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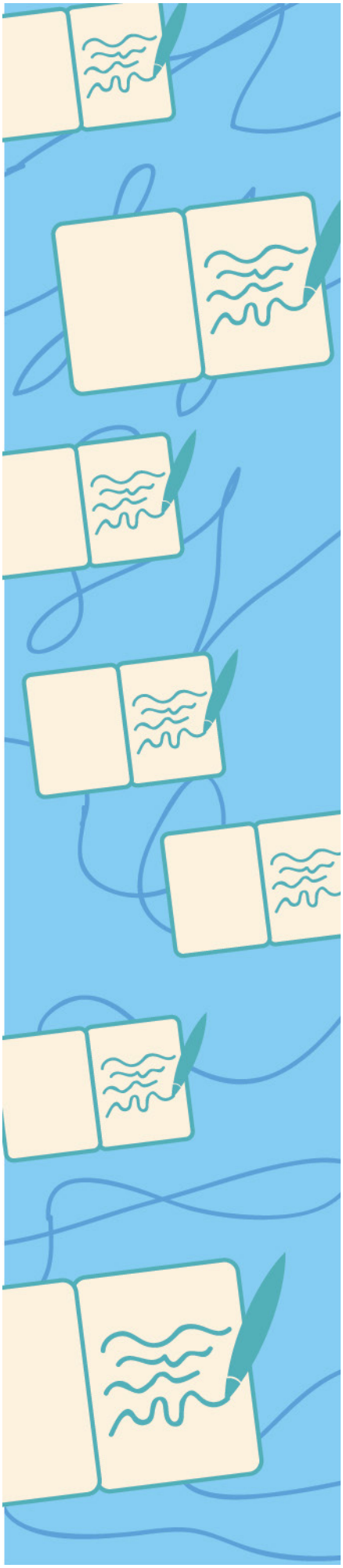
Issue 14

Editor's comment



Dear Colleague,

There are very few occupations where each year begins with a completely fresh start. Come September that can be exciting for some teachers, daunting for others. Yes, there are endless possibilities for the learners in the classroom but the pressure of results and targets also begins again.

This edition of *i.e.* is interested in the possibilities for learners in the classroom. There are teaching ideas and approaches for KS3, GCSE and AS/A Level, from ideas for class readers for boys and using grammar to improve non-fiction writing, to exploring how Shakespeare's words work in performance. There's also an encouragement to see that a classroom doesn't need to be contained within four walls as we hear of a trip to a literary landmark.

I suppose that the articles which bookend this edition sum up the focus. One is from a sixth former who falls in love with literature, with the way words work. And, for him, it changes everything. The other is from a teacher who happens to be a prize-winning poet. Jonathan Edwards discusses the ways we can make things work in the classroom, not in order to get the grade but 'to give my pupils a sense of how much fun (writing poems) can be, which my teachers gave me.' In both those articles, there is little sense of working towards a target but of how a passion and a love for words can energise and inspire others to feel the same. In short, to create lifelong readers, writers and learners.

I hope that will be the kind of success you experience this term in the classroom and I hope that, as a result, those targets will also be met.

Best wishes,

Rhodri

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The next issue of i.e. will focus on poetry. If you have any tips for teachers or lessons that have worked well, get in touch!

Contents

Why English?

Rhys Underdown explains how, when it comes to studying, enjoyment can lead to success.

Making the decision to apply to read English at university was a surprisingly difficult one, although in hindsight the prospect of studying any other subject is unthinkable. Previously convinced that a science course was the only way to find a job in the future, I spent my first year of sixth form frantically flitting between medical courses, biomedical courses, biochemical courses, and a number of other courses beginning with 'bio-'. After attending various summer schools in bio-something-or-other, I finally gave up the idea and decided to do something I actually enjoyed.

Reading about the English course details at Oxford University made me seriously consider applying - to see such an expansive list of books and names and genres was thrilling, and the idea of being involved in such a legacy was a wonderful prospect. The obvious benefits of the tutorial system on offer were also extremely attractive. It wasn't until the first day of year 13 that I decided to apply for an English Literature course, which gave me only one month to prepare a personal statement, read a copious amount of books, and essentially fit in months of preparation into a short period of time. Despite this, the thought of university was a pleasant one.

What's more, I could fully enjoy my English lessons without feeling a ridiculous sense of guilt. I'd bizarrely always felt as though I ought to be focusing on my scientific studies rather than my humanitarian studies. English Literature wasn't only my favourite subject in school - it was the subject I felt most able to genuinely engage with what I was being taught, and was certainly not something I considered to be 'work' as such. I took such great pleasure in writing my LT3 coursework, and felt such satisfaction in going to the library and discovering various critical interpretations of Charles Dickens' presentation of 'psychologically aberrant women' in Great Expectations, and seeing how these compared to Christina Rossetti's presentation of the 'admired model of Victorian womanhood'. The course entailed a detailed study of Shakespeare's King Lear, and Chaucer's 'The Wife of Bath'. I approached these texts with a similar enthusiasm, finding

nothing but enjoyment and fascination in unravelling the underlying ideas in Lear; the complexity of human psychology, the toxicity of the family relations and the gruesome battle for power, contained such a wealth of observation of the human condition. The equally compelling and often humorous contradictions and complexities of 'The Wife of Bath' were similarly fascinating. Becoming accustomed to the Middle English used in the text made think about how far language has evolved over time. In essence, the A Level course, and the way it was taught, gave me a greater appreciation of the enormity of English Literature, and opened up a world of endlessly intriguing ideas which I desperately did not want to let go. The thought of reading English for another three years in one of the best universities in the world was appealing to say the least.

