English Subject Centre
Seed Guide
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The Higher Education Academy | English Subject Centre

Pick Your Own
Ideas for English seminars

About *Seed Guides*

English Subject Centre Seed Guides are short and practical guides especially written for those teaching English Language, English Literature and Creative Writing within Higher Education. They are intended to help early career lecturers or part-time tutors finding their feet, and also experienced lecturers looking for fresh ideas, or pointers in an unfamiliar area. The Guides are digests of key information and ideas designed to provide just enough information to 'get you going' and sow ideas from which, we hope, enhancements and initiatives can grow and develop.

The English Subject Centre Seed Guide Series

Electronic copies are available on the English Subject Centre website:
www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/seedguides.php

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In this Seed Guide, you will find – to mix the metaphor somewhat – a bumper crop of short but stimulating ideas for seminar activities, written by and for English lecturers who have over the years contributed to the 'T3' section of the English Subject Centre website. The diversity of the techniques used and the ingenuity and creativity of the thought behind them reflect the healthy state of teaching in HE English departments across the country: from role-play as Jean Rhys to the close-reading of Dickens's *Household Words*.

The ideas have been loosely arranged by teaching method, complemented by an index of topics and authors (p. 28). The headings that we have used are not intended as a comprehensive or even consistent list of pedagogical techniques: they are simply a holding device designed to facilitate browsing. We have structured the Guide in this way to stress the fact that these ideas are not primarily intended as off-the-peg lesson plans. Rather, the aim of this collection is to invite adaptation, elaboration, creativity. Our hope is that hard-pressed lecturers will turn to this Guide, as to a friendly, talkative and experienced colleague, to inspire them in the creation of their own individual and exciting teaching sessions.

Detailed guidance on planning and running seminars can be found in the English Subject Centre's seminar teaching area (**www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/ seminars/index.php**) and in its recent *Small Group Teaching in English Literature: A Good Practice Guide* (**www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/archive/publications/ reports/small_gp_teaching.pdf**). There is only room here for a few introductory observations.

We ought perhaps to stress the fact that the practical and in some cases playful ideas in this Seed Guide are not intended as a substitute for rigorous textual work. But they are rooted in a strongly-held pedagogic belief that the seminar is itself a complex genre, and one in which only a minority of students can successfully perform unaided. So these activities are built upon twin notions: that to enable intellectually rich and stimulating seminars we as teachers need to plan for how students can engage with the subject matter. And secondly, that very few students have immediate access to the dense webs of allusion and knowledge attributed to the ideal reader. Faced with how much their teachers know, many students are likely to have recourse to a dutiful acquisition of information. Our object as teachers (as of this Seed Guide) is to stimulate curiosity and the anticipation of pleasure in learning. We need to provide activities which begin to open up such vistas.

Using the ideas

There are some things to bear in mind when putting into practice the suggestions in the rest of this Guide:

- We strongly recommend the use of structured activity, but note that activities that have proved productive with one group do not necessarily work with another. And even the best technique can be fetishised!

- Any plan for an activity needs to be thought through in relation to the aims of the module and programme of which it forms a part.

- The activities suggested here typically involve dividing larger groups into smaller groups, each of which chooses (or is allocated) an enrichment task towards the next session; or on occasion does a delimited piece of work within a single session. At the least, the group activities, however tangential they may seem, should throw up passages or details upon which textual discussion can get to work.

- It is always worth thinking out how the activities you plan for the class will feed into students' own independent work outside the classroom.

- Activities of this kind can productively be linked in to the use of a VLE, thereby helping students to carry out activities at their own pace, and to manage their own study. VLE-based activities enrich the face-to-face work of the seminar.

- Many of these directed activities invite students to make cross-modular connections. Suggestions aim to stimulate understanding beyond the immediate text or topic. Further, employed in a level 2 module, many of the activities outlined here could provide a stimulus for students' preparatory thinking towards their level 3 dissertation.

Ben Knights and **Jonathan Gibson**
English Subject Centre

Teaching approaches

Pick Your Own

Brainstorming

Reader theory

1. Vs. the grain

This activity captures the idea of the 'resisting reader' (Judith Fetterley), and the possibility of 'reading against the grain'. Students are invited to bring to class an example of a novel or poem which felt alien to them. This sense of alienation might be expressed as anger, boredom, impatience. A volunteer is appointed as scribe and the whiteboard / flipchart divided into two columns. The rest of the group dictates a list of responses, and have to decide collectively which should go in the 'against the grain' column, and which in the 'ideal reader' column. It is important to avoid the ensuing discussion becoming bogged down in petty negativity. You're trying to go beyond the simple listing of 'things we didn't like' towards a discussion of the challenges the text poses.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Sign to simulation (Baudrillard)

2. Brainstorming Baudrillard

Following a lecture on or a set reading of the relevant parts of Baudrillard's *Simulations*, provide the group with a handout detailing Baudrillard's four stages of the sign as a reminder. Divide the whiteboard into four columns – one for each of the proposed stages. Brainstorm examples and get the group to attempt to classify each example into the appropriate stage of the model. As they do this, and find that some examples sit less easily within one category than others, they should be able to begin to critique the model, by exposing its strengths and weaknesses through attempting to apply it. I find this a useful way of not only getting students to grapple with theory 'hands on', but also to encourage them to take issue with it where necessary.

George Selmer (Anglia Ruskin University)

Banks, *The Wasp Factory*

3. Bestiary

A suggested preliminary writing activity for orientation: invite students to undertake an individual writing task, then share results in small ad hoc groups. The suggested topic here (for perhaps obvious reasons) would be animals and their place in the human sign system (invite memories of childhood books or animations), and superstition as a dogma of signs. After individual notetaking, the group brainstorms a list of superstitions / list of moralised animals and reflects as a group on the generation of meanings from the on the face of things unpromising material of ladders, magpies, or cracks in the pavement. This could lead to a preliminary discussion of the production of culture from nature. A variant would be to concentrate on the actual animals which figure in *The Wasp Factory*, and diagram their meanings in (and out of) the novel. This could lead to free-ranging discussion of the novel as itself a technology which produces meaning.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Close reading

Wyatt, *Poems*

4. Explication

Students spend five to 10 minutes preparing an explication of a poem ('They flee from me' works well) using the following framework:

Topic: Select one word or short phrase which characterizes what the poem is about.

Theme: Prepare a clear, precise sentence that articulates what the poem says about the Topic.

Technique: Select one poetic Technique at use in the poem, and demonstrate how this Technique is used to communicate the Theme.

Students briefly present their reading to the class. A concluding class-wide discussion will take into account the various Topics and Themes addressed by students, and the parallels that emerged between the presentations.

Allan Johnson (University of Leeds)

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

5. Multum in parvo

In *Doing Shakespeare* (2005), Simon Palfrey highlights 'Shakespeare's ability to make single rhetorical figures contain their own 'mini-dramas'...encapsulated narratives, both embodying the present moment and predicting future unfoldings' (p.57). Investigate this by asking students, in small groups, to choose one example from *Macbeth* of the use of a particular rhetorical figure (there are handy chapters on hendiadys and verbal repetition in Palfrey's book) to work on outside class. Different members of each group can then be allocated different tasks (e.g. looking up one of the words in the figure in the OED; research into a particular early modern theme using EEBO (Early English Books Online)). Each student brings their findings to the seminar where each little group develops an argument to be presented in plenary session.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Understanding sonnets

6. Sonnets over time

Choose two sonnets from different historical periods (one suggestion is Shakespeare and Carol Ann Duffy) and give copies of each to the students. This activity works best if the sonnets are in some way linked in topic or theme (e.g. love sonnets, nature sonnets etc. – and / or they may be in the same sonnet form). Students are to read the poems out loud to each other, one line from each poem at a time (i.e. line one from poem one, then line one from poem two; line two from poem one and then line two from poem two etc. etc.). They then discuss whether the lines 'talk to' each other in any way – if there are any (unconscious) links between the two. What often emerges is a connection between the poems. There are sometimes some surprising similarities which stimulate good discussion. It can illuminate how contemporary poets respond to the sonnet tradition (whether by, for instance, writing about love within a Shakespearean sonnet) or subverting tradition in some way.

Karen Lockney (University of Cumbria)

Close reading continued

Dickens, *Household Words*

7. Reading a journal

This is a session I run on an MA option on Dickens. I reproduce the whole of the first issue of *Household Words* together with some of Dickens's journalistic pieces that were published later in the periodical. I begin with a look at the journal's title and running head: Why 'conducted' rather than edited by? What effect does the Shakespeare quote have? What is the impact of anonymous authorship – or 'mononomous' as Douglas Jerrold saw it? Then I close-read the 'Preliminary Word' with the students – what is the intended audience? Ethos / ideology? How do the various articles fit with the mission statement? What is the implied readership of each? – does it vary? How does each fit with the other articles of the week? What is the intertextual relationship with other pieces? You could follow this with discussion about the experience of reading a whole run / issue. Is the experience of reading these articles together different from the experience of reading them singly? How does this extend to how we read the fictional articles?

Holly Furneaux (University of Leicester)

Donne, *Poems*

8. Memorizing

Students learn a Donne poem by heart (cf. the discussion in Elaine Showalter's *Teaching Literature* (Oxford, 2002)). This can be made a more reflective exercise by getting students to write a short piece about what bits they found difficult to remember and why. What bits do they keep forgetting and getting wrong? What is the significance of their mistakes? This activity could be linked into the discussion of the textual history of a Donne poem.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

9. Problems are opportunities

It is often a good ploy to get students to face their difficulties with Shakespeare's language head on. Engaging bravely and in detail with a particularly stubborn bit of text can lead to exciting insights. For example: ask students to come to a first seminar on *Measure for Measure* with a word, sentence or phrase that they found especially tiresome, problematic or evasive. In groups of about three, get them to discuss each crux and select one to focus on. The students can then together try to get to grips with the significance of the problematic passage for the play as a whole. It would be handy to have access to an easily-searchable electronic text of Shakespeare (e.g., Open Source Shakespeare at **www.opensourceshakespeare.org**).

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Reader theory

10. Filling the gaps

After a brief discussion of inferencing, gap-filling, etc., divide the class into three groups. Groups take the opening paragraph(s) of a novel or short story (it's probably best if all groups work on the same ones). Ideally, each group has a blown-up photocopy. Using coloured pens and handwritten annotation each group agrees within itself the key things the reader has to supply to make sense of this passage. You could help by proposing some broad headings (or agree this with whole class first), e.g. historical / cultural knowledge; narrative assumptions; genre assumptions; psychological intuition; geographical knowledge; awareness of language registers, etc.

11. Meet the reader

This activity seeks to explore the related ideas of the 'ideal reader' and the 'implied reader'. In small groups (twos or threes) students work at the text (novel or poem) with the task of drawing up a list of the attributes it seems to require of a reader. What does this reader need to know (cultural code)? How does this reader's mind need to work? How are they expected to react? Who does this text want us to be? Does it regard us as a friend? An enemy? A hostile critic? A lover? Suggest that students work from broad observation to as much detail as there is time for. Groups then pool and compare their lists of attributes.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Lectures

Old English Prose

12. Rigours of the divine office

I use this mid-point in the lecture on Old English Prose / Benedictines when attention may be lagging. Depending on numbers I get the entire lecture hall to stand up (or raise their hands). I then ask them to sit down if they got up after 11am. Then I ask those who got up between 10.00am and 11.00am to sit down. Then 9.00-10.00am, and so on up to anyone left who got up before 6.00am (usually nobody). I then show them the Winter timetable for the Benedictine divine office. This makes a rather dull slide more interesting, and then allows me to talk about the relationship between the texts (homilies etc.) and the Office.

I got the stand up / sit down idea from a colleague at another university who uses it in Middle English to show the mortality rate of the Black Death.

Stuart Lee (Oxford University)

Renaissance manuscript culture

13. Evoking the past

The differences between Renaissance ways of reading and writing poetry and our own can be communicated to students (in lectures, for example) through the use of imaginative reconstruction and 'case studies': thus, instead of listing contexts ('In the sixteenth-century lots of poetry was not printed…'), describe the activities of an imaginary Renaissance reader ('Imagine that a friend has sent you a poem..'). Particularly appropriate for first-years?

