

Teachers/Adults Side (1)

Liverpool Biennial

KS4 English – A Witch’s Story

The learner will write a short story, from the perspective of Mother Shipton (England’s most famous prophetess), using themes of Luisa Ungar’s artwork to inspire their writing.

Estimated time = 1 hour

Curriculum Extract:

Pupils should be taught to:

- Write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
 - Adapting their writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences: to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue
 - Selecting and organising ideas, facts and key points, and citing evidence, details and quotation effectively and pertinently for support and emphasis
 - Selecting, and using judiciously, vocabulary, grammar, form, and structural and organisational features, including rhetorical devices, to reflect audience, purpose and context, and using Standard English where appropriate
- Make notes, draft and write, including using information provided by others (e.g. writing a letter from key points provided; drawing on and using information from a presentation)
- Revise, edit and proof-read through:
 - Reflecting on whether their draft achieves the intended impact
 - Paying attention to the accuracy and effectiveness of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Key Terms:

- **Clairvoyant** – A person who claims to have a supernatural ability to perceive events in the future or beyond normal sensory contact.
- **Contagion** – The passing on of disease from one person to another by close contact.
- **Reclaiming** – To retrieve or recover.
- **Marginalised** – To treat a person or a group as insignificant or to push them to the margins of society.
- **Prophetess** – A female prophet (a person regarded as an inspired teacher or proclaimer of the will of God).
- **Repeal** – The act of removing the legal force of a law.
- **Fraudulent** – Obtained, done by, or involving deception (misleading or tricking someone), especially criminal deception.
- **Premonition** – A strong feeling that something is about to happen, especially something unpleasant.

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Artist:

Luisa Ungar

LB2021 Project:

Luisa Ungar presents a newly commissioned performance. *A Regurgitation is a Song is a Spell (Consultations to recreate the colonial disease)* (2021), offers members of the public a personal experience to engage directly with experts in clairvoyance through a series of weekly phone calls available by demand.

Based on reports of contagion and witch-hunting, the commission is inspired by official records, rumour and historical gossip. Ungar experiments with the conversational format as a way of reclaiming certain practices excluded or marginalised by the modern world, reflecting on the absence of women's voices in connection to local history.

Activity Instructions:

Luisa Ungar's work for Liverpool Biennial 2021 is based around the concept of clairvoyancy – the practice of predicting the future and knowing facts about people they have never met. This practice is typically associated with women and has been this way for centuries across the world. Whether called clairvoyants or prophetesses or oracles, these women were often marginalised and sometimes punished by society, by others who were afraid of their gifts. Some of the most famous cases of such women being shunned by society, were those accused of being witches.

Read the information about Witchcraft and the story of England's most famous prophetess, Mother Shipton. Use this information to help you to write a short story from the perspective of Mother Shipton and think about the following questions to help you think from her point of view:

- How does it feel to be accused of being a witch?
- How do people treat you?
- Why do you think they treat you this way?
- Why do you think you have your powers? Why were they not gifted to someone else?
- What do you use your powers of prediction for?
- How do you think your past has affected you and the way others think of you?

Material List:

- Pen
- Paper

Witchcraft

From the 1400s, people were being accused of being witches, but the height of witch-hunting was in the 1500s. In 1542, Parliament passed the Witchcraft Act, which defined witchcraft as a crime punishable by death. Formal accusations against witches – who were usually poor, elderly women – reached a peak in the late 16th century, particularly in south-east England.

513 witches were put on trial there between 1560 and 1700, though only 112 were executed. The last known execution took place in Devon in 1685 and the last trials were held in Leicester in 1717. Overall, some 500 people in England are believed to have been executed for witchcraft.

In 1736 Parliament passed an Act repealing the laws against witchcraft, but imposing fines or imprisonment on people who claimed to be able to use magical powers. This Act was repealed in 1951 by the Fraudulent Mediums Act which in turn was repealed in 2008.

Click on the link below to learn more about laws surrounding witchcraft:

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/religion/overview/witchcraft/>

*A R*ehearfall both straung
and true, of hainous and horrible ac-
tes committed by Elizabeth Stile,
Alias Rockingham, Mother Duten, Mo-
ther Deuell, Mother Margaret, Fower noto-
rious Witches, apprehended at winsore in the
Countie of Barkl. and at Abbing-
ton arraigned, condemned, and
executed, on the 26. daye
of Februarie laste
Anno. 1579.



