

inote

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for Teachers of English]

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Kate Barry teaches English and French at Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy. She writes a blog at www.ellenkmetcalf.wordpress.com and is currently the ASTI subject representative for English.

Caragh Bell teaches English and French at Sacred Heart in Clonakilty and is also a published author. Her sixth book will be released in 2021.

Sarah Butler teaches English and drama in Scoil Dara in Kilcock, where she coaches the debate team. She lives in Maynooth and is an active member of the Carton House Writers' group.

Conor Farnan teaches in Loreto College, Crumlin. A holder of a PhD in contemporary Irish poetry, he has lectured for several years in the Middle East. He is author of the Junior Cycle R.E. textbook *Faith Alive* and in his spare time runs a popular course for adult learners on the works of James Joyce.

Jonathan Foley is an English and History teacher in his native Donegal. Outside of education, he also dabbles in the world of freelance journalism.

Leona Forde teaches English and History at Kinsale Community School, Cork. She is an avid reader and drama enthusiast, interested in getting educational research into practice.

Patrick Huff is an English teacher, debating mentor, and Digital Learning Coordinator in Ardscoil Mhuire, Limerick. His students insist on keeping him humble by asking such questions as, "Sir, was that you or the young sir?"

Lorraine Keenan is an English teacher at St Oliver's Community College, LMETB, Drogheda. Formerly English Advisor with Junior Cycle for Teachers.

Mary D. Linehan is a Kerry woman living in Cork. She teaches History and English at Middleton College, Cork. A former Graphic Designer, Mary has written and published two local history books in *The Kingdom*. She is a founding member of TeachMeet South, which organises Teach Meets for the Cork/Kerry/Limerick region where teachers can share ideas and demonstrate how they use technology to aid their everyday teaching.

Conor Murphy is a teacher of English and Film in Skibbereen Community School. Editor of INOTE Magazine and current Chair of INOTE. He has written articles for CinEireann, The Irish Independent, The Journal as well as a few short plays and, one, short film.

John Noonan Crescent College Comprehensive SJ no longer single sorry everyone.

Dr. Catherine O'Brien is an English and Irish teacher in County Limerick. She has an abiding interest in English which led her to complete her M.A. in English and a Ph.D. in English Language and Literature. Her Ph.D focused on the work of Irish novelist, playwright and short story writer William Trevor. She is passionate about education and enjoys teaching, reading and writing short stories and poetry in her spare time.

Claire O'Brien is a Laois woman. She teaches English and German at St Mary's Academy CBS, Carlow, where she is also page 2a debating/public speaking mentor. She moonlights as a journalist and broadcaster, producing and presenting a weekly arts show on Midlands 103 radio. The book she wishes she'd written is Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Laura Smith is a teacher of English and Religion. Previously taught these subjects at post-primary level. Currently a teacher of Communications in Dunboyne College of Further Education. A passionate book lover and education enthusiast.

Selena Wilkes has spent over thirty years teaching, reading, learning and laughing. She's looking forward to the next thirty years of more or less the same.



Matt Murdock is a blind lawyer in New York by day, superhero Daredevil by night. He puts on his mask and, unlike other superheroes, ignores the wider world and simply keeps his local community safe and secure.

They look to him as a leader in both his guises, whether defending them in the courts or defending them in the streets.

When I was a teenager, I loved this character. He is of Irish heritage, red haired, wears glasses, full of angst. I didn't exactly hope for some radioactive material to fall off a lorry and give me superpowers (mainly due to the disappointing fact that Ireland didn't have any of this hazardous material traveling in white vans around its country roads) but if the opportunity for the tragedy to occur arose, I was willing to shoulder the burden.

Now a different kind of hazardous material is all around us.

Now we all wear masks.

Now we all look after our own communities, whether it is the whole school or classrooms.

We have always balanced teaching with care but now the care aspect of our jobs has increased

Our superpowers haven't been given to us by some accident or experiment, our, superpowers have been honed over time, have developed through education, experience, and failure.

Like all superheroes we are not always appreciated by those we help. Sometimes their own issues overwhelm their ability to see the help we are offering.

But we persevere.

And we return home and, like Matt Murdock does in every comic, climb into bed and sleep.

Reading the comics when I was a teenager I would never have dreamt that I would end up teaching but, I think, my teenage self would be proud that I ended up in a profession that has put on their masks and, despite a number of adversaries, tried to help those in most need.

Conor Murphy
@conorsmurf



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INOTE has had a busy and difficult year. With the change over of Chairperson we decided to have a full review of the organisation. This included:

- Finances.
- Constitution.
- Website.
- Organisation of local events.
- Membership.

As a result of this review we undertook to draw up a new Constitution. This process takes a long period of time as, after the redrafting, we must bring it before our members and then it must be voted on. We are currently at the redrafting stage.

A new website has just been completed. This process involved sending out tenders, researching other subject associations websites, design, redesign, before, finally, releasing it into the wild.

Due to the pandemic local events are on hold, instead we have begun to put our CPD online. The first of these took place in October. We have also begun to create podcasts (more of that in Conor Farnan's article) and we hope to create more resources as the year progresses.

Indeed, we hope our members might help us in the creation of such resources (be it videos, podcasts, power point presentations etc).

And, of course, we continue with this magazine (now only online).

Membership is an ongoing concern. Originally members paid a small fee but this fell out of practice as the years went by. This has left a hole in our finances; one we will have to fill.

Not only did we review all of the above but we also conducted a quick survey on the impact of the schools closures on our members and their teaching. This was sent to the NCCA to feed into their deliberations on how to deal with this issue.

The committee also represents our members on SARG (Subject Associations Representative Group) as well as the Leaving Cert and Junior Cycle Text Committees.

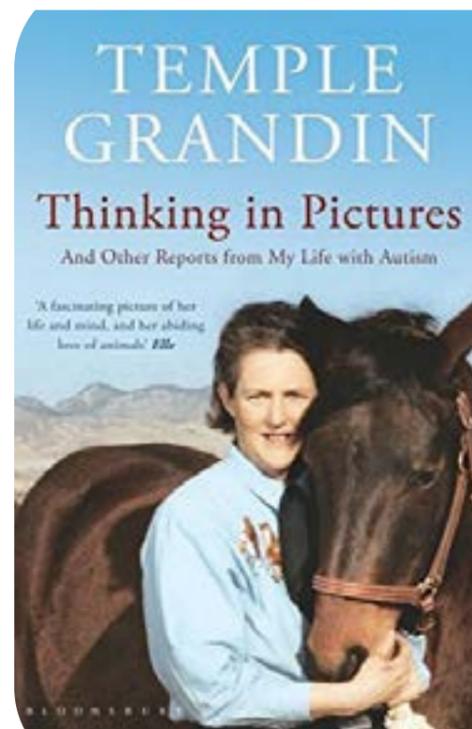
As volunteers, who do all of this work for free, the INOTE committee would like to thank all of those who have helped, contributed, and advised over the last twelve months.

Conor Murphy



Books that Shape Our Lives

Last week, I was asked a question by a student that stopped me in my tracks: 'Which book would you say inspired you as a teacher, Miss?' Having spent the last thirty years reading books, listening to books and studying books, I can think of quite a few weighty tomes which have had a mighty impact on both my personal and professional life, ranging through all the genres of great literature, philosophy and critical analysis, but to choose, on the spot, one particular book which inspired me in both a literary and an educational context, was no easy task. I gave my answer, and the reasons for my choice and I drove home.



On the journey home, I deliberated on my choice of this particular book. My response had been an honest reply, rather than an effort to influence and impress my students. My mind had immediately jumped to a little book I met in 1995, in the back of Waterstones on Dawson Street, when, after a number of years teaching, I was going through a period of disillusionment with my career choice.

The book I chose was about how children with autism view their world and some of the problems they encounter in education, and it was written from the point of view of a woman recounting her own childhood experiences and challenges, as she progressed from childhood, through college and into the world of work.

Reading this book revealed a whole new approach to teaching, including the realisation of how uneducated I was in understanding both the needs, and the terrific potential, of some of my own students, as my previously held notions that some children were just too 'difficult' to teach, were totally blown out of the water. The author pointed out the ability of many children with autism to excel at visual spatial skills over verbal skills and outlined multiple types of brain activity associated with thinking and learning, encouraging us as teachers to investigate alternate ways of providing learning for students with additional needs.

This book led to a radical shift in my own learning, as I entered the world of this woman who, instead of blaming the educational system, decided to change it. I signed up that year for a diploma in teaching students with SEN, followed by a degree, so you could say that this book has influenced my own educational journey in quite a profound way.

What makes this book such a good read is the fact that the author is comfortable with her autism as a part of her personality, not a disability – 'I have found my place along the great continuum'. The book is called Thinking in Pictures. The writer is Dr. Temple Grandin.

by Selena Wilkes

Reforming

Return

by Loraine Keenan

In September 2019 I returned to my English classroom after spending four years on secondment as an English Advisor with Junior Cycle for Teachers.

Still reading?

Let's go then!

I'm a teacher of English (mainly), in St Oliver's Community College, Drogheda. We are an LMETB school. We're one of the largest schools in Ireland, and we are the largest school with DEIS status. Our school has just shy of 1400 students, approximately 125 teachers and 13 SNAs. There are 21 English teachers in our department. We are a diverse, inclusive, bustling community, brimming over with excellence, innovation, creativity and care.

While with the JCT English team, being able to support 5, 500 English teachers was genuinely such a privilege. There were some very challenging moments, but overwhelmingly it was such a positive time. The teachers I met over the years were passionate, open to change, concerned, creative, exasperated, challenged, adaptive, excited, confused. Sometimes all in one day. They were so open about their practice and experiences. I moved from classroom to classroom, county to county, supporting, sharing and listening. Each day I learned. Robust, difficult conversations about curriculum and assessment, I welcomed, they were and still are, my favourite conversations! Now, once again in my classroom, I'm placed back at the heart of the practitioner's experience. I've been teaching English, but also history, SPHE and the JC short course in artistic performance, along with picking up 5th and 6th year groups. It has been hard to keep all those specs spinning! It has been hard to become part of such a huge community once more (not to mention the challenges of lockdown and remote learning). School life is intense and busy, and I've changed.

I try to keep the relationship between my practice and the curriculum tight. I find it imperative to keep returning to the curriculum documents. I'm not interested in middlemen peddling their (edu)wares. I've learned not to waste my time on articles, blogs, and threads that harp on about repeated calls for '21st century skills' in our curriculum (they're not mentioned once in the Framework for Junior Cycle or the English specification). They're misleading. Pull up the documents. Hit 'control/command' and 'f' keys. Type in 'workplace' type in '21st century skills'. They're not there.

Skills, yes, they are there (they were in the 1989 English syllabus too, which is available to read alongside our English specification on curriculumonline.ie). The concept of skills in our curriculum isn't new. Having a Framework for Junior Cycle that draws together a vision for what student experience should be across

the three years of junior cycle, that's new. three years of junior cycle, that's new.

Are skills separated from knowledge in our curriculum?

No, they are not. In fact, the documents repeatedly talk about the need to have balance between knowledge and skills, which of course we know is borne out by our classroom practice. At the heart of our specifications are learning outcomes (they existed in a slightly different form in our 1989 English syllabus too). The NCCA state that learning outcomes are 'statements in curriculum specifications to describe the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning.' there is no sinister push to devalue knowledge. No vacuous teaching of skills in the absence of domain specific knowledge, is promoted in our specification. That notion is false.

When it comes to learning, teaching and assessment the truth isn't clean cut, it's complex, complicated, contextual. Ideas, opinions and theories that push us toward reductive binaries and dichotomies, starve discussion of practice, collaborative conversations, open debate. This is Ireland and our context, our country, our history in education, is crucial when discussing these changes. There isn't a flatpack curriculum that can be distributed globally with universal 'success'. Balanced discussion is essential. Polarising discussion is futile.

Classroom-based assessments have certainly been a distinctive feature of Junior Cycle Reform. I welcome a new way for students to demonstrate their learning and for us to capture, assess and report on that learning. In English they are based on specific learning outcomes outlined in the English Specification. That seems to get lost in some of the conversations around CBAs. Students demonstrate specific knowledge, understanding and skills through the different formats for CBA1 and different texts in CBA2. CBAs are not addenda; they are based on the very learning outcomes that we are asked to focus on daily in our practice. I keep returning to the documents. I keep reflecting on my own knowledge, experience, skills, understanding and values in relation to what our curriculum asks of me as a teacher and in relation to my students. I keep that relationship tight.

