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Teacher Guide

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Foreword

AQA and HarperCollins have worked together to create this resource to inspire teachers and students afresh in their teaching of AQA GCSE English Language. Author Jo Heathcote has applied her years of experience to model how a vibrant choice of diverse extracts, thoughtful questioning and creative opportunities can revitalise approaches to the specification.

This booklet is designed to be co-teachable with AQA's GCSE Literature specification as well as being a springboard for approaches to GCSE English Language. When using this resource, remember to refer to AQA's specification as your definitive source of information. Further support resources can be found via [English | Subjects | AQA](#)

About the author

Jo Heathcote is a highly experienced former English teacher in Manchester, former Principal Examiner and Principal Moderator for two examination boards and the writer of numerous textbooks, resources and study guides for major educational publishers.

She is a firm believer in a rich, varied and challenging English curriculum which is inclusive of the experiences and heritages of all her students. Jo is currently a Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education (PGCE Secondary English) at the University of Manchester. She is a Fellow of The English Association.



About this teacher guide

Purpose:

This pack contains a selection of texts to add depth, refreshment and variety to the teaching of GCSE English Language. It moves beyond the use of past paper extracts to bring fresh voices and authors to the classroom, to add diversity and to inspire creative opportunities for writing and making meaningful links to Literature texts for co-teaching or interleaving.

Text choices:

The choice of extracts helps to illustrate how we can include more diversity into our subject content with ease and create more of a balance in our text choices: of gender, writers of colour, writers from different backgrounds and neurodiverse authors.

Each extract includes an introduction to the author and goes on to suggest wider reading for your students to encourage them to develop their own individual reading-for-pleasure repertoire. These suggestions could easily be adapted into reading challenges or library activities. This section might also be a rich mine of texts that could be used as further resources within your department.

Lesson plans and activities:

The lesson plans are directly focused on the Assessment Objectives for GCSE English Language and include opportunities to build skills and knowledge in inferential reading and undertake close analysis of the language and structure of texts, as well as opportunities to write in a variety of forms and styles. Each lesson plan can be easily adapted to fit with your department style, and follows a structure that incorporates a meaningful Starter activity, thorough exploration of the text through a variety of activities supported by worksheets, and the chance to respond to the text through a choice of written tasks. Suggested outcomes are included to support your teaching.

Through each lesson, there are opportunities for rich classroom talk, and each lesson includes a key focus on oracy as a means of developing confidence and critical thinking. This is supported via opportunities for paired work and structured group activities, with meaningful prompt questions to help students gain independence in developing their skills before approaching unseen material in the final examination.

For each extract, there is a choice of written tasks to enable students to think about their own strengths in writing, to relate their own experiences to the texts, and to develop their own style beyond the reaches of the examination task. The tasks are designed to develop writing skills through enjoyment and ownership, to write without specific time restraint where possible and to foster a love of writing. These experiences will then enable students to meet the challenge of the final examination with increased autonomy and confidence in their individual styles.

Development opportunities:

The opportunity for more varied experiences is then developed in the Explore further section of the lesson plan. In this section we move beyond the notion of the single extract in the single lesson and show how each of the selected texts can be used to develop a complete unit of work over several days or weeks. There are opportunities to link the texts to key and current issues, wider cultural experiences, more creative opportunities and the inclusion of multi-model supporting resources such as video interviews and film. There are suggestions as to how the extracts can be used to expand and explore key themes in Literature set texts (see also the useful Lesson overview grid on page 6). It is hoped that you will find the Explore further section an inspiration to help add to the variety and experience of GCSE English Language for your students and capitalise on the opportunities it brings to both expand the possibilities of the course and tailor it to the worlds and lives of our students.

We hope you enjoy using the pack.

Jo Heathcote, author

Contents

Lesson overviews	6
Lessons	
<i>Fiction</i>	
1. Caleb Azumah Nelson, from <i>Small Worlds</i>	
Extract	7
Lesson plan	9
Worksheets	11
2. Abi Daré, from <i>The Girl with the Louding Voice</i>	
Extract	13
Lesson plan	16
Worksheets	18
<i>Non-fiction</i>	
3. Dara McAnulty, from <i>Diary of a Young Naturalist</i>	
Extract	22
Lesson plan	26
Worksheets	28
4. Katriona O’Sullivan, from <i>Poor</i>	
Extract	31
Lesson plan	33
Worksheets	35

Lesson overviews

Lesson / text	Text type	Learning objectives	Assessment objectives	Themes / focus	Links to AQA set Literature texts
Fiction					
Lesson 1: Caleb Azumah Nelson, from <i>Small Worlds</i>	Novel: prose fiction Black British male author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore a piece of contemporary fiction with a focus on deep inferential reading and the writer's choices and their effects through collaborative discussion To develop creative writing experiences through personal choice and considering stylistic choices inspired by the extract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO5, AO6, AO8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendship Teenage years Young love School Leaving school 	<p>The 19th-century novel: <i>Great Expectations</i></p> <p>Drama: <i>DNA, Princess and the Hustler, Leave Taking</i></p> <p>Prose: <i>My Name is Leon, Anita and Me</i></p> <p>Poetry: selected poems from the Worlds and Lives and Love and Relationships anthologies</p>
Lesson 2: Abi Daré, from <i>The Girl with the Louding Voice</i>	Novel: prose fiction Nigerian female author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore extracts from the beginning of a novel, and to see the development of the character and issues raised through collaborative discussion, inferential reading and stylistic choices To develop opportunities for academic, critically evaluative writing and/or research from a literary or linguistic perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO4, AO5, AO6, AO8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family and loss Child marriage Dreams and opportunity Ambition Resilience Power of education 	<p>Shakespeare: <i>Romeo and Juliet, The Tempest</i></p> <p>The 19th-century novel: <i>Jane Eyre</i></p> <p>Drama: <i>Princess and the Hustler, A Taste of Honey</i></p> <p>Prose: <i>My Name is Leon, Pigeon English</i></p> <p>Poetry: selected poems from the Power and Conflict and Worlds and Lives anthologies</p>
Non-fiction					
Lesson 3: Dara McAnulty, from <i>Diary of a Young Naturalist</i>	Diary: non-fiction and nature writing Irish male, neurodiverse author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore a piece of contemporary non-fiction with a focus on developing knowledge about language and structure and their effects, as well as sensitive understanding of the narrator's thoughts and feelings To encourage sensitive personal and/or descriptive writing through personal choice and reflecting on the stylistic choices of the studied extracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO5, AO6, AO8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School experience Friendship Identity Isolation The importance of the natural world 	<p>The 19th-century novel: <i>Jane Eyre, Great Expectations, Frankenstein</i></p> <p>Prose: <i>My Name is Leon, Pigeon English</i></p> <p>Poetry: selected poems from the Power and Conflict and Worlds and Lives anthologies</p>
Lesson 4: Katriona O'Sullivan, from <i>Poor</i>	Memoir: non-fiction Irish female author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To critically explore a piece of non-fiction prose, examining inferences and language choices both collaboratively and individually To respond to the text in written form, making vivid stylistic choices to describe or present a character and viewpoint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO5, AO6, AO8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School experience Family Identity and belonging Poverty 	<p>The 19th-century novel: <i>Jane Eyre, A Christmas Carol</i></p> <p>Drama: <i>A Taste of Honey, Blood Brothers</i></p> <p>Prose: <i>My Name is Leon</i></p> <p>Poetry: selected poems from the Love and Relationships anthology</p>

Small Worlds by Caleb Azumah Nelson

In this extract from the novel Small Worlds, the narrator Stephen and his best friend Adeline (Del) have just had their very last day at school following their A level examinations and their school prom.

It's the last day of school. The air vibrates with something large and unknown, something which shimmers and shines, something which excites and terrifies. In our final assembly, a teacher had stood and insisted that this was not the end, but the beginning. That we had the rest of our lives ahead of us, that from this moment, anything was possible. Though we're young and often so sure we know what we want, sure we know ourselves, these moments are sobering. In the times we didn't know ourselves, we always had each other; when faced with the unknown, we could lean back into the familiar, knowing each other's hearts, knowing each other's intimacies. So, knowing how valuable this is, we all insist, once more, that we'll link up, that we'll keep in touch, that the only thing between us is love. After we've scribbled messages into yearbooks, after the frantic energy of not wanting to let go of each other begins to settle, Del and I find ourselves in our usual spot on the edge of the school fields. I discard my tie, as a slow bead of sweat darts from my forehead, blesses the grass. Del has rolled up her blazer like a pillow, inviting sunshine to graze her face. A tiny portable speaker tries its best with *Kind of Blue*. Where it fails, we fill in the gaps, knowing the record so well, knowing the beautifully odd notes, the flourish of an extended solo, the mastery of it all.

'I need an ice cream,' Del says, her eyes closed.

I gesture in the vague direction of the school gates. 'We could go shop.'