*Imprinted at London for Edward White at the
little North-doore of Paules, at the signe
of the Gun, and are there to be sold.*

Roberti Hare

This is an English witchcraft pamphlet from 1579. After a preface to the reader condemning the practice of witchcraft and advising the avoidance and prosecution of witches, the pamphlet gives an account of the doings of Elizabeth Stile – a 65-year-old Windsor woman accused of witchcraft – and three other women (Mothers Duten, Deuell and Margaret), based on Stile’s confession in jail.

Mother Shipton

Mother Shipton was born Ursula Sontheil in 1488, during the reign of Henry VII, father of Henry VIII. Although little is known about her parents, legend has it that she was born during a violent thunderstorm in a cave on the banks of the River Nidd in Knaresborough. Her mother, Agatha, was just fifteen years old when she gave birth, and despite being dragged before the local magistrate, she would not reveal who the father was.

With no family and no friends to support her, Agatha raised Ursula in the cave on her own for two years before the Abbott of Beverley took pity on them and a local family took Ursula in. Agatha was taken to a nunnery far away, where she died some years later. She never saw her daughter again.

Ursula grew up around Knaresborough. She was a strange child, both in looks and in nature. Her nose was large and crooked, her back bent and her legs twisted. She was taunted and teased by the local people and so in time she learnt she was best off on her own. She spent most of her days around the cave where she was born. There she studied the forest, the flowers and herbs and made remedies and potions with them.

As well as making traditional remedies, Mother Shipton had another gift. She could predict the future. It started off with small premonitions but as she practised, she became more confident, and her powers grew. Soon she was known as Knaresborough's Prophetess, a witch. She made her living telling the future and warning those who asked of what was to come.

Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of York, publicly accused her of witchcraft as Mother Shipton prophesied that despite being the Archbishop of York, he would never actually set foot in York itself. Furthermore, she prophesied that he would fall.

After hearing of this Cardinal Wolsey decided to visit York in 1529 and consequently arrest her as a witch. However, before he could reach York itself, he was taken to London on suspicion of high treason and executed.

Mother Shipton was never accused of witchcraft again and she went on to foretell the Spanish Armada, the discovery of the potato, the Great Fire of London and even the end of the world!

Visit these websites for more information on witches and England's most famous prophetess!
www.mothershipton.co.uk/
<https://historytheinterestingbits.com/2015/08/14/old-mother-shipton/>
https://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/myths_legends/england/north_yorkshire/article_1.shtml



A print depicting Mother Shipton prophesising the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey from *'Mother Shipton investigated: the result of critical examination in the British Museum Library of the literature relating to the Yorkshire sibyl'* by W. H. Harrison (1881)

What are the features of a fictional short story?

- **An engaging opening** – We want to draw our readers in from the very first sentence and grab their attention, to make them want to read on.
- **Consistent tense** – For consistency and cohesion, the tense of our writing needs to be the same the whole way through. Will your writing be in present tense (as if it were happening now) or past tense (as if it happened a few days, weeks or years ago)?
- **Paragraphs** – Paragraphs are important for structuring your writing, ensuring that it is well organised. A good way to remember when to start a new paragraph is by using the **TiP ToP** acronym: **T**ime, **P**lace, **T**opic, **P**erson.
- **Dialogue** – You can also introduce dialogue into your short story, giving an insight into how your character interacts with others and how they interact back.
- **Figurative devices** – Use devices such as similes and metaphors to make your writing more engaging.
- **Senses** – Use your 5 senses (what you see, hear, smell, taste and feel) to build a vivid and detailed world that your reader can really visualise.
- **Varying sentence length** – Use your sentence lengths to reflect the pace of the action within your story.
- **First person perspective** – As this story will be written from the perspective of Mother Shipton, it will be written in first person. This means imagining that you are Mother Shipton and writing from her point of view. For example, 'I have been accused of being a witch.' This will help the reader to relate more to your character and sympathise with their feelings and emotions.

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Use the page below to plan/draft your short story.

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing, framed by a thick black border. The lines are evenly spaced and cover most of the page's width and height, leaving some space at the top and bottom for the text boxes and the page number.