

NSW HSC English Advanced:  
Critical Study of Kazuo Ishiguro's  
*An Artist of the Floating World*:  
a student work ebook



Lessons and exercises based on a critical study of the novel, including analysis of textual integrity, social and historical context, content, language and key ideas and concepts

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NSW HSC English Advanced: Critical  
Study of  
Kazuo Ishiguro's  
*An Artist of the Floating World*

Shelley McNamara

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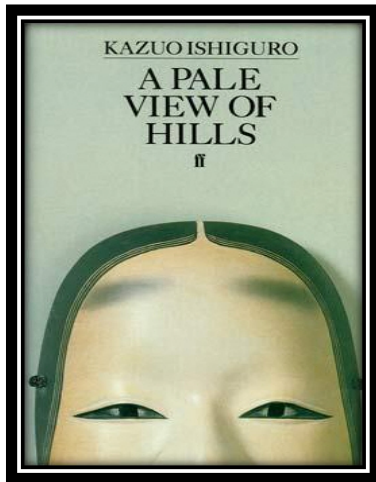
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# Introducing Kazuo Ishiguro's oeuvre

Let's have a look at some of Ishiguro's other stories. This will help you to understand his overall ideas and how they permeate through AFW.

## *A Pale View of Hills*



*A Pale View of Hills* (PVH) is Ishiguro's first novel, and AFW is his second. It was published in 1982 and won the Winifred Holtby Prize. PVH is the story of Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese woman living alone in England, and opens with discussion between Etsuko and her younger daughter, Niki, about the recent suicide of Etsuko's older daughter, Keiko.

Both PVH and AFW are set in Japan, which is astonishing considering that Ishiguro had not visited Japan since he left when he was six years old.



The extract below represents some similar ideas conveyed in AFW. As you read the extract look out for the following: a traumatic experience underpinning

the narrative, the narrator's perspective on things and gaps and silences (things that are not mentioned, but you feel are significant). As you read take note of Ishiguro's ideas, how he communicates them and how the ideas are reflected in AFW.

Niki, the name we finally gave my younger daughter, is not an abbreviation; it was a compromise I reached with her father. For paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I—perhaps out of some selfish desire not be reminded of the past—insisted on an English one. Finally, he agreed to Niki, thinking it had some vague echo of the East about it. She came to see me earlier this year, in April, when the days were still cold and drizzly. Perhaps she had intended to stay longer, I don't know. But my country house and the quiet that surrounds it made her restless, and before long I could see she was anxious to return to her life in London. She listened impatiently to my classical records, flicked through numerous magazines. The telephone rang for her regularly, and she would stride across the carpet, her thin figure squeezed into her tight clothes, taking care to close the door behind her so I would not overhear her conversation. She left after five days.

She did not mention Keiko until the second day. It was a grey windy morning, and we had moved the armchairs nearer the windows to watch the rain falling on my garden.

"Did you expect me to be there?" she asked. "At the funeral, I mean."

"No, I suppose not. I didn't really think you'd come."

"It did upset me, hearing about her. I almost came."

"I never expected you to come."

"People didn't know what was wrong with me," she said. "I didn't tell anybody. I suppose I was embarrassed. They wouldn't understand really, they wouldn't understand how I felt about it. Sister are supposed to be people you're close to, aren't they. You might not like them much, but you're still close to them. That's just not how not was though. I don't even remember what she looked like now."

"Yes, it's quite a time since you saw her."

"I just remember her as someone who used to make me miserable. That's what I remember about her. But I was sad though, when I heard."

Perhaps it was not just the quiet that drove my daughter back to London. For although we never dwelt long on the subject of Keiko's death, it was never far away, hovering over us whenever we talked.

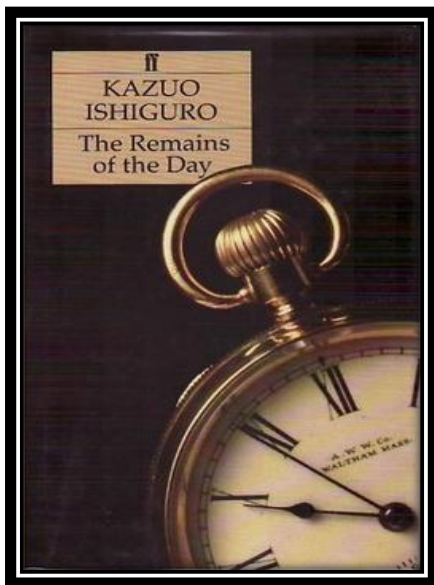
Keiko, unlike Niki, was pure Japanese, and more than one newspaper was quick to pick up on this fact. The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room.

Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills*, Vintage Book, 1982, p9-10

## Task 1.6: Exploring a PVH

1. Analyse how the following are reflected in the extracts from PVH.
  - Ishiguro's ideas:
  - How Ishiguro communicates his ideas:
  - How ideas are reflected in AFW:
2. Choose two quotes that reflect similarities between AFW and PVH. Explain how they reflect ideas in AFW.

## The Remains of the Day



*The Remains of the Day* (ROD), is perhaps Ishiguro's most famous novel. It was published in 1989 and won the Man Booker Prize the same year. It was adapted into a British-American drama film, directed by James Ivory, in 1993, and was nominated for eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor (Anthony Hopkins) and Best Actress (Emma Thompson). Hopkins won the BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role.

On first viewing the trailer for ROD, it may seem that there is not a lot in common with AFW. However, there are some known similarities. For example, references to World War Two, a vulnerable narrator, despite appearances, and notions of ethical behaviour.

Let's have a closer look at the trailer.



Watch the trailer for ROD. As you watch take note of Ishiguro's main character and the ideas conveyed about morality and service.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1aCp1Z1gAo>

## Task 1.7: Exploring ROD:

1. Analyse how the following are reflected in the trailer from ROD:
2. the language of his characters
3. key ideas and concepts.
4. Explain how ideas and language in ROD are reflected in AFW. (200 words)
5. One of the more recent film version of Ishiguro's novel is *Never Let Me Go*.

Watch the trailer and take note of the similar ideas and concepts explore in PVH, AFW and ROD. See the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXIRZhDEo8A>

6. Are there any common ideas you recognise in PVW, AFW and ROD.? What are they?
7. Write a 300-word paragraph, explaining ideas and concepts explored in Ishiguro's oeuvre.