

Empathy

Character in the Corpus
Approaches and Resources

Introduction

Each of the 'Character in the Corpus' discussions in the [Virtue Insight](#) blog is supplemented by suggested questions based on previous character education pedagogical practice. These are inspired by resources created by the Jubilee Centre and those devised by teachers and by other teachers' reflections on effective teaching techniques.

Skills developed in literature require critical thinking that can be employed as a means to cultivate practical wisdom. Beyond the general benefit that character education has to educational attainment, teachers see character education and curriculum subjects as potentially mutually beneficial. Literature has a particular part to play here as a cornerstone of the humanities, one that explores human behaviour, demands critical, close analysis, and pays particular attention to literacy.

The aim is to offer teachers an introduction those virtues evident in the prose fiction of the A-level English Literature corpus.

This set of resources includes five different approaches to 'character' and how it is treated within literature, alongside touchstone passages drawn from the A-Level set texts with associated commentary detailing how character may be discussed in relation to pupils' literary studies.

Teachers may wish to use the selected touchstone passages for close critical analysis exercises that look at character. Alternatively, teachers are encouraged to seek out such passages within their own selected set text and use the commentaries as guides to frame their own approach to character education and virtue literacy.

The approaches focus on close textual analysis but point towards discussions of character as a theme throughout the text as a whole. The commentaries therefore highlight the stylistic techniques used in relation to character to satisfy A-level requirements that pupils understand how writers create certain effects. This 'critical' approach has the advantage of embedding reflection and reasoning alongside comprehension; all key components of virtue literacy.

Definition

Empathy is the ability to take another's perspective and to be able to feel as others feel (Morgan, Fowers and Kristjánsson, 2017)

Touchstones

The classroom resources and associated commentary are centred around a selection of 'touchstone' passages.

With regards to literary studies, the term 'touchstone' was coined by Matthew Arnold in 1853. The term was conferred on literary passages of significance in relation to their role in the development of literature or their affective qualities. The application of the term here therefore adopts Arnold's definition to the extent that it refers to selected short passages and their comparison but translates his method of evaluation to considering a passage's utility in the study of virtue. In this, it is meant rather in the Shakespearean sense of Touchstone as providing a degree of insight.

The touchstone passages below allow students to look at a particular virtue in its moral sense and also look at its stylistic features. For A-level students, the touchstones offer a way by which to navigate these different instantiations of a virtue via a set of five topics, around which the passages are organised.

The value of empathy in virtue literacy discussions derives from the significant attention it has garnered, not least in the specification of the stylistic devices by which it is achieved. As such, empathy is a concept that can be considered as a virtue in itself as well as a mechanism by which virtuous behaviours can be cultivated.

I. Defining empathy

Empathy, of all the terms explored in 'Character in the Corpus', appears least in the A-level corpus. What's more, it only appears in texts from 1991 onwards. This reflects the recent uplift in use of the term in general usage. But by that absence, it is notable. That empathy is not mentioned (or thematised) explicitly can also be attributed to the fact that it is an effect of fiction rather than its subject matter. The mere mention of the word risks putting the reader's guard up: showing, not telling, is the task of art.

When it comes to virtue literacy, therefore, empathy can be treated as a tool that enables virtue as well as a virtue in its own right. Novels need not be didactic or populated with exemplars to promote virtue and this in fact highlights the difference between mimetic and diegetic routes to comprehension. This illustrates the necessity of supported discussion in virtue literacy, to be able to recognise virtuous behaviour when it is not labelled so.

Two of the four mentions in the A-level corpus come from Pat Barker's *Regeneration*, in which Prior chastises Rivers who seeks to make a connection with him over his wartime experiences. Passage 1 illustrates the difficulty in sharing the feelings of fellow men, particularly when about wartime experience, and it is a difficulty that is explored later in specific relation to the writing process. Barker's presentation of empathy is therefore somewhat cynical, something that informs Passage 2 from the same text.

Touchstone passage 1

'By the way, your file arrived this morning.'

Prior smiled. 'So you know all about me, then?'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that. What did become clear is that you had a spell in the 13th Casualty Clearing Station in...' He looked at the file again. 'January. Diagnosed neurasthenic.'

Prior hesitated. 'Ye-es.'

'Deep reflexes abnormal.'

'Yes.'

'But on that occasion no trouble with the voice? Fourteen days later you were back in the line. Fully recovered?'

'I'd stopped doing the can-can, if that's what you mean.'

'Were there any remaining symptoms?'

'Headaches.' He watched Rivers make a note. 'It's hardly a reason to stay out of the trenches, is it? "Not tonight, Wilhelm. I've got a headache"?''

'It might be. It rather depends how bad they were.' He waited for a reply, but Prior remained obstinately silent. 'You were back in the 13th CCS in April. This time unable to speak.'

'I've told you, I don't remember.'

'So the loss of memory applies to the later part of your service in France, but the early part – the first six months or so – is comparatively clear?'

'Ye-es.'

Rivers sat back in his chair. 'Would you like to tell me something about that early part?'

'No.'

'But you do remember it?'

'Doesn't mean I want to talk about it.' He looked round the room. 'I don't see why it has to be like this anyway.'

'Like what?'

'All the questions from you, all the answers from me. Why can't it be both ways?'

'Look, Mr Prior, if you went to the doctor with bronchitis and he spent half the consultation time telling you about his lumbago, you would not be pleased. Would you?'

'No, but if I went to my doctor in despair it might help to know he at least understood the meaning of the word.'

'Are you in despair?'

Prior sighed, ostentatiously impatient.

'You know, I talk to a lot of people who are in despair or very close to it, and my experience is that they don't care what the doctor feels. That's the whole point about despair, isn't it? That you turn in on yourself.'

'Well, all I can say is I'd rather talk to a real person than a strip of empathic wallpaper.'

Rivers smiled. 'I like that.'

Prior glared at him.

'If you feel you can't talk about France, would it help to talk about the nightmares?'

‘No. I don’t think talking helps. It just churns things up and makes them seem more real.’

‘But they are real.’

A short silence. Rivers closed Prior’s file. ‘All right. Good morning.’

Prior looked at the clock. ‘It’s only twenty past ten.’

