GCSE
English Literature

Hub schools network meeting

Resources and activities booklet

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Example response – full marks

Paper 2 Section A: Modern texts

A Taste of Honey by Shelagh Delaney

June 2018

Q12

'Some characters in *A Taste of Honey* suffer because they are different from most people in society at that time.'

How does Delaney present the effects of being different in this society?

Write about:
• what characters who are different say and do
• how Delaney presents the effects of being different.

Question 12 Taste of Honey

Shelagh Delaney focuses 'A Taste of Honey' around the protagonist Jo, who isn't neccessarily always the hero of the story. Her play considers the lives of the everday working class, in the format of a kitchen sink drama. Jo, alongside other characters such as Geoff, feel out of place in the soceity they live in and the people they differ from. Delaney uses the differences between the limited number of characters in her play, and the settings and characters around them to comment on how society punishes those who don't fit in, the deeper reason for prejudice and how industrialised and stagnating areas like Salford were not experiencing a suposed post-war economic boom that the rest of the country was.

Delaney uses Jo's progression (or lack of) and her unusual character throughout 'A Taste of Honey' to comment on the loss of potentional Jo experiences due to her upbringing and social background. Early on in Act 1 Scene 1, in a rare emotional break between Helen and Jo's back and fouth cynical and whitty dialogue Jo comments on how she stole some bulbs from her local garden. She states 'I hope they grow'. The verb 'grow' connotes progression and hope, however this is ironic as Jo hopes the plant will prosper in the deteriorating flat and amongst 'slaughterhouses' and rivers the colour of 'lead'. Furthermore, it is as if Jo invests all of her hopes into this plant. She rejects the idea of going to art school, the idea of becoming antything like Helen, and seems undecided on what the future holds for her, but is certain that she hopes the bulbs grow, before the audeince is bombarded with more snappy dialogue between the mother and daughter duo, and the line is quickly forgotten. However later in Act 2 Geoff finds the bulbs; they are dead. When Geoff pulls them out from underneath the bed Jo simply comments 'they didn't grow'. The repetition of 'grow' alongside monosylabic language used in both lines of dialogue by Jo stand out. Many of Delaney's intentions to comment of apsects of everyday life are hidden in complex lines of dialogue, such as the lymeric the Peter tells about Oedipus, when Oedipus really represents him. Lines like these often only hold clarity when reconsidered by the audience. However, Jo's statements, and the

way in which Delaney writes Jo's disapointment could not be more clear. At first Jo invested her hope in one object, but now she has lost all of that hope in becoming what she despises. She is a single, bedridden, pregant mother who most importantly has to rely on others; Geoff, to help her. Whereas once she stands out, now she is just like everyone else around her. Jo is clearly an intellegant person, as evidenced with her quick whitt and artistic talent, but even with the skills she has, she is reduced to just another lower class citizen who is subject to squalour and stagnation. Perhaps Delaney suggests that Jo has done to the once prospering bulb, what society has done to the once prospering Jo. At first there are ideals of growth for things that stood out amonst everthing esle, but eventually both Jo and the bulb have been forgotten.

Furthermore, Delaney uses characters who are subject to prejudice to question why prejudice was held by so many members of society. One charater used to exemplify the question posed by Delaney is Jimmie, who is at first the unnamed 'Boy'. Jo is yet again shown to be different from most other people in society for being part of an interacial relationship, alongside claiming that the fact that Jimmy is black does not phase her. In Act 1, Jo and Jimmy walk through Salford and tease each other. At this point Jo jokes that 'there must still be a bit of jungle in you somewhere'. The noun jungle suggests that Jimmy is some sort of exotic being, with jungles being a far reach from the industrial and grey Salford, and his skin colour makes him vastly different from Jo. Furthermore the phrase 'a bit' shows that Jo feels as if Jimmy is characterised by his skin colour, and without-doubt, despite Jimmy responding that he is from the much less exotic Cardiff, he must feel some great connection to the jungle. When compared to the abusive and materialistic relationship of Peter and Helen, which holds little romance, Jimmy and Jo's looks like true love. However even though this line is meant to be a passing joke, it is sympamatic of brewing tensions about race in the late 50s in the UK. Altough it happen after 'A Taste of Honey' was released, in 1958 the Notting Hill riots occoured. This saw mobs of 'local' inhabitents of Notting Hill attacking Carribien immagrents with little and delayed police intervention. Jo clearly does feel some kind of love for Jimmy, but this line is all too telling about attitudes to those who stood out.

Delaney also evidences the scapegoating of a minority through Geoff. Despite beign one of the few people who care about Jo and her child, he is victimised by other characters. The people who don't care about Jo and her child includes Jo who twice utters 'I hate milk' and 'I'll bash it's brains out', a literary allusion to the Shakesperean antagonist, Lady Macbeth who offers to 'dash' her unborn child to deamons. Geoff is called names numerous times such as 'pansified little freak', due to his homosexuality. Homosexuality only became partially legal in 1967, with the age of concent stilll being higher than the age of concent in hetrosexual

relationships. The adjectives 'pansified' alongside 'little' are deeply immasculating, and also belittly Geoff. Delaney chose to add characters, who had little representation in plays in the 50s and were part of minoroties into her play as a way of evidencing how society choses to scapegoat groups of people. Salford is clearly an area of squalour, so people turn to what they fear or what they don't know as a source of this misfortune. Even intellegent characters such as Jo fail to realise the heart of the problem lies within the societal structure that opresses her and the rest of Salford. Delaney suggests that while people chose to scapegoat minorities, until the lower class realise where the stem of thier problemes lie, they will be subject to stagnation and squalour.

Delaney uses the setting of Saford as symbolic of the opression of the lower classes, a mass of people that were not different, and did not stand out, but still suffered. In Act 1 Scene 1 the audience are given the vivid description of a slaughterhouse by Helen as 'Where all the sheep, cows and pigs go in and the beef, pork and mutton come out'. Slaughterhouses connote greusome deaths and gory images, yet the listing of 'sheep, cows and pigs' and the products, 'beef, pork and mutton' give order to the chaos. This makes the murder seem systimatic and mundane, as if it is a precise operation. Furthermore, this description that Helen gives is only prompted after Jo asks what the slaughterhouse is, as they move into their new flat. The flat, that is the setting of the first part of the play, is presented as unhomely and lacking comfort or saftey. Dealaney achives this through paring the description of the slaughterhouse with comical descriptions, such as that of the bed which Helen states 'Is like a coffin, only half as comfortable'. This conjures ideas of death. The way in which Helen comments on her soroundings is cynical, but is not a complaint. Helen states that 'it is all we can afford' when Jo complains about the new flat. This shows Helen is conditioned to want little from her life, and has to be satisfied with what she can 'afford'. The title chosen by Delaney perfectly incapsulates this; 'A Taste of Honey'. It suggests that each character recivies their own breif moment of happiness, which is true; Jo is happy at the end of the play, while waiting for Helen or geoff to return (even though it is unclear whether either will or not), and Helen is given her happinnes when she moves into her grand new white house with Peter. But these moments of joy are fleeting and breif, before the characters return to mundantiy and squalour. The title of the play is based of the first book of Samuel in which a character states 'I did have but a littel taste of honey' before concluding 'lo, I must die'. With honey representing prosperity and happiness, Delaney challanges the fact that even in holy books, people are taught to not want much from life, and to be content with what they have, only breif moments where they have a chance to have a taste of honey. Delaney herself grew up in Salford and was tired of hearing that all of the UK was entering a phase of post-war prosperity, which shenew not to

be true. The slaughterhouse is used by Delaney as a metaphor for the lives of Salford citizens. They can not escape their inevitable fate, just as thier children and generations after them will not be able to. While political figures such as Harold McMillan, who eventually becomae the Prime Minister in 1967, rose to power with slogans such as 'You've never had it so good', Delaney only saw the systematic oppression of those around her.

At first it may seem that Delaney suggests that those who stand out from society suffer. However, Delaney saw that those who didn't stand out and lived everyday lives as the ones who suffered. The play for her was a statment of rejection to society, whilst posing the question to her audiences, many of which were not lower class, of why this social system was the case.

De-mystifying the mark scheme

Levels of response mark scheme:

- Constructed using levels of attainment that span the whole range of ability at GCSE.
- Descriptors of attainment reference the assessment objectives and describe the kinds of **skills** students will be proficient in at different levels of performance and **typical features** of a response in each level.
- Markers make a judgement on the overall qualities of each response and award a *fair* mark.

