THE MINDFUL

ENGLISH TEACHER:

A TOOLKIT FOR LEARNING & WELL-BEING

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Dedication

To all the PGCE students I have educated and who inspired me to write this book.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Goldsmiths 'Department of Education for all their help, Sam Sullivan at Newington Design & my PGCE students.

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Also by Francis Gilbert

I'm A Teacher, Get Me out of Here (2004)
Teacher on the Run (2005)
Yob Nation (2006)
Parent Power (2007)
Working the System (2011)
The Last Day of Term (2012)
How to get a great English Degree (2013)
Analysis and Study Guide: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (2014)
Romeo and Juliet: The Study Guide Edition (2014)
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: The Study Guide Edition (2015)
Lewis Carroll's Alice Novels: The Study Guide Edition (2016)
The Time Devil (2017)
Who Do You Love (2017)

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *THE MINDFUL ENGLISH TEACHER*

‘I found the book really helpful, as a person who has struggled with anxious thoughts in the past, I’ve found it has helped me process those in a mindful way that has left me with more confidence. I like how the book is very accepting of different teaching styles and differentiates between by using different teaching voices in the book. I found the book accessible and the writing was easy to read. It was an engaging read as well as an educational one. ’An English teacher.

‘This book is basically a ‘go to ’book for student teachers. It is easy to read and detailed, which alongside Francis Gilbert’s study guides really sets student teachers on the road to success. Thanks Francis! ’Chloe Charles, PGCE English teacher.

‘I think mindfulness, planning, reciprocal reading, all discussed at length in the book, have been effective tools in developing my pedagogy and are methods I will definitely use in my teaching. I think the book is an excellent introduction to teaching English and makes the theory and learning easy and accessible. ’An English teacher.

‘A useful guide for both new and experienced teachers who want to excel. ’An English teacher.

‘A great read with so many useful tips and tasks. It made me step back and reflect easily on my practice. ’An English teacher.

‘This book looks at English teaching in a refreshing and non-intimidating manner. It is inclusive for all training and qualified teachers with a clear structure that encourages passionate and creative teaching in modern schools. ’Sarah Stevens, PGCE English teacher.

INTRODUCTION

The Mindful English Teacher needed a book.

Not a behaviour manual. Not another binder of strategies. But something slower, steadier—something that offered calm in the busyness, perspective in the pressure, and reassurance that teaching English with presence, care, and creativity is not only possible, but essential.

This is that book.

It's the book I needed when I was drowning in deadlines and data, when the joy of language was buried under marking and metrics. It's the kind of book you can read from start to finish—or dip into when you need a moment of clarity. A touchstone. A breath. A reminder that teaching English is more than a job. It's a profoundly human act.

This book began in a different form. In its first version, it featured fictional scripts: four teachers, each with a different pedagogical stance, debating the dilemmas of the classroom. There were bullet points, diagrams, subheadings—a structure designed to provoke reflection. It had energy, and moments of insight. But over time, it began to feel fragmented. The scaffolding got in the way of the flow. The characters became devices. And something in the deeper spirit of the book felt unfinished.

That's because the author has changed.

Mindfulness, once a coping mechanism for surviving the school day, has become something more integral. What began as a way to manage stress has deepened into a philosophy of teaching. A way of being.

In the language of MacGraw (2020), what once was thin mindfulness—a kind of institutional self-soothing—has transformed into thick mindfulness: an embodied, ethical, and relational approach to education. Thin mindfulness helps us endure the system. Thick mindfulness asks us to question it. Thin mindfulness offers a pause. Thick mindfulness offers the possibility of transformation.

That shift demanded a different kind of book.

Gone are the scripts and the over-articulated diagrams. In their place is a more fluid, narrative-driven structure—one that can be

read sequentially but doesn't require it. You are welcome to begin wherever the text speaks to your current moment. The form is deliberately open. This is not a textbook. It's a companion.

And instead of four fictional teachers, the book now centres on two archetypes: the Mindful English Teacher and the Unmindful English Teacher. These are not binaries or identities. They are modes of being—ways of responding to the moment, the lesson, the learner. Most of us move between them every day. One mode is grounded, present, responsive. The other is harried, reactive, dislocated. Neither is fixed. Both are human.

A major influence in this evolution was *The Myth of Meditation* by Paramananda (2019). His approach to mindfulness—gentle, poetic, and utterly unpretentious—helped shape the tone of this book. His writing reminded me that mindfulness is not about getting it right or reaching some higher state. It's about returning to the present, again and again. It's about paying attention to the texture of a sentence, the feeling in a room, the tone of our own voice. It's about beginning from where we are.

So, if you're here because you're tired, or lost, or simply longing for a gentler, more grounded way to teach: welcome. This book doesn't promise peace on every page. But it does offer a path—a mindful one—towards teaching English with more meaning, more presence, and more joy.

It begins, perhaps, with a breath.

The book is structured as a journey — one that begins inwardly and gradually radiates outward into practice, expertise, critique, and legacy. Each part builds upon the last, offering a coherent, holistic vision of how mindfulness can transform not only our classrooms but our entire relationship with English teaching.

In **Part I: The Inner Work of Teaching**, we begin with ourselves. These chapters invite you to reflect on your identity, values, and aims as an educator, and explore how mindfulness can offer not just a coping mechanism, but a deeper grounding for your practice. Here, the foundations are emotional and ethical: a way of reconnecting with why we teach in the first place.

From that grounding, **Part II: Foundations for Mindful Learning** turns to the professional knowledge that supports mindful practice. We explore how to inhabit English as a subject mindfully, how to organise ourselves with compassion, how to understand theories of learning and meta-cognition, and how to design lessons that are alive to the emotional textures of literature and learning.

Part III: Mindful Practice in the English Classroom brings mindfulness into daily teaching life. Here we look at creativity, identity, behaviour, multisensory learning, reading, and writing — not as isolated skills, but as human, relational acts. These chapters offer practical approaches for nurturing a classroom climate where students can feel seen, heard, and challenged.

Building on this, **Part IV: Deepening Subject Expertise Mindfully** revisits the English curriculum itself. We explore how to teach classic fiction, poetry, non-fiction, drama, grammar, and Shakespeare's language with freshness, imagination, and critical insight. Subject knowledge is reframed not as a body of facts to be delivered, but as a living conversation to be joined.

Naturally, this leads into **Part V: Towards a Mindful Decolonised Curriculum**, where we take up more urgent questions of power, inclusion, and justice. These chapters invite us to decolonise not only the texts we teach but the ways we approach them — making space for multiple voices, critical reading, and transformational dialogue.

Finally, **Part VI: Ending Mindfully** turns to the ways we close — lessons, units, and even school years. Here we explore how to assess reading and writing with care, how to teach terminology without stifling creativity, and how to end with the same mindful presence with which we began. The journey concludes with a meditation on teaching itself — a practice that is never finished, but always unfolding.

In this way, *The Mindful English Teacher* offers not a manual of techniques, but a companion for a different way of being: slower, steadier, and more attuned to the real possibilities of teaching English with joy, compassion, and authenticity.

It begins with becoming aware of your breathing…

Part I: The Inner Work of Teaching

Mindful English teaching begins not with techniques but with presence. This section invites you to turn inward: to reflect on your identity, your values, and your reasons for teaching. Before we can nurture mindfulness in our classrooms, we must first cultivate it within ourselves.

CHAPTER 1: A NEW BEGINNING

Before diving into the chapters of this book, pause for a moment. Find a quiet space. Let your breathing settle into its own natural rhythm. Bring to mind the identity of being an English teacher—or a teacher in the making. Hold that identity lightly. There's no need to evaluate or rank your knowledge. This book is not here to judge. Instead, it opens with an invitation: begin with curiosity and compassion.

In mindfulness, we speak of 'Beginner's Mind'—the idea that every moment is a new beginning. Each in-breath invites us to arrive fully, to begin again. Each out-breath is a letting go, a soft release of what we no longer need. This book asks you to approach your teaching in the same way. Let go of the need to have all the answers. Allow yourself to begin, again and again, with an open mind.

This is a space for reflection, not measurement. You may not have encountered many of the themes and questions explored in this book before, and that's completely fine. This book doesn't expect prior knowledge; it simply asks for an openness to noticing where you are right now. As you read, you are encouraged to explore rather than follow, to dip into the sections that call to you, and to respond

in the ways that feel most authentic—through journaling, conversation, or quiet contemplation.

You might begin by gently reflecting on why you teach—or why you're drawn to this work. What do you believe education is for? How might your past experiences shape the values you bring into the classroom? What do you feel English as a subject offers—beyond content or exams? How do you relate to literature, language, stories? Do they still nourish you, or have they begun to feel like tasks to complete?

Consider what mindfulness means to you. You may have practised meditation or conscious breathing, or perhaps it's a new concept. Either way, how aware do you feel in your daily work? When are you present—and when does your attention drift? Can you meet those moments with kindness, without judgement?

Turn now to your relationship with time and organisation. Are your days a blur of to-do lists and unfinished tasks? Or have you found routines that give shape and ease to your week? What feelings arise when you plan lessons or mark books? How does your organisational style affect your energy and your teaching?

Reflect too on well-being and support. What grounds you when things feel difficult? How do you care for yourself during term time? What helps you to feel restored? Who or what supports your resilience?

You might also consider your classroom practice: how you approach planning and assessment, how you support learning, how you use feedback, how you collaborate. You may not have explored learning theories before—but what do you instinctively believe about how students learn best? Do you find creativity important in your teaching? How does your own identity shape how you relate to students, texts, and subject content?

Think about how inclusive your classroom feels, and how you respond to students with different needs and ways of being. How do you honour neurodiversity, emotional differences, and physical or sensory needs? Are there moments when a student's behaviour surprises you—and can those moments become invitations to pause and respond mindfully?

What is your relationship with the texts you teach? Do you feel confident with the literary canon, with diverse texts, with poetry and

spoken word, with fiction and non-fiction? What excites you—and what feels unfamiliar? How fluent do you feel in grammar, spelling, punctuation? How do you support students to become powerful communicators?

And what about the digital world? How do you use technology in the classroom? Does it overwhelm you, or open up new possibilities? What does it mean to be a mindful teacher in a connected, online world?

You may find that some of these questions feel relevant now, while others feel distant. That's okay. Let them be gentle companions rather than demands. Return to them when you're ready.

Finally, return to your breath. Notice the rise and fall. Inhale—and begin again. Exhale—and let go. Ask yourself gently:

Where do I feel drawn to begin?

Let your answer shape your next step. There's no single path through this book. Begin where the energy is. The rest will unfold from there.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 2: AIMS, VALUES AND PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

I want to begin this chapter with a moment that changed how I understand education—and how I understand myself as a teacher.

It was my second year teaching English in an inner-city London school, and I felt I was just getting the hang of it. My Year 7 tutor group were a lively class of 11-year-olds, and I thought we had a good rapport. Except for Tom.

Tom was thin, angry, and perpetually restless. He chewed up worksheets and spat them at the floor. He snarled at instructions. He refused to work. One day, after disrupting a story-writing task for the third time that week, he scrunched up his soggy worksheet and threw it in my face. I clenched my fists but kept my voice calm, ordered him out of the room, and listened as he shouted the familiar insult—"Yer mum! Yer mum! Yer mum!"—down the corridor.

Fast forward a few months. Tom's behaviour hadn't improved much, but I fought to take him on a residential trip with the rest of the class to a rural studies centre. Some colleagues were sceptical—worried about the risks—but I had a feeling it might be good for him.

It was on that trip that something remarkable happened. I watched Tom leap along the edge of a hillside, laughing—a sound I had never heard from him. He took to birdwatching with a quiet intensity, cooked meals over the fire, foraged for berries, and even began to get on with his classmates.

Something in me shifted. I saw that when the environment changed, when the pressure eased, when he felt safe and unobserved, Tom could flourish. More importantly, I realised that *I* changed. I stopped trying to control him and began simply to *notice* him: his energy, his needs, his rhythms. In that week, Tom taught me more than I had taught him. He taught me the value of attention.

This, I later came to understand, is the heart of mindfulness.

Mindfulness, as we practise it in this book, is a secular discipline, but it is rooted in ethical and philosophical traditions that span many faiths and cultures. In its Buddhist origins, mindfulness is not just

about stress reduction or productivity—though these may be by-products—but about *right attention*, *compassion*, and *embodied awareness*. These values also appear in Christian contemplative traditions, in Sufi meditation, in Taoist philosophy, and in indigenous worldviews that honour interconnection and presence.

The values of mindfulness—kindness, compassion, curiosity, equanimity—are also values that can guide us as educators. Mindfulness is not just a technique for surviving the pressures of school life. It is a way of relating to the world: noticing our thoughts and feelings without immediately reacting; cultivating compassion for ourselves and others; savouring the sensory richness of our experience; and recognising the impermanence of all things, so we hold our successes and struggles with a lighter touch.

Importantly, mindfulness is *embodied*. There is no separation between mind and body in this approach. What we think is felt in the body; what we feel is shaped by our thoughts. For the English teacher, this means noticing not just what we teach, but *how* we teach it—how our shoulders lift with stress, how our breathing changes when a lesson flows, how words affect us in the chest, the stomach, the spine. It means sensing how a poem resonates in the body, how a metaphor lands, how a student's story stirs something in us.

The **Mindful English Teacher** honours this embodied knowledge. They notice language not just as content, but as *texture*—the musicality of a sentence, the rhythm of speech, the scent of an old book, the quiet thrill of a well-chosen word. They are present to their students' voices, not just correcting grammar but hearing meaning. They savour the sensory richness of language and storytelling, seeing teaching not just as transmission, but as relationship.

By contrast, the **Unmindful English Teacher**—which, let's be honest, we all become at times—rattles through the curriculum, marking at speed, ticking off objectives, pushing information without pause. They may be effective, but they are often unmoored from purpose, disconnected from joy. Mindfulness helps us return to that joy, not as luxury, but as essential to meaningful teaching.

A Mindful Meditation on Your Teaching Values

Now, pause. Breathe. Bring your attention back to your body, your breath. Ask yourself—not analytically, but gently, curiously: *Why do I want to teach English?* What comes up? Is it an image, a memory, a feeling? Let it arise and pass. Return to the breath if the mind begins to chase stories.

After a few minutes, begin to write. Let your thoughts flow uncensored. You might write about teachers who inspired you, books that changed you, or fears you carry. You might write about what kind of teacher you hope to be—or what kind of teacher you fear becoming. There is no right or wrong here, only *attention*.

When you're ready, look back over what you've written. What values emerge? What aims? Where do you feel certain? Where do you feel unsure? You might set some intentions—areas to develop, ideas to explore—as you journey through this book.

Mindfulness, Rousseau, and the Educated Body-Mind

The story of Tom returned to me years later when I reread Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, a book I had once dismissed as hopelessly idealistic. Rousseau argues that true education happens not in a classroom filled with discipline and rote learning, but in nature, through experience, play, and emotional connection. At the time, I was sceptical. But watching my own son flourish in a progressive inner-city primary school—one that emphasised freedom, creativity, and happiness—I began to reconsider.

What Rousseau taught me, I now see, aligns closely with mindfulness. He believed education should be attuned to the natural rhythms of the child; that the body was not something to be tamed, but a guide to learning; that joy was not a distraction from education, but at its very heart. He knew, long before the word 'mindfulness ' entered our educational lexicon, that awareness is what allows growth.

Like the mindful teacher, Rousseau invites us to see children not as passive vessels to be filled with knowledge, but as active, embodied learners, whose curiosity, movement, and emotional life are essential to their development. His emphasis on *feeling as knowing* challenges our over-reliance on facts and exams and calls

us back to what matters: how students engage with the world, with each other, and with themselves.

I carried this shift in values into my teaching. I began to use rhythm and movement—clapping, stamping, drumming—to teach poetry. I gave students space to perform in nature. I noticed how language lived in their bodies. Not everyone approved. A headteacher once told me, "They don't know their sonnets from their elbows." But I knew they felt the poetry, and that mattered too.

Mindfulness invites us to hold these tensions lightly. We don't need to abandon rigour, but we must ask: *What are we really teaching?* If we only teach analysis without wonder, grammar without joy, argument without listening—what are we building?

What Are *Your* Aims and Values?

As you consider your own journey, take time to reflect on these questions mindfully:

What do you want your students to remember about their time with you?

How do you want them to feel in your classroom?

What does success look like for you—not just on paper, but in the eyes and lives of your students?

How do your values—kindness, justice, creativity, independence—show up in the way you plan, speak, listen, mark, and rest?

You might revisit your school or department's stated aims. Do they resonate with your own? Where is there harmony? Where might there be friction? Could you create a visual map, a short poem, or a summary of *your* educational philosophy to help anchor you in your values?

As Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, "The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion" (Hanh, 1991). The more we return to the present moment—our breath, our purpose, our compassion—the more effective, and fulfilled, we become as teachers.

Let us teach from that place.

CHAPTER 3: HOW MINDFULNESS CAN HELP ENGLISH TEACHERS

This chapter turns its gaze directly onto the role mindfulness plays in the everyday life of an English teacher. Not as an abstract ideal or a fashionable wellbeing trend, but as a grounded, embodied way of being that can profoundly shape attention, presence, and the capacity to respond to the unpredictable reality of the classroom.

You have already been introduced to the two figures who will accompany you through this book: the Mindful English Teacher and the Unmindful English Teacher. They are not caricatures but composite, evolving portraits—ways of being that we all inhabit at different times. This chapter builds on those initial sketches, drawing out how mindfulness informs, or fails to inform, responses to the daily challenges of the profession.

Consider the contrast in a typical classroom moment. The Unmindful English Teacher walks into a lesson already anticipating problems. They are still carrying the stress of yesterday's cover lesson and feel a vague irritation rising before any students have arrived. A few minutes in, the class is louder than expected, and someone hasn't brought their book. They react. Their tone tightens. They raise their voice. The atmosphere darkens. The content gets covered, but barely. They leave the room drained and defeated.

The Mindful English Teacher walks into the same lesson with similar fatigue—but takes a breath. They feel the weight in their chest, notice the heat in their face, and let it be. They ground themselves with three slow breaths, reminding themselves of their intention to be kind, curious, and clear. When the noise rises, they notice their rising tension but respond calmly, praising the students who are settled, giving clear expectations. The energy gradually settles. They adjust their plan, focus on connection over content. They leave the room tired—but not depleted.

