For the classroom:

Read the section ‘The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was … Anyway, I kept thinking about all that while I walked’ (Ch.16).
- Why is the word ‘different’ repeated?
- What do you think Holden means by ‘different’?
- What does this say about the nature of identity?

Although Holden inhabits and travels through a range of settings, it is worth investigating a few with regards to this context.
- Ducks in Central Park: read references to the ducks in Chapters 2, 9, 12 and 20.
- What parallels can you draw between the frozen pond and the environments Holden encounters?
- In what ways is Holden’s preoccupation with change explored through the cyclical migrations of the ducks?
- New York versus ‘Out West’: compare and contrast what New York city (including nightclubs, hotels and street life) represents to Holden with his fantasy of living ‘out west’ (Ch.17 and 25).

Key character interactions

For the classroom:

Read the section ‘I have a feeling that you’re riding for some kind of terrible, terrible fall … You’ll begin to know your true measurements’ (Ch.24), Holden’s encounter with Mr Antolini. This section represents the classic didactic encounter between protagonist and mentor, typical of the bildungsroman novel.
- What cautions does Mr Antolini give Holden? Are these reasonable?
- Note the repetition of the word ‘fall’. What does Mr Antolini mean by this term? Find other references to ‘falling’ throughout the text (e.g. Ch.25) – when do these occur and what is implied about Holden’s progress?
- Why does Mr Antolini quote Wilhelm Stekel?
- What advice does Mr Antolini give Holden? Is this practical?
- What does Mr Antolini mean when he says ‘what size mind you have’? What does this suggest about the formation of identity?
- Could Mr Antolini be perceived as ‘the catcher in the rye’?
- Towards the end of Chapter 24, Holden wakes to find Mr Antolini stroking his hair. Describe Holden’s reaction. Can you recognise a pattern in the way Holden relates to others? In your view, is Mr Antolini’s action a sexual advance or a paternalistic gesture?

**Bombshells** by Joanna Murray-Smith

*Bombshells* is an unusual work. Joanna Murray-Smith wrote the script at the prompting of Simon Phillips, Artistic Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company, in order to showcase the talents of actress Caroline O’Connor. It is a one-woman show, consisting of six monologues. A monologue is piece of oral or written literature spoken by one person exposing their inner thoughts. It is often quite lengthy and is directed toward another, but that other remains silent. As such it provides great insights into the speaker’s character, but only from that speaker’s point of view.

For the classroom:

- Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of the monologue. Consider this from the point of view of the actor, the audience, and the playwright. Where possible, give examples from the text. Compare this list with the list from *The Catcher in the Rye*’s first classroom activity on page 16.
- How is a monologue different from a first person novel? Is it?
Meryl Davenport

The opening and closing paragraphs of Meryl Davenport’s monologue provide for us the bookends of her day and highlight Murray-Smith’s craft and concerns.

1. See page 3 from: ‘The baby cries. I open my eyes. It’s darkish’ to ‘Screaming. Screaming now...’
2. See page 10 from: ‘Kids in bed, kids want water’ to end.

Sentence Structure: By looking at these two passages together we can see very clearly one of the key points Murray-Smith want us to note. The opening and closing bracket of sentences in each passage are exactly the same. For Meryl every day is the same – there is no distinctiveness, no relief – and this is reflected through the sentence repetition. In the opening passage the succession of short, simple sentences creates a sense of responsibilities piling up on Meryl – even before she has lifted her head from the pillow. The repeated use of interrogatives suggests her essential lack of confidence and insecurity. The careful, deliberate construction of a series of short sentences recreates for the audience the experience of how reality comes to press upon us as our consciousness is broken open by the beginning of a new day. The final passage echoes the idea of an accumulation of tasks but this time they are separated by commas – the sentences are longer with several smaller components. The effect of this is to speed up what is said. And, the fact that they are all phrased in the negative, ‘didn’t’, creates a sense of Meryl being squashed and vanquished.

Tone: The first passage begins in a flat, matter of fact tone (one is reminded of Sylvia Plath’s poem *Morning Song*). The sense of Meryl being overwhelmed and desperate is created by the repetition of the word ‘need’: ‘The baby needs a feed. The videos need to go back today. I need a coffee...’. A series of four questions, ‘Is it the light? Is it the cold? Is it my diet? What are we doing wrong?’ deepens the sense of desperation. The second passage creates a tone of weariness through the repetition of the word ‘didn’t’. However as this continues – seemingly endlessly – the sense of exasperation grows until Meryl explodes, ‘FUCKING VIDEOS’.

Vocabulary: In the first passage the frequent use of the word ‘need’ indicates the tyranny under which Meryl lives. At this stage she includes her own needs in the list but as the piece progresses her needs are swamped by the needs of others. The italicisation of ‘That’ in referring to the baby down the road, indicates another aspect of intimidation that plays out in Meryl’s life. She compares her baby and thus herself as a mother to others in similar situations around her. Because she sees everything through a lens of desperation and lack of self esteem, such comparisons simply deepen her sense of not measuring up. In the second passage the climax is indicated by the use of a swear word and the capitalisation of the phrase: ‘FUCKING VIDEOS’.

