A Dark Night’s Work

**For the first session we will look at the events up to and just after the night’s work.**

**The second session will focus on the after effects of that event.**

In 1862 Dickens wrote to his editor Henry Wills, "I see that Mrs. Gaskell has put a name to her story—at the end, instead of the beginning—which is characteristic. The addition of one word will make it a striking name. Call the story 'A Dark Night's Work'" (164). ECG’s original title was ‘A Nights Work’

1. From the title of this novella, what are our expectations as readers and how would they have been different had Dickens kept ECG’s original title - A Nights Work?
2. Does the work actually live up to these expectations? How dark is ‘A Dark Night’s Work’?

**Extracts 1 and 2**

1. What is Gaskell trying to achieve in the opening extracts (discussion extracts one and two)?
2. How does Gaskell present Edward Wilkins and how is his portrayal significant to the events of the narrative?
3. What are your views of Dunster? What is his role?

**Extracts 4 Chapters 4 and 7**

1. Gaskell’s preferred methodology in her writing is to set up contrasts- initially we have Dunster and Edward as legal professionals, later Ralph joins this group. Then we have Ralph and Livingstone as prospective husbands for Ellinor. Looking at the extracts from Chapters 4 and 7 how does Gaskell present these two contenders for Elilnor’s hand. What is the significance of their presentation?
2. How does ECG present Ellinor

**Extract 5**

1. What devises does ECG use to create tension in ADNW?
2. How successful an exercise is this?
3. Do you feel the critic was right to say -‘Blink twice and you will miss them’ about the events of that fateful night?
4. Why does ECG make the actual events of that dark night so ‘insignificant’?
5. All Gaskell’s novels commend Christian virtues and censure those who succumb to temptation-pride, materialism vanity and selfishness etc.. How do these precepts work in ADNW? P. 66-67 Extracts below

But it was not for her to undo what was done, and to reveal the error and shame of a father. Only she, turning anew to God, in the solemn and quiet watches of the night, made a covenant, that in her conduct, her own personal individual life, she would act loyally and truthfully. And as for the future, and all the terrible chances involved in it, she would leave it in His hands—if, indeed (and here came in the Tempter), He would watch over one whose life hereafter must seem based upon a lie. Her only plea, offered “standing afar off” was, “The lie is said and done and over—it was not for my own sake. Can filial piety be so overcome by the rights of justice and truth, as to demand of me that I should reveal my father’s guilt.” …Her father’s severe sharp punishment began

And? p. 67

He knew why she suffered, what made her young strength falter and tremble, what made her life seem nigh about to be quenched in death. Yet he could not take his sorrow and care in the natural manner. He was obliged to think how every word and deed would be construed. He fancied that people were watching him with suspicious eyes, when nothing was further from their thoughts. For once let the “public” of any place be possessed by an idea, it is more difficult to dislodge it than any one imagines who has not tried. If Mr. Wilkins had gone into Hamley market-place, and proclaimed himself guilty of the manslaughter of Mr. Dunster—nay, if he had detailed all the circumstances—the people would have exclaimed, “Poor man, he is crazed by this discovery of the unworthiness of the man he trusted so; and no wonder—it was such a thing to have done—to have defrauded his partner to such an extent, and then have made off to America!”