

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Scuola di Specializzazione per l'Insegnamento secondario

ENGLISH LITERATURE WORKSHOP

Student: ELENA BRAITO

TEACHING UNIT	“Arts and war – the ‘style’ of violence”
TARGET	<i>5th year students of a secondary school specializing in classics</i>
STUDENTS’ LEVEL	According to the European Framework of reference: <i>B2+ / C1</i>
PREREQUISITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading and <i>analysing</i> literary texts: <i>basic techniques</i> - The first half of the 20th century: the historical, social and cultural context - Poetry in the first half of the century, in particular: Rupert Brooke’s <i>The Soldier</i> and Wilfred Owen’s <i>Dulce et Decorum Est</i>
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thom Gunn’s <i>Innocence</i>: the theme of violence in a classic style - The <i>relationship between style and contents</i> through the comparison of some twentieth century poets’ works carrying out the theme of war and violence in a classic style: Rupert Brooke’ <i>The Soldier</i>, Wilfred Owen’s <i>Dulce et Decorum Est</i> and Thom Gunn’s <i>Innocence</i>. - <i>Refining students’ ability to analyse literary texts</i> - <i>Grasping the reasons which caused the development of given textual features, in connection with cultural trends, the author’s personality as well as social and historical events</i> - Finding out <i>interdisciplinary connections (English and Italian literature, history, art and philosophy)</i>
AIMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging <i>dialogue and students’ critical mind, trying to separate truth from illusion, fact from rhetoric, historical event from interpretation.</i> - Stimulating students’ <i>reflection on war and violence</i> - Enhancing students’ <i>communicative competence and motivation</i>
SKILLS INVOLVED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Speaking</i>: explaining a viewpoint on the topical issue integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion; taking an active part in discussion in the familiar context of the classroom - <i>Reading</i>: analysing and understanding complex literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style - <i>Writing</i>: expressing points of view about war and violence at some length in clear, well-structured text - <i>Listening</i>: understanding extended speech and lectures and following even complex lines of argument that deal with reasonably familiar topics (poetical features, war and violence)

TIME	3 hours
MATERIALS	Visuals, photocopies, music, blackboard
METHOD	Students are led by the teacher's questions and slowly find out contents and connections. Students are always spurred on to intervene and to take an active part in discussion.

Introductory reflections originating this teaching unit

The relationship between poetic style and matters of war and violence is the heart of this teaching unit, which could be placed within an interdisciplinary module centred on the theme of war and violence in the twentieth century, in view of a final state exam. The subjects involved in the module are arts, history, English, Italian literature, philosophy. Students are led to the objectives through the analysis of *Innocence*, the interpretation of which is prior to a comparison with other previously studied poems (see prerequisites), both stylistically and from a thematic point of view.

Gunn's theme of manhood's ambiguity towards violence has a shocking effect, the topic being carried out throughout the poem with a nearly classic balance in an icy impersonal, "controlled" style. As a result, Gunn has often been accused of sadism and of taking a liking towards Nazism. Gunn has said of *Innocence*, "I'm trying to show how the celebration of energy can lead one to a kind of commitment where one finds that energy is not just a vacuum; it is very often destroying the energy of other people and is therefore maybe not such a great energy." (*London Magazine*, November 1964).

TEACHING UNIT'S STEPS

Lesson 1 : TEXT ANALYSIS – GUNN'S INNOCENCE

1. MOTIVATION – pre-reading activities (10 minutes): See enclosed pictures

Situation setting: use the following material to brainstorm your knowledge/experience about the subject of war and violence.

Vocabulary elicitation and vocabulary pre-teaching: see enclosed vocabulary network

Here is an example of a vocabulary network. Try to expand it with the words you already know and the ones you will come across working on the map.

2. FIRST READING (teacher reads) (2-3 minutes)

3. TRANSLATION (10 minutes) I think this activity helps refining students' interpretative abilities, as it forces them to choose the best translation among the various possible solutions: this step of course is to be carried out with the help of the teacher asking questions.

4. OPEN-AIR DISCUSSION: CONTENT ANALYSIS - 25 minutes

Look at these statements about the poem: you can agree, disagree or partly agree and partly disagree with each. Justify your opinion with reference to the poem.

Lesson 2: STYLE AND CONTENTS - See enclosed exercises

5. GROUP WORK: TEXT ANALYSIS (25 minutes). See enclosed analysis

The teacher monitors while students analyse the text, focusing on rhymes and stanzas, rhythm and meter, alliterations, consonances, internal rhymes, run-on lines, synaesthetic

words and figurative language; then groups discuss their results (a positive mark could be given to the best working group's students).

6. SYNTHESIS – Attention is focused on the objectives (style vs contents) – 25 minutes

Do you know any other poems dealing with the theme of war? (Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*, Wilfrid Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est*). Compare the three poems. **See enclosed exercise.**

Lesson 3: WRITERS ON WAR

7. WARMER: 15 minutes - See enclosed song's text.

Sting's *Fragile* (students listen to the song and try to understand it; then they're given the text)

8. DISCUSSION: 35 minutes - See enclosed texts

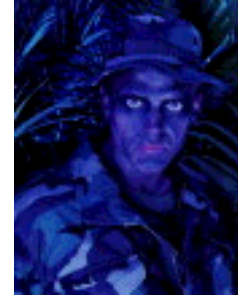
Students discuss the meaning of war and violence commenting various pictures and quotations. In particular they are asked to find out the various attitudes towards war emerging from the texts (students will also be shown texts they already know, e.g. Picasso's *Guernica* as well as intellectuals, historians and philosophers' quotations). Students are asked to focus on the relationship between contents and style, starting from Picasso's *Guernica*. The activity aims at emphasizing how difficult it is to separate truth from illusion, fact from rhetoric, historical event from interpretation.

