

OPENING
DOORS
to
QUALITY
WRITING

Ideas for writing
inspired by great writers
for ages 10 to 13

BOB COX



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For Becky, with love

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although [the Brontës] don't write many novels ... they've tried lots of different genres, they've experimented. It's been like a literary kind of workshop – the four of them working together and so by the time they're writing *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*, they're very sophisticated users of those forces.

***John Bowen and Ann Dinsdale, 'The Brontës'
Early Writings: Combining Fantasy and Fact'***

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 10 to 13 and one for ages 6 to 9. 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 using 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 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 and enjoyable 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 ideas are used as a starting point, not an end game – 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.

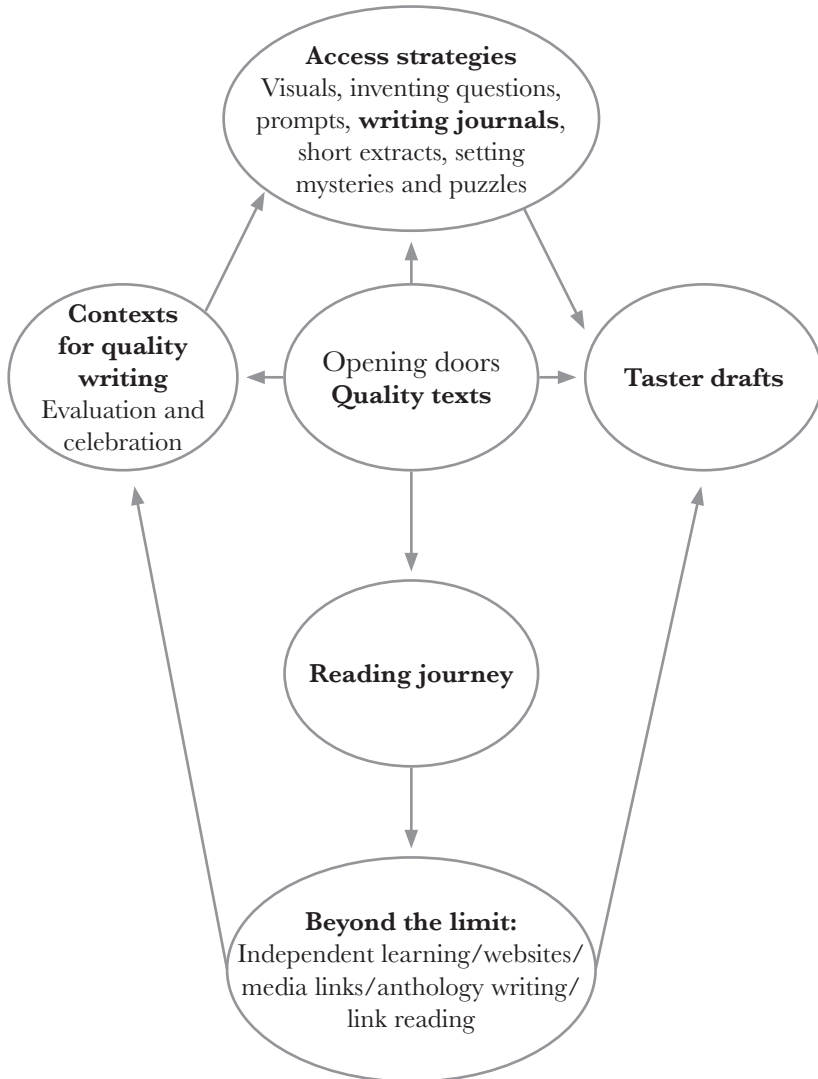
Overwhelmingly, however, teachers have been asking for more of the quality texts themselves and more ways in which all abilities can access them. So, here are fifteen units of work which should help to stimulate many innovative ways for all your pupils to enjoy literature and write with originality. 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 prose



Unit 1

Night Encounter

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins

How well can you introduce a mystery story?

Access strategies

Wilkie Collins is often credited with writing the first mystery story, *The Woman in White* (1859). It's easy to forget that, once upon a time, writing about a mystery was a new concept! The hero of the story, Walter Hartright, is a kind of detective and your pupils will be sampling the style of writing which influenced so many later authors to weave sensational plots around a sleuth. The story was incredibly popular in its own time, and there were even products like perfumes and clothing using the 'Woman in White' branding. Although the novel itself is long, encourage as many of your pupils as possible to try it because it is readable and eventful.

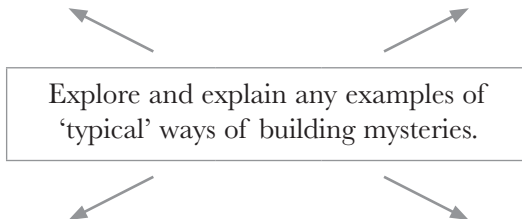
Try using a **key image strategy** to open up access to this famous mystery for all. Which images in this short extract from Chapter 4 stimulate the children's curiosity the most? Why?

[...] in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me.

I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick.

There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments, her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her.

Now, use an **explore and explain** learning pathway. The idea is that your pupils are building an understanding of *how* the mystery is set up. They must search for evidence in one group and then move groups to feed back to others. This keeps the pressure on to participate, listen and learn, rather than defer to the most proactive students.

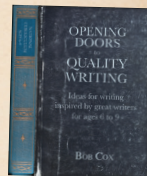


In *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose*, Bob Cox introduced teachers to engaging strategies which use literary heritage texts as the stimulus for excellent learning. This new companion book puts the focus on pupils producing quality writing – developing their literacy skills and a love of reading 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 6 to 9**



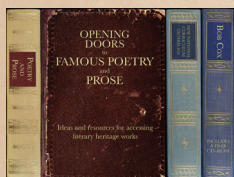
Oh what a joy to see creative English retrieved from the avaricious maws of 'literacy'! Bob Cox's 'Opening Doors' series will come as a profound relief to teachers and pupils who are desperate for some sanctuary from the life-sapping study of fronted adverbials, and who are instead up for the challenge 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

The book offers a tantalising vision for the place of great books in the KS2/KS3 classroom. It also offers a generous range of approaches with which to enhance our students' skills across the English spectrum: in reading, in writing, in speaking and in listening. It does so with its head and heart firmly in the right place: tightly focused on expanding the horizons and the capacity for joy in the written word for our young learners, but equally taking care to protect and preserve the joy of teaching that often comes from a great book and the right kinds of dialogue. I cannot recommend it highly – or frequently – enough.

**Martin Galway, Teaching and Learning Adviser,
Herts for Learning Primary English Team**

All of the extracts and illustrations you will need to begin opening doors in your classroom are downloadable.



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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