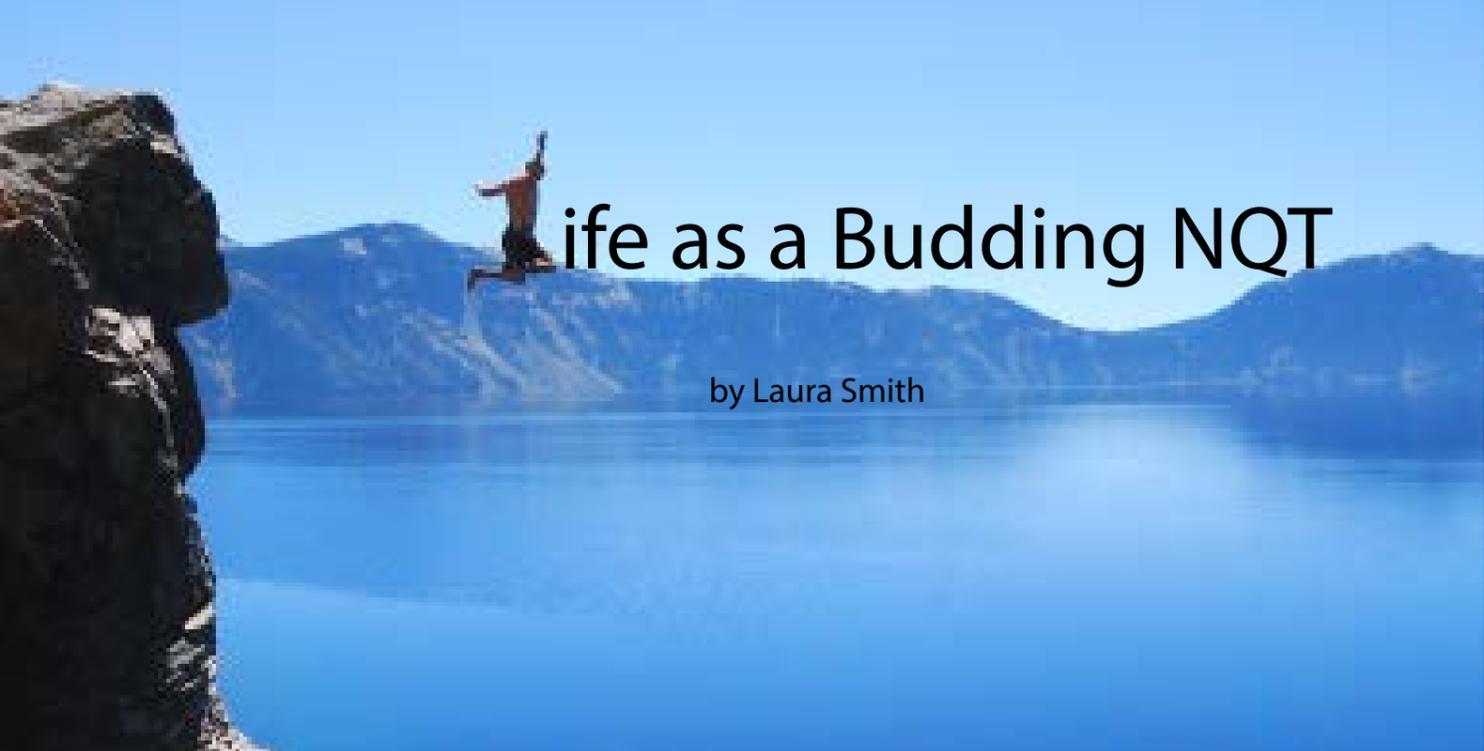
I learn through conversations with fellow teachers about their practice, their specification, their approaches and the challenges experienced. I love that educational reform has placed those conversations at our staff room tables. I learn, I try things out, reflect and refine my practice in relation to the specifications. Personally, it's my assessment practices, my own assessment literacy, that I've been developing, refining, aligning. I keep reading, keep discussing, keep practicing, keep questioning developments. I keep learning.

I'm enjoying the permission and the support the system now explicitly gives me for creativity and innovation. I embrace the breadth and the depth, that I'm asked to keep bringing to my students' learning. I'm not perfect, or even close to it, but I'm alright with that, it isn't my goal. Oftentimes this past year I have felt overwhelmed by it all, like I'm not on top of things. I stop, take a breath, speak with a colleague, and then get stuck in again. I'm a teacher with two decades of experience. I'm confident in my ability to teach, and that students in my classroom learn. I don't have to have it all perfectly figured out to move forward. I still have agency, knowledge, skills, understanding and expertise. I'm not a facilitator. I'm not a guide on the side. I'm not a sage on a stage. I am a teacher.

It isn't a surprise that I believe the changes to JC English are for the better for all students. Are there parts of Junior Cycle Reform that I don't like? Yes, plenty, but that doesn't mean I disparage the changes entirely. I feel like the greatest learning for me has been around the relationship between teachers, assessment and curriculum in Ireland. We need to talk about each of these more, especially assessment, the how and the why.

Changes push us to re-examine our views, our values and practices, that can be very uncomfortable and challenging. It demands of us a vulnerability. When we embrace it though, it's exciting.

Reform at senior cycle? Bring it on!



Life as a Budding NQT

by Laura Smith

students reap the awards in the long run and helping students reach their potential is something that not every job rewards. This has been done through becoming part of a school community through participating in extra-curricular activities, attending staff meetings and offering your knowledge to others. People suggested to me that “teaching is effortless with all the holidays” forget that being a teacher is more than just a job but a calling instead. Every student waking into your classroom has a story- a different and unique story. Some students may have had a

certainly put to the test during school closure when remote learning became the new norm. Sending work to students via Microsoft Teams was something that even my teacher placement days never taught me. Having staff meetings and tutor meetings over webcam are something I never thought I had to do. Saying goodbye to the class of 2020 over a virtual graduation was heart-breaking. It was different and yes it made me miss the classroom, the staff and students more. BUT... as all teachers can agree on, we made the impossible (somewhat) possible when faced

been on cloud nine and loved my job. Other times I’ve had days where I wonder how I could do this for the next 35 years. I’ve survived many staff meetings, CPD days, parent-teacher meetings and adapted to remote learning. I planned school trips, initiated ideas in school while trying to focus this job of being a teacher. I’ve never appreciated the role of a teacher more until I became one. Even on my awful days (yes it happens to everyone, no matter how many years you have been teaching) when I thought couldn’t I do it. I reflected, coped, learned, moved on and taught another

To the year of fast learning, keeping up with the course content, corrections and exploring the career of a teacher. Here’s to the highs and lows of an NQT. From the lessons I taught to the lessons I learned from.

I graduated from DCU (formerly Mater Dei), from the concurrent teacher training programme in the subjects of Religious Education and English. I applied for many teaching jobs and attended many interviews in my first year out and eventually got a Maternity Leave contract. It was only three months from August-November. Beggars can’t be choosers after all!

I began my new job that August and registered for the Droichead process. (The most valuable thing about being an NQT!). For those of you unaware of this Droichead process, it is compulsory for any NQT at both primary and post-primary to complete during their first year of teaching in a school. It requires having the correct amount of teaching hours done, attending your cluster

meeting, completing your class observations and working on your Taisce. My favourite part was the lesson observations of other teachers. My subjects are English and Religion, but you can observe in any subject area. In return, I got two lessons observed by my Professional Support team. I observed many different subjects like Art and Music and observed many different teachers and their teaching styles. This was one of the key learning aspects that I learned from being an NQT. Every teacher is constantly learning new skills and although I’m just beginning my career in education there is plenty of support and help from colleagues.

It has been a whirlwind of a year. On my timetable, I got many different year groups ranging from the Higher-Level English class at Junior Cycle to mixed ability classes. When doing my initial teacher training I only ever taught either a 30-minute class or a 40-minute class. In the school that I worked this year it was 58-minute-long classes. Trying to ensure I had

enough content to cover the early one-hour class, to using different types of teaching methodologies was one of many things I had to adapt to.

Another valuable lesson during my NQT year was to ASK QUESTIONS! You also have a Professional Support team under the Droichead process who are teachers in the school that help, support and guide you on the year ahead. It usually consists of two-three teachers. Ask them questions about ‘the system’ in the school, approaches to teaching certain aspects of the course (only if they teach the same subject as you) or anything that you want to know. Being fresh out of college and starting can be daunting enough so do ask questions!

The word ‘teacher’ can expand to many definitions. Throughout this year I’ve savoured this idea from being more than just a newly qualified teacher. I’ve been a listener, a speaker, an educator, a motivator to much more. Spreading kindness to both colleagues and



dreadful morning, afternoon or night. Some of them may have won a sport’s competition or an art competition whatever their story is just be aware of it.

If you told me that during my NQT year that there would be a global pandemic I wouldn’t have believed you. Many people mention how you must be flexible and adapt to many situations in today’s working world and it was

with remote learning. It wasn’t an ideal situation with the Junior and Leaving Certificate cancelled and with predicated grades being on the cards for students. Is anything every ideal when it shakes up our daily routine though?

To anyone starting in this profession, it certainly isn’t all sunshine and roses. I’ve had my good, bad and ugly days in teaching. I’ve had days where I’ve

lesson. Never lose hope!

One final note on being an NQT. Remember that Maternity Leave contract I initially got that was only three months from August-November? It ended up being extended until March 2020 until the remote teaching and learning became a thing. Nevertheless, you never know what any contract you accept may lead to. Trust your heart and follow your own path!

Lightbulb Moment



Teachers share some methods that have worked in their classrooms

by Kate Barry

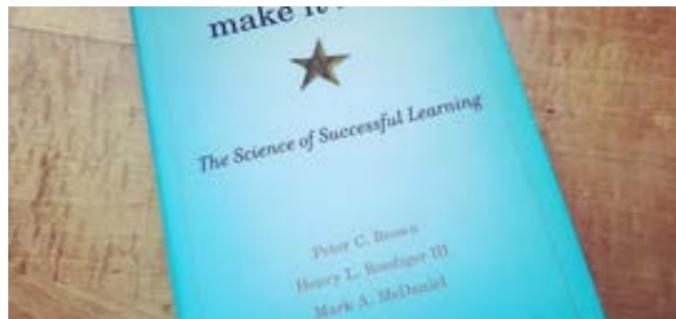
Interleaving poems

Up until recently, when teaching Higher Level senior English I would regularly “do a poet”. I’d do a poet at the start of fifth year, a couple more by the end of the year, two more by Christmas of sixth year and



I’d squeeze in a sixth if the going was good. Doing a poet meant teaching six poems by that poet, knowledge that would then go into cold-storage until it was time for revision. Then I read “Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning” by Peter Brown, Henry Roediger and Mark McDaniel. The authors discuss a study involving learning to attribute paintings to the artists who created them. The participants were divided into a massed practice group (similar to my previous method of teaching poetry, where one artist was studied for a substantial block of time) and an interleaving group (where paintings by different artists were presented one a time, moving between artists each time). The interleaving group performed better on a later test.

Similar results were shown in a study that looked at learning to identify and classify birds. Now you could argue that we want Leaving Cert candidates to be able to do a lot more than just identify poems as the work of a particular poet, but having a good grasp of the commonalities between the works of a particular writer is an essential basis for writing a coherent poetry essay. In particular, it guards against genericism such as “Frost is known for his use of metaphors” (well, he’s a poet, isn’t he?). The bird study is interesting because bird identification turns out to be much more complex than I’d thought, and “is a matter of learning concepts and making judgments, not simply memorizing features” (Brown et al, 2014, page 55). Since reading “Make it Stick”, I no longer “do a poet” but interleave the poets as we go, normally progressing in chronological order based on birthdates. I do kick off with a bit of massed practice as I’ll always start with two or three poems the first time a class encounters a poet, but after that I add them one or two at a time and each time we add a poem that’s a great opportunity to activate previous knowledge of other poems by the same writer, their themes and features.



