

Planet Earth



UNIT A4

Aims

- To explore attitudes to our world and ourselves.
- To practise and develop analytical writing.

Using the unit

4.1 - 4.3

These warm up exercises are intended to focus pupils' attention on aspects of Science Fiction that are going to be explored more fully in the unit as a whole. In particular, the opportunity that the introduction of 'someone from outside' affords for a critical examination of our behaviour and attitudes is taken up more thoroughly later on.

4.4 - 4.9 The Man in the Moon

Lucian's moon people can seem rather silly to our sophisticated, space age thinking, which is why the historical context is stressed.

There is scope for selection here. Sections 4.7 - 4.9 are intended to be complementary, as they look at different aspects of the same theme. Of the three, 4.8 is best seen as extension work.

4.10 - 4.18 The Martians Have Landed

Craig Raine's poem provides text upon which the most significant work of the unit is based. The development is from helping pupils to gain understanding of the poem itself (4.10 - 4.12) to a consideration of the underlying implications and themes. In 4.13 and 4.14 pupils are encouraged to explore critically familiar surroundings, before tackling fundamental questions of attitude and value in 4.15 - 4.18.

4.19 - 4.23 Beam me up

These exercises can be done using any Science Fiction films of your choice.

4.22

Research can cover any Science Fiction material of your, or your pupils', choice. C.S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* and the Science Fiction trilogy to which it belongs are recommended as possible texts to use. The point to emphasise is the extent to which our own life and culture are being commented upon in the depiction of other, imaginary worlds. The errors and inadequacies in our behaviour and attitudes are mirrored, or at times contrasted, in the behaviour attributed to the aliens.

A sample chart is printed overleaf to show how it can be done.

SPACE: Features of a genre (EXAMPLE)

	Text 1: TV - Star Trek	Text 2: Buck Rogers	Text 3:
Time travel	No	Lost in space. References to 1970s.	
Space travel	Yes - that's the main topic.	The teenagers steal a space ship.	
Amazing machines or inventions	- shields & deflectors - the glasses that the blind man wears - Data android - beamed up	- transmission - encoding - ion machine - particle ioniser - Datalink	
Robots	Data	small robots Binky	
Aliens	Yes - an advanced civilisation. Aldea. Klingon.		
Technical language	- warp drive, minor system - epsilon - strange names for characters - scanners	- orbital fortress - particle ioniser - Yarub	
Moral dilemmas (problems)	To help the Aldeans survive, they'd have to give away their children.	- ship out of control - rioting	
A planet or civilization in danger	Yes, a planet that concealed itself. Aldea - falling population - no children.		
Explosions or disasters	Children taken away.	Youth crime - people riot. He plans to take over the world.	

Planet Earth



UNIT A4

4.1

Alien Life

In 1938 a Radio production of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* caused widespread panic. The broadcast was so realistically presented that many people listening to it thought that Martians really had landed on earth! Since then there have been several suggestions as to what aliens from outer space might be like. Television and films have shown life from other worlds in such diverse forms as dustbin-like Daleks, humanoids with pointed ears like Mr Spock and endearing little creatures with big eyes and long bony fingers longing to call home.

- In groups, see how many Science Fiction creations of alien life you can think of. Compile a list.
- Discuss which ones you find the most convincing. What is it about them that makes them so?
- Compare your answers with another group.



4.2

DIY Aliens

- In pairs, look again at your lists.

What attributes do alien creatures have in common? In what general ways do they tend to differ from humans? In what ways are they similar to humans?

- Compile a list of what a typical alien might look like.
You might begin: 'A typical alien has . . .'
Try to include height, texture and colour of skin, shape of body, eyes, limbs, clothing.
- Now add to your list how a typical alien might communicate.
You should include how they think, speak, maintain contact with one another, make themselves understood.
- Finally, add things about their personality.
Are they friendly or hostile? Do they want to be helpful or are they selfish? Are they generous or greedy? How do they behave?
- From the list that you have compiled, try making up your own alien visitor.

4.3

My Alien Visitor

- Imagine that you meet your alien visitor. In pairs, act out the meeting.

You will have to assume certain things.

For example, such an encounter would not be possible if the alien destroys everything in its path: it must want to meet you and communicate in some way.

