BRUCE DAWE: a study of a poet
Bianca Woods, Davidson High School

Stage 6 Preliminary Unit

Rationale
This unit requires students to:

- explore the poetry of Bruce Dawe and the way he uses particular aspects of language to shape meaning and influence responses
- develop an awareness of how language can alter perceptions of and relationships with others and the world
- consider how Dawe creates distinctive voices in his poetry
- select and consider related texts
- compose their own texts in a variety of forms and media

Outcomes
1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 6.3, 7.1, 12.2, 13.1

Texts
Bruce Dawe’s poetry:
- Life-cycle
- Homecoming
- Homo Suburbiensis
- And a Good Friday Was Had by All
- Weapons Training
- Enter Without So Much as Knocking

Week 1: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” W. B. Yeats

CONTENT: OVERVIEW OF MODULE; INTRODUCTION TO DAWE; DISCUSSION OF CONTEXT; POEM: “ENTER WITHOUT SO MUCH AS KNOCKING”

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<th>LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES</th>
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<td>Lessons 1–2: Introduction to Study of Bruce Dawe “Enter Without So Much as Knocking”</td>
<td>Connectedness: Links made to real life experience</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 1:</strong></td>
<td>Substantive Communication: Students to discuss link between context and meaning</td>
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<td>Discuss overview of unit expectations.</td>
<td>Background Knowledge: Students consider own understanding of poet’s context</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 2:</strong></td>
<td>Connectedness: Students consider own response to poems</td>
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<td>During this unit students are required to keep a journal. In this journal they are to reflect upon the poems after they initially read them, log a personal response and answer any questions provided. When each poem is finished they need to consider the quotation that appears at the beginning of each week and how it relates to the poem studied.</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 3:</strong></td>
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<td>Students read the poem “Enter Without So Much as Knocking” and describe what they think is the context of the composer, remembering that context is the range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace conditions in which a text is responded to and composed.</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 4:</strong></td>
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<td>Students read through a brief biography of Bruce Dawe and consider the personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace conditions of Dawe and his writing. They discuss the era Dawe was writing in and make a list of possible significant influences on him as a writer.</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 5:</strong></td>
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<td>Students read through “Enter Without So Much as Knocking” and identify the elements of the poem that reflect Dawe’s context.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong></td>
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<td>Students re-read the poem “Enter Without So Much as Knocking” and complete the journal for homework.</td>
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Lessons 3–4: “Enter Without So Much as Knocking”

This poem presents one view of life, the idea that human beings are mortal and will one day return to the dust from which we are made. The poem experiments with poetic style in its use of episode, everyday imagery, cyclic structure and free verse form. The environment that the child grows up in is anonymous, impersonal and commercial, an environment that essentially annihilates individuality. Dawe effectively works into his poem a juxtaposition between the purity of nature (revealed in the beauty of the night sky) with the suffocating communality of urban life.

Activity 1:
Students spend time at the beginning of the lesson discussing their journal entries and the relevance of the quotation from Yeats that appears at the beginning of this part of the unit.

Activity 2:
Students listen as the poem is read out, list positive and negative thoughts on the poem to help organise an initial response to the poem.

Activity 3:
a. Working in pairs or small groups students discuss and record responses to class questions.
b. They spend time in class going through these responses and refining them.

Homework:
Students read the poem “And a Good Friday Was Had by All” and complete the journal for homework.

Week 2: “Everywhere I go I find that a poet has been there before me” S. Freud

CONTENT: POEM: “AND A GOOD FRIDAY WAS HAD BY ALL”; DECONSTRUCTING THE POEM; STORYBOARDING; SCRIPTING DIALOGUE

LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Lessons 1-2: “And a Good Friday Was Had by All”

Dawe is concentrating in this dramatic monologue on the important day in the Christian calendar, ironically known as Good Friday, when Jesus Christ was crucified and died for the sinfulness of humanity. He combines this reference with the ordinariness of non-religious human life. The immediacy of Dawe’s presentation of the scene is striking.

Activity 1:
Students spend time at the beginning of the lesson discussing their journal entries and the relevance of the quotation from Freud that appears at the beginning of this part of the unit.

Activity 2:
Students read through at least two of the Gospels and write a brief summary of what happened in each.

