

PREPARING FOR UNIVERSITY

FutureLearn MOOC

Notes for teachers

Week 5

PRE UNIVERSITY MOOC

The Preparing for University MOOC was developed to equip students for the challenges of the university learning environment. The lessons focus on specific skills while reinforcing skills learnt in previous lessons throughout the 7-week course.

At university instructions are often not as specific as students would like them to be, so instead, students have to tackle questions and learn through feedback and discussion with their peers to understand how they might improve next time. The course is reflective of this process, and involves students completing specific activities with minimal training, taking time to reflect on their own skills, and discussions with teachers and peers.

The following notes will guide you through the series of weekly steps and activities of the Preparing for University MOOC. The notes will explain the rationale behind some of the steps and suggest questions you might ask to your students to guide them through the learning.



WEEK 5: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

STEP 5.1: Introduction video

This week focuses on the Arts (you may need to explain this term to your students) – in particular, studying literature and texts. Although you may feel that engaging with this activity will only benefit students progressing onto literature, analysing texts is a skill that all students will benefit from. Through the analysis of texts, students will gain an appreciation of what it means to study a text in depth.

The video highlights reading. Within the video we focus on reading texts, but also reading one another, the process of being able to relate to each other by understanding how we react to situations. This highlights how the skill is relevant to a broad range of applications.

Reading is about interpreting the world. The video talks about the act of reading at university, and how being able to analyse texts makes reading more enjoyable, and a more useful experience.

This is a good opportunity to ask your students the following:

- What sort of reading they do? Discussion point: do your students classify engaging on their social media platforms as reading?
- Do they enjoy reading?
- What do they get out of reading?
- How might they benefit from starting to read if they don't already?

The lesson this week focuses on a poem and looks at how appreciating the context in which the poem was written can give a stronger understanding of the words. There are many articles which have comprehensive notes within them. The steps take the student through an exploration of a poem. To conclude, a video will explore an example seminar session on the poem, which covers many of the points in the preceding steps.

Note: Seminars are one-way students are taught at university – they are small group sessions, as your students would experience in their day-to-day pre-university classrooms.

Activity: Introduction to textual analysis

STEP 5.2: Exploring the meaning of textual analysis

This step introduces two different ways of reading the poem: in and out of context.
Ask your students:

- What do you think is meant by 'context'?
- What examples can they think of where reading would benefit from context?

Possible answers:

- In the sciences, to understand the importance of a scientific discovery, it is vital to study it within the context of the time in which it happened.
- To understand historical events, it is crucial to read relevant writings within the context of the time in which they were written.

STEP 5.3: Before you read the poem

This step is about recognising your first impressions of a piece of writing. It relates to the week 1 lessons on questioning and being able to question your own reactions to a piece of writing. If your students find a section of the writing is difficult, they need to recognise that it is difficult and that they should allocate time to understand that section of the writing.

When your students read the poem, they need to think about what it is saying to them as an individual, and whether there is anything that they relate to in the poem's 'out of context' reading.

Activity: Introduction to textual analysis

STEP 5.4: The poem

This step introduces the poem for analysis. Students should read the poem independently and think about what it says to them. If they struggle with this task, perhaps ask them to select a line or couple of lines they like the sound of, or that they have an idea what it might be saying, or if there is a bit they really don't get. The idea is to get some response from them, whatever that response might be.

The poem itself talks about nuns in their small rooms – students in their pensive citadels. This may be very topical for many students who are at present confined to their homes and spending a lot of time in their own rooms. The poem uses metaphorical language to suggest we are confined within a prison.

This could provide an opportunity to discuss the current isolated situation we all find ourselves in.

STEP 5.5: Identifying the poem

What type of poem is it?

The basic answer is that the poem is a sonnet. The sonnet has 14 lines, all of which are the same length. The next step goes into further detail about this; try to see if students can recognise that the lines are of equal length. Perhaps you could ask them if they know any other poems that appear to be like this.

However, there are other ways of looking at the poem:

- What is the mood of the poem?
- What feelings does it express?
- Are there scenarios students can relate to when reading it?

STEP 5.6: What is a sonnet? Searching for clues

This step teaches the students about two types of sonnet and asks them to see if they can identify which type of sonnet the poem is. You could ask your students to use the information to spot clues and ask for their evidence for the decision they come to.

Activity: Introduction to textual analysis

STEP 5.7: The sonnet and convention

In this step, we explore the analysis of the sonnet in further detail. We discuss how the poem defies some of the conventions of a traditional sonnet.

