Romantic Poetry Lesson

KS3 Curriculum links

English programmes of study:

Reading:

Pupils should be taught to:

- develop an appreciation and love of reading, and read increasingly challenging material independently through:
 - ➤ reading a wide range of fiction, including in particular poems with a wide coverage of genres, forms and authors. The range will include high-quality works from:
 - English literature, pre-1914, including poetry
- understand increasingly challenging texts through:
 - > making inferences and referring to evidence in the text
 - knowing the context of the writing and drawing on this knowledge to support comprehension
 - checking their understanding to make sure that what they have read makes sense.
- read critically through:
 - knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice and text structure, presents meaning
 - > recognising a range of poetic conventions and understanding how these have been used
 - making critical comparisons across texts.

Writing:

Pupils should be taught to:

- write accurately, fluently and effectively for pleasure and information through:
 - > writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including:
 - writing poetry
 - > summarising and organising material, and supporting ideas and arguments with any necessary factual detail
 - applying their growing knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and text structure to their writing and selecting the appropriate form

- drawing on knowledge of literary and rhetorical devices from their reading and listening to enhance the impact of their writing
- plan, draft, edit and proof-read through:
 - considering how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended
 - > amending the vocabulary, grammar and structure of their writing to improve its coherence and overall effectiveness
 - > paying attention to accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling

Grammar and vocabulary:

Pupils should be taught to:

- consolidate and build on their knowledge of vocabulary through:
 - discussing reading, writing and spoken language with precise and confident use of linguistic and literary terminology.

Spoken English:

Pupils should be taught to:

- speak confidently and effectively, including through:
 - > participating in structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said.

KS3 Lesson plan

Romantic poetry lesson

Time: 1 hour

Lesson objective	To learn about the key features of Romantic poetry.	
Learning outcomes	To recognise in lyric poems a prioritisation of passion over reason, simple language and the use of nature to convey feelings of the heart and mind, which are some key features of Romantic poetry. To recognise William Wordsworth as one of the founders of English Romanticism. To bridge the gap between the arts and sciences by examining the poetry of British chemist, Humphry Davy, and comparing it to the poetry of Wordsworth. To write one's own poetry, which utilises the knowledge and poetic techniques learned in class.	
Relevant previous knowledge	Poetry. Purpose, audience and context of a text. Language, vocabulary choice, grammar and text structure. Literary and rhetorical devices. Critical analyses and comparison of texts.	
Resources and set-up required	Lesson plan Online YouTube videos	

Lesson breakdown

Part 1 Background and heritage	10 mins	Brief history of Humphry Davy, a British chemist who also wrote poetry. Reexamine the relationship between the arts and the sciences.
Part 2 Intro to Romantic poetry	10 mins	What was the Romantic period. What are some of the characteristics of Romantic writing.
Part 3 Davy poem activity	5 mins	Analyse Davy's poem 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'
Part 4 Wordsworth poem activity	20 mins	Analyse Wordsworth's poem 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' and compare it to Davy's. Identifying characteristics of Romantic writing in Wordsworth and Davy's poems.
Part 5 Conclusion	15 mins	Writing your own Romantic poetry. Summary of lesson objectives and key information learned

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	during the lesson.
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KS3: Romantic poetry lesson notes

Part 1: Background and heritage

Describe to the pupils the following background information on Humphry Davy and his endeavours not only in the field of chemistry, but also in poetry. Use this to introduce pupils to the idea of interdisciplinarity, and viewing the arts and sciences in a compatible, rather than contradictory, light. A link to a YouTube video giving a brief overview of the life of Davy has been suggested for use during the lesson.

Key words: William Wordsworth Lyrical Ballads Romantic Age Samuel Taylor Colerdige Mary Shelley Frankenstein metaphors

Further reading:

Nature, Power, and the Light of Suns: The Poetry of Humphry Davy (Maurice Hindle, 2016)

Humphry Davy: Laughing Gas, Literature, and the Lamp (FutureLearn, 2020)

Find them online:

https://mauricehindle.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Nature-Power-the-Light-of-Suns-essay.pdf

https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/humphry-davy

Suggested script

Watch the YouTube video 'Overview of Davy's life by Tim Fulford for Humphry Davy: Laughing Gas, Literature and the Lamp' on the 'Sharon Ruston' YouTube channel (link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBMm2DkOnoo) to get a brief history of Davy's life and scientific achievements.

