

A Level English Language & Literature – preparing for September

In your first term you'll be studying an exam unit called **Voices in Speech and Writing**. An ANTHOLOGY of different texts from 11 different GENRES (ie autobiography, podcast, articles, reviews etc) will be provided.

1. Reading and notetaking.

On the BHASVIC website (<http://www.bhasvic.ac.uk/students/summer-assignments/e.aspx>), you'll find examples of texts from the following GENRES from the Anthology – YOU ARE EXPECTED TO READ THESE BEFORE YOUR FIRST ENGLISH LESSON IN SEPTEMBER.

ARTICLE: Feature articles present the views of the writer and are usually about ongoing or topical issues. They are usually more detailed than hard news stories and sometimes include images. Articles can be found in newspapers and magazines both in print and online.

'Too much talk for one planet: why I'm reducing my word emissions' by Charlie Brooker

'As gay people celebrate, the treatment of the disabled just gets worse' by Ian Birrell

BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A biography is an account of a person's life usually written by a professional writer. The biographer selects and organises material and so the subject is presented through the writer's perspective.

An autobiography is, of course, written by the subject and so is completely subjective. Some celebrity autobiographies are 'ghost written' by a professional writer who interviews the subject.

De Profundis by Oscar Wilde

Mom & Me & Mom by Maya Angelou

REVIEWS: Reviews offer personal, critical appraisals of restaurants, books, films, music, events and performances. They can be online, broadcast or printed and usually aim to inform and entertain the reader.

Flemmich Webb on *Boxer Handsome* by Anna Whittham

Martin Hoyle on television drama *The Bridge*

2. Summer English Project

Read the papers, magazines and search the world wide web for an ARTICLE that you want to read, a REVIEW you found helpful and a BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY of someone who you find interesting. Following what we did in today's lesson with Maya Angelou's autobiography please analyse and make notes on your chosen texts on LEXIS, SYNTAX and STRUCTURE and how these present VOICE and IDENTITY.

1 Article

1.1 Charlie Brooker: 'Too much talk for one planet: why I'm reducing my word emissions'

This is an article from the *Guardian* newspaper by Charlie Brooker, the English satirist and broadcaster. He has worked in television, radio, print and online media.

Too much talk for one planet: why I'm reducing my word emissions

I've been overwhelmed by the amount of jabber in the world – it's a vast cloud of blah

Eagle-eyed readers may have spotted I haven't been writing this column for a while. Roughly two people noticed its absence, until the other day when a paragraph in *Private Eye* claimed I'd asked Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Guardian*, to switch off the reader comments underneath my articles (not true), and that he'd refused to do so (also not true), so I'd quit (not entirely true). This led to an intense flurry of activity, by which I mean four people asked me about it.

Although the *Private Eye* story wasn't completely wrong – I have stopped doing this particular column for a while, for reasons I'll explain in a moment – I was all set to write to their letters page to whine in the most pompous manner imaginable, something I've always secretly wanted to do, when I figured I might as well respond here instead, for money.

Incidentally, I'm aware this is Olympic-level navel gazing, but you're a human being with free will who can stop reading any time. Here, have a full stop. And another. And another. There are exits all over this building.

Anyway, I haven't quit the newspaper, but I have, for the meantime, stopped writing weekly, partly because my overall workload was making that kind of timetable impossible, and partly because I've recently been overwhelmed by the sheer amount of jabber in the world: a vast cloud of blah I felt I was contributing to every seven days.

If a weatherman misreads the national mood and cheerfully sieg-heils on BBC Breakfast at 8.45am, there'll be 86 outraged columns, 95 despairing blogs, half a million wry tweets and a rib-tickling pass-the-parcel Photoshop meme about it circulating by lunchtime. It happens every day. Every day, a billion instantly conjured words on any contemporaneous subject you can think of. Events and noise, events and noise; everything was starting to resemble nothing but events and noise. Firing more words into the middle of all that began to strike me as futile and unnecessary. I started to view



myself as yet another factory mindlessly pumping carbon dioxide into a toxic sky.

This is perhaps not the ideal state of mind for someone writing a weekly column in a newspaper. Clearly it was time for a short break.

Reader comments form part of the overall wordstorm described above, and it's true I'm not a huge fan of them, but that's chiefly because I'm an elderly man from the age of steam who clings irrationally to the outmoded belief that articles and letters pages should be kept separate, just like church and state. I guess conceptually I still think I'm writing in a "newspaper", even though the reality of what that means has changed beyond measure since I started doing it. So now I'm sitting grumpily in a spaceship with my arms folded, wearing a stovepipe hat. Ridiculous.

