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### **'Howling at the scrabble-board': Exploring Classroom Literature from an Autistic Viewpoint**

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## **‘Howling at the scrabble-board’: Exploring Classroom Literature from an Autistic Viewpoint**

### Abstract:

There has, to date, been little discussion of how autism may affect the experience of the reading of fiction for pupils in the classroom, other than through a deficit model. One of the researchers in this study (‘Celia’) is training to be a secondary school English teacher and identifies as autistic. Her experience provides an enriched understanding of the subject and enables the study to be undertaken in line with best practice for autism research. Her experiences are explored within the concepts of Theory of Mind, empathic regulation, language awareness and local rather than global processing bias. Impact on managing authentic engagement with texts for all pupils is discussed, together with specific questions for teachers regarding appropriate support for – and celebration of – autistic pupils’ reactions to fiction.

Key words: autism; literature; empathy; authentic engagement

### **Introduction**

Perceived wisdom may be that autistic pupils prefer to read factual books rather than fiction, and that narrative can be a challenge:

Children with ASDs typically prefer expository text, such as science texts. This may be because they find narrative text especially challenging because of its more abstract (and social) reasoning demands.

Randi, Newman and Grigorenko, 2010, p. 895.

Although there has been study of the effect of autism on understanding fiction (for example, Whalon, 2018; McIntyre et al., 2017; McIntyre et al., 2018; Dore et al., 2018), there has been less consideration of how autism may affect the experience of reading fiction from the autistic perspective. All autistic people are different and will experience their autism differently. However, despite this, consideration of how autism and fiction may interplay for the autistic pupil at school remains important, especially for those teaching autistic pupils literature. What are the challenges that autism may bring to the experience of literature? Equally, what are the strengths that an autism profile might bring to the study of fiction? How can English teachers better help, support and celebrate their autistic pupils in the classroom?

The concept of an 'autism profile' is a challenging one, as autism is intensely heterogenic. However, there is a growing acceptance that on both epistemic and ethical grounds the lived experience of autistic individuals should be central to autism studies (Woods and Waltz, 2019), and that failure to include the autistic voice in discussion of issues relating to autism may result in missed understandings or misunderstandings (Bracic, 2018). Autistic lived experience is therefore at the heart of this study. Celia (a pseudonym) identifies as autistic and is undertaking post-graduate study to become an English subject teacher. The understanding of both autism and the study of literature that she brings to this study remain intensely personal yet may, we believe, nonetheless give insight to the neuro-typical reader into the experience of studying literature in a classroom context from an autistic perspective. Celia's joint-ownership of this study is in line with best practice as suggested by the draft framework for inclusive autism research (Chown et al., 2017) that argues the of the autistic voice in relation to social scientific research. This study conforms to the framework through each of the framework's four basic principles:

- A researcher with autism has confirmed the identification and definition of the problem being investigated
- The social model of disability is at the heart of the investigation
- The study is jointly owned by a representative of the autism community and
- The research outcomes of the study are focused on improving the lives of people with autism

In line with research identifying preferences within the autistic community (Kenny et al., 2016) the term 'autistic' is used throughout this paper.

## Literature

Reading is the process of 'bringing personal meaning to the printed page [and] gaining increased understanding through experiencing the recorded understandings of another' (Lee, 1969, p. 403). Several studies suggest a link between fiction reading and Theory of Mind (ToM), a component of cognitive empathy which refers to the 'ability to attribute mental states to another person and to infer their underlying intentions, thoughts, emotions and motivation' (Colle et al., 2008 p. 28). A meta-analysis comparing the correlation between measures of lifetime reading habits with

measures of empathy and ToM (Mumper & Gerrig, 2017) suggests that fiction reading has 'a relationship with ... empathic ability' (p.170) and ToM has been shown to relate to comprehension in reading (McIntyre et al., 2017; McIntyre et al., 2018). What is less clear from the research is the direction of this link; do people develop stronger cognitive empathy/ToM through reading fiction, or are those with stronger cognitive empathy drawn to read fiction? Koopman (2018) suggests that we 'are still quite a long way from knowing when and how (literary) reading has an effect on empathic understanding for others' (p. 169).

