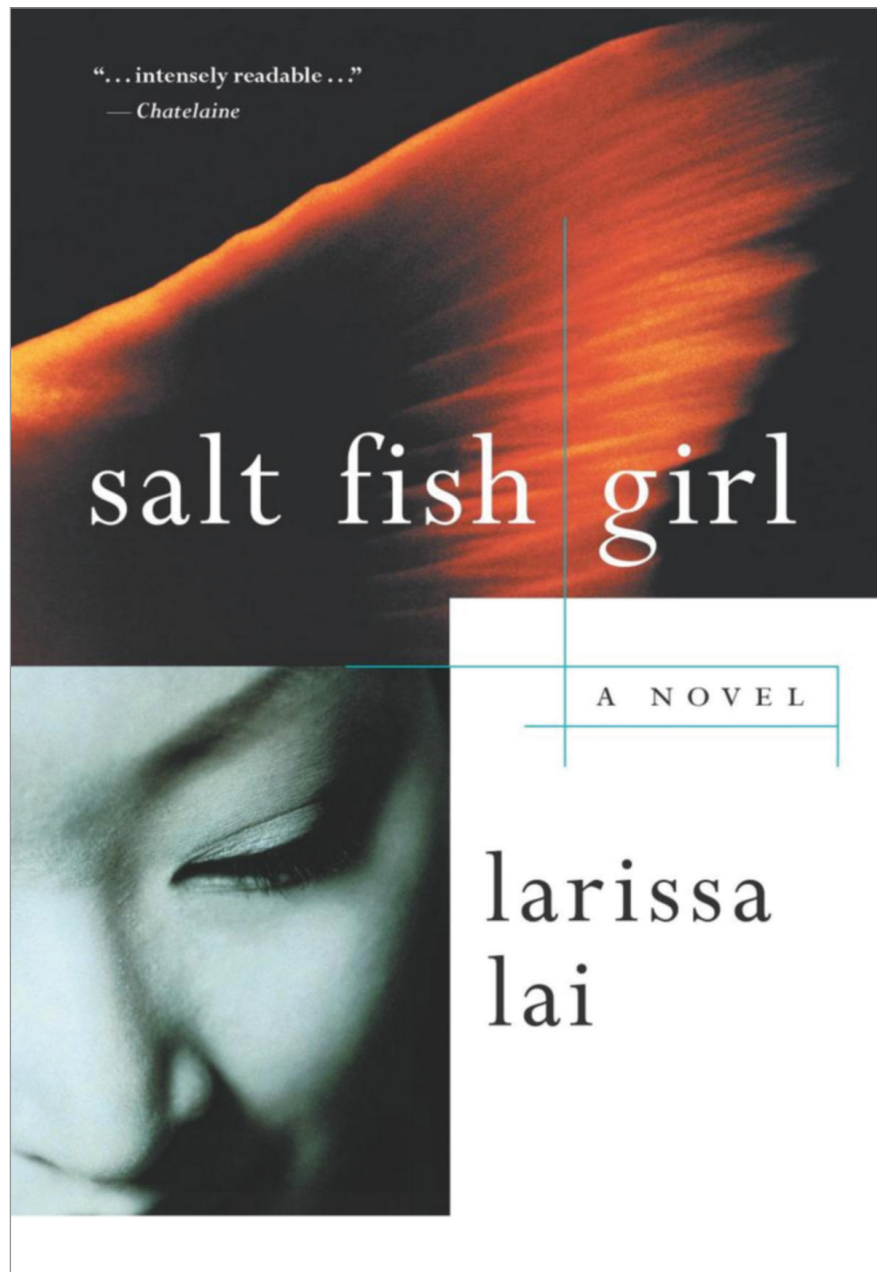


# TEACHERS' GUIDE



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# I. INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Salt Fish Girl* is a science fiction novel told by two narrators in alternating sections. These two narratives compliment and comment on each other.

Miranda is a girl of Chinese heritage growing up on the North American West Coast in the near future. Governments have failed and rule by corporation has been established. Citizens of corporations live in enclaves while the majority of people make do outside these protected spaces. Economic activities, like selling produce, making shoes, advertising, or running a medical clinic, continue.

The propagation of transgenic practices has led to some disturbing consequences. The corporations are cloning women for slave labour. They genetically modify these workers with genes culled from other species to deny them full human rights. Cultivated genetically modified organisms have escaped into the wild, some of which affect human fertility. Finally, a new disease, which may also be the product of genetic engineering, is causing an epidemic marked by disturbing odours, unusual dreams, scales, and suicides.

Miranda's own birth may have been caused by transgenic durian fruit, and she may have been born afflicted with the dreaming disease, as she constantly smells of durian.

When her family is forced to relocate to the Unregulated Zone Miranda and her family are made economic refugees. Miranda grows up with limited opportunities, and she is uncertain about her own desires and choices. As a young adult Miranda becomes involved with two significant characters: Evie, a clone and an ex-factory worker who attempts through activism and direct action to oppose the corporate exploitation of the workers, and Dr. Flowers, a scientist who made the clones and experiments on people who have the dreaming disease.

Juxtaposed with this narrative is the fantastical story of Nu Wa, a narrator based on the goddess of the same name in traditional Chinese mythology. Miranda may be dreaming of, or remembering, being Nu Wa.

Nu Wa describes her beginnings at an unknown prehistorical point, and how she created humans, agriculture, and sex. Later, wanting to become human, she visits a fish who transforms Nu Wa into a human woman by splitting her tail into two legs. Nu Wa is then swallowed by a woman who gives birth to her in nineteenth-century China. She falls in love with a fish merchant's daughter and runs away with her to Canton. Then she is taken to a fantastical island in the clouds, representative of real Western cities that were centres of immigration in the twentieth century. There Nu Wa experiences racial discrimination and systemic barriers before returning to early twentieth-century South China. After the attempt to reintegrate into her family fails, Nu Wa deliberately drowns. She exists as an encysted presence in the Pacific Ocean before she enters a durian fruit and is reborn as Miranda.

Through both narratives, themes like economic and social discrimination of women, economic and social discrimination of immigrants, and understanding self-identity are explored.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larissa Lai is an American-born Canadian writer, critic, and assistant professor at the University of British Columbia. She published her first novel, *When Fox is a Thousand*, in 1995. It was shortlisted for the 1996 Books in Canada First Novel Award. *Salt Fish Girl* is her second novel, and was shortlisted for the James Tiptree Jr. Award, the Sunburst Award, and the City of Calgary's W.O. Mitchell Award in 2002. In 2014 she published the non-fiction book *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s*. In addition, Lai has published poetry, articles, and criticism in various journals and anthologies.

## II. LITERARY DEVICES, MOTIFS, AND THEMES

### LITERARY DEVICES

#### FOIL AND MIRROR CHARACTERS

Larissa Lai frequently makes use of foil and mirror characters. Foil characters highlight each other's strengths and weaknesses. Miranda's parents, in their different approaches to parenting and culture, are foil characters. Ian Chestnut is a foil to Miranda. His easy in-group acceptance at Serendipity underscores Miranda's status as an outsider and highlights the racism involved.

Mirror characters complement and highlight shared qualities, which also lets the author emphasize important ideas. Miranda and Nu Wa are both compassionate characters who are aware of how their actions impact the people in their lives. Both spend time processing guilt and shame, and trying to do what is asked of them. The sense of obligation they feel is at odds with their own interests and desires. This is demonstrated in the quick decisions they both tend to make, showing us that who they are matters more than who they are expected to be.

Salt Fish Girl and Evie are also mirrors. They are quick-tempered and tend toward a hard-nosed realism. Their attitudes help us see that Nu Wa and Miranda are, contrastingly, optimists, always hoping for the best outcome from their actions.

#### PARALLELISM OF EVENTS

Similar to mirroring, the way events and actions repeat can have meaning. For example, immediately after Nu Wa escapes from an underwater imprisonment, Miranda also escapes an underwater cell. These parallels help us to see Miranda and Nu Wa's interrelationship as well as its complexity. They also highlight key themes. Their escapes from water is a refusal to be defined and sidelined by outside forces. Both characters declare their own relevance and agency.

