



DYLAN'S WORLD – HIS CONTEMPORARIES

PRESENTING INFORMATION FOR AN AUDIENCE

NOTES FOR TEACHERS:

This unit gives students the opportunity to learn about Dylan Thomas's contemporaries in the Kardomah Gang in Swansea, and to re-fashion their research and knowledge into a piece of transactional writing.

The resources for this unit consist of a PowerPoint which gives a brief summary of some of the members of the group as well as resource notes and an extract from Dylan Thomas's broadcast, *Return Journey*. Students can be given the opportunity to extend their knowledge through further online research.

Other members of the group which could be mentioned are Mervyn Levy, Tom Warner, and the poet John Prichard. Students could also research contemporaries such as the artist Ceri Richards.

Aim: to research information about a specific building and people associated with Dylan Thomas, and present this information for a general audience in a way that will be informative and entertaining.

RESOURCES INCLUDE:

Task Sheet
Notes on the Kardomah Gang
Extract from *Return Journey*
PowerPoint on the Kardomah Gang

THE KARDOMAH BOYS – writing an information leaflet

The Kardomah Cafe on Portland Street, Swansea has decided that it wants to be part of the Dylan Thomas centenary celebrations in 2014 by producing an information sheet for its customers, telling them about the historical importance of the Kardomah in Swansea.

This will be an A4 sheet, laminated, which will be placed on each table, which people can read as they wait to be served. You can choose whether you need it to be double sided.



Your task is to gather information about the Kardomah and the creative people who used to gather to chat there and present this in a format which will be interesting and readable for the general audience of customers to the cafe.

Think about the style of writing you will need to adopt to appeal to the audience. Think about the length of the writing – you will need to select carefully from what you read, summarize it clearly and write what you think the readers will find interesting.

Consider the balance of text and image to create an appealing format.

Decide whether you want to include any text written by Dylan Thomas himself.

The resource material you have is:

- a PowerPoint presentation
- a set of detailed notes about the cafe and the famous people
- further personal use of the internet for any research, including finding visual material
- an extract from *Return Journey* by Dylan Thomas

Decide what your priorities will be, both in terms of layout, design and content, tone and audience appeal.

Accompany your information sheet with bullet points setting out what your intentions were and an evaluation of whether you feel your approach worked successfully.

The Kardomah Gang – Resource notes

The Kardomah Gang (sometimes called The Kardomah Group or the Kardomah Boys) was a group of bohemian friends – artists, musicians, poets and writers – who, in the 1930s, frequented the Kardomah Café in Castle Street, Swansea. Before it became a café, it was the chapel in which Dylan Thomas's parents, D.J. and Florrie, got married.

The group drank coffee and discussed many subjects including Einstein & Epstein, Greta Garbo, Stravinsky, death, religion and Picasso.

During World War II, Swansea was heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe, in a 'Three Night Blitz'. Castle Street was badly hit and the 'Kardomah Café', was destroyed. After the bombing, Dylan Thomas came back to visit Swansea and later wrote about the devastation in his radio play, 'Return Journey'. He describes the café as being "razed to the snow".



The Kardomah Café reopened after the war in a new location in Portland Street, a short walk from where the original Café stood.

Among the group of men who formed this loosely formed gang of creative friends were the following names:

Charles Fisher

Charles Fisher (21 November 1914 – 23 January 2006) was born in Swansea and educated at Swansea Grammar School, where he and Dylan Thomas were both taught English by Thomas' father, D.J. Thomas. Upon leaving school, he and Thomas both become journalists for the *South Wales Evening Post*. (The Kardomah café was opposite the *South Wales Evening Post* building.)

During World War II, Fisher was an operative for British Intelligence. After the War, he was a Reuters correspondent at the British Parliament. His poems of this period were published, like those of Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins, in the magazine *Wales*.

In 1953, after attending Dylan Thomas's funeral at Laugharne, Fisher emigrated to Canada where he became a Hansard reporter in the Canadian House of Commons. He used his long vacations to travel widely, especially in Spain. He was particularly interested in the Romani people. He published poetry and writing over the years which was well received.

In 2003 he visited Swansea, to take part in the festival at the Dylan Thomas Centre commemorating the 50th anniversary of Dylan Thomas's death.

He died in Bangkok, aged 91. He was the last surviving member of the Kardomah group.

Daniel Jones

Daniel Jenkyn Jones OBE (7 December 1912 – 23 April 1993) was a composer of classical music born in Pembroke in south Wales. By the time he was nine years old the young Daniel had written several piano sonatas.

He attended the Bishop Gore School in Swansea where his enthusiasm for literature led to a close friendship with Dylan Thomas. He then studied English literature at Swansea University. In 1935, Jones left Swansea to study music at the Royal Academy in London.

In the years leading up to World War II he composed his first large-scale orchestral works and developed his own compositional system of 'Complex Metres'. During the



War he was a captain in the Intelligence Corps, and worked as a code-breaker in Bletchley Park.

Later in this career, Jones composed song settings for Dylan Thomas's play, *Under Milk Wood* and dedicated his fourth symphony (1954) to Thomas's memory. He also edited collections of Thomas's poetry and prose, and in 1977 published the memoir, *My Friend Dylan Thomas*.

