What kind of learning is enabled by using (re)creative narrative tasks to help AS pupils explore Aspects of Narrative?

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Dedicated to the memory of my grandmother,

Veryan Mary Wootton

(10/12/1921 - 28/9/2013)
Abstract

In this report I trace the development of the A level English Literature curriculum and the different pressures that led to the introduction of the Aspects of Narrative unit that I teach to my year 12 students. Starting from the observation of difficulties students experienced, and my own difficulties in interpreting this unit, I consider how creativity and culture can be defined, and ways that my classes can be encouraged to engage with narrative as a process of consciousness, “a primary act of mind transferred to art from life” (Hardy, 1977, p.12), rather than as a list of features to identify.

Over the course of an academic year I have reflected on my own practice with my year 12 classes and introduced different methods for examining their responses to literature, including reflective journals, focus groups, recording class discussions and analysing their writing. Having decided to focus on re-creative writing tasks, I chose to discuss two lessons in detail, using evidence from the students’ writing to explore ideas of voice, agency and culture, and examining closely the learning, social as well as individual, resulting from a re-creative pedagogy.
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Introduction

My interest in investigating the learning of my year 12 classes stems from observing some of the difficulties my year 12 class encountered with their A level studies: my perception is that students struggle with the huge gap in ways of studying and assessing literature from GCSE to AS level. The use of re-creative tasks with these students was an interest that developed later, during the course of my research.

My school is a large co-educational Academy in south east London. In year 12 in the academic year 2013-14 we have a cohort of 63 students studying AS English Literature, AQA specification B. The unit I chose to focus on is titled Aspects of Narrative (AQA, 2013, p.5). The unit’s explicit focus is “how narratives are constructed by authors, and the different ways in which they can be responded to by readers” (AQA, 2013, p.5). My perception is that students struggle with this unit, which requires them to take a different approach to texts from their GCSE exams. Additionally, I frequently find myself struggling to synthesise some of the ideas around narrative and to present them in a way accessible to my students. There seems to be a huge gap between the expressed aims of the unit and the way it is actually studied in the classroom.

A key aspect of year 12 study is the time pressure students and teachers are under to prepare for a mid-May exam: it can be difficult to find the time to engage students with their texts in the ways that I want, rather than just cramming exam technique.

An additional problem on the AS course is the frequency of plagiarism, with students sometimes handing in homework tasks composed of a series of paragraphs of text lifted from different study guide websites, leaving teachers feeling unable to assess that student’s
understanding of the topic. I want my students to “speak in their own voice”, (Gill, 2011, p. 25) rather than to feel they need to turn to the internet for a valid response.

I often sense resistance among the classes to activities not specifically, or explicitly, linked to exam preparation. However, as I observed my classes closely over the course of the year I became convinced that it was the creative tasks that enabled me to mediate Aspects of Narrative most effectively. I wanted to look at my students’ responses to creative tasks and examine the ways these help them to identify and evaluate writers’ narrative choices.

**Research question:** What kind of learning is enabled by using (re)creative narrative tasks to help AS pupils explore Aspects of Narrative?

**Aims**

This research will look at students’ responses to creative tasks and try to understand how these tasks help students to develop their understanding of their set texts and also of the Aspects of Narrative approach to literature. My research will “feed back directly into practice” (Denscombe, 2003, p.76) in terms of my own approach to teaching AS level, and will also help me to understand what approaches can help and hinder my students. However, I should make it clear that I am not aiming to present an “ideal teaching method”: in the words of Jane Miller, “any commitment to a pedagogy which presents itself as certain should arouse our suspicions” (Miller, 1995, p.24). My research will be focusing on one particular approach and looking at its effectiveness with a particular group of AS English students, in the hope of tracing their learning and the dynamic relationship between class, text and teacher in detail.
Literature review

A level curriculum

The A level curriculum has been the subject of frequent reforms over the last few decades, notably in the year 2000 when the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) attempted to clarify what the study of Literature expects from students by introducing standard Assessment Objectives (AOs). This was part of a drive to expand the subject from simply “the analysis of individual texts” to “the discipline itself” (Nightingale, 2007, p.137).

However, this aim is hampered by a lack of consensus about what “the discipline itself” actually is. The increasing importance of reader-response theory has disrupted traditional, canonical models of English Literature study by asserting that texts are “actualised through the experience of individual readers” (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.60), placing the emphasis on the reader rather than the writer. This poses a challenge for the education system – how can knowledge in English be defined when any individual “reader’s response” will be subjective?

Snapper suggests that “the paradigm which underlies English in HE – one which adopts a stronger socio-cultural emphasis” (p.208) is what should underpin the subject at A level as well.

I can see that AQA specification B, and in particular the Aspects of Narrative unit, is attempting to address these concerns and expand the A level beyond the analysis of individual texts, by asking students to separate “story” from the methods used to tell that story, which may be influenced by cultural factors, and by looking at texts in the context of narrative theory. However, this theoretical underpinning is weakened by the exam structure, which splits the two aspects of “how narratives are constructed [...] and the different ways in which they can be responded to” (AQA, 2013, p.5) into a two-part question; only the second
part of which engages students in a debate around different readings (see Appendix 1, pp. 45-51 for a copy of the 2014 Unit 1 exam paper). This is a clear example of “arbitrarily tying this or that AO to this or that unit, irrespective of the text being studied” (Nightingale, 2007, p.136) which results in students being drilled in exam technique and the “correct” type of response for each question, rather than broadening the subject.

Similarly, students are only marked on AO4 – relating texts to their historical contexts of production and/or reception – on one question, 25% of the exam as a whole. This appears to devalue the significance of context, and “implies that such knowledge can sometimes be dispensed with” (Literacle.com, 2013).

**The Narrative approach to Literature study**

The approach to literature advocated by the Aspects of Narrative unit is dedicated to looking at the function of stories and narratives in their wider context, and therefore can be seen as an attempt to address criticisms such as that by Bluett et al that A levels failed to “adequately deal with wider questions concerning the nature of reading and […] such key concepts as genre, narrative, representation and culture” (Bluett et al, 2004, p.10). Aspects of Narrative aims to address the human impulse towards creating stories which Barbara Hardy describes as “a primary act of mind transferred to art from life” (Hardy, 1977, p.12). This reflects Edward Sapir’s idea that “man…does not handle reality by direct and ad hoc means but via a symbolic representation of the world as he has experienced it” (Britton, 1977, p.111). This approach asks students to focus on the “narrative means” (Britton, 1977, p.15) authors have used to construct their “symbolic representation” of the world, rather than the more familiar end product of those means (i.e. the themes and characters of the text). What both Hardy and Sapir are highlighting is the centrality of narrative to our thought processes and sense of identity: far from just art or entertainment, narrative is our way of making sense of the world. Hardy traces the connection between our use of narrative in life
and in fiction: “Recollection of happenings, which removes certain parts for various conscious and unconscious motives, is the best life-model for the novel” (Hardy, 1977, p.14). This is a connection I would like my AS students to explore, drawing connections between day to day storytelling and that of literature.

AQA state that “The specification is built on a central organising principle: that the exploration of reading processes can be an interesting and enriching way to approach literary texts” (AQA, 2013, p.1). However, “the reading process” is something hugely personal and centrally concerned with subjectivity. As so often when attempting to construct a clearly-defined field of study out of the mass of questions regarding the subject matter of “English”, the response has been to develop a pseudo-systematic approach which appears to enable students to carry out an “objective” analysis of their texts: in the case of Aspects of Narrative, students are drilled in ways of commenting on the effects of authors’ narrative choices, including narrative voice, form, structure, setting, time frame, and narrative gaps. As a result a new layer of meta-language for writing about literature has been added to the “discipline” of English, without actually solving the problem of how to encourage students to truly reflect on the process and place of reading and narrative.

**The value of creativity and “re-creativity” in the English classroom**

The term “creativity” is difficult to define: “creativity has many meanings and many uses” (McCallum, 2012, p.1). Andrew McCallum draws a key connection between definitions of creativity and of learning: “In the interplay of what students know and believe with what they do not know or have experience of comes both creativity and learning” (ibid p.31) which suggests creativity should play a central role in schools. I take creativity to refer to activities in which students interact with their texts productively, whether through re-writing, acting or editing them. While the creative tasks I will be focusing on conform to
McCallum’s definition of “re-creativity” (“the self-conscious manipulation of source material to bring something new into being” (ibid, p. 54)), he acknowledges that all creativity can be seen as re-creativity: we “work with materials absorbed from a culture or a melange of cultures” (Attridge, 2004, cited by McCallum, 2012, p.56). This view positions creativity as an “ongoing process stemming from what already exists” (ibid, p.56), just as literature and culture can be seen as an ongoing process, an “unfinished reality” (Freire, 1996, p.65).

Without actively engaging students in their own writing, the study of literature remains passive (what Paolo Freire would call a “banking” system which involves “knowledge being transmitted...with no prospect for dialogic engagement or challenge” (McCallum, 2012, p.114)) whereas by interacting with their texts students can be encouraged to acknowledge literature as a “dynamic aspect of culture” (NATE, 2004, p.10), a continuing creative process in which they can participate. This conception of literature and culture as something dynamic and “unfinished” is a challenge for English as a field of study, linking to the uncertainties mentioned above regarding what really constitutes the “discipline” of English.

Richards-Kamal writes on the value to students of “personal engagement with reading and writing” (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.62) through creative work: producing and commenting on their own writing helped her students to analyse other writers’ use of language. Giving them the opportunity “to stand back from their own writing and think explicitly, with teacher support, about what they were doing” enables them in time to “comment critically upon what other writers are doing” (ibid, p.68). This implies that we need to encourage students to recognise themselves as writers in order to help them to identify the skills of other authors. However, this view of “creativity” preceding “criticism” is far from straightforward; it is more common to see “comment[ing] critically upon what other writers are doing” (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.62) as a necessary prerequisite for being able to write oneself. I see the two processes, creating and criticising, as intrinsically linked; they cannot be considered
or taught) separately but should feed into each other. McCallum challenges this split between ideas of “critique” and “design” and encourages teachers to see them as connected processes. He also suggests that it is important to “acknowledge the receptive nature of much learning”, expanding the term “creativity” beyond straightforwardly productive tasks: “critical-creativity acknowledges the creativity of processing as well as of producing, that learning takes place dialogically in the interaction between the text and the mind as well as in being articulated in a suitable form” (McCallum, 2012, p.112). This suggests that students can still be learning creatively by reading and reflecting, and not only when they are engaged in a creative-writing activity. It is important to maintain a balance of tasks, and not to neglect opportunities to comment on the work of other authors. In my own experience of learning from creative tasks, as I comment later on I found that the experience of individual students or groups sharing their work with the whole class provided learning opportunities even for students who had resisted actively participating in the creative process.

Linking to the way reader-response theory challenges notions of accepted readings of texts in English, McCallum extends the idea of “reader response”, which “gives control to readers” (ibid, p.57) to “writer-response”: not only can students develop their own readings of texts but they can express them by writing their own, new versions. By using the ideas of a text and re-writing it, a piece of literature no longer stands as “an immutable object” but becomes “relevant to [the students] lives in whatever form they deem suitable” (p.82), linking to NATE’s recommendation for A level English to recognise the “dynamic” qualities of literature.

Ray Misson brings the notion of agency to the debate on creativity in English, defining the purpose of English teaching as “to gain an understanding of what agency might look like” (Misson, 2013, p.358). His position is that English has previously been based on a negative
model in which students are seen as passive: “the main focus of education has been to promote avoidance, rather than active working to shape the world” (Misson, 2013, p.358). Instead of viewing students as unable to resist “the subject positions implied by the discourse” they are exposed to unless a good English teacher protects them (ibid, p.352) English should be about developing students’ sense of active agency, which is what I am trying to do through re-creative writing in response to texts. Similarly Ken Jones suggests that teachers and the education system should recognise “the cultural agency of learners” (Jones, 2009, p.78), which I believe can be done by encouraging students to participate in lessons as writers as well as as readers.

Students’ use of language is crucial to their positioning as active agents in the classroom. Paulo Freire’s model of “problem-posing education” which sees students as “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 1996, p.62) assigns language a central role; students are “constantly involved in bringing meaning to their own worlds” through participating in the process of “creation and re-creation” (McCallum, 2012, p.114). Rather than be constrained by Bakhtin’s idea that language always “comes to us inhabited by its previous uses” ((Misson, 2013, p. 360) Misson sees language as a creative resource: “not closed off and imposed on us, but it is a resource that we can take and shape for our own purposes so as to create ourselves and act in the world” (Misson, 2013, p.360). In re-creating, modernising and adapting these lines of text, students can learn to assert themselves in the “struggle over who owns those words” (Doecke & McKnight, 2003, p.301). English, then, should encourage students to use language for their own purposes, as active writers and not just passive readers. English teachers should consider “what might need to be done to promote agency” balancing “language as a creative resource with the understanding that language is ideological and hegemonic and so often needs to be challenged critically” (Misson, 2013, p.361). These ideas of language and agency became
particularly important for my students when studying Ian McEwan’s *Enduring Love*, a book which many of them reacted to very negatively because of their aversion to the narrative voice. Re-creative writing is an important tool to help students experiment with language and to assert their own agency; it provides opportunities for them to challenge their texts critically and to remake them “for [their] own purposes” (Misson, 2013, p.360).

**English, Culture and Creativity**

Approaches that encourage students to create their own texts ensure that “textual study in the classroom is not separate from [students’] lives but can become an integral part of them” (McCallum, 2012, p.73). My approach to the Aspects of Narrative unit was to begin with students’ own knowledge of stories and story-telling before moving on to the prescribed texts. Similarly, Cochrane and Cockett suggest that the success of some creative programmes stems from the fact that they “stay close to young people’s experiences and interests, and do not impose a prior, fixed agenda” (2006, cited in Jones, 2009, p.77). In this way creativity invites a broader understanding of culture which is recognised as having many incarnations rather than simply existing in school-sanctioned versions: this idea originates from the late 1950s and 1960s when Raymond Williams insisted that both creativity and culture were “ordinary”; experienced by people from all classes and not only the privileged few (Jones, 2009, p.21). However, the attempt to recognise and value the multiple cultures outside the school involves engaging with what Jones describes as “a field of conflict”: responding to perceived “diversity” “in general entailed an encounter with tensions, dissatisfactions and conflicts” (Cohen, 1997, cited in Jones, 2009, p.75). As I will outline, sometimes the tasks I set up resulted in my students feeling awkward or embarrassed, but ultimately I feel that in order to remain relevant it is important that school English lessons make links to the world outside the classroom, regardless of whether it is entirely
comfortable. “Tensions, dissatisfactions and conflicts” need to be acknowledged and grappled with rather than ignored.

While schools, syllabi and exam boards may pay lip-service to the power of the reader, the requirement to write “in terms acceptable to the ‘licensed ways of reading’ of the examining community” (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.58) remains a barrier to truly embracing the multiplicity of readings and cultures present in a contemporary classroom. By suggesting that learning “takes place dialogically in the interaction between the text and the mind as well as in being articulated in a suitable form” (McCallum, 2012, p.112) McCallum draws my attention to the fact that part of the struggle of working as a teacher is the amount of time we are forced to spend on the “suitable form” rather than on the learning. Throughout AS English study I can see the “power differential involved in reading” that Richards-Kamal identifies: “if you read ‘incorrectly’, the authority of the teacher and the examining board will penalise you” (2008, p.58). Studying Aspects of Narrative, a unit which explicitly states “the exploration of reading processes” as its focus in addition to the set texts (AQA, 2013, p.1) should be a place where students have more scope to express a wider range of opinions than those allowed by AQA’s mark scheme with its narrow and fragmented use of assessment objectives. I see my challenge with my year 12 students as being to acknowledge the “unfinished”, dynamic nature of literature and to encourage them to question the nature of the “licensed ways of reading” (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.58) of the Aspects of Narrative exam, while also ensuring that they are able to write in the requisite style to achieve the grades they deserve.
Methodology

My overall aims are to understand how re-creative tasks help students to develop their understanding of their set texts and also of the Aspects of Narrative approach to literature: I will be investigating my own pupils and how they respond to tasks set by me in my own lessons. Therefore, far from a disinterested observer, I have to acknowledge my passionate involvement in the subject I am studying.

The research methodology that fits my aims most closely is the qualitative case study approach, “an experiential understanding of the case” (Stake, 1995, p.40) in which the case is one of my two year 12 English groups. This approach enables a researcher to “observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both cause and effects” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.181): the context of year 12 English and the Aspects of Narrative unit and how this influences students’ responses to literature is at the heart of my topic. Rather than aiming for an “objective” research approach that “limit[s] the role of personal interpretation” (Stake, 1995, p.41), my position as teacher and my personal interpretation of my students’ comments, writings and experience is central to my project: “qualitative designs call for the persons most responsible for interpretations to be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgement, analysing and synthesising, all the while realizing their own consciousness” (Stake, 1995, p.41). In this research approach “subjectivity is not seen as a failing...but as an essential element of understanding” (Stake, 1995, p.45).

My aims and research questions evolved significantly during the year I worked on this project. I began the year with the aim of better understanding my students’ own experiences of the transition from GCSE to AS English Literature; from there I developed an interest in their relationship to their set texts, and finally the re-creative tasks and students’
responses to them emerged as the topic of primary interest for me. Appendix 2 (pp. 53-54) contains the questions I designed for my focus groups to respond to throughout the year, and documents the changing focus of my research.

From the beginning of the study I was aware of the need to gather data from students in different ways: simply asking them for their viewpoints on the AS course would not be enough, especially as they would tend to tell me what I wanted to hear: I am conscious of the fact that “Researchers are themselves a powerful, and often under-recognised, influence on their research and their findings” (Blaxter et al, 2006, p.83) and I tried to recognise my own influence at all times.

As Caroline Daly states, this type of research “is NOT about finding neat answers or setting out to ‘prove’ that something works” (Daly, 2010, p.5). My research approach is about exploring the different types of learning that occur in my classroom rather than a straightforward test of whether or not a particular intervention is “effective”.

