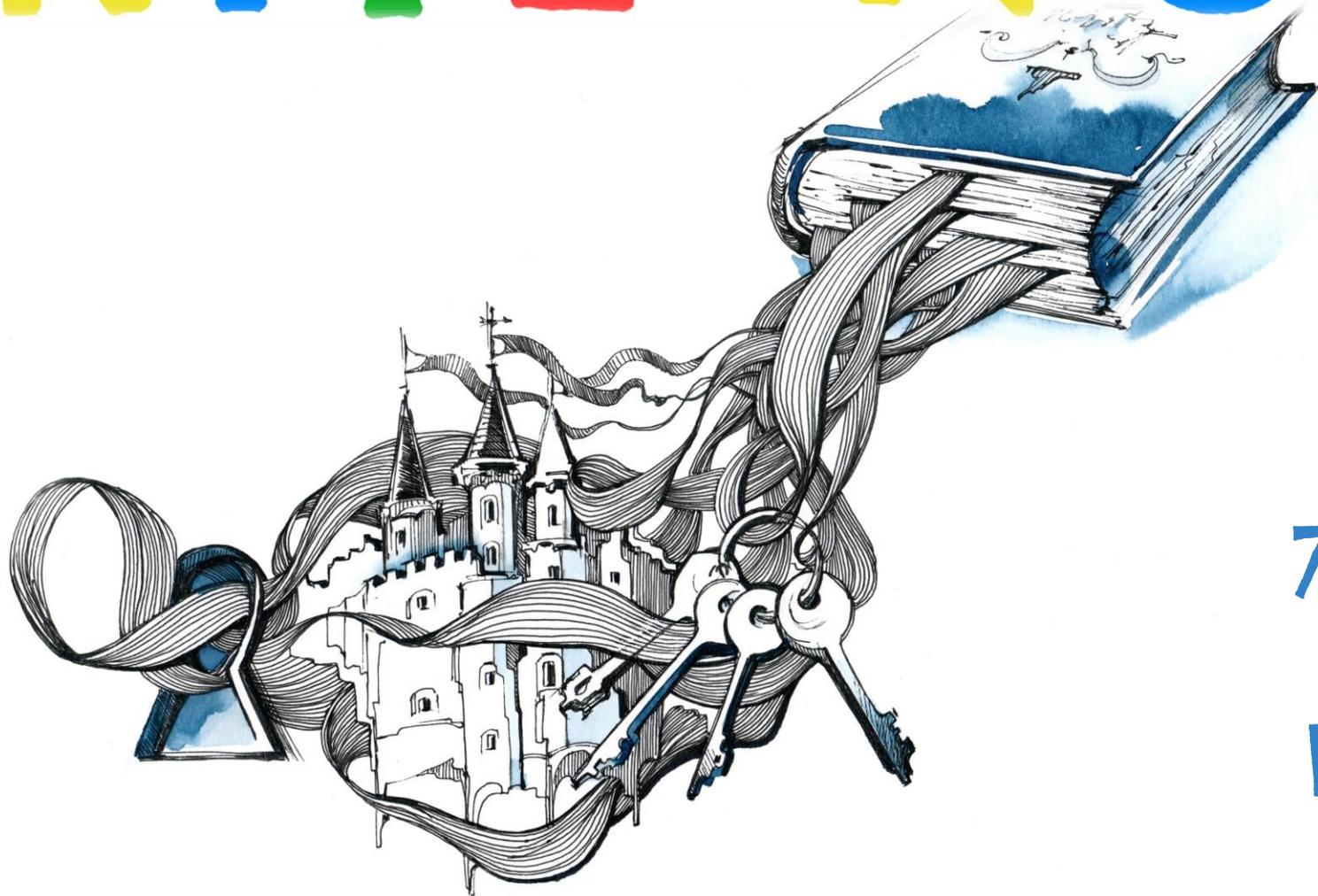


WRITE NOW!



7: Extracts
from
Literature

WRITE NOW!

7. Food

Extracts from Literature

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1. Suggestions for how to use the extracts

In this booklet, you will find some literary extracts from various writers to help you think about food in interesting ways.

As you read them, think about:

1. How the writer has used ordinary vocabulary in unusual ways.
2. How the writer has used food to mirror and match personalities, emotions and moods.
3. How the writer has used food as metaphors for other things.

You should also pay attention to:

1. Use of detail – how much detail a writer puts into individual paragraphs
2. Vocabulary
3. Punctuation use
4. Use of humour
5. Use of flavour as a sense to create feelings / emotions / connections

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2. Five Quarters of Orange – Joanne Harris

Harris's novel is interesting because the central characters love cooking, and a book of recipes is central to the plot development, but also she uses food within her imagery. It is both beautiful and ugly at times – bitter and tasty.

