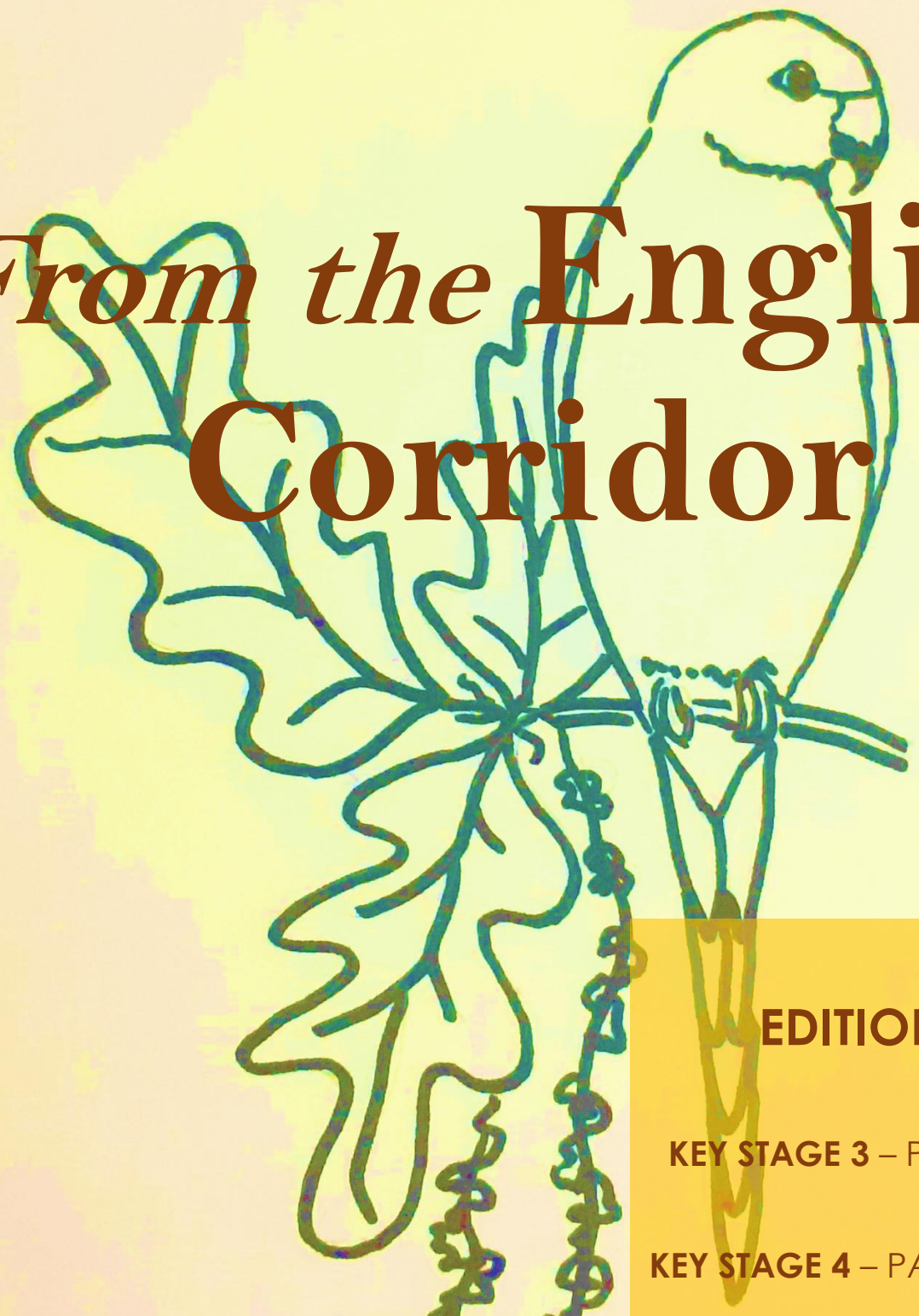


*'Poem' by Theo, Yr 11*

Somewhere  
the saltiness of the sea clings  
to the skin,  
filling the room  
before I even step inside.  
The air thick with  
simmering coconut milk,  
The goat meat dancing in the pot.  
The rhythm of it –  
hot pepper, coriander,  
Black eyed peas spinning with laughter  
It calls me in.  
Pulling me closer,  
familiar scents, soft  
Closer to the heart  
of home.



# *From the English Corridor*

**EDITION 3**

**KEY STAGE 3 – PAGES 5–18**

**KEY STAGE 4 – PAGES 20–26**

**WILLIAM ELLIS SCHOOL SPRING & SUMMER 2025**

# WILLIAM ELLIS WRITERS

## EDITORIAL

In the last English magazine, we featured quite a lot of superb writing by our then Year 9s, one of whom was Raymi Saldaña Rojas who tragically died last summer. This year we have been looking at the work of our current Year 9s and choosing someone to be awarded a small Key Stage 3 English prize dedicated to Raymi's memory. A small selection of work by skilful writers in the Year 9 of 2024/5 whose work we have particularly enjoyed reading is on the central pages of this edition. We move to some poetry by Year 11s who developed their understanding of some of the poems they study for GCSE by writing their own poems that echoed the structure or language of the published poets. We thank those students for letting us use their work here, and all others whose work we have collected.

Thank you for reading our students' work. Do feel welcome to send comments and contributions – by email if not a student or via email or any other reasonable means if a student.

Lorna Damms [ldamms@williamellis.camden.sch.uk](mailto:ldamms@williamellis.camden.sch.uk)

June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025

### With thanks to:

**The student writers  
and teacher colleagues in  
the English department.**

#### Dedication:

This edition is dedicated to the memory of Raymi Saldaña Rojas, a student whose memory lives on.

## SPRING & SUMMER 2025

# 1

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- **Myths retold**  
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# 1 Ekphrastic Poetry

By Year 7 students

Ekphrastic poetry addresses an artwork, like an urn, a painting or a sculpture. The first two poems are written in the voice of the stone angel that holds a sundial on the wall of Chartres Cathedral in France. Joey chose a painting of 'The Last Supper' for his assignment at the end of the unit.

## The Angel of the Meridian Speaks Back

By Amin Bakhshzaad 7W

As I gaze at the millions of people walking past me  
All my sweat and tears gradually break me  
No food, no water and no time to feel a touch to heal me

Things aren't the same anymore.  
Whilst blood pours, a smile feels sore...  
I am ignored with no remorse  
I need to go back to where I belong (1584 to 2024)

Oh, this generation is not fine.  
This sundial of mine, is no use for the time.  
All I do is hold this tablet till the night.  
Yet they hold me captive up high...

