LESSON 10: A leaping electric uncle

Poem: ‘The Magic Box’, Kit Wright

‘The Magic Box’ gives students a sense of the liberating effect of language and its ability to let you enter that secondary world between reader and writer; you can almost touch the images that rise out of the poem.

Resources and lesson preparation

OHT 103: Match the words
OHT 104: Connotations
Worksheet 105: Magic Box alternatives
Worksheet 106: What’s in the box?
Copies of the poem

Starter

Read aloud the poem by Rupert Brooke, ‘The Great Lover’ (see NOTES for link).

You might like to read some or all of ‘These Have I Loved’ by Edwina Cross (see NOTES for link).

Alternatively, play a recording of the song ‘These Foolish Things’. (The song has been recorded by many artists, notably Sam Cooke.)

Ask students what these pieces have in common (memories of places, people, things that have emotional content for the writer).

Introduction

Using OHT 104, ask students to create interesting phrases by matching the words in the two columns. Students might argue that some just can’t go together – in fact, every combination can suggest something (e.g. ‘carrot teacher’ might be a teacher who dangles a reward in front of you). ICT Activity 1 is an ICT version of the same exercise.

Repeat the activity, now asking students to match words that seem to go ‘naturally’ together.

Now display OHT 104. What does a phrase like ‘rumbling belly’ or a compound word like ‘broomstick’ bring to mind? What are their associations? (Introduce the term connotation if appropriate.) ‘Broomstick’ is a good place to start being, literally, the stick to which a broom is attached. However, the first thing we think of in connection with a broomstick is, probably, a witch. Then we might think of characters like Cinderella sweeping up. Unlike definitions (or denominations) connotations cannot be pinned down – a ‘rumbling belly’ might mean hunger to one person, indigestion to another. Run down the list fairly quickly, mind-mapping associations of the various phrases.
Development

- Give out copies of Worksheet 105. Ask students, working individually, to choose words and phrases. The activity is not about finding the right answer and they are not expected to guess at the original. They should however, be able to justify their choices, on the basis of content or language features such as alliteration or rhythm – or both. ICT Activity 2 is an ICT version of this exercise.

- Students then move into small groups to reach a consensus. If none can be reached, that’s fine – they should record the fact. Share the groups’ choices on an OHP or IWB.

- Alternatively, or as an extension exercise, give out copies of Worksheet 106 and ask groups to fill in the blanks with their own ideas.

Plenary

- Display the poem as an OHT and read it with the class. Point out that the poet took great care with his choice of words – and so did the students. Where this happens, writing improves.

- Discuss:
  - What do you think the ‘magic box’ is?
  - How is stanza 4 different in content and tone from the rest of the poem? (Are the ideas more surreal/fantastical?)
  - How clearly do we, as readers, see, feel, taste or hear the things described?

Suggestions for writing

- Write a poem in the same format, perhaps using a different container, (e.g. my fantasy pick-up truck, my amazing backpack) made up of a list of items that are connected with precious memories.

- ‘The Magic Box’ has a positive tone. Can you write another verse which has a melancholy tone? Reread Brooke’s poem for a contrasting mood.

- ‘The Magic Box’ relies largely on sight and sound. Can you add a verse which connects with other senses?

- See ICT Activity 3 for a writing exercise based on combining nouns and prepositions to create new images to include in a piece of their own writing.

NOTES

- Rupert Brooke’s ‘The Great Lover’ can found online at: www.bartleby.com/103/147.html

- ‘These Have I Loved’ by Edwina Cross can found online at: www.outbackonline.net/cross/CrossLove.htm

- Compare Adrian Henri’s ‘Tonight at Noon’, another poem which combines popular icons and surreal images.