Rivers spread his hands.

‘You can’t refuse to talk to me.’

‘Prior, there are a hundred and sixty-eight patients in this hospital, all of them wanting to get better, none of them getting the attention he deserves. Good morning.’

Prior started to get up, then sat down again. ‘You’ve no right to say I don’t want to get better.’

‘I didn’t say that.’

‘You implied it.’

‘All right. Do you want to get better?’

‘Of course.’

(Pat Barker, *Regeneration*, Chapter 6)

Touchstone passage 2

Callan was brought in. He looked indifferent, or defiant, though once he was settled in the chair his eyes shifted from side to side in a way that suggested fear.

‘I am going to lock the door,’ Yealland said. He returned to stand before the patient, ostentatiously dropping the key into his top pocket. ‘You must talk before you leave me.’

All very well, Rivers thought. But Yealland had locked himself in as well as the patient. There could be no backing down.

Yealland put the pad electrode on the lumbar spines and began attaching the long pharyngeal electrode. ‘You will not leave me,’ he said, ‘until you are talking as well as you ever did. No, not a minute before.’

The straps on the chair were left unfastened. Yealland inserted a tongue depressor. Callan neither co-operated nor struggled, but simply sat with his mouth wide open and his head thrown back. Then the electrode was applied to the back of his throat. He was thrown back with such force that the leads were ripped out of the

battery. Yealland removed the electrode. 'Remember you must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be,' Yealland said. 'A man who has been through so many battles should have a better control of himself.' He fastened the straps round Callan's wrists and feet. 'Remember you must talk before you leave me.'

Callan was white and shaking, but it was impossible to tell how much pain he was in, since obviously he could no more scream than he could speak. Yealland applied the electrode again, continuously, but evidently with a weaker current since Callan was not thrown back. 'Nod to me when you are ready to attempt to speak.'

It took an hour. Rivers during all that time scarcely moved. His empathy with the man in the chair kept him still, since Callan himself never moved, except once to flex the fingers of his strapped hands. At last he nodded. Immediately the electrode was removed, and after a great deal of effort Callan managed to say 'ah' in a sort of breathy whisper.

Yealland said, 'Do you realize that there is already an improvement? Do you appreciate that a result has already been achieved? Small as it may seem to you, if you will consider rationally for yourself, you will believe me when I tell you that you will be talking before long.'

The electrode was applied again. Yealland started going through the sounds of the alphabet: ah, bah, cah, dah, etc., encouraging Callan to repeat the sounds after him, though only 'ah' was repeated. Whenever Callan said 'ah' on request, the electrode was momentarily removed. Whenever he substituted 'ah' for other sounds, the current was reapplied.

They had now been in the room an hour and a half. Callan was obviously exhausted. Despite the almost continuous application of the electric current he was actually beginning to drop off to sleep. Yealland evidently sensed he was losing his patient's attention and unstrapped him. 'Walk up and down,' he said.

Callan did as he was bid, and Yealland walked beside him, encouraging him to repeat the sounds of the alphabet, though, again, only 'ah' was produced and that in a hoarse whisper, very far back in the throat. Callan stumbled as he walked, and Yealland supported him. Up and down they went, up and down, in and out of the circle of light around the battery.

Rebellion came at last. Callan wrenched his arm out of Yealland's grasp and ran to the door. Evidently he'd forgotten it was locked, though he remembered at once and turned on Yealland.

Yealland said, 'Such an idea as leaving me now is most ridiculous. You cannot leave the room. The door is locked and the key is in my pocket. You will leave me when you are cured, remember, not before. I have no doubt you are tired and discouraged, but that is not my fault; the reason is that you do not understand your condition as I do, and the time you have already spent with me is not long in comparison with the time I am prepared to stay with you. Do you understand me?'

Callan looked at Yealland. For a second the thought of striking him was clearly visible, but then Callan seemed to admit defeat. He pointed to the battery and then to his mouth, miming: Get on with it.

'No,' Yealland said. 'The time for more electrical treatment has not yet come; if it had, I should give it to you. Suggestions are not wanted from you; they are not needed. When the time comes for more electricity, you will be given it whether you want it or not.' He paused. Then added with great emphasis: 'You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say.'

They walked up and down again, Callan still repeating 'ah', but making no other sound. The 'ah' was produced by an almost superhuman effort, the muscles of the neck in spasm, the head raised in a series of jerks. Even the torso and the arms were involved in the immense effort of pushing this sound across his lips. Rivers had to stop himself trying to make the sound for him. He was himself very tense; all the worst memories of his stammer came crowding into his mind.

(Pat Barker, *Regeneration*, Chapter 21)

Here, the focus is on body language: the contrast is between movement and stillness, the characters do not mirror each other. *Move* is a collocate of *empathy* and the interplay of physical/emotional metaphors makes it a particularly fruitful resource by which to discuss how virtue is embodied. Yet Barker creates irony in that despite the claim of empathy, Callan does nothing: a validation of the scepticism that empathy alone can promote prosocial action. The result is a suggestion that empathy can be performative. (This is echoed in the third instantiation in the A-level corpus, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, in which Rasheed makes a show of "contrived empathy" to woo Laila.)

In contrast, for *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, empathy is posited as the motivation for Changez's selection by Juan-Batista.

Touchstone passage 3

I noticed Juan-Bautista watching me as I shuffled about half-heartedly from one meeting to another. He kept his door open and his desk was positioned in such a way that it was possible for him to gaze down the corridor. Once, as I was passing by, he called me to him. "I have," he said, "looked into this matter of the contemporary poets of the Punjab. Tell me, what was the name of your father's uncle?" I told him and he nodded; he had indeed seen him mentioned in an anthology available in Spanish translation. I was surprised and pleased to hear that this was the case, but before I could respond he went on to say, "You seem very unlike your colleagues. You appear somewhat lost." "Not at all," I replied, taken aback. Then I added, "Although I must say I am quite moved by Valparaiso." He suggested that I visit the house of Pablo Neruda, but to go during the day as it was shut in the evening, and with that our brief conversation concluded.

