

MACQUARIE PEN ANTHOLOGY *of* AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

TEACHING GUIDE

Unit 6: Family Dramas

for Middle to Upper Secondary English

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Family Dramas

FOCUS	The tensions of family life are a recurrent motif of fiction and non-fiction alike. How do writers use their chosen form to explore the subject of family relationships?
LEVEL	Middle to Upper Secondary
LENGTH	Approximately 18-22 lessons
KEY TEXTS	<p>From the <i>Anthology</i>:</p> <p>Gray, Robert: ‘Diptych’ Harwood, Gwen: ‘Barn Owl’ James, Clive: <i>Unreliable Memoirs</i> Seymour, Alan: <i>The One Day of the Year</i> Winton, Tim: ‘My Father’s Axe’</p> <p>Supplementary Resources:</p> <p>Gray, Robert (2008), <i>The Land I Came Through Last</i>, Giramondo</p> <p><i>Anthology</i> film clips from www.macquariepenanthology.com.au ‘Gwen Harwood’s “Barn Owl”’: a reading’ – Bonny Cassidy ‘Gwen Harwood’s “Barn Owl”’: family as a stage for big ideas’ – Bonny Cassidy</p>
ADDITIONAL TEXTS	<p>Additional texts from the <i>Anthology</i> that teachers could use for this unit include:</p> <p>Dobson, Rosemary: ‘Who?’ Esson, Louis: <i>The Time is Not Yet Ripe</i> Gow, Michael: <i>Away</i> Masters, Olga: ‘The Christmas Parcel’ Rose, Peter: <i>Rose Boys</i> Stead, Christina: ‘Uncle Morgan at the Nats’ Taylor, Andrew: ‘The Dead Father’</p>

<p>LEARNING & TEACHING ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Introduction</p>	<p>This unit of work explores the recurrent motif of the tensions of family life in a range of fiction and non-fiction texts. The focus will be on how writers use form, structure and textual features to explore and represent family relationships.</p>
<p>1. Exploring the motif of family tensions in a range of texts</p> <p>(1-2 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 1(a)</p> <p>Introduce the notion of the motif of tensions in family life by having short extracts from the key texts displayed around the room. See Teacher Resource 1(a).</p> <p>An alternative suggestion is that these extracts be placed in a power point or slide show and enriched by images and even accompanied by music.</p> <p>Instruct the students that they will be working with a partner for this lesson. Invite them to walk around the room reading the extracts and then discussing with their partner similarities and differences there are in the texts.</p> <p>Follow with a classroom discussion about the commonalities the texts share.</p> <p>Activity 1(b)</p> <p>Provide the pairs of students with a scenario that features tension in family relationships. Ask them to explore their scenario through improvisation. Student Handout 1(b) lists possible examples of scenarios and gives guidelines.</p> <p>The teacher then selects several pairs to perform the dialogue. At the end of each performance the teacher asks the students to discuss and reflect on the techniques they used to build tension in their dialogues.</p>
<p>2. Close study of Harwood’s ‘Barn Owl’</p> <p>(2-3 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 2(a)</p> <p>Explain that you are going to ask the class to give written answers to some questions about the poem you are studying. Revise any concepts with which you think they may need help.</p> <p>Read Gwen Harwood’s poem ‘Barn Owl’ to the students. Ask them for their initial impressions.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to reread the poem for themselves. • Ask them to write down any questions that arise for them. • Allow them to discuss these questions with a partner. • As a class discuss any unresolved questions. <p>Activity 2 (b) View the film clips: ‘Gwen Harwood’s ‘Barn Owl’: a reading’ and ‘Gwen Harwood’s ‘Barn Owl’: family is a stage for big ideas’ at www.macquariepenanthology.com.au. Ask the students whether either the reading or the discussion has added to or changed their initial responses to the poem.</p> <p>Activity 2(c) Provide the students with questions on the poem. See Student Handout 2(c). Either have the questions completed at home and handed in, or share and discuss the students’ responses orally in class.</p>
<p>3. Close study of Gray’s poem ‘Diptych’</p> <p>(4 lessons)</p>	<p>Writers’ personal experiences are often used as a basis for their creative work. However, the relationship between biography and imaginative writing is extremely complex. Students will be encouraged to explore this complexity as they study Robert Gray’s poem ‘Diptych’.</p> <p>Activity 3(a) To prepare students for their close study of Robert Gray’s poem ‘Diptych’ begin by listening to a reading of the poem. You could also record the poem onto an MP3 so that students can listen to the poem and download it for themselves.</p> <p>Remind them that this poem like ‘Barn Owl’ continues the focus on family relationships, and that both poems are presented from the perspective of the child in the family. The poem uses the idea of the ‘diptych’ – two panels of a painting that are joined together by a clasp and linked through a common theme or idea – to explore the tensions of family life.</p> <p>Read or play the poem to the class asking students to focus mentally and emotionally on the representation of the tensions of family life. You could also record the poem onto an MP3 so that students can listen to the poem and download it for themselves.</p> <p>Activity 3(b) Ask the students to discuss in pairs their immediate impression of the persona’s relationship with the mother and the father, and to discuss</p>