I used to either use tried and tested homework questions, old exam-paper questions or make them up, usually before the class but sometimes during the class. Then I saw a list from Andy Tharby’s “Reflecting English” blog, a list that is reproduced in his excellent book “Making Every English Lesson Count” (Crown House). The list is generic, intended to be used by the teacher as a prompt sheet and is broken into sections such as “characterisation”, “form and structure”, and “contextual features”. I have found it useful to make a version of the list for main texts I teach, essentially batching one of the many teaching tasks of



the term. There are some examples below from the “language” section of the Romeo and Juliet version. This means I am never stuck for a question, the students never have to waste class time taking a question down from the board, the questions are better quality as I’m not thinking about a million other things while writing them, and – most

importantly – I just give them out once. For junior students this means they get the questions for the text in their booklet (booklets are given out twice a year). One thing I will change this year is to number all the questions individually rather than section by section. So rather than homework being “Romeo and Juliet, characterisation Q7”, the homework might be “Romeo and Juliet, Q19”. You really can’t keep it too simple. I should explain as well that the list is not exhaustive; I still do sometimes come up with a homework question based on an interesting discussion or a misconception that comes to light in class.

Language

9. What words/phrases does Shakespeare use to imply that Romeo and Juliet’s love is almost holy and sacred?
10. Explain what Romeo means when he says “I am no pilot”. He later refers to himself as “thou desperate pilot”; what does this tell us about how his character has developed?
11. Why does Juliet refer to Romeo as “O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face”?

Teaching sentence types and structure explicitly.



This is from Judith Hochman and Natalie Wexler’s 2017 book “The Writing Revolution” (Jossey-Bass). This book outlines the “Hochman method” of coaching students in the skills of academic writing. Much of this method focuses on the sentence as the main conveyor of meaning and the writers recommend spending much more time at this level than teachers might have usually. Two things in particular that I’ve started doing is teaching students how to identify sentence types (declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory) and to compose these types of sentences on a specific topic. One thing from the book that was new to me is “appositives”. An appositive is a noun phrase that’s inserted right after the noun it describes. These are especially useful when writing about characters, for example “Tybalt, a belligerent young man obsessed with his family’s honour, is outraged at Romeo’s presence at the party”. As well as the question banks, students’ booklets include exercises on appositives. These progress from “match the appositive to the noun” to “complete the sentences using a suitable appositive” to “write a sentence on X, using an appositive”. Hochman and Wexler’s book also has excellent advice and photocopiable resources on teaching simple paragraph structure. Here’s an example of a “write a suitable appositive” question, if you’d like to have a go

Friar Laurence, _____, agrees to marry the young couple

DISTANT LEARNING

by Mary D. Linehan



SO THERE IT was! The big announcement – school was to close for two weeks!

At 1.00pm on 12th March we all gathered together in the school library where our Principal calmly informed us that schools were to close. He advised how we should communicate with our students online, setting homework, correcting and so on. I can't say it was a shock – a lot of us suspected, or should I say expected, something was going to give. Apart from the initial adrenaline rush and nervous chatter the reality soon dawned, as did Friday 13th!!

The next day was one of shock. I woke at the usual time, gathered my children's

school books, sat them around the kitchen table, full of good intentions – outlining their homework and scheduling PE times, breaks and so on. Then a mad dash to my computer to set work, search for resources, grapple with the latest and greatest pieces of technology... and so the journey began. To be honest, the Friday was OK, I bluffed a little, gave some work and stumbled through that first day which allowed me a whole weekend to get my act together. I didn't realise the steep learning curve I was about to embark on over the coming weeks.

Our school was set up with G-suite for Education for a number of years, so we were at a good starting point to begin with. I found Google Classroom was a great way to

keep in contact with the class and used Quizizz to create short, snappy quizzes that evaluated student learning in a matter of minutes. For



some groups I used live classes via 'Hangout Meets' which allowed me to share the content of my screen, I was able to ask questions as we went and the best thing was I could mute people that annoyed me (a feature sadly lacking in the classroom last class on a Friday!).

Easy! This technology lark was fantastic, some homework self-corrected, so my

workload should be halved, right?

The reality of distance teaching was a distressing virtual journey, full of headaches from unaccustomed screen time and vexatious notifications. I found myself dealing with a constant stream of emails from all quarters, students who didn't get the work set, parents who complained I wasn't giving enough work, and Management who came up with new online

and Nova Scotia this one took the biscuit!

Easter was a short reprieve amid the drowning sea I found myself in. It was a chance to catch up with my own children before being catapulted into a world where we planned online testing for May. And while we had online staff meetings once a week, via that wonder that is Zoom, I must admit I craved human contact. I found myself missing the weekly staffroom

to adjust to a new online reality with limited wifi or devices at home. You think about the parents who were now suddenly out of work, fearful of not getting their income back. You worry about elderly relatives that you can't see, neighbours you avoid speaking to too long, long supermarket queues and the four walls that you suddenly want to escape from, if just for a little while. But most of all, you grow an absolute respect and admiration for those front



policies, new timetables and so on. Overnight the workload doubled. Instead of various summative assessments like in-class work and pairwork I found myself constantly issuing homework to check students' learning, which then had to be corrected. I had students emailing at all hours (9.00-4.00 was long gone). I even received a four page essay on the unique style of Elizabeth Bishop at 3.30 in the morning from one student! While I love Bishop and her tales about the fish

banter where we conferred on the latest episode of 'Homeland' or argued over last weekend's match (and I'm not even a sports fan). It was hard to go from meeting 200+ people a week to immediate family.

As a teacher in the crisis of 2020 you try not to complain, how can you when so many families have been directly affected by Covid? It seems silly to complain about the extra hours and the headaches when you consider how hard it has been for some

line workers who were literally putting their lives on the line.

Each working day ended with the anxious wait for the 6pm news on that day's latest figures. And so slowly those cold spring evenings gave way to brighter, longer days of Summer as April turned to May and teaching via a laptop in the corner of the bedroom while managing three lively boys and a household became my new reality as I counted the days till the golden month of June!

Classroom Based Assessment

By Dr. Catherine O'Brien

Whilst I cannot endorse all aspects of the Junior Cycle English syllabus, it is our working reality and I have found some elements worth celebrating. This article will reflect on the aspects of JC English which have worked well for my students as learners and for me as their teacher. My students, as the nucleus of my classroom, led to the creation and adoption of the techniques and tips below. I hope you gain something from my experiences to complement your future teaching!

Top 5 Moments

1 **CBA 1** – was somewhat of a revelation. I was impressed by the effort which students invested in terms of research and their ingenuity. However, I was genuinely moved by the students who emerged from the process as natural orators. Sometimes, this skill was not readily apparent on paper and up until that juncture had not been obvious to me. This allowed me to cater for them as learners within my class and point them towards reading material and exercises which better suited their natural skill set.

2 **REDRAFTS IN PREPARATION for CBA 2** – I learnt a lot from the process of assisting my students to compile their portfolio of texts. I discovered that assessing and assigning grades was counter-productive and did not assist students to reach the level of autonomous learning, self-editing and self-evaluation which this CBA demands. Therefore, I changed my approach and the results were astonishing. I have found that students tend to fixate on a numerical grade. I try to avoid this where possible or I offer feedback and then reveal the grade. I have found that students tend to digest feedback in a more concerted manner if feedback is not wedded to a number or grade. Of course, students covet a grade and so I found a system of offering written feedback (featuring positives and areas of improvement) and later revealing the grade as well as revealing an amended grade upon their correction of work based on feedback was useful. It focussed students and ascribed a value to the various elements of writing i.e. punctuation, apt and accurate quotation, expansion of valid points, personal engagement etc. which they may have previously underestimated.

3 **TIMED UNSEEN QUESTIONS** – Time management is of critical importance as the terminal exam is so unpredictable and time consuming. Students must be trained to make savvy choices and gauge the amount they write according to the allocation of marks. If they don't, they run the risk of not completing the exam. I found that students tended to approach the exam chronologically and worked diligently on each question until complete. However, this approach was flawed in that they may have spent half an hour on a question worth 10 marks and may have questions worth 60 marks unattempted with twenty mins remaining. To address this problem, I presented students with unseen questions, timed their efforts (a 10 mark and 15 mark question based on same topic/reading) within a class period, and asked that they approach as they would in the exam. Gradually, students trained themselves to approach the 15 mark question first and then the lesser value. I also requested that students predict their own mark. It was interesting to note that students tended to under-estimate their mark or in the case of students that were more disciplined in terms of adhering to timing and the quantity of response needed, they often predicted correctly.

4 **QUOTATIONS** – I changed the manner in which I teach quotations this year. As students often struggle to recall quotations or despise learning them, I found that kick-starting the process in class often helped. I drew visual cues on one side of the board and we read the quote from the projector on the other. Having recited the quotation a number of times, I then dispensed with the written prompt. Five mins was often enough to learn two quotes and the evidence of this was in their subsequent writings. The visual cues or first word approach was also useful when I gave quotations' tests.

This quotation has always interested me. During the courtroom scene, Scout unconsciously equates the atmosphere in the courthouse to the morning when Atticus ventured out onto the street to face the rabid dog alone.

Scout says that the atmosphere in THE courtroom was "1. exactly the same as a cold February morning, 2. when the mockingbirds were still, and 3. the carpenters had stopped hammering on Miss Maudie's new house, and 4. every wood door in the neighbourhood was shut... A 1. deserted, 2. waiting, 3. empty street, and 4. the court-room was packed with people."

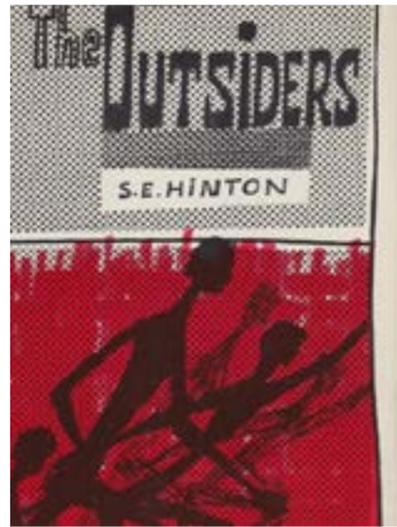
I introduced this to the class as the 4x4 link (see numerical markings). As it is lengthier quotation, we practiced saying this quote in sections and added a number until we could say it in its entirety.



5 **THE USE OF technology** has definitely enhanced my teaching and the learning experiences of my students. There are a wealth of applications which are useful for JC English. The google suite was indispensable in terms of collating students' work, forms for quizzes, slides for presentations, YouTube for clips and performances. Online quizzes such as Kahoot and Quizizz also inject some fun into the humdrum of everyday learning when appropriate (or so my students claim). However, I've also learned that less is more. Any type of approach whether it is 'talk and chalk' or tech based, leads to a saturation point for learners. This leads to my parting words of advice. **Less is more! Don't believe the hype! Follow your own trajectory and what you know is best. You know your class! Don't feel pressurised. Don't feel you have to compromise and do what everyone else is supposedly doing. Embrace the challenge but also embrace your own instincts.**

“It was meant to be written. And I got chosen to write it.”

SE Hinton by Claire O'Brien



SE HINTON IS the author of one of the great coming-of-age novels on the Junior Certificate prescribed novels text list. “The Outsiders” has inspired writers, filmmakers and musicians, comforted generations of ‘outsiders’ and is a go-to text for teachers who want their students to find themselves, their lives and their concerns in print.

That the SE stands for Susan Eloise is a great reveal, if you can hold the secret until after the class has read the book. It’s worth it to see teenage boys wonder how “a girl” could so effectively get inside their heads and hear them ponder how the phrase ‘stay gold’ was actually in use

fifty years before today’s young people invented it.

Hinton was just 16 when she wrote “The Outsiders”, and she did so for two reasons. Firstly, she couldn’t find the social and emotional peril of the teenage world that she knew in Tulsa within the fusty books she was reading. This before ‘YA’ became a genre in its own right, a time before the needs of the young reader were placed before the impulses and gratification of the adult writer.

Secondly, a friend of Hinton’s had just been jumped by rich kids because he wore his hair ‘Greaser’ style. Hinton wrote because she had something real to say and because she wanted that real voice to be heard.

LEFT

Hinton in 1970

ABOVE

The original cover of the book that made her famous

RIGHT

Hinton (playing a nurse) with Matt Dillon in the film adaptation of her book, The Outsiders

The biography on her website reveals that the pressure of being known as “The Voice of the Youth” was so intense that it led to a three years of writer’s block. It ended only because her then boyfriend (now husband) insisted that she write two pages before they went anywhere together. It became a daily habit.

She reveals in the short, plain sentences of that biography and the pithy statements that follow it, how she’s a private person who reads voraciously and loves her son and husband. Really, she says, the writer’s life isn’t really that “glamorous” (sic) at all.

