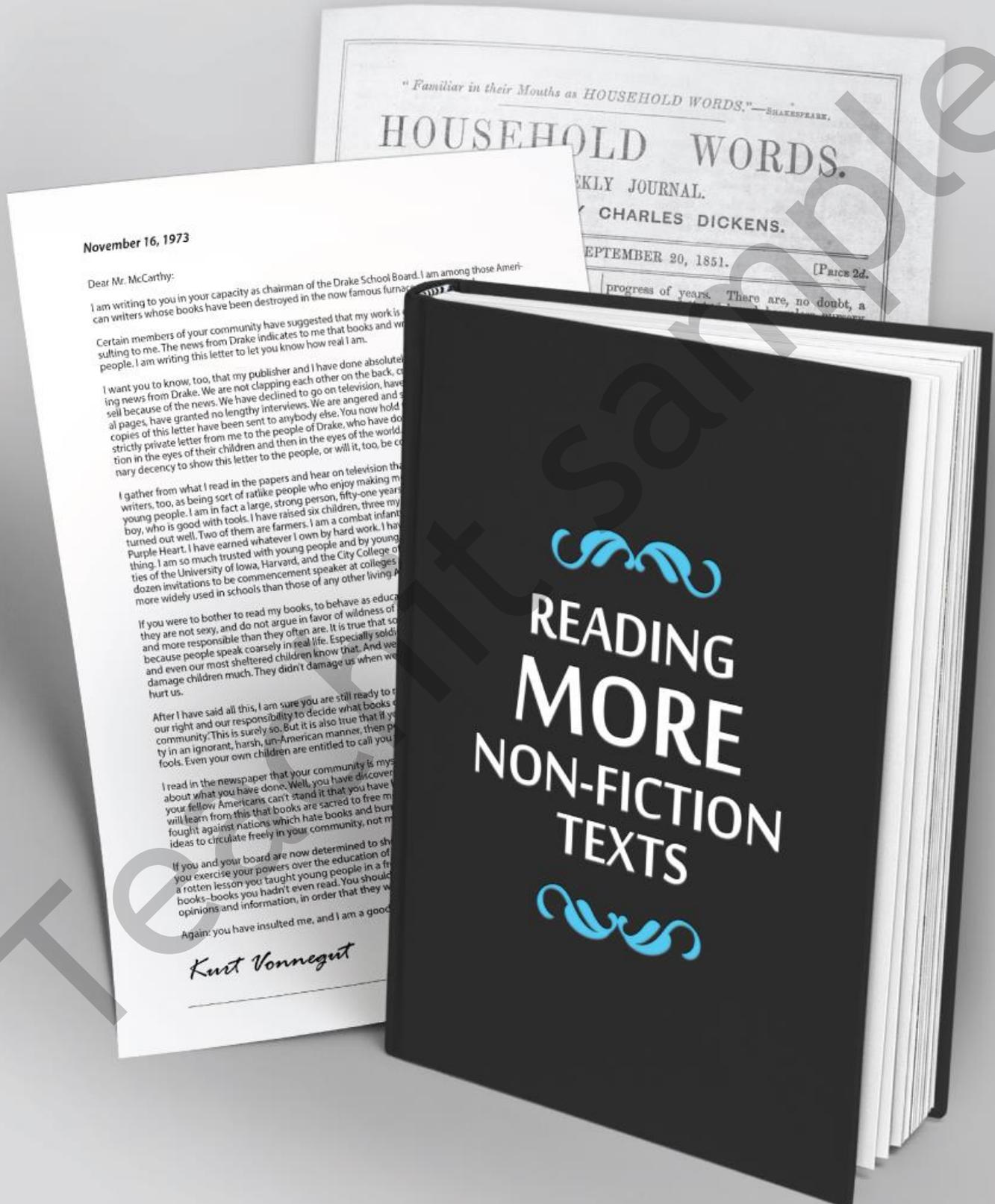


TEACHING PACK

by Linda Newton



November 16, 1973

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

I am writing to you in your capacity as chairman of the Drake School Board. I am among those American writers whose books have been destroyed in the now famous burning.