Activity 3:
This activity has two stages, the first requires students to consider WHAT is being said in the poem and the second requires them to consider HOW this is being said.

a. Students write a line by line summary of what they think the poet is saying, consider how the poem makes them feel when they read it and think about its meaning.

Students work in pairs or small groups to discuss their different responses and spend time in class going through these responses and refining them.
Lesson 3: Annotated Story Board

Bruce Dawe’s characters are so believable that you can easily picture them walking down the street in your own suburb, or on a television sitcom. His use of colloquial language, relaxed punctuation and first-person narrative help develop these characters.

Activity 1:
Using their summaries of the poem from last lesson, students are to create a story board of the action that occurs in the poem “And a Good Friday Was Had by All”. Each story board should follow the logic of the narrative and should use quotes to annotate images.

Lesson 4: Scripting Dialogue

Students imagine that the speaker in the poem is reporting to his commanding officer after the event. They complete the following:

a. How would his language be different to that used in the poem?

b. What sort of tone would be established if the poem was in the form of an official report?

c. Write this report in the form of a dialogue.

Homework:
Read the poem “Life-cycle” and complete the journal for homework.

Week 3: “Poetry is more philosophical and of higher value that history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular” Aristotle

CONTENT: POEM: “LIFE-CYCLE”; ANALYSIS OF POEM; CONSIDERING CULTURE; WRITING LETTER TO THE EDITOR; RELATED TEXT ACTIVITY

LESSON 1-2: “Life-cycle”

This poem evokes the devotion of Victorians to Australian Rules football. The poem attempts to explain to outsiders this phenomenon. Just as in “Enter Without So Much as Knocking” Dawe once again uses the idea of a life-cycle, however, this time, he uses it to reflect how the devotion to football lasts throughout the different stages of one’s life. Dawe uses a combination of Australian slang and solemn biblical language to create an obviously satirical poem.

Activity 1:
Students spend time at the beginning of the lesson discussing their journal entries and the relevance of the quotation from Aristotle that appears at the beginning of this part of the unit.

Activity 2:

a. Working in pairs or small groups, students discuss and record responses to class questions.

b. Students spend time in class going through these responses and refining them.

Activity 3:
Students go back to the poem and think about how Dawe has used techniques to create meaning in the poem. They construct a table (technique/example/effect) to help structure responses.
Lesson 3: Impact of Context on Poems
Dawe prefers to use contemporary Australian speech in his poetry as he believes that such language is a rich form of communication and should be preserved in literature before it disappears.

Activity 1:
Students discuss the following questions:

a. How many different voices can you identify in this poem? Who owns each voice?

b. Are they all the stereotypical “Australian” voice?

c. How has Dawe used language to create an Australian voice in this poem?

d. How is the colloquial “Australian” language used by Dawe similar to the language used today? Give examples.

e. Make a list of colloquial expressions that are used today. Then write a definition for each.

Activity 3:
The culture of a responder impacts significantly on their response to a text.

Students consider their own cultural background (i.e. class, race, religion, ethnicity, and gender) and then consider how this has an impact upon responses to the poem. They consider: how might your response differ if you were not from Australia? Why?

Lesson 4: Creativity – Letter to the Editor

Activity 1:
Students write a letter to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald expressing a reaction to Dawe’s poem “Life-cycle”, conveying a point of view about Dawe’s representation of football fans as being unintelligent. They should discuss the language used by Dawe to capture the voice of the fans and include support for their argument from the poem, including quotes from the poem. Length: 250-300 words

Homework Task:
Students:

1.a. Find ONE other text that features an Australian voice. This can be any text type (prose fiction, poetry, film, non-fiction, media and/or multimedia) and they must bring in either a copy or a synopsis (if it is a film or novel).

b. Write a half a page explanation of how the composer of this text has used language to capture an Australian voice.

2. Read the poem “Homecoming” and complete the journal for homework.
**BRUCE DAWE: a study of a poet**

**Week 4: “Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand.” Plato**

**CONTENT:** POEM: “HOMECOMING”; DISCUSSION OF VIETNAM WAR; POEM ANALYSIS; RELATED TEXT

**ACTIVITY**

**LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES** | **QUALITY TEACHING REFERENCE**
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**Lessons 1-2: “Homecoming”**

This poem deals with the horror of war, focusing specifically on the Vietnam War. Dawe manages to capture the frustration of those who witness the senseless carnage as well as the dehumanising effect of the “war machine”. The slight sadness in Dawe’s tone compels our agreement with this message, as do the ‘silenced’ voices of the fallen soldiers. Once again Dawe uses imagery to juxtapose nature and humanity.

