

Opening to George Orwell's '1984'

Clocks don't strike thirteen: something is not quite right here.

The fact that is 'clocks' not the 'clock' suggests that it might not be one clock going wrong, but a normal way of life.

Could Orwell be subtly alerting the reader that we are to question things in this society?

We are told Smith is trying to get out of a hostile environment: this perhaps seeks to create some sense of empathy with Smith?

The wind being described as 'vile' perhaps suggests that the setting or atmosphere is going to be in conflict with Smith

Is Smith presented as being hounded by the wind and the dust here? So perhaps symbolically he is trying to 'escape' the world around him

Perhaps the name of the place he goes into is symbolic too: Victory conjures up images of heroic success
But: if a 'swirl of gritty dust' follows him in, does that mean we should prepare for the worst?

It was a bright day in April,
and the clocks were striking
thirteen. Winston Smith, his
chin nuzzled into his breast
in an effort to escape the vile
wind, slipped quickly through
the glass doors of Victory
Mansions, though not
quickly enough to prevent a
swirl of gritty dust from
entering along with him.

Example of annotated opening to Orwell's '1984'

From the first page of 'Catching the Light' by Karen Powell

I am a girl who loves to be alone.
Lottie, the silly creature, can't do it.
My sister, though she is thirteen
and older than me by two whole
years and a bit, cannot even spend a
quiet half an hour in her room,
reading or playing, without rushing
back down the stairs to check
where the rest of us are. Mummy
says she must have skipped a stage
growing up, that, at a certain stage,
a baby believes someone
disappearing from view no longer
exists. I can see how this might
make a tiny baby cry out loud, what
a scary idea it is, but what I love are
the little pockets of aloneness that
come my way now that I am getting
bigger and can be trusted not to
open the door to strangers or set fire
to the house myself.

Your Task

1. **Read** the extract and consider the questions below. Think about how you will demonstrate your understanding before you begin.
2. **Annotate** the extract to show:
 - i. What do we learn about the narrator in this opening?
 - ii. What do we learn about Mummy and Lottie, the other two characters in this extract?
 - iii. What do you think of the relationships between members of this family?
 - iv. What are your own thought and feelings about the characters in this extract and why. Consider:
 - Do you like/dislike them? Why?
 - Do you feel empathy with any of them? Are you a youngest child? Do you look forward to spending time alone?
 - Can we trust the narrator's opinion of her family?
 - What do you think is going to happen to the characters?
 - What type of book is this going to be? Does it sound a different kind of story to '1984' from what you've read?