

Sample comparative response: *Never Let Me Go* and *Blade Runner*

Topic

Compare how the characters in *Blade Runner* and *Never Let Me Go* are affected by the knowledge of their limited life expectancy.

Notes

To begin with, analyse the topic by isolating the significant terms and identifying what the topic is asking you to focus on. In this topic a key phrase is 'their limited life expectancy', which narrows the focus to those characters who die, or will soon die, prematurely.

It can help to rephrase the topic as a question, and to create a series of key questions that highlight what you are being asked to compare.

Rephrased topic:

How do characters in *Blade Runner* and *Never Let Me Go* react or behave when they understand that their lives are being purposely ended early?

Key questions:

- Which characters are affected?
- How are they affected?
- How are these effects shown by the novelist and film-maker?

When you have a series of key questions, brainstorm each question, looking for similarities and differences within the texts as well as between them. Using Venn diagrams can help (see the next page); for other questions you might just write a series of notes.

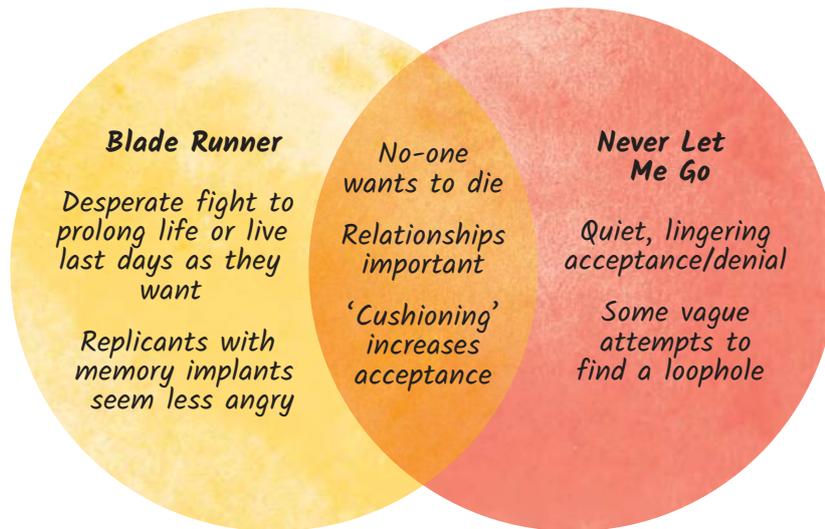
Which characters are affected?

Blade Runner: the replicants' limited life span (four years) leads to their quest to know how much time they have left and potentially to extend their lives. Nexus 6 replicants are slightly different from Rachael – initially she is not told she is a replicant.

Never Let Me Go: the clones' awareness of their limited life spans influences their relationships, but Hailsham students see their role as special, an impression created by the guardians. Is there a difference between Hailsham and non-Hailsham clones? Do Kathy, Ruth and Tommy each respond differently to the knowledge they gain?

How are they affected?

Are the effects positive, negative or a combination? Are some characters affected but don't show it? Does it depend on how they are raised or treated by society? Use a Venn diagram to organise your ideas, as shown on the next page.

**Main contention:**

The clones and replicants all desire to live longer and to be recognised for who they are rather than what they are. At first they look for a loophole that will allow them to live longer, but as they discover that a premature death is inevitable the replicants and clones react in different ways.

Key ideas for paragraphs:

- 1 Clones and replicants are all affected negatively in some way by knowing they will be forced to die early.
- 2 Replicants and clones hope to live longer, or make their own life choices.
- 3 They react to the approach of death in different ways depending on how they have been 'raised', whether they have formed bonds with others and whether they have found meaning in life.
- 4 Both texts show that language plays a powerful role in the attempt to keep clones/replicants subservient, and this affects their response to their roles in the world.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

To some extent, the replicants of Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* and the clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* are shaped by the knowledge of their limited lifespan in similar ways. At first they look for a loophole or intervention that will allow them to live longer and, when that is not possible, they seek ways to give their lives meaning. However, their searches for meaning and their attitudes towards those who created them are portrayed in very different ways. Ishiguro's clones cope largely by distracting themselves with meaningless preoccupations and unattainable fantasies, while Scott's replicants are more openly defiant.^①

TOPIC

Compare how the characters in *Blade Runner* and *Never Let Me Go* are affected by the knowledge of their limited life expectancy.

- ① Introduces the texts and defines the parameters of the essay by giving a clear sense of the main similarities and differences.

SAMPLE COMPARATIVE RESPONSES

- ② Indicates that the differences are not necessarily clear cut, and that variation exists as well as strong similarities. This shows more sophisticated thinking than just making simple distinctions.
- ③ Uses integrated quotes not only to help make the point, but also to show textual knowledge.
- ④ Refers to nuances in character development, showing deeper thinking about the subtle differences between types of clones and their upbringings.
- ⑤ Makes a clear contrast between the texts, explaining how the idea is shown in each.
- ⑥ Explains how imagery and symbolism are used to further ideas; uses appropriate film terminology.
- ⑦ Provides a clear similarity, closely tied to the topic.

