

OPENING  
DOORS  
to  
FAMOUS POETRY  
and  
PROSE

Ideas and resources for accessing  
literary heritage works

POETRY  
AND  
PROSE

NEW NATIONAL  
CURRICULUM  
CRITERIA 2014

BOB COX

INCLUDES  
A FREE  
CD-ROM

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This book is dedicated to all the teachers with whom I have worked who are opening doors for their pupils, and to my own teachers, years ago, who opened mine.

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A very little key will open a very heavy door.

*Charles Dickens, 'Hunted Down' (1859)*

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# Introduction

In my work supporting hundreds of schools in the quest for outstanding learning there is always huge interest from teachers about using challenging literature from the past. Primary schools have never lacked enthusiasm for projects featuring Shakespeare or whole days with a Dickens focus, but I began to note some common questions in my discussions with teachers:

- ☛ Where can I find new prose extracts and poems to deepen my knowledge?
- ☛ How can I find out about creative approaches that my pupils will enjoy?
- ☛ How can these resources be used for outstanding English lessons?
- ☛ How can my pupils gain access to literary heritage works in a way that is enjoyable as well as challenging?
- ☛ How can I plan from the top to include the more able but still ensure all pupils can access fascinating ideas?

This last point led to my ‘Opening Doors’ title.

Sometimes, teachers say to me that there are books about learning theory which are fascinating, and there are textbooks with varied questions which are practical. *In Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose* I have tried to combine the two by devising whole units of learning which are ready to use directly with your pupils, combined with plenty of ‘Bob says ...’ tips and advice to support methodology and first principles. The CD-ROM in the back of the book holds all of the resources so that you can use them in your classroom. In short, theory and practice coexist to inspire outstanding English using some of our greatest writers as models.

## New journeys in English: the theory

Using literary heritage texts – I am using the term very loosely to mean famous writings from the past which still influence the present – is justified on cultural grounds alone. Teachers have the huge responsibility of passing on an illustrious literary legacy. Successful authors writing in English are known around the world – visitors flock daily to the Brontë's Haworth, Hardy's Wessex and Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon. I have taken coachloads of pupils across Britain and Ireland, discovering Joyce's Martello tower outside Dublin and following Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy* trail in Scotland.

When introduced to great writers and great writing, children start to discover something deeper, more imaginative and more enduring than that which is understood in a moment and forgotten just as quickly. Of course, I have only been able to select a limited number of texts, so the idea is that you will be inspired to find new writers at the same time as your pupils. My selections are based around texts and ideas which I have used successfully in the classroom to stimulate high level reading and writing, rather than there being any suggestion that these writers are 'better' than those I have omitted. The units include American, Irish, Scottish, French and English writers, while the wider reading includes many others, past and present, whose work originates from around the world and may have been translated into English. However, the 'Opening Doors' theme of the book means that I have chiefly focused on celebrated literature from the past to elicit creative, ambitious and high quality work in English.

The need for young people to make more progress in English is a concern for educators, for parents, for the global economy and, of course, for Ofsted inspectors. However, high standards, exciting outcomes and the sheer exuberance of writing, as it should be at Key Stage 2, will only come with challenging texts as a stimulus.

If more of our pupils are going to start secondary school at a higher level of achievement, then it is challenging texts and quality teaching that will help them to reach the stage when they are regularly:

- ☛ Reading and understanding 'between the lines'.
- ☛ Inferring and deducing.
- ☛ Being engrossed in increasingly challenging and wider reading.

→ Bob says ...

*There are more ideas to discover, more words to explore and more styles to understand in these extracts than some of your pupils will have encountered in their education up to now. Using them should help deeper learning to become the norm in your literacy lessons and the potential for outstanding lessons is greatly increased.*



- ✿ Writing in varied styles, appropriate to the context or audience.
- ✿ Producing well-crafted and versatile writing – for example, exploring irony and parody.
- ✿ Using punctuation and grammar in accurate and varied ways to enhance meaning.

