

'The best way for students to remember history is to experience it!'

Transforming historical understanding through scripted drama

An article on scripted drama might seem an unlikely choice for an edition devoted to getting students talking. Surely the point about a script is that the words used are chosen and prescribed by others. However, the examples presented here by Helen Snelson, Ruth Lingard and Kate Brennan demonstrate how effectively a well-crafted script can serve not merely to clarify complex sequences of past events, but to prompt rigorous discussion and animated questioning among students about the motives and intentions of key individuals and their relationships with one another. With scenes ranging from the Wars of the Roses to Vietnam, characters as diverse as Ambroise Paré and Harry Truman, and commentators as perceptive as Ann Aylis and Eve Aluate, the scene is set for lively, critical and highly productive debate.

Helen Snelson, Ruth Lingard and Kate Brennan

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Picture the scene: a large class of 25 A-level students, mid-way through the autumn term. Their GCSE grades the previous summer had ranged from A* to C, some of them regarded as minor miracles, significantly surpassing the students' expectations but leaving them vulnerable now to simply sinking at A-level. The topic being studied was the Wars of the Roses, assessed through document analysis, traditionally the paper which had pulled down the department's results. The teaching involved discussion and presentations, but was essentially a book-based approach that required a lot of note-taking. Many of the students had begun to struggle. Despite their previously high motivation, several of them were threatening to drop history. A speedy intervention was required.

The intervention took the form of a script, set during the period 1420-1450, carefully developed to address students' factual questions. It was written by their teacher to tell a story from beginning to end: from Henry VI's accession at nine months of age to Cade's Rebellion. The plan was to reassure students, presenting them with a clear narrative that would get the basic facts straightened out.

Picture the scene: Henry V is dying; his baby son lies defenceless. Enter the Dukes of Bedford and Gloucester (in character as the super-heroes Batman and Robin) to save the kingdom! They are accompanied by the 17 Royal Council members (the group Heaven 17) – all major players and potential rivals. Figure 1 shows how the story begins to unfold.

We expected that the students would essentially read the script aloud and use it to form some kind of picture of the situation and the nature of relationships between different protagonists. However, they began to develop it much further than we had anticipated. Questions flowed: 'Where should I be standing in relation to him?', 'Didn't my character go to Ireland?' 'When do I come back?', 'Do I ally with him now, or when I get back from France?' The students were keen to stage the play accurately and, in raising questions about blocking, they shared their uncertainties and teased out the changing relationships between key figures. They decided that members of each faction should wear the same colours to make their allegiances clearer. This meant they had to work out who should be wearing which colour and when. Students who normally were not active contributors to discussion were urgently challenging others: 'I can't stand next to him, look at my colour!'; 'I don't think I would be there until later in the scene.' Discussions about meaning and how something should be portrayed were focused and articulate and students were deputised to go back to the books to check dates and locations. The learning conversations were long and involved. The script, intended purely as a 'fact unscrambler', became a vehicle for student collaboration, as they worked together to achieve a strong sense of period, establish the relationship between characters and events and formulate a clear understanding of how those events related to geographical locations.¹ Discussions continued for weeks, as students referred back to the drama and were inspired to research further, particularly through the eyes of 'their' character. The students could now move forward to develop their analysis and evaluation with a clear sense of context.

Picture the scene: The atmosphere in lessons had changed palpably. Struggling students regained their motivation and from that year on, the document study paper became the leading-edge piece of work which raised A-level performance in the department. Asked how they felt it had helped them, students reflected:

The drama brought colour, laughter and understanding to a subject that is all too often too hard to grasp in the space of a few hours a week.

When we were working in the way we did with you, we were involved with the story and could see how it all fitted together.

I got a C for the War of the Roses module, and an E for the other half of my history AS-level. It just wasn't engaging enough to be absorbed, whereas the dramas definitely were. The ability of a script to put it into chronological order was really helpful.

In subsequent history lessons, students continued to refer to the drama and their eyes would move to the area of the room where certain scenes took place. The script had made the whole topic three-dimensional and engaging, and had enabled students to work collaboratively to progress swiftly to an advanced level of chronological understanding. They had 'joined the dots', discovered their own weaknesses in relation to understanding and questioned and challenged one another quite happily and independently.

