

## **A Poem to Justine Greening**

Hey Justine Greening  
Listen up  
Talk is the sea upon which all else floats.

You politicians are all talk.  
You talk on the doorstep, you talk on TV  
You chat to constituents, you shout over each other in the House  
You speak to crowds  
You talk to convince colleagues  
You share ideas and stir into action  
You think together and write in committees.

You have a voice  
And you use it.  
You use it.

Should our classrooms be silent?  
Should our children just listen?  
Should our children not convince, share stir, think, write together?

You talk with confidence. Where did it come from?  
How did you know what you said was important?  
Your confidence is part of your cultural capital.  
How was it nurtured, from Baa baa black sheep  
To proposer for the motion?

Shouldn't our children learn from tradition?  
If so, it started with speech.  
The Greek chorus, the Seafarer, Beowulf and Grendel  
The Socratic dialogue, the Bard at the Globe.

Shouldn't their talk be valued?  
Shouldn't they discover what talk is, and how powerful it's been  
To you and others?  
Shouldn't they learn to have a voice and use it?

Understanding depends on talking  
Communicating depends on talking  
Expressing your identity depends on talking  
Having friends depends on talking  
University seminars depend on talking  
Exam vivas depend on talking  
Success at work depends on talking  
Cabinet decisions on education depend on talking  
Peace between nations depends on talking

Soft Brexit or Hard – it all depends on talking  
Being human – child or adult – depends on talking.

Are the corridors of power quiet?  
Because the corridors of schools are being silenced.  
Talk is being hushed.  
Voices aren't being heard.

If talk is the sea upon which all else floats  
Let us teach our children to swim in it, strongly,  
And bathe confidently in its depths.

## **Fostering Critical Reading**

In an educational context that is so shaped by the demands of summative assessment, how can we foster critical reading in our students, induct them into a reading culture and help them to position themselves as readers? How can we allow our students to find their own voice as readers so that they can meaningfully analyse and engage with texts?

To enable students to become critical and confident readers, we need to expose them to a variety of text experiences, including texts from different genres and contexts, of different forms and intentions. Through talk around text students should be given the opportunity to ask questions that help them to focus on the content and purpose of a text and position themselves not only as a contemporary reader but also explore how a text might be experienced by others.

To be fully functioning members of a democratic society, students should be able to engage in the cultural conversation of mankind. Students should be able to appreciate the text as a construct that has a context and intertext. We make sense of the world through language, woven into different forms and structures – by experiencing and critiquing texts students will be able to make sense of themselves in relation to the world around them.

## Pink and Green Should Never Be Seen

Remember that if you do not use paragraphs you can't get higher than a level 4

Use PEE/PEEL/SPEED to structure your paragraphs

Vary your sentence starts

Use more sophisticated punctuation – experiment with - ; and :

Check for capital letters and full stops

FANBOYS need commas

Ed-ing-ly words make a good sentence starter

TiPToP paragraphs

Even better if...

Check your work for spelling errors

Lovely use of imagery, however, to improve you must ...

I am really glad that you feel sorry for George, but you must back up your points with quotations

Three stars and a wish...

What Went Well?

This has not gone well.

## Excuse Me

Excuse me, humble English teacher,  
I think we need a word  
I've just noticed from this spreadsheet  
Your results are quite absurd

*It may sound 'hippy dippy'  
To you it may annoy  
But before we worry about levels and 'progress'  
We need to find the joy!*

But what about the school's Progress 8 and Rapid Progress made!

*With a broad experience of rich, exciting texts, solid foundations are laid.*

But is it Data Driven? Data is everything, haven't you heard

*Good luck with measuring empathy, pleasure and dexterity with words*

But what about this Flight Path that looks interesting on my wall!

*Your metaphor is lost on me, real readers fly above them all.*

Are you Differentiating, Stretching, Challenging, Intervening, Targeting...?

## **A Letter to My PGCE self**

The Creative Teacher. What does that mean? Is there a unit on the PGCE which should turn you into this?

Does it mean hours spent at the laminator making whizzy tessellating resources for students to match at the start of a lesson? Does it require 10 different colours of card and a role play to remember 'key terms'?

Is it something you can download from Teachit at 10 to 8 on a Monday morning?

No.

It is:

Questioning – yourself, the text, what you want your students to go away thinking and feeling about the work you've been exploring.

Being responsive and flexible – some of the most powerful learning experiences were never on the original lesson plan

It's about letting go. Not being restricted by a Learning Objective or PEE straightjacket.

It's about realizing that when a student doesn't understand, YOU are the one who needs to find a different way of communicating (getting angry and repeating yourself will only raise your blood pressure)

It's about you also being the student – you are exploring a text together and if your reading of Othello is the same on your tenth reading as your first, then something's gone wrong.