An impromptu list like mine is just a guide, but Geoff Dean's *English for Gifted and Talented Students* (2008), although about secondary English, has useful research about where very able writers should be at the start of Year 7. My list is a condensed version of the findings of this research. Setting a high benchmark for the standards that the very best might reach in Year 7 is a useful starting point for primary schools as it sets an aspirational agenda from the start.

All the writers in the bibliography have provided me with ideas and inspiration to develop a methodology to enable high level literacy to thrive. I have demonstrated this successfully in workshops with pupils and in consultancy briefs with teachers. Carol Dweck's work on mind-sets (2006), Barry Hymer's thinking on gifted and talented education (2009) and Guy Claxton's writing on 'building learning power' (2002) have all been influential. In addition, Deborah Eyre's (2011) *Room at the Top* report has given impetus to my ongoing search for excellence in the classroom with her recommendation to create 'more room at the top for more'.

Of course, the poets and novelists themselves continue to dazzle us: Hardy's glimpses of the past in 'Old Furniture'; Browning's 'Pied Piper of Hamelin' leaving the limping boy behind to dream of an enchanted land; Dickinson's 'Snake' curling around on the farmstead waiting to pounce; Wells's astronauts seeing the first vistas of a new, unknown world. Their originality is the principal influence on us all.

*Bob says ...*



*Our primary inspiration must come from the writing itself, our own reading of the classics and their enduring appeal. Only excellent models are likely to stimulate excellent outcomes.*

With so many subjects to teach, primary teachers always need support to use literary texts creatively, to grow their own knowledge and to find new routes into English teaching. In using these resources, I hope teachers will be encouraged to find out more about the featured writers and that this book will be the start of a journey for all concerned.

The poems and extracts I have included offer the opportunity to introduce challenging ideas and concepts which are often missing from more simple texts. When Charlotte Mew writes hauntingly about 'The Call', I find pupils in my workshops talking about eerie atmospheres, the unexpected and even spiritual feelings. When I explore 'The Land of Counterpane', there is much talk about feeling ill, being bored, finding things to do and sometimes loneliness. It is then an easy jump to discuss Stevenson's language and rhythm and for the children to write their own sharp and creative pieces.

Without challenging texts to inspire pupils to go ‘beyond the limit’ they are less likely to experiment, less likely to imitate clever models and less likely to ask questions about style, irony, rhyme or meaning. The key has always been to use the right kinds of methods to open doors. Without access strategies to challenging texts, rather than inspiring a love of reading and writing for life, the opposite can be the case.

When the doors have been opened, your pupils can begin to read more whole texts, to write with imagination and to broaden their literary landscape ‘beyond the limit’. In each unit I have either suggested further reading on a chosen author or included comparisons that could be made with more modern writers. I am hoping your pupils will be left with an understanding about how the past continues to influence the present.

Never is this more visible than in the media and in the way that films, television and the internet have continued to keep the classics alive with memorable adaptations and animations. I have included examples of how pupils can engage with multimedia reworkings of some of the featured texts via film, cartoons, television, the internet and graphic novels. Great teachers are using multimedia approaches to enhance pupils’ understanding of the original texts and to drive high level outcomes in English. Comparing films with texts promotes evaluative thinking and often leads to a greater appreciation of both media.

## Structure

The first two parts of the book are organised into fifteen units of learning on poetry and prose. Each unit uses the same format, and I also include resources to work with and theoretical principles to reflect on. You might want to use this book in an informal way, browsing through to find the units which interest you, so each unit is self-contained. However, the following principles are applied throughout:

- ☛ The need to integrate extension and create more room at the top for more.
- ☛ The importance of access strategies.
- ☛ The need to ensure that wider reading makes an impact centrally and not as a discrete activity.
- ☛ The necessity to **plan from the top** and use **support resources**.

