

GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature Focus on:

Co-teachability

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Handouts
booklet



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Assessment Objectives

GCSE English Language	GCSE English Literature
AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.	AO1 Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response • use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.	AO2 Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3 Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.	AO3 Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.	AO4 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.
AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts	
AO6 Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation	

Integrating English Language and Literature

The article below by Marcello Giovanelli explores how an integrated approach to the teaching of language and literature can lead to a greater understanding of both, from Key Stage 3 through to A-level.

It first featured in autumn 2013 edition of AQA's *Voice* magazine and subsequently included in the 'Teaching an integrated Language and Literature course' CPD event (summer 2016).

A linguist deaf to the poetic functions of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistics are equally flagrant anachronisms.

Roman Jakobson (1960)

Despite the fact that these words were spoken over 50 years ago, it is curious that 'English Language' and 'English Literature' are still largely seen as discrete subjects, and, even when they are studied together seem to be part of a combined course - part 'lit' and part 'lang' - rather than a fully integrated one. The growth of A-level English Language over the last 20 years, with its emphasis on providing students with a practical and rigorous toolkit for a systematic analysis of texts, strongly suggests the value of language-based textual work. However all too often responses in literary studies ignore the essence of literature itself: language. Instead, they focus on biography, historical context and fantastical speculation about what authors might or might not have thought, felt and said. For students, this can have the unfortunate consequence that 'literature' becomes difficult to access without resorting to impressionism of their own or else relying on what critics or teachers say that texts 'mean'. The literary text remains somehow 'special' and uniquely creative compared to mundane 'everyday language'.

'Three hours ago he blundered up the trench'¹

There's plenty of subtle and sophisticated work that your students can do with this line, to develop their skills in literary criticism, simply by answering questions about language. For example, you could ask them:

1. The poem begins with the adverbial phrase 'three hours ago' placed at the front of the clause. This emphasises a time shift – the narrated events at the start of the poem happen three hours before the recounting time of the poem. Why is this important? What would be the effect if this were at the end of the clause?
2. The soldier is referred to using the third person pronoun 'he'. Why not use a proper noun or an extended noun phrase such as 'the young/old/tired soldier'? The use of the pronoun reduces the referent (the soldier) to the smallest possible and depersonalised lexical unit. However, 'he' (and other such pronouns) tends to be used when readers are able to access the intended referent without any difficulty ie they know who 'he' is. When they can't, we tend to use more specific terms such as common and proper nouns. So here, we have a paradox – an expression that both depersonalises and emphasises closeness. Why?
3. 'Blundered' suggests movement but of an awkward kind; 'up' is a preposition that suggests a certain kind of orientation (vertical rather than horizontal). Why not 'along the trench'? How does this preposition fit with the meaning of 'blundered'?

¹ This is the first line of Siegfried Sassoon's poem 'A working party', published in 1917.

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4. Sassoon uses 'the trench' rather than 'a trench'. As with 'he', 'the' tends to be used when the addressee/listener knows the referent or is near to it. So overall, why is the definite article used? Would it matter if it were called 'a trench' instead?

These questions get students thinking about how key aspects of style are important to consider when they interpret literature. Indeed, the fact that these features are significant is in itself a type of emphatic patterning known as foregrounding. Interpreting texts in this way also encourages a focus on teaching linguistic models and ideas in their own right. For instance, the examples I gave offer ways in to enquiry and learning about syntax, the pronoun system, semantics, prepositions and the motivation for using definite or indefinite articles. **They involve students exploring language features, asking questions about prominent patterns and choices, and considering the likely effect of alternative ones** (for a detailed exploration of the benefits of textual intervention see Pope, 1995; and also Madden, 2006, and Queneau, 2009).

Creativity in non-literary texts

Very briefly, I'd like to show how an integrated approach also leads to novel ways of looking at non-literary texts. A fully integrated 'English' denies sole privilege to literary discourse and sees an inherent value and creativity in everyday language (for a detailed discussion of this idea see Carter, 2004). An interesting example for students to look at would be a technique such as metaphor and explore its importance and use in non-literary discourse. Here are two examples: the first is from a George Osborne interview on the BBC website; the second is part of a conversation between two year 11 students about a forthcoming GCSE examination.