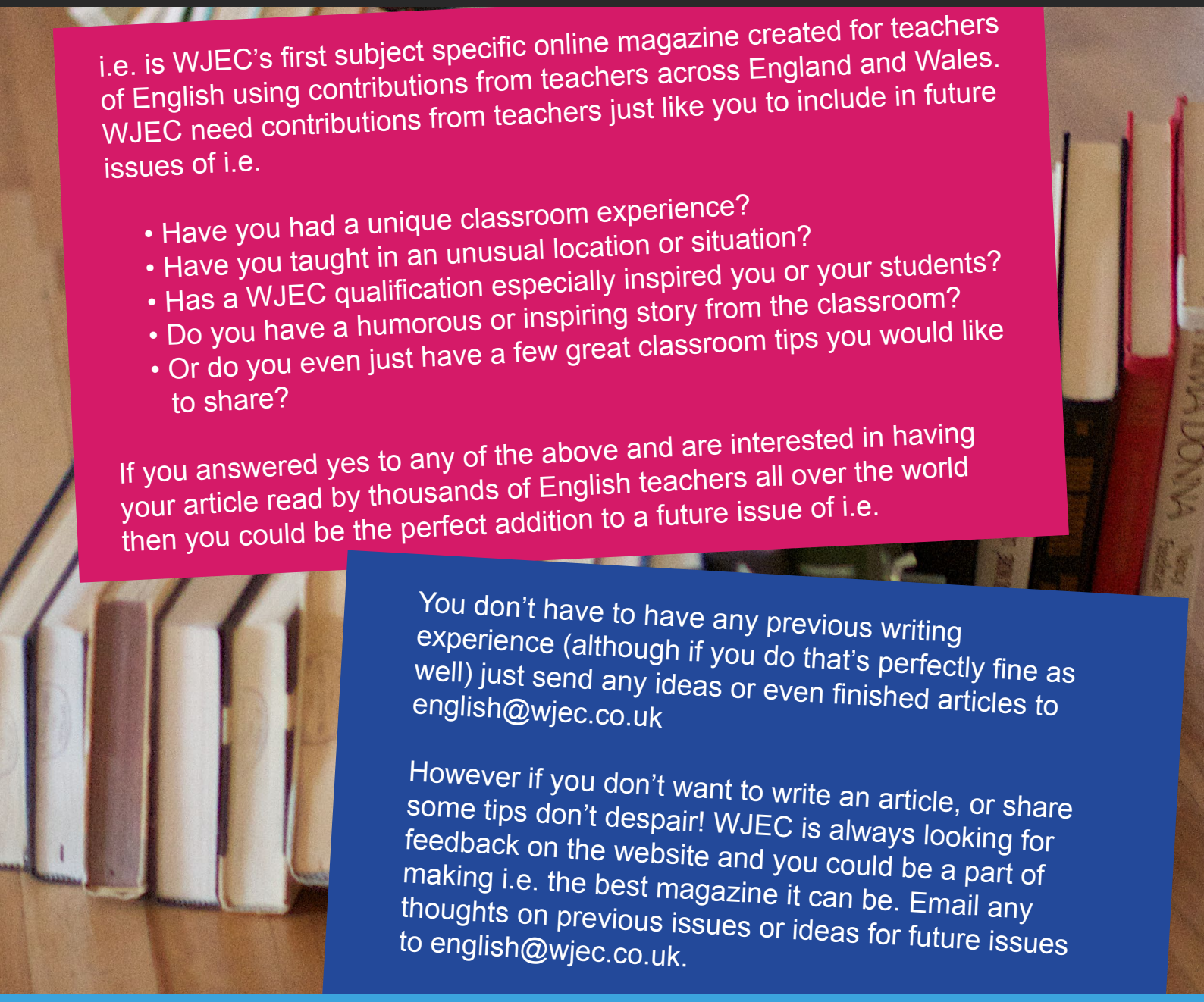
I didn't get in to Oxford, however - I was still far too inexperienced, naïve and unprepared. I was disheartened, and gave up, set to accept my second choice offer from Bristol. But after some lengthy persuasion by my family, I decided to reapply next year, with more time to prepare. Although I had to reject Bristol's offer and fling myself into the abyss of the unknown while my peers moved on in the unrelenting stream of education, it was an invaluable year for me. Although removing myself from an establishment I'd known throughout my life at the risk of ending up with neither an Oxford nor Bristol University offer was a terrifying prospect, it gave me the time to work and learn more about the admissions test, the interview process and the course itself, as well as do some living and get a job and do things with semi-adult responsibility, which all helped my application.

This year also gave me some time to realise what it was I actually enjoyed about reading English Literature. I can now see that to read is to sift through an expansive trough full of all human characteristics and traits. You can, I'm sure, find an example of every act of love, vengeance, hatred, kindness and brutality, somewhere in the infinite bioverse of literature. Studying these texts is to make a devotion to uncovering every last secret and detail about humanity, and as a result is a positive step towards discovering, essentially, what makes us human. Although nobody will ever find a definitive answer, for there is none, the impossible journey itself is too enjoyable to resist.

This time, my application to Oxford was successful, and I am to study there in October of this year. In the meantime, I have a limitless list of books to read and a lot of excitement to contain.

Calling all teachers of English… i.e. Magazine needs you!

WJEC would like to hear from you!



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- Have you had a unique classroom experience?
- Have you taught in an unusual location or situation?
- Has a WJEC qualification especially inspired you or your students?
- Do you have a humorous or inspiring story from the classroom?
- Or do you even just have a few great classroom tips you would like to share?

If you answered yes to any of the above and are interested in having your article read by thousands of English teachers all over the world then you could be the perfect addition to a future issue of i.e.

You don't have to have any previous writing experience (although if you do that's perfectly fine as well) just send any ideas or even finished articles to english@wjec.co.uk

However if you don't want to write an article, or share some tips don't despair! WJEC is always looking for feedback on the website and you could be a part of making i.e. the best magazine it can be. Email any thoughts on previous issues or ideas for future issues to english@wjec.co.uk.

If you haven't already had a chance to peruse i.e. then you can view previous issues for ideas and inspiration on WJEC's website.

The Theatricality of King Lear

It's one thing reading Shakespeare's words in a classroom, it's a different thing thinking about those words in performace. Alistar Boucher takes us through the difference it can make.

What I like about Shakespeare is that whenever I can't quite put into words what I feel about something (when I get over-emotional and inarticulate and stuttery), I find that he has already done it for me. He has, somehow, already said and written down and reached into the very heart of the problems that I face and given me the exact words to match how I feel. That always makes me feel better, because it's nice to know that other people have gone through the same worries and problems and fears that I am going through. It's nice to know I'm not alone – even if my companion has been dead for four centuries.

I am thinking back to my last English lesson with my U6 students. I had taught some of those students for four or five years: it was a wrench saying goodbye to them, knowing that my time spent teaching them has come to an end. Still now, I miss them enormously.

Our last lessons of the year were spent exploring different perspectives of their exam texts – the final one, on King Lear and the importance of theatricality. I loved this lesson, mainly because it was the literature that took centre stage, not a teaching frame, not a pedagogic trick. All this lesson was about was the text and some very passionate people unpicking it, unpacking it, thinking about it, marvelling at it.