A potential weakness of my study lies in the rate of change in the British education system: the qualification that I am focusing on, AS level, is in the process of being overhauled, and students beginning year 12 from 2015 will be following a revised curriculum, which will not include an Aspects of Narrative unit. However, this frequently changing curriculum does not necessarily mean that research is invalid: for example, a paper that I have used many times for my own research, John Yandell’s ‘Mind the Gap’ (Yandell, 2008) looks in detail at an exam paper, the Shakespeare element of the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) for year 9 students, which was abolished in 2008. Regardless of this, the ideas expressed in the research and the analysis of the way “reading and the reader are constructed” by an exam text (Yandell, 2008, p.73) remain relevant.
Data collection methods

The methods I have used to collect data from students and lessons have evolved alongside the focus for my research this year: when I began the project with the intention of studying the transition from GCSE to AS English, my first method of data collection was focus group interviews. I wanted to investigate “emotions, experiences and feelings” (Denscombe, 2003, p.165) and therefore face-to-face interviews rather than questionnaires seemed appropriate. I asked for students from the focus class to volunteer to be interviewed in groups to encourage them to feel confident when voicing their opinions; additionally, I tried to devolve control of the discussion from myself to the students by asking a student to direct the discussion, while I myself retreated, sometimes to my computer and sometimes to another room altogether. As I wished to look at students’ expectations of the AS English Literature course and the extent to which the course content matched those expectations, I began these focus group interviews very early in the year, from the first week of term, and repeated them throughout the year, roughly at the beginning of each half-term. The questions changed according to the general focus of the English course at each point, so from expectations and transition from year 11 we moved onto the coursework drafting process and then to the approach to literature required by the Aspects of Narrative exam (see Appendix 2, pp. 53-54, for details of the focus questions asked at each focus group session).

However, quite early on I became aware of the limitations of the student discussions; I struggled to encourage them to approach their texts and responses to literature in detail during these focus groups which tended to dwell more on study skills or homework pressures. Despite my attempt to steer them towards a more literary focus, they remained too general for my purposes: indeed, the phrasing of questions to encourage genuine thoughtful reflection rather than superficial comments was the aspect of the research I
found most difficult this year. One way in which I tried to address this problem was by recording a group of students engaged in a class discussion task about a chapter of one of their set texts, in order to look at the way they explored the novel through talk (see Appendix 14, p.95-97, for transcript).

Additionally, I introduced one of my year 12 classes to the regular practice of completing a reflective journal at the end of their lessons each week. Again I provided discussion points for reflection based on what we had been looking at in class that week, but also encouraged students to include any other things they wanted to note down about the course. Students of course also had the choice not to reflect in their journals, but the majority did use them to record responses. The students knew that I wanted to know their perspectives on the course for my Masters research, and that I would be looking at the journals, but I made it clear that what they wrote in this context was separate from their exercise books and would have no effect on their marks or grades. I also put emphasis on the benefits to them of reflecting on their own learning. However, despite my conviction that “writing learning journals ha[s] the potential significantly to enhance and develop the depth and range of student learning...journals g[i]ve students an opportunity to write regularly and at length, allowing them to develop their ideas and writing fluency...” (Crème, 2000, p. 98-9) I do not feel that I was able to instigate such a valuable practice; my students wrote a few notes in response to my questions but I did not ever feel that I succeeded in engaging them in sustained reflection that benefited their learning, probably due to the difficulties I experienced in formulating stimuli for reflection, as mentioned earlier (see Appendices 8 – 12, pp. 86 – 90, for some extracts from my students’ reflective journals).
Parallel with this I kept a reflective journal myself, on the computer rather than in hard copy, in which I recorded my own impressions after particular lessons each week: I found it far easier to reflect at length myself than I did to encourage my students to reflect on the same lessons. As my project progressed, it was my own reflections that drew my attention to my interest in the use of creative responses in A level lessons, and once I had decided to focus on the use of creative responses in my lessons, I began to collect evidence in terms of students’ writing and also to gear journaling and focus group discussions towards this topic. See Appendix 15, pp. 98-100, for extracts from my reflective journal relating to re-creative lessons.

**Ethical considerations**

Caran, 1977, defines ethics as “a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others.” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.56). One potential ethical consideration regarded my use of the students’ class time to write their reflective journals. With tight deadlines and a lot to cover in five 50 minute English lessons per week, could I potentially be disadvantaging my students for my own aims when asking them to devote lesson time to helping me with my research? Dourneen also acknowledges this difficulty “for English teachers in England to find space in a crowded, highly defined curriculum for ‘setting free the spirit of English’” (Dourneen, 2010, p.61). This concern can be countered, however, with the benefits to the students of reflecting on their own progress. Dedicating class time to a reflective journal should benefit the students as well as serving my research purposes, and although as mentioned earlier I do not feel that my use of the journals was very successful, I equally never felt that it was having negative consequences for learning. Before starting the project I consulted with my Head of Department to ensure I had the full backing of my school to use class time this way.
Another ethical issue in my research is the threat to the privacy of the students involved. I sought permission from all the students involved in my study, both those completing reflective journals and those participating in focus groups. I asked for permission from students and parents for me to use material (with names changed for anonymity) in my study, and made it very clear that their consent could be withdrawn at any time.

Reynolds, 1979, specifies that “possible controversial findings need to be anticipated and where they ensue, handled with great sensitivity.” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.71). The possible controversial findings I identified for my study included negative comments about other teachers which students might raise in focus group discussions. I wanted students to feel comfortable discussing their English lessons without the need to “edit” their discussion, so I let them know that I would treat any comments about other teachers as confidential and would not pass them on. I also changed teachers’ names as well as those of students in my transcripts.

Although it is not included in this report due to constraints of space and time, I also collected evidence of plagiarised work from my year 12 students as I was interested in their reasons for plagiarising. This needed to be handled tactfully so as not to intimidate or upset students, while also educating them as to the severity of submitting copied material as their own (students found plagiarising their coursework essays could be disqualified by the exam board). However, addressing issues of plagiarism with my year 12 classes would have been necessary even aside from their involvement in my research, so I did not feel that my project introduced additional ethical concerns into this field.
Research findings

Expectations for A Level English

At the beginning of the year I spent time interviewing my new year 12 students in focus groups to find out about their expectations for the course. A recurring theme was the narrowness of the GCSE curriculum. Among the higher-achieving students there was a sense of frustration with the intensive focus on teaching to the test at GCSE, and hope for the coming year as they moved ahead in the education system: “It feels like at AS you get to have a SAY more, like you know you get to express what you actually think a lot more which is what I would prefer to do” (Maeve¹, Appendix 3, Focus group #2, p.62). As I listened in to these discussions, my feeling was of sympathy with their frustration and also anticipation of the disappointment they would feel when they fully grasped the requirements of their AS level exam. While the AS level’s expressed aim is to “focus on comparing the way stories are told and thereby construct different realities” (AQA, 2013, p.1) which should enable these frustrated students the chance to explore ways of constructing and interpreting texts in a genuinely more open way than the extract questions they responded to at GCSE (Edexcel, 2012, p.6), as previously discussed in practice it simply imposes a different but still restrictive analytical formula on them.

The eagerness of my students to be able to express themselves in a less formulaic way (“what you actually think”) can be linked to McCallum’s call for “a shift away from linking outcomes in the classroom primarily to the accumulation of various skills and to examination success” (McCallum, 2012, p.115). Similarly, Richards-Kamal criticises the reduction in “opportunities for creative writing” as pupils move through secondary school (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.62); we need to be critical of the way our education system is structured to

¹ Names of all students involved in this study have been changed to culturally-appropriate pseudonyms.
move away from creative and opinion-based writing towards a focus on narrow exam syllabi as students mature. One of the things I noticed most about my students’ expressed opinions during focus groups was the extent to which they have been socialised within the standards-based education system: it was very rare for them to question the expectations or assumptions underlying their studies. For instance, when Oona comments “I like learning but I just don’t like having to always be studying for something. But obviously that’s my own problem, that’s not like something wrong with year 12” (Oona, Appendix 3, Focus group #5, p.73) she is internalising her dissatisfaction with the intensive exam focus of the current education system (with students taking high-stakes public exams at the end of years 11, 12 and 13) and attributing it to her own individual weakness rather than to an imperfect system. This leads me to think I need to introduce much more open criticism of the system in which we operate into my lessons: surely part of studying for an English A level and of developing students’ agency should involve examining the assumptions underlying the exam specification with the knowledge that “language is ideological and hegemonic and so often needs to be challenged critically” (Misson, 2013, p.361).

Creative responses in Aspects of Narrative lessons

Little Red Riding Hood

I introduced my two year 12 classes to the Aspects of Narrative unit in early November. Wanting to ensure that I respected students’ cultural agency and that studying the Aspects of Narrative unit was “not separate from [students'] lives” (McCallum, 2012, p.73), I had decided to begin, rather than by introducing any of the set exam texts, with a story all students would be familiar with, and by asking them to write themselves. Using Little Red Riding Hood, a fairy tale, additionally enabled our discussion to include the oral tradition (a precursor to “the […] reading processes” (AQA, 2013, p.1) that Aspects of Narrative is asking students to examine) and the multiplicity of versions of a story such as this. In this way, the
fairy tale can be seen as symbolic of the whole body of literature, in that it is “a contested or
dynamic aspect of culture” (NATE, 2004, p.10) while remaining something familiar and
unintimidating, providing the perfect basis for an introduction to some of the ideas of
narrative theory. Having asked the students to construct their own versions of the fairytale
from memory, using pictures as stimuli, we read the version recorded by Charles Perrault in
the 17th century (see Appendix 5, pp.84-85). My students were struck by (and shocked by)
the nudity which the Charles Perrault version introduces into the more familiar framework
of the story: Red Riding Hood strips off and gets in bed with her Grandmother/the Wolf
before being devoured. This introduces a sexual element which my class commented on
generally with a sense of surprise and revulsion, for the way it corrupted a story which they
associated with childhood and innocence.

After reading and discussing this version, I set students the task of re-writing the story while
changing just one aspect of narrative (see Appendix 4, pp.82-83 for details of the lesson).
Although it might seem like one of the most obvious narrative choices writers make,
something I find many year 12 students struggle with is the ability to identify and evaluate
the impact of different narrative perspectives: omniscient, biased, first/third person and so
on. Denis and Joseph were assigned to re-tell the story of Little Red Riding Hood in first
person, and after ten minutes or so of work, they called me over, looking confused:

“We’re telling it from her perspective, right...so how can we tell it after she gets eaten?”

This question served as the perfect starting point for a discussion of the possible advantages
and disadvantages of using a character as a narrator versus opting for an omniscient
narrator. Having experienced at first hand the limitations of telling a story from the first-
person perspective of the protagonist, the students were more confident in considering the reasons for choices of narrator in their other texts. Rather than my telling them that a first-person narrator can be limiting, the creative task meant that they had learned it through experience, fitting with Edwards and Mercer’s suggestion that students “…need to be able to relate[...] principles to their own actions, experiences and conceptions” in order to learn them (Edwards and Mercer, 1987, p.95).

It was particularly significant for me that it was Joseph and Denis who raised this question: these are students who did not usually contribute to discussion on a whole-class level. As hard-working boys who fit somewhere in the middle of the class in terms of predicted grades, they usually did not attempt to join in with either the heated debates between the most self-assured and academically successful students (all girls but one) or the anti-academic chat of the more rebellious and often academically struggling students: this very large year 12 class tended to these two polarities, with students who did not fit with either extreme tending to remain quiet and passive during lessons. Therefore this creative activity can be seen as having disrupted the usual dynamics of the group; it gave these particular students a context in which they were confident to ask a vital question, which in a different task (for example, for an essay or a discussion around a set text) they might not have had the courage to ask in front of peers perceived to be more able.

As part of the same lesson, my student Tia and her group were assigned to change the time setting of the fairytale from the classic “once upon a time…”, an unspecified but distant past, to the modern day. Tia and her partner struggled initially: when planning the lesson, I had not made it clear how much students could change the fairytale from the “original” Charles Perrault version read in class: I wrote in my reflective journal “I wasn’t explicit about what approach I wanted them to take – partly because I wanted them to experiment and see how
knock-on changes developed naturally from altering one aspect” (Appendix 14, Reflective journal 11/11/2013, p.98). In retrospect I identified this as a weakness of the activity, but on reflection I maintain that it was crucial for the learning that I wanted to happen to let the students in their groups decide how much they needed to change and how much to keep from the first version: it was this negotiation that linked to the students considering the overall effect on the reader of the aspect of narrative they were manipulating. I wanted the students to have the freedom to “re-create according to their own wishes” (McCallum, 2012, p.57). Tia’s group asked me for clarification on this point, and I remained vague, telling them they had to decide on the new time setting and then make any changes they felt were consistent with that.

When the group read out their new version of the story, the whole class was completely spellbound: whereas most of the new versions were short and unfinished (not necessarily an indication of a failure of the activity: provided students had discussed and negotiated regarding what changing their aspect of narrative meant for the story, the activity could certainly result in successful learning even if a new story was not created or not written down), Tia had produced a completely new and fascinating story (see Appendix 6, pp.86-87). Moving the setting to the modern day brought the sinister implications of the plot into sharp relief, as well as linking back to the unexpected sexual/incestuous element of nudity in the Perrault version: as she read her version out, the other students grimaced and squirmed in horror:

““Whoa, where are you heading to?” He asked, his toothy grin spreading wider.

“Umm...my mum told me not to talk to strangers.”

“It’s okay, I work here. Are you lost?”
“Oh, okay, I’m looking for my gran, she’s on the second floor in the changing rooms.”

(Appendix 6, p.86)

Replacing the wolf with a lifeguard connects the story with familiar narratives that these 21st-century teenagers are all-too-familiar with: human predators, news reports of paedophiles and child-abusers. Additionally, the lifeguard convincing the child to trust him with the reassurance “I work here” connects to those stories of abuse by people in positions of authority: priests, teachers, carers. As such, the story has been transformed from a fantasy fairy tale to a real-life horror story with multiple precedents.

When Tia’s character “Alice” reaches the changing room the lifeguard has cunningly occupied, the common cadences of the fairytale are brutally interrupted:

“Who is it?” the lifeguard adopted a high pitched voice.

“It’s me grandma, Alice” she said. “I’ve come to give you your keys.”

“Oh just a moment” the lifeguard said with a wavery voice.

“Grandma what happened to your voice?” Alice said

“Nothing,” the lifeguard replied “Come in now.” He said.” (Appendix 6, p.87).

From a Bakhtinian perspective that focuses on “the ventriloquial character of language” (Doecke & McKnight, 2003, p.301) it is significant that Tia first references the traditional call-and-response of the fairytale ("Grandmother, what big eyes you have!") "All the better to see with, my child." (Perrault, 2013, Appendix 5, p.85)) then asserts her own “cultural agency” (Jones, 2009, p.78) by dispensing with it entirely with the dismissive “Nothing” – again brutally forcing her readers into the real world of child abuse. Her ending is similarly brutal, leaving the readers’ imaginations to fill in the worst for themselves:
“The lifeguard from earlier looked down on her, his once welcoming smile now turned up in an eerie smirk as he raised his finger to his lips.

“shhhhh” (Appendix 6, p.87).

The final exhortation to silence draws attention to the voicelessness of Little Red Riding Hood. Through her modern-day version Tia shocked the whole class by drawing our attention to the nature of the story as one of a helpless, child victim who is exploited by an unscrupulous predator. This exercise clearly illustrated for the whole class the implications of changing the time setting of a story from unspecified past to modern day, a complicated topic which many of my students struggle with. (“I don’t get it...how can we write about time settings?”) As before with Joseph and Denis’s question, this lesson served as a shared memory that we referred to throughout the course: during discussions of the time setting of Ian McEwan’s Enduring Love, I reminded students of how much more sinister Little Red Riding Hood seemed when set in the modern day. Could the same be said of Enduring Love? If it was set in the less recent past, would it lose some of its resonance? The creative exercises provided my students with precise and specific reference points which could then be used to help them apply the abstract narrative concepts to their set texts. With this activity I tried to indicate to my students the infinite possibilities for different ways of telling the same familiar story, in order that they engaged with “narrative” as something dynamic, “unfinished”, and linked to culture and context, rather than as a finite list of features to spot in their set texts. The students were engaging with the new concepts of narrative from the perspective of writer rather than reader; as Richards-Kamal identified, “personal engagement” (2008, p.62) helped them to comment critically on their own and their peers’ narrative choices, before applying those ideas to text by other writers.
When interrogating the year 9 SAT papers, John Yandell questions asks what the consequences would be if “we were able to conceptualise learning as a fully social, distributed activity?” (Yandell, 2008, p.85). Observing the discussion around Tia’s story, both at the time and in subsequent lessons, it was clear to me that the learning was achieved by the class and not just the individual doing the specific piece of creative writing: a student like Tia “has an important effect on the dynamic of the classroom and of the learning that happens in the group” (Yandell, 2008, p.85).

Andrew McCallum stresses that what he calls “writer response” tasks do not “relegate[e] reading to a lesser status”, instead requiring learners “to read a text closely in order to have ideas about changing it” (McCallum, 2012, p.57). The evidence from this lesson supports this: while Tia’s group was the only one of the five groups which produced an engaging and complete new story in response to this activity, even a group who I initially dismissed as not having achieved much in response to this task have clearly worked closely with the source material:

“The man asked her where she was going and the young, innocent girl replied that she was going to visit her grandmother to show her, her exam results. The man asked the girl where her grandmother lived and she replied that her grandmother lived in a house in Greenwich. The man suggested that they both have a race, the girl on her bike and the man in his car.” (Richardson, Appendix 7, p.88).

The group have read the Charles Perrault text closely, retaining the reference to the race to grandmother’s house. The almost comic contrast in vehicles (a bicycle can clearly not compete with a car on speed) emphasises Red Riding Hood’s helplessness compared to the power of the predator, the wolf, transformed, as in Tia’s story, into a man. Again like Tia’s
story, the transformation of setting to the present day (or at least some time with cars) provides a chilling new context for the story, associating it with the familiar image of the kerb-crawler harassing a school girl. These two examples of my students complicating and darkening a story that initially the class wanted to protect from sexual implications as part of their memories of childhood can be seen as symbolic of the complexity of the “cultural landscape” (NATE, 2004, p.10) of an A level English lesson: the students began with a story from familiar, “ordinary” culture that many of them saw as fixed in nature and associated with childhood and innocence; they protested at the unfamiliar sexual element of the Charles Perrault version and when I insisted that there was no “true” version of the story; however, they ultimately participated in what Doecke and McKnight term the “struggle over who owns those words” (2003, p.301) by re-making the story themselves in darker and more sinister ways.