### THEMES

#### IDENTITY

Many of the elements that typically determine identity are represented in Miranda's and Nu Wa's stories — gender, cultural background, race, poverty and wealth, education, sexual orientation, social customs, and social expectations. These elements explicitly shape the protagonists' lives at one time or another. In Nu Wa's story, for instance, her sojourn to the Island of Mist and Forgetfulness explores how the island's existing social structure privileges citizens of European descent while pushing Nu Wa toward specific, pigeon-hole identities like maid, telemarketer, and prisoner.

Through juxtaposition, the author also explores the idea of shared identity. Nu Wa and Miranda may or may not be separate characters. The details of their lives parallel each other — are they similar people because of the

comparable life experiences they have had? Or are they literally two phases of the same person, contiguous across time? Or is Nu Wa the goddess an archetypal, primal identity that Nu Wa, Miranda, and possibly all women embody?

Through Miranda, Evie, and Evie's many clone sisters, the author questions the complexities of identity now posed by genetic engineering. Is it possible for a clone of another person to be wholly separate from that person? Is a person with .03% carp DNA, or whose birth is mediated by durian, a different species of human? In *Salt Fish Girl* this genetic understanding of personhood is critiqued by exploring the implications of the existence of the durian fruit in the context of resulting human rights abuses.

## **WOMEN'S POWER IN SEXIST SOCIETIES**

Miranda, Nu Wa, and other female characters move through a world largely defined by men, for the benefit of men. This is directly represented by the male characters in the story and the accommodations the female characters are forced to make: Salt Fish Girl's father, who prevents Salt Fish Girl from being with Nu Wa; Nu Wa's brother, who marries her off in order to preserve his social standing; Dr. Flowers, who creates the clones, kidnaps Miranda to experiment on, adopts one of the clones as a "daughter," and then later sends her back to the factory. *Salt Fish Girl* shows the ways that male prerogatives warp the lives of the women.

We are also shown how the women in the story, who are by no means passive, find ways to realize their own interests and desires. Evie directly challenges the status quo, actively campaigning for and seeking to disrupt male power structures through direct protest, activism, and sabotage. Miranda's mother builds a marketable power base through her sexual appeal and musical talent. Nu Wa's mother uses social customs to try to secure a good marriage for her daughter, which Nu Wa avoids by appealing to another social custom — spinsterhood. Miranda makes use of her artistic ability to work in advertising.

The clones present two extremes. The escaped Sonias, able to reproduce because they have the durian fruit, have their own small community in which female agency is complete, because men are unnecessary and absent. The clones still trapped in the factories are slaves, stripped of all rights and entirely lacking agency.

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MIGRANTS AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES**

Discrimination against migrants and minority racial groups is also a reoccurring theme in *Salt Fish Girl*. Nu Wa's visit to the Island of Mist and Forgetfulness explores this theme, as do the problems Miranda and her family experience. Their eviction from Serendipity is contrasted with the relative privilege the Chestnuts preserve. Miranda's family's corner store is representative of the kinds of jobs and businesses that Canadian newcomers have historically been limited to.

Other examples demonstrate white privilege (Jane's problems on the bus), the commodification of the Other (the performers at the Kubla Khan), appropriation (Adrian Wither's use of Mrs. Ling's image in advertisements), and casual racism (the behaviour of the other children at Miranda's school, or Ian's comment that "they're not women. They're Janitors"). The clones, enslaved in sweatshops producing shoes, are uniformly people of colour, and represent the worst extremes of economic exploitation.

## MOTIFS

These images and symbolic elements reoccur repeatedly and carry important weight in the story. Their presence often indicates an important event is occurring. Their symbolic content highlights or comments on the words and events of the story.

### ODOUR

References to odour and smell occur regularly in *Salt Fish Girl*. Odour is important in bonding with other people and with memory recall. Humans have strong feelings about familiar and unfamiliar odours. A person's relationship with a given smell as pleasant or unpleasant is subjective and highly influenced by cultural heritage. Not surprisingly, odour has a history of being used to enact and justify discrimination against cultural minorities and immigrant groups, like Chinese Canadians. By making systematic use of language relating to odour, Larissa Lai's writing is highly evocative for the reader, reminding them of that history of injustice, and centring the alienating experience of being marked as Other.

### WATER

Water imagery occurs frequently in *Salt Fish Girl*, and important scenes often occur in water. Water has specific cultural associations in traditional Chinese philosophy; it is one of the five basic elements recognized in Taoism, which underlies a lot of the theory behind traditional Chinese medicine. Water is sometimes considered the most powerful element, as it erodes rock and earth, flows around obstacles, changes shape, and still maintains its essential nature. The chapter title "Water on Rock" is a reference to this Taoist understanding of water.

Yin is one half of the duality of yin and yang. Yang, in contrast, is associated with masculinity, fire, direct action, and openness. Other associations of yin include covert and indirect action. The author makes use of these cultural associations with water, especially through the yin qualities of Nu Wa's and Miranda's characters. For example, Nu Wa's capacity to change greatly, and Nu Wa's and Miranda's tendency to act covertly and indirectly rather than through direct challenge.

Other characters try to make use of water as a tool of erasure, such as the attempt to drown Nu Wa and the underwater oubliette Miranda is placed in. However, water in *Salt Fish Girl* is representative of female strength, resilience, and identity, so these attempts fail. Water is a place of strength and renewed creativity for the protagonists. It is present when Nu Wa and Miranda physically transform. It is the avenue of escape Nu Wa uses twice. When Evie and Miranda retreat into the mountains, they go to a pool.

### FISH, SNAKES, AND MERMAIDS

Fish and snake imagery are used in *Salt Fish Girl* as symbols of desire — sexual desire, but also desire for change. Salt Fish Girl becomes an object of desire that impels Nu Wa to make changes in her life. Evie does the same for Miranda. Nu Wa's quest to become human is mediated by a fish. Evie and Miranda's escape begins with a visit to an aquarium. Nu Wa is frequently a symbol of this desire for change in others. Both Aaron and Miranda make drawings



of the women they desire with snakelike or fishlike tails. Miranda explicitly conflates Nu Wa and Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" in these drawings. Nu Wa is herself a sort of mermaid, beginning *Salt Fish Girl* with a snake tail. Like the Little Mermaid, she then desires to become human and have legs.

As in "The Little Mermaid," these desires are not always wise or healthy. The Little Mermaid died, Nu Wa's legs were extremely painful to acquire, and Miranda does achieve a relationship with Evie, but at a significant social cost.

The character of the mermaid, half fish, half woman, is also a good metaphor for the diasporic identity of immigrants, such as Chinese Canadians like Miranda. The mermaid, an amalgam of two different identities, is alienated from owning either identity entirely. At the same time the mermaid/snake woman in *Salt Fish Girl* is also another representation of the water-borne female ideal, powerful and in her own element.

## SHOES

In *Salt Fish Girl* shoes appear regularly. They are a symbol of agency or denial of agency. They are a symbol of agency when the Sonias use shoes as a tool of protest to disrupt the corporation's economic activities. In the song "A Song for Clara Cruise," shoes are a denial of agency. In "The Red Shoes," the Hans Christian Andersen story that "A Song for Clara Cruise" refers to, a girl wears immodest red shoes and is punished for her pride and impiety by being made to dance without stopping. Through a feminist lens, "The Red Shoes" is a problematic narrative, where the shoes are a device that punishes a woman for her expression of agency. Similarly, in *Salt Fish Girl*, we see shoes being leveraged against women via advertising. First, by Adrian Withers who uses the song "A Song for Clara Cruise" to sell shoes to women. Later, Miranda's advertising work further leverages insecurity and fear about the dreaming disease in order to sell more shoes.

## NETS, CAGES, AND PRISON

There are nets and cages in almost every section of *Salt Fish Girl*: the chicken that escapes from a cage and leads Nu Wa to Salt Fish Girl, the men in chains that Miranda sees in the RealWorld program when using the Swimming Suit with Ian, the bird man in the rattan cage, the fisherman's net, the underwater cage Miranda is held in, the glass prison that develops around Nu Wa, and the aquarium. In addition to these, both Nu Wa and Miranda are arrested and detained in prisons.

In Chinese mythology, the god Fu Xi was the inventor of fishing and trapping and the inventor of the domestication of animals. He was also Nu Wa's brother or husband, the male counterpart to Nu Wa. So, references to nets and cages may be intended to be seen as symbolic of Fu Xi, the male principal opposed to Nu Wa as female principal. Nets and cages may also suggest the negative qualities of male patriarchy, being rigid, confining, limiting, and directly negating women's capacity and right to self-determination.