Everyone is hypnotised with the digital phone,  
Eyes glued to the glow, missing moments they should've known.  
I can't help but see, what the difference of these  
Generations has been.



## Angel of the Meridian Speaks Back

By Percy Power 7W

I am standing here alone

I was a guide for the time, but now I am  
Taken for granted  
My heart is cold  
I cannot take it any more  
The seasons have hurt me  
I wish on every candle on the cake it will stop.

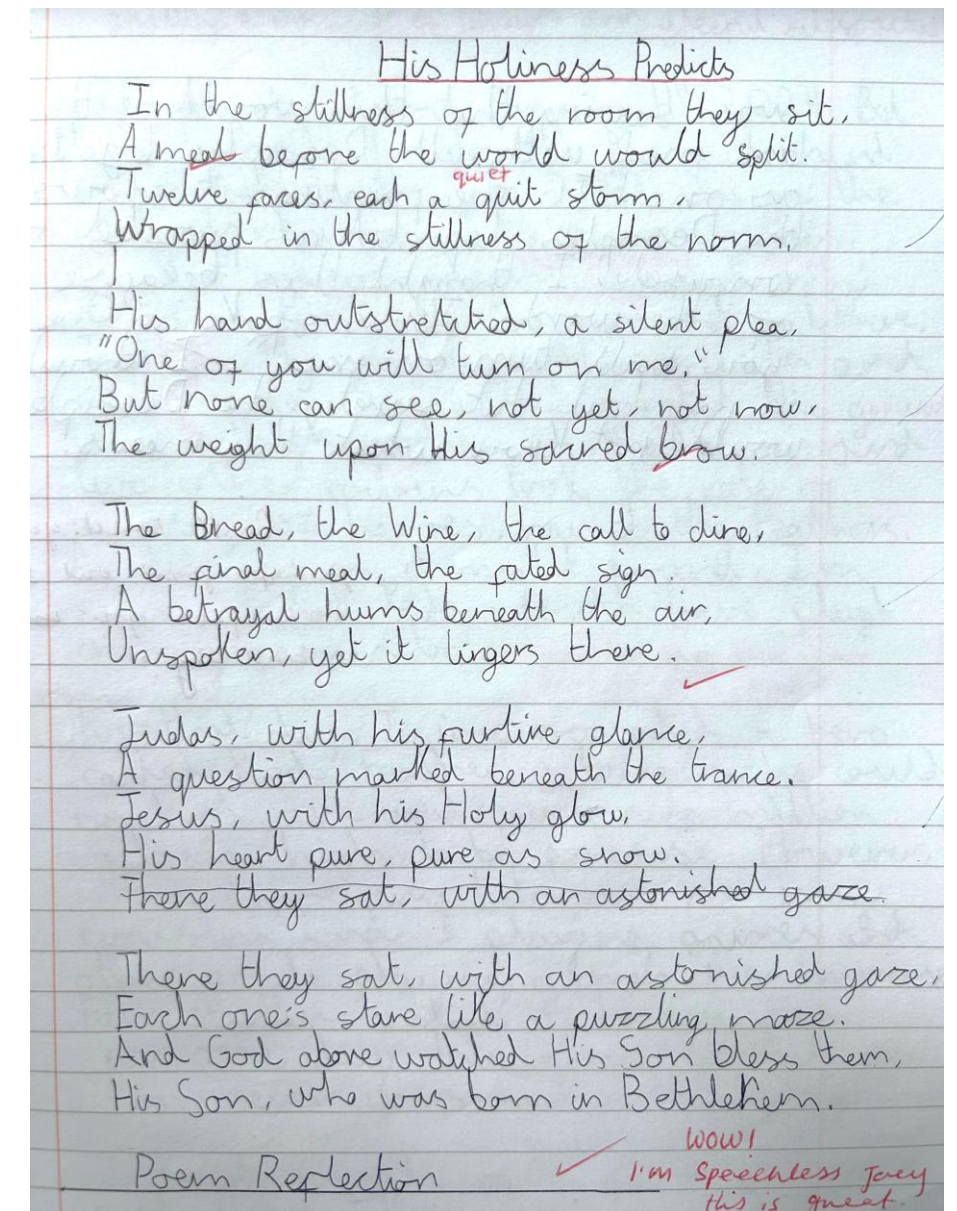
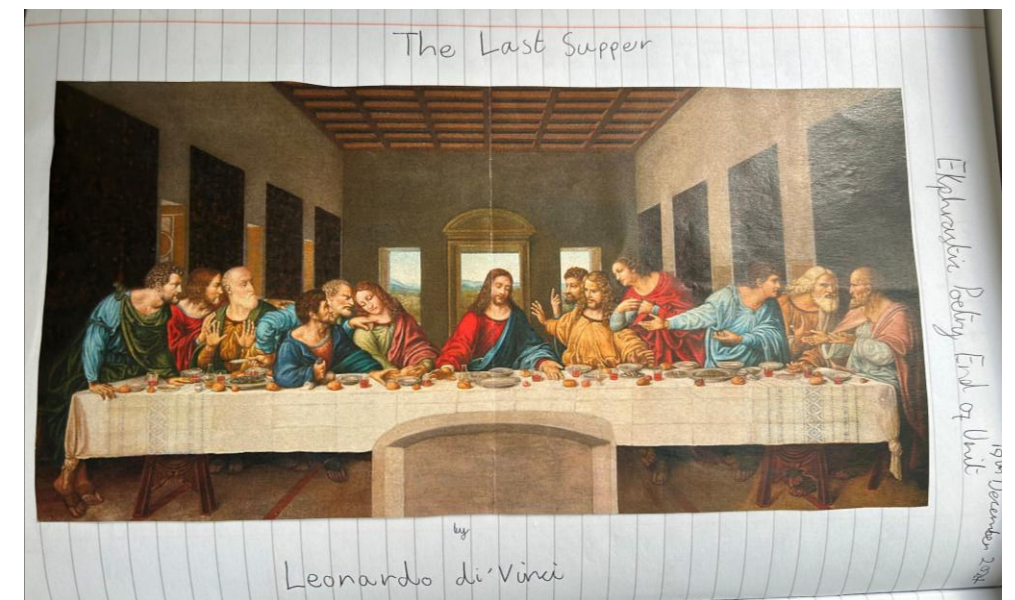
I am still here but  
Things have changed.

From the masks that  
Shadow your feelings.  
To bright flashing lights  
Of the buildings

But I am still standing.  
With no recognition

From being praised to a  
Birds' toilet  
At least the tablet is safe  
From the horror

I wish I could go  
Back.