There is a difference, when studying Shakespeare, between the play text and the performance text – the words that you read on the page, and the words as they are embodied and given breath by the living body on the stage before you. As English students, we tend to prioritise the former over the latter, regardless of the anachronism of this intent. And so we pore over images, and dissect words, and chase inferences and connotations down lexical corridors, speculating as to purpose and intention, while too often forgetting that this task is inherently anathema, that these words are a preliminary stage, a blueprint to performance, a skeleton that is bodied, packed with earth and breath and blood. We do not read words; we

read bodies, that look at us and forge a connection with us and demand acknowledgement as they speak these words.

Act 5 Scene 3 shows this beautifully. In it, Lear's dream of happiness is exposed as just that. He comes on stage bearing the dead body of his daughter, Cordelia, the noose hanging from her neck as she hangs limply in his arms. And his first words are a theatrical demand that must be addressed by the actor and director.

Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you are men of stones.

How does an actor even begin saying those first four words? Do you obey the text – literally say "howl"? When does anyone literally say "howl"? It's a bit like literally saying the word "scream" when you are angry, or "cry" when you are sad. It's not the most logical approach. You run the risk of sounding as if you are searching for your long lost Welsh friend. Maybe you gently elide the "L", nod at the word but subtly spin it into a tragic rhetorical question – "How(…l)?" Maybe you shouldn't treat the text as text at all: not a word, but rather as an animalistic wail, a wolf, baying and pewling at the moon. The word becomes less word but more emotion and so, open to interpretation – a full blown shriek? a growling, gruttering roar? a singular, ullulating note? a tremulous, trembling moan? a pitiful, whining, diminishing whimper? I remembered my old English teacher, Simon Taylor, playing Lear at the Old Fire Station Theatre in Oxford: his canine howling was a logical extension of his Lear gone mad, a King who atavistically enters on all fours, panting like a dog, scratching away the nits in his beard, barking mad.

But what happens if it's neither? What happens if you interpret the text as neither noun nor emotional note, but as imperative? What's the theatrical impact? Lear comes on stage with his dead daughter – the royal retinue (Kent, Edgar, Albany) are struck dumb, shocked into silence. Dumb? Nothing to say? Royal death is one of the only things that gets English people even remotely flustered. You only have to look back to the uproar of Diana's death, how the buttoned-up, stiffly-repressed English citizenry crumpled into bouquet-bearing, condolence-book queueing, openly weeping hystericals. It takes, it seems, a royal death to allow us to mourn obscenely, free to emote, freed from the restrictive expectations of decorum and expectation and manner and appearance. And here one is, a royal death at its most grotesque, a murder freshly made of the people's princess – and Lear, on her behalf, gets nothing? That is not enough; that is not good enough. "Howl!" Lear orders: "Howl, howl, howl!" – don't give me nothing; don't give her nothing. Show your despair; perform your distress; give her the respect to unbutton yourselves. Weep for her.

Yet nothing is all they offer ("nothing will come of nothing – speak again"), and Lear attacks them for that: "oh, you are men of stones," he castigates. Lear uses stone imagery like Titus Andronicus before him – "A stone is silent, and offendeth not / And tribunes with their tongues doom men to death" – but unlike Titus, Lear does not want the unoffending peace of the stone. He wants offence; he wants depraved, unseeming sorrow. Hamlet's Claudius is better to reference here: "to persevere in obstinate condolement," he chides Hamlet, mourning the loss of his father, "is a course of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief." Claudius, the consummate, silver-tongued politico, frowns across the texts at the inappropriately-mournful Lear. But Lear wants unmanly grief. Indeed, this grief has unmanned him – or rather, unfathered him. For what he bears aloft is not natural – the common theme of life, Claudius says, is "death of fathers", and so by his reasoning, Hamlet's "prolonged" mourning for this natural, cyclical event is illogical. But Lear

faces the death of a daughter (actually, of three). His loss is so unnatural that even his linguistic rhythms are inverted – "Thou'lt come no more," he realises, and the unnatural reversal of parent outliving child is reflected in the inversion of iambs into a feast of falling trochees: "never, never, never, never, never."

But this realisation is hard won. Lear does all he can to deny the truth and the reality before him.

Lend me a looking-glass.

If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,

Why then, she lives.

Again, it's all about theatricality. As Kent, Albany and Edgar chunter like uncertain schoolboys in the background – "Is this the promised end?"; "or image of that horror?"; "Fall and cease!" – the performance text takes over from these words. Lear, in one hand cradling his dead daughter, takes a compact-mirror (from where? from who?) in the other and holds it up to her lips. For how long? It makes no sense for it to last just the brief moments of the hurried whispers of the three men: Lear is searching for his daughter's life – to give up is to acknowledge the finality of her death. So the three men finish talking, and the text cues Lear's next line… and – we wait? Silence. The words fall away, and we watch the furtive actions of a man tilting a mirror over the dead lips of his little girl, watching, waiting, praying for a miracle.

His urgency and desperation intensify – Lear's next cued line?

This feather stirs. She lives.

This feather? Where the hell has he got a feather from? Off the floor? From a passing flock of geese? A handy symbolic dove quill? A feather seized from the doublet of one of the retinue encircling this tragic tableau, a vengeful plucking? A furtive cushion carelessly strewn, helpfully belching down? A theatrical explanation is critical to make sense of the transition. But different material, same outcome – the attention of the father, of the stage, of the audience, all trained on the quivering tendrils of one feather that proves or disproves Cordelia's mortality.

And the tragic irony? Of course it moves. Especially if you take the risk and take your theatrical time. Let Lear wait for the feather to move. 20 seconds… 30 seconds… a minute… more. Hold the feather over her mouth, and breathe my daughter, breathe! This Cordelia is a living actor, not a free-diver. The character is dead, but the actor breathes; and as the actor breathes, so the feather stirs. She lives. She lives! It is the most beautiful piece of wish-fulfilment, a dream come true, a nod to the salavation of Lear who has learned the value of love and a nod to the beauty of theatre, which can, in its own way, bring the dead to life. No one else sees it though – he is bonkers, of course, mad as a hatter, thick as two short planks – and the only person who can really see the feather move, the mirror blanche with breath's moisture, is Lear himself, no one else, not his conspirators' suspending belief on stage, not the audience too far from the action to see. Lear's great deception, his grand illusion, of seeing his dead daughter live, is a triumph because it is theatrically true. The joke's on us: for the briefest of moments, before he dies, Lear sees straight and speaks true. The tragedy is that, Cassandra-like, Lear's triumph is his only his own, for no one listens to his truth.

