

# High Performance

London Nautical School Department of English and Drama



# Rationale

**To generate a culturally rich and stimulating learning experience that leads to a passion for English through challenge and authenticity.**

“It’s not about immediate perfection. It’s about learning something over time, confronting a challenge and making progress.”

— Carol Dweck  
Mindset: How You Can Fulfil Your Potential

## Aims

Students should be encouraged to exceed their targets through a passion for the subject and drive to succeed. We want to create learning environments that stimulate high performance through challenging and purposeful learning activities as well as giving students a sense of genuine accountability for their work. By sharing exemplar work, students should feel inspired to develop their own skills, using feedback to achieve their full potential.

## High Performers should be

- Able to demonstrate high expectations of themselves through their ability to develop skills and re-draft their work
- Ready to embrace a challenge
- Willing to develop skills outside of their comfort zones
- Ready to receive and act upon their feedback
- able to support themselves and each other when faced with adversity
- Experiencing triumph over challenge
- Engaged in learning through tangible ways

# Learning through dialogue

“Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction”

— Mikhail Bakhtin

## Creating a Dialogic Classroom

How can we stimulate purposeful, exploratory and challenging discussion within our classrooms?

### Dialogic learning environments

- encourage students to generate analytical lines of enquiry of their own
- value questions rather than answers
- have a clear expectation of students to engage through dialogue and learn through interaction

## Focus on the quality of the talk rather than the content of the discussion

King Edward VI Grammar School English department conducted research into discussion within their classrooms and concluded that meaningful and challenging discussion must be:

- Collective
- Reciprocal
- Supportive
- Cumulative
- Purposeful

The most difficult of these qualities was deemed to be **cumulative**, being as this incorporated the higher order thinking skills (HOTS) from the Bloom’s taxonomy (analysis, synthesis, evaluation). The staff found that this was best achieved when the teacher focused on an individual student and questioned them in detail in an open dialogue. This takes precision questioning, but can be very powerful when developing verbal reasoning and cognitive abilities.

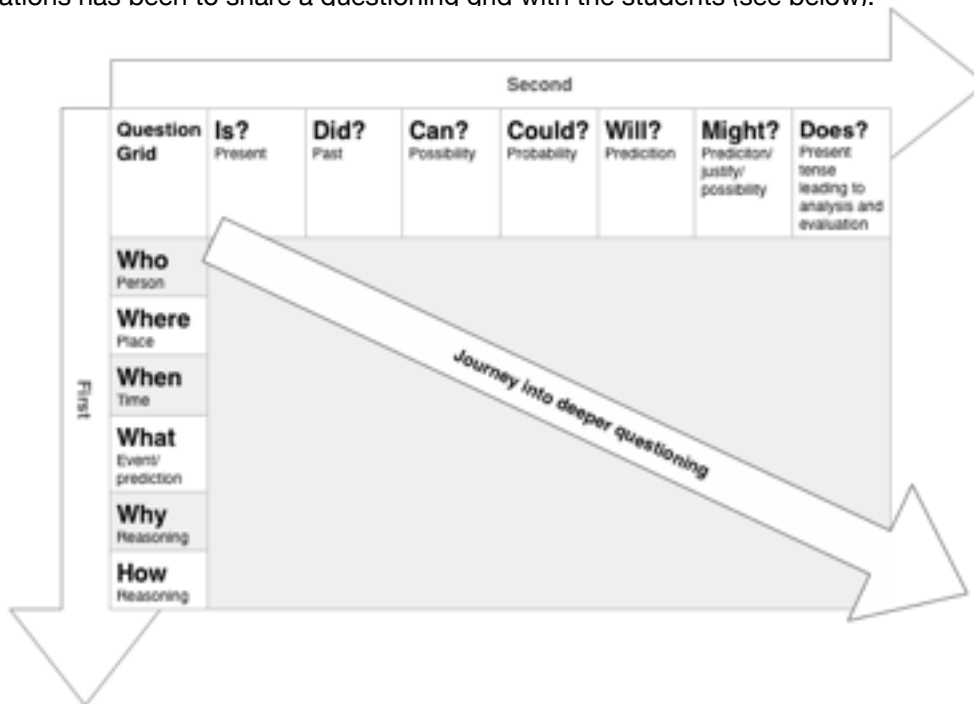
We should also be exploring how best to embed opportunities for metacognition and cognitive conflict within our own questioning.

The following prompts should be used to encourage an open dialogue that will lead to HOTS:

- ‘Talk to us about ...’
- ‘Why...?’
- ‘What do you think ...?’
- ‘Help us to evaluate ...’
- ‘How is this shown ...?’
- Can you explain ...?
- What questions do you now have ...?

