

GCSE
STUDY
GUIDE
FOR ENGLISH LITERATURE

Winsome Pinnock's

LEAVE TAKING

*Lynette Carr Armstrong
and Samantha Wharton*



NICK HERN BOOKS

London

www.nickhernbooks.co.uk

Copyright © 2024 Lynette Carr Armstrong and Samantha Wharton

All extracts from *Leave Taking* © copyright 1989, 2018 Winsome Pinnock,
published by Nick Hern Books Ltd

Introduction

How to use this study guide

This study guide for Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking* has been created to provide you with additional material to support your learning of the text. Scenes, characters, context, language, structure and themes are explained in great detail to deepen your understanding. Sample essays and paragraphs, and guidance on how to write an essay, are provided throughout the guide and in a dedicated section. Your task is to combine what you have learned in class with ideas in this study guide by taking part in the writing and research activities to solidify your learning.

Words that appear in **bold** in this guide are explained in keyword boxes in the margin, or in the glossary which starts on page 171. You can also use the glossary to help with revision.

Why *Leave Taking* is such an important play to study

Winsome Pinnock was the first Black British woman to have a play produced at the National Theatre, when *Leave Taking* was revived there in 1995 – making this a monumental play of its time.

The play covers universal themes that were relevant to the audience of the 1980s, but are equally relevant to a contemporary audience watching the play today. It deals with issues around immigration, belonging, parent/child relationships, racism, family and cultural traditions. It is a British play from a Black British perspective and addresses some of the challenges of being Black and British in England in the second half of the twentieth century.

Obeah practices

Keyword:

Diaspora – the dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland.

Obeah is a religious practice found in African **diasporic** communities, mainly in the Caribbean. It is made up of practices from African religions and spirituality that have survived through slavery and the imposition of Christianity. Obeah involves creating remedies from herbs for illnesses, reading palms, predicting the future, the use of charms for protection or guidance, and offering advice on issues pressing to the individual.

The practice makes ancestral connections to Africa: it is associated with giving reverence to the ancestors and contains elements of the supernatural, animal sacrifices, and divination, with its own set of organised rituals. Practitioners of obeah are known as ‘obeah woman’ or ‘man’, and they are believed to have been born with a gift of supernatural powers that have been passed down, or learned from one who has the ‘gift’ like Mai. They generally cultivate their skills to include herbal remedies, as the practice is often used for healing. Obeah men and women also tend to be intuitive listeners who pay close attention to auras and energies, which helps them to achieve the expected results.

In Jamaica, various Acts of Parliament beginning in 1760 have criminalised obeah, to protect against revolts because its unifying practices provided opportunities for large-scale meetings. Originally punishable by death, later Acts threatened flogging and imprisonment. The law targeted those who honoured and respected the African tradition that connected them to their ancestry. Consequently, it caused a divide between these people and the emerging Black middle classes, who aspired to be like the colonisers, adopting Christian religious values and demonising obeah practices.

In 1998, obeah was decriminalised in Barbados, but it is still an illegal practice in Jamaica.



Writing tasks:

- Write a paragraph explaining how this context helps us to understand Mai’s character.
- How might others interact with Mai, based on their knowledge of her participation in obeah?

England's history of migration

There has been a long history of immigration to Great Britain, spanning centuries, and from all over the world. Black communities have been present in Great Britain since the 1500s. 'The dark lady' referred to in Shakespeare's sonnets 127–152 has been speculated to be a Black woman in England at that time, and it is documented that there was a Black presence in England during the Tudor period too: John Blane, for example, was a trumpeter at the court of King Henry VIII. During the late eighteenth century and turn of the nineteenth century, Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho and Mary Prince wrote about their experiences in slavery and were important in the drive to end slavery as part of the abolitionist movement.

The global history of Great Britain and its relationship with its colonies meant that many people from the colonised countries, including those in the Caribbean, fought alongside the British in both World Wars. Further to this, the Royal Navy was a **catalyst** for Black migration: the demand for manpower encouraged recruitment of Black labour and as a result small Black communities settled around ports such as Bristol, Liverpool and Tilbury Docks in Essex.

Keyword: A **catalyst** is a person or thing that causes an event.

People have at times been able to cross borders freely, however, at various times and increasingly in the past hundred years, migration laws have prevented certain groups of people entering the UK. We will focus on the twentieth century and trace the changes up to how the British Nationality Act of 1981 impacted the characters in the play.

Brod, Enid and Mai would have arrived in England after the Second World War, and likely before the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968, which reduced the rights of Commonwealth citizens entering the country (see below). In Scene Two, Brod refers to the British Nationality Act of 1981, after which he had to apply for his naturalisation papers.