So that was our last lesson. The words of one man, written a little over 400 years ago, pored over by 18 year olds of the 21st century, all emitting the same "oohs" and "aahs", beaming realisation when they understand and "see" the play in their mind's eye, see it alive, the words embodied. And the beautiful thing, Shakespeare's great gift, is that the truth lies in his theatricality. Coming at the play now, as a father of two, seeing Lear bearing his child's body… Shakespeare's right. Howling is the only option. No words could capture what I would feel. An animalistic wail, a wolf, baying and pewling at the moon? Yes. A full blown shriek? a growling, gruttering roar? Yes, yes. A singular, ullulating note? a tremulous, trembling moan? a pitiful, whining, diminishing whimper? Yes. All of them. Screams of agony. Screams of despair. Not words. Just humanity. And that's where Shakespeare is at his best: when you discover, behind those finely-wrought and constructed words, the rawest of emotions, an animal pain, a father's loss, the mourning of a child killed too soon, brutally exposed before the father's eyes. There are no words.

Our last lesson. The loosest of plans, a structure that would allow us to go as deeply or as shallowly into the text as we would like. Just words and emotions and passion and love. And I was lucky enough to share that with a lovely group of students who I miss very much.

Inspired by Alistar's article? The BBC Shakespeare archive can help you think further about plays in performance.

Last year, the BBC launched the BBC Shakespeare Archive Resource, to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in April 2016. This online resource provides schools, colleges and universities across the UK with access to hundreds of BBC television and radio broadcasts of Shakespeare's plays, sonnets and documentaries about Shakespeare. The material, which dates from the 1950s, includes the first British televised adaptations of Othello and Henry V, classic interviews with key Shakespearean actors including John Gielgud, Judi Dench and Laurence Olivier, several of Shakespeare's famous sonnets in TV and radio broadcasts, and more than 1000 photographs of Shakespeare productions.

You can search under plays, sonnets and poems, factual (e.g. documentaries) and entertainment; or you can use the search box to look for a specific play or a person who appeared in or worked on the production. Most of the plays on the school curriculum are featured on the site. To see how two schools are using this resource to enhance the teaching and learning of Shakespeare, take a look at this short Teach Shakespeare film.

The earliest highlights include part of the 1955 production of The Merry Wives of Windsor starring Anthony Quayle, the RSC's production of As You Like It, broadcast in 1963 starring a young Vanessa Redgrave as Rosalind, the earliest surviving production of A Midsummer Night's Dream from 1958 and Maggie Smith and Robert Stephens in a 1967 production of Much Ado About Nothing.

In the factual category you will find Paul Robeson talking in 1959 about acting Shakespeare and the difficulty of English accents, and the series of Prefaces to Shakespeare and Shakespeare in Perspective which accompanied the major BBC series of Shakespeare's works, transmitted between 1978 and 1985. On the lighter side, there is Blackadder punching Shakespeare 'for every schoolboy and schoolgirl for the next four hundred years!' as well as Mastermind quiz rounds and a sketch from The Morecambe and Wise Show.

The BBC Shakespeare Archive Resource is only available to those in formal UK education and is free at the point of use. If you are unable to automatically view and play the media, you will need to authenticate yourself as being part of a formal educational institution in the UK. We have tried to make access as simple as possible; schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can log in using their Hwb+, Glow or C2K credentials and schools in Scotland and England can also access the site using RM Education's Launchpad. If you are unable to login, please email us at shakespeareaccess@bbc.co.uk to request access credentials.

Under the terms of the Educational Recording Agency (ERA) licence we can only include audio-visual content up until 1989 on the BBC Shakespeare Archive Resource site (approx. 300 titles) but teachers can access the whole collection from the 1950s to the present day if their school, college or University subscribes to off-air providers like BoB, Planet eStream's Connect or Clickview. So that's a huge amount of Shakespeare, including The Shakespeare Animated Tales in English and Welsh, the modern take on the plays in Shakespeare Retold, the Storyville on American prisoners staging The Tempest, In Search of Shakespeare and the Live from the Globe productions starring Mark Rylance, to name just a few.

BBC Shakespeare Archive Resource can be found at http://shakespeare.ch.bbc.co.uk

Teaching writing through grammar

How does knowing and understanding grammar impact on writing? Ruth Cummins researched the relationship with a GCSE class over a five-week period. Here she shares a lesson which made an impact and, in the following article, considers her research and its results.