When my mother died she left the farm to my brother, Cassis, the fortune in the wine cellar to my sister, Reine-Claude, and to me, the youngest, her album and a two-litre jar containing a single black Périgord truffle, large as a tennis ball, suspended in sunflower oil, that, when uncorked, still releases the rich dank perfume of the forest floor. A fairly unequal distribution of riches, but then Mother was a force of nature, bestowing her favours as she pleased, leaving no insight as to the workings of her peculiar logic.

And as Cassis always said, I was the favourite.

Not that she ever showed it when she was alive. For my mother there was never much time for indulgence, even if she'd been the type. Not with her husband killed in the war, and the farm to run alone. Far from being a comfort to her widowhood, we were a hindrance to her with our noisy games, our fights, our quarrels. If we fell ill she would care for us with reluctant tenderness, as if calculating the cost of our survival, and what love she showed took the most

elementary forms: cooking pots to lick, jam pans to scrape, a handful of wild strawberries collected from the straggling border behind the vegetable patch and delivered without a smile in a twist of handkerchief. Cassis would be the man of the family. She showed even less softness toward him than to the rest of us. ReINETTE was already turning heads before she reached her teens, and my mother was vain enough to feel pride at the attention she received. But I was the extra mouth, no second son to expand the farm, certainly no beauty.

I was always the troublesome one, the discordant one, and after my father died I became sullen and defiant. Skinny and dark like my mother, with her long graceless hands and flat feet, her wide mouth, I must have reminded her too much of herself, for there was often a tightness at her mouth when she looked at me, a kind of stoic appraisal, of fatalism. As if she foresaw that it was I, not Cassis or ReINE-CLAUDE, who would carry her memory forward. As if she would have preferred a more fitting vessel.

Perhaps that was why she gave me the album, valueless then except for the thoughts and insights jotted in the margins alongside recipes and newspaper cuttings and herbal cures. Not a diary, precisely. There are almost no dates in the album, no precise order. Pages were inserted into it at random, loose leaves later bound together with small, obsessive stitches, some pages thin as onionskin, others cut from pieces of card trimmed to fit inside the battered leather cover. My mother marked the events of her life with recipes, dishes of her own invention or interpretations of old favorites. Food was her nostalgia, her celebration, its nurture and preparation the sole outlet for her creativity. The first page is given to my father's death -- the

ribbon of his Légion d'Honneur pasted thickly to the paper beneath a blurry photograph and a neat recipe for black buckwheat pancakes -- and carries a kind of gruesome humour. Under the picture my mother has pencilled Remember -- dig up Jerusalem artichokes. Ha! Ha! Ha! in red.

In other places she is more garrulous, but with many abbreviations and cryptic references. I recognize some of the incidents to which she refers. Others are twisted to suit the moment's needs. Still others seem to be complete inventions, lies, impossibilities. In many places there are blocks of tiny script in a language I cannot understand. Ini tnawini inoti plainexini. Ini nacini inton inraebi inti ynani eromni. Sometimes a single word, scrawled across the top or side of the page seemingly at random. On one page, seesaw in blue ink, on another, wintergreen, rapscaillon, ornament in orange crayon. On another, what might be a poem, though I never saw her open any book other than one of recipes.

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3. Monologue for an Onion – Suji Kwock Kim

In this poem, the onion is both a metaphor and the narrator.

I don't mean to make you cry.
I mean nothing, but this has not kept you
From peeling away my body, layer by layer,

The tears clouding your eyes as the table fills
With husks, cut flesh, all the debris of pursuit.
Poor deluded human: you seek my heart.

Hunt all you want. Beneath each skin of mine
Lies another skin: I am pure onion--pure union
Of outside and in, surface and secret core.

Look at you, chopping and weeping. Idiot.
Is this the way you go through life, your mind
A stopless knife, driven by your fantasy of truth,

Of lasting union--slashing away skin after skin
From things, ruin and tears your only signs
Of progress? Enough is enough.

You must not grieve that the world is glimpsed
Through veils. How else can it be seen?
How will you rip away the veil of the eye, the veil

That you are, you who want to grasp the heart
Of things, hungry to know where meaning
Lies. Taste what you hold in your hands: onion-juice,

Yellow peels, my stinging shreds. You are the one
In pieces. Whatever you meant to love, in meaning to
You changed yourself: you are not who you are,

Your soul cut moment to moment by a blade
Of fresh desire, the ground sown with abandoned skins.
And at your inmost circle, what? A core that is

Not one. Poor fool, you are divided at the heart,
Lost in its maze of chambers, blood, and love,
A heart that will one day beat you to death.

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4. Onions – William Matthews

In this poem, the onion is a metaphor and part of the story.

How easily happiness begins by
dicing onions. A lump of sweet butter
slithers and swirls across the floor
of the sauté pan, especially if its
errant path crosses a tiny slick
of olive oil. Then a tumble of onions.

