

Pupil Imagist poems inspired by Tyneham

*Burn the pristine telegram.
Wilderness has cornered our homes.
Glare at the shell of a village and don't
look away.*

*My empty peg decorated with hawthorns,
Children wrapped like parcels.
"We can make snow soldiers."*

*There are chips and scratches all over
the edges.
It had been put in an attic and left there
to collect dust and cobwebs
Memories written upon the surface.*

Hardy Trip to Cornwall



WRITE IS MIGHT

We live in an age where the visual seems to have taken prime place in our preferred forms of entertainment and communication – the colourful allure of films, television drama, the Xbox; the constant presence of the mobile phone – and there is a common perception that 'teenagers today' are in thrall to their screens. Equally common is the perception that there has been a steady decline in the amount of time this age group spends reading: I'd be a happy Head of English if I had a pound for every time a Shell or Fourth Form parent has expressed their concern about their son/daughter's lack of interest in picking up a book.

The links between Good Reading and Good Writing are too obvious to need repeating here – every visiting writer who comes to Canford (and we have several a year) makes clear that his or her own passion for, and skill in, writing has arisen from voracious reading in their youth. But how do we convey to those 15 year olds with their eyes glued to their screens the urgency of the need to read, and of the central position that literacy plays in their academic and cultural life? No longer the preserve of the English department, all subjects now find that exam papers require considerable reading comprehension skills just to grasp the meaning of the questions; Physics and Biology A level exams require students to write full-length essays.

So what are we doing to make sure that every pupil at Canford recognises that 'Write is Might' – that, as Kofi Annan says, "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope," something that is tragically unavailable to millions but wholly accessible to them, and something which they ignore at their peril?

We do our level best here at Canford to make reading as enticing as FIFA 16. The librarians work tirelessly, setting up activities such as the break time Speedy Reads and the 'Drop Everything and Read' sessions on World Book Day. Together with the Library we have created reading lists for the junior year groups which are divided by genre – Adventure! Thrillers! Action! – and are easily accessible on the Gateway. The English department has designated reading lessons on Saturdays for the junior year groups, as well as setting specific holiday reading. Other subjects, such as Maths and Physics, have their own reading lists and book clubs.

Good writing, too, is both encouraged and rewarded. Lower Sixth pupils enjoy an inspirational post-exam trip to Cornwall

and the annual Creative Writing course in Lulworth is always very popular, with Old Canfordian Jo Rossiter (whose first novel has been published by Penguin) coming each year to tutor a group of sixteen junior pupils who produced some excellent Imagist poems last June after a visit to the deserted village of Tyneham. Lower Sixth pupils all participate in the Baynham Essay and C.P. Snow competitions, researching and writing on a topic of their own choice – extracts from winning entries by Alice Taylor and Isabel Cox accompany this article. In the Upper Sixth, members of The Heretics Society write excellent papers to present as a stimulus to discussion.

It's hard not to feel that we're battling against the tide of social and technological change, but we remain committed to searching for new and effective ways to keep our pupils' minds open to the magic of the written word, whether produced by themselves or others.

'All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been; it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books.' Thomas Carlyle

Caroline Barrett
Head of English

SHOULD WE CONTINUE ON THE PATH TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Isabel Cox, winner of the C.P. Snow prize

Ray Kurzweil, a leading American futurologist, has predicted that mankind will be able to produce general purpose artificial intelligence (AI) machines with a thinking power equal to that of the human brain within the next 15 years. Such general purpose AI machines will have the ability to perform a wide range of complex tasks normally requiring human intelligence and should be distinguished from more limited, specialised forms of AI created to execute relatively simple tasks such as stocking shelves in a warehouse. Such general purpose AI machines could arguably be the most significant technological advance in human history and one which I will argue may also present a serious risk to the long term future of the human race.

Society's collective unease concerning AI machines has been widely portrayed in popular culture, ranging from the disembodied Hal 9000 computer in '2001, A Space Odyssey' to the embodied, homicidal AI robots seen in films like 'Terminator' and 'I Robot'. Such films are just the latest manifestation of longstanding human fears regarding the dangers of creating 'unnatural' sentient beings, as also seen in Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'. The underlying moral theme of all such fictional works would seem to be that bad things always happen when man usurps the creationist role of a deity or nature.

Although the dangers of rebellious automatons rising up against their human creators are well documented,

it could be argued that such technophobic horror stories simply represent a more general and irrational fear of technological change. The Luddites of the 19th century are notorious for protesting against the implementation of new automated looms due to the economic threat that the innovative weaving technology presented to their jobs.

In recent times, specialised AI robots have similarly replaced human workers fulfilling repetitive, manual roles on car production lines and in other industries. Such AI robots can also fulfil vital roles in toxic environments such as those used for repair and rescue missions in the nuclear industry.

However, the introduction of more versatile general AI robots could potentially threaten a much wider range of human livelihoods, including roles involving complex social skills. This threat may eventually even involve secondary school teachers who are currently rated the 357th out of 366 jobs in likelihood of future computerisation.

SHOULD WE BE MORE SPANISH IN THE WAY WE USE OUR SUBJUNCTIVE?

Alice Taylor, winner of the Baynham Essay

The subjunctive mood in both English and Spanish supposedly serves the same predominant function: to describe hypothetical situations, desire, doubt and uncertainty. However, the English subjunctive is seemingly diminishing as the language develops over time, yet it is still an essential aspect of the Spanish language and is heavily relied on.

The subjunctive is also used significantly in many other European languages and in Arabic, implying it holds an important purpose, so why are we neglecting it in English?

The development of the English Language over time seems to show a gradual reduction of strict grammatical rules. This starts from the apparent introduction of Middle English in a homily from the 1150s and continues through to Modern-day English, where we are generally far more lenient and flexible in the way we use our language. The subjunctive

is often viewed as an element of Old English, that remains in Modern English unnecessarily as we move farther away from original English. Our abandonment of clear linguistic rules, particularly the subjunctive, is part of the desire for language to evolve and change and become free from instructions and guidelines. However, if this happens, English will become a language that is impossible to learn. If there are no rules or grammatical directions, there is nothing for someone learning the language to follow and comprehend.

The Spanish language ... embraces the subjunctive. Unlike English, Spanish has defined verb conjugations with the subjunctive. This alternative mood enables the language to be enriched with subtleties and emotion. The subjunctive in Spanish has a wider function than in English: it is used to express desire, ignorance, impersonal opinion, uncompleted actions, a vague or indefinite antecedent, uncertainty and potential situations. It provides a distinct difference between fact and unreality, allowing the subjunctive to be used to express speculations and how one feels about possibilities and doubts.