

The Text's the Thing

I've always enjoyed teaching a diversity of texts. From the start of my career I've prided myself on unearthing new stories and less well-known class readers. But I never thought I'd be teaching a unit of work that included Delia Smith and Jamie Oliver.

I love it. I'm spending time with students working on all kinds of unexpected realworld texts.

Cookery writing is a great way into instructional forms and descriptive styles. Elizabeth David is a magnificent travel writer. Nigel Slater describes food with a sensuous (and sometimes sensual) relish that makes your mouth water. Jamie Oliver provides starting-points for comparing written and spoken modes. And Delia is, well, just Delia. With her the world feels ordered, reassuring, safe.

Enough!

I think in the past I'd have written some pompous article in response to all this literacy stuff. I'd have done a knee-jerk tabloid dumbing-down kind of piece. Why are we using extracts of Jamie Oliver when we could be reading Dickens? But that argument has been and gone. We now read pukka extracts from Jamie not because he's somehow more 'relevant' (always a fatal reason for choosing a text); nor because the classics are irrelevant or outmoded. It's simply that we've shifted our focus to the purposes of texts – what they are written for, who they are aimed at, and what they aim to achieve. That's why I'm happy teaching Dickens one lesson and Delia the next. I see no contradiction. In fact, it's what continues to make the job of teaching English so richly rewarding and diverse.

The challenge, in the day-to-day bedlam of school life, is finding time to find the texts. And that's where a good textbook should help. It shouldn't replace the teacher, but should make her or his life infinitely easier by providing fresh new resources, lively ideas, and tried-and-tested activities.

That's why we're so proud of the Literacy Kit. It has been put together by a team who have been working on the KS3 literacy strategy in the pilot authorities. These are people who know their stuff. And – as a result – you get a heady mix of reliability and innovation. There are brand new starter activities, ready-made Display Text Packs, a wealth of other active teaching materials and – in the student books – a diverse range of texts that really work in class (I know because I've tested them).

The Students' Books include:

- Fiction from JK Rowling, Enid Blyton, Kevin Crossley-Holland, James Herriott, Annie Proulx, Roald Dahl
- Recounts such as the Millennium Dome raid, celebrities recalling their first day at school, flying solo, going surfing

- Analytical writing on how the rainforest works, theme parks, school uniform, children's diets, and evaluations from Science and Technology lessons
- Instructional writing on, for example, doing a magic trick
- Informative writing from leaflets on vegetarianism, a guide to health, and the Young Citizen's Passport
- Persuasive writing such as a radio commercial for the RSPCA, an advert for Save the Children, and an article about the menace of mobile phones

Using these means focusing clearly on features of different text-types through active tasks. We've done all the hard work of clustering objectives and making sure we really have a clear purpose in every unit, giving students a framework to translate their knowledge into improved writing.

Geoff Barton