



Teacher's Toolkit

Using *Discovering Literature* in the classroom

bl.uk/discovering-literature

Contents

What is <i>Discovering Literature</i> ?	3
How to find what you're looking for	4
How to use the webspace with your students	
Before reading	
1. Icebreakers using British Library collection items	5
2. Using articles	7
After reading	
1. Using collection items, works and people pages	9
2. Exploring critical articles on a text	10
Approaches for working on articles in class	
Approaches for helping students get to grips with articles when working independently	
3. Critical trails - working on several articles across the <i>Discovering Literature</i> webspace	13
4. Independent project work on a text or topic	14

Access and reuse guidelines

A lot of the material on *Discovering Literature* can be reused by teachers and students for non-commercial purposes. We do ask that you check the usage terms by each item to ensure that material is available for reuse.

The British Library asks that anyone reusing digital images from this collection applies the following principles:

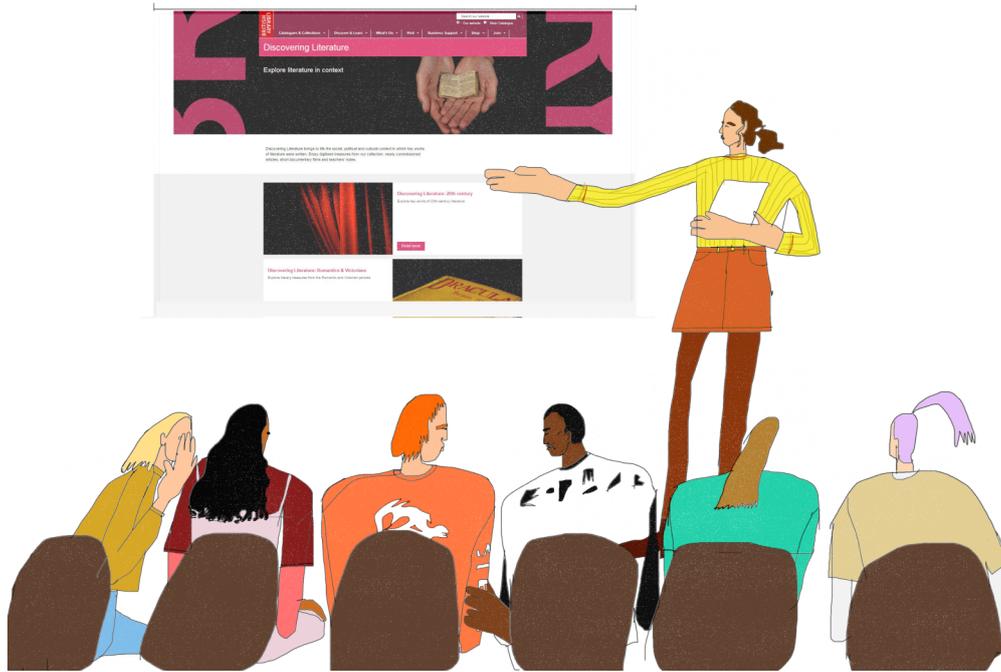
- Any adaptations made to an image should not be attributed to the original creator and should not be derogatory to the originating cultures or communities.
- Please credit the source of the material and provide a link back to the image on the British Library's website, encouraging others to explore and use the collections.

This usage guide for images is based on goodwill. It is not a legal contract. We ask that you respect it. For any further questions please contact copyright@bl.uk.

Illustrations © Hannah Buckman. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. Please credit the copyright holder when reusing this work.

What is *Discovering Literature*?

[Discovering Literature](#) is a free online learning resource, using British Library treasures to bring literature to life. The site is brimming with inspiration for English teachers and students, from GCSE to A level, EPQ and Cambridge Pre-U. Alongside digitised manuscripts and vivid contextual sources, there are illustrated articles, short videos and teaching resources on a huge range of literary texts from *Beowulf* to *The Bloody Chamber*, from *Macbeth* to *An Inspector Calls*. Put the links on your school portal, share them with your students or embed the resources in your Schemes of Work.



The site covers over a thousand years of English literature, divided into five modules:

[Medieval](#)

[Shakespeare and Renaissance Writers](#)

[Restoration and 18th Century](#)

[Romantics and Victorians](#)

[20th Century](#)

A Teacher's Toolkit

This free pack was created by the [English and Media Centre](#), with the [Learning](#) team at the British Library. It shows you how to make the most of *Discovering Literature* in your classroom. There's a guide to finding resources and a whole host of practical tips to refresh your teaching. You'll discover innovative ways of using primary sources and articles to prompt debate, explore contexts, engage with critics' ideas, inspire creativity and promote independent research.

How to find what you're looking for

Top tip: You might not get the best results with the 'Search our website' function. Instead, try using one of the routes below.

