

Introduction for Teachers

Does it matter whether or not pupils are interested in their work? That sounds like a daft question, but not if you follow media coverage of education. And if you trawl through education sections in the bookshops it doesn't seem to be that high on the agenda. The consistent public emphasis is on passing tests and gaining grades, and maybe the interest will come later.

It won't. Teachers know that the interest has to be there, or the other stuff won't happen. Government initiatives and national frameworks can be positive forces, but only if they involve giving pupils work worth doing. So the aim of this collection is to offer teachers a range of lively activities, from which they can select.

Each of these tasks relates to words, sentences or texts, and sometimes to a mixture of them. More of the tasks focus on words, partly because they are the most accessible targets for a series of short-term assignments. But each of them should fit with other activities within the framework, and with work which teachers initiate for themselves.

Language should be enjoyable and exciting. It's fluid, varied and alive, and that needs to be reflected in the way pupils encounter it. In some cases I have deliberately gone for topicality and relevance – music, football, news – but in each assignment I have worked to keep pupils thinking, and to invite them to become creatively involved.

The key factor in that encounter will be you, and the decisions you make about angle, presentation and allocations of time. Some of these tasks may produce good work, simply by being duplicated and handed out, but the work will be much better if you have thought about them beforehand, and incorporated them in your own pattern.

Teacher enthusiasm is important, but so is working format. Some of these tasks can be tackled by pupils alone, working in silence, but most of them will benefit from a more varied pattern – some talking and writing, small groups and whole-class discussion. Pupils' own experience of language will be more relevant if it can be shared in a wider forum, and their creative work will be improved if it has a meaningful audience. The notes offer suggestions about what I might do with some of these tasks, but the real quality of learning will depend on decisions which only you can make.

That's why these assignments aren't numbered in order, or allocated to a particular year. I think they're all applicable to KS3, but that doesn't mean that some of them couldn't work well with some KS4 pupils, or be fruitful with a junior school class. You have to fix the pattern, of who does what and in which order. That's work, but in my experience (thirty years of it) it's the best kind of work – necessary, challenging and enjoyable. If you do it properly, you'll find things here that you want to alter and develop, so that they become your own. And so you should.

Paul Francis
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