

## UK Teacher's Pack 2 for teaching Dylan Thomas

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Key Stage 3 & 4



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## Lesson 1 *The Followers* by Dylan Thomas

**Aims:** develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of how language works with particular emphasis on verbs; encourage pupils to use and gain confidence in using specific terminology; encourage pupils to think about the craft of writing and how to make their own writing more interesting.

The teacher will need to do some revision of verbs and introduce new terminology with explanations.

1. Read the extract from the story.
2. Who remembers what a verb is? Why are verbs necessary? Can anyone find a sentence in the extract that has no verbs?
3. Look at the "Understanding verbs" pupil sheet.
4. Activity sheets: Looking for some action; Followers - questions on lines 1-13; Your turn to write.

### UNDERSTANDING VERBS

Verbs are ever changing. They change because of **who** or **what** is carrying out the action or because of **when** the action took place.

e.g. I walk to school every day.  
He usually walks too.  
Yesterday she walked with us.  
He was walking a little way behind but tomorrow we will be walking together.

The verb changes depend on the subject (**who** or **what**) and the tense (**the time when the action takes place**).

**Who:** any person (pronoun or noun)

Here are some examples using the present tense of the verb **to be**:  
I am, you are, he is, she is, one is, John is, we are, you are, they are,  
Mum and dad are etc.

**What** = any thing (noun or the pronouns **it** or **they**)

Here are some examples using a variety of verbs and a variety of tenses:

The dogs walked; the table broke; the bird sang; the house is big; the car spluttered; the river floods every year, it is raining heavily, the leaves fell from the trees and they littered the ground etc.

The verbs **to be**, **to have** and **to go** are usually very important in a language (e.g. Welsh, French, English) because they are used with other verbs to change the time of the verb:

e.g. I have seen her before.  
I was leaving home.  
He is going to be blamed.

Verbs can often seem to be very complex but most of the time you just need to think about exactly what you want to say or what someone is trying to say to you.

**Task:** Write ten sentences using a variety of subjects (who or what), verbs and verb tenses.

Now let's look a little more closely at how Dylan Thomas uses verbs in his writing.

## "The Followers" by Dylan Thomas

### Verbs - LOOKING for some ACTION

- Read lines 1-13 of "The Followers" with your partner.

1. List the verbs used in this section.  
*You may include the present participle of the verb (-ing ending) which can also be used as a describing word.*
2. Look at each verb in your list and think about how it contributes to the mood or atmosphere of the piece.  
Which verbs contribute to the sense of the weather being bad?  
Which verbs contribute to the idea that the men find it difficult to walk through this?
3. What do you notice about the ending of the verbs?
4. Find examples of each of the following:  
verbs ending in -ed e.g. looked  
verbs ending in -ing e.g. giggling
5. Now choose 10 of the verbs you noted in answer to question 1. Write the base form of each of these verbs. The base form is a form with no endings: e.g. run, waft, jump, look, be, see, discover etc

The base form is sometimes called the infinitive form.

Remember that choosing interesting verbs can make your writing work more effective. Try it and see!

## "The Followers" by Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas' prose is very descriptive and imaginative. It is often packed with memorable images and impressions.

- With your partner, look carefully at the following quotations taken from lines 1-13 of the short story, "The Followers".

Thin, dingy rain  
Squeaking galoshes  
Thistly wind  
Safe, hot, slippered, weatherproof hearth  
Old, fond, fleabag dogs  
Big, black, circular, birds

1. For each phrase discuss the impression conveyed. **How** is the impression conveyed? Which of these descriptions do you find most effective? Why?

The underlined words can be called pre-modifiers; they come before the noun and add to our understanding of it, often creating a vivid image for the reader.

In these examples the pre-modifiers are mainly adjectives but there is also a noun (fleabag) and the present participle of a verb (squeaking). Dylan Thomas also makes use of alliteration and listing in these examples.

2. In turn explain to your partner the meaning of each of the following:
  - Pre-modifier
  - Adjective
  - Noun
  - Alliteration
  - Listing

If you found it difficult to explain any of these, ask your partner or teacher for a further explanation.

3. Now, working with your partner, try to write your own phrases; keep the nouns Dylan Thomas used but change the pre-modifiers. Try to make use of alliteration and listing too.
4. Read the passage aloud but leave out all the pre-modifiers when you read. How does this affect the passage?
5. Read on to the end of the extract (line 44).

