Summer Holiday Reading 2021

The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy

For our reading classes together over the summer holidays, we will be exploring each book in three lessons, with the first offering a general overview, the second delving into the stylistic and narrative elements of the writing and the final lesson offering a closer, more thorough examination of the text itself through the use of close textual analysis and with particular attention paid to literary techniques and structural devices. These lessons are designed to help the students develop new frameworks through which to read and understand literature, equipping them with the vocabulary with which to discuss themes, genre and morals.

*Lesson 1:* **Introduction to *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy***

In lesson 1 we will begin by discussing genre, thinking about the two key notions of science fiction but also, and perhaps more importantly, parody. From here the students will learn about the context of the book and the life and reputation of Douglas Adams. They will be able to evaluate their own feelings and opinions on the novel through this lens, thinking about what makes it a classic. We will discuss the way in which Adams uses humour and discuss the particularly dry, sardonic style he employs. We will consider the key themes and ideas explored in the novel and think about the moral of the story and what it means to be a hitchhiker. The class will be invited to think about how they can learn to value and enjoy the absurd and we will explore examples of other absurdist pieces of literature and art that they are familiar with. As a final through-line, we will consider other famous works that centre on absurdism and parody, thinking about Adams builds an entire universe around what he considers to be the weaknesses and absurdities of human life on Earth and asking what it is that he finds so amusing about the way we live our lives.

*Lesson 2:* **Exploring Style and Narrative**

In lesson 2 we will dive further into the novel, thinking about the vivid and brilliant fabric of the plot and characterisation Adams invents. We will consider the question of how we would react in Arthur Dent’s situation, listening to an extract from the famous audiobook and focusing on when he first discovered Earth is going to be flattened to make way for a bypass. The students will be asked to think about the ridiculous rules of Adams’ universe, such as carrying a towel and the real-life towel day this has spawned, and they will be invited to think of some of their own that fit Adam’s particular style of creativity. We will consider the characterisation, thinking about how classic archetypes fit into the narrative and create a rich backdrop of personalities. Finally, this lesson will touch on the philosophical framework of the book, debating why the number 42 is important and thinking about what Adams is saying about the human drive for meaning in the face of irrelevance. The class will be asked to consider *why* the author has made the stylistic and narrative choices he has made, thinking about author intent and why it is important to infer it.

*Lesson 3:* **Close Textual Analysis**

In lesson 3 we will be focusing on developing the students’ analytical skills, looking at closely analysing the text of the novel. The class will be asked to analyse and evaluate how sarcasm, puns and double-speak are utilised in this novel and will get the chance to write their own Vogon poetry. We will work on analysing key passages and quotations from the book, asking ourselves what particular wisdom can be drawn from this. This lesson will focus particularly on the use of language techniques and Adam’s unique and unusual writing style. The class will also have a chance to collaborate as a group in this lesson in creatively re-imagining parts of the novel, thinking about how to mirror Adams’ style whilst also putting their own innovative twist on his writing and ideas. This lesson will teach the class to read literature as both the audience and writer, analysing and explicating in equal measure, in order to develop their relationship with reading and understanding the deeper meaning beneath *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy’s* surface.