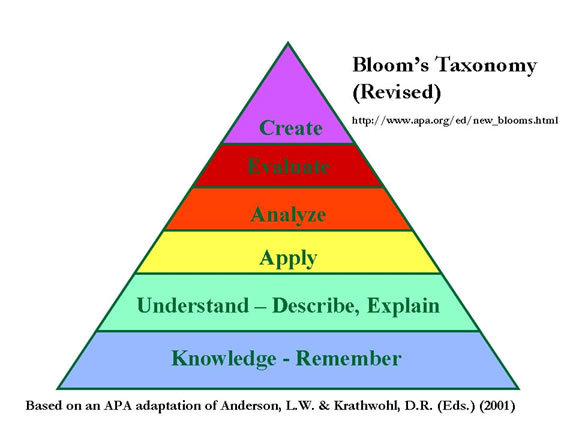
**Bloom’s Taxonomy**



Benjamin Bloom’s 1956 Taxonomy of thinking and learning skills is a widely known, much discussed pedagogical model, with which you will probably be familiar. The point of mentioning it here is that in commentary practice particularly – whether written or oral, students will be called upon to demonstrate an ability to think about texts in different

ways, and better marks are awarded for those who can move away from description, analysis and ‘explanation into ‘higher-order’ skills of evaluation and interpretation.

Fundamentally, the IB Literature Course asks for both precise, scientific dissection of the way literary craft functions, as well as a more imaginative, perhaps even ‘creative’ understanding of the way we make sense of it, and making students aware of this process is something to consider.

**Teaching commentary practice**

As you get used to the course, techniques for teaching basic commentary practice will inevitably evolve, and some will work better than others. The key idea is to encourage **active reading** practice – anything that encourages students to think, react and respond to poems or extracts, as well as sensitize them as much as possible to the way literary craft **functions**.

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**Skills of analysis**

Here are a few ideas to get you thinking:

• Make commentary practice an **everyday activity**. The more students get used to its methodology as a regular practice, the better.

• One way of developing this is to create a PowerPoint of lots of **short extracts** from

various kinds of texts and at the beginning or the end of lessons spend a few minutes only talking about just one.

• **Cloze exercises**: for any poem or even prose extract, extracting key words and

ask students to come up with their own suggestions works well to stimulate discussion about word choice. (Using Word can help here: turn the font colour of the words you wish to blank out to white, which of course makes them disappear. When you are ready to compare the students’ choices with the original, simply turn the font colour back to black.)

• **Sequencing**: to focus attention on structural issues and the sense of development in a poem or prose extract, cut out the individual lines and mix them up. Students must then re-order them. (Once again, Word can help here: change the page to

‘outline’ in the ‘View’ dropdown. The little squares on the left can then be clicked and each line easily dragged to a new position for students to re-sequence).

• **Finding Links**: present students with 4-5 poems or extracts of prose, not necessarily similar. They must then find different ways in which they could be linked together.

• **Creative writing**: getting students to write creatively is a wonderful way of alerting their attention to stylistic matters:

o Give students the first few words or a complete line of an extract of prose or poem. They must continue in a way that seems to reflect the stylistic properties of the original.

o Give students two non-sequential paragraphs from a prose extract and ask them to write one paragraph which connects them.

o Change point of view: ask students to rewrite a scene from a different character’s point of view, or change from first to third person.

o Change genre: ask students to rewrite a poem, turning it into prose, or vice- versa.

• **Use Art**: the essential practice of making sense of literature is no different to the way we interpret other art forms. Asking students to respond to the content and style of a particular image or picture can develop exactly the same kinds of analytical and interpretive skills as the commentary asks students to demonstrate

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**Skills of interpretation: Teaching commentary practice**

As mentioned earlier, one of the most important aspects of the Literature course, and certainly a skill demanded by the higher echelons of the criteria, has to do with evaluation and interpretation of the texts. This can be a difficult thing to teach, but not impossible. In part it is a matter of encouraging students to feel confident with their own ideas, and once again, to understand the process through which interpretation of texts often takes place.

Read the following poem (taken from a Standard Level Paper 1) through carefully, and annotate it with your ideas in response:

**The Visitor**

Holding the arm of his helper, the blind

Piano tuner comes to our piano.