I never came to know why Juan-Bautista singled me out. Perhaps he was gifted with remarkable powers of empathy and had observed in me a dilemma that out of compassion he thought he could help me resolve; perhaps he saw among his enemies one who was weak and could easily be brought down; perhaps it was mere coincidence. Sentimentally, I would like to believe in the first of these possibilities. But regardless, Juan-Bautista added considerable momentum to my inflective journey, a journey that continues to this day.

(Moshin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Chapter 10)

Here, the use is ambiguous: empathy is seen as a power, rather than a virtue, it is graded as remarkable, marking it as distinct from the corpus's first three examples. Nevertheless, what links the four mentions of *empathy* across the A-level set texts is the scepticism with which it is viewed. Such uses can offer useful matter by which to discuss how writers foreground empathy in ways that make it distinct from general, positive uses of the term.

Suggested questions

- What do the four examples suggest to you about how each narrator feels about empathy?
- Why do you think the narrator in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* describes empathy as "remarkable power"?
- Can you think of examples in your own life where you have been 'moved' to act?

2. Feeling

Empathy is often the object of feeling, being glossed by commentators as “fellow feeling”, and narrative fiction has particular capacities in inducing such fellow feeling. In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, it is storytelling that specifically prompts empathy. Beloved listens eagerly, with empathy, to Denver’s history.

Touchstone passage 4

Denver stopped and sighed. This was the part of the story she loved. She was coming to it now, and she loved it because it was all about herself; but she hated it too because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it. But who she owed or what to pay it with eluded her. Now, watching Beloved’s alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slavegirl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker’s quiet step.

Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her—and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved’s interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved. The dark quilt with two orange patches was there with them because Beloved wanted it near her when she slept. It was smelling like grass and feeling like hands—the unrested hands of busy women: dry, warm, prickly. Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it: the quality of Amy’s voice, her breath like burning wood. The quick-change weather up in those hills—cool at night, hot in the day, sudden fog. How recklessly she behaved

with this whitegirl—a recklessness born of desperation and encouraged by Amy's fugitive eyes and her tenderhearted mouth.

(Toni Morrison, *Beloved*)

In fact, the novel uses elements of ghost story as a medium for the past, but one which, despite its remoteness and supernature, is predicated on emotional engagement. A text like *Beloved* raises the dilemma of how accurately fiction can represent feeling, an issue that becomes a metacommentary in Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*.

Touchstone passage 5

How would Emily put what she felt into words? She would describe this, perhaps, in terms of that image of her sweeping, sweeping, the sorcerer's apprentice put to work in a spiteful garden against floods of dying leaves that she could never clean away no matter how hard she tried. Her sense of duty but expressed in images - she could not say of herself that yes, she was a good little girl and not a bad dirty little girl; a good little girl who must love cherish and protect her brother, her baby, the defenceless, the powerless, the amiably, indifferently smiling, who sat there all loose and slack in their damp, strongsmelling white wool. 'It was so hard,' she might say.

Everything was so difficult, such an effort, such a burden, all those children in the house, not one of them would do a thing to help unless I got at them all the time, they turned me into a tyrant and laughed at me, but there was no need for that, they could have had something equal and easy if they had done their parts but, no, I always had to overlook everything, comb their dirty hair and see if they had washed and then all those sores that they got when they wouldn't eat sensibly, and the horrible smell of disinfectants all the time that the government supplied and the way June got sick, it drove me crazy with worry, she kept getting ill for no particular reason - that was it, there was never any good reason for things, and I worked and I worked and it was always the same, something happened and then it all came to nothing.'

Yes, that is probably how Emily's version of that time would sound.

(Doris Lessing, *Memoirs of a Survivor*)

A passage such as the one above draws attention to its own status as fiction, and thereby invites readers to actively consider how the fiction at hand resolves these issues. The use of rhetorical questions directly engage the reader in such debates. Here, those *verba sentiendi* proliferate alongside the use of Free Indirect forms, often employed by writers describing feeling and aiming at empathy due to its neat conflation of character and narrator.

This challenge of reading other minds is both a narrative theme and provides plot devices. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a novel that takes empathy as one of its central concerns. The narrative is told from the perspective of Nick Carraway and its plot concerns his effort to get to know his fellow neighbour, the mysterious Jay Gatsby. As much as the subject of the book is Gatsby's elusive identity, it is also a reflection of Nick's own journey of self-discovery within the bustling life of New York City.

Touchstone passage 6

I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others--poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner--young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life.

Again at eight o'clock, when the dark lanes of the Forties were five deep with throbbing taxi cabs, bound for the theatre district, I felt a sinking in my heart. Forms leaned together in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes outlined unintelligible gestures inside. Imagining that I, too, was hurrying toward gayety and sharing their intimate excitement, I wished them well.

For a while I lost sight of Jordan Baker, and then in midsummer I found her again. At first I was flattered to go places with her because she was a golf champion and every one knew her name. Then it was something more. I wasn't actually in love, but I felt a sort of tender curiosity. The bored haughty face that she turned to the world concealed something--most affectations conceal something eventually, even though they don't in

the beginning--and one day I found what it was. When we were on a house-party together up in Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it--and suddenly I remembered the story about her that had eluded me that night at Daisy's. At her first big golf tournament there was a row that nearly reached the newspapers--a suggestion that she had moved her ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing approached the proportions of a scandal--then died away. A caddy retracted his statement and the only other witness admitted that he might have been mistaken. The incident and the name had remained together in my mind.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, Chapter 3

Nick equates his own life with speculations about others, using empathy as a means by which to reduce his loneliness. His quest to know Gatsby is therefore a study in empathy, one which concludes with his genuine connection to a man he does not know and, in truth, does not exist.

Likewise, in Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*, the story 'Defender of the Faith' uses empathy to examine emotional connection. The passage below encapsulates the narrative's concern with an Army Sergeant who ignores a subordinate's attempt to curry favourable treatment. Despite silence, the very absence of words, they know each other's thoughts and feelings.

Touchstone passage 7

That night, I was just sliding into sleep when someone tapped on my door. "Who is it?" I asked.

"Sheldon."

He opened the door and came in. For a moment, I felt his presence without being able to see him. "How was it?" I asked.

He popped into sight in the near-darkness before me. "Great, Sergeant." Then he was sitting on the edge of the bed. I sat up.