The power and potential of scripted drama

A scripted drama, in the context of history teaching, is an extended written text that has been carefully crafted for its performers – taking a story from history and making its twists and turns accessible to them. This article explains how and why we have built scripted drama into the GCSE and A-level curricula at our respective schools. By walking our students through events, we see them develop both a spatial understanding of the nature of particular relationships in history and the terminology to analyse and evaluate those relationships. We deliberately use lengthy scripts with many different characters in order to develop our students' understanding of the key concepts and processes of history. We use them across all key stages, with students of all ages, working at all levels of attainment. Although we begin by providing students with lots of carefully crafted words, the process gets them talking for themselves, generating and refining their ideas, equipping them to explain and argue, and thus producing many more words of their own. This is very much the story of a work in progress, as we have become increasingly innovative in our use of scripted drama to engage, enthuse, support and challenge our students.

As Ian Dawson makes clear, active learning involves physical movement, 'thinking from the inside' and making decisions from perspectives in context.² It leads students to identify with the character beyond the page, become fully immersed in history and engage with concepts and processes at a deeper level. Dawson and Banham argue that active learning strategies 'are not luxuries but essentials' because, far from wasting time, 'they accelerate learning', improving the quality of students' written work (including that produced at A-level).³

We are fully persuaded of the power of active learning. Using ideas offered by Dawson, our Year 7 students have embodied English and Normans locked in conflict in the aftermath of 1066 and, in Year 8, watched a hair-dryer dash the hopes

of the invading Spanish Armada.⁴ However, just as history teachers see limitations in the use of short extracts from historical sources and distinct possibilities in engaging with the complexities of longer historical texts, so we have moved from experimentation with short role-plays towards longer scripted dramas. That process has convinced us that such scripted dramas can be all-encompassing and allow for even more engagement and understanding of chronology, context and change. The clear framework and structure offered by a well-developed script can not only allow for greater breadth and depth of response, but also – as Figure 2 illustrates – produce the unexpected.

Writing and refining scripts: a collaborative enterprise

More years ago than we care to remember, Kate and Helen were working as colleagues, teaching history in South Hunsley School, a large rural comprehensive in East Yorkshire. Kate had an interest in all things dramatic and was already writing scripts for her classes and producing plays for the whole school. Helen, with no dramatic background or talent, began asking for scripts to use with her classes, having heard the rave reviews from students emerging from the classroom next door. Meanwhile, in Grenville College, Bideford, a school specialising in dyslexia, Ruth had discovered for herself the benefits of writing scripted drama to help students retain information before exams.

In 2009, Kate left teaching to write full time. Helen (by now Head of History at The Mount School in York) and Ruth (now Head of History at Millthorpe School in the same city) were regularly using their own scripts and commissioning A-level and GCSE scripts from 'Act the Facts', providing Kate with feedback on their impact on understanding and attainment.⁵ This collaboration has provided us with many easily adapted ideas which anyone can use and which have had a decided impact on understanding and attainment. Here we set out the thinking behind our use of scripted drama and the many reasons why we would encourage teachers to write tailor-made scripts of their own.

Motivating the de-motivated and reviving the disheartened student

We have turned to scripts as one way of tackling many of the following problems and challenges that confront us (and – we suspect – many other history teachers):

- ▶ How do we get through the tough and/or dry bits of GCSE and A-level courses, with their complex narratives and difficult-to-grasp concepts?
- ▶ How do we help students to do well in exams when they lack the skills and/or motivation to revise?
- ▶ In the wake of the EBacc, announced in the autumn of 2010, how do we inspire those who are constrained reluctantly to study history GCSE?⁶
- ▶ How we can better help students to identify blocks to their understanding and enable them to articulate their difficulties? Often we have found that students do not know what they do not know and we are not

Figure 1: An extract from the Act the Facts A-level scripted drama:

'The Wars of the Roses 1420 to 1450' initially designed to reassure a class of de-motivated AS students⁷

Scene 1 – England 1421.

(Fresh from his victory at Agincourt, Henry V is dying of dysentery watched by his new wife, Catherine of Valois and a horrified Groom of the Stool. In the wings stand all the nobility. The dukes of Bedford and Gloucester are dressed as Batman and Robin. Edward III watches from a portrait on the wall – think Harry Potter. Batman music starts. Enter in capes and hoods, John, Duke of Bedford and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester)

Gloucester: Holy diarrhoea Bedford! Our brother, Henry V, is dying!

Bedford: Don't worry Gloucester, this kingdom's safe with us. I'll rule France and you lead a regency council in England of 17 of our leading nobility. Together we will preserve the legacy of our beloved brother.

Henry: *(Weakly)* I'm not dead yet.

Gloucester: *(Carried away with his own rhetoric, he ignores Henry)* His conquests will not be in vain. The legacy of Agincourt *(Peasants and nobility solemnly make 'V' signs at one another)* will be maintained as long as there is breath in my body.

