

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

SAMPLE

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
The Left Hand of Darkness

Text guide by: David James

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TSSM

ACN 099 422 670

ABN 54 099 422 670

A: Level 14, 474 Flinders Street Melbourne VIC 3000

T: 1300 134 518

F: 03 90784354

W: tssm.com.au

E: info@tssm.com.au

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AUTHOR NOTES

Ursula Le Guin is an American author of novels, children's books, and short stories. She mainly writes fantasies and science fiction but has also written poetry and essays. She was first published in the 1960s. Her works depict futuristic imaginings of politics, the natural environment, gender, religion and sexuality.

Le Guin has more than once won the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, the Locus Award and the World Fantasy Award. In 2014, she was awarded the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

She graduated in 1951 from Radcliffe College with a major in French and earned her Master's degree in French and Italian from Columbia University in 1952. A year later she began to study for her PhD and won a Fulbright grant to study in France. Crossing the Atlantic on the Queen Mary, she met her future husband, Charles Le Guin, a professor of French history. Their marriage in Paris signalled the end of her doctoral studies and the beginning of a long and happy family life, which later included two daughters and a son. In 1959 Charles Le Guin was assigned to teach history at Portland State University and the family has lived in Portland, Oregon ever since.

Writing Career

Le Guin became interested in literature quite early. At age 11 she submitted her first story to the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, which was rejected. Between 1951 and 1961 she wrote five novels, all of which were also rejected because publishers deemed them inaccessible. Her earliest writings were non-fantastic stories of imaginary countries. In the early 1960s her work began to be published regularly. "One Orsinian Tale" was published in the Summer 1961 issue of *The Western Humanities Review* and three of her stories appeared in the 1962 and 1963 numbers of *Fantastic Stories of Imagination*. Le Guin received wide recognition for her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which won the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1970. Her subsequent novel *The Dispossessed* made her the first person to win both the Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novel twice for the same two books. Le Guin went on to work on films and operas, as well as continuing her writing career.

Influences

Le Guin was influenced by many fantasy writers, including J. R. R. Tolkien, Philip K. Dick and 'classic' writers including Leo Tolstoy, Virgil and the Brontë sisters. She was also influenced by the feminist writer Virginia Woolf, Norse mythology and children's literature such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Wind in the Willows* and.

Le Guin insists that in her entire body of stories and novels there is no autobiographical element. She claims that she maintains a sharp divide between her private and professional lives. "I want to distance myself from my books," she said in an interview. "That's one of the reasons I write science fiction. I write about aliens." (Analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*). <http://www.angelfire.com/ny/gaybooks/lefthandofdarkness.html>

Some of her political interests do, however, penetrate her work. In the 1960s she became involved in the peace demonstrations, a theme that filters into her depiction of the Gethenians. Le Guin sees fantasy as a means for self-discovery, commenting that 'as great scientists have said and all children know' it is with the imagination that 'we achieve perception and compassion and hope.' <http://worldsofukl.com>

Le Guin's father, Alfred Kroeber, was an anthropologist who spoke several languages and was renowned for his work on the Native Americans of California. Even before she could read, Ursula would listen to her father tell Indian legends and myths, and that experience is evident in her imaginative reach.

There are other areas of Le Guin's thinking that deeply penetrate her work. One is environmentalism. Le Guin uses her writing to examine the implications of the destruction of the natural environment upon which human life depends. The background setting of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is in some respects an environmental dystopia that carries political undertones about modern industrial societies.

Two other areas of Le Guin's thinking that affect her writing are Anarchism and Taoism, which she sees as linked: "Taoism and Anarchism fit together in some very interesting ways and I've been a Taoist ever since I learned what it was." Roberts, Dmae. "[Ursula K. Le Guin: 'Out Here'](#)". *KBOO: Stage and Studio*. Retrieved November 8, 2013.

Le Guin does not claim to live the lifestyle of an anarchist, but she does not believe that democracy is the only way to achieve justice and a fair share. She has commented that anarchism: "is a necessary ideal at the very least. It is an ideal without which we couldn't go on. If you are asking me is anarchism at this point a practical movement, well, then you get in the question of where you try to do it and who's living on your boundary?"