

EDUCATOR'S LESSON PLAN AND NOTES

The educator's lesson plan has been designed to accompany the microsite resource, *little red comma's Tanjong Rhu* by Ho Minfong

Class (Level and Stream)	Lower Secondary and Upper Secondary
Subject	Language & Literature
Unit & Topic	Seeing and Feeling (Lost) Memories
Prior Knowledge (Context of Lesson):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should have the knowledge of devices such as motifs, irony, diction, dialogue and figurative language • Students should have knowledge of basic essay writing skills such as writing a topic sentence, making a claim with supporting evidence
Lesson Objectives: Aligned with learning Outcome/s from the 2019 Literature in English syllabus (p. 22)	Outcomes: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the fragmented nature of memory by relating it with their own childhood memories; • construct an informed response about the thoughts and feelings of different characters, and the possible reasons for them; • understand and communicate the effects of the writer's use of diction, dialogue, figurative language and irony in discussing the motif of the binoculars and sight in the story

Brief Overview of Lesson
Pre-reading Activity

This can be done in a class prior to individually reading the short story *Tanjong Rhu* on the microsite, as a means of introducing students to the theme of memory by making them aware of their own experiences of remembering.

1	10 mins	Pre-reading Activity 1: Re-remembering Childhood Memories
2	5 mins	Pre-reading Activity 2: Overview of <i>Tanjong Rhu</i> Microsite

Lesson 1 of 2:

1	5 mins	Settle down, Lesson Materials & Lesson Objectives
2	5 - 10 mins	Activity 1: Whole-class Discussion on Question 1 Question 1 is used as a warm-up question.

3	15 mins	Small-group Discussion on Question 2 to 4. Assign students into groups to answer one question each.
4	5 - 10 mins	Whole-class Discussion on Question 2 (Chapter 3)
5	5 - 10 mins	Whole-class Discussion on Question 3 (Chapter 5)
6	5 - 10 mins	Whole-class Discussion on Question 4 (Chapter 6)

Lesson 2 of 2:		
1	5 - 10 mins	Settle down, Lesson Materials & Lesson Objectives Activity 2: Whole-class briefing on the activity
2	15 - 20 mins	Small-group Discussion Assign students into groups to answer one question each.
4	10 mins	Whole-class Discussion on Activity 2, Question 1 (Chapter 1)
5	10 mins	Whole-class Discussion on Activity 2, Question 2 (Chapter 2)
6	10 mins	Whole-class Discussion on Activity 2, Question 3 (Chapter 4)

LESSON OUTLINE

Pre-reading Activity (15 mins)		
This can be done in a class prior to individually reading the short story <i>Tanjong Rhu</i> on the microsite, as a means of introducing students to the theme of memory by making them aware of their own experiences of remembering.		
Time / Duration	Activity	Materials Required / Notes (if any)
10 mins	Pre-reading Activity 1: Re-membering Childhood Memories Refer to the lesson plan guide for how to approach each of the pre-reading questions. Teachers may choose to include specific objects, or just ask students to recall from their memories on the spot. The important focus points are a) to explain what “nostalgic” and “sentimental” means by connecting them to students’ personal memories, b) to cultivate an emerging awareness in students about how they experience the process of memory and remembering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices
5 mins	Pre-reading Activity 2: Overview of <i>Tanjong Rhu</i> Microsite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop

	Teacher to provide access to students to the <i>Tanjong Rhu</i> microsite on their personal learning devices, or by a demonstration on the projector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Learning Devices
--	---	---

Lesson 1 of 2 (50 - 65 mins)		
Time / Duration	Activity	Materials Required / Notes (if any)
5 mins	<p>Settle down, Access Check & Lesson Objectives</p> <p>Teacher to ensure access to <i>little red comma</i> microsite is consistent for all students, with at least 1 working Personal Learning Device per pair.</p> <p>Teacher to check in if students have read the story.</p> <p>Teacher to give out Handout 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings</p> <p>Teacher to explain that students will learn about how to analyse characters' thoughts and feelings from within the story by focusing on several moments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <p>• Student Handout 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings</p>
10 mins	<p>Activity 1: Whole-class Discussion: Question 1</p> <p>Teachers to discuss the answers to Question 1.</p> <p>Teachers to focus on expanding students' vocabulary of words describing feelings and emotion and to also encourage multiple acceptable answers as shared in the Suggested Answers.</p> <p>Teachers should also continue asking students to substantiate their claims of the thoughts and feelings with evidence from the story.</p> <p>Teachers help students distinguish between claims that are descriptions of the plot and story, from the actual feelings that they infer and interpret for each character.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <p>• Student Handout 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings</p>
15 mins	<p>Small-group Discussion</p> <p>Teachers assign students to groups to respond to Questions 2 to 4 in Handout 1.</p> <p>To capture student responses in writing, teachers can alternately create a Padlet, collaborate on a shared document on Google Documents or SLS, or have students handwrite their responses and prepare to share on the visualiser.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <p>• Student Handout 1: Analysing</p>

