

Task for *Heat and Light*

Language and style discussion guide

Heat

'star-posed...seemed to fight with the wind...torso wrenched back' (p. 3)

'her skin was burnt butter' (p. 4)

'the men followed the dance of her hair from back to mouth' (p. 4)

'I tug at the traffic' (p. 5)

'I find my father...who denies everything the old lady has told me. He spills paint three times on his boot, so I know I have to go back.' (p. 5)

'I am Amy Kresinger, twenty-six and already war-weary with life, already feeling pushed into the ground like some sedated potplant.' (p. 6)

'Marie and Pearl were the closest in age, and were like salt and pepper shakers, opposites, but always together.' (p. 13)

'The heat from the day had carved a dull headache in my mind.' (p. 17)

'She says she will take me to see the farm where she lives and show me her orange trees. They are the biggest oranges, the size of basketballs and they taste like love.' (p. 18)

'I feel the old woman's fury ripple through me. And then I look at the wooden call in my palm. There's a tiny grey spore sticking to my finger. The old woman had done it. She had cursed me back.' (p. 20)

'He had skin like pencil, thick eyebrows, and was large handed and awkwardly handsome at seventeen.' (p. 41)

'The girl was like her; the toxins in the house weren't doing her good. She hinged on emotion.' (p. 45)

'She sat Irma on her lap, pressed the warm back of her head against her breast...She spoke low, the words that she knew rumbling through, the wind making a part. Irma was serious in concentration with her, in connection.' (p. 46)

'Pearl, her only whole-blood sibling, didn't look like her; she was darker, stronger-looking. They didn't look alike even as children. Pearl had eyes that had been watching for a lot longer than when she was born.' (p. 47)

Pearl's connection to nature

Part of Pearl's mystique and sensuality is in her affinity with the natural world. She almost *is* the wind; she draws energy from it and it represents her in the minds of those who know her. There are also multiple references to water and drowning connected with Pearl's sensual and dangerous personality.

'I am like my grandmother Pearl. I am a strong black woman, and love comes too easy for me. There is always someone to drown.' (p. 8)

'The lake was a dark place in town folklore, a sinkhole for small children and women.' (p. 13)

'Evidently an afternoon often changed quickly in the valley. The air wolfish, the sky pale lilac, growing dark too soon. Irma lifted her head when her father spread out of the screen door and told her to come inside...When the weather turned this way they were reminded of the thin structure they lived in...Griffin moved quickly to shut every window in the house, so what resulted was a closed feeling, a whirling sound that haunted a part in Marie's consciousness, an old anxiety, not forgotten...When her sister Pearl came wading through the long grass, her hands on the hips of the ironbarks, part of Marie was unsurprised to even call out, "I knew the wind would bring you."' (pp. 37–38)

'Naked, Pearl was excess skin. After the initial surprise of her size, she was beautiful as she always was, a different beauty now. She was full with a fluid whistling under her skin.' (p. 39)

'The first thing she saw was Pearl's stomach, floating above the water's surface. Pearl's eyes were shut. There was an arm of different skin tone around her chest, below her large, floating breasts. Two people were in the bathtub. The two people, her sister and her husband, were in a terrible tangle or a struggle of some kind...He was moving, and the colourless water was running around them as if it couldn't keep up.' (p. 48)

'On stormy nights they both dreamt intensely, violently – they often drowned.' (p. 64)

Water

'I look over the edge, though the little bit of paper has already been swallowed up by the whitewater surge of the boat, and I feel a misplaced sense of grief.' (p. 69)

'There is a lot of greenery, and a thin edge of sand, like icing on a cake.' (p. 70)

'They are a community with no hierarchy of age or gender. They stand in a row, long and thin figures. They make the sky seem pale and the individual seem insignificant.' (p. 88)

'You should see the way they walk through water. Their heads like a tangling piece of reed. And you'll look closer and see their shoulders swing back and forth like some smooth stroke and it's frightening.' (p. 89)

'But when I was little, Dad and I lived off the sun. We spent the whole day in the fields. Never in the shade.' (p. 91)

'It's about time I go see my mother, eat cold macaroni in the kitchen I grew up in.' (p. 98)

'It's a dying place, more or less. The beauty is dying – all around – the industry is strangling it. The wires they are putting under the sea and the water they will pump away will destroy all of this. There is a groping sense of relief that I feel something: for this place, in this place. My country. My dad's country.' (p. 107)

'Milligan has made me a coffee. Normally it would look like a nice gesture, but Milligan's sadistic...As I predicted, it wasn't an onya meeting. He started off with saying he didn't see any progress with me...The coffee was weak, it tasted like soap suds. I let the meeting draw to a natural close, let Milligan know he had made his message clear, and then I left for the day.' (p. 108–09)

'My dad gave me a language name. Kaden means orchid...Why did Dad have to name me in a language I don't know? It was insult to injury.' (p. 109)

'The children of this generation of artists were worth a lot, like the offspring of a racehorse.' (p. 110)

'[he] went from one side of the country to the next talking about art he had no passion for, art that was supposedly his cultural expression but had become something that ate at him. That was the summer we lost him. A few days after he came home, Mum found him in the bath, fully dressed. An overdose, the doctors said.' (p. 110–11)

Light

'High school was counter-intuitive to me. All I wanted was to fish and swim on my grandmother's country in the best hours of the day. But I had to go to classes and mix with white kids, and think about "what I wanted to do".' (p. 129)

'Kela tried to talk to his mother. He watched her grip on the steering wheel. "We're going to your aunt's," his mother said. Kela's body clenched the souther they got.' (p. 152–53)

'My mother shook her head. I realised she never really let anyone in, not enough.' (p. 175)

'The supermarket shelves shine like bone...Every few minutes I feign interest in the chicken drumsticks or the two-dollar unlabelled mince, but the truth is, I'm vegetarian.' (p. 199)

'What will he do? Will he ignore me like last time, walking faster with his long legs, a stride no-one can match, going down the aisles dispelling bottles of milk into the fridge and then to the next checkpoint, shrugging off my questions until I feel stupid and fall back into a sense of intrusion?' (p. 200)

'He kicked me again, and I had seen it before, but now, with the glass door in front of me, I was seeing it done to myself. At the third impact my bladder broke, hot spills of liquid down my thighs. I lay there, on my side, gasping but mute. I told him the next time, "You got to stop. I'm your sister."' (p. 201)

'My heart is a black cat under a car.' (p. 216)

'Let me not forget that our mother used to hit us, too. That my little brother would cry at the first violation of child's flesh, a mother's touch turned untoward. These tears would suspend from his puffed round eyes and go nowhere. His body was so close to mine as we took shelter in the bathroom...Together, refugees, but we were not one...The saltiness of her wild, primal screams still on our mouths.' (p. 223)