Night-Time

The Night Circus by Erin Morganstern

KS4 example writing journey

Structure, cohesion and sentence structure

Overview

In this document

This short *writing journey* is intended for use at Key Stage 4, although it can profitably be adapted for Key Stage 3.

At KS4, planning for writing can be limited due to pressure on curriculum time and students' main regular experience of writing can be through exam-style task practice. The units in this series of writing journey planning for KS4 are intended to support improvements in students' writing through explicit teaching and the use of rich textual extracts as both stimulus for ideas and models for writing.

The focus for this series of KS4 writing journeys is on structural and cohesive features of texts and the adaptation of sentence structures for effect. These elements have been identified as being key to success in writing at GCSE, as well as being noted areas for improvement for many students.

Each of the KS4 writing journeys planned has a loose thematic link to the majority of the key texts specified for GCSE English Literature, meaning that these units can be integrated into planning linked to a literature text, either at a key moment in the text or once study has been completed. They can also be used as a bridging unit between two or more literature texts or adapted as stand-alone units in preparation for narrative/descriptive writing at GCSE.

In this writing journey, the stimulus text is the opening chapter from Erin Morganstern's novel, *The Night Circus* (Doubleday, 2011). This extract is freely available online. The motif of *night-time* is a common feature of a number of the texts across the range of GCSE English Literature specifications; pupils are invited to explore the differing ways that night-time can be used symbolically and to write a narrative that takes place at night.

Points to consider when using this resource

Teachers must adapt example plans to reflect AfL, prior learning, national curriculum requirements and the needs of individuals.

It is important that students have the opportunity to apply the learning from these writing journeys to other, more independent writing tasks, including those completed under examination conditions.

Main Outcome

Write a narrative that takes place at night. This narrative might be inspired by a key moment in one of the GCSE Literature texts, or it might be inspired by an image.

Examples of potential writing tasks:

- Romeo and his friends' arrival at the Capulet ball as day sinks into night
- Macbeth, prior to or after his murder of Duncan
- Mrs Cratchit lies awake on Christmas Eve
- The Little 'Uns face nightfall on the island in fear of the Beast
- etc.

Students should be encouraged to explore different viewpoints or experiences of known moments in the text.

If using an image as a stimulus, a choice of images should be offered; those used to spark discussion during the stimulate and generate phase of the writing journey could be used as stimuli for the final written outcome.

Key features of writing expected as an element of the final written outcome:

- ambitious vocabulary linked to darkness and light
- use of the motif of gradations of light/dark to structure the narrative
- use of ambitious sentence structures, including multi-clause sentences and the use of present (-*ing*) and past (-*ed*) participle phrases.

Summary

Stimulate and Generate	Capture, Sift and Sort	Create, Refine, Evaluate
Explore ideas about night-time	**Explore Morganstern's style**	**Plan and write a story using elements of Morganstern's style**
During this phase, students explore ideas around night-time and darkness, unpicking the connotations and symbolic meanings given to night-time by different writers. Emphasis is given to discussion, generation of ideas and the collation and learning of ambitious vocabulary in response to stimulus material (images and quotations). Students are encouraged to think about the usefulness to writers of night-time as a space of both lawlessness and freedom.	One distinctive element of these learning journeys is the use of a literary extract as an exemplar of expectations, or WAGOLL (*what a good one looks like*). This creates the opportunity to use the exemplar text deliberately practise comprehension strategies for unseen texts such as visualisation, prediction, summarising and questioning, as appropriate for the students in the class. If students are not familiar with these strategies, these could be modelled by the teacher using the *think aloud* approach.	In the final phase, students use structural and grammatical elements from the style of the extract studied to shape their own writing. Time is spent planning and drafting in order to create a polished final written outcome.
This phase also offers an opportunity for revision of the motif of night-time and its different uses in a range of literary texts, making connections between texts and looking at the meaning given to night-time within individual texts.	Students explore the structural and cohesive features of the text and use sentence imitation strategies to mimic the writer's style.	Students evaluate their writing, focusing on the impact of the structural features used to create the desired atmosphere.

Stimulate and Generate Phase

NB: If students have not been working in this way, collaborating in groups, time will need to be allocated to teaching students the skills required. The *Why Do Group Work* document, which gives details of different group work styles and configurations, is freely available in the open resources area of the moodle.
http://english.hias.hants.gov.uk/course/view.php?id=482

Key Learning:

  - To explore cumulative and changing symbolism of night-time

Initial Question: What aspect of the night is this presenting?

Provide different groups with different initial resource - 1 key quotation and selection of images

(Adaptable resource provided – print images and quotations as cards and distribute around classroom among groups; edit resource as desired). Suggested groups below.