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Ælfric, *Life of St Edmund*

14. Rhythmical prose or poetry?

I give each student an A4 sheet with numbers 1-4 on it which they can fold or tear into four. I use this as a 'voting' system for quite a few items in lectures as I do not have the facilities to do this electronically (150 students, old lecture theatre, etc). When it comes to Ælfric's rhythmical prose I show them the opening lines of *St. Edmund* typeset as prose. I ask them if it is 1) Prose; 2) Poetry; 3) Don't know. They hold up which number they think. I then show the same text, laid out the same, but underline the alliteration. I give them a chance to discuss this with their neighbour and then ask the same question. We then discuss why it is called rhythmical prose. I actually use the voting system at a few other points in the class but found that if you use it too many times (e.g. max four) it becomes trivial.

Stuart Lee (Oxford University)

History of the English language

15. Counting from one to three in English, German and Dutch

This activity is suitable for a big lecture in which the idea of language families is introduced. Before the lecture, find a student speaking a non-Indo-European language and ask them if they can loudly and clearly count from one to three in their language when you give them a signal. During the lecture, tell the students they are going to learn how to count from one to three in different languages. Write on the board: the numerals 1-3 in modern Dutch (een, twee, drie), German (ein, zwei, drei) and Old English (an, twa, thrie – use a thorn or eth for the last item if you wish, but be sure to explain it). Divide the students into three groups (left, middle and right parts of the lecture hall, who will count in Dutch, German and Old English respectively) and train them by making them repeat the Dutch, German and OE numerals after you. Then make them chant these numbers out loud, one group after another. Immediately after this three-part group chant, say: 'Good – and now one, two, three in Chinese/Finnish/Tamil/Japanese (whatever the non-IE language that you have available) and point at the non-IE speaker, who then counts from one to three in their language. Proceed to academic discussion of different hypotheses to explain the similarities and differences.

Wim van der Wurff (Newcastle University)

Generic convention

Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

16. The novel as travel narrative

Give students the cover page and first pages of other travel narratives, both fictional (for instance, *Robinson Crusoe*) and non-fictional (for instance, by William Dampier, available on ECCO (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online)). Let them compare the presentation and style of these texts with *Gulliver's Travels* in order to determine to what extent Swift fulfils generic expectations and how he disappoints and satirises them.

Britta Martens
(University of the West of England)

Banks, *The Wasp Factory*

17. Bildungsroman

A simple teacherly sketch could gather up what students already know from other texts / modules about the *bildungsroman*. Create a group taxonomy of such narratives. Cross reference 'Prentis' in *The Crow Road*, and invite annotation of the narrative of *The Wasp Factory* in terms of the traditions of male apprenticeship.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*

18. Forum

Forum: after preliminary group discussion, the whole group pools examples of literary (and / or) filmic representations of violence, and draws out a topology of victims, aggressors, and process. This is then used as an overlay to explore the episodes of violence in the text. Could be applied to any other Jacobean tragedy: the question is really about the symbolism of violence.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*

19. Lyrics, Ballads, and Lyrical Ballads

Before reading Lyrical Ballads, ask students to read the entries on 'lyric' and 'ballad' in Rhian Williams' *The Poetry Toolkit* (Continuum, 2009) and follow up some of the suggestions there for further reading, looking at examples of both lyrical verse and traditional ballads. Seminar discussion can then focus on the complex generic status of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poems.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

20. The Amritsar massacre

Give small groups a copy of two passages:

1. Saleem's account of his grandfather's presence at Amritsar.

2. The account of the event from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Ask them to discuss and then share with the group their thoughts on the two pieces and find similarities and differences. Encourage them to look at the rhetoric, detail, information and construction of both pieces. Which is the more convincing narrator? Why? Which is more factual and which more fictional? Why? Why do we take one as history and one as story? What hidden assumptions do we take for granted? This should lead into a wider discussion on the difference between factual and fictional discourse. For advanced classes I like to recommend they follow this up by reading the opening pages of Derrida's *Archive Fever*.

George Selmer (Anglia Ruskin University)

Generic convention continued

Hornby, *About a Boy*

21. A question of genre

This activity raises the subject of convention and expectation in relation to an apparently naturalistic novel. Drawing on students' knowledge of genre theory, start by discussing *About a Boy* as romance. Divide the group into three to four. Each small group takes a relevant genre and in 20 minutes sketches an argument to put to the others for claiming the novel for 'their' genre. This could then lead to a discussion about blended genres – or even a re-writing activity in which the novel is 're-genred', e.g. as tragedy, gothic, or magic realism.

Ben Knights, English Subject Centre

Shakespeare, *Othello*

22. The Comedy of Othello

Thomas Rymer's famous description of *Othello* as a 'bloody farce' highlights the extent to which the play uses the conventions of comedy. Build on this by, after a discussion on the genre(s) of Shakespearean comedy, asking students, in groups, to plot out an imaginary comic version of *Othello*. Each group presents a summary of its comedy at the end of the seminar.

This activity is proposed by Douglas Bruster ('Teaching *Othello* as Tragedy and Comedy', in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's* Othello, edited by Peter Erickson and Maurice Hunt (New York: MLA, 2005)), who lists some of the questions that the activity might raise: 'would 'The Comedy of Othello' have to punish Iago for his deception or Othello for his jealousy or Cassio for his ungentlemanly treatment of Bianca? Emilia for implicitly lying to Desdemona? Would such a comedy mandate a new structure of power in the marriages of Othello and Desdemona, Iago and Emilia? Would it include a marriage between Cassio and Bianca? Would it need to have Brabantio forgive Desdemona or ask her forgiveness? Would Brabantio and Othello reconcile? Othello and Iago? Iago and the others his deception injured? These questions, which could be answered in various ways, will foreground in the classroom the assumptions we make about comedy and its relation to justice, romance, power, and forgiveness' (106).

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Role play

Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

23. Author interview

This activity would be particularly suitable for small groups.

In groups of three, students are required to prepare, over a number of weeks, questions and answers for an imaginary interview with Jean Rhys. One student plays the author, whilst the other two are interviewers. The interviews are performed in class, perhaps for peer review, encouraging interaction with the larger group. Following the interviews, students are required to write up the script of their interview and to submit a preparatory log.

Eoin Flannery (Oxford Brookes University)

Ransom, *Swallows and Amazons*

24. Islands

Part of a childrens fiction module. Invite students individually or in small groups to list features of other island literature they have come upon in their programme or in their own reading. (*The Tempest, Robinson Crusoe, Lord of the Flies, Victory...*) Devise and collate propositions about the meanings attached to islands. This could lend itself to an island drama, where small groups of students gather on 'islands' based on their reading, and confer on them salient features of their culture. They are then subject to questioning by the inhabitants of other 'islands'.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Banks, *The Wasp Factory*

25. Interview with the vampire

One member of the class is briefed to role-play Frank's father Angus. Other members of the class prepare questions and then interview Cauldhame. The tutor may act as a chair for the proceedings. Subsequently, adventurous readers might be pointed towards an imperial gothic text like Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau*.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Theories of 'the subject'

26. Personal statement

Students find examples of self-description in local paper or magazine dating columns, and write their own examples. These could include posing as different people. They can then compare these with CVs and other conventional representations. In a whole group, discuss the conventions and linguistic repertoire involved.

27. 'Second Life'

Who do you pose as on the internet? Students are invited to draw on their knowledge of social networking to find examples of how a fictional 'personality' is constructed. The point in discussion would then be to try to identify genre, conventional elements, and the lexis of 'self'.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Brontë, *Shirley*

28. Bitter herbs

The novel begins with the narrator offering the reader a meal: '... it shall be cold lentiles and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs and no roast lamb.' Starting from the metaphorical implications of this opening, ask small groups to list examples of the giving or consumption of food (especially social meals like the School-Feast, II.6). Suggest that they question each other as anthropologists about each others' examples.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Exams and module design

Shakespeare, *Plays*

29. Themes in a hat

A simple way to help students revise for an upcoming Shakespeare exam.

With the group, draw up a list of possible exam topics / themes (e.g. fatherhood, social class, islands, food, etc.). Write each topic on a slip of paper and put all the slips in a hat. Each pair of students then draws two slips from the hat and proceeds to discuss the interrelation of topics in relation to play(s) that they have read. For the plenary feedback session, each pair is required to cite at least three key passages illustrating the topics to hand.

This activity works best if the Shakespeare exam is both very open as to theme / topic and on a wide range of plays.

30. Shakespeare vs. the historians

On an exam paper on the History plays (and / or on any other Shakespeare plays based on historical figures), present students with a collection of (unattributed) excerpts from sixteenth- and / or seventeenth-century historians' descriptions of the lives of Shakespearean characters. (EEBO (Early English Books Online) will help you track down sources more obscure than 'usual suspects' such as Bacon's *Richard III* and Holinshed.)

Students are asked, in their answers, to guess which figure each quote refers to, and to compare the quotation to the events in the relevant Shakespeare play. Make it clear that students will not be penalized for a wrong guess – only for inaccuracy in their account of Shakespeare's texts.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Bacon, *Essays*

31. A course of Bacon

One way to teach Bacon's *Essays* is to use them as the skeleton for a whole module. Each week students read a different Bacon essay alongside texts / extracts by other early modern authors on the same topic.

Other synoptic early modern texts could of course be used in a similar way, *The Faerie Queene* being an obvious example.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Creative writing exercises

Narrative genres

32. Genre and beginnings

A brief Creative Writing exercise to be used as an introduction to Genre.

For this exercise, use any of the texts on your course, if appropriate, or a well known novel like *Pride and Prejudice*.

1. Ask the students to rewrite the opening of the novel in two or three sentences as:

   a. Mills and Boon romance,

   b. folk tale,

   c. detective novel.

Give them a worksheet with a small space for each attempt.

On the back of the handout offer some ideas to help the students who feel worried about doing it, e.g. for *Pride and Prejudice* –

   a. Sparkling-eyed Lizzie Bennet smoothed the sprigged muslin which so becomingly draped her lithe figure …

   b. Once upon a time there was an old man who had five daughters, but his wife had never borne him a son …

   c. When Lydia disappeared …

2. Give the students a chance to compare their responses in small groups, and then explore with them ideas about the narrative conventions associated with the different genre.

3. Go back to the text to be studied and ask the group to think about the opening – what kind of a fiction is it?

Susan Love (University of Nottingham)

O'Hagan, *Be Near Me*

33. Re-framing

Writing task: re-frame an element of David's narrative from the point of view of Mrs Poole his housekeeper.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*

34. Social worker

Writing task: members of the group are asked to imagine that they have been appointed case worker to Melanie and her new family. After their first visit they write up their case notes. These are then shared with other members of the group, who are invited to challenge their readings, or collect counter evidence. This activity could be applied to any text in which the protagonist is palpably disturbed or living in a dysfunctional family.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Beowulf, trans. Heaney

35. Translating form

Students can be asked to research Old English formal conventions and their use in *Beowulf* prior to the seminar. Alternatively, you can briefly run through certain key features: alliteration, four stresses, kennings, etc. They should then be asked to see which of these features Heaney (or another translator) has preserved. Again, it may be helpful to provide examples from a handful of other translators as points of comparison. Students can then be asked to collaborate in small groups to produce their own mini-epic, whether based on an episode from *Beowulf* or on their student experiences, preserving or using as many Old English formal features as they can, and being prepared to describe and justify their choices to the seminar group.

Helen Smith (University of York)

Creative writing exercises continued

Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*

36. Writing fairy tales

As Susan Bruce points out, 'any [Shakespearean] romance can be usefully paired with any number of fairy tales. Fairy tales are a useful pedagogical shorthand for the establishment of an understanding of ideology' ('Shakespeare: The Comedies', in *Teaching Shakespeare and Early Modern Dramatists*, edited by Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (Palgrave:Teaching the New English, 2007, p. 84).