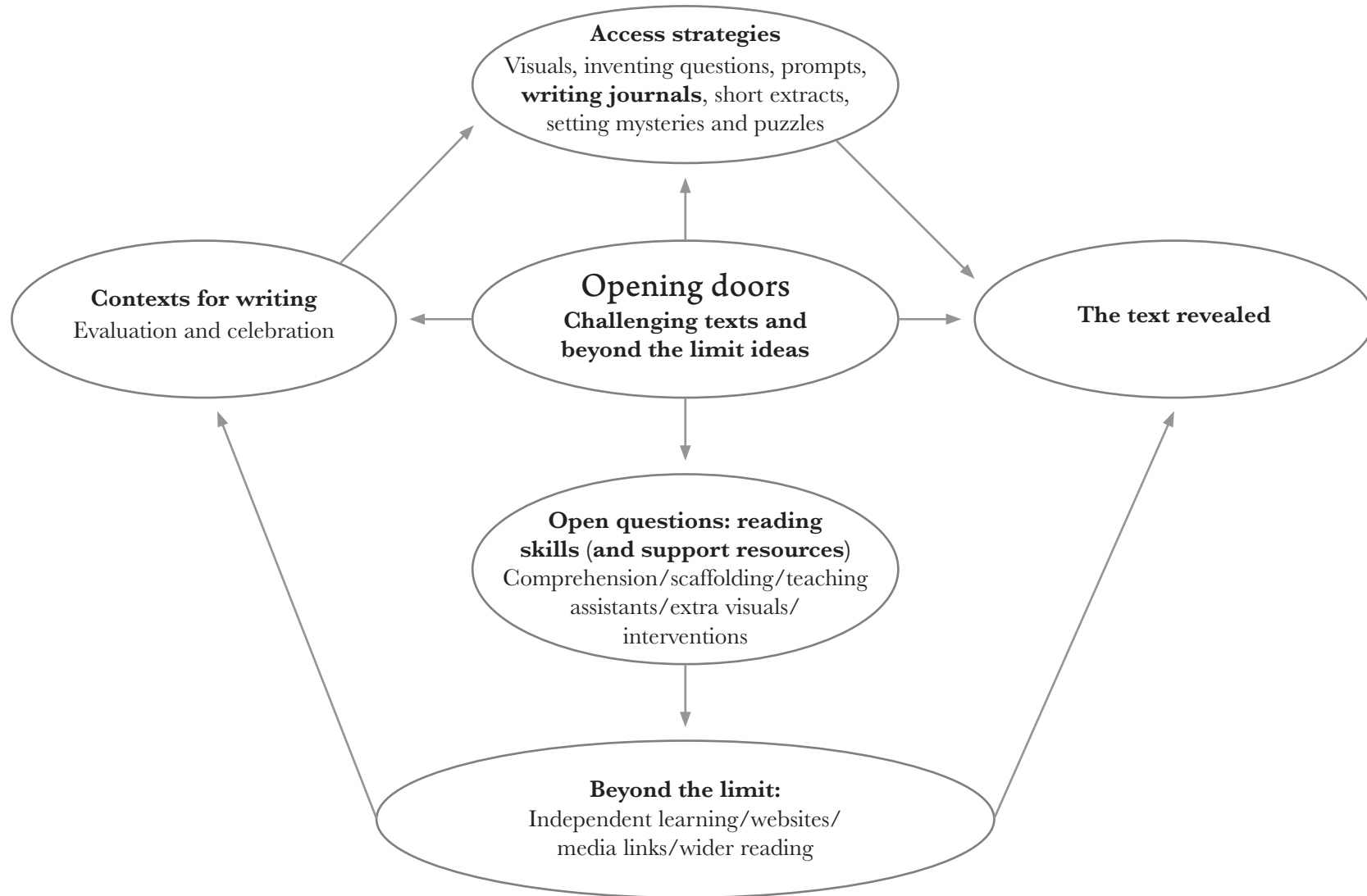
- ☛ The requirement to adapt lesson plans and to be flexible, so that ‘beyond the limit’ work is offered at the point of need.
- ☛ The central importance of the language, the excitement and the quirky originality of the texts.
- ☛ Any specific terms or recommended techniques appear in bold type and are listed in the glossary.

