



'A TASTE OF HONEY' - REVISION GUIDE



Shelagh Delaney



Shelagh Delaney was born November 25, 1939, in Salford, Lancashire, England. Her father, a bus inspector, and her mother were part of the English working class, the social group that informs of her writing. Delaney attended Broughton Secondary School but began writing even before she completed her education. She had no further interest in formal education, and after she left school, she held a number of jobs, including salesgirl, usherette, and clerk.

The play

'A Taste of Honey' was produced when Delaney was eighteen-years-old. Although this play was originally being written as a novel, it was rewritten as a play in response to Delaney's dissatisfaction with contemporary theatre. Delaney felt that she could write a better play, with more realistic dialogue, than the plays that were currently being staged. 'A Taste of Honey' became an unexpected hit, winning several awards both as a play and later as a film..

Delaney's play opened to mixed reviews. In many cases, her characters were praised for their honest, realistic voices. The play was also singled out for its accurate depictions **of working class lives**.

Delaney believed in social protest and has not been afraid to speak out on the need for a more realistic theatre, one that depicts the working class environment of many British citizens.

Theatre of the Absurd/ Social Drama

During the 1950s/ 1960s two types of theatre emerged- 'absurd' and 'social' drama.

The term 'absurd' was supposed to describe life as meaningless and this was a reaction to the mainstream post war theatre about the upper classes.

Social drama is often concerned with the working classes and the younger generation. The fact that Delaney chooses a female protagonist who has a homosexual friend and interracial relationship was very controversial at the time.



Angry Young Men

"Angry Young Men" was the label given to a group of British writers—notably playwright John Osborne—of the late-1950s, whose work expressed bitterness and disillusionment with Postwar English society.

A common feature of their work is the antihero, a flawed, often abrasive character who rebels against a corrupt social order and strives for personal integrity.

Delaney did not set out to become a part of this group, but when her play was produced, many critics saw her work as a protest against working class poverty and the social conditions of her time

Kitchen sink theatre

Kitchen sink theatre is a movement in theatre which uses family and domestic settings in order to examine social and class issues.



'A Taste of Honey' is referred to as a Kitchen sink drama because it portrays the lives of working class people, living in a deprived inner city environment, struggling to overcome practical and personal problems.

1950s/1960s Culture

Changes to culture in society began around 1950 (what we know as the 60s really began around 1955). After the difficulties of rationing and shortages, Britain enjoyed an economic boom in the 'never had it so good' years of the second half of the 50s. The good times continued into the sixties and a social revolution took place. There was a huge emphasis on youth and youth culture

Politics

Politically, people started to move away from conservatives in favour of the political left as the Country felt cheated and duped by the Suez Crisis. For the first time since the war, people started to mistrust the Government and radical views gained more power. CND movement (ban the bomb)- 1958



Morality in late 50s/ early 60s

Cult of youth- recognition of the teenager in consumerism.

Young people suddenly had more power.

Fashion and music became really important.

Contraception became readily available in the 1960s.

Rise and influence of the television.

The Wolfenden report 1957- recommended that homosexuality should not be a criminal offence- indicates the change in public opinion



ACT 1 SCENE 1

- We see the situation that Helen and Jo find themselves in – impoverished, helpless and hopeless.
- We get a first impression of the relationship between the characters: Helen and Jo are constantly arguing.
- Jo feels that she has the potential to make more of herself than Helen has.
- Helen seems not to care what happens to Jo.
- There is, though, a hint of pride in Helen's recognition of Jo's artistic efforts.
- Jo calls her mother 'Helen' – very unusual in the 1950s.
- Jo is fully aware of her mother's status as a 'semi-whore'.
- We hear about Helen's rootless life, constantly on the move, often hiding from somebody.
- We see that Jo has higher standards than her mother, in spite of being brought up by her.
- Peter puts in an appearance – a brash, boorish hanger-on of Helen's.
- Peter is sexually demanding but Helen seems uninterested.
- He even offers to marry her, but we find it hard to take the gesture seriously.
- The scene ends, though, with Helen apparently considering it.
- Jo is afraid of the dark – but only inside the house.

Begins plot

- Helen and Jo have just moved in to this flat but already Peter is suggesting yet another move.
- Jo is nearing the end of her schooling and beginning to think of her future.