One way to take advantage of this is to juxtapose a seminar on this topic with the requirement that students rewrite parts of *Cymbeline* in the manner of a fairy tale. Before the seminar, ask the students to read, as well as the play, specified fairy tales (short texts will be sufficient) and write their own *Cymbeline*-derived tale (no more than one side of A4). The seminar can then start with students, in pairs, reading each other's tales and discussing issues arising. Rather than being marked separately, the tales can form part of a portfolio of short writing exercises put together by each student at the end of the module.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Brontë, *Shirley*

37. Mrs Pryor

Who is Mrs Pryor? As individuals or small groups, class members find examples of preceding women: Eve, Mary Cave, Mrs Pryor herself. They each write a paragraph suggesting ways in which their chosen figure anticipates or pre-figures narrative potentials within the novel. A further elaboration would be a piece of 'textual intervention' – to invite a page or two from the point of view of an occluded or partially occluded figure: Mrs Pryor or Rosa Yorke. As with all such activities, the point would then be to return to the words of the text.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Richardson, *Pamela*

38. Changing the narrator

Let students rewrite a short letter from the novel in the voice of an impersonal narrator or even Mr. B. Let them discuss how their perception of the plot and characters changes.

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Webster, *A Castaway*

39. Family disgrace

The speaker's brother has a story of his own in this poem. Students could be asked to write (in poetry or prose) the brother's own story. What does he think of his 'fallen' sibling?

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

40. The rights and wrongs of incest

It's important for students to engage with and understand Giovanni's self-rationalisation of his incestuous desire for his sister, in order to get beyond the 'Yuk' factor and to take his motivation seriously. This exercise should enable students to work systematically through the (allegedly) logical arguments he puts forward, and the ways in which he tries to convince Annabella that incest is not wrong, before refuting them.

1. Focusing on the first act, identify all the ways in which Giovanni defends and rationalises his incestuous desire for his sister.

2. You should then write a rejoinder, in the form of a letter from Annabella to her brother (i.e., 'Dear Giovanni...'), which refutes all the arguments he puts forward and presents counter-arguments against incest.

Tracey Hill (Bath Spa University)

Swift, *Waterland*

41. Rough Guide

As individuals or in small groups, students use sources such as guidebooks, tourist websites, or the Ordnance Survey map of the fens (Landranger Sheet 143), to write sample paragraphs of *The Rough Guide to Waterland*. This then forms the basis for a discussion of the relation between fictive and factual geographies, the representation of space, and the relations between narrative and represented space.

42. Transformative writing

Transformative writing as preparation: ask students to prepare individually by writing the first two paragraphs of a novel set in a completely different terrain (the Alps? the outback?), and compare versions. What can you learn about the existing text from the attempt to divert it?

Alternatively, take chapter 15 ('About the Ouse') and invite preparatory writing on a terrain known to individuals in the class. Discussion then starts from comparing examples, and exploring the kinds of narrative associated with that topography.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Wordsworth, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

43. Parody and reflection

Ask students to write a parody of this poem and ask them to explain how they have parodied it (e.g. what features they are parodying).

Sharon Ruston (Bangor University) and Sue Chaplin (Leeds Metropolitan University)

Maps and diagrams

The novel

44. Mapping novels

Seeing and expressing ideas in a chart or diagram can be both fun and a great help to students in grasping the plot, themes, tensions and imagery of a narrative, particularly in first year introductory courses and / or in other non-university courses designed for mature students.

Introducing this kind of activity in one part of the course encourages some students to take the initiative and produce their own maps or diagrams later with other texts, and, having produced a diagram themselves they tend be very responsive to any that you produce for them during the course.

Depending on the time available either set up the activity the week before and ask the students to produce their charts at home or give them the opportunity to do it in the class.

1. Introducing the activity: Supply the students with flipchart sheets and encourage them to be 'bloody, bold, and resolute!' (Thick pens help the timid.)

2. Elicit from them ways in which they might go about producing a diagram / map of the text.

3. Give students a chance to talk through their results with the group and share their discoveries about the text. Often 'failed' attempts are as useful as ones that are perceived to be successful because students learn that the novel may not work quite in the way in which they had originally visualised it.

Types of map / diagram include the following:

1. **Braids**
   Braids show the interconnections and relationships in the novel, how characters may move towards or away from each other, who dies (legacies?), who survives, who gets 'rewarded' at the end for moral worth in pursuing a particular course, and whether or not marriage is constructed as one of these 'rewards'. In *Agnes Grey* students can see how Agnes seems to be moving towards female independence. Her story is eventually resolved in marriage but her widowed mother goes on to an independent life running her own school. A braid of *Jane Eyre* also generates interesting results.

2. **Circles**
   Some novels, like *Agnes Grey*, can be mapped as circles. Agnes begins in the loving vicarage, moves through other locations where different values are asserted – the brutish, poorly regulated Bloomfield household, the mercenary Murrays at Horton Lodge and the uncaring Anglicanism of Mr Hatfield, to return at the end to the modest life of commitment which she creates with the evangelical Weston: back to the vicarage.

3. **Elements**
   Some novels can be mapped onto a diagram allocating episodes to each of the four elements.

4. **Family trees**
   Some novels respond well to student mapping using family trees. Family trees can be useful as revision reference for novels, in which many of the characters seem to be related to each other.

5. **Lines from left to right**
   Some novels can be mapped by students using lines drawn from left to right across a sheet indicate to the pace, flow and pauses of a narrative and its handling of time.

6. **Locations (houses)**
   Some novels can be mapped by students in terms of their locations (eg. houses), each location being associated with a particular value and / or theme.

   Students can explore how some initial assumptions about these locations may prove to be too simplistic.

7. **Students' ideas**
   Be open to suggestions from students about ways in which novels might be mapped, particularly for ideas about using dominant images from the text.

8. **Transport routes**
   Transport can form the basis for student mapping of some novels. Mapping the plot through an awareness of the significance of the railway, for example, can be useful for *Hard Times* and *Cousin Phillis*. Students become aware of the significance of transport in plots and how some of those nineteenth-century novels which we may turn to for nostalgia are in fact using plots which depend on a relatively new technology.

9. **Webs**
   Some novels can be mapped by students as 'webs of connection'. Students can debate whom they see as at the centre of the web, or whether there is no 'centre' – useful to demonstrate family, financial and other connections in novels like *Middlemarch*, and for exploring the complexities of connection in a text like *The Secret Agent*.

Susan Love (University of Nottingham)

Brontë, *Villette*

45. Gothic dimension

Pick up on the skills and knowledge of any one in the group who has studied or been reading gothic fictions to list the 'gothic' features of the text. Using secondary texts such as Punter or Botting, individuals or pairs draw up lists of characteristic 'gothic' features. The headings are then written onto cards. The group then lays out these cards on larger sheets of paper, and collaboratively draws mind maps of how and in what ways *Villette* meets these criteria. This activity could be used with many other texts which while not obviously 'gothic' nevertheless clearly contain 'gothic' elements.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Banks, *The Wasp Factory*

46. Symbolic geography

Mapping in small groups: either (horizontally) island, sea, mainland, or (vertically) the house with its different floors and cellar full of cordite. Check details with text. Groups share their drawings and start to talk about values associated with different locations, pinning their findings to specific passages.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Maps and diagrams continued

Brontë, *Shirley*

47. Yorkshire

Take as an example the discussion of national characteristics in I.5. Students are then invited in the course of their reading to collect as many examples as they can of the characterisation of Yorkshire or, by contrast the South. Later, a group activity would be to use large sheets of paper (or whiteboard) to draw 'mental maps' of the values and attributes associated with different places within the novel. Ensuing group discussion could then tease out the way in which the text negotiates these different value positions. This could be further focused on by mapping the 'moorlands' (e.g. 'Rushedge' III.7) as a liminal or in-between zone.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*

48. Family merry-go-round

Students are divided before the class into five groups, each representing a figure or figures in the play: the Yellowhammer family; the Kix family; the Allwit family; Sir Walter Whorehound; Touchwood sr. and jr. Each group assesses the status, possessions, desires and ambitions of the characters it has been assigned, perhaps using tokens of some kind and / or diagrams or maps. The rest of the seminar can then be used to stage / analyse / discuss the exchanges and transformations that take place in the play.

This activity was devised by Alizon Bruning, who discusses it in much more detail in her essay on 'City Comedy' in *Teaching Shakespeare and Early Modern Dramatists*, edited by Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (Palgrave:Teaching the New English, 2007), pp. 135-42.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Swift, *Waterland*

49. Cycles

Draw attention to the fact that a novel which gravitates towards Greenwich has 52 chapters – the turning year? Invite small groups to draw diagrams of other cycles within the novel. Small groups then move around the room and explain their cycles to other groups.

50. Elements

A way of suggesting dialogue between 'theory' and textual reading. Invite students to think *Waterland* through a four cell diagram: water, earth, air, fire. In small groups they can assign incidents to one of the cells as preparation for a discussion of movement between the dominance of different elements.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Literary contexts

Kostova, *The Historian*

51. Dracula

Students can be asked to map across *The Historian* and *Dracula* characters that performed a similar role or function, and to explain why.

Sara Lenaghan (Lancaster University)

Wyatt, *Poems*

52. Lyric and narrative

If the students have also been reading Renaissance narratives in which lyric verse is embedded (e.g. Shakespeare, Nashe, Lyly, Gascoigne), ask what would happen if a specific Wyatt poem were substituted for the one already in the narrative. How would it affect the reading of both (a) the narrative text, and (b) the Wyatt piece itself?

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

53. Sci-Fi

The classic fifties sci-fi movie *Forbidden Planet* was famously inspired by *The Tempest* and the plot of *The Tempest* has many elements in common with more recent science fiction. If there are science fiction and / or fantasy enthusiasts in the seminar, ask them to come along to the next session with 20th- and 21st-century parallels. You can then play these intertexts off against information provided by you about Shakespeare's contemporaries, generating a debate about ways in which contemporary and early modern culture conceive(d) of 'the other'.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Webster, *A Castaway*

54. Parallel texts

Students can be asked to compare the poem with other texts by women which deal with female subjugation, with traditions of representation and women's struggle to find a voice e.g. Mew's 'Madeline in Church', or Amy Levy's 'Xantippe'.

55. Titles

Students can be asked to think about the significance of the poem's title. Why 'A Castaway'? Is it appropriate? What other titles might one expect?

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Wyatt, *Poems*

56. Medieval into Renaissance

Wyatt's poems are usually thought of in relation to contemporary or later writers' work (most often, of course, Surrey's) – but it is very useful to look backwards too, and line up some Middle English lyrics to compare and contrast. This is a very good way to interrogate the border between 'Medieval' and 'Renaissance'.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Romanticism

57. Gendered Romanticism

Discuss the place of female writers alongside male writers on modules in Romantic poetry. (This would also be a good way of discussing other writers more generally in relation to the 'big six').

Jane Moore (Cardiff University)

Teaching as / and literature

Swift, *Waterland*

58. A river of children

'Once upon a time there was a history teacher's wife who couldn't have a child ... her husband had lots: a river of children ... flowed through his classroom' (p.110).

In groups, find as many examples as you can of the idea of reproduction at work in the text. Who or what is reproduced in the novel? Invite a group to explore the metafictional dimension: is a novel about a teacher, some of whose key scenes are set in the classroom, inviting contemplation as itself a form of symbolic reproduction?

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

59. Prospero as seminar leader

How good a teacher is Prospero? Discuss this in a seminar: students are, after all, well-placed to be able to comment on teachers' failings. Students might debate what overlaps there are or aren't between what behaviour Prospero wants characters to learn, what the play wants its audience to learn about life (if anything) and what seminar leaders and critics want students of English to learn about *The Tempest*.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Brontë, *Shirley*

60. Teachers

Invite a close reading of I.6 ('Coriolanus') as a dramatised teaching encounter. Explore the roles of Caroline as teacher and Robert as learner, and the implications for the narrative as a whole. Invite the group to find further examples of learning and teaching foregrounded within the novel. Obviously, a further step might be to explore the gendered implications of heroism or of the role of mentor.

You could also look for examples of true and false spiritual authority within the novel, listing possible examples of each. What are the semiotic indices of value? Who has the role of teaching or leading others? How do such roles map onto the public role of the Church? How does the novel offer itself as a medium of ethical practice?

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Webster, *A Castaway*

61. Early life

One of things which emerges as the speaker recalls her childhood is the way in which young middle-class girls are educated. What kind of things is Eulalie taught? What is their use?

