

Appendix 7 - Materials used in the February stage of the project

Zoomable Portrait: 'Miss Orovida Pissaro', Painted by Carel Victor Morlais Weight (1908 - 1997)

Planning was based on free association clustering techniques as featured in the following book:

G.L. Rico, (2000). *Writing The Natural Way: Using Right-Brain Techniques to Release Your Expressive Powers*. Penguin: Random House.

Commentary: The lessons related to the February stage of the project were delivered via two main platforms: Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom. Learners had links to the zoomable portrait via Google Classroom. It involved using a chosen object from Carel Weight's portrait, 'Miss Orovida Pissarro' (from the Ashmolean's collection of **zoomable portraits**) as stimulus material for a piece of imaginative writing based on the theme of 'forgetting something'. This theme was lifted straight from one of Edexcel's exam-style practice questions.

In line with a 'blended learning' approach, the learners first planned their writing at home on paper. Learners wrote the name of their chosen item in the centre of a piece of blank paper. They were then given just over ten minutes to 'cluster' ideas around their chosen item. This was to encourage the learners to think 'outside the box' by using Gabriele Rico's 'clustering' technique. Learners were encouraged to write down any thoughts whatsoever that they associated with their chosen item. (N.B. This was a qualitatively different approach from the 'mind-mapping' strategy that we used at the planning stage of their first piece of imaginative writing in November. The 'mind-mapping' strategy was designed to get learners to sort out ideas, placing them in categories, related to character, setting, emotions, the five senses, and so on. The 'clustering' technique is much freer in the sense that no ideas are off the table at the planning stage, as ideas are accumulated by free association. In this regard, it is much less inhibiting or constraining).

After the learners had had some personal thinking time via the 'cluster' approach, we were able to come together as a class on Teams. The smaller class sizes over Teams afforded us the chance of discussing possible strategies and directions that the writing might take. This pre-draft discussion helped to 'get learners into the zone' in terms of organising their ideas on their respective clusters. The whole-class discussion also afforded learners the opportunity to discuss things that they have forgotten in the past in their own lives. They also thought about what turns a mere incident into an engaging story.

The zoomable portrait was ideal for an online lesson, as the learners could easily interact with it. It features Orovida Pissarro sitting in an armchair, surrounded by objects which had a special significance in her life. The **teacher notes** were a good starting point for organising our thoughts as to how we would use this portrait. Learners were asked to choose an item from the portrait. After they had completed the clustering activity, they were invited to think of why or how their chosen item is so significant, i.e. to come up with a plausible backstory, which would be the starting point for their imaginative writing. This was great material for an open-ended discussion.

We wanted to develop strategies that encouraged thinking outside the box, but not drifting so far away from the box, that the learners' work loses structure and coherence, especially at the crucial planning stage. Some of the learners who still required a little scaffolding at the planning stage used calligrams instead of clustering as a planning tool. The idea is that once the learners had chosen an object featured on Carel Weight's portrait, they were encouraged to create a calligram of words, ideas, expressions and phrases related to their chosen object. They were able to use these words later in their writing. The calligram helps them to stay focused on the object itself, so that their plan results in a piece of writing that leans more towards descriptive depth rather than superficial breadth. The process of using the calligram approach to planning is that learners will come up with more 'expressive' language to use in the drafting stage. The calligram is also a kind of controlled clustering, so it allowed for differentiation. (N.B. any Google search will show a wide range of ready-made cat calligrams, or alternatively, the learners can create their own by using an outline drawing as a template).