Keyword: The **Commonwealth** was formed in 1949 to maintain the relationship between the British Empire and its former colonies. Its membership is voluntary, with fifty-six members in 2023. King Charles III is the head of the Commonwealth succeeding Queen Elizabeth II, and remains the official head of state of many of these countries. Barbados is the most recent country to opt out of this arrangement and choose its own head of state.

Scene Eight

Who's in it? Del, Mai and Enid

Timeline A few weeks later

Set Mai's bedsit

The scene opens with Del calling upon a goddess for money and prosperity. Mai chastises Del for using Mai's equipment for her own selfish gains. Del has cleaned the room and attended to one of Mai's clients. Mai warns Del to keep the obeah practices that occur in her home private. We see that they have developed a bond.

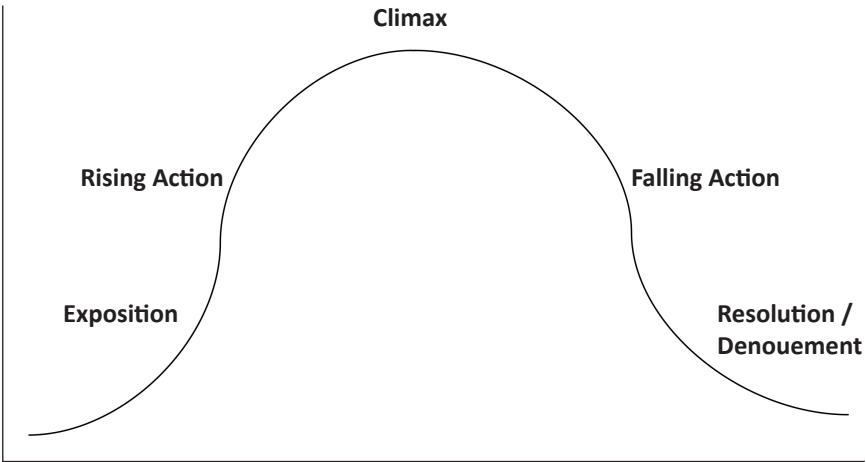
Del detects that Mai may have some health complications, after reading her palm, and tells her that she should go and see a doctor. Mai avoids the conversation, but a new understanding of each other is reached. Del also realises that a lot of what Enid feels – alienation and isolation – is a shared experience across generations.

Mai dupes Del into having an appointment with Enid. Del informs Enid that Broderick told her about her father, and asks why she keeps so many secrets. Del gives Enid back the money, insisting that it's needed back home. Enid tells her that Viv is getting ready to go to university to read Black Studies.

Del questions Enid's love for her, and Enid shares her childhood experiences of feeling disliked by her own mother. She acknowledges that she is aware of the way Del is treated and that she would do anything for her children. She has fought to get them to this point, and she is tired. This is the beginning of the repair of their relationship. She now needs somebody to love and look out for her. The play ends with Del taking and smoothing her mother's hand for a palm reading.

A note on structure

Most narratives follow this simple structure of a narrative arc:



Exposition	Scene One When the four central characters are introduced and the relationship dynamics between Enid, Del and Viv are established.
Rising Action	Scene Two At the end of Scene Two, when the argument between Enid and Del escalates, and culminates in a slap.
Climax	Scene Three When Enid receives a phone call from Cynthia informing her that Mooma has died.

Scene Three

Setting

“A few hours later. Late evening. ENID is tidying up. BROD sits on the sofa, loosening his tie. ENID hums ‘Nothing but the Blood of Jesus’ as she clears up. BROD takes a surreptitious swig from his flask then tucks into the leftover nibbles, contributing the odd line to the hymn. (page 35)

The pastor’s visit has taken place and much of the tension of Scene Two seems to be lifted.

Key points to consider

- How the tension in Scene Two is contrasted with the relative calm of this scene in its opening, but then it develops into heightened drama and a death.
- Viv is beginning to assert her own needs and personality by challenging Enid’s goals for her.
- We see the contrast in how Brod and Enid view religion and its significance in the UK and Jamaica. Brod presents the idea that religion promotes unity and authenticity ‘back home’, compared with an obsession with being respectable and conforming in its UK version.
- Enid’s doubts expressed in Scene One about the constant requests for money return to haunt her in the death of Mooma. We see Mai’s advice proven right and the pastor’s blessing of the house to be futile.

Key characters and what we learn

Enid

In this scene, we discover that Enid is keen to belong, fit in and be respected:

“ ENID. He’s a high man. It look bad that Viv and Del wasn’t here? (page 35)

She wants the approval of the pastor, craving validation, and Broderick deflects this with a joke, without being unkind.

Enid blames Broderick for Viv’s desire to visit Jamaica:

“ ENID. [...] You see what nonsense you put in the girl head? (page 39)

Enid only sees Viv through the aspirations she has for her, and cannot fathom that Viv too is looking for meaning and a sense of her identity and roots. The word ‘nonsense’ is dismissive in **tone** but the phone call interrupts any potential conflict, and we see how unprepared Enid is for what happens.