Best fit principle:

- Answers will rarely match a descriptor in all respects, markers have to allow good performance in some aspects to compensate for shortcomings in other respects.

Positive marking ethos:

- This is made very clear in the statement: *'Examiners are encouraged to reward any valid interpretations. Answers might, however, include some of the following...'*
- Indicative Content provides more question-specific **guidance** to markers. It is not prescriptive, definitive nor exhaustive.
- Students will say lots and lots of interesting, original things about the texts, including ideas or perspectives on a text that you might not have come across before!

New Ofsted frameworks

List of curriculum indicators in the research model

Discussion Point – Does your text choice allow you to evidence a curriculum narrative?

Number	Indicator
1a	There is a clear and coherent rationale for the curriculum design
1b	Rationale and aims of the curriculum design are shared across the school and fully understood by all
1c	Curriculum leaders show understanding of important concepts related to curriculum design, such as knowledge progression and sequencing of concepts
1d	Curriculum coverage allows all pupils to access the content and make progress through the curriculum
2a	The curriculum is at least as ambitious as the standards set by the national curriculum/external qualifications
2b	Curriculum principles include the requirements of centrally prescribed aims
2c	Reading is prioritised to allow pupils to access the full curriculum offer
2d	Mathematical fluency and confidence in numeracy are regarded as preconditions of success across the national curriculum
3a	Subject leaders at all levels have clear roles and responsibilities to carry out their role in curriculum design and delivery
3b	Subject leaders have the knowledge, expertise and practical skill to design and implement a curriculum
3c	Leaders at all levels, including governors, regularly review and quality assure the subject to ensure that it is implemented sufficiently well
4a	Leaders ensure that ongoing professional development/training is available for staff to ensure that curriculum requirements can be met
4b	Leaders enable curriculum expertise to develop across the school

5a	Curriculum resources selected, including textbooks, serve the school's curricular intentions and the course of study and enable effective curriculum implementation
5b	The way the curriculum is planned meets pupils' learning needs
5c	Curriculum delivery is equitable for all groups and appropriate
5d	Leaders ensure that interventions are appropriately delivered to enhance pupils' capacity to access the full curriculum
6a	The curriculum has sufficient depth and coverage of knowledge in the subjects
6b	There is a model of curriculum progression for every subject
6c	Curriculum mapping ensures sufficient coverage across the subject over time
7a	Assessment is designed thoughtfully to shape future learning. Assessment is not excessive or onerous
7b	Assessments are reliable. Teachers ensure systems to check reliability of assessments in subjects are fully understood by staff
7c	There is no mismatch between the planned and the delivered curriculum
8	The curriculum is successfully implemented to ensure pupils' progression in knowledge – pupils successfully 'learn the curriculum'
9	The curriculum provides parity for all groups of pupils

Modern prose or drama

Considering the 'less popular' text choices.

Alan Bennett, *The History Boys*

The play is set in a fictional boys' grammar school in Sheffield in the early 1980s. The plot follows a group of history pupils preparing for the Oxford and Cambridge entrance examinations under the guidance of three teachers with wildly contrasting styles.

Hector, an eccentric teacher (think Dead Poets Society!), delights in knowledge for its own sake, but the headmaster is ambitious and business-like and wants the school to move up the academic league table; Irwin, a supply teacher, is hired to introduce a rather more cynical style of teaching. Hector is discovered sexually fondling a boy and later Irwin's latent homosexual inclinations emerge.

Questions

0 5 How does Bennett present different attitudes to learning in The History Boys?

Write about:

- what some of these attitudes to learning are
- how Bennett presents these attitudes.

or

0 6 Bennett has said that the boys in the play know more than any of their teachers.

How far do you agree that the boys "know more" than the staff?

Write about:

- what the boys say and do
- how far Bennett presents the boys as "knowing more" than the staff.

Dennis Kelly, *DNA*

'Chimps are evil. They murder each other…they kill and sometimes torture each other to find a better position within the social structure'

A group of teenagers do something appalling. Some panic, some keep a cool head but they eventually come up with a plan to send the police on a wild goose chase. When the authorities believe the lie everything settles down and the gang become closer than ever. Things take a turn for the worse, however, when the police arrest a man who fits the description of their frame-up and the gang descends again into distrust and chaos.

Questions

0 7 How does Kelly use the character of Cathy to explore ideas about leadership?

Write about:

- what Cathy says and does throughout the play
- how Kelly uses Cathy to explore these ideas about leadership.

or

0 8 How does Kelly use the play DNA to explore ideas about gang membership?

Write about:

- what the gang members say and do
- how Kelly presents what being in a gang is like.

Simon Stephens, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

The play version of the best selling novel (which is a smash hit production in the West End and had an acclaimed UK and international tour) follows the unusual protagonist Christopher, a teenage boy who is exceptional at Maths but whom is poorly equipped to deal with everyday life. In the play Christopher investigates the death of a neighbour's dog and his discoveries have extraordinary results for his own family and take him on a literal and metaphorical journey of self-discovery.

Questions

0 9 How does Stephens use Christopher's book to explore Christopher's feelings and attitudes to life?

Write about:

- some of Christopher's feelings and attitudes to life
- how Stephens uses the book to explore these feelings and attitudes.

or

1 0 How far does Stephens present Christopher's teacher, Siobhan, as an important character in the play?

Write about:

- what Siobhan says and does
- how far Stephens presents her as important in the play.

Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey*

The defining 'kitchen sink' drama which is credited with revolutionising British Drama, *A Taste of Honey* is set in 1950's Salford and follows the complicated relationship between feisty teenager Jo and her promiscuous and unconventional mother, Helen. After Helen runs off with a younger, richer man, Jo falls pregnant to Jimmy, a black sailor who later goes back to sea, leaving her alone. She builds a supportive relationship with gay art student Geoff, but when Helen returns things become ever more complicated.

Questions

1 1 How does Delaney use the character of Peter to explore male attitudes to women in

A Taste of Honey?

Write about:

- what Peter says and does in the play
- how Delaney uses the character of Peter to explore male attitudes to women.

or

1 2 'Some characters in A Taste of Honey suffer because they are different from most

people in society at that time.'

How does Delaney present the effects of being different in this society?

Write about:

- what characters who are different say and do
- how Delaney presents the effects of being different.

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Animal Farm is an allegorical novella which fables the events leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union. In the story, the animals at Manor Farm – lead by two pigs, Napoleon and Snowball – revolt and drive out the humans from their farm. They adopt the Seven Commandments of Animalism, the most important of which is, "All animals are equal" but after a power struggle between Napoleon and Snowball, equality becomes less and less evident at the farm.

Questions

1 7 How does Orwell use the character of Squealer to explore ideas about truth and lies in Animal Farm?

Write about:

- what Squealer says and does
- how Orwell uses the character of Squealer to explore ideas about truth and lies.

or

1 8 How does Orwell use events in Animal Farm to explore ideas about revolution?

Write about:

- some of the events in the book
- how Orwell uses these events to explore ideas about revolution

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

Never Let Me Go follows the lives of three 'students' Cathy, Tommy and Ruth who all attend a boarding school called Hailsham. It's clear from very early on, that though the novel is set in the 1950s, the children in the school are not 'normal'. Their lives are mapped out from before they are born and the children are 'both told and not told' about what these lives will be. The novel asks questions about what it means to be human and follows the students as they discover the terrible truth about what their 'donations' will mean to them.

Questions

1 9 How does Ishiguro present the influence of life at Hailsham on the lives of Kathy,

Tommy and Ruth?

Write about:

- what life is like at Hailsham
- how Ishiguro presents the influence of life at Hailsham.

or

2 0 'It is strange that none of the young people rebel against the system.'

How far do you agree with this view of Never Let Me Go?

Write about:

- how the young people behave
- how Ishiguro uses the young people to explore ideas about rebellion

Meera Syal, *Anita and Me*

Anita and Me is the semi-autobiographical tale of a girl called Meena and her relationship with her troubled feisty neighbour Anita as they grow up in the fictional mining village of Tollington, in the Black Country, in the 1970s. Meena experiences all the usual struggles of growing up but these are compounded by the fact that her family are the only Punjabi family in the village and Anita's friendship is far from straightforward.

Questions

2 1 How does Syal present Meena's relationships with some of the male characters in

Anita and Me?