Altered Theory of Mind has been suggested as an element in autism for many years (for example, Baron-Cohen, 1995; Charman and Baron-Cohen, 1995; Karmiloff-Smith et al., 1995; Frith, 2003) and a difference in the development of ToM is considered a core challenge in autism (for example, Seidman and Yirmiya, 2018, in Whalon and Cox, 2020). Recent studies continue to explore ToM 'impairment' in both children (for example, Lecheler et al., 2020) and adults (for example, Rosenthal et al., 2019), frequently positioning these studies within explorations of support for ToM (Holopainen, de Veld, Hoddenbach & Begeer, 2019; Lecheler et al., 2020) or exploring ToM as an element to examine or decode autism presentation (Livingston, et al., 2019). Reading is a complex task involving the application of knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, together with accessing of prior knowledge, the generation of inference, self-monitoring of understanding and the integration of each of these with information from the text (Kim, 2017), with ToM increasingly recognised as an important element to the successful management of this task (Atkinson, Slade, Powell, & Levy. 2017; Dore, Amendum, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2018). It may be the case that some autistic readers experience this complexity, and specifically the ToM element of 'putting themselves in another's shoes', in an altered way (McIntyre et al., 2017; McIntyre et al., 2018). Kotovych, Dixon, Bortolussi, and Holden (2011) suggest that the process of reading is similar to that of a conversation held between the narrator and the reader:

When we try to understand a character in a book, we make similar inferences about what the other is thinking and feeling as in conversation, and making such inferences would increase our understanding of and identification with the character (p. 170).

In autism it may be that this 'conversation' is qualitatively different. It may be that altered social communication impacts some autistic readers' understanding of the author's intentions and some autistic readers may find elements such as identifying inference and understanding narrative elements more challenging (McIntyre et al., 2017; McIntyre et al., 2018). Issues making inferences may impact understanding comprehension (Cartwright, 2015), and altered perceptions of characters' emotions and motivations may alter some autistic people's reading of a text (Dore, et al., 2018), Local rather than global processing bias (Booth and Happé 2010) may impact the autistic readers' skills in recalling and retelling the events in texts, and autistic readers may struggle to integrate information from the text with existing knowledge from outside the world of the text, leading to problems with inference (Nation and Norbury, 2011). A literal understanding of language in autistic readers may also make accepting flexibility of word meaning more challenging (McIntyre et al., 2017). Our understanding of the experience of reading from an autistic perspective therefore remains partial:

We still know very little about the potential difficulties [autistic] individuals have on tasks related to ... reading comprehension (McIntyre et al., 2017 p. 1089).

What we also 'know very little about' is the way that autism may have the potential to impact positively on reading and literature experience, and specifically an articulation of that experience from an autistic perspective. This lack of understanding of autism and its effects on the reader means that autistic pupils may not be having their needs understood within the English subject classroom. This study therefore explores the perceptions of reading and of the classroom experience of literature from an autistic perspective. It articulates Celia's reading experience; as a trainee English teacher with a sophisticated response to literature, Celia is able to articulate her response with a conscious awareness of her 'autistic lens'. Further, her position as a trainee teacher enables Celia to be able to explore the subject with specific relevance to how her insight might support the teaching of literature to autistic pupils. This has not been explored before and, as such, this paper makes an original contribution to knowledge

## **Materials and Methods**

## **Design**

This study considers the experiences of one autistic reader, Celia, as she reflects on how she positions herself as a reader, a student and as someone who teaches English. The intention of the study is to reflect on Celia's experience as an autistic reader and to use the understanding this brings to support awareness of potential approaches that might help regarding the teaching of some autistic pupils.

This research grew out of a session on 'authentic engagement' (Mason and Giovanelli, 2017) that explored ways in which teachers might influence their pupils' first-time encounter with texts. Results are reported in the article "*What's the point if it isn't marked?*" *Trainee teachers' responses to concepts of authentic engagement with a poetry text* (Lawrence, 2019). In this current study, Celia reflects on some of her experiences as a student in the session outlined in Lawrence (2019), along with reflecting on her experience as a pupil in school and her principles as a trainee teacher of English with autism.