		Thoughts and Feelings
10 mins	<p>Whole-class Discussion: Question 2</p> <p>Teacher to review student work on Question 2. Teacher to use suggested answers as a guide.</p> <p>Teacher to draw connections to expectations and conventions of student writing in literary responses about characters' thoughts and feelings: e.g. sentence structure, use of quotations and paraphrase, moving student writing from purely descriptive / narrative towards more analytical language.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings
10 mins	<p>Whole-class Discussion: Question 3</p> <p>Similar to discussion on Question 2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings
10 mins	<p>Whole-class Discussion: Question 4</p> <p>Similar to discussion on Question 2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings
Lesson 2 of 2 (50 - 60 mins)		

<p>5 - 10 mins</p>	<p>Settle down, Access Check & Lesson Objectives</p> <p>Teacher to ensure access to <i>little red comma</i> microsite is consistent for all students, with at least 1 working Personal Learning Device per pair.</p> <p>Teacher to give out Handout 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight</p> <p>Teacher to explain that students will learn about how to analyse the motif of the binoculars and sight/seeing, and its relationship to memory.</p> <p>Teachers go over the questions and chapter contexts with students before assigning them into groups for small-group discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight
<p>20 mins</p>	<p>Small-group Discussion</p> <p>Teachers assign students to groups to respond to Handout 2 (Questions 1 to 3).</p> <p>To capture student responses in writing, teachers can alternately create a Padlet, collaborate on a shared document on Google Documents or SLS, or have students handwrite their responses and prepare to share on the visualiser.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight
<p>10 mins</p>	<p>Whole-class Discussion: Handout 2, Question 1</p> <p>Teachers to review student work on Handout 2, Question 1.</p> <p>Teacher to use suggested answers as a guide.</p> <p>Teacher to pay attention to different ways of explaining the symbolism of an object in a short story: of reflecting a character’s thoughts and feelings, beliefs and concerns.</p> <p>*If students ask what the difference between a symbol and a motif is, clarifications can be offered as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general, a symbol is a sign, representation, or object used to represent abstract ideas, whereas a motif is a recurring element of a story that helps to reinforce the main ideas and themes in a text. • In this story, symbols are more subtle and open to interpretation, and can extend beyond the text (e.g. praying at the altar symbolises tradition); whereas the meaning of the motif of the binoculars and sight will be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight

	specific in how it recurs within the plot of the narrative, and what it reveals about the characters.	
10 mins	<p>Whole-class Discussion: Handout 2, Question 2</p> <p>Teachers to review student work on Handout 2, Question 2. Teacher to use suggested answers as a guide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight
10 mins	<p>Whole-class Discussion: Handout 2, Question 3</p> <p>Teachers to review student work on Handout 2, Question 3. Teacher to use suggested answers as a guide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projector • Laptop • Personal Learning Devices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handout 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight

PRE-READING ACTIVITY 1: Re-membering Childhood Memories

Re-membering Childhood Memories

In this pre-reading activity, teachers can introduce the theme of memories—and particularly the ways in which we experience memories in fragments, or how they are triggered by objects. Teachers can use childhood memories as an example.

Teachers can start by asking the class the question in whole-class discussion:

1. What is one memory that you can vividly remember from your childhood that makes you feel nostalgic and sentimental?

Further prompts include: It can be an event or experience that happened; it can be related to objects and things; it can be related to other people; it can be different ways of spending time. The memory can be a positive or negative one.

Optional: Teacher can assign students to bring one object that gives them a sense of nostalgia.

After taking several responses, teachers can offer their own as well, and then ask a follow-up question:

2. Now I am going to ask you about how you remember these nostalgic parts of your childhood. Apart from me asking you this question now, what else can trigger these childhood memories?

Some responses may include: a) sometimes it comes out of nowhere; b) when I see an object that reminds me of my childhood; c) when I see a reference that reminds me of something significant/memorable in my childhood, or by any of my five senses (touch, hearing, taste, smell).