By Joey Power

# 1 Myths Retold

by Noa Jakupi, 7K

By Year 7 students

Our Year 7s end the summer term with a 'Classical Journeys' unit which follows stories from the *Odyssey*, *Arabian Nights* and *Metamorphoses*.

## The Fisherman and the Murderous Genie

After the genie desperately offered three wishes, the poor man gave him another chance. He wished for unlimited fish so he will never want or go hungry again. So the genie granted the wish, but not the way the fisherman wanted. He gave the fisherman mutated fish with teeth as sharp as daggers and as hungry as a pit of starving wolves.

The man got angry and that's what the genie wanted – for him to waste his wishes. So, the man then wished for clothes as shiny as 100,000,000 suns put together. So, the genie granted it, but not in the way the man wanted: they were so bright that they hurt the fisherman's green eyes, so he threw the clothing in the sea and let it disappear. The genie taunted him saying 'One more wish!' and the man wished for the genie to be trapped in the lamp forever and to never be able to see the day of light again, and the genie disappeared with a puff of smoke.

*To be continued.*

By Amin Ahmed, 7W



## **The Fisherman and the Genie - Scheherazade (by Ihsan Miah)**

Once upon a time, a beggar on the streets of Ancient Egypt came across a dusty lamp with engraved gold lining. He was flabbergasted. His life could be turned upside down if he sold it! But his intrusive thoughts kicked in; he couldn't help but open it to see if it contained any riches.

The lamp began to shake. Thunder woke the skies and lightning struck down onto the lamp. A large ghost-like figure arose and engulfed the sky. The man froze, his heart was racing, and his blood circulation stopped. With a quivering lip, he attempted to talk. The ancient colossal being loomed over him and beat him to it. His words rumbled the tectonic plates, and the clouds began to shake.

"I sincerely thank you for freeing me from my eternal imprisonment. In exchange for this, I will grant you three wishes".

Hmmm, three wishes, the man thought...

# 2 Year 8s tell us what they think

In the non-fiction unit in Year 8 students have been encouraged to write letters and articles that express their views on issues that concern them. We would really welcome some responses to these if you'd like to write in. You don't have to be the person named as the recipient! Our writers here are: 1) Niko Hajdasz, 2) Huxley Jackson, 3) Yahya Almoussli, 4) Edwin Bailey-Davison.

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you as a young person deeply concerned about the war in Russia and Ukraine and the war in Palestine and Israel. I am worried about these wars – in Palestine hundreds of thousands of innocent people are killed including young children. Furthermore, Russia and Ukraine's war has been going on for some time now, but I'm scared about Russia potentially attacking other countries like Poland or Lithuania.

These wars have been terrifying for me as many people have died for no reason at all and I have seen videos of people lying down in mud as deafening bullets fly over their heads. I have seen people crying in tears and grief about their loved ones dying. These people are suffering so much and for what? Presidents and prime ministers are trying to conquer other countries. I heard countries were doing it 100 years ago. Why are we doing it now?

Lastly the reason I wrote everything here to you is so you can potentially have an impact on these wars and they can come to a stop. I would like you to help Palestine as much as possible since many Palestinians are being tortured and killed. They're also very vulnerable so if it's possible many people would be glad of and happy about the support.

Yours sincerely....

1

## Human beings are meant to explore – it's in their very nature

Exploration is awesome. I think it's actually the definition of awesome. There are so many places to go and things to do. It's a way of discovering new things.

On our planet (Earth) discovery has led us to many things, like finding dinosaur bones or discovering new fish or creatures in the ocean. But none of these things would have been found if we didn't explore. Exploring helps us discover new things which is very important.

One of the most iconic moments was the landing on the moon and this was done by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin who explored the moon and discovered the rock and dust on it. This wasn't only about exploring the moon. This meant a lot to people and it felt to some like the best moment they had ever had. It was so important even primary school kids gathered up just to watch it happen. This shows such exploring can also make history.

I've explored before. It wasn't as important as Apollo but to me it was a dream. I had a tournament with my football team in Barcelona, a place where I'd never been. I went out there and really expressed myself and we ended up winning the whole thing. I had so much fun, from jumping in the pool after a hard game to having an ice cold Coca-Cola with my mates. On this trip I discovered the different culture and language, and it was overall an amazing trip.

Please consider my thoughts life isn't going to last forever so go have fun and explore.

2

## An open letter to world leaders

Dear global leaders,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the devastating impact of war from different types of violent weapons. Many people have been suffering from war including innocent children losing their families, homes, education or even their lives. I strongly believe that war should be replaced by peaceful solutions. This all helps to create a peaceful and a safe environment.

Firstly, war leads to unnecessary death. Lots of soldiers and citizens die due to a conflict between two nations, although it could be resolved through negotiation and understanding. Many communities have been broken to ruins and families have been torn apart. An example of this disaster is the war between Israel and Palestine. Leaders should focus on diplomacy and discussions to settle disagreements.

Secondly, war damages the environment. Bombs, explosions and military vehicles destroy landscapes and harm wildlife. It takes years or even decades for nature to recover. The world has more important problems to worry about such as climate change. War only makes things worse.

Finally, war wastes incredible amounts of money that could be spent on more important things such as education or healthcare. Leaders waste billions of pounds on violent weapons that destroy the planet when those funds could be used to improve people's lives. How much more could it benefit us if all that money went into schools or hospitals? War also creates hate and division. It makes others seem as enemies instead of communities. This leads to long lasting conflicts that could affect generations. If we teach peace, kindness, and respect we can build a future where countries work together instead of fighting against each other.

I urge you to think about our future and choose peace over war. There are better ways to solve problems than violence. This earth needs leaders who will work together with unity, not destruction. Wars should not be an option when peace is possible.

Yours sincerely...

3

## An article about the necessity of exploration

Should we or should we not explore? There is one obvious answer to this seemingly difficult question and that is 'yes'. Without exploration we would probably still be primitive life forms crawling about the ocean floor as we were billions of years ago. To put it simply, without exploration there would be no new discovery, no deepening of understanding or sentience and without that life forms would not evolve as much – if they even evolved at all.

All lifeforms explore in one way or another. There are many forms of exploration: mental, physical and many others. You don't even have to move to explore but either way you undergo a type of journey. We all explore at some point in our lives; each thing that we learn is a journey that we must explore to complete. It's like a corridor with many doors we must explore to open those doors so we can learn. We all explore; we have no choice.