We are shown the stark realities of having ties abroad and what can happen:

“ *As ENID listens something drains out of her. She drops the phone [...]* (page 40)

Pinnock shows us how the distance to family abroad is impactful when disaster occurs. We see the resolution of Enid’s conversation with Mai in Scene One as, without question, she makes immediate plans to send financial assistance.

Broderick

Brod’s role in the family is further cemented in this scene. It is clear that he has a different view of the UK to Enid, and that view extends to having more empathy with the younger generation:

“ BROD. Rude? You seen them kids rioting on TV? Thas what you call rude. [...] Those girls ain’t wild, Enid. (page 36)

Context: Turn to page 24 to read about rioting in this period.

Broderick

How does Pinnock present the character of Broderick?

Characteristics:

- A proud Jamaican
- A heavy drinker

What does Brod represent?

- A father figure
- An archive of history
- The Black male experience
- The **Windrush generation**
- A window into Enid's past life

Broderick is the only male character in this female-centred play. His character performs an important literary purpose as a window into Enid's past life. He has an extremely close relationship with Enid stemming from their childhood in Jamaica. We assume that he was raised in close proximity to her family, as he references Mooma being like a mother to him too. He has witnessed Enid's relationships with her Mooma and her husband, and has seen how Enid raises Del and Viv. Broderick therefore offers important contextual information about all the characters' circumstances.

We first meet Brod in Scene Two, requesting Enid's help with securing his tie, and the audience are given an impression of the intimacy of their friendship.

Brod doesn't feel like a secure British National

As the conversation progresses in Scene Two, the audience is given insight into key historical moments that have shaped Brod, as well as his lived experience. He alludes to the Immigration Act of 1971:

“ BROD. [...] All my life I think of meself as a British subject, wave a flag on Empire Day, touch me hat whenever me see a picture a the queen. Then them send me letter say if me don't get me nationality paper in order they going kick me outta the country. (Scene Two, page 27)

Why is the immigration act of 1971 important?

It was implemented to limit the right to enter and live in the UK. It was created to stop permanent migration of people from the **Commonwealth** (this related mainly to Caribbeans and African nations). It meant that all Commonwealth citizens lost their automatic right to stay. You could only stay if you had lived in the UK for over five years or had a parent born in the UK. In order to live in the UK, you would need to have nationalisation documents or a British passport as proof of your status.

Context: For a more in-depth explanation, turn to page 17.

Context: Turn to page 19 for contextual information about the hostile environment in which migrants lived at this time.

Like Enid, Brod's education and understanding of England centred around the notion of being British. Brod was subject to discrimination and observed the vile behaviour of racists who violated the property of his friend Gullyman. In Scene Two, Brod speaks of the impact of racism. Gullyman's mental health has suffered and Brod says 'him mind crack' suggesting that Gullyman had a mental breakdown. We get the impression that this has deeply affected Brod, and he retells the story as if it haunts him.

Brod is a proud Jamaican

Due to the hostile environment, Brod clings to his Caribbean heritage. Compounded by the rejections and discrimination of the British, he finds his identity in the land where he was born. A *proud Jamaican*, he insists that Enid should teach her girls about their Caribbean roots:

“BROD. You teaching these children all wrong. They going forget where them come from. These girls ain't English like them newsreader who got English stamp on them like the letters on a stick a rock, right through English. These girls got Caribbean souls. (Scene Two, page 29)

Context: Turn to page 13 for more detail about Caribbean history.

Brod is a portal for Caribbean history. He teaches Del and Viv about the Maroons and slave revolts in Jamaica – he explains that they are descendants of strong warrior women who have overcome unthinkable hardships.

Timing

Each scene takes place in ‘real time’. Whilst the characters allude to outside events and clearly things take place between scenes (such as the Pastor’s visit), we are able to watch the characters as a particular aspect of their lives unfolds. We also get to experience their responses to external events, such as Del’s relationship with her boss, and the parties she attends. The events that happen in between the scenes create momentum, making the focus of each scene more believable to the audience. They also allow Pinnock to cover much more ground and create very rounded characters.

Broader passage of time

Whilst the play homes in on just five characters over a few weeks, descriptions of the broader passage of time allow more characters to be introduced to us, such as Gullyman and Mooma. Their stories hold great significance and it is a clever technique employed by Pinnock, to take us back in time as well as nod to the future.

The Past
Colonialism beginning (early seventeenth century)
Slavery (1619–1837)
Nanny of the Maroons (early nineteenth century)
Windrush arrivals in the UK (1947–1972) Mai could have been in the first Windrush group
Enid’s childhood in Jamaica and her relationship with her mother (1950s/’60s)
Brod’s memories of Jamaica (1950/’60s)
Mai’s marriage (early 1950s?)
Enid’s marriage (late 1960s?)
Mai’s relationship with her son (late 1960s/’70s?)
Enid’s relationship with her husband in the UK (1970s?)
Gullyman’s experiences in the UK (1970s?)