A case study approach has been used in this study. Denscombe (2010) tells us that case studies are designed to focus on 'one (or just a few) instances of a particular phenomenon [...] providing an in-depth account of [...] experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance' (p.52). Whilst this approach can be criticised for lacking generalisability, our intention is not to produce a generalisable study. Rather, this study was intended to begin discussion, whilst fully acknowledging that both autism, and the way that any person experiences a literary text, vary fundamentally from person to person.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection involved the two researchers – the lead author and Celia – working together to populate a large (A1) 'target': three concentric circles providing two areas, labelled 'as teacher' and 'as student'. These areas were dissected by lines radiating from the centre, breaking the circles into five sections, corresponding to the five elements of the original research. This data collection method was designed to ensure that Celia had the space to articulate her ideas in a way that was most effective for her. According to Celia, the large visual proforma was 'less formal and less strait-

jacketed than a list.’ Celia explains that this way of working was effective for her as it helped her to make sense of the time of the session visually, where she was able to see the different parts of the session and to know what response to each were required. She describes that this enabled the discussion to be ‘not overwhelming, but logical and step-by-step; it wasn’t intimidating and was “manageable.”’ She describes that the combination of discussion and writing was helpful for her. Both researchers recorded what was said onto the sheet. This meant that Celia could make comments verbally, to be recorded by the other researcher, or could write them herself. She reports that, ‘writing and talking are different skills and this enabled both to emerge’. She also shares that for her, ‘jotting and explaining can help make my thoughts more articulate’.

Celia reports that she was happy that her responses as student (in the taught session) and teacher (as she considered the material from this perspective) were separated, ‘even if in reality they so often overlapped.’ She expresses that she liked the use of felt tipped pens to populate the sheet, indicating that the ‘scruffiness’ of the data recording made it feel ‘informal and non-threatening’ and that the ‘joint attention on the sheet was liberating.’

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed in accordance with the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, given that a novel approach was used for data collection so that the researchers could adequately cater for Celia’s needs, an adaptable approach was required to analyse data. Subsequently, the steps outlined in Braun & Clarke (2006) were used as a foundation to approach the analysis of data, but researchers had to diverge at times. Thematic analysis was chosen as a method of data analysis because its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowed the researchers to analyse data that did not take the form of a transcript and was collected in an original way. A latent approach to the method was adopted so that we could ‘examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84).



During phase one, the data written on to the 'target' by Celia were read repeatedly by both researchers. The populated proforma was summarised by the lead researcher and the summary returned to Celia for further confirmation and comment. Throughout this phase, meanings and patterns were identified and consistently returned to Celia for comment and development. In phase two, the researchers developed preliminary codes for short pieces of data which were collated into a list. Again, throughout this stage, the back and forth process with Celia continued as she ratified and added to the ideas. In phase three, the codes were sorted into potential themes and a thematic map was created. Finally, during phase four, themes were named and defined before the final report was produced. At this point, additional researchers – currently working English teachers – added to the discussion of the findings and considered their implications for teaching practice.

The paper has remained a collaborative venture throughout between researchers and Celia which was integral to ensuring that her voice was embedded into the report, in line with the Chown et al. (2017) draft framework for inclusive autism research. Throughout this collaborative process, the researchers took an interpretivist epistemological stance when analysing the data acknowledging that their own preconceived notions, ideas and values will feed into the findings.

## **Findings**

As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, themes do not emerge passively from the data; researchers are an active participant in data analysis and thematic construction. Consequently, the researchers read two themes into the data.

Theme 1 is concerned with the emotions Celia experiences when reading a fictional text and how these may be a result of, or be influenced by, her autism. Theme 2 explores how Celia reflects on the differences people with autism bring to the study of literature and how their readings should not be dismissed as 'wrong'.

In line with our interpretivist stance, findings, interpretations and discussion are presented together, representing our continual attempts to reflect and interpret the significance of data based on the literature we have reviewed.

***Theme 1: Understanding ‘autistic readings’ of literature in relation to empathy and emotional responses.***

Celia identifies how empathy and an emotional response play a large part in her ‘autistic reading’ of texts. For Celia, empathy with characters in literature results in ‘imagining myself in the same situation as the person in the narrative, with my relationships taking the place of their relationships.’ This implies that Celia finds reading an intensely emotional and potentially distressing experience, heightened by imposing her own personal relationships on to the relationships of the characters in texts. She describes how this means reading fiction can be ‘particularly harrowing.’

