

Short essay – Z for Zachariah

Assessment focuses: AF2, AF3, AF4, AF5, AF6

Context

In this sequence of lessons pupils chose a novel to read and study in groups of three or four. Pupil I's group of four chose *Z for Zachariah* by Robert C. O'Brien. They read and discussed the novel and gave a short presentation to the class outlining what they agreed to be the book's best features. Their final task as a group was to identify a question that readers were left considering at the end of the novel. Their question was whether Mr Loomis was beyond redemption. After some group discussion they individually wrote short essays in response to the question.

Pupil's work

Objectives:

- To write a short essay describing briefly whether or not Mr Loomis is beyond redemption.

Do you believe that Mr Loomis is completely beyond redemption?

The novel 'Z for Zachariah' by Robert C. O'Brien describes the extreme relationship and conditions that the possible last two people on Earth live under; these two people being Mr Loomis and Ann Burden. When Mr Loomis' quest for life on Earth came to an end with his finding of the valley, Ann's quest for freedom began. Mr Loomis evidently attempted to control her in all ways possible, however could his actions be completely redeemed?

To begin with, I consider Mr Loomis to be beyond forgiveness as he limits the basic resources that Ann needs to survive. For instance, towards the end of chapter 21 Mr Loomis makes it evident to Ann that he has "decided to keep the key" to the tractor "in the house" to try to blackmail her into coming back to him. This is outrageous as without the tractor she cannot grow the wheat she had intended to in order to survive the winter. Furthermore, he states that there are more things that she "is going to have to do without" for example the stove that she "worked so hard" to install. This shows that he is mentally playing with Ann's emotions and trying to manipulate her into forcing *herself* to come back to him. Additionally he physically limits her food supplies at the end of chapter 22, as he puts "padlocks on both the front and back doors" to the store, with this being her largest food supply. He even resorts to attempting to starve her as a way of getting her back, which shows how desperate and wicked he was.

Moreover, towards the end of chapter 23, Mr Loomis burns all of Ann's treasured belongings and leaves their remains in a "smouldering pile." This is symbolic of more than just burning something of materialistic value, as the items in the cave were memories of Ann's family, and her cherished book. These were emotional support to her in times like this, when she needed to feel closer to her family. By burning the objects, Mr Loomis had physically destroyed all of the last remnants that Ann had of her family. This made her noticeably more vulnerable and an easier target for him. This illustrates just how disgusting and unsympathetic Mr Loomis was, and for this he is unforgivable.

Also, during chapter 18, Mr Loomis attempts to rape Ann. This is completely disgusting and beyond even the thought of redemption. It really makes clear just how deceptive and wicked Mr Loomis was, as regardless of what his intentions were, this is a crime that cannot be forgiven.

Objectives: • To write a short essay describing briefly whether or not Mr Loomis is beyond redemption. Do you believe that Mr Loomis is completely beyond redemption? The novel 'Z for Zachariah' by Robert C. O'Brien describes the extreme relationship and conditions that the possible last two people on Earth live under; these two people being Mr Loomis and Ann Burden. When Mr Loomis' quest for life on Earth came to an end with his finding of the valley, Ann's quest for freedom began. Mr Loomis evidently attempted to control her in all ways possible, however could his actions be completely redeemed? To begin with, I consider Mr Loomis to be beyond forgiveness as he limits the basic resources that Ann needs to survive. For instance, towards the end of chapter 21 Mr Loomis makes it evident to Ann that he has "decided to keep the key" to the tractor In the house" to try to blackmail her into coming back to him. This is outrageous as without the tractor she cannot grow the wheat she had intended to in order to survive the winter. Furthermore, he states that there are more things that she "is going to have to do without" for example the stove that she "worked so hard" to install. This shows that he is mentally playing with Ann's emotions and trying to manipulate her into forcing herself to come back to him. Additionally he physically limits her food supplies at the end of chapter 22, as he puts "padlocks on both the front and back doors" to the store, with this being her largest food supply. He even resorts to attempting to starve her as a way of getting her back, which shows how desperate and wicked he was. Moreover, towards the end of chapter 23, Mr Loomis burns all of Ann's treasured belongings and leaves their remains in a "smouldering pile." This is symbolic of more than just burning something of materialistic value, as the items in the cave were memories of Ann's family, and her cherished book. These were emotional support to her in times like this, when she needed to feel closer to her family. By burning the objects, Mr Loomis had physically destroyed all of the last remnants that Ann had of her family. This made her noticeably more vulnerable and an easier target for him. This illustrates just how disgusting and unsympathetic Mr Loomis was, and for this he is unforgivable. Also, during chapter 18, Mr Loomis attempts to rape Ann. This is completely disgusting and beyond even the thought of redemption. It really makes clear just how deceptive and wicked Mr Loomis was, as regardless of what his intentions were, this is a crime that cannot be forgiven.