Richardson’s group had been assigned to re-write the story with no direct speech, and spent most of the time allocated to creative writing in discussion of the grammatical construct of indirect speech: they have successfully transformed this fragment of story according to their instructions. Why did they also feel the need to move the story into the present day? Did they understand that to be a requirement of the task, or was it that they associated their task of removing direct speech with bringing more realism to the story, replacing the talking wolf with a real-life predator? I wish I had raised these questions with the class rather than simply dismissing Richardson’s group’s effort as unfinished and too short to be worthy of discussion.
Voice and Gender in Enduring Love

The other lesson I would like to write about involved students responding to Ian McEwan’s Enduring Love. This novel is a source of controversy among our English AS students, with the overriding opinion being that it is boring, awful and should not be taught in schools, accurately represented in a diagram from Georgette’s reflective journal:

![Figure 1 - Georgette’s visual depiction of her response to Enduring Love](image)

One of the aims of my research this year was to investigate the reasons for this aversion to the text among many of my students. It was generally agreed to be the narrative viewpoint chosen by McEwan of Joe Rose, a middle-aged, middle-class science writer: “this novel is irritating because of Joe Rose’s constant narrative of his job and his rather mundane life” (Appendix 11, Sally’s reflective journal, p.92); “I don’t like this book because: he focuses on one place of society. His idea of London makes it seem unreal” (Appendix 12, Georgette’s reflective journal, p.93). Mies Pols comments when writing about her choices of texts to study with students “I am not so much interested in whether the students like the book, but rather that they identify with the main character” (Groenendijk et al, 2011, p.54); with Enduring Love I felt like I achieved neither of these things. Students’ feelings of detachment
from the narrator resulted in their negative feelings towards the book as a whole. However, as a piece of metafiction which can be seen as being “about making up stories and playing roles[...] about the larger narrative structure of consciousness” (Hardy, 1977, p.15) it seemed to me an ideal novel to study for the Aspects of Narrative unit. During the term of study, I tried to use the class’s antagonism in a constructive way, encouraging them to explore their attitudes to Joe and consider why they felt so hostile towards him:

“N: Umm...I think that it makes Joe look a bit more like...he’s just looking down on people just cos they have different views from him and then, he’s just describing this girl looking bad, like just trying to analyse her so much and he just...describes her like she’s just a bad person, he just can’t relate so it makes him seem kinda closed minded. Even more than he already is.” (Nia, Appendix 14, p.96).

By acknowledging that there were reasons that made it difficult to identify with the main character, working collaboratively in groups, in this lesson on chapter 21 the students were able to move beyond “it’s boring” to pin down and analyse exactly what makes Joe unattractive, as Nia is doing here. These students are grappling with one of the most important aspects of narrative, that of voice. The voice is of Joe, although the class continually insisted it was also that of Ian McEwan, also white, middle-class and middle-aged. While I found their constant criticism of Joe/McEwan discouraging, on reflection it is evident to me that these 16- and 17-year olds were developing and exercising their emerging sense of aesthetic judgement, in a way that appeared subversive to them as they criticised a book selected by both the exam board and their teacher as of good quality and suitable for study at A level. In this way, a teenage instinct towards rebellion formed a helpful basis for the development of my students as literary critics, surely among the central aims of English Literature A level.
Bruner stated that “the narrative mode leads to conclusions...about the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible” (Bruner, 1986, p.37). In studying Aspects of Narrative, voice was a central focus, particularly highlighted by a lesson on Chapter 9 of the novel. This chapter is interesting for its use of a purportedly different narrative perspective: that of Joe’s wife Clarissa. The focus for Aspects of Narrative students is to interrogate this perspective because in fact McEwan is not really giving us Clarissa’s “real” voice: rather, it is Joe inventing Clarissa’s perspective: “Or at least, from that point [of view] as I later construed it” (McEwan, 1997, p.79). This is a complex concept to grasp, which presumably was McEwan’s intention, as the reader has to grapple with the layers of reality: the fictional character of Joe is constructing a fictional voice for Clarissa.

While reading the chapter aloud in class, I tried to draw the students’ attention to the moments when Joe could be seen as constructing a flattering or self-aggrandizing version of his wife’s view of events, such as “Joe has another kind of problem. His emotions are slow to shift to anger in the first place, and even when they have, he has the wrong kind of intelligence, he forgets his lines and cannot score the points” (McEwan, 1997, p.86.) I then asked the students to write a paragraph in role as the “real” Clarissa (see Appendix 13, p.94 for lesson details). My aim was to help them identify the weaknesses in Joe’s construction of Clarissa’s voice by comparing it with their own attempts at a more “authentic” voice for the character.

I hadn’t thought consciously about the gender aspect of the task: a female teacher, critiquing a male writer’s construction of a male narrator imagining a female viewpoint; for example I commented explicitly on the lines “The exposure, and the sensation on her soles of thick carpet through the silk excites her vaguely and she remembers last night and the
night before, the sorrow and see-sawing emotions and the sex” (McEwan, 1997, p.82) and pointed out that this could be seen as a male fantasy of a woman’s consciousness, constantly thinking about sex. However, when the time came for students to share their work, to begin with, only girls would volunteer, and I realised the extent to which my task could be seen as intimidating for the teenage boys challenged to create a “more convincing” female voice. The class is already two-thirds female (representative of the gender split in A level English at my school) and an observer who sat in on a lesson with them had commented to me that “only the girls speak in class”. (I would temper that statement with “only the girls and high-achieving boys speak”). The silence and awkwardness that greeted my request for volunteers drew my attention to the complex play of dynamics around gender and sexuality in this classroom, this text and this activity. No male students felt comfortable exposing their own attempts at a “female” voice to potential ridicule, although a few of them had in fact done some writing as Clarissa as I found when I looked at their books. Foregrounding the question of gender and what constitutes a “female” voice in this and other lessons was not always comfortable for my adolescent students, which highlights the fact that re-creative pedagogy tends to foreground social differences in the classroom, introducing “field[s] of conflict (Jones, 2009, p.75).

Very few students produced the kind of empathetic writing that I had set out to elicit with the activity (see Appendix 16, p.101, for one of the few examples of a student who conformed to my expectations of the task); I was anticipating “a convincing sense of the perspective of the character” (Thomas, 1989, p.34) of Clarissa, but what I got was my class using the activity to express their own feelings about the book. This is a useful reminder that “there’s not necessarily an absolute correspondence between what I set up as a writing task and how students interpret that task” (Doecke & McClanaghan, 2011, p.66). Those female students who were comfortable volunteering to read out their writing had used the activity
either to express their personal frustration with the protagonist, Joe, and/or as an opportunity to step outside acceptable classroom discourse, peppering their writing with swearwords. Tia’s began “Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit…” which prompted me to ask whether her version of Clarissa was any more convincing than Joe’s, since the character is never heard to swear in the book. The students can be seen as resisting “the subject positions” implied by my task (Misson, 2013, p.358) and as using the opportunity to “take and shape [language] for [their] own purposes” (ibid p.360). McCallum states that re-creative writing allows students to “re-write so that something makes sense to them where the original does not” (McCallum, 2012, p.57); for Tia and the others, it did not make sense that a character as repugnant (to them) as Joe would have a loving or even somewhat loving partner, so they re-wrote the text in a way that made sense to them at the expense of the integrity of Clarissa’s voice.

To try to use this as a constructive learning opportunity, I asked the students to compare their own version of Clarissa’s voice and Joe’s version - both were projecting their own feelings onto the character, not allowing her an authentic voice. In many ways the purpose of the lesson was to draw students’ attention to Ray Misson’s idea that “language as a creative resource [...] is ideological and hegemonic and so often needs to be challenged critically” (Misson, 2013, p.261). I wanted to encourage them to separate “Joe’s voice” from the author Ian McEwan’s, hoping that an awareness that McEwan was drawing his reader’s attention to Joe’s selfish, egoist character would diminish their antipathy towards the book as a whole. This had limited success. I had wanted them to challenge Joe’s “hegemonic” version of Clarissa’s voice, and they had done so, but in response they imbued their writing with their own “particular point of view on the world” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.293) at the expense of the character of Clarissa herself who remained the voiceless, passive female consort. However, a more positive interpretation of this activity would draw attention to the fact that
my students were asserting their own agency in articulating their responses to Joe, asserting themselves in the “struggle over who owns [the] words” (Doecke & McKnight, 2003, p.301).

The task was probably most useful in terms of helping the students to articulate their criticisms of Joe’s narrative; it was also a wonderful way to open up the complexity of what is meant by voice in narrative, as the answer to “whose voice are we hearing?” was so multi-layered. The students are discovering the “polyphony... simultaneous presence and apprehension of multiple voices inhabiting the text” (Yandell, 2015, p.117) surely one of the most important ideas the Aspects of Narrative unit.
Conclusions

Implications for my pedagogy

Re-creative narrative tasks can disrupt the usual dynamics of a classroom, enabling different students to participate. This is hugely important at A level, the only time at my school when students are in mixed-ability English classes, when trying to encourage quieter students to contribute can be very difficult. Similarly, creative tasks can help provide a context for less confident students to ask questions, something I only became aware of when analysing my Little Red Riding Hood lesson closely. Creative tasks can generate memorable moments of learning which can be referred to in future lessons, providing milestones for the whole group to refer back to: learning becomes a “social, distributed activity” (Yandell, 2008, p.85). This links to McCallum’s conception of “critical-creativity” in which he asserts that much learning is receptive in nature (McCallum, 2012, p.112). The way that re-creative tasks occurred in my classroom were not as individual, silent writing activities; rather, discussing, negotiating and reading work aloud was a key aspect of the learning that took place. Students learnt receptively from listening to and discussing Tia’s re-creation of Little Red Riding Hood as well as actively by creating their own versions.

It is not necessary for a complete or even incomplete piece of writing to be produced for learning to have taken place; Denis and Joseph did not write down their first-person perspective version of Little Red Riding Hood, but it still provided a key insight into the nature of narrative voice that the whole class learnt from. Very few students produced the type of empathetic writing I was looking for when I set them to write “in Clarissa’s voice” but that does not mean that the activity was wasted; teachers need to interrogate the intended outcomes of activities and allow them to be shaped by the dynamics of the classroom.
Students’ responses are worthy of discussion even (or especially?) when they defeat the aims or expectations of the teacher.

Creative writing tasks can help students explore issues around voice, but they cannot do this without engaging with students’ own voices. The process of developing an adult identity is confusing and sensitive and teachers cannot expect students to be able to leave personal concerns outside the classroom and discuss sensitive issues – of gender and sexuality, for example – with no sense of personal embarrassment. It is important to acknowledge that a re-creative pedagogy will often result in “an encounter with tensions, dissatisfactions and conflicts” (Cohen, 1997, cited in Jones, 2009, p.75). However, English lessons should not shy away from addressing sensitive topics or engaging with the world outside the classroom; rather it is through acknowledging difficult issues that the curriculum can become relevant to students’ lives which will ultimately encourage successful learning. Asking students to produce their own writing ensures that they will bring their own voices, ideas and culture into the classroom, challenging a “fixed” conception of literature, and establishing learners’ cultural agency.

Implications for teaching Narrative at AS level

As I have explained, the Aspects of Narrative AS level unit is clearly an attempt to address historic weaknesses of the English Literature A level. However, the limited time available to prepare students for the high-stakes exam makes it difficult for teachers to address the full scope of the unit, which should engage with the centrality of narrative to our thought processes and sense of identity. I have found re-creative tasks useful in encouraging students to view their set texts (and other texts) in the context of narrative, and to address narrative as more than just a list of features for students to identify.
One of the challenges for English A level is to recognise “literature as a contested or dynamic aspect of culture” (NATE, 2004, p.10), or as Paolo Freire would put it, “unfinished”. A level students should recognise literature and culture as continually evolving entities, rather than a fixed canon of great works, and narrative as a process of consciousness which all humans participate in, rather than a set of fixed features belonging only to their set texts. Re-creative tasks can help teachers to communicate this because they require students to recognise themselves as writers, not just readers; by re-creating their texts students are encouraged to recognise literature as an ongoing creative process in which they can participate, and themselves as active agents making choices about the how to represent their narratives.

Reading and writing, critiquing and designing, are linked processes (as recognised by McCallum in his term “critical-creativity”) which need to be developed in tandem; as Richards-Kamal suggests, creative writing exercises should not disappear as students move further up the school (Richards-Kamal, 2008, p.62).

One of the key aspects of narrative which students need to grapple with is the presence of different voices in a text. Re-creative writing can help students to engage with the complex interplay of different voices, as well as encourage their own agency: writing themselves gives students the chance to participate in the “struggle over who owns [the] words” (Doecke & McKnight, 2003, p.301). Ray Misson describes one of the purposes of English teaching being to show students that “language is ideological and hegemonic and so often needs to be challenged critically” (Misson, 2013, p.361). Creative tasks can help students to challenge their teachers and texts in ways they would not be comfortable doing directly, as seen in my Enduring Love lesson in which students used a “write in the voice of Clarissa” exercise as an opportunity to express their frustration with Joe’s narrative voice, re-writing the chapter in a way that “ma[de] sense to them where the original does not” (McCallum, 2012, p.57).
If students are to examine “wider questions concerning the nature of reading” (Bluett et al., 2004, p.10) a unit on narrative needs to make more explicit links between fiction and life. I want my students to grapple more with Hardy’s description of narrative as “a primary act of mind” seen in practice through the “recollection of happenings” (Hardy, 1977, p.12). To this end I think more storytelling based around students’ real life experiences, with analysis of the narrative choices students make in forming stories out of their perceptions, could be a useful precursor to the re-telling work that we did around Little Red Riding Hood when introducing the Aspects of Narrative unit; this is the next step for my own practice in teaching narrative.
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For this paper you must have:
- an AQA 12-page answer book.

Time allowed
- 2 hours

Instructions
- Use black ink or black ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book. The Paper Reference is LITB1.
- Answer on one text from Section A (both questions) and one question from Section B.
- In your response to this paper you must write about four different texts: two prose and two poetry texts. At least one of the prose texts you write about must have been written after 1990.
- Do all rough work in your answer book. Cross through any work you do not want to be marked.

Information
- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- The maximum mark for this paper is 84.
- The texts prescribed for this paper may be taken into the examination room. Texts taken into the examination must be clean: that is, free from annotation.
- Your copy of the Literature B Poetry Anthology may be taken into the examination room. Copies of the Poetry Anthology taken into the examination room must be clean: that is, free from annotation.
- You will be marked on your ability to:
  - use good English
  - organise information clearly
  - use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

Advice
- You are advised to spend one hour on Section A and one hour on Section B.
Section A

Choose one text from this section. Answer both parts of the question.

You are advised to spend one hour on this section.

Either

Selected Poems – W.H. Auden

01 Write about Auden’s narrative methods in ‘1st September 1939’. [21 marks]

and

02 How far do you agree that Auden’s stories have love at their centre? [21 marks]

or

Selected Poems – Robert Browning

03 Write about the ways Browning tells the story in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’. [21 marks]

and

04 How far do you agree with the view that in Browning’s poetry conflict always arises from divisions in social status? [21 marks]

or

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner – Samuel Taylor Coleridge

05 Write about the ways that Coleridge tells the story in Part 1 of the poem. [21 marks]

and

06 How far do you agree with the view that The Wedding Guest is much more significant than simply being a listener to the Mariner’s strange tale? [21 marks]
Selected Poems – Robert Frost

07 Write about Frost’s narrative methods in ‘The Road Not Taken’. [21 marks]

and

08 Write about the significance of rural settings in ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘Stopping by Woods on A Snowy Evening’. [21 marks]

or

Lamia, The Eve of St Agnes, La Belle Dame Sans Merci – John Keats

09 Write about some of the ways Keats tells the story in lines 1–105 in Part 2 of ‘Lamia’. [21 marks]

and

10 At the start of Part 2 of ‘Lamia’ the narrator comments on the agony of love. How far do you agree that in Keats’s stories love is a ‘grievous torment’? [21 marks]

or

Selected Poems – Christina Rossetti

11 Write about the ways Rossetti tells the story in ‘In the Round Tower of Jhansi, June 8, 1857’. [21 marks]

and

12 Skene tells his wife to accept death and face it with courage. How far do you think the characters in Rossetti’s poems face death with courage and acceptance? [21 marks]
or

**Selected Poems – Alfred Tennyson**

13 How does Tennyson tell the story in ‘Mariana’? [21 marks]

and

14 “Although both women are trapped, the Lady of Shalott evokes sympathy in the reader while Mariana does not.”

How do you respond to this view? [21 marks]

or

**Birdsong – Sebastian Faulks**

15 Write about how Faulks tells the story in the middle of Part 5, beginning with the words “IT’S FOR YOU,’ said Erich…” and ending with the words “I will,’ said Elizabeth. ‘I love you.’” (pages 406–420 Vintage 1994 Edition). [21 marks]

and

16 “In Birdsong, Faulks presents adulterous relationships in a positive way with no negative moral judgement.”

How far do you agree with this view? [21 marks]

or

**The Secret Scripture – Sebastian Barry**

17 Write about some of the ways Barry tells the story in Chapter 15. [21 marks]

and

18 What is the significance of the Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital as a setting for *The Secret Scripture*? [21 marks]
or

Small Island – Andrea Levy

19 Write about some of the ways Levy tells the story in Chapter 3. [21 marks]

and

20 Miss Ma claims her son is a man “of courage and good breeding”.

How do you respond to Michael Roberts’ character and role in Small Island as a whole? [21 marks]

or

The Kite Runner – Khaled Hosseini

21 Write about the ways Hosseini tells the story in Chapter 17. [21 marks]

and

22 “It is impossible to sympathise with Amir despite his heroism in rescuing Sohrab.”

How do you respond to this view? [21 marks]

or

Enduring Love – Ian McEwan

23 Write about McEwan’s narrative methods in Appendix 1. [21 marks]

and

24 What significance can you find in Appendix 1 in Enduring Love? [21 marks]
or

The God of Small Things – Arundhati Roy

25 Write about some of the ways Roy tells the story in Chapter 20.

and

26 How far do you think that, like Rahel and Estha, what the reader experiences in response to The God of Small Things is ‘not happiness but hideous grief’?

or

The Road – Cormac McCarthy

27 Write about McCarthy’s method of telling the story from the top of page 17 to the bottom of page 35. (Picador 2009)

and

28 The Road has been described as ‘a work of both terror and beauty’.

How do you respond to this view?

or

The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald

29 How does Fitzgerald tell the story in Chapter 1?

and

30 Nick says that, when he returned from the East, he wanted the world to be ‘at a sort of moral attention forever’.

How far do you think that The Great Gatsby affirms the virtues of living a moral and decent life?
or

Selected Stories – D. H. Lawrence

3.1 Write about some of the ways Lawrence tells the story in ‘England, My England’.
[21 marks]

and

3.2 It has been argued that ‘England, My England’ is an expression of rage against the First World War.
How do you respond to this view?
[21 marks]

or

Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen

3.3 How does Austen tell the story in Chapter 27?
[21 marks]

and

3.4 “Money and its power dominate the world of Pride and Prejudice.”
How do you respond to this view?
[21 marks]

or

Great Expectations – Charles Dickens

3.5 How does Dickens tell the story in Chapter 49?
[21 marks]

and

3.6 It is not easy to sympathise with Pip because of his self-centredness.
How far do you agree with this view?
[21 marks]
Section B

Answer one question from this section. You must not answer on the text used in Section A.

