**Working with 19C texts: Teaching suggestions**

**Performing the text:** Students work in groups to prepare a performance of the text which captures the nature of the story. Performances could be rehearsed readings or a looser dramatization.

The extract from *A Tale Of Two Cities* provides a good basis for a radio adaptation for three voices: Lucie, the old man and the third reading the remaining prose. You might direct them to pay particular attention to the punctuation and think how this suggests ways to read the piece.

The Victorians were great fans of melodrama - texts with sensational plot lines, designed to appeal to the audiences’ emotions. Characters were often very simple stereotypes. *Captain Murderer* is a good example of a melodramatic villain. Mercy’s way of opening her reading of the story could certainly be described as melodramatic. Students may like to think about bringing out this feature of that particular story in their performance.

Hardy’s *The Superstitious Man’s Story* is very consciously presented as if it is an anecdote being spoken by a narrator. Students could consider what it is on the text which creates the sense of a speaking voice, and a listening audience. When preparing a reading aloud, how would they characterize the speaker?

**Re-telling the story**

The teacher, or a student who has prepared it in advance, tells the story to the class. This will not be word for word, just a fairly plain telling of the story. The listeners then have to reconstruct it from memory.

A variation on the storytelling approach which works well with *The Superstitious Man’s Story* is to divide the class into groups of five. Their task is to devise a re-telling of the story as a series of anecdotes told from different points of view: the sexton, Mrs. Privett, Nancy Weedle, John Chiles and Philip Hookhorn. A similar approach could be used with any of the stories where multiple viewpoint can be developed.

**Transforming the text:** Choose a short section of any of the stories and write a treatment showing how they would film it. This would also provide an opportunity to do some work on the way moving image texts are constructed if you haven’t done this in other KS3 schemes of work.

The treatment doesn’t have to be a storyboard, although that is certainly one possibility. They could produce a written account of what the camera sees, or explanations of the intended effect. Sometimes this gives a stronger sense of the writer’s vision. Where there is dialogue, this should be included as part of the treatment.

Another visual transformation could be creating tableaux of key scenes form a story. For example, if you had 5 tableaux only to convey the broad outline of *Captain Murderer,* what would they be and how would they look? They could be digitally photographed or shared “live” in the classroom.

**Comparing texts:**

The two Wilkie Collins extracts are story openings, with the same material re-worked. Students could consider:

* What differences of content there are between the two
* What differences of narrative style are there?
* What effect is Collins trying for? DO his intentions differ between the two versions?
* Which of the two versions work best as an opening for them as readers , and why?

**Working with punctuation**

Conventions of punctuation have changed over time. In particular, the writers in this collection sometimes use much longer sentences than would be the case now, chaining with commas or semi-colons. Getting students to

Working in pairs, students could look at the statements below and investigate whether they think they apply to any sections of text you identify. (The extract from *Great Expectations* works well with this activity).

1. All the sentences are long and complicated
2. The sentences are mainly simple ones, with just one clause.
3. The sentences often involve two or three part, joined with ‘and’ or ‘but’ (compound sentences)
4. Minor sentences (sentence fragments) are used for dramatic effect.
5. A lot of detailed description is packed into the longer sentences
6. Simple actions are expressed in simple sentences.
7. At tense moments the sentences become shorter and simpler
8. Several sentences of the same length build tension
9. There are several types of sentences, for example exclamations, questions, statements, commands.

They could then choose one of the longest sentences from the extract they are working with:

* Try out some different ways to split up the sentence
* Make a decision about the best way to split the sentence up.
* Identify what they think is the most important part of the sentence

**Creative writing**

Using any of the texts as a model, students could write the script for an anecdote re-told by one of the characters. A more advanced assignment might to convert the prose extract, or part of it, into a drama script, including stage directions.

Short story writing could take the form of a prequel or sequel, or simply a story which took the genre conventions of one of the texts from the collection.