Write about:

- Meena's relationships with some of the male characters in the novel
- how Syal presents these relationships.

or

2 2 How does Syal present the importance of family life in Anita and Me?

Write about:

- some of the aspects of family life in the novel
- how Syal presents the importance of family life.

Stephen Kelman, *Pigeon English*

Pigeon English tells the story of Harri Opoku, an 11-year-old Ghanaian immigrant caught up in gang warfare on a south London estate. Along with the shock of moving to another country and the usual worries associated with growing up like what trainers he wears and who sits next to him in class, Harri must negotiate tougher problems. The Dell Farm Crew are dangerous and frightening and Harri and his friend must negotiate living in proximity to them.

Questions

2 3 How does Kelman present the importance to Harrison of his friendships with Dean and with Jordan in Pigeon English?

Write about:

- Harrison's friendships with Dean and with Jordan
- how Kelman presents the importance of these friendships to Harrison.

or

2 4 How does Kelman present the experience of being an immigrant in Pigeon English?

Write about:

- Harrison's life as an immigrant in the novel
- how Kelman presents Harrison's experience of being an immigrant.

Stephen Kelman on *Pigeon English* as a GCSE text

Here are a few examples and impressions gleaned from my school visits to date. I do on average 6-10 visits per year, and would love to increase that, as they really are the best part of my job, and the students and teachers get a lot out of them too. There are a number of schools with which I have an ongoing relationship and visit on an annual basis. The English version of the book is also being taught in several German schools that I'm aware of. I have a German friend who has been teaching it in his English class for at least five years, in a quiet lakeside town called Neuruppin, a couple of hours outside of Berlin. I've been over there, and we catch up every year when he brings a group of his students to London on their annual cultural field trip (in fact I saw him just last Friday!). His town is very monocultural and affluent and his students have no experience of multicultural life or of the urban issues reflected in the book, and yet they engage and empathise with it in a very profound and quite lovely way. The same is true of fee-paying independent schools including Eastbourne College, where the book has been studied for the last five or six years. Speaking to the students on my annual visits there, I'm consistently impressed by how affected they are by the book, in terms of its positive impact on their sense of empathy and also in catalysing a genuine curiosity for lives very different from theirs; it really helps to break down social barriers in that regard. One instance that stands out in my memory was talking to a student there and hearing from him just how upset he was to discover how difficult and restricted were the lives of the characters in the novel; and then, in the next sentence, inviting me to ride on his father's private plane whenever I was next in Nepal!

More importantly, I am continually being told by students in more deprived areas, and in particular by students of colour, that *Pigeon English* represents the first experience they've had of reading a book in which they see themselves and their worlds reflected. They speak with wonder of the feeling of recognition and empowerment that comes from reading about 'themselves.' I've been particularly struck by the conversations I've had with boys – usually so reticent and resistant to the idea that books can be for them – who often come up to me after my events and confide a genuine attachment and sympathy to Harri and the other characters in the book. They ask with some despair why he had to die at the end. The book draws out their empathy as no other book they've studied.

On numerous occasions in my workshops I've had this same experience: a student who at the beginning of the session was too shy to talk or ask me a question or share their work has, by the end, mustered the courage to get up in front of the class and read their work aloud. I have also been honoured to receive many handwritten letters, cards and personal essays from students wishing to show their appreciation for the book. I've had students present me with paintings they have made in their own time, framed and ready to hang on my office wall. At a recent visit to a school in Manchester a group of year 11s even performed an original song for me at the end of our assembly.

And, crucially, this deep connection with the text translates to exam results: every single school I visit, without exception, reports that exam answers on Pigeon English score the highest marks of all the texts they study.

Telling Tales: short stories anthology

June 2018 questions

Question 15

How do writers present the ways characters react to difficult situations in 'Invisible Mass of the Back Row' and in **one** other story from *Telling Tales*?

Write about:
• what characters say and do in their difficult situations in the **two** stories
• how the writers present the ways characters react to difficult situations.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Question 16

How do writers present different kinds of love in 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' and different kinds of love in **one** other story from *Telling Tales*?

Write about:
• the different kinds of love in the **two** stories
• how the writers present different kinds of love.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Ways into teaching method via *Telling Tales: Odour of Chrysanthemums*

Method	Possible effect
• Colloquialisms • Symbolisms – cold/dark/light • Images of suffocation/entrapment • Descriptions of physical details having a wider implication/meaning	• Literal & metaphoric meanings
• Third person but mostly from Elizabeth's perspective • Speech • Uses lots of colloquial dialect • Elizabeth's language often more formal than other character's	• Allows us to mostly see things from Elizabeth's perspective • Creates a sense of realism • Shows conflict between Elizabeth and rest of mining community?
• Begins in late afternoon and moves forwards to death of Walter in the same evening and on to dawn of the next morning • Footsteps used to give structure : they are heard at key points in the story	• Gives it a sense of pace as it builds to a climax • Movement from darkness to light • Death to new life (her unborn child) • Give a sensory intrusion, suggest changes and movement

Telling Tales – one school's story of success

An example essay in response to the June 2017 paper and written as part of a mock exam within school.

- How do writers present difficult relationships in 'Korea' and in one other story from Telling Tales?
- Write about:
    - the difficult relationships in the two stories
    - how the writers present these relationships by the ways they write.

McGahern presents a damaged and embittered father in 'Korea' who struggles to reconcile current issues with his traumatic past- his psychological conflict has a direct influence on his son, who discovers his father's horrific plan to send him to the army. McGahern creates this impression through a rich and vivid image of a memory of an execution he witnessed- the memory is deep in description; its position in the story makes it memorable for the reader and demonstrates the impact it has on the father's actions.

The story is also presented in a cyclical manner- it begins with the father discussing the execution to his son in a boat whilst fishing. The story consequently ends still in the boat but now the son has gained awareness of his father's plans. The effect of the discussion of war starting and ending the story in a cyclical structure demonstrates how war affects individuals, and how parents influence their children's decisions- it suggests that we as readers can never be free of the past; it continuously shapes and forms who we are.

The memory of the execution in great detail shows the reader the brutality of war, how it changes and impacts upon different attitudes. The father is clearly haunted by his memory which constantly inflicts fear upon him- he tells his son, that on his honeymoon, seeing 'furze pods bursting' (resembling the bullets 'pumped in rapid succession') reminded him of the war camp (bullets) and 'destroyed the day'. Here McGahern employs a vivid description of the effect of the bullets to exhibit the father's stance of war and his response to ambition- the father is so deeply disturbed by his traumatic past that his present actions are heavily influenced by them.

The father's lack of communication initiates from his fear- the son (told in 1st person narration) says "It was new for him to talk about himself at all"- this quote emphasises the strained relationship between father and son due to the father's lack of communication (founded by his fear). This suggests that, as it is 'new', the father and son have had a laboured relationship his whole life, and due to the transition of maturity, he is only just realising it.

McGahern also employs a sense of a difficult relationship through the discussion of Amercia and the short time- scale. When the father suggests leaving to America (here he is seen as an ambitious protagonist), the son notices "the words were not his own voice" (the reader begins to question a deeper meaning to the suggestion, linked to the significance of the memory in the beginning)- this foreshadows the later discussion with Farrell about the money for serving in the American army (the father is no longer a protagonist, instead he is deceitful and menacing). As the story is told in 1st person, from the son's perspective, we can clearly see the revulsion the son has for his father: "the smell of shit and piss". The son vividly describes the condition of the lavatory using figurative imagery, to achieve the effect that the nouns used represent his emotions towards his father. The effect of the short timescale (over the course of one day) heightens the tension due to the son's growing sense of awareness for his father's deceit.

In ‘A Family Supper’, by Kazuo Ishiguro, and Korea, silence is a key theme in which a difficult relationship is portrayed. The adult perspective in ‘Korea’ recognises that due to the clash of social and political beliefs, the father-son relationship has a silence that is ‘fixed for ever’. Similarly, in ‘A Family Supper’, the silences are pervasive and ever present, indicating a strained, awkward relationship. Throughout the story, the silences punctuate the relationship (conveyed using short, elliptical sentences). The extended use of ellipsis’ represents the increased distance in the family. “I was silent”, “the three of us ate in silence”; the use of the dramatic noun ‘silence’ reiterates a crumbling relationship due to its blunt meaning. The added effect of the closing sentence being “we fell silent once more” confirms the disappearing status of their relationship, as it concludes the story, emphasising the lack of communication.