The last five units are based specifically around poetry, but the emphasis is on the link between reading the poem and plunging into writing tasks. I have called this the **javelin approach** – where you aim high and get pens or computers into action very quickly. These units focus on using great poems to spur on your young pupils to find the language they need to shape and craft exciting work. You can build on all the principles you have enjoyed from the first fifteen units and apply them as appropriate to a looser framework. So, for the last five units, please practise inventing your own access strategies!

I’ve called the final section ‘The Other Side of the Door’, in the hope that a great deal of inspired writing will now take place. Teachers often ask me to focus on writing ideas when I’m in schools, so this section has plenty of these to help your pupils build the confidence necessary to excel.

The most common plea I hear from keen young writers is, ‘Give me more time to get absorbed and go for it!’ Some poems are very short but that only goes to show that even a single original or telling phrase from a great writer can be enough to jump-start creative writing in the present! I am finding that teachers are learning how to offer a number of access strategies to some but fewer to others. They are ready to fly anyhow!

I outline on page 6 the structure I have used in Parts 1 and 2 – I also use these principles in my training sessions. The figure provides a visual way to understand the methodology. I have developed an open-ended approach, relying on engagement and discovery, which leaves huge scope for creative teachers to interpret and innovate. It is a framework to teach English by, planning from and beyond the top, alongside the belief that great teaching of challenging texts can take a pupil further, higher and deeper.



## Access strategies

Many schemes of work for English lessons have been conditioned by conventional ideas of linear progress, often starting with a learning objective on the board. However, lots of our pupils are non-linear learners and have been influenced by a lifestyle of personal choice, ICT and learning by doing. Much better, then, to imitate their varied learning styles by setting a challenge straight away – perhaps using an extract from the text, setting up a visual or giving the pupils a quote to read. Present the excitement of the text as a mystery to be solved, a puzzle to be explored, a fascination to be uncovered – they will love it!

This is the time to say as little as possible in order to elicit lots of questions from the children and to enable them to discover new words and techniques. Short-burst writing is often useful as a starter, but make sure they are totally immersed in the work. Encourage them to write something unusual, clever or strange! Texts like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, for example, will inspire them to produce the most fabulous pieces of 'nonsense', and the learning about diverse language use will be impressive.

At this stage, there can be some very effective teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar. When your pupils are at their most enthusiastic is the time to strike! As they feed back their drafts and quirky possibilities, pick up on incorrect spellings in an inquisitive way. Can the suffix '-ly' help us to spell 'definitely' properly? Why does Lewis Carroll use 'curiouser' when in some contexts it would be grammatically incorrect? It is also possible to follow up their interest in language with other spellings with a similar root or sound to maximise learning. If this work is done in context, and in a fun way, you should see quicker improvements in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Use this kind of approach throughout the units whenever new words pop up.

## The text revealed

Following on from the access strategies, there is generally a high level of curiosity about reading the whole text – the doors are open! Pupils love the awesome whirlpool described by Poe and the chilling description of Miss Havisham. Now is a good time to discover the learning objectives *together* because there is so much to talk about. This should be an active process,

and the children may well suggest even harder objectives than the ones you had in mind. This will help to clarify assessment expectations and assist with aspirational goal-setting.

The key to positive energy in your classroom is the engagement your pupils have with language and learning. The way the access strategies have hooked their interest should now be tangible. I have seen pupils poring over texts at this stage, reading quite difficult language with relish, because their confidence and interest is high.

### Opening questions: reading skills

In my sessions with teachers and pupils, I recommend a **hardest question first** pedagogy. This is a reversal of the normal convention but it helps teachers to plan from and beyond the top. I have found, time and time again, that when open and conceptual questions are set first, there is genuine surprise from teachers that so many pupils can access something harder.

Throughout the units, I emphasise the use of **support resources** which can be used when there is a need. Those resources are human too – our amazing teaching assistants can and should be utilised to support able learners, as appropriate, when the challenge is tough, as it should be. Even prompt questions or lists of hints can be useful resources to open more doors or act to ignite thinking or help pupils to get unstuck.