Celia adds to this, describing the impact it had on her schooling. She felt that she had to read ahead in school so she could be ‘almost anaesthetised to what’s going to happen’ when she must experience the events in fiction in the classroom. Celia’s decision to frame this statement within a medical metaphor implies that failure to read ahead would cause her emotional pain. Whilst Cupchik (2002) argues that the symbolic presentation of events in fiction enables an element of control for the reader over what is imagined during the act of reading, Celia needs to go further. Mar et al. (2011) describe this emotional control in terms of the reader’s freedom: to put the book down and to stop reading, whether that be for a moment or two (to re-orientate into the real world) or forever. This seems to describe Celia’s experience more closely; she needs to have control over the context of how and where she experiences the emotional impact of literature. She says, ‘I need to feel ‘safe’ if I am to enjoy/access it successfully.’ This has clear implications for classroom reading practices. If some autistic pupils have a similar response to literature, a teacher must find ways of allowing that pupil to engage with classroom literature in a space and time that is comfortable.

When reflecting on her experience of the approach to teaching poetry used in Lawrence (2019), Celia articulates a difference not just in the experience of, but in the regulation of, empathy. She describes how when first encountering the poem *A Fine Romance* (McGough, 2009) she was very much put in the place of the poem’s narrator, saying, ‘I found it difficult to step back and apply a layer of filter ... I became that person ‘howling at the scrabble-board’’. As literature is frequently written with the

intent of evoking strong emotions, Celia explains how this can be anxiety provoking when she is not able to anticipate or 'get ahead' of an emotional moment within a text. She likens the experience of sudden twists or unexpected, unanticipated events in literature as being a similar experience to that of a 'jump scare' in a film. When she is aware that such a twist may happen, she says, it is the anticipation that provokes the anxiety as much as the event. She feels she may be less able than a neuro-typical reader to anticipate an author's 'plan' and finds it very difficult – and indeed very powerful – if she is taken by surprise. Because of this, Celia describes how events in literature she has not anticipated can be overwhelming, giving, as an example, her extreme distress on first reading the final events of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

Celia further articulates how she finds fiction that is based on factual events – for example, war poetry – particularly difficult. She believes that her unregulated empathy means that the fact that the situation may actually have happened to a person results in a deeper sense of anguish as the 'likelihood of it happening ... increases'. However, she iterates that teaching emotions and difficult topics remains important as it 'gives the opportunity to experience the human emotion of previous events rather than study just the facts of it'.

Interestingly, as well as presenting specific challenges to the autistic reader, it may be that fiction may present a world where social empathy may be 'practised' with a safety net, especially when the fictionalised world is not based on events in the real world. Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2007) argue that our anthropomorphisation of fictional characters as real within texts may allow us to enable these characters to provide 'social comfort in ways similar to real peers' (in Mar et al., 2011 p. 820). As fictional characters are not 'real', fictional events do not actually happen and the fiction itself has an inherent time limit. According to Cupchik (2002), it may be that the act of reading fiction, with its corresponding willingness to suspend disbelief and to temporarily enter a fictional world, may create an ideal platform for the empathic experiencing of others' emotions (Cupchik, 2002). Celia articulates how this experiencing of emotions as an autistic reader is inherent in her enjoyment of literature. Although she describes her almost overwhelming distress regarding the ending of *Of Mice and Men*, she nevertheless loves the book. Her sensitivity to the events does not lead her to reject the emotions she experiences, which she describes

as ‘an intrinsic part of joy of literature’, and her sometimes overwhelming emotional response to literature did not impact negatively on her choice to study English Literature at the University of Cambridge, nor to teach it:

I’m aware when I teach that I will have to have a handle on my own emotional response, but I take care not to dull it completely so that others in the class ... can see that it’s ok to feel upset ... We just finished *Of Mice and Men* before lockdown [for the Coronavirus outbreak] and there were several in my year 9 class who were upset, but said that they felt better ... because I clearly was upset as well.

Celia’s emotional empathy and engagement with the text has created a discourse within her classroom where it is acceptable to experience and to display emotion, and where an emotional response to texts is accepted. Celia’s own emotional engagement, and her conscious awareness of it, supports her connectedness both to the text and to her pupils, so that her relationship with her class as an English subject teacher is strengthened.