4

# 3 Short Stories

By Year 9 students

*The stories here were written in the end of Key Stage 3 English exam in just half an hour or so. All the students were given is a title to use.*

**“I can see  
You walking away from me”**

## Walking Away

It was one year ago today the last time I felt your hands’ warm embrace. Your perfect pink lips touched mine and your words were like the remedy to my soul. Because you know that my heart was cold, like stone.

It was almost routine; every Friday we would sit under the tree and talk for hours on end. But when you'd leave early, I'd be left alone. Back where I started. My cold, stone heart. Each week it would be earlier and earlier: 6:00 to 5:30 to 5 to 4:45.

Just the sight of you walking away was like daggers into my soul. That feeling of separation, losing our orbit. The pain was far too immense. The daily ‘Good morning’ texts stopped coming in and it was radio silence for a while.

Then I saw you. What was wrong? You walked away with your head bowed. I shouted your name and it was silent, I tried to chase you but I couldn't seem to catch you. Then I realised. No matter what I tried, you just kept walking away.

*by Reece Bukasa, Yr 9*

## Walking Away

It wasn't easy. Leaving was the hardest thing I've ever done. The boat we were piled onto, if you could call it a boat, was small, too small for the masses on it. It was bruised, cut and moaning, as if it had been beaten up time and time again.

I was scared, but not compared to my sister. She was barely of talking age, but yet faced a task which was one a grown human would walk away from.

We hadn't been out long, but the dying sun had nearly danced below the horizon. However, none of us were in a disco mood. I saw tears flooding down the side, seeping into cracks; they combined with the salt water which lashed overboard, whipping our frozen souls.

In any other circumstance, I would have marvelled at the swirling currents of the open abyss. But flashbacks of me tearing away my sister from my mother's invincible grip lingered in my head. The deafening sound of shells as we drove to the beach blocked out the roaring motor. The potent aroma of burning carcasses blocked out the stench of seaweed. These scenes I would never forget. But at least I could dream of a new beginning, away from war.

*by Toby Cream, Yr 9*

## Walking Away

He felt the cool breeze run through his hair like an Olympic sprinter on a track, heading for the bright glory of the rising golden sun. A worn yet perfect rucksack hung from one side of his back, dangling like the chandelier he broke when he was younger. His parents and sister came down to the driveway with him carrying small boxes of necessities, talking about how much they would miss him. They had said the same thing when he was 11, heading off on a residential for the first time, like a bird who had just learnt to fly.

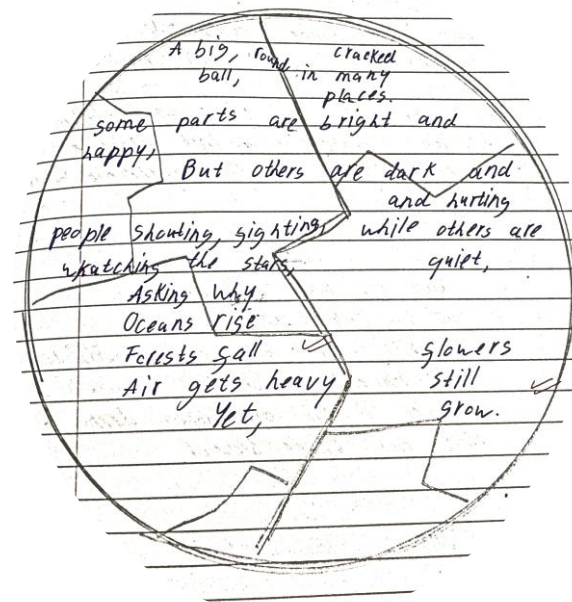
He opened the boot of the car, watching it swing open like the swing-set at the local playground. His sister ran up to him and hugged him, just like when she learned to walk. His mum sobbed proudly, putting her arms on his shoulders as she had done with his older sister only three years before, telling him to call home whenever possible. His dad comforted her, smiling at him and embracing his grown son. He was ready. Ready to keep learning, to keep going, to show how far he'd gone and how tall he'd become.

He opened the driver's door, taking one last glance at his family who stared back with equal love. He sat down, and with a deep sigh like in all the stress, all the frustration and relief and happiness and sadness, grief, disgust and fear, boredom, excitement and pain that had brought him to where he was.

He shut the door, immediately rolling the window down. The rest of the family waved him off. His journey was over but also had barely started. He was going to be okay. His parents and sister watched him drive away.

*by Anes Benbelli, Yr 9*

By Andrii, Yr 9



These poems were written after reading and discussing some very modern poems, such as Imtiaz Dharker's 'Prayer', 'Kumakanda' by Kayo Chingonyi, and Sophie Herxheimer's 'London - Velkom to Inklandt'.

Me, Myself and I

Me and my light skin blending in with the light  
 Myself and my thoughts jumping from conclusion  
 I and my knowledge of my beliefs  
 Searching for more waiting for what's to come.

Me and his dark skin standing out  
 Myself and his thoughts in his language  
 I and his strong beliefs and sense of culture  
 Seasoned and completed with different priorities.

When I saw him it was like looking in a mirror  
 A mirror you may find in a shipwreck underwater  
 Fractured and fuzzy, unfamiliar but at the same time familiar  
 Myself, I and his foreign language that I can only grasp the meaning of some words and lost.

Me when he saw me confused  
 Myself and him quite not understanding the revelation in front of him  
 I and him now feeling comfortable of each other's  
 Presence as if we were vividly connected.

Me when we spoke my posh English and his family Amharic  
 Myself as our limited knowledge of each other's language was enough for a conversation  
 I and him realizing we are not so different as we both are  
 Me, myself and I.

By Jacob Fekade, 9W

### 3 | Poems written in the Identity & Poetry unit

Well

What do you do?  
 Well, I am a doctor.  
 What type of doctor?  
 Well, I am a surgeon.  
 What type of surgeon?  
 Well, I am a bariatric surgeon.  
 How long have you been a bariatric surgeon?  
 Well, how many more questions are you going to ask me?

by Ali Al-Asadi

Whin eye step owt en  
 Tha dusky eevnin,  
 Tha streetz buzzin,  
 Cars hummin,  
 Night creapin in.

"Oi, ya hear that?"

Sumone shouts,

"Get yer coat,

We're off to tha pub,

A pint of joy

An laughter on tap!"

By Shai Blackwood

I cook,

My usual recipes,

The smell of the Middle East

Fills the kitchen.

Can use some more in

The dull suburbs of London.

'Op an thee bus,

On my way home with shoppin'

Open the door and help me

Bring em in!