These days most newspaper sites are geared towards encouraging interaction with the minuscule fraction of readers who bother to interact back, which is a pity because I'm selfishly uninterested in conducting any kind of meaningful dialogue with humankind in general. I'd say Twitter's better for back-and-forth discussion anyway, if you could be arsed with it. Yelling out the window at passersby is another option.

When it comes to comments, despite not being as funny as I never was in the first place, I get an incredibly easy ride from passing wellwishers compared with any woman who dares write anything on the internet anywhere about anything at all, the ugly bitch, boo, go home bitch go home. Getting slagged off online is par for the course, and absorbing the odd bit of constructive criticism is character-building. The positive comments are more unsettling. Who needs to see typed applause accompanying an article? It's just weird. I don't get it.

But then right now I don't "get" most forms of communication. There's just so much of it. Everybody talking at once and all over each other; everyone on the planet typing words into their computers, for ever, like I'm doing now. I fail to see the point of roughly 98% of human communication at the moment, which indicates I need to stroll around somewhere quiet for a bit.

After my break, and a rethink, I'll quietly return later in the year, to write something slightly different, slightly less regularly (probably fortnightly). In other words, I'm reducing my carbon emissions. And whatever the new thing I'm writing turns out to be, it'll appear both online, still accompanied by the requisite string of comments, and in the newspaper, which is a foldable thing made of paper, containing words and pictures, which catches fire easily and is sometimes left on trains.

Now get out.

1.2 Ian Birrell: 'As gay people celebrate, the treatment of the disabled just gets worse'

This is an article from the *i* newspaper by Ian Birrell, the former deputy editor of the *Independent* newspaper. He is a columnist, foreign correspondent, campaigner, and co-founder of Africa Express.

As gay people celebrate, the treatment of the disabled just gets worse

With more spending cuts looming, are we content to leave one minority locked out of society as second-class citizens?

They were clearing up the confetti, nursing hangovers and disappearing on honeymoons yesterday after the first batch of gay marriages in Britain. It was a remarkable moment as the contented couples celebrated their unions with the traditional kiss. Within my lifetime, homosexuality has been first legalised, then embraced into everyday normality. ...

The ceremonies mark a milestone in the bumpy march towards tolerance and equality. We should rejoice at the speed with which people who were once jailed, mocked and used as a political football have taken their correct place at the heart of society. Politicians of all hues deserve praise for displaying courage in confronting the misanthropes who sought to stop lesbian and gay people from enjoying rights that the rest take for granted.

Problems remain with homophobic bullying in schools and bigotry abroad. But the reform shows how quickly attitudes can change. ...

We have seen a similar rapid shift in attitudes on gender and race, for all the hurdles that still exist for both women and ethnic minorities. Yet, amid all the discussion of diversity and self-congratulatory talk of tolerance, one minority remains stuck in the shadows of society. Indeed, many members would argue that their life is getting worse, with hostility growing.

These are people with disabilities, a group growing fast in our ageing society. ...

Not only are people with disabilities far less likely to be in work despite being the most loyal employees, but almost two-thirds of those who develop a disability have lost their job within two years. ...

Reported hate crime is rising, with stories of awful abuse commonplace... You can multiply all these damning statistics – the terrible stories of routine harassment – for people with learning difficulties. Just imagine the rightful outcry if this was happening to people because of their gender, sexuality or skin colour.

So why is this happening in the wake of the Paralympics, with all that optimistic talk of transforming attitudes? ...

One reason is the lack of social and workplace interaction, such a crucial motor in changing attitudes. So instead of invitations to drinks after work and weekend dinner parties, there is befuddled British embarrassment at best, coldness at worst, towards people with disabilities. As a consequence comes a failure to understand their hopes, fears and desires.

Then there is the lack of political power – one more legacy of the poverty and woeful support endured by many disabled people. Digital technology has helped but the idea of seeking a seat in Parliament is a joke for people who struggle to obtain a seat on the bus. At the last general election, more than two-thirds of polling stations had significant barriers to accessibility. ...

It is great to see Britain become more tolerant. But, with more spending cuts looming, are we content to leave one minority locked out of society as second-class citizens? Just as with gay and lesbian people, disabled people want only the same rights as everyone else. And remember that only one in six people with disabilities was born with them; one day this minority might include you, whatever your colour, gender or sexuality.

2 Autobiography/Biography

2.1 *De Profundis* by Oscar Wilde

This is an extract from *De Profundis*, written by Oscar Wilde during his imprisonment in Reading Gaol and first published in 1905.

I want to get to the point when I shall be able to say quite simply, and without affectation that the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison. I will not say that prison is the best thing that could have happened to me: for that phrase would savour of too great bitterness towards myself. I would sooner say, or hear it said of me, that I was so typical a child of my age, that in my perversity, and for that perversity's sake, I turned the good things of my life to evil, and the evil things of my life to good.