Her second book, she says, is better than her first, and her explanation encapsulates the essence of every creative writing handbook – and every English class.

“That Was Then, This Is Now” is known to be a much more well thought out book than “The Outsiders”. Because she read a lot of great literature and wanted to better herself, she made sure that she wrote each sentence exactly right. She continued to write her two pages a day until she finally felt it was finished.”

It’s not often that we can engage immediately and actively with the author of a canonical text and listen in to their conversations but

Hinton is very active on Twitter. @se4realhinton reveals that she loves horses and Margaritas, despairs of the Trump regime and gun crime, writes like a feminist and is a declared feminist.

The account shows her engagement with Twitterers about books, makes recommendations of authors whose work she enjoys, like Madeline Miller (“The Mask Of Apollo”) and Mary Renault (“Fire From Heaven”) and is voluble in her discussion with like-minded fans.

But the Twitter feed, which she tunes into several times a day, shows something infinitely more curious than her own personal life – it shows the the life of “The Outsiders” itself, and how it has grown since its publication in 1967. “It was meant to be written. And I got chosen to write it”

Those lines come from a typical online exchange. One of her 55,000+ followers linked to a TV interview where “The Outsiders” was mentioned and Hinton’s reaction is typically terse and lacking in ego.

When Sean Gabler in New York posted that he’d “written a novel based on personal experiences that pays tribute to “The Outsiders”” and wonders what are the chances Hinton would read the manuscript, her response is as frank and

unambiguous as it is revealing. “I’ve been advised by lawyers to never read anything that has to do with The Outsiders. So I don’t. Sorry.”

“The Outsiders” has a grown-up life and relationships with readers and writers that she can’t be part of and can’t control. But that doesn’t stop her engaging in a little controversial analysis of the book and its characters.

In January last year, @adoringfanjack asked why Johnny and Dally have to die.

“Because I am a stone cold bitch” was the reply that earned more than 98 thousand likes, 27 thousand retweets and lots of online discussion. Whatever about the lives of her characters, she’s active in preserving the life of “The Outsiders.”

Earlier this year The Outsiders House Museum was officially opened after hip hop artist Danny Boy O’Connor purchased and restored the building used in the Francis Ford Coppola film. Hinton was one of those who cut the ribbon.





VISUALISER

by Leona Ford  @leonaford1

They say a picture is worth a thousand words... I agree.

So what is a visualizer?

A visualizer is a type of webcam or HD document camera that allows you to show any physical object to students via a data projector. Whatever is in view of the camera is magnified in real time onto the whiteboard. Widely used in practical subjects, these devices are of huge benefit in the English classroom too. The visualizer I use is the IPEVO costing around 120 euro, but a huge range are available. Here are some of the ways I use a visualizer in my English classroom.

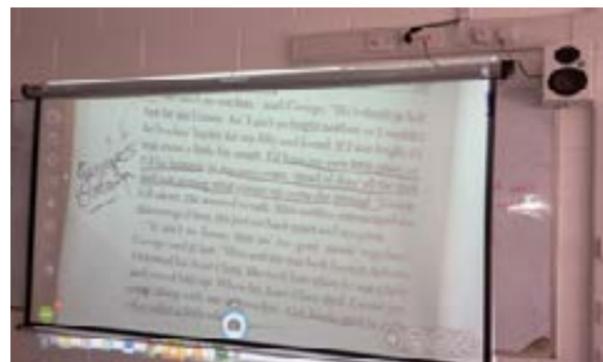
Replacing the Photocopier

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us” J.R.R. Tolkien

For teachers' time is one of our most valuable commodities and I for one have wasted far too many hours standing in line to use the photocopier. Annoyingly, what I am copying all too often ends up crumpled in the end of a school bag. The most simplistic value of a visualizer is that it saves you having to make several copies. Instead you can show any page of any book on a big screen, for all to see. Comparing the opening paragraph of five different novels, analyzing real world brochures, exploring a number of conflicting articles is made a whole lot easier when you can project one copy and avoid both the crushing frustration of a jammed photocopier and the guilt of wasting all that paper.

Annotating a text:

Another use is using it to teach students how to properly annotate a text, especially helpful for poetry. Live annotation on the big screen saves time, it reduces the need to repeat instructions, “Miss, what line? Where?” There is no ambiguity as everyone can see what your writing in real time on the whiteboard. I also use annotation to explore a new text, I will display the piece and pose questions, “How are women treated in this world?” seek explanations “What makes you say that?” Illicit argument “Does anyone disagree?” This allows the class to create notes instead of relying on you to provide them.



Direct Instruction:

One of the main ways I use my visualizer is to model how I would answer questions. According to Tom Sherrington in his book *The Learning Rainforest*, “.the quality of teacher instruction has a significant impact on students' outcomes”. High quality direct instruction should include, sharing learning intentions, asking probing questions, providing models or worked examples and scaffolding difficult tasks. Using a visualizer allows you to do all this.

For example, when I teach the style question. I display and read the text and question, then I live model step by step how I would approach the question, deliberately talking them through my thinking process, for example, “Ok so what I am being asked to do is identify 4 features of narration and discuss the effects of each one, and I need to find quotes that back up the points I'm going to make”. Then I live model on a blank sheet of paper the process of planning, writing and editing a sample answer.

Bjork and Bjork in their work on desirable difficulties, argue that we need apply the Goldilocks principal to challenges we set students. Not too easy, not too difficult, pitched just right. We can't expect great answers without showing them how to do it step by step. Experiencing you thinking aloud and working through the process, scaffolds them. Later I switch to collaborative modelling where students talk and I write, eventually students move from collaborative answers to writing independently.

Hacking revision

The value of understanding how a paper will be marked cannot be underestimated. It's vital that student knows how an answer will be graded. Using the visualizer, I revise topics by displaying sample answers the class corrects, using LC codes. We discuss strengths, weakness and possible improvements to the sample answers. They grade them, which helps them become more critically aware of what a H1, H2 etc looks like. Daniel T Willingham points out that “memory is the residue of thought”. Having students revise topics by forcing them to think critically about the information presented, helps to ensure that topics are not only revised but retained.

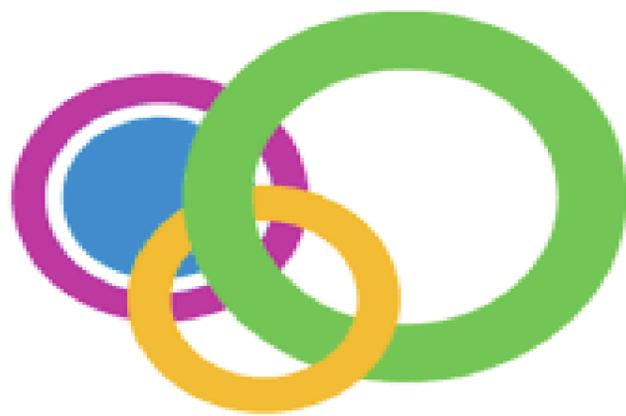
Peer / Self-assessment and whole class feedback

One of the best things that technology can do is reduce a teacher's workload. To promote peer and self-assessment I display students' work under the visualizer, the class offers feedback using the headings, strengths and suggestions. Those students who have gotten feedback are paired with students who haven't to peer and self-correct. Students become more independent, aware of the importance of redrafting and acting on feedback. It also cuts down on the amount of corrections I have to do at home. The visualizer also enables me to use whole class feedback sheets, see example.

I use these for giving written feedback on longer pieces. When praising work, I pop the essay under the visualizer and read the part I am referring to. This sheet saves me spending hours writing the same comments over and over in ten different copies. Furthermore, it promotes comparative judgement. They get to see the level that their classmates are working at, spurring them on to improve. Each student uses the sheet as a guide to redraft their original.

In Conclusion

The possibilities of how a visualizer can improve teaching and learning in English are endless. First, it has helped me realize the value of direct instruction. Secondly it has allowed me to develop my use of whole class feedback thus reducing my workload. Finally, and worthy of a mention too, it has unwittingly helped to improve my hand writing and prevent nail biting, no one wants to see their gnarled nails magnified in all their glory on the whiteboard for twenty-five teenagers to comment on.



Restorative Practice

by Kellie Lohan

<https://livingrestoratively.wordpress.com/>

My name is Kellie Lohan and I teach English, Geography and Wellbeing in Maynooth Education Campus, Co. Kildare. I am working in a school which promotes the use of restorative practice. The comments I share below are not representative of the school and are my ideas and thoughts on the role of restorative practice in my class and life.

Restorative practice (RP) is a values-based approach to developing positive and fulfilling relationships and communities. It can be used in any sector from education to finance and has many different benefits for those involved. RP stems from restorative justice which was implemented as an alternative way of dealing with incidents of crime in the United Kingdom, America and Australia (among many other countries). It has become a popular approach particularly in dealing with young people who have been involved in criminal activity, allowing them to sit down at a table

with those who have been affected by the incident. This approach allows everyone involved to discuss the impact of the event and provides a space for reparation and healing for all involved. Restorative practice takes the theory behind restorative justice and is a set of evidence-based skills which are implemented throughout a community, creating a collaborative and supportive space.

When the restorative principles are built into the practices and culture of a classroom from the start, it can foster a happier and more productive space with many more benefits than simply dealing with conflict. A restorative practitioner is someone who aims to be equal and honours the role that the core values of respect, empathy and understanding have in our interactions with other people. It is a collaborative approach, as mentioned previously, one person being restorative may not affect any change if they are surrounded by

those who believe solely in a punitive approach. In a school setting, a restorative approach to an incident would involve equal conversations with all parties, allowing each person time to discuss their perspective and working together to solve the issue at hand. However, it is not solely used to deal with an incident. As an approach to everyday school life, it reduces the intensity of conflict and creates stronger relationships throughout the school community.

I was introduced to RP early on in my teacher training and I cannot begin to understand teaching without it. The importance placed on the values of respect and empathy (among others) align themselves well with my personality and so has allowed me to grow as a restorative practitioner throughout my teaching career. This allows me to develop a safe and welcoming space in my classroom.

The new Junior Cycle English specification places a huge emphasis on the oral language skills students are expected to develop. Greater time is required for oral presentations and discussion in class. This is something that was an inherent and assumed element of the previous Junior Certificate, but the specification has included this into their requirements. Restorative practice provides an excellent platform for this element. The processes and methodologies around building relationships and developing a positive culture in the classroom all inherently benefit the English classroom too, without it being an additional task on already overwhelmed teachers.

One of the most important elements of restorative practice is the value of respect. You cannot demand or expect respect, it must be something that is created within the community of your classroom. Hearing teachers “demanding” respect fills me with panic, it simply creates fear for all involved. Thankfully this is a rare occurrence and is usually only seen in the depths of online comment section arguments. I am beyond grateful to work with a community of teachers who genuinely believe in their students and want to help them achieve their goals.

Developing a culture of respect in the classroom is a fabulous thing to be a part of. It takes time, but small snippets of this appear when you least expect it. The fruits of your labour can be found when the quiet student raises their hands to give their opinion on the topic we are discussing and everyone else goes quiet to allow them the space to speak. I’ve seen it when a student stands up to do their oral presentation on a topic that they are passionate about and students who normally may be quite boisterous sit back and listen, then raise their hands to ask a question so they can learn a little more about the topic. These moments are what exemplifies the power that restorative practice can have.

When I meet a class for the first time, there are so many nerves flying

around the room. The anticipation of what they will be like working together, worrying about additional needs, worrying about their social development, worrying about the curriculum, worrying about the seating plan, worrying about their equipment, worrying about trying to remember their names are just a few thoughts running through my mind (and that all happens in the first 5 seconds for me!!). Knowing that I have the platform of restorative practice to fall back on eases these concerns in some small way. Some of the methodologies from RP focus on the development of consistent responses in class, reframing questions to get greater responses, an emphasis on wait-time which all allow greater focus on the issue at hand.

One of the first things I do with a new class is to sit together in a circle and have a chat with them. Circles are quite structured, even if they do not appear to be from the outside. We would always start with low-risk questions (such as name and one thing they like to do to relax), topics that everyone can answer and gradually build up to a more serious topic (if necessary) and then end on a low-risk question again (such as your favourite dinner or plans for the weekend). This structured approach provides a great even platform of accessibility. We are all on equal footing, no one is considered more or less important. These moments are vital in building a relationship with these students who I will be teaching for two or three years (depending on if they are junior or senior cycle). I am genuinely interested in learning about who they are as people and this allows me to bring this information into my teaching. As their English teacher, I will be encouraging them to find their voice in my classroom. We will be discussing novels, poems, films and plays that will challenge them, that will call to their fears or passions and they will be asked questions that will require a personal response in many ways. If there is a culture of respect and openness, this process is much easier for everyone involved. Every

teacher has probably said the famous line, “there is no such thing a stupid question here!” and the majority genuinely believe this. Allowing the students’ space to voice opinions will benefit everyone in the long term.