Once again, teachers can share their own experience of how they remember childhood memories. Following this, teachers can then ask one final question about how memories are experienced. This may be abstract for some students, but teachers can encourage students to slow down and really explore the experience of remembering something.

3. Using your own childhood memories as an example, how complete do you find your memories? Are there missing parts and gaps which you cannot recall?

Although this is a leading question, the point is for teachers to lead students to understand that our experience of memory tends to be one that is fragmented, and there will always be incomplete parts of our memories that we experience.

Sharing extended definition of “remember”

Teachers can share with students that while one literal definition of ‘remember’ is to ‘bring back to mind, or conscious awareness’, another one exists. If to ‘dismember’ is to take apart something, then to ‘re-member’ is to put them back together.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY 2: Overview of the *Tanjong Rhu* Microsite

Teachers can share the following explanatory notes from the web developers of the microsite before sending students off to read the short story for the main class:

Notes from *Tanjong Rhu* Microsite web developer

For this microsite, we've organised the story into seven sections that involve two different approaches:

1. For present-day events
These are shown in sections where the user mostly scrolls to read.
2. For flashbacks in the story
These are shown in 'reverse reading' sections where the user has to first tap on images to view the text.

Our two approaches have been designed to reinforce the story's structure and themes in two ways:

- a. It mimics the process of reflection and remembering that the protagonist experiences, since memories often come to us in fragments, sometimes triggered by objects;
- b. It alludes to the idea of seeing in the story, e.g. as the user mirrors Mr Li's view and habit of counting ships at times.

User guide:

1. Students should only click on an item after they have finished reading the section, or else the story may proceed and they will need to restart the experience all over again.

ACTIVITY 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings

In this story, the writer takes on a third-person limited narrative perspective that follows Mr Li as he recalls his interactions with his mother prior to her passing. This allows us access to his inner thoughts and feelings, and at the same time, also observe the thoughts and feelings of other characters as observed from what Mr. Li himself sees.

From Chapter 1:

Even though Mr Li was apparently “not upset by his mother’s funeral”, he was still “disconcerted” and feeling uneasy while standing and looking out from his office window over Shenton Way.

After Mr Li reached for the binoculars and counted the ships out at the harbour, he arrived at a few specific numbers and began to feel differently. The narrator then says:

“Seventy-eight – that was the number for today. He repeated it to himself with satisfaction. Numbers were strong, numbers he could hold on to. Seventy-eight ships, 18th floor, 63 years old.

Like the co-ordinates of some private graph, these numbers anchored him in space and time.”

Question 1: Re-read Chapter 1. Based on the narrator’s description above, what feelings do you think Mr Li experiences from the act of counting? Why do you think he feels this way?

Possible answers: He feels more calm / reassured / comforted / relieved / at ease / grounded. Counting allows him to feel more present and not be so caught up in the past or his possible thoughts of regret.

From Chapter 3:

Just before leaving the house to go to Mr Li’s office for the binocular viewing, his mother takes her time to pray to his late father about the visit. While Mr Li himself grew impatient, his daughter Ying tried to hurry his mother up but to no avail.

Question 2: Re-read Chapter 3. What thoughts and feelings do you think Ying and Mr Li’s mother experience over the act of praying at the altar? Why do you think they each feel that way? Give at least two points per character with supporting evidence.

Possible answers (Ying): Ying was likely feeling irritated / agitated / annoyed / exasperated / irked by her grandmother’s lack of punctuality for delaying her father in going to work.

Although she was trying to rush her grandmother’s rituals, she was also trying to do so respectfully and tactfully as she tried to “[cajole] her grandmother to hurry up by letting her do it”.

After her grandmother tells her off for not knowing how to conduct the ritual and custom of praying, Ying likely felt helpless and indignant to stop her grandmother on behalf of her father, as seen from her “sigh[ing] elaborately” and “whisper[ing] conspiratorially” to her father in protest, as if to say that she had already done her best to hurry her to no avail.

Possible answers (Mr Li's mother): Mr Li's mother was likely feeling that this visit would be a solemn and serious affair, and that it should be undertaken with the utmost respect. This is seen when she insists that "It must be done properly. If I am to visit your place of work, I must tell your father of it properly".

At the same time, she was resistant to her granddaughter's suggestions to let her pray to Mr Li's father. Her chastising / rebuking / chiding / scolding of Ying for not knowing the proper rituals, processes and words to use when praying to her grandfather suggests that she is annoyed / frustrated / exasperated by how the younger generation has lost touch with the customs of respecting their elders and ancestors.