**Activity 1:**
Students spend time at the beginning of the lesson discussing their journal entries and the relevance of the quotation from Plato that appears at the beginning of this part of the unit.

**Activity 2:**

**Students:**
- Research the Vietnam War.
- Share research findings as a class.

**Activity 3:**
Working in pairs or small groups, students discuss and record responses to class questions and spend time in class going through these responses and refining them.

**Lesson 3: Analysis of Poem**

**Activity 1:**
Students read through the poem again then identify and make a list of the poetic techniques used, including, tone, repetition, oxymoron, irony, imagery, personification, punctuation.

**Activity 2:**
Using the information from the last task, students write an extended response discussing how Dawe uses poetic techniques to create an intensity of emotion and meaning in “Homecoming”.

**Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons – [http://commons.wikimedia.org](http://commons.wikimedia.org)**
Lesson 4: Related Material Research Task

It is unfortunate but true that war is a constant feature of human history. In his poems Bruce Dawe considers the impact of war upon individuals from a variety of perspectives. Many artists, be they poets, painters, musicians, playwrights, etc, have used the turbulence, horror and grief associated with war as a source of inspiration.

Activity 1:
Students go to the library or computer room and find a piece of related material that deals with the effects and/or experience of war.

Homework:
1. Students compare how the composers of the related text and Dawe's poem “Homecoming” represent war, paying particular attention to the perspective and voice that is used in each text.
2. They read the poem “Homo Suburbiensis” and complete the journal for homework.

Problematic Knowledge: Consider how perspective changes meaning

Deep Understanding: Meaningful understanding of central ideas in poem and related texts

Connectedness: Students consider own response to poems

Week 5: “Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.” P. B. Shelley

CONTENT: POEM: “HOMO SUBURBIENSIS”; CREATIVE WRITING; SONNET WRITING

LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Lessons 1–2: “Homo Suburbiensis”

This poem describes a man in an Australian setting (his backyard) and considers his spiritual condition. Dawe uses the traditional sonnet form for this poem, emphasising the idea that the man is constrained by suburbia. The disorder of the man’s vegetable patch can be seen as symbolic of every individual’s desire for freedom from the toil and tedium of everyday life.

Activity 1:
Read through assessment task notification sheet. Discuss requirements of task.

Activity 2:
Students spend time at the beginning of the lesson discussing their journal entries and the relevance of the quotation from Shelley that appears at the beginning of this part of the unit.

Activity 3:
Working in pairs or small groups, students are to discuss and record responses to class questions. They spend time in class going through these responses and refining them.

Activity 4:
Students read through information on sonnets to identify what features of the sonnet Dawe uses.

Homework Task:
Students are told to:
Stand in your own backyard at home and make notes about its appearance and how it makes you feel. Remember: even the most ordinary things can be interesting if you take the trouble to write in detail.

Substantive Communication:
Group discussion and notes on poem

Metalanguage:
Discovering correct terminology when discussing sonnets

Connectedness:
Links to real-life experience
Lesson 3: Creative Writing
Bruce Dawe's strength as a poet lies in his ability to create believable and fully-developed Australian characters and environments.

Activity 1:
Using the information collected for homework about their back yards, students are to write a 500 word description of this environment. Their writing should make use of poetic techniques to create vivid visual, aural and olfactory images, and to capture their individual voices when writing. They consider their attitude towards the backyard and how to show this through language.

Activity 2:
Students deconstruct their creative pieces to identify the techniques that used to create meaning. They should use a highlighter to highlight the techniques that used and then complete a table to evaluate the composition for its strengths and weaknesses.

Activity 3:
The narrative is rewritten in light of the analysis, ensuring that it captures/conveys a sense of each student's voice.

Lesson 4: Writing a Sonnet

Activity 1:
Using the descriptive piece from last lesson as inspiration students are to write a sonnet about the back yard, using both Dawe's poem and information on sonnets as a scaffold to help plan and compose the sonnet.

Homework:
Students read the poem “Weapons Training” and complete the journal for homework.

