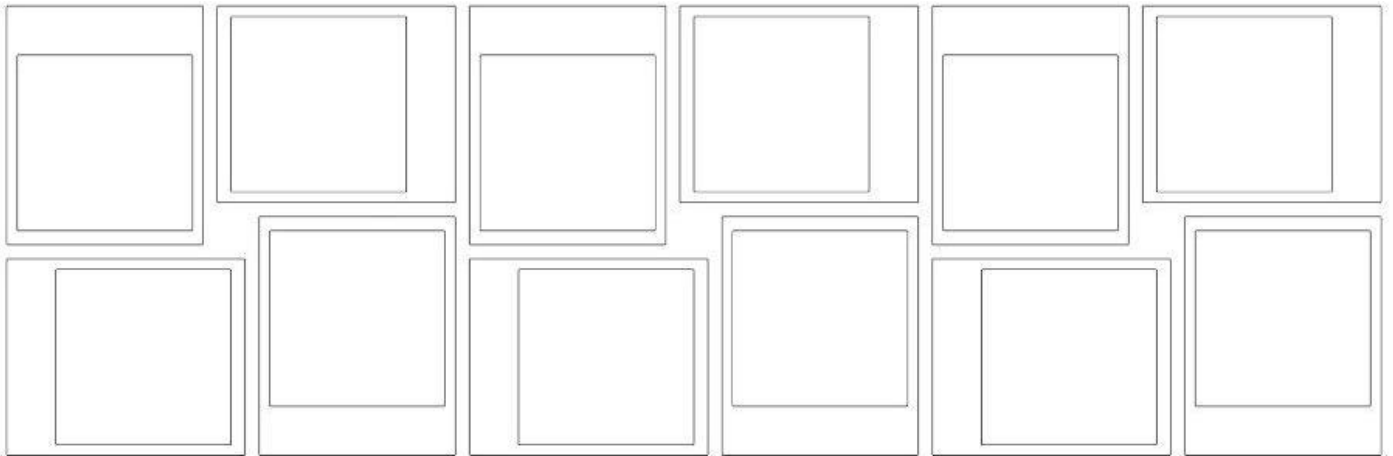


# Literary Snapshots



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They rode out along the fenceline and across the open pastureland. The leather creaked in the morning cold. They pushed the horses into a lope. The lights fell away behind them. They rode out on the high prairie where they slowed the horses to a walk and the stars swarmed around them out of the blackness. They heard somewhere in that tenantless night a bell that tolled and ceased where no bell was and they rode out on the round dais of the earth which alone was dark and no light to it and which carried their figures and bore them up into the swarming stars so that they rode not under but among them and they rode at once jaunty and circumspect, like thieves newly loosed in that dark electric, like young thieves in a glowing orchard, loosely jacketed against the cold and ten thousand worlds for the choosing.

*All the Pretty Horses*, by Cormac McCarthy

1. What material 'creaked' in the morning cold?
2. Where are 'they' (the two men) riding?
3. What does McCarthy mean by 'tenantless night'?
4. The two young riders have 'ten thousand worlds for the choosing' – what does this suggest?
5. The third sentence contains very few punctuation marks – what effect does this have?

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Calpurnia sent me through the swinging door to the dining room with a stinging smack. I retrieved my plate and finished dinner in the kitchen, thankful, though, that I was spared the humiliation of facing them again. I told Calpurnia to just wait, I'd fix her: one of these days when she wasn't looking I'd go off and drown myself in Barker's Eddy and then she'd be sorry. Besides, I added, she'd already gotten me into trouble once today: she had taught me to write and it was all her fault. 'Hush your fussin',' she said.

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee

1. What does the narrator (Scout Finch) retrieve from the dining room?
2. What is she 'spared'?
3. What does Scout mean when she says she'll 'fix' Calpurnia?
4. What might Calpurnia be 'sorry' if Scout drowns herself in Barker's Eddy?
5. How do we know that Calpurnia does not take Scout's threats seriously?