The difference between these two teachers isn't talent. It's attention. It's intention. It's a willingness to pause.

Mindfulness, in the sense we're using here, is not about achieving a state of calm or being endlessly serene. It is, as Jon Kabat-Zinn famously put it, "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally." This means noticing

what is happening both around and within—breath, thoughts, mood, reactions—and meeting that awareness with compassion. For teachers, it can mean the difference between spiralling into reactivity and finding a moment of space from which to choose a different path.

If you haven't already, take a short pause. Sit in a relaxed but upright position, and close or lower your eyes. Bring your attention to your breathing. What does it feel like, just to breathe in, and out? Try silently naming the breath: "Breathing in… Breathing out…" There's no need to change anything. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back. After a few minutes, widen your awareness to the whole body. What do you feel in your legs, your chest, your arms? When you're ready, open your eyes. You've just practised a version of what's known as the three-step breathing space (Williams & Penman, 2014).

This kind of practice can be done in almost any context—even in the few seconds before a lesson begins. Over time, it can shift how one responds to classroom stress. English teaching is an emotionally intense profession. The subject matter is often personal. The stakes are high. The marking never ends. But the most taxing element is often not the workload—it's how one relates to it. The Unmindful Teacher feels behind before the day starts. They mark with resentment. They speak to themselves harshly in their minds. The Mindful Teacher still feels stress, but they meet it differently. They notice it, breathe with it, and learn not to believe every thought their mind generates in a moment of panic.

This shift is more than emotional. Neuroscientific research has shown that regular mindfulness practice reduces activity in the amygdala—the part of the brain responsible for fear and reactivity—and strengthens the prefrontal cortex, which is linked to reflection and self-regulation (Davidson & Lutz, 2008). In practice, this means that when things get difficult, a mindful teacher is more likely to pause and reflect than lash out or shut down.

Mindfulness also enhances classroom management. Not by offering tricks to control behaviour, but by helping the teacher regulate their own reactions. When a class is unsettled, the Unmindful Teacher might raise their voice and escalate the tension. The Mindful Teacher notices the urge to shout, pauses, and calmly

acknowledges the noise while praising those who are focused. This isn't about being nice for the sake of it. It's about choosing responses that work.

What is cultivated through mindfulness is not a technique but a stance—a way of inhabiting the teaching role that is rooted in awareness, compassion, and attention. And crucially, this awareness is embodied. Mindfulness teaches us to listen to the signals of the body: the racing heart, the shallow breath, the tension in the jaw. These aren't distractions from teaching; they are information. They reveal how one is showing up in the room. They offer a way back to presence.

From this embodied perspective, literature itself becomes a space for mindfulness. English is a subject that demands close attention to language, to meaning, to feeling. When read mindfully, Shakespeare's soliloquies are not just historical artefacts but deep meditations on human longing and perception. When students read Juliet's language aloud and feel its rhythm in their bodies, they are practising a form of embodied literacy. The Mindful English Teacher knows this. They don't just analyse the text—they listen to its emotional texture, invite students to feel the words on their tongues, to notice their own responses.

We'll explore more about literature and mindfulness in later chapters, but for now, consider what it might mean to prepare a lesson not just with objectives, but with intention. What energy do you want to bring? What values are you teaching with, not just about? When things go awry, as they inevitably do, what might it feel like to pause—not to escape the moment, but to enter it more fully?

This chapter is an invitation to begin that exploration. There is no end point. The Mindful English Teacher is not a fixed identity but a practice—a commitment to noticing, again and again, and choosing presence. One will not always manage it. That's the point. But in those moments when they do, teaching changes. And so do they.

Part II: Foundations for Mindful Learning

Building on a grounded sense of self, this section explores the professional knowledge that supports mindful practice. We turn to the craft of organisation, the architecture of learning theories, and the emotional roots of lesson design — always asking: how can we create learning spaces that honour the whole student?

CHAPTER 4: MINDFUL KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AS A SUBJECT

The Unmindful English Teacher sits slumped over their desk, surrounded by teetering stacks of books: Shakespeare, Dickens, Rossetti, poetry anthologies, grammar guides, exam board specifications, theory texts. Their highlighter hovers, impotent. They feel overwhelmed. There's a voice inside: "You should have read all of this. You should be an expert in every text. You should have the answers." Their mind buzzes with anxiety—how will they ever be able to teach it all?

In the next room, the Mindful English Teacher sits in a quieter space. The same books may line their shelves, but their posture is different. They breathe in deeply, then out, slowly. They remind themselves that teaching English is not about knowing everything. It's about opening up possibilities. They know their role is to guide, to ask questions, to model curiosity. They are not the gatekeeper of knowledge but a fellow traveller. They do not pretend to have read every classic, every theory, every poem. Instead, they invite students into shared inquiry. When asked a question they cannot answer, they respond with, "Let's find out together."

Once, for example, the Mindful English Teacher was asked by a student whether Shakespeare really invented over 1,700 words. Instead of scrambling to assert expertise, they replied, "That's a great question—let's explore the evidence." Together, they looked up the Oxford English Dictionary's entries, discussed what it means for a word to be 'first recorded 'in Shakespeare, and reflected on how language evolves. It became a powerful moment of learning for everyone involved.

Understanding what English is—and what it has been—is part of the mindful perspective. English, as a school subject, has evolved significantly since the early days of formal education in England. In the early centuries of English schooling, Latin and religious texts dominated. It wasn't until much later that English literature became a subject in its own right, and when it did, it was often used to uphold particular notions of 'civilisation 'and national identity.

T.B. Macaulay, writing in 1835, advocated the teaching of English literature in colonial India not to encourage literary

appreciation, but to instil deference to British culture and values. His legacy can still be felt in the emphasis on canonical British texts in curricula around the world. As Meenakshi Mukherjee (1994) and Gauri Viswanathan (1989) have shown, the study of English literature was often used as a tool of soft power—its inclusion in school curricula not necessarily about liberating minds, but controlling them.

In English schools, literary education became more formalised in the early 20th century. F.R. Leavis famously advocated for a 'Great Tradition ' of moral seriousness, placing writers like Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Joseph Conrad at the centre. His influence was huge, but also limited: critics such as Raymond Williams (1977) and Terry Eagleton (1983) challenged this narrow, class-bound view, calling instead for a broader, more inclusive approach to texts.

The rise of English Language as a discrete area of study came later, spurred by linguists such as David Crystal and the influence of sociolinguistics and functional grammar. Meanwhile, creative writing, once dismissed as a frivolous extracurricular activity, gained legitimacy through the efforts of organisations like NAWE (National Association of Writers in Education) and courses at institutions such as Goldsmiths and UEA.

Yet, for all its histories and debates, the essence of English remains elusive. Is it about grammar? Literature? Critical theory? Orality? Creativity? Assessment? The truth is, English is all these things—and more. It's a subject of tensions and multiplicities, and this is what makes it so powerful.

The Mindful English Teacher embraces this ambiguity. They don't claim to be an expert in all areas but instead model how to navigate them. They know when to lean into literary analysis and when to allow students to explore language in their own voices. They teach grammar, but not as a list of punishable rules—instead, as a set of tools to empower expression. They read Shakespeare, but also spoken word poetry and song lyrics. They understand that the canon is both a resource and a question.

For instance, when introducing students to poetry, they might begin with William Blake's "London," but not merely as a GCSE text. They reflect with their class on the phrase "mind-forged manacles"—a powerful metaphor that speaks to the constraints

placed upon us by society and by our own thoughts. The Mindful English Teacher links this to the practice of mindfulness itself: noticing our own restrictive patterns and gently loosening them through imagination, compassion, and inquiry.

They also draw upon the idea of "funds of knowledge" (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), understanding that each student brings with them a rich tapestry of cultural, linguistic, and experiential insights. This belief shapes their pedagogy. Instead of treating English as something to be handed down from on high, they treat it as something co-created. They might pair Shakespearean sonnets with contemporary protest poems. They might invite students to rewrite endings, to perform scenes, to write in dialect, to reflect.

Importantly, the Mindful English Teacher does not feel they must rescue students from 'difficult texts 'by simplifying them, nor do they insist on blind reverence. Instead, they help students to approach complexity with curiosity, to understand that they are capable of serious thought. They differentiate, scaffold, and invite. They listen as much as they speak.

The Unmindful English Teacher, by contrast, often feels ruled by external expectations. Their approach is shaped by fear: fear of not knowing enough, of being judged, of losing control. Their lessons are rigid, their objectives prescriptive, their resources dictated by schemes of work. In trying to do everything, they forget to do the most important thing: to be present, open, and responsive.

In contrast, the Mindful English Teacher recognises their limitations without shame. They view themselves as a learner too. They bring together texts, students, and questions—not as a performance of expertise, but as a shared space of discovery.

CHAPTER 4: BEING ORGANISED

The way we organise ourselves as English teachers can be the difference between feeling overwhelmed and finding balance. In this chapter, we return to our two familiar figures—the Mindful English Teacher and the Unmindful English Teacher—and follow them into the realm of routines, checklists, and time management. This isn't about productivity hacks or rigid systems. Instead, it's about developing an embodied, flexible relationship with planning that supports both your wellbeing and your teaching.

The Unmindful English Teacher begins their week already behind. They scroll through emails before getting out of bed. They scribble a plan on the back of a worksheet five minutes before the bell. They rush to photocopy resources between lessons, forgetting their lunch on the staffroom table. Even when they carve out an hour to get on top of things, they flit between tasks, anxious and distracted, never quite completing any one of them. What once inspired them—literature, language, stories—now feels like a burden. The poetry they once loved is reduced to mark schemes and learning objectives. Reading is no longer a pleasure; it's a task to survive. The magic of English has become a source of stress.

The Mindful English Teacher begins differently. Perhaps they, too, feel the weight of the week ahead. But they pause. They sit down on a Friday afternoon, even for just ten minutes, and sketch out a gentle outline for the following week. They do not fill in every box or dictate every activity. They breathe. They ask themselves: what is essential? What can wait? And crucially, they reconnect with the subject itself. They open an anthology not to plan a lesson, but to remember why they loved that poem. They reread a passage from a novel and let it settle into them, not as a means to an end, but as a source of nourishment. They use literature to renew themselves, returning to it as a wellspring of energy and insight.

Being mindfully organised means more than having tidy folders or a detailed planner. It's about listening to your energy, noticing your habits, and creating flexible structures that support rather than constrain you. This begins with awareness. Notice when you are most focused. When do you plan best—mornings, evenings, after a walk? Notice what drains you—perhaps checking emails first thing

leaves you reactive for hours. Perhaps spending Sunday marking robs you of rest. You don't need to overhaul your life. But you do need to notice it.

The Mindful English Teacher uses tools like checklists, not as sticks to beat themselves with, but as anchors. A short list at the beginning of the day—three or four things, no more—can create a sense of movement and calm. The Unmindful Teacher, by contrast, scribbles long lists on crumpled scraps of paper, loses track of them, and feels failure by default. The mindful approach is forgiving. It's iterative. It allows you to reprioritise and let things go.

There's wisdom in working from the big picture to the small. A broad weekly plan—jotted down on a Friday—can act as a scaffold for more detailed daily prep. Over time, this habit builds muscle memory. Planning becomes less of a panic, more of a practice. And crucially, this planning extends beyond school. The Mindful Teacher knows that organisation isn't just about work—it's also about protecting time for joy, for family, for stillness. They don't work every evening. They plan their breaks, too.

Marking is often a major source of stress, particularly in English. Here, too, mindfulness offers a reframe. Rather than approaching a pile of books with dread, the Mindful English Teacher takes a breath and begins with care. They know not every piece needs detailed annotation. They trust that feedback can be simple, human, and kind. They also make space for students to mark each other's work—freeing themselves while building independence in the class. The Unmindful Teacher, however, often finds themselves marking in a frenzy late at night, doubting its impact, and resenting the time it steals. The texts blur. Poems that once stirred something in them now feel like burdens to be survived.

The Mindful English Teacher, on the other hand, lets literature guide their sense of time. They allow a line of poetry to slow them down. They let a story help them reconnect with their own story. They reflect on how a novel's pacing mirrors their own need to pause and reflect. Their planning is not detached from their love of the subject—it is infused with it. This doesn't mean sentimentality; it means integration. The work is still demanding, but it's grounded in something deeper than a to-do list.

Being organised doesn't mean being robotic. It means creating rhythms that allow for fluidity. The Mindful Teacher sets routines but holds them lightly. They might cycle to work, plan on a Friday, avoid emails in the early morning. But they are not rigid. They adjust as needed. Their routines support them in living more fully, not in cutting themselves off from spontaneity. The Unmindful Teacher, in contrast, either clings to routines in a state of brittle control or abandons them entirely in a fog of overwhelm.

Living in the moment doesn't mean refusing to plan. Quite the opposite. When planning is done mindfully—with awareness and care—it frees you to be present when it matters most: in the classroom, in conversation, in rest. Mindful organisation is a form of kindness to your future self. It says: I value your time, your energy, your presence.

And when things fall apart—as they sometimes will—the Mindful English Teacher does not spiral into self-recrimination. They breathe. They start again. They write a new list. They remember: being organised is not a moral virtue. It's a practice, like mindfulness itself. One that can begin again, with the next breath.

CHAPTER 5: WELL-BEING AND THE ENGLISH TEACHER

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you." — Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī

Rūmʾīs words invite us to reconsider how we think about pain, exhaustion, and vulnerability. Rather than seeing our wounds—whether emotional, physical, or professional—as hindrances to be hidden or ignored, he suggests they are the very openings through which insight, compassion, and healing flow. For the English teacher, this offers a radical reframe: our tiredness, our self-doubt, our moments of overwhelm are not signs of failure, but potential starting points. In these spaces of fragility, light might enter. Understanding might grow. Renewal might begin.

Teaching is an act of giving. It demands presence, energy, compassion, clarity and resilience. But what happens when that giving is not balanced by replenishment? When the well runs dry, how do we begin to refill it?

The Mindful English Teacher has learned, sometimes the hard way, that self-care is not an indulgence but a quiet form of professionalism. They do not see their body as separate from their teaching self but as deeply entwined with it. They listen to the subtle shifts in their breath, the tension in their shoulders, the racing of their thoughts. These sensations are not ignored or pushed aside but held with gentle attention. They notice how a poem makes their chest soften, how silence at the end of a story brings a sense of spaciousness, how a student's energy might ripple into their own body. They find restoration not only in solitude and rest, but also in the very literature they teach—the way a line of Shakespeare resonates in the chest, or how Wordsworth's quiet fields offer a pause amid noise.

The Unmindful English Teacher, by contrast, feels constantly pursued by the day. They wake up already rushing. They inhale their lunch while marking essays. They prepare lessons while replying to emails. They are so saturated with urgency that rest feels impossible, even guilty. Literature no longer nourishes them; it becomes a task, another deadline. They care deeply about their students but find themselves reacting sharply, pulled into frustration or apathy. Their body, their emotions, and their thoughts cry out for rest—but they have forgotten how to listen.

Perhaps many of us move between these states. Teaching is demanding. But the more we neglect ourselves, the harder it becomes to meet others with openness and care. Loving others—as Dr Andrew Curran suggests—starts with cultivating a kind, attentive relationship with ourselves. Curran's interpretation of love in teaching is rooted in neuroscience: students learn best when they feel emotionally safe and engaged. But teachers too require emotional safety. We cannot model calm if we are exhausted. We cannot offer presence if we are depleted.

Well-being for English teachers is not about perfect health or achieving some ideal physical state. We may be living with illness, disability or chronic conditions—and still have a deeply healing relationship with our bodies and minds. Inspired by Vidyamala Burch's work in Mindfulness for Health, this chapter honours the idea that healing is not the same as curing. It is possible to live with

pain and limitation, and still embody kindness, presence and ease (Burch & Penman, 2013).

As Rūmī suggests, our wounds may not be barriers to well-being but the very places through which healing insight and compassion enter. A healing attitude means turning toward difficulty with care, not turning away from it. It means noticing what helps. What soothes. What gives a sense of safety and wholeness. It means making space for rest, for breath, for the things that remind us of our own humanity.

Practising mindfulness—whether through breath awareness, walking slowly, or reading poetry with full attention—can support this rebalancing. As English teachers, we have a unique opportunity: the texts we teach are full of insight into what it means to live fully, to feel deeply, to recover from loss, to hope. Let us not forget that those same texts can sustain us too.

Part of well-being also involves understanding our need for proper rest. The emerging science of sleep, as explored in Nick Littlehales ’*Sleep: The Myth of 8 Hours*, highlights how consistent sleep rhythms, short naps, and mindful rest can help regulate our energy levels. It’s not just about how long we sleep, but how intentionally we approach our rest.

Well-being isn’t just an individual responsibility. Whole-school cultures play a crucial role in shaping how staff feel and function. National organisations that support leadership development and teacher training often provide toolkits and frameworks to help schools take a collective approach to staff welfare. Others focus on emotional literacy and mental health in education, offering structured resources for reflection, conversation, and collaboration.

When teachers and leaders champion these approaches, they help shift the narrative: well-being is not a luxury, but a foundation for effective teaching and sustainable careers.Even media discussions have begun to reflect on this. In a powerful TES article, one teacher made a ‘radical ’proposal to reverse the slump in teacher morale by urging schools to focus on kindness, community and trust. Such conversations remind us that change is possible—and necessary.

Perhaps it begins here. A quiet breath. A letting go. A question softly asked: how am I, really? And what might nourish me today?

CHAPTER 6: THEORIES OF LEARNING

"The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on." — Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

Mary Wollstonecraft's challenge to educational complacency calls to the English teacher across centuries. Writing in 1792 as one of the earliest advocates for women's intellectual equality, Wollstonecraft argued that true freedom—and by extension, stability—depends on education that cultivates reason and reflection, not rote obedience. Her work was radical not just in its politics but in its vision of learning as liberation. As the mother of Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein, she belonged to a legacy of thought that questioned authority and embraced complexity. This spirit of inquiry, of learning as an active, mindful process, resonates deeply with the ethos of the Mindful English Teacher.