By Arda Ulusu

Pray

Sitting on the floor ,  
 The cold breeze flies through the open door,  
 The priest of the church, like the boss ,  
 Said 'Give all your sins to the cross',  
 'I asked 'God, God why me ?',  
 Then it felt so plain to see,  
 Everything connected,  
 Us and the world forever protected,  
 By God, Jesus,  
 Heaven waiting still,  
 For those that make the journey,  
 Past the hill.

By Rowan Court, 9K

Permission not to speak  
 I know my place and you know yours  
 Overlapping ideas, overlapping thoughts  
 Learning from you, you've always  
 Had a way with words  
 But  
 Questions are important aren't they?  
 The way we overlap ideas, overlap our  
 Thoughts overlapping questions  
 But the more important is yours  
 I know my place and you know yours  
 Maybe we are the same after all.

Permission not to speak,  
 I chose  
 This tongue of mine,  
 Stays unused. No words  
 Will slip, no voice will  
 Rise,  
 First quick thought  
 Beneath the skies.

I wait in stillness holds its place  
 No need for noise to fill the stage  
 For not all truths are  
 Meant to share  
 Some others  
 Are safer just to own.

by Zakariah Hasnat 9F

### 3 | While reading *Small Things Like These*

Once again our Year 9s are reading Claire Keegan's novel *Small Things Like These* set in Ireland in the 1980s and at Christmastime. The piece of writing below by Sacha was inspired by the novel's description of the making of a Christmas cake and by reading Raymi's memory of baking bread. Many of our students seem to have experiences of cooking at home and to be able to write really evocatively about it.

#### Baking – a memory

First my mum drew out an enormous hardcover journal blowing off the previous years of dust and flicking through the pages indecisively. I was young at the time and the cursive writing felt as legible as hieroglyphics. My mum explained the story of the Three Wise Kings who travelled so far and their significance. And finally, she decisively lay the book down for all to see having chosen a page filled with recipes and a beautiful, illustrated picture of an orange blossom branch.

The first step was fluffing butter with white sugar and egg till it formed little peaks resembling the mountains that towered outside high like a protective well. Then we sifted in golden flour and baking soda, incorporating it in, fluffing the mix and pouring it all into a large dish that funnily resembled a giant doughnut.

Then my mum whispered for my sister and I to close our eyes. When we opened them again, we were amazed but confused. My mum had materialized a sealed glass jar ornament, decorated with embellished metals and a beautiful ultramarine stone. It was radiant, resembling a heart of the ocean. Inside, a thick golden syrup trickled down the walls of the jar. My mum explained again what it was. The essence and heart flavour of the orange blossom tree, a syrup passed down through generations. At least three trees fully bloomed of orange blossoms had gone into this. My mum and her mum and hers again had all played a part into filing and perfecting the syrup. It seemed to shine brighter than the sun on a summer's day. We then trickled no more than a teaspoon into the batter, admiring as a very brief stir left a pattern resembling a polished marble countertop. It was ready.

Finally, after an hour more of proving, it was time to bake. The aromas of the brioche were dancing and prancing and singing to my senses. And when, after all the work, it was ready, we dug in and ate like royalty.

Still to this day, I hold in my heart that the Brioche of Kings we ate that day is one of the most delicious foods I have ever eaten. And whether this was because of the precious and refined ingredients or the love poured into them and joy of baking, I'm not sure.

By Sacha Mocellin Schoeffer



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#### Emilia soliloquy (linked to the 'Othello' unit – please see the next two pages)

By Guillem Revilla Zanichelli 9L

I'm not a thing to use and throw away.  
I feel, I think, and I can understand.  
My husband talks like I am just a tool,  
Like I am here to serve and not to speak.  
He doesn't care for what I want or need.  
Desdemona's kind, but much too blind.  
She loves so hard, she cannot see the truth.  
Othello doubts her just because he can.  
He says he loves her, yet he makes her cry.  
Men blame us when they're scared or full of hate.  
They lie and cheat, then say we are the worst.  
I've done what's right, and still I'm pushed aside.  
But now I see how wrong it all has been.  
If no one speaks, then nothing ever changes.  
I won't be quiet just to keep them calm.  
I have a voice, and they will hear it now.



Felix WV, Yr 9

### 3 Creative Responses to 'Othello'

In the old days school reports had a bit more about them – a distinctive turn of phrase, some released pent-up frustration perhaps or a hint of grudging admiration. Here are some reports with a bite to them courtesy of some scholarly Year 9s who can readily assume the tone and style of principals of illustrious seats of learning. It was Mr Engel's good idea for a lesson starter and the writing was so good we had to let it roll on a little longer. The students have written progress reports for the play's villain, Iago. Andrii has written a poem voicing Othello in one of his quieter moods.

Dear parent or carer of Iago,

This school year Iago has been performing exceptionally. He has shown signs of very good potential and he has been excelling in his classes. Iago seems to be strong in manipulating and gaslighting people, bending even the strongest to his will. Iago has also shown he is excelling in other things, though manipulation seems to be his strong suit. However, Iago does need to work on his physical combat. Even if he is excelling at it, being second highest in his year for physical combat, compared to his other traits – lying manipulation etc., his physical combat is lacking a bit.

Behaviour-wise, Iago is quite troublesome, to say the least. He loves to exercise his manipulation skills on teachers to lie his way out of trouble, and even I myself do admit he is very convincing, making it easy for him to lie and manipulate the teachers time and time again. Despite his troublesome behaviour, he really is a star, and we look forward to teaching and nurturing him into a proper villain.

Yours sincerely,

The Headteacher (Jai Batten)

This is an imagined soliloquy for Othello (before reading Act 3) and Andrii has chosen to write it in poem form. He has used some internal rhyme and rhyming couplets which help to make his speaker seem controlled and wistful, perhaps.

#### Soliloquy of the Jealous Heart

Oh, how unfair this life can be  
To watch you smile while I feel pain.  
I'm jealous of the rain that falls  
on you,  
closer than my hands have been.

You walk away like I don't matter  
Like all we had is now just air.  
I'm jealous of the nights that hold  
you close,  
While I am left with nothing here.

You've moved on and seem so  
happy,  
While I still stand, stuck in the  
past.  
I'm jealous of the way you love  
again,  
Like what we had was never real.

