



## **RESPONDING TO FERN HILL by DYLAN THOMAS**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

This sequence of 4 lessons is intended to give learners the opportunity to:

- listen attentively to spoken poetry
- develop and express their personal response to the meaning of a poem by Dylan Thomas, through spoken/written/creative media
- respond to the sound and visual effects within a well-known work of literature
- make connections between literature and their own experiences
- build their confidence in responding to a complex text
- develop skills of close reading, making use of their understanding of stylistic devices to create different effects
- imitate and interpret the poem in different media.

This unit of 4 lessons covers the following framework objectives:

### **SPEAKING**

- select, analyse and present ideas and information convincingly or objectively
- present topics and ideas coherently, using techniques effectively, e.g. a clear structure, anecdote to illustrate, plausible conclusions
- respond to others' views positively and appropriately when challenged

### **READING**

- use a range of strategies, e.g. speed reading, close reading, annotation, prediction, to skim texts for gist, key ideas and themes, and scan for detailed information
- use their knowledge of:
  - word roots and families
  - grammar, sentence and whole-text structure
  - content and contextto make sense of words, sentences and whole texts
- read with concentration texts, on-screen and on paper, that are new to them, and understand the information in them
- use inference and deduction to understand layers of meaning



## WRITING

- select, analyse and present ideas and information convincingly or objectively
- adapt presentation of material according to intended meaning and effect, e.g. choice of how much detail needed to be convincing
- make connections and/or elaborate to ensure full coverage of topic
- in planning writing make choices about content, structure, language, presentation to suit the purpose

The lesson plans are intended as guides, and the amount of time required to complete the tasks as well as the level of detailed response anticipated will vary according to the groups being taught.

- Lesson 1** Thinking about childhood memories and participating in discussion  
Listen and learn about Fern Hill as an important location in Dylan Thomas' life.  
Read and listen to the poem, recording first impressions.  
RESOURCES NEEDED: Powerpoint presentation; text of 'Fern Hill'; worksheet 1
- Lesson 2** Group work – working closely on each stanza of the poem.  
Locating key images.  
Own writing – working on key images of own holiday summers.  
RESOURCES NEEDED: Internet YouTube connection; text of 'Fern Hill'; Sugar paper and writing implement – e.g. marker pen – for 6 groups; Worksheet 2 and 3
- Lesson 3** Paired work - recognising and appreciating stylistic features in 'Fern Hill'.  
Responding to the sensory impressions within the poem.  
Own writing – developing own images stylistically.  
RESOURCES NEEDED: text of 'Fern Hill'/ worksheet 4
- Lesson 4** Quiet personal response – re-reading of the poem and selection of favourite passages.  
Create a collage or print which captures the colour/mood and imagery of 'Fern Hill', incorporating favourites passage/s.  
RESOURCES NEEDED: Text of 'Fern Hill'; art materials – coloured paper/ old magazines/ A4 card or paper/ glue and scissors.



## **‘FERN HILL’ – LESSON OUTLINES**

### **LESSON 1**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The summer holidays of childhood are very special times for many people, and many writers and poets have drawn on this time as the backdrop for their stories or as the subject matter of their poetry.

Invite suggestions from the learners from their own reading – books which have a sense of a summer holiday. Some answers might be: *Over Sea, Under Stone* (Susan Cooper)/ *Swallows and Amazons* (Arthur Ransom)/ *Five Children and It* (E.Nesbit).

#### **PAIRED DISCUSSION**

Working in pairs, discuss favourite memories of summer holidays and make a spider diagram of 5-8 main memories you retain of that place or time, or how you felt. Focus on the small details, such as the feel of a different bed for example, or the sounds of the early morning, or a particular food as well as bigger memories such as the process of packing, or the journey.

#### **CLASS WORK**

Gather every learner’s strongest memory as a class on to the board to share. Introduce a PowerPoint on Dylan Thomas and his famous poem, ‘Fern Hill’, which is about the summers of his childhood at his aunt’s house of that name, in Llangain, a little village outside Carmarthen in west Wales.

Stress how Dylan Thomas’ poetry was very much written for its powerful sound qualities, and that sometimes the learners might not fully understand the meaning, but that the sound and the patterns of words convey a picture or create an impression. Ensure that learners understand that responding in this way is good and that you will ask for their first impressions at the end. View and listen to the ppt/reading and follow the text.

