FREE HOME EDUCATOR GUIDE

Below the New Paint

Free Year 9 English teaching guide · Five literary analysis sessions

Year 9 English · Literary analysis

Use this free guide on its own. The reading pages, printable teaching cards and progress records are included. Open or print only the pages you need for a lesson. Aspire's companion Support, Core and Extension workbooks offer extra practice and independent assessment if you want a longer sequence.

What this unit teaches

This sequence uses a short story, a poem and an unfamiliar micro-story. The learner follows a recurring image across a narrative, then explains how its new context, the order of scenes and precise word choices affect tone and meaning. The poem extends that reasoning to line breaks and changing language.

Learning intention	Student-facing success criterion
Separate a detail from an inference.	I can show the exact evidence behind what I infer.
Trace how a recurring image acquires meaning.	I can connect an early and a later moment and say what changes.
Explain how a choice shapes tone and meaning.	I can discuss a precise word, phrase or structural decision and what it does for a particular reader.
Consider a second defensible reading.	I can weigh what a reading explains against a detail that complicates it.

The story is set in an imagined Victorian town after a flood. It includes property loss and family memories. A learner can discuss the fictional characters without sharing a personal experience.

Get ready and choose a starting point

Use the original reading pages and teaching cards in this guide, plus a pencil, two colours for annotation and optional scraps of paper. A notebook can replace printed response pages. Print or open only the pages you need for that session.

Suggested timing	Focus	Materials and evidence to keep
Week 1, session 1 · 40–50 min	Read and infer	Story and Y9.1; one spoken or written inference
Week 1, session 2 · 40–50 min	Track the recurring line	Y9.2; an annotated evidence card or table
Week 1, session 3 · 45–55 min	Analyse choices and draft	Y9.3; one revised sentence and draft
Week 2, session 4 · 40–55 min	Independent response	Y9.4; preserve the first unaided draft
Week 2, session 5 · 45–60 min	Compare or transfer	Poem or unseen micro-story, according to readiness; track an independent claim with evidence

Before session 1, read all three sections of the main story and mark [04], [10], [12], [17], [23] and [28]–[29]. For sessions 2 and 3, copy one excerpt onto each of four spare slips if the student benefits from moving the parts around. Reserve the micro-story for an independent transfer check at the end.

Four-minute diagnostic

Read this invented example together: *Jules took the birthday card from the windowsill. Every letter was still sharp, except the name in the bottom corner.*

Say: ‘Tell me one thing we know. Tell me one thing we can reasonably guess. Which word makes your guess possible?’

Expect a definite detail such as *the name is unclear* and a defended inference such as *someone may have handled that corner more often*. An equally sensible suggestion is water damage, with *except* showing that the damage is local. Ask, ‘What would you need to see before choosing between those explanations?’

- If the student guesses without locating a clue, begin with the evidence table on Y9.1 and read aloud together.
- If they locate a clue and explain how it supports a guess with light prompting, model one row on Y9.1 and then ask for a second example without the prompt.
- If they can distinguish two readings and discuss what makes each possible, give a short review and offer the alternative readings after the independent response.

Session 1 · Observe before interpreting

I do · 8 minutes

Say: ‘We’ll read as people who notice what a writer has chosen. I’m going to name a detail before I say what it suggests.’ Read [01]–[02] aloud. Think aloud: ‘The hall looks blue on the noticeboard. The very next paragraph calls the real hall “the colour of a used envelope”. Both are descriptions, and the change matters. *Used* makes me see something worn. That makes me question how complete the noticeboard’s version is.’

Ask the learner to point to the two descriptions you used. If they say ‘The council lies’, respond: ‘The act of lying involves intention. Which words tell us what is shown? Which words tell us what the council meant to do?’ Accept a narrower claim about an idealised picture.

We do · 15 minutes

Pre-teach *shire*, *plaque* and *perforation*, using the definitions on Y9.1 as needed. Read the story aloud together, sharing dialogue if useful. Pause after [10] and [20]. At each pause ask the learner what they can show you on the page before asking for their interpretation.

Ask: ‘Jan says Mum will buy raffle tickets here. Why mention her in this moment?’ A likely response is that Jan worries about Mum seeing the flood mark. Follow with: ‘Which little action makes you hear hesitation?’ Look for the lifting and lowering of the sausage roll. If your learner says the roll is hot, acknowledge that the steam supports that detail. Ask how Jan’s sentence changes the significance of the pause.

