

TODAY YOU WILL...

> WORK TOWARDS MASTERING A STRATEGY FOR MEMORISING THE LOCATION OF VITAL INFORMATION IN EXAMINATION TEXTS

YOU WILL NEED

> COPIES OF CHOSEN TEXTS
> MINI WHITEBOARDS AND PENS
> A3 PAPER AND COLOURS

STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

Searching for textual evidence can swallow valuable exam minutes, says **Chris Edwards** – so why not teach learners a short cut?

In my day, which wasn't all that long ago, for my English literature exam, I was able to enter the room with a text that had been annotated beyond recognition, so much so that it could almost have been published as a study guide had it not been for the upside down 'appendage' sketches on the inside cover and pretty much every fourth page thereafter. I wasn't worried that any potential buyers would be offended, but that I would have to split the royalties with my un-commissioned freelance

illustrator, who preferred to desecrate copies of *Macbeth* rather than learn any moral lessons from it.

However, nowadays there are no such issues for our youngsters who, upon entry to their exams, are given a pristine copy of their (teacher's) chosen text and are expected to answer a lengthy question whilst flicking through up to 300 pages of text in order to find some quotations that could be deemed vaguely relevant. More often than not, the appearance of a character's

name is sufficient for a student to be satisfied that the surrounding sentence slips perfectly into an argument in response to any question.

This lesson plan has helped me to combat the issue that a vast amount of time is wasted during exams by students desperately looking for evidence to back up their points. It works as a fantastic refresher, as well as giving students a foolproof way to flick straight to some material which will fill any PEE sandwich handsomely.



STARTER ACTIVITY

When the students are settled, their attention should be drawn to the numbers 0-9 written in sequence on the board. As a group, they should be asked to come up with an object to represent each number visually ('1' normally becomes 'gun', '2' becomes 'shoe' and so on). Allow for plenty of discussion about which ideas are strongest, and try not to disregard any suggestions; someone will inevitably offer 'sex' or 'dicks' for '6', for example, which can be a stroke of genius, as a great deal of research suggests that the ruder or more ridiculous the images are, the more likely students are to remember them. (You can test this theory for yourself by reading out a list of 30 completely random items to your class, including the word 'nipple'. When asked to write down the list from memory five minutes later, I can almost guarantee that this will be the one word every pupil remembers.)

TURN OVER TO CONTINUE >>

INFO BAR

+ STRETCH THEM FURTHER

ASK LEARNERS TO COMPOSE AN EXAM RESPONSE PARAGRAPH USING ONE OF THE QUOTATIONS, SHOWING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE TECHNIQUE CAN BE INCORPORATED INTO AN ESSAY.

+ ABOUT THE EXPERT



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MAIN ACTIVITIES

1 MIND MAPPING

Once the list of objects has been selected, it needs to be related to your text. When I use this technique, I try to select a different classroom for each character studied. The beauty of doing this is that you can get the students to choose the classroom of a teacher within the school who reminds them most of that character. Unfortunately, they always select my room when focusing on Lennie from *Of Mice and Men*, which isn't great for my self-esteem, but helps them to remember, when in the exam, that every quotation memorised in my classroom will be relevant to Lennie's character.

It is best to focus on 6-7 key quotations for each character. More able students should be asked to find these independently, whilst

less able learners may be given a sheet with the relevant page number, or even the full quotations themselves. Pupils should then be given a sheet of A3 paper, asked to draw a quick sketch of the character in the middle and then, mind-map style, draw an arm from the picture for each point, which extends to a quotation. Along the arm should be written the character trait that the evidence at the end of it represents (e.g. 'commanding' or 'naïve').

2 STORY MAKING

Once the quotation and page number are on the mind-map sheets, ask students to concoct a story to help them remember the page number and the character trait represented. They should use the objects decided earlier to relate to numbers and build in the character trait to the story.

You will be surprised by how creative your students can be when they are given free reign. Here is an example of a quotation from *An Inspector Calls*, which shows that Eric feels lonely and unsupported by his father, Mr. Birling at times of crisis:

"you're not the sort of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble" (page 54)

My students, using the word 'hive' to represent '5' and 'door' to represent '4', came up with a story, as follows:

"Eric got himself a job at a honey farm because he didn't want to work for his selfish dad anymore. Unfortunately, he got a bee HIVE stuck on his head and ran home to get help from his dad, who slammed the DOOR in his face."

3 DRAWING LINKS

Once they have come up with a story for each quotation, learners should draw a visual representation next to the words on the mind map. This will help them to associate this evidence from the play with the relevant page numbers, allowing them to remember, for example, that there is a quotation about Eric's strained relationship with his father on page 54.

SUMMARY

Once students have completed their mind map, ask them to put it away in a safe place and assess how well the task has worked. Give students mini whiteboards each and ask them to write the relevant page number for any quotation or character trait you read out. If you ask for a page number to find a quote about Sheila Birling feeling guilty, you can marvel as you hear them recount a story of her throwing Eva's SHOE into a TREE and feeling terribly rotten about it, before coming up with the page number 23.

The beauty of this technique is that you will have students coming up to you in corridors or on the playground, telling you ever more outrageous stories about characters from the texts you have studied.

HOME LEARNING

Explore how this technique can be linked to other subjects. For example, try to learn element numbers 51-70 in the periodic table or the dates of British monarchs for history.

