Lesson 1: What a character!

Activity Sheet 1

Character studies

This is a description of the character Gradgrind from the novel *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens.

**Study the extract carefully and highlight or underline any words or phrases that particularly interest you:**

|  |
| --- |
| The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker’s square foreﬁnger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s voice which was inﬂexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s hair which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of ﬁrs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker’s obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders –nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was – all helped the emphasis.  “In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!” |

**Now think about why this description of Gradgrind is so effective.**

Did you notice how Charles Dickens...

* Described the classroom? (How do you think it added to the overall effect of the description?)
* Used his name to build an impression of his character? (What did the name tell you?)
* Used detailed descriptions of Gradgrind’s appearance? (How does it affect your feelings about him?)
* Uses metaphors? (What are their effect?)
* Uses similes? (Which was your favourite simile? Why?)
* Uses repetition? (Why do you think Dickens does this?)
* In your opinion, what is the most striking aspect of the description? (Explain your answer)

**You may ask your teacher to explain any unfamiliar words.**

Lesson 1: What a character!

Activity Sheet 1

Time to create your own character!

**These points might help to get you started:**

* Decide on your character’s name.
* Choose what kind of personality they have.
* Introduce him or her.
* How do they speak?
* What do they say?

Character checklist

**Have you included the following in your description?**

* Appearance
* Age
* Dress
* Voice
* mannerisms/movement
* employment
* background
* likes/dislikes
* similes
* metaphors
* repetition
* detailed description of speciﬁc features e.g. the face
* conversation

**Once you have created your character, write a passage that shows off the personality and behaviour of your character in a speciﬁc situation.**

Lesson 2: A sense of place

Activity Sheet 2

Setting description

This is an extract from the opening of the novel Bleak House by Charles Dickens.

**Study the extract carefully and highlight or underline any words or phrases that particularly interest you:**

|  |
| --- |
| Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it ﬂows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deﬁled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the ﬁresides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and ﬁngers of his shivering little ’prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.  Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongey ﬁelds, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time — as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look. |

**After you have read the passage, in pairs or groups, deﬁne why you think this passage describing a foggy London day, is so striking. Here are a few questions that might help you:**

Did you notice how Charles Dickens...

* Make the fog seem like a living thing? (How does this add to the overall effect?)
* Uses detail? (Which is the best example of this in the passage?)
* Uses metaphors? (What is their effect?)
* Uses similes? (What is their effect?)
* Uses repetition? (Why do you think Dickens does this?)
* Uses colour? (Does it affect the mood of the piece?)
* Why does Charles Dickens introduce the old-age pensioners and the young apprentice boy? (What is the effect of this?)
* In your opinion, what is the most striking aspect of the description? (Explain your answer)

**You may ask your teacher to explain any unfamiliar words.**

Lesson 2: A sense of place

Activity Sheet 2

Time to create your own descriptive passage!

**These points might help to get you started:**

* Decide what kind of atmosphere you want to create through the setting.
* Consider what kind of mood you want to convey in your description.
* Focus on one or two speciﬁc details of the area you are describing.
* Use the senses – what can you hear, see, smell, taste and touch?
* Decide if your passage will include people.
* Decide on what time of day or night it is.

**You can choose one of the following subjects for your descriptive passage – or create your own**

* description of the gloomy back streets of a town or city at night
* a countryside scene in winter
* the seaside in summer
* a busy airport/rail terminal/port
* war-time conﬂict
* a futuristic sci-ﬁ setting
* a party scene (before, during and after the party is over)
* a desert scene
* mountains in the moonlight
* a typhoon at sea
* after the tsunami
* the fairground at night
* the big match

Descriptive writing checklist

**Have you included the following in your description?**

**Light and shadow**  
Can be used to create an atmosphere of happiness or fear. Can help to build up to a dramatic, scary passage.

**The weather**  
Mist or fog can create a sense of mystery.

Thunder and lightning are often used to create dramatic or frightening events to come.  
 Sunlight can create a sense of joy (especially after a series of sad events).  
 Rain can be used as the background to sad events/feelings of loneliness.

**Sounds**  
Creaking doors suggest ghostly, mysterious circumstances.  
Voices in the distance can also convey mystery or intrigue.  
Strange clanking sounds can be spooky.  
Screams create a sense of fear and danger.  
A warm, crackling log ﬁre gives a sense of safety and comfort.

**Repetition**

**Give speciﬁc details about the setting**

**Describe in detail a key feature of the scene**

Lesson 3: Losing the plot

Activity Sheet 3

The press in Victorian Britain

How do you think the newspapers of the day in Charles Dickens’ time would have treated one of the issues that are dealt with in Charles Dickens’ novels e.g. child labour?

You may be able to do some research and ﬁnd a few archive facsimiles of Victorian newspapers. Note the style of print they used. Were there many pictures?

Create an appropriate, period-style headline and some or all of an article about one of the themes you have discovered in Charles Dickens’ writing. For example the headline below could illustrate a theme from the famous novel *A Christmas Carol*:

**CRUEL BOSS BANS CHRISTMAS!**

NO CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY AND NO BONUS FOR THESE POOR OFFICE WORKERS

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

Lesson 3: Losing the plot

Activity Sheet 3

Now do some research into today’s newspapers. What issues do you think would preoccupy Dickens today?