- Compare ‘i wanna be yours’ by John Cooper Clarke (Rhythm and Blues, Lesson 14), and ‘Cargoes’ by John Masefield (Rhythm and Blues, Lesson 18), both of which are structured around lists.
## OHT 103: Match the words

Create interesting phrases by matching words from the columns below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>terrible</th>
<th>belly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>black</td>
<td>breakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shiny</td>
<td>dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>drops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carrot</td>
<td>face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mighty</td>
<td>horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bluest</td>
<td>liquid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frozen</td>
<td>monster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silver</td>
<td>nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rumbling</td>
<td>smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silver</td>
<td>stallion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>broom</td>
<td>steed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high-rolling</td>
<td>stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dewy</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coolest</td>
<td>waves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OHT 104: Connotations

Chinese dragon
terrible teacher
mighty monster
high horse
carrot nose
frozen face
rumbling belly
shiny smile
coolest liquid
silver waves
dewy drops
bluest water
broomstick
silver steed
black stallion
high-rolling breakers
Choose the word or phrase which you like best:

I will put in the box
the swish of a silk sari on a... lonely avenue / summer night / breezy eve / silent street,
fire from the nostrils of a... Chinese dragon / terrible teacher / mighty monster / high horse,
the tip of a... / chilli / tongue / lip / dentist's drill ...touching a tooth.

I will put in the box
a snowman with a... carrot nose / frozen face / rumbling belly / shiny smile
a sip of the... coolest liquid / silver waves / dewy drops / bluest water ...from Lake Lucerne,
a... stinging ray / sparking arc /leaping spark / flashing fin ...from an electric fish.

I will put into the box
three violet... songs / wishes / prayers / poems ...spoken in Gujarati,
the last... wish / joke / laugh / words ...of an ancient uncle,
and the first... cry / whimper / babble / smile ...of a baby.

I will put into the box
a fifth season and a black sun,
a cowboy on a... broomstick / silver steed / horse / black stallion
and a... wonder woman / teddy bear / witch / golden angel ...on a white horse.

My box is... made / fashioned / created / wrought ...from ice and gold and steel,
with stars on the lid and secrets in the corners.
Its hinges are the... ankles of angels / toe joints of dinosaurs / knuckles of old giants / press-ups of heroes.

I shall surf in my box
on the great high-rolling breakers of the wild Atlantic,
then wash ashore on a... golden / silver / yellow / silent ...beach
the colour of the... moon / stars / rainbow / sun.
I will put in the box
the swish of a silk sari on a ____________
fire from the nostrils of a ____________ ____________
the tip of a tongue touching a ____________

I will put in the box
a ____________ with a rumbling belly
a sip of the bluest water from Lake ____________
a leaping spark from an ____________ ____________

I will put into the box
three ____________ ____________ spoken in Gujarati,
the last ____________ of an ancient uncle,
and the first ____________ of a baby.

I will put into the box
a fifth season and a ____________ sun,
a cowboy on a ____________
and a ____________ on a white ____________.

My box is fashioned from ice and ____________ and ____________,
with stars on the ____________ and ____________ in the corners.
Its hinges are the ________________________________.

I shall surf in my box
on the great high-rolling ____________ of the ____________
__________,
then wash ashore on a ____________ ____________
the colour of the ____________.
The Magic Box

Kit Wright

I will put in the box
the swish of a silk sari on a summer night,
fire from the nostrils of a Chinese dragon,
the tip of a tongue touching a tooth.

I will put in the box
a snowman with a rumbling belly
a sip of the bluest water from Lake Lucerne,
a leaping spark from an electric fish.

I will put into the box
three violet wishes spoken in Gujarati,
the last joke of an ancient uncle,
and the first smile of a baby.

I will put into the box
a fifth season and a black sun,
a cowboy on a broomstick
and a witch on a white horse.

My box is fashioned from ice and gold and steel,
with stars on the lid and secrets in the corners.
Its hinges are the toe joints of dinosaurs.

I shall surf in my box
on the great high-rolling breakers of the wild Atlantic,
then wash ashore on a yellow beach
the colour of the sun.