You will need to decide:

- where you are going to meet - *at school? in the supermarket? at home?*
- how the alien got there - *does it matter?*
- what you are going to talk about - *this might be determined by where you meet*
- how you are going to talk - *in sign language, or has the alien learned some basic English?*

The Man in the Moon

People have long been fascinated by the thought of life in space. The myths of many cultures tell stories to explain eclipses, meteors and the pattern of the stars, while the moon, especially, has been the subject of folk tale and legend.

The account of imaginary moon people printed on page 35 was written by the Greek writer Lucian in the 2nd century AD. Some of it sounds rather strange to our ears. As you read it, remember that it was thought up nearly two thousand years ago.

In *Moon People*, Lucian gives a report of his imaginary trip to the moon.

4.4

Can you see the joins?

- Read the passage about 'Moon People' on the following page.

How does Lucian make the moon people seem like us?

Write down all the similarities between them and earth people that you can find.

Which parts are the most ridiculous, and which sections seem the most realistic?

- Make up a moon people story of your own.

What are the children like? Do they go to school? What do they learn? How?

or

Are there moon farms, perhaps? What crops do they grow? What animals can be found on the moon?

Moon People

When moon people grow old, they do not die. They just vanish into thin air, like smoke - and talking of smoke, I must tell you about their diet, which is precisely the same for everyone. When they feel hungry, they light a fire and roast some frogs on it - for there are lots of these creatures flying about in the air. Then, while the frogs are roasting, they draw up chairs around the fire, as if it were a sort of dining-room table, and gobble up the smoke.

That is all they ever eat, and to quench their thirst they just squeeze some air into a glass and drink that: the liquid produced is rather like dew.

Bald men are considered very handsome on the moon, and long hair is thought absolutely revolting; but on young stars like the comets, which have not yet lost their hair, it is just the other way round - or so at least I was told by a Comet-dweller who was having a holiday on the Moon when I was there.

I forgot to mention that they wear their beards a little above the knee; and they have not any toenails, for the very good reason that they have not any toes. What they have got, however, is a large cabbage growing just above the buttocks like a tail. It is always in flower, and never gets broken, even if they fall flat on their backs.

When they blow their noses, what comes out is extremely sour honey, and when they have been working hard or taking strenuous exercise, they sweat milk at every pore. Occasionally they turn it into cheese, by adding a few drops of the honey. They also make olive oil out of onions, and the resulting fluid is extremely rich and has a very delicate perfume.

They have any number of vines, which produce not wine but water, for the grapes are made of ice; and there, in my view, you have the scientific explanation of hail storms, which occur whenever the wind is strong enough to blow the fruit off those vines.

They use their stomachs as handbags for carrying things around in, for they can open and shut them at will. If you look inside one, there is nothing to be seen in the way of digestive organs, but the whole interior is lined with fur so that it can also be used as a centrally-heated pram for babies in cold weather.

The upper classes wear clothes made of flexible glass, but this material is rather expensive, so most people have to be content with copper textiles - for there is any amount of copper in the soil, which becomes soft as wool when soaked in water.

I hardly like to tell you about their eyes, for fear you should think I am exaggerating, because it really does sound almost incredible. Still, I might as well risk it, so here goes: their eyes are detachable, so that you can take them out when you do not want to see anything and put them back when you do. Needless to say, it is not unusual to find someone who has mislaid his own eyes altogether and is always having to borrow someone else's; and those who can afford it keep quite a number of spare pairs by them, just in case. As for ears, the Tree-men have wooden ones of their own, and everyone else has to be satisfied with a couple of plane tree leaves instead.

I must just mention one other thing I saw in the King's palace. It was a large mirror suspended over a fairly shallow tank. If you got into the tank, you could hear everything that was being said on the Earth, and if you looked in the mirror, you could see what was going on anywhere in the world, as clearly as if you were actually there yourself. I had a look at all the people I knew at home, but whether they saw me or not I really cannot say.

Well, that is what it was like on the Moon. If you do not believe me, go and see for yourself.

from *Lucian*, translated by Paul Turner, Penguin Books Ltd.

4.5

Liar!

We know that Lucian is not telling the truth, though some of his original readers might have believed him.

Does it matter that he lied? Why did he do so? Was he being dishonest?

- What do you think? Discuss this with the person next to you.

4.6

One day in the life of . . .

- Write about a day in the life of a moon person. Lucian doesn't give us very much to go on. You may have different ideas anyway; perhaps you wrote about them in 4.4. Including points from *Moon People* and adding ideas of your own, try setting out your answer in diary form.

In addition to recording some of the things that you think moon people might do, consider the underlying reasons behind what they are doing.

What rules might they be obliged to keep?

What social customs might they be expected to follow?

What religious beliefs might govern their behaviour?



4.7

Thinking of moving?

Imagine that people begin to emigrate to the Moon, in just the same way as in the 17th Century the Pilgrim Fathers moved to the New World and later many emigrated to Australia and New Zealand.

- Produce a leaflet to encourage earth dwellers to settle on the Moon, or another planet of your choice. *How are you going to make it sound attractive? What are they wanting to leave behind?*

4.8

Like nowhere on Earth!

- Write a guide to life on the planet Xargos for Earthlings who are keen to live there. Include sections on different aspects of Xargosian life!

4.9

Would you go?

Already astronauts are able to spend long periods of time in space, so it may not be too long before the Moon, or another more hospitable planet, is colonised. Would you go to live there?

- Discuss in groups, or as a class, the various considerations. What would you miss? What would you be glad to get away from? What kind of society do you think a space colony should be?

The Martians Have Landed

Some Science Fiction writing seeks to put the alien's point of view. That is what Craig Raine does in a poem which takes an amusing and perceptive look at everyday things as seen by a Martian!

4.10

Guess What!

- Read the poem, and try to guess what everyday objects or events are being described. See how much of the detail you can work out.

Craig Raine described ordinary things using **metaphors**, and this made them seem unfamiliar, yet sometimes beautiful (look at verses four and five). Did you like the description of 'the punishment room' in verses thirteen to fifteen?

- Discuss the descriptions with the person next to you.
What led you to decide what each of the things were?



A Martian Sends a Postcard Home

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings -

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on ground:

then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the property of making colours darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside -
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt
and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs
and read about themselves -
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

Craig Raine

4.11

Now you try

- Plan and write your own alien descriptions of common events or objects.

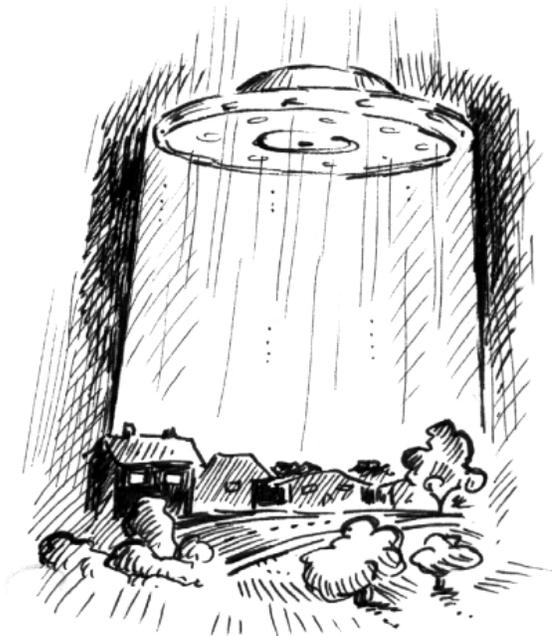
Here are some to get you started:

'Humans have a tame monster that spits out paper when they prod it.'

'Children are sent to day prison.'

What did you learn about metaphors from writing these?

- Try writing a single sentence to explain what a metaphor is and what it does.



4.13

What are you doing?

- Are there some things about ordinary life that are taken for granted, yet don't make much sense when you think about them closely? Imagine the questions that an alien might ask about them.
- In pairs, role play the question and answer session between an alien and an earthling. *'Why' questions will be frequent but don't neglect other kinds of questions too.*

4.12

Let Me Explain

The Martian in the poem has little idea of what is going on in the events described or how the objects referred to might be used.

- For either 'Caxtons' or the 'haunted apparatus', imagine how you would explain what the object really is and how it is used. Write out your explanation, then try it out on the person next to you. *Remember, you cannot take anything for granted.*

4.14

And that's not all!