You do · 12 minutes

Use the independent inference prompt on Y9.1. Ask for one claim and a short quotation from [17]–[20]. Accept a recorded, dictated or written response if the student chooses the words and evidence. Give the student a quiet read-back before feedback.

Close · 5 minutes

Say: ‘What did you change your mind about on a second reading?’ Keep one example. A useful record is *evidence located independently; explanation with prompt* rather than a single general rating.

Session 2 · Track a choice across the story

I do · 8 minutes

Write *mark → underline → label → frame and question* on paper. Read [04] and [10]. Say: 'A stain can tell us where water reached. The image of an underscore with no words gives the same stain an extra possibility. The narrator sees a space for the story people could add. I'll keep my interpretation provisional because the framing at the end could change it.'

Compare an underline beneath a real word with an isolated line on a scrap of paper. Ask, 'What does an underline usually do?' Expect that it emphasises words. This demonstration gives a reluctant reader a concrete image to use.

We do · 15 minutes

Place four scraps representing [04], [10], [23] and [28] in order. Put one phrase from each paragraph on its corresponding scrap. Discuss [23]. Say: 'Temporarily imagine they keep the first label. Visitors get an accurate statement about height. What do they now have a chance to add when they see the question instead?'

If the student says 'The frame hides the flood', point to the visible fragment in [28]. Reply: 'What can a visitor see? Where does the line seem to go? Both parts matter.' Avoid telling the student exactly what to infer about the unseen part.

You do · 12 minutes

With Y9.2, the student fills in a second row with help gradually removed or independently answers the reordered-opening question. When a first explanation is vague, ask them to compare two exact words: *reached* and *room*. The former fixes a measurement in time. The latter may name space, welcome and the work of providing both.

Close · 5 minutes

Listen for a claim about change. A suitable check is 'The first label makes the line evidence of _____. The question makes it a place for _____.' Prompt with the early and late text references if needed, then ask the student to repeat their thinking unaided.

Session 3 · Turn close reading into analysis

I do · 10 minutes

Use the annotated model on Y9.3. Read it aloud and point to its steps: claim, short evidence, precise choice, effect, larger idea. Say: 'I will cover the first clause and start with my evidence. *Used* makes me picture a marked, worn object. The opening adds a photographic picture of a finished hall just before this one. I can say the two pictures make the public image feel selective. I won't need to list all the colours in the story to explain that.'

We do · 15 minutes

Read the end quietly and then over-dramatically using Y9.3. Ask, 'Which actual words suggest the ending is restrained? What does the pencil ridge let us notice without opening the slip?' A likely answer is that the closed form and the tactile trace let the reader glimpse effort or intensity while leaving the content private. A student may think the pressure simply reflects Mum's firm grip. Ask which interpretation helps explain the decision about opening the note.

Try swapping one sentence: *I read it to everyone.* Ask what would happen to the narrator's relationship to Mum, and to the reader's access to her memories. Return to the real version immediately. The imagined version is a test of what the existing sentence achieves.

You do · 15 minutes

Give a four-minute oral rehearsal and ten minutes drafting. Offer a spare evidence card to a reluctant writer. Ask the student to choose one brief quotation, explain it to you without reading their draft and then write what they said. If the student has already explained their evidence independently, remove the sentence starter before drafting.

Close · 5 minutes

Use two highlighters. Mark evidence in the first colour and the explanation of its effect in the second. If the second colour appears only on broad claims such as *makes it interesting*, ask for one change the reader notices, expects or questions.

Session 4 · Collect an independent response

Set the independent writing prompt on Y9.4. Choose a paragraph or two connected paragraphs based on the student's readiness. Keep the reading text open. Allow planning with your learner's own annotations. Give 5 minutes to plan, 20–30 minutes to write, and 5–10 minutes to check. For learners using dictation, keep the same evidence expectations and record that the response was dictated. If time limits interfere with the evidence you need, collect the response across two sittings.

Say: 'I'll check how your interpretation fits the language and structure of the story. Point me to moments where the writer could have done something different and explain what their choices achieve.'

While the student writes, avoid supplying a preferred interpretation. If clarification is needed, re-read the task prompt without choosing evidence. If you give substantive help, mark that on the progress sheet. Save the first attempt before offering feedback or allowing a rewrite.

