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EDITORIAL

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It is already the end of first semester and as always, I am left wondering just where does the year go? It has been an action-packed six months for English teaching in Queensland, with the trial of the external senior assessment, new draft senior syllabuses, as well as a successful range of ETAQ professional development activities including two Saturday seminars and the Beginning Teachers' Day.

Please make a note in your calendars of this year's state conference, being held once again at Lourdes Hill College in Brisbane on Saturday 13 August. The conference theme is *Seeing the World Anew: English Teaching and Learning in Changing Times*.

Fifty years ago a report from the Dartmouth Conference argued that English teachers "should have more opportunities to enjoy and refresh themselves in their subject, using language in operation for all its central purposes - in imaginative drama, writing and speech, as well as the response to literature." The critical, creative and collective work of English teaching has important historical and contemporary contexts. At the same time, the ever-shifting landscape of curriculum and pedagogy means that our profession needs to constantly refresh itself in order to see the world anew.

We are being joined by Professor Wayne Sawyer from Western Sydney University and Professor Gary Crew from Sunshine Coast University, as well as a jam-packed program of interactive workshops. Please do join us for what promises

to be another cracking day of professional learning and sharing with English teachers from across the state.

On the matter of professional learning and sharing, it is my delight to bring this issue of *Words'Worth* to you. We have a number of winning entries from the 2015 Literary Competition, which are entertaining and demonstrate some of the excellence and creativity of young Queenslanders. Garry Collins provides some useful suggestions for working with Robert Browning's poem, *My Last Duchess*, while Mark Keidge shares insights on his professional learning and English teaching. Annette Curnow gets into the thick of metalanguage, student writing and the Australian Curriculum: English, while Patsy Norton, Roseanne Cavallaro, Elizabeth Burrige, and Steve Andrew share some tips for engaging reluctant readers through teacher collaboration. We also have ETAQ's response to the draft senior secondary syllabuses, and a piece from yours truly on the English teacher as modern Prometheus.

With thanks to both Deb Peden and Trish Purcell, who do much of the hard work in the editorial process, I hope that you find as much pleasure in reading this issue as what we had in bringing it together.

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SENIOR SYLLABUSES DRAFT I: ENGLISH, ESSENTIAL ENGLISH, LITERATURE, ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

ETAQ response, May 2016

Preamble

The QCAA's process of developing the suite of English syllabuses is gambling apace as syllabuses are written, feedback is sought on them and they are rewritten throughout this year, ready for implementation in 2018. ETAQ members were invited to respond to important aspects of the syllabus in May. Many thanks are due to the many members who shared their wisdom and experience to inform this important process.

Another important aspect of this process is to understand the relative status of each syllabus as currently designed, English, Essential English, English as an Additional Language and Literature. All have the same status. Students are meant to choose one of these English subjects. English Extension remains as an extra English subject which can be added in Year 12 only. Essential English is meant to fill the role currently played by English Communication. Literature is a new subject for Queensland schools and is strongly based on ACARA's Literature subject.

Below is the collation of those responses which has been forwarded to the QCAA for consideration.

Introduction

The English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ) has provision for both individual and school corporate membership and a conservative estimate of membership coverage extends to at least 2500 teachers. It has a reach across the state and across schooling sectors and has a history of strong advocacy for English teachers.

The comments below provide reflection on aspects of the draft senior syllabus for English that we believe would benefit from revision.

Those aspects which meet their purpose suitably have not been commented upon.

ETAQ commissioned a survey of members to gather comments on the first draft of the surveys in the English suite of syllabuses, as well as elements of assessment for the next stage of syllabus writing. Survey results, as well as deliberations of the ETAQ management committee, are the basis of our comments below.

Rationale

We perceive that the different 'flavours' of these courses seem to be characterised by the following inclusions in the course rationales:

- *English*: "The subject English is a study of literature, media and language which provides students with opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills through interpretation, analysis and creation of varied literary and non-literary texts"
- *Essential English*: "The subject Essential English develops and refines students' language, literature and literacy skills which enable them to interact confidently and effectively with others in everyday, community, social and applied learning contexts"
- *Literature*: "The subject Literature focuses on the study of literary texts, developing students as independent, innovative and creative learners and thinkers who appreciate the aesthetic use of language, analyse perspectives and evidence, and challenge ideas and interpretations through the analysis and creation of varied literary texts"
- *English as an Additional Language (EAL)*: "The subject English as an Additional

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Language is designed to develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in Standard Australian English (SAE), and provides students with opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills through interpretation, analysis and creation of varied literary, non-literary and academic texts"

The distinctions between the different English subjects seem minimal to members. Although 'literature' (or 'literary texts') is signalled as content for all of these courses, the points of difference between the courses is not clearly signalled. For example, 'media' texts are only explicitly signalled for the *English* course, and the rationale for excluding these in *Essential English* and *EAL* is unclear.

The term 'non-literary' texts is used throughout the draft documents as a catch-all for everything that isn't literature, but the phrase "a range of literary and non-literary texts" does not provide sufficient definition for teachers to make decisions about course content. This is particularly a concern for teachers working in small or remote schools who rely on these documents to provide clear guidance for local decision making.

Recommendation 1: *That the language of the rationale sections include clearer direction about the points of difference in **content/focus** (i.e. literature, media, personal, or community/workplace texts) and **difficulty** (e.g. perhaps language 'competence' for *Essential English* and *EAL* vs 'mastery' in *English* and *Literature*).*

Conceptual frameworks

There is a clear indication that Queensland will continue to draw on the context-text model of language that underpins the Australian Curriculum and has informed previous curriculum in Queensland, and this is welcomed by members. The addition of a diagram representing this model to this section of the syllabus would further add to the clarity of this conceptual framework for teachers (e.g. Figure 1).

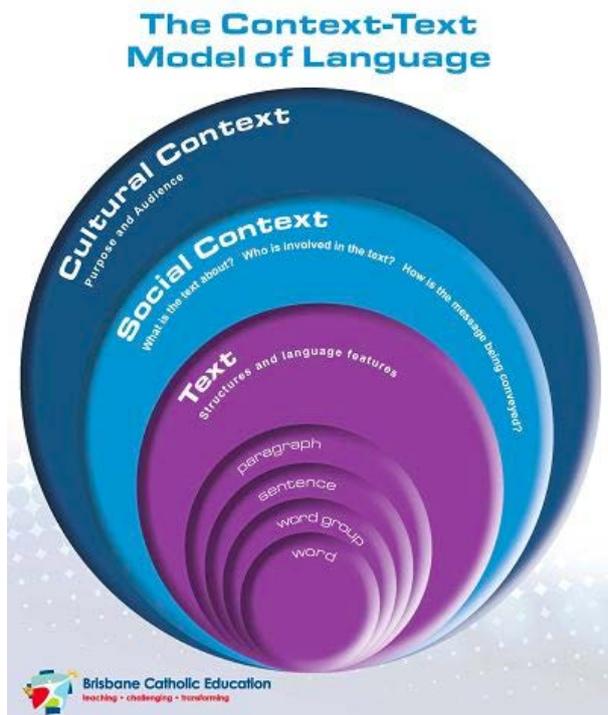


Figure 1: Example diagram illustrating the context-text model of language

This section should also be extended to provide a clear direction about the valuing of various language modes (reading/writing, speaking/listening, viewing/designing) and mediums of production (print, live, digital).

With the introduction of a *Literature* course, it would also be prudent to indicate how the meta-genre of 'literature' is conceptualised. The 2010 syllabus contrasts 'literary' with 'non-literary' texts, but this binary is conceptually insufficient. We have an opportunity with this new syllabus to indicate the properties of literary texts (e.g. they represent imaginative worlds; they draw heavily on aesthetic features), along with other meta-genres (e.g. 'media' or 'public' texts; 'community' or 'personal' texts).

It is also important that the study of literary texts is valued as vital content in **all** English courses, not just in the *Literature* course. Although this can be gleaned from very close reading of the syllabuses side-by-side, inclusion of comments on this in the conceptual framework for all syllabuses will provide clarity on this matter.

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Recommendation 2: That the conceptual framework section includes the diagram illustrating the context-text model of language.

Recommendation 3: That phrasing throughout the syllabus more accurately reflects the context-text model (e.g. the phrase in the introductory paragraph would be more accurately phrased as ‘language, text and context (purpose and audience).’)

Recommendation 4: That the conceptual framework contain further information to avoid confusion throughout the syllabus between the concepts of **language modes** (i.e. reading/writing, speaking/listening, viewing/designing), **production mediums** (e.g. broadly classified as print, live, or digital), and **genre** (e.g. broadly classified as literature, media, personal, and community/workplace texts).

Syllabus: objectives

Members consistently express a desire for syllabus objectives to be presented in a numbered list rather than a bullet-point list. Referring to objectives from a bullet point list is cumbersome and constitutes a real barrier to professional discussion (i.e. “objective 8” is a far clearer reference than “fourth bullet point from the bottom”). A numbered list will also enable easier representation of the objectives in work plans and other professional documentation.

We note that the syllabus objectives for four of the courses (*English*, *Literature*, *EAL*, and *Essential English*) are identical, with different objectives having been set for *Extension English*. Although the rationale for having identical objectives for *English* and *Literature* can be gleaned (i.e. it indicates that these two courses are intended to be of similar depth and difficulty), it seems that writing different objectives for *Essential English*, and perhaps for *EAL* (depending on how it is being pitched) would be another way of representing points of difference between the various courses.

Recommendation 5: That the syllabus objectives be presented in a numbered list.

Recommendation 6: That courses of equal depth and difficulty (*English*, *Literature*, and possibly *EAL*) continue to be developed with identical objectives, but that the **lower difficulty** of at least *Essential English* be reflected in different objectives, as has been provided to reflect the **more difficult** level of *Extension English*.

Syllabus: content of units

Unit objectives:

The replication of ALL syllabus objectives for each unit makes the syllabus element of ‘unit objectives’ redundant. It would be clearer to indicate at the outset of the syllabus that all objectives should be worked toward in every unit.

Unit content:

Some members commented that the *Literature* course has the potential to be a great subject, but that in contrast the syllabus for *English* does not contain enough detail to allow teachers to evaluate the direction being taken.

Members also commented on the lack of guidance regarding the distinction between the four units in *English*. Although the progression from a focus on local (unit 1), to national (unit 2), to global (unit 3), to historical (unit 4) contexts is apparent, this progression does not reflect a logical development of knowledge and skills in *English* from year 11 through to year 12, based on the conceptual framework.

An alternative model for unit content could be:

- Unit 1: Texts in the context of situation
- Unit 2: Texts in the context of culture
- Unit 3: Representations of people, time and place
- Unit 4: Making personal and social meanings

This is just one example to demonstrate how an alternative approach to content might develop fundamental skills in textual study during year 11 for application to increasingly difficult studies of representation and meaning making in year 12.

Recommendation 7: That ‘unit objectives’ be removed as they are redundant, OR the

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replication of every 'syllabus objective' in each unit reconsidered to make clear to users any distinctions between the units.

Recommendation 8: *That the four units in English be given titles that reflect their content, as has been provided in the Literature syllabus.*

Recommendation 9: *That the focus of the four units in English be reconsidered to provide a sequence of learning that more appropriately guides the development of students' knowledge and skills.*

Text selection

The majority of members expressed the strong view that they valued the choice of texts that they currently have. Many recognised a need to have a prescribed list of texts to select from for the external assessment, acknowledging that this is likely to be an analytical exposition in response to literature. For the majority, there was a preference for indicative rather than 'set' texts for the other units.

Members also showed concern that, with four assessment pieces, there is the potential that critical English texts such as poetry may possibly be not included, an outcome which would be of concern. At present, there is little to no guidance to schools as to which text types are compulsory and which are recommended.

One fear is that students might study English throughout years 11 and 12 without, for example, exploring poetry or reading a complete novel – the syllabuses in their current draft contain no requirements that prevent this. Another fear is that too much prescription – such as setting texts for every unit – would provide too little flexibility to respond to student interests and needs.

Recommendation 10: *That explicit requirements for the study of a range of texts (including poetry) are required to ensure balanced coverage (akin to the current 2010 syllabus for English).*

Recommendation 11: *That core texts be set for the unit that aligns with the external assessment, but not for the units that are internally assessed.*

External assessment

A strong majority of members have expressed a preference for the external assessment piece for *English* and *Literature* to be an analytical exposition in response to literature. Factors commented upon included suggestions that an essay is a text type that is more generic and easier/fairer for marking, as well as easiest to prepare for. Some suggested that the analytical exposition could be in response to other texts, such as media texts, poetry, film or other texts.

Opinion was quite evenly split between the options of assignment and short answer exam for the external assessment for *Essential English*. However the indication of these tasks as preferable to an analytical exposition under exam conditions reflects the notion that *Essential English* is a course designed around text and language in "everyday, community, social and applied learning contexts" (from the *Essential English* rationale).

Opinion was also somewhat split as to the preferred assessment mode for *English as an Additional Language*. The largest response (near majority) expressed a preference for a short answer exam. Other opinion was split between essay in response to literature, public text and 'other'. Many commented on the perception that EAL students would not have the capacity to manage more than a short answer exam.

Recommendation 12: *That external assessment items reflect the nature of each of the subjects and vary according to the relative strengths of the various cohorts.*

Internal Assessment

Members expressed a desire to have as much flexibility as possible for the internal assessments in terms of genre and content. They strongly valued the sort of choice inherent in the current suite of English syllabuses and wished to keep that flexibility.

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There is concern that the reduced number of assessment items will prevent the full range of language modes to be adequately assessed in year 11 and year 12. Students ideally should demonstrate their skills in writing, speaking, and multimodal designing in each year level and the construction of internal assessment should enable this.

Recommendation 13: *That internal assessment maintain a level of choice of genre and content combinations.*

Recommendation 14: *That internal assessment tasks enable teachers to evaluate students' development in writing, speaking and multimodal designing in both year 11 and year 12.*

Time Frame

Members expressed deep concerns about the fast pace of this development process, given the scope and significance of the proposed changes. The expectation that teachers would not be able to review all five draft syllabuses (for *English*, *Literature*, *EAL*, *Essential English*, and *Extension English*) and provide meaningful feedback in the consultation timeframe was seen as unreasonable. Information about the number of drafts planned, and a timeline for further consultation was sought.

Recommendation 15: *That a clear timeline for further syllabus drafts and consultation periods be provided.*

General feedback

Members expressed a strong desire for the flexibility that they have experienced with the previous suite of English syllabuses. They strongly valued the capacity to design programs which took account of their local communities/context. They also strongly valued the capacity to choose their own texts.

A number of members also expressed a desire for sufficient specificity to allow those in more isolated situations to be able to understand the requirements of a quality program. Some members requested sample programs to give sufficient guidance to schools.

Some members questioned the reasoning behind retaining *Extension English* given the introduction of the *Literature* course. There has been insufficient time in this round of consultation to critically compare the *Literature* and *Extension English* syllabuses and provide feedback on how the study of literature has been articulated in them both. One member articulated a significant problem that will be faced with the introduction with the *Literature* course, in that "small schools already struggle to provide a range of subject choices and this only complicates things further".

Recommendation 16: *That assessment is designed to avoid narrowing the combination of content, genre and mode, allowing as much flexibility as possible for schools to respond to the needs of their students and communities.*



LEARNING JOURNAL: SENIOR PHASE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

Mark Keidge
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1. *How do we preserve in our students a love of literature (aesthetics), imagination, personal responses and creativity whilst treating texts as cultural artefacts to be deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed (critical pedagogy)?*

I think we gain more than we lose by acknowledging that these are two very different approaches to literary texts. The motives and methodologies of the critic who treats the text as a “cultural artefact” are far removed from the reflections of the enthusiastic reader.

