



## Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

### *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler

Please note: *The Big Sleep* written by Raymond Chandler is a gritty detective novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026.

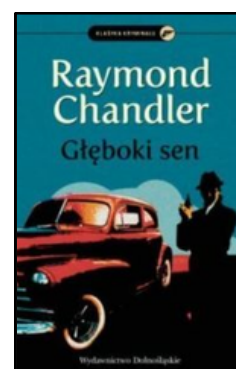
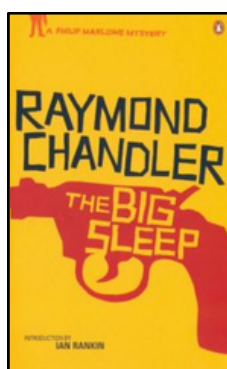
This extract and accompanying activities may be used to explore General Vision and Viewpoint, Literary Genre and Cultural Context at Higher Level or Social Setting, Relationships, and Hero, Heroine, Villain at Ordinary Level.



#### Background to the author and novel

Raymond Chandler produced his first novel, *The Big Sleep* in 1939. It introduced the now well-known character of Philip Marlowe, a tough but honest private detective. The story introduces General Sternwood, a man with four million dollars, and two young daughters, both pretty and both wild. He's an old, sick man, close to death, but he doesn't like being taken advantage of. So he asks private detective Philip Marlowe to get a blackmailer off his back. Marlowe knows the dark side of life in Los Angeles well, and nothing much surprises him. But the Sternwood girls are a lot wilder than their old father realises. They like men, drink, drugs - and he soon realises it's no longer just a question of blackmail...

#### Judging a book by its cover



Analyse the five examples of book covers from various editions of *The Big Sleep*. Discuss your thoughts and observations in pairs or small groups, then complete the following table:



Describe what you can see on each cover, noting differences and similarities	
What do the colors on the cover make you think of? What emotions do they conjure?  What is the mood or tone of the cover art?  What is unique about the cover art?	
Who do you think the book's intended audience is? Ex. Gender, age range, etc.	
What predictions can you make about the novel based on this particular cover?	
Overall, what does the cover tell you about the novel?	

**Read this short extract from chapter 1 and answer the questions which follow:**

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.

The main hallway of the Sternwood place was two stories high. Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair.



The knight had pushed the visor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying.

1. Why do you think the protagonist emphasises that he is "neat, clean, shaved, and sober"?
2. What might this reveal about his character or the expectations of his profession?
3. What do you think the protagonist means when he says he was "calling on four million dollars"?
4. What does this suggest about the purpose of his visit?
5. In what ways does the protagonist's observation about the knight and the lady tied to the tree reflect his personality or perspective?
6. What deeper meanings might be implied by this observation?

### Imitation as Inspiration:

**The opening chapter of *The Big Sleep* is widely regarded as a great example of how an author can quickly introduce character, setting, plot and tone.**

- **Reread** the above extract again, several times, noting how much we can tell about character, setting, plot and tone.
- Write down the **stylistic features** that you notice. This could be things like the choice of words, the rhythm of the sentence, or how descriptive it is.
- **Create a Blank Template:** Take out unnecessary words like "the", "and", "but", etc., from the sentence or paragraph. Keep the important words that give the sentence its meaning. This leaves you with a template that you can fill in later.
- **Put Away the Original:** Keep the original text aside. We want your own creativity to shine without being influenced by the original author.
- **Choose a Topic:** Think of a topic that matches the style of the extract. If it's descriptive, maybe write about a place or a person. If it's emotional, maybe write about a personal experience.
- **Free write:** Write down as many details as you can about your chosen topic. Don't worry about making it perfect, just get your ideas down on paper.
- **Use the Blank Template:** Take the blank template you created earlier and use it as a starting point for your own writing. Fill in the blanks with your own words and ideas. If you find the template too restrictive, that's okay! Use the stylistic features you identified earlier to guide your writing instead.