'I don't wanna move, though,' which is another way of saying, I don't want this to end. I don't say anything to this, instead reclining on the grass. Del opens one eye to spy on me, and seeing I've joined her, unrolls the tightness of her blazer, so I might lay my head down on it too. We lie in opposite directions, our cheeks close enough to touch. I can feel her deep and slow breaths. I can feel her life. Miles and his group play on. We're halfway through 'All Blues', someway into Coltrane's meandering solo. There's one more track – 'Flamenco Sketches' – and that will be it.

I close my eyes too. I think of how each track I can hear playing was recorded in one take, and what faith this would have taken, what it might mean to fall forwards into the vastness of possibility. How it might feel like the fear I feel now, but what beauty might lie on the other side. I don't know how to say this to Del, so I let the music fill the gaps where I have failed, and, knowing each other so well, Del occupies this quiet with me. After some time, as 'Flamenco Sketches' starts up, we let our hands graze each other, and, finding the link between fingers, don't let go.

[...]

I open my eyes to steal a glance at her. She's smiling, content. The music trails away and it's silence we're left with. Without saying anything, she stands and helps me up. We gather our bags and begin to walk.

At the school gates, I ask, 'What you saying tonight?'

She points at her head, the afro threatening to snap the hairband. 'Trying to get this under control. But I'm free after, if you are.'

'Cinema with Mum.'

'Ah yeah, of course, it's Friday.'

'But tomorrow? Football's on. Auntie Yaa's having a little gathering. She's closing the shop and everything.'

'I'm there.'

'Cool. Well,' I shrug.

'Yeah,' she says.

The air vibrates with something large and unknown, something which shimmers and shines, something which excites and terrifies. We don't say goodbye – goodbye sounds like an ending, and we don't want this thing to end. Instead, after we separate, the soft pounding of fists accompanied by in a bit, which is less a goodbye, more a promise to meet again.

By Caleb Azumah Nelson, 2023

Glossary

Kind of Blue: an album by the famous jazz trumpeter Miles Davis, featuring another famous jazz musician, also called Miles Davis

About the author, text and context

Caleb Azumah Nelson (born 1993) is a British-Ghanaian writer, photographer and producer living in southeast London. His first novel, *Open Water* (2021), won the Costa First Novel Award and Debut of the Year at the British Book Awards.

Small Worlds, published in 2023, is set over three summers and is narrated by the character of Stephen, who was born in London to Ghanaian immigrant parents. It explores his relationship with his family, his heritage, his friends – particularly his best friend Adeline who, like Stephen, is a musician – and the pressure he feels to go to university rather than follow his first love, which is music.



If you liked this...

You could read the rest of the novel *Small Worlds*. You could then try reading Nelson's first novel, *Open Water*, which is a love story about two young Black British artists – a photographer and a dancer – and their life in London, their friends and their relationship.

You could explore some of the poetry of contemporary Black British writers, such as Caleb Femi, whose poem 'Thirteen' you can find in the AQA Worlds and Lives Poetry Anthology, or poetry by the late Benjamin Zephaniah or Lemn Sissay.

Other texts that deal with the experience of school and the anxieties of growing up include *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999), which was adapted into a film in 2012, and Lemn Sissay's memoir of growing up in foster care, *My Name Is Why* (2019).

Learning objectives:

- To explore a piece of contemporary fiction with a focus on deep inferential reading and the writer's choices and their effects through collaborative discussion
- To develop creative writing experiences through personal choice and considering stylistic choices inspired by the extract

Assessment objectives:

- GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO5, AO6 and AO8

Resources:

- Extract 1
- Worksheets 1a and 1b
- Mini-whiteboards
- Jazz album *Kind of Blue*, available online

Thematic links:

- Friendship
- Teenage years
- Young love
- School
- Leaving school

Possible sensitivities

The extract and the lesson explore students' experiences of school. Be mindful that some students may have had negative experiences of school, including difficulties accessing education, so may find their memories and views of school difficult to share. Students with sensory sensitivity will need to be considered if opting to play background music during the creative writing task (see Responding section).

Getting started

- Working with the whole class, ask students to note down what they think they might feel on the last day of secondary school. This could be done on mini-whiteboards to ensure full participation. Draw on the prompt to start a class discussion about endings and new beginnings. You could use questions such as:
 - What memories do you have of your last day of primary school, and how did you feel on your first day of secondary school?
 - What are your plans and the possibilities when you leave school?
 - What are you most looking forward to about leaving school, and what do you think you will miss the most/least?
- Distribute copies of **Extract 1**. Introduce the text and read it aloud for the group. Take some of the students' first impressions as to whether they could relate to the narrator and how he feels.

Exploring

- Organise the class into groups of four or five and provide each student with a copy of **Worksheet 1a**. Allow the groups perhaps 8–10 minutes to work on **Activity 1** by discussing the three prompt questions on the worksheet, which support exploration of the key ideas and themes and encourage them to draw inferences from the extract (AO1). Students jot down their collective ideas in the chart. This activity encourages students' independent thinking for future unseen material while also providing them with the opportunity to work in a supportive group environment and develop classroom-based oracy skills.
- Allow time in the lesson to reconvene as a whole class and take feedback from each group on the possible thoughts, feelings and inferences. Suggested answers include:
 - Feelings: for example, the sense of having their whole life ahead of them, with its many possibilities; a sense of freedom; recognising the importance of having a group of friends; perhaps also, the anxiety of not seeing friends every day and the realisation of an ending.*
 - Friendship: the relationship between Del and Stephen seems very close, suggested by the way they separate from the others and take some quiet time together. There appears to be a strong connection between them, though there is no indication that they are romantically involved. They seem to understand each other; Stephen appears almost to read Del's thoughts and feelings.*
 - Music: it is clearly a shared pleasure for Stephen and Del. They know the songs they listen to by heart and respond to them as fellow musicians. From Stephen's description, the music could be seen to symbolise their futures as well as the sense of ending the day represents.*

- Distribute copies of **Worksheet 1b** and ask students to work with a partner to complete the table for **Activity 2**; this challenges them to think in more detail about the linguistic and structural choices the writer has made and their effects (AO2) using the prompts provided. For extra support when completing the table, direct students to the following:
 - the verb choices in the striking second sentence and why this is repeated as the penultimate sentence
 - the highly vivid verb phrases ‘blesses the grass’ and ‘inviting sunshine to graze her face’
 - how the narrator interprets Del’s dialogue ‘I don’t wanna move, though.’
 - what else may be left unsaid in the final three lines of dialogue.

Conclude with a whole-class plenary to share how students are affected by the writer’s linguistic and structural choices: their thoughts, feelings and responses.

- Now work with the whole class to develop deeper thinking using the **Challenge questions** on the worksheet, which start by exploring the writer’s use of extended metaphor in the passage. Remind students of the information below the extract as to the novel’s context and regarding the two characters’ shared interest in playing music. Encourage them to think about the noun phrase ‘meandering solo’ and how that might link to the future when you leave school and the idea of the ‘one take’ and stepping into the unknown. Give students time to cherry-pick the words or phrases that connect to silences in the extract and use the opportunity to introduce or recap on the idea of a recurring motif. Take suggestions from students as to why those moments are there and what they imply. You could encourage students to reconnect with some of their earlier thoughts and feelings about leaving school – which may perhaps have been about joy or cheering or relief – and invite them to consider why the two characters leave silences and so much unsaid, despite (or perhaps because of) their close relationship.

Responding

- Introduce **Activity 3** on **Worksheet 1b**, which gives students a choice of writing task based on the extract: either a piece of personal writing based on an event in their own life that was shared with a friend or friends, or a narrative stemming from a seminal line in the extract. This task could be planned during the lesson plenary and then completed in a follow-up lesson to allow time and space for development.
- To enhance the connection with the extract, an engaging addition would be to play the jazz album *Kind of Blue*. This could be done briefly before students start writing or could be played quietly while students write; the album is approximately 45 minutes in length, which directly mirrors the time students would have in the current GCSE examination for their written task. You could also refer students to the Spotify playlist that accompanies the novel (‘Small Worlds Official Playlist | Caleb Azumah Nelson’).

Explore further

- The lesson could be developed across a whole week, to allow time for students to work on the extract and complete the creative writing response before going on to look at a later extract from the novel, where the narrator Stephen struggles to settle into his university course and makes a bold decision.
- Waterstones Podcast: Caleb Azumah Nelson (available online) would give students the chance to ‘meet’ the author. It could be viewed in part or in its entirety before students complete their creative writing response.
- There are several interesting interviews with Nelson available online, in which he discusses his writing. These include an interview on the Penguin website (‘I met Malorie Blackman and was starstruck’: 21 Questions with Caleb Azumah Nelson), in which he cites meeting the author Malorie Blackman as influential, and a thoughtful interview by Shado magazine (‘Caleb Azumah Nelson on Open Water’, dated May 6, 2021).
- You could go on to introduce Caleb Azumah Nelson’s short story *Pray*, which was shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award in 2020 and was adapted into a short film for the BBC directed by the author; the film (19 minutes) is available on the BBC website. A post-viewing discussion could lead to a group writing project, perhaps with students selecting one of their own pieces of writing to adapt into a screenplay or creating a devised drama piece to be scripted and filmed, providing students with an enriching writing and oracy opportunity.
- The extract would combine well with other GCSE English Literature texts, including the poem ‘Thirteen’ by Caleb Femi from the AQA Worlds and Lives Poetry Anthology and the play *Leave Taking* by Winsome Pinnock.