What is said, however, by myself or by others, matters little. The important thing, the thing that lies before me, the thing that I have to do, if the brief remainder of my days is not to be maimed, marred, and incomplete, is to absorb into my nature all that has been done to me, to make it part of me, to accept it without complaint, fear, or reluctance. The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right.

When first I was put into prison some people advised me to try and forget who I was. It was ruinous advice. It is only by realising what I am that I have found comfort of any kind. Now I am advised by others to try on my release and to forget that I have ever been in prison at all. I know that would be equally fatal. It would mean that I would always be haunted by an intolerable sense of disgrace, and that those things that are meant for me as much as for anybody else – the beauty of the sun and moon, the pageant of the seasons, the music of daybreak and the silence of great nights, the rain falling through the leaves, or the dew creeping over the grass and making it silver – would all be tainted for me and lose their healing power, and their power of communicating joy. To regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul.

2.2 *Mom & Me & Mom* by Maya Angelou

This is an extract from *Mom & Me & Mom*, an autobiography by the African-American author, poet, dancer, actress and singer, Maya Angelou.

By the time I was twenty-two, I was living in San Francisco. I had a five-year-old son, two jobs, and two rented rooms, with cooking privileges down the hall. My landlady, Mrs. Jefferson, was kind and grandmotherly. She was a ready babysitter and insisted on providing dinner for her tenants. Her ways were so tender and her personality so sweet that no one was mean enough to discourage her disastrous culinary exploits. Spaghetti at her table, which was offered at least three times a week, was a mysterious red, white, and brown concoction. We would occasionally encounter an unidentifiable piece of meat hidden among the pasta. There was no money in my budget for restaurant food, so I and my son, Guy, were always loyal, if often unhappy, diners at Chez Jefferson.

My mother had moved into another large Victorian house, on Fulton Street, which she again filled with Gothic, heavily carved furniture. The upholstery on the sofa and occasional chairs was red-wine-colored mohair. Oriental rugs were placed throughout the house. She had a live-in employee, Poppa, who cleaned the house and sometimes filled in as cook helper.

Mother picked up Guy twice a week and took him to her house, where she fed him peaches and cream and hot dogs, but I only went to Fulton Street once a month and at an agreed-upon time.

She understood and encouraged my self-reliance and I looked forward eagerly to our standing appointment. On the occasion, she would cook one of my favorite dishes. One lunch date stands out in my mind. I call it Vivian's Red Rice Day.

When I arrived at the Fulton Street house my mother was dressed beautifully. Her makeup was perfect and she wore good jewelry. After we embraced, I washed my hands and we walked through her formal, dark dining room and into the large, bright kitchen.

Much of lunch was already on the kitchen table.

Vivian Baxter was very serious about her delicious meals.

On that long-ago Red Rice Day, my mother had offered me a crispy, dry-roasted capon, no dressing or gravy, and a simple lettuce salad, no tomatoes or cucumbers. A wide-mouthed bowl covered with a platter sat next to her plate.

She fervently blessed the food with a brief prayer and put her left hand on the platter and her right on the bowl. She turned the dishes over and gently loosened the bowl from its contents and revealed a tall mound of glistening red rice (my favorite food in the entire world) decorated with finely minced parsley and green stalks of scallions.

The chicken and salad do not feature so prominently in my tastebuds' memory, but each grain of red rice is emblazoned on the surface of my tongue forever.

“Gluttonous” and “greedy” negatively describe the hearty eater offered the seduction of her favorite food.

Two large portions of rice sated my appetite, but the deliciousness of the dish made me long for a larger stomach so that I could eat two more helpings.

My mother had plans for the rest of her afternoon, so she gathered her wraps and we left the house together.

We reached the middle of the block and were enveloped in the stinging acid aroma of vinegar from the pickle factory on the corner of Fillmore and Fulton streets. I had walked ahead. My mother stopped me and said, “Baby.”

I walked back to her.

“Baby, I’ve been thinking and now I am sure. You are the greatest woman I’ve ever met.”

I looked down at the pretty little woman, with her perfect makeup and diamond earrings, and a silver fox scarf. She was admired by most people in San Francisco’s black community and even some whites liked and respected her.

She continued. “You are very kind and very intelligent and those elements are not always found together. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, and my mother—yes, you belong in that category. Here, give me a kiss.”

She kissed me on the lips and turned and jaywalked across the street to her beige and brown Pontiac. I pulled myself together and walked down to Fillmore Street. I crossed there and waited for the number 22 streetcar.

