

National Theatre in the English Curriculum: *the impact of National Theatre resources on pupil engagement and understanding for key literature texts studied in English at KS5*

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Overview

Project aim:

- To improve student engagement and understanding of key literature texts studied at KS5.

Rationale

As English teachers, it can be difficult to get our students to appreciate literature texts that were written in a time young people do not connect with and in a language they do not understand. Some will never appreciate the work of Shakespeare, Dickens, Shelley, Austen (and many more) because they cannot overcome the challenges of reading such demanding texts. However, once students have overcome these barriers their appreciation of and connection with the texts can greatly improve not just their attainment in the subject but it can change how they perceive and understand the world they live in.

Now, with thanks to the array of video resources created by the National Theatre, these barriers can start to be broken down. The online video content allows students to visualise the characters they read on a page bringing them to life; appreciate plays as performances and not just written texts; gain insight into actors' and directors' points of view; engage in debates on themes and the impact of historical context and view traditional texts through modern versions.

Through National Theatre On Demand and 'Frog Learn' schools can request access to key performance clips and sections of the National Theatre performances. National Theatre have also created free video content to access on their YouTube channel: 'National Theatre Discover'. This resource complements performances. For example, students can watch actors discussing their character role, videos that contain background information of the writer and university lecturers giving their opinion on the performances.

The purpose of this project was to investigate how best we can utilise these resources to support the teaching of key texts studied at KS5 and whether they can be used to improve student grasp of and interest in the literature text they are studying.



Project outline

- Examine resources available to use through National Theatre On Demand and National Theatre Discover
- create lesson, homework and flipped learning activities around the National Theatre Live resources
- focusing on KS5, determine what effect the activities completed have had on student understanding and appreciation of the literature text studied.

Methodology

Students at KS5 were taught a scheme of work that included lessons which use National Theatre On Demand video content. This group were also given homework activities that linked to certain videos on National Theatre Discover. A questionnaire following this process was completed to assess what impact the use of the National Theatre resources had using student perception of their own understanding and engagement in the resources used.

Impact:

Statement 1 Response: The National Theatre Resource Videos improved my understanding of the text Othello

As shown in Figure 1, many students agreed that the videos improved their understanding of the Shakespearean text Othello. A common reason students gave for this was that the National Theatre Discover in particular 'helped' them 'remember key points' and 'was good' at refreshing their memory.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	0	2	10	0

Figure 1: Results from Questionnaire Statement 1.

Statement 2 Response: The National Theatre Resource Videos improved my interest in the text Othello

Figure 2 demonstrates that the videos had a positive effect on student engagement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	3	8	0

Figure 2: Results from Questionnaire Statement 2.

Students claimed the videos were interesting because it allowed them to see the 'difference between Iago and Othello from the point of view of the actors' and that 'it helped to know what the people who played the characters thought of them.' Therefore, we can determine that pupils enjoyed being able to study the characters in the play 'Othello' from the point of view of the actors playing them; allowing them to gain a unique insight and understanding of the text.



Statement 3 Response: The activities I completed alongside The National Theatre Resource Videos helped to improve my understanding of the video content given

As stated in the outline, this project aimed to create lesson, homework and flipped learning activities that accompanied the National Theatre’s video resources. Figure 3 demonstrates that students found these useful in improving and consolidating their understanding of the video content.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	0	4	8	0

Figure 3: Results from Questionnaire Statement 3.

Below are the reasons students gave for why they found the accompanying activities useful. These demonstrate that the activities created to support the video content used in lesson or for revision activities helped students to understand and give purpose to what they were watching.

Student comments in response to statement 3:

- “The activities set helped reinforce the video content.”
- “Helped me to understand what they were talking about more.”
- “Writing down the information helps me remember...watching it alone would not have been helpful.”
- “Writing down alongside listening to the video helps the information to stick in my mind.”
- “Writing down ideas from the video helped retain the knowledge.”

Statement 4 Response: I would like to complete more activities that link with the videos available from The National Theatre with other texts I study

Due to the positive experience students had with the resources available through the National Theatre, all students agreed (with 1 strongly agreeing) that they would like to use these resources again in the future when studying other texts.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	0	0	11	1

Figure 4: Results from Questionnaire Statement 4.

Reasons students gave for this included the view that the video content was ‘interesting’ and that they gave more ‘insight’ into the text.



Example

Exam Board: AQA

Qualification: A-Level Literature A

Assessment Objective 4: AO4: Explore connections across literary texts

Lesson Objective: Draw connections between Desdemona in Othello to Emilia in Hamlet

