



Course: English

Scottish Texts: *Sunset Song* by
Lewis Grassie Gibbon

Level: Higher

March 2014



This advice and guidance has been produced for teachers and other staff who provide learning, teaching and support as learners work towards qualifications. These materials have been designed to assist teachers and others with the delivery of programmes of learning within the new qualifications framework. These support materials, which are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, provide suggestions on approaches to teaching and learning which will promote development of the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills. Staff are encouraged to draw on these materials, and existing materials, to develop their own programmes of learning which are appropriate to the needs of learners within their own context. Staff should also refer to the course and unit specifications and support notes which have been issued by the Scottish Qualifications Authority.
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Introduction

The purpose of this resource is to provide staff with learning and teaching approaches for Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song*. It is aimed at Higher and will help prepare learners for the critical reading section 2 assessment by developing skills of analysis and critical reading. Several activities have been provided at the end of the resource to support learners with this area of their study. Learners will develop the skills they have acquired in understanding, analysis and evaluation, applying them critically as they respond to an imaginative Scottish text (prose, poetry or drama) they have studied.

The aim of this resource is to exemplify approaches to learning and teaching which will develop the skills sampled by the final assessment, critical reading part 2.

In the external critical reading paper, part 2, learners will complete questions which analyse *one* of the texts/extracts presented and draw on wider knowledge of the text and/or writer in order to evaluate its impact. There will be a mixture of restricted-response questions requiring short answers and extended responses. Twenty marks are allocated to this task.

Further information about the assessment is available via the link below:
http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/CfE_CourseAssessSpec_Higher_Languages_English.pdf

Working with these materials will develop learners' skills in:

- understanding of the content of the text (what the writer says)
- analysis of the techniques used (how the writer says it)
- evaluation of the effectiveness/impact of the text (how well, in the learner's opinion, the writer has explored the topic/achieved his/her purpose).

Learners will have regular opportunities to assess their progress.

Note: All textual references in this guide are to the edition of Gibbon's *Sunset Song* published by Canongate (ISBN 0-86241-179-3).

Resources for staff

Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, first published in 1932, begins Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*. The novel follows Chris Guthrie as she grows into womanhood in the small rural community of Kinraddie.

A helpful critical resource is Douglas Young's *Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Sunset Song* (Scotnotes Study Guides, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1986). Ortega and Tengrove make close studies of the language in *Sunset Song*. Another useful resource is the Association for Scottish Literary Studies Cassette No. 1, with commentary by Douglas Young.

An invaluable resource is English and Communication Literary Study: *Sunset Song* (for Higher and Intermediate 2), developed by City of Glasgow Council. This resource contains many questions and activities to use while studying the text. It can be found on the Education Scotland [website](#).

The BBC Bitesize site also contains resources for the novel: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/sunset_song/.

The 1971 BBC film *Sunset Song* is available from the Grassie Gibbon Centre. There is also a Canongate audio book read by Eileen McCallum. The unabridged version is only available in eight cassettes (10 hours 50 minutes) in some libraries. Some libraries may have *Scenes from Sunset Song*, which also contains excerpts of the text. Some excerpts are available in CD format in *A Flame from the Mearns*.

For more information see the critical resources listed in the references and bibliography of this resource. The dominant trends in the novel's criticism tend to focus on its biographical links, its themes, its central character Chris and its use of language. Douglas Gifford and many other critics note the influence of Gibbon's life in the novel. Douglas Young and J.T. Low consider the impact of Gibbon's ideas of diffusionism.

Full references for sources referred to above can be found in the bibliography at the end of the support materials.

Outline of activities

This resource provides a number of activities that help learners engage with Gibbon's novel. The activities have been designed to provide learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to study prose, considering matters such as characterisation, setting, style, imagery and theme. Learners will be encouraged to think about and discuss the issues and topics raised in the novel and to write appropriately about their own responses to them.

The resource begins with activities linked to understanding the writer and his background and influences. It then explores the novel. Review and critical reading assessment activities then follow. Handouts referred to in the activities can be found in the appendices. Teachers are free to select and modify the activities in this resource to support the learners in their classrooms.

Section 1: Getting to know Lewis Grassic Gibbon

Activity: Gibbon's background

It is important that learners have an understanding of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's background. *Sunset Song* and many of his short stories are influenced by his experience growing up in the Mearns, just south of Stonehaven. Through an understanding of Gibbon's biography readers will get a greater sense of some of the key themes in *Sunset Song*, such as the impact of change on a person when growing up, and on a community.

Provide a brief introduction to Lewis Grassic Gibbon and his work, referring to the fact that he is a specified author in the Scottish text section of the Higher examination. Learners could find information and make notes from the BBC Writing Scotland website, which contains a useful biography of the novelist:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00mr8yj/profiles/lewis-grassic-gibbon>. A good overview of his life, beliefs, *A Scots Quair* and literacy influences can be found at the following site:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/sunset_song/background/revision/1/.

Learners will also find a useful summary of each section of the novel on this site.

Explore learners' prior knowledge and provide some background concerning the challenges facing rural farming communities in north-east Scotland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Draw the learners' attention to the range of subjects that Gibbon explores in his novel such as the change that went on in small rural communities in the early 1900s, the impact of war, the role of women and others. Have learners create a historical timeline for the time period of the novel. Historical timelines can be found at the following links:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandshistory/makingindustrialurban/index.asp>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/interactive/timelines/british/index_embed.shtml.

Have the learners research information about the life and work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon (real name James Leslie Mitchell). Learners should note that he grew up on a farm at Arbuthnott in the Mearns, just south of Stonehaven on the north-east coast of Scotland.

GETTING TO KNOW LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

To check for understanding consider using the ‘take a question round’ strategy. Ask a learner one of the questions below. Before the practitioner answers, the learner asks other members of the class the same question. Then return to the first person asked to see if they have added to or changed their first response.