My favourite time of the week is the last five-ten minutes of our last class of the week. We do a really quick check-in, everyone packs up early and we stand around in a circle and using our talking piece (I currently have a giraffe but Pascal-the-Parsnip is a fond Christmas favourite amongst the seniors!) we share our energy levels and our weekend plans. It’s a simple way to connect further with them, I get to see what they are interested in outside of the classroom and it can be a great way for other students to learn common areas of interest. The circles are a phenomenally equalising activity. We all answer the same question and often they are random questions the students make up. It’s a simple activity but it encourages respect towards each other and encourages those who may be hesitant to speak in class to answer too. There is no academic pressure here, there is no pressure to answer either and sometimes the answer of “nothing” is common, but it is a space the students create for themselves. After a few weeks of this practice, the students will remind me to start the circle, they pack up early and place great value on the space that it provides them. This is one key value I have learned from implementing RP into my classes, the students are provided with a safe space which they respect as much as I do.

For more information on RP training

Maynooth University
www.maynoothuniversity.ie/edward-m-kennedy-institute

Connect RP
www.connectrp.ie

Leaving Cert Poetry

by John Noonan

Covering the Senior Cycle poetry at both higher and ordinary level represents a significant amount of work and class time but is bad value for its 50 marks if you are going to present it line by line and as a 'Russian Roulette' for 20 marks unseen.

The purpose of the Leaving Certificate examination questioning is focused on the student's knowledge and response to poetry where the individual poets act as exemplars. Poetic technique and effective delivery of setting, characterisation, sentiment and theme to the audience are the skills being addressed and should form the central exploration evident in coherent answering.

With this in mind, we can get much better value from the time and effort spent if we integrate poetry with the other course elements as part of a complete study and mastery of the five language areas: information, argument, persuasion, narrative and aesthetic.

Considering title, speaker, structure, language, imagery, setting, sentiment and theme as the core elements in any poem, we can initially examine each poem as an unseen text and also as a function of the five language areas, offering students a consistent engagement with the critical insight demanded by the course. In this way we can employ any poem as a 'Text A', examining comprehension of meaning and the poet's technical deliberation in student responses. When we first begin to read the poem, we can challenge students with question forms similar to those found in the Paper 1, A section.

- What impression do you form of the speaker and how have you come to understand this?
- Choose an image used or observation made in the poem and comment and reflect on its impact on you.
- Identify two elements of the poet's stylistic approach in the poem and discuss how these elements achieve their impact on the reader.
- What is the proposal or premise put forward by the speaker in the poem? How did they attempt to inform, argue and or persuade the reader of their view and do you think they were successful?



Secondly, we can challenge students creatively. Poets and their poetry can be used as inspiration for narrative composition, argumentative debate, persuasive assertion and aesthetic vision. Students can model on the technical aspects of the poet while responding to thematic concerns.

- Elizabeth Bishop's, 'Filling Station' can inspire a short story; 'Somebody loves us all'. Formed around a family working hard to make ends meet.
- Boland's, 'Child of Our Time' can provide the basis for a 'B' style speech or a longer composition; an article, debate or discursive reflection, on the nature of violent conflict in our world.
- Frost's, 'Spring Pools' could inform and influence a student's aesthetic writing; a poem focused on the theme of power or a descriptive piece illustrating the fragile beauty of a natural scene.
- Julie O Callaghan's, 'The Net', prompting a discussion on internet and social media use might be developed as a brochure on how to engage with these technologies while staying safe.

Integration is the key: as a proposition for investigation and inspiration, the poetry section becomes a platform for a wider more coherent practice and exploration of the central skills for examination and the five language groups rather than a separate, and singular trudge.

JUNIOR POETRY

RUNNER UP
Aoibhe Horan
Presentation Secondary School,
Milltown, Killarney

Words

First words
Words pushed out through giant sobs
Words forced out through fits of laughter
Words that want
Words written
Words typed
Words sent
Words that wriggle out and make promises
Words that come falling out to smash them like a glass bottle
Words written on a page to decide her future
Words that tumble out of drunk lips
Words that don't know what they mean until too late
Words that mean everything
Words that mean nothing
Words to confess love
Words to tempt tears
Words to bring new life
Words to shatter love
Words heard by the wrong ears
Words spoken through gasping breaths
Last words

RUNNER UP
Lisa Hayes,
Mount Saint Michael,
Rosscarbery

Memories Of Millcove

I stand there longingly,
Craving the adrenaline of jumping off Millcove pier,
Into a field of blue
The bone chilling water hitting my skin.
I have dreamt of the sun beaming down on the glistening water's surface
As swans swiftly glide through the soft ripples of the sea.
The ground as uneven and rough as it was many years before,
Broken shells breaking under my feet after every step.
How I would run my fingers over all the names scratched onto the pier's wall.
Waves send their chorus of voices bringing melodies to my ears.
Memories fill the salty air,
Not just my memories but memories that belong to people that I'm yet to be acquainted with.
Memories of,
Picnics,
Boat trips,
Laughs that consume the air.
All these special memories from just a small old pier.
A pier where I grew up,
Where I made close friends,
But most importantly...
Where I was gifted with memories I'll cherish for years to come.

W

INNER

Clodagh O'Brien,
Athlone Community College

The Seanchaí

Gathered around the hearth,
The flames danced at his ankles.
Bent double he was,
His wisdom deep as his wrinkles.

A smoke cloud lingered,
at each puff of his pipe,
as he narrated stories of lore,
collected through life.

Outside, the wind howled,
Rattled upon the mind.
Rain hissed in the darkness,
As it was here fear dined.

No torch to banish phantoms,
Under beds of young minds.
The stories' heart thumped,
Sent a welcome fear down the spine.

The candle flickered,
the ominous shadows loomed,
His alluring eyes enchanted all,
As his tales filled the room

Sukie in the Graveyard

by Robert McDermott

Between the heat of the July day and Jamie's non-stop moaning things were beginning to be a little hard to bear. As we drove the ten miles or so from the hotel to the cemetery, I tried to ignore his whining as best I could. I would ask him questions to distract him but he just kept complaining and the temperature kept rising. The air conditioning on full blast was barely more than a breeze caressing a scorched earth and when Jamie pulled down the window for the third time and searing Georgia air filled the car sucking out any accumulated coolness, I yelled at him. It made him jump and he wound up the window of the cramped rental car and sat back, forcibly pushing his feet into the back of my chair.

'Stop it,' I said, 'I won't tell you again.'

'It's too hot,' he sulked.

'There's nothing I can do about it,' I said, 'it's not far to go so just put up and shut up.'

'Why couldn't we stay at the hotel?'

'Because we're on holidays and you need to see the outside world.'

Jamie didn't respond. I had the upper hand. I could sense he was formulating a counter argument.

'It's not like anyone else wanted to do anything today,' he said finally.

I chose to ignore his comment knowing full well that he'd start accusing me of making all the decisions and of hijacking what was supposed to be a rest day.

'Who wants to see a load of dead people anyway?'

Evie, who would normally stay out of



'Once we get to Bonaventure we can get a coke. Your dad really wants to see this place. It's important to him. Remember he does plenty of things for you.'

As always, Evie struck just the right tone at just the right moment. Whether Jamie was satisfied with her suggestion, I couldn't tell, but he was quiet and, at that moment, it was enough.

'What's Bonaventure?' asked Sukie who'd been sitting quietly in the backseat alongside her brother.

'It's a cemetery,' I said, 'a place where they bury dead people.'

'Like granny,' said Sukie.

'Like granny,' I echoed.

'I know,' said Jamie petulantly, 'I'm twelve. I do know things, why do we have to hear about it all the time?'

I shared a glance with Evie. She smiled gently and squeezed my hand.

We carried on in relative silence for the rest of the journey. Occasionally I could hear Sukie babbling to her-

self in the way young children do. The car became calmer if not cooler and I could feel Jamie's resentment subside. Sometimes, as I glanced in the rear-view mirror, I would catch a glance of his eyes burning holes in the back of my head.

We arrived shortly after two. The drive from the hotel had been no more than thirty, maybe thirty-five minutes, but with the arguing and the relentless energy sapping heat it seemed as if we'd been travelling for longer. Once parked we stepped from the sticky car into the heavy humidity of the afternoon. The air was like inhaling wet paper and I felt sweat trickle down my back. Evie and Jamie made their way to an ancient vending machine which stood squat in the shade by the restrooms to the right of the entrance. I mopped my brow and fanned my shirt to create a draught. We were all suffering in the thick heat. Only Sukie seemed to be coping with it.

'Are there kids in here?' she asked me.

In the shade by the restrooms to the right of the entrance. I mopped my brow and fanned my shirt to create a draught. We were all suffering

in the thick heat. Only Sukie seemed to be coping with it .

‘Are there kids in here?’ she asked me.

‘It’s a really big place,’ I said, ‘I bet there are. Do you want to go and see?’

She nodded and scrunched up her nose before scratching it.

Evie returned with a can of diet coke and handed it to me. I opened it and went to hand it to Sukie but she shook her head and made her way towards Jamie who was leaning languidly on one of the impressive pillars that marked the entrance to the cemetery.

‘Feeling better?’ I asked.

He grunted and after finishing his coke with an audible slurp followed us in. I saw a redcardinal perched atop a statue. It moved its head in that twitchy motion birds make and flew off before I could point it out.

Like many tourists who sought out Bonaventure I’d read John Berendt’s *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and wanted to see the Bird Girl statue. It was only later, as I was leaving, that a local walking her dog informed me that the statue had been moved to TelfairAcademy in Savannah. The book, a curious mix of non-fiction and fiction told of the seedier side of Savannah society and wove local folklore into the narrative in a rich, evocative tapestry. It was this texture of ghosts and secrets and antebellum southern gothic that captured my imagination in the way only a compelling story can.

The cemetery was on the site of a plantation and one story tells of a fire at the main house some time in the 1770s. The blaze occurred during a dinner party and the host, rather than stopping the party ordered the servants to take it outside where the assembled guests revelled late into the night by the light of the raging fire. According to local lore if you listen carefully on still nights, you can hear the sounds of the party carried

on the soft breeze that drifts in from the Wilmington River. There’s no solid evidence to support this as fact, but never let the truth get in the way of a good story, or so the saying goes.

Sukie was making headway along the main avenue and lagging behind were Evie and Jamie who were taking regular sips from the now warm bottle of water we’d brought with us. As I passed them in an effort to catch up with Sukie I heard Jamie moan about the heat. Evie pulled him close to her and gave me a signal to hurry up and see what I could do as we’d probably have to leave before too long. I understood Jamie’s discomfort and boredom and reproached myself for not being more insistent about coming alone. I had suggested it but Jamie, happy in the soothing cool of an air conditioned hotel room had agreed to come along because I had sold the trip on the pretext of spooky graves and ghosts and ice cream. Five minutes into the journey and Jamie’s enthusiasm had evaporated into the stifling greenhouse of the car.

What struck me about the cemetery, aside from the pounding heat, was the serene atmosphere. There was a keenly felt tranquillity to the place which enhanced every aspect of the experience from the definition on the faces of the strikingly realistic statues to the stately mausoleums to the vividness of the ivy that snaked along the ornate crypts. Not quite surreal, but difficult to articulate, this was a place that existed in the space between both words and worlds.

Evie stopped to admire the pink azaleas that clustered along the path and dotted the graves like flashes of paint in a watercolour. Jamie looked up at the live oaks which were draped with fluttering beards of Spanish Moss.

‘Why does it grow on them like that?’ he asked, ‘it’s like the tree has hair or something.’

I had asked someone that same question as I walked through Colonial Park Cemetery two days before and now repeated what they had told me.

‘It’s not part of the tree, it’s a separate plant that just likes hanging on the branches.’

‘Like a lazy leopard,’ said Jamie.

I nodded in appreciation of his words.

‘I think it’s cool,’ said Jamie, ‘it makes the place seem relaxed.’

‘So this wasn’t a waste of time?’ I said.