The Mindful English Teacher sees learning not as the passive reception of knowledge but as a relational, emotional and intellectual journey. They ask: what is going on in the learner's mind? What are they bringing to this poem, this scene, this metaphor? They recognise that learners do not arrive as blank slates. They carry stories, assumptions, cultural frameworks and anxieties that shape what they notice and what they miss.

In contrast, the Unmindful English Teacher tends to treat the learning process as a transaction. The lesson plan is a checklist; the outcome is a grade. When students falter, the response is to correct rather than to inquire. There is little room for ambiguity or curiosity. The focus is often on compliance rather than connection, and learning becomes narrow, joyless.

Key theories of learning offer ways to reflect on these differences. Behaviourism, still influential in many schools, emphasises conditioning: stimulus, response, reward or correction. In English, this might take the form of drilling terminology, rehearsing exam structures, or memorising definitions. The Mindful English Teacher does not discard this entirely. They understand that spelling, punctuation and grammar benefit from practice. Repetition can be reassuring. But they also know that this alone does not build understanding.

Constructivist theories reframe learning as the active construction of meaning. Jean Piaget focused on how individuals make sense of their experiences, while Lev Vygotsky emphasised the social dimension of learning, how meaning is made through language and interaction. The Mindful English Teacher draws from both traditions. They design lessons that connect new texts to prior knowledge. They allow discussion to unfold organically. They scaffold, but they also listen.

When a student struggles to interpret a poem, the Mindful English Teacher does not simply tell them the ‘right ’answer. They ask, what lines stood out? What images lingered? They invite the learner to reflect on how their own mind responded. This is metacognition—the awareness of one's own thought processes. It is a skill often implicit in effective learning, and the Mindful English Teacher makes it visible. They prompt students to ask: How did I arrive at this answer? What changed my mind? What do I still find confusing?

Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy of learning outcomes, widely used across education, offers a framework for thinking about levels of cognitive challenge—from remembering to creating. While Bloom intended it to support thoughtful curriculum design, it has sometimes been used too rigidly. The Mindful English Teacher is cautious of its implied hierarchy. In English, students may write powerfully before they can fully explain why a text moves them. They may engage emotionally long before they can analyse formally. The taxonomy is helpful when used flexibly, as a map—not a ladder.

Literature itself teaches us that learning resists simple structures. A student encountering Shakespeare’s Macbeth might first feel disoriented by the language, then fascinated by the rhythm, then disturbed by the characters ’choices. This movement—feeling, puzzlement, insight—is the texture of genuine learning. The Mindful English Teacher does not rush to clarify. They allow space for the not-knowing.

The same applies to writing. When students write poetry or reflective essays, they are often discovering what they think in the process. The act of writing becomes a way of thinking, not just its expression. Encouraging practices like free writing can help students

enter a state of 'flow', described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as full immersion in an activity. In this state, learners are both focused and free. The Mindful English Teacher creates the conditions for this: gentle prompts, trust in the room, the permission not to get it 'right'.

Emotion and cognition are not separate. The philosopher Spinoza called joy the affect that increases our power to act. A classroom that honours joy—joy in language, in discovery, in connection—fosters learning at the deepest level. The Mindful English Teacher pays attention to emotional climate. They check in with students. They model curiosity and calm. They know that shame closes down learning and that compassion opens it.

Self-compassion, too, is key. Many students carry narratives of failure, particularly in English where expression feels personal. The Mindful English Teacher helps students reframe these narratives. They praise effort, not just outcomes. They show that struggle is part of learning. And they themselves remain learners—open to theory, reflective about practice, willing to change.

Wollstonecraft believed that without education, the mind rests only on prejudice. The Mindful English Teacher takes up this call—not to fill minds, but to free them.

CHAPTER 7: META-COGNITION AND SELF-REGULATION

"Give me that man /

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him /

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart."

These words, spoken by Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act 3, Scene 2), reveal a yearning for a person who can think beyond impulse, who is self-aware and reflective. Hamlet admires the capacity to pause, consider, and choose—not to be swept up entirely by emotion but to act with awareness. This yearning echoes in the classroom, where English teachers daily observe the struggle between reaction and reflection, both in literature and in learners themselves.

The Mindful English Teacher is one who recognises and nurtures this self-awareness in students. They know that English as a subject is uniquely placed to help learners reflect not just on what a character does, but why they do it—and how that connects with the reader's own thoughts and values. Teaching literature, then, becomes an opportunity to cultivate metacognition: the ability to think about thinking.

A particularly powerful example of this is J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* (1945), where the audience is asked to consider which characters reflect on their actions and which do not. Mr Birling, the industrialist father, represents the unmindful perspective. He refuses to acknowledge responsibility, dismisses the inspector's message, and clings to his status and certainty. He is unreflective, unchanging, and fundamentally uninterested in examining his role in the wider social picture. In contrast, his children, Sheila and Eric, undergo metacognitive shifts. Sheila questions her behaviour, expresses regret, and begins to see the interconnectedness of actions and consequences. Eric moves from denial to guilt to acceptance. Priestley uses their development to suggest that learning and growth arise from reflection, and that true responsibility requires a willingness to question one's own thinking and behaviour. The Mindful English Teacher draws attention to these transformations, guiding students to reflect on how literature reveals the journey from ignorance to insight (Priestley, 1945).

This capacity to step back and examine one's thought processes is central to metacognition, which can be simply defined as "thinking about thinking." For the Mindful English Teacher, metacognition is not an abstract educational goal but a practical, compassionate tool. It begins with questions: What have I learnt from this activity? What surprised me? What helped me understand something better? These are not just classroom prompts; they are invitations to notice the inner life of learning.

Research suggests that students who are supported to develop metacognitive strategies—such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning—become more independent and resilient learners (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020). Yet these habits are rarely automatic. The Unmindful English Teacher may overlook them entirely, focusing instead on the immediate delivery of content or the accumulation of grades. They may ask students what they got right or wrong, but not how they approached a task, or what they might do differently next time.

The Mindful English Teacher, in contrast, builds space for reflection into the rhythm of lessons. After analysing a poem, they might ask: How did you begin to make sense of this stanza? Did your feelings change as you read it aloud? What connections did you make between the poem and your own life? These questions encourage students to slow down and observe their own strategies, fostering a "rich conception of learning" (Watkins, 2010).

Metacognition is especially useful in writing. Myhill and Watson (2011) highlight the importance of making the composing process visible, particularly for less experienced writers. When students reflect on how they plan, experiment, revise, and respond to feedback, they begin to internalise the skills of a confident writer. The Mindful English Teacher models these practices, sharing their own thought process—perhaps reading a passage aloud and saying, "I'm not sure what this means yet, but let's read on and see if it becomes clearer." Such modelling normalises uncertainty and frames it as a gateway to understanding.

This reflective stance is not separate from the emotional life of the classroom. Emotions are central to learning. When a student feels safe, curious, and valued, they are more likely to take intellectual risks. When they feel judged or hurried, they retreat. The

Mindful English Teacher is attuned to this. They cultivate emotional as well as intellectual safety. They praise effort, encourage questions, and acknowledge that learning is often messy. They are not afraid to slow down.

None of this requires a radical departure from curriculum. Rather, it involves a shift of focus—from delivering knowledge to cultivating awareness. Even the most knowledge-rich lesson can include a moment of pause, where students are asked to notice what they know now that they didn't before, and how they came to know it.

In a world increasingly driven by speed and surface, metacognition allows students to re-centre. It reminds them that thinking is not just about answers, but about the quality of attention we bring to our own minds. It gives them the tools to become not only better learners, but better readers, writers, and citizens.

CHAPTER 8: DESIGNING LEARNING THROUGH BRONTËAN PASSIONS

"To say the truth, I had not the least wish to go into company, for in company I was rarely noticed; and if spoken to, was generally accosted with a sneer, or a simper, or an impertinent question." So writes Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (1847), giving voice to a protagonist whose passions and perceptions are sharp, self-aware, and often overlooked. Teaching Brontë demands sensitivity not only to her themes—love, solitude, power, resistance—but also to the ways in which these themes are revealed through form, tone, structure and voice.

The Mindful English Teacher sees teaching a novel such as *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights* not as a task of content coverage, but as a process of thoughtful design. It begins well before the first lesson. The teacher considers when in the school year to approach the novel—autumn lends itself well to the stormy mood of *Wuthering Heights*, while spring can echo the resilient spirit of Jane. The time of day matters, too; morning lessons may be better suited to complex close reading, while afternoon sessions might lend themselves to drama and discussion. This is lesson design, not rigid planning. It involves thinking about student energy levels, the emotional rhythms of the week, and how a text's mood might resonate with the time of year. All of this planning is contextual, not prescriptive. The Unmindful English Teacher, in contrast, selects a pre-existing scheme and marches through it, irrespective of the rhythm of the class or the mood of the material.

In designing lessons on Brontë, the Mindful English Teacher always considers prior knowledge. What do students already know about the nineteenth century? About the role of women in Victorian society? About the Gothic? These are not add-ons but foundations. One might begin with a free-writing task: 'What does it mean to be passionate? ' or 'Have you ever felt you had to hide your true feelings? 'From there, the class might build a shared glossary of terms such as "governess," "Byronic," or "bildungsroman," anchoring new learning in familiar ground.

This is where learning theory shapes design. The Mindful English Teacher integrates a skills-based approach with content-based

objectives. The key questions become: what do I want students to learn, why is it meaningful, and how will they best come to understand it? These three strands—content, purpose, and pedagogy—form the heart of effective lesson design (Watkins, 2010). Learning objectives must be framed in ways that students can internalise. As John Hattie (2010) argues, effective learning intentions clarify both the *what* and the *why*, while success criteria illuminate the *how*.

Learning objectives should be specific, purposeful and linked to rich learning activities. A strong objective might be: "Students will explore how narrative structure affects reader perception in *Wuthering Heights*." This then needs to be embedded in a learning activity that activates student thought. For example, students might be asked to write parallel diary entries from the perspectives of Nelly and Lockwood, retelling the same incident but revealing differing interpretations. The outcome here is both a better grasp of narratorial bias and a deepened sense of how readers construct meaning from limited viewpoints.

Meaningful assessment grows naturally from such designs. The Mindful English Teacher understands that assessment is not just about measuring achievement but guiding learning. Rather than relying solely on essays or tests, they gather insight from a portfolio of student thinking: a journal entry here, a sticky-note annotation there, a snippet of dialogue overheard during group discussion. These informal assessments—sometimes called formative assessment opportunities—are both manageable and motivating. They inform the teacher's next steps without overwhelming them with marking.

For instance, when exploring the Red Room scene in *Jane Eyre*, a content-based objective might be: "Students will understand the social and psychological significance of Jane's punishment." A corresponding skills-based learning objective might be: "Students will develop their ability to reflect on how space and narrative voice shape character development."

To translate these into practice, learning activities might include:

- A visual mapping exercise in which students annotate the Red Room with sensory and symbolic meanings.

- Paired discussions about students' own memories of spaces that felt oppressive or safe.
- Journal entries written from Jane's point of view using a stream-of-consciousness technique.
- Drama activities in which students freeze-frame moments from the scene to explore power dynamics.

Understanding is checked gently and often—not with a battery of comprehension questions, but with reflective prompts. After reading the Red Room scene, students might be asked: 'How do you feel reading this? ' and then: 'Why do you think Charlotte Brontë wrote it this way? 'The Red Room, where Jane is locked away as punishment, serves as a crucible for her emerging sense of injustice and resistance. It is not just a gothic image of fear, but a psychological space that shapes her developing identity. Jane's punishment is not merely physical; it is symbolic of her social position and emotional alienation. The Mindful English Teacher might pair the Red Room with a discussion on how childhood experiences can shape one's inner voice, encouraging students to connect literature with their lived emotional landscapes (Brontë, 1847).

In *Wuthering Heights*, the narrative frame offers another opportunity to foster reflective reading. Lockwood and Nelly Dean function as unreliable narrators—each shaped by their own biases, social position, and motivations. Lockwood, with his genteel incomprehension, fails to grasp the emotional extremes of the story he stumbles into. Nelly, for all her closeness to the action, narrates with judgements and omissions. The Mindful English Teacher invites students to interrogate these perspectives. Whose story is this? Whose voice dominates, and whose is marginalised? Through these questions, students begin to see narrative as constructed—a set of choices shaped by character and context (Brontë, 1847).

One of the most evocative lines in *Wuthering Heights* comes when Catherine declares, "I am Heathcliff." This moment transcends romantic cliché. It suggests a disturbing collapse of identity, a merging of self with another, grounded in the stormy, elemental emotions that drive the novel. It is not an expression of unity but of

obsession, of being consumed. The Mindful English Teacher lingers here, asking students: What does it mean to lose oneself in another person? Is this love, obsession, or something else? The line can be explored through writing exercises in which students write their own metaphoric declarations: "I am ___," inviting both literary imitation and self-reflection.

The poetry of the Brontës, often overlooked in the classroom, offers yet more ways to connect with students. Anne Brontë's "Lines Composed in a Wood on a Windy Day" (1842) exudes energy and freedom:

"My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring

And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze."

This can open discussions on nature as a metaphor for liberation and emotional expression. Students might be invited to write their own 'weather 'poems that mirror internal states.

Emily Brontë's "Remembrance" (1846), by contrast, is a study in restrained grief:

"Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee, Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!"

Here, grief is both enduring and buried—like the snow, its intensity muffled by time but never erased. The Mindful English Teacher might guide students to compare the sisters 'poetic styles, noting how both channel emotional intensity, but in strikingly different ways—Anne more outwardly hopeful, Emily more interior and haunting. These texts offer starting points for students to explore their own emotional landscapes through poetry.

Assessment, too, is reframed. Rather than a single end-of-unit essay, the Mindful English Teacher builds in varied tasks: creative responses, dramatic interpretations, journal entries from a character's perspective, even letters to Charlotte or Emily. These assessments are motivating because they allow student voice and autonomy; meaningful because they align closely with the text's emotional and intellectual demands; and manageable because many insights are gathered through ongoing observation and classwork. A well-timed teacher note about a student's verbal interpretation, or a photograph of a mind-map shared on the board, can be as instructive as a marked essay.

In all of this, planning becomes design: an artful, context-aware process rooted in attentiveness. The Unmindful English Teacher may still teach Brontë, but they may do so as a checklist of events and character traits. The Mindful English Teacher crafts an experience. They ask, at each stage: What is being felt here? What is being questioned? What is being learned—not just about the text, but about ourselves?

Part III: Mindful Practice in the English Classroom

Here we bring mindfulness into daily teaching life. From creative writing and student identity to behaviour and multisensory learning, these chapters offer practical ways to teach English with care, responsiveness, and imagination — without losing sight of the human heart of the work.

CHAPTER 9: TEACHING CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE WRITING

The Mindful English Teacher understands that creativity is not a bolt-on to be wheeled out for a lesson here or there; it is the spirit that should infuse all writing. Creative writing is not confined to stories and poems—it includes essays, responses, reflections, and even grammar exercises when approached with imagination. Writing that is born of the creative spirit is thoughtful, surprising, and alive. The Mindful English Teacher nurtures this by encouraging students to write often and freely, to see all writing as a place where their voice matters. In contrast, the Unmindful English Teacher sees writing as mechanical and plodding—predictable responses, tired structures, clichéd vocabulary. For them, writing is a means of assessment rather than discovery.

In my own teaching and creative life, I have experienced this contrast acutely. When I was writing *The Last Day of Term* (2011), I realised how much my writing was shaped by listening—to the rhythms of real classrooms, to the inner voices of teachers and students in crisis, and to my own uncertainties. The novel, set over the course of one day in a struggling inner-city school, is in many ways an extended meditation on what happens when creativity is squeezed out of education. The central character, Martin, is a teacher caught between survival and meaning, constantly pulled away from his creative impulses by the crushing bureaucracy of data and deadlines.

When teaching creative writing, the Mindful English Teacher begins not with form or grade descriptors but with emotion. How do students feel today? What ideas are sitting at the edges of their consciousness? What do they want to say, and how might they begin to say it? Mindfulness techniques—brief moments of stillness, attention to breath, awareness of thoughts—help students settle into a space where their imagination can emerge. Free writing, especially when timed and low-stakes, allows this creativity to flow. “Just write,” the teacher says. “Keep the pen moving. Don’t worry about grammar. Say what you need to say.”

Simon Wrigley and Jeni Smith, in their work with the National Writing Project (2012), argue that when teachers write with their

students, they develop a richer understanding of what creativity demands. Writing becomes reciprocal. The teacher is no longer the distant examiner but a fellow maker, struggling and inventing alongside the class. This shift transforms the classroom from a site of transmission to a shared creative studio. The teacher's vulnerability becomes a strength.

A classroom that celebrates creativity also allows for uncertainty and change. Students should have the right to cross things out, to change their minds, to try again. The National Writing Project's "Rights of the Writer" offers a powerful framework here, championing freedom and experimentation. According to the expanded version by the Writing For Pleasure Centre (2021), children have ten fundamental rights, including the right not to share, the right to a trusted audience, and the right to take time to think. These rights are not just helpful—they are essential for fostering a truly creative classroom. The Mindful English Teacher refers to this not as an add-on but as a way of being. "You don't have to share," they say. "But if you do, you will be heard."

To design meaningful creative writing lessons, the Mindful English Teacher often begins with the emotional and the sensory. A powerful approach is to ask students to bring in an object—something significant to them—and to describe it in free writing, then shift perspectives and write from the object's point of view. From this, stories grow. Memory returns. Imagination is activated. When students write about what they care about, their prose becomes purposeful and vibrant. This approach is explored further in *The Dark Alleyway* (Gilbert, 2016), where I argue that generating the right emotional conditions—through mindfulness, free writing, and sharing—is key to unlocking creativity in students.

A particularly relevant and still resonant report is Ofsted's *Moving English Forward* (2012), which, though over a decade old, continues to speak to contemporary concerns. It explicitly calls for English lessons that allow time for extended discussion, meaningful engagement with texts, and deeper enjoyment of literature and writing. The report cautions against the overuse of PowerPoint presentations and rushed teaching driven by coverage rather than understanding. It aligns closely with the ethos of the Mindful English Teacher, who seeks not to push through content for content's

sake but to dwell with texts, to invite thought, to foster dialogue. Giving students time to explore their ideas, both through talk and writing, reflects the best principles of English teaching, according to the report.