This could mean soup or risotto
or chutney (from the Sanskrit
chatni, to lick). Slowly the onions
go limp and then nacreous
and then what cookbooks call clear,
though if they were eyes you could see

clearly the cataracts in them.
It's true it can make you weep
to peel them, to unfurl and to tease
from the taut ball first the brittle,
caramel-colored and decrepit
papery outside layer, the least

recent the reticent onion
wrapped around its growing body,
for there's nothing to an onion
but skin, and it's true you can go on
weeping as you go on in, through
the moist middle skins, the sweetest

and thickest, and you can go on
in to the core, to the bud-like,
acrid, fibrous skins densely
clustered there, stalky and in-
complete, and these are the most
pungent, like the nuggets of nightmare

and rage and murmury animal
comfort that infant humans secrete.
This is the best domestic perfume.
You sit down to eat with a rumor
of onions still on your twice-washed
hands and lift to your mouth a hint

of a story about loam and usual
endurance. It's there when you clean up
and rinse the wine glasses and make
a joke, and you leave the minutest
whiff of it on the light switch,
later, when you climb the stairs.

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5. Valentine – Carol Ann Duffy

In this poem, the onion is a metaphor and part of the story.

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.

It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.

It promises light

like the careful undressing of love.

Here.

It will blind you with tears

like a lover.

It will make your reflection

a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.

Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,
if you like.
Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

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6. George's Marvellous Medicine – Roald Dahl

In this extract, we meet grandma. Dahl uses food to offer us an impression of the character's personality. He makes them likeable or disgusting just by getting them to talk about food.

Chapter One

Grandma

'I'm going shopping in the village,' George's mother said to George on Saturday morning. 'So be a good boy and don't get up to mischief.'

This was a silly thing to say to a small boy at any time. It immediately made him wonder what sort of mischief he might get up to.

'And don't forget to give Grandma her medicine at eleven o'clock, the mother said. Then out she went, closing the back door behind her.

Grandma, who was dozing in her chair by the window, opened one wicked little eye and said, 'Now you heard what your mother said, George. Don't forget my medicine.'

'No Grandma,' George said.

'And just try to behave yourself for once while she's away.'

'Yes, Grandma' George said.

George was bored to tears. He didn't have a brother or sister. His father was a farmer and the farm they lived on was miles away from anywhere, so there were never any children to play with. He was tired of staring at pigs and hens and cows and sheep. He was especially tired of having to live in the same house as that grizzly old grunion of a Grandma. Looking after her all by himself was hardly the most exciting way to spend a Saturday morning.

'You can make me a nice cup of tea for a start,' Grandma said to George. 'That'll keep you out of mischief for a few minutes.'

'Yes, Grandma,' George said.

George couldn't help disliking Grandma. She was a selfish grumpy old woman. She had pale brown teeth and a small puckered up mouth like a dog's bottom.

'How much sugar in your tea today, Grandma?' George asked her.

'One spoon,' she said. 'And no milk.'

Most Grandmothers are lovely, kind, helpful old ladies, but not this one. She spent all day and every day sitting in her chair by the window, and she was always complaining, grouching, grouching, grumbling, griping about something or other. Never once, even on her best days, had she smiled at George and said, 'Well how are you this morning, George?' or 'Why don't you and I have a game of Snakes and Ladders?' or 'How was school today?' She didn't seem to care about other people, only about herself. She was a miserable old grouch.

George went into the kitchen and made Grandma a cup of tea with a teabag. He put one spoon of sugar in it and no milk. He stirred the sugar well and carried the cup into the living room.

Grandma sipped the tea. 'It's not sweet enough,' she said. 'Put more sugar in'. George took the cup back to the kitchen and added another spoonful of sugar. He stirred it again and carried it carefully in to Grandma.

'Where's the saucer?' she said. 'I won't have a cup without a saucer.'

George fetched her a saucer.

'And what about a teaspoon, if you please?' 'I've stirred it for you, Grandma. I stirred it well.'

'I'll stir my own tea, thank you very much,' she said. 'Fetch me a teaspoon.'

When George's mother or father were home, Grandma never ordered George about like this. It was only when she had him on her own that she began treating him badly.

'You know what's the matter with you?' the old woman said, staring at George over the rim of the teacup with those bright wicked little eyes. 'You're growing too fast. Boys who grow too fast become stupid and lazy.'

'But I can't help it if I am growing fast, Grandma,' George said.

'Of course, you can,' she snapped. 'Growing's a nasty childish habit.'

'But we have to grow, Grandma. If we didn't grow, we'd never be grown-ups.'

'Rubbish, boy, rubbish,' she said. 'Look at me. Am I growing? Certainly not.'

'But you did once, Grandma.'