how the use of the poetic form creates this impression. Have a short class discussion on students' initial responses to the poem.

Activity 3(c)

Place the students in groups of three and allocate the tasks on **Student Handout 3(c)**. Remind them that they only have 30 minutes to complete the task.

Activity 3(d)

Ask the students to write a list of five to ten factual sentences beginning with the words 'I remember'. Have them select one or two of these for reading out to the class.

Ask the students to choose one of their sentences and turn it into a paragraph of imaginative writing. In this paragraph they are to include some 'factual' material and some that is invented. Have them swap their paragraphs with a partner. After the partner reads the paragraph they should decide which parts are personal and factual and which are imagined. Have them discuss their impressions with each other.

Talk with students about the differences between autobiography and fiction and how sometimes these overlap when you are creating a text. For this reason the 'I' or voice of a text is often referred to as the 'persona'. Discuss how an individual's personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace experiences can influence his or her values and beliefs and shape the way he or she creates and responds to a text.

Remind students that they need to be careful when assuming that writers are accurately describing themselves in their creative work, even when they claim to be doing so. As D.H. Lawrence said, readers have to trust the tale not the teller. Even so, understanding the context in which a text is created – the time, the place, the personal experiences of the author etc – may help to illuminate a text.

Activity 3(e)

Students research what is known about Robert Gray's family life. The following websites are useful sources of information:

- Robert Gray, Reading Group and Teachers' Notes:
www.duffyandsnellgrove.com.au/TeachersNotes/notes/Graytn.html
- Robert Gray:
www.australia.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw/cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=459&x=1

	<p>Teachers could consult his autobiography: Gray, Robert (2008), <i>The Land I Came Through Last</i>, Giramondo Publishing</p> <p>Draw together some of the relevant information from the students' research about aspects of Gray's life. Remind them that some of the material they find contains opinion, including that of the author, and it is not necessarily factually accurate. See Teacher Resource 3(e) for suggestions.</p> <p>Activity 3(f)</p> <p>Students to rewrite one of the stories or incidents about the father that Gray has told in the mother's panel of the diptych from the mother's perspective such as: waiting anxiously on the unmade bed for your husband to come home or the father's wild ride down the hill through the banana plantation.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Students to rewrite one of the stories or incidents about the mother that Gray has told in the father's panel of the diptych from the father's perspective such as: her endless care and protecting her garden from the bull.</p> <p>Have a class discussion about this exercise and the changes students made in their versions of the incidents.</p> <p>Activity 3(g) Read (or play a reading of) Gray's poem to the class again. Discuss whether the information they have discovered about Gray alters their perceptions of, or responses to, the poem.</p>
<p>4. Creating a text with the motif of tensions in family life</p> <p>(2 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 4(a) This task will give the students practice in creating an effective text in particular forms: the micro story and a free verse poem.</p> <p>Use the quotes from the key texts that the students were introduced to in the Activity 1(a) to remind them about how to create tension.</p> <p>Then instruct them to create a 50 word micro story with the motif of tensions in family life. See Student Handout 4(a).</p>