From Chapter 5:

Back in the present, Mr Li returned to use the binoculars and looked out towards Tanjong Rhu from his office once more. Mr Li wondered about what his mother could see that morning. He begins to question different fragments of his childhood memories of growing up in Tanjong Rhu that his mother could see that he struggles to recall himself.

Question 3: Re-read Chapter 5. What thoughts and feelings do you think Mr Li was experiencing as he tried to recall the memories of Tanjong Rhu? Why do you think he feels that way? Give at least two points with supporting evidence.

Possible answers: Mr Li was likely feeling regret and disappointment at being unable to accurately remember the parts of his childhood memories that his mother was clearly able to do so. His rhetorical questions of "How old was I? When was all this? Why has it all slipped away from me?" also show how he feels frustrated, lost and disoriented by his own inability to remember clearly.

He also expresses a sense of remorse for not asking his mother for more details about these memories before she was unable to do so. His repetition of "I should" only goes to show how he deeply laments his guilt for not being more open with his mother, given their shared moment at his office.

From Chapter 6:

At the hospital, Ying explains to Mr Li about her argument with her aunt over her grandmother's burial clothes. Ying encourages Mr Li to speak to his mother, carefully pulling up her grandmother's eyelids in order for Mr Li to have a conversation with her, as he tries to ask her about their memories of Tanjong Rhu. When she did not reply, he snapped at Ying, asking her to close them. Shortly after this tense exchange between Mr Li and Ying, Mr Li's mother began to stir. She began to speak about the keys to the altar, but Ying and Mr Li would ask her not to worry. After this moment, the writer implies that she passes on.

Question 4: Re-read Chapter 6. What thoughts and feelings do you think Ying and Mr Li have towards Mr Li's mother in her last moments? Why do you think they each feel that way? Give at least two points per character with supporting evidence.

Possible answer (Ying):

Ying was likely in denial about her grandmother's impending death, and would argue / contest / protest against her elders who took a more realistic and practical view of preparing for her

grandmother's death. This can be seen when Ying protests loudly "She's not dying!" in response to her father claiming that she is dying, as well as when she asks her father with "uncertain" eyes that "She is not going to die, is she?"

Ying also feels indignant that her elders seem to be too accepting of her grandmother's impending death, and that they have given up on saving her life. This can be seen when Ying argues to her father that she has donated a pint of blood for her grandmother, compared to how her aunt only showed up to "give her burial clothes". Moreover, her recount of her argument with her aunt about the placement of her burial clothes by the hospital bed is also reflective of how she sees herself as standing up to fight for her grandmother's life.

Ying also continues to believe that her grandmother will continue living as she speaks to her as if she will likely get better and continue being able to communicate. This can be seen when she downplays the significance of her grandmother's attempts to explain the location of the key to the altar. In her "[impatient]" dismissal of her grandmother "fretting about her keys again", Ying's dismissive attitude towards something so significant further suggests that she is denying the severity of her grandmother's condition.

Furthermore, her kind but patronising comment to her grandmother that she knows where her keys are, and that she will bring them tomorrow, as well as her plea to her father to convince her to stop worrying – also betrays a sense that she believes she knows what is best for her grandmother, even though she has ironically dismissed and not listened to the very person she claims to care for.

Possible answer (Mr Li):

Mr Li was thinking about the unsettling irony that his own child seemed to be a parent to his own mother in caring for her by her hospital bedside. His vision of the "hospital bed look[ing] like an oversized crib: grandmother as baby" also suggests that he feels this moment of his mother's frail and critical state to be surreal and unreal. This continued to make him feel unsettled and discomfited as he began to move about the hospital room indecisively – being unsure whether or not to close the hospital room door, and the narrator writing that Mr Li would feel "trapped" by hospital rooms.

Mr Li was likely feeling very hesitant, tentative and uncertain when asking his mother about the memories of his childhood. His multiple, unanswered questions create a sense of suspense where Mr Li would have felt nervous yet hopeful to obtain an answer from his mother, after having neglected to directly connect with her about his childhood in the past. This can also be seen in his avoidance of his mother upon entering the room.

Mr Li was also feeling sentimental about his mother as he relates her eyes to the moment when she "was looking through those binoculars".

To assuage these deep unsettling feelings, Mr Li grew very disturbed by his daughter holding his mother's eyes open in an unnatural manner, given that she did not speak while her eyes her open. By chastising Ying ("Don't you have any respect for your elders? She's your grandmother, not some toy!"), this allowed Mr Li to regain a sense of false control over his uncertain and vulnerable situation as a son when the narrator says "He was on safe ground now." by reverting to the role of a father scolding his own child ("Playing with her eyes like that when she's dying...").