Although Sir Humphry Davy is most well known for his scientific endeavours, he also wrote a lot of poetry in his lifetime. The subject of these poems ranged from natural landscapes to his experiments.

For Davy, chemistry had the power to transform one thing into another; to modify elements, to make solids into gases, or reveal new elements from chemical processes. Similarly, poetic imagination can transform the world around us.

William Wordsworth, a renowned poet of Davy's time, asked him to proofread the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads*. This book would become one of the most important of the period, helping launch the **Romantic Age** in English literature.

Wordsworth claimed that poetry was the opposite of science. Davy responded saying chemistry was just as imaginative and creative as poetry.

What similarities are there between the arts and the sciences? Do you think science is as creative as poetry?

The arts and the sciences are both ways of understanding the world. Science does this by making clear things that are assumed factual, connecting them, and therefore building a foundation of knowledge. The knowledge that the arts create is just as authentic as the knowledge of science, but it is formed through a different method; it is emotional and about expression and creativity. However, scientists also need to be creative and use their imagination in order to push boundaries and discover new things. **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, another Romantic poet, and the co-author of *Lyrical Ballads*, stated that science was necessarily poetical because it is being performed with the passion of hope.

It is important to not think of the arts and the sciences as two completely separate entities because they are irrevocably intertwined. One example of this can be observed through the way that science influences literature and vice versa.

Many critics agree that the character of Professor Waldman, from **Mary Shelley**'s prominent novel *Frankenstein*, appears to be modelled on Sir Humphry Davy. Mary Shelley was reading Davy's 'Chemistry' (how she referred to it in her journals) when she was composing *Frankenstein*. In the book, Professor Waldman is Frankenstein's professor and mentor. William Goldwin, Mary Shelley's father, was one of the attendees at Davy's lectures at the Royal Institution.

Furthermore, these scientific lectures were described as "figurative and poetical", and Coleridge claimed to attend them in order to "enlarge my stock of **metaphors**".

Part 2: Intro to Romantic poetry

Describe to the pupils the following suggested background information on Romantic poetry. Two links to YouTube videos giving a brief overview of the Romantic age have been suggested for use during the lesson.

Key words: reason Enlightenment rationality deep emotions individualism purity of childhood critique of progress nature subjective Romanticism sublime lyric poems first-person everyday speech William Wordsworth

Further reading:

Romanticism - Europe (1815-1848) British Romanticism (SparkNotes, 2018) (Poetry Foundation, 2023)

Find them online: https://www.sparknotes.com/history/european/1848/section5/https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/152982/an-introduction-to-british-romanticism

Suggested script

Watch the YouTube video 'Romanticism & English Literature' on the 'Flippin' English' YouTube channel (link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsX7sQbPv8g) until the timestamp 3:03 to get a brief introduction to the Romantic Age in English Literature.

Then watch the YouTube video 'Romanticism Characteristics: What are they?' on the 'ProWritingAidTV' YouTube channel (link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCan Ks2 m2 g&t=197s) to get a brief outline of the ideas and literary devices that characterised Romantic writing.

The basic idea during the Romantic period was that **reason** cannot explain everything. This was a reaction to the **Enlightenment**, when things were ruled by **rationality**.

Some of the key themes of Romantic literature include: **deep emotions**, **individualism**, the **purity of childhood**, a **critique of progress** and a love for **nature**. Romantic writing strayed away from the idea of an ultimate "truth", instead recognising that everything has its own, **subjective**, value. This led to questioning whether an absolute good or absolute evil even existed.

Romantic period writing was very influenced by the idea that there were two aesthetic categories: the beautiful and the **sublime**, where beautiful suggests smallness, clarity and painless pleasure, whereas sublime suggests boundlessness, obscurity and imagination-stretching grandeur.

