



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

Winter's Bone

Directed by Debra Granik

Winter's Bone, directed by Debra Granik, is a film included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2028. It may be used as part of the Comparative Study at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.



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.
- Please note that *Winter's Bone* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



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access a Getting Started with Guide
for this Text

Before You Watch... (Teacher Guidance)

These activities support students in activating prior knowledge, exploring cultural context, and making predictions prior to viewing *Winter's Bone*.

Adapt as appropriate for your class context.

1. Exploring Context and Expectations

You may wish to use a Think–Pair–Share structure to prompt discussion on students' existing knowledge of rural communities, poverty, or isolated ways of life.

Encourage students to consider what challenges young people might face when growing up in areas with limited opportunities or strong family and community expectations.

Discussion may also explore:

- how economic hardship can affect education, family roles, and daily life
- the ways tight-knit communities can offer both support and pressure
- the importance of responsibility, resilience, and moral choices in difficult circumstances

You might invite students to reflect on real-world issues such as inequality, social exclusion, or the impact of environment on life chances, while emphasising sensitivity and respect in discussion.

2. Making Predictions

Invite students to predict the type of story suggested by the film's title and rural setting.

Students may compose a short paragraph outlining their expectations in relation to tone, themes, character journeys, or possible conflicts before viewing.

They could be prompted to consider questions such as:

- Will the setting create a sense of safety or danger for the characters?
- What kinds of responsibilities might a young protagonist have to face?
- How might ideas of family loyalty or survival shape the narrative?



Activities Based on Film Still and Trailer (Teacher Guidance)

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

1. Lighting, Colour and Atmosphere

Have students examine the use of natural lighting and muted colour tones in the provided stills. Ask them to discuss with a partner how the earthy colours, winter landscapes, and simple interiors contribute to the mood of the film. Encourage consideration of how visual details such as darkness, cold settings, or worn surroundings may suggest hardship, isolation, or resilience. Students should make brief notes on their observations.

2. Cinematography and Mise-en-scène

Guide students in analysing each still by focusing on cinematography (camera angle, framing, lighting) and mise-en-scène (characters, expressions, costumes, props, setting). Ask them to consider how these elements communicate ideas about family responsibility, survival, or community life. Students should identify the image they believe conveys these themes most effectively and justify their choice with reference to visual evidence.

3. Trailer Study

Direct students to watch the [official film trailer here](#). Ask them to examine how the filmmaker uses editing, music, dialogue, character images, and setting to introduce the story and create interest for the audience. Encourage students to consider how tension, mood, or themes are suggested within a short space of time.

Instruct students to select one or two specific moments from the trailer and explain why these moments are particularly effective in shaping expectations about the film.



Images courtesy of IMDB



Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following activities may form part of your extended study of the film. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Personal Essay

Instruct students to write a personal response to *Winter's Bone*. Ask them to describe their thoughts and feelings about the setting, the challenges faced by the characters, and the film's portrayal of family responsibility and survival. Students should explain how the story prompted them to reflect on issues such as resilience, moral courage, or the impact of poverty. Direct them to support their ideas with specific examples from the film.

2. Speech

Guide students to write a speech for their classmates on the topic:

"Young people can show great strength when faced with difficult circumstances."

Students should craft a clear and engaging speech exploring this idea, drawing on moments, characters, or themes from the film where appropriate.

3. Creative Writing – Monologue

Ask students to imagine they are Ree, Teardrop, or another character in the film. Instruct them to write a monologue (a speech delivered by a character in the film) describing a moment of fear, determination, or discovery, focusing on the character's inner thoughts and emotional responses. Encourage students to adopt a voice and tone that realistically reflects their chosen character.

4. Perspective Shift

Organise students into groups and direct them to rewrite a key scene from the point of view of a minor character, such as a neighbour, a younger sibling, or a member of the local community. Ask them to explore what this character might notice or feel that the main characters do not. Students may storyboard their ideas or write a short script and perform their reimagined version.

5. Local Newspaper Project – Reporting from the Ozarks

Instruct students to imagine they are journalists reporting on a significant local event, such as the search for a missing man or tensions within the community. Have them create a front-page article that includes:

- a compelling headline
- a lead paragraph summarising the event
- a detailed body text explaining the situation
- quotes or imagined interviews
- clear background context for readers
- formal yet engaging newspaper-style language

Ask students to present their front page to the class and explain the editorial choices they made.