

GCSE English Literature

Hub schools network meeting

Presentation slides booklet

Published: Summer 2019



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Summer 2019



This meeting will be recorded

Exam boards have an Ofqual requirement to record event audio.

Recordings are kept for the lifetime of the specification and not shared as an accompaniment to session resources.

The recording will begin now.

Opening discussion

- Which texts do you teach?
- Do you enjoy teaching those texts?
- Do your students enjoy studying those texts?

Focus of the session

- Unpicking some of the 'myths' around text choice and comparability
- Explore arguments for optionality and how awarding bodies ensure fairness
- What drives teachers' text choices?
- Walk through of the Paper 2, Modern Text set text list
- Why are some teachers switching to 'less popular' texts?
- Case studies from teachers as they begin to teach 'DNA' and 'The History Boys'

Introduction

- Unpicking some of the 'myths' around text choice and comparability
- Explore arguments for optionality and how awarding bodies ensure fairness

Myths and misperceptions

There are 'easy' texts and 'hard' texts

Examiners are more generous when marking texts with lower uptake

It's harder to get top marks on particular texts

Examiners are more generous with texts that are perceived to be harder than others

Myth 1: There are 'easy' texts and 'hard' texts

This is entirely subjective.

Rich variety of texts on offer – different texts will appeal to different learners

- Short texts vs. lengthy texts
- Texts with a straightforward plot vs. multiple plot lines
- Familiar setting vs. unfamiliar setting
- Texts that deal with universal themes vs. conceptually challenging themes

Behind the scenes: specification development

DfE set out the coverage of subject content required for GCSE specifications in English Literature:

- a range of high quality, intellectually challenging, and substantial whole texts
- Shakespeare
- 19th century novel
- selection of poetry since 1789
- fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards
- originally written in English.

Behind the scenes: specification development

Texts selected by committee.

Considerations:

- Un-tiered context – importance of choice
- Variety – balance of traditional and contemporary
- Maintain some popular choices – existing stock
- Offer fresh texts that will appeal to emerging generation of young people
- Literary acclaimed
- Test-drive against the AOs, especially AO3 – what scope does the text offer for students to show understanding of context?
- Options for schools switching from different awarding body

Myth 2: It's harder to get top marks on particular texts

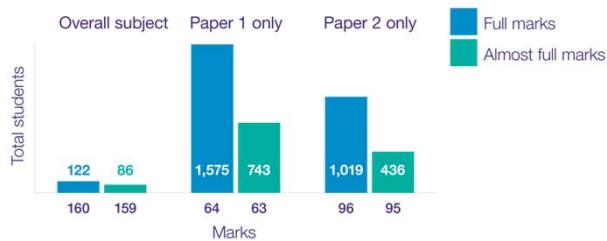
False

The proof

From [Insight report: 2018 results at a glance](#)

This shows how many students achieved full marks and how many dropped just one.

Students achieving full marks cf. dropped just one



AQA GCSE English Literature

The proof

A Taste of Honey by Shelagh Delaney

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.

The proof

Example of a full mark response to Q12 *A Taste of Honey* (see pages 6-10 in the booklet)

Look closely at paragraph 5: From 'Delaney also evidences the scapegoating of a minority through Geoff.' to the end of the paragraph '...they will be subject to stagnation and squalour.'

A Taste of Honey on tour

National Theatre production

Directed by Bijan Sheibani

(from September 2019)

This British classic is an exhilarating depiction of working-class life in post-war Salford.

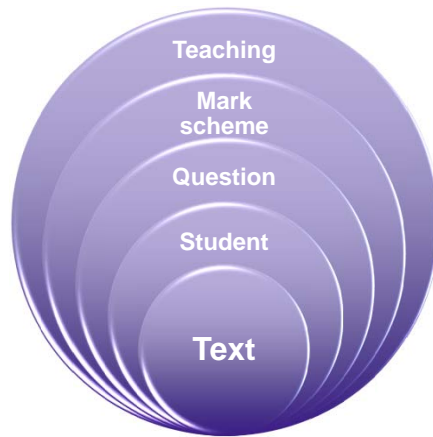
The big question

How do you ensure there's comparability of demand when there's optionality on a paper?