1. Britain is moving from rescue to recovery. But while the British economy is leaving intensive care, now we need to secure that recovery.

2. Akbar: so what you gonna revise for

Jack: well (.) Slim will come up (.) that's what Mr Jones reckons

Akbar: yeah (.) he thinks it will be there (.) I bet he's not right though

Jack: but (.) but I'm not going to risk it this year if it is there

Akbar: how would he know (1) he's just guessing

Metaphor works by mapping attributes from one concrete area of knowledge to another that is more abstract (see Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

In the first example, two metaphors are evident: the personification of the economy as a hospital patient; and the idea of a journey (moving/leaving from one place to another). Exploring why these metaphors were chosen in this example of political discourse can be just as intellectually demanding and satisfying as looking at metaphor in literary texts. Equally, in the second example, students can explore how the speakers co-construct an entire dialogue built around the metaphor 'life is a gamble'. Both texts show the inherent creativity in seemingly everyday discourse.

The way forward: an integrated English

The kind of work I have been describing is as easy to promote at Key Stage 3 as it is at A-level.

Indeed, one of the challenges of the future seems to me to offer students of all ages opportunities to engage in integrated work that can support rigorous, systematic and transparent analysis as a way of developing skills in areas of knowledge that might be seen as traditionally either more 'literary' or 'linguistic' in focus. This type of 'language and literature' work naturally resists compartmentalisation within the subject and instead sees the value in an integrated 'English'.

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Stylistic approach to reading: further examples

Here are two further examples illustrating a stylistic approach to reading:

Excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 1 Scene 1)

‘Madam, an hour before the worshipped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the east
A troubled mind drove me to walk abroad,
Where, **underneath the grove of sycamore**
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early waking did I see your son’
– Romeo and Juliet

Which line best invites a stylistic analysis?
What might your students choose to focus on?

Students often choose to focus on the line in bold and typically comment that:

- ‘syc’ sounds like (or is a homonym) for ‘sick’
- ‘amore’ means ‘love’ in Italian, the language native to Venice, Italy, where the play is set
- Romeo is therefore lovesick
- Romeo is a Petrarchan lover.

Students will be able to develop points further if we encourage them to interrogate the text and adopt a more exploratory mindset.

For example:

- Who says the line? To whom do they say it?
- How does this add meaning to the words?
- What time of the day is it? Why does this matter? What does it potentially signify?
- What actually is Petrarchan love? Who was Antonio Petrarch? In what ways does Romeo conform to Petrarchan love? When does he not confirm? Why?
- What contextual features can we introduce regarding the concept of Petrarchan love?
- Why’s the character (Benvolio) also awake an hour before the sun has risen? Why might he have a ‘troubled mind’?
- What’s the significance of the sycamore tree in literature?
- Where else is the sun used as a metaphor in the text?
- Where and when does Romeo transform from a Petrarchan lover into something else? What type of love might this be?

Remains by Simon Armitage

(see AQA poetry anthology)

For example:

What’s the effect of beginning ‘On another occasion...’?
What tense is the poem in? Where does it change? Why?
Identify all the militaristic language in the poem. What’s the effect? Why does the writer choose it?

Identify all the colloquialisms. Why does Armitage use them?
What does it mean to 'let fly'?
Why repeat 'I see'?
How does the speaker try to avoid taking personal responsibility?
How does Armitage present the speaker's inarticulacy?
What's the effect of words/verbs such as 'tosses' and 'carted'?
What's the volta/turning point of the poem? What's different after this point?
What's a 'blood shadow'?
What Shakespearean play is alluded to at the end of the poem? Why?

