

Digging for meaning

Investigating texts in an archaeological way

Most people will be more intrigued by that which is hidden than that which is clear and available. The curiosity which attaches to a hidden text can be exploited for the purposes of teaching at a number of levels and for different purposes.



The activity here is centred on a text which initially is hidden but which can be revealed bit by bit. ICT enables us to make words vanish or appear - something which is hard to achieve without the technology. One way to do this is to take a text and change the font colour so that it is the same as the background colour. To make a word or words reappear, simply select them and change the font colour to one which is visible.

This technique, ideal with an interactive whiteboard, can be used to explore an unknown text on different levels. For example, we might wish to explore the kind of text or the

period when it was written, working from whatever textual clues we can discover. We might wish to investigate sentence patterns by predicting the kinds of words which might precede or follow the ones we have revealed.

On the other hand, we could use this technique to work on texts, perhaps in examination preparation, which have already been studied.

This lesson activity should be used in conjunction with the SMART Notebook™ file 'Digging for Meaning.notebook'.

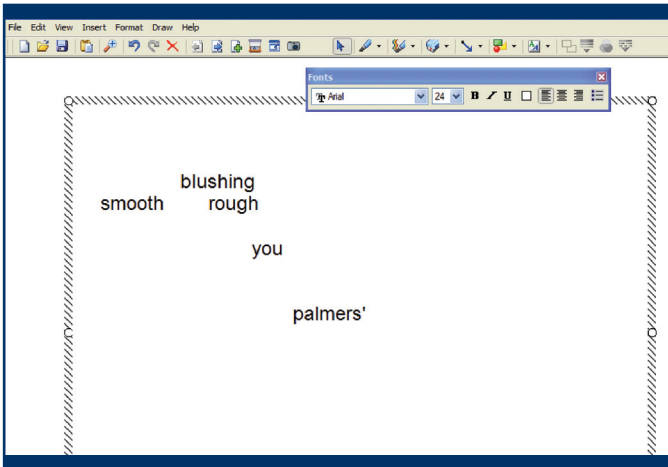
 Notes

Suggested activity outline

- Find the text with which you wish to work. In this example, it is an extract from 'Romeo and Juliet'. (Your students have a rough idea of the story and the characters but have not looked at the text in detail yet.)
- Paste it into your work area, and before students see it, change the font colour to the background colour (in most cases white on white works well).
- If students do not yet know what kind of text you are showing them, you might select the whole of it to show its shape. It should be clear that it is neither prose nor poetry.
- Select a word. With a bit of practice you will be able to hit upon the word you want. (In most software, a double click will highlight a single unit – e.g. a word.)
- Use the word as a springboard for discussion. In the example, 'blushing' is the first to be revealed – and it is a very revealing word. What does it imply?
- The next word to be revealed might be 'shrine' or 'holy' with very different implications.
- Continue with the exploration for as long as you feel it is fruitful. Encourage predictions, ideas and inferences. You may then wish to reveal a line at a time, the whole extract – or something in between, such as each character's speech.
- At the end of this session students might note their first impressions e.g. what do we think of the characters so far? What themes do we pick up?

SMART specific

Paste the text into the SMART Notebook. In 'Text' mode, change the font colour to white. Your text will disappear. Unlike Microsoft® Word, if you double click (or tap twice) on the board the word will be revealed without you needing to alter the font colour back to black – but will disappear again when you touch somewhere else. This is useful if you want to retain the mystery of the text for a little longer. Alternatively, you can of course, change the font colour so that the word remains visible (Example 1).



Example 1

Extension activities

So far we have assumed the teacher to be the one activating the board and deciding which words are shown. Instead, volunteers can come and pick a word – which will make the selection really random! (If they fail to hit on one at the first attempt, it's probably because they've found the blank line between speeches.) Depending on the chooser's ability and confidence, they can be asked to make some kind of comment on the word they have revealed.

As part of the activity, reveal all the speeches by Romeo and discuss what Juliet might be saying in response.

Investigate language. For example, the word 'blushing'. Is it a verb or an adjective? 'Smooth' and 'rough' seem like two opposed adjectives; are they? What does the apostrophe after 'palmer's' indicate? Even a simple word like 'the' or 'you' can be used in this way.

Of course, the technique can be used with any type of text. It can be turned into a quiz or competition. Teams, taking turns, can be asked what kind of word they think follows (or precedes) an already visible word. For a bonus point, can they guess the word itself? (Used as a revision activity, the bonus should be more frequently gained.)

Resources

Any literary text is an obvious goldmine but the following will also provide interesting and sometimes thought-provoking material:

A range of travel writing: from the very personal (Bill Bryson, Tony Hawks and so on) through to the opinionated (such as the 'Rough Guides' or 'Lonely Planet' series) to the seemingly neutral (official brochures and guides).

Condensed descriptive writing such as 'The Good Pub Guide' or estate agents brochures.

Simple narratives such as fables, traditional tales and myths.

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