Give one actionable next step

What you see	An exact question or prompt	A useful next activity
Plot summary with accurate detail	'Which word tells us how to picture that moment?'	Shorten the summary to one phrase, then add a sentence about the choice.
Device named, effect generic	'How would you picture the scene if the word *used* were *new*?'	Compare the two versions, then explain the actual one.
Strong evidence, unsupported intention	'Can you defend that conclusion with the text, or is it about a person's motive?'	Replace the certainty with a reasoned claim about the reader's experience.
Two sensible readings without evaluation	'Which detail would one reading have more trouble explaining?'	Put a star beside evidence that makes one reading more persuasive.
Sustained interpretation across different moments	'Can you test that method on a text with a different structure?'	Use the poem or the unseen micro-story.

Session 5 · Compare or transfer

Teach comparison with the poem

Ask the student to write a short imagined museum label before reading the poem. Read the poem once aloud. Then point to the exact moment the register changes from two compact label statements to a longer observation of a physical object. Ask: 'What can the person recording the object see that the label did not need to name?'

Read lines [03]–[04] with a small gap after *enough* and then as a continuous sentence. Ask the student which they prefer and why. The decision matters insofar as they can hear the delay and link it to the delayed mention of absence.

Offer two readings of the volunteer's line beneath *wooden*: she can only safely name a verifiable property, or she is keeping the public description simple while actions show the object's continuing value. Ask which fits both her crossed-out label and her ordinary use of the counter. The learner may defend either with good evidence or show that the poem sustains both.

For a learner who benefits from visual support, copy the first four lines, with the same breaks, onto four slips. Compare the written layout and a spoken reading. For an extension learner, ask how different speakers and endings affect who has authority to say what the object means.

Check independent transfer

Use **Inventory at closing time** with a learner ready to work unaided. They should read and annotate before you discuss it. Ask them to point to two words or details that support an interpretation of *working*. Avoid revealing the story's ending in advance. Revisit the Week 1 record to see whether they can identify a textual choice with fewer prompts.

Continue the sequence

A useful next lesson is to compare how two writers give a symbolic object different meanings through who narrates and when it appears. If the student needs more practice, choose a short literary text with a clear recurring image, read it aloud, and revisit the evidence card with a fresh example.

Weekly learning and evidence record

Keep dated examples of a first reading, an annotated passage, an independent response and one revision. A single oral recording can represent speaking confidence if it captures the learner's own explanation. Store only records appropriate for the family.

Student _____ **Week of** _____

Session and text	Evidence kept	Skill observed	Prompt level and next action

Reading and language log

Text or pages read _____ **Date** _____

New word and how the context helped define it

Spelling pattern or word family noticed

Writing portfolio item and one change from first draft

Student reflection — A detail I now read differently is …

Print-and-teach card Y9.1 · Start with what you can show

Before reading. Explain *shire* as a local council area, *plaque* as a mounted sign or plate recording information, and *perforation* as a line of small holes that helps something tear along it. Ask the learner to use the text to check each meaning as it appears.

After a first reading. Pause at [10] and [20] during Session 1. Ask, ‘What could we photograph? What idea do you infer from it?’ During independent practice ask ‘What does the narrator expect Mum to notice in the photograph? What does Mum actually notice in [17]–[20]?’ Record one precise reference and what it suggests. In [20], the narrator notices a trace in Mum's response. Accept contrasting interpretations when the learner can show a precise detail and explain it.

Detail I can show	A reasonable inference	What would make me revise it?

Check before moving on. A description of action alone is a starting point. Ask which specific word makes the explanation possible. If the learner supplies a definite motive, ask what the narrator can know and what the reader infers. Let the learner select another detail unaided before recording progress.

Print-and-teach card Y9.2 · Follow the line

Read [04], [10], [23] and [28] again in Session 2. Invite the learner to add a short reference for each point and explain which meaning changes with the frame and question. If the learner is ready for more, imagine opening with the framed line. What question would the reader no longer arrive at through the earlier photograph?

Moment	A precise detail	What changes for the reader?
Mark [04]		
Photograph [10]		
Label [23]		
Frame and question [28]		

Reading to test. The mark first records a physical height. In the photograph the comparison with an underscore suggests a space for words nobody has yet provided. The factual label can measure the level. With the question, the audience has a chance to contribute a response. The frame also hides part of the line. Ask the learner what this reading explains and which word or action might complicate it.

Print-and-teach card Y9.3 · Model an analytical paragraph

Prompt. How does the opening create doubt about the version of events on the shire's noticeboard?

> In the opening, the confident picture of a refurbished hall sits beside the narrator's doubtful, observant voice. The people in the photograph are ‘apparently in possession of a working car and somewhere dry to put it’ [01]. The tentative adverb ‘apparently’ draws attention to how carefully the figures seem posed. The next paragraph's ‘colour of a used envelope’ brings the reader back to a worn building that still needs work [02]. Putting the two views side by side creates a wry tone and prompts the reader to ask whose difficulties a polished public image leaves out.