You are advised to spend one hour on this section.

Either

3 7 Symbols and motifs (recurring elements) are used by writers to shape stories and open up meanings.

Write about the significance of symbols and/or motifs to the narratives of the three writers you have studied. [42 marks]

or

3 8 The opening sentence of any story is an important choice that writers make.

Write about the significance of the opening sentence to the stories of the three writers you have studied. [42 marks]

END OF QUESTIONS
Appendix 2 – focus group questions

1st Sessions (September 2013)

1. What made you choose English as one of your AS choices?
2. Did anything put you off taking English for AS level?
3. How have you found the homework tasks set so far and does the level of challenge fit with your expectations of the course?
4. How have the English lessons so far been different to GCSE English lessons?
5. Has year 12 so far matched your expectations?

2nd Sessions (October 2013)

1. What have you found most difficult about the AS English course so far?
2. What have you found easiest?
3. What are the main differences between AS English and GCSE English lessons?
4. Are you enjoying year 12 so far?

3rd Sessions (December 2013)

1. What was most difficult about the coursework process?
2. Did you feel like you were able to have original ideas about the coursework questions?
3. How difficult was it to include different perspectives on your texts and critical opinions, as required by AO3?
4. Did you worry about plagiarism? Do you think it’s easy to distinguish when something’s plagiarised?

Final sessions (June 2014) How did the Aspects of Narrative exam meet and differ from your expectations?
1. “It feels like at AS you get to have a SAY more, like you know you get to express what you actually think a lot more which is what I would prefer to do”
   True? Not true? How/why?

2. “I don’t want it to be like, we have to write a certain way and you have to say this, this and this...or you’re not gonna get enough marks”
   Was it like this in the end? How?

3. “That’s the real difference between GCSE and A Level, cos in GCSE you’re given everything you need”
   True? Not true? How/why?

4. In November I asked you all to transform the story of Little Red Riding Hood, changing one aspect of narrative (setting/narrative voice etc), in order to help you learn what different choices authors make and how those choices affect the reader. Was that a helpful exercise? Why/why not?

5. We also tried to write from Clarissa’s “real” perspective in Enduring Love, and some of my students wrote an extra stanza for The Patriot to fill in some of the narrative gaps. Were those activities useful? Why/why not?

6. “exam criteria require pupils to engage with texts in a split, and often-contradictory way”, “Too often, students are required to respond to the fictional world of the text, but from a distance”
   In your opinion, does the Aspects of Narrative AS exam deserve these criticisms?

7. “I like LEARNING, and um I just wish that you could just sit in, I really like class discussions, if you could just sit in the class discussion and like an in-depth discussion and there not be a particular exam at the end of the year or like an essay that you have to write. I like learning but I just don’t like having to always be studying for something. But obviously that’s my own problem, that’s not like something wrong with year 12.”
   Does education always have to involve exams?
Appendix 3 – Focus Group Transcripts

Focus group 1: Tuesday 10\textsuperscript{th} September 2013 3:47pm

Participants – from 2 different year 12 groups – all black, mid-to-high achieving, generally hard working

- Tia, 12D = T
- Oli, 12A = O
- Zarafina, 12A = Z
- Vivienne, 12D = V

V ...I chose...English for AS level cos it’s the only subject I wasn’t crap at, that’s about it
O Oh..oh...well...I chose, um, English, well first of all cos I thought it was, it’s like a recognised A level, not like those mickey-mouse subjects (laughter) though er, yeah, that’s why I chose it
T er, I chose English A level because I didn’t fail it,... I used to like English A level... I mean er English subjects, but then obviously the work got a bit too much but I still didn’t fail so I thought I’ve got a good enough grade I might as well carry on with it. And I like reading, so yeah...
Z Um I chose English cos it’s to do with the career I want to do in the future [so]
T [What’s the career?]
Z I want to be a psychologist, which involves[ a lot of writing]
T [what like brain stuff?]
Z yeah so [inaudible]
O Did anything put you off choosing English?
V Yeah my teacher[ cos]
T [why?]
V I wasn’t good at it, well I wasn’t that good at it but she didn’t really help much so I feel like I coulda gotta much better grade, if I didn’t have that teacher
T What grade did you get?
V a B, for both, but I feel like I could’ve got much better, if I didn’t have her
T Hmm
T So
O Um...I don’t think anything put me off actually
V Oh, sorry, and I don’t like reading. Well I do like reading but I don’t read a lot so I thought, this is a bit long. Like if I have to read I won’t read, but I will read if I want [to]
T [the thing is I like reading, but I don’t like to read, [puts on a voice] oh Shakespeare, and [that, like, that’s er, that’s a bit boring
O [yeah
T Like I do like to read my own type of books, and things so the reading, the reading part doesn’t bother me
O mmm
T I’ll still read it, it’s the...writing doesn’t really bother me either, to be honest,
V [inaudible]
T No, it’s something, it’s something that’s holding me back (laughter) I dunno. What about you?
O Well, everything put me off doing English, at first er because er I don’t like reading, haven’t read a book to the end since like year 5, uum, I don’t like writing essays cos I don’t know how to start them, but er, yeah [erm,
T: [ooh, I know what put me off English though, you finished?
O: yeah
T: Because um I was in a top set for English they expected us to not need as much help as, like, especially when we were young they thought we didn’t need as much help as others, but I did. I really did need the help, and it wasn’t really that…available to me. So when I was like “Miss, can I” well I remember some of my teachers like, like Ms Anstey, Ms Anstey who no longer works at this school, when I asked her for help it was like she would really moan about it like “Oh gosh” sort of thing so I never really wanted to ask for help, so I used to just go home and do my own thing.

Pause

O: Well the homework tasks…well they’ve been fair, like it’s not like, it hasn’t been like, er it hasn’t been like very difficult from, like, obviously it’s been slowly easing us into the A level obviously there’s a difference between the GCSE but it hasn’t been…it’s fair...

T: I disagree, it’s harder because really and truly we’ve only started doing like these sort of essay subjects, essay questions for the exam in GCSE when it actually was closer towards the exams whereas now we’re doing it earlier which obviously maybe is better, and I know it is a lot harder and a lot of reading, a lot of writing, a lot of essays, and obviously I mentally prepared myself for it but it doesn’t really compare to actually doing it, so...

V: I just don’t like work, in general…so to sit down and write an essay is really hard for me because like I like the words being right, if you get what I mean, I like the words to sound better so that cuts down on my time cos I’m spending longer on the essay, and its outside home cos I can’t work at home, so for me to actually like stay in the library or go to school and do the work is hard…but other than that the homework hasn’t been…it’s not , like Adaeze said it’s not unfair, it’s just homework and I’m not used to doing homework!

T: It’s a lot more consistent than it was for GCSE

V: Right and we get homework in every subject now, so every lesson, and because we have mainly 2 no 2 teachers for every lesson and we get homework for both so that’s wait that’s 8 pieces of homework every week

T: and the majority of them essays

V: yeah

Z: I think the homework’s alright but then when you think about the other subjects it seems like a lot of homework

T: yeah

Z: but for English, it’s a decent amount cos it’s only like 2 essays

T: but if you add that on top of all your other subjects

Z: yeah then it’s a lot. But for English they really help you, like they help you write what you need to they tell you what you need to write basically

T: Yeah but that’s right now, so when you get further onto the course it’s gonna be like “here’s your essay, do it by tomorrow” kinda thing

O: Yeah

Z: (inaudible) never, ever,...

T: When do we have to do a timed essay?

V: So we get used to like...in the exam we have to write 3 essays in an hour and a half
Z yeah
T what?
Z yeah
T an essay in half an hour? What?
O oh my god it takes me like 2 days
O anyway...
Pause
O how’s your lessons gone? How’ve you found the lessons?
Z oh they’re too big! I thought they were gonna be smaller
(inaudible)
T yeah I thought A level was gonna be more like, not uni but more like uni obviously, it was gonna be a smaller class be more intimate
O yeah
V yeah you can talk to the teacher more
Z well like in drama it is so small, if you compare drama to English it’s, it’s really big
T yeah but before our English class was smaller which was like, I liked having a small English class cos at least I knew everyone in my class, and I could be like “Miss, what’s this and this”
O yeah
V yeah and you can work with the people...now it’s just huge
T you get me
V yeah
Z and with the new people you kind of think “I don’t wanna look stupid”
T yeah I know
V yeah cos with internals like, even if you don’t talk to them you know they know how you are, but with externals they’re thinking “who is this girl talking so much crap?”
T yeah, like the actual, the teaching and stuff is I prefer, you know you need to start getting used to like in universities and how they just talk at you and you write, but like, a powerpoint on the board, if you think that’s a key point you’ll write it down, sort of thing without having the teacher to go “write this down” sort of thing
V I can’t do that. Like if I see something I have to write all of it. Like I don’t know how to make notes
T well you need to learn how
V yeah, but right now I really don’t know how to make notes and that’s slowing me down a lot, but
T you can’t it’s kinda hard to have lessons on note taking, sort of thing
O yeah
Teacher we could do a bit actually
T yeah
Teacher like what you should write down, and
V yeah cos when I see information, I feel like all of it’s important so I just write all of it, and sometimes the teacher says “you don’t need to write that” but I get scared and I think that’ll be in the exam, so
T I do that, I do that, I’m not gonna lie
V like can you not put it on the slide if it’s not important?
T you know what, but even if like in class I’m just doing like taking notes, I’ll just be like “teacher, put it in the shared area so I can just go home and take my own notes, you know, I think it’s important. Even if I have to memorise 2 whole slides, instead of 1 word, I’ll just do it, like
V I just don’t get, why would they put something that’s not needed, on the
T exactly, but maybe, it’ll be like explaining it more, like
Z they should talk
V the things they put on the board should be like the key things that we write down
T exactly
V and like in psychology, our teacher puts the things we need to write
Z (together) in a blue box, yeah and like the even more important things highlighted red,
T yeah
V stuff like that is good.
O anyway…yeah the lessons have been y’know some of the are quite er it’s hard sometimes it’s hard
to get your point across because you know obviously you’re not expecting your point to be
completely correct but if it’s in a big classroom with loads of people in it’s like all of these…opinions
and stuff coming at you
T to be honest when I’m in class and Miss is like “oh Vivienne answer this question” I will write down
what Vivienne says, because even if even if it’s like cos it’s not really like, well they can be but
generally it’s not really incorrect answers in English cos like you back it up
V yeah
T so I will write down Vivienne’s point so in my essay I got like my point, I got Vivienne’s point, I got
everyone’s point like that
O laughter
T but the thing is it’s learning how to write like like shorthand sorta thing like instead of writing
“with” I just write the w there like that so it’s important cos the teacher is just talking and you gotta
be writing it all down
Z the problem with the lessons, like my biology lessons yeah so my teacher like she doesn’t, because
she knows me she feels like she can put me on the spot, and it’s really embarrassing when you don’t
know the answer and the external students are just staring at you like
T yeah!
V she’s supposed to be smart, she’s taking biology, and then they cuss you when you haven’t
memorised it. Like the teachers need to understand like they need to understand that I just came
from year 11, and I haven’t done pr- I haven’t done proper work since what, December, cos we were
revising for exams, so they just need to, they need to take it easy, like
T I’m gonna lie though, I’m not gonna lie, because I haven’t…we’ve only been at school for like a
week and a half, right, our second week and already every week I’m in the library, the study area and
I’m doing revision already, I’m actually revising, I’ve got revision cards already because like, cos in
class you learn something in class on Monday, you learn something different on Tuesday, something
different on Wednesday so it’s like everything I’ve learnt on Monday’s forgotten, so I’m like, I need
to be revising already, and so balancing revision with homework, with work, well, like basically I have
no free time.
O yeah
T and balancing that is really hard, like as soon as I get home, when I get home I do work and I go to
sleep [many voices, inaudible]
V so that’s the thing, like, for example, today in biology, I did my work, I didn’t know that, she didn’t
tell us that it was a homework sheet but everybody had that in their books, but I made my own
questions from that sheet and I left it on my desk, and I was like “miss, I’m sorry, I left it at home but
I have done it, I’ve told you how to do it and that shows that I have done it, but I left it at my home
cos I was like, I was writing my own questions, I was being a good student and she’s like “that’s not acceptable” um “if you do this again something something” and I was like “do you want to leave me alone please”, cos like I’m trying, I’m trying and you’re putting me down that’s a big help. Teachers are a big part of the lesson, cos if you don’t like the teacher like
T & O Yeah
Z You know when you’re given essays, and then the teacher will ask you to read it out, and they’ll ask like Alfred or someone who’ll read in such a smart way
T & V yeah
Z and I can’t read out loud, like, I can’t read out my own things, I mean I will try, I like it when I do read out loud cos it obviously helps me, but at the same time I don’t like starting it off, cos
T Yeah cos everyone’s watching you and
Z and listening to your voice and I really hate it
O yeah, yeah, the lessons are different from last year, I was speaking to the teacher, Miss er [inaudible] or something, a couple of days ago, and um it was about the way the lessons are and how this year, year 12 and next year, year 13 there’s more independent learning, so like in class, there’s information that you, but like well bits of it that you have to learn yourself. If you don’t learn it yourself, then when it comes around eventually you’re stuck, cos er effectively what they expect you to do, differently from GCSE, you have to get up to the mark, and er obviously change the ways of, well for example in GCSE I didn’t really care, so obviously I know that it’s different now but it has to be explained to me, to some people cos it’s very very different.
T Yeah like in my politics class we have Mr Chandler [head of sixth form] and so the other day he was just like “I don’t have a powerpoint today, so I’m just gonna talk at you and you’ve gotta write down what you think is important” and he did not stop for a breath once, not once, so I’m looking at him and I’m like “I just really wanna get out my phone and record you” cos I just cannot get it down, I could not write it down, it was actually ridiculous
V yeah and the problem is I’m scared, like I’m scared to say like “can you repeat it?” cos
T & O Yeah [laughter]
O the lessons are alright though. I feel like...it’s gonna get way harder though. The way everyone’s talking about this jump.
T, Z & O [emphatically] YEAH
V this jump, that just everyone’s talking about, I mean there’s been a jump, but not like, not, like,
T yeah, I have a feeling, a feeling I’m just gonna get pushed, like
V I haven’t felt it so much yet. Like I don’t wanna feel it, but
O in a way it’s like being at the beginning of year 7 again where you’re coming from primary school, and you turn up and you’re like “I’m one of the smartest people around” but you just get so so put down cos it’s like “no, no you’re not”
T Yeah...but the thing is though I have to do a lot of like, you know where you have to go home and research important things, and I don’t like doing that. I mean if it’s a homework, I will do it, but on the internet it’s like there’s so much information and I don’t know what part of the information is worth me taking. I mean it’s like when we were doing the summer work, like we haven’t done it in lessons before, so it was kind of like “go home and research this.” So I researched it, and I’ve got like 2000 google pages coming up and I’m like “what, what one am I supposed to use?” so in my summer work, in my essays I’m writing stuff down, that I’m finding and it’s like, it’s completely irrelevant
V yeah
T so that’s the hardest part, I think, anyway
Z it’s good so far anyway. It’s not too too challenging now. I mean
T it will be though, that’s the thing
Z I mean I haven’t got stressed out with my homework, I need too, I mean I’m ready to work, I’m not
one of those pupils that hasn’t done any homework cos I do, but like I have to keep it up throughout
the whole year
T I mean we’re just so used to, like one day
Z I haven’t cared ever in my life, there hasn’t really been any time when I’ve CARED about
something. And I mean this one I have to
T & V Yeah
Z this one I have to I have to do well in my A levels, cos like my GCSEs, like in psychology I could get
an E!
T & V noooo
V I got 15/27 for my biology homework and that was a D
Z sooo yeah
V y’know in year 11 when we got homework but it wasn’t like...it wasn’t like real homework whereas
now, it’s like we have to do it
T now, homework is yeah, like GCSE it was like fill in the gaps worksheets, and like it had the answers
at the bottom so you could just
All yeah
O even if you did get in trouble for not doing it it was just like,
All yeah
T it’s like, the teacher can give you a detention but really it’s you, like if you don’t do it you’ll suffer,
not like dying but like if you don’t do it it’s up to you
Z thing is though I do my homework, I don’t do it for me, I just feel like I’m doing it cos if I don’t do it
I’ll get kicked off the course!
T no, I’m doing it for me, I’m doing it for me,
Z I’m not doing it for me yet cos I just feel like it’s just too much. Like with history I don’t feel like I’m
not learning from it but I feel like I’m not doing it cos I want to do it, I’m doing it cos well it’s just so
much. Well hopefully I’ll get the hang of it...
T the thing is yeah, I was talking to my mum, the other day and she said like back in her times, in
olden times, they had a different system so you went , you went secondary school and then you
could either do O levels, or you could do A levels or something like that, O levels, A levels something
like that, like Michael Gove wants to bring back, so you could say if you’re smart, but you’re not the
smartest there was a second thing, like an in between level so you didn’t go to university, you could
go to something, it was like university but not as intense, whereas now they’ve taken out that level
between secondary school and A levels, I don’t know if it was like A levels or what, so that’s why it’s
such a massive jump cos it wasn’t such a massive jump before, cos it’s just so much harder
V in those days you couldn’t do like you couldn’t do retakes...I feel sorry for them
T I feel sorry for US! Cos we
V I prefer that, cos like my brother’s in the year below, I prefer the fact that they can’t do retakes,
cos I feel like they’ll work harder? Cos I feel like with me I knew, I didn’t work cos I was like I know I
can do retakes in a couple of months, but they’ll...
Z It would make a difference but still, I’m just not that type of hardworking person
T but still the fact that oh, I only did work I only started revising like a week before my exams, swear
down I did, a week before,
V see I didn’t revise, I did but
T but you still got alright
V in year 11, I just didn’t revise, and I didn’t get the best grades, but, I’m just not that type of person
I’m just, sometimes I try, sometimes I do but I just...it depends what mood I’m in really
T It depends on the subject. Like, I really liked English from the get go, so obviously when I’m in an
English class I’m gonna be like, yeah and cos it’s A levels we’re doing subjects we like, it’s not like I’m
forced to do maths or science again, if I’m in my science class you see me, I’m sitting in the corner
counting the ...cos I’m like I wanna be doing it, I wanna be doing it...
laughter
Focus group #2
Wednesday 11th September 2013 11:22am. Participants white, middle-class, very high achieving
M = Maeve O = Oona