Romantic poetry was dominated by **lyric poems**, written in the **first-person**. The writing of this time period was also known for its use of **everyday speech**. **William Wordsworth** was one of the most prolific Romantic poets, being one of the founders of English **Romanticism**.

Part 3: Davy poem activity

You have been supplied with a copy of both poems: 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide' by Sir Humphry Davy, and an extract from 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' by William Wordsworth, at the end of this section of the pack. Both poems exhibit some of the

characteristics of Romantic writing mentioned previously. Help the pupils identify these characteristics, and any other poetic techniques in Davy's poem.

Key words: Romantic Age negative trance-like state scientific writing

Further reading:

When respiring gas inspired poetry

(Sharon Rust, 2013)

Find it online:

https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)60157-9/fulltext

Suggested script

Now, we are going to read two pieces of poetry written during the **Romantic Age**. One was written by the chemist Sir Humphry Davy, and one was written by the poet William Wordsworth. The titles and authors have been removed: can you match the person to their work? What do you think the titles of each poem might be?

The first poem was written by Sir Humphry Davy, whereas the second one was written by William Wordsworth. If you got it right; what gave it away?

Davy wrote this poem in an attempt to express his experience with nitrous oxide. It was therefore given the title 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'. Although its quality is unimpressive, it was an unpublished poem quickly jotted down in one of his notebooks, so one should not be too critical of his skill from reading this poem alone.

The poem provides a personal and honest account of his bodily and mental state when breathing the gas. We can see that Davy is struggling to articulate his experience by the fact that he begins the poem with a **negative**, describing what the experience is not.

Breathing the nitrous oxide has given him new perceptions of the world. Davy's description talks about being in a **trance-like state**, stuck between a dream and a vision. The last two lines of the poem represent the sublime feeling. These are all tropes commonly found in Romantic poetry.

Alongside composing the poem, Davy published scientific work on nitrous oxide. Both pieces of writing provide insight on the experience of breathing nitrous oxide, however they both offer something different in their perspective and expression.

What do you think is the difference between a poem and other kinds of writing, specifically scientific writing?

Part 4: Wordsworth poem activity

Complete the activity sheet provided at the end of this pack, and go through the answers. Help the pupils approach Wordsworth's poem analytically, recognising its use of the Romantic themes mentioned previously, and other poetic techniques.

Key words: blank verse unrhymed meter iambic pentameter syllables unstressed syllable stressed syllable prose monologue first person stanza

Further reading:

The Major Works: Including The Prelude (William Wordsworth, 2008)

Wordsworth's Poetry
"Tintern Abbey" Summary
& Analysis
(SparkNotes, 2018)

William Wordsworth (Poetry Foundation, 2023) Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey (Poem Analysis, 2023)

Find them online: https://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/wordsworth/section1/https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworthhttps://poemanalysis.com/william-wordsworth/lines-composed-a-few-miles-above-tintern-abbey/

Suggested script

The second poem is by the poet William Wordsworth. It is titled 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' and is a poem that describes the speaker's return to a specific spot along the banks of the River Wye. The subject of the poem is the speaker's past memories of communion with natural beauty. This theme is one that is very important in Worsdworth's works. The feelings expressed in the poem are similar to those recounted in 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide' but in Wordsworth's poem these emotions are not elicited because of the effects of a drug. Instead, they are just a result of joy.

In particular, in the extract from the poem that we read, the speaker talks about how the memory of the woods and cottages affects him, even when he's not aware of this memory, by influencing his deeds of kindness and love.

The poem is written in **blank verse**. This means the lines are **unrhymed** but still follow a regular **meter**, and in this case it is the **iambic pentameter**. A line written in iambic pentameter has 10 **syllables** and adheres to the specific pattern of an **unstressed syllable** (short syllable) followed by a **stressed syllable** (long syllable). This pattern sounds a bit like a heartbeat. Because of the blank verse, the style of the poem is very natural, and it flows like a **prose** piece. This, along with the use of simple, forthright language (which is standard for Romantic writing), gives the poem an air of modesty. It gives the reader the impression that the narrator is speaking from the heart.

