

## The Story of English at KLA

Students begin this story in Victorian London, studying *Oliver Twist*. Oliver, and his origins in the workhouse, show the political nature of narrative – as well as being excited by archetypal characters, especially the ominous Bill Sikes, we see that novels and literature can be more than just story and relate to discussing the context of the day. The use of an abridged text provides our way in, although we are also keen to offer the students extracts from the original which seek to widen their vocabulary which we also build explicitly throughout the course. The pace of this narrative is augmented by our Reading for Pleasure text, which has one purpose – to instil a love and excitement of books. We want our Year 7 students to find their own voice in English, and this work is supplemented with our new Writing for Pleasure which combines twenty minutes of grammar sharpening, with autobiographical writing, and then individual presentation. Confidence of expression and articulation will be key in our study of English, and this work builds on *Oliver Twist*'s focus as an origin story, as well as the basic developmental chronology of plot. Socialisation in our new school is important, and this work on self and favourites, seeks to support the students getting to know one another.

From this start, students then travel back in time to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Another exciting and engaging text, this is our students first encounter with Shakespeare at secondary school. The play has been chosen for its accessibility and sense of fun – we want the children to enjoy the confusion and slapstick nature of the play! We discuss Shakespeare and his time, to embed early the knowledge that the students will need later on, and we are keen to show the context of the world that Shakespeare is writing in. Our Writing for Pleasure unit builds on this, again emphasising the students' own voice as they begin a study of schooling over time. This gives them the opportunity to conduct interviews, and learn note-making skills, which will be presented again to the class with the focus on confident speaking and listening.

Our final term in Year 7 shifts to poetry, completing a study of the three key literary genres. Students are introduced to a range of different writers, including towering literary figures like Tennyson and Blake. There is an explicit focus on metaphor, one of the key components of literature, and the poetry we study is based upon the themes of animals – a topic that the children will find engaging and relevant. Here our writing focus changes to discursive, on the theme of animal rights and zoos.

Year 8 spirals back to Victorian London again – this time with the enigmatic, cultural icon of Sherlock Holmes. Students build from their experience of abridged texts in Year 7, and now read unabridged versions of classic Holmes stories. Again, literary context is important and we study the grimy London that Holmes inhabits, to help students understand some of the unfamiliar vocabulary that they will encounter. Holmes' deductions become a metaphor for the active reading we encourage our students to undertake – we want them to enjoy solving the crimes. The ambivalence of Holmes' character is the focus of the assessment here – more complex than the villainous Sikes, Holmes has both admirable and questionable traits. This nuance and apparent contradiction is something we want the students to wrestle with. As ever, Reading for Pleasure continues apace, and students own writing is on a Sherlock Holmes case, presented as a news report to develop their understanding of non-fiction conventions.

Mirroring the structure of Year 7, we return back to Shakespeare, this time to the magical island of *The Tempest*. A more complicated text than before, this Tragi-Comedy continues to pull on the thread of ambiguity. Is Prospero's revenge and treatment of Caliban justified? How is this play comedic like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? And how is it different? The magical island forms the thematic link to the students own creative writing, and the "isle is full of strange noises" becomes a stimulus for our

students writing imaginatively and creatively about their own utopia – a more sophisticated take on the autobiography of Year 7.

This definition of utopia is important to then understand the two dystopian Orwell texts that the students will study in Key Stage 3, the first being *Animal Farm*. The use of animals in the starring roles echoes the Year 7 work on poetry, and here the concept of allegory is introduced. Although the text may appear simpler to the first encounter with *Oliver*, its ideas are now more defined, and the figurative nature of the novel is understood in the light of the work on figurative language thus far. The political nature of the text is a vehicle to learn about rhetoric and speeches, as the students use this as the basis for their own persuasive leaflet and speech which is written in role. Again, we push the notion of individual voice.

After Year 8 we integrate our Reading and Writing for Pleasure units into our curriculum. The amount of reading in terms of core texts is now greater and writing tasks are based on the literature studied. The Gothic gives rise to students writing and then retelling their own mysterious “camp fire” story – a wonderful opportunity to build up fluency features in dramatic speech. The study of war poetry gives rise to empathetic writing, which both supports an empathetic response to Owen’s poetry and builds on the understanding of non-fiction writing from Year 7 and 8.