Viv and Del's early childhoods with Enid
Enid's experiences working for the NHS (mid 1970s/early '80s?)
Enid's last visit to Jamaica (1982)

The Future
Enid returning home for Mooma's funeral (1987)
Viv going to university (1987)
Del having her baby (1988)
The Windrush scandal

Context: Turn to page 29 to read more about this 2018 political scandal.

A turning point

Pinnock structures the play around a key turning point in the **climax** at the end of Scene Three, when Enid learns about her mother's death.

At the start of the play, Enid has convinced herself that her sacrifices have been worth it, and whilst she has ties in Jamaica, her life and the future of her girls is in the UK. In the first few scenes, the 'truth' is presented through Brod and Del, but this is robustly challenged by Enid:

“ ENID. You come here, you try to fit in. Stick to the rules. England been good to me. I proud a my English girls. (Scene Two, page 29)

She is convinced that it is hard work, conformity and perseverance that will create access to being British.

Pinnock implies, however, that Enid is simply suppressing her true feelings. She is not keen for her children to delve into her past or connect with their culture.

The death of Mooma brings a serious change in perspective for Enid. Scene Four ends with Enid stating:

“ ENID. I want... I want to go home. (page 45)

How to structure your response

Keyword: A **thesis statement** is a sentence that states what you believe in reference to the question, which you are going to use the evidence in your essay to prove.

Your essay needs to include an *introduction*, the points of analysis you have planned, arranged into *paragraphs*, and a *conclusion*. You should introduce your argument briefly at the start, by writing a **thesis statement**; then relate your points back to the claim you made in your thesis; and round off with a summary to conclude your argument at the end, ensuring that it offers your final answer to the question.

How to meet the Assessment Objectives

On page 10, you will find a table of Assessment Objectives which are used by the examiner to mark your work. Let's work through each one in turn and cover some tips for meeting them:

Assessment Objective 1

Read, understand and respond to texts. You should be able to:

- Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

In other words...

- Make your points your own and don't be afraid to express ideas and thoughts you have explored and discussed in class.
- Use Standard English – avoid being chatty or informal.
- Always support your points by using examples, with references to parts of the text and, of course, quotations.

‘Maintaining a critical style’

AVOID!
Viv says to Del that ‘those teachers don’t speak the same lingo’ which tells us that Viv doesn’t like her teachers.
Try this instead...
Pinnock presents Viv as being in conflict with her teachers, and feeling conflicted about her own academic success. When she says, ‘Me and those teachers don’t speak the same lingo’, the use of the slang term ‘lingo’ emphasises how Viv understands the formal language of school but has another language too. Pinnock conveys Viv’s need to be understood and to have her own culture recognised.

Experiment with the following words to express Pinnock’s intentions and to show the effect her choices have:

Playwright	Critical Language Bank
Pinnock	suggests presents conveys explores implies examines shows how demonstrates illustrates describes outlines

Use ‘we’ when you are referring to the audience or readers of the play; what ‘we’ can do:

You! The critic/reader/audience	Critical Language Bank
We	infer recognise deduce understand perceive question see are given the impression reflect

Exaggeration and **hyperbole** are English and Greek words meaning almost the same thing – but ‘hyperbole’ is particularly used when writing about literary technique: it means ‘exaggeration used for effect’.

Expletives are swear words.

Exposition is where key information about characters and context is established.

Foreshadowing is when a moment in the story hints at something that will happen later.

Hyperbole is exaggeration for effect.

Imagery is when writers use language to paint pictures in the audience’s mind.

Metaphors and **similes** are examples of imagery, as is **personification**.

Irony is when something said or a moment in the plot is deliberately the opposite of what is expected.

A **metaphor** is a form of imagery where a thing is described indirectly by referring to something it resembles, without using ‘like’.

Mirroring is when writers repeat images of moments, or behaviour, from character to character.

A **monologue** is a long speech spoken by a single character.

Mother Country is the country that possesses or possessed a colony or former colony. For example, under the old British Empire, England was Jamaica’s ‘Mother Country’.

A **nuclear family** is the traditional family unit of a mother, father and their children.

Onomatopoeia is a form of imagery when the sound of a word reflects its meaning.

Oral tradition is when knowledge and culture is received and passed on in spoken (or sung) form, from generation to generation.

Ostracisation is the social shunning or shutting-out of a person.

Othering is the act of treating someone as though they are not part of a group and are in some way different.

A **paradox** is something that seems to have contradictory qualities.

Personification is when something non-human is written about as if it has human characteristics.

A **plot device** is a technique designed to move the narrative forward.