The effect of writing in 1st person, but as an observational narrator (which forces the reader to make assumptions) is also significant- a limited perspective is given, meaning the reader is forced to make their own assumptions; the stoic and expressionless narrator resembles his father (blunt in dialogue, assertive) and shows that the contrast of these two characters creates a difficult relationship. A key theme in ‘A Family Supper’ is the difficulty and misunderstanding between generations- the father describes Watanabe as a ‘man of principle’ despite murdering his family (as suicide in traditional Japanese society was an appropriate response to failure) however the narrator reacts to Kikuko’s exclamation of the story shocked and disgusted. This suggests that due to the ‘modernisation’ or even ‘westernisation’ of the son, the father’s character becomes increasingly stubborn and distant towards the son as he questions his father’s authority (the narrator has not discovered a coherent identity that follows his father’s morals).

Teaching DNA by Dennis Kelly: A Case Study

About the author:

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Text summary and context

Dennis Kelly's *DNA* was originally commissioned by 'National Theatre Education' and first performed at Cottesloe Theatre in 2008[1]. It is a contemporary work that feels influenced by David Calcutt's *The Terrible Fate of Humpty Dumpty* – an undeniably shocking piece on the destructive effects and consequences of bullying.

Kelly takes this concept further, exploring the morality of the choices people make. As the Oberon School's edition summarises, the play is about '…a group of teenagers [who] do something bad, really bad, then panic and cover the whole thing up.'(Oberon Books). Kelly's characters are caught up in the storm they themselves create and don't seem to know how to find a way out of it. This is something that many teenagers (and indeed adults) can perhaps empathise with, albeit hopefully not quite on this scale.

Essentially, Kelly's drama seems to pose the question: what does it mean to be human, are the choices we make simply in our DNA?

In his 2012 Telegraph interview with Daisy Bowe-Seller, Kelly reflecting on perhaps the most disturbing of his characters, Phil, commented, "I don't think he's getting any kind of enjoyment out of it. He's trying to make the best out of a bad situation – what he does is flawed but it's also natural. When I was a kid I felt that parents and adults weren't anything to do with my world. We sorted out our own problems, often in a terrifying way, and I think he's actually trying to do something good."[2] Essentially, Kelly's drama seems to pose the question: what does it mean to be human, are the choices we make simply in our DNA?

It is this line of enquiry, that for me, makes DNA a great text to explore with GCSE students.

Why did I choose to teach DNA for the modern fiction text?

Typically, my department's 'go to' choice for modern fiction is *An Inspector Calls* by JB Priestley. The emotional draw of Eva Smith's story; the clarity of the message Priestley conveys; the links

[1] Kelly, D. *DNA*. Oberon Books, London. 2009.
[2] © Daily Telegraph Feb 2019 © Telegraph Media Group Limited 2012

that can be drawn between the text and context; and the explicit ways in which he shapes this message through his use of dramatic methods, all engage and enable students at this stage in their literature studies.

However, three years ago, in the summer term of Year 10 when the first glow of GCSE had long worn off and the pressures of the 'real thing' were too far away to give any sense of importance or urgency to what's being covered, I found myself faced with a mixed ability group who were beginning to switch off. I nearly reached for Priestley. But, I needed something different, a text that would re-focus and re-engage what was fast becoming quite a tricky group of learners.

For me, in this context, DNA was exactly the right mixture of edgy, innovative, current drama to create the hook I needed.

Hooking students into the play: an approach to the opening scene

The opening scene is compelling. It worked well just jumping straight into it, setting up the classroom as a drama space with chairs and tables out of the way to do so.

The confusion of the characters' dialogue was mirrored in the classroom as students tried to work out what was going on, hooked by the unanswered question – who or what is dead?

A Street. Mark and Jan.

Jan: Dead?
Mark: Yeah
Jan: What, dead?
Mark: Yeah
Jan: Like, dead, dead
Mark: Yes
Jan: Proper dead, not living dead?
Mark: Not living dead, yes.
Jan: Are you sure?
Mark: Yes.

The irony inherent within the exchange is cleverly constructed through Kelly's juxtaposition of the two characters. Jan seems to be so in shock she is not able to process the information being relayed, yet Mark is seemingly indifferent to the significance of what he is saying. This serves to at once to both highlight and undermine the potential severity of the situation, with the ambiguity arising from this a useful point of discussion.

Students were given the opportunity to hear volunteers read the opening aloud and consider their initial reaction to the scene. The short punchy sentences allow pupils to experiment with tone; something that is so crucial to interpreting character and meaning in drama.

A whole class question and answer session followed:

How does Jan seem to be feeling? What is the impact her of repeating Mark's words?
Is Mark indifferent to what he is describing? If he is indifferent, how indifferent is he?

Is there anything that indicates Mark might be at all disturbed by whatever the event is he's describing?

Prompting students to justify their ideas, as well as to consider how the contrast in character and dialogue serves to at once to both highlight and undermine the potential severity of the situation, secured higher level responses.

Having re-read the scene a few times in pairs, experimenting with tone, pace and volume, students were then given chance to move the text from 'page to stage', considering how it might be performed. Social status was a useful concept to consider here; which character has higher status provoked much discussion. Physical levels became important as did movement. Should Mark be sat on the curb whilst Jan circles around him? Should she sit at any point? Does she walk away? Does he get up? A handful of interpretations were performed, and their impact evaluated.

Not one single pupil left the room without echoing the characters' words as they went. Kelly's use of colloquialisms converged instantly with 'teenage speak', breaking the language barriers so often found in some of the more canonical literary works.

Connecting DNA, possible teaching activities and the Assessment Objectives

AO1

As the narrative of the play unfolds, it is the morality of the characters' actions that promotes discussion, drawing the personal responses that underpin AO1. For example, not a single student felt that the characters were right to cover up what they had done, and many were outraged with the choices made. However, once that discussion shifted to whether you would cover something up in order to protect someone that was a friend, a member of your peer group, or even someone in your family, the subtle nuances of Kelly's depictions came to the fore. It was interesting to see how consideration of the way reactions can become chain reactions, often started in the moment with nothing but an instinctive gut response, reinforced the complexity of the ideas central to the play.

> "One of the things I liked most about DNA is that I think it posed more questions and discussion points than answers." – student

Philosophical and open questions were especially useful in this regard. They were used frequently to deepen the dialogue, often moving from the general, 'Would it ever be morally right to cover up a murder?' to the specific, 'Should Phil have directed Cathy and Brian to kill Adam?'. Mind mapping whether individually, or in pairs/groups, was an important tool in encouraging pupils to extend and develop their own interpretations which could then be shared with others.

AO2

Like *An Inspector Calls*, Kelly's text lends itself to some powerful and indeed sensitive discussion of dramatic methods. The characters of course are his main tool and drama-based tasks undertaken to engage with their construction included:

Role on the wall: Students, working in groups and with large pieces of display paper, drew around the body of a volunteer and then mapped out interpretations of the character on the inside

with textual evidence placed around the outside. They worked in different coloured pens and added to each other's ideas or challenged them with a question.
Thought-tracking: The reading/performance of scenes was paused at key moments, to allow for re-reading/amended performance where selected students took on the role of a expressing a character's thoughts.
Hot-seating: This proved useful to unpick character reaction to significant events (e.g. Adam's re-appearance). Students framed questions for other students who volunteered to take on the role of specific characters, although the character Phil proved just as verbally inexpressive in this activity as in the text itself!

"The use of a central cast of characters, the way that much of the action happened off stage and we saw only the character's reaction to it, the fact that no other characters took part in any of the scenes beside the members of the group, and later Adam, meant that we got to understand and know the characters very well." - student

Most notably perhaps, the cyclical nature of the settings allowed students to confront the way the characters metaphorically wind themselves into the hole they are digging. Each place, the 'street', 'woods' and 'field' takes on a structural significance, with the mood of the scene linking directly to the action that occurs there. For example, it is in the field where Leah's monologues (another significant dramatic method) occur and the vast, emptiness of this setting connects to the unbridled, seemingly endless chain of her thoughts. Visualising such settings through drawing or collages helped students' make connections to meaning.

