



BETWEEN THE LINES

Give learners confidence in their own responses to unseen poetry with John Irving Clarke's playful plan...

TODAY YOU WILL...

> DEVELOP YOUR CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS WHEN RESPONDING TO UNSEEN POETRY

Those long enough in the tooth to remember the introduction of GCSE will also remember the title: the liberating exam. By the end of course, with clunky scaffolds around coursework submissions and didacticism running wild in teaching anthologised poetry, it didn't feel like much of a liberation.

It is no surprise then to find that the unseen poetry element of GCSE English Literature assessment has been broadly welcomed by English teachers. There is a different emphasis now, of course, when it is impossible to second guess the examiner. These days pupils need to enter the examination hall with confidence in their own ability to meet, read and enjoy the prospect

of responding to otherwise unknown texts. Gone – thankfully – are the days of trying to remember what sir or miss said about what this poem means.

This lesson plan calls for pupils to work in pairs and groups. It requires an ability to sequence poetry text, to make and justify proposals and to compare texts in terms of structure and meaning. Above all, it is a lesson designed to encourage participation. Although we end up with the poet's final published draft, there are no absolutely right answers. Hypothesising and trialling can be fun and presenting a case to support suggestions is formative. Ultimately, playing with words will be as pleasurable as messing with paints or jamming with musical instruments.



STARTER ACTIVITY+

Reveal the title first of all:
Another Cup of Coffee

What might pupils expect from a poem with such a title? Ask them to write down one word to sum up their response. Share these and consider what has been revealed about the class's expectations of the poem.

MAIN ACTIVITIES+

1 MIX IT UP

Hand out this version of *Another Cup of Coffee*, where the poem is randomly arranged:

Another Cup of Coffee

The search for food or something acrobatics of a squirrel performing dangerous tricks. Fleeting flight, Cabbage White catches the sun then is gone.

The black cloud forecasted sky unleashes its salvo and the pegged out washing needs saving.

And a coal tit drawn to the newly filled, no, not by me, dangling feeds, busily weeds out chaff like a jumble sale shopper returning and dipping in selection.

+ READATHON GETS KIDS READING



Here's an easy way to boost your pupils' reading habits this year: run a Readathon Sponsored Read. All you'll need is a Readathon resource pack, available free of charge from registered charity Read for Good.

It's easy to run. Just issue sponsorship cards to pupils, who ask family and friends to sponsor them. Students are motivated to read by knowing that they're raising money to help seriously ill children.

What's more, the school earns free book vouchers worth 20% of the sponsorship total.

Order your free pack online at readathon.org or call 0845 606 1151.

*These rattan chairs
knocked out in a warehouse
round our way
speak of colonial splendour,
of moments such as this.*

*The papers turn up on time
for once
proclaiming cultural significances
superior to their tabloid breed.*

*The wind chime
strategically placed
strikes occasional notes but fades
against the Sunday
opening overture.*

Re-sequence the order of the poem to find an order which the pupils find satisfactory. How were decisions made about the order of the poem? Were there any clues in the structure or the meaning of the poem? Compare responses and allow pupils to articulate their thinking processes and justifications.

2 FINISHING TOUCHES

Ask the pupils to provide a five-word final line to the poem (the original has so far been omitted). Again share responses.

Read the original version of the poem.

Another Cup of Coffee

*The papers turn up on time for once
proclaiming cultural significances
superior to their tabloid breed.*



HOME LEARNING

Ask students to find and read the poem, *Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota* by James Wright, and be prepared to discuss this poem in relation to *Another Cup of Coffee*.

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*The search for food or
something acrobatics
of a squirrel performing
dangerous tricks.*

*Fleeting flight, Cabbage White
catches the sun then is gone.
The black cloud forecasted sky
unleashes its salvo
and the pegged out washing
needs saving.*

I have wasted this morning.
Jack Irving

How do the pupils' versions compare with the original? What effect is achieved by the poet's final line? How would the pupils sum up the attitude expressed by the poet?

3 TALK ABOUT IT

Ask pupils to choose the line or phrase which they find most striking and then share

responses. Which part of the poem was chosen most often? Ask for explanations of why this should be.

Conversely, which part of the poem wasn't chosen very often? Again, investigate possible reasons for this.

Finally, ask students: If you could meet the person who "voices this poem", the narrator, what questions would you want to ask him?

INFO BAR

+ ABOUT THE EXPERT



John Irving Clarke has an M.A. in English in Education. After a teaching career which involved two head of English posts and another as assistant head teacher (language development,) he now writes poetry, short stories and YA novels. He visits schools to read, perform and lead workshops on creative writing and responses to literature. He also delivers INSET on Developing Language Strategies in the Classroom.
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SUMMARY

Which of these statements would your learners say is most accurate? Use them as a basis for discussion:

- I. Another Cup of Coffee is a poem where nothing much happens.
- II. The person whose voice we hear in this poem feels as though he has wasted a morning. He may even feel that he has wasted his whole life.
- III. The person whose voice we hear in this poem is very observant of the world around him. He hears the wind chime and watches carefully the creatures in his garden: coal tits, squirrels and cabbage white butterflies. He also notes the change which is about to take place in the weather.
- IV. The person in this poem is a bit of a waster;

he would rather sit and watch the world go by rather than deal with important things like bringing in the washing.

Key points to summarise: the poem *does* seem to reflect the viewpoint of someone who is happy to read papers and watch the world go by and it does look likely that the washing will get wet due to this person's inactivity. However, his observations are quite charmingly expressed and he seems drawn towards the activities of the birds, squirrels and butterflies. Surely someone who has developed this level of affinity with the natural world has not wasted his life?

Finally, take away any dread remaining of poetry. Point out to students how they have interacted with the poems and the high order skills they have employed. Congratulate them on their efforts.