My policy of independence would not allow me to accept money or even a ride from my mother, but I welcomed her and her wisdom. Now I thought of what she had said. I thought, “Suppose she is right? She’s very intelligent and often said she didn’t fear anyone enough to lie. Suppose I really am going to become somebody. Imagine.”

At that moment, when I could still taste the red rice, I decided the time had come to stop my dangerous habits like smoking, drinking, and cursing. Imagine. I might really become somebody. Someday.

8 Review

8.1 Flemmich Webb on *Boxer Handsome* by Anna Whitwham

This is a review of Anna Whitwham's novel *Boxer Handsome* by the freelance editor, presenter and journalist, Flemmich Webb.

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Book review: 'Boxer Handsome' by Anna Whitwham

FLEMMICH WEBB Friday 10 January 2014

Boxer Handsome is Anna Whitwham's first novel and was inspired by her grandfather, John Poppy, a young featherweight boxer at the Crown & Manor Boys Club in Hoxton. This familial connection gives this exciting debut an authenticity, which allied to a confident writing style, suggests Whitwham has a promising future ahead of her.

The story opens with Bobby fighting childhood friend Connor over a girl. Both amateur boxers in the same boxing club in East London, they are due to fight each other in the ring in a divisional competition in a week's time, but this flurry of fists takes place by the canal, bare-knuckled and brutal. Bobby wins but can't resist a victorious act of brutality that drives subsequent events.

Whitwham acknowledges the value of boxing in society – giving wayward kids a focus, trainers acting as father figures to young men – through Derek, who runs the Clapton Bow Boys Club and keeps an eye out for Bobby and his other charges.

But she doesn't shy away from its brutal side and the thin line that separates regulated fighting in the ring from unfettered violence outside it. Casualties of this world lay strewn throughout the world Whitwham creates. Joe, Bobby's father, was once a decent boxer himself, but is now a sad alcoholic, a broken shell of a man with none of the respect that his fists once commanded. Bobby's mother, a victim of domestic abuse at the hands of Joe, sees history repeating itself as her son follows in his dad's footsteps, a slave to the code of honour that this macho world demands. There's something of Shakespeare's emotionally stunted warrior, Coriolanus, in Bobby. When he meets a local girl, Chloe, he suddenly glimpses an alternative to the world he has inhabited since birth. The tragedy is that he lacks the emotional skills to seize this chance.

Whitwham's writing is as sharp as a one-two combination, short punchy sentences that capture effectively the brooding atmosphere of the East End, the threat of violence at every turn and the savagery of fighting. "Then [he] cracked the bridge of his nose wide open. Skin split. Blood spat. Connor stumbled about headless."

But the book is tender, too, a change of pace that deepens the emotional resonance of the characters. Bobby is uncharacteristically unsure of himself when he first takes Chloe on a date: "She had a grip on him, a spell that held him in awkward moments he couldn't get out of." This is a promising debut, and it will be interesting to see how Whitwham handles subject matter in subsequent novels that is more distant from her own experience.

8.2 Martin Hoyle on television drama *The Bridge*

This is a review published in the *FT Weekend* magazine of the television drama *The Bridge* by the TV, radio and film critic, Martin Hoyle.

Pick of the Weekend: The Bridge

By Martin Hoyle

Saturday is complete again: Scandinavian noir is back. After the civilised machinations of Danish politics in *Borgen*, we plunge into the dark world of terrorism, mass killing and poisonous grudges underlying humane, orderly Nordic society.

The second season of *The Bridge* (BBC 4 9pm) resumes thirteen months after the story of the first ended, with an opening less gruesome but just as eerie when an apparently unmanned coaster crashes into the Øresund Bridge. The five drugged youngsters found chained on board trigger more joint Danish–Swedish police cooperation. Hoorah for the chalk and cheese combination of frowsy, easy-going Martin (Kim Bodnia) and the unsmiling, briskly robotic Aspergerish Saga (Sofia Helin).

Things have changed, of course. Martin is still recovering from the murder of his son by last season's mass killer who, though safely imprisoned, haunts him to the point of obsession.

Saga's antiseptic, angular, pre-eminently logical psyche is disturbed by her efforts at normal relationships. She has learnt to detect when people are making jokes and laughs heartily if unconvincingly, hurt when Martin gently points out that this is unnecessary. 'I acknowledge their attempts to be amusing,' she explains earnestly...

Saturday's brace of episodes is rich with subplots, vivid subsidiary characters and a reminder that even mass terrorism can be rooted in the skewed world picture of one unbalanced human. There emerges a common theme: connection, the failure to connect, the fear of abandonment and isolation, and the Nordic thriller's paradoxical juxtaposition of high principles and violent action, efficiency and murderousness. The dark is all-pervasive.