"How about you?" he asked. "Have a nice weekend?"

"Yes."

"The others went to sleep." He took a deep, paternal breath. We sat silent for a while, and a homey feeling invaded my ugly little cubicle; the door was locked, the cat was out, the children were safely in bed.

"Sergeant, can I tell you something? Personal?"

I did not answer, and he seemed to know why. “Not about me. About Mickey. Sergeant, I never felt for anybody like I feel for him. Last night I heard Mickey in the bed next to me. He was crying so, it could have broken your heart. Real sobs.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“I had to talk to him to stop him. He held my hand, Sergeant—he wouldn’t let it go. He was almost hysterical. He kept saying if he only knew where we were going. Even if he knew it was the Pacific, that would be better than nothing. Just to know.”

Long ago, someone had taught Grossbart the sad rule that only lies can get the truth. Not that I couldn’t believe in the fact of Halpern’s crying; his eyes *always* seemed red-rimmed. But, fact or not, it became a lie when Grossbart uttered it. He was entirely strategic. But then—it came with the force of indictment—so was I! There are strategies of aggression, but there are strategies of retreat as well. And so, recognizing that I myself had not been without craft and guile, I told him what I knew. “It is the Pacific.”

He let out a small gasp, which was not a lie. “I’ll tell him. I wish it was otherwise.”

“So do I.”

He jumped on my words. “You mean you think you could do something? A change, maybe?”

“No, I couldn’t do a thing.”

“Don’t you know anybody over at C. and A.?”

“Grossbart, there’s nothing I can do,” I said. “If your orders are for the Pacific, then it’s the Pacific.”

“But Mickey—”

“Mickey, you, me—everybody, Grossbart. There’s nothing to be done. Maybe the war’ll end before you go. Pray for a miracle.”

“But—”

“Good night, Grossbart.” I settled back, and was relieved to feel the springs unbend as Grossbart rose to leave. I could see him clearly now; his jaw had dropped, and he looked like a dazed prizefighter. I noticed for the first time a little paper bag in his hand.

“Grossbart.” I smiled. “My gift?”

“Oh, yes, Sergeant. Here—from all of us.” He handed me the bag. “It’s egg roll.”

“Egg roll?” I accepted the bag and felt a damp grease spot on the bottom. I opened it, sure that Grossbart was joking.

“We thought you’d probably like it. You know—Chinese egg roll. We thought you’d probably have a taste for—”

“Your aunt served egg roll?”

“She wasn’t home.”

“Grossbart, she invited you. You told me she invited you and your friends.”

“I know,” he said. “I just reread the letter. *Next week.*”

I got out of bed and walked to the window. “Grossbart,” I said. But I was not calling to him.

“What?”

“What are you, Grossbart? Honest to God, what are you?”

I think it was the first time I’d asked him a question for which he didn’t have an immediate answer.

“How can you do this to people?” I went on.

“Sergeant, the day away did us all a world of good. Fishbein, you should see him, he *loves* Chinese food.” “But the Seder,” I said.

“We took second best, Sergeant.”

Rage came charging at me. I didn’t sidestep. “Grossbart, you’re a liar!” I said. “You’re a schemer and a crook. You’ve got no respect for anything. Nothing at all. Not for me, for the truth—not even for poor Halpern! You use us all—”

“Sergeant, Sergeant, I feel for Mickey. Honest to God, I do. I love Mickey. I try-”

“You try! You feel!” I lurched toward him and grabbed his shirt front. I shook him furiously. “Grossbart, get out! Get out and stay the hell away from me. Because if I see you, I’ll make your life miserable. You *understand that?*”

“Yes.”

I let him free, and when he walked from the room, I wanted to spit on the floor where he had stood. I couldn’t stop the fury. It engulfed me, owned me, till it seemed I could only rid myself of it with tears or an act of violence. I snatched from the bed the bag Grossbart had given me and, with all my strength, threw it out the window. And the next morning, as the men policed the area around the barracks, I heard a great cry go up from one of the trainees, who had been anticipating only his morning handful of cigarette butts and candy wrappers. “Egg roll!” he shouted. “Holy Christ, Chinese goddam egg roll!”

Philip Roth, *Goodbye Columbus*, ‘Defender of the Faith’

Marx can both interpret and feel Grossbart's pain but refuses to act, raising the question as to whether empathy results in virtuous action. What complicates any determination of moral stance is the implication that Grossbart is in turn seeking to exploit empathy by drawing on his common Jewish identity with Marx. Such ambivalence is typical of fiction and their exploration through the analysis of narrative point-of-view is one way in which moral conflicts and the arbitration between conflicting understanding of a virtue may be understood.

Ken Liu's short story 'The Paper Menagerie' is a moving account of what results from a lack of empathy and the pitfalls of trying to know one another. Language becomes site of familial tension as a son demands his Chinese mother speak English to him, gradually losing his kinship to her. This empathic rift becomes apparent in the mother's letter she leaves the son to be opened after her death. In it she narrates the difficult trials she has endured against the backdrop China's cultural revolution and great famine, through to her move to the US and the birth of her son.

Touchstone passage 8

In the suburbs of Connecticut, I was lonely. Your father was kind and gentle with me, and I was very grateful to him. But no one understood me, and I understood nothing.

But then you were born! I was so happy when I looked into your face and saw shades of my mother, my father, and myself. I had lost my entire family, all of Sigulu, everything I ever knew and loved. But there you were, and your face was proof that they were real. I hadn't made them up.

Now I had someone to talk to. I would teach you my language, and we could together remake a small piece of everything that I loved and lost. When you said your first words to me, in Chinese that had the same accent as my mother and me, I cried for hours. When I made the first zhezhi animals for you, and you laughed, I felt there were no worries in the world.

You grew up a little, and now you could even help your father and I talk to each other. I was really at home now. I finally found a good life. I wished my parents could be here, so that I could cook for them, and give them a good life too. But my parents were no longer around. You know what the Chinese think is the saddest feeling in the world? It's for a child to finally grow the desire to take care of his parents, only to realize that they were long gone.

