale, mind map or quick voice notes.

2. Prediction/ Visual stimulus

Invite students to study the front page of the novel. What kind of world or atmosphere does this cover suggest? Options could include, free writing, group discussion or drawing an imagined scene.

3. Reflecting on Values

Ask students to consider the following values:

“justice”, “family loyalty”, “national identity”

Rank: Students rank these three values from most to least important using:

- A physical continuum line in the classroom
- A digital drag-and-drop organiser
- A written or spoken explanation



Extract

Background: The Great Wave is a play by Francis Turnly, first staged in 2018 at the National Theatre in London.

The play is inspired by real historical events: the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea during the late 1970s and 1980s. In particular, there were cases where young Japanese people were taken to North Korea to teach the Japanese language and culture to North Korean agents.

According to North Korea's own (later) admission, part of the reason for these kidnappings was to train their agents in Japanese manners, language, and behaviour, essentially using the abductees to help spy-construction and infiltration.

Part One

Lights rise on the Sea of Japan which is a constant presence throughout the course of the play.

The sea is dark, waves gradually becoming bigger, more turbulent, encroaching on the shore. It is November 1979. Gradually we perceive the sound of heavy rain, a blowing wind. The distant rumble of thunder augurs an approaching storm. Lights up on the Tanaka household. It is traditional-looking with a lived-in quality.

*Sound of the front door sliding open. The wind blows into the house followed by **Reiko**, eighteen, wearing a school uniform and a heavy coat. She takes off her coat and hangs it up. Sound of the sliding door closing.*

A moment.

Etsuko, thirty-seven, enters. She is wearing a waitress uniform and carrying a handbag. She is holding her coat over herself and **Hanako**, seventeen, who is wearing a school uniform. **Hanako**'s skirt is noticeably shorter than **Reiko**'s.

*Everyone is a little drenched from the rain. **Etsuko** removes her coat and hangs it up. She places her handbag down on the kitchen table.*

Etsuko This is the last time.

Etsuko finds some clean towels and hands them to her daughters. They dry their hair. **Etsuko** glares at **Hanako**.

Hanako I said I was sorry.

Etsuko You just can't help yourself, can you?

Hanako I don't see what the big deal is. It's not like I was going to pass or anything.

Etsuko walks over to **Hanako**: 'What did you say?'

Hanako What? I wasn't. I'm no good with languages. Everything gets all mixed up.

Etsuko You could have tried.

Hanako I did. Mrs Ishihara's got it in for me, that's all.

Reiko laughs.

Hanako Not like her 'favourite' here.

Reiko It's not my fault you're dumb.

Hanako is incensed. She strides over to **Reiko**. **Etsuko** goes and stands between them, separating them.

Etsuko Hey. That's enough.

Hanako (to **Reiko**) Say something else.

Etsuko (to **Reiko**) You don't talk to your sister like that. **Reiko** I'm not the one who got thrown out of her exam. **Etsuko** I'd be disappointed if you did.

Reiko shakes her head: 'It's not fair.'

Etsuko (to **Hanako**) And you. How many times do I have to be called in? Make excuses for you? You just have to keep pushing it, don't you?

Hanako The room was too stuffy. I couldn't think to write.

Etsuko Using your exam papers to make origami. Mrs Ishihara said it was a first.

Hanako I wasn't. She's always trying to (make me look bad).

Etsuko She showed me what you did.

*She goes over to the table, opens her handbag and carefully removes an origami rabbit with distinctively large ears. She takes the rabbit over to **Hanako**.*

Etsuko Well?

Hanako shrugs her shoulders: 'So what if I did make it?'

Etsuko You got it just right. Every fold. Rabbits are notoriously difficult.



Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

These prompts are designed to support close reading and personal response. They may be used orally or in writing, individually or in groups.

Mood Soundtrack (Pair work)

Invite students to choose a song or piece of music that matches:

- A. The mood of the extract
- B. A character's emotional state
- C. The narrative tension.

Students must then justify/ explain their choices.

Extension (Individual)

Ask students to write the next scene or create an alternative ending to this extract

Freeze-Frame Moments (Groups)

Groups create a series of 'frozen images' representing the key points in the extract.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

These activities extend engagement with the extract and invite creative and personal responses. Use individually, in pairs, or in groups.

1. Atmosphere & Mood Exploration (Individual or pairs)

Ask students to re-read the opening stage directions ("Lights rise on the Sea of Japan... waves gradually becoming bigger... heavy rain... wind..."). Prepare them to write a brief paragraph or record a short audio reflection on:

- What emotions or ideas this stormy atmosphere evokes.
- How the weather might mirror the characters' emotional states.
- Whether they feel tension, sympathy, or curiosity as the scene begins.

2. Hot-Seating: Understanding Character Tension (Pairs or groups of three)

Invite students to choose either Etsuko, Reiko, or Hanako to embody and sit in the "hot seat."

Partners ask them questions such as:

- Why are you upset?
- What happened before you walked through the door?
- What do you want from the other characters right now?

The student in the hot seat must answer in character, drawing only on clues from the extract and their own interpretation.

3. Point of View (Individual or pairs)

Ask students to choose one character and rewrite the moment of arriving home from their perspective, either as a diary entry, text message thread, or short prose passage.

Possible prompts:

- Hanako writing a defensive text to a friend
- Reiko privately worrying about the tension
- Etsuko composing a diary entry about her fears and responsibilities