Planning an integrated curriculum

Activity 6: Thematic connections across English

Thematic/ connecting link	Fiction extracts	Non-fiction extracts	Literature text
(Re)presentation of women	<p><i>The Tiredness of Rosabel</i> by Katherine Mansfield (the presentation of Rosabel or the girl in the hat)</p> <p><i>The Other Side of the Dale</i> by Gervase Phinn (the presentation of Sister Brendan)</p> <p><i>The Silk Factory</i> by Judith Allnatt (the presentation of Rosie)</p>	<p><i>Boy Lost</i> (the presentation of the mother)</p> <p><i>On a bicycle on the streets of London</i> (the presentation of the Countess of Malmesbury)</p>	<p><i>An Inspector Calls</i> by J.B. Priestley (the presentation of Sheila)</p> <p><i>Poppies</i> by Jane Weir</p> <p><i>The Emigree</i> by Carol Rumens</p> <p><i>My Last Duchess</i> by Robert Browning</p>

Intertextuality and allusions: an example

Here is an example, using *The History Boys*, of how you might use the intertextual references/allusions within a text as a springboard for curriculum planning.

At the centre of the play is the character of Hector, arguably the hero of the text due to his name with its allusions to Greek mythology and his belief in knowledge for its own sake, making him a saviour in the face of 1980s league table accountability culture.

In the first act of the text, his belief in the 'otiose' (knowledge that serves no practical purpose) leads to numerous allusions.

Three other examples are below:

- Othello ('Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire')
- A.E. Housman ('The tree of man was never quiet')
- Thomas Hardy ('Drummer Hodge').

One option is to consider exploring these works in and of themselves.

- Looking at Hardy could lead to consideration of poets influenced by him – a study and discussion of Philip Larkin, W.B. Yeats, W.H. Auden or Robert Frost could prove fruitful.
- Equally, you might use Hardy as a springboard into poetry that's markedly different to it.
- An exploration of the Modernist movement, or that of the Beat poets could also prove interesting.
- These poets are evidently not diverse, which should be a further consideration.

If students don't know what a 'Renaissance Man' is, who Michelangelo, Plato and Oscar Wilde are, nor what is meant by the term 'shrunk violet', then they may fail to appreciate that the Headmaster's legitimate anger towards Hector is undermined by his narrow-minded argument.

If students don't know your (or the text's) terms of reference, or indeed the terms of reference in a piece of literature, they aren't part of 'the club'.

Collaborative classroom talk

Hobson (2002: 73) states, 'The world also has meanings for others, and the meaning for someone else can affect the meaning it has for me'. Such a statement can be applied to the texts – both Language and Literature – that we read, but also the concept of talk between peers. Students must speak, to think and talk together and with teachers, not just to understand a text, but to potentially understand more of themselves.

Much of this session on co-teachability has contemplated the nature of intertextuality.

- What is the meaning of the text to the self?
- What is the meaning of the text in relation to other texts?
- What is the place of the text in the wider world?
- What implications might the answers to these questions have for our curriculum offer?

The suggestion that the basis of all learning is through talking (see Alexander, 2004: 9) seems reasonable – can you learn if you cannot communicate? Can you communicate if you cannot talk? But then, can it be both a 'foundation' and a 'lifeline'?

If talk is the basis of learning, teachers should remain mindful that talking is an opportunity to develop thinking, where half-formed thoughts are teased out by teachers (and peers) into something more developed, without formal judgement and consequently less fear. Talking therefore enables all students to demonstrate expertise in a way that is not always as easily achieved in writing. Talking can be used as practice for the process of writing: if you can say it, you are likely able to write it too. We know, however, that the dynamics of the classroom can affect talk, especially if it is always public rather than in the comparative safety of peer discussion in pairs or groups.

One reason for talking in pairs and groups being a suitable method for exploration of English texts, rather than that of the whole class, is the issue of status. Chang and Wells (1988: 96) claim that those who participate in collaborative talk are often of similar status, each able to interchange the differing roles within conversation equally. This has implications for the role of teachers who sometimes have to enable students to talk in peer groups. For talk to be truly collaborative, responsibility for its direction and organisation is shared, so teachers must be prepared to cede control (see Howe, 1992: 35). When a teacher only directs classroom discussion from the front of the room, the shared responsibility of how talk happens is lost. This is not to say that whole class discussion is not useful – of course it is – more that peer discussion provides the safety net of being wrong in a less public forum.