M I think you’re right about the books at...GCSE putting you off doing it, at AS level
O yeah like cos to read, I think, like, um I’ll read a book but usually, if I’m not enjoying it, I would stop reading it, but like in GCSE you have to, you have to finish it, and um you have to write about it, and I think that can put a lot of people off choosing it for A level because for an A level you have to read around, so if there’s a book you don’t like or an author like Charles Dickens, then um
M reading around, reading not only the book you’re doing but another book well, or like a few, even just another book,
O that’s a lot, a lot of reading of books that you wouldn’t necessarily want to read, so
M yeah
O life’s too short! To read bad books. Or like, not BAD books but books that you don’t like...enjoy.
Teacher but you did, you did choose English.
M yeah, cos like, Great Expectations I had read it before and I had enjoyed it, but doing it in class, and I liked the book less afterwards and it wasn’t anything to do with the teaching or anything, it’s just when you over-analyse a book so much and you have to go right into the details of it, it becomes... it kind of loses, like
O yeah it loses, like some charm.
M charm, the book, yeah, it makes you like, not hate it but not enjoy the book as much, even if it’s like a good read or whatever
O yeah for what it is, like the Aestheticism movement or what...Oscar Wilde [laughter]
O so the reason I chose English, was because I really like theatre, but I didn’t want to do drama, because well I like drama but like, I dunno, I thought like if I like reading as well, and like it’s a good opportunity for you to read, to just read books as well and that can be part of your work, whereas like with other subjects you’re reading books it would be, well not extra work but it would be...I don’t know how to explain it...
M It would be...
O It would take up more of your time that you like would need to spend revising, whereas in English I like the idea that you can just read for pleasure but it can actually be for your studies.
M It’s also like, one of those A levels that will be helpful for anything. Like, I do enjoy English as well, like I read a lot and I know the sort of stuff we’d be studying, I still find it quite interesting, and I know, cos it feels a bit at GCSE we were kind of spoon-fed and it’s like “you write your essays in THIS structure” “you HAVE to include these points” whereas it feels like at AS you get to have a SAY more, like you know you get to express what you actually think a lot more which is what I would prefer to do, so I kind of chose it cos I want to do that, to get a say more.
O like I actually think that’s true what you said I want to think about the book instead of just like following the order [of ideas to put in essays at GCSE?] but yeah also English will help with everything and...yeah
I think actually at the moment, cos we just started, the lessons are...I’m not finding them that different, from GCSE classes, I think they’re quite similar. I think I’m just waiting, because everyone says there’s this massive leap
M yeah
O I’m waiting for it, I don’t know if I’m nervous for it to change, cos like even when we just saw Mr Lucas just then and he was saying year 12 is a lot different, but so far it hasn’t been different, I’m not sure WHEN it’s gonna become so much harder, I’m just…waiting. Also the other thing is that there’s a lot there’s a lot of different types of people in the class now, before when we were in sets it was...quite a lot of like similar people, who were

M very opinionated

O yeah VERY opinionated, in our class, and there were a lot of similar people. Not like similar opinions, but similar personalities, and like maybe similar upbringing, I’m not really sure

M yeah

O but now it’s just like all people that have chosen English, so it’s like...a different atmosphere. Yeah it’s a very different atmosphere. Yeah and also, we’ve not done English with boys before

M yeah it’s the first time I’ve ever, ever done English with boys which is really weird because it’s one of the core subjects, and we’ve got quite a quiet class. That’s the biggest contrast

O yeah cos last year it was like set 1 girls...we used to talk all the time

M I think that, yeah, it’s nice that everyone’s there...well most people are there because they want to do English, which means we actually get stuff done, in the lesson. I think well it’s quite similar to GCSE at the moment but it’s like I don’t know if it’s just the introduction and it’s going to change. I think it’s...

O I feel like at the moment it’s not EASIER than GCSE but at the moment I think it’s more simple because we’re just at the beginning, just starting the plays, whereas the last lessons of English...well the last lesson I was in of English before this was our last lesson before our exam, it was really like we knew what we were doing, it was really like specific, we weren’t being introduced, we were definitely like, not experts but we knew what we were doing.

M It was like –

O like a different level, whereas now we’re going back to the beginning again, so it’s kind of simple compared to how we’ve left off, but it’s like, well, I don’t really remember the start of GCSEs but it’ll probably all change

M yeah. I think, my, I did – although I got two As in English, my grades did, slightly slightly take me aback, cos I really wanted A* in English, especially in Literature because they...I felt like I could get them and I felt like I’m of that ability, so, even though an A’s still good and like I’m not complaining, it’s not, but like in a way I’m like “I only got an A, will I be ok at A level?”

O mmm, I got an A* and an A and the A* was in the literature and in a way I was surprised that I got so high, because I didn’t like Great Expectations and so I was worried that that would bring down my ability to analyse or whatever, cos I really liked To Kill a Mockingbird, and it really helped with my revision, so I’m kind of the opposite

M I like the idea that we study more books as well, so even if you don’t like one there’s more chance that you’ll eventually find one that you’ll like,

O yeah

M so that’s quite nice. It’s because like the thing at like GCSE, like I’m not being snobbish or anything but loads of people are like “why do we have to do OLD stuff like Shakespeare” and stuff, and it’s like, I quite LIKE doing Shakespeare but people complain about it like it doesn’t make sense and stuff, so it’s good to seriously do...

O I think I can relate to Shakespeare more when I...once I’ve seen it, rather than just like reading it out, like I saw, actually it was really funny I saw As You Like It at the Globe, but it was a Georgian theatre company it was all in Georgian, but it was still like, it was so entertaining that you just
understood it anyway, it was really physical so you always knew what was going on and it just makes you think “it’s not that complicated”. Even though it’s a language you’ve never heard before you can still pick up the story, and it’s like when Shakespeare’s in, I mean it’s in old English but it’s written down, why should it be that complicated?

M yeah I think with Shakespeare you just need to take it and think like “what would the equivalent be?” just take it and almost like translate some of the sections, and it, it does make sense, and I find it quite funny, like I never worry that I won’t find Taming of the Shrew FUNNY, cos I think that, you can still relate to it...

O yeah I think it’s good that we’re doing comedies though, I wouldn’t want to be doing like Macbeth or anything like that

M no

Me: You know it was tragedies up until last year!

O No! Yeah, I think that comedies, they’re just quite light hearted, I think that Shakespeare’s not my preferred topic but at least...

Me: at least it’s drama.

O yeah, it’s drama and I like yeah, I enjoy that. OK the homework...well the main thing I’ve done is like the summer homework, and like...I...thought that was really cool that we could read a whole play, like

M yeah same! It’s like not just a chapter from a book or just

O yeah a paragraph from a book and like...I felt quite grown up. I did The History Boys and I found it...it was good...it’s a good play I can see like why it’s been so popular, it’s really clever but I found it a bit pretentious, I’m not sure if Alan Bennett was just trying to like show off how much he knew...it was very like public school boy, and like I don’ t go to a private school and I’m a girl, so it’s completely different to what I’ve experienced, and like...I just felt it was a bit pretentious

M yeah I wasn’t the happiest with the essay I wrote, due to because it was quite daunting, not being able to focus on a chapter or in so much detail, like even though I prefer to do the whole book, it’s also you have to choose your approach, like a WHOLE play, it’s

O I found it, um in a way I found in easier, because in a way in GCSE when we were doing chapters, or short paragraphs...

M extracts

O yeah extracts I found it like it’s happened to me in history as well, I want to explain, I’d forget what the essay was about cos I was trying to explain everything that happened around it

M the context

O yeah the context and so my essay would get so long, and so complicated, but wouldn’t make sense and then I’d have to start again and change it all, but this time, because it was the whole book anyway, that helped a lot with the context and like you didn’t have to...you...can introduce it to whoever’s reading your essay

M it was we’re studying a play as well, cos even though we’ve done Shakespeare plays before, it was like quite difficult to understand it, and like I really felt like I wanted to SEE it, because it would make more sense

O yeah well after I read the History Boys the book I watched the film, and like it was so similar I was surprised it stayed quite true to the actual writing...yeah it was it was um it did make it visually it made it a lot easier, like I wrote my essay after reading and then watching the film and THEN I wrote my essay
M cos Bouncers, like is just 4 guys and they change into the women and its...these 4 different characters all the time...so READING that is really difficult because it didn’t change their name, they just switch so it’s just these 4 guys’ names...it was REALLY difficult to analyse a play like that because it was like, visually it would make sense but I couldn’t see it from that perspective...and because it’s so of its time I was kind of lost with how to write about it...because at least with Shakespeare or something you know it cos you know, like, that style, I’ve seen that style before but with this I’d never seen that style before
O I agree, it’s quite daunting
M in AS with new styles
O with the play as well there are a lot of characters, like all the boys, there are I can’t remember how many there are, like, 10 of them or so (laughs) I can’t actually remember...maybe 7 or 8...hang on I think there’s between about 7 and 10, um and they’re yeah they’re quite similar, and just remembering who said what, just from looking at the side of the um the column where it says who’s speaking, that was hard. And sometimes I just, I just didn’t bother about that, like if it was just the students, I just told between the students and the teachers because it was um 3 teachers or 4 and it was fine with them, and they were all quite different, but with the boys in the class it was really confusing, who was speaking, also because it had a photograph on the front cover of the book, and it had a list of who was who, but it had it in like a really weird format, so I kept looking on the photo to check who was who, but then it just took a really long time, and I was like “I don’t really need to know what they look like”
M yeah also cos its changing who’s speaking all the time – like there’s hardly any long paragraphs. With Shakespeare they’ve got so many long speeches, so you can like, analyse what they’re saying, which is easier but when it’s just all tiny sentences
O yeah I just couldn’t compute the ...who was speaking
M Yeah I think it’s daunting but it’s kind of, exciting at the same time, cos like I want to know how to analyse those sorts of things. So I’m looking forward to it, and like, although yes I mean yes my stepmother’s an English teacher so she’s been like, encouraging me to take this subject, but it’s also, kind of made me more interested cos I’ve read some of the books you do, that we’re gonna do and I really like them and she talked about, like the exam and stuff and it did appeal to me more that having your own opinion, and being able to actually you yourself define the structure of what you’re going to write, instead of like being told the structure that you HAVE to do in order to get a good mark...
O yeah I guess that’s kind of why I chose English as well because I feel like I could actually enjoy the books, instead of JUST overanalysing them.
Focus group #3 – external students (new to year 12), not such good friends/so comfortable with each other.

Tamara, Selina, Richardson and Callum

T What made you choose English for um AS level?
R Um. I think English is a very good subject, especially as like you can see a lot of different interpretations and you learn a lot of new things, which like normal people don’t actually see, like, I think it’s kind of cool. To discover. Yeah.
T yeah
R so that’s why I chose it.
C I just really like reading books.
T ok, Selina?
S you also gain a lot of key skills and you can also transfer them to university, now you can, you know, work more efficiently,
T I chose it cos, what I want to do, in uni, I have to do English for it so, and also it’s fun
R What do you wanna do at uni?
T I want to do IT
R IT?
T yeah, IT. Did anything put you off choosing English and why?
R yeah, the essays. All the time. (laughter)
T How have you found the reading and homework tasks so far?
S they’re quite….well they’re enjoyable tasks. Even though they’re quite...
R Long.
S yeah. I’d say that they are interesting, and they’re different.
T Um. I’d say that they’re quite fun cos you have to watch like comedy films, and yeah but um they’re really long (laughter) and you have to like spend a lot of time on it, cos you can’t just write a little essay you have to like spend a lot of time on it and yeah
C I don’t think they’re that much. I mean in GCSE I loved literature, I think like 1000 words is ok for me, but it’s just like we rarely do just 1000 words. Or we do 1000 words like regularly at A level
All yeah
T How have you found the lessons that you’ve had …how’ve you found the lessons so far?
Pause
R Well. They require a lot of confidence, cos you have to do a lot of role plays and stuff
S yeah. And acting. Take you out of your comfort zone a bit
R yeah
S they’re different. They’re different. And you…have to get involved in the class. Everyone plays a part.
T yeah, in year 11 you could just stay at the back and we had like only one reader, but here the teacher gets a lot of people to read, even though you don’t want to (laughter) Um. In what way are lessons different in year 12?
S er, in A level, well um you’re required to do much more independent research and study, so that’s a big change
R & C yeah
S it’s a bit harder in terms of that.
C yeah and um like GCSEs the teachers would give you stuff to say, but now like in A Level you have to think of it yourself, or other, classmates they tell you stuff, more than the teacher.

T cos in GCSE we kinda relied on our teacher to like bring in worksheets for us, that kinda like...had the answers on it, but here you have to go off and do stuff for yourself and come back and like say what you’ve learnt, so, yeah

Pause

Teacher – think about other subjects as well, and about the other people – do you think the classes are different because you’ve all chosen to be studying? Rather than at GCSE when it’s compulsory.

C everyone’s prepared to work.

T yeah cos in GCSE our class was like full of people that talk a lot, but in A level they don’t really talk, it’s not really disrupti- disrupti-

S disruptive

T yeah disruptive. That word. Yeah, cos in GCSE...they don’t really do that here. People are a bit more maturer, than

R yeah

Pause

Teacher – have you heard people talking and saying it’s a really big jump up to A level? And how does that fit with your experience so far?

All yeah

T yeah...

R well so far, I think it’s an exaggeration.

S&T no!

T I thought so...

R it really is, like people, like when they tell me about GCSE to A level, they make me feel like I’m gonna fail. I’m not failing/

S yeah but maybe that’s cos it’s only the beginning/

T innit

R yet. I’m not failing yet.

S I feel like we’re just settling in. And the workload hasn’t really hit us yet.

T but you done, you done a test in music, with like your class didn’t you?

R maths, no for maths, but it was just GCSE so...

C what subject?

R maths.

Mumbling

R I don’t think it’s really started yet.

T I don’t think it’s really started yet, cos I think A levels actually complicated, sorry, it’s hard (laughter) it’s hurting my head, I just have to go and cry sometimes...

S and we’ve only been here for 2 weeks! Oh my god...

C the thing wait the only thing I find challenging is physics, and that’s cos like if you look at the text book it doesn’t tell you nothing

All yeah!

C it doesn’t actually tell you nothing.

T yeah it’s like in ICT as well, it doesn’t tell you nothing! What’s the point in having it?

C it just gives you questions. I think it just wants you to be independent, and like go online and do it yourself
sometimes it’s not there online!
S yeah you just have to really LOOK for the work in order to understand it!
Pause
C you guys are all external, right? (assent) how you finding it?
R er
S oh my god
R it’s very different
C in a bad way?
R nah it’s just that...there’s rules like...
T the internals don’t mix. That’s the thing
R I’m just a shyer person. That’s why...
S it’s kind of the same. Cos I came from Knights anyway
C oh right
S but it’s just like everybody already has their friendships groups and cliques and
C but you guys all have friends already
T no, I came by myself! There’s like one other person...
C yeah but now I mean...it didn’t take you long to make friends...
S I still haven’t made a clique yet.
C oh right...
T I kinda have but...you can’t really make a clique cos everyone’s in different lessons, and like some
people have half days, you know
R that’s true
Teacher – be better if we had a good common room.
R yeah that’s true. I think we should do something about that you know.
T they’re doing that speed dating event thing.
S Take Me Out
R when?
T next week
R I’d...
Focus group #4 4th October 2013 9.51am

Liam, Christopher, Tymera, Greer, Tia, Aaliyah (a mixture of high-achieving, middle-class students, black, white and mixed race (Liam, Greer, Tia and Christopher) and less high-achieving mixed race/Arabic girls (Tymera and Aaliyah). Aaliyah has a hearing impediment as well.

C What have you all found most difficult so far?
A I think it’s a big gap, between the GCSE and the A level? Like a lot of difference.
L I don’t think it really feels that way though. I –
C well, people keep talking about how it’s a big step, but, it’s just more work.
Gr yeah it’s just more homework
L yeah it’s just more homework
T in every subject as well, so you have to do all of them, and it’s like all due in on one day…
C yep. That’s the thing though. It’s just more the homework. I’ve found the work is not that much, I mean due in every 2 weeks…I expected it to be more I expected at least 2000 [words] A week, so,
T I think it is harder. In other classes, like in History, he just talks at you, and that was like a big thing to have to change. I mean I had this in other lessons, you have to take notes anyway, but in all of my lessons now I’m more taking notes in the lessons, which is a big change, and like Psychology for instance is all…there’s so much new information, every second? And English, like everyone’s read Shakespeare and stuff in their own time, I’m like, haven’t done that, so it’s like “ok guys, ok!”
C ok then. Is anything different from GCSE to AS level English, like was it just more easy?
A there’s more books.
L yeah. It is just a lot more work as well. I mean you can’t really say much, if you
Ty more independent learning as well
C yeah
T it’s not a lot of…not everything is in the text book or in the class. You have to research
C yeah you have to research around the subject which is really…boring, but it works (laughter)
C it is quite boring! Like sitting there reading A Midsummer Night’s Dream or whatever
T I tried to read Much Ado About Nothing at home
L that’s the real difference between GCSE and A level, cos in GCSE you’re given everything you need.
C yeah
T yeah in like a cool powerpoint, a really neat powerpoint with instructions, “do this”, “do this”, you’re ready…
C the teacher kind of gives you what you need and then, it’s not really copying but it’s in your own words, writing it in your own words. (assent) I think it’s helpful though that we get to do our own stuff, now cos I mean, independence…
A I think it’s there’s we develop more learning skills as well. It helps you to improve as well
Gr yeah you’re more reliant on your own knowledge…
C yeah is there anything that’s easier than GCSE? Like I think it’s easier cos there’s less
T less stuff you mean?
C yeah
L yeah there’s more free time. Um…free lessons.
T I think analysing The Importance of Being Earnest is easier than I thought it was gonna be. I actually kind of understand what’s going on in the play, whereas when I read Othello I was just lost, I didn’t have a clue what was going on with Iago
Gr yeah
A at GCSE? It was like...what...
T yeah we read A Midsummer Night’s Dream in year 8 and it was like...
Gr I think cos we did Shakespeare before, it kind of helps us understand it more when we get to A level
All yeah
C especially like when it’s slang as well, cos I mean Shakespearean slang is just odd, but
T it really is
C so what’s different from AS to GCSE? Is it a giant step like the teachers said or is it just...is it just...not that big a step?
All mumbling it’s just more work, it’s just more work
L it’s just more in depth. That’s the only difference really.
C I just got annoyed yeah cos when I came to sixth form, the way they talked, they made it out like this really big step, this giant step, “the biggest step you’ll ever take in your academic career”, and it’s not really. It’s not really.
G I think it depends on what kind of student you were in secondary school.
L what subjects you do as well, cos I mean I did physics for 2 weeks, and I mean that was just like the biggest step, of like, It was just a different subject, basically
C the chemistry one, the chemistry was just...it...it was just more of chemistry, it wasn’t that it was harder, there’s just so much more of it
T there’s so much that’s new as well, you have to like read big books, for chemistry.
Gr I’m finding Art quite difficult. We have to do 5 hours of homework, for art every week
T I’m finding Psychology difficult, cos I just can’t remember what they talk about to be honest. It’s just so much information to take in, overload, I have to go home and I’ve never been the type of student that sits on the bus reading text books
C & L yeah
L reading text books on the way to school
T sitting on the bus and just reading my Psychology text book
A I’ve got 10 minutes, on the train, 10 minutes and I just get my text books out and I just revise
C yeah
C so overall, I’d say personally that it’s not as big a step as was put across, but like I think that’s because of my subjects I took so, yeah
T I think it depends on what type of student you were in secondary school, like if you were the type of student that just did the bare minimum, then I think it would be a lot different, a lot harder for you, but if you’re someone that would probably go over your notes anyway, and would
A revise
T yeah revise and read around your subject then it’s probably not that much of a jump, anyway
Focus group #5

