



Blue Coat Church of England Academy

Year: 8

Subject: English

Overview

Unit 1: Power and Villainy

The year begins with an exploration of the theme of power and villainy through an in-depth study of William Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Over the course of the unit, pupils will engage with the complex language and structure of Shakespearean drama. They will learn how to track big ideas—such as corruption, manipulation, and ambition—across key scenes in order to identify and analyse the central themes of the play. Pupils will explore how Shakespeare crafts meaning through metaphor, symbolism, and irony, and will learn to explain the common ground in metaphorical comparisons. Through a close examination of soliloquies, monologues, and dialogue, students will develop a deep understanding of indirect characterisation and how the reactions of others can shape a character's

portrayal. The study will include exploration of dramatic conventions such as the five-part structure, acts and scenes, and the use of stage directions, all of which contribute to character development and thematic progression. Pupils will also learn about the features of the tragic genre, including the roles of the tragic hero and anti-hero, and will consider how Shakespeare engages with the idea of the divine right of kings to challenge or reinforce contemporary power structures. In writing, pupils will refine their ability to craft effective introductions and develop persuasive, personal viewpoints on the big ideas in the text, expressed through clear thesis statements and topic sentences. The unit culminates in a critical written response in which pupils explore the nature of villainy in *Richard III* and its connection to Shakespeare's presentation of power.

Unit 2: Good vs Evil

In this immersive unit, students will explore the enduring theme of good vs evil through the chilling lens of the Gothic genre, with a particular focus on Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*. Over the course of the unit, pupils will apply core reading fluency strategies—prediction, clarification, and summary—to support their understanding of dense, atmospheric prose. They will study the key conventions of Gothic literature, examining how setting establishes tone and how writers manipulate characterisation and voice, particularly in 19th-century texts. Pupils will learn how to track recurring themes—such as fear, the supernatural, and moral duality—across a range of Gothic extracts, both traditional and contemporary, developing their ability to identify intertextual links and contextual influences, including Victorian attitudes toward the Gothic. Through detailed textual analysis, they will explore the symbolic and metaphorical layers embedded in Gothic imagery and language, including how motifs contribute to meaning and mood. In writing, pupils will develop their descriptive craft, beginning with constructing effective introductions using pathetic fallacy to establish atmosphere. They will learn to develop big ideas across a piece, using topic sentences, detailed imagery, and zoomed-in focus on key moments to create tension and mood. Pupils will also refine their use of symbolism and metaphor by applying tenor, vehicle, and ground, while using varied sentence structures to evoke tone and emotional response. By the end of the unit, students will produce a cohesive piece of creative or analytical writing that demonstrates their understanding of Gothic conventions and the interplay of good and evil within the genre.

Unit 3: Experience of Conflict

In the penultimate unit of the year, pupils will explore experience of conflict through the study of a diverse range of poems from various writers, including Simon Armitage and Wilfred Owen. A focus on figurative language, especially metaphor, will help students to deepen their understanding of the relationship between tenor and vehicle, uncovering the emotional and symbolic weight of poetic imagery. Through examining the distinction between the poet and the speaker, pupils will develop their ability to comment on how poetic voice is crafted to convey perspective, emotion, and identity. They will consider how structural choices—such as stanza formation and line breaks—contribute to a poem’s meaning and tone, and how poets use voice to evoke pathos and explore historical context. In writing, pupils will build analytical and interpretive skills by developing their ability to construct effective predictions, inferences, and summaries. They will develop structured responses through clear introductions, accurate sentence construction, and the use of varied sentence types for effect. The unit culminates in an analytical response that reflects on how poets use voice, structure, and language to explore experience of conflict.

Unit 4: Exploration

Finally, pupils will explore the theme of exploration, through a study of literary non-fiction travel writing from a range of writers including Bill Bryson, Micheal Palin and Karl Pilkington. Pupils will engage with a diverse range of non-fiction texts to explore how writers use language to transform thought, influence opinion, and evoke emotional response, whilst giving a factual account of their personal experiences. They will recognise how writers use rhetorical appeals—*pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos*—to persuade and connect with their audience and develop their ability to comment on the effect of this. In writing, students will experiment with crafting their own travel texts, learning how to use a range of rhetorical devices to add depth and imagination. Pupils will also learn how to shape voice and tone for a specific audience. The unit culminates in the production of a polished travel piece in which pupils apply the full range of rhetorical strategies to describe their account of a real or imagined travel experience.