Introduces key characters

- Helen, the 'semi-whore', is clearly unable to organise her own life in a satisfactory way.
- Jo despises much of her mother's attitude to life. The two women squabble constantly, refuse to help each other and score points off each other.
- Their relationship seems more like that of peers rather than mother and daughter. This is emphasised by Jo addressing her mother by her first name all the time.
- Peter is arrogantly confident that Helen will accept him. He is openly hostile to Jo, whom he sees as a barrier to his enjoyment of Helen's company.
- Jo seems to resent Peter's arrival.

Establishes central themes and issues

- Peter's presence emphasises the complexity of the relationship between mother and daughter. On the face of it there is little affection between the women, and yet Jo seems jealous of Peter.

- Helen's poverty is partly due to her own lack of ambition, will-power and sense of her own worth.
- It is clear, though, that she finds herself in this situation partly because of the role of women in 1950s society: they are dependant upon men.
- Poverty and a lack of decent living conditions are commonplace.

Act 1 Scene 2

Introduces a new character

- The Boy will play a crucial role in the plot by fathering Jo's baby.

Develops the plot

- The Boy proposes to Jo, although they haven't known each other for very long.
- Jo's acceptance of the proposal is casual.
- She assures the Boy that Helen will not be prejudiced against him because of his colour.
- She is as excited about his toy car as she is about the ring.
- We learn about Helen's husband, and the fact that he wasn't Jo's father.
- Helen reveals her decision to marry Peter. Jo is opposed, apparently because Helen is ten years older than Peter.
- Jo is leaving school and has found herself a part-time job.
- Helen proposes leaving Jo in the flat when she moves in with Peter.

Develops the key characters

- Peter makes the mistake of trying to tell Jo what to do. She attacks him, 'half-laughing, half-crying'.
- Jo's hostility to Peter is partly because of his attitude to her, but also because of her opposition to the marriage.
- She is suspicious of him and accuses him of being a womaniser. He doesn't deny it.
- Peter flirts a little with Jo and gives her a cigarette, perhaps as a peace offering.
- The Boy quotes 'Othello', significant in view of the inter-racial relationship.
- On her own wedding day, Helen is violently opposed to Jo's engagement.
- Jo is remarkably calm about the likelihood that the Boy will not come back to her after his six-month tour of duty.
- Helen reveals that Jo's father was 'retarded', and this makes Jo worry that she may have inherited a mad streak. She also claims that he had been her first lover because her husband was too puritanical to have consummated the marriage.

Develops central themes and issues

- The Boy is black. Jo has no prejudice and believes that her mother has none either.

- Poverty. There isn't much evidence for Helen's marriage to Peter being a love match. He can offer her a better house and money to spend; that's enough for her. 'He's got a wallet full of reasons.'
- We see further evidence of the complexity of the women's relationship. They are still sniping at each other; Helen feels no obligation to look after Jo; she doesn't seem to care what happens to her in the future. Yet Jo is distraught at the idea of the marriage and even wants to be taken on the honeymoon with them.
- Jo has higher ambitions for herself than Helen has. But she is unclear about how to achieve them and runs the risk of slipping into her mother's ways just because society appears to offer her no escape.

Act 2 Scene 1

Development of plot

- Jo is pregnant.
- She has made friends with Geof, a caring homosexual man.
- Geof moves into the flat. Jo assumes he has been thrown out by his landlady for having entertained a male lover there, but we don't know if this is true.
- Geof plans to tidy up the flat.
- Jo has an attack of self-pity. She also claims to hate babies and the thought of motherhood.
- Geof unexpectedly tries to kiss Jo and offers to marry her.
- Helen arrives – sent for by Geof who had felt she had a right to know about the pregnancy.
- She immediately starts to bully Jo.
- Helen promises to send Jo money regularly.
- Peter arrives, very drunk, and is thoroughly unpleasant to everyone, quarrelling with his wife, insulting Geof and mocking Jo.
- Helen offers to take Jo home, to look after her; but Peter is, of course, furious.
- He gives Helen an ultimatum: go home with him, without Jo, or stay away. She chooses to go with him, urging Geof to look after Jo.



Further illustration of central themes and issues

- Jo's lack of prejudice is shown in her attitude to Geof.
- His hatred of people who laugh at others is stated. We can assume that he has been laughed at because of his sexual preferences.
- Geof mocks at Jo's art work, calling it sentimental. Yet perhaps her hopes of breaking out of her dreary lifestyle had lain in her art?
- Geof further challenges our attitudes to sexual stereotyping by making clothes for Jo's baby.
- He has arranged for the landlady to make a wicker basket cradle.
- Helen shows no interest in the baby. She refuses to help Jo; she doesn't want to be thought of as a grandmother because it makes her sound old.