He hesitates at first, but once he finds

The keyboard, his hands glide over the slow

Keys, ringing changes finer than the eye Can see. The dusty wires he touches, row On row, quiver like bowstrings as he Twists them one notch tighter. He runs his Finger along a wire, touches the dry

Rust to his tongue, breaks into a pure bliss And tells us, “One year more of damp weather Would have done you in, but I’ve saved it this Time. Would one of you play now, please? I hear It better at a distance.” My wife plays

Stardust(1). The blind man stands and smiles in her

Direction, then disappears into the blaze

Of new October. Now the afternoon, The long afternoon that blurs in a haze

Of music … Chopin nocturnes, Clair de Lune(2), All the old familiar, unfamiliar

Music-lesson pieces, Papa Haydn’s

Dead and gone(3), gently down the stream(4) … Hours later, After the latest car has doused its beams,

Has cooled down and stopped its ticking, I hear

Our cat, with the grace of animals free

To move in darkness, strike one key only,

And a single lucid drop of water stars my dream.

(1) Stardust: American popular music

(2) Clair de Lune: classical music

(3) “Papa Haydn’s / Dead and gone”: improvised children’s chant

(4) “ gently down the stream”: folk music

Gibbons Ruark

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Look carefully at your annotations: which features of content and style came to your attention?

Now read through the following statements of interpretation:

1. This poem is essentially concerned with the relationship between music and the imagination, and the transient nature of creative inspiration.

2. The power of this poem comes from its interplay of contrasts – music and

silence, movement and stillness, light and dark.

3. ‘The Visitor’ finds its central meaning in the identification of the piano tuner with the piano itself, and the interplay between them.

4. This poem gains its main effect from the use of sense imagery, auditory and visual.

5. Above all, ‘The visitor’ is concerned with the nature of time, and the inter-mingling of past and present.

Which of the statements do you most agree with? Or, if you prefer, write your own thesis statement.

What’s your evidence? Identify the features (stylistic and thematic) of the poem that you would foreground in seeking to argue this particular line of interpretation.

Asking students to argue for one particular idea can yield some really fruitful work, and encourage debate about the way meaning is constructed in commentary writing. With more time and practice, of course, students will need to come up with their own interpretive lines.

**Understanding the basic difference between analysis and interpretation is an important feature of development in commentary writing skill.**

Perhaps you have some other ideas about the way interpretive skills can be taught?

**Choosing the passage**

Remind yourself of the extract you chose at the beginning of this module, and the reasons for your selection.

Students often say that they ‘always choose’ either the poem or the prose, sometimes without even reading the other. Occasionally, teachers have been known to give out the same advice, citing the reason that one is ‘more difficult.’ This is unhelpful and students should be advised against it.

The process of selecting the passage should be undertaken carefully and thoughtfully. It is sometimes the case, for instance, that students will opt for the one they consider to be

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‘more accessible’, or ‘easier’. Whilst this may be so, it does not necessarily mean that the commentary they write will be any better. Sometimes, the more challenging passage can provoke more detailed and independent thinking, yielding a better response.

**Annotation**

**Annotation as a record of the reading process**

Students who do best in Paper 1 tend to be those who display the highest degree of explorative engagement with the passage they choose. Annotating records the journey students take through the passage, from first glimpse of its shape on the page right through to the point at which they are ready to start writing, and the more careful and considered this process, the better.

Reading for different purposes: it’s a good idea to encourage students to see each reading of the passage with a different purpose in mind. From first impressions to reading for aspects of content to reading for aspects of language and style, annotating can then sustain the principle of reading as an active process.

• **Using colour:** identify the features of content and style that strike you as most important and allocate one colour for each with which to highlight key words and phrases. This will ensure that students are thinking about the way different components work towards the ‘overall effect’ of a particular extract, as well as encourage them to categorise ideas.

• **Thinking visually:** One good activity comes from a book called Double Vision by Michael and Peter Benton. The book is concerned with the relationship between poetry and painting, and at one point asks students to look at the picture, ‘Man Lying on a Wall’ by L.S Lowry:

They are instructed to make a quick sketch of this simple painting and then draw onto the sketch the points their eyes are drawn to in sequence. Discussion can then be had as to which feature/s draw immediate attention as well as the aspects of form, design and colour that pull the eye through and around the picture. Applying the same thinking to a poem or even prose extract can work also. Students can plot the points to which their imaginative eye is drawn initially and plot the way their response is channeled as they continue to read.