# III. PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

## AUTHOR STUDY

Have students work in small groups and investigate the author by visiting her website: [larissalai.com](http://larissalai.com). Ask students to prepare a one-page information sheet about Larissa Lai, her written work, and the critical responses that her books have received.

## COVER DECONSTRUCTION

Ask students to analyze elements of the cover and make predictions about the book based on the elements they can see or read.

Consider drawing students' attention toward the following:

- The different possible meanings of the book's title. The cover design and choices of images. Why have two images sectioned off?
- That *Salt Fish Girl* was a finalist for three awards. Have students research these awards.
- The quotations from reviewers. What information can we gather from these?

## CLASS DISCUSSION: SCIENCE FICTION AS A GENRE

Share the following quotation with the class:

**"Science fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology."**

— Isaac Asimov, *Asimov on Science Fiction*

Ask students to discuss their ideas about what distinguishes science fiction as a genre. Consider sharing other definitions of science fiction.

Ask students to discuss why writers and readers of science fiction might want to explore topics like identity and social justice through the lens of a genre that is often called "speculative fiction." Possible answers include:

- To get a fresh perspective on a topic.
- To test the limits of the topic.

- To prepare for the future.
- To explore and prepare for the potential impact of a particular technology.

## COMPOSITION: IDENTITY

Have students write a one-page composition on the topic of identity. This gives students an opportunity to rehearse their own thinking, and primes them to be sensitive to the main themes of *Salt Fish Girl* while reading the novel.

Give students the **On Identity Assignment** page. Ask students to pick a quotation from the provided list and to write a one-page response to the quote.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## ON IDENTITY ASSIGNMENT

To prepare for reading *Salt Fish Girl*, you are challenged to consider what your own ideas are on the topic of identity.

Pick one of the following quotes. Write a one-page response explaining why you chose that quote and why you find it significant.

**“It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity.”**

— Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

**“Certain favourite roles are played by us so often before the public and rehearsed so carefully when we are alone that we find it easier to refer to their fictitious testimony than to that of a reality which we have almost entirely forgotten.”**

— Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*

**“You cannot hide your true self forever.”**

— Cassandra Clare, *City of Fallen Angels*

**“I have a certain way of being in this world, and I shall not, I shall not be moved.”**

— Maya Angelou, *Phenomenal Woman*

**“The social self is simply any idea, or system of ideas, drawn from the communicative life, that the mind cherishes as its own.”**

— Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*

**“All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you.”**

— Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

Consider researching the author of your quote and including some biographical detail.

Remember to include a bibliography of all your sources.

Your response is due in class on \_\_\_\_\_

## IV. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

### NU WA — THE BIFURCATION

Nu Wa, a goddess with the body of a woman and a snake's tail, exists before the start of life in a location that will become the Yellow River.

She is lonely, so she creates the human race out of clay. But she is dissatisfied with the imperfection of her creations. Nu Wa becomes reconciled to their limitations and teaches the first humans agricultural and life skills. Later, she teaches them how to procreate, as a partial redress for their human mortality. She also creates gender distinctions.

As the human population increases, the humans neglect Nu Wa. Feeling lonely, Nu Wa longs to experience human life herself. She returns to the river site where she first made people and enters the water. She observes a young man in a boat, and then encounters a large and ancient fish who agrees to give Nu Wa legs. The fish places a pearl in Nu Wa's throat to give her immortality, and splits her tail into legs. Nu Wa swims to the surface and sits on a rock to examine her new legs, which are rapidly and painfully losing their scales and becoming human. She sees another woman, also on a rock examining her legs, with the face of the young man she had seen earlier.

### MIRANDA — FIRST SYMPTOMS

Miranda is born in Serendipity, a corporation-controlled enclave kept separate from the Unregulated Zone. Miranda's birth was unlikely, as her mother was sixty-three years old at the time. But her mother had eaten a wild, possibly transgenic, durian fruit, and this seems to have enabled the pregnancy. It also left Miranda marked by a strong, durian-like body odour. Miranda's odour initially leads to, or develops concurrently with, Miranda's parents' bonding and a period of happiness as an isolated familial unit. Later social pressure, exemplified by an irate neighbour complaining, ends this idyllic period.

Aimee Ling, her mother, was a singer and songwriter. Her adult brother has the leisure to "tinker with cars." Her father is now the primary earner for the family, working for the corporation as a tax collector. This requires that he use a virtual reality emersion device known as a Business Suit to visit a dystopian, virtual environment with strong game-like elements.

As a child Miranda also engages with artificial environments in the form of interactive storybooks. The storybooks and the Business Suit show that life for Serendipity's inhabitants is filtered and disconnected from the larger world. This is especially true for Miranda's father, who is the most concerned with conforming to the social norms of the Serendipity community. Although life in Serendipity is very comfortable, the intrusive nature of the ads in Miranda's storybook and the nightmarish elements of her father's work suggest that the corporation controlling Serendipity is not entirely benign.

Miranda's odour also causes issues at school, where the other children ostracize her. Miranda's parents strongly disagree about the scale of the problem and what to do about it. Her father takes Miranda out of the enclave

and into the Unregulated Zone to visit Chinese herbalists. Her mother attempts to mitigate the odour through perfumed baths. These attempts do not work. However, after bathing, Miranda discovers fish-like scales in the bathtub.

## **NU WA — THE SALT FISH GIRL**

Nu Wa, still in pain from the bifurcation of her legs, walks into a human town and gets into a cistern. She shrinks and is swallowed by a human woman who subsequently gives birth to Nu Wa.

Nu Wa has a normal human childhood, then falls in love with Salt Fish Girl, the daughter of a dried fish merchant, because of the familiarity and appeal of Salt Fish Girl's odour. Salt Fish Girl and Nu Wa begin a relationship. Nu Wa announces that she will undergo a formal spinsterhood ceremony in order to avoid being married to a man. This makes Nu Wa's family unhappy, but they feel they have to let Nu Wa make this choice. Salt Fish Girl is from a different cultural background, however, and her father refuses to let Nu Wa see his daughter anymore, leaving Salt Fish Girl at home when he visits the village.

Nu Wa pesters Salt Fish Girl's father several times. He responds by attacking and choking her. Nu Wa visits Salt Fish Girl's home in his absence, taking a live chicken with her, which Salt Fish Girl then kills. Nu Wa and Salt Fish Girl bury Nu Wa's chicken-blood soaked clothing, steal a boat, and run away.

After they have left, the salt fish merchant accuses Nu Wa of having kidnapped Salt Fish Girl. The subsequent investigation leads to the salt fish merchant being accused of their murder. When Nu Wa and Salt Fish Girl discuss this, they argue. Salt Fish Girl does not want her father to be killed, as he would be if convicted. Nu Wa offers to go back with Salt Fish Girl, but she refuses.

## **MIRANDA — THE MEMORY DISEASE**

Miranda grows up, continuing to take treatments for her odour, which do not work and sometimes have strong side effects. Miranda's father continues to use the Business Suit to do his job. Miranda meets a new child at school, Ian Chestnut, whose family has emigrated from another corporate enclave maintained by a rival of Saturna, the corporation maintaining Serendipity. Ian's parents were spies for Saturna and have been traded back following their discovery. They may be double agents. Miranda visits Ian's home. Ian's mother — who also has an unusual odour, like rusting metal — gives Miranda an unusual blue drink. Ian has two child-sized VR suits called Swimming Suits. When he and Miranda use these to take a trip through a simulation of their neighbourhood, Miranda experiences a disruption and sees a vision of her father chained in a wet basement, beaten, with other men. Ian and his mother try to calm Miranda, but she runs home.

At home Miranda checks on her father in the Business Suit. He pushes her away and she hits her head and is knocked unconscious. She wakes and is offered a blue drink by her father. She reads three letters she has taken from her father's office. In the first, Miranda's father asks Dr. Flowers, a reputed scientist, to take his daughter's case. In the second, Flowers offers to enroll Miranda in his drug trial. In the final letter, Miranda's father provisionally accepts the offer. Miranda is upset by these letters, as they acknowledge that her odour is problematic. She responds by

drawing a midnight bath in which she falls asleep. In the morning she discovers that her period has begun. She pretends that nothing is happening and goes to school.

