

Key Stage 3

English Career Resources for Teachers

(Career Education Guidance Objective 6)

The Poetry of Work

English Career Guidance Objective 6 proposes that students should 'Recognise that work is more than paid employment and that there is considerable variation in the value individuals and society attach to different kinds of work.'

Overview

In this unit, students will work collaboratively to define the term 'work' through dictionary research, mind mapping and class discussion. They will then explore Tom Sawyer's definitions of work and play by reading an extract from the novel. Two texts by Philip Larkin are used to explore attitudes to work through poetry.

The unit then guides students to investigate attitudes towards different kinds of work using a selection of poems that can be accessed online. Teachers' guidance notes to these poems, together with activities to support their students' investigations are provided. Finally, students are given an opportunity to explore different career paths through writing poems of their own.

The work is progressive and the teachers will need to make available samples of student work from Part 1 when they begin Part 2.

Part 1: Introduction: What do you call work?

Activity One

You will need: Dictionaries and thesauruses
Flipchart or big pieces of paper
Interactive whiteboard (optional)
Copies of the Helpsheet 'Dictionary and Thesaurus Research'

Tips:

- You can access online dictionaries and thesauruses by Googling and then display these on your interactive whiteboard.
- Adapt the Helpsheet 'Dictionary and Thesaurus Research'

Write the words WORK and PLAY on the board. Ask pupils to give their definitions of each word. Explore with them the differences between the **meaning** of each word.

Ask pupils to look up each word in the dictionary. Compare the dictionary definitions with those provided by the students.

Then ask students to look up 'work' in the thesaurus. Write these up for all the class to see. Do the same with 'play'.

Introduce the idea of 'positive' and 'negative' attitudes. For example, 'daily grind' conveys a negative attitude towards work. Put in a positive attitude as well. The Helpsheet called 'Dictionary and Thesaurus Research' shows sample definitions and lists of synonyms together with a table for sorting the words.

Ask students to sort the word lists for work and play into negative and positive columns. In a plenary, discuss what they have found out about attitudes to both words.

Activity Two

You will need: Copies of 'Toads' and 'Toads Re-visited' by Philip Larkin
Big sheets of paper (optional)

Tips:

- These poems are available online by going to: <http://plagiarist.com/poetry/4885> and <http://plagiarist.com/poetry/4886>
- You don't need to make copies of the poems – view them on the interactive whiteboard.

Display one of the poems so that all the class see it clearly.

Without any discussion, ask the students to read it through TWICE in their heads. Working in pairs ask them to answer these two questions:

*What is Larkin's attitude to work in this poem?
Which words and phrases are particularly positive or negative?*

To increase the impact of the work one strategy might be to provide students with a paper copy of the poem to annotate and keep.

In your plenary, refer back to the investigations into 'work' in Activity One and decide on the synonyms for work which are the 'best fit' for Larkin's poems.

Activity Three

You will need: Copies of 'What do you call work?'
Paper and pens for writing

Tips:

- The text is pre 1900 so you could link it into a scheme of work to cover that requirement.
- Ask students what things they do which they regard as 'work' and then do the same for 'play'.
- With older students you might prefer to replace 'play' with the word 'leisure'.

Remind students about the attitudes they have found out from their research in Activities One and Two.

Give out copies of 'What do you call work?' This is an extract from 'Tom Sawyer' by Mark Twain. It tells how Tom deals with the problem of having to work when he wants to play and shows how he arrives at his own definition of work. You can use this in a variety of ways. There are some discussion questions included at the end of the extract for you to use in any which seems appropriate. Since this is a nineteenth century text you may need to explain one or two phrases.

Part 2: What people feel about their work – investigating the poetry of work

Activity One (Homework assignment)

You will need: *Samples of students' work from Part 1.*

Tips:

- Students do not need actual copies of the 'Work Attitudes' as long as they have some sort of record of what they found out.
- Less confident students may be guided towards interviewing school employees such as: clerical staff and ancillary workers.

Briefly re-cap the students' collaborative definition for 'work', which was based on a range of sources both factual and literary used in Part 1.

Ask students to interview 2 or 3 adults about the work they do and their feelings about it. Ask students to record interviewee's comments under the three headings:

POSITIVE

NEUTRAL

NEGATIVE.