Activity 1: Small group exploration

Working in a small group, discuss the questions below, which explore some of the extract's key ideas and themes. Add notes to the chart to record your group's suggestions and interpretations. Be ready to feed back.

<p>a) Feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the opening paragraph, how do you think the narrator is feeling about leaving school? • Is he experiencing more than one feeling? If so, list them. • What particular words and phrases in the extract suggest those feelings to you? 	
<p>b) Friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you understand about the relationship between the narrator Stephen and his friend Adeline (Del)? • What is implied about how close they are? • What do they have in common? • What does Stephen notice about Del in the extract and how <i>she</i> might be feeling about the end of school? 	
<p>c) Music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Stephen and Del spend time listening to music on the school field rather than leaving school straightaway? What is your evidence for this? • Do you think the music they are listening to is important? Are there any clues in the way the narrator describes the music that suggest this? 	

Nelson creates a poetic quality in this extract to portray the feelings of the characters and the atmosphere of their final school day. This is achieved through the writer's use of structure and particular language features.

Activity 2: Paired work

Work with a partner to find examples of the features listed in the table.

Then, add notes on how you are affected by those choices: what do they make you imagine or see in your mind's eye? How do they make you feel? How do you respond to the choice? What does each choice make you think of? Why might the writer have made this choice?

Language or structural feature or technique	Precise example(s) from the extract	The possible effects: what do I think of, feel or imagine? How do I respond? Why might the writer have made these choices?
a) Interesting choices of verbs and verb phrases		
b) Use of dialogue		
c) Cyclical structure/ repeated sentence		

Challenge questions

1. The narrator uses music as a backdrop to the scene he describes in the extract. How could music be seen as an **extended metaphor** in the extract? What might it represent when Stephen thinks of 'what it might mean to fall forwards into the vastness of possibility'?
2. How many references can you find in the extract connected to quietness or silence? How might this recurring **motif** help us to understand the feelings of the two characters?

Activity 3: Individual creative writing

Taking inspiration from your exploration of the extract from *Small Worlds*, choose **one** of the following creative responses to plan and write.

Either:

- Describe a special moment or event in your own life that you have shared with a friend or group of close friends. Aim to create the atmosphere of that moment or event by using some of the techniques you have explored in *Small Worlds*. If you had to provide a soundtrack to your description, what would it be? Aim to include a reference to this in your writing.

Or:

- Take this sentence from *Small Worlds* and use it as the opening line for a short story: 'The air vibrates with something large and unknown, something which shimmers and shines, something which excites and terrifies.'

You may write in any genre you prefer, for example, romance, mystery, science fiction.

The Girl with the Louding Voice by Abi Daré

This first part of the extract is from the opening of a novel where we meet Adunni, who is fourteen years old and lives with her father and two brothers – one older and one younger – following the death of her mother. Her mother's greatest wish was for Adunni to be educated so that she could have a secure and fulfilling life.

This morning, Papa call me inside the parlour.

He was sitting inside the sofa with no cushion and looking me. Papa have this way of looking me one kind. As if he wants to be flogging me for no reason, as if I am carrying shit inside my cheeks and when I open my mouth to talk, the whole place be smelling of it.

'Sah?' I say, kneeling down and putting my hand in my back. 'You call me?'

'Come close,' Papa say.

I know he want to tell me something bad. I can see it inside his eyes; his eyeballs have the dull of a brown stone that been sitting inside hot sun for too long. He have the same eyes when he was telling me, three years ago, that I must stop my educations. That time, I was the most old of all in my class and all the childrens was always calling me 'Aunty'. I tell you true, the day I stop school and the day my mama was dead is the worst day of my life.

[...]

'Community rent is thirty thousan' naira, 'Papa say. 'If we cannot pay the money, we must find another place to live.' Thirty thousand naira is very plenty money. I know Papa cannot find that money even if he is searching the whole of Nigeria because even my school fees money of seven thousand, Papa didn't have. It was Mama who was paying for school fees and rent money and feeding money and everything money before she was dead.

'Where we will find that kind money?' I ask.

'Morufu,' Papa say. 'You know him. He came here yesterday. To see me.'

'Morufu the taxi driver?' Morufu is a old man taxi driver in our village with the face of a he-goat. Apart from his two wives, Morufu is having four childrens that didn't go to school. They just be running around the village stream in their dirty pant, pulling sugar cartons with string, playing *suwe* and clapping their hand until the skin about to peel off. Why was Morufu visiting our house? What was he finding?

'Yes' Papa say with a tight smile. 'He is a good man, that Morufu. He surprise me yesterday when he say he will pay community rent for us. All the thirty thousan'.'

'That is good?' I ask the question because it didn't make sense. Because I know that no man will be paying for another somebody's rent unless he is wanting something. Why will Morufu pay our community rent? What was he wanting? Or is he owing Papa money from before in the past? I look my papa, my eyes filling with hope that it is not the thing I am thinking. 'Papa?'

‘Yes.’ Papa wait, swallow spit and wipe his front head sweat. ‘The rent money is ... is among your *owo-ori*.’

‘My *owo-ori*? You mean my bride price?’ My heart is starting to break because I am only fourteen years going fifteen and I am not marrying any foolish stupid old man because I am wanting to go back to school and learn teacher work and become a adult woman and have moneys to be driving car and living in fine house with cushion sofa and be helping my papa and my two brothers. I don’t want to marry any mens or any boys or any other person forever so I ask Papa again, talking real slow so he will be catching every word I am saying and not mistaking me in his answer: ‘Papa, is this bride price for me or for another person?’

And my papa, he nod his head slowly slow, not minding the tears standing in my eyes or the opening wide of my mouth, as he is saying: ‘The bride price is for you, Adunni. You will be marrying Morufu next week.’

—

The second part of the extract is from much later in the novel. Having escaped from her forced marriage, Adunni finds herself in the city of Lagos, working as a housemaid for a demanding employer. She becomes aware of a scholarship programme for domestic workers and decides to pursue her dream, supported by Ms Tia, one of her employer’s neighbours, who treats Adunni kindly.

‘What you see in me, Ms Tia?’

She shake her head, hold my two hand up, make it like two bars, so she can peep my face, the real me behind the bars. It feel like she is climbing out of herself and entering my own soul, my heart.

‘Tell me, what do you want most in life?’ she ask.

‘For my mama to not be dead,’ I say, my voice breaking. ‘For her to come back and make everything better.’

‘I know,’ she say with a soft, sad smile. ‘I know, but can you think of something else you want?’

‘To go to school,’ I say. ‘And now, to win the scholarship.’

‘Why is this so important to you, Adunni?’

‘My mama say education will give me a voice. I want more than just a voice, Ms Tia. I want a louding voice,’ I say. ‘I want to enter a room and people will hear me even before I open my mouth to be speaking, I want to live in this life and help many people so that when I grow old and die, I will still be living through the people I am helping. Think it, Ms Tia. If I can go to school and become a teacher, then I can collect my salary and maybe even build my own school in Ikati and be teaching the girls. The girls in my village don’t have much chance for school. I want to change that, Ms Tia, because those girls, they will grow up and born many more great people to make Nigeria even more better than now.’

Ms Tia is nodding her head yes as I am talking. ‘You can do it,’ she say. ‘God has given you all you need to be great, and it sits right there inside of you.’ She drop my hands, point a finger to my chest. ‘Right inside your mind, in your heart. You believe it, I know you do. You just need to hold on to that belief and never let go. When you get up every day, I want you to remind yourself that tomorrow will be better than today. That you are a person of

value. That you are important. You must believe this, regardless of what happens with the scholarship. Okay?’

I look deep into Ms Tia’s eyes, at the spot of something gold in the brown of her eyeballs and my heart sort of melt. I know she is saying all this from the good of her soul, but it is not so easy when you are born into a life of no money and plenty suffering; a life you didn’t choose for yourself. Sometimes I wish I can just believe for a good life and it will magic and happen for me, just like that. But maybe, to believe it in my mind is the start, so I nod my head, drag it real slow up and down as I am saying: ‘Tomorrow will be better than today. I am a somebody of value.’

By Abi Daré

Glossary

naira: the Nigerian currency; 30 000 naira equates to approximately £15.00 currently

suwe: a game similar to hopscotch

About the author, text and context

Abi Daré was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She came to the UK to study law at the University of Wolverhampton. A storyteller from childhood, she went on to complete an MA in Creative Writing in London, where an early version of *The Girl with the Louding Voice* was part of her project work. It was eventually published in 2020 as her first novel and went on to be shortlisted for several awards.



If you liked this...

You may enjoy reading the rest of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, to find out what happens to Adunni, and the novel’s sequel, *And So I Roar* (2024).

You could read the classic American coming-of-age novel *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, which is told in a series of letters and narrated through the unique ‘voice’ of Celie, a young Black girl born into poverty during segregation. It is a moving story of resilience and survival, and was adapted into film in 1985 and 2023.