Henry: I'm not dead yet!

Bedford: Send out word to all corners of the kingdom that England expects every man of noble blood to unite behind the heir to the English throne.

Edward III: *(Speaking from his picture frame)* Some would argue that Richard, Duke of York, should be considered the rightful heir to the throne. Both his parents are descended from me and through his mother, he has the Mortimer claim to the English crown

Henry: I can hear my great-great-grandfather's voice calling! I think I'm dead now *(Dies)*

Catherine: Oh my poor Henry! How will I live without you! I am a widowed French woman in the land of my enemies. Oh will give me 'elp and comfort in my hour of need?

Owen Tudor: Owen Tudor's the name and being Welsh is my game. Meet me behind yonder tapestry and I'll see what I can do for you.

Catherine: You are on. *(They move aside)*

Bedford: Let every nobleman in the kingdom gather to hear the last will and testament of our noble sovereign Henry V, victor of Agincourt *(Everyone makes 'V' signs)* and our beloved brother. *(All nobles arrive, looking downcast and serious)*

Gloucester: *(Reading from Henry's will)* Let it be known that I, Henry, King of England do divvy up the jobs as follows

Warwick: I, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, being one of the three richest men in the kingdom shall be guardian of the prince until he comes of age. *(Catherine throws the baby to Warwick and continues to canoodle with Tudor behind tapestry)*

York: I, Richard, Duke of York, being also one of the three richest men in the kingdom, but being better than the other two because I'm descended on two sides from Edward III and am heir to the throne after Bedford and Gloucester if the prince dies, will be generally important and treated with great respect. Oh, and I want to go to France and fight a lot too.

Northumberland: I, Henry Percy, Duke of Northumberland will hold the marauding Scots at bay in the north of England, but I'm not sitting next to Warwick at the dinner table because I hate him.

Warwick: I hate you more.

York: You don't hate him as much as I hate that bastard Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset.

Somerset: Oh that's so unfair, just because my great grandparents weren't married and I'm an illegitimate descendant of Edward III, you're always picking on me.

York: Am not.

Somerset: Are.

York: Am not.

Somerset: Are, are, are and are.

Bedford: Enough of this faction fighting, we seventeen have a kingdom to run.

Gloucester: We could call ourselves Heaven's 17.

Bedford: Let's not

Gloucester: We could be the next boy band sensation

Bedford: Shut up.

Gloucester: I've got the tights.

Bedford: Right, that's it! I'm going to France and I'm going to fight the French which is what I do best and I'm leaving my brother Gloucester in charge of England at the head of this regency council.

Gloucester: Holy responsibility, Bedford. I won't let you down.



Figure 2: The penny drops!

A Year 10 GCSE class at Hull Collegiate School in Anlaby was acting out a scripted drama script on the Cold War in Europe. One student, playing the part of Harry Truman (and shown on the left in the photograph below), kept stroking his foot along the furry rug which represented the divided Germany. When his teacher asked him to take his foot off the rug he defended himself with: 'My foot represents the toehold America had in Germany!' The penny had dropped and the teacher stopped setting up the scene to allow the class to discuss this insight. His comment helped the whole class move on; an example of the sort of sudden breakthrough in understanding that scripted drama encourages.⁸



always sure either! Could we find a way to provide a stimulating, but safe place to articulate uncertainty and question and challenge interpretations?

- ▶ How do we develop historical understanding of the topic so that a student can demonstrate their competence and progression with concepts and processes?
- ▶ How do we ensure that students have a real and personal understanding of the topics we are studying so that they can analyse and evaluate the role of specific factors in context?

Over the past few years, we have found it harder to get students out of school to participate in school visits and keenly feel how great a loss this is to their historical education. We wanted to see whether we could achieve some of the benefits of off-site visits – engagement, understanding beyond the abstract and the unpredictable ‘joining of the dots’ – without leaving the classroom.

Deepening students' understanding of complex narratives and chronology

The Wars of the Roses was one of the first scripts that we devised with the intention of sorting out the basic chronology of a complex topic. Our aim was simply to unscramble the story in a fun way; but to our surprise and delight, what emerged were learning conversations which revealed students' lack of chronological awareness, inspired them to tackle their difficulties head on and took the whole group to a new level of understanding the relationships between people, events and motivations within a particular period. That first example of scripted drama at A-level has subsequently been replicated with other groups, with scripts, for example, about the French Revolutionary Terror (that can be seen enacted in Figure 3) and it continues to be an important element in our A-level revision strategies.