Robin Peel asserts that “many English teachers, who themselves were excited by personal response and creative writing approaches at school, are now equally excited by the possibilities of critical literary approaches precisely because they offer a more rigorous and interesting critique of the self, the personal, of subjectivity” (2009, p.32). “More rigorous and interesting”: how can we be certain of that? What do the terms mean in this context? Peel doesn’t delve into either of these questions, but goes on to write that there is a “false binary” between analysis and creativity (2009, p.32). Just a few paragraphs later, however, Peel acknowledges that Cultural Studies fails to include “personal response, pleasure and enjoyment” (2009, p.33). The contradiction remains unexamined in the ensuing praise for Cultural Studies’ general inclusiveness.

It’s this kind of writing that compels me to point out that the critical practices we know as Cultural Studies and Deconstruction are themselves constructions. They are not natural, inevitable, immutable, unerring, incontrovertible discoveries and innovations. They constitute a number of strategies for placing texts – and

elements of texts – in particular academic contexts. Moreover, critics of literary theory have noted that theorists are reluctant to acknowledge the *constructedness* of their own cherished ideas (Fromm 2005, p.457). This slipperiness helps create awkward assumptions. Too often educators expect students to adopt the practices and priorities prized by our critical pedagogy as a natural development in their English studies. We can begin to address the problem here by recognising that critical pedagogy and its strategies are impositions. (Curiously, Peel finds that Cultural Studies is different from other approaches because it doesn’t “impose one culture on top of another” [2009, p.35]. No explanation is offered. The values of Cultural Studies appear beyond not only reproach, but also analysis.) These critical practices ensure that students will concentrate on certain specific values. As such, they have a tenuous relationship to students’ creative work and appreciation of literary art. A candid assessment of the situation would allow us to state, simply and concisely, that students will be obligated to learn the rhetorical manoeuvres of deconstruction, transformation and reconstruction. They are skills to be demonstrated, not a mystical enlightenment to be revered.

Imaginative literature has always sought to make its readers consider the world from new vantages. Jonathan Swift didn’t write *Gulliver’s Travels* to assure his readers that their society was sane and equitable. Samuel Richardson didn’t write *Clarissa* to inform his readers that women were doing just fine in mid-eighteenth century England. Once Cultural Studies (or Deconstruction or any other critical practice)

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claims the distinction of ensuring that readers will be forced to comprehend literary texts in a new, sceptical, socially just, broad-minded way, it reverts to its own limited conception of literary history. Books, movies, plays and poems always refer their audiences to the world beyond the text, and ask those audiences to make judgments, exercise compassion, think critically. (Critics from humanist and historicist traditions are also capable of referring to social issues.) Deconstructionist and Cultural Studies criticism has to downplay these facts in order to emphasise its own efforts to bring “new” contexts and insights to the interpretation of texts.

Once we recognise that this awkward business is a process designed to produce a desired result (e.g. students comment on the sexism, Eurocentrism, or capitalism endorsed by the text), the difficulty is essentially resolved. Demystification is the vital strategy: current critical pedagogy compels students to acquire a skill-set in which texts are cultural artefacts (to be deconstructed and reconstructed); the love of literature is a different thing. The Maths department does not need crisis-counselling just because it must teach surds and geometry in the same building.

2. Who has the most to lose from the promotion of poststructural principles and approaches for reading texts in English classrooms?

Dissenting students and faculty probably lose the most through the promotion of poststructural principles and approaches. The very idea that one set of values should be established as the proof of intellectual seriousness and integrity carries with it an ultimatum: join in or suffer the consequences. Even poststructural critical theorists seem to realise this posture needs to be justified:

While critical literacy is not a panacea that will cure all social ills if regular doses are spooned into students, it may also [*sic*] bring about some shifts of attitude and behaviour in ourselves and our students, and our worlds. We may not be able to guarantee

these, but we can at least practise forms of language and literacy in the service of a more just world. We can aspire to an ideal of a socially just society, even if it remains just that, an ideal (Morgan 2009, p.92).

The most troubling thing is the want of perspective. How could any theory, in any field, possibly warrant these claims? It leaves no place for honourable dissent, since, by its logic, such disagreement would be an advancement or defence of injustice. It discourages examination of its intentions and methodology, since its idealism needs no such scrutiny. It assumes a shared (essentialist) view of the correct purposes for English studies, and a similarly shared view of the aims, efficacy and credibility of poststructuralist criticism. This is the heart of the problem: poststructuralism is often too preoccupied with its own radicalism, innovation, and nous to be able to appreciate the merits of counterclaims and objections.

Whether or not it is right that students should be compelled to accept the reasoning of poststructuralists is not a matter that I can determine. But the promotion of a body of theory that actively repudiates challenges to its legitimacy must be reckoned somewhat disconcerting. Moreover, the claims that poststructuralism makes for itself ought to be examined. Misson declares that Derrida's poststructuralism has “given us a great deal of respect for the multiplicity and shiftiness of language” (2009a, p.70). Furthermore, Barthes's contributions have enabled us to read differently: “The text is no longer tied down by authorial intention or even the meaning possible to the author” (Misson 2009a, p.71). Again, the scale of the generalisation is astonishing. It is hard to imagine how anybody could believe that criticism and commentary prior to poststructuralism did not recognise ambiguities, slippery terminology, deliberate wordplay, accidental felicities and confusions.

But what's the harm? Misson claims that deconstruction “is the analytical process by

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which the ideology of a text is shown not to be a natural reflection of the world, but a product of certain textual strategies that privilege a particular viewpoint” (2009a, p.71). If deconstruction can really do that, then it must always unmask deception and manipulation. If that is true, who would have the audacity to decide which texts to analyse? Such a decision would be a direct, politically motivated intervention in the students’ lives, an unambiguous attempt to force a favoured ideological conviction (e.g. Austen supports cultural hegemony) on adolescent learners. Just as important would be the unexamined decision to make certain texts exempt from scrutiny. What teacher would ask a class to read indigenous/queer/feminist texts “against the grain” and expose their complacencies, false binaries and misrepresentations?

I know the usual objection: minority groups don’t need to have their motives examined in the same way that dominant cultures do. But if that is the case, then *that* statement is the central belief of high school poststructuralist criticism. All the talk of innovative practice becomes mere window-dressing. The entire business is determined by the belief that dominant cultures are shifty, thuggish liars and smaller cultures are plucky, resourceful truth-tellers. However, that sort of statement demands verification. Are high school students and faculty welcome to start pulling at that thread? I tend to doubt it. At the heart of poststructuralism there remains an unspoken governing principle: this far and no further. Ideological agenda are exposed so long as the exposure gratifies the critic’s expectations. There is some imagined duty to “throw into doubt such a lot of the beliefs that people live by” (Misson 2009a, p.75). But sites of analysis are chosen – and the choice *cannot* be neutral.

I am not suggesting that the high school English classroom is the place to discuss Louis Althusser’s murder of his wife, Paul de Man’s youthful flirtation with fascism, Jacques Lacan’s medical ethics or any of the other scandals that have hurt poststructuralism’s credibility

in the last 50 years. A hatchet job is not required. We might, however, mitigate the damage to genuinely independent students by letting them see the limits and prejudices of poststructuralism, allowing them to discuss the evasions and hyperbole that feature in so much critical theory.

3. How do we strike a balance between ‘the canon’ and popular cultural texts in our classrooms?

The great virtue of the canonical text is that it can take a hit. *The Scarlet Letter* is not diminished by the condemnation of students who find it boring. More than that, canonical texts allow us to feel that our time has not been wasted. Reading a Dickens short story, or a Sylvia Plath poem, or a Harper Lee novel requires literary literacy, concentration and discipline, all of which have a demonstrable value in life. For popular texts to merit a place in the English classroom, I believe they must be able to sustain scrutiny and reward the student who puts in the time to study their structure and content.

Ray Misson offers the commonplace justification for popular culture in the classroom: students should be able to “read intelligently the central texts of their culture” and that this is necessary because of the texts’ potential power (2009b, p.331). He presents this argument as a defiance of a cultural-heritage brigade determined to extol Shakespeare and exclude everybody else. I know that politicians occasionally take a swing at the non-traditional content of the English syllabus, but I can’t think of a single old-fashioned critic who doesn’t write about some element of popular culture. (Monty Python, spaghetti westerns, Agatha Christie, and *The Gilmore Girls* all have academic admirers in the English faculty.)

Perhaps the most curious part of Misson’s argument is the absence of any defence of popular texts for their own cognitive or aesthetic qualities. The thought that students might be genuinely enlightened or inspired by

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popular texts does not factor in the conversation. Misson even rationalises removing questions of artistic value from the enquiry (2009b, p.334). (Likewise, when Russell and Beavis find conventional, historically-informed literacy in students' analysis of videogames, it seems to be a bit of a bonus, even a surprise [2012, p.30].) Why not begin with the best of contemporary culture? Peter Craven comes close to this point in his very guarded support for John Howard's critique of modern English syllabi: "Apart from anything else, a belief in literary value is the thing that would allow our educators, in constructing syllabuses, to give due weight to the most dynamic writing of recent years" (2006). The same goes for other media too.

In truth, nobody can be certain how to strike a balance between a literary canon and popular texts. My suggestion is that we might begin by considering the aesthetic and cognitive merits of well-made television and compelling genre fiction. Oddly enough, it's the advocates for popular texts who seem to undervalue them, focussing on television programs merely to demonstrate how they embody "our current social and cultural priorities and beliefs" (Misson 2009b, p.332). Not surprisingly, this approach leaves us mulling over the finer points of reality television formatting (Misson 2009b, pp.334-334.) Why should we end up there? Perhaps we should have enough respect for popular culture to take the best of it into the classroom, analysing productions that can earn and hold their places in the syllabus through their capacity to engage students' intellects.

4. As English teachers, how do we ensure that our own value systems/beliefs are not reified? How do we ensure that the beliefs and values of our students are treated respectfully - even if we disagree with them?

Structured as it is around politically charged notions of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, Senior English has taken upon itself the responsibility of scrutinising (even grading) students' responses to tasks which have inherent

ideological values. Basic fairness, however, requires that some effort is made to show an interest in divergent opinions.

As I have indicated above, a combination of candour and humility represents our best hope. There's no reason why students shouldn't know they are engaged in projects designed with a purpose, a motive and a set of ideological preoccupations. When we make it clear that we cannot promise vital, unquestionable insights and admit the processes of the English classroom lead us to a few reasonably reliable ideas, we allow students to see the subject for what it is: a part of the school curriculum, not a source of all-encompassing truths. This ought to go some way towards avoiding bitter rifts and overwrought quarrels.

Doecke and McClenaghan (2009) point out that the curriculum itself seeks to encode a respect for the experiences and opinions of students (p.128). Though Doecke and McClenaghan concentrate on the students' pre-existing literacies, I think their remarks may be applicable here too. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of popular texts and multimodal presentations gives students a few opportunities to exploit their own competencies and enthusiasms in fields where some teachers may be at a disadvantage. The content of the English curriculum may intersect with the obsessions of popular culture and the students' social world, but they are not exactly the same thing – rather, the intersection offers us a chance to influence students' social consciousness (and vocabulary and curiosity) and offers students the chance to draw on "natural" extra-curricular skills and knowledge in the classroom (Doecke & McClenaghan 2009, p.129). But in all of this, Doecke and McClenaghan make it clear, subtly but insistently, that the students' experience cannot really ever be entirely familiar to the teacher (2009, pp.128-130). Ultimately, it must be respected as something different from the world we know as teachers.

This insight, I believe, ought to be applied to

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our understanding of students' opinions. An adolescent's convictions may well be soppy or provocative or callous or naïve, but that is hardly surprising. High school students have a certain right to offer up perverse opinions, so long as they are not deliberately offensive bigotry. Factual analysis may be necessary to halt misinformed prejudice, but otherwise we ought to recognise that tolerating other viewpoints is actually part of the teacher's job. Indeed, if the teacher's views are adopted by the entire class, something has gone wrong. The students are supposed to be learning to articulate how they make sense of their world; not racing to adopt the teacher's world-view as their own.

5. *Is it possible to be objective when assessing students' creative responses in English?*

Objectivity in the assessment of creative work is not matter to be taken lightly. A teacher who offered purely instinctual responses to students' short stories and poetry would be highly irresponsible. On the other hand, we must have some respect for the potentially indefinable virtues of good writing. Can we always explain why a poem is effective? Does anybody really want to define wit, or beauty, or innovation?

So, what kind of sensible measures can we turn to when faced with directing and assessing creative work? First, we may take comfort in the knowledge that some aspects of writing can be appraised objectively. Does the student use figurative language competently? Is there evidence of a growing vocabulary? Did the student turn in a screenplay when he was asked for a poem? Second, there will always be some indication whether the students have engaged with the material covered in class. Third, the rubric of the task sheet and the task itself should provide students with a clear concept of what is required. It may be necessary, on occasions, to remind students that they do not need to pour out their very souls in the form of a short story. We will assess their work, not their innermost beings.

Gannon describes a variety of strategies for structuring creative work in the classroom, which may be relevant to the question of assessment (2009, pp.226-227). Specifically, we may begin with the simple fact that creative work is subjective, not directionless. Audiences, purposes, modes and mediums should be analysed by teachers and students working together in the classroom (Gannon 2009, p.227). Immediately, we are empowered to provide feedback and assess performances by establishing what the project is (and what it is not). Many elements of creative writing can be explicitly identified as areas of concern, and students can be told to ensure that they remember, say, to resolve the central conflict of their stories, or to use alliteration and metaphor in their poems, or to employ emotionally manipulative camera angles in their short films.

Perfect objectivity is not possible, but there are many ways to make certain that students are not cheated out of the chance to demonstrate a diligent engagement with a creative task. Sincere attempts to develop new competencies can be rewarded. Likewise, we can probably discern the work of a student who has taken the trouble to focus on narrative structure, or generic convention. Ultimately, the role of the teacher may be our best guide in these matters: we are not judging a short story contest, but grading the work of students who have been asked to complete a defined task.

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THE ENGLISH TEACHER, THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

Stewart Riddle
University of Southern Queensland

The ‘inspirational teacher’ is a classic protagonist in films such as *Dead Poets Society*, *Mr Holland’s Opus*, *Dangerous Minds*, and my own personal favourite, *School of Rock*.

We laugh and we cry while watching the teachers and their young charges deal with the vagaries of life both inside and outside the classroom walls.

We cheer as the teacher perseveres with the troubled student and finally makes the all-important breakthrough.

The credits roll, and then we go back to reading negative pieces in the press decrying the state of education – falling standards, falling results, not teaching the basics and at the same time not teaching kids how to prepare for jobs that don’t yet exist.

We get distracted by the public debate and my point is that in real life, we seem largely unwilling or unable to acknowledge that teachers do so much more than teach students things that are written in curriculum documents, assessed through assignments and examinations, and then reported back to parents every six months. The labour of teaching goes well beyond what can be measured.

This brings me to my reason for writing this piece – I want to share a story about a real English teacher, in a real school in Queensland.

Earlier this year, Graham Potts had his debut novel, *No Free Man*, published. Dedicating the book to his High School English teacher, Graham wrote:

To John Acutt: to me you are a Promethean figure, a great teacher who opened up a world of words and ideas. Dedicating this book to you is the least I can do – you started this, after all.

At the book launch, Graham again publicly acknowledged the influence of John’s support and guidance as a teacher, and toasted his contribution. A story in *The Courier Mail* following the launch highlighted the important role that an English teacher played in his decision to pursue writing.

I asked John how he felt about having a book dedicated to him, and he told me:

The significance of these gestures was not lost on me. He genuinely believed, and publicly acknowledged, that his teacher had made an impact on his life. It’s not something that we hear very often from our students, and when it happens, it reinforces the significance of the job that we do.

Every day, every teacher, has opportunities to make an impact on a student’s life. When I encouraged Graham Potts to enter a short story competition, and showed faith in him, I helped unlock the potential he had to help him find the determination and confidence to undertake the arduous journey of writing, and having published, his own novel.

