What the Dickens?

Lesson 2: A sense of place

Key Stages: KS2 – Yr 5 & 6, KS3

Term: Spring

Timing: 60 mins

This Lesson Plan has been designed to be used with either Year 5 or Year 6 at Key Stage 2 or with Years 7, 8 or 9 at Key Stage 3. Content can be adjusted according to the range of abilities within the class, to provide sufficient challenge for the most able students and to accommodate individual school lesson plan requirements. Lesson timings are approximate and can be easily adjusted.

Prior knowledge:

Some knowledge of Charles Dickens’ life and work.

Understand the term ‘setting’ and have read examples of descriptions of settings.

Objective:

By the end of the lesson students will:

* gain an understanding of the way in which effective descriptive writing and the creation of evocative settings adds depth and atmosphere to writing;
* acknowledge Charles Dickens’ ability to produce powerful, descriptive passages which enable the reader to become profoundly involved in the plot and themes of his work;
* distinguish between becoming inspired and influenced by another writer and stealing their ideas.

Main curriculum links:

Key Stage 2

* En1 Speaking and listening: 1a,b, 2a,b,d
* En2 Reading: 2a,b,d, 4a,b,c,e,h
* En3 Writing: 1a–c, 2a,b,c,f

Key Stage 3

* En1 (a) Gaining a sense of the English literary heritage and engaging with important texts in it.
* 1.3 Cultural understanding
* 1.4 Critical understanding
* **3.2 Reading**

Other curriculum links:

Key Stage 2

* PSHCE: 1a, 4b, 4f
* History: 1a, 2a, 2b, 3, 4a

Key Stage 3

* Citizenship: Rights and responsibilities

Equipment and resources:

* Per project: IWB/projector
* Per student/group: computer access as appropriate

Preparation required:

Access to a computer, speakers and IWB/screen to show Video 2.

Settling activity/Starter:

Timing: 10 mins *(Timings adjustable according to teacher preferences)*

Students research Mal Peet and his work e.g. *Keeper*, *Tamar*, *The Penalty* and *Exposure*. Research can be done at the library or on the internet.

A useful website is [www.walker.co.uk/contributors/Mal-Peet-2722.aspx](http://www.walker.co.uk/contributors/Mal-Peet-2722.aspx)

Main teaching phase:

Timing: 35 mins

Students watch Video 2 in which Mal Peet explores Charles Dickens’ ability to create strong, evocative and dramatic descriptive passages and settings. He goes on to explain the way in which inspiration differs from plagiarism.

The teacher leads a short exploration of the opening of *Bleak House*, identifying some key elements of descriptive writing, using the extract on Activity Sheet 2. Teachers may need to explain unfamiliar vocabulary for this task. Teachers may prefer to substitute their own choice of extract to illustrate Dickens’ descriptive writing.

Discuss how the description allows the reader to imagine the setting clearly, especially before film and television with sophisticated visual effects had been invented.

Teachers can use this part of the lesson to recap on the elements of writing that bring it to life e.g. adjectives, using the senses in descriptive passages. Teachers may wish to use extracts from their own favourite writers as illustrative material.

Students are then asked to create a descriptive passage to illustrate a 21st-century setting. The descriptive writing checklist on Activity Sheet 2 will help them to get started.

Teachers might like to give the students some options for their settings. There are some suggestions provided on Activity Sheet 2 but a longer list of options can be found below:

* description of the gloomy back streets of a town or city
* a countryside scene in winter
* the seaside in summer
* a busy airport/rail terminal/port
* war-time conflict
* futuristic sci-fi settings
* an idyllic country scene
* the city at night
* a party scene (before, during and after the party is over)
* a desert scene
* mountains in the moonlight
* a typhoon at sea
* a magical moonlight lakeside scene
* a rock concert
* after the tsunami
* the palace and gardens
* the floodlit castle
* the arena after a major sporting event
* a town-centre market
* the fairground at night
* the big match

(Some teachers may wish to supply relevant pictures as prompts)

A discussion of the difference between inspiration and plagiarism follows. The class discuss why the first is an important aspect of one’s development as a writer whilst straightforward copying of other people’s work for your own benefit, and/or profit, causes distress and loss to the victim and can damage the creative arts in general.

Plenary:

Timing: 15 mins

Students are encouraged to share the descriptive passages they have written with the rest of the class.

Students, in pairs, discuss merits of each other’s work and identify areas for further development.

Teacher leads students in discussion about how much more they are aware of plagiarism after creating their own writing.

Connection to copyright abuse is made.

Homework:

Students begin to develop a character of their own in note form.