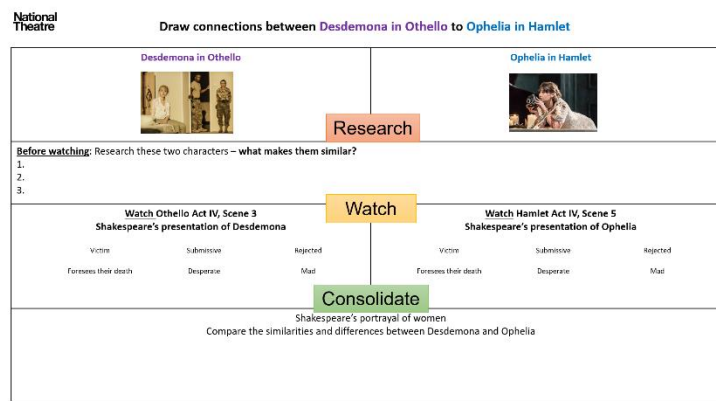
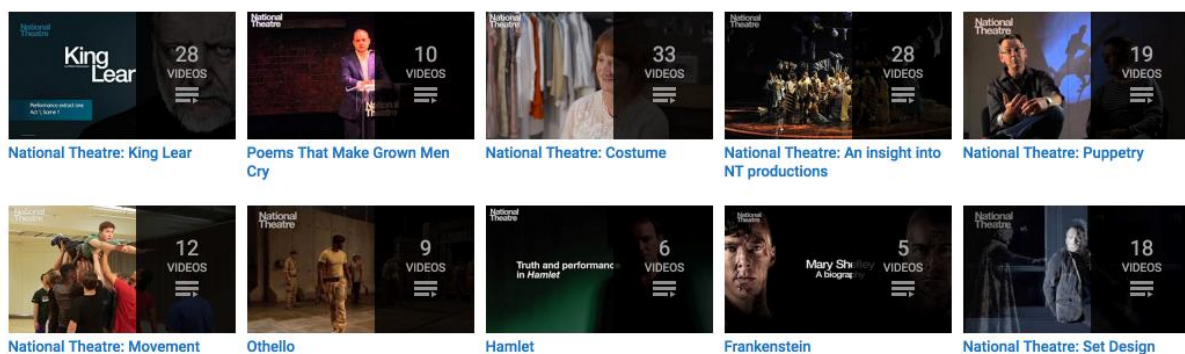
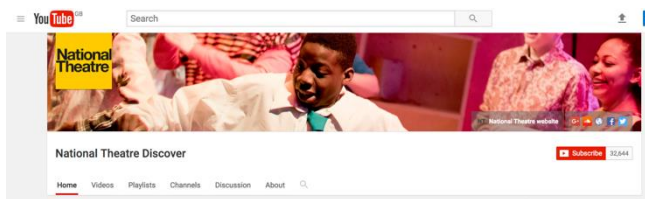


Figure 5: Example lesson resource to accompany National Theatre Video Resources

National Theatre Discover: Process Overview

Step 1: Go to 'National Theatre Discover' YouTube channel and search for a playlist that links with a literature text your students study.



Step 2: Create homework activities that accompany the video content. Remember to use timings for the activities created.

Example

National Theatre Discover Playlist: Othello

Video entitled: 'Iago and Othello'



National Theatre in the English Curriculum

Othello
Iago and Othello

Watch the National Theatre Discover Video entitled 'Iago and Othello' then complete the activities that follow.

0.0 – 0.32

What do you learn about Othello's character? Mind map your ideas below:

0.52 – 1.37

What do you learn about Iago's character? Mind map your ideas below:

Specific timings

2.00 – End

Iago: The Villain
'It is not that easy just to play a villain, you have to think about why someone is the way that they are.' Rory Kinnear (Iago)

What do you learn about how the role of Iago as "the villain" of the play?

Judicious toward Othello	Othello's unsuspecting and vulnerable disposition	Effect on the audience	Methods of Iago as the villain

Figure 6: Example homework activity to accompany National Theatre Discover video content



National Theatre in the Media Curriculum

Use of the National Theatre's YouTube channel: 'National Theatre Discover' was trialled in the Media Studies curriculum. The trialling teacher aimed to investigate whether the use of the online video content available improved the introduction of new concepts and captured early interest in the subject when starting the GCSE course in Year 9. In order to complement the course, the different National Theatre videos included 'Careers at the National Theatre: Graphic Designer', 'Careers at the National Theatre: Sound and Video Supervisor' and 'Designing Sound for Theatre.'

Impact with Media Studies

Media Studies Teacher Comments:

- *"The use of National Theatre videos in Media Studies allowed students to visualise the media concepts learnt early on in the course, and how these concepts are put into practice."*
- *"It emphasised the importance of taking each of the media concepts into consideration during planning and production of plays."*

Media Studies Student Comments:

- *"It helped me to understand the use of media in different types of jobs."*
- *"It was interesting to see how sound could be used."*
- *"It helped me picture what concepts we were learning in class."*
- *"The activities set helped me understand the concepts in relation to a play."*

Comparing the Impact between Media Studies and English

The use of the video content for Media Studies was useful to engage and immerse students in the course at an early stage and to improve student understanding of key concepts including mis-en-scene and diegetic sound which are 'learnt early on in the course.' Whereas for English, the content proved important for reinforcing what students had learnt about *Othello* and securing their understanding of characters and context during the course. Furthermore, compared to English, the video content acted as a way for students to consider key concepts learnt in the context of 'planning' and 'producing plays.' On the other hand, for English, the online video content was important for improving student understanding of and engagement with key texts studied.

In conclusion, the use of the online video content helped to improve student understanding in both subjects because the National Theatre video resources helped students to visualise what they were learning about.

Final Thoughts

As teachers of English using the resources available through National Theatre On Demand and Discover is a great opportunity for us to teach the literature texts we love in a new, visual and exciting way. Creating and designing a curriculum alongside these resources has helped our KS5 students to better engage with and understand often difficult and challenging texts.