AO3

DNA does not have the specific historical, or political contexts of *An Inspector Calls* or *Animal Farm* that so often ground students (and indeed teachers) in their thinking about authorial intent. However, as students became familiar with the play, it was striking to witness the way in which they made connections to their own knowledge and experience. The themes *DNA* explores: peer-pressure, identity, bullying and morality exist within a Key Stage 4 pupil's frame of reference and, sadly, can form the headlines that this same group are too often keenly aware of. Contemporary news events therefore became a useful way to engage with the concepts underpinning the text and allowed students to see a more 'real world' view of the narrative it plays out. Interestingly, having met students outside the exam hall at the end of the exam, several wanted to vocalise the links that they'd made independently to issues such as knife crime and social media. The play seemed to extend the possibilities around how 'context' is interpreted and led to autonomous student responses.

One student commented "DNA is relatable and easy to connect with. The events are hard hitting and evoked a lot of emotions in the class. The events are also not unrealistic as this type of thing does happen and we hear about it in the news. The play shows the extreme but true consequences of what bullying can do to people."

On reflection, would I teach DNA again?

DNA worked well. Given the mixed ability setting, it afforded access to the full range of marks in the exam (from level 2 to level 6 in the mark scheme). Crucially it was pivotal in re-focusing and re-engaging a group at a point in the course when their interest was waning. It is undoubtedly a text I would re-use.

Teaching The History Boys by Alan Bennett: A Case Study

About the author:

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Text summary and context

The History Boys by Alan Bennett is a text with a central message at its heart: that knowledge is for its own sake and should be passed on. In the text, Bennett uses his characters to embody different attitudes and approaches to what is taught, how it is taught and why it is taught. The characters are then used to explore themes such as gender and the role of women, sex, homosexuality, Christianity, class and status, truth and more. The text was first performed in 2004, so it is current; students have an opinion on the aforementioned issues, as well as what a good teacher is, what school is for and what teaching philosophy they prefer, all topics which emanate from the text. Bennett crafts characters who represent these themes: Hector is a man of 'studied eccentricity' and a teacher who seeks to pass on useless knowledge for its own sake. Irwin, the 'new boy', is brought in to enhance exam performance. As Hector's antithesis, his philosophy is to manipulate knowledge to appear clever, finding interesting lines of argument in order to be more interesting in exams. Mrs Lintott is a 'safe pair of hands' who has taught the boys facts, getting them to the position of applying to Oxford and Cambridge universities before being disregarded. Then there is the fool character of the Headmaster, concerned with league tables and their impact on perception and reputation, a construct Bennett uses to critique school accountability culture; the enemy of knowledge for its own sake. These characters teach a cast of able boys all aspiring to Oxbridge, each of whom falls into the role of an archetype/stereotype: a confident, attractive one; a sporty but intellectually inferior one; a sensitive, thoughtful one; an observer/overseer. These are, of course, simplifications, but these simplifications are in and of themselves worth considering with students.

Rationale: Why did we select The History Boys?

Hector's 'sheer calculated silliness', evidence of his belief in knowledge for its own sake, was a significant reason the text was chosen, especially when the prevailing view of the class was that the purpose of school is functional – it is necessary to get a good job. As an English teacher, I most enjoy teaching literature, it being a form of knowledge that can be passed on. Students who have the cultural literacy that comes from reading are likely to be interesting people, so why not choose a text that implicitly and explicitly promotes this? What other text offers the opportunity to consider the following mix of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' content, ranging from Shakespearean allusion (*Othello* and *King Lear*) to the film *Brief Encounter*, to Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No.2. On this, pointing out that the Eric Carmen song 'All By Myself' is based on the second movement of that concerto was a delight, especially when it then became clear I would need to

play the Celine Dion, Mariah Carey or even the Renee Zellweger as Bridget Jones version for students to recognise the song!

Allusions and cultural literacy

While some might argue that *The History Boys* itself does not necessarily form part of any canon beyond it being on an exam board specification, let alone Eric Carmen, the text's allusions to the works of Hardy, A.E. Housman and Larkin, to name but a few, help to broaden cultural perspectives. If students already know of this 'literary heritage' then that's fantastic, but if they don't the text provides ample opportunity to look to know more. The text's rich use of allusion has thus proved incredibly fruitful in branching out into other areas of the course. Our English curriculum model seeks to teach the skills of the GCSE English Language specification through English Literature, so in addition to looking at Hardy's 'Drummer Hodge', Housman's 'A Shropshire Lad' or Larkin's 'MCMXIV' as pieces of Unseen Poetry, it led to Paper 2, Question 5 tasks such on issues such as whether poetry serves any purpose and whether it should be learned by heart (it does and why not? Students are only too prepared to learn lyrics to pop music), and also tasks that prioritised the use of allusion in writing to establish a viewpoint or perspective. Some of the debates that arise from the text intrigued students: Can and should you teach the Holocaust? Is literature really 'consolation' for 'losers'? It has been gratifying to see students grapple with these complex ideas, not to mention a teacher's delight at seeing students seek out more poetry as a consequence of this approach – Larkin has been a particular favourite, perhaps because of their teacher's enjoyment of his writing, too.

By way of contrast, some students have noted that the allusions the text makes are quite difficult to understand, being 'obscure'. Obscurity emanates in part from the allusions, especially the supposedly cultural ones, being from the 1940s of Hector's (and Bennett's) youth. Gracie Fields and George Formby are not likely to be well known by lots of 14-16 year olds, but that is not to say they should not know it. When raising this point, I made a point of giving students examples of my cultural references from the 90s (*Father Ted*; *The Matrix*; *Candle in the Wind*) before discussing how an absence of knowledge can be alienating. I was reminded of this phenomenon when the class asked me if I knew of a rapper called 6ix 9ine. I did not, to the amusement of all. I still don't. Teachers must therefore be mindful of student's prior cultural knowledge and use suitable examples when making analogies.

"I like it."

A further reason the text was chosen is simple: I like it. Some of my colleagues do not. Therefore, they have not sought to teach it where I have. For some, the profanity is too strong, the nature of the student teacher relationships too 'near the mark', the 'smugness' (as one colleague put it) overbearing. These are valid concerns; many of my colleagues pointed out teaching *The History Boys* to all students in a large year group would be very challenging indeed, given that some students would lack the maturity required for it. Some students also pointed out this as a potential issue. But for the class in question, *The History Boys* was appropriate. I spoke with the previous class teacher to ascertain if the group were of sufficient maturity to discuss issues as potentially provocative as sex, paedophilia, and homosexuality. I was told they were, and they have been. Using my professional judgment and that of my colleagues has been fundamental to the success of teaching the text at GCSE so far. Treating the group with maturity and trusting them has led to all rising to the challenge.

Success at this stage is hard to define. The vast majority of students remain studying *An Inspector Calls*, so it will be informative to see comparative performance across the cohort. It remains the dominant text in our school because teachers still enjoy teaching it and students respond very well to it. One colleague commented that while he detests *An Inspector* Calls, it is the best text for many of our students because it has a simple dynamic and fits neatly into existing cultural products students are aware of, even if they do not know they are, such as the 'whodunit'. Having said this, the same colleague is now considering changing texts in future years, dependent on the class in question, because that first step of diversification has occurred.

Most importantly, the class have not been hindered by their new text. Nor have I missed *An Inspector Calls*. *The History Boys* is relevant, discussing issues students are interested in – sex, the purpose of education, the best way to pass exams. Not only this, but it is genuinely very funny, with teaching being aided by an excellent film adaptation of the text with characters being played by their original actors as seen at the National Theatre. All students laugh at the 'French Scene', all students squirm at Mrs Lintott's biting satire on the role of women, all students are saddened by the ending. The play evokes an emotional response, a point which I don't think can be overstated. They care about the characters, so write a more personal response to it. This makes it an excellent text choice.

Managerial concerns: teaching a 'new' text

On this issue of why the text was chosen, I ensured transparency at the start of the course. I liked it. I thought it was good. I openly stated that if I want students to be enthused by literature, there is no better way to promote this than by choosing a text about which I was very enthusiastic. I find it exciting. Why apologise? But this is not to say there haven't been whole school concerns. Performance at 9-7 dipped significantly after a higher performance the year before. As a Head of Faculty, it seemed sensible to take responsibility for a class where attainment is expected to be high, but to do something different. If recidivism is the act of making the same mistake over and over again, choose a new text for one class in the first instance and see if there is a change, hopefully for the better.

Yet *The History Boys* was not new. When outlining the texts to be studied at the start of the course, I also explained that I had taught the text at A-level (as part of the AQA AS English Literature B specification), so student 'buy in' was high. They inferred I had expertise and so would not be disadvantaged, while I was keen to try and enhance take-up for English Literature at A-level by promoting the idea that if they liked this, they would like A-level and would be able to manage its more mature themes.