- Helen shows a prejudiced attitude to Geof's homosexuality.
- Helen has a brief impulse to look after Jo, but when Peter says she must choose between him and Jo she settles for him and his money.

Development of character and relationships

- Although Jo has now left school and is pregnant, she still has a childlike side to her character. It is brought out here as she plays with the brightly coloured balloons.
- Jo can't resist teasing Geof about his sexuality but there is no hint of prejudice in her attitude – just curiosity.
- There is a warm friendship developing between the two of them. She says he is 'just like a big sister' to her.
- Geof is quite secretive about himself and his life style.
- Jo expresses disgust at the way some children are brought up – 'It's their parents' fault'.
- Geof's behaviour is contradictory. He has many feminine characteristics and doesn't deny being gay. Yet he would like to have sexual relations with Jo, be regarded as the father of her child and even marry her. He agrees that it isn't good for him to be with Jo, but he can't bear to think of leaving her.
- Helen treats Geof despicably, openly despising his gentle feminine qualities.
- In spite of her own promiscuity, Helen accuses Jo of having low sexual standards. Does she have some hope that Jo will avoid drifting into the kind of lifestyle she has led?
- Jo has not considered an illegal abortion. She believes that Helen has had several but here, too, she reveals different standards from her mother.
- When Geof tries to stop Helen and Jo shouting at each other, Helen tells him, 'We enjoy it'. They never show any affection for each other; perhaps only their bitter quarrelling binds them together.
- Jo seems to take sides with her mother, temporarily, against Geof. Yet she approves of him and despises her mother's way of life. It is another example of the bond between the women.



Act 2 Scene 2

Development of plot

- The scene opens in an atmosphere of happy, gentle domesticity. Jo even says, 'I feel wonderful'.
- Geof has fulfilled Jo's earlier prophecy that he would 'make somebody a wonderful wife'.
- The discovery of Jo's forgotten bulbs, now dead, saddens and frightens her.
- Jo tells Geof the story of her conception but he refuses to believe Helen has been telling the truth.
- Jo wishes her mother were with her for the birth, even though she knows they would only quarrel. In fact, she says she hates the sight of her.

- Geof has brought Jo a present – a life-sized doll ‘to practise a few holds on’. She reacts violently, smashing the doll and threatening to kill the baby when it comes.
- Helen moves back in.
- Geof moves out.

Further illustration of central themes and issues

- Helen’s attitude to Geof’s sexuality is even more unpleasant than before.
- Helen’s reliance on alcohol is emphasised again.
- Helen is revealed as a virulent racist.
- Helen’s stay in Peter’s better quality house has made her contemptuous of the poverty of Jo’s flat – which she had been glad to get for herself a few months before.

Development of character and relationships

- Pregnancy has made Jo more aware of the possibility of death. The sight of her dead bulbs frightens her.
- Jo says, revealingly, of her mother, ‘She had so much love for everyone else, but none for me’.
- Geof upsets Jo by saying that in some ways she is exactly like her mother. Jo now seems to think Geof isn’t gay at all, but just ‘an old woman’. A comfortable and comforting old woman.
- More strands in the complex Helen/Jo relationship: Jo admits that she both hates the sight of her mother and longs to be with her.
- Jo’s reaction against the doll seems to be brought on by its colour. She doesn’t want a black baby. Is she afraid of people’s reactions? This has never seemed to worry her before. This develops into a feeling that she doesn’t want *any* baby.
- Geof manages to calm her and they return to a happy, contented state: ‘We’ve been married for a thousand years’.
- Once Helen moves in, she immediately takes over, bossing Jo around, rejecting everything Geof has done, insulting him. The world must revolve around her and at the moment she wants to play at being a grandmother. This is because Peter has rejected her and she can no longer play her wife role.
- Helen has bought a cot for the baby. Therefore Geof’s wicker cradle must be thrown away. The food he has brought for Jo is similarly rejected.
- Geof knows that Jo can’t cope with him and Helen both in the house; so he goes.
- Helen reacts violently to the news that the baby will be of mixed race. She is appallingly rude about it.
- In the end, Jo is stuck with her mother and their love/hate relationship. She is thinking happily about Geof as the play ends, unaware that he has gone, sacrificing his own happiness, perhaps mistakenly, for her.

Helen



Helen should not be viewed as a prostitute but as an attractive woman who enjoys life without thinking about the consequences of her actions.