When I asked John if he would be happy for me to share the story with *Words’Worth* readers, he was a little concerned that it might come across as wanton skiting.

I disagree.

In an email to John in late 2015, Graham wrote the following:

I graduated from Rosewood State High School in 2001 and, while my memories of school are a little faded, I do remember that you were my English teacher – in fact, I don’t think I could forget it. You were a teacher that recognised

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Author, Graham Potts, at a recent visit to Ipswich Grammar School, with John Acutt, the Head of Department: English and Languages.

that I had a talent for writing and encouraged me to do more of it.

I've come a long way since the first seeds were planted (arguably, the first seed was planted in primary school, but saplings need care before they can become trees). And, now, I'm sending you this e-mail to share the good news: I'm about to become one of Australia's newest published authors.

Thank you for all of your encouragement in those formative years. Your insistence and dedication were important. I am especially grateful to you for helping me enter in a writing competition (Somerset College Novella Writing, I think). Believe it or not, some of the early ideas from that manuscript survived and are in the final draft.

Without your early assistance, I'm not sure I would've made it this far, and I am very grateful for that.

It's been a long journey, and I still have many more stories to tell before I'm done, but thanks for the education – I wouldn't stand a chance without it.

And here's the thing. I know that Graham isn't making any of this up, because John was also my English teacher at Rosewood State High in 1995, and is in no small part responsible for me wanting to become an English teacher.

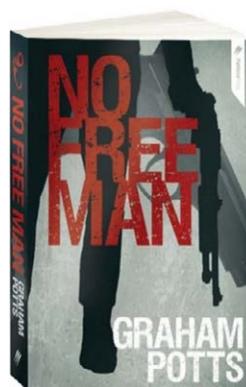
I now teach future English teachers at the University of Southern Queensland and I

constantly remind them that our work involves much more than delivering curriculum and assessment, and the thousand administrative tasks that teachers are expected to undertake. Our work is about connecting young learners to the love of the word, and to engaging them with rich texts and language experiences that meaningfully connect to their lives. If just one of my graduates goes on to have the impact on one of their students that John has with Graham, it is all worth it.

In my correspondence with John while preparing this piece, he wrote to me:

During this whole adventure, as a teacher, I have felt incredibly humbled by the generosity of Graham. He didn't need to give anybody, other than himself, any credit at all. Writing is a long and lonely process, and for the most part you travel it alone. So, for him to acknowledge me in the way he has, and for sharing his success, speaks very highly of his humility.

He has been busy since the publication with many book signings and writing workshops from Sydney to Darwin. He also made his debut at the Sydney Writers' Festival on the 20 May this year. On the day before he was kind enough to come to Ipswich Grammar School and run two creative writing sessions with Year 11 and 12 students. Maybe he planted a seed in someone's mind on that day.



Graham claims his writing effort in the competition he first entered was no great success but the experience ignited a slow burning ambition, the best sort, that didn't extinguish. And an English teacher helped to light the flame.

Graham's book, *No Free Man*, is available from Pantera Press.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, it is "an action-packed espionage thriller in the mould of Robert Ludlum or Lee Child...taut and suspenseful and skilfully plotted...there's no question Potts is the real thing."



CAPITALISING ON CURIOSITY WITH THE DUCHESS

Some suggestions for teaching Robert Browning's poem *My Last Duchess*. Part I

Garry Collins

This article is the first of several based on a workshop presentation initially prepared for the AATE/ALEA joint national conference held in Canberra in July 2015 and then given a try-out at ETAQ's seminar entitled "Getting reading right" held at Corinda State High School in March of that year. The national conference theme was "Capitalising on curiosity: Nurturing inquiring minds".

The abstract for the session is shown below.

Workshop session abstract

This workshop will outline some activities for teaching Robert Browning's poem *My Last Duchess* in secondary school English classrooms. It will be suggested that, with this poem, students should be encouraged to take on the role of literary sleuths or text detectives, capitalising on their curiosity to make deductions from the incomplete evidence available in the text and to determine if a crime has been committed. Integration of the Language, Literature and Literacy strands of the F-10 Australian English Curriculum will be modelled, in particular, the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling in context. With minimal adaptation, the proposed activities could be suitable for Years 10, 11 or 12.

The poem

Below is Browning's poem. The lines are not normally numbered as they are here but this is done for ease of reference.

Ferrara

1. That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
2. Looking as if she were alive. I call
3. That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
4. Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5. Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
6. "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
7. Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
8. The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
9. But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10. The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
11. And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
12. How such a glance came there; so, not the first
13. Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
14. Her husband's presence only, called that spot
15. Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
16. Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
17. Over my Lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
18. Must never hope to reproduce the faint
19. Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
20. Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
21. For calling up that spot of joy. She had
22. A heart -- how shall I say? -- too soon made glad,
23. Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
24. She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
25. Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
26. The dropping of the daylight in the West,
27. The bough of cherries some officious fool

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28. Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
29. She rode with round the terrace -- all and each
30. Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
31. Or blush, at least. She thanked men, -- good! but thanked
32. Somehow -- I know not how -- as if she ranked
33. My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
34. With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
35. This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
36. In speech -- (which I have not) -- to make your will
37. Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
38. Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
39. Or there exceed the mark" -- and if she let
40. Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
41. Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
42. - -E'en then would be some stooping, and I choose
43. Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
44. Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
45. Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
46. Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
47. As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
48. The company below, then. I repeat,
49. The Count your master's known munificence
50. Is ample warrant that no just pretence
51. Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
52. Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
53. At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
54. Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

55. Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
56. Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Some preliminary information

Making a link with the national conference theme, it was proposed to workshop attendees that with this poem, students need to take on the role of literary sleuths (text detectives), *capitalising on their curiosity* to make deductions (i.e. infer) from the incomplete evidence available to them. There might even be a crime involved.

Pre-reading activities

With this poem I suggest that there is value in considering several extracts, formatted as prose, before students are presented with the whole text. This article is concerned with just two of them. The extracts could be presented as snippets of overheard talk.

The first extract, consisting of the first four lines and most of the fifth, is shown immediately below.

Poem extract I

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, looking as if she were alive. I call that piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands worked busily a day, and there she stands. Will't please you sit and look at her?

The word duchess

A short **cloze comprehension task** could be done with a text like this brief internet-gleaned one about the current Duchess of Cambridge.

Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge

Kate Middleton _____ Britain's Prince William on April 29, 2011 and is now _____ as the Duchess of Cambridge. She was known as Kate Middleton _____ she met the future king while both were _____ art history at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

(From: <http://www.who2.com/bio/kate-middleton>)

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A related question here would be:

- If Kate Middleton is the Duchess of Cambridge, what other title would Prince William, her husband, have?

The relevant entry from the Macquarie Dictionary is:

duchess

noun 1. the wife or widow of a duke.

2. (formerly) a woman who held in her own right the sovereignty or titles of a duchy.

3. *Colloquial* a woman of showy demeanour or appearance.

–**verb** (t) 4. *Colloquial* to lavish entertainment on someone in order to gain favour, or to distract their attention from the reality of the situation.

[Middle English *duchesse*, from French, from *duc* duke]

It could also be noted that the noun *duchess* can also denote an item of bedroom furniture. At least that's what my mother used to call the dressing table in my parents' bedroom.

The plural form of the noun *duchess* features in the Australian folk song "Botany Bay". An interesting discussion could be had about the sense in which the word is used here.

"Taint leaving old England we cares about,
"Taint cos we mis-spells what we knows,

But because all we light-fingered gentry
Hops around with a log on our toes.

Singing too-ral-li, oo-ral-li, addity,
Singing too-ral-li, oo-ral-li, ay,
Singing too-ral-li, oo-ral-li, addity,
And we're bound for Botany Bay.

Now all my young Dookies and **Duchesses**,
Take warning from what I've to say:
Mind all is your own as you toucheses
Or you'll find us in Botany Bay.

Grammatical gender

Unlike some other languages such as French, gender is (thankfully) not a big deal in the grammar of English. There is no gender to be considered with the vast majority of ordinary common nouns in the language. We do, however, have masculine and feminine forms of some words as illustrated in the table below. A question that could be asked here is what word class (part of speech) all the words in the table are. As presented in these pairs, they are, of course, all nouns.

A further question would be whether there is anything problematic about some of the words in the right hand pair of columns. Some would suggest that these days it is unnecessary or even objectionable to have feminine forms of words like *actor*, *hero* and *poet*.

Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
king	queen	man	woman	actor	actress
emperor	empress	husband	wife	waiter	waitress
prince	princess	boy	girl	hero	heroine
duke	<i>duchess</i>	lad	lass	bachelor	spinster
count	countess	son	daughter	host	hostess
baron	baroness	uncle	aunt	poet	poetess
god	goddess	nephew	niece		
wizard	witch	stallion	mare		
master	mistress	stag	doe		
		ram	ewe		

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Some background information from Wikipedia

Lucrezia de' Medici (14 February 1545 – 21 April 1561) was the daughter of Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Eleanor of Toledo.

Born in Florence, she was the first wife of Alfonso II d'Este, Duke of Modena and Ferrara, whom she married on 3 July 1558. Lucrezia died in 1561, probably from tuberculosis. Another possible cause of death, that is often speculated, is poisoning.

It is possible that she is the girl referred to in the poem "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning.

This short text provides an opportunity for briefly addressing an aspect of **numeracy** in an English lesson. Students could be asked to calculate the age of this duchess at the time of her marriage and then at the time of her death. In the course of this quick activity it will be noted that societal notions about the appropriate minimum age for marriage can vary according to time and place.

It is also worth considering the use of **modality** in this text. This is the aspect of grammar concerned with the degree of certainty or sometimes obligation involved in messages. Some of the information is tentative and three different grammatical structures can be observed accommodating this aspect of the meaning. We have:

- A **modal adverb**: "Lucrezia died in 1561, probably from tuberculosis."
- A **modal adjective** within a clause: "Another possible cause of death . . ."
- Another **modal adjective** but this time deployed in a separate clause: "It is possible that she is the girl . . ."

Some questions about Extract 1

The following questions could be explored with students:

1. Who is the speaker?

2. Who is being addressed?
3. What is their relationship?
4. Who/what is the Duchess?
5. What is the Duchess's current situation?
6. Who/what is Frà Pandolf?
7. What is the listener being invited to do?
8. Does anything seem implausible?

From a consideration of just this segment on its own it is not yet possible to fully answer all of these questions. More information is required.

The Duke of what?



When the full text of the poem is considered it will be seen that it is headed with the word *Ferrara*. A little guided research will quickly reveal that this is the name of a northern Italian city and its surrounding

area. Now a part of the modern Italian state, this was previously an independent duchy, an area ruled by a duke. Its location is shown in this map. In passing, it would be appropriate to inform/remind students that both Italy and Germany assumed their modern unified forms only in the second half of the 19th century not all that long before the separate Australian colonies federated.

Plausibility

In case you are wondering about Question 8, what seems a tad implausible to me is that the painting would have been completed in a single day ("Frà Pandolf's hands worked busily a day, and there she stands.") but of course I don't pretend to know anything much about art.

'Person' of pronouns

The first extract from the poem presents an opportunity for some brief revision of another

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aspect of grammar – the characteristic of ‘person’ of pronouns in English. These three noun groups could be compared:

- My last Duchess (first person)
- Your last Duchess (second person)
- His last Duchess (third person)

Another question: would it be possible or logical to talk about “her last duchess”?

Apostrophe use

Before moving on from a consideration of this extract from the poem, the opportunity could be taken to revise the two legitimate uses of the apostrophe:

- to mark omitted letters in contractions – *that’s (that is) my last Duchess; will’t (will it) please you;* and
- to indicate possession – *Frà Pandolf’s hands.*

My regular advice to students about the use of the possessive apostrophe was to use a simple three stage process, viz:

1. Write the *owning* word
2. Add the apostrophe **AFTER** the word
3. Add an S if it **sounds** OK

My experience is that this works very effectively for native speakers.

Poem extract 2

A second extract to be considered initially as prose (ll 49–53) is shown below. As with the first, it could be treated as a snippet of overheard conversation.

I repeat, the Count your master’s known munificence is ample warrant that no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed; though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed at starting, is my object.

Some comprehension questions to be posed here are:

1. Is this the same speaker?
2. What is a Count?
3. Can we now better identify the person

being addressed?

4. A synonym for *munificence*?
5. A synonym for *warrant*?
6. A synonym for *object*?
7. What is a dowry?

In considering Question 2, reference could be made to two classic novels:

- Alexandre Dumas’s *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and
- Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in which one of the main characters is Count Dracula

Vocabulary choice

An elaboration on Questions 4-7 could be to task students to come up with other vocabulary choices for the words underlined below. Some of these should be simpler and others just alternatives.

I repeat, the Count your master’s known munificence is ample warrant that no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed; though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed at starting, is my object.

Some possible outcomes of this exercise are shown in brackets:

I repeat, the Count your master’s (*boss’s, employer’s*) known munificence (*generosity*) is ample (*sufficient*) warrant (*guarantee*) that no just (*reasonable*) pretence (*request*) of mine for dowry (*marriage property settlement*) will be disallowed (*refused*); though his fair (*beautiful*) daughter’s self, as I avowed (*stated*) at starting (*the outset*), is my object (*goal*).

Grammatical person again

This sentence from the poem provides a convenient opportunity for briefly revisiting the concept of “person” in grammar touched on with the first extract.

- **I** (*first person – the speaker*) repeat, the Count **your** (*second person – refers to the one being addressed*) master’s known munificence is ample warrant that no just pretence of **mine** (*again first person*) for dowry will be

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disallowed; though **his** (*third person – refers to an individual being talked about*) fair daughter’s self, as **I** (*first person again*) avowed at starting, is **my** (*first person yet again*) object.

Sentence structure

Consideration could also be given to the structure of the sentence with students first asked to identify the verb groups and then the boundaries of the clauses that are clustered around them. Guided analysis and discussion should lead to the following list of clauses in which the verb groups (in this text they are mainly single words) are shown in bold.

1. I **repeat**,
2. the Count your master’s known munificence **is** ample warrant [[that no just pretence of mine for dowry **will be disallowed**]];
3. though his fair daughter’s self, <<as I **avowed** at starting>>, **is** my object
4. as I **avowed** at starting

Clause 4 is what is referred to as an **interrupting clause**. Clause 3 begins with the conjunction *though* and the noun group *his fair daughter’s self* but its flow is then interrupted by the complete separate clause *as I avowed at starting* before Clause 3 is completed by the verb group *is* and the noun group *my object*.

Alignment of punctuation with grammatical structure

Since the interrupting clause *as I avowed at starting* disrupts the flow of Clause 3 it is

important that it is marked off with commas. Students could be challenged to come up with some sentences of their own including interrupting clauses and appropriate use of commas. Some possible examples are shown below. The interrupting clauses marked off by commas are underlined.

- The narrator of the poem is, as will become clear, a pretty nasty piece of work.
- These extracts, as I explained at the start of the lesson, come from a poem which relates to our unit theme of love.
- Aristocratic ranks such as dukes and counts, as you will be aware, are not part of modern Australia’s social structure.

Ranked vs embedded clauses

In the sentence we are considering, there are five verb groups and therefore five clauses but only four of them are “ranked” clauses, i.e. ones operating at the clause level of the grammar rank scale between the level of groups and phrases below and the sentence level above. The clause shown in square brackets in #2 above is an **embedded clause** functioning as the **Qualifier** in the noun group built on *warrant*. This would be an opportunity for an episode of teaching and/or revision on **noun group structure**. From a functional grammar perspective, this noun group is structured as follows. The table also shows other noun groups from the sentence.