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Source study

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

62. Ovid

Prospero's speech 'Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves' is a very rare example of Shakespeare writing an extended imitation of a passage from a classical text: in this case, Medea's speech in *Metamorphoses* 7.197-209. What's going on? Get students to compare Prospero's speech both to a literal modern translation and to Golding's 16th-century version. There are useful critical discussions by Jonathan Bate and Raphael Lyne (the latter reading the passage as a renunciation of Ovid as much as of magic).

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Richardson, *Pamela*

63. Conduct books

In pairs or small groups, let students compare the first two letters of the novel to the two letters on the same situation in Richardson's *Familiar Letters* (available through Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO)).

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Shakespeare, *Plays*

64. Shakespeare news

Many of Shakespeare's plays are based on sources describing actual events (or events which Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have thought to have had historical foundation). To get to grips with some of the implications of this, ask students to plot out an imagined Shakespearean play using a genuine news story as source material. If students spend some time in groups on this task, it can lead to a discussion on the ethics of adaptation / fictionalisation as well as on a range of other issues (depending on the nature of the news story). How comfortable did the students feel with the task? What pressures did they feel operating on them? What comparisons / contrasts can be made between the task as they performed it and Shakespeare's works of adaptation in his, very different, cultural context?

Careful choice of news story (avoiding, perhaps, recent and tragic examples) will be important if you are to be sensitive to student anxieties. The task may not be appropriate for some groups.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Source study continued

65. Working from a 'source'

After analysing and discussing Shakespeare's use of one or more of the narratives in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* as a source-text, ask students to read a Painter narrative not used by Shakespeare and imagine how Shakespeare would have altered it if he had taken it as the basis for a play.

One way to run this activity is to ask students to do it in sub-groups. Each sub-group gives an oral presentation to the full group outlining their proposed plot.

This activity can of course be run using other texts (e.g. North's Plutarch, Golding's *Metamorphoses*). Painter's stories, however, have the advantages of being in prose, of being (some of them) relatively short, and of being written in a relatively uncluttered style.

Painter's Palace can be accessed via EEBO (Early English Books Online) and in a number of subscription-free sites: the Internet Archive, for example, holds downloadable text of Joseph Jacobs' excellent 3-volume edition of 1890.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Games and puzzles

Metaphor and simile

66. Mix'n'match metaphors

Find about 10 metaphors and similes (I like to use texts that students are unlikely to know but that they can find on the web later). Change similes to metaphors. Mix up the metaphors to produce a list that is something like this:

EAGLE – the thing with feathers
HOPE – a naked new-born babe
LOVE – exists in the valley of its saying
PITY – a red red rose
POETRY – a thunderbolt

As part of the work on imagery students work in small groups to match the metaphors to the nouns, then share their answers with the whole group.

You don't need to tell students the right answers; it's more important that they discuss how the metaphors extend and limit meaning.

Kathleen Bell (De Montfort University)

Amis, *Money*

67. Connotations with 'objects'

'Our lives, they harbour form, artistic shape, and we want our form revealed even though we only move in our detail, with keys, spongebag, coffee-cups, shirt drawer, chequebooks, linen, hairstyle, curtain-rod holders, fridge guarantee, biros, buttons, money' (p. 261).

Individuals write down on a small piece of paper one item / object that features in the text. These are placed in a box or bag, mixed up and drawn out in the class's own random generator of meanings. Each person then has five minutes to list as many connotations for an object as they can. Follow with group discussion of the movement of details between levels of meaning.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Hornby, *About a Boy*

68. Board game

The whole group brainstorms key stages in Marcus' movement from dependency to being an active agent. Small groups choose seven 'moments' from this list and design a snakes and ladders diagram. Then they explain their narrative turning points to the rest of the group, examining alternative narrative paths as they arise.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Creative writing

69. The Aibo oracle and point of view

1. The week prior to the workshop, ask students: 'If you had access to your pet's thoughts, what would you ask it?'

2. The workshop involves introducing the students to the Sony Aibo (robot dog). It is an example of an artificial intelligence that you interact with.

3. Students come to the workshop with a list of identity-related questions (not realising that they will put them to a robot).

4. The tutor introduces the idea of the oracle at Delphi.

5. The tutor introduces the Aibo oracle and the students ask the robot dog identity-related questions.

6. Students don't realise that the dog's responses are triggered by another tutor in a different room: as s/he types responses on a laptop, voice software means the dog speaks replies in an electronic voice.

7. After the 'oracle' session, students are asked to write a creative piece from the point of view of an Aibo dog in whatever form suggests itself.

The idea behind the exercise is to fabricate an encounter with an artificial intelligence in order to stimulate the creative contemplation of identity, point of view, and voice.

Simon Perril (De Montfort University)

Understanding sonnets

70. The sort-a-sonnet game

Following on from a lecture on sonnets – their history and various forms, etc. – in seminars students are given a jumbled-up sonnet (Wendy Cope's 'Strugnell Sonnets' (in *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis*), which parody Shakespeare's, are good) and are invited to work in groups of two / three to reassemble the sonnet's lines in their correct order. To introduce an element of competition, offer a small prize for the group which gets there first!

Rosie Miles (University of Wolverhampton)

Critical / reflective writing exercises

Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

71. Aesthetics and design

Students read a brief extract from Chapter 1 of J.-K. Huysmans's *À rebours* and spend five minutes writing a short response to the role of aesthetics and design. Students then spend a further five minutes in pairs discussing their response and considering how Huysmans's treatment of design is related to Wilde's.

Allan Johnson (University of Leeds)

Life-writing

72. Letter to a lifer

The final task in a life-writing module is to write a personal letter to a prospective student, telling them what to expect from the module.

The benefit is three-fold:

1. Students are forced to reflect on their learning.
2. The module leader gets feedback which is not institutionally generated / limited.
3. The letters can be used by potential students trying to choose a future module.

With acknowledgements to Graham Gibbs.

Candi Miller (University of Wolverhampton)

Theories of 'the subject'

73. Introductions

Students are asked to write (if possible without stopping to think much) 150 words introducing themselves. They then discuss in pairs what they found themselves foregrounding, and – if they trust their partner – the sort of things they left out. This doubles, of course, as an introductory exercise.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Browning, *Porphyria's Lover*

74. Prose and verse

Students write 'response statements' describing the reactions they had on first reading the poem (perhaps recording something every five lines or so on about character, setting, genre, etc.). Seminar leaders can be more or less prescriptive about this, but should stress that students should be as honest as possible in their response statements, which will not be seen by the seminar leader. The response statements are brought along to the seminar.

In the seminar, ask the students to rewrite the poem in prose and then compare rewrites with their neighbour. Then ask them to isolate poetic effect in Browning's original by discussing the extent to which the feelings described in their response statements might or might not also apply to the prose version.

This activity could be either topped or tailed by plenary discussion of generic expectation etc. in another dramatic monologue by Browning.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Staging and performance

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

75. Groups within groups

In *The Tempest* little groups of people move around the island in isolation from each other (though ultimately under Prospero (and Ariel)'s control). A seminar can mimic this: for example, a group of students might discuss a theme in relation to one of these character groups (e.g. Alonso's party) whilst a second group of students looks on. The second group of students could then discuss the same theme in relation to Prospero and Ariel – but in privacy, in the absence of the first student group. And so on... There will be lots of other, more theatrical, ways of mirroring student groups and character groups. And, of course, the 'eavesdropping' structure of this sort of seminar can be used to invert power relations in the play: the Trinculo and Stephano group could 'eavesdrop' on the Prospero / Ariel group, and so on.

76. Spitting at Prospero

In Sam Mendes's 1992 RSC staging, Ariel (Simon Russell Beale), when given his freedom by Prospero, spat at his old master in the face. Tell the students about this and ask them, in small groups, to devise other bits of 'extra-textual' stage business resisting or protesting at Prospero's authority. Each group can be allocated either a different scene or a different character. This activity can serve as a starting-point for the discussion of a variety of topics: the relationship between text and stage action, the basis on which interpretative judgements are made about a play, the political uses of Shakespeare, textual authority and stability, the basis of Prospero's power, and so on.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *Othello*

77. Transgendering performance

Choose a scene (or part of a scene) from the play in which gender issues seem particularly important. Ask students to perform the passage twice, the second time 'transgendering' it, as suggested by Emily C. Bartels ('Improvisation and *Othello*: The Play of Race and Gender', in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's* Othello, edited by Peter Erickson and Maurice Hunt (New York: MLA, 2005) pp. 72-9): 'a female actor takes Othello's part, constructing him thus as female, and a male actor plays Desdemona… substituting 'lord' for 'lady' where needed and altering names (Othella, say, for Othello) but nothing more.' Bartels suggests that the class respond to the transgendered performance by seeing if they can identify 'lines, phrases, or rhetorical structures that seem especially well suited to the alternatively gendered speakers.' The class can then 'treat these gender-crossing speech acts as potential points of crisis and consider the reactions they provoke' (p. 78).

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Staging and performance continued

The Battle of Maldon

78. Rap

The Battle of Maldon describes a defeat (historical) of Anglo-Saxon troops at the hands of the Vikings. The poet uses Scandinavian loan words to denote the Viking messenger's speech. The poem uses a jingoistic view of the 'English' against the other. To underline the complexities of language and register I ask students to translate the passage about the messenger as a group and perform it as a rap. We then discuss the implications of changing styles. Students enjoy pulling the text into a contemporary format.

Christina Lee (University of Nottingham)

Glaspell, *Trifles*

79. Gendered performance

After a lecture introducing Reader-Response theory and gendered theories of reading, the seminar text is Glaspell's *Trifles*, the play version of her short story 'A Jury of her Peers'. It is short enough to be easily read out in full, with students taking the various parts (this will take about 15 minutes). The obvious discussion question is then 'why can the male characters not read the scene of the crime, why can the female characters do so?' This discussion can be used to highlight how this is an exemplary text in terms of being all about gendered ways of reading.

Rosie Miles (University of Wolverhampton)

Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness*

80. Staging a masque

Help students get to grips with the multimedia, collaborative nature of the masque by splitting them into groups and telling each group to research, outside the seminar, one of the following: the original location for the masque; stage machinery and effects; the visual appearance of the masque (scenery and costumes); music and dancing; the people who originally performed and watched the masque (political and courtly contexts); symbolism and classical allusion (i.e. Jonson's particular contribution).

This activity is proposed by Richard Dutton in his essay on 'The Masque' in *Teaching Shakespeare* and *Early Modern Dramatists*, edited by Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (Palgrave:Teaching the New English, 2007). See Dutton's essay for detailed questions and background. Dutton proposes that work on these features of *The Masque of Blackness* precede work on race and gender issues.

This is an elaborate activity worth spending a substantial amount of seminar time on. (It could, for example, form a large part of a PBL / EBL ('problem (enquiry)-based learning') module.) Students could be allowed to present their findings in a range of different media (reflecting the nature of the task) – using collage, music and performance as well as oral presentation.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Mining the text

Trollope, *The Small House at Allington*

81. Country versus city

Students can be asked to consider the country versus city motif in operation in this novel. How far are we encouraged to see Allington (and the county of Barsetshire) as a rural idyll? An Eden? Is this a novel about invasion?

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*

82. Lost and Private Languages

'What I found myself longing for was a gay literature that was literature first and gay second' (Leavitt's own introduction to *The Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories*, p. xix). This activity is designed to enable students to think freely about Leavitt's novel without being unnecessarily constrained by the 'gay novel' label. Students may well want to return to its meanings as a gay novel, but after exploring it through other, more oblique, lenses.

Divide a seminar group into three smaller groups, allocating each one of the activities below. Each small group must prepare a short presentation exploring the significance of their topic within the narrative as a whole.

1. In a small group, students are asked to look for motifs of cake-making and frosting (icing). Indicative examples may be found at pp. 5, 24, 48, 143, 249 (refs. to Penguin edition). This group could be asked to represent their findings as a diagram: a cross section of a frosted cake. Frivolous as it sounds, this could provide a channel for a whole group discussion of editing (Rose as both cake maker and copy editor), or an ethnography of food and food-giving within the novel.

2. Explore the (metafictional) presence of fiction written for children within the text. Indicative examples: pp.111-16, 120-1, 145 , 211. The group must examine one or more example to explain to the rest of the class the significance of Derek Moulthorp's invented oeuvre within the novel.

