THE REMAINS OF THE DAY

Kazuo Ishiguro
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Context:

- Author: Kazuo Ishiguro
- Historical Background: the rise of fascism (1920’s - 1930’s)
- Literary Connections: a fictional autobiography (*Jane Eyre*); a metaphorical, though literal, journey (*Heart of Darkness*); physical places triggering thoughts & memories (*Mrs. Dalloway*)
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Prologue: July, 1956 (Darlington Hall)

* Examine Stevens’ style of speaking closely. What does it suggest about his character?

Day One: Evening (Salisbury)

* Why is Stevens so attached to Darlington Hall?
* What is significant about the old man’s insistence that Stevens experience the view? What is the purpose of this scene?
* Why is “dignity” as the mark of a “great butler” so important to Stevens?
Day Two: Morning (Salisbury)

- How is the trip triggering repressed feelings in Stevens? Could his assumptions about Mrs. Benn just as easily be true of himself?
- What do the exchanges between Stevens and his father reveal?
- Assess Stevens’ actions at the conference. Does it differ from Stevens‘ own assessment?
- What lies behind the conflict between Lewis’s and Darlington’s attitude toward Germany?
Day Two:  Afternoon  
(Mortimer’s Pond, Dorset)

- What do Stevens’ denials of Lord Darlington indicate? Do you notice a change in Stevens’ tone?
- What do we understand from the visit to the pond?

Day Three:  Morning  
(Taunton, Somerset)

- Why does Stevens’ fail at banter?
- What is symbolic about the signpost?
- Is Stevens proving to be an unreliable narrator? Can you find any irony in his arguments?
Day Three: Evening  
(Moscombe, near Tavistock, Devon)

* Note how trivial things have greater significance: the fog, Miss Kenton’s hands, Stevens’ “pantry” and the flowers she puts there, etc.

* What might be the climax to the odd relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton? What about the rising and falling action?

* What are “the remains of the day?”

* Does Stevens make a psychological breakthrough in this chapter? He denies Lord Darlington three times. Hmm...
Day Four: Afternoon (Little Compton, Cornwall)

* Explain Stevens’ response to Miss Kenton’s news.
* Can you connect this episode and Stevens’ feelings about his “triumph” to the 1923 conference? What’s the tragic irony?

Day Six: Evening (Weymouth)

* What’s ironic, for Stevens, about Miss Kenton’s return to her husband? What imagery and symbolism marks the pier scene?
* Compare Stevens’ conversation with the retired butler to his encounter with the old man at the beginning. Has he changed?
* Compare / contrast the end of the book with the movie version.
What is the effect of each of the narrative approaches used in the novel? 

- The unreliable narrator
- Pre-emptive tactics
- Three points of view
- The imagined reader
- Time and Place

The novel may be best appreciated as a character study. If so, what do we learn from Stevens? Do we admire him or feel sorry for him? Has his life been a success, or a waste?
Group Work/Classroom Antics: Consider the following possible themes in the novel. In 5-7 minutes, present a sketch showing how one of these themes (or another of your interpretation) is expressed in the novel.

- Banter
- Dignity
- English vs. Americans
- Seeing & Blindness
- Triviality
- Symbiosis