This is not to say that knowledge or comprehension questions should be avoided; it's more a question of knowing when to use them for those pupils who need them. Schools are finding that applications downloaded onto tablets can be really useful for further personalisation and to explore language use, technical terms and parts of speech.<sup>1</sup> This is learning that is non-linear and introduced via discovery methods.

The schools in which I work are increasingly pioneering different styles of lessons and incorporating a high level of challenge. These resources suit more varied approaches to teaching and learning and address the need to make better progress with all pupils. I recommend

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Gobby Academy, which was created by Ian Warwick, working with the University of Warwick, and is based on Lynn Cameron's work on academic literacy.

→ Bob says ...

*Watch the difference between handing out a text now, when they have already appreciated its style and meaning, compared with a cold reading just a few minutes into the lesson with no prior knowledge.*

→ Bob says ...

*Until harder learning opportunities are set, no teacher knows how well a pupil may do.*

moving away from the standard three- or four-part lesson (which is like a ladder) and shifting to lessons shaped like mazes (with many routes to the middle), **jigsaws** (a **cognitive field** coming together) or javelins (heading straight for high challenge). Variety is everything and, across the curriculum, exciting challenges with many layers of possibility are crucial for outstanding learning.

Developing a wider repertoire of skills can only be a good thing. While linear learning will still be a good method for certain objectives, a mindset for discovering many other shapes to lesson planning will add so much more potential for excellence.

*Bob says ...* ←

*Without challenging texts, the layers of possibility are not there to be discovered.*

## Contexts for writing

If the opening engagements have supported access and the pupils' comprehension has been deepened by the reading tasks, then creative writing becomes the most natural process of all. Speaking, listening, reading and writing have sometimes been artificially separated, but most outstanding English lessons include the development of all four modes of language. Many teachers have observed that the most impressive early writing comes from pupils who have been regularly read to at home and who can talk about their reading.

I have made suggestions for inventive tasks which are hard yet fascinating. Some young writers have a tendency to play it safe with a familiar genre and known vocabulary, so the units are designed to open doors to more imaginative possibilities. Often these are based around style imitation or experimentation with parody, irony or continuation. The aim is always that the pupils will see that classic literature has endured for a reason.

The works of these celebrated authors are excellent models for stimulating writing and supporting creativity. Your pupils' written standards will improve and this will be reflected in formal summative assessment. The feedback I get from schools is that their pupils surprise them when they attempt harder pieces – and the more choice the better! I anticipate that new talent will emerge in clusters at your school.

*Bob says ...* ←

*I recommend using the contexts for writing very liberally – add your own suggestions too. Alternatively, ask your pupils to compile a list of challenging titles and select their favourite to read.*

One of the wonders of creative writing is that teachers and parents will be perpetually surprised at what their pupil or child has achieved and how unusual it can be. If we can use

flexible systems like ‘Opening doors’, with its ‘Wings to fly’ section, we can maximise the possibility of originality emerging. The best writing outcomes I have seen arise from the complex interplay of the stimulus material, discussion, prior literacy acquisition and individual inspiration. That inspiration is often driven by you, the teacher. I hope that you will find your own voice within the flexible structures, principles and texts I have recommended. Your interventions with extra titles and additional routes are critical. Your explorations of grammar for meaning and **archaic language** for effect will bring the learning alive. You may choose to move on to the writing stage more quickly or linger on the access methods for longer if some pupils are struggling. There is space for you to interpret, insert your own ideas and go at your own pace.

## Beyond the limit

Going beyond the limit should be planned very flexibly. The units are challenging, but teachers are the best judges of when to include extension and when to introduce comparative texts or multimedia approaches. Extension is always best when programmed into the overall scheme. It’s a good idea for the most able, in particular, to view extension as a norm and not extra work when they finish. Any kind of bolt-on activity can start to seem like a punishment!

