

OPENING  
DOORS  
to  
QUALITY  
WRITING

Ideas for writing  
inspired by great writers  
for ages 6 to 9

BOB COX



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For Vicky, with love



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A word is dead  
When it is said,  
    Some say.  
I say it just  
Begins to live  
    That day.

*Emily Dickinson*

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# Introduction

*Opening Doors to Quality Writing* is a companion book to *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose* (2014). There are two books, one for ages 6 to 9 and one for ages 10 to 13. The idea is that teachers will be supported, in flexible and creative ways, to use quality literary texts to stimulate quality writing. My theme has continued to be the exploration of poetry and prose from long ago, sometimes termed ‘literary heritage’ texts. My aim is to suggest ways in which the evident quality of the writing can be exploited by schools to develop exciting journeys in reading, writing, speaking and listening for their pupils. I am seeing many teachers successfully use the scope and depth which literature can offer to inspire high standards, mastery learning and, above all, a love of language in its many forms. My criteria for choosing the texts has been that they support the need for greater knowledge of literature from the past and provide the scope needed for deeper learning in English.

All the units should help you to make links from understanding the challenging texts to maximising the huge potential for quality writing. I hope your pupils will enjoy the writing ideas suggested and that you and your pupils will be inspired to devise your own! You should find the level of expectation goes up and, with it, the children’s writing should become more quirky, creative and unusual – after all, it’s great writers who have inspired the class! In this book, I have been able to include examples of remarkable pupils’ work, of all abilities, and I have included a story of my own. I am always encouraging teachers to write with their pupils, so it’s a way of showing that it can be a

natural thing to do. Writing creatively maintains my own awareness of how difficult, yet fulfilling, it can be and, since we are encouraging quality writing, we can all be partners in the process.

In my extensive travels as a teacher and an educational consultant, I have often found that progress is limited either by a model which becomes too much of a straightjacket or by an unwillingness to adapt the model to suit particular classes or pupils. Feedback from *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose* has frequently emphasised the confidence which can develop when creative ideas are used as a starting point, – for example:

---

Thank you for reigniting our love of quality texts and giving us fantastic planning and teaching ideas to encourage all abilities to access the texts.

*Churchfields Junior School Conference, 2015*

---

Support and enthusiasm from teachers is essential. It is the teachers who will take ideas deeper, invent new questions and present their lessons in new planning shapes. The books (and the conferences I run) are designed to signpost ways to access a harder curriculum so that confidence and self-evaluation can grow. When challenging texts become the norm in classroom practice, there are significant implications for methodology and resourcing, so the ‘Opening Doors’ series is a complement to approaches being trialled in schools which involve all learners working on the same content and with the same objectives.

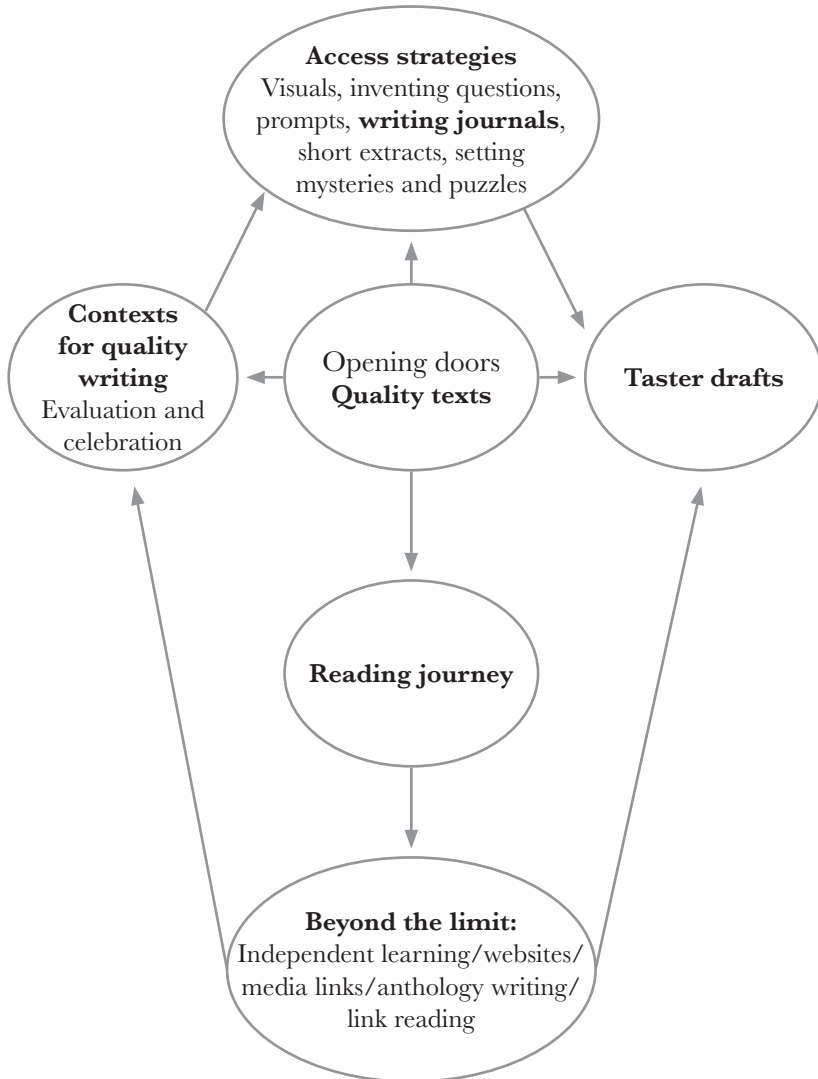
Overwhelmingly, however, teachers have been asking for more of the quality texts themselves and more ways in which all abilities can access them. So, here are fifteen units of work which should help to stimulate many innovative ways for all your pupils to enjoy literature and write with originality. Schools working with the ‘Opening Doors’ strategies have tended to report:

- ♥ More teacher empowerment and confidence.
- ♥ More knowledge building for pupils and teachers.
- ♥ A growing confidence with literature, including poetry.
- ♥ A tendency to move to using ‘English’ as the subject name rather than ‘literacy’.
- ♥ Planning from the top becoming a norm.
- ♥ Planning for mastery learning becoming a norm.
- ♥ Improved comprehension skills.
- ♥ Improved quality writing and associated excitement.