Scripted drama has been similarly effective in enabling a lower-attaining GCSE set to understand Renaissance Medicine. The Paré script (shown in Figure 4) was one of two scripted dramas written by teachers to address a significant drop in the department's A*-C pass rate at GCSE. A major contributory factor to this drop was identified as boys' underperformance. In the class which first used this scripted drama, half of the boys had scores that ranged from 79 to 99 in standardised Cognitive Ability Tests; most of the students had poor study skills, wouldn't or couldn't revise effectively and struggled to give more than the most superficial answers to source-based exam questions.⁹ By rehearsing the scripts, these students effectively revised together and consolidated their learning through competitive factual quizzes based on the script and peer-marking of paired exam-style questions. Like Paula Worth, writing for her low-achieving Year 8 students, the teacher deliberately wrote character parts for every member of the class with roles created for specific students.¹⁰ Michael Aspirin and the Clapperboard Operator spoke in short sentences suitable for students with lower literacy levels, while the roles of Thierry and Henri were designed for dominant members of the class. The fact that these characters had kudos gave dominant individuals a stake in making the drama work. Students who were sometimes difficult to handle became purposefully engaged, poring over their scripts to find out when they next had a line and what happened to their character in the end. Their sense of personal engagement and emotional connectedness in a structured environment seems to have encouraged the retention of this fairly dry part of the GCSE specification.

The nature of the process is crucial to achieving this kind of emotional engagement. These are not scripts to be learned and performed to an audience. They are scripts for the cast. If students had to learn their lines by rote they would focus on remembering their own lines and tend to shut out the rest of the narrative. Students must keep their scripts in their hands and run the dramas almost as conversations

Figure 3: An extract from the Act the Facts GCSE script 'Paré, this is Your Life!' written to address a drop in performance among boys

Scene 2: A battlefield somewhere in 16th century France:

(Soldier 1 is propped up on a desk with a piece of shin bone sticking out of his leg (use a ruler). Paré is preparing to amputate it. Two muscular helpers, Thierry and Henri, are on hand to hold the patient down. Soldier 2 sits with his intestines in his hands, waiting to be treated. Enter film crew and Michael Aspirin clutching a red book with: 'Works on Surgery 1575 by A. Paré' on the cover)

Michael Aspirin: Is there a famous barber surgeon in the tent?

Soldier 1: *(Aggressively)* Wait your turn. I was here first

Paré: Take a seat sir, I won't be a moment. I'll just amputate this leg, then I'll be right with you.

Soldier 2: Oi! What about me and my internal bleeding?

Soldier 1: He carried those intestines for three miles so you could shove them back in.

Thierry: *(To Soldier 2)* You've had a wasted journey, soldier. We can't treat internal injuries like that in the sixteenth century. You're a dead man walking.

Soldier 2: So I staggered all this way for nothing?

Paré: I'm sorry. Nobody can operate safely inside the body cavity until Lister discovers antiseptics in the 1860s.

Soldier 2: Well I'm gutted.

Henri: Yes you are. Go somewhere and die from septicaemia and blood loss. You're making the tent untidy.

Soldier 2: How dare you! Damn the lot of you! *(Soldier 2 picks up his innards and staggers painfully off stage. Paré turns to Soldier 1)*

Paré: Right soldier, where does it hurt?

Soldier 1: Do you see this bit of bone?

Henri: The bit sticking out of your knee cap here? *(Prods bone with his finger)*

Soldier 1: OW!!!! Yes. That's where it hurts.

Thierry: Another cannon ball wound. That's nasty, very nasty. *(Thierry leans over the bone and coughs on the wound)*

Camera Operator: Is that a good idea?

Thierry: What?

Camera Operator: Coughing on his wound like that? You're infecting it with germs.

Henri: It's the sixteenth century; we don't know anything about germs yet.

Paré: Well that's not quite true. We have seen germs, thanks to Galileo.

Clapperboard Operator: Galileo?

Paré: Galileo. He made a lens that shows up tiny animalcules wriggling around on everything.

Camera Operator: Yes. Those things are called germs and they cause infection and disease. They're killing most of the soldiers in here!

Henri: *(Shrugs)* Well, we don't know that yet.

Clapper board Operator: Not until Pasteur's germ theory in 1861.