- First choose your **module**. So, for Chaucer it's Medieval. For Virginia Woolf, it's 20th Century.
- Click on the **People** or **Works** tabs to find whole hubs of resources on key writers and works of literature, with links to all the relevant articles, primary sources and teaching resources.
- Explore by **Theme** to see articles grouped into broader topics such as Tragedy, Comedy, the Gothic, Gender and Sexuality, Crime Fiction or 20th-Century Theatre.
- Browse **Articles** for short illustrated pieces exploring key themes and characters, close readings or aspects of context. We've commissioned experts including Zadie Smith, Philip Pullman and Elaine Showalter. They're a perfect way to:
 - * refresh your subject knowledge
 - * explore different interpretations
 - * model excellent writing
 - * encourage independent research
 - * prompt debate
- Click on **Collection items** for beautiful high-resolution photos of:
 - * literary manuscripts and notebooks by iconic authors from Geoffrey Chaucer to Andrea Levy
 - * early printed editions and illustrations
 - * Vivid contextual sources, from maps to witchcraft pamphlets, reviews, playbills, posters, paintings and production photos

Project the images onto your screen as a starter or plenary. Use them to spark group discussion. If you want more information, there's a detailed description of each one.
- Click on **Videos** for short, themed films shot in relevant locations such as the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth.
- Download **Teachers' Resources** to find themed resource packs containing useful links and ideas for using the site to teach particular topics.

Before reading

1. Icebreakers using British Library collection items

Top tip: To find collection items relevant to particular texts, it's best to use the **Works** tab. Scroll down and click on the title of your text, and the '**related collection items**' are near the bottom of the page.

a. Getting to grips with genre - using covers and title pages

Introduce a genre (e.g. Narrative, Gothic, Tragedy) by looking at a range of covers and title pages. Ask students to jot down their impressions or questions on post-it notes. For example:

- Why do the title pages of Gothic novels present them as authentic documents?
- How do the title pages of narrative texts change over time? What does this show about the changing place of the novel in society?

b. Texts in context - using contemporary images

Collect together images related to the text and its context (e.g. [The Canterbury Tales](#), [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Great Expectations](#), [Nineteen Eighty-Four](#)). Ask students to annotate the images with anything they find interesting, surprising or puzzling, and note any connections or differences.

- Use any differences as a way of complicating simplistic understandings of historical context (e.g. that all women were subservient in Shakespeare's day).
- Feed in snippets from the British Library notes accompanying each collection item. In what ways does this information add to, complicate or challenge their initial ideas?

c. From page to stage – using production stills

Provide stills from one or more productions of a play (e.g. [An Inspector Calls](#), [A Taste of Honey](#) or [The Taming of the Shrew](#)) and use the prompts below to focus discussion:

What they see	The sort of world it seems to be	Ideas about the characters and relationships between them
The mood or tone	Words they might use to describe the image	



d. How did the first readers experience the text? Using early editions, posters and playbills

Ask students to look at images of early editions and posters or playbills for the text (e.g. [Frankenstein](#), [A Christmas Carol](#) or [Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde](#)).

- What do they notice about the typeface, the look of the page, any adverts, prefaces or letters to the reader?
- What does this suggest about the status of the text (or author), the reader's expectations and so on?

e. How have readers and critics responded over time? Using reviews

Ask students to introduce reviews of films, music or games that they are interested in. Then consider what is distinctive about the focus of the review, the style and the context in which it is published.

Show reviews from the British Library's collection to prompt questions and fuel speculation (e.g. [Jane Eyre](#), [Pride and Prejudice](#) or [Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde](#)). Ask students to reflect on where the reviews were published (for example a literary journal, a newspaper) and anything interesting about the way they are presented (for example choice of headline, images, adverts etc.).

- Who does each review seem to be aimed at?
- What does this suggest about the text?

2. Before reading: using articles

Top tip: To find articles relevant to particular texts, it's best to use the Works tab. Scroll down and click on the title of your text, and the '**related articles**' are near the bottom of the page.

a. Meeting and greeting - titles and intros

For this activity, select a range of articles on the set text. Then copy and paste the titles and introductions onto separate sheets of paper, folded so that only the title is visible.

E.g. [Elaine Showalter's article about *Mrs Dalloway*](#)

Mrs Dalloway: exploring consciousness and the modern world

Elaine Showalter describes how, in *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf uses stream of consciousness to **enter the minds** of her characters and portray cultural and individual **change** in the period following the First World War.

- Give each student a sheet with just the title and introduction of one article.
- Ask them to look at the title only and speculate about the kind of text it refers to. They should then unfold the paper so that they see the introduction. What does this add to their speculations? Ask them to highlight three words that strike them as being key to the text.
- Ask students to stand up and find a partner. They take it in turns to introduce their title and introduction, comparing what the different critics are interested in. Repeat this several times.
- As a class, pull out six to ten key words from the titles and introductions to use as the starting point for an agenda on the text. Throughout the reading, use these key words as foils for developing a response.