Helen derives pleasure from the company of men and alcohol. In fact, she is dependent on alcohol as she enters and leaves the play looking for a drink. Helen is a bully, frequently making threats of physical violence against Jo; she demands her own way, despising everyone else's opinions, choices and values; she is, by the standards of the time, immoral in her sexual behaviour; she drinks too much; she shows Jo no affection at all; she seems unconcerned about what Jo does or how she will live, apart from an occasional brief hope that she won't 'spoil her life' by following in her own footsteps. She abandons Jo in order to go off with a man; her only interest in men is money; she is disorganised, lacking in direction and weak.

Yet when she has access to Peter's money she does seem keen to offer some to Jo (though Jo recognises that she is likely to forget her promise); she is even willing to take Jo into her new home – until Peter opposes the plan and she withdraws the offers of money and accommodation in order to stick with him. Helen is racist, she is not only shocked that Jo has become pregnant to a black man but makes thoroughly unpleasant jokes about the baby. She is homophobic, hostile to Geof and joking about his apparent sexual preferences (though her prejudice is based on his appearance and his interests rather than on any evidence that he is actually gay.) Helen blames society for her poverty when, in fact, it is due to the flaws in her own character; at the end of the play she pretends to have come back to look after Jo but in fact she has been thrown out by Peter and she has nowhere else to go; she is aggressive in her treatment of Geof and his gifts.

However, Helen can be honestly self critical and sometimes show real concern for Jo such as when she discovers Jo is engaged and pleads with Jo to learn from her own mistakes and when she comforts Jo during labour pains. She is witty and she has some awareness of her own failings. Helen makes the most of life and accepts its realities.

Helen is a changeable character. She can be kind and caring just as she can be cruel and insulting.

Top Quotes

- 'Have I ever laid claim to being a proper mother?'
- 'He's got a wallet full of reasons'
- 'He spends his money like water. Oh I'm so excited.'
- 'You silly little bitch.'
- 'What sort of wife do you think you'd make? You're useless.'
- 'Oh Jo, you're only a kid. Why don't you learn from my mistakes?'

- 'Look you're only young. Enjoy your life. Don't get trapped.'
- 'How was I to know you'd materialize out of a little love affair that lasted five minutes?'
- 'I loved him. It was the first time I'd ever really been with a man..'
- 'I never thought about you! It's a funny thing, I never have done when I've been happy.'
- 'You know what they're calling you round here? A silly little whore!'
- 'I should have got rid of you before you were born.'
- 'You prefer to stay in this hole with that pansified little freak?'
- 'I haven't been able to sleep for thinking about you since he came round to our house'
- 'I'll take care of you and see you through it'
- 'I'll send you some money'
- 'You can't have a baby in this dump'
- 'It's all right love, I'm here and everything's all right'
- 'Put it on the stage and call it blackbird'





Jo

Jo begins as a school girl and evolves into an expectant mother. Jo has inherited many of her mother's weaknesses: she has a tendency to drift, rather than make a determined effort to achieve something; she has little ambition; she is ready to settle for less than she deserves, becoming engaged to the Boy even though she knows he will probably never come back to her; she has outbursts of temper – smashing the doll, attacking Peter, falling out with Geof; accepting the abusive relationship with her mother.

But she has strengths that her mother lacks: she has a higher standard of personal morality; she is capable of affection; she has some artistic talent, though lacking the drive to make the most of it; she has no prejudices and she gets herself a job.

Jo has many teenage insecurities and confusions. These are particularly well-drawn in the play – not surprisingly, since Shelagh Delaney was herself still a teenager when she wrote the play. Jo has a complex relationship with her mother, constantly changing and always emotionally draining. At one extreme she hates the sight of her; at the other she longs to be with her; in between, she is sometimes the child craving affection and sometimes a mother figure to Helen, looking out for her, protective of her and knowing her weaknesses.

Top Quotes

- 'If I was a man and my wife had a baby that wasn't mine I'd sling her out'
- 'I'm sick of you. You make my life a misery'
- 'You should prepare my meals like a proper mother'
- 'Don't you think I'm a bit young to be left like this on my own while you flit off with my old woman?'
- 'Good, I'm glad nobody can see a resemblance between us'
- 'I'll probably never see you again. I know it. But I don't care. Stay with me now. It's enough.'
- 'If you don't watch it, you'll end up an old down and out boozier knocking back the meths'
- 'Why did you have to tell me that story? Couldn't you have made something up?'
- 'How could you go with a half wit?'
- 'I think I've had enough. I'm sick of love. That's why I'm letting you stay here. You won't start anything.'
- 'You're just like a big sister to me'
- 'You know I used to try and hold my mother's hands but she always used to pull them away from me. So silly really. She had so much love for everyone else, but none for me'