Son, I know that you do not like your Chinese eyes, which are my eyes. I know that you do not like your Chinese hair, which is my hair. But can you understand how

much joy your very existence brought to me? And can you understand how it felt when you stopped talking to me and won't let me talk to you in Chinese? I felt I was losing everything all over again.

Why won't you talk to me, son? The pain makes it hard to write.

#

The young woman handed the paper back to me. I could not bear to look into her face.

Without looking up, I asked for her help in tracing out the character for ai on the paper below Mom's letter. I wrote the character again and again on the paper, intertwining my pen strokes with her words.

The young woman reached out and put a hand on my shoulder. Then she got up and left, leaving me alone with my mother.

Ken Liu, 'The Paper Menagerie'

The effectiveness of letters like this are predicated on the direct relationship between writer and addressee. The novel form itself, emerged from letter writing practice and the epistolary novel was one of the first genres in which the new form was honed.

Through empathy, the task of writing can therefore become a mode of reasoning. Often, fiction becomes a space in which defining a term becomes part of the narrative. In the two extracts below the notion of feeling is considered within institutional contexts. In P.D. James's *Children of Men*, *feel* is primarily used to describe physical sensations.

Touchstone passage 9

I might just as well not have spoken. He continued to study the pamphlet. Then he said: "A fish. Quite nicely drawn. Not, I think, by a professional artist, but by someone with a feeling for design. The fish is a Christian symbol. Could this be a Christian group, I wonder?" He looked up at me. "You admit that you had one of these pamphlets in Your possession, sir, but you did nothing about it? You didn't feel that it was your duty to report?"

"I treated it as I treat all unimportant, unsolicited mail." Then, deciding it was time I went on the offensive, I said: "Forgive me, Chief Inspector, but I don't see what precisely is worrying the Council. There are malcontents in any society. This particular group have apparently done little harm apart from blowing up a couple of flimsy, temporary ramps and distributing some illthought-out criticisms of the government."

“Some might describe the pamphlets as seditious literature, sir.”

“You can use what words you like, but you can hardly elevate this into a great conspiracy. You’re surely not mobilising the battalions of state security because a few bored malcontents prefer to amuse themselves by playing a more dangerous game than golf. What precisely is worrying the Council? If there is a group of dissidents they will be fairly young, or at least middle-aged. But time will pass for them, time is passing for all of us. Have you forgotten the figures? The Council of England reminds us of them often enough. A population of fifty-eight million in 1996, fallen to thirty-six million this year, so per cent of them over seventy. We’re a doomed race, Chief Inspector. With maturity, with old age, all enthusiasm fades, even for the seductive thrill of conspiracy. There’s no real opposition to the Warden of England. There never has been since he took power.”

“It is our business, sir, to see that there isn’t.”

“You will, of course, do what you think is necessary. But I would only take this seriously if I thought that it was, in fact, serious: opposition, perhaps within the Council itself, to the authority of the Warden.”

The words had been a calculated risk, perhaps even a dangerous one, and I saw that I

had worried him. I had intended to.

After a moment’s pause, which was involuntary, not calculated, he said: “If there were any question of that, the matter wouldn’t be in my hands, sir. It would be dealt with at an altogether higher level.”

I got to my feet. I said: “The Warden of England is my cousin and my friend. He was kind to me in childhood, when kindness is particularly important. I am no longer his adviser on the Council but that doesn’t mean that I am no longer his cousin and his friend. If I have evidence of a conspiracy against him, I shall tell him. I shan’t tell you, Chief Inspector, nor shall I get in touch with the SSP. I shall tell the person most concerned, the Warden of England.”

This was play-acting, of course, and we knew it. We didn’t shake hands or speak as I showed them out but this wasn’t because I had made an enemy. Rawlings didn’t permit himself the indulgence of personal antipathy any more than he would have allowed himself to feel sympathy, liking or the stirrings of pity for the victims he visited and interrogated. I thought I understood his kind: the petty bureaucrats of tyranny, men

who relish the carefully measured meed of power permitted to them, who need to walk in the aura of manufactured fear, to know that the fear precedes them as they enter a room and will linger like a smell after they have left, but who have neither the sadism nor the courage for the ultimate cruelty. But they need their part of the action. It isn't sufficient for them, as it is for most of us, to stand a little way off to watch the crosses on the hill.

P.D. James, *Children of Men*, Chapter 17

Suggested questions

- Looking at the passages above and consider the ways in which writer's create empathy for characters. Think specifically about vocabulary, sentence structure, and discourse presentation.
- Identify all of the words in the passages above that do, in fact, put feelings into words.

3. Fellow feeling

The debate as to what extent empathy is virtuous is often better understood when considered alongside sympathy. For instance, empathy, is more readily associated with the idea of fellow feeling and sympathy with virtues such as compassion. The distinction between the two can provide stimulating material for classroom debate, supported by stimulus material that use these terms. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* takes for its title a metaphor that suggests a lack of feeling and this describes the characterisation of the suspect in a series of detective notes.

Touchstone passage 10

2.) It is a foolish letter, but born of human failing.

Your letter to her, and this, her answer to you, failed in their objectives. Your letter was an attempt to explain your outlook on life, as you are necessarily affected by it. It was destined to be misunderstood, or taken too literally because your ideas are opposed to conventionalism. What could be more conventional than a housewife with three children, who is “dedicated” to her family???? What could be more natural than that she would resent an unconventional person. There is considerable hypocrisy in conventionalism. Any thinking person is aware of this paradox; but in dealing with conventional people it is advantageous to treat them as though they were not hypocrites. It isn't a question of faithfulness to your own concepts; it is a matter of compromise so that you can remain an individual without the constant threat of conventional pressures. Her letter failed because she couldn't conceive of the profundity of your problem—she couldn't fathom the pressures brought to bear upon you because of environment, intellectual frustration and a growing tendency toward isolationism.

3.) She feels that: a) You are leaning too heavily towards self-pity.

b) That you are too calculating.

c) That you are really undeserving of an 8 page letter written in between motherly duties.

4.) On page 3 she writes: “I truthfully feel none of us has anyone to blame etc.” Thus vindicating those who bore influence in her formative years. But is this the whole truth? She is a wife and mother. Respectable and more or less secure. It is easy to ignore the rain if you have a raincoat.