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**The "Lucky Seven" Guide to Annotation**

Directions: After you've read the poem over a couple times (and at least once aloud) to gain a **first**

impression, take pencil/pen/highlighter/marker in hand and follow this process carefully.

1. **Reflect on the poem's title.** Circle the title and draw a quick "web" of denotations and connotations.

The title is our first way into the poem. How does the writer use it?

2. Using a variation of the journalist's "code," and your own skills at "close reading," **summarize the basic "sense of the poem"** Who is speaking, to whom, about what, for what purpose, when and/or where (if relevant), and how (tone)? In the upper the upper right corner, print *BS:,* and then give your one or two sentence summary.

3. **Paraphrase any problematic lines or sentences.** A "problematic line" for you would be any line which you can't immediately and readily paraphrase with precision and accuracy. Some poems written in a modern idiom don't need much paraphrasing. Other poems - especially those that are centuries old - may require a complete paraphrase. An important part of this process might very well involve **defining any unknown and otherwise significant words.** (Use a dictionary if you're preparing this poem

outside of exam conditions.) Keep in mind that even simple words can function on a variety of levels. Verbs typically serve as "hinges" of meaning, and poets sweat bullets over choosing the right ones – so scrutinize them carefully. Print necessary or helpful phrases to the right of the line(s).

4. **Note the poem's use of language.** Remember that the basic building blocks are words. How would you assess the poem's diction, overall? Is the poem's language formal or casual? filled with jargon or slang? more concrete or abstract? precise or ambiguous? How does tone appear as a function of diction? Are there key words anywhere? How does the poet manipulate syntax?

5. **Map the poem's tensions and contrasts.** Many oppositions and dichotomies are possible here, and many poems use contrasts of various sorts as levels with which they "move" the poem's meaning. A former, well- loved and smart, IB English teacher once said, poetry is "moment, movement, and meaning" - by which she meant, a poem establishes a *moment,* or an occasion, an issue, an image, a dilemma, a voice, etc.; then the poem *moves* somehow from this initial state; and the overall effect of that movement on the reader indicates or otherwise suggests the poem's meaning. Tensions and oppositions may come in the form of contrasts between: speaker and situation; our view and the speaker's view; sides of a dilemma or problem; sets of images; past and present; levels of diction, etc.; even between form and content. Typically, irony is present, therefore, in some form or another. The "mapping" process itself can take whatever form you feel comfortable with: coloured pencils, highlighters, circling, underlining and joining key elements of the contrasts, etc.

6. Using the signs/symbols you've been taught and a sharp pencil, **scan the poem** and **determine the rhyme scheme.** Note substitutions or other critical rhythmic features. (For longer poems, you may not need to scan single syllable - if your ear is good enough to recognize substitutions and other changes.) Note any rhymes that are not exact (e.g., slant, etc.). Identify traditional patterns **("fixed"** forms such as sonnet, ballad, etc.) that are defined in part by rhyme. Note also any stanzaic patterns, even if not **fixed.** Remember. poets writing in a closed form craft their own structures that they then adhere to. Write EF: (to stand for "effect of form") in the upper left hand corner and write a sentence or two that asserts how form functions in this poem.

7. **Assert an interpretation.** In its broadest sense, this step doesn't merely call for a statement of the poem's theme, but rather an integrated view of what the poem is doing and how. Try to bring the various elements together in a coherent fashion. Look over what you've written for your "BS" and "EF." Write your *Interpretation* on the bottom of the page. (Note: If you do a thoughtful job with this step, you'll notice that your *Interpretation* will almost certainly serve as an introduction to a Commentary you might then develop.)

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**A WAY IN: COLOR-MARKING PROSE AND POETRY PASSAGES**

First, we'll define our terms.

**IMAGE:** a word (or more than one word) appealing to at least one of our senses; an image deals, then, with reader response. Ofour five senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, gustatory), the visual is the strongest.

**IMAGE PATTERN:** the repetition of three (yes, the magic number!) images, not necessarily in uninterrupted succession

**MOTIF:** a repeated pattern of any type within a work. Note that an image pattern **IS** a motif, but a motif is **NOT** always an image pattern. (Note also that various reference sources define the term **motif** in various ways.