- 'The time to have taken care of me was years ago when I couldn't take care of myself'
- 'I mean it. I hate motherhood'
- 'I'll bash its brains out. I'll kill it. I don't want this baby Geof. I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman.'
- 'I don't want any man'
- 'She's got no rights where I'm concerned'
- 'You should have been locked up years ago, with my father!'
- 'You walked through the door with that man and didn't give me a second thought'
- 'You should have known. You're nothing to me.'
- 'A bit of love, a bit of lust and there you are. We don't ask for life, we have it thrust upon us.'
- 'The colour's wrong'
- 'We're already married. We've been married a thousand years'
- 'You know. I wish she was here all the same'
- 'You hurt people's feelings and you don't even notice'
- 'For the first time in my life I feel really important. I feel as though I could take care of the whole world. I even feel I could take care of you, too!'



Geof



Geof is perhaps the most sympathetic character in the play: he is caring, concerned and gentle; he has interests traditionally seen as feminine, especially in the 1950s – making baby clothes, keeping the flat tidy, cooking, looking forward to caring for the baby. As a result, he is assumed to be gay by all the other characters but he never admits to it himself. In fact, he has sexual feelings for Jo, forcing a kiss on her, is this because he is confused about his sexuality? He offers to marry her but seems to accept her rejection quite calmly. He accepts the role that Jo invents for him – an old woman, sexless, old-fashioned, trustworthy. His decision to leave at the end of the play hurts him deeply but he knows that Helen will not go away and he realises that the three of them living together would create tensions that would be bad for Jo. He is giving up everything he longs for – the pseudo-marriage, the baby, the comfortable relationship, the opportunity to care for Jo and the baby – in order to protect her from hassle.

Top Quotes

- 'I can't stand people who laugh at other people'
- 'Your mother should know'
- 'Someone's got to look after you. You can't look after yourself'
- 'What would you say if I started something?'
- 'Am I repulsive to you?'
- 'You do need me Jo, don't you?'
- 'I'd sooner be dead than away from you'
- ' Oh well, you need someone to love you while you're looking for someone to love'
- 'If you don't watch it, you'll turn out exactly like her.'
- 'Can you see Helen going out with a real loony!'
- 'It's alright Jo. I don't mind moving out'
- ' Would you not frighten Jo'



Peter



Helen has few redeeming features; Peter has none at all. He is a bully; he is prejudiced; he is a drunk; he is a womaniser. He marries Helen in spite of having, Jo believes, a string of other women. He throws her out as soon as he finds someone more attractive. Why does he fancy Helen? She is ten years older than he is; she has no money; she is aggressive; she is clearly after his money; she is no longer physically attractive. Yet he marries her, spends lavishly on her and puts up with her aggression. Although he is a bully, he is not frightening: Jo and Geof both stand up to him.

Top Quotes

- 'I'm not having her with us'
- 'What's this, giving my money away again?'
- 'Who's the lily?'
- 'Shut your mouth bubble belly! Before I shut it for you.'
- 'I'm not having that bloody slut at our place'
- 'I could throw you out tomorrow'
- 'And don't bring that little fruitcake parcel either! I can't stand the sight of him.'
- 'Look at the sour faced old bitch'
- 'I don't like the smell of unwashed bodies, woman. I dragged you out of the gutter once.'





The Boy (Jimmie)

The Boy's main function in the play is to get Jo pregnant. We don't even learn his name until almost the end of the play. However, he is cheerful, optimistic and loving. The engagement ring may have been bought in Woolworths, as he claims, but at least he has gone to the trouble of getting one. Is he sincere in his promises for the future? It's possible, of course, that he gives a cheap ring to every girl he wants to bed, just as a way of buying sex (not so readily available free in the 1950s as it is today). He does show genuine concern for Jo, trying to do something for her cold, and saying he loves her. He enjoys teasing Jo. He is not uneducated: he quotes Shakespeare though he may know these lines only because he identifies with the black Othello.

- He promises Jo they will be married in six months when he returns on leave but nine months later, he has not returned.
- Despite claiming he loves Jo he'd still rather meet his mates down the pub.