1. Setting questions and mark schemes
2. Examiner standardisation
3. Marking processes and monitoring of markers
4. Performance review process



Comparability



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Skills-based assessment

The text serves as the student's opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in particular skills.

Parity of demand is built into the assessment through use of a common levels of response mark scheme.

Historic research suggests that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged by text choice or question as long as there is consistent application of a criterion-referenced (skills-based) mark scheme (John F Bell, 1997)

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De-mystifying the mark scheme

Levels of response mark scheme

Principle of best-fit

Positive marking ethos

Myths 3 and 4: Markers are more generous when...

Markers are expected to have a good working knowledge of all the texts for the component they're marking.

There is a danger in being 'too familiar' with a text – markers are guided to be mindful of not developing expectations of what students 'should' say.

Examiners are encouraged to reward any valid interpretations and as such be open-minded.

Reliable, rigorous, robust

There are processes we put in place that ensure marking is reliable – examiners mark accurately and equitably.

Standardisation process:

- Standardising scripts are scripts which have been scrutinised by the senior examining team and the marks have been agreed
- They enable markers to recognise what performance at different levels actually looks like
- It's a training exercise in how to apply MS consistently
- Compulsory – regardless of experience

Reliable, rigorous, robust

Seeding process:

- Seeds are scripts that have already been marked by the senior team
- They are used to 'test' whether examiners are marking to the agreed standard
- Systematic and reliable way of monitoring the quality of marking 'in flight'
- On average, there will be one seed in each batch of 20 scripts
- If marking is out of tolerance, the examiner will be paused
- Triggers discussion and review of scripts by team leader

An examiner's experience

Anna's story



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Revision: Marking and awarding de-mystified

For more information on marking re-visit the summer 2017 hub materials

Available on the meeting materials archive page
[aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/hub-schools-network/english-meeting-materials-archive](https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/hub-schools-network/english-meeting-materials-archive)

- Marking processes
- Setting grade boundaries (awarding)
- Reviewing and analysing results
- Post-results services

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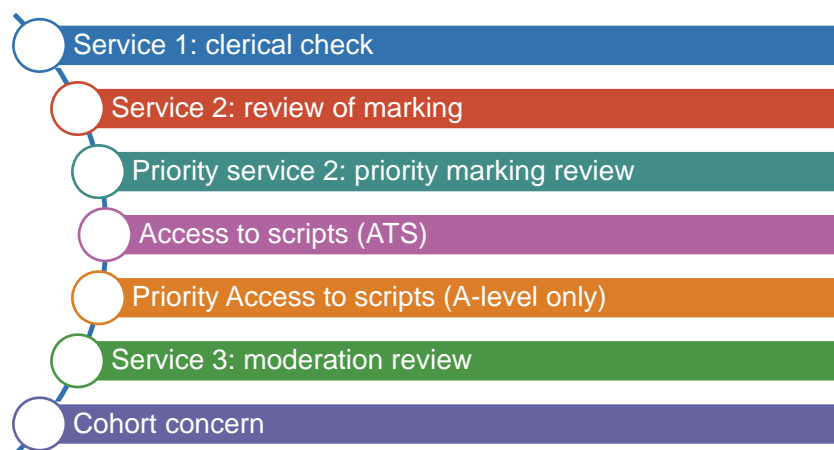
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Awarding re-visited – the highlights

- We don't know how exam papers have performed until the marking is completed.
- We consider any shifts in how the papers have performed and the impact on the shape of the distribution curves.
- We might need to shift the boundaries slightly to ensure comparability with previous years.
- More information about how grade boundaries are set can be found on the [website](#).

Reminder: Post-results services



Post-results - Ofqual regulation from Spring 2016

All exam boards are required to correct marking and moderation errors but not otherwise change marks.