Certain members of your community have suggested that my work is selling because of the news. We have declined to go on television, have sold out pages, have granted no lengthy interviews. We are angered and surprised that copies of this letter have been sent to anybody else. You now hold a strictly private letter from me to the people of Drake, who have done nothing in the eyes of their children and then in the eyes of the world. It is a primary decency to show this letter to the people, or will it, too, be censored?

I gather from what I read in the papers and hear on television that you are a writer, too, as being sort of ratlike people who enjoy making money out of young people. I am in fact a large, strong person, fifty-one years old, a boy, who is good with tools. I have raised six children, three of whom are turned out well. Two of them are farmers. I am a combat infantryman, a Purple Heart. I have earned whatever I own by hard work. I have been invited to the University of Iowa, Harvard, and the City College of New York. I have a dozen invitations to be commencement speaker at colleges and universities more widely used in schools than those of any other living American.

If you were to bother to read my books, to behave as educated people, they are not sexy, and do not argue in favor of wildness of behavior and more responsible than they often are. It is true that some people speak coarsely in real life. Especially soldiers and even our most sheltered children know that. And we do not damage children much. They didn't damage us when we were young.

After I have said all this, I am sure you are still ready to do what is our right and our responsibility to decide what books are to be read in your community. This is surely so. But it is also true that if you do it in an ignorant, harsh, un-American manner, then you are making fools. Even your own children are entitled to call you names.

I read in the newspaper that your community is mystified about what you have done. Well, you have discovered that your fellow Americans can't stand it that you have done it. You will learn from this that books are sacred to free men and women. I fought against nations which hate books and burn them. I want ideas to circulate freely in your community, not to be censored.

If you and your board are now determined to show that you exercise your powers over the education of your community in a rotten lesson you taught young people in a free country, then you should burn books—books you hadn't even read. You should burn opinions and information, in order that they will be scarce.

Again: you have insulted me, and I am a good person.

Kurt Vonnegut

READING MORE NON-FICTION TEXTS

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Introduction

This GCSE pack is designed to help students engage with and prepare for the reading non-fiction elements of GCSE English Language.

Like our first *Reading non-fiction texts* teaching pack, this pack has been devised for use with the AQA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC Eduqas specifications for GCSE English Language. There are specific resources and exam style practice questions for each of these specifications included within the pack. The activities and ideas will help students to: read and evaluate texts critically, compare ideas and perspectives across two or more texts and analyse the use of language and structure to achieve effects and influence the reader.

The pack contains ten non-fiction text excerpts from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Each non-fiction text excerpt has a thematically linked 'partner text'. Texts can be taught discretely, or in partnership with one another. Which texts and activities you choose to include will depend on the nature of your class and their needs. There is some differentiation included within activities, with accompanying 'answers' where applicable. The structure of the pack is designed to be flexible in that you do not need to teach the texts in chronological order, or within a set time period.

The text excerpts are paired as follows:

- **Text 1:** *All About the Telephone and Phonograph* by Alexander Graham Bell (1878)
- **Text 2:** 'Tim Peake can be a catalyst for more UK space missions' from *The Engineer* by Andrew Wade (2016)
- **Text 3:** 'A visit to the cholera districts of Bermondsey' from *The Morning Chronicle* by Henry Mayhew (1849)
- **Text 4:** *A Passage to Africa* by George Alagiah (2001)
- **Text 5:** *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup (1853)
- **Text 6:** *An Evil Cradling* by Brian Keenan (1991)
- **Text 7:** *American Notes* by Charles Dickens (1842)
- **Text 8:** *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell (1937)
- **Text 9:** 'A witch in the nursery' from *Household Words* by Richard Horne (1851)
- **Text 10:** Letter from Kurt Vonnegut to Charles McCarthy, Drake High School (1973)

Our thanks go to our contributor Linda Newton who has written this pack.

Text 3: 'A visit to the cholera districts of Bermondsey' from *The Morning Chronicle* by Henry Mayhew (1849)

This is an extract from an early piece of social investigative journalism, providing shocking details of a visit Henry Mayhew made to the London district of Bermondsey. He describes how the poorest people in the area live in unsanitary conditions which promote the spread of cholera. Cholera killed many thousands of people in London alone that year.