The following questions could be considered:

- What information are we given about Gibbon’s life and writing?
- How effective is the text or website in providing this information?
- Does the text help you to understand Gibbon’s influences and preoccupations? Why or why not?

Learners may need a reminder on how to save and collate notes on the novel at this point.

Section 2: 'The Prelude: The Unfurrowed Field' activities

Activity: A snowballing starter

Before reading the novel, write the following phrases on the board:

- Dealing with change and difficulties in life.
- Growing up.
- Changes in Scottish farming/crofting in early 1900s.

Learners should discuss these ideas. After 2 minutes they should join another pair and continue the discussion, making notes in their jotters. After a few more minutes this group should join another group of four to engage in discussing key ideas that will be explored in the novel. Ideas could be noted on A3 paper and shared with class.

Activity: Judging a book by its cover

Sunset Song is set between 1911 and 1919 in the isolated community of Kinraddie, which is based on Gibbon's childhood home of Arbuthnott, near Stonehaven. The novel begins with 'Prelude: The Unfurrowed Field' followed by four sections covering the farming cycle ('Ploughing', 'Drilling', 'Seedtime' and 'Harvest') returning to 'The Unfurrowed Field' in the epilogue. Through this agricultural society, Gibbon explores a central concern of the novel: how change, progress and farming affect an individual and a community.

Discuss with learners why publishers spend a lot of time considering the cover of a novel. The photograph or illustration and design may suggest the plot and themes of the text. See Appendix 2 for examples.

Activity: Some thoughts on the title: *Sunset Song*

Learners could consider the double imagery in the title. You could use a 'listen' starter with learners. Have learners make a list of at least five things they associate with the word 'sunset' and five things they associate with the word

‘THE PRELUDE: THE UNFURROWED FIELD’ ACTIVITIES

‘song’. Give learners about 3–5 minutes to make their lists, and then have a brief discussion of the lists that the learners have made.

Activity: Setting the scene

Read the beginning of the novel with the learners or play an audio recording of it being read. Make learners aware that Gibbon uses Scots occasionally in the text and that a glossary is available at the end of the novel.

Ask learners to make a brief note of their first impressions. What did they enjoy about the text? What do they think are the main ideas and themes? What did they notice about how the ‘Prelude: The Unfurrowed Field’ was written?

Learners could view the following video, making notes on the setting of the novel: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Setting Video](#) (4:31 minutes – staff preview is recommended). They should note how the way of farming was changing and that the period in which the story is set is between June 1911 and late summer 1919. There are shots of Gibbon's childhood home of Arbuthnott, which Kinraddie is based on. The description of the Kinraddie Kirk resembles the church in Arbuthnott where Gibbon lies buried.

Learners could also view the following short video: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Importance of Setting Video](#) (53 seconds – staff preview is recommended). Their notes should help them answer the question: where and when is the text set and what makes this significant?

Activity: Tell me about Kinraddie

The opening paragraphs place the setting of the novel in its historical context. A narrator introduces the theme of change by illustrating the changes that Kinraddie has undergone from Picts to kings to kirks. Ask learners to list the historical events that have taken place in the novel. The list may include references such as a Pict hailing Pytheas’ ships, Calgacus’ army warrior, various cruel overlords and William Wallace.

Activity: The ‘Speak’ of the Mearns

Many of the memorable images in the novel are from voices overheard. The contribution of each voice gives authenticity to the speakers and adds to the realistic quality of the novel.

Have learners scan the opening pages and note who is speaking. How does the 'speak' or gossip make the storytelling interesting? Explain to learners how some writers use the stream-of-consciousness technique in their novels. Ask learners if Gibbon is employing the 'stream-of-consciousness' method in places. Evidence?

The interplay of historical narrator with images glossed from the community gossip aided with the use of 'you' draws the reader into the conversation. The narrator's tone moves from a formal historical style to a community folk style. The use of 'you', as in the first paragraph after the first break in the prelude, 'well might you expect' (p. 5), involves the reader and one's response enters into the narrative's conversation. Moreover, the long sentences and conjunctions imitate the sounds and rhythms of north-eastern speech.

Section 3: 'Ploughing' activities

Activity: Introducing the land

This section begins in June 1911 with Chris resting at the standing stones. Gibbon's detailed description of the landscape around Chris (p. 25) is striking. Ask learners to analyse at least two literacy techniques used by the author to achieve this effect. Then ask them to compare their answer with the person sitting next to them. Then pairs become squares where they discuss ideas. One member of the group will share ideas with the whole class.

Activity: The Guthries' arrival in Blawearie: summarising the journey

Summarising is a key skill in both the close reading and critical reading exams. Learners should look at the words and phrases they have highlighted, underlined or circled and their annotations. Ask learners to consider the following question:

In your own words, summarise the Guthries' journey through the storm (pp 36–39). Make at least six key points.

Learners need to remember to select information that deals with the family's journey and ignore the information that does not.

Activity: Chris, education and the land

Before considering the pressures and decisions Chris has to make, learners may want to begin by discussing the pressures teenagers face nowadays.

Early in the novel we read of Chris's education and of the 'two Chrisses' (p. 44). Learners should consider what attracts her to learning and school. What does she dislike about it? Learners should also consider why the land appeals to her. Ask learners to examine how her love of learning conflicts with her love of the land (pp 31–33) and write down quotations from the passage.

English Chris	Chris of the land

Learners could compare John and Jean Guthrie's opinions of education.

What is John Guthrie's opinion about Chris getting an education? What does this reveal about him?	What is Jean Guthrie's opinion about Chris getting an education? What does this reveal about her?

Activity: Jean's death and asking questions

Active reading requires learners to develop skills in asking themselves questions such as the following:

- What is the extract about?
- How does Gibbon use language to add meaning? Why does he use that word?
- What message is the writer trying to get across?