Fill out the activity sheet, following the instructions written at the top. You have five minutes to fill in the blanks, and then we will go through the answers. After that, complete the ten minute activity. We will discuss the answers shortly after.

Answers to the activity sheet

1. Emotion and passion

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The poem is very emotional as the narrator talks about the feelings that resurface as he looks upon the landscape of his memories again. Passionate language is used to describe how recalling these memories in his mind, later in life, has shaped the narrator into the person he is today, and helped him in times of trouble.

Example quote(s):

'sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart'

'feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure'

'unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love.'

'sublime'

'that serene and blessed mood'

'deep power of joy'

The language Davy uses throughout the poem to describe how breathing the nitrous oxide made him feel is brimming with emotion and passion.

Example quote(s):

'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'

'eyes with sparkling lustre filled'

2. The critique of progress

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The narrator talks about how, often, they look to their memories of nature, amid the bustle of the cities, in order to restore feelings of joy when they are tired.

Example quote(s):

'But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities, I have owed to them, / In hours of weariness, sensations sweet'

3. Celebration of the individual

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The narrator is speaking imaginatively to himself; the poem is a **monologue**.

Example quote(s):

'in lonely rooms'

'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'

Davy's poem is also a monologue, where he speaks about his own experience with nitrous oxide in the **first person**.

Example quote(s):

'I beheld'

'My bosom'

'my cheek'

'my eyes'

'my mouth'

'my limbs'

4. A return to the past

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The narrator describes how the images he has seen in the past have never truly left him, and how they provide comfort and pleasure to him in troubled times. These memories improve him as a person.

Example quote(s):

'Though absent long, / These forms of beauty have not been to me, / As is a landscape to a blind man's eye'

'But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities, I have owed to them, / In hours of weariness, sensations sweet'

'His little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and love.'

5. In awe of nature

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The narrator addresses nature and says it has given him more than what he has yet to return, in the form of alleviating the weight of the world. Nature will affect him for the rest of his life and has allowed him to value the world, and thus experience contentment and see deeper into life.

Examples quote(s):

'To them I may have owed another gift'

'that blessed mood, / In which the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lightened'

'we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul'

'deep power of joy'

'We see into the life of things'

6. Spirituality and the occult

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The speaker addresses the spirit of nature and talks about the spiritual gift it gave him. It has helped him find spiritual peace.

Example quote(s):

'To them I may have owed another gift, / Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood'

'become a living soul'

'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'

Davy appears to mention the occult and dream-figures, but only in order to point out that his experience with the drug has not been caused by such supernatural elements.

Example quote(s):

'Not in the ideal dreams of wild desire / Have I beheld a rapture wakening form / My bosom burns with no unhallowed fire'

7. The search for subjective truth

'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

The narrator speaks about how nature has allowed him to alleviate the burden of this confusing world and see clearer into life.

Example quote(s):

'that blessed mood, / In which the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lightened'

'We see into the life of things.'

'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'

Davy says how inhaling the drug has rendered him unable to control the words he utters, but in their utterance, he finds new perceptions of the world.

Example quote(s):

'Yet is my mouth implete with murmuring sound'

'And clad with new born mightiness round'

Since this is just an extract from 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', there are other Romantic themes, not mentioned in the **stanza** that we read, that are referred to in other parts of the poem.

For example, in the final stanza, the narrator addresses his sister. He speaks to her with immense love, feeding into the idea of the 'idealisation of women' that was common in Romantic writing. We see this implicitly through the narrator's repeated use of the affectionate term 'dear' when speaking to her, and explicitly, when he refers to his heart as 'The heart that loved her'. Through introducing his sister to the beauty of nature, it becomes 'More dear' to him, not only for itself, but also for her sake.

Also, although not specifically clear in this extract, Wordsworth largely uses imagery of the natural world throughout the poem, tying in again with one of the main themes of Romanticism: the beauty of nature.

Part 5: Conclusion

To conclude the lesson, give the students a short ten minute writing task where they are challenged to jot down a quick poem, much like Davy did in his notebook when he wrote 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide', incorporating what they have learned about Romantic poetry today, and remembering their existing knowledge of: vocabulary, grammar, text structure, literary and rhetorical devices, punctuation, spelling and, audience and purpose of poem. Then, remind pupils of the key information learned during the lesson.