Either: Take feedback from this homework assignment and try to identify patterns in what people like and dislike about their work. Some will be 'job-specific' while others will be generic such as: having to get up early or the chance to meet new people.

or: Use the feedback to introduce Activity Two.

Activity Two

You will need: *An interactive whiteboard connected to the internet and linked up to a sound system to go to the Poetry Archive website at www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/search.do?method=theme&searchTerm=work*

Access to a suite of online computers so that students can access the poems independently

Tips:

- You will need to prepare for this lesson by first looking at all the poems and deciding which are suitable for your students.
- Experiment with the best way of introducing students to a poem. For example, ask them to close their eyes and listen to the words of the poet as the poem is read out aloud.
- The Poetry Archive has a downloadable lesson plan for teaching 'The Chimney Boy's Story' – go to: www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePlan.do?planId=961.

Introduce students to the poems by going to the Poetry Archive section on poems on the theme of work by clicking on the above link.

Demonstrate how to view a poem and listen to a reading of it. Stress to students that a single reading will not be sufficient to fully grasp the poem's meaning and impact. Suggest they listen to a poem at least twice.

The aim of this activity is to introduce a range of different poems and to identify jobs, aspects of the work described and attitudes towards the work. You might do this all as a class and work through each poem in turn.

Ideally, students should work in small groups to investigate the attitudes towards work which are expressed in several of the poems.

Finally students can decide which of the synonyms for work are most applicable to the poems they have studied.

Part 3: People and their work – poetry writing

Activity One - haiku

You will need: *Writing materials*
 Examples of haiku

Tips:

- A haiku is a brief Japanese form that has been adapted into English in various ways. Its usual definition is that it is a three-line poem, consisting of seventeen syllables split 5 - 7 - 5.
- For excellent advice on how to write haiku and examples go to: www.toyomasu.com/haiku/#Menu

Show pupils some examples of haiku. Try writing some haiku together. Here is one I wrote about the window cleaner who comes once a month.

My window-cleaner

Carrying his sponge
Water bucket and ladder
He's on the way up!

Activity Two – Acrostic poem

You will need: Writing materials

Tips:

- Though the lines don't need to rhyme – it does help to raise the level of challenge.
- Let students work in pairs on the writing.

Students choose an occupation that they think they would like to do and then create an acrostic poem full of attitude!

Here's an example:

Drills away all day
Enjoys filling in his time this way
Novacaine dulls the pain
Teeth are what he sees in a red lane
Inspection of mouths a speciality
Saliva, gobs and gums his reality
This is the life of the dentist!

Helpsheet 1

Dictionary and Thesaurus Research

Work

Here is one dictionary definition:

“to do a job, especially the job you do to earn money, or to make someone do a job:

- *He works at the local hospital.*
- *She worked as a cleaner at the hospital.*
- *Mike works for a computer company.*
- *It's not unusual for a junior doctor to work a seventy or sometimes an eighty hour week.*
- *Have you any experience of working with children who have learning difficulties?*
- *The instructors worked us very hard on the survival course.”*

Thesaurus synonyms:

“assignment, attempt, commission, daily grind, drudge, drudgery, effort, elbow grease, endeavor, exertion, functioning, grind, grindstone, industry, job, moil, muscle, obligation, pains, performance, production, push, salt mines, servitude, slogging, stint, stress, striving, struggle, sweat, task, toil, travail, trial, trouble, undertaking”*

Play

Here is one dictionary definition:

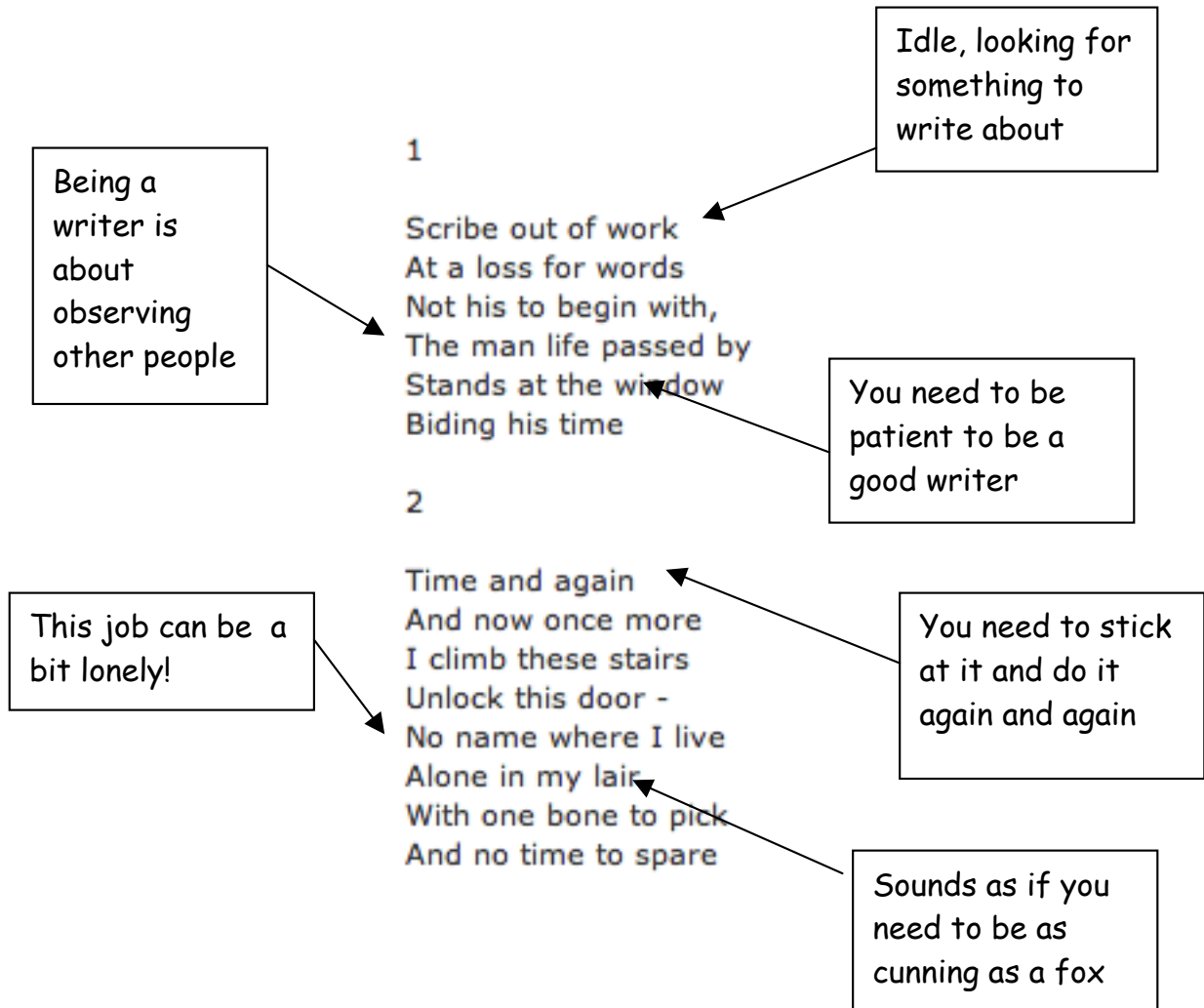
“activity that is not serious but done for enjoyment, especially when children enjoy themselves with toys and games: The kids don't get much time for play in the evenings. We watched the children at play in the park.”

Thesaurus synonyms:

“caper, dalliance, delight, disport, diversion, foolery, frisk, frolic, fun, gambol, game, gaming, happiness, humor, jest, joking, lark, match, pastime, pleasure, prank, recreation, relaxation, romp, sport, sportiveness, teasing”

Positive	Negative
Delight	Daily grind

How to annotate a text to research it



What do you call work?

This is an extract from the novel 'Tom Sawyer' by American author, Mark Twain. Tom, a boy in his early teens, is having to spend a sunny day whitewashing his aunt's fence. He dislikes this work mainly because it is preventing him from doing what he would like to do. Then he hits on a cunning plan to get someone else to do his work for him. In so doing, he stumbles upon a definition of what work is and what it is not!

Tom was whitewashing with vigour, and Aunt Polly was retiring from the field with a slipper in her hand and triumph in her eye. But Tom's energy did not last. He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of fun of him for having to work -- the very thought of it burnt him like fire. He got out his worldly wealth and examined it -- bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.

