between the lines

A lesson written for every student in the room

FREE LESSON SAMPLER

Victorian voices: journalism and letters: Quiet and composed

How does Dickens present himself in a letter about a railway accident?

Lesson 5 of 14 from the scheme of learning

Teacher notes, slides and student pages at all three levels

Written for the English national curriculum at Key Stage 3



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What is in this sampler

This is one complete lesson from our Victorian voices: journalism and letters scheme for Year 9. It comes exactly as it appears in the full scheme, so you can teach it next week and see how our lessons work.

Teacher notes	Timings with slide numbers, Do Now answers, the exploded quotation, the hinge question and what each answer tells you, the task at three levels, a model paragraph and notes on misconceptions and adapting the lesson (next pages).
Slides	The editable PowerPoint deck for Lesson 5, with teacher notes on every slide (separate file).
Student pages	The lesson's pages from the student booklet: one question, with the Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support side by side (at the end of this document).

How every lesson works

Know	Do Now from memory, vocabulary, then the reading. The five Do Now questions build on what students learned in Lessons 1 to 4 of the full scheme.
Apply	Explode one quotation together; a hinge question checks understanding.
Master	One shared question answered as a What–How–Why paragraph, with Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support; then a model paragraph and an exit ticket.

Three levels of support

Every student answers the same question in every lesson. What changes is the support on the page, so the whole class does the same lesson:

Securing	The most support: a word bank, a choice of quotations, a worked example and sentence starters.
Strengthening	Some support: prompts for What, How and Why, a planner and a checklist.
Soaring	The most challenge: a debatable statement, prompts to think further and an argument planner.

The names describe the support, never the student. The hinge question shows who might start where, and students move between levels from lesson to lesson.

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In the full scheme

- 14 lessons like this one, with editable slides and a teacher handbook (lesson notes, unit map, assessment guide and knowledge bank)
- A student booklet with every lesson and all three levels of support, plus the same lessons as one pack per level
- Six weeks of independent practice homework at three levels
- A checkpoint (Feedback Loop kit) with a whole-class feedback sheet and improvement tasks
- A two-part end-of-unit assessment with a teacher guide, band guidance and annotated models
- A catch-up sheet for every lesson, for students who missed it
- An inclusion guide: pre-teaching, SEND, EAL and pupil premium notes for every lesson

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Lesson 5: Quiet and composed

SEQUENCE 1: THE CITY: MAYHEW AND DICKENS · 60 MINUTES

How does Dickens present himself in a letter about a railway accident?

By the end of the lesson, students can

- Explain how Dickens presents himself as calm and honest in a private letter
- Analyse how direct speech and tone build a persona
- Write a What–How–Why paragraph that starts from a concept about Dickens's persona

Lesson at a glance

Time	Phase	What happens	Slides
0–8	Know	Do Now: five quick questions on Lessons 4, 3 and 1. Students check their answers from the answer slide.	2–3
8–18	Know	Pre-teach "tone", "persona", "composure" and "account". Read the extract aloud while students follow and underline every place where Dickens reports what was said.	4–6
18–28	Apply	Explode the quotation together. Think aloud about the honest first clause and the calm that follows it, then students annotate their copy. Before you reveal any notes, students try the four empty boxes on the first explode slide, on their own or after you model one box.	7–8
28–33	Apply	Hinge question on mini-whiteboards. Use the answers to decide who starts on which level of support.	9–10
33–53	Master	Students write one What–How–Why paragraph that starts from a concept, using their level of support in the student booklet. Share the model paragraph in the last five minutes.	11–12
53–60	Master	Exit ticket. Collect and sort into three piles to plan the start of the next lesson.	13

Do Now answers

1	What did Dickens say is a greater vice than gin-drinking?	Wretchedness and dirt (poverty)
2	What is irony?	Saying one thing while meaning another, often to make fun
3	What word means the way a group speaks, with its own words and grammar?	Dialect
4	What was the Penny Black?	The first postage stamp, issued in May 1840
5	What was Dickens's first job as a writer?	Reporter

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Vocabulary

tone	the feeling or attitude that a writer's words give
persona	the version of himself or herself that a writer shows to readers
composure	calm self-control, especially when in danger
account	a spoken or written report of what happened

Reading

Letter to Thomas Mitton: the broken bridge

On 13 June 1865 Dickens writes to his friend Thomas Mitton about the railway accident at Staplehurst. His carriage has been caught by the ruin of a bridge.