	<p>Activity 4(b) Ask the students to compose a free verse poem using their micro story as the source for the ideas, the motif and the language features.</p> <p>Adapting the form will refine students’ writing skills and deepen understanding about the role that different forms play in conveying meaning. Once again impose a strict time limit such as 15 minutes.</p> <p>Activity 4(c) Ask the students to select either their micro story or poem as a piece to refine and publish. These could be displayed around the classroom. Tell students that they may use these as a basis for their formal assessment task at a later stage.</p>
<p>5. Close study of Tim Winton’s short story ‘My Father’s Axe’ (3 lessons)</p>	<p>Named in 2006 as one of Australia’s living National Treasures, Tim Winton has produced a prolific number of short stories, plays, novels and children’s books. He was born in 1960 in Perth and he was surrounded by a line of strong women and a supportive, loving family. His father, a policeman, provided the rich tales that Winton now uses as he would relay every detail of his work experiences to his wife when he came home at night and young Tim would listen attentively through his bedroom wall. Family relationships and the tensions in family life are often of central concern in Winton’s writing.</p> <p>Activity 5(a) Talk to the student about the title of the story, asking them what expectations it sets up for them. Read aloud Winton’s story, ‘My Father’s Axe’, to the class.</p> <p>Discuss the use of the axe in the story. The axe in the story symbolises the tenuous and troubled relationship that children have and continue to have with their parents even after they become adults. The persona must find his father’s missing axe as it provides that important connection to his father, but its presence reminds him of all the tensions in this relationship such as the feeling that his father was always disappointed in him.</p> <p>Activity 5(b) Instruct the students to create a visual representation of the short story that employs the axe as main symbol. Student Handout 5(b) provides guidelines.</p>

	<p>Activity 5(c) Discuss what the class already knows about Winton’s life. What other texts of his are they familiar with? Students can research Winton’s background and experiences further using the resources listed on Student Handout 5(c).</p> <p>Follow this with a class discussion about whether learning more about Winton’s personal life and experiences changes their perceptions of, or responses to, his story.</p>
<p>6. Drawing it all together (3 lessons)</p>	<p>Activity 6(a) Briefly talk about Clive James as a well-known Australian writer and TV commentator known for his dry humour. Students read the extract from Clive James’ <i>Unreliable Memoirs</i> from the <i>Anthology</i>.</p> <p>Discuss with them the techniques James uses in his writing to convey the nature of the tensions in his family. What responses does he elicit from his reader?</p> <p>Activity 6(b) Briefly talk about Alan Seymour’s play from 1960 and about ANZAC Day and the attitudes different generations of Australians hold towards it. Students take the parts of the characters from the extract of Alan Seymour’s <i>One Day of the Year</i> from the <i>Anthology</i> and perform it for the class.</p> <p>Discuss the family tensions created. How does the student audience respond to Hughie’s point of view? How do they think their parents would respond?</p> <p>Activity 6(c) Take a vote on which of the five texts studied students consider the most effective in terms of its exploration of family tensions in its chosen form. Keep a record of the voting pattern.</p> <p>Activity 6(d) Place the students in teams of three and tell them that they have to come to an agreement among themselves as to which of the five texts is the most effective in its exploration of family tensions.</p> <p>Their task is then to persuade the class to their point of view. See Student Handout 6(d) for guidelines. Take the initial vote again. How many people have changed their minds?</p>

<p>7. Creating a digital text</p> <p>(2 lessons + homework time)</p>	<p>Students to create their own original digital text in a multimedia format. Using the motif of the tensions of family life, students create their own short story, free verse poem, non-fiction memoir, or scene for a play script and present it in a digital format. See Student Handout 7 for guidelines.</p> <p>If the task is done in class it will take approximately three lessons: one to write and edit the text, one to download images and sounds and record the voiceover, and one to create the digital text.</p>
<p>8. Extension activity</p> <p>(1-2 lessons + home time)</p>	<p>Students are to explore the motif of family tensions in their choice of texts from different genres. See Student Handout 8.</p>

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Teacher Resource 1(a)

Extracts from the key texts

HUGHIE: ‘No buts. I know what you lot think about it, everyone your age is the same. Well, I’ve seen enough Anzac Days to know what I think of them. And that’s what I got today with my little camera. What I think of it.

MUM: You can’t put that sort of thing in the paper.

HUGHIE: Just watch us.

The One Day of the Year

‘Whereas, my father only seemed to care he would never appear a drunkard while ever his shoes were clean.’

‘Diptych’

A horny fiend, I crept
Out with my father’s gun.
Let him dream of a child
Obedient, angel-mild—
‘Barn Owl’

‘In a slow, tumbling trajectory it sails across the woodheap and unseats my father’s head from his shoulders and travels on out of sight as my father’s head rolls onto the heap, eyes toward me, transfixed at the moment of scission in a squint of disappointment.’

