In each of these extracts the narrator describes an encounter with a member of the health profession. Read through the extracts at least twice and then try the activities below.

Doctor Gordon twiddled a silver pencil.
‘Your mother tells me you are upset.’
I curled in the cavernous leather chair and faced Doctor Gordon across an acre of highly polished desk.

Doctor Gordon waited. He tapped his pencil – tap, tap, tap – across the neat green field of his blotter.

His eyelashes were so long and thick they looked artificial. Black plastic reeds fringing two green, glacial pools.

Doctor Gordon’s features were so perfect he was almost pretty.
I hated him the minute I walked in through the door.

I had imagined a kind, ugly, intuitive man looking up and saying ‘Ah!’ in an encouraging way, as if he could see something I couldn’t and then I would find words to tell him how I was so scared, as if I were being stuffed farther and farther into a black airless sack with no way out.

Then he would lean back in his chair and match the tips of his fingers together in a little steeple and tell me why I couldn’t sleep and why I couldn’t read and why I couldn’t eat and why everything people did seemed so silly, because they only died in the end.

And then, I thought, he would help me, step by step, to be myself again.

But Doctor Gordon wasn’t like that at all. He was young and good-looking, and I could see right away he was conceited.

Doctor Gordon had a photograph on his desk, in a silver frame, that half faced him and half faced my leather chair. It was a family photograph, and it showed a beautiful dark-haired woman, who could have been Doctor Gordon’s sister smiling out over the heads of two blond children.

I think one child was a boy and one was a girl, but it may have been that both children were boys or that both were girls, it is hard to tell when children are so small. I think there was also a dog in the picture, towards the bottom – a kind of Airedale or a golden retriever – but it may have only been the pattern in the woman’s skirt.

For some reason the photograph made me furious.

Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar, P 135-6
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She stops and nods at some of the patients come to stand around and stare out of eyes all red and puffy with sleep. She nods once to each. Precise, automatic gesture. Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-coloured enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink little nostrils – everything working together except the colour on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it.

The men are still standing and waiting to see what she was onto the black boys about, so she remembers seeing me and says, ‘And since it is Monday, boys, why don’t we get a good head start on the week by shaving poor Mr Bromden first this morning, before the after-breakfast rush on the shaving room, and see if we can’t avoid some of the – ah – disturbance he tends to cause, don’t you think?’

Before anybody can turn to look for me I duck back in the mop closet, jerk the door shut dark after me, hold my breath. Shaving before you get breakfast is the worst time. When you got something under your belt you’re stronger and more wide awake, and the bastards who work for the Combine aren’t so apt to slip one of their machines in on you in place of an electric shaver. But when you shave before breakfast like she has me do some mornings – six-thirty in the morning in a room all white walls and whiter basins, and long tube-lights in the ceiling making sure there aren’t any shadows and faces all round you trapped screaming behind the mirrors – then what chance you got against one of their machines?

Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, P11

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- **Compare and contrast the presentation of the doctor and the nurse**
- **What do the extracts reveal about the narrators?** (You should consider their feelings, their concerns and their attitudes towards the health professionals)
- **What do you find interesting about the use of language in the extracts?**
- **Compare and contrast the themes in the extracts.**
- **After reading the passages above can you make any predictions about the novels from which the extracts have been taken?**