You could also try reading *Purple Hibiscus*, the debut novel of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a coming-of-age story about a fifteen-year-old girl, Kambili, growing up in a wealthy but strict household. It may also be interesting to watch Adichie’s TED talk ‘The Danger of a Single Story’, which explores how harmful it can be to have stories that only provide one perspective on a people or culture.

The House on Mango Street (1984) by Mexican-American author Sandra Cisneros, is a novel told in a series of lively short stories about Esperanza, a 12-year-old Chicana girl growing up in the Hispanic quarter of Chicago; she faces – and rises above – many hardships and harsh realities.

The Canadian classic novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by Lucy Maud Montgomery is about an orphan, Anne, who is adopted by an elderly brother and sister who were expecting to adopt a boy to help on their farm. She is spirited, imaginative and surprising. There is also an enjoyable Netflix adaptation of the novel, *Anne with an E* (2017–19).

Learning objectives:

- To explore extracts from the beginning of a novel, and to see the development of the character and issues raised through collaborative discussion, inferential reading and stylistic choices
- To develop opportunities for academic, critically evaluative writing and/or research from a literary or linguistic perspective

Assessment objectives:

- GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO4, AO5, AO6 and AO8

Resources:

- Extract 2
- Worksheets 2a and 2b
- Mini-whiteboards; large sheets of paper

Thematic links:

- Family and loss
- Child marriage
- Dreams and opportunity
- Ambition
- Resilience
- Power of education

Possible sensitivities

The extract deals with the difficult topic of forced child marriage to a much older man, as well as experiences of poverty and barriers to accessing education. The text also gives voice to the main characters' non-standard English and authentic expression, which will require sensitive discussion and reading.

Getting started

- Begin by sharing definitions of standard and non-standard English with students and discuss what we associate the form of standard English with. Student responses might include: formal; polite; associated with education; understood widely (globally); uses what are perceived as correct grammatical rules. There are several online definitions and videos that support this exploration, for example, you could refer students to 'Using standard and non-standard English' on BBC Bitesize. You might also go on to consider what students understand by non-standard English and how they feel about those definitions.
- Using mini-whiteboards, give students the following three closed questions:
 - (1) Does the use of standard English matter for your future?
 - (2) Does a good level of education matter for your future?
 - (3) Do we take our access to education for granted?

Cold-call on some students to explain and develop their responses, perhaps using this opportunity to gently raise and challenge any negative assumptions around non-standard English and potential barriers to education.

- Next, distribute and introduce **Extract 2** before reading the first part of the extract aloud. There is an audiobook available, narrated by Adjoa Andoh, which will help students to engage with and appreciate the richness of the author's creation of the narrator's authentic voice.
- Hand out copies of **Worksheet 2a**. Using the instructions for **Activity 1**, allow students in pairs a few minutes to re-read the first part of the extract. Then take their responses to the question of how Adunni's voice differs from standard English in a brief plenary. They may have noted differences in tenses, plurals and occasional unusual phrasing such as 'inside the sofa'. Establish through discussion that we still fully understand both characters and we also begin to develop a real sense of Adunni's character.

Exploring

- Move the pairs into small groups of four and allow time for the groups to thoroughly explore the first extract, collecting their thoughts and ideas for the five prompt questions in **Activity 1** on large sheets of paper. Take feedback from different groups as to their findings. For the final two questions, aim to encourage students to consider what is suggested or implied about the two men, as well as the specific effects of the words, phrases and features of language the author uses to elicit our response as readers.
- Next, return students into their pairs to close-read and annotate the two extracts for **Activity 2**, with a focus on the effect of the sentence structures. During feedback, encourage students to note the balance of questions/interrogatives to statements in the first extract, and how that helps us to see the pace at which Adunni's mind is working and her sharp ability to reach a realisation. Explore the number of clauses in the second lengthy, complex sentence and the fact they are presented without punctuation to

create the breathlessness of the character and show us Adunni's panic, anger and disbelief as well as a clear picture of what she wants for herself.

- In a short plenary that allows students some time to reflect on Adunni's situation and to share their personal responses to the situation in which this young teenage character finds herself.
- Carefully read aloud the next section of the extract, then allow time for students working in small groups to respond to the selected quotations in the table in **Activity 3** on **Worksheet 2b**. This activity encourages them to think about the development of Adunni's character and to show her determination and resilience. The quotations also raise important thematic issues to explore, such as the importance of self-belief along with the need for encouragement and support. The final quotation also raises the idea of the privilege Ms Tia has, which Adunni astutely recognises.

Responding

- Introduce **Activity 4**, which gives students a choice of approaches when responding to the text in an academic way – either through a critically evaluative exploration of the character, using the evidence and ideas gathered through the lesson(s), or through a related and individual linguistic response that considers students' own personal idiolect and spoken voice. Students' written responses to these tasks could be planned in plenary and then completed in a follow-up lesson, to allow time and space for development.

Explore further

- You could develop the initial lesson across a whole week; this would allow students to complete the work on the extract and the academic writing response on Adunni's character before they attempt the idiolect collaging. The collation of students' 'My Language History' findings would then create opportunity for a Spoken Language Endorsement presentation or classroom debate, which could lead into possible point-of-view writing on topics connected to the importance of standard English, own voice and individuality, and perhaps even the importance of preserving dialects or non-standard forms and varieties of English.
- There are several videos available online where students can 'meet' Abi Daré, including a short introduction to the novel by the author from both Waterstones and Penguin Random House.
- You could interleave teaching this unit with work on *Romeo and Juliet*, especially the scenes in Act 1 where Paris and Capulet discuss Juliet's marriage without her, Lady Capulet's expectations of Juliet compared to Adunni's late mother's wishes for her daughter, and Juliet's Act 3 response to the news she should marry Paris compared to Adunni's response to her father's announcement. You could compare and consider the wealth, cultural and time divide between the two girls and the different options that were open to them in order to make their own choices. You might also connect this exploration with the teaching of Browning's poem 'My Last Duchess' from the AQA Power and Conflict Poetry Anthology, considering the objectification of the Duchess and ideas around dowries and bride prices, again thinking about the divisions in wealth, culture and time both in terms of the experiences of the thirteen-year-old Lucrezia de' Medici and Browning's connection with Victorian gender conventions. You could combine this with an exploration of extracts from *The Marriage Portrait* (2022) by Maggie O'Farrell, which was shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2023. Students could consider what these connections tell us about the position of women and girls across cultures, across time and across different wealth divides.
- Students could explore statistics on child marriage in contemporary society, connecting Adunni's experience to the lived experience of many young girls worldwide. Several charities provide up-to-date facts, statistics and personal anecdotes, such as Plan International, Girls Not Brides, Save the Children and UNICEF. Students could research several websites, collating information and evidence from various sources, and go on to prepare for either a panel discussion, formal presentation or debate, or even script and record a group podcast on the topic; all such formats will provide them with opportunity to present their viewpoints on their findings.

Read the first part of the first extract with a partner. One of you should take the role of Adunni and read aloud her narrative and dialogue; the other should take the role of Papa and read aloud his dialogue. As you read, think carefully about the impact and effect of the characters' authentic voices and their use of non-standard English. Then note down **two** ways in which Adunni's voice differs from standard English.

1.

2.

Activity 1: Reading aloud in pairs

Working in a small discussion group, look again at the first part of the first extract, up to 'and everything money before she was dead.' Collect notes on your thoughts and ideas on the following questions. Be ready to feedback.

- What do we discover in this part of the text about Adunni's education so far?
- How might this help us to understand Adunni's use of non-standard English?
- Which of her parents does Adunni seem to admire the most? What is your evidence for this?

Now consider all of the first extract. Adunni writes in non-standard English but paints a vivid picture for us through her description. Look closely at how she describes Papa and Morufu, the taxi driver.

- What impression does Adunni create of her Papa? How do you feel about him based on Adunni's description?
- What impression does Adunni create of Morufu? How do you feel about him based on Adunni's description? Do you agree with Papa that 'He is a good man, that Morufu'?

Activity 2: First extract group discussion

Working in a pair, look closely at the two extracts below.

Think and share: what do you notice about the writer's choice of sentence structure here? Annotate each extract to show:

- what the sentence structure reveals about Adunni's thoughts and feelings
- how the choice of sentence structure helps to reveal more about Adunni's character.

"That is good?" I ask the question because it didn't make sense. Because I know that no man will be paying for another somebody's rent unless he is wanting something. Why will Morufu pay our community rent? What was he wanting? Or is he owing Papa money from before in the past? I look my papa, my eyes filling with hope that it is not the thing I am thinking. 'Papa?' [...]'?

... My heart is starting to break because I am only fourteen years going fifteen and I am not marrying any foolish stupid old man because I am wanting to go back to school and learn teacher work and become a adult woman and have moneys to be driving car and living in fine house with cushion sofa and be helping my papa and my two brothers.

Now look again at the final paragraph of the first extract. How do you respond personally to this news? How might you feel in Adunni's situation? Take a moment to jot down your responses.