Jamie didn’t say anything but I knew I’d got through to him. He moved over to Evie and felt along her arms to her hands searching for the water bottle. He took it from her hand, twisted the top, and offered it to me. I shook my head and looked up along the path to where I could see Sukie moving through the light and shadows like a butterfly. After the brief pause we ambled along in a quiet procession and I took in the angels and cherubs and names on the graves. I reflected on lives those named had lived and how they were now reduced to letters and numbers carved into marble. We stopped at a family plot and noted with sombre respect the grave of an infant. As we went further into the environs under the canopy of tangled oaks we noticed with increasing frequency the number of graves belonging to children. Evie moved in beside me and took my hand casually, squeezing it as she had done in the car, before disengaging and returning to sync herself with Jamie’s slow steps.

I had lost sight of Sukie and moved more briskly along the path. We were quite far into the cemetery by now and Evie suggested that we should turn back to the car soon. I told her if she wanted to make her way back with Jamie I’d catch up with them. Jamie looked pleased with this and they turned foot and began their slow retreat from the oppressive heat. Even under the protection of the oaks and moss, the sun pushed suffocating air from the ground like a wave of hot oil.

I pushed ahead and within a minute saw Sukie off to the right of the



path sitting at a grave surrounded by a high and ornate wrought-iron fence. I approached slowly. Sukie was in one of her dreamlike moods where nothing in the world bothered her and lost in her thoughts she could wile away hours narrating the events around her. She was a free spirit in the truest sense. I’d always been simultaneously enchanted and disarmed by this quality of hers and I waited for her to acknowledge me.

After a moment she turned to look at me and waved and smiled.

‘Hi,’ I said, ‘you could have got lost running off like that.’

‘I knew you’d find me,’ she said casually, ‘you always do.’

I sat on the ground with her and she snuggled into my body. She pointed to a statue behind the wrought-iron fence.

‘That’s Gracie’s grave,’ she said.

I saw the word Watson on the low wall that surrounded the grave.

‘There are words over there about her, but I couldn’t read them all,’ said Sukie.

I stood up, looked through the bars of the fence, and read the inscription. Little Gracie Watson had died on Good Friday in 1889 aged six.

‘The same age as me,’ said Sukie.

She was reading my thoughts again.

I thought it apt, albeit sad, that this little girl had died on Good Friday. Something about the place made me think of death not in terms of finality or even separation but as resurrection. It was the abundance of life that did it. The trees, the flowers, the skittering of small animals, the song of birds rendered death powerless. My eyes were drawn to the lifelike and life sized statue of Gracie sat at the back end of the enclosure surrounded by a muted congregation of purple azaleas. The inscription told of how the statue had been carved by sculptor named John Walz from a photograph and I couldn’t help but admire his skill.

My eyes looked down at Sukie who was examining the gifts visitors had left for

Gracie. There were small stones as a mark of respect, but there was also a hairbrush and a yoyo and small toys befitting a little girl. Planted into the ground was a blue windmill that made me think of the Holy Angels plot in Glasnevin where my brother lay. I thought of how he and Gracie were connected through time and distance by the winds of the world that raced over the Atlantic to spin their windmills and sound their wind chimes. Stopped in this moment I felt Sukie’s hand curl around my index finger.

‘I hear her ghost haunts this place.’

‘It says in the guide that if you look at her eyes in certain way they follow you.’

The sound of these words broke the peace of my reflections and instinctively I looked to where it had come from. A young couple in smart shorts and t-shirts stood to my left. They shared a nod and one of those half-hearted stranger smiles with me then took out their phones and snapped a picture of Gracie’s grave.

‘Have a nice day,’ they said as they moved along.

I looked back along the path and realised Evie and Jamie would be waiting.

‘I’m glad we came here,’ said Sukie.

‘Me too.’

‘Can I stay and play with Gracie?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

She smiled at me and gave my finger a squeeze.

‘I’ll see you later,’ she said.

‘Not if I see you first,’ I replied.

She skipped into the azaleas and disappeared into the light and shadows. The red cardinal descended from a nearby branch and perched on Gracie’s statue. There was a ripple in the air as if the line between one world and another blurred. I watched for a moment before heading back. As I turned, I heard the sound of uninhibited joy that only the laughter of children can express.

I knew Sukie would be ok.

Senior Poetry Competition



RUNNER UP
Jake Murray,
Tempelogue College

“Rubbish Bin”

I’m like a rubbish bin
Whom everyone throws rubbish in.
They make me smelly and dirty,
Then they look down on me.
I can only play with flies,
Hiding in the shadows.
This is not what I deserve.
No one remembers what I was like
When I first came to this world.

2ND PLACE
Marina Evseeva,
St Olivers CC
Drogheda

×SCREEN× 1am

A chattering lack of sense amongst the singular entities
in the
Room,
Disjointed and
Cackling,
Heaving for breath.
I rise from the deep indentations of bed, still
Chortling, like,
Like, an asthmatic rat,
Scraping my lungs with the scent of mother’s cooking.
The image’s blue-hued, glitching hand strangles me, in a
way that I can’t help but cherish as tears
flood my eyes with dopamine.
Crawling down the
Stairs, I am a Roach with every malicious intent,
Of devouring a meal, choking still on my spit, words, as I
try to explain.
I raise proudly the picture picture to mother, the hand
coiling itself round her neck, and
Nothing.
No chaotic crackling laughs. Her breath steady as ever,
she sighs.
Abstract comedy has crowned me a fool, and stolen the
air from my lungs
But never
Hers.

1ST PLACE
Derek Pun,
Marist College,
Athlone

The Oil Tank

I spent Saturday Cementing blocks onto blocks,
Talking to men I had known for years
But only then did we see the other
As we mixed the grey into the brown,
Talking of things going and coming around –
Not much was said in our idle chatter.
As his blade scraped against the stone,
I went off to carry the next load –
As I worked I sang an old tune;
He caught wind of it and
From there our treatise bloomed.
We talked about the old song that I love,
And the old way it was sung –
Smoke in the mouth, whiskey in hand –
Recounting that which will be no more.
And we talked about the old way:
They fascinated by what is –
I enthralled by what once was.
I learned a great deal about them then:
He supported the American, I the Long Fellow;
We both respected Brugha,
Both regretted the pointless uncivil war.
It was not said but I expect each of us knew,
With all that had changed
Hard work still remained much the same

Prescribed Texts 2022

by Conor Murphy

One of the highlights of the teaching year is when the Leaving Cert Text list comes out. I don't get time to read as much fiction as I used to but I always read the ones from this list. Add to that new plays and films and the list provides an escape from work that has the benefit of still being work! There are five new books (four novels and a memoir), one new play, and three new films on the list.

The five books span a huge period of time, from **Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*** to **Tara Westover's *Educated***.

Shelley's novel is well known but one that I had never read before. Relatively accessible in terms of style, it is as fascinating as you would expect. You get the classic gothic atmosphere and psychology in a tale that has particular resonance with the world we find ourselves in today. Then again, that's the sign of a good novel, always being relevant.

A world where people hide from a monster, never knowing where he will turn up, who he will kill, is a world we are all too familiar with.



Nuala O'Connor's novel, ***Miss Emily*** is a wonderful story set in the home of Emily Dickinson. The chapters are all written in the first person, alternating from Dickinson's point of view with that of her new, strong willed, Irish maid, Ada Concannon. The novel is a classic page turner with a number of beautifully written passages.

As the story progresses the plot becomes sensational in places (I haven't researched whether it was a true story or not) but this works, adds meat to the underlying

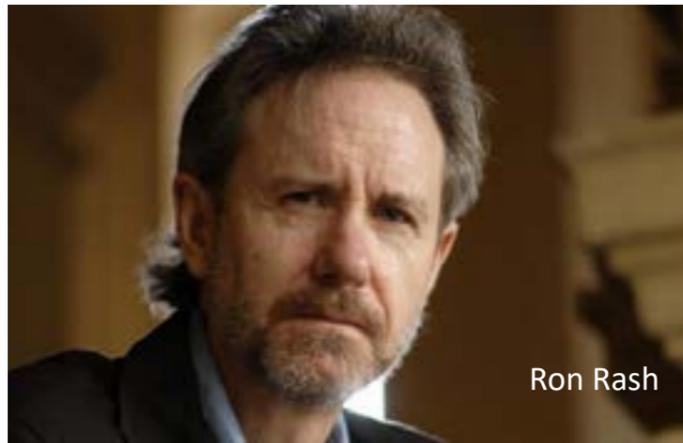


conflicts. Although I enjoyed this book the most out of all of the new arrivals on the list, I am unsure whether I would teach it as well as Dickinson's poetry. The clash of her poems and this fictionalised account of her life might be too confusing for some students. But if I wasn't going to teach her (or if she wasn't on the list) I would jump at the chance of delving into this tale.

The Cove, by **Ron Rash** is similar in how it moves from one character to the next in each chapter. Set in Appalachian Mountains in 1918, the slow burn plot also has a familiarity to it, it is a predictable sequence of events. But, if the overall plot development might be clear from the start then the character details are where the story grabs you.

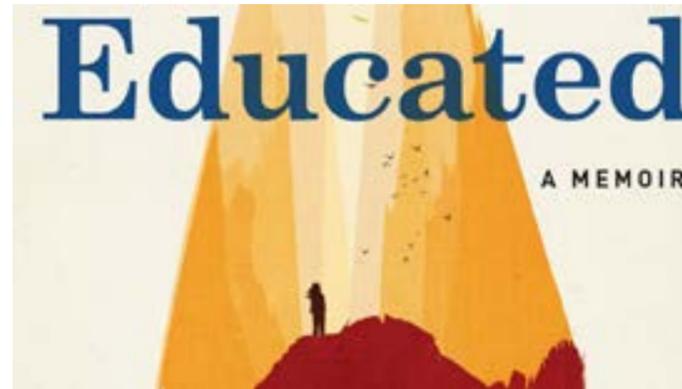
We follow Laurel Shelton and her brother as they try to make the most of the family farm. A stranger arrives (as is their wont) and, inevitably, romance ensues. This might sound trite and obvious, and it is at least one of those, but it is written with such a sure hand, with an understanding of pace and place, that we are never not enthralled.

And then we come to **Educated** and **All the Light We Cannot See**, two books that, before they appeared on the list, are amongst the most popular recent releases with teachers.



Tara Westover's memoir, ***Educated***, is an intriguing insight into a life on the outside of society, in nearly every way, and how education opened up an escape route for her. The story unfolds with one shocking incident after another as she traces the movement from abuse and restriction to agency and freedom.

An extremely popular memoir it was, for me, a bit repetitive and over written. This sounds counter intuitive, after all the story she has to tell is one that many of us would find incredible, but for me there were moments where less would have been more and reading those



sections distracted me from the world she was revealing.

All the Light We Cannot See by **Anthony Doerr** is another popular choice and, along with **Frankenstein**, can be taken as the main text for both Higher and Ordinary levels. Set during World War 2 the novel, again, moves from character to character. One is a boy in the Nazi youth, the other a blind French girl. I have to admit that I didn't finish the book and so, really, I can't talk about it with any authority. All I can say is that I'm a bit WW2 weary at this stage and the characters, the short cliff hanging chapters, and the tendency to explain metaphors rather than trusting the audience, meant that I put down the book for something else and never picked it up again.

Diane Samuels' play, *Kindertransport*, is also set, in part, during World War 2. It tells the story of a young Jewish girl sent to England at the start of the war so that she could avoid the persecution to come. It follows two timelines, one in 1938 as nine-year-old Eva says good-bye to her mother and the other when she is an adult and discovers letters that her foster mother has hidden from her.

Although the setting is, again, World War 2 the play is more successful than others in its use of setting to explore universal themes. One of the strongest themes present is that of the parent/child relationship. What

do we conceal, what do we sacrifice, what does it mean to be a parent, a daughter (or son)? Perfectly pitched dialogue, realistic confrontations and a rhythm that holds the attention result in a play that will be rich pickings for any class.

Film choices over the years have improved exponentially and this list seems to have the strongest selection so far. ***Mustang***, ***Ladybird*** and ***Rosie*** are three films with strong, unique, voices but ones that speak, again, to us all.

Rosie, directed by **Paddy Breathnach**, tells the modern story of a homeless family's struggle to find a bed for the night. Centring around the mother, Rosie Davis, the social realist film is told in a neo-realist style that proves to be both heart-breaking but also, at times, uplifting. There are no easy answers in this film.