At school Ian shows her a subterranean area of the building she had not realized existed. In it a number of dark women, speaking another language and wearing uniforms, move around. Ian denies that they are women and are only janitors. The women's backs show evidence of experimentation — they are transparent, and their organs have been rearranged. Ian believes that this has something to do with the contagion and that the women are primary carriers. Ian has seen Rudy Flowers dissect and rearrange organs on television.

That night, Miranda observes her father suffering, following a day in the Business Suit. When her family is asleep she puts on the suit. She “shoots streams of numbers” at birds, and attacks the Receiver's General, the figures who had previously beaten her father. The next morning her father discovers her in the suit, and her mother confronts her father regarding the letters. Immediately following this, Miranda's father is fired for having returned money to people and for attacking the Receiver's General. The family is forced to move out of Serendipity.

They move into an old grocery store and begin a grocery business, mostly dealing in barter. The store becomes especially known for durian fruit. Her brother Aaron starts a successful car and bicycle repair business. Miranda works in the store. Her odour becomes less noticeable.

In this same period there is a stock market crash, and many corporate employees lose their jobs. Knowledge of the contagion becomes more widespread. It becomes known as the “dreaming disease” and stories circulate of people having strange memories, odours, and walking into the sea.

Miranda's mother dies, crushed by a box of Durian fruit that Miranda was attempting to pass down to her. Miranda is willed the rights to her mother's songs. Her father makes her promise never to sell these and creates a shrine to Miranda's mother. He obtains a piano, possibly by selling his knowledge of Saturna's tax collection practices. He begins playing Aimee Ling's songs nightly.

Miranda takes a job drawing blood samples in Flowers's clinic in the Unregulated Zone where he tests for the dreaming disease, which he is studying. The job exposes her to many people with the dreaming disease and many ideas about it.

Miranda draws the blood of a young woman, Evie. Miranda finds her intensely familiar, especially her odour, though they have not previously met. When she says “It's you,” Evie runs away.

Flowers asks Miranda to let him study her, as he believes she is a “prime carrier” of the disease, based on her having fistulas. He offers her more money to take part in the study. At home, Miranda observes that Aaron is aging, and will soon be an old man as well. Aaron experiences a strange, painful collapse, prompting Miranda to call Flowers. Flowers takes Miranda to a cell partly below sea level, separated from the ocean water by a plexiglas wall. Flowers cuts Miranda's back and inserts an object into her. He ignores her request to remove it, and when Miranda tries to leave, she is drugged and left unconscious.

## **NU WA — THE ISLAND OF MIST AND FORGETFULNESS**

Nu Wa and Salt Fish Girl struggle to live in the city of Canton. Initially homeless, they resort to mugging drunk men. When Salt Fish Girl kills a man, she is pressured into working in a sweatshop, whose poor conditions affect her

health and sight. Nu Wa avoids getting a factory job of her own, preferring to pick pockets on the street. This leads to some tension and resentment between them. Following an episode at her factory, Salt Fish Girl gives Nu Wa a coin to get some medicine for Salt Fish Girl.

Nu Wa previously saw a stranger, a foreign woman dressed in white. She runs into her again and the woman takes Nu Wa away (Nu Wa protests, but weakly) to the “City of Hope on the Island of Mist and Forgetfulness,” a place located in the clouds. The stranger, Edwina, shows Nu Wa the city. Edwina takes Nu Wa into a hotel and gives her a drink that causes her to adopt a new language, Forgetfullian, and to literally urinate away her old language. Edwina checks Nu Wa into the hotel, and then disappears. Nu Wa is forced to take a job as an attendant at the hotel. While doing this job, Nu Wa finds a severed finger. The owner of the hotel, who looks like Edwina, appears on television, showing a patently fake finger. He insists that it is his real finger, and that he is neither a member of a secret society nor selling heroin. Shortly after, the hotel burns down.

Nu Wa becomes a scam artist, selling fake lottery tickets and stealing credit card information. The scam is ultimately exposed. Edwina returns and takes Nu Wa to Spool Island for a holiday visit. After returning from Spool Island they are stopped by the coast guard and arrested. Edwina testifies against Nu Wa, who is then convicted of being an illegal immigrant and smuggling heroin.

Nu Wa spends five years in jail. She is mistreated, but takes up the study of probability. On her release she learns that local rules prevent her, an outsider, from becoming a practicing statistician.

Nu Wa has a dream about Salt Fish Girl, in which Nu Wa eats a fish, realizes it is human flesh, and spits out a coin. Following the dream, Nu Wa hunts for Edwina. In a bar, a bird-masked man in a rattan cage points out a hidden room to Nu Wa, where Edwina is located. Nu Wa demands that Edwina take her home. Edwina agrees to sell her a map in exchange for the coin that belonged to Salt Fish Girl. Nu Wa agrees and makes the trade. Then, using Salt Fish Girl’s knife, she stabs and kills Edwina. Nu Wa then leaves.

## **MIRANDA — A SONG FOR CLARA CRUISE**

Miranda wakes alone at Flowers’s clinic. She leaves and bikes home, passing a protest against Zodiac Industries. As she passes the protest, the police gas the protestors and Miranda is caught in the gas. She is rescued, carried away, and treated by Evie, who had been protesting. Miranda recognizes her again, by scent. Evie again denies knowing Miranda. Suspicious of Miranda, Evie holds a knife to Miranda’s throat and demands the return of the blood Miranda drew previously. Miranda has been carrying it since, and gives it to her now. Miranda returns home.

Evie approaches Miranda outside the clinic. She asks Miranda to identify Flowers’s car, which Miranda does. Evie breaks into and hotwires the car, and Miranda joins her. Evie drives them to a mountain lake, where they talk. Evie explains that she is an escaped factory worker, part of a clone workforce designed with .03% non-human DNA, which means that corporations do not need to respect their human rights, as they are not considered people. Additionally, the human genes used to create workers were taken from the Human Genome Project, which collected genes from diverse human populations. As a result, all the workers are also racial minorities — “Brown eye and black hair.”

As proof she shows Miranda the scars on her back created by the removal of the monitoring device that had been installed on her until her escape. Evie claims that compounds across the PEU house hundreds of thousands of



clones exactly like her. Miranda is unwilling to believe Evie but she is unable to contradict her. Evie and Miranda have sex. Afterward, Miranda asks why Evie came to the doctor's office. Evie shows her a large boil, an infection behind her ear, where Evie, like Miranda, has a fistula. Miranda lances the boil, which drains. The smell makes Miranda remember a time when she had a longer, leaner shape. Evie mentions that all the clones have fistulas, and that Flowers used to help Evie with hers. The two return to town, abandoning the car and riding a bus. Evie wants Miranda to avoid Flowers's experiments and to keep herself secret from him. She dismisses the idea that they might both have the disease, seeing it as unimportant if they are both healthy.

On the bus two young white men sit next to a young Asian woman and begin to pester her. Miranda recognizes the interaction as problematic. Evie intervenes and begins questioning one of the men, who objects. The girl, Jane, gets off the bus to avoid the developing conflict. The men immediately follow her. The bus driver then starts the bus moving and refuses to let Evie and Miranda get off, preventing them from intervening again.

Once off the bus, Miranda realizes that Evie is correct — she may have the disease but she is asymptomatic. She is unsure how to feel about Flowers, however, despite her spotty memories of her time in Flowers's cell. Miranda invites Evie home, but Evie refuses.

Some of this chapter's titular song is found on page 24. The full text of "A Song for Clara Cruise" is given on pages 91–92.

## **NU WA — DROWNING**

Nu Wa opens Edwina's map to find that the secret to returning home is simple — she only needs to follow the river. She arrives back in Canton and looks for Salt Fish Girl, eventually locating her by smell. Salt Fish Girl lets her in, but does not believe Nu Wa is Nu Wa, since fifty years have passed by and Nu Wa still seems young. Nu Wa is unable to explain what happened or to apologize. While she can understand Salt Fish Girl's Cantonese, Nu Wa can only speak Forgetfullian. After the attempt to communicate fails, Salt Fish Girl pushes Nu Wa out.