# Pushing students to develop their own deeper questioning skills

An effective technique that I have embedded into my teaching practice and have used in successful observations has been to share a questioning grid with the students (see below).



The vertical axis makes a deliberate use of adverbs to begin framing questions, with the more challenging question stems at the bottom of the grid. In combination with this, the horizontal axis should then help to create a more sophisticated line of questioning. The inner area of the grid might well focus on comprehension, whereas the outer encourages analysis, evaluation and hypothesis.

## Let's Think in English

The Let's Think in English series is a body of lessons that have been created to stimulate students to develop reasoning patterns and cognitive development through discussion based learning. Chris has worked in conjunction with Laurie Smith at King's College to help develop this. The programme has been proven to encourage the growth of general thinking skills, not just scientific ones.

The programme uses three concepts from Lev Vygotsky:

- social construction of understanding (“we become ourselves through working with others”)
- the more knowledgeable other (teacher, peer, parent)
- students challenged to work at the upper limit of their current ability (zone of proximal development)

Progress is assessed in terms of Piaget's stages of cognitive development. John Hattie places Piagetarian programmes second most effective learning strategy with an effect size of 1.28

Chris, Rob and Joel have all been involved with this programme if you would like to gain an insight into the pedagogies of Let's Think; there is also a bank of resources for key stages 3 & 4 on Google drive.

Students in Year 7 should have a Let's Think lesson once a fortnight. Joel will be organising an inset on this in the next term so that you can begin embedding it into your practice.

# Socratic Circles

This method of discussion places much more emphasis on student interactions, leaving the teacher as an observer. The intention is that the learning takes place through a form of disciplined dialogue.




The aim is to build analytical and creative thinking skills, with students taking positions of responsibility for their own learning and pushing the understanding and analysis skills of their peers. This creates an authentic environment where the students are accountable to each other.

## Creating your own Socratic Circle lesson

A suggested method that I have used is as follows:

1. Give the students a short passage of text the day prior to the socratic circle activity.
2. Students read, analyse, and take notes individually. I normally hold up my annotated copy of the text, covered in markings and state that I am expecting something similar from each student.
3. Lesson day: students are divided into two circles - inner and outer.
4. The inner circle reads the passage aloud and discusses the text for about ten minutes, while the outer circle silently observes. They may take notes, but this is optional.
5. The outer circle evaluates the inner circle's conversation and provides feedback to the inner circle.
6. Students switch circles.
7. The new inner circle discusses the text for approximately ten minutes and are then given ten minutes of feedback by the outer circle.

I have a video of my old tutor group attempting this during a PSHE lesson that I used to deliver an inset on this method that you are welcome to watch.

<p>Name: _____</p> <p><u>Explore the ways in which Caliban and Ariel can be read as standing for different sides to Prospero's character.</u></p> <p>Essay Planning:</p> <p>1. Consider the evidence, read back through the book and pick out some key scenes.</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Act:Scene</th><th>In your own words what happens?</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>e.g. 2:3</td><td>e.g. Caliban is shown as being quick to anger</td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></tbody></table> <p>2. Now consider the characters, write down some quotations from these scenes or a description of what they do:</p> <p> Prospero:</p>	Act:Scene	In your own words what happens?	e.g. 2:3	e.g. Caliban is shown as being quick to anger											<p>Name: _____</p> <p> Caliban:</p> <p> Ariel:</p> <p>These Statements: Briefly say what you think your answer is going to argue</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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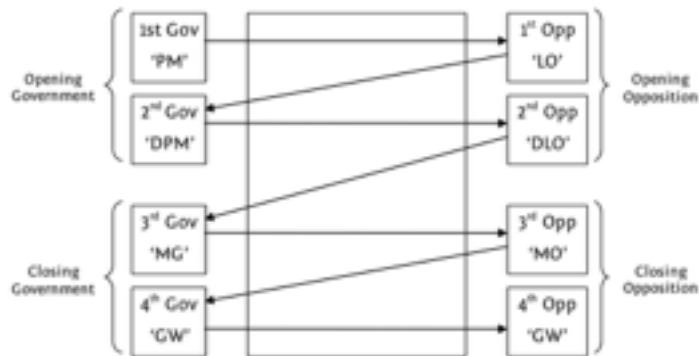
# Subjectivity

We don't analyse a text because we enjoy analysis, but because we are defending our own argument; we are looking for evidence to support our own thesis statements. To simply focus on the skill of analysis without developing a personal affinity to a text can be both damaging and meaningless. Rob created the previous worksheet to help students form thesis statements of their own when writing their essays. Throughout the course of the debate, students would use their notes on the sheets to challenge each other's interpretations of the text.