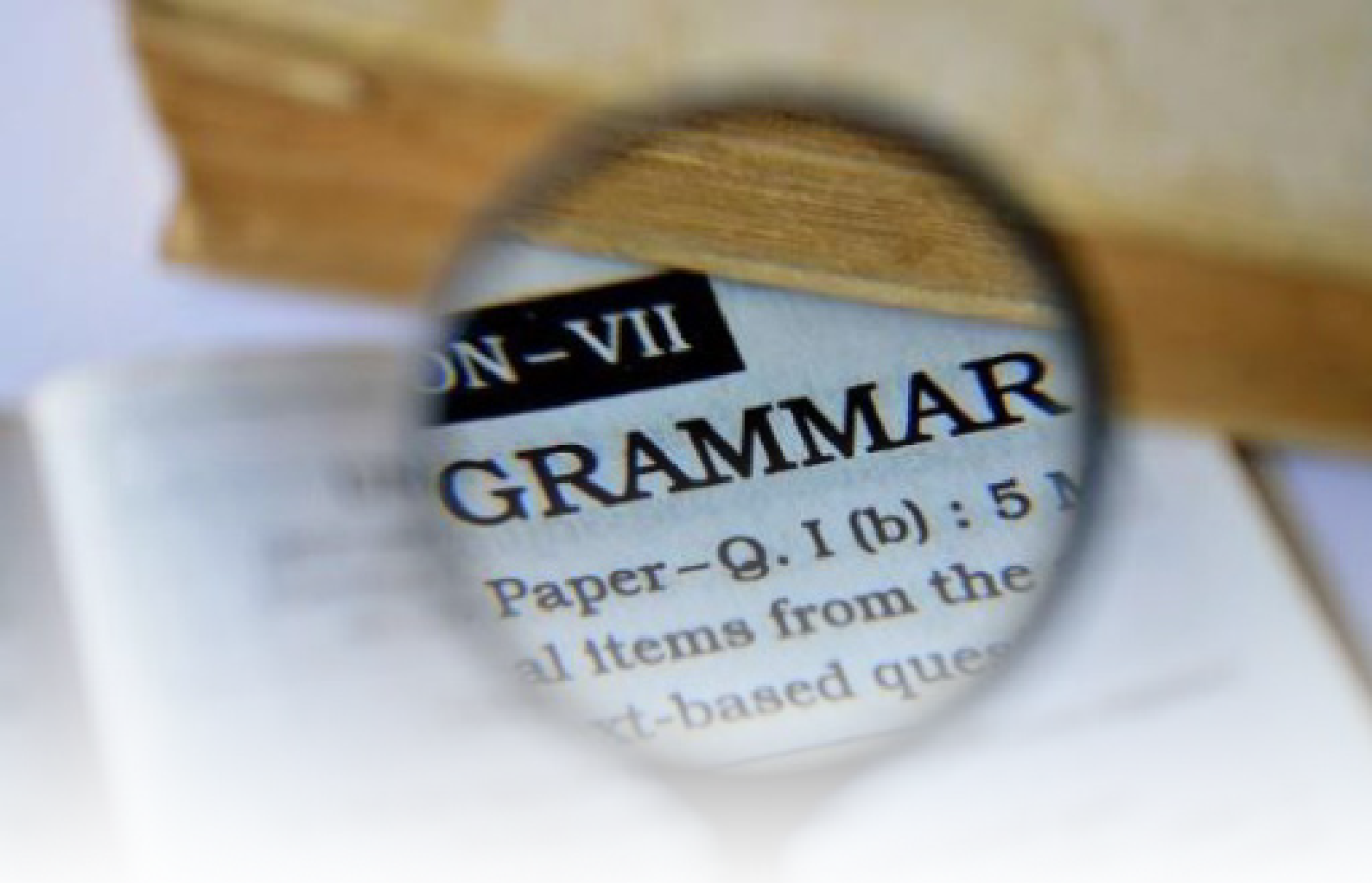
How does knowing and understanding grammar impact on writing? Ruth Cummins researched the relationship with a GCSE class over a five-week period. Here she shares a lesson which made an impact and, in the following article, considers her research and its results.

When approaching text types with my Year 11 class in preparation for their English Language exam it became evident that they struggled mostly with reviews and articles. It was the style that threw them and initially I was doubtful that teaching grammar in the context of a lesson on review writing would be able to help with this. How wrong I was!

I found a written review on the Sponge Bob Square Pants movie (they were a class of 24 Year 11 boys, C/D borderline; humour seemed to appeal to them!) and started the lesson off with the trailer. I then asked them to 'deconstruct' (a new word I had to teach them) the review. In pairs they highlighted and noted how the sentences started, what punctuation was used and any patterns or techniques. We then fed back as a class and I encouraged the introduction of technical terms. For example, when a pupil identified that the review started with an 'ing' verb, I identified that it was called a present participle, followed by a question, such as 'What punctuation follows the present participle clause?' to identify comma use. I then asked the class to list a set of criteria (check list) for a review based on the model review they had just deconstructed. This included:

- start your review with a minor sentence
- start a sentence with a present participle
- include an embedded clause
- list details using a colon
- start a sentence with a adverb followed by a comma
- use parenthesis
- ask a rhetorical question
- use a semicolon
- end your review with a simple sentence

After pupils completed their review following the success criteria from their model review it became clear their style had improved dramatically. The pupils immediately recognised that their writing had personality and style and when I marked their writing following the examination mark scheme, the mark for their SSPS increased, in the majority of cases, by a band.



"Teaching grammar in isolation produces little if any improvement" (Andrews et al, 2004, p4).

"Instruction in grammar itself is minimal; application of grammar to writing is maximal" (Weaver, 2008, p26).

Introduction

I wanted to find out what the impact would be on pupils from teaching grammar in the context of writing rather than as separate, rule-driven lessons. I was particularly interested in:

a) Would it improve the accuracy/quality of their writing?

b) Would it improve their attitude towards writing?

Method

I selected a Year 10, GCSE, boys only class to implement the 5 week intervention. The intervention itself was a series of lessons that focused on teaching grammar through the context of writing. This was primarily achieved by employing Didau's ideas of 'slow writing' (2014) and Weaver's advice on teaching grammar to enhance and enrich writing (2008).

A variety of data collection methods were used such as:

- textual analysis of pupils' written work;
- observations by colleagues and lesson filming;

- pupil questionnaires;
- focusgroup interview.

Main Findings

1. There wasa clear increase in confidence from the pupils in terms of theirattitude towards writing. This was reflected in the questionnaire revealingthat 81% of the class felt that their writing had improved. However, despitethis, 50% of the class stated that they would still opt for the previousteaching of grammar in isolation. The main reason given for this from thepupils is that they found the rule-driven grammar lessons 'easier'.

Possible Implications Include:

- Why would pupils, despite acknowledging the benefit of being taught contextualized grammar, opt for 'easier' lessons of less value to theirwriting?
- Does this imply that there is an issue with pupils' motivations tolearning in general? Or is this a subject specific issue?

2. From textual analysis of the pupils' writing from different periods in theintervention, it is clear that some of the pupils' written accuracy had improvedyet careless mistakes were still evident. Despite this, the majorityof pupils work did show an increase in style and therefore the overall quality of their writing was improved.

Possible Implications include:

- What could teachers do to improve written accuracy and careless mistakes?
- Is proof-reading a skill that should be taught separately?

3. I have had to revise my own grammatical knowledge during this intervention.By teaching grammar contextually the format is more open and has requireda greater in-depth knowledge of grammar. Previously teaching grammar in isolation was controlled and only required the grammatical knowledge on therule that was being introduced to the class.

Possible Implications include:

•If this method were to be adopted by departments responsible for teaching grammar, would teachers need to further their own grammatical knowledge first?

Conclusion

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that teaching grammar in the context of writing improves pupils' confidence in writing and improves the overall quality of their writing too.

The inquiry has also suggested however that this method would be a significant change for teachers in addition to the pupils and would require a teacher who is more than competent in their own grammatical knowledge to deliver the lessons effectively.