Nu Wa travels back to her hometown, where she discovers that her father is dead, her mother is old and senile, and her younger brother is now the head of the family. She proves her identity by showing her brother where they had hidden a book as children. Her family takes her in, and her brother adopts her, in order to avoid questions. However, this is still unusual and the village assumes Nu Wa is her brother's illegitimate child. An additional problem caused by her arrival is that the family of the salt fish merchant have been paying compensation to Nu Wa's family since her supposed death. As a result, Nu Wa's brother is the business partner of the salt fish merchant's nephew, Hap, a tobacco merchant living in Gold Mountain. Nu Wa's return shows that this financial arrangement is based on false pretences, and may cause Nu Wa's family to lose face and the debt to be reversed.

Nu Wa's brother decides to solve this problem by marrying Nu Wa and Hap, which would tacitly rebalance the scales somewhat and get Nu Wa removed to Gold Mountain. Neither Nu Wa nor her proposed husband want to marry but both agree. This initially seems manageable; the relationship between Hap and Nu Wa is civil, though chaste. When Nu Wa's brother begins making jokes about Hap's virility, Hap tries to initiate sex. When Nu Wa rejects him, Hap asks her to find somebody else to get pregnant by. Nu Wa approaches a fisherman who agrees to have sex with her if she helps him untangle her nets. She visits him three times. On the third visit she is followed by her niece, who witnesses what occurs and informs Nu Wa's brother and the village. This is so public that Nu Wa's mother-in-law is forced to order that Nu Wa be drowned.

When the villagers come to capture Nu Wa, she escapes and throws herself in the river, drowning herself and floating away with the current.

## MIRANDA — THE NEW KUBLA KHAN

Miranda arrives at home, uncertain what to do about her job at Flowers's clinic. Her family needs the paycheque, but she does not want to be near him again after recent events. She begins to experience memories or dreams of "a body as wide as a road," and draws pictures of snake or fish women. These make her think about Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," and prompts her father to tell her the story of Nu Wa and Fu Xi. This in turn inspires Miranda to draw pictures of Nu Wa, including one of Fu Xi as a woman embracing Nu Wa.

Ian Chestnut visits the store and invites Miranda to a party in Serendipity at the New Kubla Khan. Miranda opts to go, as the Kubla Khan is the venue her mother used to perform at. Miranda takes her mother's red cheongsam dress from the shrine and bicycles to the Kubla Khan. She meets Ian and his friends, including Adrian Withers. There are a series of performances: a faux surgery in which a woman seems to remove and juggle her organs, an emotionally wrenching piano performance by a Chinese boy, and a bird woman who reminds Miranda strongly of Evie.

The MC calls Miranda out, and asks Ian if she can sing. Ian nods yes. Miranda initially refuses to sing, but when Adrian puts a significant sum of money on the table, Miranda takes the money and sings "A Song for Clara Cruise." While singing she thinks she sees Flowers in the audience. After the song, Miranda prepares to leave. Adrian offers to buy the rights to the song so that his ad company can use it to sell Pallas shoes. Miranda initially resists, but Adrian forcefully persists and Miranda ultimately signs a contract and accepts a large sum of money. She begins to bike home but is interrupted by Flowers and his assistants. They abduct her.

Flowers ignores her protests and takes her to the experiment site, where she is pushed into a flexible tube, like a plastic umbilical cord. She falls through this into an underwater Plexiglas cage shaped like a rattan birdcage. The cage is empty except for a bathtub and a razor blade. Miranda lies down on the floor and reflects about the sale of her mother's song.

## NU WA — A SEED

Nu Wa "becomes river water," then, when she is washed out to sea, sinks into the cold ocean water where the pressure causes her to be encased in glass. She remains encased for 250 years.

She grows bored but can only find one solution to escape. She sees her mother swimming in the ocean. This prompts her to spit out the pearl that is in her mouth (placed there by the great fish in the first chapter) at the wall of her prison. The glass shatters, the pearl is lost, and Nu Wa is cut, but she can now swim to the shore. On the shore she crawls inside a durian tree blossom and sleeps. A durian fruit grows around her.

Later she hears her mother, Aimee, talking to her father about eating a durian fruit. Nu Wa prepares by entering one of the durian seeds and ultimately fusing with it.

## MIRANDA — WATER ON ROCK

Miranda escapes by singing, which makes the seal at the top of her cage leak water. After a week Miranda is able to float to the top and squeeze out of the opening. She swims to the surface, losing the money Adrian Withers had given her.

Miranda walks home. She is met by her brother, Aaron, and his new wife, Karen, a clone like Evie. Aaron upbraids Miranda for selling the song, which has now become ubiquitous in advertisements, upsetting their father's mental health. Miranda is confused by Karen, whose presence makes Miranda confront her prior disbelief about Evie and the thousands of other clones. Miranda and Aaron argue about Flowers. Miranda goes to sleep in Aaron's old room, where pictures of his former wife cover the walls, including pictures of her with snake or fish tails. After seeing these and hearing her father's persistent piano playing, she leaves the house, going to sleep at a Christian mission.

Miranda begins shoplifting tin toys and selling them to children on the street. When she returns to a store she had previously targeted, the owner grabs her. She protests, then is rescued by Evie, who starts a fire and leads her away. Evie leads Miranda to a house where a strange durian tree grows. There she meets a number of clones, Sonia 14, an old woman, Sonias 116, 121, 148, 161, 211, and 287, all young women, as well as several infants. Evie feeds Miranda and gives her durian fruit to eat. Miranda confesses to Evie about the sale of her song, which angers Evie. Evie and Miranda have sex. Miranda thinks about shoes and the relationship of women to shoes. Miranda experiences something stirring inside herself, then sleeps.

The next day Miranda wakes and discovers a gun under Evie's pillow. Later, Miranda sees Evie conferring with Sonia 14 outside near a vegetable garden. She goes down to the kitchen and is given breakfast cereal to eat. Evie then suggests to her that it would be safe for her to return home and gives her a knapsack full of breakfast cereal as an apology for Evie having made Miranda lose her job.

Miranda returns home and observes people wearing bags in their shoes to avoid contracting the dreaming disease. Miranda meets Darling Tom, an advertising executive for Logo Moguls. Darling Tom interviews Miranda and commissions her to redo her drawings of the Little Mermaid in order to advertise Pallas shoes. Miranda signs a contract to work for Darling Tom's company, Logo Moguls. She works on several campaign ideas, despite some strong reservations about the ethicality of the work.

After meeting Evie outside Miranda's new job, Evie comes to see Miranda again to give her more cereal. Pallas security interrupts their meeting and investigates the bag of cereal, discovering that it contains shoe soles cut to stamp messages on the street, which have been used to agitate against Pallas practices. Evie and Miranda are arrested and held in a cell together for a considerable time before being released on an empty highway near the Sonias' house. Evie and Miranda walk to the house, where Sonia 14 is preparing to leave with the infants. A planned act of sabotage (infiltrating shoe manufacturing plants and replacing the moulds for soles in those factories with their own) has failed following Evie's arrest. The other Sonias have been killed and buried in a mass grave. The durian tree and some supplemental plants have been destroyed. Sonia 14 invites Evie to come with her. Evie refuses.

Miranda and Evie travel toward Flowers's office. Evie reveals that Flowers is the architect of the Sonias and other clones. Evie and Miranda invade Flowers's office, where Evie confronts Flowers at knife point about the death of

the Sonias. Flowers is behind the attack on the Sonias, which he justifies because they have been using the durian tree to reproduce parthenogenetically. When a guard interrupts, Evie drops the knife. Miranda picks it up and stabs Flowers. Evie and Miranda flee, leaving Flowers alive but bleeding heavily.

Evie and Miranda steal a car and discuss the secret of the durians. They drive to an aquarium and meet Chang, who worked with Flowers to create the Sonias. He agrees to get them supplies so they can run away. Evie and Miranda visit the exhibits, including the carp that the Sonias' nonhuman DNA came from. When the Pallas police arrive, Miranda and Evie escape and drive into the mountains.

In the mountains they stop at the complex where the clones were developed. They discover a number of sleeping young men, clones of Flowers. Evie shows Miranda the lab in which the cloning work was done. The two walk farther up into the wilderness before discovering a hot spring. They get into the water, where both develop tails, and Miranda gives birth to a daughter.