He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently -- the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Tom went on whitewashing -- paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment and then said: "Hi- yi ! You're up a stump, ain't you!"

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist, then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said:

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?"

Tom wheeled suddenly and said:

"Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."

"Say -- I'm going in a-swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther work -- wouldn't you? Course you would!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

"What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't that work?"

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer."

"Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you like it?"

The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth -- stepped back to note the effect -- added a touch here and there -- criticised the effect again -- Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little."

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind:

"No -- no -- I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence -- right here on the street, you know -- but if it was the back fence I wouldn't mind and she wouldn't. Yes, she's awful particular about this fence; it's got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done."

"No -- is that so? Oh come, now -- lemme just try. Only just a little -- I'd let you, if you was me, Tom."

"Ben, I'd like to, honest injun; but Aunt Polly -- well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn't let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn't let Sid. Now don't you see how I'm fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it -- "

"Oh, shucks, I'll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say -- I'll give you the core of my apple."

"Well, here -- No, Ben, now don't. I'm afeard -- "

"I'll give you all of it!"

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while Ben worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with -- and so on, and so on,

hour after hour. And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar -- but no dog -- the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window sash.

He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while -- plenty of company -- and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn't run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it -- namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a tread-mill is work, while rolling ten-pins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement. There are wealthy gentlemen in England who drive four-horse passenger-coaches twenty or thirty miles on a daily line, in the summer, because the privilege costs them considerable money; but if they were offered wages for the service, that would turn it into work and then they would resign.

The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances, and then wended toward headquarters to report.

Discussion questions

- What are Tom's initial feelings towards the 'work' of whitewashing his aunt's fence?
- What – for Tom – appears to be the complete opposite of 'work'?
- How does Tom make the 'work' of whitewashing appear to be attractive to Ben?
- What do other boys give Tom as payment for being allowed to help whitewash the fence?
- At the end of the extract, Tom has learned the difference between 'work' and 'play'. What is the difference for Tom and do you agree with his definition?

To access these poems go to:

www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/search.do?method=theme&searchTerm=work

Poem & author	Level of difficulty	Summary and notes
Curriculum vitae – Samuel Menashe	*	This poem is about the experience of being a writer, whose raw materials are words. The writer is seen as an outsider who observes other people and records them in words. This work requires patience (“biding”) and has to be done repetitively. The job is a solitary one but has its satisfactions.
Emergency Haying – Hayden Carruth	***	This is a challenging poem about the sheer physical labour of farm work. Running through the poem is a comparison between the pains of farming and the crucifixion. However, you can just read it as a graphic account of a harvest. As such, you could put it alongside poems by Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney which also deal with rural work and farming.
Straw hat & Dusting – Rita Dove	**	It’s important to read the poet’s introduction to these two poems to understand their historical and social context. ‘Straw hat’ deals with the harshness of work on in a factory while ‘Dusting’ deals with housework.
The Automatic Days – Alan Brownjohn	*	This poem deals with working life in a department store and is structured around one employee who walks past many of her co-workers. You could focus on just one section of this poem and look at the particular job which it deals with.
The Chimney Boy’s Story- Wes Magee	*	Teachers might want to explain the historical context of this poem so that students fully grasp it. Students should be alerted to the dangers such work involved. Its simple language and first person viewpoint are a bit reminiscent of Blake’s poetry. The refrains, simple rhyme scheme and structure all contribute to the success of this lyric which gives a voice to a worker who would have been invisible to most of the public.
The Innocence of Radium – Lavinia Greenlaw	**	Students must have pointed out to them the context which the poet provides. In the 1920s before the dangers of radiation were understood, radium was used on a wide range of products from children’s toys to paint. This poem is the story of workers in a New York clock factory and how they used radium to paint numbers on the clock faces.
Wall – Norman Nicholson	**	Surprisingly this poem only briefly considers the wall-builder at its conclusion. It is worth looking at though because it can lead you into discussing what inanimate products might say about themselves if they had the power of speech.
Washing the coins – Douglas Dunn	**	This is not a particularly ‘difficult’ poem but it is long. It is an account of being a potato picker in Ireland and is told in the second person. It describes the harshness of the work and of the people that did the work.