By demonstrating to students that they are able to grasp higher order concepts and by studying a text that requires maturity, it could be a means of ensuring that students opt for English Literature. Our context has been that students who achieved highly have tended to opt for Mathematics and Science subjects at KS5 due to the perception that these afford better job opportunities in future. Choosing a text which espouses a view that literature is worth knowing despite a job, is also particularly helpful. Given the class are in Year 10, it remains to be seen if there is any impact. Even if there is, it will still be down to a combination of text choice, teaching and a whole variety of other factors.

There are a variety of other options available on the specification, but given the context of the school I work in and students' attitudes to learning – English and Maths are prioritised by many in an effort to ensure they can go to the Sixth Forms and Colleges of choice – there was partly a desire to try and redress this imbalance. The text was also appropriate because it is a play. Given

the time limitations of the course, introducing another longer prose text may not have been suitable for the group in question. When also taking into account that *The History* Boys would be in place of *An Inspector Calls*, there remained a requirement to keep a play text in the curriculum to ensure students were being exposed to a suitable breadth of literature.

From a managerial point of view, studying a text with far fewer resources that are freely available could place an additional burden on a teacher. The extent to which this is a problem depends very much on how the teacher plans and teaches.

Teaching strategies and planning

As I have become a more experienced teacher, I have moved away from the PowerPoint as a form of lesson plan, it being an increasingly unnecessary crutch, and instead have become the resource. I read the text closely and annotate it comprehensively. I plan the questions I wish to ask (some examples include: What is the difference between being 'thoughtful' and being 'smart'? What is the difference between a 'statesman' and a 'politician'? What does the word 'glib' mean?). I pre-empt the kinds of responses students will return with and consider what can be done to ensure understanding. In terms of workload, these are the things that would have been done before, but typed up onto a PowerPoint and made to look interesting. This is not to say PowerPoints are never used, but they are more of a visual prompt. Interestingly, discussion of what a good teacher is has teased out student perception, at least in my context, that a PowerPoint or a textbook is a sign of a teacher who is less secure in their subject knowledge, or that it is 'boring'. This speaks to the misuse of technology or textbook rather than the program or resource itself being poor.

Typically, I use the PowerPoint to store a series of retrieval questions which start the majority of lessons. Taking inspiration from the good TeamEnglish folk of Twitter, I create a '5-a-day' to check what students know or do not know as the case may be. The questions prioritise the knowledge I want students to remember; sometimes this is a short quotation (though students need only make references to text), sometimes it is the meaning of a new word or concept, sometimes it is a cultural reference that they probably won't need, but why not know it anyway. Students like the questions: they like the validation of getting it right; they like the feeling that they are accumulating knowledge; they like that there are no consequences if they don't know. If they don't know, answers are provided and the questions are revisited later in the process. The key to its success in my lessons has been to ask students to record answers on a mini whiteboard or printout of the page, but more importantly, to delve deeper irrespective of whether the answer was right or not.

The History Boys: 5 a day	
1. What compound adjectives of Hardy's does Bennett use to convey Hector's loneliness?	
2. Name at least one of the writers/artists the Headmaster labels as 'shrunken violets'.	
3. As TV Historian, what does Irwin focus his presentation on? Why?	
4. What does 'meretricious' mean?	
5. Why does Hector 'teach behind locked doors'?	

For example, for the second question above, I would ask for at least one 'shrunken violet' and might get a correct response of 'Oscar Wilde'. Subsequent questioning would then seek to elicit what the phrase 'shrunken violet' means, why the Headmaster says it, who he says it to and so on. If I wanted to spend more time on it, I might ask for information on Wilde, though this would require additional teaching, and, in essence, this is supposed to be a reasonably rapid opening to lessons. Yet there are endless opportunities for 'pass(ing) it on'. This is not to say that the 5-a-day is always perfect, though. What is? If not, it might be due to the way I have implemented it. For the students in my class, the word 'meretricious' is used appropriately in most essays where the word 'otiose' sometimes is not. But this is why teachers read what students write; I know that this misunderstanding is occurring and will seek to do something about it. On one occasion, I wrote a series of questions to address reasonably straightforward misconceptions that were seen across student work, with students able to respond very quickly to 'What is wrong with the word 'gobbet'?' and 'What is a 'gauntlet'?' very quickly.

Modelling

When teaching writing, instead of preparing models, I write them in front of the class, either on the board or, even better, under a visualiser so the writing can be kept for future use. I am even more enthusiastic about writing than I am about *The History* Boys, typically seeking to model what I want my students to do. My writing is far from perfect, but again, this is rather the point. I plan; I ensure an element of thesis (beef! More on that later) to underpin the thinking; there are errors (we are all human!); I talk through my thought process; I edit and re-draft and constantly re-read. Students see their teacher under a bit of pressure, but their teacher is reminded of the difficulty of writing under timed conditions and the legitimate concerns of an aching hand. I think students are more likely to emulate the writing process if they see the supposed experts do it, and, if the work is good, it

reinforces teacher expertise. Even if I have been unhappy with a piece of my own writing, we dissect it and use it as a prompt to improve work.

Better still is to use student work and put this under the visualiser instead, selecting work carefully for this purpose. In one teaching sequence, I wrote a response to Question 6 from the June 2018 exam: *Bennett has said that the boys in the play know more than any of their teachers. How far do you agree that the boys 'know more' than the staff?'* (see 'live' model below) before students then wrote their own response to the other question offered: *How does Bennett present different attitudes to learning in The History Boys?'*

A 'live' model

Bennett has said that the boys in the play know more than any of their teachers.

How far do you agree that the boys 'know more' than the staff?

Write about:

- what the boys say and do
- how far Bennett presents the boys as 'knowing more' than the staff

The concept of who has the most knowledge is dependent on what type of knowledge is being referred to. If it is historical fact, Mrs Lintott is more knowledgeable; if knowledge is useless or 'otiose', then Hector knows more; if it is a 'glib' ability to manipulate facts to get an 'angle', then Irwin appears most successful. If anything, Bennett seems to suggest that knowledge alone is not enough - it is what it is for that most significant. Therefore, some boys such as Dakin know more than the staff while others, such as Posner, do not. Yet it is Bennett's consideration of the morality of knowledge that is most interesting.

In many respects, Dakin knows more than the teachers. Bennett's use of extended war metaphor to establish Dakin's increasingly sexualised relationship with Fiona gives him a status amongst the boys, only surpassed by the already sexually active Rudge. Dakin refers to the Headmaster's secretary as his 'Western Front' and implies he has been successful in his pursuit as he met only 'token resistance'. Bennett implies Dakin's exploits are both admired and a source of consternation as Scripps says he doesn't want to know more, before quickly saying 'Go on'. Dakin therefore has more knowledge of an area that the stereotypical teenage boy – and Bennett's play is arguably riddled with diverging examples of teenage boy stereotypes - is interested in. Even Mrs Lintott acknowledges to Irwin that Dakin's sexual maturity means he probably knows more than they do, at least in terms of gossip. A dalliance with secretary Fiona ensures that Dakin is aware of Hector's future retirement before anyone else. Knowledge is power.

Bennett also presents all the boys as knowing more about Hector than Mrs Lintott and Irwin. As the (apparently willing) victims of his 'laying of hands', they contrast with Mrs Lintott who does not know of his touching, and who is surprised to discover it. Perhaps the case can be made that such ignorance seems incongruous in a character who is otherwise so knowledgeable – it is Mrs Lintott's facts that have enabled the boys to undertake Oxbridge entrance exams; it is she who identifies the faults in Hector and Irwin for us (Hector wants to be remembered; Irwin is the metaphorical equivalent of a 'sprig of parsley') – but even so, Bennett constructs 'Totty' to be a one woman tour de force who, paradoxically, embodies the marginalisation of women by being a

female character who is marginalised. As arguably the most legitimately knowledgeable character in the play, or at least, one with less of an obvious agenda at work, her acerbic put down of her husband as a 'story-teller' being a case in point, she appears the most rounded figure in terms of what she knows. She knows men value presentation over all else; she knows men are inclined towards vanity (see the aforementioned Hector and the Headmaster's obsession with league tables – the very essence of how they are perceived by the outside world); she knows that women exist to follow after men, cleaning up their messes. Perhaps the issue is that Mrs Lintott is too passive, not doing enough to change perceptions. Alternatively, maybe Bennett holds her up as above the petty concerns of the men – the best way to not be caught up in the game of how one is seen is not to play the game in the first place, another sign of her knowing more. Perhaps the euphemism 'story-teller' is most informative; Bennett implies her husband is an adulterer who has lied, so by saying that history is story-telling and that men are invariably superior story-tellers, the point being made is that all men are liars. Irwin is obviously a liar – or at least economical with the truth, saying 'Maybe' when asked if the boys should cheat - but so is Hector and therefore, by fact of being male and, more importantly, having been taught by both men, all the boys will be deceptive too. However, such an argument raises the question of why Bennett chooses a virtually all male setting. It could be that Bennett is positioning the audience as those who know the most; we are expected to see the flaws of all the characters and ensure that we leave the audience wise and more knowledgeable about men, school, relationships and even the human condition itself. If the text is indeed imbued with this moral, it reasserts the argument that knowledge alone is not enough – it is what it is for that counts. Ergo, Bennett constructs Mrs Lintott to embody the importance of equality by, in many respects, ostracising her.