## V. DURING-READING ACTIVITIES

# CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 1

## NU WA — THE BIFURCATION

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one- to two-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 1** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

### COMPREHENSION

1. Describe Nu Wa.
2. Describe Nu Wa's relationship with her creations.

### EXPAND YOUR FRAME

1. Investigate the legendary Nu Wa, the Chinese goddess the author bases her character on. What elements of the original stories has the author used? What elements are absent?
2. Investigate and explain what pearls symbolize in Chinese cultural tradition. What do you think the pearl Nu Wa is given represents?

### MAKING INFERENCES

1. Nu Wa says of the young man in the boat: "I couldn't know then that it was not the kind of face young men usually wore in public." What does the author intend for us to understand from this observation?
2. Who is the second woman on the rocks? What is her relation to Nu Wa? What is her relation to the young man in the boat?
3. Read a summary of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." How does the fairy tale parallel the first chapter? How might it foreshadow other events in *Salt Fish Girl*?

# VOCABULARY BUILDING 1

## NU WA — THE BIFURCATION

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
unformed	1		
dormant	1		
profound	1		
insolently	2		
monstrous	3		
qualms	4		
aromatic	4		
indecipherable	7		
bifurcation	8		
wrenched	8		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 2

### MIRANDA — FIRST SYMPTOMS

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a three- to five-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 2** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What is Serendipity and how is it governed?
2. What is Miranda's father's job? How does it work?

#### EXPAND YOUR FRAME

Research durian fruit, its properties, and its history of cultivation.

#### MAKING INFERENCES

People in Serendipity do not enter the Unregulated Zone if they can help it, and they do not eat food without a Saturna Sticker. What implications does this behaviour have?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

1. How do the descriptions of the uses of virtual reality technologies inform the reader about the culture of Serendipity?
2. Why did the author choose to make Miranda smell strongly? Why specifically did the author choose durian?
3. Miranda's parents disagree on a several topics. How do their disagreements represent the tension that immigrants assimilating to a new culture often feel?

#### DISCUSSION

Are there foods and odours you find attractive that others dislike, or you dislike that others enjoy? Why are our reactions to odour so personal?



## VOCABULARY BUILDING 2

### MIRANDA — FIRST SYMPTOMS

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
conception	13		
engrossed	17		
emanated	20		
inarticulate	29		
cryptic	30		
tendrilling	31		
propaganda	32		
emancipation	34		
conniving	42		
cloying	43		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 3

### NU WA — THE SALT FISH GIRL

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one- to two-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 3** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. Explain the social custom of spinsterhood.
2. How does Nu Wa explain her attraction to Salt Fish Girl? Do you think that her theory is credible?
3. How does Nu Wa frame the dried fish merchant?

#### MAKING INFERENCES

1. Why do you think Nu Wa's mother cries softly in her room?
2. Why do you think Salt Fish Girl rejects returning to save her father?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

1. How does the author present ideas about the oppression of women and institutional sexism in this chapter?
2. What does the author want us to understand about life for women in a patriarchal society like nineteenth century South China?

#### DISCUSSION

How does the right to personal freedom conflict with obligations to family and parents? Are these ideas entirely irreconcilable? If they are not, which is more important?

## VOCABULARY BUILDING 3

### NU WA — THE SALT FISH GIRL

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
baser	47		
cistern	47/48		
inexplicable	48		
putrid	48		
congee	49		
go-between	50		
patriarchy	51		
frugal	52		
autonomous	54		
pungent	58		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 4

### MIRANDA — THE MEMORY DISEASE

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a three- to five-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 4** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What is the “dreaming disease”? What are its symptoms and possible causes?
2. Why does Miranda feel guilt and obligation to her parents?

#### MAKING INFERENCES

1. Are the Chestnuts double agents? What is your evidence? What might be the implications if they are?
2. What do you know or suspect about Dr. Flowers?
3. What do you think is the purpose of Dr. Flowers’s experiment, which he subjects Miranda to?

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. What do the blue drinks offered to Miranda at the Chestnuts and then again by her father represent?
2. When Aaron collapses (page 110) Miranda sees a shadow left behind by his fallen body. What do you think this is intended to represent?
3. How does Larissa Lai develop the theme of cultural prejudice against migrants in this section?

#### DISCUSSION

A feature of the dreaming disease is experiencing memories. Are these real memories?

## VOCABULARY BUILDING 4

### MIRANDA — THE MEMORY DISEASE

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
embryonic	59		
liminal	59		
seeped	60		
fistula	69/ 107		
epidemic	70		
palpable	78		
shunned	83		
nostalgia	93		
materializing	106		
marrow	107		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 5

### NU WA — THE ISLAND OF MIST AND FORGETFULNESS

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one- to three-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 5** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What was the cause of the disagreement between Salt Fish Girl and Nu Wa?
2. Why is Nu Wa imprisoned?

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. List details that demonstrate that the chapter “The Island of Mist and Forgetfulness” is an extended metaphor for the experience of being an immigrant.
2. How does this section echo representations of fairy abduction?
3. What does the bird-man in the rattan cage represent?
4. What does the character of Edwina represent?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

1. Why may Larissa Lai have begun this section in the early twentieth century in the rapidly industrializing city of Canton?
2. How does the chapter “The Island of Mist and Forgetfulness” provide a critique of the different barriers immigrants often face in their new homes?

#### DISCUSSION

On page 125, Nu Wa tells us that “when you own nothing it’s hard to believe you have anything to lose. I can’t say what made me go with this strange woman, but it had more to do with weakness than strength.” How do you think poverty impacts people’s decision making?

## VOCABULARY BUILDING 5

### NU WA — THE ISLAND OF MIST AND FORGETFULNESS

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
hawker	117		
dilapidated	117		
quaint	120		
outlandish	122		
hysteria	122/ 123		
irretrievable	126		
brogue	131		
lilt	133		
gullible	135		
unmoored	139		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 6

### MIRANDA — A SONG FOR CLARA CRUISE

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one- to three-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 6** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. Who and what is Evie?
2. Why would the corporations want a private workforce that are “patented new life forms”?

#### EXPAND YOUR FRAME

Read Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Red Shoes.” This chapter is named for a song based on that fairy tale. What other connections can you find between this chapter and “The Red Shoes”?

#### MAKING INFERENCES

1. What are the implications of Evie and her clone sisters having fistulas in the same location that Miranda does?
2. Why does Evie begin speaking to the men on the bus?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

1. Why does Larissa Lai include the scene on page 152, in which Miranda’s brother and father are angry over the lost bike?
2. Why does the author include the scene on the bus in which Jane is accosted? What does the author want us to know about Miranda, Evie, and this world?

#### DISCUSSION

Corporations in *Salt Fish Girl* are often connected to mythological names: Zodiac, Saturna, Pallas Shoes, and Aries William. Why does the author want to associate the corporations with ancient mythology? What is the potential value of doing so?



## VOCABULARY BUILDING 6

### MIRANDA — A SONG FOR CLARA CRUISE

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
disoriented	149		
interminable	154		
humusy	155		
vicissitudes	155		
scalloped	156		
patented	158		
sordid	158		
bioluminescent	164		
seething	165		
inflict	167		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 7

### NU WA — DROWNING

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one- to two-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 7** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What are the two problems that Nu Wa encounters on her return to Canton?
2. Why is her reappearance problematic for Nu Wa's family? How does her brother propose to solve the problem?

#### EXPAND YOUR FRAME

Find and read a version of the story of Liu Ch'en and Yuan Chao. How is this similar to what happens to Nu Wa? Can you find other similar stories?

#### MAKING INFERENCES

1. What do you think Salt Fish Girl's life has been like in the intervening fifty years?
2. Why is Nu Wa's sexual encounter with the fisherman an offense worthy of the death penalty?

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. Nu Wa is almost drowned, then escapes by throwing herself into the river and drowning. Discuss how water is symbolic in *Salt Fish Girl*. Justify your answer with examples from the text.
2. How does the author make use of second person narration on pages 183 and 184?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

1. Why do you think the author has chosen to have fifty years pass in this way?
2. What would the author like us to conclude about the problem of independent or excess women in patriarchal societies? Justify your answer with details from the text.

## VOCABULARY BUILDING 7

### NU WA — DROWNING

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
surreptitiously	171		
unceremoniously	173		
indifferent	173		
archaic	175		
indemnities	176		
compensation	176		
impunity	177		
stagnant	180		
skulk	180		
flail	183		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 8

### MIRANDA — THE NEW KUBLA KHAN

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one- to two-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 8** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

Why is the New Kubla Khan a significant location for Miranda?