As we passed along the reeking banks of the sewer the sun shone upon a narrow slip of the water. In the bright light it appeared the colour of strong green tea, and positively looked as solid as black marble in the shadow - indeed it was more like watery mud than muddy water; and yet we were assured this was the only water the wretched inhabitants had to drink. As we gazed in horror at it, we saw drains and sewers emptying their filthy contents into it; we saw a whole tier of doorless privies in the open road, common to men and women, built over it; we heard bucket after bucket of filth splash into it, and the limbs of the vagrant boys bathing in it seemed, by pure force of contrast, white as Parian marble. And yet, as we stood doubting the fearful statement, we saw a little child, from one of the galleries opposite, lower a tin can with a rope to fill a large bucket that stood beside her. In each of the balconies that hung over the stream the self-same tub was to be seen in which the inhabitants put the mucky liquid to stand, so that they may, after it has rested for a day or two, skim the fluid from the solid particles of filth, pollution, and disease. As the little thing dangled her tin cup as gently as possible

into the stream, a bucket of night-soil was poured down from the next gallery.

In this wretched place we were taken to a house where an infant lay dead of the cholera. We asked if they *really did* drink the water? The answer was, 'They were obliged to drink the ditch, without they could beg a pailfull or thieve a pailfull of water. But have you spoken to your landlord about having it laid on for you? 'Yes, sir; and he says he'll do it, and do it, but we know him better than to believe him.' 'Why, sir,' cried another woman, who had shot out from an adjoining room, 'he won't even give us a little whitewash, though we tell him we'll willingly do the work ourselves: and look here, sir,' she added, 'all the tiles have fallen off, and the rain pours in wholesale.'

We had scarcely left the house when a bill caught our eye, announcing that 'this valuable estate' was to be sold!

From this spot we crossed the little shaky bridge into Providence-buildings - a narrow neck of land set in sewers. Here, in front of the houses, were small gardens that a table-cloth would have covered. Still the one dahlia that here raised its round red head made it a happier and brighter place. Never was

colour so grateful to the eye. All we had looked at had been so black and dingy, and had smelt so much of churchyard clay, that this little patch of beauty was brighter and greener than ever was oasis in the desert. Here a herd of children came out, and stared at us like sheep. One child our guide singled out from the rest. She had the complexion of tawed leather, and her bright, glassy eyes were sunk so far back in her head, that they looked more like lights shining through the hollow sockets of a skull than a living head, and her bones seemed ready to start through the thin layer of skin. We were told she had had the cholera twice. Her father was dead of it. 'But she, sir,' said a woman addressing us, 'won't die. Ah! if she'd had plenty of victuals and been brought up less hardy she would have been dead and buried long ago, like many more. And here's another,' she added, pushing forward a long thin woman in rusty black. 'Why I've know'd her eat as much as a quartern loaf at a meal and you can't fatten her no how.' Upon this there was a laugh, but in the woman's bloodless cheeks and blue lips we saw that she like the rest was wasting away from the influence of the charnel-like atmosphere around her.

Lesson 1

Starter activities

1. **Pre-reading activity.** Display the following quotations on the board, and ask students to add post-it notes to the phrases, to give their comments on what sort of a place is being described. You could use the PowerPoint resource [‘Bermondsey’ \(Resource 13\)](#) to display these.

- reeking banks
- wretched inhabitants
- black and dingy
- churchyard clay
- patch of beauty
- oasis in the desert
- mucky liquid
- black marble
- ‘this valuable estate’
- small gardens
- shaky bridge
- charnel-like atmosphere

Draw out the contrasts between the less and more salubrious descriptions, and get students to predict what kind of environment these phrases might describe. (AO1)

2. **Image interpretation:** Display the *Punch* cartoon of the cholera epidemic in London (1852) on the PowerPoint presentation [‘Bermondsey’ \(Resource 13\)](#). Discuss students’ impressions of the image, and what it suggests about the environment.

