Winter Writing 2023

Years 567

Writers can take inspiration from many different components of writing- character, setting, genre- but one of the biggest and most poignant sources of inspiration comes from theme. This writing course will take the class through some of the major literary themes, exploring their use by famous authors from Shakespeare to Harper Lee, enabling the class to write stories and pieces inspired by themes and ideas. In each lesson we will explore philosophical questions regarding these major literary themes- i.e., what does it mean to have power? Can you have the individual without society? - comparing this to the things famous authors have to say on these ideas, whilst also exploring writing techniques that can enable the class to say something about these themes in original and unique ways. By the end of these ten weeks, they will have had the opportunity to practice and perfect their use of themes and morals, and will have also taken a mock exam, designed to help them find their own unique, original voice in their writing, experimenting with style and creating a distinctive authorial voice. They will have a homework task every week that enables them to showcase their work and receive weekly feedback on their writing.

***Lesson 1:* What is Theme?**

An initial look at the concept of theme and why it underpins every piece of writing out there. In this class we will look at the tradition of theme, the class will be encouraged to evaluate their own use of theme, and we will look at pertinent literary examples of themes, morals and symbolism. We will then play with this concept, writing passages that span themes and each have something unique, particular and important to say on the subject.

***Lesson 2:* Prejudice & Justice**

This lesson focuses on stories that revolve around prejudice and justice. We will debate the concept of both themes, discussing works such as Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* in order to ground our understanding of how these themes are discussed and developed. By the end of the lesson the class should be able to answer questions such as ‘what does justice mean to you?’ and ‘can authors have a real life impact on reducing prejudice and inequality?’.

***Lesson 3:* Environment**

This lesson will consider the theme of the environment, considering books from a modern cannon that deal with climate change and our relationship with the natural world. We will consider the work of authors such as Atwood and McCarthy who write on the way we treat the world around us- helping us to question things such as ‘is literature a force for change?’. We will also think about how this interlinks with genres such as sci-fi and why that might be!

***Lesson 4:* Power**

This lesson will deal with one of the most important themes in literature- power. We will touch on different authors’ conceptions of power- moving from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* to Orwell’s *Animal Farm-* considering how we can define power and touching on the philosophy behind these novels. The class will think about how to present power in their own writing, giving examples of different ways in which power can be presented and reckoned with in their stories.

***Lesson 5:* Individual vs. Society**

This lesson will look at concepts of the individual vs. society, thinking about what society means and why novels often focus on an individual standing slightly outside of a society they either cannot or will not be a part of. We will discuss the literary concept of the flaneur and consider examples such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *1984* The class will think about the philosophy behind society and the way we present it through the stories we tell, touching on dramatic conflict.

***Lesson 6:* Coming of Age**

This lesson will look at the genre and theme of coming of age- considering everything from the Victorian *Bildungsroman* to books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* as a point of comparison. We will discuss why people reflect back on childhood, touching on the concept of nostalgia and the purpose it serves and the class will discuss the kinds of moments in life that mark ‘coming of age’ such as starting a new school, learning particular life lessons and become an adult.

***Lesson 7:* Friendship**

This lesson focuses on the theme of friendship, diving into the way in which literature portrays these relationships and the extent to which this reflects real world experience. We will cover topics such as the presentation of female friendship (and its underrepresentation), alongside how portrayals of community, difference and love factor into the way these stories are told. Authors such as Zadie Smith and John Steinbeck will be used to explore this topic and the class will consider their own portrayal of friendship within their writing.

***Lesson 8:* Free Will vs. Fate**

This lesson will consider the theme (and philosophical concept) of free-will vs. fate, considering how this tradition has changed over time and how it intersects with ideas of philosophy, religion and morality. We will consider works such as *Dr Faustus* and *Harry Potter* in order to unpick the way writers create a framework within which their character operates and how writers ‘play God’. We will discuss the notion of free-will, thinking about why it is an important debate, and practice creating characters who either have it or do not.

***Lesson 9:* Redemption**

This lesson focuses on redemption, thinking about the human yearning for redemption and how this theme flows into character and narrative arcs. We will consider stories such as *A Christmas Carol* and *Crime and Punishment,* thinking about the way in which the theme of redemption shapes the story’s plot. We will think about what happens when a character is not redeemed within a story, or where their redemption comes at a cost, and the class will write and share passages utilising this theme, linking this to their own use of characterisation.

***Lesson 10:* Mock Exam**

This lesson will contain a mock exam to help test the students’ skills, enabling them to showcase all they have learnt about writing over the past sessions. They will be asked to complete an exam under timed conditions, after a group revision session at the beginning of class. They will have their exam graded and returned to them after the lesson.