Activity 3: Second extract group discussion

Working in a small group, consider these quotations from the second extract. In each case, use the prompt questions to discuss what is implied or suggested. Add your ideas to the table.

Quotation	Discussion prompts	Our ideas
<p>'I want a louding voice,' I say. 'I want to enter a room and people will hear me even before I open my mouth to be speaking, ...'</p>	<p>What does this tell us about Adunni's character?</p> <p>What do you think Adunni means by 'a louding voice'?</p> <p>What influence does Adunni want to have and why do you think it is important to her?</p>	
<p>'You just need to hold on to that belief and never let go ... That you are a person of value. That you are important.'</p>	<p>Why might this be an important message for Adunni? How might it help her?</p> <p>In what ways might this advice be more significant for Adunni because she is a girl?</p>	
<p>'I know she is saying all this from the good of her soul, but it is not so easy when you are born into a life of no money and plenty suffering; a life you didn't choose for yourself.'</p>	<p>What else does this reveal about Adunni? What does Adunni realise that Ms Tia perhaps does not consider?</p> <p>What is the writer's intention here by including this? What is the writer's possible message for us as readers?</p>	

Activity 4: Individual writing choice

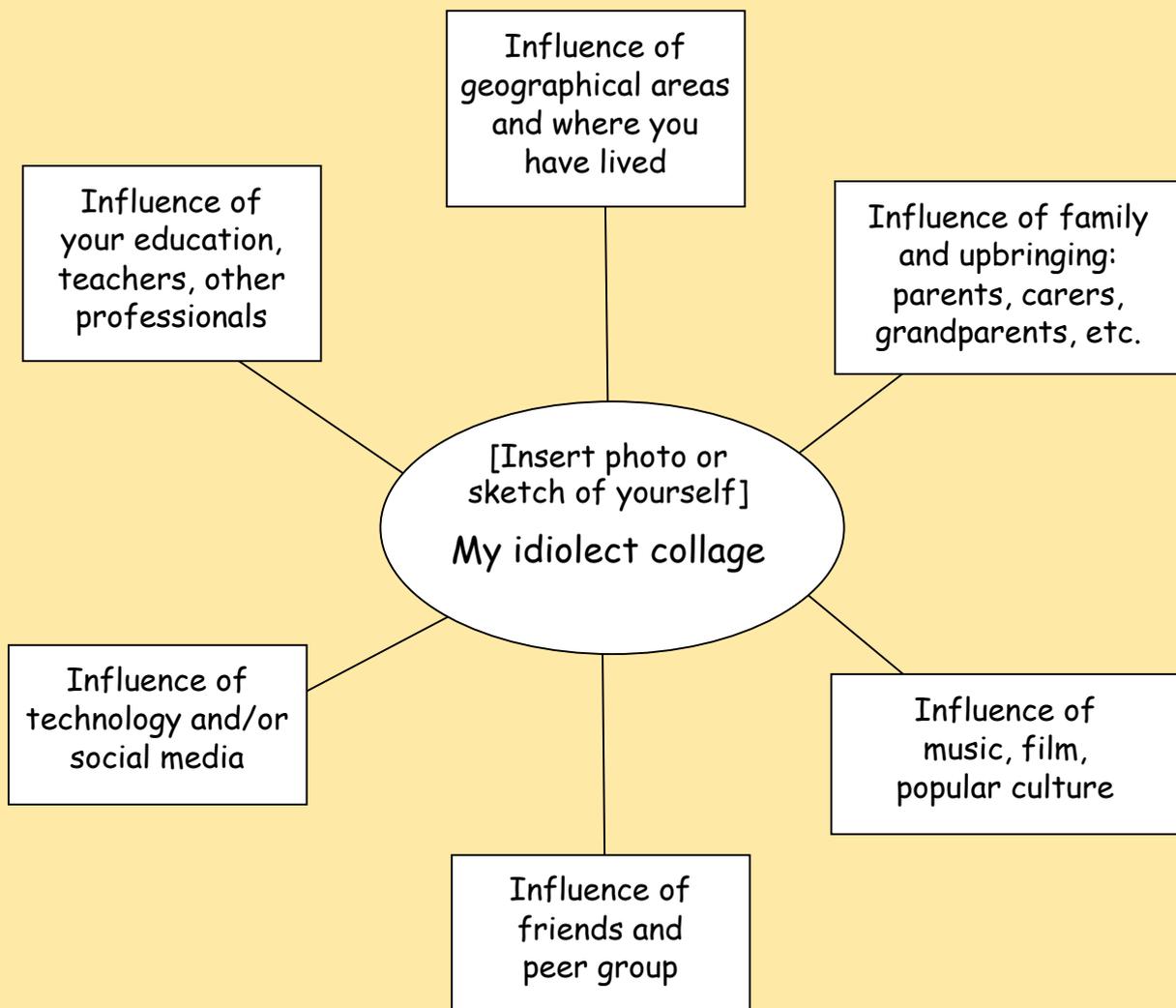
Choose **one** of the following responses.

Either:

- ‘Adunni is a fascinating, determined, sharp and funny character.’ Write an essay in which you consider:
 - a) your own impressions of Adunni’s character and what we learn about her life (AO1)
 - b) how the writer presents Adunni and gives her a unique ‘louding’ narrative voice (AO2).

Or:

- Your personal voice and vocabulary store is called your idiolect. Think about your own unique voice. What makes it up? Is English your first or an additional language? Do you have a particular accent or use dialect words? Do you have special words you use in your family or a ‘code’ you share with friends?
 - a) Create a collage on a large sheet of paper that maps your own personal idiolect. You could use the diagram below to help you get started.



- b) Write up your findings as a piece of writing with the title ‘My Language History’, in which you explore and explain all the influences that contribute to your ‘louding’ voice.

Diary of a Young Naturalist by Dara McAnulty

The first two diary entries – dated Friday, 1 June and Tuesday, 5 June – describe how the writer, Dara McAnulty, who has a keen interest in nature, is feeling as the school year draws to a close. In the third diary entry – dated Tuesday, 20 November – Dara has moved schools for the autumn term. His diary entries reveal some of the challenges he faces as an autistic teenager.

Friday, 1 June

The school week is over and I'm still haunted. I sit on the swing watching the adult garden birds to and fro at the feeders, to eat and dig in the earth before flying off to feed their young.

I have a weight on my tongue, and I've had it most the week. I haven't been able to speak. School is gearing up for exam time, yet again. Apparently these are the 'more important' exams because they'll have an impact on which GCSEs I can choose. The exams are no problem to me; I actually like sitting tests. I like the challenge, sort of, but they just seem to roll around so quickly and we don't learn enough new things in between. It's so frustrating and tiring. If I didn't write, if I didn't have a way to sort through and filter the fluffiness, the haziness, the overwhelming noise that constantly surrounds me, I think I would implode. All the pressures would crush me. Yet, I'm here and it's a Friday evening, and we're going pond dipping tomorrow.

I lean out of the bedroom window and watch intently as the harrying shapes flit at two-minute intervals. Back and forth. Diligent parents. No rest. It's a joyful time. The fledglings will be out soon, and the garden will be all action. A male bullfinch lands on the wall (we had one this morning too). Its round, coral breast is flamboyant against the grey of the stone. It's an ungainly form, plopping down to pluck the seeds of the dandelion heads. He repeats this a few more times and is joined by the dusky-pink-chested female. They converse in bubble and squeak. The male's silver back-plumage comes so close, I could reach out and touch it. The tail flicks closer still. I hold my breath, prepare myself, and at that exact moment a lawnmower drones, our encounter sucked away.

Tuesday, 5 June

The garden has blossomed in the warmth of these late spring days. So much light and sunshine, compensating for the heaving tiredness and exasperation that comes, for me, at the end of the school year. Friendship has always eluded me – what is it anyway? A collection of actions and words between two people or more, people who grow and change anyway. It's a good thing, apparently. That's what some people say. I don't have any experience, though. I mean, I play board games with a group at my school. We play, we deconstruct the game. We don't 'talk'. What is there to say?

Sometimes, I feel that if I start, I might not shut up. This has happened, lots of times. It doesn't end well. Kids in my class, they walk around town together, they might play football together or whatever other sport takes their fancy. They don't talk, though. They smirk and snigger at anyone who is different. Unfortunately, for me, I'm different. Different from everyone in my class. Different from most people in my school. But at breaktime today I watched the pied wagtails fly in and out of the nest. How could I feel lonely when there are such things? Wildlife is my refuge. When I'm sitting and watching, grown-ups usually ask if I'm okay. Like it's not okay to just sit and process the world, to figure things out and watch other species go about their day. Wildlife never disappoints like people can. Nature has a purity to me, unaffected. I watch the wagtail fly out and in again, then step a little closer. Peering in, I see that last week's eggs are now chicks. Tiny bright-yellow beaks, mouths opening and closing silently. This is the magic.

—

Tuesday, 20 November

I'd struggled to concentrate all day. Things have been going so well. I was really starting to enjoy my life here at school, so why was I putting my head above the parapet? Foolish. I couldn't help the urge, though. One of the history teachers had heard about my 'work' for nature and planted an idea, left it hanging in the air. It wouldn't go away so I convinced myself to try again.

