READING SOURCES USING TEXTBREAKER:

THEORY INTO PRACTICE. THE END OF ROMAN BRITAIN: A PICTURE AND A DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING TEXT

— Jon Nichol

Introduction

Pages 8-9 detail how functional literacy's concept of genre resulted in the creation of Textbreaker to empower pupils to 'read' all historical sources, but especially those previously thought too hard for them to tackle. Below is an account of how we used Textbreaker, pp. 8-9, to enable two mixed ability Year 3 classes to tackle an Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Ruin*. The poem was an element in a scheme of work whose pedagogy had three distinguishing features:

1. Active whole class teaching that treats learning as being as much a social phenomenon as an individual one. AWCT is teacher-led and directed, involving individual, pair, small group, large group and whole class interaction to achieve common goals.
2. Teaching activities that actively involve pupils working in different modes and transforming information from one mode to another: the oral and aural [oracy]: visual/iconic, enactive [drama/role play] and the symbolic [reading text]
3. Working within the Nuffield Primary History model and its seven principles, the first of which is to **challenge** pupils continually, i.e. to force them to think, to develop high level thinking and study skills.

Textbreaker enabled us to prepare the poem so that the pupils could develop their understanding from six perspectives:

- Meaning of paragraphs [providing a sentence to sum up each one's meaning]
- Meaning of the whole text [suggesting a title]
- Meaning of six different categories of word [picking them from the text]
- The identity of the author and audience
- The value of the source as historical evidence
- The poem's structure: so they could write their own Ango-Saxon poems about the destruction of the Roman town.

Using Textbreaker's ideas the class deepened and extended its knowledge of the cultural and historical context of the poem, i.e. the impact of the Anglo-Saxons on Roman Britain during the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

Background to teaching the Anglo-Saxon poem

In the previous term the Year 4 class had been learning about Roman Britain. Working with their class teacher, we taught two lessons on the end of Roman Britain. The class focused on how a Roman town might have changed during the Saxon invasions and settlement. After working on an artist's picture of a bustling Roman market place, the class developed ideas about the Saxon impact upon the town from studying a contemporary Saxon poem, *The*
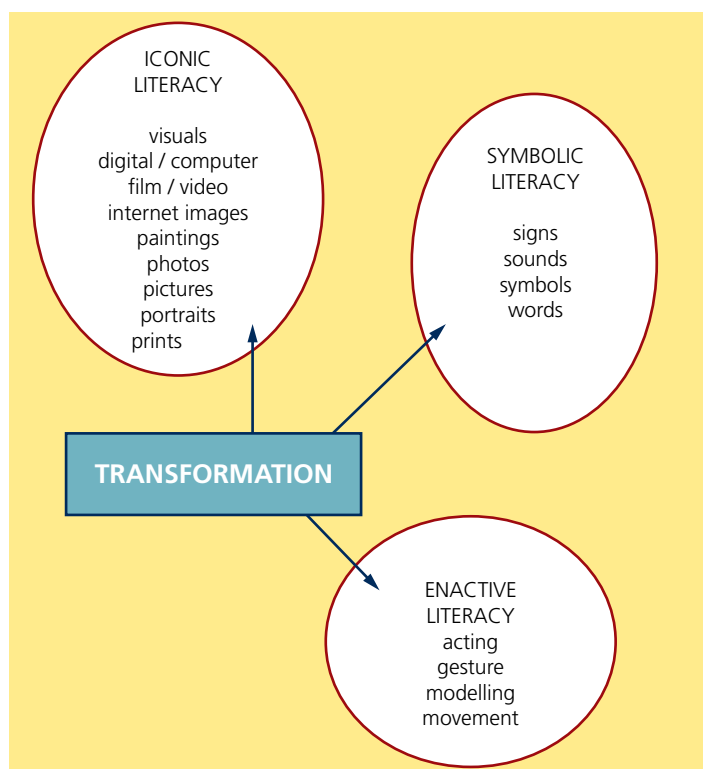
Ruin (Source A). The poem describes what had happened to a Roman town after the Romans left Britain. Clues in the poem suggest that it might be about Roman Bath.

We based the 'reading' of both the picture and the poem on the ideas contained in Textbreaker, pp.8-9. Textbreaker enabled the class to read a full version of the poem [in translation!] instead of the simplified, truncated version that we had previously used.

The lesson plans
What were the teaching objectives?

1. To set the scene for learning about the Saxons through studying a picture of a Roman town at the end of the Roman period, and then seeing how the Saxon invasion might have affected it.
2. To develop an understanding of the picture through questioning, the close observation of detail and the use of the informed imagination to bring the scene to life.
3. To build up pupil vocabulary through the medium of the 'I spy with my little eye' game.
4. To promote literacy through the reading of a Saxon poem, demonstration of the poetic genre and pupil modelling

ICONIC LITERACY

visuals
digital / computer
film / video
internet images
paintings
photos
pictures
portraits
prints

SYMBOLIC LITERACY

signs
sounds
symbols
words

TRANSFORMATION

ENACTIVE LITERACY
acting
gesture
modelling
movement

of the genre with them writing their own poems based upon the picture and the Saxon poem.