The more learners get into the habit of asking questions about a text the easier it will be for them to answer them in an assessment.

The last episode of 'Ploughing' concerns Jean's death. Ask learners to review the passage from 'And then an awful thing happened ...' (p. 60) to the end, and to think about what questions they could ask about it.

'PLOUGHING' ACTIVITIES

Model for learners questions they could ask about the first paragraph. For example, show how Gibbon highlights the change in Jean Guthrie. How does the writer create a serious tone? What techniques has the writer used? What words stand out? Why?

Learners could create at least five questions for this section, rank them and then share their best question with class. They may choose to explore her mother's advice; how Chris' point of view is developed; or the imagery of 'The weary pleiter of the land' or Guthrie's 'glowering and ginning'.

Activity: Exit passes and ploughing

Have learners complete an exit pass at the end of the activities on this section to evaluate what they've learned (see Appendix 3 or use sticky notes). Asking an exit pass question at the end of the lesson will reveal how many learners still have difficulties with this section that will need to be addressed in the next lesson. One question that could be asked is the following:

Why is this section called 'Ploughing' and how is it linked to Chris' development?

Section 4: ‘Drilling’ activities

Activity: First reactions to the chapter

After reading this section give learners an opportunity to express their personal reactions to the material. Did they like the chapter? Why or why not? Was the narrative interesting? Which events were compelling? Did they like the ending? What did they think of the ideas expressed by the section?

Activity: An education for Chris?

The death of her mother makes it difficult for Chris to attend college and have a possible teaching career. She must care for what’s left of her family. It is not until John Guthrie leaves Chris £300 and the lease of the farm (pp 118–120) that she has the freedom to choose her own future. Ask learners to discuss whether or not Chris was right. How important is education? When should a person give up? How does Gibbon present her inner conflict and tensions?

Gibbon uses images of death throughout the novel. Learners could examine Gibbon’s use of language in the opening scene (pp 63–64) and consider how Gibbon uses images and word choice linked to death.

Activity: Chris’ growing sexual awareness

In ‘Ploughing’ and ‘Drilling’ Chris becomes aware of sex from two events: Will’s information about John Guthrie’s role in producing the twins (p. 34) and her experience with Margaret Strachan (pp 46–47). The episode with the ‘tink’ (pp 69–71) continues to awaken her sexuality. Learners should consider how Chris reflects on the experience. Learners could also view the following video, making notes on Chris’ character development: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Development of Chris' Character – Video](#) (4:33 minutes – staff preview is recommended).

In the following passage Chris becomes afraid of her father (p. 72). Learners should consider how Gibbon draws attention to Chris’ fear during the night. Learners should note examples of fear and suspense. They should investigate

'DRILLING' ACTIVITIES

how an image of a beast is used. It is often employed in regard to an unhealthy sexuality.

Examples of fear and suspense	Effect/explanation

Activity: Happy New Year?

Learners could examine the mood in the Guthrie house at New Year (pp 91–93). What does John whisper to himself and how do Chris and Will react? Ask the learners to consider how Gibbon uses imagery, sound and the contrast of the weather to highlight the loss of Jean.

The learners could then analyse how Chae Strachan and Long Rob change the mood when they arrive.

Technique	Evidence	Effect
Dialogue		
Action		
Language of the narrator		

Activity: The destruction and breakdown of the Guthrie family

Ask learners to list examples of how this section of the text highlights the destruction and breakdown of the Guthrie family. They should write down their examples for a few minutes. Then ask them to compare their answers with the person sitting next to them. Discussion should note the death of the mother and twins Alec and Dod being sent away to live in Aberdeen with relatives, Will leaving with his girlfriend Mollie Douglas and finally the death of John Guthrie.

Activity: John Guthrie – a complex character

Before completing this activity, have the class think about a relative who is or was very memorable. Was the relative important in their lives? What made them memorable? Was it their appearance, a mannerism or the way they spoke? Do they have any objects, places or events that they associate with them?

Learners could view the following video and make notes on Guthrie's character and his relationship with Chris: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Characterisation Through Relationships \(pt 1/2\) – Video](#) (3:13 minutes – staff preview is recommended).

Gibbon reveals his characters in a number of ways. Learners could examine what John Guthrie says to other characters in his dialogue and his actions. What do the narrator's comments and what other characters say about Guthrie suggest about him? Ask learners to review the novel, examining scenes for what they reveal about John Guthrie's character and filling in the chart below. They may note what he was like when he was young (p. 27), how he helps at the fire at Peesie's Knapp (p. 88) and how he loves his horses. He is independent but cruel to his son (p. 29, p. 42) and wife (p. 28). In an episode with Chris at the standing stones (p. 41) he complains that she is wasting time and that the stones are pagan. Learners may want to consider why he is uncomfortable around the stones. How does Gibbon want the reader to see John Guthrie and how does his language achieve this?

What John Guthrie says, does or what others say about him	What this reveals about John Guthrie's character

Section 5: 'Seed-Time' activities

Activity: Death and John Guthrie's funeral

Learners could examine the passage concerning John Guthrie's funeral (pp 115–116). How does Gibbon reveal the thoughts and emotions Chris is experiencing concerning her father's death? Learners, in pairs or groups, could analyse the imagery in this extract and comment on its effectiveness.

Imagery	Evidence (quotations)	Explanation
References to rain	'it was strange and silent but for the soft patter of the rain on the yews ...' 'She found herself praying then ... speaks of the rain' 'she was in the drive of the rain ...'	Highlights ...

Chris cries out: 'I didn't know'. Describe Chris's feelings about her father. What language techniques does Gibbon use to render them?

John Guthrie leaves Chris £300 and the lease of the farm (pp 118–120). He gives her an opportunity to choose her own future. Can he be considered an admirable figure in the novel? Learners could draw up a list of the positive and negative characteristics of John Guthrie.