Top Quotes

- 'I adore you'
- 'Doesn't she care who her daughter marries?'
- 'We're saving up to get married'
- 'I hate dirt and this is the dirtiest place I've ever seen'
- 'But I will come back, I love you'

Themes



Helen and Jo's relationship

- Jo and Helen do not behave like a normal mother and daughter.
- Throughout the play Jo is torn between wanting her mother's affection and a desire to be independent of her.
- Jo is angered by Helen's preoccupation with herself because Jo wishes her mother was as concerned with Jo as she is with herself.
- When Helen finally leaves Jo, Jo makes no effort to move from the squalid area (perhaps hanging on to her childhood) and despite being so neglected by Helen, still wants her with her when she is about to give birth. This shows that despite Helen's failures at being a Mum, she is still a source of comfort when Jo is faced with fear.
- Helen tells Jo she wishes she had never been born and Jo accuses Helen of having aborted many babies.
- Jimmie notices that Jo is upset/ ill and wants to care for her by making her milk- this is exactly the type of care that Jo would like from her Mum but doesn't get. He is appalled by the place she lives in- almost a paternal comment? Is Jo looking for a father figure?
- Jo is so used to living in her Mum's shadow that she believes all men will fancy Helen. Notice how she is defensive when asking if the boy fancies Helen.
- Jo becomes more self-reliant and less dependent on Helen towards the end of the play. Helen has become more aware of her failings admitting that she only ever thought of her own happiness. Helen is openly affectionate towards Jo when she is in pain at the end of the play. Is this because Jo reminds Helen of herself at that age?

Love, Sex and Marriage



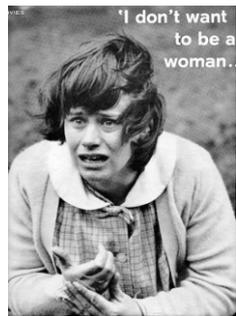
- Delaney presents us with several views of love and relationships throughout the play (Helen and Peter; Helen and first husband, Helen and Jo's dad; Jo and Jimmie and Jo and Geof)
- Both Peter and Jimmie have an obvious sexual attraction to Helen and Jo. They both propose and offer gifts as tokens of their love. But they both have obvious interest in other women. Peter carries photos of other women and the boy talks in vague terms about a future.
- The issue of sexuality and its place in a relationship is explored in the play. Both Jo and Geof are unclear about what they want. On the surface they both get on with each other but it seems a physical relationship would not work.
- Helen divorced her first husband as she was unfaithful but her marriage to Peter ends as he was unfaithful to her.
- The only person who displays truly unselfish love is Geof. His declaration that he would rather be dead than separated from Jo shows his strength of feelings.
- All the characters in the play discover that love is hard to find.

Loneliness

- Jo is lonely due to the inadequate relationship with her mother
- Do Helen and Peter settle for each other due to loneliness? To some extent, Peter adopts a child role with Helen and Helen lavishes him with all the love she refused to give Jo. Peter also refers to himself as Oedipus (Greek myth where Oedipus marries his mother which ends in tragedy)
- Jo throws herself at the first boy who shows any interest in her as she is lonely and does not want to spend Christmas alone.
- Geof moves in with Jo as he is lonely and wants someone to look after who will need him.
- Geof and Jo compliment each other as they are both looking for someone to give emotional meaning to their lives.

Growing up

- Jo is constantly torn between wanting independence from her mother and wanting to be looked after and treated properly as a daughter.
- Jo displays a range of teenage mood swings, anxieties and confusion that reflect not only her unique situation but also universalises the confusion of feelings that typifies being a teenager.
- As much as Jo wants to be grown up- she wishes her mother could have lied to her and disguised the truth about her Dad.
- Jo says she wants to be grown up but desperately tries to hold on to her mother and fails.
- The episodes with Jo and her boyfriend alternate with scenes concerning Helen's marriage and how this will affect Jo. This is deliberate juxtaposition to make the audience question whether Jo is ready for adulthood and independence
- The play shows lots of contrasts of innocence and experience



Death and darkness

- The flat is close to a cemetery and slaughterhouse
- Jo brings bulbs which die and dreams of Helen's dead body under a rose bush
- Helen compares her bed to a coffin
- Jo learns her dad is dead
- Jo threatens to kill the baby
- References to death remind the audience of the realities of life and death.
- Images of the dark remind the audience of the unknown
- Jo is afraid of the dark whilst Helen and Jimmie both declare they like the dark (innocence and experience)
- Peter refers to the flat as 'the black hole'



'A Taste of Honey'

The title of the play comes from a reference in the Bible from the Book of Samuel which refers to a story where a character called Jonathan tasted honey when he shouldn't have and then has to be punished. This therefore suggests that each character has to pay for their happiness.

- Jimmie is Jo's physical taste of honey.
- Geof is Jo's emotional taste of honey.