We will only review papers to correct genuine marking errors – we can't change reasonable marks

- Marks may be changed when there is a marking error (can be adjusted upward or downward to correct the mark)
- Marks may be changed when the original marking cannot be supported by evidence from the mark scheme and 'the original marking represents an unreasonable application of academic judgement'

Enhanced results analysis (ERA)

Are you getting the most out of the **Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA)** tool?

We've produced detailed guides and video tutorials to help you with your analysis on results day:

aqa.org.uk/contact-us/secure-services/enhanced-results-analysis.

Results day: Thursday 22 August 2019

ERA will be available from 6.00am

Session 1

- What drives teachers' text choices?
- Walk through of the Paper 2, Modern Text set text list

Paper 2, Section A – text choice

What is the text selection process at your school?

Are you happy with the text choice or do you wish you could do something different?

Please complete the survey and let us know your thoughts.

Which texts do you think are the most popular choices for Paper 2 modern texts?

Most popular texts on Paper 2
Section A



1. An Inspector Calls 2. Blood Brothers 3. Lord of the Flies 4. Animal Farm 5. DNA

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How many of us here in the room teach one of these texts?

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Why do so many teachers and schools choose these three texts?

An Inspector Calls

Blood Brothers

Lord of the Flies


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Why do so many teachers and schools choose these three texts?

- The plays are short and take up less teaching time to read.
- They are familiar and were taught on the legacy specification.
- The school does not need to buy in new books.
- They are a 'safe' choice.
- There are lots of resources available for these texts.
- They are widely taught so everyone knows them.
- They are relevant and offer excellent opportunities for contextual discussion.
- They are brilliant texts that students enjoy.

Why teachers choose *An Inspector Calls*

 **Sonja**

AIC is accessible across the range of abilities and students always have strong opinions about the characters. Themes link nicely to articles for P2 Lang. We do ACC and there is a lot of contextual and thematic cross-over which helps to keep referring to and revising both texts.


22:17 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPad](#)

 **Harriet Rowe**

AIC - context obvs plus play so less text heavy (mixed ability). Also links to current issues in society so great discussions and (usually passive) girls seem to respond very positively to transformation of Sheila/ attitudes to women.

13:25 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Why teachers choose *An Inspector Calls*

 **Charlotte Bowles**

AIC- we have all taught it previously and the language is easy enough for lower ability students but can be made more complex for higher ability. Both gender students find characters to relate to and easily understand the context to the text. We taught it prior to the changes too

22:25 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

 **Melanie**

AIC we all teach it allows the dept to share ideas and resources

11:24 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

2 Likes

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Why teachers choose *Blood Brothers*

 **MrsMoEnglish**

BB - accessible to all students in terms of language, plus (and this is a biggie for me) we take them to see this as a piece of musical theatre. Our ERA shows our students who study this out perform similar students who study other modern texts.

13:03 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)

 **Louise SJ**

BB. Lyrics make it easy for students to learn quotations - we use soundtrack a lot. Accessible for all students and one of our best performing lit questions across the board. Definitely recommend.

23:03 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

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Why teachers choose *Blood Brothers*



Mrs Brewer

We teach Blood Brothers to whole cohort. The thinking behind it is we can really teach the context well and the students can easily relate to the text as our school is in inner city Liverpool. I'm still to be convinced that this is the most apt text for our ablest students though

21:57 · 23/02/2019 from [Liverpool, England](#) · [Twitter for iPhone](#)



Freya

Went with BB when I was in England. Pupils love it and got 9s with it!

09:33 · 24/02/2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)

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Why teachers choose *Lord of the Flies*



MrsLeggEnglish

Lord of the Flies, pupils perform well nationally, it offers richness and depth of language and the allegory allows all abilities to reach higher levels of analysis.

09:30 · 24/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)



Mrs Hunt

LOTF- rich language and literary context. Lots of opportunities to develop understanding of writer's viewpoint and purpose. Used to teach Pigeon English- great for mixed ability/reluctant readers.