Activity: Why does Chris choose the land and marriage?

When John Guthrie leaves Chris £300 and the lease of the farm (pp 117–120) he gives her an opportunity to choose her own future. Consider using a whiteboard, overhead or visualiser to model effective annotating by noting important points in the first paragraph of the passage. Once the paragraph is completed with the class ask learners to annotate the rest of the extract.

Remind learners that they should mark/highlight any words or phrases that seem significant. Learners should write notes and any questions in the margins. The notes in the margins of their text could include brief comments on the following:

- ideas in extract (bracket important ideas) → connect ideas with lines or arrows
- themes
- techniques (sentence structure, similes, metaphors, personification, striking imagery that helps to create meaning, effective or unusual word choice etc).

Annotating key events in the novel will actively engage the learner in understanding and analysing *Sunset Song* as a whole.

Have learners share their first annotations in pairs, groups or with the class. Discuss the content of the extract with the class. Why does Chris choose to stay on the land and marry?

Learners could view the following video clip and make notes on the early relationship between Ewan and Chris: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Characterisation Through Relationships \(pt 2/2\) – Video 1 minute](#) – staff preview is recommended).

Activity: Scots in the text

Gibbon adds a short note at the beginning of the novel to explain why he uses Scots words in the text. Now that learners have read several sections of the novel, have them consider how Gibbon uses the language of the north-east of Scotland without making it too difficult for non-Scots speakers to read it.

Chris suggests that using Scots is different than using English. She says that ‘Scots words to tell your heart how they wrung it and held it’ (p. 32). In comparison, ‘the English words so sharp and clean and true – for a while, for a while, till ... you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all’ (p. 32). Ask learners to think about which characters use English most of

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the time. What is Gibbon suggesting about them? Which characters use Scots often? Why does Gibbon do this?

During the wedding, Long Rob and Gordon argue about how the use of Scots is disappearing. Rob believes that Scots is more exact when used in description:

'And Rob said You can tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glunching or well-kenspeckled? And if you said gloaming was sunset you'd fair be a liar; and you're hardly that, Mr. Gordon.

But Gordon was decent and reasonable, You can't help it, Rob. If folk are to get on in the world nowadays, away from the ploughshafts and out of the pleiter, they must use the English, orra though it be.' (p. 156)

Learners could debate which character is right.

Activity: Chris's pregnancy

Learners could read the section dealing with Chris' pregnancy. It begins with the phrase 'But she did not tell Ewan ...' (p. 176). Gibbon uses language in this paragraph to illustrate the physical and emotional changes of early pregnancy. The learner will also notice how Chris is distancing herself from Ewan.

Use the pose-probe-bounce strategy to explore why Chris is secretive about the pregnancy.

- Ask learners to think of the question: Why does Chris not tell Ewan about her pregnancy?
- Wait for a few seconds to allow learners to list some points.
- Ask learners to keep their hands down and then choose someone in the class to answer. Probe their response for an example or justification: 'How come?' or 'Why?' Instead of confirming whether the answer is right or wrong, bounce it to someone else: 'Do you agree with that answer? Why? Why not?' See if anyone else wants to contribute.

Ask learners to examine the paragraph beginning 'And she wakened more fully at that' (p. 177), where Chris thinks about her mother. Beginning with the question 'How does Gibbon use language to highlight "the terror daze of the night"?' use the pose-probe-bounce strategy, remembering wait time. Learners should comment on the sentence structure, word choice and use of imagery associated with walls and prison. Answers could be compared and discussed with the class.

Activity: Questioning Chris' argument with Ewan

Before reading the scene where Chris and Ewan have an argument and she calls him a 'Highland pauper' (p. 178), ask learners to imagine that (or recall when) they have been in an argument with someone they really care about. What was the impact of it on them? What did it make them think about? Learners can discuss in pairs, groups or as a class.

Ask learners to reread the section beginning: 'It quietened way then, morning came tapping at the window ...' (p. 177). Have learners generate three to four questions regarding it. They should try to create the following types of questions: summarising content, theme and use of language. Here is a list of question stems that may help learners construct their questions:

- In your own words summarise the ways in which Gibbon ... Make at least four key points.
- Summarise what happens in paragraph 2 and 3 from the extract. Make at least three key points.
- Many of the main ideas or concerns of this extract come across in paragraph X.
Identify two of these main ideas or concerns from paragraph X.
- Show how two examples of Gibbon's use of language in paragraph X help to clarify or illustrate his meaning.
- Gibbon feels ... about ... Show how this is revealed through word choice.
- Look at paragraph X.
What is the mood or atmosphere created by the writer, and how does the writer use language effectively to create this mood or atmosphere?
- Look at paragraph X.
Show how any two examples of the writer's use of language contribute to his tone of ...
- Show how any two examples of the Gibbon's use of language in paragraph X or paragraph Y effectively contribute to the main ideas or concerns of the extract.
- How effective do you find any aspect of the characterisation of ...?
Your answer might deal with ideas and and/or language.

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- With close reference to the text, explain how the narrator reveals their feelings towards:

(a) the ...

(b) the ...

Share some of the best questions with the class, highlighting their strengths and areas where they can be improved. Challenge the learners to answer one or two of the questions. Have learners choose one of their questions to answer for homework.

Section 6: 'Harvest' activities

Activity: Ewan – the land and the war

Learners should trace Ewan Tavendale's reactions to the war. In the beginning he doesn't care about the war (p. 186, p. 192). When he joins the army Ewan changes dramatically (p. 211).