Assignment: after this teaching unit students are asked to write a composition about Gunn's *Innocence*, considering:

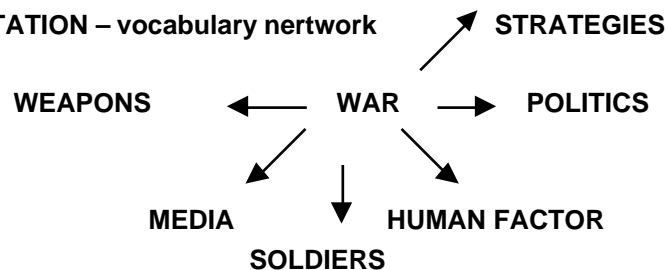
- the dominating feelings
- the aspects of war that are shown
- the author's outlook on war, and why the author has come to think on war the way he does
- rhyme, sound and language devices as precious resources with a peculiar function in the poem.

ENCLOSURES: FURTHER DIDACTIC MATERIAL

1. MOTIVATION – Pre-reading activities: examples of images



VOCABULARY ELICITATION – vocabulary network



4. OPEN-AIR DISCUSSION: CONTENT ANALYSIS

This exercise is partly based on a free resource available at www.teachit.co.uk

Look at these statements about the poem: you can agree, disagree or partly agree and partly disagree with each. Justify your opinion with reference to the poem.

- He was fit and forceful
- He wasn't aware of his physical energy
- He was humble
- He was a thoughtful, meditative person, reflecting upon his human condition
- He was an individualist, a loner
- He was a representative of the Corps he joined
- He felt guilty
- He had underneath his confidence and his certainties, private doubts and fears
- "Innocence" is the term the poet uses to describe the mental outlook instilled by the Corps he belonged to.
- Indoctrination explains and excuses the crimes he was involved with
- He forced himself to watch things that he found morally repulsive in order to prove his toughness.
- The poet offers a neutral view of this character, without judgement.
- The poet admires his character

5. GROUP WORK: TEXT ANALYSIS

Students should find out that:

- the poem is divided in 6 six quatrains rhyming alternately (abab), the rhymes of the fourth stanza being pararhymes.
- The poem is mainly iambic in rhythm, and pentameter in verse length
- Quite common devices for varying too regular a pattern are adopted by the author, e.g. the insertion of a trochaic foot among iambics, especially (but not exclusively, e.g. line 21) at the opening of lines (e.g. lines 3, 5, 6, 10, 14)
- Sometimes the sense flows over the end of the lines, creating run-on lines (e.g. lines 2 – 3, 18-19)
- Poetic assertions are often dramatized and reinforced by means of alliteration (especially through the repetition of fricatives and plosives. Here are some examples: *f*, line 2, 21, 22, 23 and 24, with the onomatopoeic effect of a slow burning fire; *s*, line 7; *c*, line 16, *b*, line 18)
- Repetitions (e.g. *knew*, line 3) are to be found
- Assonances serve to enrich the poem (e.g. line 20, the diphthong *əʊ* reinforces the idea of feeling sick; line 23 – pain same -)
- “Synaesthetic words” are used to enrich the poem (sight: watch, behold, see; sense of hearing: onomatopoeic effect of the repetition of the fricative *f* sound in the last stanza; sense of smell: smelt, fragrance). The initial fragrance of the first stanza changes into a negative sensation at the end of the poem.
- The poet uses figurative language as a resource: e.g. the simile in line 8

6. SYNTHESIS – Attention is focused on the objectives (style vs contents)

Fill in the following grid to compare the three poems on the basis of their style and contents.

BROOKE'S <i>THE SOLDIER</i>	OWEN'S <i>DULCE ET DECORUM EST</i>	GUNN'S <i>INNOCENCE</i>
What feelings dominate the poem?		
What aspects of war are shown?		
What is the poet's outlook on war? What message does the poet give in the text?		
Why has the poet come to think of war in the way he does?		
Can you identify any connections between the poet's attitudes and his personality, social and historical events, cultural trends?		
Compare language devices, rhyme and sound		
- Rhymes and stanzas		
- Rhythm and metre		
- Alliterations, consonances, internal rhymes		

- Synaesthetic words and figurative language		
- Run-on lines		
Is the style conventional?		
Is the language traditionally poetic in the choice of words? Do all of the poems express feelings and emotional involvement? Does the connection between style and contents aim at achieving a particular effect? If so, which effect do you perceive, and why?		

7. *FRAGILE*

Music and Lyrics by Sting

If blood will flow when flesh and steel are one
 Drying in the colour of the evening sun
 Tomorrow's rain will wash the stains away
 But something in our mind will always stay

Perhaps this final act was meant
 To clinch a lifetime's argument
 That nothing comes from violence
 And nothing ever could
 For all those born beneath an angry star
 Lest we forget how fragile we are

On and on the rain will fall
 Like tears from a star Like tears from a star
 On and on the rain will say
 How fragile we are How fragile we are

8. DISCUSSION

Example of one of the resources to be used to encourage discussion.

