

## Summary of the Work:

Set in the near future, *The Handmaid's Tale* describes life in what was once the United States and is now called the Republic of Gilead, a monotheocracy that has reacted to social unrest and a sharply declining birthrate by reverting to, and going beyond, the repressive intolerance of the original Puritans. The regime takes the Book of Genesis absolutely at its word, with bizarre consequences for the women and men in its population. The story is told through the eyes of Offred, one of the unfortunate Handmaids under the new social order. In condensed but eloquent prose, by turns cool-eyed, tender, despairing, passionate, and wry, Atwood reveals to us the dark corners behind the establishment's calm facade, as certain tendencies now in existence are carried to their logical conclusions. *The Handmaid's Tale* is funny, unexpected, horrifying, and altogether convincing. It is at once scathing satire, dire warning, and a tour de force.

-Amazon

## Rationale:

Considered a crucial read since its publication, *The Handmaid's Tale* has not only withstood the test of time, but adapted to it. The novel reveals the dangers of complacency within unfair power dynamics, and the problematic connections between gender and politics. The way in which Offred is slowly made to settle into near acceptance of her situation is telling of the gradual infringement upon human rights that only multiply as they become rule. Atwood provides a harrowing account of a world that, while dramatized, is not terribly far out of reach in some regards. Hence, the *Handmaid's Tale* is not only relevant, but helpful in understanding just how quickly shifting dynamics of power can be and empathizing with those most affected.

## Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

*The Handmaid's Tale* based on the 1985 Margaret Atwood novel, is a cautionary tale, a story of resistance and a work of impeccable world-building." -New York Times

*The Handmaid's Tale* emphasizes the dangers of religious fundamentalism and draws upon the imagery of Communist authoritarianism. But the cultural forces that Atwood was responding to include a neoliberal revolution that colluded in oppressing women." -New Yorker

## Noted Distinction:

- Governor General's Award for English-language fiction (1985)
- Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction (1986)
- Arthur C. Clarke Award (1987)
- Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best Book (1987)

## Readability

- Lexile Score: 650

## Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

# ***The Handmaid's Tale*** by Margaret Atwood

(Published in 1985 )

## **Notes on the Text:**

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

## **Connection to the Curriculum:**

RI.11- 12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11- 12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11- 12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, cultures, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

## **Additional Connections:**

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*