It's about modelling what it is to be creative - how can you be expected to produce imaginative original writing having never encountered any inspiring examples? Remember creativity is a work in progress so let them see you struggle!

It's about being a perennial performer – leave your own inhibitions at the door and lift the writing off the page by example.

It's about challenging rather than dissipating their energies, about us finding the meaningful link between what we're reading and their own lives.

It's about risk taking and failing in front your ever-critical audience and showing them that it's ok.

It's about communicating the wider, empowering purpose of what we're doing in the English classroom, far beyond the immediate hoops to be jumped.

It's about letting them realize that there's a world of pleasure to be had out there, even when the Internet's down.

It's about modeling what it is to be a critical, imaginative and discriminating reader and the pleasures in this.

Do all this, and you've nailed it!

## Radicalism for our times

I sit outside the box,  
Standing on the edge,  
Like an elephant in between the criteria,  
The fountain pen poised in between my fingers,  
Waiting for the timer to start,  
The exam question to be echoed,  
And echoed again,  
The sweat the drip,  
The fear to cascade  
The clock to start its countdown.  
The lined paper was distributed  
The date and title drawn  
I was ready, I think?  
When...

"FREEWRITE!" she said...  
or was it freedom?  
We met together  
Wanting to explore  
That space, so much stimulus  
The words she chose, the work on the wall  
Those wizards  
That energy and magic  
Collecting your work in the precious notebook  
Marking place and time  
Sounds and chats  
All these words so far removed from everyday  
Choice  
Excitement  
Freedom

The hands of the clock had shifted slightly  
"Tim" she repeated  
"Tim"  
The bell had called  
But I wasn't there  
I was stuck in an imagined world  
A space without limits  
Criteria  
A capital SP and question mark  
Red circles  
Grades  
Levels  
Criticism

Fear  
Humiliation  
Progress  
Peer Assessment  
Self reflection  
Highlighters  
Two stars and a wish

It was my space  
The elephant had disappeared  
I could write  
Just not that way.

## Letter to Nick Gibb

Dear Mr Gibb,

We're making this presentation to you because we want to give you the means to leave a powerful legacy in creating critically literate citizens for the future.

Critical literacy is a way of reading both the word and the world. It gives readers the tools not just to understand the text but to question, evaluate and make reasoned judgements. In an era of fake news and non-verified online information sources, what better way to protect and develop young minds?

We already know about your passion for literacy. Embracing critical literacy will ensure new levels of intellectual enquiry in classrooms across the nation.

From decoding to making meaning to simple interpretation, students go on a learning journey when they enter the world of texts. Critical literacy is the end destination of that journey, properly equipping them to be active citizens.

In a critical literacy classroom, students learn to question everything, basing this on sound judgement and reasoning. Students might look at how to read texts from different perspectives, questioning the underlying assumptions, or re-purpose texts so they take on a whole new meaning, or re-write them so that they offer a radically different view.

To create a critically literate population is to take a risk: they will question politicians, stand up for what they believe in and challenge the way things are. Surely you wouldn't disagree that these are necessary and noble aims?

To reject critical literacy is to create a nation of passive and easily manipulated subjects, Surely this is the last thing you want, given the anxieties manifested in the Government's Prevent Agenda?

Fortunately, the English and Media Centre is here to help. For a reasonable price – and a considerable discount for bulk purchases – you can buy every child in the nation a copy of our soon to be released *Diverse Shorts: stories to promote criticality, discussion and debate*, meeting all your critical literacy needs in one publication.

## **This poem makes me feel thirsty**

*To a Year 11 student about to sit their GCSEs.*

Making your response stand out in the exam will mean drawing on everything you've been taught ... but there's something else too. It's about confidence, about expressing your emotions, about your personal response.

Making your response stand out in a crowd  
Sometimes means more than what you've been taught in a classroom:

Don't worry – you should express your own opinions: it's allowed.  
You need to be creative.  
You need your mind to be active.  
It's not going to happen with you being passive.  
Bring yourself to it.  
Have a debate.  
Forget the clock.  
This is not just about English.  
Life requires this kind of thinking; to grow, to flourish.

Value your viewpoint, take pride  
And be confident to say it; none of your ideas  
Will ever be redundant,  
That's what learning means.

If you can look at things from more  
Than one point of view: ...  
How much richer is that going to be?  
You're going now – practise it!  
Make connections between your own  
experience and Romeo – what's your point of view?

So go out and draw on your experiences.  
Put them on paper.  
Don't be frightened.  
Make more experiences.  
Be creative.  
It's reading, it's watching, it's taking part,  
It's visiting, it's talking, it's listening.  
It all counts.