I'd tried and failed so many times at so many other schools. No one ever turned up, except the odd well-meaning teacher whose interest would eventually wane, 'It's not really my thing'. It was after one such day of deflation, while I waited for an early lift home, that some kids started their taunting and baiting. They pushed and they shoved and my face was in gravel, a sulphurous bloom in my mouth. Quickly cleaned and easily explained to Mum – I bit my lip, I bumped into something, quirkily I missed a stair. And now I was about to try again. I have to start turning the anger into something.

When school ended, Lorcan and I made our way to the designated classroom. I can't remember what happened first, but I was aware of myself standing to speak and could hear my voice boom in my ears. I stood with the kids from different year groups, some younger, some older, fifteen in total (seventeen if you include Lorcan and me). They listened to me talk about why nature has become so important to me, how I store even the tiniest noticing so I can retrieve it on demand to help me navigate everyday life, and why, because of this, I want to stand up for wildlife, shout loudly about the wondrous things I've seen and learnt, all the magic that we can see if only we stop and look. Then I stopped and stared and started to breathe, and said we should go outside, which is what we did, in the waning light after school.

They followed me out of the car park, across the damp sports fields, out of school and into the trees and the presence of Slieve Donard, where I showed them lichen on bark and explained how it was an indicator of clean air and asked them if they felt lucky having a forest on our doorstep. And these mountains guarding us. The sea before us. Habitats of wild importance.

When we found some fungi I wanted to tell them how amazing it was for all living things, but the buzzing in my ears had started and was getting louder.

My heart raced. I could actually feel my brain disconnect as I tried too hard to process the questions they started asking. How should I read the way they're looking at me? Do they respect and enjoy the answers I give? The smells of the evening air and the rustling of the trees were becoming thunderous. The effort it took to stay with them, to stay focussed, was gargantuan. But it was worth it. None of the fifteen kids sneered. They didn't heckle. They looked at me, listening. They asked more questions, and before we called it a day and walked our separate ways, we were making plans and talking about when to meet next, calling ourselves an 'eco group', and figuring out what the aims should be. As everyone left, I could see my breath in the cold night air and felt the shape of a glow around me. The herring gulls and jackdaws had all roosted, the rooks were in the trees above. The oystercatchers piped their last notes to the dark.

By Dara McAnulty

Glossary

fledgling: a young bird not quite ready to leave the nest

plumage: the collection of feathers that covers a bird

Lorcan: Dara's brother

sulphurous: related to the chemical sulphur, suggesting a bitter or unpleasant taste

Slieve Donard: the highest mountain in Northern Ireland

About the author, text and context

The diary entries are taken from the first book by Dara McAnulty, published in 2020 when the author was just sixteen, living with his family in Northern Ireland. A keen conservationist and environmental activist, Dara's book shows us the seasons, at home, at school and in the natural world, through his eyes as an autistic teenager. It also reveals how the natural world helps Dara to process his experiences and show his extraordinary ability to describe with real sensitivity and close observation the natural world around him. The book made Dara the youngest person to win The Wainwright Prize for nature writing.

Since then, Dara has gone on to receive awards for his conservation work, including from BBC's *Springwatch*, whose presenter Chris Packham is also autistic. Dara has presented natural history programmes for the BBC both on radio and television, is an ambassador for the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Protection of Animals) and also became the youngest person to receive the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) medal for conservation.



If you liked this...

You could read the rest of *Diary of a Young Naturalist*. You could also try Dara's second publication, *Wild Child* (2023), which takes you on a guided nature walk by literally stepping out of your own front door.

You might also enjoy *Fingers in The Sparkle Jar* (2016) by BBC presenter Chris Packham, which is a memoir of growing up with a love of the natural world and his experiences as an autistic child and young adult.

Hamza Yassin – known for his role as Ranger Hamza on CBeebies, and who moved to the UK from Sudan when he was eight years old, knowing only four words of English – has crafted a beautifully illustrated guide to fifty of his favourite birds. *Be a Birder* (2023) was nominated for The Wainwright Prize in 2024; it encourages all of us to get outside and enjoy nature's benefits.

A gripping coming-of-age murder mystery novel about living in nature as a social outsider is *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) by Delia Owens, which has been adapted into a 2022 film starring Daisy Edgar-Jones.

Circe (2018), part of the Madeline Miller retellings of Greek myths, also contains some beautiful writing about the natural world. Circe is perceived as a strange child and is discovered to have the power of witchcraft, for which she is banished to a deserted island. As an outsider from the worlds of both the gods and the mortals, she discovers the power of the natural world, through herbs, plants and taming wild beasts.

You will discover many of the 19th-century Romantic poets' beautiful depictions of the natural world in the AQA Worlds and Lives Poetry Anthology, as well as depictions of the power of nature in the AQA Power and Conflict Poetry Anthology. You might also enjoy the more visceral and violent nature poetry of Ted Hughes, written in the 20th century. For more contemporary work, you could dip into the poetry collection *The Peace of Wild Things* (2018) by the American poet Wendell Berry.

Learning objectives:

- To explore a piece of contemporary non-fiction with a focus on developing knowledge about language and structure and their effects, as well as sensitive understanding of the narrator's thoughts and feelings
- To encourage sensitive personal and/or descriptive writing through personal choice and by reflecting on the stylistic choices of the studied extracts

Assessment objectives:

- GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO5, AO6 and AO8

Resources:

- Extract 3
- Worksheets 3a and 3b
- Notebooks, mini-whiteboards

Thematic links:

- School experience
- Friendship
- Identity
- Isolation
- The importance of the natural world

Possible sensitivities

The extract deals with the experiences of an autistic teenager and the way he relates to the world. It also describes his anxieties regarding school and his experiences of bullying.

Getting started

- Introduce the text and read aloud the diary entry for Friday, 1 June. Then hand out copies of **Worksheet 3a** and ask students to individually select two quotations to complete **Activity 1**. Take varied suggestions from around the group, drawing attention to the first sentence and the choice of the word 'haunted' and what that implies. Encourage students to reflect on the idea of feeling unable to speak and the 'weight on my tongue'. Sensitive ask students to consider that the writer is an autistic teenager, before reading the second diary entry from Tuesday, 5 June.

Exploring

- Direct students to work with a partner to complete **Activity 2** on the worksheet, a think/pair/share that requires them to explore the diary entries from June, making notes of their thoughts and findings in response to the five prompt questions. Take feedback in a whole-class plenary. Consider whether the anxiety Dara feels is something that may be common to all teenagers – does anyone share his feelings? Open the discussion to consider how journal writing seems to be helping Dara process his experiences and ask students whether this is anything they have ever done or tried. Is writing always a chore for them or a source of relaxation, pleasure or comfort? How is writing presented to them in school? Consider also the peace that Dara finds simply by watching the birds arriving at the nest. Prompt students to consider what kind of person the writer is and why that attracted the bullying and treatment he received. You could also consider why he hid this from his mum.
- Continuing to work in pairs, students now complete **Activity 3** on the worksheet, which gives them a chance to work on selection and thinking more closely about the vocabulary choices Dara makes. In consolidating their findings, encourage them to use a method that links to the skills descriptors for AO2 in the GCSE mark schemes, and to show their knowledge about language and their skills in commenting on effect. This creates an opportunity to check knowledge through some live marking.
- Continue the exploration of Dara's diary by introducing the entry for Tuesday, 20 November, reminding students that in the autumn term Dara has changed schools. Read the extract aloud.
- Next, hand out copies of **Worksheet 3b** and ask students to complete **Activity 4** individually before sharing their thoughts with the class. This work could also be done on mini-whiteboards. Lead students to deduce that Dara has opted to give a talk on something he is knowledgeable about. Ask students how they feel about giving talks or speaking in front of others – for example, in their GCSE Spoken Language Endorsement. What barriers do they face? What additional barriers might Dara face because of his neurodiversity and as a result of his previous experiences?

- Now organise students into small groups of three or four to work closely on **Activity 5**, which explores the linguistic and structural choices Dara has made in constructing his sensitively written piece. Use the opportunity to consolidate more knowledge about language and structure via the emboldened subject terminology. Working in small groups will help students to build confidence in exploring language and structure and seeing different possibilities for the effects of the choices. Move around the groups, offering support and prompts in recapping and revising subject knowledge. Allow time for a generous plenary session, to allow for sharing of some of the more interesting ideas you have observed students making.

Responding

- Introduce **Activity 6** on **Worksheet 3b**, which gives students a choice of writing tasks. The writing task could be planned as a homework exercise and/or completed in a follow-up lesson, to allow time and space for thought, planning and development.