Views of 1950s society

What was 'a taste of honey' for Jo is viewed by the outside world as immoral. They call her a 'silly little whore' and wonder why she is living with a homosexual man.

Helen's relationship with Peter would also have been viewed as sordid. Jo is not the only one who probably thinks Peter is playing away.

The outside world looks at sex, love and marriage in a very different way to Jo and Helen.

Delaney is making a social comment about the distinction in views towards sex from both women and men. Men are allowed to be frivolous when it comes to sex but the women in the play have to pay for their taste of honey, they are punished for their sexual encounters whereas the men are free.





The Exam- 1 hour

There will be 3 questions presented.

- You **must answer the first question** worth 10 marks which will be based on the extract provided. – spend 20 minutes
- You must then **choose to answer question 2 or question 3** worth 20 marks. – spend 40 minutes (**DON'T TRY TO ANSWER BOTH**)

Extract question- 20 minutes

You will be provided with an extract from the play which will be about an important moment or will illustrate a link to a theme or relationship between characters or ask you to consider how a mood or atmosphere is created

How to answer the question

- Before you start, check the focus of the question, then highlight or underline relevant details (words/phrases, rather than big chunks) covering key relevant parts of the extract.
- It's useful to ask yourself why this particular extract has been chosen: it may be a turning point in the story, or it may reveal something new or significant about a character, for example. This could be a starting point for your answer.
- Then, establish an overview, summing up what you will say in the rest of your answer, clearly addressing the question. Focus is really important here. You need to position yourself and make clear what your point of view is: so long as you back up what you say with evidence from the text, you can't be wrong.
- Be specific - for example, if the question is about how the writer creates mood and atmosphere, say straight away what the mood and atmosphere is, or if it is about a character, make a clear point about the character in question

Analysing the extract

- Tackle the key areas of the extract, selecting and highlighting detail. **DON'T FORGET THE QUESTION!** Make sure you go right to the end of the extract - there will be a good reason why it starts and ends where it does.
- If it's relevant, you may make brief reference to other parts of the text - to put the extract in context - but your main concern is the extract.
- Don't get so caught up by analysing the detail that you neglect the content - what is actually going on in the extract.
- In the play extract, make full use of the stage directions, and analyse them as closely as you do the dialogue - look really closely at how the characters speak and behave.

- If Foundation Tier, candidates may be asked to give their thoughts and feelings or to write about audience reaction to the part of the play featured in the extract. If so, you could write about the mood and atmosphere, or how the extract relates to what's gone before, or on the behaviour of characters. Avoid being general, and always support what you say with reference to the text of the extract.

Typical extract questions

- With close reference to the extract, show how Delaney creates mood and atmosphere here.
- Look closely at how ----- speaks and behaves here. How does it affect your feelings towards him/her?
- Look closely at how ----- speaks and behaves here. What does it reveal of his/her state of mind?
- How does ----- suggest -----'s feelings in this extract?
- Look closely at how ----- and ----- speak and behave here. What does it reveal about their relationship?
- Look closely at how ----- speaks and behaves here. What impressions would an audience receive of his/her character?
- Look closely at how ----- speaks and behaves here. How might it affect an audience's feelings towards him/her?

You can revise this section by choosing any point in the play- choose a double page- and apply one of the above questions a character/s. (TIP- try to focus on a key moment in the play)

Choice question

- The second section of the exam is worth 20 marks and you should spend **40 minutes on it.**
- **Only answer 1 question!**
- It will usually be based on either a theme or a character

Practice character questions (40 minutes)

1. Write about the relationship between Jo and Helen and how it is presented.
2. What do you think of Peter and the way he is presented to the reader?
3. Imagine you are Jo. At the end of the play, you think back over its events. Write down your thoughts and feelings. Remember how Jo would speak when you write your answer.
4. In your opinion, who or what had the greatest influence on Jo? Support your answer with detailed reference to the text.
5. Show how Jo is affected by Jimmy.
6. To what extent is it possible to feel sympathy for Geof? Remember to support your answer with detailed reference to the text.
7. How is the character of Helen important to the novel/play as a whole?
8. Show how and why the character of Jo changes throughout the play.
9. To what extent is Helen responsible for the vents that affect Jo in the play?
10. Give advice to the actor playing Helen on how she should present the character to an audience.