#### EXPAND YOUR FRAME

1. Find and read “Kubla Khan” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the Poetry Foundation website ([poetryfoundation.org](http://poetryfoundation.org)). Research and explain what Coleridge based this famous poem on.
2. Who is Fu Xi and what is his relationship to the mythical figure Nu Wa?

#### MAKING INFERENCES

Why has Dr. Flowers left a razor blade in the underwater cage?

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

Is Fu Xi represented symbolically by anybody or anything in *Salt Fish Girl*?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

1. What does the author want to demonstrate about agency, privilege, and consent in this chapter?
2. Why does Larissa Lai choose not to have a character named Fu Xi in *Salt Fish Girl*?

#### DISCUSSION

What is “cultural voyeurism” and why is it problematic? How does the scene set in the New Kubla Khan exemplify cultural voyeurism? Why is “Kubla Khan” a good reference to the history of cultural voyeurism?

## VOCABULARY BUILDING 8

### MIRANDA — THE NEW KUBLA KHAN

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
dolefully	186		
generative	186		
androgynous	187		
cheongsam	190		
clavicle	193		
doyenne	195		
skiving	196		
minx	199		
rattan	201		
glamour	202/ 203		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 9

### NU WA — A SEED

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a one-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 9** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

Describe Nu Wa's transformations in this chapter.

#### MAKING INFERENCES

1. What is Nu Wa's only plan, and why would she prefer to find another way?
2. Who is Nu Wa referring to as "my mother"?

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. What do pearls and seeds represent in *Salt Fish Girl*?
2. How does your understanding of who Nu Wa and Miranda are change based on this chapter?

## VOCABULARY BUILDING 9

### NU WA — A SEED

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
transmuting	205		
reverberated	206		
rooting	206		
lolloped	206		
daunted	207		
tenacity	207		
languorously	208		
unadulterated	208		
stingy	209		

## CHAPTER RESPONSE ACTIVITIES 10

### MIRANDA — WATER ON ROCK

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Record a three- to five-paragraph summary of the significant events and information from this section of the book.

#### VOCABULARY CHART

Use **Vocabulary Building 10** to investigate specific vocabulary words.

#### COMPREHENSION

1. What are the Sonias planning and why?
2. What is the history and capability of the durian fruit?

#### MAKING INFERENCES

1. Why does Flowers have the Sonias killed and the durian tree cut down?
2. Why does Miranda consider her work at Logo Moguls to be a crime?

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. Compare and contrast historical instances of shoes being used as a mechanism of oppression (e.g., foot binding) and as a mechanism of liberation (e.g., sabots).
2. How is the durian representative of female power?
3. In the last scene, Miranda and Evie both transform and grow tails. What is the significance of this event?

#### CRITICAL LITERACY

Think about the character of Dr. Flowers. Explain how his actions represent patriarchal stereotypes about women.

#### DISCUSSION

Are Miranda and Evie members of an entirely new species, as Miranda thinks on page 259?



## VOCABULARY BUILDING 10

### MIRANDA — WATER ON ROCK

For each word in the table below, locate the sentence in *Salt Fish Girl* where it was found. Learn and record the dictionary definition.

VOCABULARY WORD	PAGE	CONTEXT SENTENCE	DICTIONARY DEFINITION
perturbing	215		
clandestine	216		
sabotage	216		
diversified	219		
homogenization	225		
undulate	238		
infiltration	249		
altruistic	251		
latent	252		
degenerate	255		
subversion	256		

# VI. POST-READING ACTIVITIES

## COMPARISON STUDY

*Salt Fish Girl* was first published in 2002. Since then some of the science and technology ideas that the author used have advanced considerably; in particular, the science of genetically modifying organisms, which has seen the development of Cas9- and CRISPR-based methodologies.

With the class, brainstorm a list of predictions about the future (scientific, technological, and social) that are referenced in *Salt Fish Girl*.

Have students pick one development to investigate. How is the development they chose rooted in a modern field of study or current technology? How far removed from the present moment is Larissa Lai's vision of the future?

Have students present their findings in class or submit a short report.

## COVER REDESIGN

Ask students to redesign the cover of *Salt Fish Girl*.

The new design should showcase at least one key theme from *Salt Fish Girl* in the textual and graphical choices the students make.

## DRAMATIZATION

Have students work in pairs to write and present a short dialogue scene (one to three minutes) between two characters, either from *Salt Fish Girl* or living in the future world of *Salt Fish Girl*. The scene should present one key theme found in the book.

The scene should provide an opportunity for students to practice their oral communication and presentation skills (clarity, diction, nonverbal cues, etc.).

## ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Give students the **Essay Assignment** handout and have them write a three- to five-page essay on one of the following topics:

- How are fairy tales utilized as a motif in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore themes of women's empowerment and patriarchal oppression?

- How is odour utilized as a motif in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore themes of cultural bias and diasporic identity?
- How is the element of water utilized as a motif in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore themes of female identity?
- *Salt Fish Girl* has an unusual, dual narrative set alternately in the past and in the future. Why has the author used this structure to explore her chosen themes?
- How does Larissa Lai use science fiction, mythical, and fantastical elements to explore her chosen themes?

## SCIENCE FICTION STORY

Have students take one of the science fiction premises from *Salt Fish Girl* (or an idea of their own about a possible scientific, technological, or social development) and write their own science fiction short story around that development. Consider brainstorming ideas as a whole class initially.

Consider having students share their stories and provide peer feedback through one of the following formats:

- In a VoiceThread, in Google Classroom, or in another online shared space
- An in-class Writer's Café

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Write a three- to five-page essay on one of the following topics:

- How are fairy tales utilized as a motif in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore themes of women's empowerment and patriarchal oppression?
- How is odour utilized as a motif in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore themes of cultural bias and diasporic identity?
- How is the element of water utilized as a motif in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore themes of female identity?
- *Salt Fish Girl* has an unusual, dual narrative, set alternately in the past and in the future. Why has the author used this structure to explore her chosen themes?
- How does Larissa Lai use science fiction, mythical, and fantastical elements to explore her chosen themes?

Please remember to include a bibliography of all your sources.

Your essay will be assessed for:

- Knowledge and understanding of the text
- Analysis of the text
- Organization
- Clarity and Sentence fluency
- Revision
- Research Skills

Your response is due in class on \_\_\_\_\_

# VIII. ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

This rubric is closely based on the Ontario Achievement Chart, found in the ministry document Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools.

CATEGORIES	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
<b>KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</b>				
<b>Knowledge of content</b>	demonstrates limited knowledge of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates some knowledge of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates considerable knowledge of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates thorough knowledge of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>
<b>Understanding of content</b>	demonstrates limited understanding of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates some understanding of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates considerable understanding of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates thorough understanding of the content of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>
<b>THINKING</b>				
<b>Use of planning skills (such as creating a T-chart to compare characters, or documenting the occurrence of specific motifs)</b>	uses planning skills with little effectiveness to systematically investigate <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses planning skills with some effectiveness to systematically investigate <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses planning skills with considerable effectiveness to systematically investigate <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses planning skills with a high degree of effectiveness to systematically investigate <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>
<b>Use of processing skills (such as making an inference, interpreting specific symbolic references, or analyzing the story structure)</b>	uses processing skills with limited effectiveness to explain ideas and concepts from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> or related to <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses processing skills with some effectiveness to explain ideas and concepts from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> or related to <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses processing skills with considerable effectiveness to explain ideas and concepts from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> or related to <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses processing skills with a high degree of effectiveness to explain ideas and concepts from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> or related to <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>