### ***Theme 2: Accepting the differences autistic people bring to the study of literature***

Mason and Giovanelli (2017) have described the need to preserve an ‘authentic engagement’ when literature is taught in the classroom. Sometimes, they argue, this is lost when the teacher ‘foregrounds’ certain aspects, or when classroom versions of texts anticipate events and dictate the relative values of what is written. Celia articulates how important she believes it is that a neurotypical teacher does not ‘foreground’ neurotypical responses to texts; although she accepts that there may be a need for a conventional, exam-driven reading of a text at KS4, she believes that an alternative or more unusual response of an autistic reader must nevertheless be respected if the engagement with the text of these students is to be authentic. To be told that their understanding of the text is ‘wrong’ is to undermine these readers’ confidence as readers. In the case of autistic pupils, this ‘authentic engagement’ may be experienced differently from that of their neurotypical peers. An altered empathic response coupled with a potentially reduced ability to anticipate events that have been socially cued within the text may make the impact of events in literature very powerful for autistic readers. This is consistent with Celia’s experience. She confirms that

metaphors can be both striking and challenging, not solely because they may be confusing but because they can yield too much information and detail. This may provoke an image that is disturbing: 'I can't stand it when people say, "Can I pick your brains?"!'. Celia explains that these sorts of images can be difficult to process. However, she is able to recognise the potential in this, stating that the difficulty of some images means that they stay with her and that her mind 'worries away at them' (in a process that she describes as positive). She indicates that images may stay with her long after she has finished reading a piece of literature and can also be a source of great interest. She describes how satisfying she finds it when she has worked through a metaphor and 'really got it on all levels.' The implication here is that the increased cognitive effort may make understanding figurative language a more rewarding experience. Celia also describes how she can be distracted by individual images, especially if she feels they are not effective. She gives the example of a song lyric where the singer is 'dancing in the dark/with you between my arms' (Sheeran, 2017):

"Between" makes it sound (to me) like he has his arms out wide with the other person just stood in the middle ... It really annoys me, and I can't shake the mental image.

Although this quotation implies that Celia has interpreted song lyrics rather literally, it does not make her reading any less valid. It is potentially different from that of a neurotypical reader, but not any worse or better. Although she may have difficulty processing the figurative meaning, her focus on the literal could open discussion in the classroom should a similar situation or interpretation arise with an autistic pupil.

Canavan (2013) expresses some of the strengths autistic pupils can bring to the study of literature, claiming that the detail focussed processes present in some pupils with autism may support their contextual understanding of literature. However, she does not carry this across into her analysis of figurative or idiomatic language, instead suggesting that autistic pupils might be trained out of misreading texts with 'experience' (p.52). She uses the potential confusion that could be caused by Steinbeck's use of the word 'set' as a phonetic spelling of characters' pronunciation of the word 'sit' in *Of Mice and Men*. However, within this she misses the potential detail that an autistic reader might observe. Steinbeck does not, in fact, use 'set' as

synonymous with 'sit' within the dialogue of the text, using each to a specific purpose. It is used by George when describing the dream farm ("We'll build up a fire ... and **set** around it" (p. 16)) or when George invites Candy into the bunkhouse ("Come on in and **set** down a minute" (p. 27)). In contrast, 'sit' is used to describe a more temporary, less settled condition, as in George's description of how other men must spend their time ("We don't have to **sit** in no bar room blowin' in our jack" (p. 15)). The implication in Canavan's proposition is that there is both a right and a wrong way to read and interpret literature. Celia, quite rightly, challenges Canavan's suggestion, that 'misreading' can or should be 'trained out' of an autistic reader. She argues that she should not feel that she must wait for a received or prescribed meaning to be issued and that it is important for her to form her own interpretations and for her personal responses to images and ideas to be recognised as 'valid'. Celia argues rather that the sensory experience of words may be particularly strong for some autistic readers (Bogdashina, 2011). She describes how the sounds of individual words and how they react with each other is very powerful for her, identifying how alliteration, emphasis, rhythm and rhyme are all 'dynamic' elements of her literary experience.

Celia's position as an autistic teacher may give her heightened sensitivity to her own word use, making her more aware of the needs of autistic pupils in her classes. She indicates an interest in the etymology of words and phrases, and an awareness that prior knowledge should not be relied upon for all pupils. She gives the example of the idiom, 'We'll cross that bridge when we come to it' as a phrase that has caused her autistic pupils confusion, and how subsequent investigation of the source of the phrase (apparently, according to Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick (1999) first recorded in Longfellow's 1851 play *The Golden Legend*) enriched the experience of the whole class through tangential learning.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study examines the experiences of one autistic trainee teacher, Celia. Whilst every autistic pupil's experience will be different and a variety of classroom approaches will be needed for different pupils, Celia's report raises some important questions about how teachers support autistic readers in their study of literature.