The stars that watched us laugh  
together,  
Now shine, but not for me.  
I told you when you left me, there's nothing to forgive,  
But I still grieve.  
Yet if you're happy, I won't cry  
Even if inside I ask why.

by Andrii Petrovskyi

## Iago End of Year Report

by Sidney Singleton, Year 9

Dear Parent/Carer,

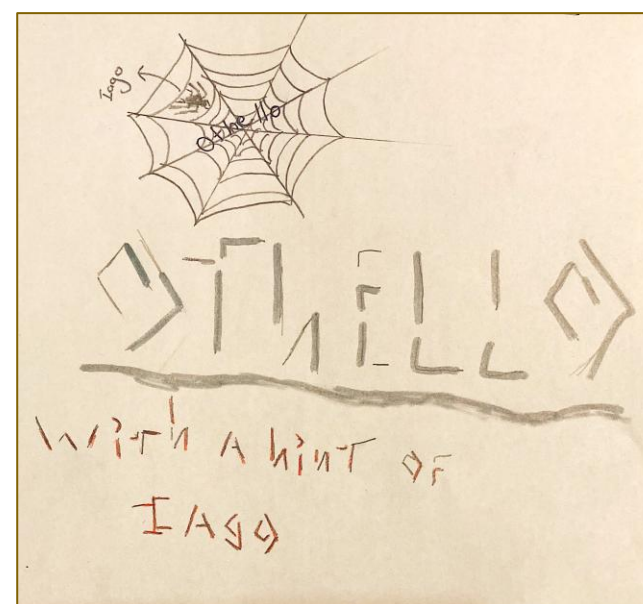
This school year, Iago has made astounding progress in his insidious plot to bring down two opposing students from the London Academy Of Heroism. So far, using his cunning and devious senses, he has managed to not only plant a piece of key evidence perfectly framing one of the two opposing students, but he has also managed to drive another one insane and has turned him against his right-hand man and the one lady who looked past his race and age to love him.

He is, to be completely honest, a selfish, evil, cunning, manipulative, jealous, malevolent, monster. And these are exactly the values, or lack of values, we are looking for at London's School For Villains.

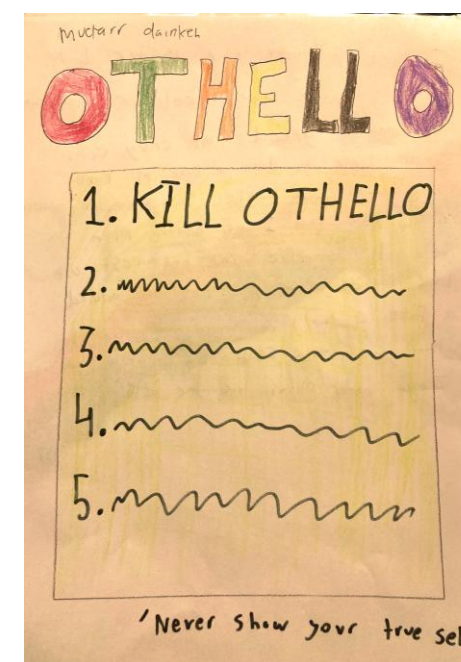
When the wolf in sheep's clothing needs tips, it goes to him. He lacks the empathy required to even think about reconsidering what he is doing. If the Wicked Witch of the West had a brother it'd be him.

He is an inspiration to other students, to show that no matter how malicious their plans may be, they can be worse. I can most definitely see him becoming a Supervillain.

Yours sincerely,  
The Headmaster of London's School For Villains, Aaron the Moor.



By Ehsanul H, Muctarr D, Yr 9



# 3-4 World Book Day 2025

Ms Sam Nunnery, Assistant Headteacher (member of the Charlie and the Chocolate Factory team on the day) and English teacher, organised this year's WBD events and they went off very well. The English department largely decided to dress as key metaphors and motifs in Dickens's Great Expectations with our Year 11s' revision in mind, though Ms Hinton-Hallows wanted to be Hester Shaw in Mortal Engines and Mr Rahman Friar John in Romeo and Juliet and couldn't be persuaded otherwise. The idea was to be not so obscurely dressed that we were inscrutable but memorable enough to remind the GCSE students of some of the key imagery in their 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, notably the finger-post outside Pip's village, Pip's tears, the 'wittles' that Magwitch demanded of Pip, Miss Havisham's broken heart, the Knave of Hearts in a playing cards pack, the mists rising and a candle. Even this magazine's editor's sister's collie joined in with a photographic pun on the title of the novel. *Perey Wemmick's Pig* biscuits were distributed as prizes for the best identification of literary allusions in human form. Here are some photos from that day, as well as some taken around the English corridor, and one via WhatsApp in literary solidarity from a garden in Devon.



Get it?  
Zak the border collie with *Grate Expectations*

The 11s are reminded of Friar John's existence

Yr 7s in Miss Havisham's class, right



Magwitch's pork pie hat is adorned with symbolic references

Below: "He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy."



Above, Pip's tears and the candle watch the finger-post cutting a cake in a department moderation meeting, to be washed down by neither tar-water nor brandy



A rival friar in the PE dept.



Left, Friar John, a candle at Satis House and Miss Havisham and a finger-post do their morning registers

## 4 After reading *Great Expectations*

If there isn't a lot of Year 10 work in this edition, it is purely because we have been reading and discussing some substantial full texts – and that rich oral work can be hard to collect evidence of. (We've also had to give 10s their books back to revise for their mocks.) Here though are some pieces of evidence of their engagement.

Zoë Williams wrote a piece in the *Guardian* after the June 2025 Year 11 GCSE literature exam (not OCR's) in which she humorously questioned whether it was reasonable to expect any reader to remember the character of Herbert Pocket in *Great Expectations* and, moreover, whether it was ridiculous for an exam board to set a question on him. We print her article below. She got a lot of pushback in the below-the-line comments, and they're worth reading of themselves, but we set a homework asking our 10s to write their own letter to Zoë Williams in response to her letter (shown below). Here are some replies.

Think you know a lot about Dickens? Then who's this Herbert character?  
Zoe Williams



This minor figure from *Great Expectations* has sown panic at the GCSEs. Be honest: have you even heard of him?

It's unwise to drill too deeply into the exact questions that come up in a GCSE paper. You can't get a proper sense of proportion when: you most likely don't know the answer the examiners are looking for, or anything about the subject; your kid can't remember what they wrote anyway; and someone on TikTok has the mark scheme. But do they really? Or is it more TikTok nonsense? You'll either get sucked into the catastrophe-vortex, or you fall into the trap of minimising, looking over your metaphorical half-moon glasses and going, "I'm sure it'll be fine, darling," like an Edwardian dad.

All parents and teachers know this, which is what made last week so very unusual. The English paper set by one of the main examining boards has a character question that encourages pupils to engage deeply with someone in the key text. It might not be the main character, but usually it will be one you've heard of.

In *Great Expectations*, however, they chose Herbert. Maybe you're familiar with the story – there's a hero, there's a love interest, there's an eccentric benefactor, and there's a villain who only appears twice but is very colourful. None of these people are Herbert. There's a kindly father figure, a mother figure, a random bad guy, a merchant and a gold-digger, and, again, none of these are Herbert.