Thierry: So I'll cough as much as I like. *(He coughs on the wound again)*

Soldier 1: I'm bleeding to death in 1536. I can't wait 300 years for you to discover that germs cause infection. Just do your best Monsieur Paré.

within the group, rather than as staged performances for an audience. Unless a part is large, it is best to write a script in which students have many parts, even if this makes for some clumsy scene-changes. The more students who take part in each scene, even in non-speaking roles, the more engaged they will be and the better they will remember it. Comments from pupils who enacted a scripted drama on the significance of the Iraq war were perceptive about this:

I can remember loads of stuff – other people's lines as well as my own.

I didn't get it all in the first read through, but I did when we all started walking around.

I managed to link up characters and factors for the first time.

I understand it in place and time now.

Modelling, practising and developing a deep understanding of historical processes

We have had misgivings over the years, concerned that, while it might be supporting students' retention of knowledge, scripted drama might also be restricting the development of their own ideas. In embarking on a piece of action research undertaken as part of a MA course at Hull University, Kate expressed her anxiety that scripted drama might prove too didactic as a teaching and learning method, 'giving control over what is learnt to the teacher/author' and allowing the student participants 'little room for negotiation'.¹¹ Subsequent investigation, however, which included canvassing the students' views, showed that those fears were largely unfounded. Within strictly fixed parameters, the depth of

Figure 4: A-level students acting out the script based on the French Revolutionary Terror



thinking is nevertheless very much student-owned and directed. As one student reflected in feedback on the Iraq play, 'It's given me food for thought and room for more'.

We worried too, that the anachronistic nature of a script in which real historical figures like Paré engaged in conversation with invented characters such as Thierry and Henri (see Figure 4), might confuse students and simply serve to replace one misconception with another. In practice, students do not appear to have any difficulty distinguishing between real and invented characters, and they consistently claim that the process of acting out a script helps them to understand topics more readily. When asked to compare their understanding of the two Renaissance topics taught through scripted drama (Paré and Vesalius) with the one taught using traditional methods (Harvey), 83 per cent of the students claimed that they understood the work on Vesalius and Paré better.¹²

Rigorous historical thinking obviously depends on secure historical knowledge. As Chapman and Woodcock have recognised, any kind of causal argument or analysis of patterns of change and continuity over time, depend on students' knowledge of, and familiarity with, the detail of what happened. They appreciate that it is 'often difficult to enable students to dive into and walk through the detail of a story ... in a way that will allow them to pinpoint precise events or moments in time which were turning points.'¹³ Scripted drama can provide an engaging way for students to make that leap into the story, developing the knowledge that they need and sufficient confidence in their mastery of that knowledge to be able to deploy it in subsequent argument and analysis.

Encouraged by our success in building students' confidence in this way, we have been experimenting with the construction of scripts, seeking to find ways of using scripted drama to help improve progression in relation to other concepts and processes, particularly related to students' development of historical enquiry questions and hypotheses, and also seeking to foster a sense of place in relation to local history.

Modelling analysis and evaluation in an historical context has been a particularly effective development. Several of the scripts now feature specific characters called Ann Alysis, Ian Vestigate, Eve Aluate, Ann Achronism and Ray Flect. As illustrated in Figure 5, an extract from 'The Vietnam War, 1960 to 1975', they typically converse with one other and with the historical characters and comment on the action. Played straight, these characters form an entertaining part of the drama and introduce the concepts of analysis and evaluation in a fun way. A colleague commented that her students found it much easier to understand the nature of analysis having heard two characters in the Cold War GCSE script discussing the Yalta Conference:

It was easier to hear two gossiping cleaners (Ann Alysis and Ann Achronism) talking about political intrigue than ploughing through a source analysis in the classroom. After all, 'gossip' is the way the students pick up changes in relationships in their normal lives.¹⁴

We have also used these characters to help students become confident in their own analysis and evaluation. Even AS-level students can struggle to appreciate what is required of them in relation to these processes, and if they don't understand what they are meant to be doing, it is unreasonable to expect them to do it well. Our experiments have shown, however, that students have little difficulty in commenting on the action in a play. We use a script, for example, to analyse the build-up to the French Revolution; it recaps progressive phases, using the idea of different courses on 'Masterchef', with the flavours of each course (or phase) becoming more intense as the Revolution reaches its climax. Year 12 students really enjoy acting this out and then use the script as the basis for a written exercise. The first four scenes take the action to the autumn of 1791. Students are then asked to write Scene 5, (without looking at the original), as if they are Ann Alysis and Eve Aluate, providing their own analysis and evaluation. We throw them into this task in pairs with only the definition of the roles of Ann Alysis and Eve Aluate shown in Figure 6 to work with. We then interject

Figure 5: A scene from the Act the Facts GCSE script 'The Vietnam War 1960-1975'

Each scene is based on an exam style question exemplifying how the role of analysis can be made explicit in a scripted drama.