Findings from Celia's experience indicate that teachers need to harness the learning differences autism brings and to celebrate the strengths of autistic pupils regarding their reading of literature. An autistic reading of a text may be richer, more unusual and more varied than that made by either neurotypical pupils or, indeed, a neurotypical teacher. Achieving an informed, independent, personal response to a text is often held up as a gold standard for pupils studying English Literature at GCSE and A-Level (Department for Education, 2013). The concept of personal interpretation separate from any authorial intention is embedded in literary theory and awareness of the idiosyncrasy of this personal response in autism may well enrich many English subject classrooms. As an autistic reader, Celia expresses her determination to reject conventional pedagogical approaches in favour of her own, personal responses. She articulates the need to have her interpretation acknowledged as 'valid' and not treated as if her way of thinking is, in some way, deficient. This resonates with the desire of many English classroom practitioners to move away from a deficit model of teaching, where teachers focus on students' weaknesses (Comber & Kalmer, 2007) towards a strength model where teachers facilitate and build upon the pupils' own knowledge, critical thinking skills and allow them to build on their strengths (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Celia's experience suggests that teachers should accept that although some autistic pupils may appear to 'misread' a text, their life experiences, values and attitudes are all feeding in to their interpretations, providing a valid response that should be explored and respected. As Rosenblatt suggests 'no one else, no matter how much more competent, more informed, nearer the idea (whatever that might be), can read ... the poem or story for us' (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 141).

As with so much associated with autism, the English subject teacher who is sensitive to the different needs of his or her autistic pupils may feel that they are left with more questions than answers from this study. However, it may be argued that it is through considering these questions that the sensitivities, strengths and different learning needs of autistic pupils may begin to be addressed. It is important to note also that, as an autistic teacher, Celia approaches many of these questions 'from the other side', having to adapt her autistic-lens reading of literature to consider the needs of neurotypical pupils. Awareness that any person undertaking the transaction of classroom literature – the reader, the teacher or the author – may be autistic enriches the appreciation of that literature for all.

This study, whilst vitally enriched by Celia's contribution, is limited by the single autistic voice expressed. Further study that enables the voices, ideas, differences, challenges and originality of autistic pupils (and autistic teachers) to be heard will begin to provide a proper understanding of how to meet the needs of autistic pupils within the literature classroom. Until that greater discussion is available, however, teachers may like to consider the following questions as a starting point in their consideration of how better to meet the needs of their autistic pupils.

### **Some questions to consider when teaching autistic pupils literature**

1. Autistic readers may struggle to maintain control over the distinction between the real world and the imagined events in fiction (they may 'live in' the narrative). How can support be provided within a classroom context to transition into/out of the reading experience for these pupils? How might your autistic pupils be supported to 'flag up' their emotional response needs to you within lessons?
2. Autistic engagement can be different, but should be recognised as authentic. How as a teacher can you guard against 'foregrounding' certain (neuro-typical-lens) elements as being more important in your reading than others? Can you find ways to value more unusual readings while still supporting examination requirements?
3. Literary texts require de-coding of social situations, often via the description of body language or gesture, or through characters saying one thing but meaning another. Can/should you teach this element explicitly in order to support your autistic pupils? Would classroom discussion of characters' motivation as if 'real world' support or confuse your pupils as they learn to develop a critical voice?
4. The reader of literature may be required to decode the author's intention: why does s/he use that structure? Why does s/he not explain that information? These questions may not be clear to the autistic reader who may struggle to hold the writer's perspective in mind. How can you support your autistic pupils to manage this dual focus?
5. Can you find ways to value the greater analytical detail (word-level as opposed to text-level) that your autistic pupils may make and that may be missed by the



neuro-typical reader? Can you use the sensory appreciation of language of some autistic readers to better explore the author's use of words for all pupils?

6. If your autistic pupils are using narrative to 'practise' social understanding and interactions, how can you support these pupils when characters within the text act towards each other with callousness, inconsistency or violence?

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