ACTIVITY 2: Motif of Binoculars and Sight

In this story, the motif of sight is strongly connected to the theme and experience of memory. Recall our pre-reading discussion about the fragmented nature of memory and how it is often triggered by our associations with objects.

By paying close attention to how the writer describes the reasons for buying the binoculars, as well as their differing views when using it, we can observe how it reveals the thoughts and feelings of each character.

From Chapter 1:

Near the end of Chapter 1, the narrator explains why Mr Li bought the binoculars for his mother:

“The binoculars had been for her cataracts, he remembered, a feeble attempt to persuade both himself and her doctors that an operation could be forestalled.”

Question 1: Re-read Chapter 1. What does the reason for buying the binoculars for his mother reveal about Mr Li’s thoughts and feelings about his mother’s declining eyesight?

Possible answers:

This reason reveals that Mr Li was likely in denial about the seriousness / severity of his mother’s declining eyesight. It suggests that he hoped to put off and prevent the deterioration of her condition, even though it is something that is beyond his control.

It may also suggest that he had hoped that money and material possessions could counteract any decline of his mother’s health. This could be a result of his guilt for not spending enough time with her while he was working.

From Chapter 2:

Initially, Mr Li’s mother was not interested in using the binoculars that Mr Li had bought for her, thinking that it was not important as she already has everything she needs. However, she begins to have a change of mind when Mr Li explains that the binoculars can “help [her] see things faraway”. She eventually takes up the offer after considering how she can see where Mr Li’s father used to work at Tanjong Rhu. Even then, she says to Mr Li:

“Not that I really need those glasses of yours anyway,” she said. “I can see Tanjong Rhu well enough,” she paused for emphasis. “Behind my eyes.”

Question 2: Re-read Chapter 2.

a) Identify one use of figurative language by the mother.

b) What does the mother’s use of figurative language here reveal about her character?

Possible answers: The mother’s use of figurative language here about seeing and sight suggests that she is quite a nostalgic and sentimental person. This is because her comment “I can see Tanjong Rhu well enough” despite her failing eyesight figuratively suggests that she is able to retain a clear memory of the past that she treasures in her mind.

Motif of Sight

By paying close attention to how the writer describes Mr Li's mother's eyes and their differing views from the binoculars, we can observe a consistent use of irony to highlight the missed connection between mother and son.

From Chapter 4:

At the office, Mr Li's mother appears to be unable to see through the binoculars at what is presently out on the harbour. This is when Mr Li responds by "press[ing] her head back down towards the binoculars, making her hold on to them more steadily" and asking her to look out again. His mother responds by looking back at him. Eventually, she begins to claim to see what are fragments of their past in Tanjong Rhu. This annoys Mr Li who pleads with her to stop it and finally takes back the binoculars from her.

Question 3: Re-read Chapter 4.

a) What is ironic about this moment between Mr Li and his mother? Why is it ironic?

b) How does the writer use diction and dialogue to highlight this irony?

Give one example with reference to the mother, and one example with reference to Mr Li, and explain why it is ironic in each instance.

Possible answers:

a) In this moment, the irony lies in how despite Mr Li's mother literally having failing eyesight, she still manages to be clear with her vision about her memories of the family's past in Tanjong Rhu. At the same time, Mr Li himself – the person who has clear eyesight and the power of the binoculars – is unwilling to share in the same vision of the memories of his childhood in Tanjong Rhu with his mother.

b) The writer's use of diction in describing the mother's eyes is very striking in how it highlights the irony of seeing one's past clearly.

Mother

Example 1: "Her opaque gaze followed vaguely. 'Oh yes, I think I see... well, what am I supposed to see, anyway?'"

Example 2: "But she had moved her head away from the binoculars and was staring blankly, straight in front of her."

Example 3: "I see you, Ah Wah, I see you so clearly."

Example 4: "when she raised her eyes to his, they were as blank as the office windows reflecting the morning sunlight"

Mr Li

Example 1: "Look through them," he commanded. "Can't you see far away? The whole view of the harbour?"

Example 2: "That's Tanjong Rhu over there, mother. Can you see it? Those glasses are powerful, Ah ma. You must be able to see something?"

The lack of agreement between mother and son about the view is ironic because even though they have the binoculars to help them see better, they cannot seem to share the same vision of life and their family's past. This is also compounded by the diction that describes Mr Li's mother as one who has failing eyesight.