Imagine that this is being filmed. Draw the sequence of shots you would include (or list what would appear in each shot). You must begin by showing that it is "six o'clock" and end by showing it is "the saddest of days" but you may only use the actual dialogue used in the story e.g. "Night, Mr. Macey." Everything else must be shown visually in the film.

## Your Turn to write

Either;

1. Write a paragraph in which you describe one of the following:
  - A stormy night
  - A very sunny day
  - A crowded beach
  - A school playground

Or:

2. Write your own descriptive opening to a story.  
Begin with a specific time of day e.g. six o'clock and end with

"It was the \_\_\_\_\_ (superlative form of adjective e.g. happiest, saddest, most frightening)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (day, night, evening) I had ever known.

Try to make an imaginative choice of verbs and pre-modifiers (adjectives, nouns or present participle); also try to use alliteration and listing.

Remember that using these techniques will help to make your own poems, short stories and descriptive writing more interesting.

## Lesson 2 *Memories of Christmas* by Dylan Thomas

(Please see resource notes at end)

**Aims:** develop speaking and listening skills; encourage pair and group co-operation; develop pupils' reading skills; encourage pupils to notice and think about the effect of punctuation devices; develop pupils' creative writing skills.

The following activities will take up several lessons.

**Class discussion:** pupils to provide Christmas words for the teacher to note on the board.  
Talk a little about memories. Are our memories exact or vague? Or a mixture of both? Do we remember every single detail of events that happened four years ago at Christmas?  
Are some memories jumbled together?

The teacher should share a Christmas memory with the class as an example.

**Individual work:** every pupil to note a few words associated with a specific Christmas memory on a card e.g. disappointing present; heavy snowfall; burning the turkey. Make sure that the pupils know they should choose a memory that they won't mind sharing with the class or group. All cards can then be put inside a group Christmas Memory Box.

**Group task:** every pupil in turn to take out a memory card and the pupil whose card it is will share the memory with the rest of the group. Groups may then choose a favourite story to be shared with the class. (The idea of the memory box is so that pupils may better understand Dylan Thomas' idea of plunging his hand into the snow and taking out a memory.)

Introduce the idea of Dylan Thomas' first paragraph - how he shows that his memories of Christmas all run into each other.

**Pair work:** paired reading of the first paragraph. Pupils advised to take turns to read (change reader) after every punctuation device and told not to take a breath until the next punctuation device.

**Recap:** discuss what pupils have noticed about the way the paragraph is written. Was it difficult to read aloud? Effect of colons and semi-colons? Effect of absence of full stops?

**Pupil readings:** in groups' pupils to prepare a reading of the whole text. Every group is given a different section and specific advice for the preparation. (See advice sheet for pupils). They will need at least a one hour lesson just to prepare the reading.

**Rehearse:** perhaps record or perform for a different class or during a school Christmas assembly or concert. Pupils may choose to bring props or dress up for the performance.

After the performances discuss what pupils enjoyed about preparing and performing "Memories of Christmas"?

What have they learnt about the way Dylan Thomas writes? What are the techniques they noticed in his work?

(Alliteration, listing, hyphenating two or three words together, similes, metaphors, patterns of words, snippets of dialogue etc)

**Pupil sheet:** questions on the text.

**Pupil sheet:** "Your turn to write".

## Shared reading of Dylan Thomas' "Memories of Christmas"

### Advice:

- Divide the extract fairly equally between you but not into long sections
- Discuss the mood and atmosphere you want to create
- Discuss the meaning and tone of the section you are reading
- Use a dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words
- Look at the punctuation devices and use these to guide you about where to put pauses
- Look at the lay-out of dialogue to help you to decide on when to change speaker
- Ensure that everyone varies tone of voice to convey meaning
- Highlight your own parts and circle words that need a particular emphasis
- Look for patterns in the text - linked words
- Remember to convey the child's perspective (point of view) where appropriate
- Focus on enjoying the sounds, the atmosphere etc
- Remember that this is a performance and that you have to bring the passage to life for the listener.
- Enjoy it!

## "Memories of Christmas ", by Dylan Thomas

1. Read the first two paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs is made up of only ONE sentence. Your teacher would be unhappy if you produced a paragraph made up completely of one sentence.  
  