<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>LEVEL 1</b>	<b>LEVEL 2</b>	<b>LEVEL 3</b>	<b>LEVEL 4</b>
<b>Use of critical/creative thinking processes (such as determining the author’s perspective, or creating a new chapter or cover)</b>	uses critical or creative processes with limited effectiveness to evaluate, synthesize, or extend ideas from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses critical or creative processes with some effectiveness to evaluate, synthesize, or extend ideas from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses critical or creative processes with considerable effectiveness to evaluate, synthesize, or extend ideas from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	uses critical or creative processes with a high degree of effectiveness to evaluate, synthesize, or extend ideas from <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>				
<b>Expression and organization of ideas and information (clear expression, logical organization) in oral, graphic, and written forms</b>	organizes and expresses clear ideas and understandings about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with limited effectiveness	organizes and expresses clear ideas and understandings about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with some effectiveness	organizes and expresses clear ideas and understandings about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with considerable effectiveness	organizes and expresses clear ideas and understandings about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Consideration of and effective communication to specific audiences for specific purposes, in oral, graphic, and written work</b>	demonstrates limited effectiveness in communicating to specific audiences for specific purposes in oral, graphic, and written work about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates some effectiveness in communicating to specific audiences for specific purposes in oral, graphic, and written work about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates considerable effectiveness in communicating to specific audiences for specific purposes in oral, graphic, and written work about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>	demonstrates a high degree of effectiveness in communicating to specific audiences for specific purposes in oral, graphic, and written work about <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>
<b>Use of appropriate conventions, vocabulary, and terminology in oral, graphic, and written work, (such as using the word <i>motif</i> in literary analysis, or <i>diaspora</i> in a discussion of immigration)</b>	uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology in their work discussing <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with limited effectiveness	uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology in their work discussing <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with some effectiveness	uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology in their work discussing <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with considerable effectiveness	uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology in their work discussing <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> with a high degree of effectiveness

CATEGORIES	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
APPLICATION				
<b>Application of knowledge and skills in familiar contexts (such as modeling the use of foil characters in their own writing)</b>	applies themes and writing techniques demonstrated in <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> to their own writing with limited effectiveness	applies themes and writing techniques demonstrated in <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> to their own writing with some effectiveness	applies themes and writing techniques demonstrated in <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> to their own writing with considerable effectiveness	applies themes and writing techniques demonstrated in <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> to their own writing with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Transfer of knowledge and skills (such as assessing the impact of the author's cultural context in other works of fiction)</b>	transfers knowledge and skills to the study of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (or from that study) with limited effectiveness	transfers knowledge and skills to the study of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (or from that study) with some effectiveness	transfers knowledge and skills to the study of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (or from that study) with considerable effectiveness	transfers knowledge and skills to the study of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (or from that study) with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Making connections between various contexts (such as explaining the relevance of Chinese mythology or Hans Christian Andersen to <i>Salt Fish Girl</i>)</b>	makes connections within sections of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> , with other texts, to personal knowledge, and to the outside world with limited effectiveness	makes connections within sections of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> , with other texts, to personal knowledge, and to the outside world with some effectiveness	makes connections within sections of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> , with other texts, to personal knowledge, and to the outside world with considerable effectiveness	makes connections within sections of <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> , with other texts, to personal knowledge, and to the outside world with a high degree of effectiveness

# VIII. ONTARIO CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

## FOR SECTION III: PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### ENGLISH, GRADES 11 AND 12

#### Oral Communication

1. **Listening to Understand:** listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes.
2. **Speaking to Communicate:** use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

**Applies to:** Class Discussion: Science Fiction as a Genre

#### Reading and Literature Studies

1. **Reading for Meaning:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning.
2. **Understanding Form and Style:** recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning.
3. **Reading With Fluency:** use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently.

**Applies to:** Author Study, Cover Deconstruction

#### Writing

1. **Developing and Organizing Content:** generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience.
2. **Using Knowledge of Form and Style:** draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience.
3. **Applying Knowledge of Conventions:** use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively.

**Applies to:** Composition: Identity



## **CANADIAN LITERATURE, GRADE 11**

3. **Critical Literacy:** demonstrate an understanding that Canadian authors, readers, and texts have particular perspectives that influence the reading experience.

5. **The Role of Literature in Society:** assess the importance of Canadian literature as a social and cultural force.

**Applies to:** Author Study

## **STUDIES IN LITERATURE, GRADE 12**

3. **Critical Literacy:** demonstrate an understanding that the perspective of the author, the reader, and the text all influence the reading experience;

5. **The Role of Literature in Society:** assess the importance of literature as a social and cultural force.

**Applies to:** Author Study

# FOR SECTION V: DURING READING ACTIVITIES

## ENGLISH, GRADES 11 AND 12

### Oral Communication

1. **Listening to Understand:** listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes.
2. **Speaking to Communicate:** use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

**Applies to:** Discussion Questions

### Reading and Literature Studies

1. **Reading for Meaning:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning.
2. **Understanding Form and Style:** recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning.
3. **Reading With Fluency:** use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently.

**Applies to:** Chapter Summary Questions, Comprehension Questions, Expand Your Frame Questions, Making Inferences Questions, Critical Literacy Questions, Vocabulary Building

### Writing

1. **Developing and Organizing Content:** generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience.
2. **Using Knowledge of Form and Style:** draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience.
3. **Applying Knowledge of Conventions:** use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively.

**Applies to:** Chapter Summary Questions

## CANADIAN LITERATURE, GRADE 11

1. **Understanding Texts:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of Canadian literary texts from different cultures, regions, and historical periods.

2. **Analyzing Texts:** respond to and analyze Canadian literary texts to develop and extend their understanding of how content, form, and style in combination communicate meaning and enhance a text's effectiveness.
3. **Critical Literacy:** demonstrate an understanding that Canadian authors, readers, and texts have particular perspectives that influence the reading experience.
4. **Literary Criticism:** use literary criticism to enhance their understanding of Canadian literature.
5. **The Role of Literature in Society:** assess the importance of Canadian literature as a social and cultural force.

**Applies to:** Chapter Summary Questions, Comprehension Questions, Expand Your Frame Questions, Making Inferences Questions, Critical Literacy Questions, Discussion Questions

## **STUDIES IN LITERATURE, GRADE 12**

1. **Understanding Texts:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary texts from different countries, cultures, and historical periods.
2. **Analyzing Texts:** respond to and analyze literary texts to develop and extend their understanding of how content, form, and style in combination communicate meaning and enhance a text's effectiveness.
3. **Critical Literacy:** demonstrate an understanding that the perspective of the author, the reader, and the text all influence the reading experience.
4. **Literary Criticism:** use literary criticism to enhance their understanding of literature.
5. **The Role of Literature in Society:** assess the importance of literature as a social and cultural force.

**Applies to:** Chapter Summary Questions, Comprehension Questions, Expand Your Frame Questions, Making Inferences Questions, Critical Literacy Questions, Discussion Questions

## FOR SECTION VI: POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### ENGLISH, GRADES 11 AND 12

#### Oral Communication

1. **Listening to Understand:** listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes.
2. **Speaking to Communicate:** use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

**Applies to:** Dramatization

#### Reading and Literature Studies

1. **Reading for Meaning:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning.
2. **Understanding Form and Style:** recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning.
3. **Reading With Fluency:** use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently.

**Applies to:** Comparison Study, Cover Redesign, Essay

#### Writing

1. **Developing and Organizing Content:** generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience.
2. **Using Knowledge of Form and Style:** draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience.
3. **Applying Knowledge of Conventions:** use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively.

**Applies to:** Essay, Science Fiction Story

### CANADIAN LITERATURE, GRADE 11

1. **Understanding Texts:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of Canadian literary texts from different cultures, regions, and historical periods.

2. **Analyzing Texts:** respond to and analyze Canadian literary texts to develop and extend their understanding of how content, form, and style in combination communicate meaning and enhance a text's effectiveness.
3. **Critical Literacy:** demonstrate an understanding that Canadian authors, readers, and texts have particular perspectives that influence the reading experience.
4. **Literary Criticism:** use literary criticism to enhance their understanding of Canadian literature.
5. **The Role of Literature in Society:** assess the importance of Canadian literature as a social and cultural force.

**Applies to:** Comparison Study, Essay

## **STUDIES IN LITERATURE, GRADE 12**

1. **Understanding Texts:** read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary texts from different countries, cultures, and historical periods.
2. **Analyzing Texts:** respond to and analyze literary texts to develop and extend their understanding of how content, form, and style in combination communicate meaning and enhance a text's effectiveness.
3. **Critical Literacy:** demonstrate an understanding that the perspective of the author, the reader, and the text all influence the reading experience.
4. **Literary Criticism:** use literary criticism to enhance their understanding of literature.
5. **The Role of Literature in Society:** assess the importance of literature as a social and cultural force.

**Applies to:** Comparison Study, Essay