Teaching ideas

A-level English Language and Literature 7707
Dramatic encounters: Schemas

Introduction

These teaching ideas can be used with students when exploring the playwright's selection and use of family and relationship schemas. They offer students the opportunity to explore the significance of schemas in relation to the overall focus of 'conflict', and are important in exploring key aspects of dramatic discourse. They also encourage students to think about how the playwright represents natural speech features, show characters' asserting power and use the idea of conflict both to create dynamic narratives and to address the wider themes of the play.

The suggested activities are intended to span two lessons lasting one hour each.

Learning objectives

Students will:

- engage with their own understanding of 'real-world' schemas
- explore how the playwright uses the audience's schematic knowledge in creating the world of the play and to craft characteristics of conflict
- evaluate the significance of specific language choices used and their likely interpretative effects, as well as the influence of contextual factors.

Prior knowledge needed

Students should have some knowledge of the following:

- language levels
- how playwrights represent natural speech features
- aspects of stagecraft.

Lesson preparation

Teachers will need the following resources:

- **Lesson 1**: a selection of short clips or transcripts to illustrate scripted or spontaneous schemas (eg soap operas, Jeremy Kyle, *Big Brother* first meetings etc)
- **Lesson 2**: selected extracts from the play to illustrate different schema (eg family reunions, birthday parties, meeting a new person, family arguments (husband/wife or siblings etc), family mealtimes etc
- lined or A3 paper
- arrangement of tables suitable for collaborative pair work.

Activities

Lesson 1

- **Starter**: ask students to discuss what assumptions they would have about 'a lesson' if they have to describe it to someone else. Discuss in terms of:

  o overarching ideas they might have about what occurs in a lesson (students are seated, teachers may be standing in front of the whiteboard, students will be given tasks and so on)
  o how a lesson is structured into a sequential order of events (students enter the room and take designated seats etc)
  o what kind of linguistic strategies might be used by students and teachers
  o what deviations can occur from these (ie the effects of having a supply teacher, different student groups, different teachers – stricter, subjects in labs etc) but how these are still within a larger narrative *frame* but with varying *scripts.*

- **Activity 1**: select some short clips that would illustrate these from fictional representations such as soap operas, reality shows (for example, *Dinner Date* or *Big Brother*) or interview programmes. Students watch these clips and identify: what order events occur, the aspects of interaction and discourse that are important and the aspects of non-verbal communication and context that are significant. Students share ideas to see if these match or differ from others to see whether we share the same schemas?

- **Activity 2**: ask students to consider the following scenarios and decide the *frame* for one of these and reflect on the script - the typical order of events and the types of linguistic devices that would features (for example, turn-taking, non-fluency, aspects of non-verbal communication).

  Scenarios:
  o family reunions
  o a family celebration such as a birthday party
  o a welcome / greeting between new acquaintances
  o family mealtimes
  o an argument between parents and teenage children.

- Ask pairs to write the dialogue for a section of a play based on this scenario, perhaps using features of stagecraft to add to the presentation. They can either share this with the whole group via role play or pairs could swap and analyse the dialogue for aspects of the 'script' they recognise from the schema being represented.

- **Activity 3**: students discuss what impact contextual factors might have on schemas. For example, the impact of age, gender, culture, ethnicity and time period could have on the ways these are described or represented. (You could select some short extracts from prose or drama to illustrate these, show more clips that develop this or select transcripts to show students.)

Plenary and preparation for next lesson

- Students could as an *exit pass* write down a definition of a schema.
- For the next lesson, students will individually select an extract from the play they are studying that illustrates where the writer is using a recognised schema and be prepared to offer evidence for this.

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Lesson 2

- **Starter**: students' feedback briefly on their chosen extract and the schema it builds on, offering textual evidence to support this.

- **Activity 1**: give the students this extract from William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Give them the context of a wedding service. Ask them to consider how it meets and breaks the schema for a marriage.

LEONATO Come, Friar Francis, be brief; only to the plain
    form of marriage, and you shall recount their particular
    duties afterwards.
FRIAR You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?
CLAUDIO No.
LEONATO To be married to her: Friar, you come to marry her!
FRIAR Lady, you come hither to be married to this Count?
HERO I do.
FRIAR If either of you know any inward impediment why
    you should not be conjoined, I charge you, on your souls,
    to utter it.
CLAUDIO Know you any, Hero?
HERO None, my lord.
FRIAR Know you any, Count?
LEONATO I dare make his answer, None.
CLAUDIO O, what men dare do! What men may do!
    What men daily do, not knowing what they do!
BENEDICK How now! Interjections? Why, then, some be
    of laughing, as, ah, ha, he!
CLAUDIO
    Stand thee by, Friar. Father, by your leave:
    Will you with free and unconstrained soul
    Give me this maid, your daughter?
LEONATO
    As freely, son, as God did give her me.
CLAUDIO
    And what have I to give you back, whose worth
    May counterpoise this rich and precious gift?
DON PEDRO
    Nothing, unless you render her again.
CLAUDIO
    Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.
    There, Leonato, take her back again,
    Give not this rotten orange to your friend;
    She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.
    Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
    O, what authority and show of truth
    Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
    Comes not that blood as modest evidence
    To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
    All you that see her, that she were a maid,
    By these exterior shows? But she is none;
    She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.
    Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.

LEONATO
　　What do you mean, my lord?
CLAUDIO　　　　　　　　　　Not to be married,
Not to knit my soul to an approved wanton.

> For example, students might pick up on the sequence of events and the Friar's leading of the turn-taking as typical of a marriage service schema. They might also see the formulaic nature of the Friar's dialogue, the order of addressing the male first and his use of a biblical register as other evidence for the schema. However, they might then see how the bridegroom Claudio diverges from expectations, in contrast to Hero who converges to the expected verbal responses. They might identify that this occurs through Claudio's dispreferred responses, his directly addressing the bride instead of speaking in response only to the Friar and his lexical choices that seem inappropriate in reference to his bride-to-be. Other challenges to the marriage schema might be identified in the giving back of the bride. Students might debate the significance of contextual factors in the constant references to the bride's virtue as relevant to a 17th century schema.

- **Activity 2**: give the students the extracts that have been already selected and copied for them from the play they are studying. (This could be paired or group work, or a carousel activity where extracts are stuck to A3 or poster paper and different groups add to the observations made on each extract). After reading them, ask students to identify:

  - the relevant schema/s
  - the ways in which the extracts meet assumptions about schema and how these are foregrounded
  - the ways in which the playwright challenges these assumptions and how these deviations are presented.
  - specific linguistic devices that highlight either of these, with a particular focus on discourse.

- **Plenary**: ask students to write down an individual response to the following question and share this with the group: How does an audience's background knowledge (ie schemas) add to their interpretation of a play?

Further work

- Students can explore the rest of the play for other uses of schemas or write up their responses to the extracts that they were given to work with.
- Ask students to find a selection of fictional representations of typical schemas and bring these in to share with others. A-level students could begin to think about possible areas of exploration for their NEA (it would be possible to explore in detail the fictional representations of schemas in poetry, prose or other plays and then do some comparative work with non-literary material such as transcripts).

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