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A shadow fell over my T-bar sandals and I looked up to see Anita Rutter staring at me through squinted eyes ringed in bright blue eyeshadow. She broke off a twig from our privet hedge and thrust it under my nose, pointing at a part of the branch where the leaves were not their usual straight darts but were rolled up in on themselves, neat and packaged as school dinner sandwiches. 'See them leaves?' She carefully unrolled one of them: it came away slowly like sticky tape, to reveal a sprinkling of tiny black eggs. 'Butterflies' eggs, them is. They roll up the leaf to hide them, see.'

She stripped all the leaves off the twig in one movement and smelled her fingers, before flicking the naked branch at my ankles. It stung but I did not pull my legs back. I knew this was a test.

*Anita and Me*, by Meera Syal

1. What is the narrator (Meena) wearing on her feet?
2. What colour is Anita's eyeshadow?
3. The leaves on the branch are 'neat and packaged as school dinner sandwiches' – what does this suggest?
4. Why does Anita say 'them is' instead of 'they are'?
5. What sort of 'test' is Anita giving Meena?

**'And another thing. Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots have so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because this is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal passion, it is not the desire to mate every second minute of the day, it is not lying awake at night imagining that he is kissing every cranny of your body. No, don't blush, I am telling you some truths. That is just being "in love", which any fool can do. Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident. Your mother and I had it, we had roots that grew towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossom had fallen from our branches we found that we were one tree and not two. But sometimes the petals fall away and the roots have not entwined. Imagine giving up your home and your people, only to discover after six months, a year, three years, that the trees have had no roots and have fallen over. Imagine the desolation. Imagine the imprisonment.**

*Captain Corelli's Mandolin, by Louis de Bernières*

1. Why is love compared to an erupting volcano?
2. What can 'any fool' do?
3. What is left when 'being in love has burned away'?
4. What do the roots represent?
5. What do the petals that have fallen away represent?

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I have subsequently wondered why my mannerisms so appealed to my senior colleagues. Perhaps it was my speech: like Pakistan, America is, after all, a former English colony, and it stands to reason, therefore, that an Anglicized accent may in your country continue to be associated with wealth and power, just as it is in mine. Or perhaps it was my ability to function both respectfully and with self-respect in a hierarchical environment, something American youngsters—unlike their Pakistani counterparts—rarely seem trained to do. Whatever the reason, I was aware of an advantage conferred upon me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, by Mohsin Hamid

1. What is the narrator (Changez) reflecting on as the passage opens?
2. Which two countries does the Changez name as former English colonies
3. What is a 'hierarchical environment'?
4. What does it seem American youngsters are rarely 'trained to do'?
5. Which two adjectives precisely describe the tone of Changez's narration?

I phoned Midori.

“I have to talk to you,” I said. “I have a million things to talk to you about. A million things we have to talk about. All I want in this world is you. I want to see you and talk. I want the two of us to begin everything from the beginning.”

Midori responded with a long, long silence – the silence of all the misty rain in the world falling on all the new-mown lawns of the world. Forehead pressed against the glass, I shut my eyes and waited. At last, Midori’s quiet voice broke the silence: “Where are you now?”

Where was I now?

*Norwegian Wood*, by Haruki Murakami

1. Who does the narrator (Toru Watanabe) need to speak to?
2. Why does Watanabe exaggerate and say they have a ‘million things’ to talk about?
3. What does the ‘long, long silence’ imply?
4. What mood does the image of ‘misty rain’ evoke?
5. Why does Watanabe press his forehead against the glass?

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After a week on the road I finally arrived at Southampton, where I'd been told I would see the sea. Instead, I saw a few rusty cranes and a compressed looking liner wedged tightly between some houses; also some sad allotments fringing a muddy river which they said was Southampton Water.

Southampton Town, on the other hand, came up to all expectations, proving to be salty and shifty in turns, like some ship-jumping sailor who'd turned his back on the sea in a desperate attempt to make good on land. The streets near the water appeared to be jammed with shops designed more for entertainment than profit, including tattooists, ear-piercers, bump-readers, fortune-tellers, whelk-bars, and pudding boilers. There were also shops selling kites and Chinese paper dragons, coloured sands and tropical birds; and lots of little step-down taverns panelled with rum-soaked timbers and reeking of pickled eggs and onions.