7th October 2013 2.40pm. Participants white, middle-class, very high achieving – 2nd focus group

M = Maeve
O = Oona

O what’s been what’s been most difficult so far? I think it’s that we’ve had…multiple homeworks at the same time
M yeah and not even easy like, 15 minutes …everything is an essay
O an essay or it’ll be kind of some deep thinking thing
M research that takes ages
O that kind of thing
M structuring your time. Cos in year 11 you could get away with not doing anything on some nights, but now you can’t. Now if there’s…we have to do at least something every night…Mr C says we’re meant to do like 3 hours a night, which is not really possible if you have a life. It’s still like, that is kind of realistic, I do need to do that much, but I CAN’T, it’s just, at the moment like not really in English but in history especially, no one’ll get a good mark, so there’s no motivation to do the essay…you’re told “it’s so different from GCSE” and it’s just like “you can’t write like that anymore” and it’s just like…so how are we meant to write?
O I think…don’t you think that…if you aren’t motivated NOW, to do it, then of course you won’t ever stop like getting Ds and things…don’t you think…
M I don’t think so, like, the thing is at the beginning when you’re just sort of trying to find your new writing like not new writing style but adapt your writing style, to fit it? So cos I’m trying to find that I’m not really ready yet, I’m finding it difficult and like homework takes HOURS. I’ve got 3 essays due
O that’s true
M and it takes hours to do it and even then, my very best isn’t…great. And that’s hard because…well I know that if I keep trying it’ll get better…it’s just a bit, it doesn’t HELP, when you get bad marks
O I think that, what makes the hardest, the hardest about the homework at one time is that I don’t know if you LIKE…or I like to spend time on what if we had an essay, I’d like to spend a lot of the time on that one thing, and like try out different styles and things, but because we have lots of other things to do, I end up just doing what I can anyway, instead of experimenting with like unusual formula of essays or
M yeah that’s true, there’s no point
O something or, like what I’d usually do, so
M and it’s not even that you don’t manage your time well, like realistically cos if you get essays from like every week and like I have 3 essays due in this week, and there’s not time to go into each of those in detail, cos it’s like not even about me not managing my time it’s just all the smaller homeworks, that are also due in that week as well
O yeah
M like “research this” and like pile up
O and also in languages it’s very annoying cos we er cos we have, well if we get like a worksheet in the lesson then we’ll have to finish that worksheet, we’ll have to do some vocabulary thing, and then we’ll have an essay on top of that, so I think sometimes in my head I forget, about the smaller homeworks, like I think planning my week “I have 3 essays this week so I can spend a day and a half
on each of them, or an evening and a half on each of them” but then the problem is I forget like “oh, wait, I’m meant to learn that vocab, or revise that tense” and I get all a bit caught up

M yeah and you end up doing it the night before, and it’s not even cos you’re not organised

O yeah that’s not even bad organisation it’s just it can happen, the worst thing that can happen is that you don’t hand it in. The second worst thing is that you do it the night before and that’s when it becomes really limited and rushed and

M yeah cos I’ve been doing homework like JUST before at the last minute, like in my free period right before the lesson, and it’s not even cos I’m badly organised it’s just because, because I AM an organised person but to be able...to be able to um manage it as well you have to like, I dunno I think your head...you have to change the way you think quite a lot, like your outlook on schoolwork has to change and it takes a while for that to kick in...

(pause)

M anyway! Are you enjoying year 12?

O that is not, no. What I was going to say was, what’s been EASIER – cos that’s the NEXT question – um...what’s been easier is um hmm. I think a lot of the concept of just doing 4 subjects that you’ve CHOSEN is

M oh that’s so nice

O is a pleasure.

M Not hating anything

O yeah. I think well in a way you kind of decide different ways to hate them...but you love them really...and...so it’s been easier to kind of well you said about not being motivated for certain things, but I think that it can actually be easier to motivate yourself, for certain subjects.

M hmm, once you’re into the module, it’s fine

O yeah, yeah! And I mean like you, it’s more it makes the sixthform experience more personal. Yeah. M I like the way we learn as well, that’s been easier, than I expected, like I prefer the way we learn in class. Like, the teacher says something, and we’re taught like to write down everything and stuff, like some people find it really hard to get out of that. But I like just deciding, like writing down what the teacher tells us and then kind of being able to form our own opinions. With English like I’m not sure yet, what it’s gonna be like. Like it feels quite similar, so far what we did at GCSE just on a larger scale. But I don’t want it to be like, we have to write a certain way and you have to say this, this and this...or you’re not gonna get enough marks.

O it definitely won’t be AS MUCH like that as GCSE, like we still have to pass an exam, so it’s still gonna be oriented towards that, but

M yeah but

O yeah but the exam will be, like more open than GCSE, like look at our coursework, when we got to choose our own question for the coursework

M yeah

O I was really happy about that cos you get to do what you want, it’s different from GCSE where you just had one...one question for everyone. And oh, I had something else...

M well that answers question 3 about differences.

O yeah. And also, I really like it, the more class discussion, at at A level or AS level

M and everyone wants to be there, which is really nice

O most people want to be there

M most people want to be there. Or they’ve left already.

O um...well the smaller class sizes, I like that.
M yeah I like that that’s much better, especially when you luck out with a really good class, like our English class
O yeah I like our English class, like it’s nice and calm, it’s quite...
M eager
O eager?
M yeah you know what I mean like everyone wants the same things from the lesson?
O I guess, yeah
M yeah
O So, are you enjoying year 12?
M um
O I guess, yeah. Yeah. I am enjoying year 12. Because, of course I’m enjoying like we said the more freedom and more um personal um experience I don’t know if that makes sense
M no yeah
O and there’s other, there’s other kinda things that I would say that I’m not enjoying, which is the fact that um I’m not sure I’m not 100% sure that I actually...like studying, to be honest (laughter)
M I 100% do NOT like studying!
O no but like if you think about it, if you think “oh, I’ll go and get my A levels and I’ll go to uni”, I’m not sure if I actually
M yeah
O if that’s what I want to do necessarily, cos it doesn’t, it doesn’t particularly make me happy. Like, I like LEARNING, and um I just wish that I just wish that you could just sit in, I really like class discussions, if you could just sit in the class discussion and like an in-depth discussion and there not be a particular exam at the end of the year or like an essay that you have to write. I like learning but I just don’t like having to always be studying for something. But obviously that’s my own problem, that’s not like something wrong with year 12.
M yeah I think I’m quite similar, like the only subject I GENUINELY enjoy researching and studying for is history, but with English it’s hard cos the homework tasks we’ve been set recently have been really interesting, but it’s frustrating because at the moment it feels like at the moment I don’t have the knowledge, or the writing skills that I need to be able to put across what I mean, to say what I want to say in like a sophisticated way? So I mean the Midsummer Night’s Dream homework I knew, I had loads of ideas but the way to phrase it and put it down on paper, I didn’t know how to phrase anything
O yeah I’m looking forward to learning that. That homework I think, I didn’t know much about the play, I had to use the internet and like I did research to start me off and like get my essay going cos I didn’t really have many of my own original ideas when I initially looked at the task, but I I’d quite like to be able to move away from that eventually
M yeah same
O as brilliant as the internet is, I think that like I don’t think it should be the be-all and end-all of studying
M I’m enjoying the kind of general atmosphere of sixth form. But I think I would prefer to have less free periods, to be honest, cos I work better in a class, but the thing is it’s SO easy in your free period just to go to the library and be like “I’m gonna do some work” and just sit there and do nothing
O yeah, you say there should be less free periods, but I think the free periods should be less random. I know that would be like impossible
M yeah that would be good actually
O cos if I had all my free periods...like on a Wednesday’s perfect, I have one lesson then I go home, cos I study really well at home
M yeah that’s true, I work well at home
O I don’t work that well at school, cos
M yeah same
O that’s the frustrating thing about detentions, cos our class is actually like in art, our class has been put into um I can’t remember what they call it, it’s not detention any more, it’s like, in...it’s like it’s not invasion it’s like
M intervention
O yeah, intervention.
M why? Cos you don’t do enough work?
O yeah or they don’t think we do, but we’re all just like, we’re all just catching up um basically it started off like we just didn’t really have the right concept of what we were supposed to be doing, but we didn’t realise, they like “eugh” and we had to like so we had to we’re now every Tuesday after school we have to go and spend at least an hour doing art. Like I can see how that’s productive for some people but like for me that definitely doesn’t work, I do work so much better at home so I find that frustrating
M I work better at home. Or the library has to be deserted, or none of my friends are there, and then I’ll work. But it’s still difficult, cos people are always moving around and stuff, and it’s distracting. The study area – I NEVER work in the study area, cos it’s just people talking
O the study area, I don’t like
M it’s not a study area, it’s a chatting area
Teacher I’ve seen Mr Greenwood shouting at them!
M occasionally
O but you can never sit there for an hour and get your work done.
M so we all rely on the library, but that isn’t
O I like the library, actually
M I like the library, but
O like especially on a Monday, 5 and 6 like everyone’s gone home, it’s usually just me and a couple of other people in the library, that’s a good time to get work done actually
M the problem, it’s just the way everyone works differently and it’s just kind of finding your feet in the first term of when you work best and I think that’s quite difficult but once I’ve got that sorted out I’ll enjoy it more
O I really think you have to be less scared or intimidated of your tasks, cos I find that the more worried I am about a task the less I’ll do cos I’ll think like “wait, I have to do all this research” and then it just never happens so
M mmm
O I can try that. I’ll end up just having a go at it and it’ll get done in the end.
Focus group #6 (second session of group 1)

Participants – all in year 12 – all black, mid-to-high achieving, hard working
- Tia, 12D = T
- Oli, 12A = O
- Vivienne, 12D = V
- Arthur, 12D = A

O so um what’s been most difficult for you so far? In year 12.
T um…possibly the amount of workload that you get? Cos like for each subject you have 2 teachers so the amount of homework it’s kind of like, it’s not like “oh, yeah you can do this” it’s like well both of them are essays and they both have to be due by the same day next week, that sort of thing, so kind of complete all of that, and kind of balancing enrichments cos they say to us “oh yeah it’s so good to do enrichments” and like on a Wednesday you’re supposed to do an enrichment anyway, but like it’s probably one of the hardest things for me anyway.
A yeah I think um trying to manage TIME is one of the hardest things, as well, cos you know like when you’re doing GCSE it’s more easier to manage your time, but now it’s more harder cos it’s like you wanna do this like for an hour, then I’m gonna do this, you have so many other things you have to do, you know, and it’s really difficult to kinda manage your time.
V Mine is probably the motivation of actually doing the work, cos I probably have enough time to do the work but I’m not gonna just sit down and do it, that’s the problem, cos I’m not a very motivated person, to do it. And meeting the deadlines as well, cos they come round so fast, and there’s so many other homeworks as well so the deadline comes and it’s just like “oh! Deadline’s here”, it’s easy to lose track of them
O I think what’s hardest, for me, is that like there’s no time to relax. It’s like, every little time you get, you have to work. Otherwise it’s like you’re putting yourself behind and you have to stay on the ball, there’s no time for slacking, no time for missing deadlines or anything cos you’re only doing damage to yourself, really…yeah
Pause
O What’s been easier than expected?
T I think possibly the content? Cos personally I don’t think, it’s not really the CONTENT that makes A level to GCSE such a big jump. I think it’s the grade boundaries in the exams. Cos if you compare what we’re actually learning it’s not that different, it’s just the questions and the grade boundaries which makes you have to work that much harder.
O is it content for a specific subject or is it content just in general for all subjects?
T In general, all subjects. Apart from politics, cos I just don’t know anything about that subject at all, so I have to just really try, to get on top of things
A um well I think what was easier than I thought is…being able to er process the information they give you when you’re doing let’s say A level English literature for example. Cos when you’re doing GCSE there’s like so much content that you have to remember, so many formulas, or, you know, just so many rules for different things, but in A level, like, they go deeper into it, but not as deep as I thought they would, so like I thought your head would just explode, just trying to think about it, but...
V I agree with what everyone else has said. Like with the content, it’s not THAT hard, as long as you like go home after the lesson and revise it there’s no way that you can find A levels hard well right
now anyway. I think that, I like the lessons, that it’s not from 8.30 til 3.15, you do have some breaks, and it’s just more chilled, so it’s not like, ok, 2 periods, break, 2 periods, break, 2 periods, break – it’s more relaxed
O well I think what has been easier for me is like getting the attention of the teachers. I don’t know why but it just seems that sometimes as a class size it’s hard to properly connect to your teacher, but if you have a smaller class then it’s been a lot easier to talk to your teachers, and everything and so forth
V yeah the fact that the class is smaller, the fact that there’s less people makes it easier, as well. And I’ve noticed that teachers are always asking after they say something, do you want them to go over it again, do you understand, cos they don’t want to move on unless they’re sure that everybody knows what’s going on.
O what differences do you notice from GCSE?
T well from GCSE, you could just like get the text book, like the anthology in English, and read it, and you could put annotations and then you’re just like “boom”, I can do the exam, I can probably get an A possibly an A*, but with your other subjects now at A levels you have to like know your text book but you also have to do further reading as well, so it’s kind of like you’ve got to do so much work on the exam board, the exam with information from the text book but also further reading, so for example history, we’ve got the text book, but then we have to do so much work going to the library going on the internet looking for other evidence, it’s just like...the BBC and alla that, and I think that’s the biggest difference for me, yeah
A I think that one difference is the level of understanding. So like from GCSE, compared to A level, the level of understanding is very very different. Cos when I um when I basically first came into my first lesson of doing A levels, I didn’t think there would be as much depth into that specific subject and content that’s different to what I’ve done before. And what’s difficult is you have to LEARN those things, you can’t miss anything out, you have to learn all the small things so you can keep up.
V Ummm, one of the factors is obviously the class size, so you can’t mess about, you HAVE to focus. More or less. So like, and usually in your classes, I dunno in GCSE you felt more comfortable, more relaxed, but now it’s like this is GOING somewhere. For me anyway, for my GCSEs I didn’t think “oh my gosh if I don’t learn this I’m gonna miss out on a mark on my exams” but now it’s like...yeah. But I think I still haven’t felt the jump. I still haven’t really felt the jump, even though the WORKLOAD is a lot if I actually prioritise my time is it POSSIBLE to do, so I haven’t felt the jump yet.
O yeah, the thing that is different for me is er the levels of um independent learning. Like it’s literally, you get a small amount of information and it’s up to you to um gather the rest and you’re EXPECTED there’s a higher expectation on you to do that independent learning um otherwise, you’re only jeopardising yourself and it’s a lot, it’s a lot different.
V another thing is in class, like in history, they give us like loads of subtitles and then WE have to do the research, whereas at GCSE they just gave us the information and we had to remember it. Whereas now we might have a whole lesson and it’s us, we have to find that out.
O well how are the deadlines going?
All laughter
V ha, the deadlines
T um, I said before, it’s like if we GOT the work, like we’re getting now but further spaced apart it wouldn’t be AS bad, but it’s just the fact that for example this week I had to do FOUR essays. Like four essays over the weekend, due in next week, whereas if you had essays spaced out it would be ok but basically 3 of them were due for Friday. So it’s just like really hard, kinda like “oh great”
A the deadlines, yeah the deadlines are pretty tough. Just to echo what you said, yeah, It’s having to,
having to meet a deadline when you’ve got all these other homeworks to do as well and you say to
yourself “which one shall I do?” and then it’s like “I’ll do that” but you forget about the other one
and it’s like you’ve got more and more homeworks to get through. To do. So it’s like, meeting
deadlines is very difficult, but I’d say so long as you can apply yourself and manage your time, you’ll
be fine.
V deadlines is not going well for me at all. (laughter) it is mainly my fault, cos like I haven’t learn to
prioritise my time, but in future, I’ve learnt from my mistakes so it’s getting better, I’m getting
better.
O I think for me it’s just about getting into a routine. Of making sure you get all the work done. I
mean, they wouldn’t give it to us if it wasn’t possible, so...what I’m saying is, yeah they are, they’re
not going WELL, but I mean over time, over the time we’ll be able to do it on time. So yeah. So...are
you guys enjoying year 12?
A yeah
T & V yeah
T to be honest, I like it, cos it’s like MY subjects, you know, I chose those subjects. Like my favourite
subjects, I’m not just doing it for the sake of doing it, like I was at GCSE, but I’m interested, these are
subjects I actually want to pursue. I think a little bit it’s also like “teacher, what you doing” and you
can also get a better relationship with your teachers than at GCSE where there’s like 31 students in
the same class, cos the class sizes are smaller.
A yeah um, year 12’s going, year 12’s going fine, you know, it’s a really nice atmosphere to be in cos
there’s a lot of independence, it’s literally just you, you know it’s just you and the people around
you, and you have a closer relationship with your teachers, whereas in GCSE the teacher wouldn’t be
as close to you as A level, they might treat you more like a young adult, whereas now at year 12 we
are adults, you know, we’re at the next stage of adulthood.
V I’m enjoying it, cos, cos I like learning, I just don’t like the exams. So the learning stage for me is
fun, and I like learning about new things, and some of the things we learn like in Psychology it can
actually help me with my everyday life, and even with school, with revision so it’s not just like, I’m
like well for me anyway if I learnt something in Maths I was like “how am I gonna use this in my
everyday life” but now all my subjects, I can see how I can use it, it’s useful. And all the externals and
internals are getting to know each other, started to mix, and, yeah.
Teacher – to Arthur: Are you an external, actually?
A yeah.
Teacher – what school did you go to before?
A Trinity in Lewisham. It’s quite, it’s quite like at some points it’s quite weird and it’s annoying at the
same time when you’re an external, cos it’s like all the internals just know each other, they’ve been
through the whole of secondary school together, and then you’re the new person, but I think it’s
getting better, it’s really fun so, yeah.
(mumbling, indistinct)
O I’ve just got one more thing to say, um what I, what I like about year 12 is that it’s interesting to sit
back and watch everyone develop, like the people that you’ve known from maybe like year 7 or
before that, it’s um, it’s quite, it’s nice to see them going on to become adults with you, so you’re
going through the same stuff, everyone has the same level of understanding.
Focus group #7 - Mary & Denis

High achieving, white/European, middle-class students

M: So what was most difficult about the coursework process?