- Supposing the Martian who wrote the postcard home spent a day with you - at school or with your family. How might it (he/she?) write about the day. Comment especially on the things you say and do, rather than just the objects and events? Write the Martian's letter home.

What would the Martian's account of school assembly be like? Or the school playground at break?



4.15

Looking in from outside

Supposing you sit down to watch the news on television with the Martian. The news that is presented includes the following:

- (a) a report of the bombardment of a city;
 - hundreds of refugees, mainly women and children fleeing for their lives;
 - the discovery of the brutal murder of a teenager;
 - angry scenes at a multiple pile-up on a motorway;
- (b) the announcement of £1m lottery winners;
 - scenes at a pop star's glamorous marriage (for the fourth time);
 - excited footballers kissing and hugging a goal-scorer.

- How are you going to explain each of these to the Martian? You need to include not only **what** is happening but **why** as well!

How might you try to justify what is being reported?

- In pairs, role play the conversation. *What questions do you think the Martian would ask?*

- Choose one from (a) and one from (b) to discuss in detail.



4.16

What's going on?

- How would the Martian describe the news items? Write the account that you think he might have sent home of what is going on in each of the news items.

How is he going to explain war, suffering, violence, anger, the stark contrast between the news in (a) and that in (b)?

4.18

I'm going home!

- Planet Earth may not seem so wonderfully mysterious to the Martian after all! Taking all the matters explored in 4.17, and especially the news items and comments (4.15, 4.16), write the postcard that the Martian might leave on Earth to say that he is going back to Mars.

4.17

Why does it happen?

Often, we only understand important truths about a situation when we take a step back from it, or have to explain it to someone else.

- Look back over all that you have considered in 4.10 to 4.16. What awkward questions has the Martian asked? What aspects of human behaviour have been queried? Jot down all the points that you can.

Beam me up

As both *Moon People* and Craig Raine's poem have demonstrated, Science Fiction is often about life here on Planet Earth as much as the possibilities of outer space. The restyled *Star Trek: The New Generation* has a very different attitude to aliens from that of the original *Star Trek*. In the original series these aliens were threatening and warlike. If you consider that Americans call immigrants and foreigners 'aliens', it is possible to think that the series was expressing a fear of other cultures. Captain Picard runs a very different ship today! There is even a cuddly Klingon called Worf.

4.19

Space: features of a Genre

You will watch two extracts from different science fiction films or television programmes. Your teacher will stop the tape at intervals to discuss what you can see that is typical of the Science Fiction genre.

- Copy the chart printed on page 41 and make your notes in the spaces provided. The final column should be left empty for use later on.

You are learning how to take notes and organise them, and you are also learning how to identify the typical features of a genre. Look back at the notes you made in 4.3. The exercise you are doing here is very similar.



4.20

4.20 How did they do?

- What did you think about how the heroes and heroines in the extracts you watched handled the problems they encountered?

Discuss this in pairs.

4.21

Over to you

- Try writing an alternative development to one of the extracts. If the extract didn't complete the story, go on to decide what happened next.

Remember to keep the characters and setting of the original.

4.22

Research

- Choose a Science Fiction story, film, book or television programme and make notes in the third column of your chart on the features that you find it contains.

SPACE: Features of a genre

	Text 1:	Text 2:	Text 3:
Time travel			
Space travel			
Amazing machines or inventions			
Robots			
Aliens			
Technical language			
Moral dilemmas (problems)			
A planet or civilization in danger			
Explosions or disasters			

4.23

Essay: What are the typical features of Science Fiction?

You are going to use a writing frame to help you write an essay.
In your answer, give examples from films, television or books.

How to use the writing frame

This is to organise your writing and give you ideas. You can see how to begin your essay and how to introduce each topic. The frame also shows you how to conclude.

Remember:

- include more than the paragraphs shown below as examples;
- refer to at least three texts, not just the programmes seen in class;
- give examples of the typical clothes, plots, characters and so on;
- explain how each feature is typical of the genre.

Writing Frame

When we read a science fiction story or see a programme, there are certain things that we usually find. There tend to be typical plots, characters and props in this genre.

We often encounter For example, in the film we see

Another typical feature of this genre is, which can be seen in the film

We also see in

All in all, I do (do not) like Science Fiction because