Why do you think Dylan Thomas chose to write this way? What does he achieve by doing this? How does he make sure that the sentences still make complete sense to the reader?
2. Look at the incident with Mrs. Prothero and the cats that begins in the third paragraph.
  - a) Now Thomas varies the length of the sentences. How does this affect the piece?
  - b) List all the words in this section linked with snow or the cold.
  - c) What is the effect of the alliteration of "cold...callous...cats"?
  - d) How does Thomas show us the child's point of view in this extract?
  - e) What do you think is the meaning of "bombilating"?
  - f) Comment on how Dylan Thomas describes this incident. How effective do you find it?
3. Think about the story as a whole.  
How effective do you find Thomas' use of dialogue? Why?  
Choose an example of a piece of dialogue that you particularly like.  
Give reasons for your choice.
4. Look at the last part of the story from "And I remember that we went singing carols..." to the end.
  - a) In your own words explain what happens here.
  - b) How effective do you find this as an ending to the story? Give reasons to support your points.

## Your turn to write

Now write your own "Memories of Christmas" piece.  
Here are some beginnings from Dylan Thomas' work to help you:

One Christmas was so much like another.....

It was on the afternoon of the day of Christmas Eve.....

Now out of that bright white snowball of Christmas gone.....

Christmas morning was (is) always.....

I remember that on the afternoon of Christmas Day.....

I remember that we were singing carols once.....

Try to make your writing interesting and use some of the techniques Dylan Thomas uses. Think about using:

- alliteration
- patterns of words or words that are linked in meaning  
e.g. bright, light, shining, sunny, sparkling
- snippets of dialogue
- similes, metaphors or personification to help create vivid images or pictures

**Beware!** As a general rule avoid writing sentences as long as those in Dylan Thomas' work unless you are completely confident that you can keep control of the sentence and make it manageable for a reader to follow. If in doubt try reading aloud what you've written.

## Lesson 3 *A Story by Dylan Thomas*

**Aims:** to develop pupils' close reading skills and understanding of how language works; develop pupils' descriptive writing skills.

Focus initially on an extract from the story, lines 5: "I was staying at the time..." up to "...had won many cups" at the end of the third paragraph.

In this extract we see how Dylan Thomas describes people.

1. Pair task: together pupils to discuss words to fill the gaps.
2. Discuss pupils' choices of words - read aloud to the class. Opinions of the choices? Did they all make sense?
3. Compare with the real version. Did they succeed in conveying the same impact or impression? Why? Why not?
4. Now get the pupils to highlight patterns of words in the extract.
  - Words to suggest his uncle is big
  - Words to suggest that his aunt is small
5. Look for examples of similes and metaphors and discuss their effectiveness.
6. Discuss what Dylan Thomas establishes about each character. What have the pupils learnt about some of the techniques used to convey character?

Now read the whole story to the class and then discuss pupils' opinions of the whole before setting up the writing task.

## A Story

This story was written by Dylan Thomas. If you have already read some of his work think about some of the techniques he uses to help you complete this task.

In pairs fill in the gaps with words you think make sense. Look carefully for the clues that will show you whether the missing word is most likely to be a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb. Also look for other clues e.g. is it likely that Dylan Thomas would have used alliteration here or perhaps could he have listed words with similar meanings? Think about the impact of the words on a reader.

I was staying at the time with my uncle and his wife. Although she was my aunt, I never thought of her as anything but the wife of my uncle, partly because he was so \_\_\_\_\_ and trumpeting and red-hairy and used to fill every inch of the hot little \_\_\_\_\_ like an \_\_\_\_\_ buffalo squeezed into an airing cupboard, and partly because she was so \_\_\_\_\_ and silk and quick and made no \_\_\_\_\_ at all as she whisked about on padded \_\_\_\_\_, dusting the china dogs, feeding the buffalo, setting the \_\_\_\_\_ that never caught her; and once she sneaked out of the room, to \_\_\_\_\_ in a nook or nibble in the hayloft, you forgot she had ever been \_\_\_\_\_.

But there he was, always, a steaming hulk of an uncle, his braces straining like hawsers, crammed behind the counter of the \_\_\_\_\_ shop at the front of the house, and breathing like a \_\_\_\_\_ band; or guzzling and blustery in the kitchen over his gutsy supper, too big for everything except the great black \_\_\_\_\_ of his boots. As he ate, the house grew \_\_\_\_\_; he billowed out over the furniture, the \_\_\_\_\_ check meadow of his waistcoat littered, as though after a \_\_\_\_\_, with cigarette ends, peelings, cabbage stalks, birds' bones, gravy; and the forest fire of his hair crackled among the hooked hams from the ceiling. She was so \_\_\_\_\_ she could hit him \_\_\_\_\_ if she stood on a chair, and every Saturday \_\_\_\_\_ at half past ten he would lift her up, under his \_\_\_\_\_, on to a chair in the kitchen so that she could hit him on the \_\_\_\_\_ with whatever was handy, which was always a \_\_\_\_\_ dog. On Sundays, and when \_\_\_\_\_, he sang high tenor, and had won many \_\_\_\_\_.