Erguven's ***Mustang*** is similarly truthful but told in a



more poetic, tactile, style. Set in a conservative Turkey it tells the story of five vibrant sisters as their father tries to cloister them from society before marrying them off. Poetic with moments of blunt reality the film is one of those texts that students will remember.

We all knew that **Greta Gerwig's *Ladybird*** would appear on the list. It is perfect Leaving Cert material. Highschool student going through the trauma of her final year before college. All the tropes are there but from a fresh angle.

New texts are new opportunities. I love them! Read them all, watch them all. They have been chosen with care by English teachers. You don't have to like them all but there could be one in there that you love!

The Changing Face of Female Characters

by Carragh Bell

READER, I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present. When we got back from church, I went into the kitchen



classic female characters be updated to suit a modern day audience.

Get over yourselves.

These women reflect the time they lived in. It is perfectly acceptable and supremely important that this is preserved exactly as it is. Future generations will read it and see what life was like, and crucially, how far we've come. It is a snapshot in time of social history and should remain so.

That is where the challenge lies in an English class – opening your students' minds to a context different to their own. Making them understand that women have not always been represented as fearless warriors. Showing them that the limitations of said women's cultural context perhaps impeded them from taking a stand.

As well as being a teacher, I'm also a published author. I write popular, romantic fiction. My books follow the age-old formula:

two characters meet, hit it off, there's a roadblock to happiness and resolution at the end. Sometimes I throw in a love triangle for good measure.

However, I find that there's a real challenge nowadays to strike a balance when creating characters. Especially in my genre. The trusted formula of the knight on a white horse coming to save the damsel in distress has worn thin.

That's why teaching English helps me no end. Years of teaching and studying various texts has enabled me to write about my characters as individuals rather than just male or female. I explore men's emotional vulnerability as well as women's. I give them strengths and weaknesses as equally as I can. Their actions reflect their upbringing – they are people who have been shaped by experiences of the world I've created. Some are rich, some are poor. Some are vulnerable, some are tough. Their actions are influenced by their past, like us all.

In my fourth book, *Echoes of Grace*, there is a minor character called Laura whose main objective in life is to marry someone wealthy. Feminist eyebrows were raised when the book was released, but I defend Laura's actions. She lost her father when she was a child and ends up marrying an

older man. She was searching to fill the gap – for someone to look after her. It's



her choice and she makes no apologies for it. She's strong, but knows what she wants, however unpopular it may seem. It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I stand by her as a character.

Things have certainly changed since Daisy Buchanan called women 'beautiful little fools'. Yet we can't deny that gender equality has yet to be achieved. The female character is, and will be, in flux. However, we've definitely come a long way since poor Bertha Mason was locked in an attic.

"I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

FAR LEFT Jane Austen, the consummate feminist writer

ABOVE Daisy Buchanan played by Carey Mulligan

BELOW The New Generation of Disney Heroines



There has been a wave of political correctness in recent times. Look at the recent *Toy Story* film – Bo Peep is wearing the pants (literally and metaphorically). You have Queen Elsa in *Frozen* running off and letting it go, without anyone's help. Who didn't love the fact that brainy Hermione Granger was a key element in *Harry Potter's* victory? Or how *Mulan* bravely took her

A staple on the English curriculum, Shakespeare was never one for feminism. Take Gertrude, Hamlet's flaky mother, for a start. Or poor little Desdemona. Lady Macbeth had such promise but then true to form, ended up buckling under the pressure. And don't get me started on Ophelia.

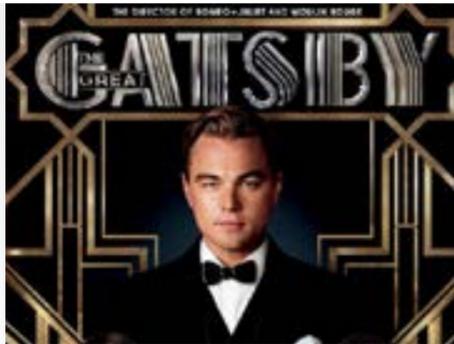
Nothing annoys me more than the PC Brigade who demand that

Comparative

Thoughts

Johnathan Foley & Sarah Butler share their thoughts on the Comparative texts

THE COMPARATIVE STUDY, while daunting for some, can be the most rewarding units to teach for English Paper 2. And here's an outline of how it can be approached for optimum results.



First up, teachers should take their time and deliberate over which texts to choose. Base them on how well they connect with one another and what's suitable for the class sitting there in front of you.

From personal experience, I often tend to start off with the novel in the January period of fifth year.

You'd be hopeful that students have a confident grasp of characterisation and thematic study from having studied the Single Text the previous term.

Now's a good time to build on that knowledge.

Before the book is even opened, I'd spend at least two lessons covering an overview of the novel, its cultural context and some of the themes and issues we will encounter along the way.

You may be giving away spoilers about the plot, but I've always found that kids are more than okay with this. They want to build up their notes and organise their handouts more than they want a story told.

Linking the English classroom with other subjects - such as History, for example - will help pupils to gain a better understanding of the time period and societal attitudes that existed in real-life. Ones that will later surface when reading the novel.

Take The Great Gatsby as an example. A lesson or two on 'The Roaring Twenties' is always useful.

It will guide the learning of how people felt about money, racism, family values, sex, pop-culture and gender during a post-war period in America. Pupils will later spot these issues as they crop up throughout the novel.

If you're not much of a historian, fear not, explainer videos and other online resources are a dime a dozen on a novel as well-known as something like Gatsby.

For me, I'm sceptical about prolonged periods of reading during class time. I feel it causes kids to let their minds drift off and the overall progress begins to stifle, but maybe that's just me.

My approach is to provide detailed handouts on a summary of each chapter. To save on printing and photocopying, pupils can also avail of websites like sparknotes on their phones.

Also very handy for pupils who are absent a lot.

This speeds up the process and can allow us more time to watch that chapter in a TV, film or movie adaptation. They are then tasked with Higher Order Questioning on the chapter.

Such questions are often based on a Bloom's Taxonomy approach that will direct and encourage them to write in more detail about a character, a theme, an issue etc.

Critical Thinking box ticked.

Reading of the novel is still paramount, but now when they pick up a copy or

download an audiobook version, they are more likely to engage with it more as they already know what's going on. The tendency to drift will lessen.

Once the novel is completed and we've had the reward of watching a less-interrupted version of the movie, it's critical essay time!

An essay on the novel's cultural context / themes and issues combined. For differentiation, a series of Bloom's Questions will also suffice. It's more important that they're all engaging, after all.

The second comparative text will then follow. Usually this will be around March time and I tend to go with a film at this point. A nice reprieve after two meaty texts have been done in the year already.

There's a plethora to choose from but once concept I hope we can all agree on is that comparative texts always hold a theme linked to America.

Use that to your advantage because kids, regardless of their background, are very aware of America. It's in the pop-culture they follow, the music they listen to and movies they watch.

Texts on the course such as Lance Armstrong: Stop At Nothing and Brooklyn are testament to this. I've taught both to different year groups but the approach to each is similar.



Proceedings are kicked off, as before, with a spoiler-alert prelude of the film's cultural context. When it was set, what's the real-life background and how it might link to Text 1.

Resources on more modern film texts may be harder to come by, but they can be obtained. If not, a quick bit of digging and you'll be fine.

YouTube has plenty of short videos on Lance Armstrong and for Brooklyn, the special features on the DvD has interviews where the actors, writers and director discuss the context of the story.

I provide my pupils with a handout and instruct them to be on the lookout for the following topics and how the characters relate to them. These topics are based on the texts' attitudes towards:

Money and Power, Sex and Relationships, Authoritative Figures,

Society and Politics, Emigration, Gender Roles, Ethnicity, the American Dream and Religion.

Now's a good time to merge the two texts.

While it's highly unlikely that all of these topics will be relevant to both of your texts, I'd recommend putting the students into groups and deciphering for themselves which ones suit best.

Stipulate they should look to cover at least five of the topics, that it's perfectly ok to seek for contrasts on the same issue and that they must use the relevant linking phrases and conjunctions in their responses.

Planning Grids are provided for them to fill in individually and thus, through your coaching and feedback, you will see them make the connections between the texts themselves.

Once that's done, it's time for

another assignment. Usually a past paper question where you instruct them to focus on two texts for now will do. It'll give them the feel for an essay.

Model answers from textbooks, even if they are on vastly different texts, are also useful for showing pupils how to avoid simply retelling the story and get them accustomed to using linking phrases.

Whether it be under the heading of Cultural Context or Themes and Issues, your class should be well on their way to tackling one of these. Literary Genre too, if that's your thing.

Upon completion, it's time to shelve to Comparative Study until the third text joins the party in sixth year. The main thing to remember is fix the landing and let them join the dots.

By Johnathan Foley

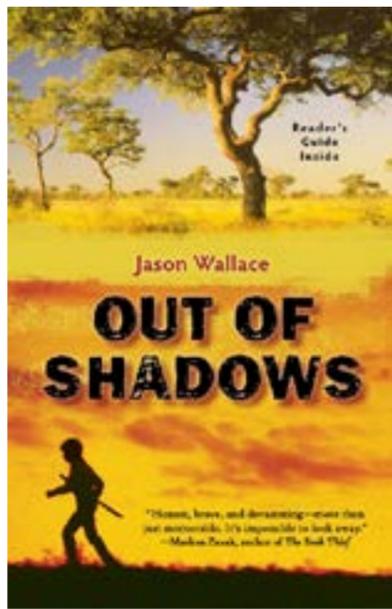
Why it's worth taking risks with the comparative

Fifty pages into 'Out of Shadows' with my fifth year class and the 'new boy', who had only started in September, and about whom I knew very little, approached me at the end of class and informed me that his mum was from Zimbabwe.

'Oh really? That's interesting. And what does she think of Mugabe?'

'My grandfather was Mugabe's general!' For those of you not familiar with 'Out of Shadows', this novel, new to the course for 2021, takes quite a scathing look at Zimbabwe under Mugabe's rule. Its language is crude, and many of the characters are racist, sexist and offensive from absolutely

every angle. The students sitting in front of me come from a variety of racial backgrounds, so I was uncertain how this novel would be received. That's before we start on the portrayal of Mugabe. Let's just say that the infamous leader does not come across in a favourable light. Had I known that Mugabe's general's grandson was sitting in my class, I may have chosen a different novel. When I first began teaching English, back in the year dot, I was adamant that I would always teach a 'classic' novel, with the argument that the vast majority of students would never read 'Wuthering Heights' for pleasure. The most daunting was probably 'Jane Eyre' - which I thought we would never finish - on completion of which my class celebrated with a Victorian tea party. However, times have changed, and with the realisation that many students will never read any novel 'for pleasure', my approach evolved. I determined



TY Deas



Choosing texts to study for TY can sometimes be a daunting and thankless task. John Noonan shows why Stephen King's *The Body* could be a useful addition to your anthology.

never to teach the same text twice. Will I teach a classic novel again in the future – absolutely. I was delighted to see the addition of 'Frankenstein' on the 2022 list.

How do I choose a text? Each year I get highly excited when the 'new' prescribed list is revealed in February. I try – and fail – to read everything on the list. I find something that – to quote Marie Kondo – 'sparks joy' in me. And I teach that. Do I plan my theme and how this novel will connect with the other two texts? No. Do I worry about exposing my students to adult or potentially upsetting themes? No. Do I fear what parents will say? You guessed it.

Many of the novels I have taught, may be considered controversial. Many times I've wondered how I didn't notice how many sex scenes there were. Many's the time I've been reading aloud in my classroom with the door ajar, hoping that some innocent first year student is not walking down the corridor at that exact moment on their way to the bathroom. Racism, rape, abuse, even infanticide – these are not topics which we are comfortable reading about. My students have been exposed to them all. But maybe there is truth in the phrase that 'The days you are most uncomfortable are the days you learn

the most about yourself.'

And then there were the times when Alexandra Fuller and Jeanette Winterson wrote back after receiving packages of letters from my students. The time when Jack and Ma were attempting their escape when the bell rang to signal the end of school and my students groaned in unison. The time when we turned the page at the end of 'The Handmaid's Tale' to find there was nothing more, and the students nearly blew the roof off. These are days when you put the book down on the desk after the students leave and think to yourself with wonder

– I'm getting paid for this.

You've had those moments. You know you have. Until a crowd of noisy second years comes barging in and brings you back to reality with a bang.