Week 6: “Poetry is man’s rebellion against being what he is” James Branch Cabell

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<td>Lessons 1–2: “Weapons Training”</td>
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<td>Dawe adopts the persona of a drill sergeant in this poem to portray how men are trained to use devices that will kill other men. Dawe cleverly utilises the military idiom to develop a character who, in his encouragement of the dehumanisation process, is seen to be beyond redemption.</td>
<td>Metalanguage: Using correct terms to discuss the language of the poem</td>
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<td>Activity 1:</td>
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<td>Students spend time at the beginning of the lesson discussing their journal entries and the relevance of the quotation from Branch Cabell that appears at the beginning of this part of the unit.</td>
<td>Substantive Communication: Group discussion and notes on poem</td>
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<td>Activity 2:</td>
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<td>Students compare and contrast “Weapons Training” to one of Dawe's other poems that studied so far.</td>
<td>Deeper Knowledge: Focusing on the key ideas and relationships between the poems</td>
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<td>Activity 3:</td>
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<td>Students read through the poem “Naming of Parts” by Henry Reed in order to compare and contrast the two poems.</td>
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Lessons 3–4: Creativity: Script Writing & Performance

The poems of Bruce Dawe, whilst having obvious traces of his historical context, still manage to be relevant today, particularly due to his focus on characters who are the ‘underdog’ and themes that are significant to Western society.

Activity 1:
Working in groups of 3-4 students will be assigned a poem to transform into a play script. They consider how the language used by Dawe captures the voice of the persona and how this voice reflects his personality and values.

Activity 2:
They rehearse and perform your script for the class, ensuring that different character types are demonstrated through the use of voice.

Activity 3:
Students answer the following reflection questions after their performances:

a. How did the task help you to understand Dawe’s ability to create distinctive Australian voices in his poems?

b. Consider the ‘silenced’ voices and their reactions to the persona. Do they get to voice themselves at all?

c. Why has Dawe ‘silenced’ the soldiers?

d. What does this silencing tell you about Dawe’s attitude to the persona?

e. Write what the soldiers would say after the drill sergeant has left.

Higher-order Thinking: Students organise, reorganise, apply, analyse and evaluate during the composition of their script and performance

Deeper Understanding: Students develop a profound and meaningful understanding of the ideas in Dawe’s poems

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons – http://commons.wikimedia.org
Week 7: “Poetry is just the evidence of life.” Leonard Cohen

CONTENT: LISTENING TEST PRACTICE; PEER MARKING; ESSAY WRITING

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<td><strong>Lesson 1-2: Listening Test Practice</strong></td>
<td>Metalanguage: Using correct terms to discuss the language of the poem</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 1:</strong></td>
<td>Deeper Knowledge: Focusing on the key ideas in the poems</td>
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<td>Students listen carefully to the reading of the poem, “When First the Land was Ours”. The poem will be read twice, during the second reading they may take notes. After the second reading they are to answer the questions.</td>
<td>Explicit Quality Criteria: Students are provided with marking criteria to assess work of peers.</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 2:</strong></td>
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<td>Students swap responses with those of another student. Using provided marking guidelines, they mark their peer’s responses. When this is completed they return it with a mark and half a page of comments, highlighting strengths and weaknesses.</td>
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<td><strong>Lessons 3-4: Essay Writing</strong></td>
<td>Higher-order Thinking: Students organise, reorganise, apply, analyse and evaluate during the composition of their essay</td>
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<td><strong>Essay question:</strong></td>
<td>Explicit Quality Criteria: Students are provided with a scaffold to guide them in their composition</td>
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<td>Dawe once said “The world is a brutal, mysterious, beautiful, inexplicable affair.” Show how the work of Dawe and one other composer reflect this statement. You should discuss at least two poems by Dawe and one other related text in your response.</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 1:</strong></td>
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<td>Students develop an essay plan of 250 words. This plan is to be submitted for marking at the end of the lesson.</td>
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<td><strong>Activity 2:</strong></td>
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<td>Students write example paragraphs using the T.E.E. structure (Technique/Example/Effect) and share these with peers for suggestions/corrections.</td>
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<td><strong>NOTE:</strong></td>
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<td>(When essay plans are marked and redistributed students are to be given time to complete this extended essay. Students must references all sources of information that are not their own.)</td>
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