Nor is this to say that teachers should not be involved in exploratory, collaborative talk when students converse with each other: Mercer suggests that students who think through problems and issues with their teachers make better progress (2000: 43). However, it's just that the very act of being a teacher, with a context where students may perceive you to be the arbiter of all knowledge, can alter the quality of the talk for the worse as well as for the better. Some teachers will no doubt recognise moments in their classrooms when some students who were speaking freely clam up when a member of staff joins the conversation, or even just noticeably eavesdrops. Consequently, teachers must be sensitive to their body language and physical location when in the classroom (see Alexander, 2004: 30).

Of course, pair/group work is effective only if students are thinking on similar lines and are even interested in doing so: just because students are working together in groups, it does not always translate to them collaborating (see Alexander, 2004: 11)

Talk of any kind, but particularly classroom talk, is difficult to make 'good' because of the dynamic; the constantly evolving social context; and the varied relationships, experiences and identities present. It is not a simplistic, linear process. For some students, explicitly 'handing over' responsibility for talk inhibits them, lost without any form of guidance, constrained by 'not knowing', in addition to the constraints of status within a group. Whilst the presence of a teacher could help create a safe space for the less confident children to feel able to contribute (see Rosen, 1971: 146), this is not always the case.

Classroom talk enables teachers to formatively assess the quality of students' thinking, corroborating the view that thought comes before language and is not determined by it (see Edwards and Mercer, 1987: 18). Furthermore, talk can be seen as a 'lifeline' for many students because it allows increased opportunity for less-able students to demonstrate their competency and progression in alternative ways (see Alexander, 2004: 38). This is not to say collaborative talk is easy: there will be just as many failings as successes in trying to achieve a shared understanding between students and teachers (see Edwards and Mercer: 1987).

However, just as writing is practised, so must talk be, for talk is the most time-efficient means of seeing what students think. The fact that 'growing up is an 'apprenticeship in thinking' (Mercer: 2000: 133) highlights that it is the role of the teacher to act as expert 'builder', providing the scaffolding for students to make progress so meaning can be made.

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Appendix

Activity 2: Language or Literature?

Content	Subject
'Some fairly obscure literary terminology is seen by some students to have intrinsic prestige and is often used incorrectly.'	GCSE English Literature
'There were some students who used historical contextual information unrelated to understanding the characters and events in the passage, and this was rarely helpful to the answer.'	GCSE English Language
'Spelling of key words, correct homophones, correct apostrophes, accurate sentence and speech punctuation are all core skills for this specification.'	GCSE English Language
'There are students who produce a number of very similar paragraphs, demonstrating the same level of achievement repeatedly, rather than moving their argument forward. These students might benefit from an appreciation of how an essay can be built, constructed and used as illustration of a point of view/response to a question.'	GCSE English Literature
'Less successful students retold the sequence of events.'	GCSE English Language
'Much more attention was paid to how writers have structured their texts and the impact this has on meaning. Students have also reflected very fruitfully on characterisation. There is a possibility that because terminology related to structure is less common, students are able to discuss structure with clarity and fluency, using simple terminology such as 'at the start/this changes when/in contrast...''	GCSE English Literature
'Students who succeed...are often those who have had the opportunity to read a wide range of non-fiction texts from different genres.'	GCSE English Language

Content	Subject
'Speculative comments on how 'the reader' might respond are less helpful.'	GCSE English Language
'What characterised the best of these responses was the ability to engage with the 'big ideas': politics, economics, gender, aesthetics, class, morality, psychology, even philosophy.'	GCSE English Language
'One hallmark of writing with (precision/clarity) is often a confident general vocabulary, which allows them to engage fully with concepts and ideas'	GCSE English Literature
'Many students were able to discuss these 'shifts' with some confidence, with many able to discuss contrasts...'	GCSE English Language

Notes

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