Assessment in creative writing must also reflect this spirit. Rather than one high-stakes task at the end of a unit, the Mindful English Teacher gathers fragments of the student's journey: a journal entry, a favourite line, a draft reworked with care. Notes taken in class, photos of a group brainstorming session, a short recorded reading—these can all form part of a portfolio that celebrates growth rather than simply measuring output. It is motivating, meaningful and manageable—for both student and teacher.

In *The Last Day of Term*, there are moments when Martin catches glimpses of what education might be. He watches a student sketching in a notebook, a quiet defiance of the lesson's routine. He remembers his own boyhood urges to write, to draw, to dream. These moments are fleeting but illuminating. They remind us that creativity, when noticed and nurtured, can bring transformation.

The Unmindful English Teacher ignores these flashes. They hand out worksheets, drill for exams, scold students for using their imagination inappropriately. They fear mess. But the Mindful English Teacher embraces the chaos of the creative process. They design lessons that are spacious enough for surprises. They trust their students to find meaning in metaphor, in rhythm, in silence.

Ultimately, creativity is not a luxury. It is the engine of thought. It is how we make sense of ourselves and others. In fostering creative writing across all areas of English—not just in story-writing units but in analytical essays, reflective pieces, reading responses—the Mindful English Teacher opens a space for freedom, for expression, for being fully human.

CHAPTER 10: IDENTITY IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

The Mindful English Teacher begins their exploration of identity in the classroom not with abstract theory but with lived experience, literature, and the rich tapestry of student voices. A powerful text that foregrounds this complexity is *The Wild Ones* by Antonio Ramos Revillas, translated into English by Clare Storey (HopeRoad Publishing, 2021). Set in an unnamed Mexican city, the novel tells the story of a group of teenage boys navigating the brutal realities of violence, poverty, and friendship. These boys are often labelled as part of a 'gang', but the Mindful English Teacher invites students to question this term: what is a gang, really? Is it merely a pejorative for young people who live outside societal norms? Or is it a term used to obscure systemic injustice?

Revillas, a writer and librarian from Monterrey, Mexico, writes with intimate knowledge of these worlds—his prose gives voice to lives that are frequently stereotyped and sensationalised. Rather than reinforcing one-dimensional portrayals of delinquent young men, The Wild Ones offers context, nuance, and interiority. The characters are vulnerable, poetic, and flawed. They are not defined solely by the violence around them but by their longing, their language, their grief, and their love. As the translator Clare Storey notes, the novel's power lies in its lyrical exploration of how young men resist dehumanisation through storytelling, bonding, and memory.

The Mindful English Teacher may not find *The Wild Ones* an easy or comfortable read, but they recognise its value. They share it with students not necessarily because they love every line, but because they know it will open up rich conversations about masculinity, class, race, nationhood, and language. The novel becomes a mirror for some students, a window for others, and a lens through which to interrogate identity. Lessons include structured dialogue, reflective journaling, and creative responses—rewriting a passage from a new perspective, composing a monologue for a minor character, or writing a letter to one of the boys in the story.

This approach embodies what the Mindful English Teacher does best: using literature not to impose answers but to open up questions.

Identity is not a fixed thing. It is fluid, situated, intersectional. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own identities, considering how their gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, age, and linguistic background shape their experience in and beyond school.

The aesthetic learner is central to this process. Unlike a 'writer ' burdened by literary expectations, the aesthetic learner approaches texts and tasks with a sense of inquiry and responsiveness. They are not afraid to experiment, to fail, to respond emotionally. The Mindful English Teacher models this aesthetic learning by engaging in the same tasks as students—writing in response to a poem, crafting a letter to a character, sharing their own experiences.

This concept is explored in more depth in my article 'Aesthetic Learning, Creative Writing and English Teaching published in Changing English '(2016). I argue that adopting the identity of an "aesthetic learner" can dissolve the fear and pressure associated with traditional notions of being a 'writer'. Instead of aiming for perfection, both teacher and student can embrace curiosity, imperfection, and growth. Writing becomes an act of exploration rather than performance.

For example, when teaching William Blake's 'London', the Mindful English Teacher writes their own version of the poem, inspired by their local streets and contemporary injustices. They talk openly about their thought processes, uncertainties, and choices. This authenticity demystifies writing and opens the door for students to explore their own poetic voices. In turn, students compare their writing to Blake's, thinking critically about form, content, and emotional resonance. Through this, they deepen their understanding of both the canonical text and their own identities.

Blake's 'London', first published in 1794 as part of his Songs of Experience, is a powerful indictment of social inequality and repression. Its critique of the "mind-forged manacles" that bind human perception offers a prescient lens for students to consider how social forces shape identity. The phrase itself is deeply mindful: it captures the ways in which rigid thought patterns, harsh judgments, and internalised oppression can imprison people mentally and emotionally. Mindfulness aims to liberate individuals from these 'manacles'—freeing them through compassion,

imagination, commitment to learning, and engagement with sensory experience in the present moment.

The Unmindful English Teacher, by contrast, may prioritise rigid interpretations, exam rubrics, and formal assessments. Their lessons focus on right answers and standardised readings, leaving little space for exploration or emotion. When identity is mentioned, it is often tokenistic. There is little room for student voice or lived experience.

But identity cannot be truly explored through a worksheet or PowerPoint alone. It must be felt, questioned, tested. Literature, when taught mindfully, offers a safe space for this exploration. Books like *The Wild Ones*, with their complex portrayals of marginalised youth, invite honest and sometimes uncomfortable conversations. The Mindful English Teacher welcomes these moments, providing scaffolding and structure without shutting down emotion or uncertainty.

As Revillas's novel shows, identity is never singular. His characters wrestle with multiple selves—the boy, the brother, the fighter, the lover, the storyteller. So do our students. So do we. The English classroom becomes a site of dialogue where stories shape and reshape our sense of who we are.

CHAPTER 11: MINDFUL MANAGEMENT OF BEHAVIOUR

One spring morning, in an inner-city classroom, a group of Year 10 students groaned collectively as their teacher wrote the words Great Expectations on the board. "Why do we have to read this boring old book?" one student muttered, loud enough to provoke a ripple of laughter. As another buried their head in their arms, the teacher, a Black woman with years of experience and quiet confidence, did not raise her voice. Instead, she took a long, slow breath. She smiled gently and said, "Let's start with what you think Pip's world has to do with your own."

She was a colleague I knew and admired deeply—a woman of colour who was a great believer in the power of literature. Observing her that day, I found myself wondering what I would have done in her position. Probably overreacted, or resorted to handing out a worksheet. But she led from a place of composure, not compliance. Her calm presence and creative approach turned resistance into curiosity.

This teacher reminded me of the reflections of bell hooks in Teaching to Transgress, where she writes about the transformative possibilities of education when it honours both intellect and

emotion. hooks—a Black feminist scholar—advocates for classrooms where all voices are heard, where discomfort is not avoided but embraced with care, and where educators lead with love, clarity, and courage. Like hooks, the teacher in this example didn't see the students 'resistance as defiance, but as a call to reframe the text, to make it speak meaningfully to their lived experiences. She knew how to identify and draw out her students 'funds of knowledge'—the cultural experiences, beliefs, and skills they already held (González et al., 2005)—and connect them to the literature. She saw beyond surface-level disengagement and invited her students to bring what they knew to the text. This ability to make the text meaningful is at the heart of effective English teaching.

She drew analogies between Pip's class aspirations and the students 'own ambitions, encouraged discussion rather than silent reading, and used paired work and scaffolded tasks to draw students into the story. Over weeks, the same pupils who had slouched and scoffed began arguing passionately about Miss Havisham and whether she deserved sympathy.

This is the heart of what I call Mindful English Teaching. It is not about enforcing rules for the sake of control, but creating an atmosphere where learning becomes possible—by attending carefully to the emotional climate of the room, and to one's own emotional state. In my book Teacher on the Run, I wrote about times when I failed to do this—when I reacted with anger and fear instead of responding with curiosity and care. When I lost connection with myself, I lost connection with my students.

The Mindful English Teacher is not a behaviourist, nor are they a pushover. They understand that effective classroom management is not about domination, but about presence, boundaries, and professional compassion. They manage themselves first—using mindfulness practices to regulate their own responses, maintain a sense of clarity, and model emotional intelligence.

Rather than striving to "control behaviour," they focus on cultivating the conditions that reduce disruption: thoughtful lesson design, emotional safety, and relevance. These teachers practice conscious breathing, listen actively, frame discipline as learning, and use affirming language. They don't react from ego or insecurity; they respond from a place of strength and stillness.

This approach is supported by robust research. Mike Bell and Geoff Petty's work on evidence-based teaching shows that punitive strategies and excessive marking are far less effective than feedback-rich, collaborative, and purpose-driven pedagogy. When students feel seen, challenged, and supported, they are more likely to engage.

Crucially, the Mindful English Teacher does not label students or themselves. They adopt a research-informed mindset: when behaviour deteriorates, they investigate. Is the task engaging? Is the language accessible? Have they scaffolded the skills? Are students clear on expectations? Is the emotional climate conducive to risk-taking and learning?

In the past, when I taught without this awareness, I would get into conflict with students like Azizur—a defiant Year 9 boy who seemed determined to sabotage my lessons. I now realise that what he needed wasn't punishment but a teacher who could stay calm, be consistent, and help him feel that he mattered. When I lost control of my emotions, I lost my ability to teach. But when I learned to manage my inner world—to pause, breathe, reflect—I began to create the kind of classroom where students like Azizur could start to succeed.

The Mindful English Teacher is not a saint. They are human, with doubts and frustrations. But they are committed to growth—for themselves and their pupils. They set boundaries with warmth. They teach with their whole selves. They make evidence-informed choices. And above all, they believe that education is not simply about control, but about connection.

CHAPTER 12: MULTISENSORY MINDFUL LEARNING IN ENGLISH

One rainy Monday afternoon, a Year 10 class slumped into their seats, groaning audibly as the Mindful English Teacher wrote *Far From the Madding Crowd* on the whiteboard. "What even is that title?" one student scoffed. "Sounds ancient." Another muttered, "We've got to read a whole novel?" A third declared, "I'll just watch the film." The Mindful English Teacher, unfazed, paused, smiled, and said: "Let's start by watching a few scenes—but I want you to notice what's missing."

The Mindful English Teacher knew their class well. They had chosen to begin the unit with key scenes from the film adaptation not because they wanted to replace the novel, but to open a door. By showing Gabriel tending sheep in silence, or Bathsheba riding a horse fiercely across the fields, they could ignite curiosity. They asked students to imagine what the characters were thinking, to guess what lines might appear in the book. When students opened Hardy's prose, it was with a sense of recognition and a little more patience. They had a framework, a mental image—and a purpose.

Using film in this way is a prime example of multisensory learning. The Mindful English Teacher understands that students engage differently with texts. They also understand that neurodiversity—our natural cognitive variation—is not a deficit but a spectrum of strengths. While some learners may be diagnosed with conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism or dyslexia, we are all, in essence, neurodiverse. Our brains process information in different ways: some think in images, others in words; some learn best through movement, others through sound.

Educational thinking about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has changed. It is no longer about identifying deficits but about recognising difference. The Mindful English Teacher uses official labels—such as Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), or SEN Support Plans—as tools for understanding students, not for confining them. They do not lower expectations. Instead, they diversify access. If a student struggles with decoding Hardy's 19th-century syntax, they offer an audio version. If another

finds long passages overwhelming, they structure shorter, scaffolded tasks, paired with images, music, or key vocabulary cards. They allow students to work collaboratively, read aloud, annotate visually, or respond through drawing, speech, or drama.

They encourage all students to discover how they learn best and help them reflect on what works for them. A student with autism might enjoy creating a timeline of events using colour-coded sticky notes. A student with dyslexia might use speech-to-text to record a response. A student with ADHD might benefit from reading while standing or walking slowly around the room. These are not remedial strategies; they are part of a responsive, flexible pedagogy that benefits everyone.

Teaching *Far From the Madding Crowd* becomes an act of co-creation. The Mindful English Teacher reads a storm scene aloud while playing background sound effects. They show contrasting passages from the novel and the film, prompting students to consider how narrative voice, symbolism, and structure are conveyed differently across media. They model curiosity: "Why do you think Hardy describes the sheep like that? What do you make of Bathsheba's choices?"

This approach draws on the concept of learners‟ 'funds of knowledge" (González et al., 2005)—the idea that every student brings valuable cultural, familial and experiential knowledge into the classroom. The Mindful English Teacher doesn't try to 'make ' students like Hardy. Instead, they find ways to connect students' existing knowledge, identities and preferences to the text, showing them they are already literary critics.

Neurodiversity, then, is not a challenge to be overcome, but an opportunity to deepen engagement and extend inclusion. The Mindful English Teacher uses multiple senses, multiple modes, and multiple pathways into learning. They plan, reflect, and adapt. They let film be a bridge, not a shortcut. And above all, they trust in their students 'capacity to make meaning, in ways as varied and rich as their minds.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 13: READING AS A RECIPROCAL PROCESS

It's a Friday afternoon and a Year 9 class is restless. The play they're reading—Willy Russell's *Our Day Out*—has failed to grip them. The Unmindful English Teacher has defaulted to an old standby: reading around the class. One by one, students stumble through lines, barely engaged. Some mutter, some giggle nervously, others zone out. A few confident readers carry the rhythm, but the rest are just waiting for their turn to be over, hoping not to mess up in front of their peers. The atmosphere is performative and uncomfortable.

Next door, the Mindful English Teacher is working with the same text. But here, students are seated in small groups. They've been assigned roles based on the Reciprocal Reading strategy—Clarifier, Questioner, Summariser, Predictor. The Mindful English Teacher moves quietly between groups, listening in as one student explains why Carol, the young girl in the play, feels desperate to escape her life. Another student asks whether the teacher in the play is doing enough to support the students on the trip. The class is alive with discussion. Each student feels involved. They've had time to prepare short scenes for performance, and as they rehearse, they reflect on how different characters speak and behave. They are not just reading the play—they are living it.

For the Mindful English Teacher, reading is not about mechanical delivery or performance anxiety. It is a deeply social, constructive process, rooted in shared experience. Drawing upon the work of Palincsar and Brown (1984), who developed Reciprocal Teaching to support students struggling with reading comprehension, the Mindful English Teacher knows that reading strategies work best when they are modelled, discussed, and practised together.

They do not see reading as a solitary decoding task, but a form of meaning-making that thrives in community. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), which argues that learners build understanding through dialogue with more knowledgeable others. The English classroom becomes a space where students help each other navigate texts, scaffold each other's thinking, and reflect on their progress as readers.

The Unmindful English Teacher, by contrast, sees reading as a performance to be endured. In their classroom, students are often put on the spot, forced to read aloud with little support. Mistakes are met with impatience. Discussion is limited to brief questions about plot or vocabulary. There is little room for imagination, improvisation or reflection. Reading becomes something students dread.

The Mindful English Teacher understands that not all students arrive at secondary school with the same relationship to reading. Some bring with them a deep love of books; others have experienced reading as a site of failure or exclusion. The Mindful English Teacher responds with curiosity, not judgment. They begin with students ʾinterests and build from there, offering a wide range of texts—graphic novels, plays, articles, poems, short stories—and encouraging personal connections and creative responses.

They know that reading for pleasure is one of the most powerful predictors of academic success (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). But they also know that pleasure cannot be forced. It must be nurtured. This might mean setting up a sustained reading project, where students choose their own books and keep reflective journals, or integrating short bursts of paired reading into every lesson. Sometimes it means reading aloud to the class—not because it's efficient, but because it creates atmosphere, models fluency, and shows that reading is a joy.

And the Mindful English Teacher reads too. They share what they're reading with their students—not just to model good habits, but to signal that reading is an ongoing, living process. They admit when they find texts challenging. They pause to ask questions. They show how their own understanding evolves.

In this way, the Mindful English Teacher embodies a key principle: that learning is reciprocal. Teaching is not about transmitting fixed meanings but about co-constructing them. As hooks (1994) reminds us in *Teaching to Transgress*, education is the practice of freedom. The classroom must be a space where everyone has a voice, where power is shared, and where knowledge is created collectively.

This is why the Mindful English Teacher avoids the deficit model. They do not label students as weak readers or reluctant learners. Instead, they ask: What can this student already do? What

insights do they bring? What might they need from me, or from their peers, to go further?

Reading, for them, is not a neutral act. It is cultural, emotional, political. It can reinforce hierarchies—or it can challenge them. That's why they choose texts thoughtfully, and teach students how to read critically: to notice who is speaking, who is silenced, whose stories are told.

And when a student resists a text—"This is boring," "I don't get it," "Why are we reading this?"—the Mindful English Teacher doesn't panic. They ask questions. They reframe the task. They change the approach. They don't feel the need to defend the canon, but to open up its possibilities.

In the end, they know this: Reading is not just about decoding words on a page. It is about learning to be human with others. It is about imagining, questioning, listening. And it begins with how we read together.

CHAPTER 14: MINDFUL WRITING PEDAGOGY

The classroom is quiet. A Year 11 group sits, not in exam rows, but in a circle. They've just finished freewriting for ten minutes in their notebooks, using the prompt: "What do you think Othello is really about?" Pens moved without stopping, some with fluid confidence, others more hesitantly. The Mindful English Teacher had offered a short meditation beforehand, helping students notice their breath, their thoughts, their nervousness. "Just write what comes," the teacher had said. "This isn't for marks. This is for you."

This approach, the students discover, frees them. It opens doors. One writes, "I think Othello is about believing lies because you're scared to ask the truth." Another: "It's about how society treats people who are different." The class discusses their freewrites in pairs, reading each other's work aloud—not to correct, but to listen. Each student offers two reflections: what they learned from their peer's writing, and what they'd like to learn more about.

This is assessment in the Mindful English Teacher's classroom: reciprocal, respectful, rooted in curiosity. It's not about marking every word, but about learning from one another, seeing writing as a process of discovery. In this space, essays don't begin with rigid structures or daunting expectations. They begin with ideas. With voice.

The Mindful English Teacher then guides students in shaping these ideas into formal essays. Using visual organisers, they help students group thoughts into themes. They model inductive and deductive reasoning, showing how you might begin with a close reading of a moment between Othello and Desdemona, and build outwards to a wider point about jealousy, power or race. They introduce different essay types—the dialectical essay, the themed essay, the evidence-based essay—not as prescriptions but as possibilities.