You may wish to encourage beyond the limit thinking throughout the unit. There is nothing particularly linear about the work I propose, which is why I advocate methods like **hardest question first** or discovering objectives later in the progress. I have made suggestions for wider reading, film clips and more evaluative or analytical possibilities to broaden and deepen the learning.

The objective of independent learning is implicit, since independent thinking and goal-setting needs to be encouraged as a habit, not as a separate project. Delving into great works of literature should do just that. The ‘Did you know?’ section aims to support pupils’ investigations and to help them understand the long-term impact of writers’ work. I have also included specific extension ideas along the usual lines of creative thinking and exploring techniques and the imagination.

It’s a great idea for pupils to use the internet to find other texts by the same writer and to deepen their appreciation of literature. Some of the texts I have chosen are very well known, but I am hoping that others will be new to you. Overall, I have selected texts that have scope



for challenge and to stimulate creative writing. For example, Poe's 'Maelström' can seem baffling at first, but I have seen teachers use the access strategies to good effect and turn the lesson into a terrific exploration of adventure, danger and even philosophy.

## Reflecting on impact

I have included a final word in each unit on the importance of impact. During the past ten to twenty years of educational change, it has been all too easy to get bogged down in fine detail at the expense of the big idea. The tools of teaching have been taken out of the toolbox without knowing what job is being tackled. Objectives have been up on the wall, challenge boxes have been filled in for the term and exact timings have been set, but not enough attention has been paid to the value of anticipated outcomes. Great teachers are always aware of *why* they use a particular tool because they know what the inspiring possibilities of the lesson are.

By reflecting on impact, I am emphasising the value of considering how each unit can inspire your pupils, including the most able, to new achievements. New learning for all and progress for all should be apparent in outstanding lessons. The units are less about tasks to work through and more about ensuring that deeper and wider accomplishment is the outcome.

Bob says ...

*A book is just a guide, a signpost,  
a support. If you can open the  
door a little wider to literary  
appreciation and better writing, then  
one day your pupils will open it for  
someone else!*



Part 1

# Opening doors to poetry

# Zero at the Bone

## 'Snake' by Emily Dickinson

### Access strategies

Try starting at the end for a change by giving the children the poem's final stanza:



---

But never met this fellow,  
Attended or alone,  
Without a tighter breathing,  
And zero at the bone.

---

Use **prediction** and **white space thinking** to get the children thinking about which 'fellow' this might mean. This is a fun activity as there is very little to go on, although it is clearly something designed to make us scared!

More challenging would be to ask the pupils to compose their own four concluding lines which must express fear. The 'zero at the bone' image is particularly poetic, so set them the challenge of coming up with something equally impressive. Try a whole-class **plus, minus, interesting** brainstorming task to accept or reject suggested images. If possible, the **metre** (or beat) needs to fit and enhance the meaning.

Another option is to cut up the poem into separate lines and ask groups of pupils to **sequence** it. See if they can 'read' the meaning, including the clever punctuation, to work out the correct sequence (including where the stanzas begin and end). Initially, you could ask them to work with a line each and ask questions about what type of poem it might be. Then

build in more lines for each group and listen to the conversation expand. Finally, ask them to sequence the entire poem.

A narrow fellow in the grass
Occasionally rides;
You may have met him, – did you not,
His notice sudden is.
The grass divides as with a comb,
A spotted shaft is seen;
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on.
He likes a boggy acre,
A floor too cool for corn.
Yet when a child, and barefoot,
I more than once, at morn,
Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun, –
When, stooping to secure it,
It wrinkled and was gone.
Several of nature's people
I know, and they know me;
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality;



But never met this fellow,
Attended or alone,
Without a tighter breathing,
And zero at the bone.

Ask each group to feed back the reasons for their choices before you reveal the text. I would be surprised if they didn't make some informative points about how punctuation can make a difference to meaning.

## The text revealed

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### Snake

A narrow fellow in the grass

Occasionally rides;

You may have met him, – did you not,

His notice sudden is.