Scene/Question 1:

What can you learn from Source A (an extract from President Johnson's address to the nation) about the reasons for the increase in US troop numbers sent to Vietnam in 1965?

(It is 7 April 1965 and Lyndon B Johnson, President of the United States, has just addressed the nation explaining why more troops are being sent to Vietnam. At the back of the room, cleaning women Ann Alysis and Ann Achronism discuss proceedings with investigative reporter Ian Vestigate and a Security Guard.)

Ian Vestigate: So why *did* the USA send more troops to Vietnam in 1965?

Security Guard: As the President just said: the reason America sent in more troops was to protect South Vietnam, that's all.

Ian Vestigate: And is that America's only reason for increasing troop numbers?

Ann Alysis: Before you take the President's words at face value, think about the nature, origin and purpose of his speech.

Ann Achronism: (*helpfully counting each point on her fingers*) Think about who wrote it, when they wrote it, why they wrote it and who they wrote it for.

Ian Vestigate: The President wrote it to address the American public.

Ann Alysis: Exactly. He wants the public's approval for American foreign policy, so he makes America sound like the 'good guy', protecting a weaker nation from Communist bullies.

Ann Achronism: But the world's media is also listening to his speech, so the President's sending a warning to North Vietnam, China and the USSR that America won't stand by and let the Communists take over South Vietnam.

Ann Alysis: That's why he increases troop numbers in 1965 – it proves that he means what he says.

Security Guard: He didn't mention any of that in his speech.

Ann Achronism: Of course not. Anything the US President says will have a big impact on relations between the two superpowers, so he has to be careful. He daren't *provoke* Russia and China, but at the same time he needs to look as though he can stand up to them.

Ann Alysis: A speech is not like a private diary where Lyndon Johnson might write down his *real* reasons for doing things. There are other, hidden reasons for increasing the troop numbers in 1965, but Johnson would never say them out loud on a public platform.

Ian Vestigate: So the answer to my question is that I can learn from **Source A** what the US Government's *official line* was on the reasons for increased troop numbers, but I can't learn about the other, hidden reasons?

Ann Alysis: That's it. You can learn a certain amount, but it's not the full story.

fairly quickly to ask them why they are finding the task so hard, and the students immediately grasp that they need a focus for their discussion. How can they analyse and evaluate without one? This makes their focus on the theme that we then give them – the state of the revolution by the autumn of 1791 – much sharper.

Of course, it is the work that is done with the scenes that the students draft – discussing both process and outcome – which is the crucial part. Not all of the students write fully analytical scenes, but this in itself is helpful. We read each other's scenes and discuss which parts simply add more action, which parts are essentially descriptive commentary on that action and which parts are actually analysing and evaluating the action. This kind of modelling has encouraged students to think critically about the differences between the processes and to be reassured that other people find it hard to differentiate between analysis and evaluation. It is clear that the

students whose work is shown in Figure 7 have grasped the differences and hopefully can apply this learning when writing answers to A-level questions. When asked what they had to do to write their analysis, typical responses were that they had to look back to the previous information and think about how to connect the ideas in the scene. After this kind of script work, it is much easier for students to appreciate that close reading of their previous notes and careful attention to structure are essential to writing good essays. The task is obviously a demanding one, hard, but it is only impossible if students have not gained the contextual knowledge that they need through the course of their AS programme. Those who have not yet grasped the need to do background reading find out for themselves that it is not an added luxury.

This kind of approach can be easily adapted to help Key Stage 3 students struggling to move from description towards explanation. We use Dee Scribe and Ed Splain explicitly to model the difference between the two. Dee tends to

Figure 6: Working definitions of analysis and evaluation used with AS-level students to help them write a scene for a scripted drama

Ann Alysis	She uses her knowledge of the whole topic area to think about and comment upon the importance of specific actions, events and people. Imagine her as a film critic dissecting a specific performance.
Eve Aluate	She uses her knowledge of the whole topic area to think about and comment upon the inter-connections between actions, events and people. She makes comparisons and weighs things up. Imagine her as a judge.

be interesting for a while and then goes on a bit until Ed intervenes to ask and answer the ‘But why?’ questions coming from another character, Dev Elopit.