But how would she feel if she were compelled to hustle her living on the streets? Would she still be all-forgiving about the people in her past? Absolutely not. Nothing is more usual than to feel that others have shared in our failures, just as it is an ordinary reaction to forget those who have shared in our achievements.

5.) Your sister respects your Dad. She also resents the fact that you have been preferred. Her jealousy takes a subtle form in this letter. Between the lines she is registering a question: “I love Dad and have tried to live so he could be proud to own me as his daughter. But I have had to content myself with the crumbs of his affection.

Because it is you he loves, and why should it be so?” Obviously over the years your Dad has taken advantage of your sister’s emotional nature via the mails. Painting a picture that justifies her opinion of him—an underdog cursed with an ungrateful son upon whom he has showered love and concern, only to be infamously treated by that son in return.

On page 7 she says she is sorry that her letter must be censored. But she is really not sorry at all. She is glad it passes through a censor. Subconsciously she has written it with the censor in mind, hoping to convey the idea that the Smith family is really a well-ordered unit: “Please do not judge us all by Perry.” About the mother kissing away her child’s boo-boo. This is a woman’s form of sarcasm.

- 6.) You write to her because:
- a) You love her after a fashion.
 - b) You feel a need for this contact with the outside world.
 - c) You can use her.

Prognosis: Correspondence between you and your sister cannot serve anything but a purely social function. Keep the theme of your letters within the scope of her understanding.

Do not unburden your private conclusions. Do not put her on the defensive and do not permit her to put you on the defensive. Respect her limitations to comprehend your objectives, and remember that she is touchy towards criticism of your Dad. Be consistent in your attitude towards her and do not add anything to the impression she has that you are weak, not because you need her goodwill but because you can expect more letters like this, and they can only serve to increase your already dangerous anti-social instincts.

FINISH As Perry continued to sort and choose, the pile of material he thought too dear to part with, even temporarily, assumed a tottering height. But what was he

to do? He couldn't risk losing the Bronze Medal earned in Korea, or his highschool diploma (issued by the Leavenworth County Board of Education as a result of his having, while in prison, resumed his long-recessed studies). Nor did he care to chance the loss of a manila envelope fat with photographs —primarily of himself, and ranging in time from a pretty little-boy portrait made when he was in the Merchant Marine (and on the back of which he had scribbled, "16 yrs. old.

Young, happy-go-lucky & Innocent") to the recent Acapulco pictures. And there were half a hundred other items he had decided he must take with him, among them his treasure maps, Otto's sketchbook, and two thick notebooks, the thicker of which constituted his personal dictionary, a nonalphabetically listed miscellany of words he believed "beautiful" or "useful," or at least "worth memorizing." (Sample page: "Thanatoid = deathlike; Omnilingual = versed in languages; Amerce = punishment, amount fixed by court; Nescient = ignorance; Facinorous = atrociously wicked; Hagiophobia = a morbid fear of holy places & things; Lapidicolous = living under stones, as certain blind beetles; Dyspathy = lack of sympathy, fellow feeling; Psilopher = a fellow who fain would pass as a philosopher; Omophagia = eating raw flesh, the rite of some savage tribes; Depredate = to pillage, rob, and prey upon; Aphrodisiac = a drug or the like which excites sexual desire; Megalodactylous = having abnormally large fingers; Myrtophobia = fear of night and darkness.") On the cover of the second notebook, the handwriting of which he was so proud, a script abounding in curly, feminine flourishes, proclaimed the contents to be "The Private Diary of Perry Edward Smith"—an inaccurate description, for it was not in the least a diary but, rather, a form of anthology consisting of obscure facts ("Every fifteen years Mars gets closer. 1958 is a close year"), poems and literary quotations ("No man is an island, Entire of itself"), and passages for newspapers and books paraphrased or quoted. For example: My acquaintances are many, my friends are few; those who really know me fewer still.

Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*

What is noticeable about the extract is its formal register: as with Passage 9, despite discussing *feeling*, it does so in an impersonal, unfeeling way. The fragmented text from Capote owes its form to his branding of it as a 'non-fiction novel', that uses the stylistic features of fiction to narrate true crime. Here, he uses the rare term *dyspathy* – that Capote has to gloss the term betrays its rarity. Whilst its literary usage is attested by Coleridge, general usage, as noted earlier, prefers phrases such as 'lack of sympathy'.

These presentations of empathy as part of official and social procedures, suggests the way that writers consider virtues like empathy in broader, civic ways. In P.D. James's *Children of Men*, she uses a dystopian society to examine empathy as seen as a civic virtue codified in a political manifesto.

Touchstone passage I I

Ten years on we still watch, but we watch with less anxiety and without hope. The spying still goes on but it is twenty-five years now since a human being was born and in our hearts few of us believe that the cry of a new-born child will ever be heard again on our planet. Our interest in sex is waning. Romantic and idealised love has taken over from crude carnal satisfaction despite the efforts of the Warden of England, through the national porn shops, to stimulate our flagging appetites. But we have our sensual substitutes; they are available to all on the National Health Service. Our ageing bodies are pummelled, stretched, stroked, caressed, anointed, scented. We are manicured and pedicured, measured and weighed. Lady Margaret Hall has become the massage centre for Oxford and here every Tuesday afternoon I lie on the couch and look out over the still-tended gardens, enjoying my State-provided, carefully measured hour of sensual pampering. And how assiduously, with what obsessive concern, do we intend to retain the illusion, if not of youth, of vigorous middle age. Golf is now the national game. If there had been no Omega, the conservationists would protest at the acres of countryside, some of it our most beautiful, which have been distorted and rearranged to provide ever more challenging courses. All are free; this is part of the Warden's promised pleasure. Some have become exclusive, keeping unwelcome members out, not by prohibition, which is illegal, but by those subtle, discriminating signals which in Britain even the least sensitive are trained from childhood to interpret. We need our snobberies; equality is a political theory not a practical policy, even in Xan's egalitarian Britain. I tried once to play golf but found the game immediately and totally unattractive, perhaps because of my ability to shift divots of earth, but never the ball. Now I run. Almost daily I pound the soft earth of Port Meadow or the deserted footpaths of Wytham Wood, counting the miles, subsequently measuring heartbeat, weight loss, stamina. I am just as anxious to stay alive as anyone else, just as obsessed with the functioning of my body.