3. Find examples of a 'lost language'. Indicative examples may be found at pp. 51, 53, 92, 131, 153, 181-3. Students should be encouraged to draw on ideas about metafiction and metalanguage in reflecting upon the significance of the way this novel foregrounds problems of communication.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Hornby, *About a Boy*

83. Happy families

'It's like those acrobatic displays' (p. 278). This activity takes as its starting place the narrative generation of alternative or substitute families. Trios are given 15 minutes to identify as many family or quasi-family units as they can. Then they come together to compare notes on the downward or upward trajectory of those units. Given Hornby's acknowledged penchant for Ann Tyler, some students could volunteer to report on e.g. *Back When We Were Grownups*, or *The Amateur Marriage*.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

84. Unison, harmony, counterpoint and discord

Take a selection of musical terms, such as 'unison', 'harmony', 'counterpoint' and 'discord'. Set students the task of selecting sections of the play, concepts, characters, events, etc. which they believe reflect these qualities. Use these as a basis for discussing how music used in relation to these characters, events or concepts adds to our understanding of the events of the play.

Andrew Green (Brunel University)

85. What's past is prologue

One of the best and simplest ways of generating fresh ideas about Shakespeare's plays is to get students to juxtapose two or more very straightforward themes: arbitrary clashes often generate interesting sparks. In *The Tempest* the past – the play's 'back story' (on the island, in Milan, in Tunis...) can help cast light on almost any other topic. One possible approach is to get groups to comment on each others' work. For example: in the first part of a seminar, ask each small group to consider a different topic / theme – then, after the groups' conclusions have been aired in a plenary session, get each group to reconsider another group's topic from the point of view of the past.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Amis, *Money*

86. Mutilation

Pairs make lists of examples of mutilated or deformed bodies. They exchange one example with another pair, who then have the task of sketching the connotations of their acquired example. This could lead on to a discussion of text as itself a monstrosity, a hybrid of other genres. A further development would be to build on Berthold Schoene's argument about male narratives as a form of Gothic in *Writing Men* (2000), to explore the novel in terms of dissociation from the female.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Brontë, *Shirley*

87. Robert's dream

'The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse.' This might be a way of linking students' growing knowledge of the text with their contextual readings on Chartism, the Industrial Revolution, etc. Begin with a close reading of the final chapter (III. 14). Students identify commercial and industrial motifs, then return to the body of the novel to consider alternative visions of 'progress' within the text. A further step, thinking of Shuttleworth on 'stocks ... which now went off in a moment' (III.14), might be to collect examples of commodities in the novel. Small groups could collaborate in producing examples of residual and emergent communities.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Reading and writing in the text

Brontë, *Shirley*

88. Intertexts and reading

To focus student reading, invite lists of other texts alluded to or quoted in the novel. (Existing ones: The Bible, Milton, Cowper, fairy tales, *Coriolanus*; fictions within the fiction like Shirley's 'first blue-stocking' efforts or Louis Moore's diary.) The group explores the narrative significances of this abundant textuality. Closely examine III.13 'Written in the School Room' to explore Moore's diary as a narrative medium. Students could make links to 'theory' by debating *Shirley* in terms of the fissured or incoherent text.

Alternatively, individuals or small groups collect 1) examples of reading within the novel; 2) examples of address to the reader. They are invited to identify the attributes of readers and reading communities within the world of the novel.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Hornby, *About a Boy*

89. Metafiction

A way of estranging an all too easily naturalised kind of text. 'It was more confusing than he had imagined, making people up' (p. 53). In 10 minutes students discover as many textual references to the making of art / music / fictions as they can. Results are then compared: this leads on to a discussion of Will as voyeur, in some sense representing the novelist, and of the text as self-referential artifact.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *Richard II*

90. Speech and language

Students should be asked to go through the play looking for the points at which characters make reference to their ability / inability to speak, or to the conditions in which they are speaking. Examples might include Mowbray's reflection on his exile, John of Gaunt's speech about story-telling, the garden scenes, and the repeated rhyming of tongue with wrong. How do these scenes function within the play, and how do they add to or alter students' sense of the conditions of reading and writing in early modern England? If more than one play is being studied, Jonson's *Sejanus* makes an excellent companion piece for this exercise.

Helen Smith (University of York)

Digital resources and websites

20th-century London

91. Website design

Students are asked to design their own website using a wiki. Examining one of the texts from the first four weeks of the semester, students create a learning resource for the text.

Avoiding prescriptiveness, yet pre-empting student anxiety, suggest they can provide:

1. An interactive map of the text's London.
2. A visual mapping of character relations.
3. A list of useful weblinks.
4. Use of relevant audiovisual and new media.
5. An interactive annotated bibliography.
6. Video documentary (done by students).
7. Historical contexts.

And so on. These wikis can be built on year upon year to become a useful public resource. Each site will also be accompanied by a reflective student report.

Alex Murray (University of Exeter) and Mary Fairclough (University of Huddersfield)

Shakespeare, *Plays*

92. Using the Field field

The printer Richard Field was a Stratford contemporary of Shakespeare's who printed a number of books influential on Shakespeare's work. (For an introduction, see David Kathman's online anti-Oxfordian article, 'Shakespeare and Richard Field', at **www.shakespeareauthorship.com/field.html**.)

You can explore the links between Field and Shakespeare with students by getting them to use the 'publisher' and 'date' fields in EEBO to track down Field's publications. Assign student pairs plays (and their approximate date). Their research project is to look for books published by Field in the years immediately before the writing of their play, identifying books printed by Field that may have influenced that play. (The working hypothesis is that Shakespeare is particularly likely to have read books printed by Field.) This work could be done either during class or out of class.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Swift, *Waterland*

93. Greenwich

Use web resources to demonstrate the significance of Greenwich within the text e.g. the Greenwich Mean Time site or relevant essays in Wikipedia. Students list forms in which time is thematised in the novel.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

18th-Century non-fiction

94. Stranger than fiction

Each student selects a 'non-literary text' (ie. something that is not a poem, a play or an obviously fictional prose narrative) from ECCO (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online). Outside class, the students then list:

1. 10 distinguishing characteristics of the text.

2. Two to five things about it that puzzle them as a 21st-century person.

Students bring their lists to a session at which they have online access to ECCO. In pairs, sharing computers, they show each other their texts in ECCO and discuss the lists they have made. Each pair then discusses what the items in their two lists might tell them about 18th-century culture. Either outside or inside class, each student then writes a two-page essay reporting their findings. The essay can be used as a portfolio item. It can also be used as part of a continuing research project, e.g. the next stage could be for each student to use ECCO and secondary materials to research a particular theme in more detail across more texts.

This activity adapts an assignment originally devised by Professor Huston Diehl of the University of Iowa for EEBO and published on the EEBO-TCP website.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Student reflection

Wyatt, *Poems*

95. Gendered readers

Gary Waller's *English Poets of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longman, 2nd edition, 1993) begins with an account of a teaching strategy for 'They flee from me': Waller's students wrote one or two-page response statements detailing as honestly as possible with the effect the poem had on them. The results, Waller found, could be broken down by gender: most men identified with the narrator's 'wounded male ego', whilst the attitude of most women was 'amusedly derisive' (p. 3). It would be interesting to repeat this exercise (without showing the students Waller's account) to see if the same breakdown could be made. The discussion could, then, be taken in a number of different directions: e.g. what do the poems expect / demand from their readers?

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Reader theory

96. Finding the address

This activity asks students to work with a piece of their own writing (already written or written for the occasion). In pairs, A tells B what signs he / she picks up from the text about who the intended addressee is. B compares this diagnosis with his / her own mental image. The pair then swaps round. Larger group activity can then be moved towards a discussion of what Lucy Newlyn calls 'the anxiety of reception': how your own writing – or the writing of published authors – seeks to find, to create, and perhaps to manage or control its audience. What is the implied stance towards the audience? Is this an audience of friends or of strangers? What does this text do (if anything) to please, or to pre-empt hostile response?

97. Call me Ishmael

Students are invited individually or in pairs to find and bring to class the openings of four or five first-person novels. Within the seminar, the finders introduce their speaker, and compare the stylistic and genre conventions involved in creating this 'voice'. (This would work particularly well with speakers with a pronounced idiolect, e.g. Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, or Peter Carey's *Ned Kelly*.) A further variant would be for them to jot notes on the speaker from the point of view (for example) of their university tutor; a social worker (notes towards a case study); an interviewing journalist, etc. The point of course is not to reinforce a sense of the 'reality' of the character ('it must have been awful for him, his father dying like that'), but to draw attention to the way genres of self-representation work.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Lawrence, *Women in Love*

98. A reading journal

Keeping a reading journal is a good way for students to focus and organise their reading. Encourage students to keep an outline record of their reading process. This could take the form of an ideas tree or mind map where they list metaphors, or motifs which they see as endowing the novel with coherence. Examples of such links (backed by quotation) could then be used in class discussion. Once a reading is complete pairs / trios might be deputed to draw a diagram of the gradients of the narrative. That would then lead to questions about whose story this is, and about centrifugal or centripetal narrative forces. The object is to instil the idea that the reader's own difficulties with the text may themselves be growth points.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*

99. 'Bad' poetry

1. In pairs, students brainstorm about the characteristics of bad poetry (cliché, inappropriate diction, predictable rhyme, etc.)

2. Using this check-list, they evaluate samples of bad poetry (Wordsworth's 'Stuffed Owl', 'To a Spade', 'Sailor's Mother'; Coleridge's 'To a Young Ass', etc.).

3. Extracts from negative reviews (Southey on *Lyrical Ballads*, Lord Jeffrey on *The Excursion*) are used to discuss what makes these poems bad while the other poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* are considered literary.

This helps the students understand

    a. The nature of Wordsworth and Coleridge's experiment and some of the hostility it prompted.

    b. That taste is not timeless.

    c. That they have sufficient knowledge to *evaluate* poetry.

4. As a fun post-script, get them to identify the fake – Twain's 'Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots' or Julia Moore's 'Little Libbie'.

Ian Gadd (Bath Spa University)

Kostova, *The Historian*

100. Reading group

The course is modelled on a reading group but with deeper analysis and assessed work. Having provided background reading, reviews and author interviews, I ask students to discuss the role of history within the novel, and within literature in general – they can compare what the author says with reader perceptions.

Sara Lenaghan (Lancaster University)

The senses

History of the Book

101. Blindfolded reading

Blindfolded students are handed a variety of books (and magazines). First they are asked to describe the feel, weight, sound and smell of the book and then asked a series of questions:

Does this feel like an expensive book?

Might it have illustrations?

How might you expect to use this book?

Starting with straightforwardly obvious books (street atlas, cookbook), students progress to novels, plays and poetry, offering not only unexpected insights but also surprising themselves with their ability to identify genres.

The exercise demonstrates both that students have a latent bibliokinaesthetic knowledge of which they are unaware and that the physical form of a book does bear meaning.

Adapted from D. F. McKenzie's 'blank book' exercise with postgraduate students.

Ian Gadd (Bath Spa University)

Reader theory

102. Vertigo

As a way of opening up the psycho-physical nature of response to written words. In the context of a discussion of the gaps in the text, inferencing, the constitutive activity of the reader, etc., invite the class to close their eyes. Then read aloud a passage involving pronounced physical / kinetic response. (I have used the passage in Ian McEwan's *The Child In Time* where Stephen visits his regressed friend and is challenged to climb to Charles's tree house.) Where is the experience, and how does it arise?

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Levy, *Small Island*

103. Skin colour

Students should work in pairs and begin by trying to define the exact colour of each other's skin. They should then identify moments in the novel where skin colour is discussed (Chapter 33 is a good example). What connotations are there in the terms 'white', 'black', 'fair', 'ruddy', 'honeyed', 'drab', and so on? Are the descriptions always technically precise? Remind students that these descriptions come from the multiple narrators in the novel.

Alison Waller (Bath Spa University)

Translation and adaptation

Shelley, *Frankenstein*

104. Recreating Frankenstein

Two adaptation-related activities:

1. Compare Shelley's account of the genesis and composition of the novel with a contemporary fictional treatment in Benjamin Markovits's *Imposture* and / or Ken Russell's *Gothic*.