Pointer <i>which one</i>	Quantifier <i>how many/ much</i>	Describer <i>what like</i>	Classifier <i>what type</i>	Head word <i>main noun</i>	Qualifier <i>more info</i>
	ample			warrant	that no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed
	no	just		pretence	of mine for dowry
The Count your master’s		known		munificence	
His fair daughter’s				self	
my				object	

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It will be noted that the group shown in the second row is part of the embedded clause that constitutes the Qualifier (information that comes after the main noun) in the group built on *warrant* in the first row. Hence, we have a noun group inside a clause inside a larger noun group. Being aware of this capacity for “nesting” can assist students to make sense of texts containing complex noun groups.

Clause structure

With the verb groups realising or expressing the Processes in the clauses already identified, students could then be guided to identify the associated Participants (the people or things involved in the Processes) and Circumstances. Student work and subsequent discussion should lead to an appreciation of the clause element structure shown below. The third row in each table shows the grammatical structure involved.

1. I repeat,

I	repeat
Participant	Process: verbal
pronoun	verb group

2. the Count your master’s known munificence **is** ample warrant [[that no just pretence of mine for dowry **will be disallowed**]];

the Count your master’s known munificence	is	ample warrant [[that no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed]]
Participant	Process: relating	Participant
noun group	verb group	noun group

3. though his fair daughter’s self, <<as . . . starting>>, **is** my object

his fair daughter’s self	is	my object
Participant	Process: relating	Participant
noun group	verb group	noun group

4. as I **avowed** at starting

I	avowed	at starting
Participant	Process: verbal	Circumstance: Time (when)
pronoun	verb group	prepositional phrase

This sort of understanding of clause structure in English is a fundamental element of the Language Strand of the F-10 *Australian Curriculum: English* (AC:E). As I have commented in a previous article in *Words’Worth*, once the AC:E has been properly understood and taught for a few years students should arrive in high school English classes very

familiar with the different types of elements to be found in clauses. The first relevant Content Description (CD) in the AC:E is:

ACELA1451 Year 1 / Language / Expressing and developing ideas

- Identify the parts of a simple sentence that represent ‘What’s happening?’, ‘What state is

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being described?, ‘Who or what is involved?’ and the surrounding circumstances

The two elaborations are:

- knowing that, in terms of meaning, a basic clause represents: a happening or a state (verb), who or what is involved (noun group/phrase), and the surrounding circumstances (adverb group/phrase)
- understanding that a simple sentence expresses a single idea, represented grammatically by a single independent clause (for example ‘A kangaroo is a mammal. A mammal suckles its young’)

This view of the basic structure of the clause derives from functional grammar but, appropriately for Year 1, student-friendly labels are used in lieu of the technical labels which are in bold below.

- ‘What’s happening?’, ‘What state is being described?’ = a **Process** expressed by a verb group
- ‘Who or what is involved?’ = **Participant/s**

– usually, but not always, represented by noun groups

- the surrounding circumstances = **Circumstances** – usually represented by adverb groups or prepositional phrases

Careful readers will have noted that two words from the sentence are not included in the analysis above. These are the **conjunctions** *though* in Clause 3 and *as* in Clause 4. When we talk about Participants, Processes and Circumstances, we are referring to the way in which clauses represent some aspect of the world in language. This system is called transitivity. The conjunctions *though* and *as* have an important function but it is that of linking clauses rather than representing the world.

Clause order within a sentence

Whenever a sentence contains more than a single clause, the writer obviously has a choice about the order in which they will be deployed. A useful little activity here would be to ask students to come up with a possible rearrangement of the original sentence. The table below shows a possible outcome.

Original sentence	Possible rearrangement
I repeat, <u>the Count your master’s known munificence is ample warrant that no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed;</u> though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed at starting, is my object.	I repeat, <u>the young lady herself, as I avowed at starting, is my object,</u> and the Count your master’s known munificence is ample warrant that no just pretence of mine for dowry will be disallowed.

After the initial “I repeat” verbal process clause which projects all the others, we now have a different element of the whole message. The issue here is that of **grammatical theme**. The part of a message that is deployed in first place is accorded relatively more emphasis. This can be considered within individual clauses but also at the sentence level and even beyond that.

Order of elements within a clause

Students could be asked to note how three of the clauses in the sentence can be internally rearranged as follows:

- ample warrant [[that no just pretence of mine

for dowry will be disallowed]] is provided by the Count your master’s known munificence (*In this version we have a different Participant in Theme position.*)

- though my object is his fair daughter’s self (*Again, we have a different Participant in Theme position.*)
- as at starting I avowed (*In this version we now have a Circumstance rather than a Participant in Theme position.*)

The underlined theme element in each clause is now different, subtly changing the relative emphasis to the various components of the message.

CAPITALISING ON CURIOSITY WITH THE DUCHESS

At the sentence level, the clause that immediately follows “I repeat” is at odds with what the speaker says is his first priority. He claims that his real goal is the young woman herself but it is the value of the dowry that he mentions first.

Conclusion

Thus far I have been discussing teaching and learning opportunities that arise from just two extracts from the poem. In fact, I have suggested that these would be appropriate pre-reading activities. To be sure, they consider some key parts of the poem in some detail but I envisage that they would be done before students are presented with the complete text. The next article in this series will consider a third extract from the poem,

On this occasion I am again happy to repeat my standard offer which is that if anyone thinks

that the Powerpoint file used in the workshop and/or the Word file of the poem text might be of use to them, they could be obtained by emailing me at gazco48@bigpond.net.au.

References

ACARA *F-10 Australian Curriculum: English* at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au>

Author

Garry Collins taught secondary English for 35 years, mainly at Gladstone and Ferny Grove State High Schools, but also on exchange in the US and Canada. President of ETAQ from July 2005 to March 2014, he served a 2-year term as AATE President in 2014 and 2015. He is currently a part-time teacher educator in the School of Education at the University of Queensland.



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TEACHER COLLABORATION AND AN ACTION THRILLER SERIES – THE SOLUTION TO A COMMON PROBLEM

Patsy Norton, Roseanne Cavallaro, Elizabeth Burrige, Steve Andrew

Introduction

This article presents the reader with a typical problem facing secondary school teachers – how to engage adolescent Year 10 students in reading literature.

The problem in this context was exacerbated by the students' history of being both non-readers and disengaged from learning. What follows is an account of the problem and the solution, which included (a) teachers working collaboratively, (b) a selection of a series of novels that “worked” and (c) the literacy–learning strategies to scaffold the reading process to develop understanding. A brief evaluation of the solution concludes the article.

The problem

The class of approximately 15 Year 10 students consisted of mainly boys, all of whom had what one of the two class teachers termed “large” personalities – very confident, physically quite mature, able to express opinions and prepared to challenge disciplinary measures adopted. In general, all students (boys and girls) had a history of a lack of engagement in most school subjects, particularly Mathematics and English. Each offered a different challenge, given identified learning difficulties, or varied placement on the autism spectrum. These students lacked the capability or motivation to address the challenges of reading the set novel within the English program for mainstream students, although they were enrolled in the subject. None of the students acknowledged having read a complete novel unaided for a number of years. Further, diagnostic testing indicated that most operated well below the mean of the average 15-year old reader. Further,

individual self-management and organization were not evident. Thus, the class presented a challenge to the two teachers, neither of whom was a specialist teacher of English. However, both were very experienced and skilled at managing behavioural issues.

The first unit of study for this class focussed on the novel *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. Students were reluctant, if not obstinate, about reading this. Strategies that might have worked with the average adolescent reader were useless. One of the two teachers of the class was a male HPE teacher, who, acting on instinct and good sense, began reading aloud to the students. Because of his status in the eyes of the students, the male students did not just accept, but embraced the role of being listeners. They also absorbed what they saw and heard, that a male could read and enjoy literature. The second teacher was a female Home Economics and History teacher who had prior experience of teaching the students in Year 8 classes. Her strong and good relationship with the students, allied with the male teacher's role modelling, ensured that the students respected and trusted both teachers.

The enjoyment students experienced from being part of the story-reading translated to a more cooperative and positive class environment, making it possible for the teachers to leapfrog to traditional strategies of comprehension, vocabulary, discussion, prompting, questioning and evaluation of understanding. Thus, initially, the students' attitude took a positive turn. The question at that point, however, was where to next? Students needed to learn to read for themselves, preferably willingly and with enjoyment. Help was sought from the Master

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Teacher and Teacher-Librarian, with a request for suitable reading material and supporting pedagogical strategies to extend the set unit appropriately. It was a request for a solution in terms of both professional collaboration and practical approaches. As one teacher said, memorably, “I just want these kids to enjoy reading a good book”.

The Solution

Improving pedagogical knowledge of strategies that would scaffold reading and learning was part of the role of the Master Teacher. In this case, the problem was complex given that the students were enrolled in the mainstream English program and therefore needed to work within the guidelines of the syllabus and program. The challenges to developing readers, then, rather than listeners, included:

- Designing a small extension unit around an appropriate year level novel as the organizing concept
- Developing purposeful strategies for the students to enable continued effective teaching and learning of syllabus demands regarding literature, language and literacy.
- Evaluating with teachers the benefits of the approach to teaching and learning in terms of teacher professional satisfaction and student outcomes.

Discussion with the Teacher-Librarian (TL), to find the perfect hook for these students was critical. The TL identified Gabrielle Lord as an Australian writer of crime fiction who had been given a brief to write a series of action thriller novels specifically for reluctant adolescent male readers. The result was the series of novels titled *Conspiracy 365* (Book one, 2009 to Book 12, 2010), consisting of one novel for each month of the year, with cliff hangers at the end of each novel, to encourage ongoing reading, in the way that a soapie encourages regular viewing. Lord succeeded in manipulating the features of the crime genre: she controlled a fast-paced plot, compelling story-line, credible, identifiable characters, easy-to-read style and vocabulary. Further, the presentation of the novels was

appealing in their similarity to adult crime fiction novels. There was no suggestion of the novels being “dumbed down” for these students, who were very conscious of their limitations.

The resource inquiry produced a set of the first novel in the series and a library set of the 12 novels. A DVD of the series was an added incentive for adolescent readers, while online resources (interview with author, information about other novels) were located to deepen the immersion in the literature. (This pack of resources also secured the teachers’ commitment to the approach.)

Thus, the solution to the challenges became a mini-unit to extend the set unit and meet the demands of this class, written within the school’s pedagogical framework, too detailed to include in this article. An overview only follows, therefore, in terms of Objectives, Assessment, and Content. The scaffolding in the form of strategies sequenced within the I-Plan Model follow.

Objectives:

- Articulate understanding of what is a good read.
- Evaluate features of crime fiction/thriller genre studied that make reading worthwhile. (Hooks, especially).
- Talk about and write about a novel critically (recognise and analyse the ways authors manipulate features).
- Participate in group interaction/debate and discussion to contribute viewpoint.
- Express opinion, with justification, orally and in writing.

Content: (Supported by learning strategies)

- Inquiry into media representation of crime, unsolved mysteries, street action.
- Sharing/discussion of stories, issues re crime fiction, crime stories. Media focus. Sensationalism, etc.
- Introduction to author, Gabrielle Lord (knowing the author was critical for later assessment, where students sent evaluation to author).

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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MokboiMFMoA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i90GW0ivLtY>
- Library investigation of crime fiction, novels, spine identification, etc.
- First chapter reading with teachers and prediction. Introduction to notion of series with episodes to follow over 12 months.
- Individual reading with teacher support.
- Viewing of DVD of series based on Lord’s 12 novels.
- Ongoing reading of other novels in series.
- Discussion. Focus on features of novel. Opinions based on justification.

LITERACY LEARNING FRAMEWORK – the I–Plan Model

The literacy learning strategies are constructed

within four stages reflecting a literacy learning model titled *I-PLAN: a conceptual framework for teaching and learning literacies*. It is a revised version of the 1984 ERICA (Effective Reading in the Content Areas) model drafted by Nea Stewart-Dore prior to her death in 2014, and originally developed by Bert Morris and Nea Stewart Dore in 1984.

Stage 1: I-LINK (formerly Preparation)

Stage 2: I-THINK (formerly Thinking Through)

Stage 3: I-KNOW (formerly Extracting and Organizing)

Stage 4: I-SHOW (formerly Synthesizing and Presenting)

Reference: Morris, B. and Stewart-Dore, N. (1984). *Learning to learn from text. Effective reading in the content areas*. Addison-Wesley: North Ryde, NSW.

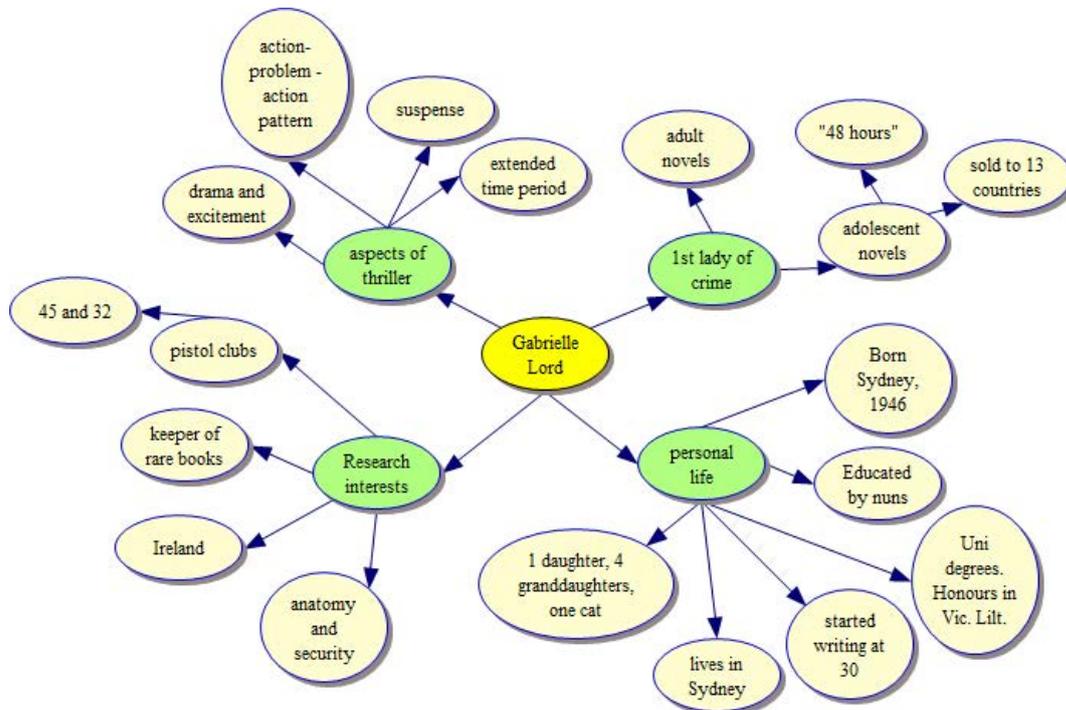
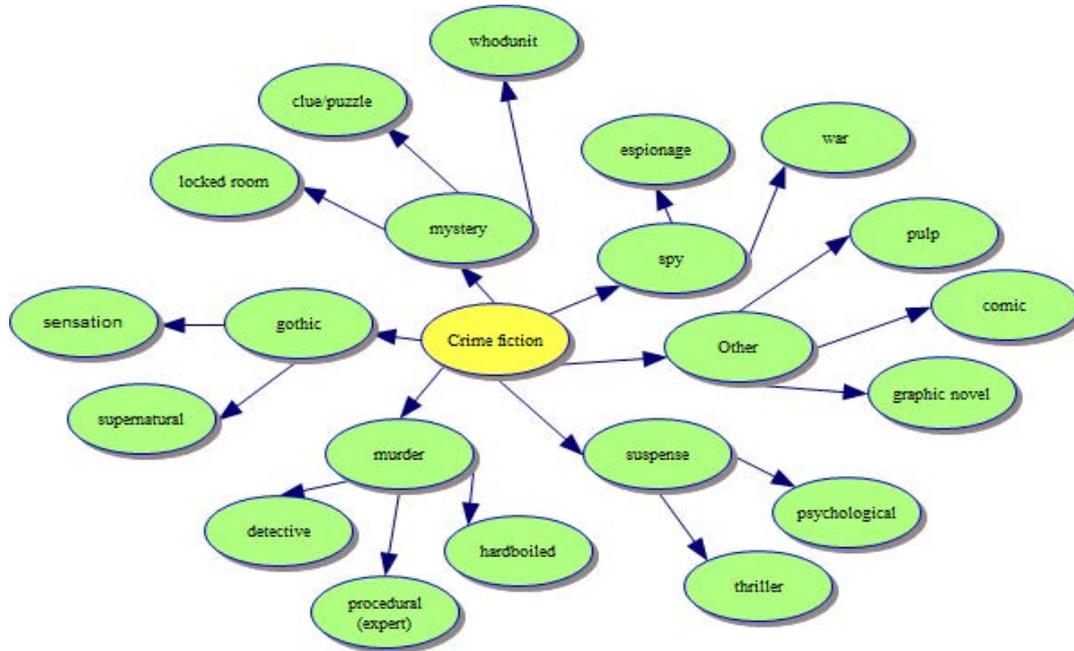
I–LINK stage: Two strategies are included for this preparation stage for reading

Strategy: VOCABULARY CHART. This strategy will help you to think about some key words and ideas that will be part of the unit. It is a preparation for learning strategy.