[...]

The paper was of cheap quality, the message amateurishly printed. Presumably they had a press hidden in some church crypt or remote but accessible forest shed. But how long would it remain secret if the SSP troubled to hunt them down?

Once more he read the five demands. The first was unlikely to worry Xan. The country would hardly welcome the expense and disruption of a general election but, if he called one, his power would be confirmed by an overwhelming majority whether or not anyone had the temerity to stand against him. Theo asked himself how many of the other reforms he might have achieved had he stayed as Xan's adviser. But he knew the answer. He had been powerless then and the Five Fishes were powerless now. If there had been no Omega, these were aims which a man might be prepared to fight for, even to suffer for. But if there had been no Omega, the evils would not exist. It was reasonable to struggle, to suffer, perhaps even to die, for a more just, a more compassionate society, but not in a world with no future where, all too soon, the very words "justice,"

"compassion,"

"society,"

"struggle,"

"evil," would he unheard echoes on an empty air. Julian would say that it was worth the struggle and the suffering to save even one Sojourner from ill-treatment or prevent even one offender from being deported to the Man Penal Colony. But whatever the Five Fishes did, that wouldn't happen. It wasn't within their power. Rereading the five demands he felt a draining-away of his initial sympathy. He told himself that most men and women, human mules deprived of posterity, yet carried their burden of sorrow and regret with such fortitude as they could muster, contrived their compensating pleasures, indulged small personal vanities, behaved with decency to each other and to such Sojourners as they met. By what right did the Five Fishes seek to impose upon these stoical dispossessed the futile burden of heroic virtue? He took the paper into the lavatory and, after tearing it precisely into quarters, flushed them down the bowl. As they were sucked, swirling, out of sight he wished for a second, no more, that he could share the passion and the folly which bound together that pitifully unarmoured fellowship.

Again, what marks this passage is an ambivalence towards virtuous acts, encapsulated in the oxymoronic “futile burden of heroic virtue”. Beyond the definition of virtue, what James interrogates is its real-world application and the cynicism that attends such politicisation of such terms.

In contrast, George Eliot presents a more positive view of fellow feeling, albeit in relation to their shared misfortune when the Tulliver family contemplate their bankruptcy. Eliot here aims at empathic understanding, a point underscored by her direct retort to the reader in the middle of the extract.

Touchstone passage 12

Mr Tulliver lingered nowhere away from home; he hurried away from market, he refused all invitations to stay and chat, as in old times, in the houses where he called on business. He could not be reconciled with his lot. There was no attitude in which his pride did not feel its bruises; and in all behaviour toward him, whether kind or cold, he detected an allusion to the change in his circumstances. Even the days on which Wakem came to ride round the land and inquire into the business were not so black to him as those market-days on which he had met several creditors who had accepted a composition from him. To save something toward the repayment of those creditors was the object toward which he was now bending all his thoughts and efforts; and under the influence of this all-compelling demand of his nature, the somewhat profuse man, who hated to be stinted or to stint any one else in his own house, was gradually metamorphosed into the keen-eyed grudger of morsels. Mrs Tulliver could not economise enough to satisfy him, in their food and firing; and he would eat nothing himself but what was of the coarsest quality. Tom, though depressed and strongly repelled by his father's sullenness, and the dreariness of home, entered thoroughly into his father's feelings about paying the creditors; and the poor lad brought his first quarter's money, with a delicious sense of achievement, and gave it to his father to put into the tin box which held the savings. The little store of sovereigns in the tin box seemed to be the only sight that brought a faint beam of pleasure into the miller's eyes,—faint and transient, for it was soon dispelled by the thought that the time would be long—perhaps longer than his life,—before the narrow savings could remove the hateful incubus of debt. A deficit of more than five hundred pounds, with the accumulating interest, seemed a deep pit to fill with the savings from thirty shillings a week, even when Tom's probable savings were to be added. On this one point there

was entire community of feeling in the four widely differing beings who sat round the dying fire of sticks, which made a cheap warmth for them on the verge of bedtime. Mrs Tulliver carried the proud integrity of the Dodsons in her blood, and had been brought up to think that to wrong people of their money, which was another phrase for debt, was a sort of moral pillory; it would have been wickedness, to her mind, to have run counter to her husband's desire to "do the right thing," and retrieve his name. She had a confused, dreamy notion that, if the creditors were all paid, her plate and linen ought to come back to her; but she had an inbred perception that while people owed money they were unable to pay, they couldn't rightly call anything their own. She murmured a little that Mr Tulliver so peremptorily refused to receive anything in repayment from Mr and Mrs Moss; but to all his requirements of household economy she was submissive to the point of denying herself the cheapest indulgences of mere flavour; her only rebellion was to smuggle into the kitchen something that would make rather a better supper than usual for Tom.

These narrow notions about debt, held by the old fashioned Tullivers, may perhaps excite a smile on the faces of many readers in these days of wide commercial views and wide philosophy, according to which everything rights itself without any trouble of ours. The fact that my tradesman is out of pocket by me is to be looked at through the serene certainty that somebody else's tradesman is in pocket by somebody else; and since there must be bad debts in the world, why, it is mere egoism not to like that we in particular should make them instead of our fellow-citizens. I am telling the history of very simple people, who had never had any illuminating doubts as to personal integrity and honour.

Under all this grim melancholy and narrowing concentration of desire, Mr Tulliver retained the feeling toward his "little wench" which made her presence a need to him, though it would not suffice to cheer him. She was still the desire of his eyes; but the sweet spring of fatherly love was now mingled with bitterness, like everything else. When Maggie laid down her work at night, it was her habit to get a low stool and sit by her father's knee, leaning her cheek against it. How she wished he would stroke her head, or give some sign that he was soothed by the sense that he had a daughter who loved him! But now she got no answer to her little caresses, either from her father or from Tom,—the two idols of her life. Tom was weary and abstracted in the short intervals when he was at home, and her father was bitterly preoccupied with the thought

that the girl was growing up, was shooting up into a woman; and how was she to do well in life? She had a poor chance for marrying, down in the world as they were. And he hated the thought of her marrying poorly, as her aunt Gritty had done; that would be a thing to make him turn in his grave,—the little wench so pulled down by children and toil, as her aunt Moss was. When uncultured minds, confined to a narrow range of personal experience, are under the pressure of continued misfortune, their inward life is apt to become a perpetually repeated round of sad and bitter thoughts; the same words, the same scenes, are revolved over and over again, the same mood accompanies them; the end of the year finds them as much what they were at the beginning as if they were machines set to a recurrent series of movements.