Changes in Ewan	Evidence (quotations)	Effect
Before the war		
After training	'He had never spoken to her like that – he was EWAN, hers!' (p. 211)	
In the trenches	Chae tells Chris the truth about Ewan: 'It was that wind that came with the sun, I minded Blawearie, I seemed to wake up smelling that smell. And I couldn't believe it was me that stood in the trench, it was just daft to be there. So I turned and got out of it.' (p. 238)	

Learners will note how Gibbon focuses on the war's impact on the community and not on the trenches. At the beginning of the war Ewan sees no sense in it. However, community pressures lead him to enlisting. Learners could view the following dramatisation of Ewan returns from basic training. Learners should note how Ewan has changed. [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Impact of War – Video](#) (2:30 minutes – staff preview is recommended).

Learners could examine how Gibbon uses language in the paragraph where Chae tells Chris the truth about Ewan (pp 237–238). Learners may use different highlighters in this scene to track the narrator's comment, Chae's voice and Ewan's voice from the past. Moreover, they could consider how the

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scene ends with the voice of the land waking up Ewan's senses and leading him to self-reflection. Chris finally understands why the young peasant who loved the land died: 'Oh Ewan, Ewan ... sleep quiet ...' (p. 240). Again, changes in Chris' personal life mirror changes in the community. Ewan's death shows the destructiveness of the war and how powerless we can be in these circumstances.

Learners could research the topic of desertion. The BBC website contains a detailed article, 'Shot at Dawn: Cowards, Traitors or Victims?':

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/shot_at_dawn_01.shtml.

Learners may want to listen to Michael Marra's anti-war song based on Ewan Tavendale called 'Happed in Mist'. It is available on YouTube.

Activity: Walkabout/talkabout Jean Guthrie, Ewan, Chae, Long Rob and Will

Write the following question on the board:

Gibbon creates several secondary characters to bring the novel to life. List examples from the text that provide the reader with a sense of who these characters are and what they are like.

Divide the class into five groups and give each group a coloured pen to work with and carry with them as they move from table to table. Allow learners some time to think about the character, find evidence from the text and write their answers for the character at their table. When directed, the group moves to another character at another table. If the group agrees with the comment that has been written before, they should put a tick next to the comment to show they agree. They should add any new thoughts or ideas regarding the characters to the page.

After completing all of the characters, each page will have answers written in four colours. Information from each sheet can be fed back by a group member.

During the next lesson, groups could organise the examples and fill in any missing gaps regarding their characters. The final product could be shared with the class.

Activity: Death in *Sunset Song*

Ask learners to list examples of death in the novel. Many will note that most of Chris' family, her husband, Long Rob and Chae, have died. Ask the learners to skim the opening pages of novel: Chris' school essays, her vision of the dead at Dunottar Castle, the black ribbon around Chris's neck at her wedding and the references to 'Floors o' the Forest'. Discuss the impact this could have on Chris.

Section 7: 'Epilude: The Unfurrowed Field' activities

Activity: The big question

Before studying the concluding section, have the class consider the following question: how does one deal with change? Discuss in pairs, groups or as a class.

Activity: War, change and the community

The novel concludes with 'Epilude: The Unfurrowed Field' set in January by the Kinraddie war monument. Gibbon continues to explore the theme of change in the last section of the text. Learners should examine the opening pages of the epilude and list how Kinraddie has changed from its description in the 'Prelude'. They should also note any aspects of the place or people that have not changed, such as the standing stones.

Changes to Kinraddie?	What remains constant?

The following link contains a short video on some of the changes experienced in farming during the time of the novel: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Theme of Change – Video](#) (1:03 minutes – staff preview is recommended). Learners should then consider how Gibbon establishes the theme of change in the text in areas of the text such as key characters, the land and the community. What changes and what remains constant? How has the war changed Chris' life in relation to the people she knows, the land she loves and the marriage that is destroyed?

Earlier in the novel Chris says 'nothing endured ... but the land' (p. 119). Learners could have a group discussion exploring this idea with references to events in the novel.

A short video reviewing themes in the text can be found at the following link: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/sunset_song/theme/video/ (4:16 minutes).

Activity: Chris at the stones ... again

Ask learners to consider why the standing stones are important to Chris. When do they appear in the text? What is their role in the novel? Are they only a place for her to escape the farm and reflect on life? What do they represent? Learners could discuss their history, their use as a war memorial and their link to themes of novel.

Learners could consider how Gibbon uses the farming seasons to structure his text. View [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Structure and Theme – Video](#) (2:57 minutes – staff preview is recommended). Learners could make notes on the structure of the novel and their relationship with theme. Learners could also trace how Chris' development is linked to the farming cycle and sections of the novel. They could also note whether their perceptions of Chris change in each section.

Section	Chris	Evidence/quotations	Thoughts about Chris?
Ploughing	Chris' childhood		
Drilling	Adolescence		
Seed-Time	Love and marriage		
Harvest	Maturity		

'EPILUDE: THE UNFURROWED FIELD' ACTIVITIES

Activity: Chris Guthrie/Tavendale

Early in the novel there is a discussion about the 'two Chrisses' (p. 32). Learners could consider how Chris is divided in her attitude to the land, education, her father, Ewan, her neighbours and language. Ask learners which Chris is at the memorial at the end of the novel. How do they know? Learners could copy the following table into their jotters and complete it during this activity.

Chris' divided attitude to ...	Evidence (quotations)	Explanation/effect (What does it reveal about her character? Her strength? Her determination? etc).
The land		
Education		
Her father		
Ewan		
Her neighbours		
Language		

Share examples of good work using a visualiser or by taking pictures of the table and projecting them onto the whiteboard. This will provide learners with a clear idea of the quality of work you believe they can achieve.

Learners could view the following video clips, noting how Chris Guthrie develops and grows as a character: [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song – Character of Chris – Video](#) (3:02 minutes – staff preview is recommended) and [BBC – Learning Zone Class Clips – Sunset Song: Character Development in Harvest – Video](#) (2:51 minutes – staff preview is recommended).

They should also consider how she doesn't change.

An entertaining video review characterisation in the text can be found at the following link:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/sunset_song/character/video/

(5:07 minutes – staff preview is recommended).