Main activities

1. **Life in the cholera districts:** Start by reading through the text carefully, at least once, to consider how Mayhew presented the conditions in his report. Using the resource [‘Life in the cholera districts’ \(Resource 14\)](#), ask students to find quotations in support of the statements. There is a differentiated version of the worksheet to support less able students with a matching activity. (AO1)

2. **Analysing techniques:** Using the resource [‘Analysing techniques’ \(Resource 15\)](#) students complete the grid to explore how Mayhew uses techniques to influence the reader. For more support for less able students, you could use the answer sheet to add more of the techniques as a starting point. (AO2)

Plenary activities

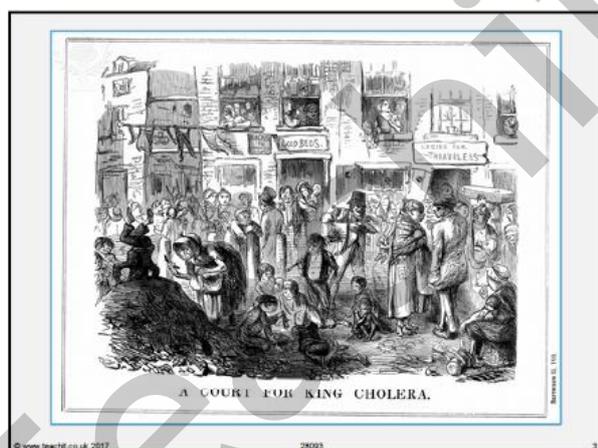
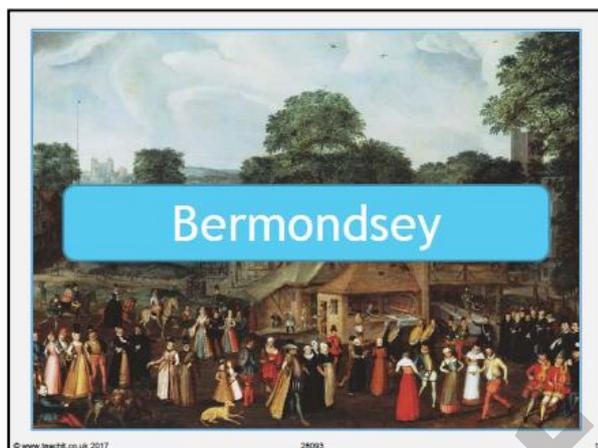
1. **Reporter’s notebook:** Get students to imagine they were another reporter at the scene, and to make notes on the most striking images from the scene. Alternatively, ask them to compose short tweets to report back (140 characters each). (AO1)
2. **The wretched place:** Reread the second paragraph from ‘In this wretched place ...’ to “‘this valuable estate was to be sold!’” Put students in groups to take on a role for a short hot-seating task. Ask them to prepare their response, including arguments and possible counter-arguments, to the fact that this house is to be sold, based on their point of view:
 - **Group 1:** Henry Mayhew and the local people who want to argue in favour of keeping and improving the houses for the residents.
 - **Group 2:** the landlord and prospective buyers who should argue that the houses are beyond saving and all the residents must move out to allow for redevelopment.
 - **Group 3:** the chair and local council officials, who should start the debate, control the process, ask questions, decide when to end the discussion and hold a vote. (AO1)

Resource 13

Bermondsey - PowerPoint

PPT

We've included a screenshot of this PowerPoint here so you can see the resource. To access this resource please [log in](#) to the [Teachit English website](#) and type '28093' into the search bar.



Resource 14

'Life in the cholera districts'

Life was very hard for the poorest people in nineteenth-century Victorian London. Find a quotation from the text which proves each of the following statements about life there at that time.



Toilets without doors and in public view were shared by everyone.	
People tried to remove the worst of the dirt before they drank the water.	
The people were forced to drink unclean water unless they could get something better another way.	
The people wanted to improve their homes but received no help from the landlord.	
The roofs leaked badly when it rained.	
Some of the houses had tiny front gardens.	
One person had tried to brighten up their garden with flowers.	
The children weren't used to seeing strangers in their area.	
Some children were able to survive on very little food as that's all they'd ever had.	
The place felt like somewhere everyone was waiting to die.	

'Life in the cholera districts'

Life was very hard for the poorest people in nineteenth-century Victorian London. Cut out and match up the quotations with the points listed.