# Debating

There are some excellent resources at [www.debatingmatters.com](http://www.debatingmatters.com). The Debating Matters website has lots of resource packs that you can distribute to students or link into your own blogs. There are a number of different structures to debating, we should try to be using the British Parliamentary style. You can find details of this on the [Cambridge Schools debating competition website](http://Cambridge Schools debating competition website).

Each team should have:



Debating challenges high achievers because of its potential for creating cognitive conflict through the unpredictable nature of the questioning in the forum. Those students speaking are accountable to each other and know that they will be called upon to justify their arguments by their opposition and their audience.

Most year groups are taught in blocks, this will allow some excellent opportunities for inter-class debating.

# Ambiguity

"I began by tinkering around with some old tunes I knew. Then, just to try something different, I set to putting some music to the rhythm that I used in jerking ice-cream sodas at the Poodle Dog. I fooled around with the tune more and more until at last, lo and behold, I had completed my first piece of finished music."  
— Duke Ellington

## Rationale

Where the outcome or path are not obvious, this necessitates an increase in reasoning and thinking in group discussion, thus creating cognitive conflict.

Ambiguity helps to stimulate challenging discussion.

High achievers thrive when presented with agency and open ended tasks. This makes them accountable to themselves, but also allows for creativity through freedom.

## Open ended tasks need

- clear expectations of minimum standards
- a clear format, but not necessarily a clear goal
- to allow freedom for students to develop their own creativity in response to the task(s) set
- to allow opportunities for you to learn something about your students

The subject content has to be dominant throughout the end product; students must use their knowledge and imagination to convey concepts/themes taken from the given unit of work.

## Examples

- create a 10 minute mini lesson that teaches a given concept that you feel is important from [insert text/unit title]
- create an extra scene for a play you have been reading
- interview a character from your book after a significant event
- transformative/multimodal writing
- create a physical representation (symbolic prop) of a theme from the given text you have been reading

# Depth

"It is what you read when you don't have to  
that determines what you will be when you  
can't help it."  
— Oscar Wilde

## Increase opportunities for Project Based learning & Reading Theme Studies

Choice is a very powerful tool within our classrooms. By giving our students agency via a variety of tasks, we allow them to pick tasks that suit their learning needs and allow them to take ownership of their personal development within English.

The [Reading Projects](#) should now be in use with each year group. Remind your students of the long term goal on a regular basis and discuss their overall presentations accordingly leading up to their date. Remember that for IGCSE English Language, these presentations will count towards 20% of their final grade.

We want to encourage healthy reading habits with our boys, but more than this, we want them to analyse what they are reading and share their findings, particularly with those students who may be reluctant readers. Positioning themselves with a Line of Enquiry that they might follow will add purpose to their reading, but allow students to recognise that they might read across a variety of platforms. The teacher is able to monitor the students' progress via their work on blogs. This practice allows students to be accountable for their own learning; raising the stakes when students deliver their findings to their audience. Here are some examples of Chris's theme studies from [Jonas Kalvis](#) and [Mark Allaway](#).

Chris's post on successful homework strategies ([you can find it here](#)) justifies exactly why these two strategies are effective in terms of increasing student accountability in high stakes scenarios. The project provides different opportunities for analysis of a text that allow students to develop their creativity and personal interests for a set text. I have experimented with project based learning with my [Year 8](#) and [Year 9](#) classes with considerable success of groups making [symbolic props](#)/creative pieces and performing their own drama devised pieces from the text, either learning sections rote or building to perform them.



# Grammar For Writing

"Grammar is what gives sense to language ... Sentences make words yield up their meanings. Sentences actively create sense in language and the business of the study of sentences is the study of grammar."  
— David Crystal

The principles that underly this focus on the exploration of grammar with a purpose. Students should be given the meta-language of grammar, but in a meaningful way that links the device to its function.

## Aims

- students to become 'designers of writing', consciously crafting their work with a greater understanding of word classes and syntax and how these might be used for a particular effect
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- Establish a culture of debate where students are encouraged to experiment and play with language
- Make explicit links between established writing and the style of writing being analysed by the students.
- Depth - not moving on until we know our students are secure with current skill being studied

Chris's resources on this can be found [here](#), the focus is exploring the language of dystopian fiction. The sequence of lessons looks at prepositions, noun phrases and adverbials leading to the students writing their own dystopian opening.

Our department grammar progression can be found [here](#).