*As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*, by Laurie Lee

1. How are Southampton and Southampton town different?
2. What does the 'ship-jumping sailor' simile suggest about Southampton Town?
3. The streets are 'jammed' – what does this mean?
4. Does the narrator (Laurie Lee) like Southampton Town and how do we know?
5. Which five adjectives precisely describe Southampton Town?

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But how could she swallow all that stuff about poetry? How could she let him hold forth about Shakespeare? Seriously and solemnly Richard Dalloway got on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare's sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes (besides, the relationship was not one that he approved). No decent man ought to let his wife visit a deceased wife's sister. Incredible! The only thing to do was to pelt him with sugared almonds – it was at dinner. But Clarissa sucked it all in; thought it so honest of him; so independent of him; Heaven knows if she didn't think him the most original mind she'd ever met!

*Mrs Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf

1. Does the narrator (Clarissa Dalloway) feel that Richard's views on Shakespeare's sonnets are fair?
2. Why does Richard believe that reading the sonnets is like 'listening at keyholes'?
3. Do Clarissa and Richard argue at dinner?
4. Does Clarissa believe that Richard is intelligent?
5. Which two adjectives precisely describe Clarissa's feelings about Richard?

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Nick watched them all take refuge in their first sip. He felt ashamed of the smallness of the drinks, and the way his father had made them in the kitchen and brought them in like a treat. His parents looked at Gerald proudly but nervously. They were so small and neat, almost childlike, and Gerald was so glowing and sprawling and larger than local life. Don was wearing a bright red bow tie. When he was little Nick had revered his father's bow ties, the conjuror's trick of their knotting, the aesthetic contrasts and implications of the different colours and patterns – he'd had keen favourites, and almost a horror of one or two, he had lived in the daily drama of those strips of paisley silk and spotted terylene, so superior to the kipper ties of other dads. But now he was made uneasy by the scarlet twist below the trim white beard; he thought his father looked a bit of a twit.

*The Line of Beauty*, by Alan Hollinghurst

1. Are the drinks that Don provides large or small?
2. Which details suggest that Gerald (a local MP) is an important guest?
3. Why might Nick's parents feel both proud and nervous?
4. Which item of his father clothing did Nick used to particularly like?
5. Which details suggest that Nick feels embarrassed?

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One day, in July 1973, I played another little trick on Hassan. I was reading to him, and suddenly I strayed from the written story. I pretended I was reading from the book, flipping pages regularly, but I had abandoned the text altogether, taken over the story, and made up my own. Hassan, of course, was oblivious to this. To him, the words on the page were a scramble of codes, indecipherable, mysterious. Words were secret doorways and I held all the keys. After, I started to ask him if he'd liked the story, a giggle rising in my throat, when Hassan began to clap.

*The Kite Runner*, by Khalid Hosseini

1. What is the trick that the narrator (Amir) plays on Hassan?
2. Is Hassan aware that he is being tricked?
3. Can Hassan read and how do we know?
4. If words are like 'secret doorways', why does Amir hold 'all the keys'?
5. Why does Hassan clap at the end of the extract?

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Shadow was not superstitious. He did not believe in anything he could not see. Still, he could feel disaster hovering above the prison in those final weeks, just as he had felt it in the days before the robbery. There was a hollowness in the pit of his stomach which he told himself was simply a fear of going back to the world on the outside. But he could not be sure. He was more paranoid than usual, and in prison usual is very, and is a survival skill. Shadow became more quiet, more shadowy, than ever. He found himself watching the body language of the guards, of the other inmates, searching for a clue to the bad thing that was going to happen, as he was certain that it would.

*American Gods*, by Neil Gaiman

1. Where is Shadow?
2. Shadow feels 'disaster hovering' – what does this mean?
3. What is described as a 'survival skill'?
4. Shadow becomes more 'shadowy' – what does this mean?
5. What is Shadow certain of?