Yet while this may be a valid argument, an arguably more persuasive one emerges in the character of Hector, the hero of the text. The audience 'knows' this from the outset by the allusion to the classical story of Troy where Hector fights against the Trojans, in this case perhaps being a metaphor for a belief that knowledge is for the sole aim of passing exams. His admirable status is accentuated by his attire of gauntlets, aviator's jacket and the flourishes in how the boys announce his arrival.

Moreover, Hector's philosophy is quickly established; the boys know of Shakespeare, A.E.Housman, Larkin and Hardy as well as Brief Encounter and Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered. These high and lowbrow allusions that litter the play, specifically Hector's classroom, are emblematic of the boys not necessarily knowing more than their teachers, but that they have been inculcated into knowing the same cultural references as Hector. As this text is set in the 1980s, such cultural references to Ella Fitzgerald, for example, are potentially rather odd, raising the question of whether this type of knowledge is what the future men of Thatcherite Britain should know. Placing Hector as the hero who 'pass(es) it on' rather suggests Bennett thinks they should – or they may just be the references that Bennett himself knows of, also explaining why the boys have to sit an Oxbridge entrance exam after their A-levels (Bennett did this; 1980s students would not have had to).

In conclusion, Bennett demonstrates that knowledge is valuable and precious and that it can be used for different purposes, some which the audience are supposed to view as more morally valid than others. Ultimately, the audience are supposed to think that knowing things need not 'serve a practical purpose', but having it is better than not having it. Both Hector and Irwin can be forgiven their differing crimes because of this. Thus, knowing more is irrelevant, it is what you do with it that counts.

Impact on teaching: stories of the classroom

The History Boys, while still a play, is longer than *An Inspector Calls* and has taken longer to teach. This has meant that time that would otherwise be devoted elsewhere will have to be found. Greater responsibility will need to be placed on students to work hard outside of the classroom.

A more significant concern has been the perception of some students in other classes that they are not worthy of the text or that it is 'too clever for them'. To find this information, I conducted a fairly unscientific survey of the students in my class and have frequently asked teachers what they think. While most students relayed that the other students didn't care what text they did, some revealed that they felt inferior and others revealed the long term impact on revision – as only one class was studying Bennett, there would be fewer peers to revise with.

To combat this, this coming year, due to poor attendance at revision sessions and a desire to ensure as many students as possible hear what we want them to, our faculty have created a series of 20 minute 'Revision Lectures' in the form of audio files which are to be played to all classes. They are more academic in tone than a lesson, partly due to the one-way nature of them, and focus predominantly on text rather than exam technique. After all, we want to 'pass it on' for more than just the sake of the exam. Currently, lectures cover topics such as 'Toxic masculinity in *An Inspector Calls*', 'Critical Perspectives in *A Christmas Carol*' and '*Romeo and Juliet*: a problem play?' They have been created by each member of the faculty based on their interest and area of expertise so that different voices and perspectives are heard. The same will occur next year, focusing on *The History Boys*, where colleagues who taught it at A-level will be utilised to offer their perspective, even if the viewpoint is negative. A future task will be to ask students to create their own short lectures.

As previously mentioned, *The History Boys* is provocative. References to sex, with both men and women, are commonplace and often wrapped up in innuendo and euphemism. I haven't shied away from teaching this – when you teach Sampson and Gregory's use of euphemism at the beginning of Romeo and Juliet, or Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* at A-level as used to happen, it's hard to feel embarrassment for too long. Such themes are a part of life. Hector implies that literature is life. So, too, is swearing. It is noticeable that some students do not wish to read swear words and others say them more quietly, but the context of the play – these are a group of mostly 18 year old boys – means that it can be considered to be in some kind of context. Arguably, swearing jars most when it is out of kilter with its surroundings. It is not unusual to hear teenage boys swear, or discuss sex, or many other supposedly taboo issues. Therefore, the vast majority of students have been unconcerned by contentious issues, maybe because they are a reflection of life, certainly in terms of daily news (?), but I would hope it's also because I haven't sought to either overplay their importance, nor downplay them either. They just are.

If anything, students find it funny that their otherwise mild mannered teacher occasionally swears. Or at least, they did, the first time. As for the text itself, there have been moments where sniggers have almost taken over – there is one fantastic scene in the film version where Posner sings Ella Fitzgerald's 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' while directly gazing into the nonplussed eyes of Dakin that had students in giggles – but I think they are meant to. Sensitive and thoughtful

Posner's unrequited love for Dakin is beautifully realised here, with both character and audience realising the depth of Posner's 'spaniel heart'. It's funny. They snigger and so do I, even though I have seen it before. But sometimes, with some classes, teachers won't always feel comfortable to laugh along. The text requires a teacher to discuss teaching. It can all get a bit 'meta', or self-indulgent, depending on your viewpoint. As I talk about Hector or Irwin's teaching style, it will inevitably lead some students to consider the teaching style of the person in front of them. On one occasion, a student asked me what my style was. He obviously had his own thoughts and was playfully seeing how I would respond. This might not be for everyone. If you are happy to discuss your own teaching style, the text can be interesting. Personally, *The History Boys* has really helped me evaluate what I think teaching is and what it is for; it isn't jumping through the hoops of the exam. Having these conversations with the young people we teach is probably no bad thing.

On reflection, would I teach The History Boys again?

It remains to be seen if teaching *The History Boys* will be beneficial in terms of examination success, though I feel reasonably confident: teaching has been refreshed and inspiration renewed by teaching something different. I have enjoyed it hugely and students have, too. There are those who have enjoyed *The History Boys* less, with one student commenting bitterly on the irony of being in a school, talking about school and how there must surely be more to life than school. There is merit to this argument. *An Inspector Calls* does expose students to something they are likely to be less familiar with, at least in terms of era; this is just one reason why I would never rule out returning to it. But I haven't missed Priestley's text this year. If anything, the study of a different text has encouraged me to look at the other texts in the specification. If they are right for the group, they should be considered for teaching. Many of my colleagues are now feeling the same.

"You are probably completely unaware of this but John had really lost a lot of interest and confidence in English as a subject… a spark has reignited and I can see that his interest and enthusiasm for the subject is back. He talks about lessons with such passion which is a real accomplishment when we are talking about a teenager. He talks to me often about the History Boys, the story line, the characters etc which I really feel that you have brought alive".

Conclusion: what is our 'beef'?

When teaching how to write introductions and conclusions, a colleague of mine asks students to consider what a writer's 'beef' is. It means what the problem or agenda is; why the writer got out of bed on that day and wrote the text. Teachers will typically have a 'beef', a reason for being a teacher. Perhaps we all need to have our own 'beefs' with the text choices we make. There is a moral reason for choosing the texts we do. What are the values and philosophies that shape your choice? Be clear on them and students are likely to be well served by what we do.

Paper 2 case studies

Discussion prompts and further questions to consider

Personal context

- How are classes organised in your school? For instance mixed ability or multiple teachers?
    - What implications does this have when choosing a suitable text?
- How do your students' contexts influence your teach choices or teaching approaches?
    - Are there themes, topics or texts you avoid? If so, why?
- How do you encourage uptake of English at A-level in your school?