Choose from the following words:

there    house    big    loud    paws    small    only    squeak    arm  
brass    tiny    boats    picnic    night    old    noise    smaller    cups  
china    pickled    head    small    mousetraps

## Your turn to write

Descriptive writing task.

Write your own description of a person you know well. Your aim is to describe the person vividly so that your reader will get an accurate impression of their appearance and personality.

Remember to try out some of Dylan Thomas' techniques in your writing.

Try using:

- A variety of interesting verbs
- Similes
- Metaphors
- Alliteration
- Patterns of words
- Plenty of pre-modifiers

## Lesson 4 *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night* by Dylan Thomas

**Aims:** develop pupils' skills in responding to unseen poetry; encourage them to look closely at the language and imagery of poetry; encourage them to think about how the poet's choice of form contributes to the effect of the poem; teach them the about the villanelle form.

**Pair or small group task:**

try to put the cut up pieces of the poem together in a form that makes sense and seems to work. This should encourage discussion about rhyme, punctuation and language. (20-30 minutes perhaps).

Feed pupils the clues about the Villanelle form one at a time at various times during the exercise.

- the poem has six stanzas, five of which are of three lines each
- the poem ends with a rhyming couplet
- there are only two different rhymes in the poem
- the first and third lines of the first stanza are repeated alternately as the last line of the remaining stanzas
- the stanza with four lines is the final stanza
- look for patterns of words or ideas

Encourage pupils to read their version aloud to check that it makes sense.

When the task has been completed, discuss with pupils how difficult - or easy - they found it and then hand out copies of the original poem for comparison with their own versions. How accurate were they?

Now ask pupils to read the poem silently and highlight and annotate the poem.

- Focus on links, patterns e.g. Old age - Wise men - Good men - Wild men - Grave men - And you, my father. Effect of this? Discuss this progression.
- Highlight words to do with darkness or death. Look for euphemisms of death.
- Highlight words to do with light.
- Discuss the tone of the poem and words or phrases that convey this tone.
- Striking imagery.
- Use of the imperative form of the verb ( the commands).
- What is the overall effect of the poem.
- Discuss: how the form of the poem contributes to its overall effect.

### The Villanelle.

Dylan Thomas' poem "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," is written in the classic form of a villanelle.

- A villanelle consists of 19 lines, each containing 10 syllables.
- There are five stanzas of three lines each (tercets or triplets) and the final stanza has four lines (quatrain).
- The first and third lines of the first stanza are repeated alternately as the last line of the remaining stanzas and together as the final couplet of the poem.
- There are only two different rhymes in the poem.
- The form lends itself to many different effects. Due to the repetition of lines and the use of only two different rhymes it has a haunting quality. It can however help convey a range of emotions from humour to anger.

The Villanelle originated in France as early as the fifteenth century and was a very popular form until the Sonnet became very popular.

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
-----  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
-----  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

---

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
-----  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
-----  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

---

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
-----  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
-----  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

---

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
-----  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
-----  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

---

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
-----  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
-----  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

---

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
-----  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
-----  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
-----  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

## Lesson 5 *The hand that signed the paper* by Dylan Thomas

**Aim:** develop pupils' confidence and skills in handling previously unseen poetry; develop their close reading skills.

Either give pupils a copy of the poem and ask them to highlight, underline or circle key words and images and to jot down their initial ideas. Ask them also to note anything they find puzzling. Encourage them to ask questions about the text, both the images they understand and those they don't understand.