Encourage the class’s instant responses, no matter how tentative and simple they might be. How did the poem make them feel? What did they feel it was about?

#### **GROUP WORK**

Working in groups, look at the first two stanzas. What do you sense Dylan Thomas remembers about being young in Fern Hill? Use Worksheet 1 to make a note of thoughts.

Learners can choose to look at one stanza only, or groups can divide the work among the members, or work together, according to ability. Report back to the class.



## **LESSON 2**

### **'FERN HILL' – LOOKING AT IMAGERY**

Remind the class how important imagery was to Dylan Thomas, and how he wrote his poetry often by taking an image, adding another one, then adding another, not always similar, and so he built up a rich pattern of associations. Sometimes the images seemed to pull against each other, and that added energy into his poem.

Read 'Fern Hill' to the class, or divide up the reading between confident readers, or listen to Philip Madoc (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTPKtCPvc6Y>) or Richard Burton (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Z-ZuguSrQQ>) or Dylan Thomas himself ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XG1B\\_7r4y8&feature=kp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XG1B_7r4y8&feature=kp)) reading the poem. Explain that this lesson is about recognising the images Thomas has created, so the purpose of the listening and following is to 'see' the world he recreates for us in his words.

### **GROUP WORK**

Divide up the class into groups to work on each of the stanzas, each one stuck onto a large sheet of paper, to annotate the images which can be found in their allocated verse, and explaining what kind of effect or feeling the image creates.

Set the aim of finding three images in each verse, but also note any images which seem perplexing.

When the task is complete, place each sheet around the class and allow learners to move around and see what others have said, adding any thoughts they wish. Discuss any issues which seem perplexing, and work towards establishing an understanding of the poem overall, in particular exploring the meaning of the closing lines.

Worksheet 2 is an alternative way of exploring the meaning of images for learners who need further support.

### **INDIVIDUAL WRITTEN RESPONSE**

Using the 3rd worksheet, jot down a response to their favourite images in the poem and make notes about their own personal summer memories.



### **LESSON 3**

#### **A CLOSE LOOK AT 'FERN HILL' – DYLAN THOMAS'S STYLE**

This lesson is about working closely with the text to notice the different stylistic devices which Dylan Thomas used to create his distinctive poetic voice.

Play an extract from the BBC's *iwonder* series on sound in Dylan Thomas's work - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3mqg6f#zgdkkqt> (no.5) and read the accompanying text about Fern Hill to set out the aim of the lesson, which is to 'hear' the poem through Dylan Thomas's use of numerous poetic devices.

#### **PAIRED WORK**

Using Worksheet 4, remind and/or establish understanding of the terms needed to be able to recognise stylistic devices – match definitions to terms.

Each pair to check their answers with another pair. Final check as a class, looking at an example of each one.

#### **GROUP WORK**

Each group is given a verse for which they are responsible, and they have five minutes to find as many devices as possible, with which they annotate their verse. Report to class

Return to the worksheet to complete final thoughts.

#### **OWN WRITING**

Return to the 6 images they wrote in lesson 2 linked to their own summer holidays. Able students could aim to develop a few of their images using any of the devices they have been looking at in the lesson, experimenting with organising them into a verse form.

Learners who need support can create a descriptive paragraph of favourite summer memories, with a goal of incorporating alliteration and similes.

### **LESSON 4**

#### **A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO 'FERN HILL' – USING DIFFERENT MEDIA**

Either provide coloured paper and magazines, glue and scissors, or ask learners to bring in their own art materials to create a visual response to Fern Hill.

Show examples of collaged work by googling the images for mixed media collage art.



Invite learners to work either as individuals, pairs or group to create their response. Encourage use of cut-up poem, images of Dylan Thomas, images of the Llangain area, drawing, textual detail to capture what the learners feel is the essence of the poem in their opinion.

They can be given the choice of focusing on a section or verse, or looking at the poem as a whole.

Use their work to create a class or departmental display.

## **EXTENDED TASK**

Able learners could create their own poem based on their own summer memories then present it in a collaged form.

## **FURTHER WRITING TASKS:**

- Write a diary entry which Dylan Thomas might have written as a boy on holiday
- Write Dylan Thomas's letter or postcard home to his parents in Swansea from Fern Hill
- Write a descriptive piece about a place you associate with your own happy childhood memories.
- Fern Hill is near the village of Llangain, outside Carmarthen. Research the area and create a poster, based on images of the area, incorporating some of your favourite lines from the poem.