Peer assessment becomes an integral part of this process. With clear criteria, students read each other's drafts, responding not with grades or criticism, but with two key questions: What did you learn from reading this? What would you like to learn more about? These responses spark dialogue. They help writers see their work through

new eyes. They reduce the marking burden on the teacher while deepening the learning for everyone involved.

Throughout, the Mindful English Teacher listens. When a student says, "I don't know how to start," the teacher doesn't rush in with a formula. They ask, "What do you want to say? What struck you most?" They help the student return to their freewriting, their annotations, their conversations. They show how essays emerge not from thin air but from thinking, talking, writing, redrafting.

This process echoes James Britton's insight that "writing floats on a sea of talk." It also reflects the work of Cremin and Myhill (2012), who argue that writing develops best when teachers act as writers themselves—sharing drafts, uncertainties, revisions. In the Mindful English Teacher's classroom, writing is not a solitary struggle but a shared journey.

By contrast, the Unmindful English Teacher focuses on outcomes over process. Essay writing becomes a one-size-fits-all activity. Students are handed formulae: PEE paragraphs, thesis statements, tick-box structures. They are told what to write before they've had a chance to think. Redrafting is minimal; feedback is sparse or rushed. Writing becomes performative and stressful, not exploratory.

The Mindful English Teacher knows that writing is both private and public. It is a way of making sense of the world, of rehearsing ideas before sharing them. That's why they make space for expressive writing as well as academic writing. Journals, blogs, letters, poems, scripts—these all have a place. They help students find their voice. They show that writing is not just a task, but a practice.

And the teacher writes too. They keep a notebook. They share their struggles with drafting. They write alongside their students in workshops. This reciprocity builds trust. It shows that writing is not just taught—it is lived.

In the end, the Mindful English Teacher cultivates a classroom where writing is a mindful act: attentive, purposeful, compassionate. Where students are not afraid to begin, and not ashamed to revise. Where each piece of writing is a conversation—with the self, with peers, with the world.

Part IV: Deepening Subject Expertise Mindfully

Mindfulness calls us to re-encounter our subject — English — not as a fixed canon, but as a living conversation. In this section, we explore literature, poetry, non-fiction, film, drama, grammar and language, seeking to teach them with freshness, depth, and critical attention.

CHAPTER 15: MINDFUL ASSESSMENT, FEEDBACK AND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

It’s the end of a busy term, and Year 10 have just finished a comparative poetry essay. The room is quiet as students re-read what they’ve written. There’s a familiar anxiety in the air. They expect red pen. They expect their mistakes to be circled. They expect to be told they’ve fallen short. But something feels different today. The Mindful English Teacher smiles gently and says, "Before you hand in your work, let’s do something a little different."

Students turn to a partner and read their essays aloud. Slowly. Carefully. They’re asked to highlight one sentence they’re proud of. Then, they swap essays—not to mark them, but to respond with two reflections: "What I learned from reading this piece," and "What I’d like to learn more about." No grades. No judgments. Just thoughtful attention. One student writes, “I hadn’t thought about how structure can mirror theme—your point about enjambment taught me that.”

Another writes, "I want to hear more about your idea that the poet feels trapped. Where do you see that in the imagery?"

This is how assessment begins—not with a red pen, but with dialogue. When the Mindful English Teacher reviews the essays, they resist the urge to correct every error. Instead, they look for what's blooming: a thoughtful metaphor, a bold interpretation, a well-turned phrase. They offer short comments, questions even—"Could you take this further?" or "How else might we interpret this line?"—designed not to close a conversation, but to open it. Later, in whole-class feedback, the teacher focuses on strategies rather than scores: "Lots of you are beginning to link form and meaning. Let's practise how we can do that more precisely." The goal is growth, not grading.

Students are invited to redraft. Sometimes it's just a paragraph, revisited with fresh eyes. They reflect on their changes, often sharing their process aloud. This iterative loop, rooted in metacognition, helps them see writing not as a one-off task but a journey of refinement. As one Year 10 student puts it, "It's like I'm learning to think on the page, not just rush to the end."

This approach draws on research by Ruth Dann (2014), who writes that formative assessment should build learner identity and agency. Feedback is no longer about fixing errors, but about empowering students to see themselves as writers. When students feel ownership, they're more likely to engage deeply. They become co-assessors, not passive recipients.

The same mindful principles apply to grammar and vocabulary instruction. Rather than teaching clauses from a PowerPoint or giving decontextualised worksheets, the Mindful English Teacher embeds grammar in real texts and student writing. After reading an extract from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, students are asked: "What do you notice about her sentence structure? How does her rhythm change when she shifts tone?" One student observes, "She uses a long sentence to build emotion, then suddenly stops—like hitting a wall." Another experiments with that technique in their own work.

Grammar becomes less about rules and more about effect. When students write, the teacher doesn't swoop in to fix punctuation but instead asks them to read aloud and listen. "Where might a pause help your reader?" they ask. "What are you trying to say here?" They

trust that, over time, students will develop a stronger ear for clarity and tone. “I used to hate grammar,” one student confides. “Now it feels like I’ve got tools to say what I really mean.”

Vocabulary is treated with the same care. Students build word banks collaboratively before essay writing. They explore abstract terms like "power," "loss," or "identity" in relation to a poem or play, making links to their own experiences. New words are introduced through context—words like "ambiguous," "subversive," "juxtapose"—and then played with in poems, debates, and creative pieces. Students don’t just learn the word; they inhabit it. One Year 9 student describes the effect of this approach: “It’s like the words stick because I’ve used them to say something I care about.”

Even assessment itself becomes a site of language learning. Peer feedback is scaffolded not with vague criteria, but with prompts that encourage insight: “What’s one idea that stayed with you?” “What might you want to explore further after reading this?” This encourages peer-to-peer teaching, lowers the emotional stakes, and fosters a sense of community. Feedback becomes a shared act of learning.

Meanwhile, the Unmindful English Teacher marks quickly and harshly. Essays are returned with cursory comments: “Add more analysis,” “Explain this,” “Needs deeper insight.” Grammar is covered through weekly tests and vocabulary is drilled through rote lists. Students rarely redraft. The classroom becomes a place of performance, not process.

The Mindful English Teacher knows better. They slow things down. They understand that writing is not linear, that understanding unfolds in spirals, that learning to express oneself with clarity and confidence takes time. They treat grammar and vocabulary not as hurdles to jump but as pathways into meaning. They offer feedback not as a verdict, but as a question: What are you trying to say, and how can I help you say it better?

Above all, they remember that their students are not blank slates. They are thinkers, creators, emerging voices. The role of feedback, grammar instruction, and vocabulary development is not to correct them, but to invite them more deeply into the world of language. And through that invitation, the students begin to see themselves—not as flawed writers, but as writers in progress.

CHAPTER 16: MINDFUL TEACHING OF PRE-1900 FICTION

It's the first lesson on *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The Mindful English Teacher walks into the room, not clutching a fat workbook or reams of extracts to annotate, but a single mysterious image: a Victorian street at night, shrouded in fog. "Take a breath," they say. "Now imagine walking down this street. What do you hear? What do you see? What do you feel?" Pens are raised; free writing begins. Within minutes, students are crafting the world of the novel from the inside out—long before a single word of Stevenson's prose is read. They are already writing their way in.

In another classroom, the Unmindful English Teacher launches straight into a summary of context: duality, Victorian repression, Darwinism. Students jot definitions and dates. The novel is presented like a fossil—something to be dusted off and decoded. They haven't yet felt the chill of the fog on their skin.

Back in the mindful classroom, the teacher invites the students to generate their own ideas of what a "classic" text might be. They discuss Tupac, *The Godfather*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They begin to understand that classics are texts that endure, that trouble us, that ask big questions. Then the teacher offers Stevenson—not as something to conquer, but to converse with. One student writes, "It's like Jekyll is two people because he doesn't feel safe to be his full self. I get that."

The novel is read not in one go, nor in mechanical chapters, but in fragments that hold dramatic or emotional weight. Utterson's dream. The transformation scene. Hyde's cruelty. Each one is approached with slow reading, visualisation, sometimes performance. Students write journal entries in character—"Dear Lanyon, today I saw something that shattered me..."—or create storyboards for Hyde's first appearance. They build empathy and understanding through embodiment, not worksheets.

Language is treated as texture. When students encounter Stevenson's descriptions—"pale and dwarfish," "something troglodytic"—they are invited to mimic the voice, to write their own gothic portraits, to notice how rhythm and sound shape fear. "He trampled calmly," one student underlines. "That's such a weird

combination. How can you be calm and trample?" The class pauses. A new discussion begins.

Grammar isn't taught in isolation. The teacher uses Stevenson's sentences to open questions. What does the semicolon do here? How does the syntax shift when Jekyll is panicked? Vocabulary is gathered collaboratively, not just glossed. One Year 10 pupil reflects, "When I use Stevenson's words, my writing feels different. Like I'm playing a role. It's fun."

Assessment, too, is slow and recursive. Rather than rushing to a full essay, the class explores fragments of argument. They write analytical paragraphs in response to questions they've generated. They read each other's writing aloud, responding with: "What I learned from this" and "What I'd like to know more about." Over time, their writing develops voice, subtlety, argument. As one student says, "It feels like we're building an idea, not just answering a question."

Research supports this approach. Dymoke (2009) and Smidt (2014) show that creative engagement with difficult texts boosts not just motivation, but critical understanding. When students write in response to literature—not just about it—they internalise its rhythms and themes. They learn to inhabit it.

The Mindful English Teacher also knows that context is better felt than lectured. Rather than listing Victorian anxieties, they stage a debate: Should a respectable gentleman be allowed a private life? Is science dangerous? Can people change who they are? Students begin to realise that these are not just Victorian questions. They are our questions, too.

Visual organisers are used not as display but as tools of discovery. A relationship web shows who fears whom in the novel. A pyramid reveals how the setting creates tension. A cycle diagram illustrates the moral consequences of repression. One student's notes connect Jekyll's house with the divided self: "The front is respectable, but Hyde uses the back door. It's like pretending to be someone you're not."

By the end of the scheme, students aren't just ready to write an essay—they're ready to say something. Their analysis has grown out of personal, mindful engagement. They quote Stevenson not to tick boxes, but to pursue an idea. When they hand in their work, the red

pen is replaced with a dialogue: "What are you trying to argue? What convinced you of that?"

The mindful approach to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is not about removing difficulty. It is about making difficulty a site of curiosity and creativity. It assumes that literature is not a dead artefact, but a living conversation. And it trusts that, with time, care and mindful attention, every student can find their way into that conversation.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 17: MINDFUL TEACHING OF POETRY – A FOCUS ON BLAKE'S *A POISON TREE*

The Unmindful English Teacher begins the lesson with a directive: "We are analysing *A Poison Tree* today. Get out your highlighters. Let's identify similes, metaphors, and rhyming couplets." Students oblige, but their eyes glaze over as they underline 'I was angry with my friend'. There is little pause for thought, little space to feel the poem before dissecting it. Meaning becomes secondary to method. Poetry becomes a puzzle to solve—or worse, a formula to memorise for an exam.

Meanwhile, in the next classroom, the Mindful English Teacher walks in holding nothing but a single word: 'ANGER 'on the board. "Let's sit in stillness for thirty seconds. Think about the last time you felt anger. What did it look like? Where did you feel it in your body?" The room is quiet. Then: "Now let's write. Just free-write—whatever comes to mind." Pens begin to move. One student writes, "It's like a hot coil in my stomach." Another, "It's silent and icy. I pretend I'm fine."

Only then, once students have named and explored their own experiences, does the teacher offer Blake's poem. Not as a text to conquer, but a text to converse with. "This is what Blake wrote about anger. Let's see how it connects to your writing." The class reads aloud together. Someone notices the contrast in the first two lines. "He told his friend, and it ended. But with his enemy... it grew." Another student murmurs, "He's watering it with fears. That's weird—like he's feeding it."

The poem unfolds slowly. The teacher doesn't rush to paraphrase. Instead, they invite students to sketch what they see: a small tree growing in secret, fed with smiles and deceit, bearing bright but poisoned fruit. Others are invited to imagine a modern version—what does 'poisonous anger 'look like today? Could it be subtweets, ghosting, rumours? Through creative association, the archaic becomes contemporary.

Language is not dissected, but dwelled in. When Blake writes, "And it grew both day and night / Till it bore an apple bright,"

students are asked to speak the lines aloud and listen to the rhythm. "It sounds like a lullaby," one says, "but it's about hate." They examine the paradox: something beautiful born of wrath. Why might Blake choose that image? What does it suggest about temptation, deception, control?

Mindful grammar and vocabulary work emerges organically. The teacher invites students to notice how Blake's use of passive voice—"my foe outstretched beneath the tree"—hides the speaker's agency. Did he kill him? Or did the foe kill himself? They gather vocabulary together—wrath, wiles, veiled—and students write sentences of their own using these words. "He smiled with wiles," one writes, and laughs. "That sounds creepy." They're absorbing tone, nuance, connotation—not because they must, but because they are curious.

When it comes time to write analytically, the class doesn't start with a full comparative essay. Instead, they build it like a scaffold. First, they return to their own anger poems. Each student reads theirs aloud. Their peers respond mindfully: "One thing I learned from this," and "One thing I'd like to know more about."

Then, together, they fill a comparative grid. How does Blake use imagery to depict anger? How did they? How is Blake's structure—four quatrains, rhyming couplets—different from theirs? What is the effect of this structure? One student notes, "His rhyme makes it feel simple—like a fable—but the meaning is really dark." Another says, "My poem just spills out, his is more controlled." These aren't just observations—they're insights born of empathy and practice.

Only then do they write. Some start by explaining their own poem, then comparing Blake's. Others interweave the two. The teacher models a paragraph: "In my poem, I described anger as a silent burn. Similarly, Blake's speaker hides his wrath, but unlike mine, he lets it grow into something deadly."

Throughout, the teacher resists red-pen corrections. Instead, students read each other's drafts aloud in pairs or groups, responding as readers first, critics second. They highlight phrases that struck them, and ask questions that encourage depth: "What made you choose that word?" "Could you say more about this image?" Feedback becomes a form of dialogue, not judgement.

Research supports this approach. Dymoke (2009) and Dymoke, Lambirth & Wilson (2015) note that when students write poetry

themselves and are given space to respond emotionally as well as intellectually, their critical understanding deepens. The act of composition leads naturally to analysis because they are experiencing the same writerly choices Blake once made.

This mindful teaching of *A Poison Tree* doesn't avoid complexity—it meets it with curiosity. The moral questions at the heart of the poem—what happens when we bury our anger? Is it better to confront or conceal?—are not reduced to themes, but opened as provocations. The poem is no longer just historical, but human.

Later in the term, the teacher draws a golden thread between Blake and more contemporary poets. Carol Ann Duffy's "Havisham" offers another portrait of bitterness and rage, this time infused with betrayal and loss. Simon Armitage's "Remains" shows the long echo of trauma and guilt. Students return to their own poems and refine them: how can they capture emotion through image, through voice, through silence? They notice how Duffy's enjambment mirrors emotional unraveling, how Armitage uses plain language to devastating effect. These connections emerge not from a checklist of techniques, but from lived, writerly awareness.

Teaching poetry mindfully means teaching it backwards—experience before explanation, feeling before form. Students write their way into poetry, reflect on what works in their own words, and only then do they analyse others'. It takes time. But it's not lost time—it's invested. It builds confidence, deepens empathy, and awakens voice. And it reminds both students and teachers that poetry is not a test to pass. It is a way of seeing, of feeling, of making meaning.

CHAPTER 18: MINDFUL TEACHING OF POETIC TECHNIQUES

You begin not with a worksheet, but with a breath. The students are quiet, the blinds half-drawn, a faint light filling the classroom. You open the lesson not with a PowerPoint slide titled "Poetic Devices" but with a poem read aloud, slowly, musically, allowing each word to settle. The poem is not yet something to be analysed. It is something to be felt, sensed, lived with.

Language in poetry is not inert. It breathes, pulses, leaps. It stirs emotion before explanation. A metaphor arrives, not as a term to be labelled, but as an emotional voltage, a flare in the dark. You say: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" and the line lingers, delicate as breath on a windowpane. One student smiles. Another shifts slightly, uncertainly, as if something just passed through them. This is the space where poetry begins—not in terminology but in texture.

You ask, "What did you notice?" and the responses are tentative, human. "It sounded warm." "It made me feel like I was outside." "It's soft… but kind of strong?" No mention yet of simile or iamb. That comes later, after the body has spoken. The rhythm has already landed somewhere deeper than the conscious mind. The technique is not something to be hunted; it reveals itself when it's ready.

Now you bring in the rhythm gently. You read it again, clapping softly. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" The beat emerges—soft-hard, soft-hard—a familiar iambic rise. You do not name it yet. You ask them to walk to the line. Step forward on the stress. They begin to feel the pattern in their bones. Language becomes movement. Poetry becomes dance.

Meanwhile, the Unmindful English Teacher hands out the "Poetic Devices" sheet. Metaphor, simile, alliteration, personification. Find three examples. Underline them. The students comply. "This is a simile." "This is a metaphor." "This is alliteration." Boxes ticked. Answers completed. But no one has asked, "What does this *do*?" No one has paused to feel. Poetry, flattened into a vocabulary test.

Back in your classroom, you begin to explore metaphor more closely. You ask: What do we mean when we say "He's a bear in the mornings"? What kind of bear? What mood does that carry? What

image forms in your mind? You guide them through the structure—not as a rigid formula, but as a lens. The tenor is the person. The vehicle is the bear. The ground is what they share: grumpiness, slowness, wildness, unpredictability. You help them see that metaphor is not an ornament. It is a mode of perception. It changes the way we see what we think we already know.

You read Blake's "Laughing Song" aloud. The classroom becomes a forest of voices, green and laughing. The children clap out the rhythm, quick, bright, skipping. The poem gallops forward. You ask, "What does it feel like?" "Happy," says one. "Like a festival," says another. "Like when you're playing and you forget time," says a third. They haven't said "anapaest" yet. That will come. First they must live the poem.