2. After reading *Frankenstein*, students should read either the whole of or selected extracts from Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*. A lively discussion can be developed exploring how Ackroyd's novel enables us to read out of and back into Shelley's novel. Specifically, students could be asked to explore the comparisons between Romantic and postmodern treatments of the outsider, the monstrous, scientific exploration, religious belief, etc.

Andrew Green (Brunel University)

Swift, *Waterland*

105. Adaptation

Delegate some students to watch the feature film (Gyllenhaal 1992) and make a short presentation to the rest about the ways the film differs from the book. What can we learn from comparing the two? Given the importance of place in the novel, what can we learn about the narrative through this geographical re-positioning? Would the students have chosen to foreground the same elements as the film?

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Beowulf, trans. Heaney

106. Beowulf or Heaneywulf?

Ask students to find 'Ulsterisms' within Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. Splitting into small groups, the students can be assigned one term each. They should be asked to work out its resonances and significance for them and the effect of them on the reading experience. It would be helpful to have examples available of the choices made by other translators at the same point. Students might then be asked to think of words from within their own dialect traditions (if any!) which they would use and how that would alter the poem for them.

107. Whose book is it anyway?

Students should be asked to read Howell Chickering's 'Beowulf and 'Heaneywulf,' (*The Kenyon Review* 24:1 (Winter 2002), 160-178) before the seminar. In the light of this review, ask students to look at the cover of their edition of *Beowulf*. Who does it suggest authored the text, or what is its point of origin? What does it say about its place in the canon and its genre (i.e. which other books would it fit alongside on the shelf)? If the book features critical quotes or puffs what do they say about what the book is and where it has come from? How does this tie in to what Heaney says about the text's place in his autobiography as a poet?

Helen Smith (University of York)

Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

108. Melodrama

Students can be asked to consider ways in which the play, for all its apparent modishness, actually fits into the genre of melodrama. A useful aid to understanding the emotive acting style of melodrama is Fred Paul's silent film of the play, made in 1913 and available on video and DVD from the BFI.

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Using visuals

Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*

109. Text and Illustrations

Two possible ways of using the book's illustrations:

1. Compare the way the eclogue-illustration relationship works in *The Shepheardes Calender* with the way in which selected Renaissance emblems work: using, for example, George Wither's *Collection of Emblems*.

2. Students write an analysis of a woodcut (perhaps in class) before reading the text: i.e. they describe what they might expect from the illustration the eclogue would be about. Outside class, the students read the eclogue and write a commentary on how it relates to their expectations.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

110. 'Fallen' women

Using paintings such as Augustus Egg's trio of paintings 'Past and Present' as a starting point, students can be asked to consider (via Mrs Erlynne) Wilde's treatment of female disgrace and its place in mid-late Victorian representations of 'fallen-ness'. Other examples can be collected.

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Romanticism

111. Context of the 1790s

Fuseli's painting 'Nightmare' can be compared to Godwin's conceptualisation of law in the *Enquiry into Political Justice* as a Gothic unintelligible burden.

Sharon Ruston (Bangor University) and Sue Chaplin (Leeds Metropolitan University)

Dickens, *Oliver Twist*

112. Cruikshank as first critic

Henry James remembered *Oliver Twist* as 'more Cruikshank's than Dickens's; it was such a thing of terribly vivid images.' Ask students to compare Cruikshank's illustration of 'Oliver Asking for More' with 'Oliver introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman' – notice how these images are clearly constructed as a pair, with Oliver similarly positioned in relation to the adult 'provider' in each scene. When I did this exercise my students made interesting points about the lack / provision of food and the general scarcity vs. more homely furnishing; the cadaverous / corpulent faces of the boys; the greater individuality of Fagin's boys (although, given that Oliver's clothes are also replaced at the den, this might just be another form of uniform). I use this to propel a discussion about how far Dickens, and Cruikshank as first critic, ask us to compare the 'care' offered by the parish and by the thieves. This could be developed into a wider discussion of Dickens's Poor Law critique.

Holly Furneaux (University of Leicester)

Verse analysis

Kavanagh, *Consider the Grass Growing*

113. The significance of the line

This exercise is useful with groups who find it difficult to appreciate the craft of poems which on a first encounter may seem to lack shape. It is based on a short poem so it doesn't take too long for the students to produce their versions. The brevity of the piece also encourages students who feel timid about a creative approach to texts.

Give them a handout containing 'Consider the Grass Growing' laid out as prose. Provide them with pens and flipchart paper. Ask them to write the prose version as a poem and transfer it to the large flipchart sheet.

Elicit from the whole group ideas about what they could consider as they make their decisions about their shaping of the prose into lines to create a poem. Encourage them to think about the number of lines they want to use, line lengths – regularity and variation, the use of single word lines, emphasis, rhythm, enjambment, flow and pause, line endings and sound patterns.

Let the students decide whether they want to do it individually or with a partner. Ask each student / pair to show the result and talk through their decision with the whole group. They will make fruitful discoveries about how the line controls the reading of a poem and understand some of the ways in which a poem is a product of careful choices.

Finally show them the original version, so that they can make comparisons with their own constructions, and explore Kavanagh's shaping.

'Consider the Grass Growing' can be found in *The Bloodaxe Book of 20th Century Poetry*, ed. Edna Longley (2000).

Susan Love (University of Nottingham)

Writing poetry

114. Speed sestinas

1. As students enter, ask six for a word – any word.
2. Give each student a copy of a a sestina (e.g. Elizabeth Bishop's 'Sestina', which is in the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*).
3. Read aloud – look for the rules of the form.
4. Distribute sestina blanks, indicating the movement of each end-word using A, B, C, C, E, F.
5. Write the six words on the board.
6. Students work in groups of two or three. They have 40 minutes (one minute per line, plus one minute) to write complete sestinas, using the six words as end-words. In the first stanza they can use the words in any order – but the position of the words governs the order in subsequent stanzas.
7. Read all completed sestinas and note effects achieved.
8. Return to analyse effects and technique in the poem read originally.

Kathleen Bell (De Montfort University)

Donne, *Poems*

115. Reading for the metre

Students can be very anxious about the identification of metrical patterns (and breaches in pattern). One way to get round this is to go round the group reading out each line of quite a short extract twice – first by a student putting very heavy, artificial sounding stresses on every other syllable (thus highlighting what the poem would sound like if it were a leadenly regular piece of iambic pentameter) and then by her / his neighbour reading the line 'naturally'. After each pair of readings you can stop and discuss the differences with the class. This should help clarify the relationship between abstract metrical patterns and language in action.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes*

116. Discovering pattern in the expression of passion

Provide students with a handout of one stanza from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. The Second Book, Canto XII (78) seems to work quite well for this activity.

Allocate a different stanza from 'The Eve of St Agnes' to each group of two or three students and ask each group to:

1. Choose three words to describe what they see as most significant about the images, themes, or narrative movement of their stanza.
2. Compare the form and sound pattern of their Keats stanza with the stanza from Spenser.

Explore the results as a whole group. The students will probably have made their own discoveries about Keats' consistently tight control of this very passionate narrative poem.

Susan Love (University of Nottingham)

Verse analysis continued

Writing poetry

117. Quick sonnet exercise

This exercise is for Creative Writing students who have been introduced to the sonnet form, and who have also read examples of contemporary free-verse sonnets.

Remind students that since Petrarch and Shakespeare one of the central themes of the sonnet form has been LOVE (in one form or another).

1. Elicit 14 words about love and / or eroticism from students, and write them on the board. This usually livens the class up, and gets students interested in the exercise.

2. Have students write a sonnet using one of the 14 words in each line. They must use all 14 words, they must use one word per line, and they cannot use the same word twice. (Initially it is useful to have them write free verse sonnets, as the one word from a given lexicon per line is enough of a constraint).

3. The lecturer can write two or three lines first on the board, using their lexicon, in order to get them started and to check that everyone gets the concept.

4. Give them sufficient time to work through the entire lexicon (15-30 minutes, depending on the class. It's a good idea to keep things moving quickly at this stage). Then let them know they can have a few minutes to edit their work.

5. Students next read their work to each other in pairs or very small groups.

6. Ask for brave volunteers to read their work to the class.

7. Conclude by telling them this practice can be used to generate ideas, and then revised into more finished poems.

8. Homework: revise their sonnet.

Peter Jaeger (Roehampton University)

Pope, *An Essay on Man*

118. Heroic couplet and binary oppositions

Give students the first 18 lines of Epistle 2 of *An Essay on Man* and ask them to underline all the pairs of opposites that they can find:

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is Man.
> Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A being darkly wise and rudely great: […]

This allows them to appreciate how Pope places these pairs in many different positions in the line or couplet, and how he thus creates an impressive number of variations on a theme within the rigid confines of the heroic couplet. Highlighting these terms should also make students more aware of the key terms that Pope uses throughout the poem.

119. Heroic couplet and rhyme

Give students short passages from the poem and leave out the last rhyming word, which they have to complete. For example:

> All Nature is but Art unknown to thee;
> All chance direction, which thou canst not see;
> All discord, harmony not understood;
> All partial evil, universal _____ .

Let them discuss how Pope's syntax and line of argument make it easy to guess that the final word is 'good'.

This can lead to a discussion about the kind of satisfaction a reader derives from the form of the closed couplet and / or about the strategic positioning of key terms at the end of the line.

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Understanding sonnets

120. Sonnet construction

Give students end words only of a sonnet of your choice. A poem that works very well is 'Quoof' by Paul Muldoon. Without telling them anything more about the poem (this works best if you give them something they are less likely to be familiar with), ask them to write a poem using these words at the end of each of their lines, in the order with which you have presented them. You do not even have to point out there are 14 words, this hopefully will emerge during the activity. When I have done this, the variety of work produced is fascinating. They then have to discuss their work with a partner and explain how they responded to each word (which caused more problems etc.). If they have not already referred to the rhyme scheme themselves, you can then ask them what the rhyme scheme of their poem is and how this may or may not contribute to their meaning or to the shape of their poem. After discussion of their own work you can then return to the original poem and compare results, seeing if their own work has any impact on their responses.

Karen Lockney (University of Cumbria)

Historical and cultural context

Webster, *A Castaway*

121. Poetry with a purpose

Christine Sutphin's edition of Webster includes a selection of her articles for *The Examiner*. Choose quotations from 'Husband-Hunting and Match-Making' (perhaps the passage beginning 'Marriage should mean love') and 'Protection for the Working Woman' (a good passage is that beginning 'There is nothing more difficult than to protect without enslaving.') Ask students to think about how these passages shed light on Webster's thought as expressed in 'A Castaway'. It may be helpful to point out that Webster's persuasive articles for *The Examiner* may be written to make a debating case rather than to express her own view in its entirety.

Kathleen Bell (De Montfort University)

Milton, *Paradise Lost*

122. Ideas of marriage

As preparation for a discussion of *Paradise Lost* Book 4, students are asked to read Genesis 1-3, Ephesians 5, and the opening section of the Prayer Book marriage service, and asked to see how Adam and Eve's marriage fits with these prescriptions (and where it doesn't!).

Roger Pooley (Keele University)

Austen, *Mansfield Park*

123. Comparing the novel to conduct books

Let students read excerpts from contemporary conduct books and discuss how the novel's female characters measure up to the conduct books' standards and how the reader should judge these characters. This could lead to a discussion about whether Austen tries to teach the same precepts as the conduct book through fiction or whether she distances herself from these standards.

You can also ask students to compare the conduct book guidelines to the expectations that the male characters have regarding young women, especially Henry Crawford in Chapter 30 and Sir Thomas in Chapters 32 and 48.

Depending on how familiar students are with ECCO (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online) or with independent research, you can let them find their own conduct books on ECCO, bookmark select texts on ECCO or provide photocopied extracts. (The Broadview edition of *Mansfield Park* has an excellent selection of short extracts.)