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Worst Case Scenarios : What would I choose to read?

It's not always easy finding a book that works for boys. This one did for Carol Clohesy.

Reluctant and rebellious teenage boys with learning difficulties, excluded from school and frequently facing worst case scenarios themselves, are notoriously difficult to engage in learning to read. I am sure most teachers would agree that it is more important to foster a life-long love of reading than the mechanistic ability to decode without any real engagement in meaning.

Although it is never possible to generalize, I have certainly found that many such boys are seeking to take responsibility, test their mettle and are intrigued by the idea of a teenager surviving alone in the Canadian wilderness. This is the theme of "Hatchet" by Gary Paulsen, an American writer well respected in the US. The plight of a boy just like themselves had so gripped its early teenage readers that they asked for an even worse case scenario! In response, Paulsen wrote a sequel, "Brian's Winter", which can easily be read first and it is shorter. Personal qualities and life skills are presented through the protagonist's actions and thoughts in shovelfuls, making it an ideal teaching tool and source of encouragement for these boys who need to develop their own resilience and ability to face difficult circumstances.

Following a dramatic worst case scenario of a pilot suddenly dying of a heart attack leaving our protagonist as the sole passenger obliged to crash land into a lake, the reader embraces the thoughts of What if…? What would I do in such a situation? While recalling their hero, Bear Grylls', Survival and Bushcraft skills and setting their minds to practical problem-solving which is the great strength that these boys often have, they enter wholly into the scene and experience, possibly for the first time, the joy of reading. They find themselves not simply decoding but reading for meaning, identifying with the protagonist, feeling his pains, joys and hopes, benefiting from immersion in story in all the ways we value. Boys who find it hard to communicate with us suddenly open up and talk about real-life practical tasks such as how to light a fire, make a bow and arrows, find out if there is an animal hiding in a cave, whether it is safe to light a fire inside a wooden shelter, how to skin a rabbit and use its fur to make rope, clothing etc. All the skills which these boys often have in abundance, such as resourcefulness, creativity and ingenuity - skills which largely go unnoticed and unacknowledged in our classrooms – are demonstrated by this young teenage boy.

The readers become engrossed in problem-solving, empathising and predicting, all the while feeling good about themselves as they vicariously take risks and share the boy's victories. Although initially attracted and drawn in by their interest in the physical survival skills needed in such a hostile environment, these readers soon recognise the significance of other personal qualities and skills. With the teacher's help, they see the importance of maintaining one's emotional and mental health through speaking positively to yourself, being self-disciplined, persevering with dull routines and even replaying in their minds, advice from the past. A boy, like themselves in so many ways, suffering the fallout of his parents' messy divorce appeals to their imagination like no other. They read a whole book for the first time and are so enthused by the total experience that they go on to become readers which is surely the best indicator of success in education.

The Secret World of the Brontë Sisters

Rebecca Welch finds that a visit to a literary landmark broadens horizons, deepens relationships and brings literature to life. (Photograph of students from Blackpool Sixth Form College)

When we first decided to teach Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre I was filled with much excitement and enthusiasm. It was a novel that had a great influence on me when I had read and studied it myself. I fully immersed myself within the realm of the Victorians and had a real passion for that era of British history. However, I did have a feeling that my students may not feel quite the same fervour that I held for Victorian novels. How was I going to connect my extroverted and uninhibited students with the sensitive delicacies and deeply rooted emotional repressions of Victorian England?

Rather than starting with the novel itself, I started with the world that inspired it: Charlotte's world. We discussed and explored the disintegration of religion, the rigid class system, the concept of the Angel of the House, the role of education during this era and 'Great' Britain's colonisation and proselytism. Although the Victorian attitude towards sex and sexuality was perhaps the topic that they found the most riveting, The British Library with its plethora of intriguing videos from specialists on the topic was a great help to engage the students and build their knowledge too.

But I wanted something more for them. I wanted them to really see this world, not just learn about it through books and the internet. So, we planned a trip. Yes, hours of meticulous planning, a multitude of health and safety precautions and every possible need addressed. It was all worth it.

As we started to drive through the vast and empty countryside that is Yorkshire I felt a weight lift from my shoulders and I could see that my students felt the same. It was wild and beautiful. I discussed the sisters' love of long walks through the moors come rain or shine, but mostly rain! How these walks would inspire Jane Eyre's destitution on the moors and the haunting setting of Emily's Wuthering Heights. Young girls talking and exploring, just as they were, as we made our way to the Brontë Parsonage: a time capsule of their lives.

We started our trip by meandering through Haworth. There was of course the immediate attraction to the medley of shops and quirky tea rooms that were on offer. I am a great lover of the Dales and was quite happy to join in as we all decided on which trinkets we would take home and, most importantly, where we would enjoy a hearty Yorkshire lunch.

Perhaps the trip started to lose its light and jovial tone as we approached the church where Patrick Brontë resided as reverend. We explored the church and the students were very moved to be standing before the vault that contained many members of the Brontë family. They were no longer just characters that we had constructed in the classroom. They were real people, they had existed in this place that we were now immersed within. I explained that death was commonplace for the Brontës and indeed most families within this era. Even the Brontës' sitting rooms directly overlooked the graveyard, a rather daunting reminder of what had passed for them and also what was to come.

The students found the graveyard to be very intriguing. It is council managed, rather than being the responsibility of the church, due to being immensely overcrowded and once a key source of disease in Haworth as the water from the hills ran through into the village. We argued that being in the face of such things may have directly inspired the dark imaginings of the sisters and perhaps their use of disease and vulnerability within their writing.

The Brontë Parsonage itself was an absolute delight. We entered through the front door and were greeted by the dining room where the young women would circle the table each evening sharing their fictitious creations. We huddled into the kitchen where Emily would assist their housemaid whilst studying German with her book propped up before her. We gained a real insight into their father too, the liberal man who uncommonly allowed his daughters free reign within his library. We peered at the miniature books that the sisters constructed as well their delicate, petite clothing that has been so well preserved by the parsonage. The tour finished with a glimpse of Ann's blood speckled handkerchief. Death was never far removed from this family.