D: Well I thought what was most difficult was like the pressure we had to face, when we got (laughter) cos like we had this like it was building up to our A levels, like with an exam we’re like preparing for it preparing for it preparing for it, but with coursework it feels like it’s in my own hands and I could control it...so that felt quite stressful...but then on the other hand I guess um you could say you can take advantage of it cos like, you know where your coursework lies

M: It’s also quite nice though the time was less under your control, like you had responsibility, like you didn’t have the “now sit down and do it and it’s done and you don’t have to worry about it” um like you had at GCSE. You had to be able to sort of get feedback, which was much, much, much more useful, telling you what’s good and what you can get rid of, I think...

D: Yeah. (pause) Did you feel like you were able to have original ideas about the coursework questions?

M: I think (pause) I think so. I think for me definitely, my conclusion the opinion that I came to at the end was my own. Um. But I do kind of feel like we didn’t get the chance to know the plays well enough. Like particularly the Shakespeare. Um. Just cos it’s hard to decipher. But I mean I don’t think there’s really anything that could have been done about, apart from like spending more time on coursework which isn’t really feasible. But it would have been nice to have the chance to get to know the books better before I had to make an opinion...but...I think yeah, I think it was quite...if we’d had longer it would have made it easier to come up with original ideas, but...

D: Yeah I felt that like...I felt like they were my original ideas but I felt like they were being re-used...like the idea of the patriarchal society, I mean I felt like I know about it, but it’s like other people have used it before, I mean there’s only so much you can really say about Shakespeare so...in The Importance of Being Earnest I felt like I had more creative space, to start coming up with other ideas/

M: //yeah, cos you understand it more, whereas the Shakespeare’s harder to get your head around, cos the language is like//

D://it’s so outdated, yeah

M: Er...including critical opinions, how did that feel?

D: I felt...it felt quite good to see that we can have our ideas backed up by other people, I mean I remember at GCSE for Of Mice and Men particularly, I could write an idea about The American Dream, but there was no way I could show people it was not only my idea, other people had thought it as well, and so when I see critical opinions I guess it just makes me feel more...confident that what I’ve written down is right. But then I guess that links to the second question as well, that I just feel, it wasn’t my own original idea that I had...
M: Yeah, I kind of felt like...obviously a lot of the critical opinions I used informed my opinion, but didn't necessarily mould it, I mean I felt like my ideas, well, ok the OPINION was my own but the ideas were other peoples, like um I took other people's interpretations, critical interpretations, and that did form my opinion rather than mould it, so my conclusion was very much my own

D: Yeah

Pause

D: Plagiarism: Is it easy to spot?
M: I think it depends on whose writing it. Cos I mean I know there were some kids in our class who struggled with plagiarism and who just copied and pasted off the internet, and...

D: I mean. I think it's quite hard, again linking with the earlier questions, I mean there's only so many ideas you can have. I kind of feel like, what if AQA see this and the idea of the patriarch and like “other people have used this idea, he must have copied it” I mean it's probably not going to happen, but I feel like cos there's only so many ideas you can use, I feel like plagiarism can perhaps be seen, but...

M: there are a lot of popular ideas as well though. Where people have the same sort of points and analysis, stuff that we did in class...I guess it depends, on the level of your ability, whether you take that to inform your opinion or

D: or just use that, yeah

M: use it AS your opinion. I think both of us are quite, well, we're in the higher bands, for our coursework, so for us I think it was ...plagiarism is not so much of an issue, cos we knew what

D: we knew what we were talking about

M: Yeah and we'd been taught before as well...I know a lot of the people who came from external schools didn't always have teaching about what was acceptable to put in essays, so a lot of people were coming in with essays that were mostly copied and pasted off the internet, and thought that it was totally acceptable, but for us at GCSE we did get taught “ok, this is ok for your essay”

D: “You've got to have your own opinion, you've got to...”

M: “You've got to give in your own work”, so I think we maybe found that a lot easier than people who were maybe either not at the same level of ability, or who just hadn't had the same introduction to English literature...

D: yeah...
**Focus group 8 transcript**

**Participants: Tia, Joseph, Tara, Selina**

T: So they’re saying that you get to express what YOU actually think, instead of just the teacher says, this guy’s [inaudible] so you got to write that in the exam, NO I think this guy’s [inaudible]

J: I dunno cos at GCSE you can write ANYTHING, literally ANYTHING, and like if you can back up your argument you can get marks for it. A level, it’s not it’s kinda not that same

S: I dunno cos if you’re able to back if up, if you can then there’s more development

J: But like you can’t do like individual words, at A level

T: yeah that’s because at GCSE we did literature and language, and we’re just doing literature now, d’ya know what I mean. But like I prefer A level because like you explore more themes, cos like in A level, we get to discuss feminism, Marxism and stuff like that, whereas in GCSE we just like “oh, like patriarchal like society”, that’s all we kinda did, we didn’t do anything more than that

[T reads question 2]

J: That is slightly true, cos basically you just have to remember everything you’re told, and like the teacher would narrow it down for you

S: Um...in order for us to grow, and develop, we have to do some level of independent study.

J: Yeah...

T: But I think at GCSE it was...well thinking back to how I felt in GCSE I didn’t feel like we were just given everything, but only now once it’s a lot more free, like do your own thing, it’s like I feel like I was spoonfed, but in GCSE I felt like I needed that spoon feeding.

[T reads question 4]

J: I think it was relevant. Cos it helped us like...pinpoint, like in the exam, with Rime of the Ancient Mariner for example, it could be like first person, third person, so it just helps pinpoint like the narrative voice more, like between two narrative voices and like, tell the difference and like...make more points about it, cos we did it ourself for example

S: Yes, it helped us apply it to the exam, put it into context so then...during the exam we wouldn’t be stuck thinking “not sure”

T: Definitely cos I think, being able to think of other types of narrative aspects, I think it was better for us cos we did that before we started the books, I think we did it before [others agree] so like at GCSE I remember “oh, 3rd person narrative”, that was basically all that we did, whereas at A level it’s all “1st person, omniscient narrator”, things like that so I think it was good to get those, learn those
terms and realise how that can change the whole perspective of the stories, before we actually started our full A level kind of thing

T: [reads question 4]

J: think it was useful

T: do you want me to read it again? Cos you know in chapter 9, he does like he does her perspective

S: Yes very useful cos I remember in the exam, it was really useful cos it helps you to like understand the significance of other characters and kind of look at them, and try and see, or, view the story in a different way, cos in the exam there was a question about the wedding guest, “do you believe view the mariner, no the wedding guest, as more than just...something...

J: A silent listener

S: Yeah a silent listener, so doing that activity, you had to think about Clarissa and we read how, from Joe’s point of view, how she was, but then trying to think about how she felt, kind of made us see it from, a different perspective in a different light, so with that question, it helped.

J: yeah, I mean, kind of that whole idea of narrative gaps is interesting, it’s like the question, what does the writer doing, cos it could go this way that way, you don’t know the whole story, like the Patriot, you can’t say he’s a good person or a bad person, you don’t KNOW, or it could be his country that are the bad ones, so the last question, there was variety in our answers

T: I think the Clarissa thing, it was a good activity for those who could do it, I couldn’t do it though. I for me, I couldn’t. For me, when I think about as soon as Miss said to do it I thought “yeah ok I’ll do it” but then as soon as I started writing, I felt like there was no...guideline, I could write completely anything cos like...that’s probably the whole point, that we all write different things...but I felt like...what if I’m writing is it right, is it wrong, like I didn’t like the fact that it was...too free like if somebody came to you “write a story” and like if they don’t say to you “write a story about whatever”, it’s different cos like you’re limited, but I just felt like I could write anything, and I felt like I was going off task, getting confused in myself so ... don’t really know.

[T reads question 5...2 minutes of discussion skipped as students try to make sense of question]

T: I think the exam’s alright cos I don’t think, it’s not like the whole exam is only asking you to talk about language or whatever, a lot of different areas, I think think it’s alright to be honest

J: I think it depends on the book, cos like I liked Enduring Love some parts of it, but I hated some things I didn’t really like the whole idea of writing about descriptive language, I hated it

T: The thing is, I preferred section A to section B, cos the thing is section B to me, I could only write 20 minutes on each text, and the thing is I did so much preparation, and I had A LOT to write about and way more than 20 minutes would allow me, so I felt like I had to limit myself and consequently I won’t get the grades I would get and like explain all the different interpretations and so on...I felt like it was restricting me.

S: Yeah.
Aspects of Narrative
L.Q. What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?

Starter – we form our lives into stories all the time.

What was your most embarrassing moment?
Tell the story to the person next to you.

Stories are the currency of life. There’s no escaping stories, or the pressures to tell them. Jonathan Gottschall’s book, “The Storytelling Animal” suggests that human beings are natural storytellers—that they can’t help telling stories, and that they turn things that aren’t really stories into stories because they like narratives so much. Everything—faith, science, love—needs a story for people to find it plausible.

Aspects of Narrative
L.Q. What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?

The “Aspects of Narrative” exam is about considering why writers have chosen this particular way of telling their story. Why do they start at the point they do, and narrate it from the perspective of that character? Why do they include those details but skip over these others? Why do they set it in the place it’s set?

Aspects of Narrative
L.Q. What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?


Fairy tales are stories that are told and re-told in many different versions.
What choices has the writer made in this particular version? (e.g. what has been added in or left out compared to your knowledge of the story?)
Discuss in groups, then feed back

Aspects of Narrative
L.Q. What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?

Task: Each group will be given an “Aspect of Narrative” to change.

Re-write the story, changing only the narrative technique you are given.

Think carefully about how the changes you make affect the story.
Group 1 – choice of narrative style
This story is written in the 3rd person (She walked through the wood...).
Change it into the 1st person (I walked through the wood...)

Group 2 – choice of tense
This story is written in the past tense (there lived a pretty little girl...).
Change it into the present tense (there lives a pretty little girl...)

Group 3 – choice of setting
This story is set “deep in the heart of the country” and Red riding Hood walks through the wood to her grandmother’s house.
Change it to a different setting – could be a city, a beach, a desert.
(Hint: you might also need to change the wolf into a more appropriate bad guy for the setting!)

Group 4 – choice of structure
This story starts by introducing the characters, then there is the journey, and finally there is the unhappy ending and the moral. Change it round so it begins with Red Riding Hood arriving at her Grandmother’s cottage.
(Hint: you’ll need to think how to include all the background information so that the story still makes sense to the readers)

Group 5 – choice of perspective
This story is written from the point of view of a narrator who knows everything that happens and is in a position to tell us the “moral” at the end of the story. He calls Little Red Riding Hood “poor child” and the wolf a “wicked wolf”.
Change it so that it is written from the point of view of a narrator who thinks Little Red Riding Hood is incredibly stupid and that the wolf is the hero of the story.

Group 6 – choice of description
This story doesn’t include much description of the setting or characters. Change it so that the wood, the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood are described in very vivid detail using all the senses.

Aspects of Narrative
L.Q. What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?

Listen to each version in turn. How do the changes influence our perception of the story overall?

Aspects of Narrative
L.Q. What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?

Now read “The Werewolf”, by Angela Carter.

What narrative choices has she made in this retelling of Little Red Riding Hood?

How do they influence our understanding of the story?

Clarissa
L.Q. What is the narrative function of the character of Clarissa in this novel?

Starter – What was the last argument you had?

Write a few sentences telling it from THE OTHER PERSON’S point of view.
Once upon a time there lived in a certain village a little country girl, the prettiest creature who was ever seen. Her mother was excessively fond of her; and her grandmother doted on her still more. This good woman had a little red riding hood made for her. It suited the girl so extremely well that everybody called her Little Red Riding Hood.

One day her mother, having made some cakes, said to her, "Go, my dear, and see how your grandmother is doing, for I hear she has been very ill. Take her a cake, and this little pot of butter."

Little Red Riding Hood set out immediately to go to her grandmother, who lived in another village.

As she was going through the wood, she met with a wolf, who had a very great mind to eat her up, but he dared not, because of some woodcutters working nearby in the forest. He asked her where she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay and talk to a wolf, said to him, "I am going to see my grandmother and carry her a cake and a little pot of butter from my mother."

"Does she live far off?" said the wolf

"Oh I say," answered Little Red Riding Hood; "it is beyond that mill you see there, at the first house in the village."

"Well," said the wolf, "and I'll go and see her too. I'll go this way and go you that, and we shall see who will be there first."

The wolf ran as fast as he could, taking the shortest path, and the little girl took a roundabout way, entertaining herself by gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and gathering bouquets of little flowers. It was not long before the wolf arrived at the old woman's house. He knocked at the door: tap, tap.

"Who's there?"

"Your grandchild, Little Red Riding Hood," replied the wolf, counterfeiting her voice; "who has brought you a cake and a little pot of butter sent you by mother."

The good grandmother, who was in bed, because she was somewhat ill, cried out, "Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up."

The wolf pulled the bobbin, and the door opened, and then he immediately fell upon the good woman and ate her up in a moment, for it been more than three days since he had eaten. He then shut the door and got into the grandmother's bed, expecting Little Red Riding Hood, who came some time afterwards and knocked at the door: tap, tap.
"Who's there?"

Little Red Riding Hood, hearing the big voice of the wolf, was at first afraid; but believing her grandmother had a cold and was hoarse, answered, "It is your grandchild Little Red Riding Hood, who has brought you a cake and a little pot of butter mother sends you."

The wolf cried out to her, softening his voice as much as he could, "Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up."

Little Red Riding Hood pulled the bobbin, and the door opened.

The wolf, seeing her come in, said to her, hiding himself under the bedclothes, "Put the cake and the little pot of butter upon the stool, and come get into bed with me."

Little Red Riding Hood took off her clothes and got into bed. She was greatly amazed to see how her grandmother looked in her nightclothes, and said to her, "Grandmother, what big arms you have!"

"All the better to hug you with, my dear."

"Grandmother, what big legs you have!"

"All the better to run with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"All the better to hear with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big teeth you have got!"

"All the better to eat you up with."

And, saying these words, this wicked wolf fell upon Little Red Riding Hood, and ate her all up.

Moral: Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say "wolf," but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all.
Appendix 6 - Tia's modern-day version of Little Red Riding Hood

Aspects of narrative

2 hours
2 Sections

"Alice, Alice!"

Diving under the water I spot her. Her body huddled as she tries to hold her breath. Her deftly pink costume adding to the water's allure. I pull her deep, water spurting everywhere.

"Yes mummy?"

"Go and give Granmie the letter here please, she's 2 floors up in the changing rooms."

Alice ran out of the pool, wrapping a towel around her body to halt the shivering. To go from the cold air.

She was running so quick that she didn't notice the lifeguard in front of her. Crashing into him, he beamed down at her, his toothy grin welcoming & inviting.

"Woah, where are you heading to?" He asked, his toothy grin spreading wider.

"Umm... My mum told me not to talk to strangers."

"It's okay, I work here. Are you lost?"

"Oh okay. I'm looking for my gran, she's on the second floor in changing room."

"On there's only one changing room there, it's the may blue 365."

"Thank you." A viceman off towards the way he instructed. Pleased that she'd met him.

The lifeguard sprinted off, surprised she fell for it. He took the stairs two at a time, he reached the changing.
room 365. He knocked on the door, informing the lady inside that it was her granddaughter Alice. Upon hearing her voice inviting him in, he locked the door with his keys, tapping the lady inside.

He wandered along the corridor to 365, stepping in, waiting for Alice to arrive. A short while afterwards, Alice knocked on door number 365.

"Who is it?" the lifeguard adopted a high-pitched voice.

"It's me, grandma, Alice," she said. "I'm here to bring you your keys."

"Oh just a moment," the lifeguard said, with a very high voice a far away voice.

"Grandma, what happened to your voice?" Alice said.

"Nothing," the lifeguard replied. "Come in now."

Alice stepped twisted the door knob and stepped in to the changing room. Her grandmother was nowhere to be seen. As the lights turned on, a figure stepped out from the shadows.

The lifeguard from earlier looked down on her, his once welcoming smile now turned up in an eerie smirk as he raised his ginger to his lips.

'Shush..."
Appendix 7 - Richardson's modern-day version of Little Red Riding Hood.

Ending Love by Ian McEwan

What different choices do writers have in choosing how they tell their stories?

- The moral was added in
- The happy ending was left out.

The man asked her where she was going and the young, innocent girl replied that she was going to visit her grandmother to show her her exam results. The man asked the girl where her grandmother lived and she replied that her grandmother lived in a house in Greenwich. The man suggested that they both leave a race, the girl on her bike and the man in his car.
Super Turbo Ultimate Reflection Dick's Cat
Part 3 - Cyborg Attack

The exam result was alright. Not the greatest, but not the worst. Would have liked to do better, but for my part, I guess it was alright.

I just need to fix some silly mistakes and pass like that. Then I will hopefully get a B or an A.

Appendix 8 - Denis's reflective journal
28/01/14
Reflection - Part 4: Now it's just silly

The book is too descriptive. This means that the book is too slow, and doesn't have very fast pace, or even runtime pace.

The book starts off good, you really put paid. Then later on it just gets slower and slower. It just kind of just move nowhere near as fast as before.

Hair dresser is insane. I had no idea.

He's not a douche.

No. Nothing has changed, Joe is still a douche. He is not an ass, really.

The game is getting pretty good. So is my health, getting better.

ช้านี้คุณเคยเห็นเรื่องราวนี้

You shouldn't believe everything you read in the shitty.
Reflecting on Enduring Love

- Studying a modern novel is nice because the language is easier to get your head around. Completing the novel was easier.

Coursework
- Citing quotes correctly was a minor concern, as was taking any ideas from study notes (via Sparknotes etc). Overall I was not warned enough.

Appendix 9 - Mary's reflective journal
28/01/14 Reflecting on Enduring Love

What makes the book annoying?
- It's misleading - it opens as a thoughtful exploration of human nature and turns into a thriller. The descent into violence that is kind of unnecessary to the plot cheapens the value of the entire novel.

10/02/14

Reflecting on Learning Activities
- I enjoy discussions because it's a good way to sound out ideas before using them in essays. It also gives multiple opinions a chance to share.
- I'd like the chance to take more notes for specific quotes etc.
- I did not enjoy speed dating, as I just got loads of the same points repeated...
Appendix 10 - Angela's reflective journal

Tuesday the 4th of February

Enduring Love

What is helpful to you when reading literature?