‘My Father’s Axe’

So really my mother was the only pillar of strength available. One parent is enough to spoil you but discipline takes two. I got much of what I wanted and not enough of what I needed.

Unreliable Memoirs

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Student Handout 1(b)

Find a partner and choose one of the following scenarios:

- a. A parent asks if a child has any homework
- b. A teenager wants to go to a party at a friend's house and the parent wants to ring the friend's parents
- c. A teenager wants an iPhone, which causes an argument between two family members
- d. Two siblings believe that the other is the favourite
- e. A grandparent believes that the parents need to have stronger discipline in place
- f. Free choice

You are asked to observe the following guidelines:

- A time limit of five minutes to create and perform the dialogue
- To include no more than ten short, sharp exchanges of dialogue that captures tension between the characters.

Some pairs will be asked to perform for the class as a basis for a discussion about how the dialogue, setting, characterisation etc. in their improvisations, create tension.

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Student Handout 2(c):

Questions about Gwen Harwood’s poem ‘Barn Owl’

1. How does Harwood use language to build the tension at the start of the poem?
Refer to three features.

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2. What has motivated the child to take the gun and kill the barn owl?

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3. Harwood has used a range of effective figurative devices and language features. Identify the device or feature in the following and describe its effect:

a. 'day-light riddled eyes':

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b. 'urine-scented hay':

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c. 'owl blind in the early sun':

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4. Describe the tension between the father and the child. Refer to how the child regards the father and how the father responds to the child's cruel actions. Use quotes from the poem to support your response.

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5. How does Harwood use language to convey the relationship between the child and the father?

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Student Handout 3(c)

Group responses to ‘Diptych’

The teams of three will be allocated one or more of the following tasks to be completed in 30 minutes, and then discussed and submitted at the end of this time. The responses will be collated and shared with the class.

1. Analyse the persona’s relationship with his mother. What was the mother like and what did her son think of her? How do you know? Refer to key quotes from the poem and the language features.
2. Analyse the persona’s relationship with his father. What was the father like and what did his son think of him? How do you know? Refer to key quotes from the poem and the language features.
3. Analyse the mother and father’s relationship. What things did they both do that could have adversely impacted on the relationship? How do you know? Refer to key quotes from the poem and the language features.
4. Consider the form that Gray has used to explore the tension in family life. Is the diptych an effective form? Justify the team’s decision by referring to the poem.
5. Select six of the most memorable lines from the poem that convey the tensions in the persona’s family life and then justify why and how these lines are memorable.
6. Create a mind map or visual representation of the persona’s relationship with his parents grounded in the two panels of the poem.

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Teacher Resource 3(e)

The information about Robert Gray's life you discuss could include the following:

- He was born in the small country coastal NSW town of Coffs Harbour in 1945.
- His father was an alcoholic banished by his wealthy Sydney family to a banana plantation that he lost in a wager when Gray was ten years old. '*.. He was a frozen man, deeply neurotic, imposing a highly mannered life upon himself, and us. He was tormentingly fastidious, constantly belittling, and I, as the eldest, was his main target, apart from my mother. We kids all turned against him, to varying degrees, early on; and he wanted this, I realise*', (1990, Interview with Barbara Williams, Southerly).
- His mother was a quiet, caring woman and a devout Jehovah's Witness who did not stand up to her husband. '*My mother was very warm; she had a sort of marsupial warmth about her. But it's fair, even though harsh, to say that she was unintelligent - most significantly in that she chose for a husband a person who could only bring her a great deal of unhappiness*', (1990, Interview with Barbara Williams, Southerly).
- Gray and his brother were sent to a children's home for a few months when his family were insolvent.
- Gray commented on his parents being like the panels of a dyptich: '*My parents, like the panels of a diptych, were forever separated while in proximity. In a way I was fortunate they were so different: I was able to see the inadequacies of both their extreme temperaments*', (1990, Interview with Barbara Williams, Southerly).

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Student Handout 4(a)

Writing a micro story encourages writing that is precise, punchy and powerful. Your micro story will contain:

- No more and no less than 50 words
- At least one truncated, one complex and one compound sentence
- At least one figurative device and one sound device
- Imagery
- Striking verbs

You have 10 minutes to draft your story, and 15 minutes to refine it.