What were our intended learning outcomes?
• To develop knowledge about the impact that the Saxons had upon Roman Britain.
• To develop an understanding of substantive concepts such as invasion, conquest and settlement.
• To promote oracy through questioning, pair, group and class discussion and the oral presentation of ideas.
• To foster social skills through co-operative pair and small group work, and through the whole class engaging in a word-game.
• To continue to develop understanding of what 'Doing History' means in terms of working on sources.
• To enhance pupil knowledge of a poetic genre.

Key question
How did Britain change during the period of Saxon invasion?

Year group
Year 4, mixed ability and gender. The class had a number of very able pupils.

Teaching time
Two lessons of one hour each.

Resources
1   A picture of a Roman market place or forum, www.history.org.uk.
2   A Saxon poem, *The Ruin*. Source A.

The teaching: the annotated lesson plan
Teaching activities
• playing of an I-Spy game
• reading the picture
• reading of the text of *The Ruin*
• pupil story-telling
• role play/drama: freeze frame
• pair and group work: oracy – discussion

The learning activities/pedagogy
Episode 1. *Making sense of the picture*
Focus. *Reading a picture, teasing out its meaning using 'I-Spy with my little eye' game*
• We split the class into two teams, A and B.
• One member of Team A asked Team B to find an object in the picture beginning with a letter of the alphabet. 'I spy with my little eye something beginning with [a letter of the alphabet]'
• The members of Team B had three attempts to answer the question correctly. If they got the right answer they received one mark, if they failed, Team A got the mark.
• Sinead began with: 'I spy with my little eye, something beginning with L.' Annika from Team B gave the correct answer: lady. Team B got a mark.
• The person who had answered correctly then asked Team A a question: 'I spy with my little eye something beginning with [a letter of the alphabet]'. The same pattern was followed for scoring points.
• We kept the score on the blackboard.

Great excitement and pleasure from the pupils during the playing of the game. Among the words chosen were:

building, castle, city, cloud, dog, food, people, roof, stall, statue, temple, tent , wall.

Episode 2. *Title of the picture for a children's book*
Focus. *Making sense of the picture*
• I told the children that they had been given the picture to put in their books.
• They had to think of a title and put it on top - this they did in pairs.
• We listed the titles on the board, and talked about them. Titles included:
• Roman History, Roman Picture, Roman Feature, A town called Robeeta,
• Roman City Centre, Romans in History. I liked Adam's best: 'Cracking City Centre'.

Episode 3. *Brainstorming characters*
Focus. *Getting deeper into the picture through story telling*
• I asked the children to put their fingers on two dogs in the picture and look for the lady with the cloak and two children.
• Then I said, 'Imagine that you are one of the two children with the lady who is looking at the dancer. One of the children lives in the town, the other is a friend who has come from the country. You will be the guide to that child.'
• Working in pairs, in their drafting books they had to put down what they would see, hear, smell, taste, feel.
• Pairs then reported back to the whole class: Josh and Kieran smelt the Roman baths, felt a cake, saw people dancing and watched a show while Adam and Helena smelt drinks, fish and air, saw dancing, saw statues and buildings, people watching.

Episode 4. *Newsflash – Go home and Dad says that you are called back to Rome*
Focus. *Telling the story of the decline of Roman Britain through the child*
• I told the class that one of the children's father was the commander of the Roman garrison. Rome was under attack from invaders. The commander has been told to leave with his soldiers.
• S/he keeps in touch with his or her friend, who lives in a villa in the country.
• The Roman child hears about terrible happenings - the pupils mentioned killing people, breaking statues, tearing down buildings.
• Fifty years later s/he sends you an Anglo-Saxon poem to Rome about what has happened to the city.

Episode 5. *Listening to the poem*
Focus. *A mental picture, impression of the poem*
• We gave out a copy of the poem, Source B, to each pupil.
• We asked the class to shut their eyes and listen as we played a tape recording of the poem. During the reading we made sure that all eyes were shut and the children concentrated on listening.
• When they opened their eyes they had to think of a title for the poem, talking about it with their partner, and write it on the top of their copy of the poem.
• Next we went around the class, getting the children to read out their titles. These we listed on the board as a star diagram. Ideas included:
• Saxons attacking, Fall of the Romans, Death and People Dead on the Earth'

Episode 6. *Working on the text: using Textbreaker's ideas*
Focus. *Breaking into the text from different perspectives to build up knowledge and understanding*

- We had prepared the poem using Textbreaker with a vocabulary and sections for recording the meanings of six types of words in the poem, the poem's paragraphs and an overall grasp of the poem – its title.
- The pupils were asked to work through the text in pairs, picking out words for each of the six categories. These we pooled on the board, drawing up a list that the pupils copied on to their sheets. Feedback was both lively and constructive; the class was fully engaged in extracting the words from the text and developing an understanding of what they meant. This was done both through whole class discussion and referring to the word list.
- We now moved on to working on ideas about the messages that each of the poem's paragraphs A-D conveyed.

