

Lesson 7: English

Looking at Language

Aim:

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

Objectives:

- To analyse use of dramatic language
- To discuss the distinction between banter/teasing and abusive/objectionable language
- To compare broadsheet and tabloid styles of journalism
- To write an article in one of these styles

National Curriculum Links:

ENGLISH: AO1, AO2

Materials:

Information Sheets English: Articles 1,2 and 3

Note: As an alternative to reading, you could carry out exercises 1 and 2 as listening exercises. For this, read the articles aloud twice, and ask the students to answer the questions below.

Activities:

- 1) Read articles 1 and 2 from Information Sheet English (Included in this document)

Make a list of the words used to describe the women featuring in each article, then compare with a partner and discuss the following questions:

- What words/phrases have the biggest impact on you? Why?
- What does the article focus on? What are its main themes?
- Does it tend to use facts or opinions?
- 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 each of the articles sourced from? (Broad-sheet e.g. The Times, The Guardian or Tabloid, e.g. The Sun, The Daily Mirror).

2) In the play, Omar and Ryan discuss the difference between banter and abusive language.

Look at the following extract from the play:

Ryan: It's just football fans. They like to have a dig. D'you know what they chant to Dean Gherkin? 'Liked McDonalds, you're not even liked in McDonalds'. Or Andy Goram. Schizophrenic-

Omar: 'There's only two Andy Gorams...'

Ryan: We'll have a pop at anyone.

Omar: 'Why don't Asians play football? Because every time they get a corner, they build a shop on it'.

Ryan: See, that's funny.

Omar: Yeah, but there's a line. Between banter and abuse. Between having a laugh and bullying the hell out of someone...I don't need that crap.

Ryan: Then fight back.

Discuss: Are the jokes that the boys discuss funny or offensive/abusive? Who decides whether language is offensive? Where is the line between banter and verbal bullying? Does verbal bullying lead to violent abuse?

3) Read article 3 from Information Sheet English.

Make a list of 8 forms of bullying that are mentioned in the article.

Compare your list with a partner, and discuss the following questions:

- What words/phrases have the biggest impact on you? Why?
- What does the article focus on? What are its main themes?
- What impact does the article have on you?
- Do you think this is the aim of the piece?

4) Use the information from all the articles on Information Sheet English 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:

- Bullying
- Women's football
- Homophobia in football
- Racism in football
- Football as a way of bringing people together

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

- emotive 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 4 can be set as homework.

Activity Sheet English 1

Article 1

Sexy ref aims for top job, Offside rule ... pretty Lisa's top job

Luscious Lisa Rashid gets to whistle at fellas when she's at work - as a football referee. The 18-year-old has set her sights on being the first woman to take charge of Premiership matches. And the 5ft 4ins official is not scared of tirades from the likes of Man Utd's Wayne Rooney.

She said: *"It can't be worse than refing at Sunday League football when everyone's been out on a Saturday night!"*

Lisa, from Birmingham, has been a referee for four years and is now at senior county level.

She said proudly: *"I sent off two players in my first two matches."*

Lisa, who has four A-Levels, also runs the line at Conference level. But she is being fast-tracked by the FA and could be in the Premiership in five years.

But if that fails, the Aston Villa supporter, whose dad Abdul was the club's commercial manager, could make it as a manager. The qualified football coach already has a job lined up to teach kids at a primary school.

Lisa said: *"I've got my hopes but I'm not getting carried away. I watch top refs on TV and I know how much hard work and dedication it's taken to get there."*

Article 2

Football's sexism hurt her. But it won't stop her being a referee

Amy Rayner made global news when she was verbally abused by a manager. Now she speaks for the first time about the controversy

The accusation was about as bad as it could be in the male-dominated world of professional football. Not only had the assistant referee, Amy Rayner, failed to flag for a penalty but she was also, unfortunately, a woman.

Last night Rayner broke her silence about the abuse she received from Luton Town manager Mike Newell during a match in November and lamented that sexism in English football is still considered acceptable while racism is routinely condemned.

Newell had blamed her for his team losing 3-2 and said that her appointment smacked of token political correctness. *'This is championship football,'* he said. *'This is not park football, so what are women doing here? She should not be here. I know that sounds sexist, but I am sexist.'*

Rayner, 29, who has been refereeing for 15 years, railed against those senior figures in football and the media who failed to condemn Newell after the match against Queen's Park Rangers. *'If it had been a racist comment, I don't think papers would dare to have a poll on whether people agree or disagree. They would be too afraid to print things like that. But if it's sexism it's somehow acceptable,'* she said.

Brian Barwick, chief executive of the FA, and Neale Barry, head of senior referee development, gave Rayner their full backing at the time and Newell has since called Rayner to apologise, but refuses to retract his comments. Next week he faces Football Association charges of improper conduct for his outburst.