(You may wish to use this later when you are creating a text in a digital format.)

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Student Handout 5(b)

You have listened to the story ‘My Father’s Axe’ by Tim Winton. Your task is to create a visual or aural representation of the story in one of the following forms:

- a poster,
- a mind map,
- a power point,
- a soundscape (where the axe is the recurrent sound in the background).

Your representation should include:

- Key quotes that reflect the tension in the family relationship.
- Images that represent the son’s relationship with his father, and the son’s relationship with his own child.

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Student Handout 5(c)

Enough Rope with Tim Winton (2004):

www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1227915.htm

Readings (May 2008): www.readings.com.au/interview/tim-winton

The 7:30 Report (2008): www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s2237159.htm

McGirr, Michael (1999), *Tim Winton: the writer and his work*, Macmillan Education

McPhee, Hilary (Ed). (1999), *Tim Winton: a celebration*, National Library of Australia.

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Student Handout 6(d)

In teams of three you are to select from the following texts the one which you consider to be the most effective in its exploration of family relationships. Your task is to persuade the class with your point of view. You have 15 minutes to prepare and three minutes to give your presentation.

Your argument should include:

- a line of argument or thesis that states up front why this text is the most effective;
- at least two to three reasons that support the thesis;
- reference to the context of the author and how this has shaped the text, if relevant;
- judicious textual support (i.e. quotes and direct references to the text).

As this is an argument remember to use persuasive language such as: the imperative voice, second person to directly address the audience, and where necessary, emotive language.

After listening to the arguments the class will vote on the text they now consider to be the most effective.

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Student Handout 7

Creating a text in digital form

Using the motif of the tensions of family life you are asked to create a text in digital form.

1. You will need to decide which form you will be using in the digital medium, such as:

- A digital story
- A digital poem
- A digital non-fiction piece such as a memoir
- A digital play.

You should visit the following websites that provide tips about digital stories in multimedia formats:

www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/about/pages/howto.shtml – a site where you can view interesting digital stories and learn how to create them.

Digitales: www.digi-tales.org/ – provides digital stories

Digitales: www.ice.org.au/projects/digitales/ – provides multicultural stories

Changing Lives: www.changinglives.com.au/2008/04/abrar-autumn-and-i.html – digital stories by seven young Iraqi women living in Western Sydney

ACMI Digital Stories: www.acmi.net.au/digital_stories.htm

2. Create a text in your chosen genre (i.e.: a short story; poem; non-fiction memoir; scene for a play script of 300 words or less:

3. Your task is to now present this text in a digital format.

- Select some images that reflect the key ideas, the motif and the events of the text. The images could be downloaded, scanned, or be original art work. Add these to the text.
- Record the voiceover on an MP3 player or via a microphone and download to the computer or a flash drive. If a non-fiction memoir is being created you could record comments by family members.

- Download any music or sound clips that will be used.
- Edit the text.
- Create your digital text using PowerPoint, Photo Story, Movie Maker, iMovie, or a similar program.

Your work is to be handed to your teacher for assessment at the end of this unit.

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Student Handout 8

Extension Activity

Choose two texts from the list below. Read your chosen texts noting down observations about the way the authors deal with the motif of family tensions. Spend some time searching the internet for reviews, information about the authors, and about the genre of the texts you have chosen.

Prepare an email message of about fifteen lines to a friend giving them advice as to whether or not they should read your chosen texts. Post a copy of the email to your teacher or print it out and hand it in. Choose language appropriate for an email and for the age of your audience.

Poetry

Dobson, Rosemary: 'Who?' (*Anthology*)

Taylor, Andrew: 'The Dead Father' (*Anthology*)

Drama

Esson, Louis: *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (extract in the *Anthology*)

Gow, Michael: *Away* (extract in the *Anthology*)

Short Stories:

Lanagan, Margo: *Black Juice*

Le, Nam: *The Boat*

Masters, Olga: 'The Christmas Parcel' (*Anthology*)

Stead, Christina: 'Uncle Morgan at the Nats' (*Anthology*)

Graphic Novels:

Sherman, Alexie: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

Yang, Gene Luen: *American Born Chinese*

Memoir

Rose, Peter: *Rose Boys* (extract in the *Anthology*)