Now, we'll take a look through a microscope at our passage to better understand the writer's techniques, whether they be narrative, as in prose fiction, or poetic, as in (you guessed it) poetry. This process applies to all passages, whether they be prose or poetry.

1. Mark with a different colour each type of image/image pattern/motif predominant in

the passage. (Carefully examine what is "going on" within/prior to/following the passage.

2. Based on your colour-marking, ask these questions:

**\***Is one colour predominant?

\*Why?

\*Is there some logical progression of imagery/motifs, from one type to another?

\*Is the progression illogical?

\* Why?

\* How do the imagery/motifs reinforce and/or illustrate the content of the passage? ( or, if you prefer, what is the relationship of the scene to the imagery/motifs

used to describe it?)

Imagery reinforces content by giving it **emphasis,** by making it **fresh** (an unusual or creative use of imagery), and/or by adding **Irony** (imagery appears to contradict

the content or describe it in terms of its opposite qualities).

\* Is a specific tone or mood created by the marked material?

3. Based on your answers to these questions and any others you think appropriate, **CODE** each colour marked with **INFERENCES** you draw about the use of that particular image/image pattern

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**Henry V**

**Literary Devices/Features Exercise**

Read the attached excerpt from Henry V, IV, 1, 1-15.

Discuss the literary devices/features of the passage under the following prompts.

“Now entertain conjecture of a time

When creeping murmur and the poring dark

Fills the wide vessel of the universe.

From camp to camp, through the foul womb of night,

The hum of either army stilly sounds

That fixed sentinels almost receive

The secret whispers of each other’s watch.

Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames

Each battle sees the other’s umbered face.

Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs,

Piercing the night’s dull ear, and from the tents

The armourers, accomplishing the knights, With busy hammers closing rivets up

Give dreadful note of preparation.

The country cocks do crow, the clocks do toll…”

1. Identify where each device/feature begins and ends.

2. List and discuss elements of the diction that define and give force to

each device/feature you discuss.

3. Discuss the effect of the device/feature. (How does it affect the

plot, the reader, etc?) How does it make you feel? What ideas does it make you bring to mind? What questions does it raise?

4. If the device is comparative (a metaphor, simile, or direct comparison)

discuss what is the essence of the comparison.

5. How might this pattern of imagery or feature fit into the larger

pattern/themes of the play? What questions does it raise?

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Student response (Foundation Year)

In the Chorus’ speech in the prologue to Act 4, the Chorus is trying to explain and brief us on the coming battle. What he does to describe the feeling to us is he tries to create a mood through diction and sensory imagery. The focus upon the dialogue is the use of sound imagery and a little bit of visual imagery. At this time in the play it is now night and the armies are separated too far to see each other’s number of troops and equipment. So the Chorus uses sound imagery to overcome the dark and convey a mood

of fear. The Chorus tries to create a unsure and confusing feel with language such as ‘murmurs (line 2), ‘hum’ (line 5), and ‘whispers’ (line 7). All of this language from either side makes both think of what is coming and what is being plotted. So tension has been created. The looming combat is brought about on lines 10 and 11 with ‘high and boastful neighs, piercing the nights dull ear’. Now a idea of the combat is slowly brought about. The last bit of sound imagery is brought on the last line with ‘the country…toll’. This line is a metaphor for the coming of a new day and a metaphor for the beginning of combat. Sound imagery itself in this provides numerous moods to the reader and the feeling of the troops.

Although sound imagery is key in this passage other aspects like visual imagery and diction play a part. The dark and gloomy language on lines 2, 4, and the second last line all aid in the impact of the speech. Words like ‘dark foul womb of night’ and ‘dreadful’ all of these are used to make the scene providing fear and mystery. The visual imagery in this speech only relates to the men at there own camps. Terms like ‘sentinel’ and ‘armour’ are things they can see only at there own camp. Essentially Shakespeare has created a scene where men are confused and blind to see their opposition. They are left with empty sounds and familiar images. In effect by letting them have less they have given them more room to think more and create more fear

and darkness than could be imagined.