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First came a Mrs Emmeline Roberts, seventy-six, who had been a cashier at the Odeon in the days when it was the Odeon. Next came Miss or Mrs Lydia Reewes-Duncan, seventy-eight, whose past career was uncertain, but who was visited fortnightly by a middle-aged niece, very bossy towards the doctors and staff, very uppish. After that came Miss Jean Taylor, eighty-two, who had been a companion-maid to the famous authoress Charmian Piper after her marriage into the Colston Brewery family. Next again lay Miss Jessie Barnacle who had no birth certificate but was put down as eighty-one, and who for forty-eight years had been a news-vendor at Holborn Circus. There was also a Madame Trotsky, a Mrs Fanny Green, a Miss Doreen Valvona, and five others, all of known and various careers, and of ages ranging from seventy to ninety-three. These twelve old women were known variously as Granny Roberts, Granny Duncan, Granny Taylor, Grannies Barnacle, Trotsky, Green, Valvona, and so on.

*Memento Mori*, by Muriel Spark

1. Why is 'was' on the second italicised?
2. Lydia Reewes-Dawson's niece is described as 'very uppish' – what does this mean?
3. How old is Jean Taylor?
4. Which lady has no birth certificate?
5. What is the age range of the ladies?

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Directly I began to cross the Common I realized I had the wrong umbrella, for it sprang a leak and the rain ran down under my macintosh collar, and then it was I saw Henry. I could so easily have avoided him; he had no umbrella and in the light of the lamp I could see his eyes were blinded with the rain. The black leafless trees gave no protection: they stood around like broken waterpipes, and the rain dripped off his stiff dark hat and ran in streams down his black civil servant's overcoat. If I had walked straight by him, he wouldn't have seen me, and I could have made certain by stepping two feet off the pavement, but I said, 'Henry, you are almost a stranger,' and saw his eyes light up as though we were old friends.

*The End of the Affair*, by Graham Greene

1. What is wrong with the umbrella?
2. Why does the narrator (Maurice Bendrix) think he could have avoided Henry?
3. Why is the 'broken waterpipes' simile particularly appropriate?
4. What colour is Henry's hat?
5. How do we know that Henry feels no animosity towards Maurice?

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They had another auntie that wasn't really their auntie. That was what Kevin told us anyway; he heard his ma and da talking about it. She was Mister O'Connell's girlfriend, although she wasn't a girl at all; she'd been a woman for ages. Her name was Margaret and Aidan liked her and Liam didn't. She always gave them a packet of Clarnico Iced Caramels when she came to the house and she made sure that the white and pink ones were divided evenly between them, even though they tasted the same. She made stew and apple crumble. Liam said she farted once when he was sitting beside her, during *The Fugitive*.

*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, by Roddy Doyle

1. What do the words 'ma' and 'da' mean?
2. Which details from the extract suggest that the narrator (Paddy Clarke) is a child?
3. Does Liam like Margaret?
4. Which details suggest that Margaret is a nice person?
5. Why do you think Margaret is referred to as an 'auntie'?

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Two summers ago this was our camp, where we plotted various expeditions into the African jungle and took refuge from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Last summer it was our hide, where we did our birdwatching. Now it's to be the headquarters of a much more serious enterprise.

Keith sits cross-legged on the ground, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. I sit cross-legged opposite him, hardly conscious of the twigs sticking into my back or the tiny creatures dangling on threads that catch in my hair and fall down the neck of my shirt. I imagine my mouth's hanging half-open once again as I humbly wait for Keith to announce what we're to think and what we're to do.

*Spies*, by Michael Frayn

1. How do we know that the narrator (Stephen) is a child?
2. Which of the two boys is in charge and how do we know?
3. How are both boys sat?
4. Stephen is 'hardly conscious' of his discomfort – why is this?
5. What does the adverb 'humbly' mean?

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Mom's best friend is called Palmyra. Everybody calls her Pam. She's fatter than Mom, so Mom feels good around her. Mom's other friends are slimmer. They're not her best friends.

Pam's here. Three counties hear her bellowing at the sheriff's secretary. 'Lord, where *is* he? Eileena, have you seen Vern? Hey, love the hair!

'Not too frisky?' tweets Eileena.

'Lord no, the brown really suits you.'

You have to like Palmyra, I guess, not that you'd want to imagine her humping or anything. She has a lemon-fresh lack of knives about her. What she does is eat.