Later, you introduce the term gently. You show them the foot: di-di-DUM. The light rhythm of joy. The pattern that dances behind the words. Then you bring in "The Lamb" and let the trochees fall, DUM-di, DUM-di, like soft drops of water. You ask again, "How does it feel?" The tone shifts. Slower. Tender. A hush spreads. Rhythm, now, is emotional contour.

Feature-spotting does not live here. You know that once students learn to name techniques, they become eager to prove it. "This is alliteration," they write. "This is a metaphor." But the danger is that naming replaces noticing. They label what they have not truly read. They see the signpost, not the road. You resist this. You ask them always to begin with what they felt. You model this. You say, "This line makes me pause. I feel unsettled when I read it. I don't know why yet." You show that understanding is a slow unfolding, not a sprint to the answer.

You use acronyms, but mindfully. Sometimes **DAFOREST**—which stands for Direct address, Alliteration, Facts, Opinion, Rhetorical questions, Emotive language, Statistics, and Triples—helps a student remember key persuasive techniques to look for. Or **PEE**—Point, Evidence, Explanation—offers a scaffold to structure their analytical thinking. But you also remind them that poetry, and language more broadly, cannot be reduced to letters on a grid. You invite students to invent their own acronyms, ones that reflect *their* ways of noticing, remembering, and interpreting. You ask, "What would help you unlock this poem?"—and you listen.

You talk about defamiliarization—not as a theoretical term but as a shift in awareness. You ask, "How does this poem make something ordinary feel new again?" Kafka's bureaucracy, Orwell's future, Blake's innocence—these become occasions to question reality, not just literary technique. A kettle is not just a kettle. It might be a steam-spitting beast. A classroom, not just a space, but a bear pit. You give students this freedom: to transform the ordinary with language.

At the end of the lesson, you do not return to the worksheet. You return to the breath. One more poem. One more reading. Slower this time. Everyone silent. Then you ask them to write—not an analysis, not yet. Just a response. What stayed with you? What image? What sound? What rhythm?

And as they write, there is a hush in the room. A kind of listening. A feeling that something is still echoing. That's the sound of mindful teaching. That's the moment where poetry begins.

CHAPTER 19: MINDFUL ANALYSIS OF NON-FICTION

The Unmindful English Teacher walks into the room holding a printed transcript of Martin Luther King's *"I Have a Dream"* speech. She hands out highlighters and a sheet of questions: find an example of repetition, underline a metaphor, identify the purpose of the text. She stands at the front and reads the first line flatly, without pause or breath. Then she says, "This is a persuasive text. It uses rhetorical devices. Let's spot them." The students highlight quickly. They underline "I have a dream" in every stanza. One student writes, "This is repetition. It is effective." Another writes, "The tone is hopeful." The activity is efficient. The answers are accurate. The emotional register is silent.

In another classroom, at the same time, the Mindful English Teacher has drawn the blinds and lit a quiet stillness. She holds the same speech in her hands, but not as an exercise. As a voice. As a moment. She does not begin with a worksheet. She begins with the spoken word.

"I have a dream..." she reads, slowly, letting the cadence rise and fall, letting the sound settle into the room like music. She reads with respect, not mimicry. She does not explain. She asks gently, what do you notice? One student says, "It gave me goosebumps." Another: "It made me feel lifted somehow." The teacher does not say "correct." She says, yes. Let's stay with that.

The speech is long. The Mindful English Teacher does not race through it. She reads sections aloud, returns to the words. The students listen—not to tick boxes, but to feel language working on them. She reads:

"Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice."

She lets the sentence breathe. Then she asks: what images come to mind? what sensations rise in your body? One student draws a valley. Another whispers, "It feels like climbing." The metaphor is not labelled. It is experienced.

She brings in the *who, what, where, when, why, how* chart—but not as a checklist. As a series of openings. She begins with who.

Not, "Who wrote this?" but: Who is King speaking to? Who is included? Who is left out? The answers are layered. "He's speaking to the crowd." "To white Americans." "To the future." "To his children." Now they begin to see the voice as relational, responsive, alive.

What is happening here? she asks. Not just *civil rights* but *a dream made public*, *an act of faith*, *a poetic protest*. The students begin to move beyond summary. One says, "It feels like a sermon." Another: "He's not just saying what he wants—he's making you feel it."

She plays the recording. The voice is there now—deep, rising, insistent. The students shift in their chairs. Some close their eyes. The spoken cadence brings a new dimension. One student says, "He's not reading. He's *speaking*. There's breath in it."

She pauses at:

"We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

They feel the weight of the biblical language, the unstoppable rhythm, the prophetic tone. A student says, "It sounds inevitable." Another adds, "It's like a warning. But also a promise." Now they begin to name the technique—not before they've felt it, but because they've felt it.

They come to:

"I have a dream that one day my four little children will... be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

The Mindful English Teacher asks, what do you hear in this line now, after hearing the others? One student says, "It's not just a message. It's personal. It's his fear, and his love." They do not write "King uses emotive language." They write, "This is a father speaking to a nation. This is a dream built from grief and hope."

The Unmindful English Teacher returns to the board. She writes:

Purpose = to persuade
Technique = repetition
Tone = optimistic

Students copy. Some underline a few more phrases. The lesson ends.

Back in the other room, the Mindful English Teacher brings in writing. Not an analysis essay yet. Something quieter. She asks: What stayed with you? What line echoed? What do you dream of changing? One student writes a letter to King. Another writes a monologue from the crowd. A third draws a stream and writes alongside it: *justice, flowing forever.*

Later, they will return to the structure. They will write paragraphs, explore rhetorical strategies, even sit the mock paper. But they will do so with the echo of a voice still ringing. The speech will not be flat words on a page. It will be something they *heard, felt, lived through.*

The Mindful English Teacher knows that analysis cannot begin with terminology. It begins with presence. With listening. With the silence before the words, and the breath after them. She does not teach *I Have a Dream* as a famous speech. She teaches it as an act of faith. As a living thing. As language in motion.

CHAPTER 20: TEACHING ENGLISH TEXTS USING FILM

The Unmindful English Teacher announces to the class, "We're going to watch a film version of *Frankenstein* today," and presses play. The lights are dimmed. No discussion. No questions. No notebooks open. Students slump in their chairs, watching passively, some whispering, others half-asleep. It's the Kenneth Branagh version—visually rich, emotionally heightened, and filled with gothic excess—but none of that is spoken into life. When the credits roll, the teacher hands out a sheet: "Compare the creature in the film with the one in the novel." No one writes much. Some copy from the back of the textbook. The film has washed over them. It's left no trace.

In another classroom, the Mindful English Teacher enters slowly, carrying a battered DVD case, a stack of storyboards, a basket of objects: a stethoscope, a jar of screws, a broken doll. She sets them on the desk, quietly. No film yet. Instead, she asks the class, **what kind of creature do you expect to see today?** She plays just the first ten minutes. No more. Then she stops. **Breathe. What stayed with you? What surprised you? What unsettled you?**

One student says, "He looked more human than I thought." Another, "The music felt sad, not scary." Another whispers, "I felt sorry for him. I wasn't ready for that."

They discuss what's been left out, what's been changed, and why. She plays the same scene again with the sound off. Now they focus on the light, the colour, the way the camera lingers on Victor's face, or turns away from the creature. She pauses and says, **what do you notice now that you didn't before?** They begin to see how meaning travels through more than words.

Later, she gives out sketch paper. "Draw the creature—not how he looks, but how you think he feels." One student draws a heart inside a cage. Another sketches a shadow with no face. Another draws a mirror, cracked. The room is quiet, focused, alive.

She introduces the novel again. This time, they read a section alongside the film. Not to find differences, but to ask deeper questions: **what does it mean to be monstrous? what does it mean to be made? to be rejected? to want love?**

They use a visual organiser to map Victor's and the creature's emotions. Two trees on the page—one labelled 'creation', the other 'isolation'. On the branches they write key moments. On the roots, the emotions driving those moments. One writes: "Victor creates from grief." Another: "The creature learns rejection before love."

She plays another clip. A montage of the creature learning language, reading Milton, watching a family from a distance. She pauses again. "What senses are engaged in this sequence?" A student says, "It's mostly sound. Wind. Music. No words. But I still get what he's feeling." Another adds, "It's like watching someone become human, but no one sees it."

The Mindful English Teacher does not play the whole film at once. She uses clips as invitations. She lets students storyboard their own version of key scenes. They choose the shots, the colours, the mood. She encourages them to direct. To imagine. To embody. Then they write: not an essay yet, but a monologue in the creature's voice, or a letter from Victor to Walton, reflecting on what went wrong.

In the Unmindful classroom, the film is an add-on. It fills time. It is justification for a quiet lesson. But in the Mindful classroom, the film is not an 'extra'. It is part of the meaning-making. It is a mode of learning that engages sound, movement, image, emotion. The film becomes a way in. Not a replacement for reading, but a companion to it.

Later, students in the Mindful classroom build memory boxes: small collections of objects that represent the creature's inner life. A torn page from *Paradise Lost*. A map of the Alps. A child's toy. A shard of broken glass. They present them to the class and explain each choice. Then they write about the process: *What did I understand differently by creating this? What did I learn through my hands that I hadn t noticed with my eyes?*

The Unmindful English Teacher sets an essay. *Compare the presentation of the creature in the novel and in the film*. Students Google answers. Some copy out descriptions. Others write one paragraph. There is no urgency. No curiosity. The text remains at a distance.

The Mindful English Teacher asks instead: **what happens to your sympathy when you watch the creature speak? why does the camera never show Victor watching him learn? what do we**

lose when we only read? what do we gain when we combine modes? Students answer not from habit, but from experience. They reflect. They slow down. They notice more.

They talk about their own learning. Some say drawing helped them imagine the novel's spaces more vividly. Others say they felt the creature's pain most when watching the silence in the film. One student says, "I finally understood why Victor ran. Because he saw what he made—and he couldn't unsee it."

The Mindful English Teacher knows that learning is not just linguistic. It is sensory. Spatial. Emotional. Multi-modal. And the more ways a student can enter a text, the more meaning they are likely to find there.

She ends the lesson not with a test, but with a question: **how do you learn best? how did this help you understand something you couldn't see before?**

And they write—about their process, about their discoveries, about the way that watching, drawing, speaking, and writing connect. They do not just know *Frankenstein*. They have walked through it. They have felt its cold air. They have stood with the creature in the snow.

They have learned something of themselves through another mode.

They have read with their whole body.

They have been taught, mindfully.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 21: USING DRAMA TO TEACH ROMEO AND JULIET

The Unmindful English Teacher stands at the front of the classroom with a battered copy of *Romeo and Juliet* in one hand and a stack of printouts in the other. "We're doing Act 3 Scene 1," she says. "Let's act it out." She hands out parts. The students dutifully stand, some barely audible, some giggling, some refusing. The sword fight is mimed with pencils. A desk falls over. One student does Mercutio in an Australian accent. Laughter erupts. A few students are told to sit down. The teacher sighs. "This is why we can't do drama."

When the dust settles, the class returns to their seats. "Now, write an analysis of Mercutio's death," she says. "Make sure you use PEE." One student asks what PEE stands for. Another says, "Why did he die again?" No one remembers. The moment has passed.

In another room, the Mindful English Teacher begins the lesson not with a performance, but a pause. She asks the students to close their eyes for thirty seconds. "Imagine you're in Verona," she says. "It's hot. You're angry. You've just lost your best friend, and someone you love is in danger." She waits. Then: "How would you move? What would you say?"

She opens the play not with a reading, but with a single line.
"A plague o 'both your houses!"
She writes it on the board and asks: "Say it out loud. What's happening in your body when you say that line?"
They try it. One says it with clenched fists. Another whispers it. A third shouts it with a crack in their voice. She asks them to freeze in those positions. "Hold that moment," she says. "Now—who are you? And what just happened?"

Later, she introduces hotseating. A student takes the role of Mercutio. Others ask him questions:
"Why did you draw your sword?"
"Were you afraid?"
"Did you know you were going to die?"

The answers come slowly at first, then build. The classroom shifts. The students begin to listen to the scene differently. The lines are not just poetry. They are decisions. They are feelings. They are mistakes.

When the class is ready, the teacher plays the same scene from Baz Luhrmann's film. The sound crashes. The city hums. The guns are raised. The students lean forward. One says, "I didn't realise how sudden it is." Another, "It's almost like they don't want to fight, but something pushes them."

They watch the scene again. This time, muted. They focus on movement. Body language. The tension before the violence. Then they storyboard the scene as a comic strip. Not just to 'remember what happens', but to capture expressions, gestures, decisions. A student draws Tybalt's hand trembling. Another draws Romeo frozen in shock. Another draws a rose falling into water.

The Unmindful English Teacher returns to the textbook. "Now let's do Act 4," she says. "We don't have time to act this one out." She reads Juliet's speech herself. Her voice is flat. No one is listening. A student asks, "Isn't this the part where she fakes her death?" Another shrugs. "I think so."

Meanwhile, the Mindful English Teacher gives each student a single line from Juliet's soliloquy. They repeat them softly, one after the other, like a poem passing around the room. Then they sit at their tables and shape freeze-frames using only their hands. Juliet holding the vial. Juliet reaching for the dagger. Juliet curled in dread. They annotate their freeze-frames with inner thoughts.

She asks: "If you were the director, what music would you choose? What colour would the lights be? Would she whisper the line or scream it?" One group creates a soundscape using water glasses and whispers. Another adds a ticking clock. Another uses silence.

The drama happens quietly. Thoughtfully. No rushing. No chaos. The students move from image to feeling to idea.

Then they write. Not immediately. First they discuss. They plan. They reread the lines they embodied. Then they begin: *Juliet s soliloquy becomes more powerful when we imagine her alone, lit in blue, whispering to the vial in her hand. We feel her fear not only through words, but in her stillness."*

In the other classroom, the writing begins with: "Shakespeare uses a soliloquy to show Juliet's emotions. This is effective because the audience understands what she is feeling."

The words may be similar. But one is lived. The other is filled in.

The Mindful English Teacher knows that drama does not require a stage. It requires imagination. And structure. And care.

She uses small, manageable strategies. Table-top freeze-frames. Hotseating. Drawing costumes. Creating a puppet show. Rewriting a scene as a radio play. She uses comic strip templates. Finger puppets. Paper masks. A line of dialogue printed on a slip of paper and handed to a student to carry all day, whispering it in different tones, discovering its weight.

She understands that drama is not chaos—it's a way of seeing. A way of listening with the body. She knows that Shakespeare was a dramatist. That his words live best when spoken, not just studied.

She asks her students to evaluate what they've learned after each drama activity. Not just what happened, but how it felt. What it helped them understand. What surprised them.

They begin to see the stage in their minds. They begin to move differently when they read. They start to ask questions not just about meaning, but about motive, intention, choice.

Drama, taught mindfully, is not about performance. It's about presence.

It's not about staging a play. It's about stepping inside it.

It's about standing with Romeo in the shadow of the tomb, with Juliet as she wakes, with Mercutio as he jokes his way to death.

It's about saying a single line, with your whole body, and feeling what it means to speak it.

CHAPTER 22: TEACHING SPELLING, PUNCTUATION AND GRAMMAR (SPAG)

The Unmindful English Teacher begins each lesson the same way: "Right, get out your books. It's time for the spelling test." Ten obscure words, spoken quickly, monotone. Students slump. Someone drops a pen. There's laughter, a groan. A few half-hearted guesses. A few beautifully written lists from students who already know how to spell. A few blank pages.

"What's the point of this?" one student mutters under their breath.

The teacher moves briskly on. "Now open to page 34. We're doing apostrophes today." The worksheet begins with a definition, then twenty fill-in-the-blank sentences. Most of the class guess. Some doodle. No one asks why apostrophes matter, what they mean, where they came from. The classroom is quiet, but not in a good way. The silence is flat, disconnected.

In another room, the Mindful English Teacher begins differently. She writes a word on the board:

necessary

She pauses. Looks at the class. Then says, **"Who else finds this word annoying?"** Hands go up. "Why is there a 'c 'that sounds like an 's'? What's it even doing there?"

She pulls up the Etymology Online website and models her own curiosity: "Look, it comes from Latin: *ne-*, meaning 'not', and *cedere*, meaning 'to yield or withdraw'. So something that is 'necessary 'is something you can't walk away from. No backing away. Isn't that amazing?"

Now the room is alive. Students lean in. They draw the word, underline its roots, play with its sound. They begin to own it.

Later, when students are writing their stories, one spells it wrong. Instead of red-penning it, the teacher says: "Look at what you wrote. Does that word feel right?" The student shakes their head. "Want to check it?" They do. And they remember.

The Mindful English Teacher knows that SPaG isn't something to be endured. It is something to be explored. Not a set of punishments, but a way of thinking. A kind of noticing. A form of care.

She watches how her students speak. She celebrates their dialects and home languages. Then she gently shows them how punctuation can change tone. "Try saying this without a comma," she says, writing:

Let's eat, Grandma.

Let's eat Grandma.

The room erupts in laughter. The comma lands. It has meaning now. It's not just a rule—it's a relationship.

She uses drama when teaching grammar. Students act out word classes. One becomes a noun, standing tall and naming things. Another becomes a verb, leaping across the room. A third becomes a conjunction, trying to hold everyone's hands together. The lesson is noisy, playful. But the learning sticks.

The Unmindful English Teacher, meanwhile, hands out a grammar glossary at the beginning of term. "Learn this by next week," she says. "It'll help with your writing." No one does. The sheet crumples at the bottom of a bag.

When students make mistakes in their writing, she circles them, writes "SPaG" in the margin, then moves on. The same errors appear next time. "They just don't care," she says in the staffroom.

But in the room next door, the Mindful English Teacher is building a bank of class errors. She keeps a central sheet: spelling issues, punctuation issues, grammar issues. At the start of each week, she shares the patterns. "These are the things we struggled with. Let's see if we can work them out together."

She doesn't mark every error. She circles them. Students do the work of finding, reflecting, redrafting. They're learning to see their own writing differently. They're learning how to learn.

When grammar is taught, it's always in context. They explore noun phrases in *Of Mice and Men*, noticing how Steinbeck uses *small*, *quick*, *dark* to pin down George's wiry presence. They examine verb choices in *Touching the Void*, noticing how *slid* becomes *lurched* becomes *plummeted*. They play with prepositions in their own writing: "Change *into* to *onto*—what happens now?"