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**Literary Features & Literary Devices**

In general, literary devices are the mechanical means (the tools) by which broader literary features are established. For instance, the literary device of diction or punctuation may help establish the literary feature of mood or atmosphere. A metaphor may be a literary device that helps establish the literary feature of character. While this distinction is by necessity somewhat artificial, it is useful when close reading a passage for commentary purposes. The chart on the following page may be helpful to categorize literary devices and literary features.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Literary Devices | Literary Features |
| Metaphor | Mood |
| Simile | Character |
| Personification | Setting |
| Use of diction | Plot |
| Punctuation | Tone |
| Repetition |  |
| Use of Dialogue |  |
| Foreshadowing |  |

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**Metaphor: Tenor & Vehicle**

Terms used by I.A. Richards for the two elements of a METAPHOR. The tenor is the subject that the vehicle illustrates; the vehicle is the FIGURE that carries the weight of the comparison. According to Richard's definition, a METAPHOR always involves these two ideas. If it is impossible to distinguish them, we are dealing with a literal statement. If we can distinguish them, even slightly, we are dealing with METAPHOR. Hamlet's question, "What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?" is metaphoric. Although Hamlet may literally crawl, there is, as Richards points out, "and unmistakable reference to other things that crawl…and this reference is the vehicle as Hamlet…is the tenor."

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**Activities to Teach Critical Literacy**

**‘Predicting Missing Content’**

In the poem below, the last 10 lines have been removed (one four- line and one five-line stanza). How do you think the poem ends? Give one or two reasons for your opinion.

**The Bull Moose,** Alden Nowlan

Down from the purple mist of trees on the mountain, lurching through forests of white spruce and cedar, stumbling through tamarack swamps,

came the bull moose

to be stopped at last by a pole-fenced pasture.

Too tired to turn or, perhaps, aware

there was no place left to go, he stood with the cattle. They, scenting the musk of death, seeing his great head like the ritual mask of a blood god, moved to the other end

of the field, and waited.

The neighbours heard of it, and by afternoon cars lined the road. The children teased him with alder switches and he gazed at them

like an old, tolerant collie. The women asked if he could have escaped from a Fair.

The oldest man in the parish remembered seeing a gelded moose yoked with an ox for plowing. The young men snickered and tried to pour beer

down his throat, while their girl friends took their pictures.

And the bull moose let them stroke his tick-ravaged flanks, let them pry open his jaws with bottles, let a giggling girl plant a little purple cap

of thistles on his head.

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**Activities to Teach Critical Literacy**

**‘Beginnings and Endings: What’s in the middle?’**

Below is a text that has its original beginning and ending. Make a case for what you think the deleted middle section is about. (The section deleted contains 2 four-line stanzas.)

Stopping B y Woods on a Snowy Evening (R obert Frost, 1923)

Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

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**Activities to Teach Critical Literacy**

**‘Missing Words Activity’**

In the poem below, fill in the blanked out sections with words/images that seem appropriate. Discuss your choices with the members of your group. Select the one that your group likes best. (Just for your reference, in the original poem there are 3 additional words on line 2, and 2 additional words on line 5.)

**FOG, by Carl Sandburg**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The fog comes** | **1** |
| **on .** | **2** |
| **It sits looking** | **3** |
| **over harbour and city** | **4** |
| **on** | **5** |
| **and then moves on.** | 6 |

**Elements of Pace in Poetry**

Consider how the following literary devices contribute to the pace of a passage or a poem.

1. **Punctuation/Grammar**—Note length of sentences, even of clauses; use of question marks, ellipses, exclamation marks, commas, periods, etc.

2. **Cadence (Rhythm, rhyme)—**Use scansion to discover the metrical rhythm of the text; check for the various forms of rhyme scheme (end, masculine, etc.)

Consider ‘anchor lines’ that transfer a rhyme scheme from one stanza to another.

3. **Natural Speech**—If dialogue is used, does it appear naturalistic, or formal (literary)? How have these effects been achieved? (Robert Frost is a good example of a poet who takes great care to make his reported speech naturalistic.)

4. **Diction**--Monosyllabic/polysyllabic, stressed words. To what extent does the choice of diction contribute to the pace of the work?

5. **Enjambment**—Is this device used to bridge two lines of verse? What effect does it have?

6. **Stanzas & Line Breaks**—How is the work divided? What effect does this have on the pace of the work?

7. **Simple or Complex Sentences**—How do long or short sentences contribute to the pace of the work?

8. **End of Lines**—What elements come into play a the natural emphasis point of the end of a line? (sentence-thought unit, punctuation, metrical stress, rhetorical stress, enjambment)

Tension

Release