WORD	Your meaning	After talking to partner	Class consensus
thriller			
crime fiction			
conspiracy			
riddle			
countdown			
suspense			
Cliffhanger			

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Strategy: WORD MAP. Use this strategy to summarise all the information you can find about Gabrielle Lord, the author of the novel you are going to read. The class will be able to make a summary of what everyone finds. (Models follow.)



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Interview with Lord: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MokboiMFMoA>

Gabrielle Lord – the first lady of crime: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i90GW0ivLtY>

Behind the scenes of the television series: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_iB4sW0fTQ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MokboiMFMoA>

STRATEGY: GRAPHIC OUTLINE

Clues to the Mystery

This is a strategy to help you to read carefully, so that you pick up the “clues” the author has written into the story as you are reading, or after you have finished reading. Note the backward numbering of the pages. It can be used both during and after reading to help your understanding.

Instructions:

As you are reading, check that you picked up on the clues offered by the reader on the following pages. Quickly write what you think the clue suggests quickly as you are reading, or at least when you finish.

Page no.	Clue	Your thinking
Prologue 182	“They’re going to be after you for 365 days! Week after week! Day after day!”	
176	The buoyancy tanks in the hull were designed to keep it floating, even with a lot of water on board, even if it capsized. What was wrong?	
175	I realized that my life jacket, suddenly extremely heavy, was dragging me deeper, and further away from the surface.	
173	I had to find out what Dad meant in his last letter. I had to see the pictures he drew while he was in hospital...	
165	‘I’m glad he’s alive, but the idiot almost got the two of us killed.’ I said. ‘Mum doesn’t think he’s an idiot,’ said my sister.	
163	I was determined to find out whatever it was that he had discovered about our family – the massive secret he’d told me a little about in his last letter, over six months ago.	
169	Maybe Dad drew something that would help me understand what in the world the Ormond Singularity was.	
155–154	There was something about him that I didn’t like. (Rafe)	
152	Jewellery box	

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151	Transparent sheet of paper from the mesh sleeve in the suitcase.	
146	'And Rafe completely freaked out about it,' I said. 'Like he knows something we don't.'	
141	Boat...sabotaged	
137	Hey, that package is mine.	
132	The nurse....Jennifer Smith	
124–121	The gun ... No replica My uncle has a gun.	
112	He's a bloody liar!	
107	A set-up	
105–104	Ormond riddle....Ormond singularity... Ormond angel	
093	All our money's gone.	
088–089	The map...Rafe ... He knows something about the Ormond Riddle thing too.	
036–035	Blackjack...winning combination	
012	'We can do this the hard way or the easy way,' said my captor, a solid guy wearing a red singlet with a black Chinese symbol on it.	
009	It was very clear now that two criminal groups were after the information about the Ormond Singularity.	
008	Vulcan Sligo	

I-KNOW STAGE: Three Level Guide

Read from page 115 (from "I went straight down to my room..." to page 112, 'I'll have it later,' I said as I slipped out the door"). Complete the three levels shown below.

LITERAL LEVEL. Tick those statements that can be found on the pages you read, either in exactly the same words or close to the same words. Justify your choices with your group or partner, or with the teacher. There does not have to be a right or wrong answer.

- Dad did family research stuff in Ireland.
- Rafe took the envelope.
- Rafe was wearing Dad's face.
- Mum approved of my uncle.

INTERPRETIVE LEVEL. Tick those statements that the author meant. That is, read between the lines. Justify your choices. i.e. have an argument with your partner, group or teacher.

- Research in Ireland could have had something to do with the Ormond riddle.
- Rafe was both a thief and a liar.
- Twins just look alike.
- Mum and Rafe were working together.

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APPLIED LEVEL. Tick those statements that are the big ideas in these pages. Defend your decision to your group or partner.

- Family history can be both good and bad.
- You should be able to trust your relatives.
- Kids should stay out of adults' business.

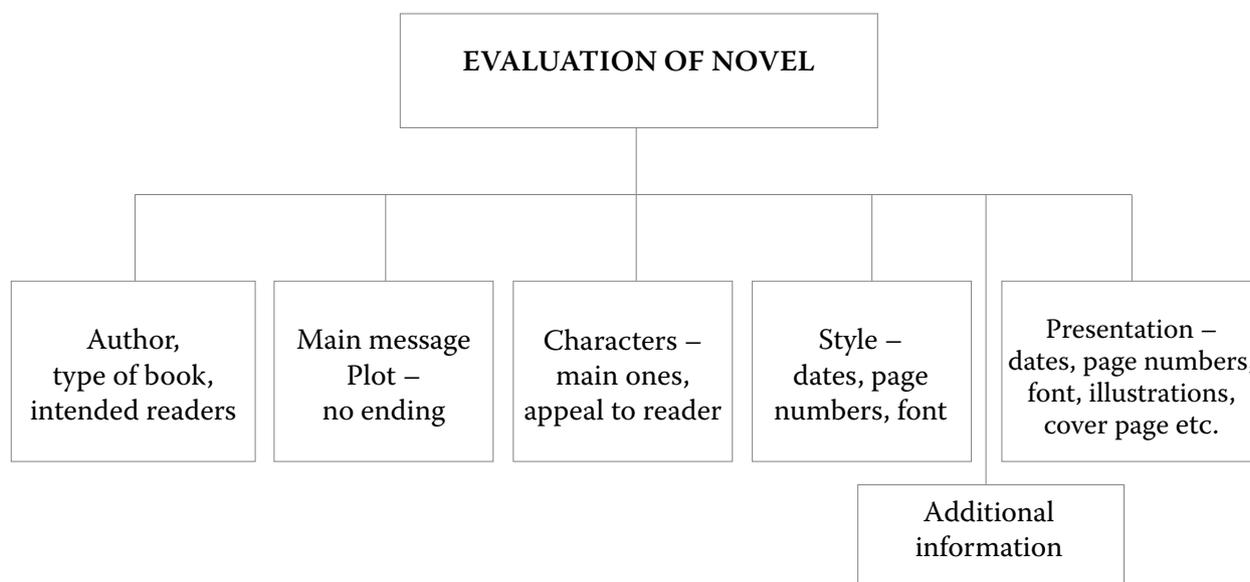
I-SHOW STAGE

The final evaluation of the students' engagement in reading came from written evaluations addressed to Gabrielle Lord.

Instruction: Write to Gabrielle Lord, giving your opinion of the first novel in the series "Conspiracy 365".

Your writing should weigh up what was good and perhaps not so good about the novel for you personally. Give evidence where possible.

Consider commenting on aspects noted in the structured overview below.



EVALUATION

What contributed most to the level of teacher satisfaction in catering for the needs of this diverse range of students was the collaboration experienced with the Teacher-Librarian and Master Teacher. Problems faced together do seem to be more manageable. The goal of encouraging students to read one book was also achieved for all but one student, while one student continued to read the series. It was notable that the DVD of the series held attention for only one lesson, while the novel and the series

were more appealing. Although students were asked to write an evaluative text, this was not seen as an assessment task, thereby improving the appeal of the novel. Lord's brief was to engage male readers, but the female students were able to relate to the male protagonist, especially given the female character who gained more prominence as the plot progressed. This problem is not unusual and the solution is not mind-blowing, but the authors are happy to celebrate the benefits of collaborative work in the English classroom.



HELPING TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLE IN THE TEACHING OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM ENGLISH

Annette Curnow

It has been argued that there are three essential understandings needed for teachers to teach the language strand of the Australian Curriculum English: 1) the understanding that language is functional in nature, always chosen for a purpose, 2) the understanding that language choices can be discussed at a number of ranks or strata e.g. whole text, paragraph, sentence, clause etc. and 3) the understanding that language learning is a cumulative process; i.e. that the curriculum is organised so that one year builds on/extends the learning from previous years (Love et al 2014). The latter requires that every teacher play his/her part in the cumulative development of the meta-linguistic understandings about how the English language works in texts.

What is documented below is a process undertaken on the Darling Downs to show teachers the significance of their role in the cumulative chain of language teaching required by the Australian Curriculum. Education Queensland advisers had observed that, while some teachers were successfully integrating the contents of the Language Strand into their teaching, some of their colleagues were struggling to see the relevance of teaching some aspects of this curriculum component. The advisers asked that I provide them with examples of high quality Year 12 writing and discuss with them the linguistic characteristics of this high level writing. This would then be used in developing professional development on writing

for primary and middle school teachers which would include showing teachers how important their role was in the students' building of knowledge and understanding about language as it operates in texts.

Research on the characteristics of high level writing (e.g. Ferguson, 2001; Christie & Derewianka, 2008) has already established several characteristics of highly effective written text. Of course, the choices made will depend on purpose, genre and register. In response to the request from the advisers I analysed two of the examples of QCS writing which are published annually in the Year 12 QCS *Retrospective*. To do this the sub-strands and threads of the Australian Curriculum English were used. This enabled primary and middle school colleagues to make easy links to what they were to teach. The language choices identified were then linked to the year in which they were to be introduced in the Australian Curriculum English. This analysis was then used successfully on the Darling Downs to show the cumulative nature of language teaching and provide the bigger picture to primary teachers in particular.

Below is the piece of quality Year 12 writing selected by the team for use in the professional development. It is useful to remember that this was written in response to an unseen topic under examination conditions. The Writing Task Stimulus was a collage of pictures and written texts pertaining to the concept "Things Unknown".

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AN ELEMENTAL INFLUENCE by Katelyn Bailey (Yr12)

Is the continuing popularity of Sherlock Holmes simply due to the suspense and intrigue his mysteries provide, or does his seemingly eternal influence run deeper? Louise Lea investigates.

No doubt you've heard of Sherlock Holmes. You know, the mystery-solving, action-loving amateur sleuth, widely believed to be one of crime fiction's most valuable assets. His creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, skyrocketed to fame when he published his accounts of Holmes and his companion, John Watson, shedding a light on some of the most baffling fictional cases ever recorded, against the backdrop of a somewhat dreary, late-1800s London.

At first glance, there is no reason why Holmes should still be as well-known today as he was a century ago. There is no reason that two popular TV shows – adaptations of his extraordinary sleuthing jaunts – should be currently gracing our screens. Or is there? Are Doyle's tales more than merely brief samples of narrative intrigue? Can they offer us something more?

Undoubtedly so, considering the relentless curiosity of humanity. After all, we have the need to know *everything*. When we don't – which is most of the time – we feel lost, confused, hard done by. We hate darkness, both literal and figurative, and for most of us it is synonymous with horror, with fear, with monsters under the bed. As a result, we crave the beautiful, blinding light of clarity that good answers bring. What clearer answers could we obtain than those laid out for us at the end of one of Holmes's cases? Short and simple, they quench our thirst for things unknown – at least temporarily.

This final revelation, an essential part of the predictable template of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, is not the only thing that draws us in. Each story oozes suspense and allows us to invest in a juicy crime that we personally do not have to solve. Unlike those present in our own lives, Holmes's problems are guaranteed a solution. We know the big reveal is coming and so we can savour the journey by cheering Holmes on, chuckling at Watson's unhelpfulness, rolling our eyes at the 'official' police inspectors. Each tale offers stability and control; things that, in the chaos of everyday life, many of us lack.

Free from the pressures we so often face, we experience almost tangible relief during the eventual resolution, as well as a warm reassurance that what was so craftily hidden from us is now, finally, in plain sight. It's a pat on the back of sorts, a realisation that though we don't know it all we do, at least, know this much.

The influence of Sherlock Holmes does not end there. It's impossible to encounter this fictional mastermind without envying his incredible skills of deduction. Subtly, almost unnoticeably, his talents start to weave their way into the tapestry of our own lives. Our questions start with 'how?' instead of 'why?' A new generation of detectives is born, and as the fire of our curiosity rages endlessly on we set about solving our own mysteries. This is a true testament to the timelessness of Sherlock Holmes.

Such is the surprising impact of a fictional 110-year-old deductionist. By providing the means, Holmes also gives us a way – a way to battle our own way through the boggy quagmire of our countless questions. It's undeniable that the classic tales of Sherlock Holmes and his good old sidekick, Watson give us more than a quickly forgotten flash of entertainment. In this troubling world of ours, full of eternal mysteries, they furnish us with the most precious thing imaginable – answers.

Published in QCAA *Retrospective* 2013 Queensland Core Skills Test.

HELPING TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLE IN THE TEACHING OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM ENGLISH

The above feature article is written as a persuasive exposition, with the author writing in the role of a journalist for an unseen audience. She cleverly manipulates the structure of an exposition, making explicit her arguments not in the first sentence of each paragraph as is traditional, but in the last. The hypothesis is only hinted at early in the piece and then revealed fully at the end of the article. Her ideas are expressed with authority, demonstrating deep knowledge of her subject and an ability to link this subject to broader understandings of the human condition. These ideas are expertly developed as she moves between the abstract (our need for answers) and the exemplification (Holmes and his creator's skill). Her text is highly cohesive with a range of lexical and grammatical devices used for this purpose. However, it is the manner in which she engages us, her audience, that Ms Bailey's competence as a writer is revealed as she draws us personally into the quest for things unknown.

The detailed analysis (Appendices 1&2) was presented as an A3 sheet at the Writing PD. In Appendix 2, three of the sub-strands of the Language Strand have been used as major headings and the relevant threads as minor headings. Often threads themselves have further sub-headings in order to pick up references in the curriculum. The outside column on each side of the analysis links the initial teaching of this concept to the Australian Curriculum English. The use of these links enabled teachers to see how understanding of the language choices, which characterise this text, are intended to be gradually built in students in the first 11 years of schooling at least. The advisers reported that seeing this was a "light bulb" moment for many teachers.

Below is a brief discussion of some of the key choices made in the focus text.

In her text, Ms Bailey has used verbs for three purposes. First, she has used a variety of verb types to express her arguments (her ideas); for example, she has used mental verbs to describe the nature of the feelings of Holmes' fans. We *know*, *hate*, *crave*, *feel* etc. Second, she has also chosen particular verbs to intensify the impact

of her argument. Hence we have the use of *verbs such as skyrocketed and savour* rather than *rose and enjoy*. Finally, she uses repetition of verbs; for example, the verb *is* occurs three times in succeeding sentences in para 2. This, as well as adding force to her argument, also ties it together to create a cohesive text. Some students acquire these understandings and competencies naturally through reading and through the other discourses in which they operate. However, it is possible for students without such opportunity to develop these competencies through explicit teaching of the Language Strand through comprehending and composing texts.

