Lesson Plan: The Vincy Breakfast Scene

Objectives

Skills: core comprehension – information retrieval/gathering, inference and implication (Lang: AO1 & AO2); close reading: analysis of language used; generic skills: character and theme in novel; playscript structure (Lit: AO2); compare forms and contexts of production (Lit: AO3) write in a particular form (Lang: AO5)

Scene setting

Where we are in the novel and television adaptation script: Chapter 11 and Scene 1/21.
This is the reader's/viewer's introduction to the Vincy family at home. Vincy is the town mayor and ribbon manufacturer (new money but living beyond means). Mrs Vincy's father had been an inn-keeper. Fred has dropped out of university and is lacking in direction. Rosamond has put through a second-rate finishing school and has aspirations to marry well (i.e. beyond Middlemarch). Uncle Featherstone is a wealthy relative of Mrs Vincy upon whom financial expectation rests. Fred's childhood sweetheart, Mary Garth, has accepted a position as old Featherstone's carer – an invitation Rosamond has declined as being beneath her.

Starting points

***Pre-reading (watching scene 1/21 only)*:** The session might begin by sharing the topics that families might argue or bicker about over breakfast. Are there arguments between brothers and sisters? Do they argue about what to eat for breakfast? How do parents/carers get involved? Note down ideas and then watch this scene as screened in the adaptation.

Post-first reading (of the novel), watch Scene 1/21: Alternatively, begin the session with a focus on character as presented in Scene 1/21. Ask students to write down 3 character points for Rosamond, Fred and Mrs Vincy from their reading of Chapter 11. Then watch to the scene ask: What do we learn about the different characters of Fred and Rosie? What kind of a mum is Mrs Vincy? Do different/additional points emerge from student's first impressions of the novel?

Revision (themes) watch Scene 1/21: If revisiting Chapter 11, use a viewing of Scene 1/21 to revise key themes in Eliot's novel such as: the significance of social class (rank), the constraints of provincial society, youthful aspirations for self-improvement.

Main activities

Novel to script: Now re-read this episode in Chapter 11 and then read this scene (1.21) in Andrew Davies' Shooting Script. In groups of 3 or 4, ask students to think about one of these points:

- What does Davies include verbatim (from the novel)? [dialogue]
- What extra features does he need to include (not in the novel)? [stage directions and commentary]
- What does Davies leave out (from the novel)? [simplifications: such as reducing minor characters; plot points; word-play]

Gather feedback from the groups on each point and summarise.

Character and performance:

- What advice does Andrew Davies' script give to the actors in the stage directions?
- How do the actors respond to this guidance in their performances?

Hot-seating Fred and Rosamond: Ideas for questions: What three words would you choose to describe yourself? What do you think about your brother/sister? What do you think of your mother? What do you wish for most?

Collate a list of the answers on the board and end by asking class members which character they would most like to play.

Writing
Invite students to write a diary entry for this day from either Fred or Rosie's perspective, using some of the ideas from the hot-seating.

Extensions

Language task 1: Pick out a key word or short phrase from Chapter 11 which describes each character in this episode.

Language task 2: What different names (forms of address) do the characters call each other? What do we infer about their relationships and social pretensions? For example, Rosie/Rosamond and Mama/Mother.

Genre: The director of the *Middlemarch* adaptation, Anthony Page, suggested this scene was like one from a soap opera. Ask students: What do you think he meant by this? Think about the situation, the characters and their attitudes. Responses might include: the scene's domestic setting based around a mealtime; family arguments; shows of affection; brevity of dialogue.

Intertextuality: If time allows: Watch this extract featuring another family breakfast scene from a film by Horace Ové called *Pressure* (1976) (NB the first British film to be directed by a black film-maker). Abridged version at very start of this new trailer:
https://youtu.be/Y6n8055O878?si=k99DwpBUuB2iIEBf
What similarities do students see between the two scenes? What different themes emerge?

Glossary:

Novel

placidity – being calm and peaceful

decry – criticise publicly

forbearance – patience/restraint

remnants – the rest of something/leftovers

composure – having calm self-control

cordiality – being friendly and polite

capricious – prone to sudden actions or mood changes

innuendo – a suggestive remark

eclipse – to hide or blot out

governess – a woman employed to teach children in their home

chestnut – a reddish brown horse

irrepressible – unable to be controlled; unstoppable

Novel and TV Adaptation

finicking – fussy about things

laggard – someone who dawdles/is slow to do things

prig – someone who thinks they are better than others

feckless – lacking strength of character; aimless

parlour – a 'best' sitting room

finishing school – private school teaching social manners