Choosing texts

- How important is teacher personal preference when choosing texts?
    - Do you genuinely enjoy the texts you teach?
- Are texts chosen to engage students, teachers or both?
    - Claire noted the 'switch-off' in her students, but was she noticing it in herself too?
- What is the appeal of An Inspector Calls?
    - Is it the clarity that Claire notes in the DNA case study, or are there other reasons?
- Do you consider ethical debate/morality when choosing texts for teaching?
    - Our 'Statement of importance' notes that the study of English literature *'aims to develop a critical understanding of the ways in which literary texts are a reflection of, and exploration of, the human condition'*.
- Does teaching new texts reinvigorate planning and teaching?
    - How does this impact teachers' lives?
    - Are lessons for 'new' texts more engaging compared to previously used lessons?
    - Are these lessons focused more or less on 'teaching to the test'?
- How does the prospect of choosing and teaching a new text feel?
    - Scary? Empowering? Burdensome? Exciting?

Modern literature

- What constitutes 'modern' and 'contemporary' literature?
- What are the opportunities and challenges of teaching modern/contemporary texts?
- How does the modern setting and/or modern context affect students' confidence in reading, studying and revising the text?
- Both case studies note how modern texts provide the scope to explore sophisticated concepts and universal contexts.
    - Could this flexible treatment of context help students to address the 'AO3' element of the question stem?
- What opportunities do you see to prepare students for the mature/contentious/provocative/[insert other] themes a text may raise?
- How do you manage provocative, taboo or challenging content in the texts you're teaching currently?

Drama

- How do you approach teaching a drama text?
    - How do your students engage with the ‘dramatic’ nature of a play?
    - What strategies do you employ when teaching a play, as opposed to a novel?
- To what extent do you engage with dramatic methods when teaching plays in English?
    - Does a focus on dramatic method reinvigorate teaching?
- Do contemporary plays provide more of an opportunity to focus on dramatic method and social context compared to other plays, eg Shakespeare?
    - Is this because the perceived ‘barriers’ of language and historical context are removed?

Appendix

The below teaching and learning activities have been taken from the spring 2016 hub materials which focused on teaching creative writing. These could be used in connection with teaching the Telling Tales anthology as way to develop students' understanding of the construction of narrative and to stimulate their own creative writing.

Narrative hooks

Effective introductions do two things: grab the reader's interest and make the reader want to read on. The following are a variety of techniques that can be used as narrative hooks in an opening to a story. More than one hook can be used!

Narrative hook	Example
The outrageous hook – this will make you do a double take. *Did I really read that?*	See opening *to Bring Up the bodies* – Hilary Mantel (from AQA English Language resources for Paper 1)
The puzzling hook – this immediately makes you ask questions of the story.	See opening to *Compass and Torch* – Elizabeth Baines *(*from *legacy* AQA Anthology *Sunlight on the Grass)*
The quotation hook – this can connect you with something you already know and it can make the writer seem more credible.	See opening to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* – Mohsin Hamid (from *AQA* English Language resources for Paper 1*)*
The startling hook – this makes you think twice, but isn't as shocking as the outrageous hook.	'Fugu is a fish caught off the Pacific shores of Japan. The fish has held a special significance for me ever since my mother died through eating one" *A Family Supper* - Kazuo Ishiguro (from AQA Anthology – *Telling Tales*)
The direct address hook – you are spoken to directly and feel involved from the start.	Suggested example opening to *Waiting for Sunrise* – William Boyd [due to copyright restrictions we've not been able to reproduce the text here]
The subtle hook – a bit like the startling hook, this appeals to your sense of curiosity. Who is he?	See opening to *I'm the King of the Castle* – Susan Hill *(AQA* English Language resources for Paper 1*)*
The atmospheric hook – this is descriptive, and could evoke a variety of moods.	"The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston — with seven full waggons. It appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed, but the colt that it startled from among the gorse, which still flickered indistinctly in the raw afternoon, outdistanced it at a canter. A woman, walking up the railway line to Underwood, drew back into the hedge, held her basket aside, and watched the footplate of the engine advancing. The trucks thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement, as she stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting

	black waggons and the hedge…. *The Odour of Chrysanthemums* – D H Lawrence *(from AQA Anthology Telling Tales")*
The visual hook – appeals to our sense of sight.	'The pond in our park was circular, exposed, perhaps fifty yards across. When the wind blew, little waves travelled across it and slapped the paved edges, like a miniature sea. We would go there, Mother, Grandfather and I." *Chemistry* - Graham Swift (*AQA Anthology – Telling Tales*)
The amusing hook – this is a tricky hook and only works if it appeals to your sense of humour.	Suggested example opening to *Bill's New Frock* – Anne Fine [due to copyright restrictions we've not been able to reproduce the text here]
The question hook – you want to read on to find the answer.	Suggested example opening to *Artemis Fowl* – Eoin Colfer [due to copyright restrictions we've not been able to reproduce the text here]
The direct speech hook – pace and in this case introduces characters.	Suggested example opening to *Babylon Revisited – F Scott Fitzgerald short story.* [due to copyright restrictions we've not been able to reproduce the text here]

Teaching plot and structure

What to look for when analysing texts and things to bear in mind when planning your own narrative writing.

Beginnings:

- What is the narrative hook? How is the reader drawn into the story?
- Is a setting/time period established?
- Is a character (or characters) introduced?
- Is a theme or story-line suggested?
- Is there a narrator? First or third person? What is their tone of voice like?
- Is the narrator omniscient? Are there multiple narrative viewpoints?
- Is dialogue used? What effect does it have on the reader?
- Is there a prevailing tense (past or present)? What effect does this have?
- Has the writer used contrast or juxtaposition?
- Has the writer moved from the general to the particular or vice versa?
- Is there a shift in perspective?

Middles:

- Is a problem introduced? How quickly is the problem introduced?
- How do the characters deal with the problem?
- Are all the characters behaving in the same way? (Have the characters changed in any way? What has motivated this change?)
- Has the setting changed?
- Has there been a time-shift?
- Are there clear links with earlier parts of the story/play?
- Does the writer suggest what is to come?

Endings:

- Does the story/play come to a definite end? How is the problem resolved?
- Does the story end as you expected?
- Have the characters changed in any way?
- Does the end echo the opening?
- Is there a moral/message?

Students could also consider the following structural devices:

- movement from big to small – ideas or perspectives
- internal cohesion and topic sentences
- taking an outside to inward perspective, or vice versa
- introductions and developments
- reiterations, repetitions, threads, patterns or motifs
- connections and links across paragraphs
- narrative perspective
- shifts of focus
- foregrounding of certain objects, characters to draw the reader's attention to them
- end focus – has a particular word/phrase/idea been left to the end of the text for dramatic impact?

Reflective writing process

Step 1	Students write for approximately 5 to 6 minutes.
Step 2	Students stop writing.
Step 3	Students read what they have written so far and reflect on how well they are achieving their purpose. (They could refer back to their plan at this stage)
Step 4	Using a different coloured pen/ post it notes**,** students annotate their own work and/or make notes on what they have used to achieve their purpose. (Teacher can decide what would be useful to reflect on depending on the focus of the learning)
Step 5	Students note down what the emphasis needs to be in their next period of writing.
Step 6	Students continue writing in response to the task for approximately 10 minutes.
Step 7	Repeat steps 4 and 5.
Step 8	Students continue writing and checking their response to the task for 45 to 50 minutes
Step 9	Students reflect on their completed task

Further reading and references

Introduction:

DfE subject content for GCSE English Literature
assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254498/GCSE_English_literature.pdf

AQA GCSE English Literature Insight report: 2018 results at a glance
filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-8702-RIS.PDF

Bell, John F. (1997) Question Choice in English Literature Examinations, Oxford Review of Education, 23:4, 447-458, DOI: 10.1080/0305498970230402 (published online 07 Jul 2006)
tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0305498970230402

AQA An Examiner's experience - video
https://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/become-an-examiner-or-moderator

AQA For more information on marking and awarding re-visit the summer 2017 hub materials
aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/hub-schools-network/english-meeting-materials-archive

AQA Quality assessment
https://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/getting-the-right-result/quality-assessment

AQA Video of Alex Scharaschkin, the Director of AQA's Centre for Education Research and Practice, talking about how we make sure results are accurate and reliable
https://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/getting-the-right-result/quality-assessment/how-we-ensure-quality-of-marking

Ofsted (December 2018) An investigation into how to assess the quality of education through curriculum intent, implementation and impact.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766252/How_to_assess_intent_and_implementation_of_curriculum_191218.pdf

Notes

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