Unit 9 — A Novel in Full — Teacher copy

Track E · Klasse 12 · Niveau E (Basisfach / Leistungsfach)

Niveau E

1. Vocabulary

Match each item to its meaning or use it in a sentence.

Term	Your note
motif	
leitmotif	
structural argument	
narrative arc	
chapter rhythm	
framing device	
epigraph	
frame narrative	
unreliable narrator	
polyphony	
focalisation	

2. Reading

Read the text and use it for the activities below.

Whole-novel essay — structural moves

1. **Frame the motif** in two sentences.
2. **Trace the motif** through three or four moments — opening, middle, late.
3. **Name the structural argument** — what is the novel saying *through* the motif?
4. **Concession + counter-reading** — name an alternative reading and engage with it.
5. **Close** with a sentence that integrates the thesis.

Vocabulary — whole-novel analysis

motif, leitmotif, structural argument, narrative arc, chapter rhythm, framing device, epigraph, frame narrative, unreliable narrator, polyphony, focalisation.

3. Practise

Niveau E — controlled

1. Match: leitmotif → recurring motif; framing device → opening / closing structure; focalisation → point-of-view.
2. T or F: a structural argument is the same as a thematic claim; a motif must appear at least three times to be a motif.

Niveau E — productive

3. Build a 4-sentence motif-trace for one motif across *The Handmaid's Tale*.

4. Your turn

Whole-novel essay, 500 words. Trace one motif across the whole novel. Use 5 integrated quotes (across at least three chapters) + 7 academic discourse markers + 1 cleft + 1 concession + counter-reading.

Sample

The motif of language as instrument of control carries Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* from its opening pages to its Historical Notes. Reading the novel as a whole, the motif moves through three phases — colonisation, refusal, and academic recovery — and the structural argument rests on the third. Early in the novel, scripture-coded greetings — *"Blessed be the fruit"*; *"May the Lord open"* — replace ordinary speech, and Offred (the narrator) reports them with a flatness that is itself a small refusal. By contrast with a regime that simply forbids speech, Gilead *re-codes* speech, which is the more durable form of control. By the middle of the novel, Offred has begun to compose her account silently — a private language inside the public one. It is precisely the existence of this private register, more than any single act, that the regime cannot reach. Accordingly, what the novel is doing through the motif is not just illustrating linguistic totalitarianism but staging the irreducibility of private narrative inside public scripture. More specifically, the *Historical Notes* at the close — a fictional 2195 academic conference re-reading Offred's recovered tapes — re-frames the entire preceding text. The academic voices are themselves implicated; they laugh, they joke, they miss-read. In this regard, Atwood's structural argument is sharper than the surface plot suggests: the recovery of a silenced voice is itself vulnerable to a *new* form of instrumentalisation, this time by the academy. A counter-reading would argue that the *Historical Notes* simply provide documentary frame. I find this reading flat: the satirical edge of the conference tone, especially the male keynote's small jokes, makes the frame interpretive rather than documentary. In this regard, Atwood is not naive about her own readers. By contrast with a more triumphalist closing, *The Handmaid's Tale* leaves us inside three layers of language-control: Gilead's, Offred's silent counter-narrative, and the academy's well-meaning future appropriation. The motif of language as control is not, finally, *about* Gilead. It is about the difficulty of reading any voice from across a structural distance.

5. Further reading / listening

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985); also *The Testaments* (2019).
- Coral Ann Howells, *Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge Companion).

6. Teacher answer key

Controlled. 1. all true.

2. F (structural argument is *what the novel is doing* with the theme — process, not theme alone), F (no fixed minimum, but rough rule-of-thumb).

Productive. 3. Open.