Practice theme based questions (40 minutes)

1. How does Delaney present the theme of love and marriage in 'A Taste of Honey'?
2. Why do you think Delaney called the play 'A Taste of Honey'?
3. To what extent do you find Act Two Scene Two an effective ending for the play?
4. How is Act One Scene Two important to the play as a whole?
5. How is the theme of innocence and experience presented in the play?
6. How does Delaney present the theme of parent/ child relationships in 'A Taste of Honey'?
7. How is the darker side of society portrayed in the play?
8. How does Delaney portray the teenage experience in 'A Taste of Honey'?
9. How is the theme of loneliness presented in a 'A Taste of Honey'?
10. Which characters have a taste of honey in the play and what are the effects?

Remember

- Point, Evidence, Explain paragraph structure (PEE)
- Try to remember some key quotes or references to specific elements of the play to justify your ideas- if you can't remember it exactly- explain it.
- Try to analyse the choice of language of the quotes and consider how this communicates meaning or alternative interpretations
- Try to add as many details as you can
- Remember to analyse- not re tell or narrate the story.
- Remember it is a PLAY not a novel and you need inverted commas around the title, 'A Taste of Honey'
- Remember to refer to the context of the time- 1950s society.

A Sample Paper

HIGHER TIER QUESTIONS

(e) A Taste of Honey

Answer part (i) and **either** part (ii) **or** part (iii).

You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on part (i), and about 40 minutes on part (ii) or part (iii).

(i) Read the extract on the below page. Then answer the following question:
Look closely at how Peter and Helen speak and behave here. How does it create mood and atmosphere for an audience? [10]

Either,

(ii) Why do you think Shelagh Delaney called her play *A Taste of Honey*? To what extent do you find it an appropriate title for the play? [20]

Or,

(iii) How does Delaney present the character of Geof to an audience throughout the play? [20]

FOUNDATION TIER QUESTIONS

(e) A Taste of Honey

Answer part (i) and **either** part (ii) **or** part (iii).

You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on part (i), and about 40 minutes on part (ii) or part (iii).

(i) Read the extract on the opposite page. Then answer the following question:
What do you think of the way Peter and Helen speak and behave here? Remember to support your answer with words and phrases from the extract. [10]

Either,

(ii) Why do you think Shelagh Delaney called her play *A Taste of Honey*?

Think about:

- some of the events that happen in the play;
- Jo's relationships with the Boy and Geof;
- anything else you think important. [20]

Or,

(iii) Which character do you have most sympathy for and why?

Think about:

- what happens to your chosen character in the play;
- your chosen character's relationships with others;
- the way your chosen character speaks and behaves;
- why you feel the most sympathy for him/her. [20]

PETER: What the hell's going on? Do you expect me to wait in the filthy street all night?
HELEN: I told you to stay outside.
PETER: Don't point your bloody finger at me.
HELEN: I said I'd only be a few minutes and I've only been a few minutes. Now come on, outside!
PETER: Ah! The erring daughter. There she is. *[Sings.]* "Little Josephine, you're a big girl now."
Where d'you keep the whisky?
HELEN: They haven't got any. Now, come on.
PETER: *[seeing GEOFF]*: What's this, the father? Oh Christ, no!
GEOF: Who's he?
HELEN: President of the local Temperance Society!
PETER: *[singing]*: "Who's got a bun in the oven? Who's got a cake in the stove?"
HELEN: Leave her alone.
PETER: Oh, go to hell!
JO: I've got nothing to say . . .
PETER: Go on, have your blasted family reunion, don't mind me! *[Notices GEOFF again.]*
Who's this? Oh, of course! Where are the drinks, Lana? *[He falls into the kitchen, singing.]*
"Getting to know you, getting to know all about you . . ."
HELEN: Jo, come on ...
[There is a loud crash in the kitchen.]
And the light of the world shone upon him.
[PETER enters.]
PETER: Cheer up, everybody. I am back. Who's the lily? Look at Helen, well, if she doesn't look like a bloody unrestored oil painting. What's the matter everybody? Look at the soufaced old bitch! Well, are you coming for a few drinks or aren't you?
HELEN: The pubs aren't open yet.
JO: Do you mind getting out of here?
PETER: Shut your mouth, bubble belly! Before I shut it for you. Hey! *[To GEOFF.]* Mary, come here. Did I ever tell you about the chappie who married his mother by mistake?
JO: I said get him out of here, Helen. His breath smells.
HELEN: I can't carry him out, can I?
PETER: His name was Oedipus, he was a Greek I think. Well, the old bag turned out to be his mother . . .
HELEN: Shut up, Peter, for God's sake!
PETER: So he scratched out both his eyes.
HELEN: Cut the dirty stories!
PETER: But I only scratched out one of mine. Well, are you coming or not?