Activity: Who is you?

Learners could discuss why Gibbon uses 'you' throughout the text. Consider the following extract when Chris is thinking about the 'two Chrisses' at an early moment in the text:

You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills ... You saw their faces in firelight, father's and mother's and the neighbours, before the lamps lit up ... you wanted the words they'd known and used, forgotten in the far-off youngness of their lives, Scots words to tell to your heart, how they wrung it and held it, the toil of their days and unendingly their fight. And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to the English words so sharp and clean and true – for a while, for a while, till they slid so smooth from your throat you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all. (p. 32)

Learners should consider what Gibbon gains from using this technique. How does it allow us to understand Chris better? Compare this use of 'you' with its use by the unnamed 'folk voice' narrating the story.

Another useful paragraph to examine Gibbon's use of language the word 'you' concerns about Chae's fight with a motorist (p. 26). Learners could observe his use of Scots and long sentences with many conjunctions, suggesting the ongoing change taking place in Kinraddie.

Activity: Narrators in *Sunset Song*

Learners could look at the many narrators (folk voice, individual voices: Chris, Chae, Rob and Minister Colquhoun) and points of view that exist in the novel.

- Place learners into home groups of a similar number of learners. Have learners number off within their groups.
- Assign different narrators from the novel to home group members by listing their numbers and corresponding narrator on the board.
- Have learners move to expert groups where everyone in the group has the same narrator as themselves.

'EPILUDE: THE UNFURROWED FIELD' ACTIVITIES

- Learners work with members of their expert group to discuss and make notes on key aspects of their narrator. They prepare a short presentation and decide how they will teach aspects of their narrator to their home team. You may want learners to prepare mini-posters while in their expert groups. These posters can contain important facts, information and images related to the narrator.
- Learners return to their home groups and take turns teaching their group members the material. Team members should make notes.
- At end of activity have a whole-class review of all the content you expect them to master during the activity. Learner presentations may be used as an assessment for the talking element of the Creation and Production unit.

A useful webpage for learners to review and make notes on narrative structure can be found at the following link:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/sunset_song/style/revision/3/

Activity: Reverend Colquhoun and the memorial ceremony

Learners could summarise Reverend Colquhoun's sermon 'I Will Give You the Morning Star.' Learners may wish to compare his statement 'nothing, it has been said, is true but change' (p. 256) to Chris' thoughts about the land (p. 119).

How is Reverend Colquhoun different from Reverend Gibbon? If the author is critical of religion and uses Reverend Gibbon to highlight some of its flaws, why does he use the name Gibbon?

By the end of the novel it is quite clear that the old ways are changing in Robert Colquhoun's sermon. Learners could list the changes that Colquhoun suggests are taking place. They will note that the time of men like John Guthrie, Rob and Chae are over. Ask the learners to consider whether the ending of the novel presents a world where things are getting better or worse. They should refer to this part of the text and to other parts of the text. Robert Colquhoun's 'ringing' (p. 255) requiem for the peasant folk, the final interplay of voices, challenges our understanding of the difficulties of the past and the politics of the present. He gives voice to the land and the peasants at the closing of the day, and the closing image of the morning star provides hope for the future.

The names are those of Rob, Chae, Ewan and one other carved on the standing stones. Why are they significant? Ask learners to consider why Gibbon places his own first two names James Leslie on the stone.

Section 8: Review activities

The following activities will be useful in considering the novel as a whole, reviewing the knowledge and understanding gained from the study of each section in the previous activities.

Some of the activities will support learners in preparing for the critical reading paper, part 2. In this assessment learners will have 45 minutes in which to complete questions that analyse *one* of the texts/extracts presented and draw on wider knowledge of the text and/or writer in order to evaluate its impact. There will be a mixture of restricted-response questions requiring short answers and extended responses (using a bullet point or mini essay structure). Twenty marks are allocated to this task.

Activity: The approaching darkness and music of *Sunset Song*

Now that learners have finished reading the novel, they could reflect on its title. How is the idea of sunset linked thematically with the sections of the novel? Are there any other links? What is the sun setting on? Learners may mention that it is the end of the old ways of farming or crofting, the end of a way of life and the end of some relationships. Learners may want to create a mind map with a setting sun at its centre.

Many times in the novel the singing of traditional songs helps members of the community. Ask learners to list examples of music in the text. The list could include some of the following:

- Rob singing 'Bonnie wee thing, cantie wee thing', saving Maggie Jean from Daft Andy in 'Ploughing'
- Rob singing a folk song when John Guthrie sings psalms in 'Drilling'
- Long Rob singing folk songs when he has been released from jail: 'an echo from a long lost glen'
- the lament 'The Floors o' the Forest', played at the end of the novel.

What emotions are linked to the music when it occurs?

Activity: Timeline and plot review

Learners should review the significance of the section headings. Divide the class into at least six groups. Each group will create a summary of one of the sections: 'Prelude: The Unfurrowed Field', 'Ploughing', 'Drilling', 'Seed-Time', 'Harvest' and 'Epilogue: The Unfurrowed Field'. They should discuss and present aspects of the text such as the significance of the headings, key events and literary techniques. Notes can be made on the handout in Appendix 2: Timeline. Learners should note the link to the agricultural cycle and how each section represents a stage in Chris' life.

An entertaining video reviewing the plot in the text can be found at the following link:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/english/sunset_song/plot/video/ (5:28 minutes)

Learners could also note the many vivid images running through their section of *Sunset Song*. They could note how Gibbon utilises them in developing his characters and illustrating the ideas he wants his reader to think about. Often these images will repeat themselves. Learners could also consider what Gibbon achieves by doing this. Are there any other images or themes that learners find interesting or important in the story?

Learners could prepare a short presentation and decide how they will teach their section of the novel to the class. You may want learners to prepare mini posters while in their expert groups. These posters can contain important facts, information and images related to their section of the text.

