

Suggested responses: *Till Death Us Do Part*

1. Throughout the episode, Alf Garnett repeats racial slurs and discriminatory remarks towards non-White people. Using your knowledge of 1960s culture and society, how accurately did this reflect public opinions towards race at the time?

Discriminatory remarks were used frequently in the mass media. The decades before 1974 had seen race riots in inner-city areas, indicating that public opinions towards race could be extremely negative.

2. Alf Garnett's opinions are sometimes challenged by his daughter and her husband. This represents a growing concern that older and younger generations had increasingly different views. Write down an example of this generation gap in the 1960s.
Rebellious teenagers / end of National Service / increased leisure time / more educational opportunities / increasingly politicised young people / access to the mass media.

3. Why is the presentation of Kevin O'Grady (by Spike Milligan) problematic? What does this suggest about attitudes towards non-White people in Britain?

Spike Milligan is a White actor pretending to be a Black character. He blackened his face in order to do this, indicating a seriously problematic portrayal of a non-White character on screen. This presumably aims to provide a point of comedy, which involves mocking the look of the non-White character – a form of racism. Furthermore, the fact that a White actor was used in the first place indicates a fundamental lack of willingness to employ non-White actors in roles in prime-time sitcoms. The fact that Kevin O'Grady is the only non-White character in the sitcom also demonstrates a lack of representation unless the script specifically calls for it.

4. Which of Alf Garnett's racial stereotypes are reinforced by Kevin O'Grady when he tells them about himself in the pub? What is the effect of this?

Kevin O'Grady says that he claims money from the government and sells stolen goods rather than having a job. By reinforcing the complaints that Alf Garnett made earlier, it implies that these are common actions of immigrants in Britain and that Alf was right to rant about them in his mocking and discriminatory manner. This reinforces the racist overtones.

5. The intention of this sitcom was to highlight the obscenity of racism and use comedy as a weapon to combat it. What does this suggest about how the BBC saw its role in shaping people's attitudes?

The BBC appeared to see its role as a broadcaster that could influence people's ideas about and attitudes towards race. By featuring a bigoted character who was intended as a point of mockery, the BBC used the programme to attempt to point out discriminatory and outdated attitudes towards immigrants.

6. At the time of broadcast, *Till Death Us Do Part* was controversial, but not only as a result of the racial prejudice that it contained. Instead, Mary Whitehouse campaigned against the general vulgarity of the programme. Why would a modern audience have different concerns?

A modern audience would have very different concerns because the racial language used is very frequent and is now considered extremely offensive. At the time of broadcast, people were more likely to use these racial slurs in conversation, whereas now it is vastly more distasteful to listen to.

7. The intention of this sitcom was to highlight the obscenity of racism and use comedy as a weapon to combat it. Do you think that it achieved these aims? Explain your reasoning.

The main character of Alf appears to be a popular one and receives many laughs from the audience when he makes racist jibes and jokes. The reaction of the audience doesn't appear to be mocking Alf but mocking those at the butt of his jokes. Furthermore, although he is sometimes challenged by his daughter and her husband, these challenges are often weak, and Alf's is the loudest voice to be heard in the dialogue regarding immigration and attitudes towards it. Therefore, rather than highlighting the obscenity of racism, the sitcom appears to poke fun at the expense of immigrants, and the audience subsequently enjoys the use of racial slurs and finds them entertaining.

8. To discuss in class: How does the fact that this is a BBC sitcom affect its usefulness to you in analysing 1960s society?

The sitcom is useful as it depicts some popular opinions towards non-White people in Britain at the time and the way in which some people refuted these. It is also valuable for understanding how the BBC tried to combat racism in society.