Toilets without doors and in public view were shared by everyone.	'the rain pours in wholesale'
People tried to remove the worst of the dirt before they drank the water.	'one dahlia that here raised its round red head made it a happier and brighter place'
The people were forced to drink unclean water unless they could get something better another way.	'if she'd had plenty of victuals and been brought up less hardy she would have been dead and buried long ago'
The people wanted to improve their homes but received no help from the landlord.	'a herd of children came out, and stared at us like sheep'
The roofs leaked badly when it rained.	'charnel-like atmosphere'
Some of the houses had tiny front gardens.	'skim the fluid from the solid particles of filth, pollution, and disease'
One person had tried to brighten up their garden with flowers.	'small gardens that a table-cloth would have covered'
The children weren't used to seeing strangers in their area.	'doorless privies in the open road, common to men and women'
Some children were able to survive on very little food as that's all they'd ever had.	'he won't even give us a little whitewash'
The place felt like somewhere everyone was waiting to die.	'obliged to drink the ditch, without they could beg a pailfull or thieve a pailfull of water'

Teacher's answer sheet

Toilets without doors and in public view were shared by everyone.	'doorless privies in the open road, common to men and women'
People tried to remove the worst of the dirt before they drank the water.	'skim the fluid from the solid particles of filth, pollution, and disease'
The people were forced to drink unclean water unless they could get something better another way.	'obliged to drink the ditch, without they could beg a pailfull or thieve a pailfull of water'
The people wanted to improve their homes but received no help from the landlord.	'he won't even give us a little whitewash'
The roofs leaked badly when it rained.	'the rain pours in wholesale'
Some of the houses had tiny front gardens.	'small gardens that a table-cloth would have covered'
One person had tried to brighten up their garden with flowers.	'one dahlia that here raised its round red head made it a happier and brighter place'
The children weren't used to seeing strangers in their area.	'a herd of children came out, and stared at us like sheep'
Some children learned to adapt and could survive eating very little food; others were not as strong even if they had had a lot of food available.	'if she'd had plenty of victuals and been brought up less hardy she would have been dead and buried long ago'
The place felt like somewhere everyone was waiting to die.	'charnel-like atmosphere'

Resource 15

Analysing techniques

When this piece was first written, in 1849, it was one of a series of articles on how the poorest people of London were forced to live. Mayhew wanted to convince readers that something had to be done to improve their living conditions. To do this he had to get their full attention and so he used a mix of techniques to create a vivid account which would appeal to his readers' head (intellect) and heart (emotions).



Technique	Example	Effect
	'we saw drains and sewers emptying their filthy contents'	
	'bucket after bucket of filth splash'	Onomatopoeia of 'splash' and repetition emphasises the volume of sewage.
	'reeking banks of the sewer' 'smelt so much of the churchyard'	
	'muddy water' 'mucky liquid'	
	'wretched inhabitants' 'vagrant boys' 'bloodless cheeks'	

Technique	Example	Effect
	'strong green tea' 'raised its round red head'	
	'happier ... brighter ... greener'	
	'eyes ... like lights shining through the sockets of a skull'	
	'Water is 'black marble' whereas limbs are 'white as Parian* marble'	

Techniques to choose from:



**Parian marble is a type of white marble.*

Teacher's answer sheet

Your students' responses might include some of the comments below.

Technique	Example	Effect
Sight	'we saw drains and sewers emptying their filthy contents'	Direct description creating a shocking picture of water being polluted.
Sound	'bucket after bucket of filth splash'	Onomatopoeia of 'splash' and repetition emphasises the volume of sewage.
Smell	'reeking banks of the sewer' 'smelt so much of the churchyard'	Suggests a strong, unpleasant smell and associated with death and burial.
Adjectives: setting	'muddy water' 'mucky liquid'	Vivid images of a dirty and polluted place.
Adjectives: people	'wretched inhabitants' 'vagrant boys' 'bloodless cheeks'	These words present unhappy, vulnerable and unhealthy people.
Colours	'strong green tea' 'raised its round red head'	Contrasts the polluted water with an everyday drink; brightness and personification of a flower demonstrates people's dignity.
Comparisons	'happier ... brighter ... greener'	These present the inhabitants as proud and dignified, trying to improve their environment.
Similes and metaphors	'eyes ... like lights shining through the sockets of a skull'	Makes the girl sound like a skeleton rather than a living person.
Contrasts	'Water is 'black marble' whereas limbs are 'white as Parian marble'	The water suggests dirt and death whereas the boys are compared to a pure, flawless marble used for sculptures by the Ancient Greeks.