In addition, at the start of chapter 23, Mr Loomis shoots Ann in his scheme to slow her down so she cannot escape from him. This is unacceptable as he physically harms her without any reasons of self defence or innocence, but purely to scare her into doing what he wants. This irrational and sinister behaviour continues throughout the novel as Mr Loomis *hunts* Ann down as if she "were an animal." He constantly follows her and during their dialogue in chapter 20 he repeatedly asks "where" she is living. He proves to spy on her also as he was "looking out... from an upstairs window" in search of her. He then uses the tractor to try and hound her down on a number of occasions which shows how superior and more dominating he perceives himself to be over her. We are also showed how this strategy works on Ann, making her feel frightened as she is terrified that "on the tractor" he would "speed after" her. This possessive and controlling behaviour is beyond pardon.

Nevertheless there are arguments for Mr Loomis' redemption, for instance his possessiveness over Ann could be due to an anxiety and desperation for company and a fear of being alone in a world of deadness, with no other human beings around. I think when we see this from Mr Loomis' point of view we can begin to empathise with him a little. However this still doesn't justify the means by which he went about making sure he had Ann's company.

Additionally, it can be argued that Mr Loomis in fact did increase, as oppose to limit, Ann's resources, as he taught her how to get petrol from the store, without which she would not have the tractor in the first place. Despite this, giving her petrol still did not validate his actions in trying to starve her or force her into being manipulated.

Furthermore, perhaps Mr Loomis attempted to rape Ann in order to save the human race and to keep life on Earth existing. Perhaps he was just being logical and looking at the bigger picture to keep civilisation going. However, I still do not think that this justifies his actions by any means as he did not even consider what Ann might feel; and what sort of society would it be if it was created a crime?

Nonetheless in chapter 26 we see the roles reverse a little as Mr Loomis' persistently cold character warms a little and Ann seems to be the one in control. As she confronts him, we see a more emotional side of him as he realises how irrational his behaviour had been. He "shook his head," "turned away" from Ann, "trembled," "spoke quietly," and seemed "frightened and bewildered". This shows us that he becomes more vulnerable, confused, weak and inferior through both his words and body language. The fact that he "turned away" suggests that perhaps he can't even face himself. He constantly repeats to Ann "don't leave me" which shows us the anxiety and desperation he is feeling. Furthermore his sentences become fractured with ellipsis used to show us his shock and dismay at himself. In the end, perhaps we can even sympathise with him a little as he doesn't shoot Ann and even helps her by reminding her of the "birds." Despite this, by the time the damage was done and I feel that because Ann chose still to leave as opposed to stay, despite seeing the other side of Mr Loomis, that she didn't entirely forgive him and this was reflected in my own feelings of the situation.

This highlights that the whole novel was written as a diary in the first person narrative, with everything being in Ann's viewpoint. Because we are sharing her thoughts and feelings and we feel as though we have her confidence we, as readers, are automatically on her side. This makes us instantly dislike Mr Loomis and by being able to feel so closely Ann's terror at what has happened to her, it make our loathe towards him much stronger. Therefore, I think he is less forgiven by the reader robotically.

In conclusion, I do not think that Mr Loomis is completely beyond redemption as the actions he did were simply outrageous, whether in civilisation or not. Despite his actions themselves being beyond redemption, I think his intentions show a different side to him that perhaps can be empathised with and forgiven a little.

Excerpts from a book review of 'Z for Zachariah' written by Robert O'Brien has. The review talks about two characters: Ann and Mr Loomis.

Extracts from Z for Zachariah by Robert C. O'Brien.