'Only very little,' the old woman answered. 'I gave up growing when I was extremely small, along with all the other nasty childish habits like laziness and disobedience and greed and sloppiness and untidiness and stupidity. You haven't given up on any of these things, have you?'

'I'm still only a little boy, Grandma.'

'You're eight years old,' she snorted. 'That's old enough to know better. If you don't stop growing soon, it'll be too late.'

'Too late for what, Grandma?'

'It's ridiculous,' she went on. 'You're nearly as tall as me already.'

George took a good look at Grandma. She certainly was a very tiny person. Her legs were so short she had to have a footstool to put her feet on, and her head only came halfway up the back of the armchair.

'Daddy says it's fine for a man to be tall,' George said.

'Don't listen to your daddy,' Grandma said. 'Listen to me.'

'But how do I stop myself growing?' George asked her.

'Eat less chocolate.' Grandma said.

'Does chocolate make you grow?'

'It makes you grow the wrong way,' she snapped. 'Up instead of down.'

Grandma sipped some tea but never took her eyes from the little boy who stood before her. 'Never grow up,' she said. 'Always down.'

'Yes, Grandma.'

'And stop eating chocolate. Eat cabbage instead.'

'Cabbage! Oh no, I don't like cabbage,' George said.

'It's not what you like or what you don't like,' Grandma snapped. 'It's what's good for you that counts. From now on, you must eat cabbage three times a day. Mountains of cabbage! And if it's got caterpillars in it, so much the better!

'Owch,' George said.

'Caterpillars give you brains,' the old woman said.

'Mummy washes them down the sink,' George said.

'Mummy's as stupid as you are,' Grandma said. 'Cabbage doesn't taste of anything without a few boiled caterpillars in it. Slugs, too.'

'Not, slugs!' George cried out. 'I couldn't eat slugs!'

'Whenever I see a live slug on a piece of lettuce,' Grandma said, 'I gobble it up quick before it crawls away. Delicious.' She squeezed her lips together tight so that her mouth became a tiny wrinkled hole. 'Delicious,' she said again. 'Worms and slugs and beetle bugs. You don't know what's good for you.'

'You're joking, Grandma.'

'I never joke,' she said. Beetles are perhaps the best of all. They go crunch!'

'Grandma! That's beastly!'

The old hag grinned, showing her pale brown teeth. 'Sometimes, if you're lucky,' she said, 'you get a beetle inside the stem of a stick of celery. That's what I like.'

'Grandma! How could you?'

'You find all sorts of nice things in sticks of raw celery,' the old woman went on. 'Sometimes it's earwigs.'

'I don't want to hear about it!' cried George.

'A big fat earwig is very tasty,' Grandma said, licking her lips. 'But you've got to be very quick,

my dear, when you put one of those in your mouth. It has a pair of sharp nippers on its back end and if it grabs your tongue with those, it never lets go. So you've got to bite the earwig first, chop chop, before it bites you.'

George started edging towards the door. He wanted to get as far away as possible from this filthy old woman.

'You're trying to get away from me, aren't you?' she said, pointing a finger straight at George's face. 'You're trying to get away from Grandma.'

Little George stood by the door staring at the old hag in the chair. She stared back at him.

Could it be, George wondered, that she was a witch? He had always thought witches were only in fairy tales, but now he was not so sure.

'Come closer to me, little boy,' she said, beckoning to him with a horny finger. 'Come closer to me and I will tell you secrets.'

George didn't move.

Grandma didn't move either.

'I know a great many secrets,' she said, and suddenly she smiled. It was a thin icy smile, the kind

a snake might make just before it bites you. 'Come over here to Grandma and she'll whisper secrets to you.'

George took a step backwards, edging closer to the door.

'You mustn't be frightened of your old Grandma,' she said, smiling that icy smile.

George took another step backwards.

'Some of us,' she said, and all at once leaning forward in her chair and whispering in a throaty sort of voice George had never heard her use before. 'Some of us,' she said, 'have magic powers that can twist the creatures of this earth into wondrous shapes...'

A tingle of electricity flashed down the length of George's spine. He began to feel frightened.

'Some of us', the old woman went on, 'have fire on our tongues and sparks in our bellies and wizardry in the tips of our fingers...'

'Some of us know secrets that would make your hair stand straight up on end and your eyes pop out of their sockets...'

George wanted to run away, but his feet seemed stuck to the floor.

'We know how to make your nails drip off and teeth grow out of your fingers instead.'

George began to tremble. It was her face that frightened him the most of all, the frosty smile, the brilliant unblinking eyes.

'We know how to have you wake up in the morning with a long tail coming out from behind you.' 'Grandma!' he cried out 'Stop!'

'We know secrets, my dear, about dark places where dark things live and squirm and slither all over each other...'

George made a dive for the door. 'It doesn't matter how far you run,' he heard her saying, 'you won't ever get away...'

George ran into the kitchen, slamming the door behind him.