As an extension to this activity, learners could share their feelings and thoughts about *Sunset Song* in a blog. Learners could make connections between their own lives and the lives of the characters in the novel. They could begin by explaining how they came to read the novel. They should try to communicate why certain events in the plot or the characters, setting, etc are appealing to them. They could also mention anything they find confusing or have questions about. In all cases they should support their ideas with evidence (quotations) from the text.

Activity: Douglas Young on *Sunset Song*

The class could listen to extracts from ASLS Cassette Commentary No.1: Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, read by Celia Craig and commentary by Douglas F. Young (if available in department or library). Key ideas in the novel are explored and it may be convenient to stop the cassette after each section in order for learners to make notes and check understanding. The resource

comments on Leslie Mitchell's life, provides social and historical background to the novel, analyses the characterisation of Chris and John Guthrie, and examines the style and language in the novel.

Topic	Notes/comments
Biographical comment	
The development of Chris Guthrie	
The social background to the novel	
Diffusionism and the historical basis of the novel	
John Guthrie – the destruction of natural man	
World War I	
Promise of a new dawn	
Style and language	

Activity: Extract quiz

Present the class with extracts from the novel (see Appendix 4). Without having access to their copy of the text or notes, have the learners write brief comments on each, identifying where the extract takes place and explaining the context of each extract and what makes it characteristic of Gibbon's style.

Activity: Book trailers

Learners could be encouraged to create their own audio or video interpretations of favourite or key sections of *Sunset Song*. They could work alone or with a partner when creating their book/key scene trailer. The trailer should last from 30 seconds to 2 minutes in length and should be in a standard video format (.wmv, .mov, .avi, .mp4). Trailers should be learners'

REVIEW ACTIVITIES

own creation with no copyrighted material. It would be useful if learners could provide a brief description of the process they followed. A useful site is teacher librarian Michelle Harclerode's site:

<http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer>.

Have learners discuss what will makes a good book trailer and generate success criteria. Learners create a mind map of how they make the novel appealing to their target audience. Learners develop a storyboard, noting in each frame the images and type of shot, voice over, sound effects and music (see Appendix 5).

Activity: Comparing key events for the last question

The last question for the critical reading Scottish texts section asks learners to refer to more than one part of the novel. Learners could work in pairs to complete an answer outline for one of the questions below.

- Show how Chris can be seen as both an individual character and a symbolic figure in *Sunset Song*. You should refer briefly to more than one part of the novel in your answer.
- Show how John Guthrie, although he does some terrible things in *Sunset Song*, has some admirable qualities. You should refer briefly to more than one part of the novel in your answer.
- With close reference to the text, show how the ideas and/or language of at least two parts of the novel are similar *or* different.
- Loss is an important theme in several key events in the novel. With close reference to several parts of *Sunset Song* explain how the theme of loss is explored.
- With close reference to the text, show how Gibbon develops the relationship between people and place to more than one part of the novel.
- To what extent do events in the farming year link to key developments in Chris' life in at least two parts of the novel?

Share some of the best outlines with the class, highlighting their strengths and areas where they can be improved. Have learners complete their answer for homework.

Activity: Critical essay writing

The novel provides a good opportunity to develop critical essay skills. Discuss a suitable topic for the essay with the class, settle an appropriate structure and make suggestions about the best way to use the text for reference and quotation in the course of the essay.

Learners could begin the writing in class and complete it as homework. Alternatively, learners could be given a selection of questions similar to those that they might receive in an exam and complete them under exam conditions. The specimen paper for Higher Critical Reading – Section 1: Critical Essay will have suitable questions that learners could use for practice.

Here are some more questions:

- Choose a novel that deals with a society very different from your own and show how techniques such as setting, characterisation, language, etc contribute to your understanding of that society.
- Choose a novel that you enjoyed because of the effectiveness of its ending. Explain how the ending satisfies you and adds to your appreciation of the novel.
- Choose a novel in which a technique (such as symbolism or narrative) is used by the author and is, in your view, vital to the success of the text. Explain why the writer employs this technique and why, in your opinion, it is so important to your appreciation of the text.
- Sometimes the significance of the title of a novel is not immediately obvious. Choose a novel that fits this description and show how, after careful study, the full significance of the title becomes clear.

Learners must know that the opinions they express on Gibbon's work need to be soundly argued and supported by evidence from the novel. Learners could think about the key scenes in the novel. After a few minutes learners could begin working in pairs to discuss and list the most appropriate scenes to tackle the question they have chosen. Each pair could prepare a brief presentation to the class of how they would tackle their question.

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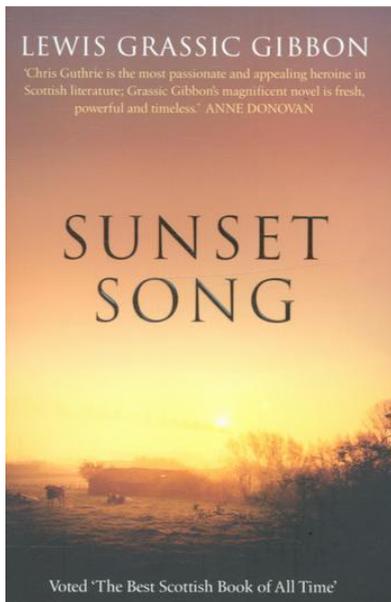
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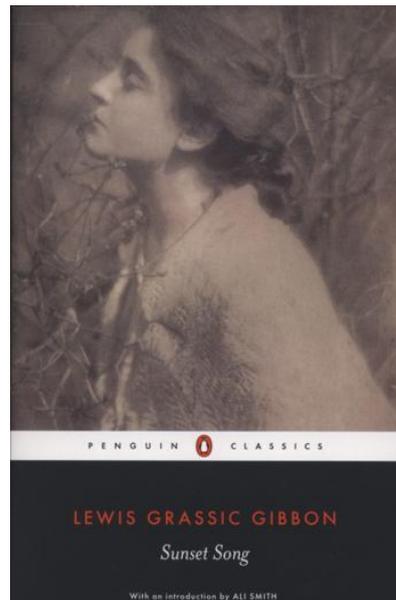
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Appendices