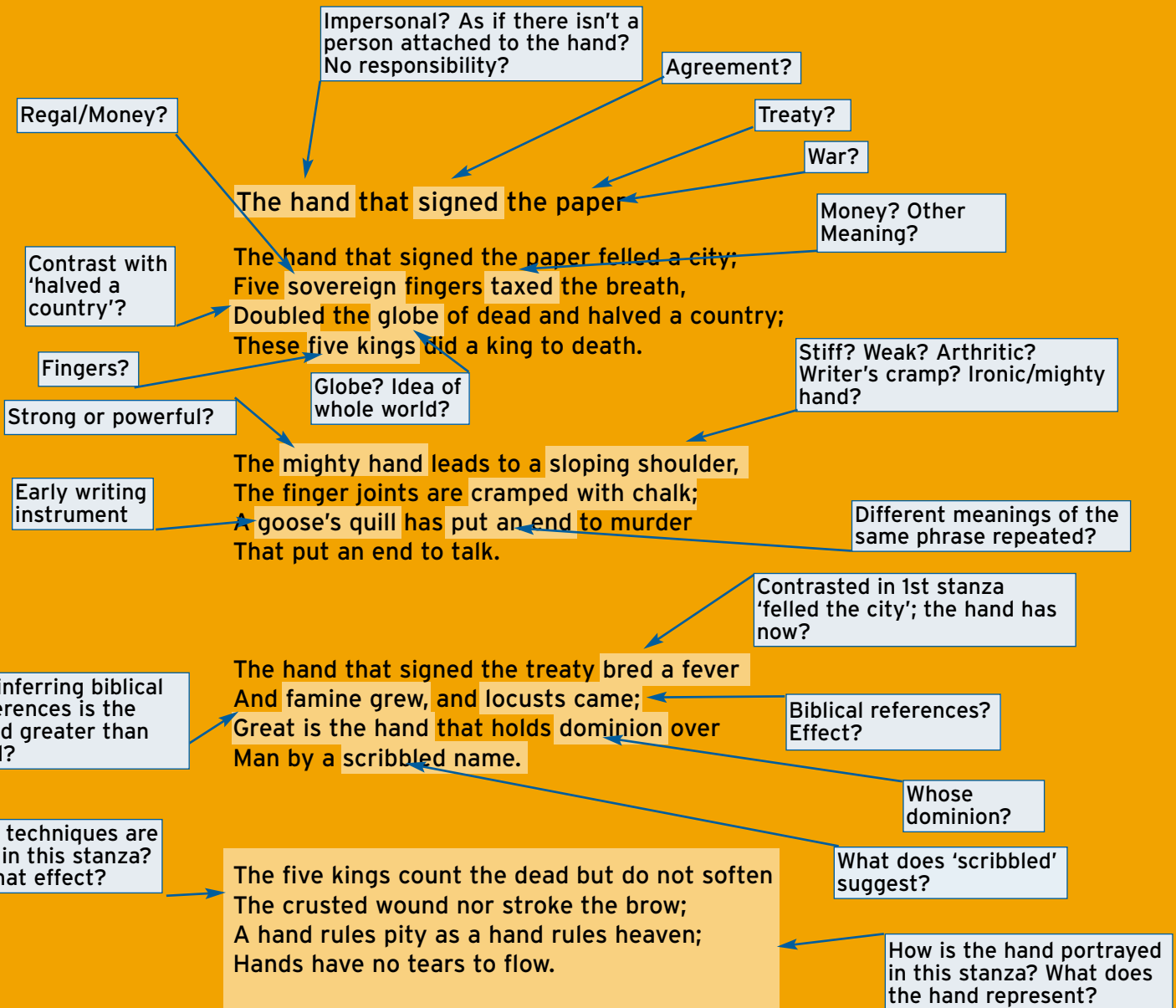
Then using the example given go through the poem with the pupils to see whether or not they noticed and commented upon the same ideas or images.

Alternately use the example given to work through with them in class during a first reading of the poem.

### Highlighting exercise

Here are some of the words or images you may have noticed and thought interesting, puzzling or worth commenting on or thinking more about.

How many of them did you choose? What ideas did they give you?



Can you comment on all the highlighted words? Are they easy to explain? Do you need to use a dictionary to look up words? What ideas are suggested by these words? Are there words here with several possible meanings or connotations? Are there patterns of words here - words linked or perhaps contrasted in meaning? What is the tone of the poem? How is this conveyed?

What techniques e.g. repetition, metaphor, have you found? How effectively are they used here?

What is your opinion of the poem?

## Poetry Examination Style Task "The hand that signed the paper"

Now that you have worked through the poem spend no more than 30 minutes writing about it.

Write about the poem and its effect upon you.

You may wish to consider some or all of these points:

- what the poem is about - its content;
- the ideas Dylan Thomas might have wanted us to think about;
- the mood, atmosphere or tone of the poem;
- how it is written - words or phrases you find interesting, striking images, some of the poetic techniques used, the way the poem is organised etc;
- how the poem makes you feel.