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Brontë, *Shirley*

124. Graffiti

A way of building bridges between contextual and textual knowledge. On a long roll of wallpaper the class pools what they have learned about the 1840s. (This activity would transfer to an interactive whiteboard, if you had such a thing.) The group debates its collection and can add to it in a subsequent week. Gaps can be filled by turning to textbooks like F.M.L. Thompson's *Rise of Respectable Society*, and / or The Victorian Web. They then trawl the text for items which can be seen to have a connection to their 1840s map. An example might be to take the assault on the mill (II.8) and compare with non-fictional accounts of riots or disturbances from e.g. *The Illustrated London News* or a comparable source, or from another near contemporaneous novel, e.g. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Further discussion could move on to the text's own status as a historical novel, set a generation earlier.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Online discussion

Shakespeare, *Richard III*

125. Looking for Richard

1. Ask the students to research actors who have played Richard III.

2. Create a discussion forum on your VLE which opens at a fixed time, and which is advertised to the students. The discussion forum will also have an end time (usually seven days).

3. Students submit a post giving an example of an actor who has played Richard III and with a paragraph outlining how the actor approached the part. Posts must be referenced. If an actor has already been chosen by another students, the student must find a different example.

4. A follow-up seminar discusses the posts.

Aims:
1. To build students' confidence in using the discussion forum. (Students are encouraged to post when the forum opens, because they all have to find different examples. The longer they leave it, the harder the exercise becomes.)

2. To give students an opportunity to demonstrate the use of research skills. (The session at York St John follows a session run by the library.)

3. To consider Shakespeare in performance.

4. To consider different perspectives on a Shakespearean character.

Julie Raby (York St John University)

Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

126. Dorian Gray and / in the Wilde trials

After a lecture that has introduced the topics of decadence and Oscar Wilde, seminar discussion focuses on the week's set text, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. We then move beyond the face-to-face classroom into an online activity whereby the students are invited to access extracts from Oscar Wilde's trials on Douglas O. Linder's *Famous Trials* site at University of Missouri-Kansas City (UKMC) School of Law. In particular, the class are directed to the libel trial and the 'literary part' of Wilde's testimony and his cross examination, in which *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is quoted back at Wilde. Literature is literally on trial here, and in a discussion forum students are asked to consider how this fictional text is being used in a legal setting. This also raises issues and questions about art and morality – key tenets of the High Victorian period which aesthetic and decadent works of art of the later nineteenth century seem to argue are not necessarily linked.

Rosie Miles (University of Wolverhampton)

Online discussion continued

Wyatt, *Poems*

127. Chinese whispers

Students circulate their own poems anonymously within small sub-groups or mini-coteries (perhaps using a VLE), emulating early modern readers by successively adapting the poems sent by other students in a written form of Chinese Whispers. Some of the poems are then passed to students in other 'mini-coteries' who try to guess which variant text came first. The exercise can link into a discussion of secondary texts on authorship (e.g. Foucault, Barthes) and manuscript culture (e.g. Wendy Wall, Arthur Marotti). For more ideas about replicating coteries with students see Steve May's discussion in *Approaches to Teaching Shorter Elizabethan Poetry*, edited by Patrick Cheney and Anne Lake Prescott, (New York: MLA, 2000).

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Editing

Shakespeare, *Plays*

128. Prefaces to Shakespeare

Ask students to write an essay-length preface to an imaginary edition of a specified Shakespeare play. Tell them to make their preface as biased as possible – it will be up to the students to choose the type and nature of their particular edition's bias. Make it clear that you expect all the prefaces to engage in detail with at least four passages from the play in question.

Possible supplement: a short commentary reflecting on the exercise.

Prepare for this exercise by looking with students at a number of different critical / interested approaches, ideally from a range of periods, to the same play.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*

129. Being E.K.

Ask students to write annotations in the manner of Spenser's contemporary editor 'E.K.' (eg. pointing out rhetorical devices, explaining mythological references, glossing difficult vocabulary) to parts of *The Shepheardes Calender* he omitted to gloss, to other texts by Spenser, to texts by other Renaissance writers or to texts by writers from other periods.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Wyatt, *Poems*

130. 'Totles'

Students compose discursive titles in the style of Tottel's (or 'totles' as Mary-Thomas Crane calls them), everyone focussing on the same poem or poems, as a lead-in to a discussion of the ways in which Wyatt's poems invoke (or don't invoke) contexts and 'back story'.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *Othello*

131. Willow [Willow]

Desdemona's Willow Song appears in the folio text of *Othello*, but not in the first quarto. Does its absence in the quarto represent a cut? Or does its presence in the folio represent a new addition to the text? As Michael Warren suggests ('Teaching the Texts of *Othello*', in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's* Othello, edited by Peter Erickson and Maurice Hunt (New York: MLA, 2005)), getting students to discuss this crux is a useful way of opening up a range of important topics, in terms of theme, character and performance.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Rochester, *Imperfect Enjoyment*

132. 'Had charms upon't' or Rochester and the c-word

Students will need a modern edition of Rochester's poem and a photocopy of the 1685 edition of Rochester's Poems (Wing R1755), pp. 28-30 (from EEBO (Early English Books Online)).

First students are given a brief introduction into the textual problems of Rochester (issues of attribution, different manuscript versions, etc.). They are then given a brief guide to early printed texts (chiefly so they read '/ucks' in line 6 correctly). They are then asked to compare their modern edition with the 1685 'expurgated' version, to note differences and to think about what is lost (or indeed gained) in the 1685 reworking.

(The discussion can be concluded by showing the relevant page from the uncensored 1680 edition (Wing R1754B), pp. 28-30.)

Ian Gadd (Bath Spa University)

Donne, *Poems*

133. Editing and meaning

Students should be split into small groups, and each given a facsimile copy of one stanza of a Donne poem to edit (the 1633 edition is available fairly readily through EEBO (Early English Books Online)). Students should be asked to read the stanza carefully, and should be encouraged to use dictionaries (e.g. OED; LEME) and other appropriate resources. They should identify which words they think require either a gloss or an annotation, and encouraged to look out for double meaning or ambiguity, and to think very carefully about words they usually skip over or assume are familiar. Students should also be asked to decide whether they will modernise or preserve spelling and paratextual features such as enlarged capitals. The seminar group as a whole can then go through the poem stanza by stanza, explaining and discussing choices; this usually results in a rich, close reading of the poem. Students can also be asked to compare their choices with those made by the editors of student or one-volume editions, pointing out where annotations are too limited or overly directive, where there are inconsistencies in modernisation, and where there are differences in wording, which can lead to brief discussion of the manuscript tradition.

Helen Smith (University of York)

Fielding, *Bridget Jone's Diary*

134. Feng Shui

This is intended to help students explore one problem of contemporary reference in the realist text: that topical allusions date so quickly. Arguably, the text was showing its age even by the time it was published. Focusing on sample entries, individuals / small groups write the explanatory notes that would be needed by readers / students in 2096. This can also sharpen perceptions about notes encountered in editions of classic texts. Alternatively, students could apply this activity to a contemporary text of their own choosing: this might heighten the sense of estrangement the task attempts to create.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

More, *The Sorrows of Yamba*

135. Alternative versions

This seminar activity is inspired by Alan Richardson's article about different versions of the poem: 'The Sorrows of Yamba,' by Eaglesfield Smith and Hannah More: Authorship, Ideology, and the Fractures of Antislavery Discourse'.

Give students the well-known version of the poem by Hannah More and the version by Eaglesfield Smith ('The Sorrows of Yamba; or, The Negro Woman's Lamentation'. [40-stanza 'Cheap Repository' broadside]. London: J. Marshall and R. White and Bath: S. Hazard, [November 1795]; 'E. S. J.', 'The Sorrows of Yamba.' *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 101 (July, 1797): 43-44).

In pairs or small groups, let students search for differences in content and style between the two versions as well as for ruptures in the narrative. Ask them to reflect on how these differences affect the message of the poem and let them guess which is the original version of the text, giving an explanation why they have come up with their solution.

Main points that students should notice:

More's version (the later one) turns Smith's suicide narrative, which ends with an attack on British imperialism and does not contain any reference to religion, into a pious conversion narrative; she infantilises the protagonist by letting her speak in pidgin English, which jars with Smith's standard English elsewhere in the text – an indicator that hers is the later version.

This exercise can lead to discussions about the spectrum of different political positions among abolitionist writers, about the aesthetic merits of political poetry, or in a more general context, about the ownership of a literary text, and about how authorial intentions can be reflected in texts.

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Analysing characters and their behaviour

Milton, *Paradise Lost*

136. Curricula vitae

Students are asked to prepare a *Curriculum Vitae* for one of the characters in *Paradise Lost*. It may be helpful to provide a template or outline of the appropriate categories for a CV. This encourages students to read through and across the text, picking out the detailed information Milton provides as to the history of many characters, often also central in terms of plot or theology.

Helen Smith (University of York)

Wyatt, *Poems*

137. Homosociality

The high number of male-male relationships in Wyatt's poetry provides fertile ground for the application of Eve Kosofky Sedgwick's ideas about homosociality (cf. Mario DiGangi's discussion in *Approaches to Teaching Shorter Elizabethan Poetry*, edited by Patrick Cheney and Anne Lake Prescott, (New York: MLA, 2000), pp.173-8). Students can track and classify different types of male figure in the poems (Love and other abstractions, friends, patrons, Wyatt's lute) and map their relationships with the poems' narrators onto the narrators' relationships with women.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

138. Prospero: player, composer or conductor?

Divide students into groups to consider the extent to which Prospero is the composer of events, the extent to which he simply conducts forces outside of himself and the extent to which he is a player within the events of the play.

Andrew Green (Brunel University)

139. Prospero's roles

Prospero's power over others takes many forms: he is, by turns, wizard, master, teacher, father and avenger (and what else?). Allocate one of Prospero's roles to each small group for discussion and, get them to do guided out-of-class research focusing on early modern fathers, wizards, masters, etc.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Trollope, *The Small House at Allington*

140. Social strata

One judgment about Trollope has long seem fixed: this is his apparent endorsement of the professional man alongside the county squire (as opposed to the titled aristocracy). Students might be asked to think about how different social groups are represented in this novel. Can they rank characters according to social status?

Analysing characters and their behaviour continued

141. Commodification

It is often suggested that Trollope is a very sympathetic observer of the restricted choices faced by mid-Victorian women. At the same time his depictions of some of his heroines can make them seem little more than a collection of body parts. Students might be asked to consider some of the literary conventions or scientific discourses (e.g. physiognomy) at work in these description of young women. Starting points might be the descriptions of the Dale sisters in chapter 2. What purpose do such descriptions serve?

142. Sexuality

As they are represented in *The Small House at Allington*, these mid-Victorian women do not quite fit with the school of thought which attempts to depict the Victorians as repressed or sexless. At the same time, of course, it is partly Lily Dale's fervent expression of her love for Crosbie which causes him to feel trapped. Lily's opposite, Alexandrina, appears to have no sexual feelings at all. Using these two contrasting women as a starting point, students might be asked think about the ways in which Trollope represents and problematizes female sexuality. A starting point might be the Dales' croquet party in the early part of the novel, and Alexandrina's and Crosbie's train journey as they set off on honeymoon.

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Brontë, *Shirley*

143. Depression

'To avoid excitement was one of Miss Mann's aims in life … a certain lethargic state of tranquillity …'. While warning against anachronistic interpretation, invite a pre-reading of 'Old Maids' (I.10) in terms of confinement and restraint. Cross reference can then be made to Caroline's own narrative, and the figure of Shirley at the end of the first volume can be introduced. Pairs diagram patterns of energy and containment, then each finds an exemplary scenario to present to the group. Plenary discussion can then fold discussion back into students' knowledge of gender in the nineteenth-century.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Sound / reading aloud

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

144. 'the isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs'

There are many operatic and musical versions of *The Tempest* ranging from Purcell's songs through Tchaikovsky's overture to Thomas Ades' recent setting and the soundtrack to *Prospero's Books*. Play a selection of these musical versions of the text to the student group. A lively discussion can be developed, drawing on a range of textual evidence and issues, considering how the various composers have sought to represent the strange music of the island and how these seem to relate to the world of Shakespeare's play.

Andrew Green (Brunel University)

Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*

145. Aural Sonnets

Divide the students up into groups. Give each group a different sonnet by Sidney. In their groups, students must devise a physical / aural method for depicting iambic rhythm (marching, chanting, clapping, etc.). They must then practice a presentation setting a reading-aloud of their poem alongside their preferred enactment of the iambic beat. The purpose will be to show the relationship (or lack of relationship) between Sidney's poems and metrical regularity. The last part of the session will consist of the group presentations and plenary discussion of points arising.