The writer has also made competent use of nominal (noun) groups in order to compress information while at the same time providing vivid description and evaluation. These noun groups often contain embedded clauses which again compact the text. Nominalisations, which are a key feature of high level expository writing, have also been located in noun groups often as part of the qualifier. At times the 'thing' or head noun in this group is metaphoric e.g. *the fire of our **curiosity**, a flash of **entertainment***. (Here the head noun or 'thing' is underlined and the nominalisation is bolded.) These choices again increase lexical density but the metaphoric use of language works to add impact or force.

What Halliday (2004) calls elaboration – restatement (e.g. *His creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*), explaining in further detail (e.g. *... a way – a way to battle our own way through the boggy quagmire of our countless questions*), exemplifying (no use in this text) or commenting (e.g. *which is most of the time*) – is a strong feature of this text. Using words, word groups and clauses to elaborate is a common feature of highly written text.

The author's choice of evaluative language deftly positions the audience to judge and appreciate people and things. She also engages us by ascribing emotions to the avid reader of Holmes' books, using the first person to enrol us as these readers. As she goes about arguing her case, proving the hypothesis revealed in the last paragraph, she generally avoids the bare assertion, instead choosing other rhetorical

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devices to close down the dialogue on the subject. She chooses graduated language (language which increases or decreases force or focus) throughout to achieve her purpose of persuading us to take her view. This is in keeping with research by Ferguson (2001) which found that writers of texts awarded a high grade in the QCS Writing Task used what is known as the Appraisal system – Attitude, Engagement, Graduation – effectively.

Various language choices are made to increase the cohesiveness of the text. These choices are both lexical and grammatical. The author's use of grammatical theme contributes to the smooth flow of the argument. She has chosen marked themes to draw the audience's attention to the subject matter she wishes to foreground; e.g. in para 2 the phrase "At first glance" is used first to modify the following statement. This choice foreshadows to us that the author is about to take a contrary position. The use of "Such" in theme position in the opening sentence of the second last paragraph succinctly sums up what has been said previously and gives a platform for the conclusion.

The above choices have been made to realise the three meta-functions of language identified by Halliday. The ideational meta-function of language allows us as writers to express and develop ideas. The interpersonal meta-function allows us to interact successfully with our audience and in the case of exposition, persuade them to our point of view. Finally, the textual meta-function allows the writer to organise the cohesive flow of the text. All choices are made in response to the cultural context (including purpose and genre) and the social context (register) of a text's production. The choices have also been made at the various strata of language: whole text, paragraph, sentence, clause, word group and word level.

Many of the linguistic and grammatical resources which contribute to the effectiveness of this text are actually set down for formal teaching in the early years of schooling; for example, the noun (nominal) group is introduced at Year 2 and evaluative language at Years 1 and 2. Others are taught in the middle school; for

example, the concept of grammatical theme is introduced at Year 5 and rhetorical devices are a focus at Year 8. Their placement at these levels of schooling was informed by the research of Christie and Derewianka which traced a writing developmental trajectory from ages 5 to 18. This work has helped teachers and academics world-wide understand more fully the paths written language learners follow in written language development.

The above research showed clearly that the acquisition of this repertoire of language resources is a cumulative process. This is reflected in the sequencing in the Australian Curriculum English. Thus the curriculum requires that students, for example, learn about nouns before they encounter the term noun (nominal) group and are given several opportunities to understand that concept more deeply before moving on to nominalisation. Similarly at the sentence or clause complex level, students begin with simple (one clause) sentences before learning how coordinating conjunctions link ideas in compound sentences. Then, in turn, they learn the term "clause" in preparation for understanding the difference between main and subordinate clauses which can be combined into complex sentences. At Year 6 they further develop control of clauses by using them to elaborate and extend on other clauses. The curriculum then moves students to an understanding that lexically dense writing often involves embedding of clauses in groups or other clauses and ellipsis e.g., of subject and finite. Finally they are encouraged to study and to use a range of clauses. The teacher of Year 7 for example will have difficulty teaching the embedded clause if the teacher of Year 3 has not taught the concept of clause and the teachers of Years 4, 5 and 6 have not reinforced this.

In 2013 British academics Myhill, Jones and Watson made the distinction between various kinds of meta-linguistic knowledge which teachers need to teach language effectively (See Appendix 3). They distinguish, for example, between *grammatical content knowledge*, that knowledge of morphology and syntax which allows us, for example, to name parts

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of speech, find the subject of a sentence and distinguish between a complex and compound sentence, and *grammatical pedagogical content knowledge*, teachers' knowledge about how, when (and why) they teach language and their knowledge of grammatical constructions which can be chosen to shape meaning in texts. In the Australian Curriculum English, the sub-strands are organised to reflect the concept of language as systems of resources for making meaning rather than merely requiring grammatical content knowledge.

Thus to maximise the potential of the curriculum, the teachers of Years 1-6 need to have shown their students that writing is about choice of language resources to make meanings in response to purpose, genre and register. It is their challenge to build a sequence of knowledge which enables students to make those choices. In turn, secondary school teachers have their role to play in developing the lexical and grammatical resources which characterise highly written text. Armed with these understandings, young people will then be able to engage with the more challenging domain of subject disciplines in an academic world and perhaps eventually produce a text such as the one discussed here. To do this they require knowledge of the function or purpose for which various grammatical resources are used in text. This goes well beyond being able to name parts of speech in a NAPLAN test. The descriptors found in the threads of the Language strand show that students need to understand the use of language resources and identify their use for a purpose. This is done by exploring their use in texts and by comparing texts to see how choices construct meaning.

Australian linguists, Love, Maken- Horarik and Horarik (2015) point out that teachers (both primary and secondary) need to have the necessary knowledge not just to teach the curriculum for their year level but also to understand expectations for their students in earlier years and to anticipate those in later

years of English. This allows them to build effectively on what has come before, address gaps in student understanding and prepare them for the next steps in the writing development path. Darling Downs teachers, after having been taken through the text and its language features and shown the importance of the chain of learning that is the Australian Curriculum English, were then given samples of primary and middle school student writing. Using the Sentence and Clause Level Grammar thread of the Language Strand as the focus, they were asked to place the writer's demonstrated sentence writing capability as evidenced by their writing. They were also asked to mark the sentences in terms of the NAPLAN Sentences criteria. These activities proved very challenging for some teachers who were unused to focussing on writing in this way. They were then asked to plan future learning activities for those students in order to move their linguistic competence forward. There were many examples of writing where students from Years 7 and 9 were actually operating at a level many years lower. Understanding the trajectory of learning as it was teased out in the Australian Curriculum was of course essential for this planning.

On April 1, 2016, ACARA announced that the NAPLAN test will now actually test the language requirements of the Australian Curriculum English: Language Strand. This should increase the focus on the Language strand and improve the grammatical content knowledge of both teachers and students. However, teachers at every level of schooling will need to develop and apply all of Myhill's knowledges to improve the writing competence of their students. Whether teachers are on the Darling Downs or in the Daintree, they will need to use all the years of students' schooling to develop a deep understanding of the choices available to them as writers to produce texts which are appropriate and effective for purpose, genre and register. If this can be achieved, more students will be able to write as Katelyn Bailey has.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Analysis of Structure: *An Elemental Influence* by Katelyn Bailey

<p><u>Hook</u> (and sets up straw man to rebut)</p>	<p>Is the continuing popularity of Sherlock Holmes simply due to the suspense and intrigue his mysteries provide, or does his seemingly eternal influence run deeper? Louise Lea investigates.</p>
<p><u>Background</u> (‘shedding a light’ links to the thesis)</p>	<p>No doubt you’ve heard of Sherlock Holmes. You know, the mystery-solving, action-loving amateur sleuth, widely believed to be one of crime fiction’s most valuable assets. His creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, skyrocketed to fame when he published his accounts of Holmes and his companion, John Watson, shedding a light on some of the most baffling fictional cases ever recorded, against the backdrop of a somewhat dreary, late-1800s London.</p>
<p><u>Reprise of hook</u> (with hint at hypothesis) Elaboration of issue</p>	<p>At first glance, there is no reason why Holmes should still be as well-known today as he was a century ago. There is no reason that two popular TV shows – adaptations of his extraordinary sleuthing jaunts – should be currently gracing our screens. Or is there? Are Doyle’s tales more than merely brief samples of narrative intrigue? Can they offer us something more?</p>
<p><u>Argument 1</u> (underlined) Gives first answer to question <i>Can they offer us something more?</i></p>	<p>Undoubtedly so, considering the relentless curiosity of humanity. After all, we have the need to know <i>everything</i>. When we don’t – which is most of the time we feel lost, confused, hard done by. We hate darkness, both literal and figurative, and for most of us it is synonymous with horror, with fear, with monsters under the bed. As a result, we crave the beautiful, blinding light of clarity that good answers bring. What clearer answers could we obtain than those laid out for us at the end of one of Holmes’s cases? Short and simple, <u>they quench our thirst for things unknown</u> – at least temporarily.</p>
<p><u>Argument 2</u> (underlined)</p>	<p>This final revelation, an essential part of the predictable template of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, is not the only thing that draws us in. Each story oozes suspense and allows us to invest in a juicy crime that we personally do not have to solve. Unlike those present in our own lives, Holmes’s problems are guaranteed a solution. We know the big reveal is coming and so we can savour the journey by cheering Holmes on, chuckling at Watson’s unhelpfulness, rolling our eyes at the ‘official’ police inspectors. <u>Each tale offers stability and control</u>; things that, in the chaos of everyday life, many of us lack.</p> <p>Free from the pressures we so often face, we experience almost tangible relief during the eventual resolution, as well as a warm reassurance that what was so craftily hidden from us is now, finally, in plain sight. It’s a pat on the back of sorts, a realisation that though we don’t know it all we do, at least, know this much.</p>
<p><u>Argument 3</u> (underlined)</p>	<p>The influence of Sherlock Holmes does not end there. It’s impossible to encounter this fictional mastermind without envying his incredible skills of deduction. Subtly, almost unnoticeably, his talents start to weave their way into the tapestry of our own lives. Our questions start with ‘how?’ instead of ‘why?’. A new generation of detectives is born, and as the fire of our curiosity rages endlessly on <u>we set about solving our own mysteries</u>. This is a true testament to the timelessness of Sherlock Holmes.</p>
<p><u>Conclusion</u> This draws questions and answers together and states hypothesis clearly.</p>	<p>Such is the surprising impact of a fictional 110-year-old deductionist. By providing the means, Holmes also gives us a way – a way to battle our own way through the boggy quagmire of our countless questions. It’s undeniable that the classic tales of Sherlock Holmes and his good old sidekick, Watson give us more than a quickly forgotten flash of entertainment. In this troubling world of ours, full of eternal mysteries, they furnish us with the most precious thing imaginable – answers.</p>

An Elemental Influence published in QCAA *Retrospective* 2013 Queensland Core Skills Test. Thanks to Professor Beverly Derewianka for her support with this analysis.

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Appendix 2 An Elemental Influence: Detailed Analysis

AC Language Strand	<i>Text Structure and Organisation sub-strand</i> Purpose, Audience and Structures of Different Types of Text thread	Is the continuing popularity of Sherlock Holmes simply due to the suspense and intrigue his mysteries provide, or does his seemingly eternal influence run deeper? Louise Lea investigates.	<i>Expressing and Developing Ideas sub strand</i> Sentence and clause level grammar thread	AC Language Strand
Yr 1	Purpose: To persuade Audience: Readers of a newspaper or magazine. Structure: See text above Text Cohesion thread Lexical: Repetition of words; e.g. <i>no</i> , and sounds; e.g. <i>-ing</i>	No doubt you've heard of Sherlock Holmes. You know, the mystery-solving, action-loving amateur sleuth, widely believed to be one of crime fiction's most valuable assets. His creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, skyrocketed to fame when he published his accounts of Holmes and his companion, John Watson, shedding a light on some of the most baffling fictional cases ever recorded, against the backdrop of a somewhat dreary, late-1800s London.	Simple sentences, compound and complex sentences used appropriately and effectively Non-sentences used for effect; e.g. Sentence 1 Par 3. Use of non-finite clauses; e.g. <i>cheering Holmes on, chuckling at Watson's unhelpfulness, rolling our eyes at the 'official' police</i>	Yrs 1,2,5
Yr 2	Antonymy: e.g. <i>darkness/ light</i>	At first glance, there is no reason why Holmes should still be as well-known today as he was a century ago. There is no reason that two popular TV shows – adaptations of his extraordinary sleuthing jaunts – should be currently gracing our screens. Or is there? Are Doyle's tales more than merely brief samples of narrative intrigue? Can they offer us something more?	Embedded clauses strong use; e.g. <i>some of the most baffling fictional cases [(which have) ever (been) recorded]]. The beautiful blinding light of clarity [[that good answers bring.]]</i>	Yr 9
Yr 2	Collocation: e.g. <i>mystery, sleuth, intrigue, fear, cases</i> Grammatical Some excellent links between paragraphs e.g. the last sentence of para 3 is picked up in para 4's topic sentence.	Undoubtedly so, considering the relentless curiosity of humanity.	Elaboration (restatement, explaining in further detail, commenting) used at clause level e.g. <i>When we don't – which is most of the time – we feel lost, confused, hard done by.</i>	Yr 6, 9 (implied)
Yr 5	Excellent use of theme position in sentences e.g. <i>Free from the pressures we so often face..., subtly, almost unnoticeably...</i>		Embedded clauses strong use; e.g. <i>some of the most baffling fictional cases [(which have) ever (been) recorded]]. The beautiful blinding light of clarity [[that good answers bring.]]</i>	Yrs 7/8
Yr 4	Use of personal pronouns <i>we</i> and <i>us</i> .		Word level grammar thread Significant choice of mental and relational verbs; e.g., <i>know, heard feel, crave, experience, hate (mental); is, was, have, are (relational)</i> Strong use of noun groups; e.g., <i>brief samples of narrative intrigue; the surprising impact of a 110 year old deductionist.</i>	Yrs 3/6
				Yrs 2,5,7

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Yr 6	Ellipsis; e.g. ...and (it) allows us to invest...	<p>After all, we have the need to know <i>everything</i>. When we don't – which is most of the time – we feel lost, confused, hard done by. We hate darkness, both literal and figurative, and for most of us it is synonymous with horror, with fear, with monsters under the bed. As a result, we crave the beautiful, blinding light of clarity that good answers bring. What clearer answers could we obtain than those laid out for us at the end of one of Holmes's cases? Short and simple, they quench our thirst for things unknown – at least temporarily.</p> <p>This final revelation, an essential part of the predictable template of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, is not the only thing that draws us in. Each story oozes suspense and allows us to invest in a juicy crime that we personally do not have to solve. Unlike those present in our own lives, Holmes's problems are guaranteed a solution. We know the big reveal is coming and so we can savour the journey by cheering Holmes on, chuckling at Watson's unhelpfulness, rolling our eyes at the 'official' police inspectors. Each tale offers stability and control; things that, in the chaos of everyday life, many of us lack.</p> <p>Free from the pressures we so often face, we</p>	Effective combinations of adjectives in noun groups; e.g. <i>mystery –solving, action – loving, amateur ...</i>	Yrs 1,2,5	
Yr 6	Substitution; e.g. <i>Undoubtedly so.</i>		Use of abstract nouns; e.g. <i>humanity, clarity</i>	Yrs 2,7,9	
Yrs 4,8	Ideas linked through text connectives e.g. <i>As a result</i>		Nominalisations; e.g. <i>popularity, clarity, reassurance, thirst</i>	Yr 8	
Yrs 2,6,8	Punctuation All punctuation correct. Good use of the hyphen, semicolon and dash , as well as the comma.		Vocabulary thread Strong field (subject matter) knowledge indicated; e.g. <i>John Watson, Arthur Conan Doyle, sleuth, sidekick</i>		
			Stylistically effective word choices; e.g. <i>action-loving, mystery-solving, extraordinary sleuthing jaunts; darkness, both literal and figurative</i>	Yrs 6,8,9	
		High degree of abstraction; e.g. revelation, samples of narrative intrigue, the predictable template	Yrs 8/9		
		Language for Interaction sub-strand			
		Evaluative Language thread			
		To express and invoke feelings and emotions; e.g. <i>relief, warm reassurance, curiosity, confused</i>	Yr 1		
		To judge character (positively or negatively); e.g. fictional mastermind, action loving	Yr 2		
		To evaluate/appreciate ideas, concepts and objects (positively or negatively); e.g. predictable template, juicy crime, classic tales, troubling world	Yr 2,7		
		Language variation to add or reduce force	Yr 3		
		Intensifying verbs; e.g. <i>skyrocketed, oozes</i>	Yr 3,6		