Explore further

- There are several videos available online where students could ‘meet’ Dara McNulty to add value to the extracts when reading them. These include an interview by Chris Packham for the Waterstone’s podcast and an interview with Julia Bradbury when Dara won The Wainwright Prize for his diary.
- You could go on to complete some comparative work using an extract from Chris Packham’s memoir *Fingers in The Sparkle Jar* (2016), looking at the similarities in the way Chris, who openly discusses living with autism, took refuge in the world of nature as a child and was similarly bullied and treated as an outsider. The language of Chris’s memoir is especially rich and exciting to explore.
- Alternatively, you could link this text with the teaching of nature poetry from the GCSE English Literature anthologies. Useful texts which provide comparative links could be found in *Power and Conflict*, for example Seamus Heaney’s ‘Storm on the Island’ or Wordsworth’s ‘Extract from, The Prelude.’ In *Worlds and Lives* you might consider Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ and Antrobus’s ‘With Birds You’re Never Lonely’.
- Neurodiversity Celebration Week is generally held in March. There are various resources available from the Neurodiversity Celebration Week website, as well as information to help students understand different types of neurodiversity and recordings showing the perspectives of young people on neurodiversity.
- *NeurodiVERSE* is an anthology of poetry by neurodivergent writers, which was published by Flapjack Press in 2022. Reading poems by neurodivergent writers would create the opportunity to interleave some unseen poetry work with the exploration of Dara’s diary entries.
- Dara uses writing to help him process his thoughts and experiences. Many writers advocate ‘morning pages’ as a way of enhancing creative thinking and exercising our writing ‘muscles’. Though many schools have introduced the idea of reading aloud in form time ‘for pleasure’, do we offer the same opportunities for personal writing? Consider setting up a week of mindful journalling for students – perhaps in form time, to begin each day or to begin English lessons over a week or fortnight. How does this meditative activity help students to focus, to process their anxieties, to improve concentration and behaviour, and to alleviate stress before mock exams?

Activity 1: Selecting quotations

Look again at the diary entry for Friday, 1 June. Select **two** quotations from this part of the text that shows you that Dara has had a difficult week at school.

1.

2.

Activity 2: Think, pair, share

Work with a partner to explore the diary entries for Friday, 1 June and Tuesday, 5 June by discussing and answering the following questions. Make notes of your findings in your notebook.

1. What is causing the writer to feel anxious on Friday, 1 June?
2. What do you think Dara means when he says: 'If I didn't write ... I think I would implode.' What does this suggest about how he feels when he is in school?
3. How are things different for Dara when he looks out of his bedroom window?
4. What things does Dara find easy and what things does he seem to find difficult?
5. What impression is given of Dara's classmates?

Activity 3: Exploring the author's language choices

Now look more closely at the language Dara uses to describe his experiences. Is there a contrast between the way he describes life at school and how he describes the world of nature?

Create **two** mind maps in your notebook to help you to draw some conclusions. You could start like this:



Then write 2–3 sentences explaining your findings. Aim to show some knowledge about language and explain the effect of Dara's choices on you as a reader. How do they help us to understand more about the writer? You could organise your response logically; for example, you could start like this:

The writer uses abstract nouns, for example, 'tiredness and exasperation', to help us as readers feel the impact that school has on him and how it affects him physically and emotionally. It makes me feel that perhaps every day is very draining for Dara.

Diary of a Young Naturalist by Dara McAnulty

Activity 4: Language focus

In the extract from *Tuesday, 20 November*, Dara is settled into his new school, but the opening paragraph suggests he is anxious about something. What do you think is causing Dara to worry? What decision has he made? Jot down your ideas in your notebook.

Activity 5: Exploring language and structural techniques

Look carefully at the selected extracts below from *Tuesday, 20 November*. Working in a small group, use the question prompts to explore the different methods that Dara uses to bring this experience to life. Annotate each extract with your ideas.

It was after one such day of deflation, while I waited for an early lift home, that some kids started their taunting and baiting. They pushed and they shoved and my face was in gravel, a sulphurous bloom in my mouth.

- What do you notice about the choice of **verbs** here?
- What do they tell us about how Dara was treated at this school?
- How do you respond to the **noun phrase** 'a sulphurous bloom'?
- What is this a **metaphor** for?

They listened to me talk about why nature has become so important to me, how I store even the tiniest noticing so I can retrieve it on demand to help me navigate everyday life, and why, because of this, I want to stand up for wildlife, shout loudly about the wondrous things I've seen and learnt, all the magic that we can see if only we stop and look.

- What kind of sentence is Dara using here?
- How many different ideas does it contain?
- How might it communicate to us his enthusiasm? Can you 'hear' the voice of the writer here?
- What sense of **pace** do you get?
- How do you respond to the two **noun phrases** 'the tiniest noticing' and 'the wondrous things'?
- Why do you think Dara uses the **abstract noun** 'magic'? Where have you seen this before and what does it tell us about Dara?

My heart raced. I could actually feel my brain disconnect as I tried too hard to process the questions they started asking. How should I read the way they're looking at me? Do they respect and enjoy the answers I give? The smells of the evening air and the rustling of the trees were becoming thunderous.

- What is the impact here of the **simple sentence**?
- What do the **questions** help you to understand about Dara and his feelings?
- Why do you think Dara chose the **adjective** 'thunderous'?

As everyone left, I could see my breath in the cold night air and felt the shape of a glow around me. The herring gulls and jackdaws had all roosted, the rooks were in the trees above. The oystercatchers piped their last notes to the dark.

- How does the focus change in this final section?
- What cluster of **nouns** do we become conscious of? How does this change the atmosphere?
- How might you describe the **tone** of this final section? Why do you think Dara closes his diary entry with this memory?

Activity 6: Individual writing choice

Choose **one** of the following responses to plan and write. You could use Dara's writing style as a model.

Either:

- Create a piece of non-fiction personal writing where you describe a time from your life where you faced one of your fears or moved out of your comfort zone, like Dara did when he was giving his talk. Think carefully about how you can use vocabulary choices and particular sentence structures for effect, to communicate how you felt at the time.

Or:

- In his diary, Dara tells us 'Wildlife is my refuge.' Think about a place that makes you feel peaceful, or where you can escape to when you need to relax. It could be an aspect of the natural world such as a park, a forest or woodland, or a place you have been on holiday; it could be a building like a library or sports club, or even your own room. Write a description of the place, thinking carefully about your vocabulary choices and the small details – 'the tiniest noticing' which reveals to the reader why this place might be your refuge.

This extract is from the memoir of Dr Katriona O'Sullivan. In this extract, Katriona's younger brother is being left at primary school for the first time.

Matthew lost his mind. He kicked the table and the chair, and the assistant teachers ran in circles after him as he slid and burrowed between other pupils in a bid to escape. Other children started crying too.

Then my teacher, Mrs Arkinson, came through the door with her brown leather book bag in one hand and her coat in the other. She stood for a moment taking in the screaming, hissing mess that was my brother. She raised a finger and with a firm 'Ah-ah!' she stopped him in his tracks. He looked at her, and she shook her head. 'There will be NO running in my classroom,' she said. 'Sit down.'

And he did. Although he still cried the whole day, face down into his arm at his desk. And every other day that year. He hated being away from my mum.

I didn't understand that at all and, frankly, I was raging. I was so happy to be going back to school after the summer. I liked the way things were set out there, always the same. And we got fed, with school dinners. If it wasn't for school I wouldn't have had a dinner, if I'm honest. Sometimes I would be given breakfast by Mrs Arkinson, if I was in the class early enough, before the others came in. Mrs Arkinson had a blue-and-orange metal cupboard and sometimes she would bring out a lunchbox from in there and pass me a bun or a fairy cake to get me through to lunch. But most days, by the time I heard the shutters of the canteen going up, the rumble echoing through the halls, my stomach would be growling and I'd lose concentration for whatever I was doing and instead focus on the delicious smells that wafted down from where the dinner ladies were setting up. There were five of them, dressed in white coats and hats, and they'd call out to you as you queued up, letting you know what was in. The queue never moved fast enough for me. There was a routine to school dinners, the same meal on the same day, and the food was made in big trays. Shepherd's pie, chicken pie, and mince and onions – that was my favourite – served with mashed potato and gravy poured on top from a big ladle. We would get roly-poly pudding on Thursdays. Other kids, the loved ones, they sometimes complained, but I didn't give a shit what was served, I'd have eaten anything. My mouth would water in advance as I moved up the queue, watching the dinner ladies slap portion after portion on to tray after tray until they got to me. The clank of knives and forks, the little cartons of milk, the good food: this was routine, every day the same. I would hear the call of 'Custahhd! Custahhd!' from the dinner lady at the end, a huge Cypriot woman with a strong accent, and feel at home. I would sit down at the plastic picnic-style tables, always the same one – across from two boys, both called Adam – and eat my food contentedly. The routines of school – the desk where I knew to sit, the timetable, my school dinners – that was what I needed.

I liked school. There was a place for me there. My name was on a list – Mrs Arkinson always checked if I was there and would tick my name.

By Katriona O’Sullivan

About the author, text and context

Dr Katriona O’Sullivan is a leading academic who, along with her siblings, grew up in abject poverty as the child of heroin addicts and faced numerous traumas and challenges. Pregnant at 15, and on the verge of homelessness, Katriona nevertheless went on to enrol in a university Access Programme at Trinity College, Dublin. She went on, not only to complete her degree, but also her PhD to become a Doctor of Psychology.



If you liked this...