18:53 · 23/02/2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)

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Discussion time

Does your text choice allow you to evidence that you have considered the list of curriculum indicators in the new Ofsted model?

[An investigation into how to assess the quality of education through curriculum intent, implementation and impact](#)

(See pages 12-13 in the booklet)

Alan Bennett *The History Boys*



CharlotteWoolley

I love teaching the history boys and partly because in a great class they really get the concept of nuggets in the exam! Loads of great stuff to do with it and they respond well to the comedy and modernity of it compared to the 19C.

12:50 · 07/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)



Layne

I loved teaching The History Boys a couple of years ago. Some of the kids are now in my upper sixth and we still refer back to it.

18:39 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

1 Like

Alan Bennett *The History Boys*

- Question 5 was substantially more popular than question 6.
- Contextually, couldn't be more current: debates about what constitutes a 'good' education.
- About a school, many of the characters a relatable age.
- Funny, with jokes the students get (and comedy swearing)
- A good film version
- In terms of curriculum – acts as a contrast to the most popular Shakespeare genre (tragedy) so widens the school's offer.

Dennis Kelly *DNA*

 Sophie Pateman

Higher level easily grasped the religious symbolism to it and made original comments. Lower level were able to make connections to it and discussed the portrayal of teenagers

19:56 · 14/03/2018 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

 Kate Eastman

We do DNA - the pupils are engaged with it and even though analysing the methods can be tricky at first, there is actually lots to say about once you delve a bit deeper. Nice for them to have some more recent modern literature alongside Dickens/ Stevenson and Shakespeare too!

18:13 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Dennis Kelly *DNA*

- Question 8 was the more popular of the two questions.
- Kelly has spoken at length about the context behind the play – when asked if it referenced a specific event he said: ‘Not really. It was just about the idea of whether it’s ever justified to do something that hurts the individual for the sake of the group. It follows our country going to war and the fear of increasingly draconian laws being put into place because people were scared.’ Great for authorial intention.
- Fantastic BBC teach live recordings and National Youth Theatre and Birmingham Rep resource packs.

Simon Stephens *The Curious Incident...*



Simon Stephens *The Curious Incident...*

- Both questions were fairly equal in popularity.
- Fantastic BBC teach live recordings of the play.
- Useful for exploring ideas about SMSC within a curriculum.
- Stephens said this about the play: 'the play is not just about Christopher but about the combination of people who surround Christopher who are affected by the things that he does to them. So the play is about two things, I think the play is about family and it's about raising children. I think to a real degree, and this is my own area of interest, it's actually a play about teaching.'

Shelagh Delaney *A Taste of Honey*



Tracy Jacks
The Smiths Sleeves #23

Louder Than Bombs

The Smiths use another image of playwright **Delaney**. One of the tracks on the compilation album, 'This Night Has Opened My Eyes', retells the story of **Delaney's** play **A Taste Of Honey** and the central character of Jo



Richmond Theatre

Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey* was first performed in 1958, and was a landmark in feminist drama. The show returns to the stage coming to Richmond from 7 - 12 Oct.

"A woman's got as much right -and more cause- to get drunk than any man." [#InternationalWomensDay](#)

Shelagh Delaney *A Taste of Honey*

- Two thirds of students chose question 12.
- Written by Delaney when she was 19 – very inspiring for our students.
- A National Theatre production starring Jodie Prenger will be going on tour with it from September 2019.
- British Library has lots of linked resources.
- Social issues follow on from those in the 19th century texts, which makes it easy to design a curriculum narrative.

George Orwell *Animal Farm*

 **Amanda Bellamy** ▾

Animal Farm because it has a rich historical context, as well as looking at Orwell as a writer. Lots of stretch and challenge for the brighter kids and the less able find it accessible on a different level too

19:40 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPad](#)

 **Susan Strachan** ▾



Animal Farm - works a treat. Have done BB (not enough stretch imo) & AIC (as a tutor) but AF wins hands down - its interesting, engaging & v relevant.