After reading

1. After reading: using collection items, works and people pages

Top tip: To find collection items relevant to particular texts, it's best to use the Works tab. Scroll down and click on the title of your text, and the '**related collection items**' are near the bottom of the page.

a. Reading as a writer – using manuscript drafts and notebooks

Use manuscript drafts and notebooks to give an insight into the writing process and to sharpen students' focus on stylistic features of the text (e.g. William Blake's '[London](#)'; [Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles](#); [the poems of Wilfred Owen](#) with Siegfried Sassoon's notes; stories from Angela Carter's [The Bloody Chamber](#); outline of chapters for [Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar](#)). They reveal that the words on the printed page were not the only one's considered. Authors made difficult choices about language, form and structure.

- Ask students to work in pairs, in the role of literary editors, to discuss the draft versions of texts. Consider:
 - * What is working well?
 - * What seems less successful?
 - * What alternatives would they suggest?
- Students prepare and share the feedback that they would give to the writer.
- They then have a go at redrafting a section, following their own advice.
- Review the draft text, their own re-drafts and the final text, as published. How have the changes altered the meaning and impact?
- As a class, brainstorm what you have learned about the writer's style. From this, individual students try to sum up the writer as precisely as possible in just six bullet points.
- Use this as the basis for creative writing. Students should try writing a short paragraph or stanza that includes three features of the writer's style. Then swap with a partner, who suggests possible edits. Discuss the effects of those changes.



b. Promoting your author - an advertising campaign or bookshop window display

Use the portrait of the author from the **People** page, along with any other relevant collection items (e.g. title pages), short extracts from the text, contemporary reviews and *Discovering Literature* articles. Students plan and present a campaign to promote their author's book tour.

Pairs/groups could prepare campaigns for different contexts, as a way of exploring the differences between how the author might have been presented (and received) at the time of writing and now.

- E.g. a bookshop window advertising [Wuthering Heights](#) in the mid-19th century might emphasise the writer's anonymity, the connection with the author of [Jane Eyre](#), or the reader's shocked responses. In the 21st century, the campaign might centre on the book's canonical status, the place of the novel in popular as well as literary culture, or [Emily Brontë](#)'s bicentenary.

c. Crystallising a writer - exploratory writing

Students read the introduction to their set text (from the **Works** page) and the biography of the writer (on the **People** page). They then highlight 6–8 phrases that particularly illuminate their text.

- They choose one or two of these phrases as the starting point for a piece of exploratory critical writing, using it as a stimulus or foil against which you test out your own ideas.

d. Putting on the show! Exploring production stills

Return to the production stills introduced before reading ([page 6](#)), to discuss the ways in which the director, set designer and actors have interpreted the play.

- Send students back into the text to find quotations to illustrate the stills.
- They take it in turns to introduce the quotation and explain the thinking behind their choice.

e. Evaluating contexts

Use the articles and collection items related to specific works and themes to create short contextual snippets of information (no more than 50 words each). Then provide the snippets as cut-ups, along with short extracts from the text.

- Ask students to arrange the context cards around the extract according to how relevant they think they are. Compare arrangements across the class, and ask students to justify their decisions.

2. After reading: exploring critical articles on a text

Top tip: To find articles relevant to particular texts, it's best to use the Works tab. Scroll down and click on the title of your text, and the '**related articles**' are near the bottom of the page.

Approaches for working on articles in class

a. Golden critical nuggets

For all the activities below, you will need to create a bank of tiny snippets taken from critical articles on a particular text – preferably controversial or provocative readings. These could be short quotations from the articles or statements based on the ideas they raise. The aim here is to develop students' abilities to think flexibly and use critical statements to develop their own thinking.

Just a minute!

- Students take it in turns to speak for a minute on a critical nugget. They can range as widely as they want, putting forward ideas to support and challenge the reading.

Boxing match

- Whatever their partner says in response to the critical nugget, they have to disagree!

Tag team – building an argument

- Students work together in pairs to build an argument in response to the nugget, with each of them contributing an idea in turn. Their argument can still consider both sides.

Speed dating

Each student is given one critical nugget.

- Ask them to read it to themselves without worrying too much about understanding every word.
- Students stand up and find a partner. They take it in turns to read the critical nuggets to each other and to talk about the connections between them or the different angles they give on the text.
- Repeat this four to five times.
- As a class, pull together new ideas about the text, based on the critics' views.

Below the line – response chains

- Students read their critical nugget and write 'Below the Line' style comments in response, being as provocative and controversial as they like. They then pass on the paper, with both nugget and comment. The person receiving the paper adds their thoughts on the nugget, comment or both.