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		<p>experience almost tangible relief during the eventual resolution, as well as a warm reassurance that what was so craftily hidden from us is now, finally, in plain sight. It's a pat on the back of sorts, a realisation that though we don't know it all we do, at least, know this much.</p> <p>The influence of Sherlock Holmes does not end there. It's impossible to encounter this fictional mastermind without envying his incredible skills of deduction. Subtly, almost unnoticeably, his talents start to weave their way into the tapestry of our own lives. Our questions start with 'how?' instead of 'why?' A new generation of detectives is born, and as the fire of our curiosity rages endlessly on we set about solving our own mysteries. This is a true testament to the timelessness of Sherlock Holmes.</p> <p>Such is the surprising impact of a fictional 110-year-old deductionist. By providing the means, Holmes also gives us a way – a way to battle our own way through the boggy quagmire of our countless questions. It's undeniable that the classic tales of Sherlock Holmes and his good old sidekick Watson give us more than a quickly forgotten flash of entertainment. In this troubling world of ours, full of eternal mysteries, they furnish us with the most precious thing imaginable – answers.</p>	<p>Intensifying adjectives; e.g. <i>relentless curiosity,</i></p> <p>Intensifying adverbs; e.g. <i>rages endlessly</i></p> <p>Superlatives; e.g. <i>most valuable, most baffling</i></p> <p>Use of metaphor; e.g. <i>talents weaving their way into the tapestry of our lives, the fire of our curiosity rages...</i></p> <p>Repetition; e.g. <i>of sounds and grammatical structures. beautiful, blinding light, cheering...chuckling..., rolling etc.</i></p> <p>Rhetorical devices</p> <p>Questions used to provoke thought; e.g. <i>Or is there?</i></p> <p>Person: Use of 1st person (<i>we, our</i>) to align audience</p> <p>A form of bare assertion which presumes that we are all in agreement e.g. <i>...we have a need to know everything, We hate darkness ...etc</i></p> <p>Pronouncements (propositions presented as generally agreed on, ruling out alternatives); e.g. sentences beginning with <i>no doubt, undoubtedly</i></p> <p>Denials which shut down the contrary position e.g. <i>There is no reason..., It is undeniable...</i></p> <p>Countering (A proposition is used to invoke, then counter some contrary position); e.g. <i>Each story oozes suspense and allows us to invest in a juicy crime that we personally do not have to solve. (However) unlike those present in our own lives,...</i></p> <p>Modality e.g. <i>What clearer answers could we obtain?</i></p>	<p>Yr 3, 5</p> <p>Yr 3, 4</p> <p>Yr3?</p> <p>Yr5</p> <p>Yr5</p> <p>Yr 8 (rhetorical devices)</p> <p>Yr 5</p> <p>Yrs 3,7</p>
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Feature Article by Yr 12 student, Katelyn Bailey. (Used by permission) Analysis by Annette Curnow, 2016
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Appendix META-LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

(Explicit bringing into consciousness of an attention to language as an artefact, and the conscious monitoring and manipulation of language to create desired meanings grounded in socially shared understandings)

(Myhill 2011a:249)

Term	Definition	Practical Examples
Meta-linguistic content knowledge	Teachers' knowledge about language.	Knowing that emotive language used in a conservative campaign leaflet is used to persuade the reader to empathise with the issue.
Grammatical content knowledge	Teachers' explicit knowledge about grammar in terms of morphology and syntax. It is declarative knowledge which is conscious and can be articulated, and uses the meta-language of grammatical terminology.	Knowing what is the subject in a sentence Knowing that word classes in English are mobile and need to be looked at in the context of their function in a sentence.
Meta-linguistic pedagogical content knowledge	Teachers' knowledge about how to teach language in order to address learners' needs.	Being able to select appropriate texts to exemplify meta-linguistic features of texts Knowing how to model the meta-linguistic features of text in the classroom.
Grammatical pedagogical content knowledge	Teachers' knowledge about how and when to teach grammar in order to address learners' language needs. This includes procedural knowledge of the interrelationship between grammatical constructions and how texts work to shape meaning.	Knowing that children are often confused by word class mobility Knowing that post-modifier noun phrases can be valuable in creating effective descriptions of characters.

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2015 LITERARY COMPETITION

Co-ordinator's Report

The 56th Annual Literary Competition was a very successful event. In 2015 we received just shy of 900 entries (similar to last year's submission figure) from students and teachers alike, across Queensland and the Northern Territory. The quality of these entries was 'exceptional', as several of our judges attested, reflecting the breadth of talent in the State and Territory. The winning entries were published in the November 2015 issue of the IEUA-QNT's journal, *The Independent Voice*, as well as featuring on ETAQ's official website.

The Presentation Evening was conducted on Wednesday 14th October, 2015 at the Queensland Multicultural Centre at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane and was attended by around 200 people. This number included the prize winners, their family members and friends, as well as dignitaries from IEUA-QNT and ETAQ. Among the highlights of the evening included a student travelling all the way from Miles State High School: Angela Krause's entry for the Lisa Allen Memorial Poetry Prize for Years 9 and 10, was awarded a Highly Commended Certificate. From the Open Teachers Division, Frances Prentice of Chinchilla Christian School was in attendance at the Presentation Evening to receive her Highly Commended award. Another significant aspect of this division and the overall competition, was that we have our first prize winner from the Northern Territory – 2nd Place was awarded to Shona Ford of the Good Shepherd Lutheran College at Howard Springs, NT.

An inspiration to these talented writers was our Guest Author/Speaker, Mrs Cori Brooke, a children's picture book writer with several published works including 'Fearless with Dad' and 'Max and George'. She provided some brilliant insights into self-belief and persistence with writing, to inspire the young (and the not-so-young) writers.

On a sad note, we missed the presence of Mr Paul Sherman this year who passed away on 4th May. He has, for many years, made such a valuable contribution to our competition, to

poetry and to literature in a myriad of ways, and after whom the Year 7 Poetry Competition is named. Paul will always be fondly remembered and it is with gratitude that we acknowledge his flair, expertise and passion for sharing his literary gifts with us.

The 1st place-getters for 2015 are:

- Section A Non-Fiction Prose – Celine Chong, Somerville House
- Section A Short Story – Mia Jones, Chancellor State College
- Section A Poem – Rosie McCrossin, Sandgate District State High School
- Section B Short Story – Elise Andreas, Loreto College
- Section B Poem – Karima Hussaini, MacGregor State High School
- Section C Short Story – Sally Park Weir, Maleny State High School
- Section C Poem – Hannah Ostini, Somerville House
- Section D Short Story – Ochre Howard, Yungaburra State School
- Section D Poem – Emily Baxter, Mary Immaculate Primary School
- Section E Short Story – Michael Houldsworth, Pimlico State High School

Deb Peden

2015 Literary Competition Coordinator ETAQ

2015 LITERARY COMPETITION

JUDGE'S REPORT

Section A — Poem, Years 11–12

Judge: Ynes Sanz

In the old cultural traditions around food, the great cooks said that to make a superb dish, you require all the finest ingredients, plus a little something extra, sometimes described as 'passion' or 'soul'. I think the same thing is true for poetry.

Any poet with some imagination and a good brain can fill a page with the right ingredients, things like fresh language, authentic tone, vivid sensory imagery, original subject matter or an unusual 'take' on a more familiar theme. For me, a piece that doesn't communicate except via the intellect and relies on linguistic tricks may be a poem, but it's not properly 'poetry'.

Above all what I hope to find in any poem, regardless of its format and style, is cadence. It must hold together because of the internal dynamics of its structure, its stress patterns, the ebb and flow that directs the reader's response and the varying weight of its words and its pauses. The cadence is something like the poem's melody, and is where the signature feeling of a particular piece can be found.

In the thirty-three entries in this class this year, I found plenty to admire: there were passionate commentaries marked with searing honesty and maturity of insight, while other pieces were distinguished by lyricism and gentle humour. The entrants who tackled formal rhythm or rhyme handled it competently in general, and there weren't many of the small errors that sometimes make judging heartbreaking, where one last edit could have made all the difference to the success of an entry.

The four highly commended and three prize-winning poems illustrate a wide range of work, from dream-like or gothic fantasy scenarios to lyric descriptions and from narratives about life and love to violence and its aftermath.

Now to the winning poems.

Highly Commended:

- Fourth Highly commended is **An Army Divided**, an elegant extended metaphor, dovetailed together like an old riddle.
- Third Highly Commended is **Butterfly Bones**, a songlike memento mori in a suitably arch voice.
- Second Highly Commended is **From Dawn to Dusk**, a lyric poem that plays with a series of similes: 'Light dribbles through the trees/like milk from an infant's lip.'
- First Highly Commended is **In the Still**, this disciplined piece of writing, unrelenting but never overstated, compels us to gaze directly at the aftermath of battle, as 'The sun rises on a day that could be a future.'

Prize winners:

- The Third Prize poem **lilac**, is a free verse dream sequence, its carefully constructed form contrasting with the seductive elusiveness of its meaning.
- The Second Prize poem, **Lupus Filios**, paints an urban dystopia in words that come at you off the page in beautifully cadenced bites. This is a great poem to read aloud.
- The First Prize goes to 'Undertow'. This winning poem stands out in a number of crucial ways: it's well-observed, with great visual imagery (like the girls with chapped lips and 'skin which peels at their tailbones'); perhaps most importantly it's tightly constructed around the wonderfully apt, multi-layered metaphor of its title, then sustained until its well-resolved ending. It invites, and rewards, reading out loud. This poem is a fine piece of original writing by any standard: strong, moving and meticulously constructed.

Congratulations to all of the entrants. Our new generation of poets is producing remarkable work.

UNDERTOW

by Rosie McCrossin

Drawn away from the soft-crested waves
Which haunt these boys in sleep, incessant,
Longboards clatter in footpath cracks,
Along dirty-white boulevards
Of endless pun-named takeaways,
Haunted and owned by cloudy-eyed immigrants.
While their younger siblings frolic in cool and safe shallows,
Urban sweat infects the skin of their necks
And they are burnt and burnt again by their enemy sun of escape.
And feel the frozen Coke shimmer,
Cold and sugar-water sweet in their throats.
Running between the boys' legs,
Watch it melt and run like biblical floods,
Crushing and absorbing the warm bodies of the green-black ants.
Watch the insects struggle, fall defeated into the thick ice floe.
The undertow towards the blunt grey gutter which these boys must feel as well,
As years of school deliver their failings printed neatly
On a five-letter scale of inadequacies mailed directly home.
And the promises of improvement dribble, intoxicating, from tired lips.
But now it is in the summer holiday.
Bare feet on scorching pavement.
The girls they kiss here have chapped lips and skin which peels at their tailbones.
The beach is a place to show pain-forged shadows of muscle.
At home they are boys in uniforms pressed by motherhood's iron but here
Here they are hidden in the shadows of the salt-swept monsterias.
Here they are free in a world of adult sensations and it sets them alight
And they are *on fire*.

2015 LITERARY COMPETITION

The nights lit in orange red blue bonfire flames on the yellow beach
Blind ghost crabs shimmer across the sand
Lying back on the sand with eyes closed to weightlessness
Kissing with warm breath and hand and body
Waking up with eyes red like the morning sun and residual smile fading
Nights fade into mornings into days and into nights again.
Finally the joy of simply being alive
Defeats the endless failure.

But surely they must feel something when
The rip under the harsh blue-cream waves,
Drags them, close-eyed, far, far away from shore,
When the blind pull feels too familiar not to hurt.
When far away from the melting bitumen,
There is only them,
And their burning futures.

JUDGE'S REPORT

Section A — Short Story, Years 11 & 12

Judge: Esmé Robinson

Once again the Senior short stories provided interesting reading. Topics included the plight of refugees, environmental issues, war, family dysfunction, bulimia, murder, child abuse, abuse and subjugation of women, prostitution, slavery, the stolen generation, coping with grief, and rites of passage. Many other stories were monologues based on texts students were studying, for example, Browning's poem *My Last Duchess* and Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby* or prequels to Miller's play *The Crucible*.

The majority of stories were written in the first person present tense which heightened tension. However, many stories were spoilt by lapses into past tense. I noted particularly that very few students made use of dialogue. Surprisingly, only one story was humorous. As one can see from the topics, most of the stories were tragic and harrowing.

The students whose stories were highly commended are in alphabetical order.

Lizzie Campbell from Downlands College for *Dusty Tears*, Matilda Day, Loreto College for *4.00-500 am on a Tuesday Morning*, Jack Donnelly for *The Father, the Sun*, and Dayspring Koop for *The Danger of Picking Apples*.

Third prize is awarded to Bella Zhong from All Saints Anglican School, Merrimac for her story *Red Letter Day* which is a different take on Christmas. Set in Santa's workshop deep below the ice, Charlie the elf is disillusioned with his life of spraying plastic stars in a world where it is always Christmas. Bella sustains her use of present tense very well and there are some delightful touches.

For the Stars to Avenge the second prize winning story reminded me of the novel *The Book Thief* whose narrator is Death. Katherine Butcher from Genesis Christian College, Bray Park, has death as her protagonist. This is a very well-written and moving story. Death has been drawn to Hiroshima, Japan, unsure of what has drawn him there. There is no sign of war but he sees his terrified sister Anguish to whom he must not speak and this heightens his awareness of

impending doom. What is about to happen? And then, a cylinder is dropped from on high – silence, a cloud, a wasteland, unrecognisable human beings, the wailing of Anguish and Death himself cries. Most moving.

Mia Jones from Chancellor State College, Sippy Downs wins first prize for her story, *The Girl with the Hair*. Mia uses a different and imaginative structure in her first person narrative as her omniscient narrator speaks directly to the woman with the hair who has left the cloying protectiveness of her mother for life in the big city. Cleverly, Mia uses italics as she recounts, in past tense, the girl's childhood. Effective use of questions and commands add immediacy to the story. Mia also makes effective use of imagery.

The narrator's tone is at times accusatory, at times deeply caring as can be seen from this extract as the girl is reminded of her mother's love.

Have you forgotten her already? Do you remember? You wading in to the soupy humidity of the city, it bathing in delusion. With a sloppy hand, you adjusted your façade, the cliché of happy-go-lucky youth you hoped to masquerade. I know you shivered at the tang of illicitness, saccharine in your mouth, as you traded sensible skirts for a higher cut; jerked your mother's clasp from your hair and left it on the floor.

The city drawing you in like the tide: the forbidden sea.

Mia is indeed a talented writer. A plea to all writers.

Please re-read your stories aloud so that you can use punctuation effectively to control the way you want your readers to read your stories. Inappropriate use of punctuation, particularly semi-colons and colons, can spoil the flow of a story. Check for consistency of tense and do not rely on the computer for accuracy of spelling and grammatical choice.

Congratulations to all winners and thank you to all those students who entered the competition.

Esmé Robinson

THE WOMAN WITH THE HAIR

by Mia Jones

There's something you should know.