I've been teaching this course for umpteen years now and no parent has – as yet – ever complained about my choice of text. We are blessed as teachers to be offered a text list so wide that we don't ever have to read the same novel twice. A list so brave that we don't feel the need to justify our choice of novel. We have the luxury of time in our senior classes, which allows us to choose a novel irrespective of length. And a class will uncover fascinating links between three seemingly unconnected

texts. The freshness and variety of the comparative course is one of the things that makes teaching senior English such a joy.

The knowledge that one of my students had a connection to Mugabe, may have deterred me from choosing 'Out of Shadows'. Instead, it taught us all an important lesson about perspective and the subjectivity of history – something which was relevant also to our chosen film, 'Hunger' – a film which I allowed students to choose, against my better judgement, and ended up enjoying far more than I anticipated.

A few weeks after our initial chat, I warily asked the no-longer-new boy what his mum thought of the novel.

'She thinks it's great that we're studying a novel set in Zimbabwe', was his reply.

by Sarah Butler

★ Top Tips for Choosing Comparative Texts ★

1 . DON'T OVER-THINK the theme. Teachers often feel the need to choose texts that share a common theme. This is unnecessary. Try conflict, power, identity or gender roles.

2 . USE AN audio book. A colleague who had a l w a y s wanted to teach 'The Damned United', balked at the number of times the 'c word' is used. He is much more comfortable allowing the expletives to play out on audio

3 . B A B Y STEPS. The course is designed so that once we get too comfortable teaching a particular text, it is removed from the list. Next time you find yourself faced with choosing a new text, consider pushing yourself out of your comfort zone.

4 . MEET THE class. You might be bursting to teach a particular text, but when you meet the class, you know it won't work. Tailor your choice to the class in front of you.

Stephen King, one of the best-selling authors of modern times with over 350 million copies sold, has been enjoying a revival in film and television adaptation of late, dragging him out of the 'has been' territory of the end of the last millennium and placing him firmly back in the cultural milieu of today's teen and more relevantly your TY student.

While many of his novels are not suitable for general class work his early novella 'The Body', is an engaging, superbly crafted, coming of age adventure, displaying Kings admirable control of the narrative form. Available in print, as an audio book and as a downloadable PDF.

Transition year allows us to take the foot off the examination pedal and offer students a chance to engage with narrative literature for its own sake. It is an opportunity for those who have scheduled reading for leisure out of their lives to

rediscover the pleasure and for those who had never engaged with the escapism, joy and revelation offered by a well-wrought novel to be initiated.

Narrated in the first person and presented in a biographical form, the action follows the macabre, thrilling and powerfully emotional journey of a group of friends who set out to find the body of a missing boy. The story is presented in short episodic chapters and accessible language, delivered with Kings talent for characterisation, dramatic action and comic relief.

Short enough to be read in a single week by most students and touching on themes of friendship, courage and the loss of innocence, it is an excellent text simply to be enjoyed as a bildungsroman or as a touchstone for other exercises such as; examination of narrative structure, review, biographical narrative and personal reflection on a thematic concern.

The remarkably performed cinematic adaptation, 'Stand By Me' can be used in conjunction with the novella as a platform to engage with the comparative skills students will need in Senior Cycle. Students can compare and contrast their vision of the characters derived from the narrative versus the casting and representation in the film or examine other generic elements such as the impact of musical score.

Ultimately King's 'The Body' showcases the skill, design and deliberation needed to deliver fast paced, entertaining and powerful narrative and is a brilliant model for any student to explore and take inspiration from, as well as a rich ground to sow the seeds of Senior Cycle aspiration and expectation by teachers looking to develop valuable skills with an eye to the future.

Lend Me Your Ears

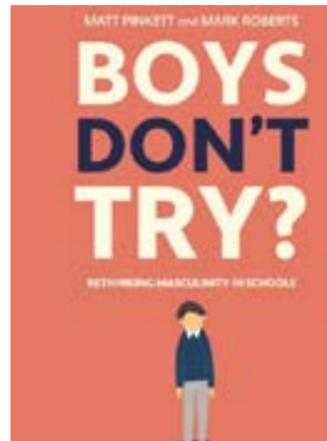
Recommended Podcasts for English Teachers

Let's begin with a few truisms: We're all incredibly busy, there have never been so many people wearing headphones (or a variant), and everyone seems to be hosting a podcast! These statements have aligned for many teachers seeking to upskill on the go, as for most topics that we're interested in, there's likely a podcast! As an English teacher I cannot discount the valuable, and often entertaining, CPD that I can enjoy whilst engaged in the more mundane aspects of life. There's a personal and professional satisfaction in being able to "brush up [my] Shakespeare" or keep up to date on the research that's affecting the wider educational landscape as I'm walking, running, driving, cleaning, or cooking. Furthermore, I can earnestly attest to the positive impact that listening to some of these podcasts has had on my teaching practice and ability to offer accessible resources to students seeking to deepen their studies. It's with that in mind that I recommend six podcasts that I've found nourishing on a personal and professional level.



'Inside Education', hosted by Séan Delaney, seeks to offer "an Irish perspective on education for all who value teaching." It boasts a huge back catalogue of episodes that focus on a wide array of educational issues (at both primary and post-primary levels) that are informed by research and expertise. A recent episode featured Ciara Reilly running through some common sense considerations for teaching online. English teachers may appreciate the episode where author Dave Rudden offered a fascinating insight into his methods for teaching creative writing, especially on how to motivate reluctant writers.

@Insided



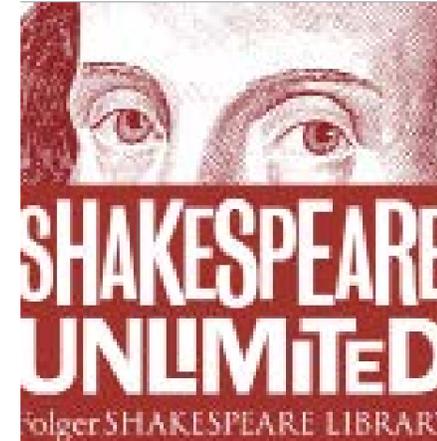
'Boys Don't Try? – The Podcast' is in its infancy, but producing essential listening for teachers. Episodes are hosted by James Trapp, who is joined by the writers of the book 'Boy's Don't Try? – Rethinking Masculinity in Schools', Matt Pinkett and Mark Roberts. These three experienced English teachers discuss the issues that were highlighted within the book in a style that is refreshingly frank. Whilst discussion is based on the UK education scene and focusing mostly on boys in school, the points raised seem universal and are based on hard evidence. Many of their examples are rooted in the English classroom, with episodes on mental health and engagement providing food for thought in regards to text choice and classroom management.

@BoysDontTryPod



Jennifer Gonzalez is an experienced and passionate educator based in the US. Her 'Cult of Pedagogy' podcast sees her reflect on teaching strategies, classroom management, education reform, educational technology — really anything to do with teaching! She often interviews stakeholders about the psychological and social dynamics of school, trade secrets, and much more! Particularly appealing is her willingness to reflect on what didn't work in her own teaching practice, as these experiences are reframed as genuine learning opportunities for herself and other teachers. There are many practical episodes, including one that dives into the idea of group work and advises on the potential pitfalls in addition to the opportunities.

@cultofpedagogy



Produced by the Folger Shakespeare Library and primarily hosted by Barbara Bogaev, the 'Shakespeare Unlimited' podcast is dedicated to the work and wider cultural and social influence of William Shakespeare. A typical episode centres on an interview with an academic, actor, director, or author with a unique insight into the bard, the world he lived in, or the impact he made. English teachers looking to experience 'Othello' with their classes this year will find several episodes focusing on race in the play, as well input from Iqbal Khan, who directed the play for the RSC in 2015. Also look out for an excellent episode on the acclaimed American actress Charlotte Cushman, famed for her portrayal of characters deemed not manly enough to be portrayed by male actors.

@FolgerLibrary



Avowed logophiles, and verifiable word experts, Susie Dent and Gyles Brandreth host the charming 'Something Rhymes With Purple' podcast. In their own words, "they delve into a topic around language, offer some words of the week and pepper it with fascinating insights, facts and quirky anecdotes." This is an excellent podcast for teachers who are interested in the etymology and morphology of words - a crucial set of knowledge bases for word learning — and in assisting their students in becoming competent "word detectives". Expect to be impressing your own English students with the answers to classic questions such as, "why does goose become geese, but moose doesn't become meese?"

@susie_dent and @GylesB1



Featuring a revolving set of hosts, including the likes of Sue Perkins and Katy Brand, 'The Penguin Podcast' is a weekly love letter to reading, writing, thinking, and creating! Each episode revolves around an intimate interview with an author that hones in on their inspirations and creative processes, as well as individual works. A nice touch is that each guest is asked to bring in three objects for discussion; each one being inspirational or meaningful to them as a writer. English teachers with a yen for the writing process will appreciate the practical and pragmatic guidance offered by authors such as John Boyne, Philip Pullman, and RJ Palacio. One idea that shines through is the importance of dedication and discipline as a writer, not just raw talent.

@PenguinUKBooks



inote Podcast

We'll be delighted to introduce, over the course of the next few months, a fresh addition to our offering: the INOTE podcast. It's a simple idea, enabled by technology: practical, curriculum-relevant material created for practising English teachers by practising English teachers. From late 2020, INOTE's website will host an expanding range of audio resources, typically between 15 and 40 minutes long – ideal listening length for a walk, gym session or morning commute.

In light of the focus on Junior Cycle CPD in recent years, we took the editorial decision to push in another direction. Most of the material we will make available, initially at least, will be of use in teaching Senior Cycle English. Let me take this opportunity to pull back the curtain on a small selection of what's in store on the podcast during the 2020-2021 school year.

In three podcasts on Othello, we aim to strike a balance between individual contributions and structured group discussions among contributors. Always placing the accent on what is most likely to be useful to you, the teacher, our contributors thrash out a number of key issues related to the play. These include themes such as Shakespeare's depiction of women in Othello, jealousy as a central force and – of course – the topical and perennial question of race. Contributors shine a light on how best to ready your students for the daunting challenge of Shakespeare's language at LC level and how to approach race in the play so that discussions are both informed and fruitful. In a final strand of our Shakespeare offering, teachers

zoom in on key scenes and characters, illuminating the text through their close attention to detail.

How do you teach it at Leaving Certificate level?: this is the question animating a lively roundtable debate on poets and poetry. A rich and varied discussion, grounded in classroom experience and littered with hints and tips, arrives at a reassuring conclusion: there are multiple ways to get it right. Contributors treat us to a walk-through of their particular approach to 'covering' a poet, often in granular detail and with reference to specific resources or methods. You may find particularly useful an exploration of how to build students' capacity in developing and articulating personal response.

If, like me, you have at times found yourself befuddled or wrongfooted by the Comparative Study, you'll find much of use in the INOTE podcast too. A spirited discussion on the art of text selection – how loudly is student voice heard in your classroom on this issue? – is complemented by an exploration of each of the modes of comparison. Be warned: you may never look at Literary Genre the same way again ...

Our hope in creating the podcast has been to seek a balance between exploring generally applicable techniques and approaches and text-specific content. To this latter end, a series of the podcasts will be titled A Closer Look and focus-in on pivotal scenes and moments from the Comparative Study texts. Stroll onto the set of Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* or Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* and have

your attention drawn to the directors' art in canny commentaries on camera angle, scriptwriting, image-making and so much more. In their deep dive into specific scenes, these podcasts are useful both for their content and the way in which they model an approach to the Comparative Study more broadly. In time, cardinal scenes and crunch moments in prescribed novels and plays will also find the limelight in A Closer Look.

As indicated by the sheer volume of podcasts available now – 850,000 active podcasts, Google tells me – the form is both accessible and hugely popular. With this in mind, INOTE is interested in hearing from you regarding the future of our offering. Could you contribute your expertise on a particular area of the curriculum – perhaps on a topic with which you are at ease, an area in which you know you have a knack? All could be recorded from the comfort of your home or school (via Zoom etc.) and produced to an eminently listenable standard. We can't promise money: how about glory and audio immortality? Likewise, if there is a topic you would like to see addressed on the INOTE podcast, do let us know. We're listening, too.

I want to thank our podcast contributors to date: they have shown great generosity of spirit and have given freely of their time and professional expertise. I hope that you will find the INOTE podcast as informative and entertaining in the listening as we did in the making.

Conor Farnan