The Unmindful English Teacher occasionally sets creative writing tasks, but always returns to tests. "We'll do the writing after we've finished the workbook." SPaG becomes something to master *before* expression, rather than a way *into* it.

The Mindful English Teacher flips this. Her students write all the time—for real audiences. Letters to younger pupils. Reviews of their favourite games. Newsletters for their families. She builds redrafting into everything. "You're going to be read. Make it your best."

She encourages pair reading. Students read each other's work aloud, softly. They laugh at awkward phrasing, spot missing full stops, puzzle over homophones. They talk about commas like clues in a mystery.

In a particularly effective lesson, she has her students write Macbeth revision leaflets for Year 7 students. "They're counting on you," she says. "They need you to explain what's going on—and to do it with accurate grammar and brilliant spelling." Suddenly, editing becomes purposeful. The students care. They want their ideas to land.

They begin to see SPaG as a set of *choices*, not constraints. Punctuation becomes musicality. Grammar becomes architecture. Spelling becomes history, culture, memory.

When the lesson ends, she asks:

What did you notice about your writing today?
Where did your grammar help you say something more clearly?
What errors are you beginning to catch yourself?

And they answer—not with grammar labels, but with insight.

"I always forget capital letters in dialogue," says one. "I mix up 'they're 'and 'their 'when I write fast," says another. "I used to hate commas, but now I get that they're about rhythm," says a third.

And the teacher smiles, because this is grammar not as punishment, but as *possibility*.

CHAPTER 23: TEACHING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE MINDFULLY

The Mindful English Teacher knows that many students meet Shakespeare's language with a mixture of awe and fear. The words sound familiar, but feel slippery. Some lines shine with clarity; others tangle and thicken. It is not enough to tell students that Shakespeare's English is 'beautiful 'or 'poetic'. They need to understand it. And more than that—they need to feel that it is theirs to play with, pull apart, explore.

Rather than beginning with difficult scenes, she begins by grounding the students in the world of the play. She offers a clear, engaging summary of the plot, sometimes asking students to storyboard or map the events in small groups, narrating them aloud as though they are campfire tales. She invites them to explore the characters 'motivations and relationships—who is jealous, who is loyal, who is in love or afraid—and then slowly, gently, she introduces the language.

She chooses a short, manageable speech. Perhaps Juliet's balcony soliloquy, or the first time Hamlet speaks to the audience. She does not simply hand it out. She explains the moment: where it is in the play, what's at stake, what has just happened, what is about to happen. She reads it aloud once, slowly, without interpretation. Then again, stopping at key phrases. She does not ask, "Do you understand?" but instead asks, **"What do you notice? What confuses you? What images leap out?"**

Then she invites them to translate it—not as a chore, but as an act of creative intimacy. "How would this character speak if they were here, in this room, right now?" she asks. "What would they say in your voice?" Students begin by underlining difficult words, using glossaries and tools like David Crystal's *Shakespeare s Words* to find meanings. The teacher reminds them that 'owe 'once meant 'own'; that 'soft! 'means 'wait!'; that Shakespeare's words were never static, always alive.

The process becomes detective work, translation, and reimagining. Some students keep close to the text. Others move further from it. She encourages both. "Try rewriting this for your own time," she says. "What would Juliet text to Romeo?" One group

reworks a scene into WhatsApp messages. Another recasts *As You Like It* as a breakup story in a sixth form common room. The teacher smiles. "It doesn't have to be faithful. It has to be alive."

She knows that translating Shakespeare demands more than understanding—it demands decision-making, empathy, and voice. So after the translations are written, she invites performance. Not polished theatre, but seated readings, radio-style voice-overs, puppet shows with drawn masks. Students giggle, rehearse, revise. In groups, they try different tones: angry Romeo, sarcastic Mercutio, nervous Juliet. Through these choices, the language becomes personal.

She asks the class to reflect: **"What choices did you make? Why? What changed when you said the lines out loud?"** Students write short commentaries, some tentative, some bold. One admits: "I didn't understand it until I had to say it like I meant it." Another says: "I didn't know it could sound like me."

Later, they write. Some write analytical reflections—essays titled *Translating Shakespeare"*, exploring how they approached the text, what they altered, and why. Others write informative leaflets—*How to Translate Shakespeare Without Losing Your Mind*—and share their tips with next year's class. Some write impassioned speeches, arguing whether Shakespeare should be modernised at all. The teacher shares her own story: how she was once criticised for adapting *The Tempest* with her Year 10s. "They said it wasn't real Shakespeare," she tells them. "But it felt more real to us than anything."

The Unmindful English Teacher, meanwhile, tells her students, "We're reading *Macbeth*. It's in old English, but don't worry, we'll get through it." She hands out copies, assigns parts, and asks students to read aloud from their seats, stumbling through unfamiliar words without support. When a student looks up, puzzled, she says, "It just means he's confused." They move on. Later, she sets an essay: "Analyse the language in Lady Macbeth's soliloquy." No one mentions what it felt like to speak it. The words remain at a distance.

Back in the mindful classroom, the work continues. Some students adapt their translations into comic strips, complete with thought bubbles and stage directions. Others film their scenes, choosing costumes, backgrounds, and music. They discuss whether

Romeo should wear a hoodie or a school tie. Whether the Capulets drive Range Rovers or own a corner shop. They make choices. They shape meaning. They make Shakespeare their own.

And at the end of term, the teacher invites a debate: **"Modernising Shakespeare—sacrilege or saviour?"** The arguments fly. "He'd have loved TikTok," says one. "No way," says another. "It ruins the rhythm." They quote lines, parody monologues, and write persuasive speeches. The words of a sixteenth-century playwright echo through twenty-first-century voices.

The Mindful English Teacher watches and listens. She knows they have gone beyond comprehension. They are playing with the language now. Wrestling with it. Living inside it. And as they do, they are becoming more confident readers, bolder writers, more curious speakers. Not because they were taught the answers, but because they were given the freedom—and the structure—to explore.

She ends the unit with a final reflection:

"What did you learn about Shakespeare's language? What did you learn about your own?"

The students write slowly, thoughtfully. Some write of new words. Others of old ones. Some write about their dialect, their family's speech, the poetry of their everyday language. One student writes:

"Before, I thought Shakespeare was for other people. Now I think maybe it's for all of us."

And the teacher, quietly, agrees.

Part V: Towards a Mindful Decolonised Curriculum

To teach mindfully is to teach critically. This section invites us to examine the colonial legacies of English curricula, to listen for silences, and to create more expansive, inclusive classrooms. It is a call to humility, complexity, and hopeful transformation.

CHAPTER 24: DECOLONISING ENGLISH THROUGH MINDFUL PEDAGOGY

The Unmindful English Teacher begins the lesson on *Oroonoko* with a factual monologue. "Behn wrote this in 1688. She was a pioneer. The novel is important because it's anti-slavery." There is no interrogation of that claim. No space for discomfort, no recognition that Behn was not only critiquing slavery, but was also deeply implicated in its aestheticisation. The students are told, in clipped tones, that Oroonoko is "noble," that Imoinda "dies tragically," and that Behn "gives voice to the enslaved." There is no room to ask whose voice is being heard—or not heard—and on what terms. The students read silently. They fill in worksheets on literary techniques. "Find a metaphor," the sheet says. "Underline an example of emotive language." Oroonoko's mutilated body becomes a textual feature. His rebellion a plot point. The story is colonised once more—flattened, instrumentalised, and extracted.

In the Mindful English Teacher's classroom, the same text is approached with a very different spirit: not as a monument, but as a site of tension, excavation, and urgent dialogue. She opens with a question rather than a claim:

"Can a story written by a white English woman in 1688 about an African man's enslavement ever be truly anti-slavery?"

And a second:

"What happens when the coloniser tells the story of the colonised?"

She invites her students not to praise or dismiss Behn, but to examine the complexities—linguistic, political, emotional—of the text with care and with critique. She doesn't treat *Oroonoko* as a neutral artefact. She treats it as a colonial text—because it is—and she teaches it as such.

The lesson begins not with a glossary, but with a moment of breath. The students are asked to sit, close their eyes, and imagine a voice narrating their story—beautifully, eloquently—but never letting them speak. "How would that feel?" the teacher asks. "What

would it mean for your story to be told without your permission, even with great sympathy?"

From here, the class begins to read.

They do so slowly, aloud, in fragments. They pause to question tone, syntax, framing. "Why does Behn describe Oroonoko's skin before his words?" one student asks. "Why does she compare him to marble and statues?" another notes. The Mindful English Teacher draws their attention to what Frantz Fanon called **"epidermalisation"**—the process by which Black bodies are transformed into symbols and surfaces, stripped of interiority, used as mirrors for white identity.

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* is introduced not as a theoretical afterthought but as a framework for reading. "Fanon said that the Black man is not only seen, but seen *through*," the teacher explains. "What if Behn's admiration is not liberation—but possession?"

The students begin to sense the slippages in the text. Behn's voice, so fluent and persuasive, becomes unstable under their gaze. They notice the colonial aesthetic—how Oroonoko is made 'palatable 'through classical comparisons, how Imoinda's silence preserves the narrator's dominance. "She tells us she's on his side," one student says, "but she never lets him speak for himself." The teacher affirms this insight. "This is what postcolonial critics mean when they talk about **narrative colonisation**," she says. "Even stories meant to critique empire often replicate its logics."

The students don't leave the lesson with answers. They leave with better questions.

Later in the week, they return to the text to write. But before they do, the teacher asks them to read a short passage from Fanon again—this time from *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country s cultural standards."

"How does Behn measure Oroonoko's worth?" the teacher asks. "How much of her admiration depends on how well he performs whiteness?" The class is silent. Then a hand goes up: "She calls him a prince, but only after she calls him 'handsome', 'European ' looking. He's heroic, but only in ways she recognises."

From here, the students set their own goals:
Reading goal: *To unpick how colonial language masks itself as admiration.*
Writing goal: *To analyse Behn s voice using postcolonial concepts.*
Spoken language goal: *To explain the tension between sympathy and power in narrative.*

Some students write critical essays, reflecting on the paradoxes of colonial authorship. Others write creative monologues from Imoinda's perspective, rewriting her silence into speech. A small group creates a podcast exploring how *Oroonoko* anticipates and contradicts abolitionist rhetoric, drawing on Fanon, Said, and Toni Morrison. One student, working quietly, draws a comic strip that reimagines the novella's final scene—not from the narrator's eye, but from the eyes of a Surinam servant, watching silently.

This is decolonial pedagogy in practice: not tokenistic additions, not surface-level diversity, but a fundamental shift in the *relationship* to the text. The Mindful English Teacher does not treat *Oroonoko* as a universal narrative or a moral parable. She treats it as a product of its time—*and* as a living document, still shaping how we imagine race, suffering, authorship, and beauty.

She encourages students to reflect on their own positions:
"Who has the right to tell which stories?"
"What stories do you see repeated in today's media, and who gets to speak?"
"What does it mean to study a text critically *and* compassionately?"

She does not allow the classroom to become a court—but nor does she allow it to become a museum. The learning is alive. It breathes.

By the end of the unit, students are not only more skilled readers. They are more *conscious* readers—aware of power, of silence, of narrative control. They have been invited not to simply inherit literature, but to interrogate it. They understand that a text like *Oroonoko* is not simply a relic of a racist past—it is also a window into the lingering structures that shape our present.

The Mindful English Teacher has not "decolonised" the curriculum with a single gesture. She has, instead, committed to teaching with a decolonial **ethic**: one of humility, critique, historical

awareness, and student voice. Her goal is not to shame the canon, but to question the conditions of its authority—and to give students the tools to do so for themselves.

And in doing so, she creates something more than a lesson. She creates a space where literature is no longer an inheritance of empire but a conversation about liberation.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 24: TEACHING CHALLENGING POETRY MINDFULLY

The Unmindful English Teacher begins the lesson by announcing that they'll be looking at the poet Benjamin Zephaniah, introducing them with the phrase "a performance poet who writes about issues like racism and refugees." There is no context provided—no biography, no sense of Zephaniah's activism, political commitments, or decision to reject the OBE. A video of the poem 'The British 'is played without preamble. The class responds with some laughter at the poem's list of ingredients, and a few comments are made about the poet's energy and performance style. The teacher affirms these responses as signs of engagement and moves swiftly on.

Students are given a worksheet and asked to find examples of metaphor and repetition. They are told to answer the question "What is the message of this poem?" in one or two sentences. Most answers mention diversity or multiculturalism. One says "Britain is made of different people," another says "He's using food to describe the UK." The teacher accepts these surface-level interpretations without pressing further. There is no discussion of satire, colonial history, or the dangers of simplistic metaphors for national identity. No one mentions the deliberate recipe structure or the poem's sharp final warning about volatility.

A second poem, 'We Refugees', is handed out. It is read once by a volunteer. The class is then asked to "write a poem about something they care about." Several students write rhyming poems about bullying, littering, or exams. There is no structured reflection, no invitation to discuss tone, voice, or strategy. There is no mention of who the "we" in We Refugees includes, and no opportunity to notice or reflect on what might be absent. The poetry is presented as expressive but not political, powerful in delivery but not necessarily in content. The session ends with the teacher asking for volunteers to read their poems aloud. Some do. Others do not. The lesson moves on.

In contrast, the Mindful English Teacher begins not with the text, but with a question written carefully on the board: who belongs? Students are invited to respond in writing, quietly, and then to share

in pairs. There is no rush. The teacher walks the room slowly, listening to fragments of conversation, gently prompting where needed. Some students speak about borders. Others speak about language and names. One mentions citizenship tests. Another shares a story about being asked where they are "really" from. The teacher notes these contributions with care and ensures that they are heard.

The lesson begins with 'We Refugees'. The teacher offers a brief context: Zephaniah's work as a poet and activist, their rejection of the OBE, their long-standing resistance to racism and injustice. The poem is read aloud, not once but twice—first silently, then in pairs. Students annotate as they read, underlining lines that move or unsettle them. The teacher asks, not what is the message, but how does this poem want us to feel? How does it shift us? They talk about the change in tone—from lyrical to stark, from beautiful to brutal. One student notes how the poem begins with music and ends with violence. Another observes the way the repeated "no one is safe" opens up fear and solidarity at the same time.

Next comes 'The British'. The teacher invites students to enjoy the humour, but then slows them down. What is this poem doing with its list of ingredients? What does it mean to mix cultures like a recipe? And what does the final line—its warning about handling with care—imply? Students begin to speak more critically. One says, "It sounds like celebration at first, but it's also fragile." Another adds, "It's saying this isn't just something to be proud of—it's something that could fall apart."

Then the teacher asks students to look again. Is anyone missing? A few scan the poem more closely. One raises a hand and points out that Jewish people are not mentioned in the list. The teacher affirms the observation calmly and carefully, and opens a quiet discussion. Why might this omission matter? How can a poem that celebrates inclusion still exclude? They consider the idea that even texts written in solidarity can contain gaps. One student suggests that lists always leave someone out. Another says, "Maybe the poem is asking us to think about who we forget."

The teacher gently introduces the idea of "strategic inclusion and accidental omission," encouraging students to read critically but also compassionately. There is no rush to blame or excuse. Instead, the classroom becomes a space to sit with complexity—to acknowledge

that even radical voices are shaped by context, by limitation, by what is seen and what is not.

To expand the conversation, the teacher introduces Refugee Blues by W. H. Auden. This poem, written in 1939 from the perspective of a Jewish refugee in Europe, provides a powerful counterpoint. Students note the contrast in tone and form: where Zephaniah's poem is direct, urgent, and collective, Auden's is lyrical, mournful, and deeply personal. One student observes that Auden's speaker seems more isolated, more silenced. Another says that Zephaniah's poem calls for action, while Auden's invites reflection. The comparison brings new insights to both texts. Students begin to see how different poetic strategies shape meaning and emotion in different ways.

The lesson ends not with a task but with reflection. Students are asked to write briefly: what challenged you today? What changed in your thinking? What did you notice that you hadn't noticed before? Some write about the power of comparison. Others reflect on the question of voice and absence. A few write new stanzas or letters in response to the poems, imagining who else might be included, or how the poems might be expanded.

In this classroom, poetry is not decoration or entertainment. It is a way of asking questions that do not have easy answers. It is a way of paying attention—to language, to power, to each other. The Mindful English Teacher does not present themselves as the authority on meaning but rather as a co-inquirer, someone who is also listening, noticing, and learning. The omission of Jewish people from The British is not ignored, nor sensationalised. It becomes part of the work of reading: slow, generous, alert. This is what it means to teach protest poetry as part of a decolonising pedagogy—not just by diversifying content, but by creating conditions where students can encounter texts as complex, living documents, and where their own responses are welcomed with curiosity and care.

CHAPTER 25: MINDFUL TEACHING OF COMPREHENSION SKILLS

In the classroom of the Unmindful English Teacher, comprehension is treated as a box-ticking exercise. After reading a chapter or poem, students are handed a worksheet filled with closed questions. These questions ask for retrieval of detail or the simplest form of inference—"What happens after the character leaves the room?" or "What is the mood of the poem?" Once the sheets are completed, the teacher collects them in, marks them at speed, and hands them back with ticks and crosses. Some students receive comments such as "Good" or "More detail needed." Others are told "Try harder" or simply see question marks in the margins. There is no space for dialogue, no reflection, no sense of growth.

When students ask how to improve, the answer is vague. "Look at the model answer," the teacher says, or "Just read it again carefully." The purpose of the task remains unclear. Students begin to see comprehension as a guessing game, not a skill to develop.

They read for the right answer, not for understanding. There is no discussion of reading goals, no encouragement to set intentions or reflect on how their thinking is changing. Peer feedback, if attempted, is chaotic or perfunctory. Comments are shallow—"Good job," or "You missed a bit"—and no time is given to revise the work. Comprehension becomes passive, mechanical, disconnected from the actual experience of reading.

By contrast, in the classroom of the Mindful English Teacher, comprehension is approached as a dynamic and developmental practice. Before reading begins, students are encouraged to set goals. These might be as simple as "I want to be able to explain what this poem is really about in my own words," or "I want to understand how the writer uses language to create mood." These goals are discussed briefly with peers or jotted down in notebooks. The reading then begins with quiet focus, followed by structured dialogue in small groups. Students are encouraged to ask questions, make predictions, and listen to each other's interpretations before writing anything down.