Rayner recalled the furore that followed: *'I didn't think it would blow up in the way that it did. It really upset my family. I had radio interview requests from Australia, and even my parents' local paper in Spain ran a piece on it. How can one person's opinion make all those headlines?'*

'Nobody even looked at the decisions. One paper said, "Amy will either go home and cry and eat chocolate cake, or come back and say she's had a bad day at the office," the assumption being I'd had a bad game. But the referee and the assessor [the official who reports on referees' performances] didn't seem to think so. I was never judged on my performance.'

She is not the first female referee to make headlines for the wrong reasons. Last year 19-year-old senior county level referee Lisa Rashid was featured in a paper under the headline, 'Sexy ref aims for top job'. Rayner rolled her eyes at the memory.

'Something about whistling at men at work. That's the kind of image we're trying to avoid,' she said. 'We try to put ourselves on a level playing field and things like that are 10 steps back.'

Rayner took her first referee's qualification aged 13 after being unable to find a girls' team to play for. She is not the first woman match official in the league - in 1997 Wendy Toms, now retired, got as far as the Premiership. Still, provision for women in the game is unwelcoming, to say the least. Rayner rarely has a separate changing room from her male colleagues. *'I'll just tuck myself behind the shower curtain or sometimes there's a corner to go round, or we take it in turns to shower and change. But that's life.'*

She regularly puts up with crowd abuse and false preconceptions. *'You mean I'm not a lesbian?' she smiled. 'People tend to assume, but I have a boyfriend. It's sad, because it shouldn't matter anyway.'*

The FA is pushing to recruit more female officials into the game. There are 30,500 registered referees in England, only 985 of whom are women, and only 14 of those have made it beyond county level. The governing body is committed to supporting women in the game and is actively recruiting more women refs.

But Rayner says the numbers shouldn't matter. *'It's always got to be on merit and not percentages, as long as women are being given the opportunities. Getting into the Football League is massive. The next obvious move would be football league referee or running the line in the Premiership. Competition at this level is very tight, but it would be fantastic.'*

Article 3

Smack in the mouth that ended my bullying career

Blue wristbands is about as close as most people think footballers come to the issue of bullying. No doubt a few Premiership stars will take to the pitch wearing the wristbands for National Anti-Bullying week. Good on them - it's a major issue for kids in this country, and more than 25 per cent of calls made to Childline are about bullying. But plenty of us have first-hand experience, too.

A few years ago, my son was bullied at school and was too scared to say anything about it. I was playing for West Ham at the time. Every time I had a bad game, he'd get slaughtered; if I had a good game, he was flavour of the month.

In my schooldays, it was the kids with special needs who got it most. A recent report for Mencap found that about 90 per cent of kids with learning difficulties are bullied. We've made no progress in 25 years? That's unbelievable.

At school, I was both bullied and a bully. I got picked on for being mixed race, and at the same time I picked on others for things that made them stand out. But one day, when I was 13, I picked on the wrong kid. He was a square who played rugby, and he turned around and smacked me in the mouth. The whole school seemed to hang out the windows shouting, 'Fight! Fight! Fight!' That moment had a profound effect on me. I looked at everyone baying for blood and thought 'what's it all about?'. I walked off. Bullying career over.

Football, with all its glitz and glamour, isn't a million miles away from that school mentality - that intense, hostile environment where everyone's competitively programmed, wound up like a clockwork toy.

I remember that feeling most as an apprentice at Watford. It was my first encounter with football 'banter' and I didn't like it. I'd be cleaning the showers and getting it in the ear about my mum, my gran, my girlfriend. I was a bit of a misfit.

As the saying goes, it made me stronger. I was better able to face fans' abuse on the pitch. As an apprentice you expect it, you're told that's part of the initiation: if you don't survive you won't make it in football.

But if the confidence gets knocked out of someone because they can't trust their own team-mates, where's the good in that? The distinction needs to be made between banter and abuse. I remember hearing horrific stories from a former team-mate at Watford who was black. Some of the other players would set upon him in the boot-room, cover him in boot polish and give him a good hiding - all in the name of fun.

The coach's favourite is another classroom parallel. It tends to rub everyone up the wrong way and the player can't then integrate into the team. I've seen players walk off in training - and get away with it - because they are the favourite. Then who has the power?

And then there are the fans. My gut instinct is that fans who have paid for their tickets can shout whatever they like, within the rules of the game. I prepare for it. I visualise them giving me stick before every match. But there are occasions where fan abuse crosses a line of decency. At Aston Villa, I was involved in a fatal car crash. Away to West Ham a few weeks later, the fans sang: 'James is a murderer.' That was too much. It isn't just the player who hears it, it's their families too. All in the name of entertainment.

The media can bully, too - although the flip side to this is ridiculous adoration. And it can change from one to the other in a second.

The problem is that no high-earning footballer is ever going to stick his hand up and complain about bullying, and no young player breaking through is going to risk everything by complaining about a senior colleague.

Wristbands and photo opportunities are fine for promoting awareness of the problems children face, but if it's still an issue even at the top end of football then who are we kidding?