

Who wrote it? A man or a woman?

- ✓ Reading and discussion activity
- ✓ Language focus: Giving reasons
- ✓ Level: B2.2 – C.1

Teacher's notes

The students read extracts from novels, all of which describe women, and decide whether they think they were written by a man or by a woman, and why. Copy one set of cards per per of students.

- Put students in pairs and give out the cards. Read out the following instructions: "You're going to read eight extracts from novels, all of which describe women or women's attitudes to life in some way. Discuss with your neighbour and decide which you think are by whom and write M or W in the boxes". Allow 30 minutes to compare and discuss.
- Check answers. For each extract, first find out what most students think and why, and then tell them whether it was written by a man or a woman. Then write the name of the book and author on the board. Find out if the students have read any of the books.

Answer key

- 1 M From Promise me, by Harlan Coben
- 2 W From The Palace of Strange Girls, by Sallie Day
- 3 M From Beware of Pity, by Stefan Zweig
- 4 W From Spellbound, by Jane Green
- 5 W From Sex in the City, by Candace Bushnell
- 6 M From In the Company of Cheerful Ladies, by Alexander McCall Smith
- 7 W From Bridget Jones' Diary, by Helen Fielding
- 8 M From The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, by Stieg Larsson

Students' cards

1

You fall in love with a man because he is everything your father isn't. He is strong and tough and you like that. He sweeps you off your feet. You don't even realize how much he takes over your life, how you start to become merely an extension of him, rather than a separate entity or, as you dream, one grander entity, two becoming one in love, like out of a romance novel. You acquiesce on small things, then large things, then everything. Your laugh starts to quiet before disappearing altogether. Your smile dims until it is only a facsimile of joy, something you apply like mascara.

2

She puts the white stilettos she has been carrying since she reached the sands under her chair, opens her handbag and pulls out a pink enamelled compact decorated with the silhouette of a black poodle. She checks her lipstick in the mirror first, using a brightly varnished nail to wipe away the inevitable smudges of matching pink lipstick from the corners of her mouth. Snapping the compact smartly shut, she flashes Jack a brilliant smile. In present company Irene may have both youth and beauty on her side, but still she regards Ruth with careful eye.

3

By my side sat the brown-eyed, proud beauty, the pretty niece, who had after all, it appeared, noticed my admiring gaze in the patisserie, for she smiled at me kindly as at an old acquaintance. Her eyes were like coffee-beans, and, when she laughed, they really did seem to crackle like roasting beans. She had charming, translucent little ears beneath luxuriant dark hair; like pink cyclamen nestling in moss, I thought. She had bare arms, soft and smooth; they must be like peeled peaches to the touch.

4

Alice strides ahead, loving that she's not dressed up, that when she's with Emily she doesn't have to put on an act, she can wear her oldest, most casual, comfortable clothes, and really be herself. Her jeans may be Earl, but today she's wearing her gym sneakers, a Gap sweatshirt and a baseball cap pulled down tight over hair scraped back into a ponytail. She can really walk in these clothes, can sit with her legs apart, resting her elbows on her knees, can run and play games with Humphrey, scooping him up for a cuddle without worrying that he might be getting mud on –heaven forbid- a Chanel jacket or a shearling coat.

5

Camilla was the first to arrive. Five feet ten, pale white skin, big lips, round cheekbones, tiny nose—Camilla is twenty-five but says she "feels old." She began modeling at sixteen. When I first met her, months ago downtown, she was doing her duty as a «date» to a well— known television producer, which meant she was smiling and speaking back when someone asked her a question. Other than that, she was making very little effort, except to occasionally light her own cigarettes.

6

What attracted men? Good looks? Certainly if a girl was pretty then she tended to get the attention of men; that was beyond any doubt at all. But it was not just prettiness that mattered, because there were many girls who did not look anything special but who seemed to find no difficulty in making men notice them. These girls dressed in a very careful way; they knew which colours appealed to men (red, and other bright colours; men were like cattle in that respect) and they knew how to walk and sit down in a way which would make men sit up and take notice. The walk was important: it should not be a simple walk, with one leg going forward, to be followed by the other; no, the legs had to bend and twist a bit, almost as if one was thinking of walking in a circle.

7

I looked at her wistfully, her vast, bulbous bottom swathed in a tight red skirt with a bizarre three-quarter-length striped waistcoat strapped across it. What a blessing to be born with such Sloaney arrogance. Perpetua could be the size of a Renault Espace and not give it a thought. How many hours, months, years, have I spent worrying about weight while Perpetua has been happily looking for lamps with porcelain cats as bases around the Fulham Road? She is missing out on a source of happiness, anyway. It is proved by surveys that happiness does not come from love, wealth or power but the pursuit of attainable goals: and what is a diet if not that?

8

She had a wide mouth, a small nose, and high cheekbones that gave her an almost Asian look. Her movements were quick and spidery, and when she was working at the computer her fingers flew over the keys. Her extreme slenderness would have made a career in modelling impossible, but with the right make-up her face could have put her on any billboard in the world. Sometimes she wore black lipstick, and in spite of the tattoos and the pierced nose and eyebrows she was... well... attractive. It was inexplicable.