Jones was awarded an OBE in 1968. He died in Swansea in 1993 aged 80.

Vernon Watkins

Vernon Phillips Watkins (27 June 1906 – 8 October 1967) was born in Maesteg in Glamorgan but was brought up in Swansea. He read fluently by the age of four and at five announced that he would be a poet.

Watkins read modern languages at Cambridge but left before completing his degree. He wanted to travel but family pressure made him take a bank job in Cardiff which ended in a breakdown that marked him permanently.

It was around this time that Watkins met Dylan Thomas. About once a week, Dylan would come to Watkins's parents' home situated on the Gower peninsula. Watkins was the only person from whom Dylan took advice when writing poetry and he was always the first to read his finished work.

Watkins was godfather to Dylan's son Llewelyn and they remained lifelong friends. Dylan Thomas described Watkins as "the most profound and greatly accomplished Welshman writing poems in English".

Watkins died from a heart condition on 8 October 1967 aged 61.

Alfred Janes

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alfred_Janes,_c._1960.jpg

Alfred George Janes was a Welsh artist. He was born on 30 June 1911 above his parents' fruit and flower shop in Castle Square. He attended the Bishop Gore School and then the Swansea School of Art and Crafts (now part of Swansea Metropolitan University).

Although Janes and Thomas had been to the same school, Janes was three years older than Thomas so they didn't get to know each other until after their schooldays. They first met in 1932 through their mutual friend, Daniel Jones.



DYLAN THOMAS

ROCK AND ROLL POET - KS4

In 1934 Janes, Thomas and Mervyn Levy shared a flat at 5 Redcliffe Street, Earls Court. Janes created two portraits of Thomas during the poet's lifetime and one after his death.

In 1936, Janes settled in Swansea again and taught part-time at the Swansea School of Art and Crafts. During World War II, he was a soldier in the Pioneer Corps. After the war, Janes returned to Swansea and resumed his teaching at the Swansea School of Art and Crafts and his painting. During these years he painted portraits of several members of the Kardomah Gang as well as of well-known figures in public life. His parents' shop also provided him with copious material for his still lifes. In 1963 Janes moved to London, accepting a post at Croydon College of Art. He died on 3 February 1999.

Don't forget Dylan Thomas himself! How much do you know about him? Research.



EXTRACT FROM 'RETURN JOURNEY' ABOUT THE KARDOMAH GANG

'Return Journey' was a radio broadcast by Dylan Thomas, where he imagines himself going back to Swansea (in the role of the Narrator here) to see if people might remember him as a young man.

In pairs, read this extract to get a sense of the mood and atmosphere of the Kardomah then. Research any of the topics and names mentioned to discover more.

NARRATOR:

I said: I wonder if you can tell me...

PASSER BY:

Yes?

NARRATOR:

...I said: If you can tell me whether you used to know a chap called Young Thomas. He worked on the *Post* and used to wear an overcoat sometimes with the check lining inside out so that you could play giant draughts on him. He wore a conscious woodbine too...

PASSER BY:

What d'you mean, a conscious woodbine??

NARRATOR:

...a perched pork pie with a peacock feather and he tried to slouch like a newshawk even when he was attending a meeting of the Gorseinon Buffalos...

PASSER BY:

Oh, him! He owes me half a crown. I haven't seen him since the old Kardomah days. He wasn't a reporter then, he'd just left grammar school. Him and Charlie Fisher – Charlie's got whiskers now – and Tom Warner and Fred Janes, drinking coffee dashes and arguing the toss.

NARRATOR:

What about?



PASSER BY:

Music and poetry and painting and politics. Einstein and Epstein, Stravinsky and Greta Garbo, death and religion, Picasso and girls...

NARRATOR:

And then?

PASSER BY:

Communism, symbolism, Bradman, Braque, the Watch Committee, free love, free beer, murder, Michaelangelo, ping-pong, ambition, Sibelius, and girls...

NARRATOR:

Is that all?

PASSER BY:

How Dan Jones was going to compose the most prodigious symphony, Fred Jones paint the most miraculously meticulous pictures, Charlie Fisher catch the poshest trout, Vernon Watkins and Young Thomas write the most boiling poems, how they would ring the bells of London and paint it like a tart...

NARRATOR:

And after that?

PASSER BY:

Oh, the hissing of the butt-ends in the drains of the coffee-dashes and the tinkle and the gibble gabble of the morning young lounge-lizards as they talked about Augustus John, Emil Jannings, Carnera, Dracula, Amy Johnson, trial marriage, pocket money, the Welsh sea, the London stars, King Kong, anarchy, darts, T.S.Eliot, and girls...Duh, it's cold!

NARRATOR:

And he hurried on, into the dervish snow, without a good morning or good bye, swaddled in his winter woollens like a man in the island of his deafness, and I felt that perhaps he had never stopped at all to tell me of one more departed stage in the progress of the boy I was pursuing. The Kardomah Cafe was razed to the snow, the voices of the coffee drinkers – poets, painters, and musicians in their beginnings – lost in the willy-nilly flying of the years and the flakes.