Yes, you, young woman with the hair. The mousy locks you rarely let down, the strands strained in an ever-present bun at the nape of your neck. This is the style you release as rarely as your pride; but now the tresses tumble free, spiralling downwards in the same fashion as your dignity.

Tight clothes, tight-smile. The spotlight is on you, my girl; a world of flashing lights and dazzled faces, blaring music setting the thrumming heartbeat of the city. Let yourself go, my friend: atop these scuffed floors, every maladroit pivot is a pirouette, every gauche swivel a flamenco of the highest order.

Now stop. Cast your eyes around.

No one is watching.

How the alcohol reached your brain? They waltz to their own tune; they are ballerinas within their own little snow domes. Why would they care for your petty display, just as you do not care for theirs?

Your face crumples.

Hush now. Look once more Carefully, closely. I won't ask you again.

Do you see him?

Do you feel the tide kiss your ankles, cold as death?

Do you remember?

Gold and blue, the hues of your childhood: sand and sea, sky and sun. Snug in your skin as a little girl, arms blistering and hair tousling.

You dashed into the water, hitching knees high from the icy spray. An insistent whine calls from the shore; your mother, already fading into the background like a bad dream. Calling for you. Wanting you back.

Have you forgotten her already?

Do you remember?

You, wading into the soupy humidity of the city, as if bathing in delusion. With a sloppy hand, you adjusted your façade of blitheness, the cliché of happy-go-lucky youth you hoped to masquerade. I know you shivered at the tang of illicitness, saccharine in your mouth, as you traded sensible skirts for a much higher cut; jerked your mother's clasp from your hair and left it on the floor.

The city, drawing you in like a tide: the forbidden sea.

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Do you remember?

Your mother calls from the shore. She wants you safe.

The pulsating life of the nightclub as you tiptoed inside, high heels clacking a staccato of hesitation?

The tide sucks about your ankles; no longer welcoming. It's drawing back, folding in on itself.

Taunting you. Inviting you deeper, so the tide can rise in a flash and swallow you whole.

The man leering from the corner, face swathed in shadow?

She wants you safe.

The silent catcall of that smirk, the black intent in his eyes?

You're not safe.

Upon that lacklustre dance floor, you freeze. The glow in your chest evaporates. Humidity descends like a soaking coat of mail.

My dear, listen closely: turn and scuttle. Keep your breath bated against pursuit.

The tide drags back, like the sheet from a corpse. An autopsy of your poise and pride. It withdraws with a sigh, and the rocks are exposed. They are teeth. Daggers.

Did he follow you?

You're not safe.

Look behind you.

"Don't look behind you! You'll fall!"

The voice rose to sugary heights, hitting all the pitches formulaic in gently rebuking a child.

The girl whipped her head back to face the front, feeling the world plummet around her can her insides somersault.

The woman behind the swing began laughing, as if the sharp tangle of notes was infectious and would grip the girl in a raging fever of hysteria. Eyes downcast, the girl only gripped the ropes tighter and closer her ears to the sound. The childish game of a swing seemed to be a gambit to keep the woman entertained: a role reversal that curdled the bright sunshine sour.

Stony-faced, the girl stared at her surroundings (or the rest of the park?): the sensible couples, picnicking families. She felt like she was pressing her nose against a piece of art, praying to fall through the glass.

Suddenly, the swing slowed beneath her mother's hands.

"What's wrong, darling?"

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The weight of her mother's eyes could break bone. The girl carefully wiped her face of expression, but her throat began to close.

"This is fun, isn't it? Isn't it, honey?"

Her cheeks burned with the heat of lies brewing on her tongue.

The woman's fingers began to tremble, clutching the swing ropes like a lifeline. Something was caving inside her; something only buoyed by the

(soupy humidity of delusion)

sturdy reassurance of a child.

"I love you, you know." The words were taut and quivering.

Silence.

"Remember that," she whispered, and her voice broke.

The girl turned towards her, and

the man is there.

Oh yes, my dear, he is there; silhouetted against the pulsing disco lights, draped in a cloak of dusky shadow.

When the tide crawls back to its den, the rocks come out to play. A little girl in the big bad city – when the thrill of independence evaporates, what then? When the tide goes out, what happens?

The rocks are exposed, of course. The rocks, with their dagger-like edges on skin softened by the surf. When the fog of city humidity rolls back

(wading through delusion)

those with black eyes and blacker intents come out to play.

Your mother called you back to shore. She wanted you safe.

Do you miss her now?

Don't run. Let your shoes kiss the pavement. Carefully now; this is no ragtag love affair.

And whatever you do, my love; no matter how straitjacketed your heart, how icy your sweat, how scarce your breath:

Don't look back.

You draw in a deep breath, and

saw her crumpled against the doorway, an origami of hurt and confusion. The prehistoric wail that escaped her mouth cut the ears like broken glass.

A young woman stood stiffly nearby as the sobs rained blows on her. In one hand was a suitcase; the other, the throbbing pulse

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(of the city)

of freedom.

“Why are you leaving?” the woman sobbed. She dug her fingers into her froth of mousy hair and wrenched with violence, bawling hysterically.

But the enticing scent of liberation has rendered her daughter sturdy as an oak; she waited in silence, coolly observing her roots fester and sob before her.

“Please stay,” her mother choked out. She writhed under the surge of uncontrollable sobs, her pathetic form shivering like a leaf.

Images flashed through the young woman’s mind, each tasting worse than the last. Her mother’s face splitting like a watermelon into hysterical laughter at the smallest of things, until the stares made the woman’s face burn like wildfire. The odd moods that descended,

(like humidity)

when her world blackened and everyone was an enemy. The moments when she lashed out in deluded

(sweet humidity of delusion)

anger and smashed plates in fits of fury.

In a sickening reel of credits, the words scrolled in her mind’s eye. Strange. Hysterical.

Moronic. Weak.

“Will you visit me?” Her voice was sunken with tears.

The door drew the young woman like a magnet. Her mother let out another awful sob, tattooing the air with misery, and raised her palms in final, desperate supplication.

“Remember me!”

Her daughter looked away, and

realises with a sickening jolt that she misses her.

My dear, keep on your measured pace, your calculated tap dance of panicky high heels. I see your hands tremble, your lungs struggle to push out air, but listen to this: the ambling pace is a façade of indifference, a poker face in the game for your life.

Don’t look back. Eye contact provokes predators.

Every night sound could be a footstep. Every breath of air could be a hand, reaching...

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But you won't look, you can't look, one look and your nerve is lost, one look and

(Don't look behind you! You'll fall!)

you're dead.

But there is something else - an ache, deep in your chest; a root canal ignored and inflamed.

Your shoulders bunch forward as you walk, as if trying to cradle your heart.

You've never missed her more than this night.

A path, a gate, a door - the borders of familiarity. At the cool touch of the doorknob, the rigor mortis of terror unclenches its iron grip from your body, and your knees begin to buckle.

It is only after the door closes behind you when a strangled sob escapes.

There's something you should know.

Yes, you. Young woman with the hair. The mousy locks you are twisting into a strained bun at the nape of your neck. Seeking your mother's hair clasp and rescuing it from the floor.

Do you remember?

Do you remember the soft nest of her arms; her words and her tears; her laughter and theatre?

The words scroll in your mind's eye. *Unique. Warm. Vibrant. Rare.*

There's something you should know.

This life is a lonely tide. The rocks are like knives. Your mother calls from the shore.

She wants you back. She wants you safe.

Do you remember?

"I remember," you whisper, and cradle the hair clasp close.

JUDGE'S REPORT

Section A – Non-Fiction Prose, Years 11 & 12

Judge: Dr Stephen Torre

The entries in the Literary Competition Non-Fiction Prose section were of a commendably high standard. The majority were well researched and competently written. There was some clustering of subject-matter around two areas.

Many entries addressed issues of gender, stereotyping, discrimination against women or women's empowerment, male female relationships and marriage, and other topics relating to feminist issues. These were usually energetic in their identification of discrimination and defence of equality. While the approaches were often appealing and convincing, by and large the ideas stayed within the current understanding and rhetoric of feminism and related issues. Few of these tried to push the discussion into innovative or unusual perspectives.

The better articles made good use of literary sources (including classical works such as *Pride and Prejudice* as well as more modern ones) and modern culture and movies (such as *My Brilliant Career* or *The Devil Wears Prada*).

A second area of interest focused on media and technology, and the personal, social, and political impacts of these. A nice range of specific topics included how the internet is changing language, the collection of metadata and invasion of privacy, the way online communications are changing human social relations, and so on. These were always well researched, but again, often tending to 'mashups' of existing sources, which, while well done and informative, did not push into innovative understanding or unusual perspectives.

There was an interesting range of topics outside these two dominant areas. The newspaper/magazine review mode was used to examine art exhibitions, such as the *Sublime* exhibit at

QGOMA, or recent movies or novels. Other articles focused on Australian or American history or society (for example 'The American Dream') or contemporary issues such as bioethics, conformism, and consumerism.

Writing style and structure were generally of a high standard. However, the most popular style was a very subjective/personalized narration using contemporary idiomatic neologisms and expressions. This racy, flashy, hip popular magazine/internet sub-style could be entertaining, but often worked to make ideas somewhat superficial. Popular rhetoric and discourse sometimes worked against the probing and elucidation of complex ideas which more formal and studied prose can achieve. It was also gratifying to see the references to secondary sources, both imaginative and factual, with sometimes quite sensitive and creative readings or interpretations of these.

In deciding the winner and the rankings I looked for the following qualities:

- An innovative or unusual treatment of a current topic of significance OR an original analysis of a new or unusual area of awareness or significance;
- The intelligent and critical use of authoritative sources;
- A tight, coherent and logically developing argument or analysis which led to clear conclusions and insights, with no padding or repetition;
- An expressive and polished prose style which brought clarity to complex ideas and avoided cliché and jargon.

The top seven pieces all had merit, and were separated in quality only by the narrowest of margins.

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My choice for first prize is “War for the Word”. This essay addresses the influence of digital communications in our lives, but unlike other more generalized submissions on this theme, it has a focused thesis about the destructive effects of social media and popular culture on language. The author instances text-speak and emojis as forms of communication which replace the diversity and richness of our language with simplifications and banalities, ultimately leading to a narrowing uniformity of thought, emotion and expression. The sources and quotations from secondary material are cleverly chosen and appropriate. The essay demonstrates a careful linear development of thought leading to a strong conclusion based on careful analysis. Best of all, despite the examples of linguistic disease cited, this author’s ideas are articulated with clarity and precision.

- First ANF 024 War for the Word
Second ANF 019 Black and White:
The Villainous Turned to Vulnerable
Third ANF 026 Walking the Digital Plank,
Blindfolded
Highly Commended
ANF 004 The How To: Barbie Girl
ANF 021 The Cult(ure) of
Consumerism
ANF 022 March of the Morons
ANF 027 Technological Terror

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WAR FOR THE WORD

by Celine Chong

In our world, technology and pop culture are being hailed heroes, but in the face of a literary downfall, should it really be “out with the old and in with the new”?

It's no question that the technological advance in the last century has been remarkable. Where once, Christmas cards would be opened in February (after a good dusting off), now, regardless of a sub-par wifi connection, any message, for any occasion, can be sent and received before anyone can say “slow internet sucks”. But all is not fine and dandy as we navigate the frontlines of what's in, hip, and happening. The fact of the matter is, the onslaught of social media and popular culture is truncating our language, moulding us into an army of tech-savvy, banal-brained robots, completely devoid of thought, emotion and individuality.

Humans have always been visionaries, creators and dreamers: from ancient Hindu paintings of flying rockets, to Einstein and his genius Theory of Relativity. A desire to progress and improve on what has been done is in our nature. But in our current age of finger-tapping screen-starters, we may be on the cusp of an intellectual backward spiral.

We've all fallen victim to the terrors of text-speak, of which monosyllabic “LOL” is undoubtedly leading the siege. Originally meaning “laugh-out-loud” is now, in all its straight-faced glory, everyone's go-to phrase in “what-you're-saying-is-mildly-interesting--but-tbh-I-don't-really-care” situations. And don't deny it, we've all been there and said that.

And that's just it. The internet is silently enslaving us all into groupthink by allowing phrases like “LOL” to go viral, sparing 100% of the population (minus that one guy who said it before it was cool) the hard labour of coming up with their own witty sayings. Had Jane Austen's ‘Pride and Prejudice’ been written in the last ten years, Darcy's “in vain I have struggled, it will not do ...” would have been met with an indifferent “Lol” from Elizabeth and a 21st century version of William Blake's ‘The Garden of Love’ would probably read: “The Church. Lol.” In short, if “writing is ... an attempt to ...create an identity” (Stephen Fredman), then right now, we would all be pretty similar. By simplifying our language, the idiosyncrasies in each individual's expression is fast becoming a relic of the past.

And it's not just in our speech and writing. Popular music is also joining the clash of the complex words, or lack thereof. Take love song, “Baby I” by Ariana Grande, past its prime, but will have to do for our purposes. When the chorus repeats the words “oh baby, my baby” for 30 seconds, you'd think she'd get to the point. But she doesn't. And what's really frightening is when Ariana croons “words, they only complicate it”.

How can Grande feel the love that she's singing about if she can't even find the words to describe it? More importantly, how can her listeners understand what she means? Similarly, when “all the feels” became ‘a thing’, it became the norm for people to

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express their aching ‘feels,’ while leaving them completely undefined. Despite the cracks in communication, however, nobody seems to mind and we all live happily ever after, wallowing in our mutually ambiguous ‘feels.’ Orwell’s ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ provides a timely reminder: “every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller...” So how can we feel these emotions if we have no word for them?

Nek minnit. Why use language at all when we have emojis? With 1 in 10 tweets including these innocent pixels, they can really pack a punch. To your vocabulary that is. Why think to express your idea with words, such as ‘exuberance,’ ‘jubilation,’ or even ‘hedonism,’ when all you need to type is the ‘red dancing lady’ emoji? Or one of the 700 other pre-programmed expressions ready and waiting on the emoji keyboard. And with Fred Benenson’s aptly titled ‘Emoji Dick,’ an emoji translation of Melville’s ‘Moby Dick,’ soon, we’ll be saying, in the words of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, “the pen-sorry, predefined PIXEL is mightier than the sword.”

By using our beloved emojis, we are banishing many powerful words, to the realms of the unused. The rejected. The socially-strange. In using the ‘thumbs up’ emoji rather than ‘exceptional,’ ‘exemplary’ or ‘outstanding’ or the ‘no good’ emoji instead of ‘abhorrent,’ ‘abominable’ or ‘detestable,’ “we are [becoming] dry in terms of the cues we use to signal exactly what we mean.” That’s coming from Tyler Schnoebelen, who wrote his university thesis on the nuances of the emoji language. Legit. And he’s not far off the mark. In the reduction of the use of complex words, we are narrowing our range of thought and giving rise to our very own real-life Newspeak, or should I say, Nospeak.

People, we are looking at the surrender of words from, not just English, but all languages as our vocabulary continues to plummet to depths of unparalleled vacuity. And if the limits of language are the limits of the world (Ludwig Wittgenstein), it’s REALLY going to be a small world after all. Don’t forget to open up ‘thesaurus.com’ every time you try to write anything longer than a Facebook message.

So maybe technology has conquered us, making us crave convenience and simplicity in our language, Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein-complex,’ so to speak: “You are my creator, but I am your master--obey.” We are merely slaves to our invention and our intellectual demise a consequence of our own creation.

Or perhaps change is truly the only constant, and our battered and broken language is the reward for our victory over hardship and struggle, a manifestation of humanity’s need to endlessly make things easier. Technology is here to make our lives better, but in our world, has better become a synonym for easier? If, as Dumas says in ‘The Three Musketeers,’ “the merit of all things lies in their difficulty,” then who has really won the battle?

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