Again, we return to the Nineteenth century, and our Year 9 literature forms a chronology of texts that starts with the dark mystery of the Gothic – dealing with deep thought on the place of Science and Darwinism – through to War poetry, which we regard as an essential component of our cultural heritage. This study of poetry involves a deeper understanding of literary terminology, and builds on the study of figurative language earlier on in the course. The study of recruitment poems allows students to understand the ways that language can act persuasively, even manipulatively, and foregrounds the study of 1984 at the end of Year 9, with its chilling conclusion of Newspeak.

In the interim students will read *Of Mice and Men*. This sets the stage for Orwell’s political dystopia in that its social conscience is clear. The political and social aspect of texts is again foregrounded, and the inequality of *Animal Farm* in Year 8, now finds expression in Steinbeck’s novella. The focus on race and gender are two key points that are emphasised, to help students understand the cultural background that has informed today’s real-world debates. This reaches its conclusion in the most challenging text of Key Stage 3 – Orwell’s 1984. Here many of the themes of the last two years are drawn together. The villainous Bill Sikes is drawn out in the menace of Big Brother, the moral ambivalence of Holmes is shown through Winston. The opposite of the student’s own Year 8 utopia finds expression in room 101. The students compliment this literary study with their own speech on a topic that they feel strongly about – building towards the non-exam assessment in Key Stage 4.

Our Key Stage 3 curriculum paves the way to success at Key Stage 4. Inevitably attention will move to success in external exams and their outcomes, and we support our students by interleaving exam practice throughout their key stage 4 course. However, we are keen to ensure that the study of English and Literature does not become reductionist and retains the excitement of Key Stage 3. At the end of Year 9 we introduce Russell’s *Blood Brothers*. A text which builds on the social concerns of Dickens in Year 7, Orwell in Year 8, and the war poets in Year 9, this acts as a foil to some of the literary language of before. As well as understanding the political points Russell makes on class, we want students to enjoy a modern drama and laugh.

Year 10 begins back in the same streets as Year 7 and 8, this time following the misanthropic Scrooge. The villainous Sikes might have changed into a less violent form – but Dickens’ repugnance for his character at the start of the novella is clear. We re-apply the context of *Oliver Twist*’s workhouses,

and study the transformation of Scrooge. There is a view of hope in Literature and what it might be able to achieve in this text, that we want students to understand this. Our work on this text is augmented with the practice of English Language skills – summarising the text, and blending language analysis. Students ask “what?”, “how?” and “why?” in their study of language, and are encouraged to form critical, evaluative opinion on what they read, drawing on their experience of Key Stage 3.

The Power and Conflict poetry develops the study of war poetry from before. The understanding of key war poems from Year 9 acts as a reference point and supports the reading of poems like Owen’s Exposure. However, the notion of conflict moves beyond the physical and is now defined as also psychological (see the mad duke who can’t stop his obsession with his last duchess) as well as cultural (exactly whose history do we study in Jon Agard’s Checking Out Me History?). The integration of context and terminology from before informs a discussion of this work, and through the poetry, students build their skills of linguistic analysis.

Students have studied a comedy in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and a Tragi-Comedy in The Tempest. Now the tragic form is studied in Romeo and Juliet. Students will be familiar with the context of Shakespeare’s time and his language. Now they apply this to possibly the most famous Shakespeare play of all. As well as analysing the writer’s methods, we want to apply today’s context to the play. How are men and women portrayed? What type of masculinity is shown? Do we admire any of these characters? Is the world really that different today?

The end of Year 10 mock acts as a benchmark to begin our study in Year 11. The students will be spending this year revisiting and refamiliarising themselves with the texts and techniques from before, as well as having the opportunity to express their own thoughts in their speaking and listening topic – building from Year 9.

However, there is a development and maturity in the Year 11 voice that allows deeper thinking. Now, in each text, students are encouraged to develop their own thesis – picking apart dual interpretations and forming opinions themselves on the “big ideas” in texts. This is work that began back in year 8, understanding the ambiguity around Holmes’ character, and with the confidence of expression built up throughout the course, it is now time for students to express their own evaluative voice.

It is hoped that this voice, confidently expressed, and based on understanding of and sensitivity to language and literature, will serve the students well for the rest of their lives.