
Teaching ideas

A Level English Language and Literature 7707

Writing about society: Commentaries

Introduction

These teaching ideas can be used with students when developing their skills in creating critically comparative commentaries on their re-creative writing. They provide students with some initial small-scale, quick-fire practice with all of the steps involved in comparative analysis of original and re-cast texts, and a longer, more systematic learning activity targeting the same learning objectives. They also encourage students to think about how to structure commentaries so as to communicate the comparative analysis clearly and logically.

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

Learning objectives

Students will:

- practise re-creative writing
- identify language features
- investigate changes in language features
- evaluate the significance of specific language choices used and their likely interpretative effects
- structure comparative commentaries.

Prior knowledge needed

Students should have some knowledge of the following:

- characterisation
- point of view
- narrative structure and pace
- genre and discourse types
- language levels.

Lesson preparation

Teachers will need the following resources:

- A4 paper – one sheet per student
- for the first lesson, arrange the chairs and desks in a circle (or several small squares)
- for the second lesson, prepare a template table (3 columns x 5 rows) for each student.

Activities

Lesson 1

- Do this activity as a whole class or in small groups. Encourage quick thinking, not allowing too much time for more developed thought. Begin by giving each student a blank piece of A4 paper, then follow these steps:
 1. From the set text, each student chooses a sentence that they like and/or think is interesting, and writes it out at the top of the page.
 2. Every student then passes their page to their left.
 3. With a new page and new sentence in front of them, each student then re-casts the sentence however they like, and writes their new version a few lines below the original.
 4. Each student then passes the page to the left again.
 5. Faced with two sentences, one re-cast, each student identifies some of the language features altered, and notes down what these features are a few lines below the re-cast line on the page.
 6. Each student then passes the page to the left.
 7. The next student to receive the page writes down how the features (identified by the previous student) have been altered.
 8. Each student then passes the page the left.
 9. The next student to receive the page writes down the changes in interpretative effects created in the alteration. This student then turns the page over and copies the original sentence from the top of the previous side to the top of this blank side, and the process starts again (from steps 2 to the first half of step 9).
- Put the students in pairs, and distribute two sheets per pair.
 - Students should compare the two re-castings of each of the two original sentences.
 - Each student takes one of re-castings and develops a brief commentary on the re-cast sentence, using the notes made in the activity as a prompt, building upon these notes, and giving the commentary a logical structure.
 - The students then compare their commentaries, exploring strengths and areas for improvement.

Preparation for next lesson

In preparing for this lesson students should find and re-read the last full re-creative writing exercise they did, and should bring it to class.

Lesson 2

- Each student should complete the following learning activity in relation to their last full re-creative writing composition.
 - Using the template table, the students should give the columns the following headings, from left to right: 'WHAT', 'HOW', and 'EFFECTS?'
- Students should fill out their tables as follows:
 - in the 'WHAT' column, students should give an example of a feature in the original base text which they altered in their re-cast text. They should focus on changes which they feel are significant to the effects created in their re-cast text.
 - in the 'HOW' column, in the box to the right of each feature, students describe *how* they altered that feature. They should use appropriate technical terminology when doing this.
 - in the 'EFFECTS' column, students describe any changes in the interpretative effects created through the change they made. Again student should use appropriate terminology.
- When students have filled out the chart, they plan how they could arrange the information into a commentary of around 400 words (probably two paragraphs).

This should encourage students to:

- compare the interpretative significance of different changed features
 - go beyond description of language features to analyse interpretative effects
 - consider different organisational structures for commentaries.
- Finally, round off the learning by asking the students to write out their planned commentary.

Further work

- In a whole class discussion, share thoughts on particular difficulties and challenges with the re-creative writing and commentary tasks, possible traps/obstacles for the commentary that students can accidentally set for themselves in the re-creative writing process, etc, and share thoughts on possible strategies to avoid/overcome these possible problems.

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Instructions:

- in the 'WHAT' column, give an example of a feature in the original base text which you altered in your re-creative writing. You should focus on changes which you feel are significant to the effects created in your re-cast text.
- in the 'HOW' column, describe (using appropriate terminology) *how* you altered that feature.
- in the 'EFFECTS' column, describe (using appropriate terminology) any changes in the interpretative effects created through the change you made.

WHAT	HOW	EFFECTS?