

Text 1: Charlie Brooker – ‘Too much talk for one planet: why I’m reducing my word emissions’

Audience, purpose and mode

Audience: *Guardian* readers, fans of Brooker, broadsheet newspaper readers, those with an interest in satire, intelligent general readers and readers of *Private Eye* magazine.

Purpose: to express an opinion and inform, to amuse, to satirise conventions and use of social/other media such as TV and print and ‘green issues’, to engage readers with the reasons for writing (for an audience), and in the writing process.

Mode: newspaper article in print. Generic conventions are reflected in the headline/sub-heading structure giving a concise overview of the article.

Points for analysis and discussion

Students should be encouraged to closely analyse, discuss and evaluate the text and consider the effects of literary or linguistic choices.

Some points of interest might include:

Brooker’s voice: confrontational, wry, sardonic tone.

Reflections on Brooker’s comments on other modes and modality (multimodal) texts, and how newspapers have changed.

Inter-textual references to other media: *Private Eye* and social media (eg Twitter, online versions of newspapers in print) and himself as an author; his relationship with his editor and his own perceptions of his audience.

The following techniques are evident in this text:

Use of irony and sarcasm.

A cohesive, linear structure, with digressions; the run of the argument/opinions revealed through (for example) humour, pointed phrasing and direct address to the reader.

Tone and register: elements of spoken language features are seemingly used (or rather conveyed) through the mixture of colloquial and more formal register.

The use of punctuation within paragraphs and parentheses to offer asides.

Discourse: how the whole text reflects on the (pervasive?) use of social media.

This text gives opportunities for students to reflect on a variety of terms and concepts. Some examples might include:

Use of semantics in relation to types of media and the language of green issues and the green debate; (social) media as pollution, eg ‘yet another factory ... pumping carbon dioxide into a toxic sky’.

Use of neologisms, eg ‘wordstorm’, and lexis of social media and IT, eg ‘Photoshop’, ‘meme’.

Use of repetition for comedic effect, to address the audience and shape the article, eg ‘Here, have a full stop. And another. And another.’, ‘events and noise, events and noise’.

Comic use of hyperbole for effect, eg ‘elderly man from the age of steam’, ‘sitting grumpily in a spaceship ... wearing a stovepipe hat’.

Use of the imperative, eg his final challenge and dismissal of the audience in three words and his skill in engaging and addressing with ‘his’ audience, and its mirroring of the article’s structuring earlier in the text, ie ‘there are exits all over this building’, ‘now get out’.

When discussing the effects of literary or linguistic choices, students might be asked to consider questions such as:

What is the overall tone of the piece? How is this achieved?

What is the intention of the text? How do you know? How successful is it in achieving this?

What is the context in which this text was written? How has the context influenced the writer? How has the text been crafted or shaped to meet the expectations of the supposed audience?

What does the writer intend to tell us about themselves? How do they create a sense of their personality in the text?

How are his views on 'acceptable' levels of engagement from readers and criticism in the online arena portrayed? How does he suggest his experience contrasts with female writers in similar spaces?

In what ways does Brooker convey his views on the value of communication online? What does he reflect in the way he presents hybridised versions of newspapers and feature (opinion) articles?

Links and connections

Students should be encouraged to make connections across texts, drawing comparisons with and contrasts to other texts:

To what extent are the generic conventions similar to Birrell's 'As gay people celebrate, the treatment of the disabled just gets worse' article in the anthology? Are the audiences seen as similar, as a type of 'broadsheet' newspaper audience?

How the articles contrast in tone and register but both reflect upon contemporary issues. How they contrast (and compare) in overall structure. To what extent do they differ in the internal structuring of paragraphs and overall address to the reader?

External sources/reference to similar feature- and opinion-led articles and publications should be encouraged, and may be drawn from a variety of print and online versions of the same newspapers (*Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The FT* etc.) Other useful comparisons could be drawn from satirical-based sources (*Private Eye* magazine, both in print and online) and general publications that focus on current affairs, eg *The Economist*, *The New Statesman*, *Newsweek*.

Suggested teaching activities

Brooker is identified as a satirist and broadcaster. With the students, discuss and explore recent, and less recent, examples of satire in print and on television. In a group task, ask students to research and report back on examples of their favourites, writing brief evaluations on why they think they are effective.

In reference to the provenance of the article, Brooker refers at one point to being '... all set to write to their letters page to whine in the most pompous manner imaginable.' Using some suitable examples of letters published in *Private Eye* as additional background, ask students to reproduce Brooker's imaginary letter to the editor.

Ask students to convert the article into a screenplay, rewriting the text into a suitable format for presentation to camera. Students could perform their pieces as individuals or divide the script between pairs or small groups.

Students could be asked to imagine, plan and produce a dialogue or an extract of the scene between Brooker and *The Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger in the style of a play.