Vernon God Little, by DBC Pierre

1. The narrator is a boy called Vernon Gregory Little – what sort of character is he?
2. What is the name of his mother's best friend?
3. Which two adjectives precisely describe Vernon's mother?
4. Why is the word '*is*' italicised?
5. What does 'lemon-fresh' suggest?

A cloudless sky, as dull as the air over a cold vat, lay across the concrete walls and embankments of the development project. At dawn, after a confused night, Laing went out on to his balcony and looked down at the silent parking-lots below. Half a mile to the south, the river continued on its usual course from the city, but Laing searched the surrounding landscape, expecting it to have changed in some radical way. Wrapped in his bath-robe, he massaged his bruised shoulders. Although he had failed to realize it at the time, there had been a remarkable amount of physical violence during the parties. He touched the tender skin, prodding the musculature as if searching for another self, the physiologist who had taken a quiet studio in this expensive apartment building six months earlier. Everything had started to get out of hand. Disturbed by the continuous noise, he had slept for little more than an hour. Although the high-rise was silent, the last of the hundred or so separate parties held in the building had ended only five minutes beforehand.

*High-Rise*, by J. G. Ballard

1. What is the main character called?
2. Is it morning or evening?
3. What does the adjective 'radical' mean?
4. What does the informal phrase 'get out of hand' mean?
5. What seems to have happened to the main character?

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‘One more word from you Mr Ick-Ball and you are out!’

‘Shakespeare. Sweaty. Bollocks. That’s three. Don’t worry, I’ll let myself out.’

This was the kind of thing Millat did so expertly. The door slammed. The nice girls looked at each other in *that* way. (He’s just *so* out of control, *so* crazy . . . he *really* needs some help, some close one-to-one *personal* help from a *good friend* . . . ) The boys belly-laughed. The teacher wondered if this was the beginning of a mutiny. Irie covered her stomach with her right hand.

‘Marvellous. Very adult. I suppose Millat Iqbal is some kind of hero.’ Mrs Roody, looking round the gormless faces of 5F, saw for the first time and with dismal clarity that this was exactly what he was.

*White Teeth*, by Zadie Smith

1. What does the exclamation mark in the first line suggest about the speaker (a teacher called Mrs Roody)?
2. Why are some words italicised?
3. What is a ‘mutiny’?
4. What does the adjective ‘gormless’ mean?
5. How do the students in 5F view Millat Iqbal?

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In this room I wake early and lie shivering for it is very cold. At last Grace Poole, the woman who looks after me, lights a fire with paper and sticks and lumps of coal. She kneels to blow it with bellows. The paper shrivels, the sticks crackle and spit, the coal smoulders and glowers. In the end flames shoot up and they are beautiful. I get out of bed and go close to watch them and to wonder why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason. What is it that I must do? When I first came I thought it would be for a day, two days, a week perhaps. I thought that when I saw him and spoke to him I would be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. 'I give you all I have freely,' I would say, 'and I will not trouble you again if you will let me go.' But he never came.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys

1. What details suggest that the narrator (Antoinette Mason) is confused?
2. What details suggest that she is uncomfortable?
3. Has Antoinette been in the room for a long time?
4. What does Antoinette think is 'beautiful'?
5. How do we know that Antoinette is being held against her will?

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There they were – two normal unhappy alcoholics, her in pink high heels, him in a double-breasted suit, dressed for a wedding, almost innocently walking into a party. They were Mum’s tall sister Jean and her husband, Ted, who had a central heating business called Peter’s Heaters. And they were clapped in the eyeballs by their brother-in-law, known as Harry, lowering himself into a yogic trance in front of their neighbours. Jean fought for words, perhaps the only thing she had ever fought for. Eva’s finger went to her lips. Jean’s mouth closed slowly, like Tower Bridge. Ted’s eyes scoured the room for a clue that would explain what was going on. He saw me and I nodded at him. He was disconcerted, but not angry, unlike Auntie Jean.

*The Buddha of Suburbia*, by Hanif Kureishi

1. What are the names of the ‘two normal unhappy alcoholics’?
2. What does ‘fought for words’ mean?
3. What does the Tower Bridge simile suggest about Jean’s opinion of what she has seen?
4. What does ‘disconcerted’ mean?
5. Which character is angry?

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