After reading, the teacher sets a comprehension task that requires transformation of knowledge rather than mere retrieval. Students are asked to summarise the poem's central argument in a single sentence or to create a visual map of a character's internal conflict. They might write a reflective paragraph explaining how their understanding of the text has shifted after group discussion. When peer feedback is introduced, it is framed through the "medal and mission" approach. Students are reminded to offer one specific medal—something that worked well in the response—and one mission—something that could be improved or deepened. For example, "Your summary captures the character's main feelings clearly—medal. Your explanation of why they feel that way could be extended—mission." These comments are written in calm tones, shared respectfully, and then used to guide redrafting.

The teacher models how to give this feedback by reading anonymised examples with the class and showing how to respond with clarity and care. Comprehension becomes an active process of making sense, not just answering. The teacher checks in on reading goals again. "Did you reach your goal today? What helped? What was difficult?" Students begin to reflect on their own reading

behaviours and what strategies support their understanding. Note-taking and summarising are taught explicitly, often through shared writing. The teacher will write their own summary on the board and then model revising it—removing what is inessential, clarifying key points, distilling the meaning without flattening the text. Students try this themselves, sometimes in graphic organisers, sometimes in free writing, and then compare their approaches.

The room is filled with a sense that comprehension is not about correctness but about insight. Students are learning to notice how they read, to trust their developing voices, and to listen to the voices of others. The feedback process becomes not a judgment but a conversation, not a ranking but a relationship. The Mindful English Teacher does not assume comprehension has taken place just because an answer has been written down. They understand that comprehension is an unfolding process, one that requires attention, questioning, and the confidence to revise and reframe.

The difference between the two classrooms lies not just in methods but in values. The Unmindful English Teacher sees comprehension as something to be tested. The Mindful English Teacher sees it as something to be nurtured. One marks answers. The other grows readers.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 26: MINDFUL TEACHING OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

In the classroom of the Unmindful English Teacher, media analysis means finding a newspaper article, printing it off, and handing it out. There is no discussion of why the article was chosen or whether the topic has any relevance to students 'lives. It might be an editorial on housing policy or a broadsheet column about generational values—dense, abstract, and pitched to an imagined adult audience. Students read it in silence and answer comprehension questions at the bottom of the page: "What is the writer's main point?" "Find a rhetorical device." "Do you agree with the argument?" The questions are predictable, and so are the responses. Some students guess. Others write vague phrases like "This is persuasive because it uses facts." A few don't write anything at all.

When they finish, the teacher reads out the answers, perhaps putting a model on the board. No dialogue follows. The text remains static, its meanings sealed. The article is never situated in time, place, or power. No attention is paid to how students read differently, what they bring to a text, or how their perspectives might illuminate its deeper contradictions. Reading is solitary. The only goal is correct analysis.

By contrast, the Mindful English Teacher selects an article based on conversations overheard in the corridor, topics brought up during tutor time, or stories mentioned by students themselves. In one class, there's been heated discussion about influencer culture and body image. The teacher chooses a recent article from *The Guardian* exploring the rise of TikTok cosmetic trends and their impact on self-esteem among teenagers. The article is vivid, contemporary, and ethically complex.

Students are placed in small groups, and before they even begin reading, they are asked to discuss a simple question: who shapes how we see ourselves? One student mentions family, another says "the algorithm," a third refers to celebrities. The teacher explains that they'll be using **reciprocal reading** to explore the article—each group member will take on a role: the predictor, the clarifier, the summariser, and the questioner. They rotate roles as they read each paragraph. The predictor wonders what the article might focus on

next. The clarifier helps define the term "digital dysmorphia." The summariser restates the central point. The questioner asks whether the article assumes too much about what young people think.

Students annotate as they go, circling emotive phrases, identifying the tone of the writer, underlining sources and statistical evidence. When they pause, the teacher models a think-aloud strategy. They say: "I'm noticing how the writer begins with a personal anecdote before moving into analysis—what effect does that have on me as a reader?" They encourage students to monitor their understanding. "If you hit a paragraph and lose track—stop. Reread. Talk it out."

The class then moves into **dialogic discussion**. Students reflect in groups: "What voices are present in the article? Which ones are missing?" A student points out that no actual teenagers were interviewed in a piece about teenagers. Another student links the article to their own experience of feeling anxious about their image online. Another brings up the difference between US and UK influencers, and the group considers cultural framing. The teacher does not dominate. They prompt with questions that extend thought rather than conclude it: "Why might the journalist begin this way?" "Who is the audience?" "What's the purpose, and how do you know?"

Later in the week, the teacher brings in a second article on a similar theme but from a different publication—this time a *Daily Mail* piece warning about the dangers of online platforms corrupting youth. Students use a **comparison chart** to trace tone, headline structure, use of images, and persuasive techniques. This is **teaching through similarities and differences**—not simply to spot devices, but to think critically about how language positions readers.

One group notices the way the Mail article uses words like "epidemic" and "vulnerable youth," which paints teenagers as passive victims. Another group discusses the layout: how one article uses clinical data and quotes from experts, while the other relies on anecdote and rhetorical questions. The comparison becomes a springboard for meta-cognition: how do we read when we agree with a writer? When we don't? Who do we trust? Why?

Finally, the class engages in **peer tutoring**: students work in pairs, taking turns to explain the core argument of each article and

the devices used. They give one another feedback using a version of the medal and mission structure—"One strength of your summary is how clearly you identified the shift in tone. One suggestion is to think more about how the images shape reader response."

The Mindful English Teacher closes the lesson by asking: "What helped you understand this article better today? What was hard, and what strategies did you use to work through it?" Students write short reflections: "Predicting helped me stay engaged." "Talking it through with someone made me realise I had misread a key line." "I didn't realise how much a headline can shape how you feel before you've even read the first sentence."

Media analysis becomes not a box-ticking exercise but a practice of critical consciousness. Students are learning not just how to identify persuasive devices but how to resist them, to question the source, to track the emotion, to seek the silenced voice. The Mindful English Teacher does not simply "teach the media"—they teach how to read it with awareness, rigour, and care. And in doing so, they help their students become not only better readers, but freer thinkers.

Part VI: Ending Mindfully

How we close lessons, assess learning, and reflect on progress matters as much as how we begin. In this final section, we explore mindful endings — ways to conclude with clarity, celebration, and compassion — leaving students, and ourselves, with a deeper sense of purpose and growth.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 27: MINDFULLY ENDING LESSONS

The Unmindful English Teacher reaches the end of the lesson without really noticing. Time has slipped away in a blur of disconnected tasks and last-minute explanations. As the bell rings, there is a hasty instruction—"Finish the worksheet for homework!"—followed by the usual warnings about behaviour in the corridor. No time is left for reflection. Students gather their things in a rush, unsure what they've just completed, unclear about why they did it, and with no sense of how today's lesson connects to anything else. Homework feels like a chore, often an afterthought: "Write a paragraph" or "Revise what we did today." There is no curiosity, no invitation to take ownership, no link to what matters to them. The lesson has simply… ended.

In the classroom of the Mindful English Teacher, endings are not accidental. They are designed with as much care as beginnings. As the final minutes approach, the teacher slows the pace, not to cram in more information, but to give students space to breathe and think. In one lesson on protest poetry, students are asked to return to the goal they set at the beginning—perhaps "to understand how repetition builds emotion" or "to explore different perspectives on justice." Quietly, they write a few lines reflecting on their progress. Some find they've met their goal; others haven't, and that's fine too. The emphasis is not on success, but awareness. The teacher says, "It's okay to still be working it out—what helped today? What might help next time?"

In another class, the Mindful English Teacher uses the final five minutes for paired reflection. Students turn to a partner and share something they've learned—something surprising, something confusing, something they want to remember. One student might say, "I hadn't thought about how metaphors can be dangerous as well as beautiful." Another says, "I realise I need more time to get into reading aloud." These conversations are brief, but they are deliberate. They return the student to themselves as a learner.

Homework is not framed as an obligation but as an extension of thought. After exploring a character's inner conflict, students are invited to choose a creative response: write a diary entry from the

character's perspective, sketch a symbolic object from their world, or record a short voice note explaining their decision-making at a key moment. The teacher offers choices, knowing that different students will connect with different modes. "Think about how you best express yourself," they say. "Use that." The homework is not "more work"—it is more *you*.

Sometimes the lesson ends with a brief mindfulness practice—a closing breath, a silent gratitude for what was discovered, even a moment of shared stillness. One class, reading *Frankenstein*, ends with a simple question: "What does it mean to be made?" Students write their answers quietly on slips of paper as the room falls into a thoughtful hush. They leave slowly, still turning the idea over in their minds.

In these classrooms, endings are not endings. They are invitations—to continue the conversation, to carry the learning into the corridor, into the walk home, into the next page of a journal. The Mindful English Teacher does not see the bell as a boundary, but as a bridge. Learning is not switched off at 3.15. It lingers. It echoes. It grows.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 28: ASSESSING STUDENTS ' READING SKILLS MINDFULLY

In the classroom of the Unmindful English Teacher, students are told to read quietly. They may be handed a novel or nonfiction article and given a set of comprehension questions to complete in silence. There is little attempt to find out how students feel about reading, what strategies they use to make sense of a text, or what they already know about the topic. When students struggle, the assumption is often that they are simply not good readers. The teacher may move on quickly, skipping over the challenge, or might offer superficial support—telling the student to "read it again" or to "use a dictionary." The teacher assumes that reading is a neutral activity: that all students decode, comprehend and engage in the same way, regardless of background, reading level, or emotional relationship to text.

There is no visible assessment of reading skills beyond test scores or comprehension answers. The teacher might mark a worksheet, noting whether answers are right or wrong, but offers no meaningful feedback on *how* the student approached the reading, what they found difficult, or what strategies they could try next time. Reading becomes a closed system—something to get through, not something to explore. And because students are never taught to reflect on their reading habits, they never think to question what is or isn't working for them.

By contrast, in the Mindful English Teacher's classroom, reading is not a single act—it is a rich, complex and self-aware process. When students begin a new text, the teacher might begin by offering the **reading strategies checklist** as a reflective tool—not a test, but a mirror. Students are asked to pause and consider: what do I already do as a reader? What happens in my head and my body when I start a new book? Am I the kind of reader who skims, who rereads, who imagines, who questions? Students complete the checklist and then have time to write or talk in pairs about what they noticed about themselves. For many, it is the first time they have ever considered the act of reading as something with depth and individuality.

The teacher then models how to use the checklist to *grow*. In a Year 9 class reading Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses*, a

student says they rarely picture what's happening. Another says they never reread a sentence, even when confused. The teacher introduces a reading journal, asking students to jot down what helps and what hinders their understanding. Students are encouraged to set specific goals: "I want to get better at working out unfamiliar words," or "I want to understand how the structure of a text shapes meaning."

In a Year 12 class studying George Orwell's *Politics and the English Language*, students annotate a dense paragraph together. The teacher asks, "What strategies are you using to make sense of this?" One student says they're focusing on conjunctions to track the argument. Another says they're chunking long sentences. The teacher affirms these strategies and adds their own: "Sometimes I rephrase it out loud to check if I've really understood." This becomes a class norm—*talking about reading while reading.*

Midway through the unit, the Mindful English Teacher sets up a case study. Each student chooses a short story or article and works through it using the checklist, keeping a log of their process. They record what helped them understand, where they stumbled, what techniques they tried, and what they want to try next. The teacher reads these journals not to mark them but to understand how their students are experiencing reading. They use this insight to adapt future lessons. A group struggling with inference might be given scaffolded texts with visual supports. Another group might thrive with reciprocal reading, taking turns as summariser, questioner, and clarifier.

Reading is no longer an invisible skill—it is visible, shared, personal, and social. In plenary discussions, the teacher invites reflection: "What did you learn about yourself as a reader today?" "What surprised you?" "What will you do differently next time?"

The checklist is never used in isolation. It is part of a system of **dialogue**, **goal-setting**, **peer support**, and **mindful attention**. It works because the classroom values process over product, growth over perfection. And because students are treated not as vessels to be filled, but as readers already in motion—curious, capable, and full of possibility.

Francis Gilbert

CHAPTER 29: TEACHING TERMINOLOGY MINDFULLY

In one Year 9 class, the Mindful English Teacher gently introduced students to the concept of narrative structure using a story that already held emotional weight for them—an autobiographical extract by a young refugee, shared in a recent anthology they had read. Before even mentioning terminology, the teacher asked students to talk freely in small groups about what they noticed about the shape of the story—where things felt calm, where they became tense, where a turning point occurred. As students shared their ideas, the teacher listened closely, making a point of modelling back their words using terms like "complication" and "climax," not in a corrective way but as a way to gently expand the students' vocabulary. The students were then invited to experiment with applying these terms to their own narratives, or to short stories they had read recently. The terminology became a tool for understanding something already meaningful, rather than a test to pass.

In contrast, an Unmindful English Teacher in a neighbouring class taught the same terms using a worksheet of definitions to copy, followed by an exercise that asked students to match the terms to a simplified version of *Cinderella*. There was little discussion or invitation to reflect; the focus was on memorisation. Students who were unsure stayed silent, while the most confident raced ahead. When asked to apply the terms to a scene in Of Mice and Men, some students struggled, not because they couldn't think about the shape of the story, but because the language felt alien and disconnected from their natural way of responding.

With another class reading *Romeo and Juliet*, the Mindful English Teacher guided students in exploring dramatic irony not just as a device, but as a human experience. Students first reflected on times they had known something someone else didn't—what it felt like to hold that knowledge, and what emotions came with it. The teacher then drew a line to the prologue of the play, where the audience learns the lovers will die, but the characters do not. Students discussed how this made them feel and why Shakespeare might want us to experience those emotions. Dramatic irony became

not just a literary term but an ethical and emotional question: what is the responsibility of knowledge?

For a unit on figurative language, students began with abstract art and free association, linking colours and shapes to feelings and memories. Only later did the teacher bring in metaphors and similes from the texts they were reading, encouraging students to find their own ways of describing what an image made them think and feel. They discussed how metaphors shape our thinking, and how language can both reveal and obscure truth. One student, working with images in Zephaniah's poetry, wrote about how a single metaphor made them feel "seen in a way school books usually don't." Figurative language, in this context, became not just about identifying a technique but about personal resonance and connection.

In an Unmindful English lesson focused on the same texts, figurative language was approached through a rigid acronym—Technique, Example, Effect—with students instructed to spot a simile and write a sentence describing its "effect on the reader." The exercise created a sense that there was one correct answer, and some students grew anxious when their interpretations didn't match what they thought the teacher wanted. The emotional, sensory, and imaginative potential of the figurative language was reduced to a formula.

When exploring themes, the Mindful English Teacher took care to emphasise their complexity. Reading Steinbeck's portrayal of loneliness and powerlessness, students discussed what the story revealed about their own world—about exclusion, dreams, and moral choices. The word "theme" was introduced as a way of capturing these big ideas, not a hurdle to jump. They were encouraged to find their own words for the themes, and only later aligned these with more traditional vocabulary.

To support this approach, the teacher used the terminology list as a living resource. Students created their own annotated versions, adding examples from their reading, drawings, film references, or memories that helped the terms make sense. This was not a static glossary but a collaborative, growing conversation about language and meaning. It was shared in circles, used to reflect on readings, and returned to at moments of insight.

In contrast, the Unmindful English Teacher handed out a vocabulary sheet at the start of term and tested students every week, penalising incorrect definitions. Few students remembered the terms beyond the test. They had learned the words but not what the words could do.

By teaching literary terms as part of a dynamic, emotional, and reflective process, the Mindful English Teacher helps students connect to literature in a way that builds both academic fluency and personal insight. The terms become scaffolds for thinking, rather than fences that restrict. They support exploration rather than prescribe interpretation. They help students not just understand texts, but inhabit them.

CHAPTER 30: A MINDFUL CONCLUSION

At the end of a teaching day, or a book like this, it can be easy to race ahead, to start planning the next scheme, the next resource, or to focus on what went wrong. But a mindful conclusion asks something else: it invites you to pause, to honour the work you've done, and to treat yourself with the same care you offer your students.

Teaching is an act of attention, and it begins with noticing our own states of mind. If you notice stress arising, try not to resist it. Becoming aware of your stress is itself an act of mindfulness. Rest in that awareness without rushing to change it. Breathe gently, slowly, with a sense of kindness towards yourself. As Thích Nhất Hạnh teaches, smile to your breath. Say to yourself: it's okay to feel this way. Just as we are not meant to rid ourselves of difficult feelings, we are not required to be perfect teachers. We are simply invited to be present, responsive, and aware.

Gratitude is also a mindful practice, and in teaching it can offer profound perspective. Not a blind optimism, but a steady anchoring in what sustains you: a student's smile, a shared moment of curiosity, the simple beauty of language. These are small but powerful sources of joy. Gratitude allows us to acknowledge the challenges of the job while also attending to the parts of it that nourish us.

Teaching is never solitary, even when it feels like it. At its best, it is collaborative. Try to build a culture of shared learning, not only with students, but with colleagues too. Avoid the spiral of complaint and seek instead to reflect together on what matters. As E. M. Forster reminded us, only connect. And as Fanon might have urged us, only decolonise by beginning with dialogue. To teach mindfully is to resist alienation, to locate teaching within a web of interdependence that extends from the classroom to the wider world.

Discomfort will arise. You will make mistakes. You will not always know what to do. But none of this is failure. It is the fertile ground of learning, and if we can meet that discomfort with curiosity instead of fear, it becomes transformative. It is possible to feel anxious and still teach well. It is possible to be tired and still create beauty in a classroom. These are not contradictions. They are the truths of teaching.

Try to close your working days with intention. Lie down, if you can, on a yoga mat or just stretch gently. Let your body soften. Reflect not in judgement but in awareness. What images linger from the day? What surprised you? What touched you? If you like, replay the day in your mind like a silent film, watching without analysing, simply observing. In this quiet presence, learning continues.

Build your own 'magic bag'—those reliable strategies, texts, and activities you know work. Return to them not as routines but as rituals of learning. Share the literature you love, and let your students see your joy in it. Read aloud just because. Let them be writers and critics, readers and questioners, partners in the great conversation that is English.

Be mindful. Be gentle with yourself. Keep noticing. And most of all, keep teaching not just content, but care. That is the true work. And it matters.

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