19:57 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)

George Orwell *Animal Farm*


- Question 17 was a little more popular than question 18.
- Brevity means it fits easily into a packed key stage 4.
- As contextually relevant today as it has ever been.
- Orwell said of the story: 'I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job. The turning-point of the story was supposed to be when the pigs kept the milk and apples for themselves. If the other animals had had the sense to put their foot down then, it would have been all right.'

Kazuo Ishiguro: *Never Let Me Go*

 **Lucinda Gilchrist** 

I taught *Never Let Me Go* to a top set and they loved it. Really interesting ideas about morality, mortality, science, genre... and the author is a Nobel winner!

18:13 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

 **CMP** 

I've taught *Never Let Me Go* to my groups for the last few years and I love it. It's dense and forces the students to think abstractly but the students genuinely get into it. My department are through and through AIC fans but I just hate it so much

08:41 · 24/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Kazuo Ishiguro: *Never Let Me Go*

- Encourages students to read for pleasure.
- A great film version available.
- Ishiguro has said about the text: 'Paradoxically, I found that having clones as central characters made it very easy to allude to some of the oldest questions in literature; questions which in recent years have become a little awkward to raise in fiction. "What does it mean to be human?" "What is the soul?" "What is the purpose for which we've been created, and should we try to fulfil it?" It's a futuristic way of going ancient.'

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Meera Syal *Anita and Me*



Miss Parkes

Have been toying with Anita and Me because school is in Walsall and several parallels between upbringing/background of our students and characters in story. Currently doing AIC, but teachers becoming a bit...fatigued over repetitive lessons.

08:34 · 24/02/2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)



Anna Reynard

I adore Anita and Me. So funny. I used to teach it for legacy CA and it was really well received.

08:36 · 24/02/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

[View Tweet activity](#)

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Meera Syal *Anita and Me*

- Gives an alternative to all the white-centric narratives.
- A great film version is available.
- Meera Syal says of her novel being a GCSE text: 'To a lot of kids the story, set in the 1970s, is ancient history. But I think it works because we can all remember being teenagers. We've all been Anita. It's the story of a little Indian girl but also about growing up.'

Stephen Kelman *Pigeon English*

 Jen teaches English

Pigeon English for us. It's properly modern and grabs the kids. We do it first too.

18:06 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

 Miss Fincham

Pigeon English - education about knife crime is a must for starters. Has wide student appeal. Some really clever structural elements for the most able. A gripping story for all.

18:13 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter Web Client](#)

Stephen Kelman *Pigeon English*

 **Laura**
@MsLPitty

Replying to @ReynardannaAnna @LitdriveUK and @Team_English1

We teach Pigeon English because the kids love it and the contextual links they make are strong. We teach this before any other Lit text as we find it's a good hook. It is our most stolen text if that gives you any clue about its popularity. No one steals J&H.

17:51 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

 **Stephen Kelman**
@stephen_kelman

Replying to @MsLPitty @ReynardannaAnna and 2 others

The most stolen book...what an honour! Perhaps I can pay you a visit some time?

23:16 · 06/03/2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Stephen Kelman *Pigeon English*

- Culturally and contextually, intensely pertinent.
- A thoroughly 'modern' text.
- Many of the characters are a relatable age.
- Great for SMSC.
- Kelman's own thoughts on the text as a GCSE choice are in the booklet in full (see page 22).

Telling Tales: short story anthology

Telling Tales: short story anthology

- One of the main barriers to changing text choice is often cited as cost.
- The Telling Tales anthology can be ordered freely via the [website](#).
- You have a copy of the anthology in today's pack.
- Are you familiar with any of the stories? In what capacity?

What are the advantages to teaching a collection of texts rather than one big one?

- They are easily digestible.
- They don't require the same stamina as an extended novel/play.
- Students get to experience a range of writing styles.
- They lend themselves well to shared groups or interleaved teaching.
- Exposes students to a range of complete structural choices so helps with teaching Paper 1 for English Language.
- There is **no requirement** for students **to compare** short stories within their response.