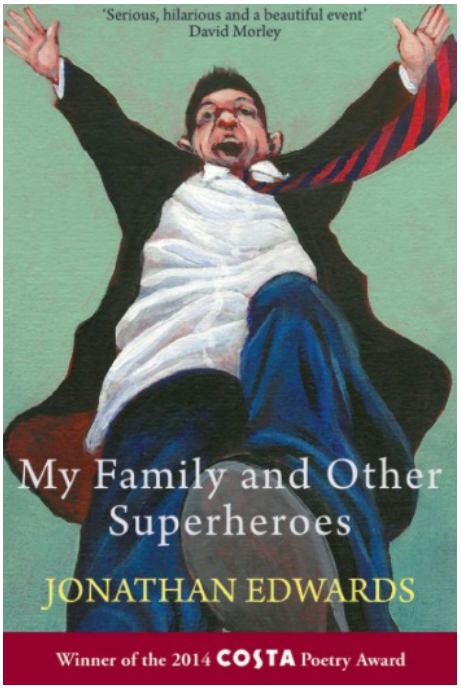
My students developed a real empathy for the family whilst we visited. They grew a new and more in depth understanding of the fervent pain and desire of Jane Eyre, the loss of her family and her need to have more as a woman than her era would allow. Delving into their home and seeing such rare literary treasures brought the family to life and the Victorian realm.

The students and I had a wonderful day. We got out of the classroom and they got into Jane Eyre.

Meet the Writer – Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards was born and brought up in Crosskeys, South Wales. He has an MA in Writing from the University of Warwick and currently works as an English teacher. He has won numerous prizes, including the 2014 Costa Prize for Poetry for his debut collection My Family and Other Superheroes.

How did you become a poet?



This was really all down to my experience at the University of Warwick. It has an amazing Creative Writing department with supportive and inspirational teachers, including David Morley and Michael Hulse.
I went there wanting to be a playwright, having not really thought about writing poems - it's that place and those people which gave me a sense of vocation. From there, it was about a decade of practice and determination, sending work out to magazines and competitions and papering the walls with the rejection slips! An Arvon course with Hugo Williams and Greta Stoddart and a wonderful Poetry School Course in Bristol with David Briggs were also hugely formative, but there was a lot of that ten years where I was really developing away from any sort of literary community - I'm grateful for that time to fail now. The opportunity to forge your own voice in isolation can help in building your distinct identity and sense of yourself as a writer.

Why is poetry important?

Firstly, because it's great fun to write. What a joy it is! I think as a teacher I'm keen to give my pupils that sense of how much fun writing poems can be, which my teachers gave me. I don't know if there's anything that makes people feel more special than when they've managed to write a line which makes a room of people laugh or smile or feel something - there it is, and it came out of the writer's head. Poetry can be the fullest way of capturing someone's personality, and also for me it's a way of preserving and speaking for those who never had the chance - this is why I write about family history so often.

Where do your poems come from?

This might sound obvious, but I think ultimately poems come from the process of sitting down and writing them. If I'm lucky I might have an idea before I start - that might come from something seen in the newspaper, something overheard, something from my reading (I read a lot of books about Welsh history, in particular). But in the process of writing the thing might well turn into something else, and I very often sit down with no idea at all of what I might write. This is why some of my poems are about the view through a window, because that's a day where I was sitting by a window, and didn't know what else to write! The desire - the desperation - to write poems means that poems will be written, wherever it is they happen to be grabbed from.

What's your recollection of studying poetry at school? Was it helpful or did you become a poet in spite of it?

I very much remember reading RS Thomas and Ted Hughes, and that was certainly formative for me. I think a lot of my writing about characters in the Valleys can be traced back to Thomas character sketches like 'Cynnddylan on a Tractor,' 'Evans' and so on. And a poem like 'View of Valleys Village from a Hill' grows clearly out of his poem 'The Village.' It's also easy to see the influence of Hughes's animal poems on a number of the poems in my collection, though obviously there is much in the way I treat that subject which is very different. While it was university that really allowed me to think that poetry was something I wanted to do, it was school, with its emphasis on taking poems apart, bit by bit, that gave me the tools to do it.

You're an English teacher. What do you think are the most important things to remember for teachers as they teach poetry to children?

I know that sometimes the traditional approach of detailed discussion of a poem with a class can sometimes be maligned as insufficiently funky or engaging or sparkly or whatever, but for me it is what teaching English is about, and it is the experience from school I draw on most to help my writing. Like everyone else I've had that experience of spending an hour taking apart with a class a poem by say, Hardy, only to get to the end and be faced with the same student question: did the writer think of all that when they wrote it? When Lionel Messi drops the shoulder or does his twelfth stepover, he probably isn't thinking about why he's doing it, but the point is that if I wanted to get any good at football I would need to think about exactly each thing he does. It's the same for students of literature. In order to write well intuitively - perhaps in twenty years' time - we have to think carefully now about why writing that works does work.

The other thing I would say is that, where possible, demythologising writers can be a good thing to do. I think the one weakness in my education was that it taught me to think writers were gods, that I could never be one. John Keats is a god, of course, but he's also a bloke in a room in his twenties, with the same problems as the rest of us, trying to sweat out a line which doesn't suck too much. Or, at least, it's helpful to think that way when you pick up a pen.

How would you try to help pupils to enjoy poetry rather than seeing it as something to write on in order to pass an exam?

I think anything which can help close the gap between the writer and the pupil's own experience is really helpful, anything which allows pupils to see the poem as relevant to their own lives and experiences. Pop culture references are useful. I've often taught the conception of time in 'Ode to a Nightingale' or The Great Gatsby, for example, by reference to Back to the Future. The problem is, as I get older, my pop culture references result in more and more blank faces! The other thing I'd say is that trying to get them to write as much poetry as possible is great, because that side of it is fun, creative and empowering, and feeds back into their reading work.

You write poems rooted in particular places, in particular communities and often about particular people. In terms of encouraging pupils to write poetry, is that where you'd start – the local experience of the person?

I think linking writing to the real world is useful - poems to loved ones often work well. Auden had this brilliant definition of poetry where he described it as like writing a letter to someone you deeply, deeply care about - so there's an intensity of emotion - but that the writing has to be accessible and clear enough that, if the poem got intercepted by someone who knew nothing about either of you, they would be able to understand. I love that definition. So tapping things which the class feel strongly about - this isn't difficult with teenagers! - is useful. Local issues and things in the media can do it. And getting out into the world to see things to write about is great. I'm blessed in the school I work in - as many of us are in Wales - that we're surrounded by wonderful natural spaces to observe and experience. The local graveyard is brilliant for inspiring gothic writing, so I often take classes there. Sometimes we even all make it back, which is a bonus!