Herbert is a nobody. He's the guy in the wedding photo whose name people can't remember by the 10th anniversary. He is – in the modern parlance – not A Thing. Shoehorning everything, or even anything you know about *Great Expectations*, through the character of Herbert is like trying to explain photosynthesis using a fingernail and some gravel. It's been the talk of the town. I walked into a Starbucks and overheard two people of about my age going: "Who the hell is Herbert?" This is probably the most talked-about Herbert has ever been.

So, a great day for him, but a disaster for everyone else.

• Zoe Williams is a *Guardian* columnist

Dear Zoë Williams,

I believe Herbert Pocket is one of the most important figures, mainly because of how he's always there for Pip, being a shield and always helping him. He has been in the novel for the majority of the time and has a great impact on Pip's life. I'll remember him as a key character, and usually I think of him as a brother to Pip, ever since their first encounter at Satis House, and how they end up in Cairo, Egypt.

Yours,

Alex Rahmany



© Alec Guinness as Herbert Pocket, left, with John Mills as Pip in David Lean's 1946 film of *Great Expectations*. Photograph: ITV/Rex Features

Dear Zoë Williams,

Herbert Pocket is a memorable character in *Great Expectations* for three reasons, the first being his role in Pip's life as both his best friend and his tutor of manners and all such things. He never once took Pip as lesser, not even when they first met and Pip was still a common labouring boy, and this is something that Pip himself noticed. This links to his humility and seeming lack of interest in Pip and Miss Havisham's wealth (as with his father). And, lastly, his self-confidence is admirable because even after having had a bad start with limited hopes, he managed to make something of himself.

Yours sincerely,

Theo Jacquinet

"No varnish can hide the grain of the wood."

Dear Zoë Williams,

I do believe that you made an error in labelling Herbert Pocket as an insignificant character in 'Great Expectations'. Herbert is in fact an essential character in the development of the story. He is one of Pip's only true friends and has practically no negative qualities. He helps Pip to speak out his concerns and assists him with them. I will remember him due to his kindness and his likeness to Joe, as well as how he doesn't treat people based on the class of person they are or their background.

Kind regards,

Astor Bidmead

Dear Zoë Williams,

I think that Herbert is an essential character in *Great Expectations* as he's the only true friend Pip has during his regretful time in London. Pip trusts Herbert like his brother and gives him a reason to want to be in London. Herbert is not like other people Pip meets in London who only care about Pip because of his money, wealth and status.

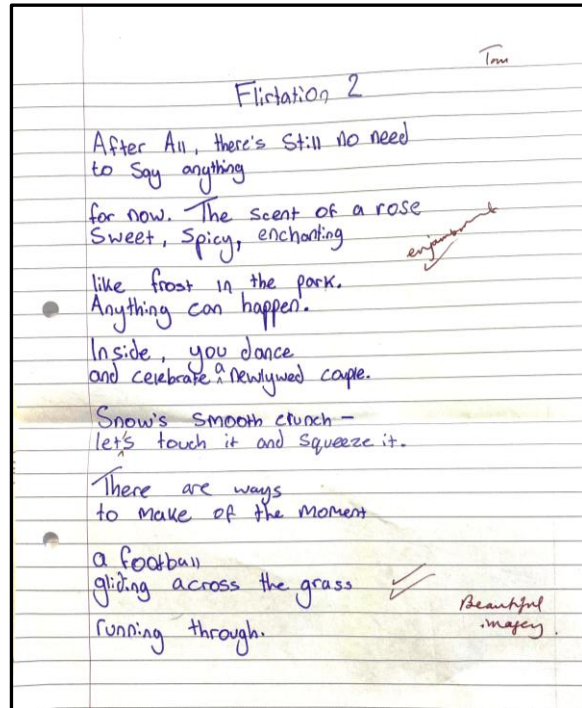
I will always remember Herbert because for me he defines a true gentleman: honest, kind and loyal, unlike Drummle who was a 'gentleman' through material things.

Yours sincerely,  
Anas Baghriche

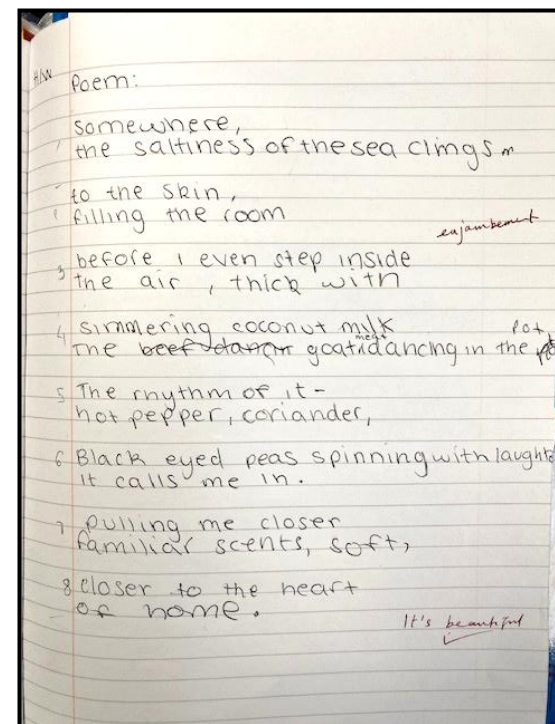
# 4 Creative Responses...

## Work by Year 11 students

...to poems. These new poems were written by Year 11 students (Tom, Theo, Felix, Junayd and Ohi) in the spring as part of a homework exercise to show their attentiveness to the imagery and structure of some of the poems they have studied, but they then became more than 'tribute acts' to the source poems and stand alone in their own right.



Tom  
Game



Theo's  
poem also  
appears on  
the back  
cover

Felix  
Colman

This is what freedom tastes like —  
salt on sunburned lips,

a breeze stung with wild thyme,  
the breath of ancient hills

The quad bike hums beneath us,  
its engine a restless heart,

dust rising like golden smoke  
as the road curves

and the sea, impossibly blue,  
winks between sharp cliffs.

Tonight, there will be music,  
voices tangled with laughter,

Cheap wine staining the moonlit air.  
In some rented villa

hidden by bougainvillea,  
we'll dance barefoot

until the stars grow jealous.  
But for now —  
the warm, reckless hum

of summer on our skin,  
the world unfolding,

ready for us to take it  
in reckless handfuls

like ripe figs stolen from the roadside.

