

Teacher's notes

General points

We wish to emphasise from the outset that what is provided is resource material for teachers and students. While the pages are presented in such a way that text and related activities appear together, often on double page spreads to make photo-copying more straightforward, these are not simply worksheets. Many of the tasks are suggestions, to be followed up and expanded by class teachers, who will wish to select from the material offered and add appropriate texts and ideas of their own.

The teacher's involvement as a reflective practitioner is indeed crucial to the approach that we are advocating.

Each unit is free standing and can be used without reference to other parts of the book, but the range and variety of genre and approach that can be found in the anthology as a whole are not always fully presented in each. Unit 3, for example, is essentially made up of two extended prose pieces, one literary and the other non-literary. Nor is the material offered in each unit intended as representative of what is available - the pieces are simply examples and the unit headings under which they appear, at times only loosely apply.

Unit 1 - Birth and Infancy

We make no apology for including two poems on death in infancy in this opening unit. Death is often a taboo subject in schools yet one that is properly the subject of some of the finest literature. Consideration of it ought not to be confined to the final unit and these poems give an early illustration of the way in which themes transcend unit boundaries.

The Birth of Jesus, 1.1 - 1.4

The comparison of two translations of the same textual material raises the issue whether the text is literature to be cherished, or living language to be understood as simply and directly as possible - a subject explored in 1.4.

Nettles

Another poem by Vernon Scannell appears in Unit 9, for which the Teacher's Notes include comments from the poet himself.

1.19 Rites of Passage

This is the first of a number of *research projects* scattered throughout the anthology. Not every unit has one but, where they are included, they are designed to open up possibilities for library work, group or class discussion that can lead on to individual coursework. For this particular project

the assistance of the R.E. department may be useful. 1.20 and 1.21 activities could be linked to this.

Unit 2 - Childhood

As schooldays have been extensively anthologised elsewhere, we have deliberately concentrated on other aspects of childhood in our selection for this unit. The sole exception is the *Tom Sawyer* extract, which is included for the interesting issues of collective moral responsibility and substitutionary intervention on behalf of another that it raises.

King John: Act 4 Scene 1

King John is a Shakespeare play not often read in schools. If you or your students would like to explore it further, the *Cambridge School Shakespeare*, from which this extract is taken gives many interesting ideas for studying the play.

2.18 The Welfare State

This clearly will be a difficult issue with many students. Yet it is one that can be sensitively explored through such passages as *The Visitor*. You will best know whether it is one to avoid.

Unit 3 - Teenage Years

Students are encouraged to consider differing accounts of events, to judge with sensitivity and to develop their awareness of how family relations become strained. “Honour your father and mother” is easy to say - is it easy to *do*?

Challenging the stereotypical portrait of Anglo-Asian women and arranged marriages is also a feature of the unit.

Unit 4 - Love and Marriage

Love is often seen as being solely about self-fulfilment, and lovers can ‘worship’ their own feelings at the expense of others. Students explore the long-term effects of our behaviour on others - selfishness and other sins have consequences. The imagery and content of poetry show love in its infinite variety. Through the use of contrasting texts, students are encouraged to think through the problems and issues faced by lovers.

Popular radio channels are full of love songs, songs about being young and misunderstood. The love they celebrate is a warm, liberating feeling. It is true that romance feels good, but the distinguishing feature of a Christian view of love is its very different point of view: love is not something you *feel*, it is something that you *do*.

Women who marry for money

The materialistic attitudes of this *Marie Claire* article may well be glaringly obvious, but should not be allowed to go unchallenged. The tasks in 4.13 and 4.14 are specifically designed to open up that debate and may give rise to class or group discussion on the subject.

Sonnet

This is the first of a number of sonnets in the anthology, both Petrarchan, as here, and Shakespearean - see *Sonnet 116* on page 70. There are further examples of sonnets in Units 6, 7 and 10.

Unit 5 - Family Life

In this unit we concentrate on just two aspects of family life: meals and travel. But, eating together is a significant social activity, as the opening extract

suggests, and life itself is often portrayed as a journey which we all travel.

Great Expectations

The Cratchit family’s Christmas dinner in *A Christmas Carol* gives another Dickensian Christmas family meal scene.

Weekend

Perhaps Fay Weldon chose the name Martha for her put-upon character with another Martha in mind. The quotation from *Luke* chapter 10 in the speech bubble between 5.9 and 5.10 allows the comparison to be drawn.

Unit 6 - Work

In this section we have deliberately focused on work in a wider sense than simply that of paid employment.

Warning

This poem could easily have been placed in one of the later units, although it is not so much about old age, as an initial reading might suggest, as the conventions and restrictions of earlier life.

On his Blindness

Some students are likely to need guidance in sorting out the precise meaning of this sonnet. Milton was steeped in the language and teaching of the Bible and it may be helpful to explain both the source and the meaning for the following:

- *light* (Matthew 6 vv 22,23) - as he has gone blind his light has been dimmed;
- *half my days* (Psalm 90 v 10) - half is therefore thirty-five years;
- *one talent which is death to hide* (Matthew 25 vv 14 - 30) it was the servant who buried his one talent, rather than putting it to use, who was condemned to death;
- *my true account* - again a reference to the parable of the talents. The account is the reckoning that the king in the parable asks of his servants;
- *day-labour* (John 9 v 4) - night, which, in blindness has come early to the poet, is the time when ‘no man can work’;
- *fondly* - meant foolishly in Milton’s day;
- *mild yoke* (Matthew 11 vv 29, 30).