Short stories: a genre in itself

Ernest Hemingway was a major American writer of the twentieth century. His writing style was quite simple and minimal. He was once challenged by a friend to write a story in under 10 words. This was his response.

'For Sale:
Baby shoes, never worn.'

Short stories: a genre in itself

For Sale:
Baby shoes, never worn.

- Is this a story?
- If so, what is the story?
- If not, what is missing?

How is a short story different from a novel or a play?

- A need to be economical.
- The need for an efficiently convincing narrative perspective and voice.
- Writers must build worlds with minimalistic details.
- General reliance on inference to explore how character is presented and developed in a brief story.
- A clear moment of epiphany.

Helen Dunmore: *My Polish Teacher's Tie*

I wear a uniform, blue overall and white cap with the school logo on it. Part-time catering staff, that's me, £3.89 per hour. I dish out tea and buns to the teachers twice a day, and I shovel chips on to the kids' trays at dinner time. It's not a bad job. I like the kids.

Helen Dunmore: *My Polish Teacher's Tie*

- What has been achieved in just 55 words at the opening of this story?
- How might this approach - typical to a short story - help students studying the anthology?
- Look at the opening to John McGahern: *Korea*. The same efficiency of establishing voice, world and character can be exemplified there too.

One school's story of success

Telling Tales

or

How we learned to love Odour of Chrysanthemums and all lived happily ever after.

One school's story of success

Why teach Telling Tales?

- They are short
- They are relatively straightforward in terms of language
- We have a bank of good resources
- We got good exam results
- We know much more about what the examiners are looking for in these texts through studying past mark schemes
- We can teach these more smartly
- Don't obsess over details – the exam wants ideas, let's teach pupils to think.

One school's story of success

- With less narrative to explore, the school spent much longer looking at writers' methods.
- It found that the short story genre is rich in method and that the students were able to see the impact of structure and narrative voice more clearly than with the broader texts.
- This allowed the teachers to focus on the big ideas in the stories and to teach the students to think, rather than regurgitate tropes.

Ways into teaching method via Telling Tales. Odour of Chrysanthemums

Please refer to page 24 of your text choices booklet.

An example response

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.

(Please note this response was written as part of a mock exam)

Session 2

- Why are some teachers switching to 'less popular' texts?
- Case studies from teachers as they begin to teach 'DNA' and 'The History Boys'

Group activity

Read each case study and consider the discussion prompts in your groups

Case study: Teaching DNA (pages 27-31)

Case study: Teaching The History Boys (pages 32 – 40)

Discussion prompts (pages 41 - 42)

Plenary

Support from Teachit

Sample pack of (free) resources to support the following texts:

- Anita and Me
- Telling Tales short story anthology
- Never Let Me Go
- The History Boys



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Is there anything you'll be taking back?

Would you be tempted to choose a different text?

If so...

Which text?

Would you need 'approval'?

How would you make the move?

How could local schools support each other with text choices or changes?

eg, book club, book reviews, sharing resources.

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Reviews of results

- Marking is completed expertly and with care, but occasionally errors occur
- The review of results service provides a means to correct any errors
- Reviews will address genuine errors in marking
- In many responses, including more extended answers, there is a range of reasonable marks, not one single correct mark
- If this is the case reviewers will not replace one reasonable mark with another reasonable mark.

Resources

The electronic materials from this event will be made available to you in the customer portal of our online booking system.

Once we receive notification that you have attended the course, you will be sent a certificate of attendance by email. When you receive your certificate, please log in to your account and the materials will be available on the my resources tab from the welcome screen.

How did we do?

Please take a moment to complete a brief evaluation form for today's event. Your feedback is very important to us as it helps us improve and plan future training.

You should have been emailed the evaluation form. Please check your inbox (possibly your junk mail folder). If you haven't received it please give your trainer your name, centre name/number and email address so that we can look into it for you.

Thank you.

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