> I was in the only carriage that did not go over into the stream. It was caught upon the turn by some of the ruin of the bridge, and hung suspended and balanced in an apparently impossible manner. Two ladies were my fellow-passengers, an old one and a young one. This is exactly what passed. You may judge from it the precise length of the suspense: Suddenly we were off the rail, and beating the ground as the car of a half-emptied balloon might. The old lady cried out, "My God!" and the young one screamed. I caught hold of them both (the old lady sat opposite and the young one on my left), and said: "We can't help ourselves, but we can be quiet and composed. Pray don't cry out." The old lady immediately answered: "Thank you. Rely upon me. Upon my soul I will be quiet." We were then all tilted down together in a corner of the carriage, and stopped. I said to them thereupon: "You may be sure nothing worse can happen. Our danger must be over. Will you remain here without stirring, while I get out of the window?" They both answered quite collectedly, "Yes," and I got out without the least notion what had happened.

Charles Dickens, letter to Thomas Mitton, 13 June 1865

Word help **suspended**: hanging · **the car of a half-emptied balloon**: the basket under a balloon that is losing air · **composed**: calm and in control · **collectedly**: calmly

Explode the quotation

Method
Direct speech. Dickens quotes his own words from the moment of danger and promises that this is "exactly what passed".

Zoom in
The first clause admits the danger. The calm adjective "composed" then asks for self-control, as an order that is also a comfort.

"We can't help ourselves, but we can be quiet and composed."

Effect
Readers see a man who tells the truth about the danger and still keeps control of everyone around him.

Purpose
Dickens presents himself to a friend as calm and in charge. He wants Mitton to know that he behaved well.

Hinge question

Dickens is writing to a friend, Thomas Mitton, and not to the readers of a magazine. How does that change the letter?

A. He can be frank, and he lets the shock show at the end. (the right answer)

B. He must be formal and leave out his own feelings.

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C. He must blame the railway company for the accident.

What the answers tell you

B treats the letter as a public report: ask what "I feel the shake and am obliged to stop" tells you. C is a guess from outside the text: ask what Dickens actually says about the cause. These may be your students who start on Securing.

Why the answer is right

A private letter lets him be honest, so the calm account ends with "I feel the shake and am obliged to stop."

Master task

How does Dickens present himself in this extract from his letter?

Securing the most support

Quotations to choose from

"hung suspended and balanced in an apparently impossible manner"

"I caught hold of them both"

"You may be sure nothing worse can happen"

Starters

Dickens presents himself as a calm and honest leader who keeps control of the people around him. Dickens writes "____". The ____ (adjective) ____ (word class) "____" suggests ____. Dickens wants his friend to ____ because ____.

Strengthening some support

Prompts

What: Make a clear point that starts from a concept, such as a leader who is calm and honest, and answers the question.

How: Choose a short quotation. Name the method, such as direct speech, and zoom in on one word, naming its word class. How does the calm in this extract sit with the danger?

Why: What does Dickens want his friend to think of him? How might this change if he wrote the same account for the readers of a magazine, as he does in 'A Walk in a Workhouse'?

Soaring the most challenge

The debate

"In this letter Dickens is more interested in showing his own composure than in describing the accident."

Write two paragraphs. In the second, argue against the statement, beginning with "Alternatively".

Model paragraph

What	Dickens presents himself as a man who stays in command while danger is at its worst.
How	He reports what he said as the carriage hung from the bridge: "We can't help ourselves, but we can be quiet and composed." The first clause admits the danger, so the calm that follows seems honest and not boastful. The polite verb "Pray" in "Pray don't cry out" is old-fashioned and gentle, as though he were still in a drawing room. Soon he asks the ladies a question, "Will you remain here without stirring", and treats them as people to ask and not to order.
Why	Readers admire a man who can be calm and kind in a crisis, and Dickens lets his own words do the praising by reporting only what he said. His purpose is to show a friend that he behaved well, and to do it with the same quiet control.

Exit ticket

Dickens presents himself as calm so that…

Teacher notes

Subject knowledge

The letter is private, to Dickens's friend Thomas Mitton, and is dated 13 June 1865 from Gad's Hill Place in Kent. In the extract his carriage hangs from the broken bridge at Staplehurst. He reports his own words

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