'Delight' (in the style of Rita Dove's 'Flirtation')  
by Junayd Fetuga

Time passes. Seasons change  
and soon enough that spark

is rekindled. Like the soft  
flicker of warm streetlights

on a day defined by thick fog.  
Paths open. Leaves fall.

The sun sinks, relentlessly  
rallying to the ever-reflective

Moon. The clock slows, almost  
counting in reverse. Dew

on the heath silently solidifies  
to frost under the stars

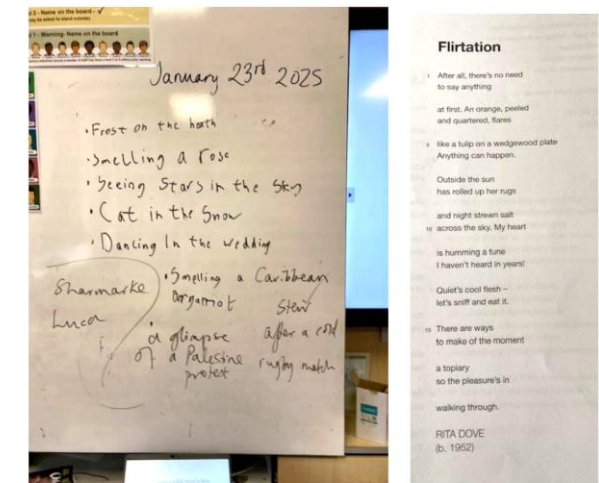
we gaze eternally. Eyes mirror  
galaxies like a snowflake does

the winter. Together let's  
savour those tenuous treasures that

pass by us.

Yesterday you read 'Flirtation' by Rita Dove, and you were kind of remarkable with it.

I asked you, before we properly started, to come up with some ideas of small moments of delight you had experienced, and you said:



### Poem inspired by 'Flirtation' by Rita Dove

The moon pulls at the night,  
its silver light falls into the warm tea—*drifting*.

The breeze, alive, playful,  
yet a little wild

fills the air with cinnamon and pine,  
Christmas lingers like a warm hug—*embracing*.

The night, fireworks lights above us,  
like the stars—had planned it all

in your smile—  
a spark I thought I'd lost—*igniting*.

Eyes that meet, and time,  
too shy to stay, slips away—*drifting*.

In the stillness, this night feels endless,  
like a story yet to be told—

*unfolding.*

Ohi Ohi

# And finally...an essay

## A Year 11's GCSE mock exam essay on 'Great Expectations' from the spring 2025 mocks

*Sometimes students manage to write essays that show thoughtful commitment to a text and an argument even in the less than inspiring conditions of Year 11 mock exams. Junayd tried out a discursive essay option for his Great Expectations mock. Here is his essay which is notable for its argument. He was working with the title: 'Pip's real journey in the novel isn't becoming a gentleman, it is finding a family.' Do feel free to write in with your own reading of the novel and particularly your response to this topic.*

*Great Expectations* is a novel about love and its consequences on one's life and actions. In Volume 1 we see Pip change from a country boy on the marshes to someone who is obsessed with raising his class and becoming a 'gentleman'. Throughout the novel his views on what a gentleman is are challenged and eventually changed as he finds himself and finds out who his family really are.

In the first half of Volume 1, Joe is painted as a role model, as a shining example of how a person should act. When Pip stole the pie for 'his convict' he felt so terribly about it that he could hear voices from inanimate objects denouncing him [and it is probably the influence of Joe's example that affects him most]. When Joe is told (untruthfully) that the convict stole his pie he sees no issue with it, saying he was 'entitled' to it as they ever were. Joe isn't caught up on class conflicts or crimes as he believes they are all equals, all God's 'creatures'. Another time his warm ideology is shown is when he tells Pip about his past with his father. Pip learns how Joe's father 'hammered away' at his wife and son, not letting them leave him, and after the story Pip sees Joe in 'a new light'. This is not because of pity but because of how it built Joe into Pip's guardian who shields him from 'tickler' and accepts physical and verbal abuse from his wife all to protect Pip. He doesn't even blame Mrs Joe for it and labels her 'a mastermind'. Joe's 'good' 'Christian values' are something that older Pip and people of that time would admire as respectable and virtuous. However, we see negative aspects being attributed to other sorts of 'gentlemen', for example Drummle being portrayed as an 'idle and proud' 'spider'-like person but also as a gatekeeper of the club of gentlemen Pip wants to associate with. This upright attitude is what Dickens wants to portray as the real nature of a gentleman and he connects Pip becoming a 'gentleman' to him finding a family.

Pip's life in Volume 2 can be described as manufactured. He does the things he thinks a gentleman should but since these decisions aren't his own when the one who did sculpt that life for him shows up, it breaks him. At the end of Volume 2, Magwitch returns to England and tells Pip the truth – how he 'created a gentleman' out of Pip. This destroys the web of delusions he built for himself which is shown in his metaphor of 'the ship in which I had sailed was gone to

pieces'. He feels vulnerable and exposed, knowing he has tricked himself in so many ways. It recontextualizes his relationship with Estella: she wasn't the 'cold' 'princess' to be saved by the 'hero' Pip, but a 'creation' of Miss Havisham who is not designed for him. The first time he meets Estella her disdain is described as an 'infectious' disease that he 'caught'. His love for Estella made him push away his true family to ascend to her level as a high class lady. The 'raging wind' outside when he discovers the truth seems to symbolise his raging emotions. When all the flames waste away to leave him in 'thick darkness' it can be emblematic of the emptiness there is in the reality of his 'great expectations'. This leads to immense shame and self-loathing throughout Volume 3 as he remembers the way he treated Joe and Biddy, which links back to older Pip's narration at the end of Volume 1 and how 'being ashamed of home' is 'such a terrible thing' to feel. Pip in Volume 3 comes to the same conclusion but is far too ashamed to ever return. He also discards his obsession as he reveals the love he once felt being so intense that he saw 'Estella in every line [he'd] ever read' and, as he states, 'a part of my existence'.

In the revised ending, Pip and Estella meet again, having both lost their great expectations and they build a new relationship as friends. The 'mists rising' motif is used in this scene and perhaps helps to exemplify the way Pip has changed from a false gentleman to a gentleman at heart. Estella behaves differently to how she has everywhere else in the novel (even in the original ending) which may suggest she has adopted similar values after losing everything. The 'heart' Miss Havisham 'stole and filled with ice' has finally melted away, allowing Estella to truly connect with Pip and, potentially, find a family. I believe that *Great Expectations* as a story advocates for those familial connections to be the most important thing to become a true gentleman.



Magwitch  
imagined by Jack  
Orbell, Yr 10