Conclusion:

Sir Humphry Davy was a British chemist, but he also wrote poetry, making him a very **balanced scientist**, who could straddle both the arts and the sciences.

The arts and the sciences do **not** always have to be seen as **contradictory** and it is important to not think of them as **separate**.

The main idea of the Romantic age was that **reason** cannot explain everything.

Deep **emotions**, **individualism**, the **purity of childhood**, a **critique of progress** and a love for **nature** are some key themes of Romantic literature.

William Wordsworth was a British poet and one of the founders of English Romanticism.

A possible homework task could be to get pupils to refine the beginnings of the poems they wrote in class, amending the vocabulary, grammar and structure to improve the coherence and overall effectiveness of the piece. In order to extend their learning, they may want to read another one of Davy's poems, that is also similar to 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', from John Davy's *Memoirs*, and use what they have learned from this lesson to better

analyse the poems' similarities and differences, and also their connection to Romantic poetry. A copy of this poem can be found at the end of this section of the lesson pack.

KS3: Copies of the poems

'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide'

Not in the ideal dreams of wild desire
Have I beheld a rapture wakening form
My bosom burns with no unhallowed fire
Yet is my cheek with rosy blushes warm
Yet are my eyes with sparkling lustre filled
Yet is my mouth implete with murmuring sound
Yet are my limbs with inward transports thrill'd
And clad with new born mightiness round —

Sir Humphry Davy

An extract from 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

Though absent long, These forms of beauty have not been to me, As is a landscape to a blind man's eye: But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din Of towns and cities, I have owed to them, In hours of weariness, sensations sweet, Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart, And passing even into my purer mind With tranquil restoration:—feelings too Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps, As may have had no trivial influence On that best portion of a good man's life; His little, nameless, unremembered acts Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust, To them I may have owed another gift, Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood, In which the heavy and the weary weight Of all this unintelligible world Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood, In which the affections gently lead us on, Until, the breath of this corporeal frame, And even the motion of our human blood Almost suspended, we are laid asleep In body, and become a living soul: While with an eye made guiet by the power Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, We see into the life of things.

William Wordsworth

'Many days have passed'

Many days have pass'd. Beloved scene, since last my wet eyes saw The moonbeams gild thy whitely-foaming waves. Ambitious then, confiding in her powers, Spurring the prison,—onward flew my soul, To mingle with her kindred;—in the breeze That wafts upon its wings futurity, To hear the voice of praise;—and not in vain Have these high hopes existed,—not in vain The dew of labour has oppress'd my brow, On which the rose of pleasure never glow'd; For I have tasted of that scared stream Of science, whose delicious water flows From Nature's bosom. I have felt the warmth, The gentle influence of congenial souls, Whose kindred hopes have cheer'd me; who have taught My irritable spirit how to bear Injustice; who have given New plumes of rapture to my soaring wing When ruffled with the sudden breath of storms. Here, through the trembling moonshine of the grove, My earliest lays were wafted by the breeze,— And here my kindling spirit learn'd to trace The mystic laws from whose high energy The moving atoms, in eternal change, Still rise to animation. Beloved rocks! thou ocean white with mist: Once more with joy I view thee; Once more ye live upon my humid eyes; Once more ye waken in my throbbing breast The sympathies of nature. Now I go Once more to visit my remember'd home, With heartfelt rapture,—there to mingle tears Of purest love,—to feel the ecstatic glow Of warm affection, and again to view The rosy light that shone upon my youth.

Sir Humphry Davy

KS3: Activity sheet

Recall the video you watched on the characteristics of Romantic writing and fiill out the blanks with the correct words.
Spend 10 minutes finding an example for each of the following characteristics of Romantic writing in the extract from 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'. Use quotes from the poem where you can. If you finish early and have extra time, try and do the same but for 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide' instead.
1 and passion
2. The of progress
3. Celebration of the
4. A return to the
5. In awe of
6. Spirituality and the
7. The search for truth

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