The grass divides as with a comb,

A spotted shaft is seen;

And then it closes at your feet

And opens further on.

He likes a boggy acre,

A floor too cool for corn.

Yet when a child, and barefoot,

I more than once, at morn,



Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash  
Unbraiding in the sun, –  
When, stooping to secure it,  
It wrinkled and was gone.

Several of nature's people  
I know, and they know me;  
I feel for them a transport  
Of cordiality;

But never met this fellow,  
Attended or alone,  
Without a tighter breathing,  
And zero at the bone.

---

### Learning objectives

- ☞ Know how to create fear in a poem.
- ☞ Understand how the way a poem is structured contributes to the meaning.

### Opening questions: reading skills

As usual with **thinking from the top**, your aim is to encourage as many pupils as possible to delve as deep as possible into the meaning and effect of the poem. Try asking these **white space thinking** questions:

- ☞ What kind of tone is set up by Dickinson?
- ☞ How does the fear develop?
- ☞ What evidence can you find for how she relates to the snake?

As always, the assessment for learning that occurs via the dialogue and feedback is vital. Some pupils will be able to produce detailed examples and analysis, but for others you might need to provide some prompt questions to take it further. For example:

- 🐍 Why is there an unusual (and backwards) grammatical construction in the first stanza ('his notice sudden is')? A hint might be that this is something to do with the shape and movement of the snake.
- 🐍 Why is the informal word 'fellow' used? Does that make the fearful ending more purposeful?
- 🐍 How does the mention of the poet as a child develop her relationship with nature?
- 🐍 What does 'transport of cordiality' mean?

Resource 20





### Excellent responses will:

- ☛ Show how the regular structure helps a personal tale to unfold.
- ☛ Demonstrate how the informal language builds a relationship with nature, only for the final stanza to deliver a chilling image of ‘zero at the bone’.

**Support resources** will assist those finding the poem difficult and help them to explore the snake theme in ways that they will find accessible but challenging. For example:

- ☛ Create a **continuum line** through which the children explore whether they are very scared or not scared of snakes. Where do they stand?
- ☛ Ask the pupils to write about any scary creatures they have ‘met’ or seen.
- ☛ Invite them to select two of Dickinson’s images (e.g. ‘wrinkled’ and ‘whip-lash’) and say what they tell us about the snake.

### Contexts for writing

The doors should now be open to attempt something special.

#### Wings to fly

Task your pupils with composing a poem backwards (inspired by the grammar reversal in the first stanza). Try this method:

1. The theme is a creature which prompts fear of some kind.
2. Use the same six-stanza structure and rhythm as ‘Snake’.
3. Compose the final stanza first and share this with friends (you must include a stunning and unusual image like ‘zero at the bone’). Do they know which creature you have chosen?
4. Improve the final stanza before going back to the beginning and writing the first verse.

5. Next, build in the middle verses to show how the narrator has a relationship with the creature.
6. Remember, the fear must dominate at the end!

Bob says ...

*For those pupils who are a bit daunted by this activity, find images, visuals and word cards which could give some structure but still leave gaps for the imagination. The concept of structure with gaps (see Hart et al., 2004) embodies the need for planning and purpose, but never as a straightjacket or to stifle pupils' minds. Over-planning can hold back teachers too, so it is vital that talented teachers adapt ideas and devise them for a clear purpose. Dependency on over-prescribed schemes or systems is the most common reason I see for lessons falling short of outstanding.*

To help guide them through each stanza, the children could draw pictures to symbolise each of their ideas. They could also be encouraged to include some of Dickinson's terms like 'boggy acre' or 'unbraiding'. Teaching assistants could support the tricky process of imitating the metrical pattern – for example, 'a narrow fellow in the grass' spoken aloud should help to reveal the stressed beats. Are there any irregular beats? Once the children start to understand the rhythmic structure, they will produce better poems of their own.

**Role play** could also help with children's understanding and inspiration. Can your pupils imitate the motion of the snake? What about showing the different movements of the snake through different habitats? Perhaps your pupils could write about the fear felt by a snake or a spider – that would stimulate some original twists!