‘Opening Doors’ is intended to add a more challenging dimension to English teaching, but all learners can find that doors have been opened because access is always emphasised. The diagram on page 4 provides a framework for the many ways in which quality writing can be achieved.

The pattern you will find across the units marks out the major principles which can support a richer diet in English:

- ♥ Texts with scope for creativity and curiosity.
- ♥ The need for a range of access strategies.



- ♥ The recommendation to write early on in the process via **taster drafts**.
- ♥ Using a range of assessment for learning strategies and ‘excellent responses’ criteria.
- ♥ Emphasising the wonder of the text revealed.
- ♥ Offering harder, evaluative questions sooner.
- ♥ Linking the learning about quality texts with the application required for quality writing.
- ♥ Including ‘beyond the limit’ reading and writing ideas at appropriate points.
- ♥ Planning lessons in shapes which suit the objectives.

Both the diagram and the questions across the units are set out in a radial way with choices, options and routes critical to differentiation methods which can be planned according to progress. At all times, great writers and great writing lead the way so the inspiration comes from them, with pupils guided by the immense talent of their teachers. There is no need to be limited by any single pedagogy. Approaches can be constantly evaluated and altered according to outcomes. I love the feedback I get from teachers telling me they have linked the text with a more modern one, negotiated fresh questions or converted the task into a different medium.

At the heart of the ‘Opening Doors’ concept is the need for the teachers to use literary texts as starting points for their own invention. That mindset is bound to spread to the pupils. They will be suggesting approaches too – and why not?





Part 1

# Opening doors to poetry



## Unit 1

# His Waistcoat and Trousers Were Made of Pork Chops

## ‘The New Vestments’ by Edward Lear

How well can you understand and write ‘clever nonsense’?

### Access strategies

What better access strategy could there be than to study an illustration first and start creating words and ideas immediately!

Try a **question maze**. The pupils have to ask as many questions as possible which have been raised by the picture. Just ask them what puzzles them about the picture. If they need starter prompts try these:

- 🐷 What is on his head?
- 🐷 Which colours would you use for different parts of the clothing?
- 🐷 What is unexpected?

You may find it useful to magnify the picture if you can or crop sections of it for discussion.

Write harder conceptual questions (you could call them **killer questions**) on sticky notes and place these in the middle of each table.

Your pupils should write their attempted answers on different coloured sticky notes and place these around the question. Now turn the ‘answers’ over so no one can see them and ask the groups to change tables and try answering another group’s questions. Compare the answers from the different groups later.

When you feed back on this in a **mini-plenary**, you can begin the process of guiding pupils towards the idea of ‘clever nonsense’. Content which is, at first reading, absurd, can be very clever indeed or it can seem just ridiculous.

The following points might emerge:

- ♥ The images are surprising and unlikely but there is a kind of pattern too.
- ♥ The images could be unpleasant or just fun.
- ♥ The **rhyiming couplets** and regular rhythm support the jolly, whimsical feel.

At any appropriate point, offer the beginning of Edward Lear’s poem, ‘The New Vestments’, which might support your teaching strategies and your pupils’ engagement:

---

There lived an old man in the Kingdom of Tess,  
Who invented a purely original dress;  
And when it was perfectly made and complete,  
He opened the door, and walked into the street.

---



In *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose*, Bob Cox introduced teachers to engaging strategies which use literary heritage texts as the stimulus for excellent learning. This new companion book puts the focus on pupils producing quality writing – developing their literacy skills and a love of reading in the process.

The 15 units of work cover poetry and prose: each unit provides exciting stimulus material, creative ideas for writing projects, and differentiation and support strategies, meaning all pupils can achieve the quality writing objectives.

Discover a multitude of ready-to-use ideas, inspired by classic literature and great writers' works, along with plenty of new strategies and advice.

*Also available Opening Doors to Quality Writing for ages 10 to 13*



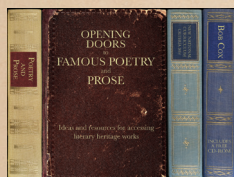
*Oh what a joy to see creative English retrieved from the avaricious maws of 'literacy'! Bob Cox's Opening Doors to Quality Writing series will come as a profound relief to teachers and pupils who are desperate for some sanctuary from the life-sapping study of fronted adverbials, and who are instead up for the challenge of matching their skills against the great writers of the past – and in the process finding new ways to write with elegance, imagination, precision and power.*

**Barry J. Hymer, Professor of Psychology in Education,  
University of Cumbria in Lancaster**

*Mr Cox has done it again! Following on from Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose are these new resources for younger learners. From the beautiful illustrations to the extraordinary range of texts, there is much to admire. I think that what busy teachers will particularly appreciate, though, are the clear, practical but inspiring activities suggested for each text.*

**Claire Gadsby, teaching and learning consultant and author**

*The CD-ROM of resources contains all of the extracts and illustrations you will need to begin opening doors in your classroom.*



**Bob Cox** is an independent educational consultant, writer and teacher coach who works nationally and internationally to support outstanding learning. Bob has been working with clusters of schools and local authorities to apply 'opening doors' strategies to raise standards in English and to make links between quality texts and

quality writing. Before that Bob taught English for 23 years.

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