You could read the memoir *My Name is Why* (2019) by the poet Lemn Sissay, who grew up in foster care, followed by six years in care homes before learning that his birth mother had been pleading for his safe return since his birth. It is a true story of his journey from neglect and cruelty to become the creative and inspiring poet he is today.

You might also like *My Name is Leon* (2016) by Kit de Waal, a novel set in the 1980s that tells the story of Leon, a young boy of mixed ethnic background who becomes a foster child and is separated from his baby brother Jake, who is white. The novel traces Leon’s challenges and brave journey to reunite his family.

The novel *Money Hungry* (2001) by Sharon G. Flake tells the story of thirteen-year-old Raspberry Hill, who is driven to do all that she can to make money – wash cars, clean houses – in order to overcome her fear of homelessness following a period of rough sleeping and achieve her dream of moving with her mother out of ‘the projects’ (a slang term for government-owned public housing developments in the USA).

Ghost (2016) by Jason Reynolds tells the story of gifted track runner, Castle Cranshaw, whose abusive father has been imprisoned. He finds a mentor in a former Olympic medallist to have the chance to change his life.

Elizabeth Acevedo’s novel *With the Fire on High* (2019) is also a story of resilience and ambition for teenage mother Emoni, who works to finish her education and pursue her dream of becoming a chef – which she feels is only a dream because of her difficult economic situation.

Learning objectives:

- To critically explore a piece of non-fiction prose, examining inferences and language choices both collaboratively and individually
- To respond to the text in written form, making vivid stylistic choices to describe or present a character and viewpoint

Assessment objectives:

- GCSE English Language AO1, AO2, AO5 and AO6, AO8

Resources:

- Extract 4
- Worksheet 4a and 4b
- Large sheets of paper, pens

Thematic links:

- School experience
- Family
- Identity and belonging
- Poverty

Possible sensitivities

The extract deals with ideas connected to poverty and the neglect of a young child. In particular, it concerns references to food poverty and the author’s difficult family life and upbringing as the child of drug addicts.

Getting started

- Working with the whole class, ask students to jot down their earliest memory of school. This could be done on mini-whiteboards to encourage participation. Develop the question by following up with a question about their feelings. Were they happy to go to school or unhappy? What were their favourite things about primary school? Their least favourite? Did they have a teacher they remember well?
- Give out copies of **Extract 4** and set the scene using the information about the author and context. Read the extract aloud. Take some initial responses to the text. Are students surprised by the focus of the passage (for example, it does not mention toys, books, reading on the carpet, friends, playgrounds)?

Exploring

- Organise the class into small groups of no more than five. Hand out copies of **Worksheet 4a**. Using the groupings on the worksheet for **Activity 1**, allocate each of your groups 1, 2 and 3 a key idea to explore, along with large sheets of paper and pens to collate their responses. Allow time for the groups to re-read the extract and consider their allocated prompt questions. Move around the class offering support and prompts where needed. This activity will promote sensitive class discussion as well as building confidence for students in thinking about and exploring non-fiction texts in depth.
- Bring the class together and allow time for all the groups to feedback their responses to the bulleted prompts. Ensure discussion of the following points:
 - *Group 1: how significant Mrs Arkinson is to Katriona – for her care, consideration of the fact she may be hungry and not have had breakfast, and for the structure she provides.*
 - *Group 2: the importance of the pre-lunchtime sounds for Katriona; her vivid descriptions of the way the dinner ladies look; her preference for the potentially stodgy ‘comfort food’, and the striking descriptions – even down to the sounds of the cutlery and the voice of the lady serving the custard.*
 - *Group 3: the idea that school seems to provide Katriona with security; the importance of school for providing a routine she can rely on – implying perhaps that her home life is more chaotic and confusing for her; she seems to relish the order and feels safe in the environment.*
- Following the group work, hand out copies of **Worksheet 4b** and ask students to complete **Activity 2** independently. They may draw on ideas from the group discussion, but lead them to consider the writer’s intention here: what message is she giving about the school environment and how it can/should help to nurture a vulnerable child such as Katriona? Encourage students to develop their language knowledge and draw attention to:
 - the non-finite verb ‘growling’ and the abstract noun ‘concentration’ (quotation 1)
 - the evocative noun phrases ‘the loved ones’ and its implications for how Katriona feels about herself (quotation 2)
 - the emotive reference to ‘a place’ and the importance of the inclusivity of ‘My name’ (quotation 3).

Responding

- Introduce **Activity 3**, which gives students a choice of writing tasks based on the extract to play to their strengths. These could be planned in plenary and then completed in a follow-up lesson, to allow time and space for development. For the dramatic monologue task, you could model an opening to illustrate the way a 'voice' for the teacher could be created.

Explore further

This lesson could be completed over the course of a week, using an extract from later in the text as a contrast if this is suitable for your context. Later extracts, for example, deal with Katriona's experiences at secondary school and teenage pregnancy.

Alternatively, you could complete comparative work using the resources from the 'Stories' page of the BBC Children in Need website or the End Child Poverty website, which provides statistics on child poverty and accounts of alternative lived experience by their Youth Ambassadors. For example:

'There is a narrative that the parents of those growing up in child poverty are lazy, and do not work hard enough and so therefore their children must "deserve" to grow up so deprived. My single mother is the hardest worker I have ever known, I am so proud of the sacrifices she has made to get to where she is today.'

Students could complete further research about food poverty in the UK leading to presentations about the importance of food in school, for example, via breakfast clubs, school lunches and perhaps even sandwiches or snacks at the end of the school day. Students could consider the impact on learning this might have and debate or develop a panel discussion on the quality and cost of school food. This could culminate in a series of 'real' letters to a local MP.

You could retain the dramatic monologue task for all students to attempt following a 'hot seating' activity with teacher or student in role as Mrs Arkinson. The humorous but poignant short film 'Always the Teacher, Never the Bride' from the Staffroom Monologues series (available online) makes a useful model of the perspective of the primary school teacher and setting.

You are going to work in a small group to discuss and explore a key idea in the text in close detail. Record all your thoughts and findings ready to feed back.

Activity 1: Group 1

Look back through the whole text thinking about this key question:

How important is the teacher Mrs Arkinson to Katriona?

As a group you should consider:

- how Mrs Arkinson responds to Katriona's brother, and why Katriona is 'raging' at Matthew's behaviour
- what is implied by the fact Katriona's teacher gives her 'a bun or a fairy cake' before the other pupils arrive – what must the teacher know about Katriona?
- what it is that Katriona likes about the way Mrs Arkinson runs her classroom
- what it might mean to Katriona that Mrs Arkinson 'always checked if I was there'

Activity 1: Group 2

Look back through the whole text thinking about this key question:

How important are the school dinners to Katriona?

As a group you should consider:

- what we know about Katriona and how she is feeling by lunchtime each day
- the precise details by which Katriona remembers the dinner ladies
- Katriona's memories of 'the good food' compared to how some of the other children responded to it, and the precise dishes she remembers the most – what do they have in common?
- how Katriona uses different senses and techniques of language to describe dinner time. What is the effect or impact of this as we read? How do we feel? What are we led to imagine?

Activity 1: Group 3

Look back through the whole text thinking about this key question:

How important is the pattern of the school day to Katriona?

As a group you should consider:

- why Katriona is happy to be going back to school and what this implies about her life outside of school
- why Katriona is content to have 'the same meal on the same day' and the fact she likes to sit on the same table – what does this suggest?
- how many references there are in the extract to 'routine' and things being consistent. Why might that be important to her? How might this help Katriona to feel safe? What does it imply about her life at home?

Katriona O'Sullivan is writing her memoir as an adult looking back and reflecting on her time in primary school. Interestingly, she doesn't mention the classwork they did at all.

Activity 2: Key quotations

Now that you have listened to the feedback from the group discussions, look again at these key quotations and annotate them with your thoughts. Consider:

- a) What does each quotation suggest about what might be the most important things a child needs to be able to succeed?
- b) How does the choice of language in each of the quotations make you feel or respond? Which words, phrases or techniques have the most impact on you and why?

'...my stomach would be growling and I'd lose concentration for whatever I was doing ...'

'Other kids, the loved ones, they sometimes complained,'

'There was a place for me there. My name was on a list ...'

Activity 3: Individual writing

Choose **one** of the following responses.

- In the extract, the writer vividly describes a memory of food. Write your own descriptive food memory. This could be a dish that is important to you, from your family, your past or your culture. Who made the dish? Where was it served? Why is it so memorable and important to you? Use the senses and describe the colours, fragrances and textures for your reader.

Or:

- Mrs Arkinson is clearly an important figure in helping Katriona to feel safe and secure, and a strong role model. Choose an important person in your life, who is a strong influence or role model for you. Write a description of them, planning your piece so that your reader can picture them but also have a sense of their personality and why they are so important to you.

Or:

- Retell this memory from a different perspective. Write a dramatic monologue in character as Mrs Arkinson. How does she remember the opening incident with Katriona's brother? What are her thoughts about the little girl who is sometimes there 'before the others came in'? How might she reflect on teaching Katriona and share what she knows about her life?