Clones and replicants react differently to knowing about their short lifespans, but they are all affected negatively in some way, and all wish at some level to change their destinies.② The replicants are angry and feel cheated; they seek out ways to escape their servitude and to prolong their lives. In contrast, the Hailsham students perpetuate a naive lack of self-awareness by imposing a code of silence with 'severe punishment for any idiot ... who got careless' and questioned their fate.③ Instead of resenting their role or actively investigating alternatives, they channel their energies into gossip and social game-playing, creating an atmosphere of repression and delusion. Tommy's tantrums and Kathy's sexual urges seem to be expressions of deeply repressed, passionate frustration. Similarly, Ruth's social manipulations and dreams of working in an office are attempts to gain control over her world. Even the non-Hailsham clones discuss the idea of 'possibles' and 'deferral' with secretive reverence.④ The rebel replicants, however, know what they are and how they are perceived, and will do anything to escape their fate. As Roy tells Deckard, 'Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave.' Knowing their deaths are imminent drives them to spend their limited time fighting against the role that humanity has given them.

The most significant impact of knowing they have a limited lifespan is that replicants and clones long for more time. After escaping from their off-world enslavement, Roy and the other Nexus 6 replicants return to Earth to confront their maker, Eldon Tyrell, with their problem: 'Death'. Tyrell has no solution for them and suggests 'revel in your time'. Even with no hope of a longer life, they are desperate for an answer to the universal question: how long have I got? The clones seek out information about their lives too, but they don't possess the raw desperation of the replicants.⑤ Their curiosity is manifest in unsubstantiated rumours about 'deferral' that only Ruth, Kathy and Tommy actively seek to clarify. Kathy and Tommy's visit to Madame and Miss Emily mirrors Roy's meeting with Tyrell in many ways – revealing that there are no 'deferrals', that 'normal' humans find them abhorrent and that they are 'special' for their kind. Both scenes also demonstrate the different mindsets of clones and replicants regarding their mortality. Director Ridley Scott uses the confrontation to highlight Roy's anger at his creator. In his novel, though, Ishiguro leaves Kathy and Tommy standing awkwardly and alone in the street, as a symbol that they have no higher power left to consult. The final statement from Madame before she turns her back, 'You poor creatures', highlights the clones' ineffectuality and contrasts starkly with the close-up shot of Roy crushing his 'maker' Tyrell's skull in rage.⑥

These different reactions reflect the 'cushioning' provided to the clones and replicants. In both texts, the ways in which characters learn about their fate, the relationships they are allowed to establish and their given roles in the world shape their attitudes to death.⑦ The clones are naive and accepting. The guardians normalise and underplay the roles of the students as future organ donors, encouraging them to focus on relationships and creativity. Hailsham allows them to feel connected and, ironically, unique. Clones also spend their final days with carers who make them feel loved. This provides a similar effect to Rachael's memory implants in *Blade Runner*, which give her a sense of belonging. Even though she escapes with Deckard, who may also be a

replicant, neither of them exhibit any of the deep resentment shown by Roy, Pris, Zhora or Leon, who have never had their origins or purpose concealed. As he dies, Roy is distraught that he will be forgotten, 'like tears in the rain'. These moments suggest that an early death feels less unfair if we have lived with a sense of purpose and been able to make lasting connections with others.⁸

The language used in each text to describe the clones and replicants is quite different, reflecting the contrasts in how they are taught to see themselves. Nexus 6 replicants are objects created to serve humans. Their lifespan is discussed in technical terms – 'incept dates' and 'longevity' – like machines. Roy even has to remind J.F. Sebastian 'we're not computers'. In contrast, the language used to describe clones has positive connotations. 'Donating' suggests selflessness and honour; 'completing' suggests that dying makes them whole or fulfilled.⁹ The clones also have their own, relatively free community and do not know which of their donations will be their last, which seems to displace mainstream society's direct responsibility for their deaths. Consequently, the clones regard humans as fascinating superiors, not as persecutors. This makes clones alarmingly compliant. In contrast, replicants are denied any such comforting illusion or language cushion, but Roy's primal grief after Pris' death shows that replicants are, perhaps, 'more human than human' despite the labels they are given.

Both *Blade Runner* and *Never Let Me Go* explore complex questions about the ways in which the knowledge of our own mortality affects us. The replicants and clones all want more time, and through their limited lives we see reflected our own innate desire to live a meaningful life filled with close relationships.¹⁰

- ⁸ Addresses ideas and values that are embedded in the text; links back to the topic.
- ⁹ Ties Scott's and Ishiguro's crafting of their texts to the characterisation, also making a broader point about how language can shape perception.
- ¹⁰ States a broader point arising from the comparison, highlighting the central views and values of the texts, without introducing new ideas.