Teach the moves. The first sentence names a relationship between two choices. The quotation supplies a detail that a reader can locate. The explanation of *apparently* shows the effect of a single word. The later comparison offers a second moment. The final sentence explains what those choices do together.

Practise restraint. Read [24]–[29] at a conversational pace. Read the last paragraph again with an exaggerated dramatic voice. Ask which reading fits the short final sentences, the folded slip and the tactile detail of the pencil ridge. For a writing rehearsal, turn ‘It makes it interesting’ into one sentence explaining what a particular reader understands or questions.

Print-and-teach card Y9.4 · Gather independent evidence

Session 4 prompt. ‘How does *Below the New Paint* use its structure and a recurring image to explore what a town can preserve after a loss?’ Ask for one sustained paragraph of about 100–150 words if a shorter sample secures the intended reading evidence. For sustained practice, invite two connected paragraphs of about 250–350 words total. Keep the story open. Collect the first response before providing feedback.

Skill	Progress to look for
Interpretation	A reasoned claim about preservation and change, including an acknowledgment of uncertainty where the story leaves it open.
Evidence	Brief details from two moments, chosen for what they help explain.
Reasoning about choices	An explanation of how wording, placement or sequence shapes meaning, beyond retelling the event.
Expression	Connected reasoning and precise use of quotation, in writing or in an independent oral response.

Two possible responses. ‘The line shows how high the water went’ identifies a literal detail. The next move is to ask what the underscore comparison does to that detail. ‘The empty underline creates a gap, and the later question leaves space for an audience to add experiences’ traces a change. Ask what the unopened slip then contributes to a reading about privacy or public memory.

Session 5 transfer. After the poem comparison, use *Inventory at closing time* without supplying a model. Ask for two details behind an interpretation of *working* and one alternative reading. Look for the same habit of linking a precise choice to an effect in a new text. Reassess later with another short text if the explanation still depends on a prompt.

Below the New Paint

An original short story for Aspire Learning Resources

[01] In the photograph on the shire noticeboard, the hall was already blue. There were people in the picture too: little white figures leaning over the veranda rail, all apparently in possession of a working car and somewhere dry to put it.

[02] The real hall at Wattle Reach was the colour of a used envelope. I came through the side door on Saturday with two sausage rolls in a paper bag and found Auntie Jan crouched beside a tin of primer. Somebody had left a new brass plaque on the ticket counter, still in its clear wrapper. The date of the reopening was engraved at the bottom. Two weeks to go.

[03] ‘You can eat first,’ she said. ‘I’m waiting for Len to find the spare roller.’

[04] Behind the counter, a brown line crossed the wall at the height of my shoulder. It ran through the old white paint, over a nail head and out the other side of the doorway. Beside it, in pencil, someone had written *Thursday 3.10*. The foil pie trays in the kitchen cupboards had all been cleaned and stacked again. The line was the only thing that made the building look as though anything had happened.

[05] ‘Leave a bit of that,’ I said.

[06] Jan tore the bag open so it sat flat between us. ‘You want to leave it where people buy their raffle tickets?’

[07] ‘That’s where it is.’

[08] Her sausage roll steamed in the cold. She lifted it and put it down again. ‘Your mum will buy raffle tickets here.’

[09] I knew what she meant. Mum’s sewing machine had stood on the dining table for a week, waiting for its turn with a man in town who repaired motors. Mum had cleared a space under the window in our new place, where she’d put it if it came back. I’d been at the hall when she first asked if someone could drive her home to get it, hours before the water came up to the hall steps. One of the men at the door had said, ‘There are things you can replace,’ in the voice people use when they’ve already decided which things you’re grieving.

[10] I had taken a photo of the line that morning, before Jan arrived. In the picture it looked like an underline with nothing written over it.

The ticket counter

[11] Len came in with the roller under his arm and a jar of screws rattling in his coat pocket. He had been the hall caretaker for so long that people gave him keys even to buildings he didn't look after. He put the roller down and read the new plaque through its wrapper. It thanked the shire, the rebuilding committee and the sponsors.

[12] 'My part's here,' he said, tapping the small print about the committee. 'Duyen's isn't.'

[13] Duyen, who ran the bakery, had held the hall's back door open with a flour sack on the first night, so people carrying boxes could get through. Len told me she had spent most of the next week delivering bread to the tennis pavilion, where some families were staying. He only knew that because she had borrowed his van. By the time the shire formed the committee, she'd gone back to getting up at two for work.

