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Session Report:NLS/Ks3 Teaching and assessing writing skills. 17.10.02

Writing as an activity is often dependent on the other three elements of English: Speaking, listening and Reading. However it is important to remember that there are many situations where writing can be used to support effective speaking, listening and reading. For example, prompt cards can be used in an oral presentation or a class could write down their first impressions of a new novel.

In the English National curriculum programmes of study for speaking, listening and reading are often supported by writing activities. In En2 literature pupils are expected to consider poetic forms and their effects and so arises the opportunity to write a critical piece on a poem they have been reading.

During the session we were shown how to take a poem and turn it into an English lesson. We were reminded of the importance of having clear and precise objectives for the lesson. The first poem we looked at was 'Beside The Riverside' by Philip Gross. One approach to get the class to read the poem several times over is to cut out the key words in the poem and ask the class to fill in the blanks with their own ideas. It is important to read the poem to the class with the blanks so they get a feel for the shape of the poem first. After a strict time limit of say six minutes ask the class to read out their own version of the poem-being strict about how many can read theirs out as there won't be time for all of them. As the poems are read out key words can be written up on the board eg: onomatopoeia, metaphor and rhyme. Now the full version of the poem can be given out to the class and discussed.

Possible activities for the class to do with the poem include: writing a small account of what happened before the events in the poem took place, or discussing the way Gross has taken a moment in time and made a narrative from it. The class could try and write their own kind of moment as a narrative but this would depend on the ability of the class.

In the next part of the session we looked at formal and informal writing. In the English National curriculum pupils are expected to: Use formal and impersonal language and concise expression, and develop logical arguments and cite evidence.

We looked at two formal letters and discussed how it is important for the pupils to see models of formal writing like these. (keep all your Oxfam letters for lessons). By studying these models pupils could then draft their own formally argued letter to a broadsheet newspaper and one to their local newspaper perhaps with a more rational tone. Each activity must be modelled for the pupils before they can be expected to complete a task. At this point the poem 'Beside The Reservoir' could be brought back to use in a lesson and an activity where the characters in the poem are considered. The pupils could be asked to write an informal letter to the daughter of the couple in the poem describing what they might have seen.

To conclude; from just one poem we have come up with a whole lesson or more of writing activities for a class and at the same time covered certain requirements from the national curriculum.

#### Reflection: Teaching practice

In my first term at Cleeve I taught a poetry scheme of work to a class of year sevens. In the first few lessons I introduced the class to the basic form of the poem starting with haiku. I asked the class to close their eyes and remember a moment from the school holidays. I then asked them to list the key words that sum up this memory and from this write a haiku poem- remembering the rule of 5-7-5 syllables. The results from this activity were excellent. Lots of wonderful haiku were written, from walks on Cleeve hill to bowling with their friends. I also asked the class to illustrate their haiku for homework.

As the scheme of work progressed I introduced a different poetic technique in each lesson to build up their knowledge of poetic terms. At the end of the term I wanted them to have a full knowledge of the basic poetic terms and have a wide variety of poems written in their books. I also hoped to teach them how to carry out an analysis of a well-known poem in the form of an essay. I used 'The Lady of Shalott' by Tennyson to do this. Most of the class knew the poem from their time at primary school but others were unfamiliar with the language used. When I asked them to fill in the gaps some became very anxious about finding the right words and did not want to be wrong. I assured the class that it was more important they decide what words they thought should fill the gaps. After I read out the full version of the poem some of the

pupils were very pleased with themselves because they had come pretty close to finding the right words to fill the gaps. This activity proved hard to differentiate because of the mixed ability of the group- perhaps the use of two poems at different levels would have worked better.

In future lessons I plan to introduce poems first to a class written by a particular poet to get them used to the style of language and the content of such poems before expecting them to carry out a similar cloze activity. I also plan to use paintings to help in my teaching of poetry along with drama activities too. In this way poetry will appeal to all abilities and bring poetry to life for the class.

I really enjoyed teaching the poetry scheme of work at Cleeve School and was surprised at the amount of enthusiasm and talent that came out of the work completed by the class. In their last lesson I asked to hear my favourite poems read out loud and those chosen received a prize for their efforts.

Poetry can be successfully taught on a spiral curriculum. Each year group can be re-introduced to poetic techniques and these techniques gone into more depth.

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#### References

English National Curriculum: pp25=37  
Learning To Teach English in The Secondary School: chp 7  
pp125=126