Developing conceptual understanding of change, continuity and diversity of experience

The National Curriculum requires students to identify and explain change and continuity and diversity of experience within and across periods of history. This too requires a secure knowledge base and sense of period. Involvement with a particular character and the situations happening around them, enables students to empathise strongly with their perspective on events, drawing on specific knowledge to so. This can be built on with the use of hot-seating in conjunction with the scripted drama.¹⁵

We use hot-seating with students of all ages; for example, at the start of the A-level French Revolution script, characters assemble to take part in the Estates-General. We ask each of them in role what their life has been like in the years leading up to 1789, where they come from, how they live (including what they eat), what aspirations they have and how they have got to the position they are in. Other members of the class are encouraged to join in the questioning, as the common experiences and diversity within and between the Estates are made explicit. This exercise causes students to think creatively and make connections while we, as teachers, readily spot gaps in their understanding of period.

The way we write scenes can itself encourage understanding of diversity. The GCSE script, ‘The Significance of the Iraq War’, which is modelled on Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, culminates in a scene where Jacques Chirac, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China and Tiny Tim are sitting around the Christmas dining table. The guests discuss their views about the Iraq War. We asked for feedback on this script after working with a class and one student commented:

I wouldn't have thought that another country would have thought differently about the war from Britain. I learnt other countries' perspectives, and even the fact that they had different perspectives.

Another student said of the same script that they understood now that experiences were different and could change over time: ‘I’ve really grasped variety of experience past, present and future.’

A Year 8 class with a reputation for being low achievers and difficult to motivate, worked with a script about the Luddites. They were divided into factory owners and their wives enjoying a meal cooked and served by their servants, and handloom weavers, driven to desperate measures by unemployment and starvation. They saw the same event, an attack on Armley Mill in Leeds in 1812, from both points of view. The students’ feedback was that they felt an emotional connection to their character; they felt ‘part of the whole thing’; they could see the pictures in their mind; and they wondered what was going to

Figure 7: An example of a student-written section of script for Ann Alysis and Eve Aluate set in France, autumn 1791

Eve Aluate: So, what’s going on then, Ann? I want to know how secure the constitutional monarchy is.

Ann Alysis: Well, Eve. There’s a lot been happening. The King running away last June made it very difficult for anyone to claim he was co-operating and then when Lafayette’s National Guard fired on the crowd at the Champs de Mars... Oh dear, oh dear. It seems that the National Assembly is only in charge because they’ve used force. I hear that down at the Jacobin Club they are openly calling for a Republic. Mind you, even they’ve split up into the Feuillants and the Jacobins. They meet so near to each other they can almost pull faces at each other.

Passer by: Good job the Cordeliers aren’t pulling faces too. Could Danton look any worse?!

Ann Alysis: Oy you! Don’t listen in on other’s conversations! (*speaking more quietly*) Between you and me, I think that Robespierre chap is one to watch.

Man rushing in: Have you heard? The new Constitution’s been published. The King has signed! We are a Constitutional Monarchy just like the Brits. *Vive la France!*

Eve Aluate: So, it seems that we have a new constitutional government, which is popular enough. The future depends on whether King Louis really will co-operate. I also wouldn’t like to say how tense things would get if a war broke out!

Figure 8: Questions about change and continuity to pose to characters in the hot seat

What type of change has your character experienced in the last few scenes?

How would you describe the pace of the change that has taken place for your character?

How many other characters have experienced the same type of change as you?

Form a continuum, ranging from the characters who have experienced the most change in this section of the play to those that have experienced the least.

Which characters are comfortable with the changes and which are not?

Is your character hopeful? Why? Why not?

How would your character describe their life now?

At what point did life for your character change?

Did every character's life change at the same point?

happen to their character and others. All of these comments indicate some of the prerequisites for engaging with diversity. The Luddites drama allowed the students to grasp the diversity of experience of characters from both ends of the social scale. This moved them on from the one-dimensional experience level of the 'diary of a mill girl' approach, as we call it, where students do little more than describe the daily grind, to a more sophisticated understanding that change and continuity can be experienced in diverse ways.

We find that change and continuity within periods is harder for students to access than that across periods. So, our Year 7s are very good at understanding the change and continuity between Britain in the Middle Ages and the Industrial Age, but they find the micro-complexity of topics hard. Figure 8 shows how we have taken some of Christine Counsell's suggestions about questioning in relation to change and continuity and used them to address questions to specific characters within the scripts.¹⁶

Of course, you could use this sort of questioning without scripted drama, but we have found the depth of responses particularly good because the students are so engaged and immersed in the topics. They can use head and heart to understand the overwhelming nature of some change, or the changing mood over a few years, or the tipping points when people are driven to action.

What have we learnt and where are we going?

