



Creative criticism

Collection: Assessment

Resource: Creative assessment

Approximate duration

About 2 hours

Learning outcomes

To be able to ask yourself the question 'do I have to set another essay?' with some hope of getting an intelligent answer.

Introduction

This activity draws on those approaches to literary study known variously as 'creative criticism', 'crossover criticism', or 'textual intervention' (Rob Pope). Between them they help students develop insights and draw on energies more commonly associated with creative writing.

The activity

The invitation: choose a text which you are planning to teach. Write a short list in two columns: 1) things you'd most like students to be able to address; 2) things that are most likely to create obstacles for students in approaching this text. Then set about identifying some creative assessment methods which could meet both sets of observations. The underlying idea here is precisely that while students will indeed need to be able to write essays, they don't always have to do so, and that the genre of the essay itself may distort insights into particular kinds of boxes. In activities of this kind, students are asked (whether for formative or summative purposes) to make something that responds to the text, but is in a different 'voice' from a traditional critical essay.



1 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

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Once they have made their experimental text, they can then return to compare it with their starting place. Such an activity focuses on language as an active and engaging process. Such engagement will enable students not only to get in touch with the affect of their reading, but will stimulate an intellectually rewarding dialogue between levels of comprehension. At the least, writing a plan will provide you with a 'thought experiment'.

Possible approaches

You are going to teach John Banville's novel *The Sea*. You are struck by the difficulties you anticipate students having with the narrative structure of the novel and its movement between time planes; the long, often rather 'literary' scenic descriptions; and the thick intertextuality - all the references to art and artists, gods, and mythologies. The following suggestions might provide the germs of 'ways in'. They all need you to elaborate them, but we think that if you do, you will be providing students with an active way of focusing and expanding their reading.

Note that as teachers we often need to weigh up whether to approach through what we (or critical convention) see as major themes, or to approach obliquely, through details, or the flotsam of the text. If we go straight for what we see as the big questions (e.g. what is the significance of the 1950s setting? Explore the significance of Irish setting and history) we might be helping students. Equally, we might be getting in the way of their own as yet unshaped perceptions.

With these things in mind, ask your students in small groups to choose one of the following topics or tropes. Each group then has the task of finding two or three resonant quotations that bear on the topic.

1. The uncanny;
2. Skin, smells, and bodies;
3. Visual arts, artists, and self-reflexiveness;
4. The gods (you could broaden to classical references in general)
5. The 'rubble of the past'.

Those quotations then become the basis for a short piece of individual writing after the class. A formative assessment (and, potentially, a summative one as well) could take the form of setting this piece of writing alongside a short reflective commentary exploring



what they each learnt about the source text from the first exercise. One way of starting would be to demonstrate the activity in class by asking students to write individually a paragraph on 'the sea' as liminal zone - as sharply imagistic as they can manage. The object is to help students engage with text in a different mode - but one that enriches 'conventional' critical engagement by its detour through more creative or affective territory.

A further detour, in terms of your own pedagogic writing, would be to extend this form of creative insight to pedagogy itself: to attempt writing about teaching as itself a liminal zone.

A further selection of brief examples can be found in Appendix 1 of Knights and Thurgar-Dawson, below. The module from which they are drawn is also the subject of a discussion within the Collection on '[Course Design](#)'.

Links & References

- Knights, Ben and Thurgar-Dawson, Chris. *Active Reading: Transformative Writing in Literary Studies*. London: Continuum. 2006.
- Pope, Rob. *Textual Intervention: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies*. London: Routledge. 1995.
- Scholes, Robert. *The Crafty Reader*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press. 2001.

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Areas of Activity 3:** Assessment and giving feedback to learners
- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Core Knowledge 5:** Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching
- **Professional Values 1:** Respect for individual learners
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity



More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>

Resources in the Assessment Collection

- Assessment: introduction to the collection
- Assessment audit: resource overview
 - Auditing English: individual activity
 - Auditing English: group activity
- Designing and running innovative assessments: resource overview
 - Creative assessments in Literature: outcomes, criteria: individual activity
 - Creative assessments in Literature: outcomes, criteria: group activity
- Assessment SWOT analysis: resource overview
 - SWOT analysis: individual activity
 - SWOT analysis: group activity
- Mix and match: resource overview
 - Matching assessment to outcome: individual activity
 - Matching assessment to outcome: group activity
- Creative assessment: resource overview
 - **Creative criticism (*you are here)**
- Feedback and marking strategies: resource overview
 - Marking exercise: individual activity
 - Marking exercise: group activity
- Computer-aided assessment: resource overview
 - Writing multiple-choice questionnaires: individual activity
 - Writing multiple-choice questionnaires: group activity
- What is assessment for? : resource overview
 - Balancing the interest groups: individual activity
 - Balancing the interest groups: group activity

