

Lesson 5: English

Looking at Language

Aim

To explore how language is used in media writing about stem cells (reading/listening and writing)

Objectives

- To analyse use of dramatic language
- To discuss the distinction between sensationalist and balanced reporting
- To compare broadsheet and tabloid styles of journalism
- To write an article in one of these styles

National Curriculum Links

QCA GCSE Criteria: 3.1

- Focus on extended individual contributions, group discussion and interaction, and drama-focussed activities

GCSE Specifications (across all boards)

Speaking and Listening: - Explain, describe
 - Explore, analyse, imagine
 - Discuss, argue, persuade

Reading and Writing: - Inform, explain, describe
 - Argue, persuade, advise
 - Analyse, review, comment

Materials

English Information Sheet: Extract from the play and Articles 1 and 2 (1 per student)

Activities

Note: As an alternative to reading, you could carry out exercise 2 as a listening exercise. For this, read the articles aloud twice, and ask the students to answer the questions.

1. In the play, Tracey and Phee have a conversation about hybrid embryos as a source of stem cells for research. Ask the students to read the extract from the play on the Information sheet, and/or have 2 students read the parts aloud to the class. Then ask the students to discuss the following questions in pairs:

- What different ways of creating an embryo are discussed in the dialogue?
- Who has a higher status/more power in this passage, Phee or Tracey? Why is this?
- What is Tracey shocked by? Why is she shocked? Do you think her reaction represents what most people feel?
- What language does Phee use to persuade Tracey towards her point of view? Is it effective?

Give the students 10 minutes to discuss these questions in pairs, and then have some pairs feed back to the class.

2. Ask students to read articles 1 and 2 from the Information Sheet.

3. Individually, the students are to make 2 lists of words or phrases found in the articles, one under the heading of 'sensationalist language' and one under the heading 'objective language' (you may need to define these concepts). When they have completed their lists, they should compare with a partner and then discuss the following questions:

- What does the article focus on? What are its main themes?
- What words are used to describe scientists in the first article? How does the impression of scientists differ in the second article? Why?
- Which article gives information about the potential use of the cells? Does this change the focus of the story? If so, how?
- What words/phrases have the biggest impact on you? Why?
- Do the writers tend to use facts or opinions? Do they use mainly sensationalist or objective language?
- What impact does the article have on you?
- Do you think this is the aim of the piece?

- Does it present a balanced view of the story?
- Which kind of newspapers are the articles sourced from? (broadsheet e.g. *The Times*, *The Guardian* or tabloid, e.g. *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*).

4. Give the students the following task:

Use the information from the extract and articles on English Information Sheet and what you have learned from the play, to write your own piece about one of the main issues or events in the play. Possible issues or events might be:

- The use of embryonic stem cells for research into disease and treatments
- The development of hybrid embryos
- Riv and Cassie's story; what do they decide to do with the surplus Huntington's embryos?
- A story about Dr Khaled's lab, and the research that goes on there

Before starting, decide if your article is going to be:

- sensationalist or objective
- for a tabloid or broadsheet newspaper

Give your article a headline, then write your article.

You may need to refer your students to further resources (see RESOURCES).

Note: If short on time, exercise 3 can be set as homework.

English Information Sheet:

Looking at Language

Extract from *Nobody Lives Forever*

PHEE Look!

TRACEY What's that?

PHEE That's what a cloned human embryo would look like.

TRACEY A clone?!

PHEE A cloned *embryo*. To get stem cells out. They're not going to grow it into a baby or anything! The technique, right, is they get a donated egg, they scrape the egg's DNA out, then they scrape some DNA from your skin cells or something, put that in, give it a little electric shock and hey presto!

TRACEY They make an embryo without sperm?

PHEE That's what they're trying to do.

TRACEY Where do they get the eggs from?

PHEE I dunno. Donations and stuff. They're going to start using animal eggs though, because then there'd be a bigger supply.

TRACEY (SPLUTTERS FOOD OUT) *Animal* eggs?!!!

PHEE Yeah. Rabbits and cows mostly. It's a really good idea, scrape out the animal DNA, put in the human. They're called Cytoplasmic Hybrids.

TRACEY But what sort of creature do they grow *into*?!!

PHEE I *told* you! They wouldn't grow into *anything*! They can only use them for 14 days cos after that the nervous system starts to form. They don't put them back into a woman's womb or anything, that would be gross. Anyway, it's against the law.

TRACEY Thank God for that.

Article 1

Docs to create Mootant cells

BOFFINS want to fuse human stem cells with COW eggs to try to find a cure for Parkinson's. The plan would allow them to create "hybrid" embryos that are 99.9 per cent human and 0.1 per cent animal. They would NOT be implanted in humans.

Critics last night branded the scheme "unethical and disgusting". Scientists at Newcastle's Centre for Life who cloned the first human embryo last year have applied for a licence for the tests. They plan to replace the centres of cow eggs with human stem cells, the body's building blocks.

They will then apply an electric shock to make them divide into an embryo, which would be "grown" in a lab dish. The boffins would harvest cells from it and analyse them before destroying the embryo before 14 days.

Article 2

Go-ahead for hybrid embryo research praised

Scientists and patient groups have welcomed a decision by the fertility regulator to allow scientists to create half human-half animal embryos.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) ruled that research using cytoplasmic hybrids - made using eggs from rabbits or cows that have had their nucleus replaced with human genetic code - should be permitted.

British scientists want to use the technique to create embryonic stem cells so that they can study the causes of and develop treatments for diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cystic fibrosis, motor neurone disease and Huntington's.

The HFEA announced a public consultation which found 61 per cent of the public in favour of the research.

Dr Belinda Cupid, from the Motor Neurone Disease Association, said: "This position by the HFEA is very encouraging. There is currently no cure for MND, but allowing the use of hybrid and chimera embryos in scientific research may revolutionise the future treatment of this disease and other degenerative neurological conditions."

Rebecca Wood, the chief executive of the Alzheimer's Research Trust, said: "This decision could really speed up progress towards treatments in the future."

Dr. Stephen Minger of King's College London said yesterday: "These techniques provide the only ethically justifiable option given the large numbers of eggs required to derive cloned human stem cell lines from individuals with incurable and highly progressive neurological disorders."

Yesterday's announcement means such work will "in principle" be permitted. However, each proposal will be examined individually and decisions on the applications already submitted are expected in November.

In a statement, the HFEA said: "Having looked at all the evidence the authority has decided that there is no fundamental reason to prevent cytoplasmic hybrid research."

Opponents of the research, who claim it is unnecessary and unethical, believe the HFEA does not have the powers to give the go-ahead for such work.

Josephine Quintavalle, of Comment On Reproductive Ethics (Core), said: "The HFEA are saying that an animal-human hybrid would not be a true hybrid and would in fact be a human embryo. We believe that to be incorrect."