George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, Book IV Chapter 2

What Eliot does here is to provide a metacommentary on how she expects her readers to respond: with empathy. The unusually personal tone struck by the first-person narration and direct address to the reader lay bare her narrative point.

Suggested questions

- Highlight the virtue terms in the passages above. Are there any vices?
- In what ways do society, government, and community show compassion? Is compassion a civic virtue?
- How is the word *feel* used differently in the passages above?
- In what ways do the characters display heroism?

4. Compassion

An issue that the brief history of the word *empathy* outlines above transfers into the literary corpus, i.e., part of the reason for the scarcity of *empathy* is its synonymy with other terms. One such term is *compassion*. As with most synonyms, it is not a direct substitute, entailing virtue connotations more directly. As mentioned previously, this polysemy is a critical aspect of literacy education and can be a fruitful basis for classroom exercises.

A text which clearly concerns compassion and shows empathic engagement within the contexts of moral dilemmas is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Midway through the text, Victor Frankenstein ascends to the summit of Montanvert in pursuit of the monster, his creation. Shelley here draws on the classic Romantic image of the individual thinker, reflecting on sublime, but one which is interrupted by own creation. As such, it symbolises the way in which Gothic literature was itself an interruption of Romantic thinking; one that exposed the dark side of the imagination and creativity.

Shelley essentially makes this critique via characterisation. The monster's speech is full of language that seeks to evoke pity in his wish to be virtuous: "Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous". He implores compassion, linking it with justice. He also uses the metaphor of 'move': asking that it be moved and the ability of words to move. All this dextrous rhetoric means that, in contrast to, say, Milton's Satan, the monster's eloquence indicates his virtue.

Touchstone passage 13

"You propose," replied I, "to fly from the habitations of man, to dwell in those wilds where the beasts of the field will be your only companions. How can you, who long for the love and sympathy of man, persevere in this exile? You will return and again seek their kindness, and you will meet with their detestation; your evil passions will be renewed, and you will then have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction. This may not be; cease to argue the point, for I cannot consent."

"How inconstant are your feelings! But a moment ago you were moved by my representations, and why do you again harden yourself to my complaints? I swear to you, by the earth which I inhabit, and by you that made me, that with the companion you bestow, I will quit the neighbourhood of man and dwell, as it may chance, in the most savage of places. My evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy! My life will flow quietly away, and in my dying moments I shall not curse my maker."

His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him, but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that

moved and talked, my heart sickened and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred. I tried to stifle these sensations; I thought that as I could not sympathise with him, I had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which was yet in my power to bestow.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Chapter 17

Although the verb form (here “compassionated”) is endorsed by dictionaries, its use is extremely rare. The British National Corpus records no instances. It is attested in the Hansard corpus of British Parliamentary speeches, but its usage, restricted mostly to the nineteenth century, seems therefore delimited historically and in terms of register (being both official and lofty).

What this suggests is that a virtue like compassion is more usually understood as a characteristic (noun) or attribute (adjective) rather than a process (verb). But owing to our innate linguistic ability along with our familiarity with the morphological rules of English, this word presents little problem with literacy. It is a basic requirement of language that the mind be able to comprehend words and sentences it has not encountered previously. Again, we have an instance of foregrounding, one that places virtue, and its enactment, at the centre of the text.

Victor is indeed moved by the words of the monster as Shelley mixes emotion and reason. The monster ultimately states, “I now see compassion in your eyes” yet Victor's ultimate lack of agreement is because he cannot identify with the monster. In this way, *Frankenstein* is a useful text through which to explore the ethical question of whether we can empathise with those unlike ourselves.

In this vein, *Frankenstein* also offers a useful resource for discussing the notion of feeling in relation to empathy and situating that discussion within a complex array of flawed characters. As already noted, Gothic literature sought to question the excesses of Romanticism, in which feeling and man's pursuit of knowledge were central. In the passage below, the monster contemplates virtue and feeling. Furthermore, he is aware of the usefulness of writing for such contemplation and conscious of power of storytelling in that endeavour, introducing chapter as the “more moving part of my story”.

Touchstone passage 14

“These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike. To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation, a condition more abject than that of the blind mole

or harmless worm. For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased and I turned away with disgust and loathing.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Chapter 13

This (Aristotelian) notion of the relationship between virtue and emotion is also explored by Walton, who employs similar metaphorical language to explore virtue in its comparison with feeling.

Touchstone passage 15

I was at first touched by the expressions of his misery; yet, when I called to mind what Frankenstein had said of his powers of eloquence and persuasion, and when I again cast my eyes on the lifeless form of my friend, indignation was rekindled within me. “Wretch!” I said. “It is well that you come here to whine over the desolation that you have made. You throw a torch into a pile of buildings, and when they are consumed, you sit among the ruins and lament the fall. Hypocritical fiend! If he whom you mourn still lived, still would he be the object, again would he become the prey, of your accursed vengeance. It is not pity that you feel; you lament only because the victim of your malignity is withdrawn from your power.”

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, September 12th

Here again, fellow feeling is equated with sympathy and language is expressly linked to the idea of empathy with another. The passage raises the possibility of exploring the practical application of virtue literacy to the extent that it presents Walton’s own reasoning between compassion for the monster and for that of his victims.

Suggested questions

- What metaphors can you identify that relate to emotion in the passages?
- What kind of metaphors do we use to discuss feelings and why?
- Do the passages indicate ways in which language can be unvirtuous?

- Can you think of an instance when you were emotionally 'moved' to perform a virtuous act?
- What other words relate to empathy? How are words like sympathy/compassion different?
- How is Frankenstein's monster un/like us? How does this affect our ability to empathise with him?