Character: Meryl is person who wants to do well. The content of her monologue demonstrates that her focus is very much on the needs of those around her. She wants those she loves and is responsible for, to be happy. She wants them all to be healthy, well educated and in control. Her vision of life is one of perfection and she is struggling with the limitations of her humanness. This is shown in her language use when her attempts to get everything done are thwarted nad her speech rises to a shrill crescendo: ‘Truck. TrucktrucktrucktrucktrucktruckTRUCK! PRICK!!’ (p.5)

She typifies what many women experience in taking on the identity of motherhood:

63 percent of women did not expect their identity to alter in any major sense.
63 percent reported an impact on coping 33 percent severe to extreme.
57 percent experienced intrapersonal conflict, 30 percent severe to extreme.
55 percent engaged in interpersonal conflict, 33 percent severe to extreme.
A baby, when it is born, is recognised as having attained new status in the world. It is no longer a foetus but a person. A mother, when she is born, also becomes a new being but without any recognition that her new identity is quite foreign to the woman she once was... Where once she spent her days in the company of other adult workers making a valued contribution to the world and was paid an income in acknowledgment for so doing, she is now 'just' a mother among mothers. She is unpaid. She is alone for whole days at a time with no opportunity for adult company and no-one who is able to reflect, support or help her mould her new identity. If a new mother is stunned at her inability to complete even the simplest of tasks she may begin to doubt her own competence.


Meryl is too quick to take responsibility for all manner of what she sees as failures: 'I'm a selfish, hungry, greedy mother.' The final passage in the monologue suggests she has made little progress in the identity war in which she is engaged. At the end of the day she can only list her failures e.g. 'Didn't water hydrangeas, didn't ring anyone...' and fall into exhausted sleep. Whilst the character of Meryl creates great hilarity in the theatre, she is a woman on the brink of oblivion if she is unable to revise expectations of herself as a mother.

Winsome Webster

See from p.34 ‘On Mondays, I go to the pictures with the widows’ to 'I'll talk to a widow or two on the telephone.'

Sentence structure: This opening part of the monologue is structured around the activities of Winsome's week. The repetitive sentence opening, ‘On Mondays... Tuesdays... Wednesdays... Fridays...’, suggests that there is something monotonous about Winsome's week. This is reinforced by the fact that the sentences are simple and are followed by the same clause structure: ‘On...I go / play / do...’. These are also not particular days, rather there is a sameness and predictability about the days of each week.

Tone: Winsome Webster's speech style is relaxed and conversational. We feel as if we are mid-conversation when she begins, ‘On Mondays...’ and further on she speaks directly to us, ‘You know that one...’ Whilst the content of the passage suggests that Winsome's life is busy, the weariness of her existence is underscored particularly in the fourth and sixth sentences: 'The beach, the dogs, whatever... Thursdays, we have book club.' These are spoken with a tone of dismissiveness – the word 'whatever' creates this – which is quite different to the surrounding sentences that are poised and carefully structured.

Vocabulary: Perhaps the most striking feature of Murray-Smith's vocabulary choice in this passage is the repetition of the word 'widows'. Winsome is telling us not only about the activities of her life, but also the people with whom she spends her time. For most of us, spending time with people is an indication of our regard for and our closeness to them. Fascinatingly, Winsome's companions remain anonymous – they have no personal names, nor are they distinguished in any other way from one another. They are simply the grey, non-descript widows.

Character: Winsome is a measured person. This emerges from the organised manner in which she conducts her life. She is also abstemious: ‘On Monday’s it's cheaper for senior citizens...the Widow's Special’. The fact that she does volunteer work one day a week shows that she is not an egocentric person, that she has a social conscience. She is also mindful of the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle and exercises regularly. The exercise of her intellect is also catered for through book club. The profile of Winsome's life thus constructed is however at odds with her lack of vitality at her very core. Her belonging to the widows is a deficit construction of her identity – this is who she is because of what she lacks.
Tiggy Entwhistle

See from p14 ‘During the cooler months...’ to ‘...To feel something – anything – for that?’ (p.15)

For the classroom:

- In this passage, explore how Murray-Smith parallels and intertwines the lives of certain plants with the life of Tiggy Entwhistle. Focus on sentence structures, how tone is created, vocabulary choices and the language used to construct character.

Witness directed by Peter Weir

The opening sequence


The action in Witness occurs in two contrasting communities – the Amish settlement in country Pennsylvania (Lancaster) and the cityscape of Philadelphia. Not only does the marked contrast between these two settings presage the clash of cultures and narrative conflict, it also signifies the central theme about a sense of community and a sense of selfhood within that community.

For the classroom:

A film’s ‘set-up’ includes the visualisation of place, mood, theme, pacing and style. Often a key film image (or metaphor) will be introduced. The opening three minutes of Witness is image oriented through a series of lingering long shots of the Pennsylvania landscape.
- Why has the Director used long shots? Make notes about how the rural nature of the setting is established.
- What mood is conveyed through such images? Consider the musical soundtrack accompanying these images – how does it add complexity to the mood?

The field of wheat sets up a recurring visual motif in the film – images of grain and bread. This is also a unifying visual motif in the film as it is present in both the rural world of the Amish and bustling Philadelphia, and connects the characters.
- What does it mean when people “break bread” together? Note the contrast between the wholesome, home-made bread served at the funeral and the hotdogs served in white processed rolls.
- List other examples of this visual motif throughout the film and consider what is being suggested about relationships. Be aware that this motif also represents the violence of John Book’s world – note examples of this.

The striking image of Amish people emerging as a collective from the field of wheat signifies their connection with the earth and each other. In the ‘Funeral Rites’ scenes, most frames are composed of groups of people.
- Make notes of the ways in which a sense of community is conveyed in the human world and also the animal world in these scenes.
- What do we learn about the roles of men, women and children in this world?
- What are the key values about belonging in this community?

- What does the superimposition of ‘Pennsylvania, 1984’ suggest about the importance of time and place in this film?