- Night-time as a cover that hides things
- Night-time as a dream space
- Night-time – restlessness and insomnia
- Night-time – nocturnal
- Night-time – wildness/excitement
- Night-time – fear, darkness and anxiety
- Night-time – beauty and romance

Students explore in focus groups (one key theme) before jigsawing to share responses. Students take one key image with them that represents their understanding of this concept.

Key Questions

- Is night time a time of danger or safety?

- Is night time a space of lawlessness or freedom?

- Why do normal rules appear to be suspended at night?

- How is this useful to writers?

Students create mindmaps to explore the layers of meaning, ideas around and symbolism of night individually, but through discussion as a group of the different concepts and associated vocabulary

Capture, Sift and Sort Phase

Explain the outcome options to students and that they will be using the extract from *The Night Circus* as a WAGOLL for their own writing.

<mark>**Key Learning:**</mark>
<mark>- To articulate my thought processes as I read for meaning</mark>

Reading of *The Night Circus* by Erin Morganstern

Focus on modelling and applying the thought processes of comprehending a text.

- Share the title *The Night Circus*. Use mindmap and understanding from previous lessons to make predictions about the text.
- Model comprehending the text up to 'Closes at Dawn' but modelling 'thinking aloud' and annotating to illustrate
- Students then work together to continue to annotate the text in the same way, exemplifying their thinking
- Students finish reading the text, doing this independently
- **NB: if students are already secure in doing this, the scaffolding may not be required**

Ask students to identify the references to light/time (i.e. 'grey sky', 'by afternoon', 'in the fading light')

Focus on modelling and applying the thought processes of summarising the text by noticing the key sections and shifts/changes

- Model noticing the shifts in your visualisation. For example:
  1) I am imagining a very odd, possibly menacing circus as it is black and white with 'towering tents' in a 'colourless world'
  2) The picture in my mind then shifts to the crowds gathering
  3) 'You are among them' – shift of viewpoint from observer to participant
  4) 'First, there is a popping sound' – the circus starts come to life as the night falls
- **NB: if students are already secure in doing this, the scaffolding may not be required**

Students create a flow map 'boxing up' the structure, plotting in the references to light.

<mark>**Key Learning:**</mark>
<mark>- To analyse the effect of the writer's structural choices</mark>

Focus on modelling and applying the thought processes of exploring the impact of structural choices

- Model exploring the intended impact on the reader
  1) Overall this text seems to be building up anticipation from the moment the circus arrives to the moment the crowd are allowed to enter – it seems more and more intriguing as the writer draws out the suspense by making us wait.
  2) At first it seems quite detached and distant, as if you're just observing and

describing from the outside – big picture description of the circus as a whole

3) When it shifts and repositions the reader so that 'you are among them' the detail becomes quite sensory (temperature, smells, sounds) to emphasise the physical 'reality' of the scene

4) The references to the changing light show how time is moving forward and the gathering dusk reminds me that the circus opens 'At nightfall' and that this is getting closer
Etc…

Add effect on the reader to boxed up structure

*There is the option at this point to model or practise answering a GCSE structure question if desired.

<mark>Key Learning:</mark>
- <mark>To use a full range of sentence forms for effect</mark>

Model using sentence imitation to secure sentence structure using embedded descriptive clauses:

When the tents are all aglow, <u>sparkling against the night sky</u>, the sign appears. Stretched across the top of the gates, <u>hidden in curls of iron</u>, more firefly-like lights flicker to life.

Note with students the impact of contrast between complex descriptive sentences and simple sentences

Students select 4 sentence structures that interest them from the text and imitate these structures, deciding where these sentences will fit within their narrative.

Create, Refine, Evaluate Phase

Key Learning:
- To structure a text using a repeating motif to create anticipation

Students return back to the initial explorations of night-time and plan their chosen option using a chosen structure:

- Light to dark
- Dark to light
- Dark to light to dark (or vice versa)
- Cyclical

Focusing on desired effects on the reader, identify the emotional reactions wanted by the end of the narrative and the emotional steps the reader needs to go through. Box up plans:

Desired effect	Reference to light/dark	Details

Key Learning:
- **To write in fluently linked paragraphs with integrated discourse markers**

Students write their narrative/descriptive piece, ensuring that the motif of light and dark is repeatedly used to link and shape the text in order to create the desired impact on the reader (anticipation +…)

Key Learning:
- To propose changes to enhance effects

Model editing process (not simply secretarial corrections) followed by shared editing and improvement of a prepared example, focusing on structure and cohesion and the ways that motifs are used to create anticipation.

Students self and/or peer edit their writing

Key Assessment Outcomes:

Assess against the AO5 and AO6 descriptors for the exam specification studied by students, focusing on the elements for organisation and sentence construction.