Do any of the issues remain the same? Use the box below to make notes of issues that you consider to be relevant:

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

**Now use one or more of the themes you have outlined to create a passage of your own writing which explores some current themes.**

The theme in a novel might be illustrated in many ways including:

* Events that occur (e.g. young boy getting trapped and dying in a house chimney illustrates the problem of child labour).
* Descriptive passages (e.g. a foggy day might illustrate the theme of confusion and mystery).
* Strong images (e.g. a view of beautiful open ﬁelds stretching far ahead might illustrate freedom).

Lesson 4: Cliffhangers

Activity Sheet 4

Cliffhanger endings

**Charles Dickens and other writers of the time, such as Wilkie Collins, would often publish their stories in serialiased form so that they would appear in monthly episodes. Quite often, each episode would end with a cliffhanger ending which kept the readers hooked and eager to buy the next edition of the journal in which the story appeared.**

In this extract from Charles Dickens’ famous novel *Great Expectations,* Pip, a poor boy who is the hero of the novel, becomes involved in a dangerous mystery. At the start Pip, whilst running through a deserted, misty graveyard in desolate marshland, runs into a scary-looking escaped prisoner who frightens the young boy into helping him. Chapter 2 of *Great Expectations* closes with Pip sneaking out of the house with a bundle which contains food and drink for the prisoner. As he leaves the house he has no idea what will happen when he travels across the deserted marshes:

|  |
| --- |
| There was a door in the kitchen, communicating with the forge; I unlocked and unbolted the door, and got a ﬁle from among Joe’s tools. Then I put the fastenings as I had found them, opened the door at which I had entered when I ran home last night, shut it, and ran for the misty marshes. |

Charles Dickens’ readers would have been impatient to know what would happen to Pip when he set out across the marshland.

* Would the police be waiting for him and arrest him for assisting a prisoner?
* Would the prisoner grab the food, drink and ﬁle, and kill Pip because he knew too much?
* Would the prisoner kidnap Pip and use him to get a ransom?

Lesson 4: Cliffhangers

Activity Sheet 4

What do you think happens next?

**For the next activity you may be asked to work in a pair, in a group or you might be working on your own. Your teacher will tell you what they have decided.**

Stage 1

If you are working with a partner or group, work your way through all of the chapter openings

**Consider these questions:**

* Which chapter opening did you like best?
* Why?
* Which chapter opening is most suitable to develop into a story of your own?
* When you are ready, tell your teacher which chapter opening you have chosen.
* Now, simply continue the story!
* If it will help you to write a better story, you can alter the opening.

Now, depending on how your teacher has organised the class, you should be ready to start Stage 2.

Stage 2

* You should now pass your story, including the cliffhanger ending, to someone who hasn’t seen it before.
* They should now study your story in detail.
* They should now start to work on the sequel to the chapter.

**Consider these questions:**

* Does the new part of the story follow on logically from how the chapter ends?
* Has the new chapter used all the characters that appeared in the ﬁrst chapter?
* Is it possible to conclude the new chapter with another cliffhanger?

**Your teacher might now ask you to share your chapter(s) with the class.**

Lesson 5: From page to screen

Activity Sheet 5

Screenplays

**Below is an extract from Episode One of *Oliver Twist*, written by Sarah Phelps for the BBC. It shows how a screenplay is set out, with dialogue, scene headings and description of the scene setting:**

|  |
| --- |
| Bumble’s eyes widen, he bows so low he nearly scrapes the ﬂoor. Mrs Corney’s eyes narrow, money…The visitor heads to the door…  **MRS CORNEY**  The boy could be anywhere but his sort always winds up back in trouble. Mr Bumble and I might hear some news. Perhaps Sir might like to leave an address …?  And the visitor pauses… **CUT TO:**  **EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT 6 20.24**  The coach and four gallops back to London… They disappear down the road and Oliver steps out back onto the road. He’s all alone in the darkness. Moonlight, the yip of a fox. Strange calls from a nightjar. Nothing for it but to keep walking…  **CUT TO:**  **EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY 7 11.40**  And on Oliver’s feet in his old boots as he walks… Night to day to night to day…  And one of his old boots just falls to pieces. Oliver stands and looks down at his feet. The sole has come off completely. He shakes his foot and the boot disintegrates. He pulls the knotted lace off the other boot, kicks that off into the side of the road and keeps walking… bare feet picking their way over the ﬂints… |
|  |
|  |

With thanks to the BBC for use of the script extract from *Oliver Twist* © BBC 2007

Lesson 5: From page to screen

Activity Sheet 5

Now you should start to create your own screenplay

**Storyboarding is the term used for creating an outline story. Use the space below to divide your screenplay into six main sections of action. You can draw what is happening in the larger box and write a brief description of the action below each picture.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | **2** | **3** |
|  |  |  |
| **4** | **5** | **6** |
|  |  |  |

**Now use your storyboard as a basis to start writing your screenplay, using the format shown in the extract from *Oliver Twist* on the previous page.**

Lesson 6: All my own work!

Activity Sheet 6

Plagiarism checklist

**Jot down some answers to the following questions about the previous ﬁve lessons:**

What have you learned about plagiarism?

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

Think about your own experiences of copyright infringement. Write about them here.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

What does ‘out of copyright’ mean?

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

Why is copyright so important to writers?

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |