Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Never Let Me Go

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Plot

- Kathy H., a 31-year-old '**carer**', looks back on her childhood at Hailsham, a boarding school in England, with her friends Ruth and Tommy.
- Miss Lucy, a guardian, tells the students the truth: they are **clones**, created to donate their organs until they 'complete' (die). Madame collects their best art.
- At the Cottages, Ruth and Tommy are a couple. Later, as donors and **carers**, the three meet again. Ruth, before she completes, admits she kept Kathy and Tommy apart and gives them Madame's address.
- Kathy and Tommy ask for a 'deferral', but learn it never existed; the art was collected to prove **clones** have souls. Tommy completes, and Kathy prepares to become a donor.

Themes and context

- Mortality, memory, what it means to be human, acceptance, love and friendship, and the ethics of science.
- Kazuo Ishiguro published it in 2005, set in an alternative late-20th-century England, after debates about cloning (Dolly the sheep, 1996).

Form

- A quiet first-person narrative full of memories, with **euphemisms** such as 'donations', '**carers**' and 'completing' hiding the horror.

How to get top marks

- Use Kathy's calm voice. What makes the book chilling is what she doesn't say, and how slowly we find out.
- Have a big idea: Ishiguro asks what makes a life valuable, and who gets to decide.
- Use 'told and not told' to write about how the students are kept from understanding their own lives.

Key terms

Euphemism	A mild word for something unpleasant, such as 'complete' for die.
Clone	A copy of a living thing made from its DNA.
Dystopian	Describing a world that seems good but is deeply wrong.
Carer	In the novel, a clone who looks after donors.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who narrates Never Let Me Go?
2. What is Hailsham?
3. What are the students created to do?
4. Who tells the students the truth about their future?
5. What does 'complete' mean in the novel?
6. What do Kathy and Tommy hope to get from Madame?
7. Why did Madame collect the students' art?
8. When was the novel published?

Answers

1. Kathy H.
2. A boarding school for cloned children
3. Donate their organs
4. Miss Lucy
5. Die after donating organs
6. A deferral, putting off their donations
7. To prove that clones have souls
8. 2005

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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