For more on this sort of activity, see Virginia Zimmerman's article on kinaesthetic approaches to metre in the journal *Pedagogy* (2002).

The group performances could also be videoed and thus be used in assessment. If groups met outside class, more elaborate videos could be produced.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Debates

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

146. Debating Shakespeare's genres

The Tempest can be useful at the end of a Shakespeare course as a way of synthesising themes and genres. Students can debate which genre the play is – or, rather, how it relates to other plays by Shakespeare in a variety of genres: e.g. comedy (opposition to young love), tragedy (authority figure with problems), pastoral, etc. etc. in Polonian fashion. Divide students into pairs: one member of each pair will look for evidence supporting a particular generic label; the other will look for evidence disproving it. Give them time to argue in their pairs before returning to plenary discussion.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

147. Genre

Introduce students to definitions of utopia and dystopia and let them discuss in which genre they would place the whole of *Gulliver's Travels* or individual books. The most fruitful subject for discussion should be Book IV. You can divide students in two groups who have to argue for one of the genres and try to counter the opposition's arguments.

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Trollope, *The Small House at Allington*

148. Lily Dale and the single life

Lily Dale has always been one of Trollope's most controversial characters, provoking admiration and exasperation in equal measure. Modern critics tend to be divided on how we should read her decision to remain unmarried. Is it masochistic and selfish or is it an unusual (for a mid-Victorian novel) assertion of selfhood and a stand which we should admire? Students might be asked to vote on this issue. Contemporary reviews collected in Donald Smalley, ed. *Trollope: The Critical Heritage* (1969) give a good sense of what some 1860s readers thought.

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Austen, *Mansfield Park*

149. Fanny Price as hero or anti-hero

Give students a few quotations from critics that take different views on whether Fanny is a positive heroine or an anti-hero. Let students take sides in small- or whole-group discussions and argue their case with reference to the text.

Britta Martens (University of the West of England)

Milton, *Paradise Lost*

150. Retrying Charles

Put King Charles on trial: research newsbooks, printed 'speeches', trial proceedings etc. and take roles: King, Parliament, Judges.

Sharon Achinstein (Oxford University)

Pre-seminar preparation

History of the Book

151. History of a Book

Students should be asked to choose one text or book, and to find out all they can about its publication history. Obviously, this works best if the student chooses a text that has appeared in several different forms: perhaps one that was first serialized, then published as a three-volume novel, then as a one-volume text; one that first circulated in manuscript, then in miscellanies, then in a selected or collected poems; one that has been frequently anthologised. Students should choose what they see as two or three key moments in the life of the text and explain the ways in which its different incarnations affect the way we, as well as contemporary readers, approach the text.

Helen Smith (University of York)

Milton, *Paradise Lost*

152. Epic allegory

As the activity name suggests, small research tasks are distributed to *all* students for presentation in the following weeks' seminar (up to a maximum of approximately 10-12 students). With regard to *Paradise Lost* such tasks might include aspects of Milton biography (e.g. education, marriages, blindness, public appointments), brief background on the epic allegory genre, paragraphs on Genesis, the English Civil War, *Paradise Lost* structure, publication, reception, influence, etc. Students are willing to prepare short research tasks; this leads to further independent reading, and, most important, gives all students a voice in each seminar.

Hugh Adlington (Keele University)

Study skills

153. Portfolio of learning resource

Students produce a portfolio of learning resources (including images from a book, website, journal article and two others of their choice). They submit the portfolio with a cover sheet which is an annotated bibliography – explaining why each of the resources might be of use and with correct referencing.

Students exchange their cover sheets (only) and must find the materials listed and bring them (or photocopies) into the next class. Students assess the appropriateness of the materials and ease of discovery, using a tick-box sheet.

Staff assessment of the accuracy of referencing would also take place. By the end of the task, students would have experienced two sets of resources:

1. Their own, during the preparation of the sheet

2. The materials presented by the other student on their sheet.

Eleanor Lowe (Oxford Brookes University) and Nolan Dalrymple (Newcastle University)

Shakespeare, *Richard II*

154. Censorship

Students should be asked to undertake research prior to the seminar. Different small groups could investigate the following questions: what was the Bishop's Ban and who did it affect? Why might history plays be appealing to authors and a problem for the authorities? Who had the power to decide what was and was not printed / played (Master of the Revels, ecclesiastical licensers, Royal authority, Stationers' Company, etc.)?

In class, students should be given a facsimile of the relevant pages from the 1597 and 1608 printings to compare with their own editions, and asked to think about what the implications are both for this textual moment and for the play as a whole.

Helen Smith (University of York)

Romanticism

155. Student-directed research on periodicals

Students are each assigned a periodical to research, i.e. *Edinburgh Review, Blackwoods' Magazine, Frazers' Magazine*. Students map the periodical through the semester, reporting on how it engages with class materials week by week.

Anon

Pre-seminar preparation continued

History of the English language

156. Analysing an 18th-century passage

Students are all asked to prepare a five-minute seminar presentation in which they analyse the language used in a passage from an 18th-century work (of any kind, but in the original spelling). The analysis must focus on the following question: what linguistic differences (grammatical, lexical or orthographical) are there between the language of the passage and present-day English? For each difference, they are asked to establish exactly what has changed (using appropriate background materials, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* online for lexical and orthographical differences, their course materials for grammatical differences) and also to think of a possible reason why it has changed. They are required to bring to the seminar a sufficient number of photocopies / printouts of the passage, to be handed out. In the photocopy / printout, the lines of the relevant passage should be numbered, so they can refer to line numbers for concrete examples while doing their presentation.

This activity was designed for a seminar in an introductory module on the history of the English language (it is best done when students have had some practice working with historical texts and can do simple searches in the *Oxford English Dictionary*). Experience has shown that this extremely simple assignment works very well. The need for students to find an original-spelling text themselves is a first challenge. It may bring them to the library's Special Collections or lead them to all kinds of text-based websites. Any 18th-century passage will have enough differences from present-day English for students to talk about (but not too many to make the text inaccessible without specialist knowledge), with obvious learning opportunities regarding the systematic and linguistically correct description of the differences that they find. The question of causation is a real intellectual challenge, with sufficient possibilities for students to go completely wrong (and be gently told) or to come up with ideas that would repay further serious work.

Wim van der Wurff (Newcastle University)

Brontë, *Shirley*

157. Governess

'I will not have it said that my niece is a governess' (I.11). One small group is tasked with reading up on the social history of the governess. Starting places would be Mary Poovey's 'Anathematized Race' chapter, and the bibliography on The Victorian Web. Other groups comb the text for the working conditions of Mrs Pryor, or Louis Moore. Groups compare their findings.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Wyatt, *Poems*

158. Types of instability

The search for stable reference points in Wyatt (as in his use of, e.g., questions ('What menythe thys?'), verbal repetition ('There was never file') and refrains ('In eternum') is an obvious topic for discussion (and classification), and

opens out into several different areas: deconstruction, early modern Stoicism (and thus the *Satires*), male anxiety, the loss of the poem's social context, Lutheran angst (and thus the *Penitential Psalms*), the strangeness of Renaissance concepts of the self, the uncertainty of the life of a Henrician courtier. Each group of students could be given one of these areas to investigate independently, leading up to a plenary session in which links and differences between the various contexts could be explored.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Everyday life

Hornby, *About a Boy*

159. How cool was Will Freeman?

Small groups collect evidence on the construction of men as consumers during the 1980s and 90s. There are useful prompts in R.W. Connell's *The Men and the Boys* (2000) and John Beynon's *Masculinities and Culture* (2002). Permeable boundaries with popular culture can be explored by dipping into the magazines which appeared in the mid-90s: e.g. *Arena*, or *GQ*. Make use of men in the group by inviting them to keep reading diaries, and submit to interview by other members of the group. Could also be the basis for a study of infantilisation.

160. Meals

Draw attention to the codes and conventions surrounding meals, and invite group to think of examples from their reading and viewing. They then list examples from *About a Boy*. Small groups take one example each (the picnic, Christmas, etc.) and make a case for the narrative significance of 'their' meal.

Ben Knights (English Subject Centre)

Writing poetry

161. Slang poems

'Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands and goes to work' (Carl Sandburg).

Ask students to think about slang they use in their normal life. They could also use slang from their area, their family or friends. After freewriting on the slang, ask them to draft a poem using slang. The sound of the slang encourages students to focus on the use of sound in poetry.

Jennifer Young (University of Hertfordshire)

Levy, *Small Island*

162. The cricket test

Ask students what sports teams they support.

Do they follow a local team or one they have old family links to?

Do they support their national team in big tournaments?

Are they passionate fans or reluctant spectators?

Allow the discussion to develop to incorporate wider issues of nationality, patriotism and participation, exploring how *Small Island* refuses to simplify its conflicts by creating obvious 'teams'.

To provide a sense of the historical development of these issues you could get students to read extracts from Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech (*The Birmingham Post*, 1968), Norman Tebbit's comments about 'the cricket test' (*The Los Angeles Times*, 1990) and a more recent article by David Davis about cultural tolerance (*The Daily Telegraph*, 03/08/2005).

163. Sexual Style

Sexual impropriety drives much of the plot of *Small Island*. Students might be tempted to dismiss this theme as of purely historical interest to readers like themselves from an age when 'anything goes'.

Identify some of the novel's diverse sex scenes and ask for volunteers to read them out loud. Any embarrassment can be used as a starting point to discuss the meaning of sexuality in different cultural contexts. The distinctive narrative styles employed by Levy in these extracts (purple prose, farce, gritty realism) can also be examined to explore the links between body, voice and identity.

Alison Waller (Bath Spa University)

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

164. I'm the King of Naples, Get Me Out of Here!

Discuss the similarities (and differences) between the play and reality TV shows (e.g. Prospero / Ariel as Big Brother). Each group prepares to make a pitch for a reality TV programme echoing the plot of *The Tempest*.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Writing poetry

165. Poetry for places

Ask students to think of (or assign them) a place in which a poem will appear. This may be a visible place – the window of a clothes shop, the side of a bus – or somewhere more hidden, like a toilet door or the back of a painting. Students can be directed to think about why the poem is where it is – what is it about, who will read it? Also, it may help to adopt a poetic character – who would be writing a poem in this place?

Sara Lenaghan (Lancaster University)

Using criticism

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

166. Pre-Colonialist discourse

Peter Womack's short essay on 'The Writing of Travel' in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Blackwell, 2000) gives a useful anatomy of early modern approaches to foreign countries, classifying early modern travellers (as depicted in the travel literature of the time) as 'bearers of strange news', 'liars' and 'pilgrims'. Getting students to apply Womack's categories to *The Tempest* should lead to a better understanding of the play's (and the period's) pre-colonialist discourse.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

167. Morality and aesthetics

Wilde wrote: 'An artist, sir, has no ethical sympathies at all. Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on the palette are to the painter' (*Selected Letters*, p. 81). Students might be asked to think about ways in which this play fits such a description and about the questions posed by its subtitle 'A play about a good woman'.

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*

168. Barthes

Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* can be a useful tool to get students thinking about both their own attitudes to love (and gender) and those they find, or imagine they find, in Sidney.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Wyatt, *Poems*

169. Reader response

Combine reader-response theory (readings from Fish, Iser) with the learning journals approach and get students to prepare for a seminar by writing a blow-by-blow account of their first reading of the poems. After the seminar, they could be asked to write a follow-up piece, comparing their own reading processes with the drift of the seminar discussion.

Jonathan Gibson (English Subject Centre)

Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

170. Autobiography

'When Mrs Erlynne talks of being 'despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at`, and forced to `pay for one's sin, pay again and pay all one's life' she might be reading her author's palm. The Woman with a Past was, so to speak, Wilde's own future' (Benedict Nightingale, 'Dated witch-hunt which makes sense as author's cool self-revelation,' *The Times*, 16 April 1990). Given the popularity of biographical readings of Wilde's work, students might be asked to investigate some of the links seen by Nightingale and others. How far do the motifs of masks and fans represent the kind of doubleness that Wilde's own life took on at this time? Is this a valid question to ask?

Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)

Index of topics and texts

Numbers refer to activity numbers, not page numbers.

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