Episode 7. *Learning from the poem*
Focus. *Pupils working upon the key ideas in the text, and seeing in sequence how they tell us what happened to the Roman city*

- We split the class into groups of four; each group was given one section of the poem to work upon. As they were in fours, we divided the fours into pairs and made sure that there was one copy of each section for each pair of pupils.
- We told each group that they had to appoint a spokesperson who would report back to the whole class. Another pupil would be responsible for organising a group tableau of a scene from the paragraph.
- The group had to decide on a phrase or sentence that would describe what was going on in their section.
- They had to provide a tableau, a freeze frame, of that scene.
- This they acted out in front of the rest of the class, who had to guess what the scene was.

Episode 8. *The linking of the two sources, the picture and the poem*
Focus. *Transferring the information taken from the poem on to the picture*

- The pupils were asked to mark on the picture of the Roman town how it might have changed. They could write on the picture, or draw lines from features to the edge, where they would write down what had happened since the scene in the picture.
- We played through the taped version of the poem, making sure that the pupils listened to the words while looking at the picture.
- The pupils worked in pairs on this activity, annotating their pictures.

Episode 9. *The reliability of the poem*
Focus. *The extent to which we can trust the poem as a source about Saxon Britain*

- I told the pupils that a Saxon wrote the poem in the time after the Roman legions had left Britain, and that it was one of the few pieces of evidence that had survived from the period.

Source A The Anglo-Saxon poem, in Textbreaker format

Title

Splendid this rampart is, though fate destroyed it.
The city buildings fell down, the work of giants crumble.
Tumbled are the towers, ruined the roofs and broken the gate with its bars.
Frost breaks up the plaster and all the ceilings gape wide open.
For they are torn and collapsed, age has eaten them up.
In the hard earth lie the dead long gone builders, a hundred generations of people have passed by. [A]

The moss has stained this wall red and grey while it stood through storms as kingdoms rose and fell.
Now the high curved wall itself has fallen down.
The builders put up their round arch buildings, the public halls were bright with high chimneys.
Many were the bath houses ringing with happy noise, many the beer houses full of human joy. [B]

Mighty fate brought change to it all.
Slaughter was widespread and disease spread,
Death took away those brave men, the halls of warriors became empty places. [C]

The city crumbled, its builders fell and its armies are in the earth.
And so these halls are empty and this red curved roof now sheds its tiles.
Decay has brought it to the ground, smashed it to piles of rubble.
Long since gone an army of heroes, glorious, loaded with gold shone in their armour, gazed on jewels and treasure.
Stone buildings stood, hot streams threw out fountains of water inside the city walls. [D]

WORD LIST	What it means
ceilings	part of a room – above you
collapsed	fell down
crumble	break into small bits, like a biscuit
decay	rot
destroyed	wrecked, ruined, broken
disease	illness - germs cause this. You are sick
fate	what the gods say will happen to you
fountains	water sprays out of them, like in a garden
frost	ice crystals on the ground in cold weather
gape	wide open
generations	time a person lives
glorious	great, famous
heroes	famous people you look up to
kingdoms	lands a king rules
loaded	weighed down with
plaster	a kind of cement you put on walls
public	all the people
rampart	walls of a city
rubble	broken bits of brick, plaster, stone, etc.
sheds	throws down
slaughter	kill
splendid	great, wonderful
tile – roof tile	small, thin tile to put on a roof
towers	forts on the walls you fight from
tumbled	fell down
warriors	fighters, soldiers
widespread	all over

Buildings:	Colours	Action Words
Thoughts and Feelings	Sounds	People

What does paragraph A tells us?	What does paragraph B tells us?
What does paragraph C tells us?	What does paragraph D tells us?
Who might have written the poem?	Who might he or she have written it for?
Can we believe what it tells us?	How can we check the truth?

- Knowing what kind of person the poet was, and when he wrote, could we believe what it said?
- Laura said that it reminded her of the ruins of Bath, a Roman city that the Saxons had destroyed. Sinead argued that it could well be true because her book on the Saxons told her that the Saxons had 'ruined a lot of Roman bits.'
- [For the remainder of the lesson the pupils wrote their own poems].

Conclusion

We have used the ideas of functional literacy/genre extensively in our teaching over the past decade. It has enabled us to work on a much wider range of historical sources than we would have considered using previously.

References
The Anglo-Saxon poem
www.history.org.uk/
The Roman market place
www.history.org.uk/

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