What the Dickens?

Lesson 3: Losing the plot

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.

Experience of writing and discussing book reviews.

Objective:

By the end of the lesson students will:

* have gained an understanding of how Charles Dickens’ work contains key themes which encourage the reader to reflect on the issues of the day;
* acknowledge Charles Dickens’ ability to provoke powerful responses to his work through the themes he embodied in his writing;
* understand the personal dimension of the effects of plagiarism and copyright infringement.

Main curriculum links:

Key Stage 2

* En1 Speaking and listening: 1a,b 2a,b,d, 3a,b,d, 3a,c,d
* En2 Reading: 2a,b,d 3g, 4a,b,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.

Settling activity/Starter:

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

Students share their experiences of their work being copied, stolen or unfairly borrowed. (Teachers should safeguard this situation)

* The teacher relates this to the wider theme of copyright theft.

Main teaching phase:

Timing: 40 mins

The teacher leads a discussion in which each student (and the teacher) shares with the whole class the outline of a book they enjoyed. They briefly describe how they discovered the book, its plot and what the book means/meant to them and why. A previous class reader might be a useful starting point for the discussion.

Where appropriate, the teacher identifies themes emerging from their book choice to some of the key themes in Dickens’ work e.g. poverty, the fear of debt and its consequences, cruelty, class/snobbery, corruption and honesty, good v evil.

The teacher explains that many of these themes emerged from aspects of life that Charles Dickens observed around him.

Teacher describes the way in which some of Dickens’ writing and public readings were powerful enough to influence public attitudes, and even the policies of the government, to issues such as poverty and slavery.

Using Activity Sheet 3, the teacher asks students to think about how the newspapers of the day in Charles Dickens’ time would have treated one of the issues that Charles Dickens addressed in his novels. If possible, the teacher shows students some real Victorian newspapers. Students to write their own headlines and newspaper articles on the theme they choose.

Using the IWB, the teacher encourages students to share their thoughts on a range of 21st-century themes e.g. bullying, cruelty to children, unemployment and leading on to issues such as terrorism, the cost of education, the right of media stars to privacy, corruption, attitudes of young people to authority.

Discuss which of these issues might preoccupy Charles Dickens in 2012 using Activity Sheet 3. Would some of the issues remain the same – the attitude of the public to the poor? Are we being complacent if we think that slavery has disappeared without trace? What new issues would concern him? (Teachers might wish to brief students on one or two key issues of importance to Dickens.)

Teacher explains the way in which some of Charles Dickens’ themes reflected his early life e.g. his father being committed to debtors’ prison (Marshalsea) and his own experience of being sent to work in a blacking shop and how these traumatic experiences left him with a lifelong fear of poverty and failure.

Students share knowledge of different writers’ backgrounds and how these may have affected their plot themes.

Discussion follows about the fact that Charles Dickens’ work was heavily reprinted without his permission and the fact that he campaigned for the introduction of appropriate copyright laws. How did this affect him as he tried to make a living? How might appropriate copyright laws have helped him?

Class discusses how impoverished English literature would be without the benefit of Charles Dickens’ work and how the absence of adequate copyright laws could have prevented him from earning a living as a writer. Discussion continues to consider how copyright theft could, or may have already, prevented a 21st-century Dickens from being able to produce great modern works of literature.

Plenary:

Timing: 10 mins

Students who have completed newspaper articles and thematic passages to share them with whole 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.

Homework/Extension:

Students tasked to create a passage of writing which explores and/or illustrates some current themes.