Unit 7 - Middle Age

While we would not want to suggest that this period of life is one of anxious reflection, it is true that some

of the questions that have been put off come back with greater insistence as the grey hairs form. More to the point, they are questions that we can encourage students to ask from the objective distance of youth, as they look at them through the eyes of Dorian Gray or Mr Polly. Success may be elusive, but it is relationships that matter. “Who am I?” ask Bonhoeffer and Clare, and at least for Bonhoeffer, there is a clear, though complex, answer.

Something really worth preserving

The work based on this advertisement is intended as an extended introduction to the whole unit. You may find that just some of the tasks will suffice, in which case 7.2 is probably the most appropriate. On the other hand there is sufficient here to form the basis of coursework, especially 7.5 - 7.7.

A Consumer's Report

This poem is deceptively straightforward and it may be helpful to go over the substance of 7.8 - 7.10 in class first. Students may welcome some indication of what consumer research questionnaires look like.

Making an End to Things

The History of Mr Polly is a rather more difficult text than its presence in many school stock cupboards would imply, but the episode in which he contemplates suicide proves much more accessible than the rest of the novel. 7.22 - 7.25 offer several ways of working through the issues facing him. They could be undertaken as group work.

Unit 8 - Old Age

Much of this unit takes the form of a mini anthology of poems by writers contemplating their own or others' ageing, with stolid determination and quiet trust or with misapprehension and fear. On what are those feelings based? What is it like to be old? How can we face up to the prospect, however distant it may be? These are some of the questions that are raised in a unit that helps to prepare the ground for the two that follow.

The Gift of Immortality

This extract is particularly for higher level students.

How to be a Good Granny

This has been included with standard level students particularly in mind. The values underlying this pop magazine extract need to be called into question. What is the writer's attitude to marriage and family life? Isn't the whole approach morally neutral?

Unit 9 - Approaching Death

What makes life worth living? How do people approach the ending of life? Is this life all we have? What next? These issues are explored through a range of literary and non-literary texts.

Few young people manage to avoid death completely. The choice of texts is designed to open the subject up, and assumes active and sensitive teacher involvement. Some material does not reflect an orthodox Christian viewpoint.

9.1 _____, _____, _____ and _____

This introductory piece is intended as an oral exercise. It introduces death as one of our society's prohibited subjects, and explores various attitudes to it.

It might be worth spending a short time considering various euphemisms: from “passed away” to “kicked the bucket”.

9.2 Do you agree?

Sources of the quotations are as follows:

1. Francis Bacon *Essays: Of Death*
2. Alfred, Lord Tennyson *Break, break, break*
3. Henry Scott Holland (Canon of St Paul's Cathedral from 1884 - 1910)
4. William Ernest Henley *Invictus: Out of the night that covers me*
5. The Bible *1 Corinthians 14 v 26*
6. W. H. Auden *Funeral Blues*
7. Emily Brontë *No coward soul is mine*

A Kind of Hero; Richard Cory; Not Waving but Drowning, 9.5 - 9.9

The subjects of all three poems die prematurely; in each case we only have part of the story. The second and third poems raise the question of what makes life worth living. *A Kind of Hero* has similarities but also differences: the central character in one sense dies for others, but how far do we give him credit for it? Each poem has questions which could provide the raw material for a unit of coursework.

A Kind of Hero

Vernon Scannell wrote to us with suggested additional notes to explain the final stanza, as follows:

“*handcuffs* - handcuffed because he was taken straight from Military Prison to the troopship;
webbing - fabric belt and equipment, i.e. pack, gaiters etc.

white as rice - because soldiers serving in the glasshouse scrubbed their equipment until it was

white instead of blanching it a dark green camouflage shade.
 The point of these is that the soldier in the poem is just as subversive, rebellious and anarchic in the army as he has been as a boy at school.”
 We are grateful to the poet for these comments.

Letters to *The Times* and *Diary of a Country Parson*, 9.10 - 9.12

The questions on the letters and diary extract are intended to encourage students to look closely at non-fiction and non-literary texts. This work could be done in pairs.

9.13 - 9.17

The two newspaper articles on euthanasia are intended to provide some kind of balance. Some pupils will find Adrian Rogers’ language difficult. Because of this, and because of the emotive subject, it would probably be better to begin this work orally in class.

10.13 Personal Approaches

This is a major oral unit which could easily be extended. As it stands, it provides a range of poems from different periods, and a fairly simple framework for looking at them.

Unit 10 - The Last Enemy

This unit gives an opportunity to consider not only death but also resurrection.

The Prospect of Death

This uses two recent non-fiction texts. The questions, 10.1 - 10.4, could be used as an end in themselves, or could provide the framework for a possible coursework essay, as suggested in 10.5.

River or Sea?

The three extracts - poetry and prose - are concerned with leaving this life. The symbolism has obvious points in common, but the differences are more striking.

The Prophet is prepared to leave this world. He does this calmly, leisurely, and appears to be in control. His repeated words: “A little while ... and another woman shall bear me” express a distinctive - and not Christian - point of view.

Crossing the Bar hints at a possible difficult journey and expresses a “hope” (in the modern sense) for the end of it.

The Pilgrim’s Progress extracts suggest a range of approaches within the Christian experience. Christian almost drowns in the river that separates him from the Celestial City. The journeys of Mr Honest and Mr Valiant-for-Truth are less traumatic, and the details provide some indication of the reasons for this.