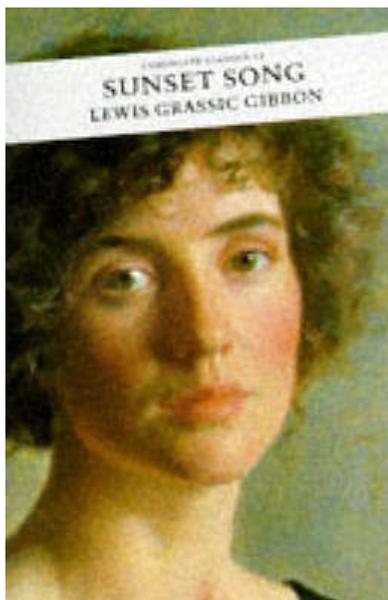
Appendix 1: Book covers for *Sunset Song*



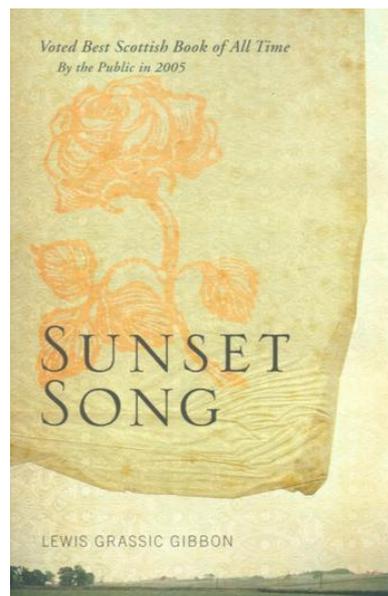
Polygon edition



Penguin Classics edition



Canongate edition, 1988



Canongate edition, 2006

Appendix 2: *Sunset Song* timeline

Instructions

Using the time line below list the most important events in the novel. This will help you outline the structure of the novel, showing the main divisions of the action. Remember to include page numbers.

Section	Events
Prelude: The Unfurrowed Field	
Ploughing	
Drilling	
Seed-Time	
Harvest	
Epilude: The Unfurrowed Field	

Appendix 3: Exit passes

EXIT PASS
One thing I understood today:
One thing I didn't understand:

EXIT PASS
Describe one topic that we covered today that you would like to learn more about.

Appendix 4: Gibbon's *Sunset Song*

Extract quiz

Read the following extracts from the novel. For each extract complete the following:

- (a) Identify where it takes place in the novel.
- (b) Explain why the extract is important to the text as whole.

1. *So that was the college place at Duncairn, two Chrisses went there each morning, and one was right douce and studious and the other sat back and laughed a canny laugh at the antics of the teachers.*

or

So that was Chris and her reading and schooling, two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies.

2. *He had never spoken to her like that – he was EWAN, hers!*
3. *Below and around where Chris Guthrie lay the June moors whispered and rustled and shook their cloaks, yellow with broom and powdered faintly with purple, that was the heather but not the full passion of its colour yet. And in the east against the cobalt blue of the sky lay the shimmer of the North Sea, that was by Bervie, and maybe the wind would veer there in an hour or so and you'd feel the change in the life and strum of the thing, bringing a streaming coolness out of the sea.*
4. *Scots words to tell your heart how they wrung it and held it ... the English words so sharp and clean and true – for a while, for a while, till you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all*
5. *... and she minded then, wildly, in a long, broken flash of remembrance, all the fine things of him that the years had hidden from their sight, the fleetness of him and his justice, and the fight unwearying he'd fought with the land and its masters to have them all clad and fed and respectable, he'd never rested working and chaving for them, only God*

APPENDICES

had beaten him in the end. And she minded the long roads he'd tramped to the kirk with her when she was young, how he'd smiled at her and called her his lass in days before the world's fight and the fight of his own flesh grew over-bitter, and poisoned his love to hate.

6. *'Oh lassie, I've come home!' he said, and went into the heart that was his forever.'*

Appendix 5: Book trailer**Brainstorming**

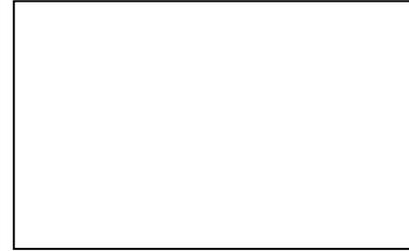
Target audience: _____

Best points about book:

Tone of book trailer (serious, humorous, reflective etc):

Images to be used:

Memorable language features (word choices, imagery etc) to be used:

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APPENDICES

Appendix 6: Sample recording sheet: staff record of strengths and next steps

Class: _____

Date: _____

Task: _____

Learner	Strengths	Next steps
Joe Bloggs	Content of review, use of evidence, aud. + purp. Clear Engaging	S structure, SP review More evidence to support comment on effectiveness

Appendix 7: Learner record sheet – Higher English assessments

Name: _____ Staff member: _____

Analysis and Evaluation

Reading	Passed <input type="checkbox"/>	Paper topic: _____
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	Task: _____

Creation and Production

Writing	Passed <input type="checkbox"/>	Task: _____
Talking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Task: _____

Prelim (Higher)	Grade	
Close reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paper topic: _____
Critical reading:	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Critical essay Critical reading: Scottish texts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Text: _____ Text(s): _____

Folio (Higher)	Grade	
Creative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Topic: _____
Discursive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Topic: _____

Internal assessment complete

Learner's signature: _____ Staff signature: _____

Date: _____