What are you reading at the moment?

I am utterly obsessed with the Northern Irish poet Alan Gillis, and especially his third book, Here Comes the Night. It's so incredibly musical, funny, ambitious, streetwise and swinging. I carry it around with me everywhere. It's a Mary Poppins carpet bag of a book - every time you think you've exhausted it you open it to discover a new poem you didn't even know was there. Extraordinary and energising.

New Directions in Post-16 English

A day conference for teachers of English in post-16 and higher education

Robert Eaglestone (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Billy Clark (Middlesex University)

Saturday 12 November 2016, 10.00 - 16.00

Hendon Campus, Middlesex University

Teachers of English to post-16 students, whether in secondary education, further education, sixth form college or university, face complex and contradictory challenges in curriculum and assessment. A prescriptive "grammar" curriculum in earlier years differs from language study at A level and beyond, while new approaches to Literature at A level sit uneasily with practice in higher education. Creative Writing courses, well established at HE, have been proscribed at A level. Changes in assessment at A level have created further differences in practice between phases, while validity and reliability remain in question. A debate about subject knowledge in English from primary schooling to higher education is required, alongside a review of teacher education. How can practitioners find support and inspiration in these circumstances? The day conference will focus on good practice and current opportunities for a more coherent and progressive approach to English studies in post-16 education. The invited speakers will provide the context for short presentations and discussions led by members of the NATE Post-16 Committee. Issues to be discussed include:

- Transition between GCSE and A Level and HE.
- Dealing with unseens and other forms of critical analysis.
- The role of theory and the canon.
- Creative and critical writing.
- Possibilities for integrating the subject within and across subjects.

Cost: £50.00 per delegate including lunch and refreshments

Book tickets via EventBrite: bit.ly/Post16English

NATE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

eduqas
Part of WJEC

For the last three years, WJEC Eduqas have been the proud sponsors of NATE's annual conference. As part of that sponsorship, we have held a number of seminars and workshops as well as events with established writers. Click on the link to view this summer's event from Stratford-upon-Avon with Tessa Hadley. Jonathan Edwards and Paul Henry spoke at the event in Newcastle in 2015 while Owen Sheers and the late Dannie Abse appeared in Bristol the previous year.

NATE's 2017 conference will be held in Nottingham on 23rd-24th June under the title, 'Bringing English Together'. Visit NATE's website for more information.

What's on?

Theatre

Royal Shakespeare Company

https://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/filter/what/any/where/any/when/2016-04-01/2016-06-30

King Lear 20th August to 23rd December 2016

Much Ado about Nothing 9th December – 18th March 2017

The Tempest 8th November – 21st January 2017

Love's Labour's Lost 12th December – 18th March 2017

Julius Caesar 3th March - 9th September 2017

Anthony and Cleopatra 11th March - 7th September 2017

London Plays Listings

http://www.londontheatre.co.uk/londontheatre/whatson/drama.htm

Useful Links

www.thestage.co.uk

www.clwyd-theatre-cymru.co.uk

www.shermancymru.co.uk

www.chapter.org

www.newtheatrecardiff.co.uk

www.bristolhippodrome.org.uk

www.bristololdvic.org.uk

What's on?

Cinema Events

BFI

https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/

www.filmclub.org

National Theatre Live

http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/58103-amadeus

Books for autumn 2016

http://buzz.publishersmarketplace.com/booklist

Important dates

GCSE ENGLISH, ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

Important dates 2016-2017 (for centres in England)

20 September	Final date for centres to submit intentions to enter for GCSE English Literature (LEGACY) for January 2017 series
4 October	Final date for November 2016 legacy re-sits entry applications. Applications made after this date will not be accepted
1 November AM	4171/01 English/English Language Unit 1 Reading Foundation Tier 4171/02 English/English Language Unit 1 Reading Higher Tier 4172/01 English/English Language Unit 2 Writing Foundation Tier 4172/02 English/English Language Unit 2 Writing Higher Tier
Controlled Assessment Submission Date 5 November	4193/01 English Unit 3 (LEGACY) RESIT ONLY 4943/01 English Language Unit 3 (LEGACY) RESIT ONLY 4194/01 English Unit 4 (LEGACY) RESIT 4944/01 English Language Unit 4 (LEGACY) RESIT ONLY 4173/01 English Language Unit 3 (LEGACY) English 4174/01 Language Units 4a/4b (LEGACY) RESIT ONLY
4 January AM	4201/01 English Literature Unit 1 Foundation Tier (Legacy) 4201/02 English Literature Unit 1 Higher Tier (Legacy)

6 January AM	4202/01 English Literature Unit 2a Foundation Tier (LEGACY) 4202/02 English Literature Unit 2a Higher Tier (LEGACY) 4202/03 English Literature Unit 2b Foundation Tier (LEGACY) 4202/04 English Literature Unit 2b Higher Tier (LEGACY)

GCSE ENGLISH, ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

Important dates 2016-2017 (for centres in Wales)

1 November AM	4941/01 English Language Unit 1 Foundation Tier 4941/02 English Language Unit 1 Higher Tier
7 November AM	4942/01 English Language Unit 2 Foundation Tier 4942/02 English Language Unit 2 Higher Tier
4 January	4942/01 English Language Unit 2 Foundation Tier 4942/02 English Language Unit 2 Higher Tier

ADDITIONAL ENGLISH

Important dates 2016-2017

21 October	Entry deadline for January Series (amendments until 11 November)
12 December	Deadline for sample of work to be submitted to WJEC for January Series

ENTRY LEVEL CERTIFICATE

Important dates 2016-2017

21 November	Entry Deadline for March Series

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS (for centres in England only)

Important dates November 2016 only

4 October	November 2016 entry deadline
7 November – 2 December	Controlled Task window for completion
3 November AM	Level 1&2 Examination (RESIT ONLY)
2 December	*Sample submission deadline – Entry Level* *Sample of Records and Outline of Activities to moderator – Level 1&2*

LEVEL 1 / LEVEL 2 CERTIFICATE

Important dates November 2016 only

2 November PM	9700/01 English Language Paper 1
7 November AM	9700/02 English Language Paper 2

GCE ENGLISH

Important dates 2016-2017 (for centres in England and Wales)

10 October	Final date for submission of preliminary entries for June 2017
31 October	Final date for June 2017 legacy re-sits entry applications. Applications made after this date will not be accepted

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