STEP 5.8: Looking at the structure of the poem

Here, there are some more suggestions about how the poem is going against pure sonnet form. The sonnet is a very rigid form, and yet this poet has chosen a strict form and then plays around with it.

STEP 5.9: Thinking about confinement. What is a prison?

In this poem, the poet suggests that what may seem like a prison is actually offering an opportunity. In this step, you may prompt your students to discuss the opportunities of not being in school/college etc. In a similar way to the confines of the sonnet, the poet is taking liberties with it.

STEP 5.10: Thinking about confinement and the idea of liberty

This step provides a comprehensive description of many of the lines in the poem and provides other ways of thinking about how you may perceive it. The aim of this step is to provide students an insight into how to look deeper into a poem – how to pull it apart and get more from it than the initial reading.

STEP 5.11: Becoming an interrogative reader

In this step, we introduce the idea of too much liberty. The poem has talked about being confined, but it is also about liberty. Here, we start to explore how the poem deals with the concept of liberty.

Activity: Introduction to textual analysis

STEP 5.12: 'Too much liberty': What might this mean to you

In the current climate it might be hard to think of having too much liberty. But perhaps with the web at our fingertips, can the confinement to our homes result in too much liberty surfing the web, for example? We ask students to explore the concept of 'too much liberty' in different parts of their lives, or in different areas of society. Students should consider whether they have felt as if they have had their liberty denied, they may wish to reflect on their time in isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic – how does this make the students feel about the liberty they used to have?

STEP 5.13: The idea of liberty in historical context

In this step, students are introduced to the period in which the poem was written. Can the students think about what might have been happening in Europe in 1807? What was life like then? You could prompt them to think about France and the French Revolution.

STEP 5.14: Wordsworth, the French Revolution and war with France

We provide a background to the French Revolution and what it meant for the people of France and for society across Europe to discuss the poem in greater contextual detail. The Revolution had impact further across the world – the spread of revolutionary ideas was a real concern for many countries at the time. Wordsworth was writing his poem at a time when England was at war with France, to protect itself from invasion by a country which had had a revolution against the aristocracy.

STEP 5.15: The significance of the French Revolution and war with France for the idea of 'Liberty'

We now combine the messages from the account of the historical context with the poem and ask students if it changes the reading of the poem. The notes hint that the idea in the poem - too much liberty - might refer to France in the early 1800s.

STEP 5.16: Re-reading the poem in context: Part 1

Students are provided with an opportunity to think about any political message the poem might be trying to get across.

Activity: Introduction to textual analysis

STEP 5.17: Re-reading the poem in context: Part 2

In this step, we turn to the idea of England relative to France, and how we might protect England from France. Here, we try and enable the students to see that the poem may not be straightforward in its interpretation. Instead, maybe it is trying to influence the thinking of those who read it?

STEP 5.18: The contexts of the poem and the reader

The poem may be relevant beyond the early 1800s, particularly in times of war. We ask students to think about other times this poem might be relevant, and when this poem might have had a political message beyond its initial relevance. At this stage we come full circle to ask students, knowing what you know now about context and applicability of messages beyond the context of the time, what is the relevance of the poem now? You may wish to prompt students by hearing their perspective on what liberty meant to the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.

STEP 5.19: Changing contexts

In this step, we progress students' thinking of current scenarios the poem might speak to.

STEP 5.20: Seminar based on the poem

In this video, students have a chance to listen to a seminar based on the poem. It gives students a chance to see what a seminar might be like when exploring writing like this. Students can compare their own ideas, thoughts and discussion with those of the students in the seminar. You might like to ask your students, if they could see themselves in this environment at university? Is there anything they would add to the discussion?

STEP 5.21: Reading literary material

The lecturer talks about reading a text, and recognises that when reading a text, what is important to some may not be important to others. She talks about the importance of context and the process of reading texts in context.

Top tips

Week 5

1. When reading a new text, record a brief reflection of your first reading. Consider what you think matters, what you don't understand, and what questions you have.
2. Pay close attention to the words on the page and work with them to consider what wider reading you think might be useful to help develop your understanding of the text.
3. Read beyond the text. For example, read critiques of the text and take note on what others have written about it. Consider the key concepts that the text covers, and what wider contextual reading will help provide background to help your interpretation.
4. Reflect on the significance of the points that you are making.
5. Take time to come full circle. It helps to read, and re-read, to think, and re-think. Once you have noted your initial interpretation, conducted wider reading around the context of the source, then come back and read the piece again. Note down what is new about your understanding of the piece.