## General Guidance for Studying Poetry

In responding to poetry you should try to consider all of the following:

1. What is the poem about?  
Can you explain briefly?
2. Q: Who is speaking in the poem?  
A?: Is it the poet's voice or someone else, real or imagined?  
Q: To whom is he speaking?  
A?: Someone special or the world in general?
3. How does the poem sound?
  - imagery and comparisons
  - the poet's choice of words
  - alliteration
  - assonance
  - verb tenses
  - punctuation
  - rhyme and rhythm
  - mood or tone
4. What was the poet's purpose in writing?  
What is his attitude towards the reader?  
Friendly? Mocking? Preaching?  
Confidential? Pleading?  
Is the purpose to teach us something?  
Does the title help convey the purpose or intention?
5. What is your response to the poem?  
Does it affect you in a particular way?  
Is it moving? Shocking? Disturbing?  
Funny? Thought-provoking?  
How do you react to it?

## Lesson 6 Pairings

1. Dylan Thomas: "In my craft or sullen art".  
Seamus Heaney: "Digging".

Write about Thomas' "In my craft and sullen art" and Heaney's "Digging".  
Compare and contrast the poets' attitudes towards their writing.

2. Dylan Thomas: "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night."  
Seamus Heaney: "Follower".

In these two poems the poets write about their relationship with their respective fathers. Compare and contrast the two poems commenting on the relationships and the poets' thoughts and feelings.

3. Dylan Thomas: "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night."  
Seamus Heaney: "Mid-term Break".

These two poems are about loss. Compare and contrast the poems commenting on how the poets deal with their loss and the thoughts and feelings they convey.

4. Dylan Thomas: "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night".  
Dylan Thomas: "Elegy".

Both of these poems are about Thomas' father, the first written before his death and the second is an elegy written after his death. Examine the poet's attitude towards his father as portrayed in these poems. Remember to compare and contrast the poems.

### Some other possible pairings:

"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night".  
"Because I could not stop for death" by Emily Dickinson.

"In my craft and sullen art".  
"Sailing to Byzantium" by Yeats.

"Over Sir John's hill".  
"The Hawk in the Rain" by Ted Hughes.

"This side of the truth (for Llewelyn)".  
"A prayer for my Son" by Yeats.

"The hand that signed the paper".  
"Epitaph on a Tyrant" by W. H. Auden.

## Resources: Links and resources on where to find texts and background source material

It is not possible to reprint on this website the actual texts of Dylan Thomas's work due to copyright restrictions. The *Dylan Thomas Omnibus* (London, Phoenix 2001) contains all the key texts and is referred to here [DTO] with corresponding page numbers. See the Dylan Thomas Links page for links to poems online.

**"The Followers"**, [DTO p271]: Originally published in *World Review*, October 1952, collected posthumously in *A Prospect of The Sea* (1954)

**"Memories of Christmas"**, [DTO p289]: In the *Dylan Thomas Omnibus*, p289, this is the 1945 broadcast and the text referred to here. Thomas wrote a script called 'Memories of Christmas' for the BBC Wales Children's Hour in the autumn of 1945 (broadcast 16 December 1945; published in the *Listener*, 20 December 1945, and *Wales*, Winter 1946; collected in the British edition of *Quite Early One Morning*). He later wrote a piece on similar material in the form of a 'Conversation about Christmas' for *Picture Post* (27 Dec. 1947). During his first visit to America he amalgamated the 'Memories' and the 'Conversation' for publication in *Harper's Bazaar* (December 1950) as 'A Child's Christmas in Wales'. In the *Dylan Thomas Collected Stories*, Ed. Walford Davies, Phoenix, 2001 republishes the now accepted amalgamated text 'A Child's Christmas in Wales', see p304.

**"A Story"**, [DTO p279]: Written for television, and Dylan's only TV broadcast, 10 August 1953. Collected posthumously in *Quite Early One Morning* (American edition), and *A Prospect of The Sea* (1954)

**'Do not go gentle into that good night'**, [DTO p128]: Originally from the collection *In Country Sleep* (USA, 1952) and *Collected Poems 1934-52* (1952). See, also, *Collected Poems*, Ed Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, Phoenix 2001, p.148 and the notes for the poem p255.

**'The hand that signed the paper'**, [DTO p47]: Originally from the collection *Twenty-five Poems* (1936) and *Collected Poems 1934-52* (1952). See, also, *Collected Poems*, Ed Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, Phoenix 2001, p.51 and the notes for the poem p204.

### Pairings:

'Digging', 'Follower' and 'Mid-term break' by Seamus Heaney: from *Death of a Naturalist*, Faber and Faber, London 1966. Republished Faber & Faber, London: 1999, p3, p14, p17 respectively.