[14] 'Would you leave the line?' I asked him.

[15] He took an old paper ticket from his pocket and folded it along the perforation. 'My grandson used to ask how much water would fit in here,' he said. 'Now we know. I don't need a ruler for it.' He held the two halves of the ticket together and let one fall. 'But if you keep a piece, put something by it that's worth reading.'

[16] At lunch Mum arrived with a plastic tub of lamingtons. She had cut each one in half with the good bread knife. I could see a little layer of chocolate running down the cut side, where the icing had come off on the blade.

[17] I showed her the photograph. She slid it sideways with her thumb. She wasn't looking at the line anymore. She was looking at what my phone had brought up next, a photograph from the tennis pavilion. There were my cousins asleep on two folding tables pushed together. In the corner of the picture sat Mum, threading a needle. In the week before she got the machine back, she had stitched three torn school jumpers by hand. Mine was the one with blue thread through the cuff. The machine had come back eventually. It had run long enough to finish a zip, and then it had stopped again.

[18] 'Can I send that one to your cousins?' she asked.

[19] 'Which one?'

[20] She passed the phone back. The cousins and the folding tables. 'They were so small,' she said. It was eleven months ago.

A space for names

[21] In the afternoon I found a strip of card and carried it from the pencil date to the edge of the counter. It covered a piece of the line a little longer than my hand. Jan looked at it, then looked towards the kitchen, where Mum had got the urn going.

[22] 'What are you putting on the label?' she asked.

[23] I had written a first draft on the back of the old raffle pad. *The water reached this point.* Underneath it I had put a date I'd found in the shire newsletter. The date was right. It would probably have outlasted whatever people had to say. I looked through the serving hatch at Mum, who was lifting the wet teabags out of the sink one by one with the tips of her fingers.

[24] 'What if it's a question?' I said.

[25] Jan wiped a drip from the skirting board. 'What sort of question?'

[26] I tore the sheet off the pad. 'Something you could answer even if you weren't on the committee.'

[27] We asked Len if we could leave that much wall. He found a spare picture frame in the cupboard above the stage. Jan said I'd have to sand its sharp edges before we hung it. I eased the paper from the back. On the front, the glass had an oval trace where someone had wiped it with a cloth and stopped just short of the edges.

[28] Mum came to see what we'd done. By then the wall was blue except for what we'd saved. The line went right to the wooden edge of the frame and seemed to carry on behind the new paint. Underneath, I'd pinned a few blank slips and a card with the question *Who made room for you?* I held out a pencil.

[29] Mum wrote for a while with her hand turned so I couldn't read. She folded the slip before she handed it to me. Her pencil had pressed hard enough to make a slight ridge in the paper. I didn't open it. From the kitchen Jan called that the tea would go cold. Mum went back through the kitchen door first. I picked up the empty cups and followed her.

Museum label, revised

An original poem for Aspire Learning Resources

[01] *Object*: one wooden ticket counter.
[02] *Use*: admission.
[03] Beside the till, a circle clean enough
[04] to tell us what is missing.

[05] The volunteer sets her mug there
[06] without looking down. On the label
[07] she scratches out *disused*
[08] with the blunt end of her pencil.

[09] Before opening, she copies one word
[10] from the front of the counter:
[11] *COME*. The last nail, where the other
[12] letters hung, still holds a coat.

[13] The museum will open at ten.
[14] At five to, she finds a ruler
[15] and draws a small straight line
[16] under the word *wooden*.

Inventory at closing time

An original micro-story for Aspire Learning Resources

[01] The spreadsheet wanted a quantity. I typed *one* next to *kettle*, although there were three in the scout hall that morning. One had belonged to the caretaker, who took it home the day they took his keys back. One was the tall steel urn we had to turn off at the wall. The third was on the bench, under the window. That was the one with the red switch.

[02] I could still tell, from across the room, when the red switch went up. It made a little click like a pen being closed. After the Friday meeting there would be mugs out and a packet of arrowroot biscuits split between two saucers. The council had left the chairs for collection. I pushed them into stacks of six, matching the number on a piece of masking tape stuck to the first chair.

[03] At the bottom of the screen a new cell opened. *Condition*. I tipped the kettle and shook it. Three dry crumbs fell out of the spout. The lid clicked shut. In the cell I typed *working*. Somebody down the corridor had been waiting for the keys. I touched the screen just below the word, where my reflection was brightest, then shut the laptop.