What I find helpful is that all of the units narrative go in each chapter so that if I to do 'Enduring Love' for Section A it would be helpful. Then recappping would be useful of Section B.

What would be more helpful

I do not think that this book is annoying and I have already read it

What people might find annoying is the scientific language however I think that this is a good feature because it gives you a deeper insight into aspects of the character. Also at the beginning was slow however I realised that after chapter 7 and Joe's encounter with Ted, the plot began to pick up.

What is that makes Enduring Love so annoying?
28th January 2014

Pin down what makes it one enduring love story.

I feel this novel is irritating because of Joe Rose’s constant narrative of his Job and his rather mundane life. It is irrelevant to the main story and yet he insists on talking about it in detail in almost every chapter. This book might be more interesting if it stopped relying on unnecessary tangents.

In chapter 9, he tries to write from an objective point of view, and if anything, it only added to my annoyance. His own anger and arrogance comes across more than Clarissa’s own feelings. As the book continues, he should never try this kind of narrative because he failed spectacularly.

January 21st 2014

Mark Evans - Pied Piper of Harlem

A little depressed because this is the section I spent a long time reading for, but there’s not much I can do and I know my abilities can only improve in the space of 5 months.
I don't like this book because:
- he focuses on one place of society
- his idea oflander makes them seem unreal
- the first chapter is good then got boring disappointing me.
- it isn't crazy enough
Clarissa
L.Q. What is the narrative function of the character of Clarissa in this novel?

Reading: chapter 9

Are we really getting Clarissa’s viewpoint?
What hints are there that we are still hearing Joe’s voice underneath?

Why does McEwan choose to tell chapter 9 in the 3rd person, Clarissa’s point of view-as told by Joe in the 3rd person?

Challenge – Write a short section of the argument GENUINELY from Clarissa’s viewpoint

Clarissa
L.Q. What is the narrative function of the character of Clarissa in this novel?

Ch. 9: Joe attempts to tell narrative from Clarissa’s point-of-view (highly unconventional use of third-person narrative); Clarissa’s bad day at work described; Clarissa feels tired and unwell and returns to find Joe agitated. Clarissa feels neglected as Joe rants about desire to get back into serious physics and about his harassment by Jed. Clarissa struggles to understand Joe’s response to Jed, suggesting Joe is obsessed with Jed. Clarissa and Joe argue. Joe storms out of apartment; Jed is waiting outside.

HOMEWORK Reading

- Homework – read chapters 10-12
- Section A part B question: “Would you agree with the suggestion that Enduring Love is all about telling stories?”
- The story of the balloon incident is central – chapter 3 (imagery used to describe story telling)
- Self-conscious narrator – he’s reflecting on the story he’s telling as he tells it
- Focus on science and maths – does it belittle storytelling?
- Joe and Clarissa’s jobs – storytelling versus science (but he’s writing stories about science)

Clarissa
L.Q. What is the narrative function of the character of Clarissa in this novel?

Homework – writing a Section A part A on a chapter of Enduring Love – peer assessment

- Band 6 – Evaluation of how the author’s narrative methods work. Several points fully developed and evaluated; structure/voice evaluated; excellent illustration
- Band 5 – Analysis – several points analysed; likely to be good analysis of structure/voice. Well illustrated
- Band 4 – Explanation – several points developed and explained; likely to be some explanation of structure/voice. Clear illustration
Appendix 14 – small-group discussion on Enduring Love
Tuesday 11th February 2014 Participants: Tia (T), Anthony (A), Nia (N), Leanne (L)

T: (reading) would a person like Joe be able to get hold of a gun so easily?
N: No...
T: Why not?
N: Cos he’s a white middle-class man
A: I dunno I mean...there definitely obviously coulda been less gun crime for like middle aged people...middle aged, middle class people...
N: I just find it like really annoying but...
T: Yeah but (inaudible)
A: Yeah, I suppose. Still. I mean, even just like living in London, you do meet like nice people every day so...
T: Yeah fair enough. OK...why are the gun-sellers such caricatures?
Pause
T: cos it’s funny? Cos they’re such...contrasting characters
N: to who?
T: Who? Joe, sort of...Yeah. Plus it’s funny. Like the moustache thing.
A: I didn’t understand that bit. Like why he was laughing. I thought it was just cos he was like stoned
N: what?
(laughter)
A: cos he said something about all the passive smoking, you know
(lots of voices)
A: Yeah but would you really want to [something] that bad just because
T: Maybe, yeah, he was laughing at him because
[lots of laughter, speculation about why Joe was laughing – talking at once]
N: Yeah but he wouldn’t be like...laughing at the other guy, you’d just think he was a bit weird
T: How does the house contrast with Joe & Clarissa’s flat, or Jean Logan’s house?
N: It’s like...messy...and it’s in the countryside
T: you can kind of compare it to Jean Logan’s house, cos their house is like dark and that, like Jean Logan’s one
A: They’re both kind of like yeah gloomy and that, messy
T: but Joe and Clarissa’s flat...it’s neat
N: it’s dark...pretty much all we can say about that
T: It’s dark...he says he just has to follow the outline of the guy...um...yeah it’s not that deep, I dunno. OK. What is the effect of the contrast between these people and Joe.
K: It’s like...what the effect? Just makes it funny
A: It makes Joe seem bare clever. Or like he thinks he’s bare clever because he sees them like
T: Like they don’t speak. But through their eyes, I don’t think they see him as clever.
K: It’s making them look
A: Yeah, making them look ridiculous. No he does seem like a dick actually, cos he’s there looking down on them but they’re just like talking to him like he’s a normal person
T: Yeah
N: Yeah, he’s just like...
T: OK. Many people criticise this chapter for being unconvincing and for not fitting with the rest of the book. Why would McEwan have included it?
N: makes the book longer
A: ha, yeah, be good to fill out the book
N: Um...maybe he just wanted to write
K: Add something more like...
N: It would be more clear
T: mm. Or maybe like to show a different side to Joe, sort of? Cos you know we see a different side to Joe, he knows...these people and he's
N: Yeah and I guess it would be really implausible if Joe was just like “oh yeah, I found a gun, got a gun” and he'd never ever like expressed any interest in that kind of thing
A: I think he kind of did it just to make it just a little bit more exciting
All: Yeah
A: cos if he didn’t have the gun, then it would’ve been kind of dead, the final scene
N: I dunno though, I think it would have been better if he didn’t have a gun!
A: What...if he just...
N: No like, I dunno, just something more interesting, just
K: It does seem very random, like just gone from 0 – 100
N: yeah
T: It doesn’t make the book any better, though
K: No
N: It doesn’t make it worse, though
T: Yeah if it was just psychological and stuff then
A: yeah
N: a bit of random...gun crime...
All: yeah
T: OK. Does this chapter influence or change our sympathies?
N: Umm...I think that it makes Joe look a bit more like...he's just looking down on people just cos they have different views from him and then, he's just describing this girl looking bad, like just trying to analyse her so much and he just ...describes her like she's just a bad person, he just can’t relate so it makes him seem kinda closed minded. Even more than he already is. Is that the last one?
T: Nope. Does it push us to side more with Joe?
A: No. Just makes him seem like more like more of a wasteman. Cos he's...just cos he’s a bad as these people who have a gun, because he’s gone to buy a gun, he’s still looking just as
K: It’s just like not necessary, like...it can even be like interpreted that he’s WORSE than the people he’s getting the gun from, because at least they’re trying to find out why he wants a gun what he’s gonna do with it
N: yeah they’re being quite nice about it! I don’t know why he doesn’t just tell them, to be honest, at the start, like he makes it seem so much more shady by being like “oh I won’t tell you what I need it for”...
Lots of voices
N: cos he’s not gonna do anything like, illegal. Well, not illegal but he’s just not really...well he is like the moral right...well I don’t know...(laughter)
K: I think it’s just he feels like he doesn’t have to explain himself to anyone
A: yeah. He’s just got carried away. He thinks he’s some action man now. Like “I’m buying this gun so fucking deal with it” like no
T: Yeah he is like “I’m a bad man now”…ok last one now. What is the – oh no, this one’s long. What is the purpose of including this chapter in the book?
N: to add to things, and to be
T: to make it funny, to add comedy
N: do you think? It is quite funny, like where he’s laughing
Ms King: How are you getting on?
A: yeah...
Ms King: Do you have any ideas for sort of overall why is this chapter included?
T: that’s what we’re doing now.
N: Yeah maybe it’s included just to make it like more plausible that he would buy a gun.
A: Yeah
N: If he was then like “oh yeah, I’ve got a gun from my friend” it would just be like...
T: But it still, like seems weird, you know, like I’ll just look through my phone book to find my
N: yeah but still at least you got some back story to it, and like
T: Yeah but he’s got a phone book.
Pause
N: I’ve got a phone book!
A: What?
N: A book with phone numbers in it
T: you have your friends’ phone numbers?!
N: my mum has
K: Shut up! Who has a phone book
A: No one has a phone book. That idea of...numbers...
T: cos everyone has a phone
N: OK, well sorry! But yeah...the purpose of the chapter...
A: well also yeah to make it more exciting, innit so that it’s not
T: Make the book more
K: just like to liven it up a bit, make it a bit more controvers
T: Controvers? (laughter) OK. We’re done. Are we done?
A: think so
Appendix 15 – my reflective journal entries after re-creative lessons

Reflective journal date 11th November 2013

I was really pleased with this lesson. Using Little Red Riding Hood as a starting point made it accessible, and constructing the story from pictures got most of the students talking and involved. A few high-achieving and middle-class students tend to dominate, but at the beginning of this lesson there were others getting involved and contributing answers which I was really pleased to see, as this is a particular challenge with this group. They found the Charles Perrault version funny with Red Riding Hood stripping off her clothes at the end – it seems to come from nowhere if you haven’t read the Cristina Bacchilega on the origins of the traditional tale, which we didn’t have time to get into, so I just let them puzzle over it.

Allocating the different “aspects of narrative” was interesting. Obviously a problem with the lesson was the massive variation in tasks: some groups were being asked to change the story into the present tense from the past, which they could feasibly just do with small grammatical changes, whereas others had to transpose the whole setting into a completely different place. Additionally, I wasn’t clear on how much I wanted students to change: some interpreted the task very very literally, and just made grammatical changes, whereas others took a more impressionistic approach, creating a completely new story – such as Tia’s creepy paedophile lifeguard version of the wolf, which developed from changing the setting of the story into a swimming pool. I wasn’t explicit about what approach I wanted them to take – partly because I wanted them to experiment and see how knock-on changes developed naturally from altering one aspect. However, I think some of the students probably needed a bit more encouragement to really play with the story – and yes, in terms of this lesson I really do think of it as playing, I am trying to get the class to see what happens when they play around with aspects of narrative, and as a result, consider their importance.

One of the best moments for me was Joe and Deniz, re-writing the story in the first person from Little Red Riding Hood’s point of view. They worked hard for about 10 minutes and then suddenly called me over with a “Miss, we’re stuck”. When I got round to them Joe said “we’re doing Little Red Riding Hood’s point of view, and we’ve done it, but then she gets eaten by the wolf so what are we supposed to do now?” “If she’s dead, she can’t tell the story, can she?”

Right there – the crucial distinction between an omniscient versus a first-person involved narrator. Exactly what the students need to be able to explain regarding their exam texts. I tried to use questioning to get them to reflect on that, but as always when I’m on the spot, I feel like I can identify the learning point but not always think quickly enough to guide the students to reflect on it the way I would like. Anyway, I also tried to encourage them to think of any books they knew in which a dead person did act as narrator – for example, The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold, but unfortunately neither of them had read it. Anyway, during feedback at the end of the lesson, when we read out each version, I got them to repeat their problem to the rest of the class and again urged the discussion.

The feedback was fantastic – lots of interaction. I had to do some quite heavy-handed guided questioning to get the students focusing on the aspects of narrative in the way that I wanted, but regardless they were almost all engaged. The change-of-setting to the swimming pool was hilarious.
and creepy; as I asked, is it that putting it in a modern setting makes the violence seem more real to us and therefore we react to it more? Adding in detailed description was very interesting – the students found it very difficult to identify what it was that the group had changed, but it did help them to reflect on the very bare fairy-tale style when we looked back at the Charles Perrault version.

Next week we will read Angela Carter’s version, The Werewolf, and again I think it will be very thought-provoking. I am very proud of these introductory lessons.

Reflective journal       date Tuesday 28th January 2014

Not feeling secure about today’s lesson or my students’ knowledge of Enduring Love. It is a difficult book to read with a class – a lot to do with Joe’s narrative voice, which is something I’ve been trying to really get to grips with. We’ve done some reflecting on what it is that makes him annoying or unsympathetic. Some of the class, e.g. Colm, Joe, Arthur…all boys funnily enough…really dislike Joe as a character and can be quite scathing and amusing in their analysis. Chapter 9 is a really important chapter to read on this topic – it’s Joe telling the story “from Clarissa’s point of view as I later construed it” – but it’s complex material: not easy to be sure all the students have got their heads round the relationship between Ian McEwan (author), Joe (narrator) and Clarissa (we’re not hearing from HER but from Joe’s version of what she is thinking).

Part of the problem with this lesson (and I remember this from last year, too) is that it’s subtle: Joe doesn’t actually come out and say “Clarissa is so grateful to be with an awesome lover like Joe”, but what I want the class to see is that he is implying that, just as a subtext while on the surface he’s giving an almost-convincing version of Clarissa’s viewpoint. That’s what’s difficult – if the book was purpose-written to teach this idea then it could be more heavy-handed and clunky and that would help me to get the message across to students like Melisa or Eunice.

However, some of the writing tasks were fun. The starter – write an account of an argument you had recently, from the other person’s perspective – was a very good way in and we had some funny contributions, e.g. from Josh. I pointed out that every student we heard from was not really giving the other person’s genuine viewpoint, but using the exercise as an opportunity to reiterate their OWN point of view: that was good because of course that’s exactly what Joe is doing in the chapter. Then we read. Part of the difficulty with Enduring Love is that there’s a lot to read and after last year, when I left the reading way too much up to the students, I’m determined to read a lot of full chapters in class, out loud, so I can be SURE everyone’s understood. That slows the lesson down a lot, but luckily this chapter has a lot of action, there’s nudity and swearing, which helped keep everyone on board.

After a lot of discussion of whose voice we are hearing, how we know, whether it’s convincing, etc etc, I set the students to write a paragraph from a more convincing Clarissa’s perspective. A lot of students didn’t do this: there was far less sense that this creative writing was important and everyone was doing it than we had back in December with the intro to narrative lessons. However, we did get some responses to read aloud and look at. As I said to the class, in some ways I was interested in hearing from boys, to see if they thought they could do a better job of getting inside a woman’s head than Joe. (I like pointing out the ways in which Joe can be seen as constructing a male
fantasy of a female viewpoint – e.g. Clarissa supposedly thinking about sex even during their argument, etc).

**Reflective journal 24th March 2014**

I’ve taught “The Patriot” by Robert Browning twice this week. With my big class we read it and just talked about the narrative gaps and what Browning’s reasons for including them could have been. The class is big and chatty and we just didn’t get onto the creative task. Instead with 12B, with only 15 students, we took our time to write our own stanzas of the poem. First I introduced them to the possible sources Browning was building on, such as Albert of Brescia. This class, just like the big class, were so intrigued by way Browning took the subtitle OFF the poem, so that the edition we have does not explicitly indicate that the poem is based on him. To me it seems so obvious that he wanted to give the reader the opportunity to assign a meaning to it, but to them it’s not at all obvious. My main worry is that once I tell them the information, they will take it for granted that that’s the “correct” interpretation and will stop looking for meanings. Since the author said it, it must be true – these students are really struggling with the concept of “death of the author”, as are my year 13s, a year ahead of them: I have to remember I only encountered ideas like this at university. It’s challenging material.

Anyway, after looking at possible sources and then the question of why Browning would keep the poem so vague, I set the task of writing an extra stanza for the poem, to go anywhere they wanted (beginning/end etc) that would fill in SOME of the narrative gaps. They didn’t have to fill in all the unanswered questions of the poem, but they did have to try to stick to the rhyme scheme and structure of the stanza (I was trying to give them a lot of structure). I wrote one as well myself, which made me realise how difficult it is to CREATE in the middle of a classroom with lots of people around. I wanted to set a good example for the class, for them to see me as a participant rather than the teacher with all the answers.

We read out several of the extra stanzas around the classroom. Suleyman and Tanveer were mainly being silly and giggling. Tiffany was trying to fill in the vital information of “what did the Patriot LOOK LIKE?” ha, these students fit into sit-com-style caricatures sometimes. Louis wrote a fantastic one which introduced the idea that the patriot was a soldier who’d shot a child (on purpose or by accident wasn’t clear) and that was what he was being punished for. I was really excited because I could see him linking into the talk we’d just had at Amnesty club, which I often sit in on, about Blackwater security in Iraq; one of the horror stories we’d heard was about an incident in which Blackwater security personnel were involved in shooting civilians, including children. As I saw it, Louis was linking that new knowledge with the poem, making connections with class knowledge and general knowledge, and transforming Browning’s poem into something much more modern and topical. Interestingly, when I pointed this out to Louis, he was completely unaware of the connection, though he agreed that the Amnesty talk might well have inspired his writing. That interplay between the classroom and the real world is what really fascinates me.

I feel like the exercise was a very worthwhile one and has drawn the students’ attention very closely to the narrative gaps within the poem and also, crucially, the reasons they are there.
Appendix 16 - Lilacs version of Clarissa's viewpoint

Clarissa 28/01/14

'Clarissa does not hear reason'.

I was once again overwhelmed by Joe's selfishness. Having told him I had had an awful day, he once more makes it about himself. It is incredible how a man of reason, logic and science seems to think and enforce the belief that he is indeed the centre of the universe. Silently fuming by the window and then I accuse me of not supporting and helping him. I want to, I do, I always have but he does not need it. I need it. I appreciate what happened on Sunday was terrible and how Joe must feel to have been the one responsible for John Hogan's death, but does he not think Iliked

Chapter 9 - Joe's version of Clarissa's perspective

Self Persuasion - Chapter 11

Joe Parry - Volatile, kids himself of event in Chapter 10 'across the road from me, with the unspoken love between us'.

Assumes Joe feels the same way "we have a cinema waiting'.

Vulnerable. 'Noted, derelict, dependent'

Semantic yield.

Love of god - Semantic yield 'mercy'

Joe and God mixed up - what exactly does Joe want?

12 'Even a trashy movie can make you cry'.

Chapter 12 - Driving to Oxford

- Flashback to yesterday - Back to driving