We have become convinced that scripted drama is a powerful way to motivate students and help them to get better at doing

history. When the first sight of a script yields comments such as, 'This is going to be fun!' and when 8Z leave saying 'I enjoyed that!' we all get a buzz. Through the scripts we are able to deepen the historical understanding of our students and develop their historical skills. When a student using a script examining significance picks up a phrase and develops it so that she describes recent history as: 'the arc that's still arc-ing' we feel things are working well. Participating with an historical event via a script brings an emotional connectedness that helps students remember material and analytical ideas for exams. We think that the scripts 'impress general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents'.¹⁷ Our brains are wired to understand complex, conflicting stories presented to us through narrative and the scripted dramas work like that. Carefully planned scripted drama creates calm and purpose in the classroom with each student engaged in the activity, which can be difficult to achieve with more open-ended role-plays. We can then move beyond the scripts to deepen students' understanding of key historical concepts and we are continuing to explore their potential. Yes, writing scripts takes time, but it is time well spent because they can be used again and again. Each year, a fresh cohort of students can be engaged and motivated at a deeper level than is usually the case with shorter role-plays. Complex thinking is thus accelerated.

REFERENCES

- ¹ For an example of the way in which role-play can support students' awareness of the importance of geographical dimensions, look at how Ian Dawson turns a classroom into a map of England to help students appreciate the variation of reactions to the Norman Conquest in the different parts of England. See Dawson, I. and Banham, D. (2002) 'Thinking from the inside: Je suis le roi!' in *Teaching History*, 108, *Performing History Edition*, pp. 12-18.
- ² Ian Dawson's 'Thinking History' website provides an introduction to active learning, summarising the many benefits that it offers to history students. www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/IssueActiveLearning.html
- ³ Dawson and Banham, *op. cit.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.* 'Je suis le roi!' is a role play originally designed by Ian Dawson and Dale Banham for both higher education and Year 7 students. It explores William's actions in the aftermath of 1066 by putting the students into roles which develop a more nuanced understanding of the Conqueror's reactions to the recalcitrant English and their responses to subjugation. The hairdryer mentioned here makes frequent appearances in Ian Dawson's 'Thinking History' role plays. For more details visit the website: www.thinkinghistory.co.uk
- ⁵ Details about Act the Facts, the educational script-writing company, can be found at www.actthefacts.com Contact Kate Brennan on 01482 634373 or by email at kate@actthefacts.com
- ⁶ The welcome inclusion of history in the EBacc means not only that a wider range of students may be encouraged to opt for history at GCSE, but also (as the latest Historical Association survey has shown) that some students are being compelled by their schools to continue with the subject to GCSE. The survey findings are available at www.history.org.uk
- ⁷ Extracts from the scripts are reproduced courtesy of Act the Facts. See www.actthefacts.com
- ⁸ A video clip of this incident can be seen as part of a video explaining the work of Act the Facts, the educational script-writing company available
- ⁹ Standardised cognitive ability tests (CATs) tend to be administered when students join their secondary schools at the age of 11. They are intended to measure three principal areas of reasoning – verbal, non-verbal and quantitative – as well as an element of spatial ability. Test scores are often used to predict attainment in public examinations at 16+. An average score of 99 at age 11 is equated with a 50 per cent chance of achieving five GCSE exam passes at Grades A*-C, the benchmark standard set by government.
- ¹⁰ Worth, P. (2011) 'Which women were executed for witchcraft? And which pupils cared? Low-attaining Year 8 use fiction to tackle three demons: extended reading, diversity and causation' in *Teaching History*, 144, *History for all Edition*, pp.4-15.
- ¹¹ Kate Brennan (2009) 'Critical Incident Analysis', unpublished assignment submitted as part of the Advanced Certificate in Sustained Professional Development, University of Hull.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Chapman, A. and Woodcock, J. (2009) 'Mussolini's missing marbles: stimulating history at GCSE' in *Teaching History*, 124, *Teaching the Most Able Edition*, pp.17-27.
- ¹⁴ Clare Atkin, history teacher at Hull Collegiate School, Anlaby, East Yorkshire.
- ¹⁵ www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityModel/ActModHotSeat.html
- ¹⁶ Counsell, C. (2008) 'Making meaning out of change, continuity and diversity', Workshop presented at the Schools History Project annual conference. www.schoolshistoryproject.org.uk/ResourceBase/Issues/CounsellChangeContinuity.htm
- ¹⁷ Macaulay, T. (1843) 'Hallam's History' in *Critical and Historical Essays*, vol. 1, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, p.11.