### Extension

Wider reading possibilities involve linking the poetry of Emily Dickinson with those poets mentioned in Unit 5 – for example, the pupils could create poetry collections around a nature theme.

Here are some suggestions for specific angles on writing which might prove inventive:

- 🐍 Write a poem from the point of view of the snake.
- 🐍 Write about a second encounter with different feelings.
- 🐍 Take inspiration from the unusual use of 'rides' and write a poem which includes original metaphors to portray a creature or creatures in unexpected language.
- 🐍 Try writing a prose version of any encounter with a potentially dangerous creature.
- 🐍 Write about your favourite snake poem after reading some of those listed below:
  - 🐍 'A Snake Ate My Homework' by Lori Degman (very funny!)

🐍 ‘Snake’ by D. H. Lawrence

🐍 ‘Snake’ by Ian Mudie

You can see from ‘A Snake Ate My Homework’ that your young poets could take a very different route with their writing! A poem about a snake could also be humorous or describe an encounter with no fear at all.

You could ask the children to write an inventive piece which reverses our normal expectations about snakes – one which is kind and helpful! If you have the technology available, create an animation using Movie Maker starring a friendly snake but with the same slithery motion and bite.

A rich source of inspiration is to consider how snakes have been portrayed in stories and films. Perhaps find some excerpts from *The Jungle Book* or other films which show how our image of snakes has developed. For most of us, our feelings about reptiles are more likely to be from fiction than real experience.

## Beyond the limit

These websites will be useful for finding out more about Emily Dickinson: [www.poets.org/edick/](http://www.poets.org/edick/), [www.poemhunter.com/](http://www.poemhunter.com/) and [www.poetryfoundation.org/](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/).

Dickinson is known for her clear, compact poetry which includes original uses of form and style, just like the reversed grammar found in ‘Snake’. Other poems the children may enjoy include ‘A Bird Came Down’ and “‘Hope’ is the Thing with Feathers”.

## Did you know?

- 🐍 Emily Dickinson was born in 1830 in Massachusetts.
- 🐍 She was educated at Amherst Academy and was an excellent student.
- 🐍 She suffered from depression.
- 🐍 She left school early to work on the family homestead.

- ☛ She spent her life away from people and was very reclusive.
- ☛ Dickinson looked after her sick mother and supported her family for many years.
- ☛ She spent her time filling notebooks with poems and letters.
- ☛ Some of her friendships were developed through correspondence.
- ☛ Dickinson died of kidney failure in 1886. At that time the world knew nothing of her or her writing.
- ☛ It was Dickinson's sister who discovered her many wonderful poems and got them published in 1890.
- ☛ Emily Dickinson is now regarded as one of America's greatest poets and her work has influenced thinking across the world.

## Reflecting on impact

If we are trying to open doors to great writers and famous literature, the way in is through accessing pleasure and wonder. That is why in all the units I have suggested that specific access strategies must come first.

*Bob says ...*

*It is often too late to enthuse about the originality of words and ideas when the opportunity to hook a reader has already been missed.*

In this unit the opening exercise is perhaps the most important. All your pupils will have the opportunity to explore an ending, to get engaged with language and then to be admitted into a subtle but intriguing world. I hope the extension suggestions will enhance the effect.

The aim is for creative writing to be fun but also to go beyond the **periphery of expectation**. There should always be a little struggle in crafting and composing because that is then followed by more fulfilment and the 'wow' factor for you and your class. I hope the impact will be in pupils enjoying the snake theme and appreciating the clever wordplay. With revisiting, this could stimulate a genuine love of poetry.

*Bob says ...*

*The doors have to open somewhere and your classroom is the best place!*

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**Bob Cox** taught English for 23 years, he is now a local authority school improvement consultant and a freelance trainer. He runs conferences, courses, INSETs and a Saturday Challenge school for primary pupils – all to inspire teachers and pupils with creative approaches, both nationally and internationally.

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