

Mini beasts and dialect - teacher's notes

Poem/Language

The poem is best read in a Afro-Caribbean accent, if possible. The title of the poem is a Caribbean proverb. What does it mean? What might it mean in a wider sense? If the poet were writing his poem in Standard English, how would he put it – which words or phrases would change and how? Which do you think fits the poem best – Standard English or the Black English dialect? Why?

Discussion/Language awareness

Standard English is merely a dialect of the English language (originally the dialect of the educated classes in S E England), and of no greater or lesser worth than other dialects. It has, however, been adopted as the dialect in which written English is to be presented. It is also used for speech in formal situations.

What does 'Standard' mean? Why do you think we have a 'standard' form of English? What might happen if everyone wrote in their own dialects? When might you need to speak in Standard English? (When might you speak in your own dialect?)

Accent

The accent which is usually associated with Standard English is known as Received Pronunciation (RP), but nowadays any accent is accepted with Standard English.

Can you read aloud the newsreader's speech in accents other than RP? Do you know any Standard English speakers with regional/ethnic accents? (Perhaps some of their teachers?)

Discussion/Dialect

Share the page with pupils and discuss dialect words and speeches, eg: What do you call this particular creature? What do you think this speech means? How would you say it? etc.

Standard English Dictionary definitions of the 'mini beasts' featured in the pictures are:

Crane fly (Judging by some of the names, this creature was mistaken in the past for a type of spider. In a later session, pupils could seek to explain why through observation of the crane fly.)

Earwig and alternate names

Ants and alternate names

Ladybird and alternate names

Dialect speech in examples:

- 'Mum, do a yerriwig...' Recorded in Suffolk.
- 'Can ee tell...' Recorded in Devon.
- 'Leddy leddy landers...' Scottish rhyme

There are many other examples, eg, another rhyme from Scotland, about an earwig:

The horny goloch is an awesome beast
It has twa horns, and a hantle of feet
And a forkie tailie.

Dialect words/Spoken English

Interest in our own native dialect and how it differs from Standard English is an excellent introduction to the study of language. Pupils may know dialect words from their own area/ethnic group; or they may be able to collect them from adults (opportunity for interviewing/taping).

Non-chronological writing

Pupils might compile a 'dialect dictionary'.

Discussion: accent

Can you 'do' different accents (eg. Coronation Street/Eastenders/American)? What is the difference between accent and dialect?

Discussion/Dialect grammars

The examples focus on dialect words, but more important for teaching purposes are dialect grammars, eg. 'We was talking' for 'We were talking'. Pupils must recognise how the grammar of their native dialects differs from that of Standard English. The teaching required in this respect will differ from one part of the country to another, and should arise from a consideration of pupils' and others' dialect variations.