

Year 1 English Language: Flying Start

Please note this task was also included in our Year 11 pack this term

1. Read and annotate the extract below from B. Bryson's 'the Lost Continent' about the town he grew up in, in America. Identify any techniques which you feel are significant and copy them into the chart overleaf, as demonstrated.
2. For your first class in Sept, produce a short piece of writing about 300 words long, starting with the words: 'I come from...' Use techniques like Bryson's when you write this up and do ensure the work you bring in is a second draft, which is thoroughly checked for accuracy and neatness.
3. Filling in the grid on the final page, see if you can identify examples of different word-classes/ grammar from the Bryson text below.

'The Lost Continent'

Bill Bryson

I come from Des Moines. Somebody had to.

When you come from Des Moines you either accept the fact without question and settle down with a local girl named Bobbi and get a job at the Firestone factory and live there for ever and ever, or you spend your adolescence moaning at length about what a dump it is and how you can't wait to get out, and then you settle down with a local girl named Bobbi and get a job at the Firestone factory and live there for ever and ever.

Hardly anyone ever leaves. This is because Des Moines is the most powerful hypnotic known to man. Outside town there is a big sign that says WELCOME TO DES MOINES. THIS IS WHAT DEATH IS LIKE. There isn't really. I just made that up. But the place does get a grip on you. People who have nothing to do with Des Moines drive in off the interstate¹, looking for gas or hamburgers, and stay for ever. There's a New Jersey couple up the street my parents' house whom you see wandering around from time to time looking faintly puzzled but strangely serene². Everybody in Des Moines is strangely serene.

The only person I ever knew in Des Moines who wasn't serene was Mr Piper. Mr Piper was my parents' neighbour — a leering cherry-faced idiot who was forever getting drunk and crashing his car into telephone poles. Everywhere you went you encountered telephone poles and road signs leaning dangerously in testimony³ to Mr Piper's driving habits. He distributed them all over the west side of town, rather in the way dogs mark trees. Mr Piper was the nearest possible human equivalent to Fred Flintstone, but less charming. He was a Shriner⁴ and a Republican⁵ — a Nixon Republican — and he appeared to feel he had a mission in life to spread offence. His favourite pastime, apart from getting drunk and crashing his car, was to get drunk and insult the neighbours, particularly us because we were Democrats⁶, though he was prepared to insult Republicans when we weren't available.

Eventually, I grew up and moved to England. This irritated Mr Piper almost beyond measure⁷. It was worse than being a Democrat. Whenever I was in town, Mr Piper would come over and chide⁸ me. 'I don't know what you're doing over there with all those Limeys,' he would say provocatively⁸. 'They're not clean people.'

'Mr Piper, you don't know what you're talking about,' I would reply in my affected⁹ English accent. 'You are a cretin.' You could talk like that to Mr Piper because (1) he was a cretin and (2) he never listened to anything that was said to him.

'Bobbi and I went to over to London two years ago and our hotel room didn't even have a *bathroom* in it,' Mr Piper would go on. 'If you wanted to take a leak in the middle of the night you had to walk about a mile down the hallway. That isn't a clean way to live.'

¹ motorway

² peaceful

³ proof

⁴ a group for men which is committed to community service

⁵ one of the main political parties in America

⁶ the other main political party

⁷ tell me off

⁸ to try to get a reaction

⁹ pretend

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‘Mr Piper, the English are paragons of cleanliness. It is a well-known fact that they use more soap per capita than anyone else in Europe.’

Mr Piper would snort derisively at this. ‘That doesn’t mean diddly-squat, boy, just because they’re cleaner than a bunch of Krauts and Eyeties . My God, a *dog’s* cleaner than a bunch of Krauts and Eyeties. And I’ll tell you something else: if his Daddy hadn’t bought Illinois for him, John F. Kennedy would never have been elected President.

I had lived around Mr Piper long enough not to be thrown by this abrupt change of tack. The theft of the 1960 presidential election was a long-standing plaint of his, one that he brought into the conversation every ten or twelve minutes regardless of the prevailing drift of the discussion. In 1963, during Kennedy’s funeral, someone in the Waveland Tap punched Mr Piper in the nose for making that remark. Mr Piper was so furious that he went straight out and crashed his car into a telephone pole. Mr Piper is dead now, which is of course one thing that Des Moines prepares you for.

Feature	Example	Comment
First person pronouns	<i>I come from Des Moines.</i>	Establishes personal voice to connect with reader
Variety of sentence-length	<i>Somebody had to. When you come from...</i>	2 declarative sentences, one minor, at start, then longer, complex one to reinforce the humorous tone
Repetition		

Reread the Bryson extract for the following grammatical features. Find and jot down examples of the following word-classes and log on to the UCL website each time: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/frames/glossary.htm>, to obtain linguistic definitions for each technical term.

1. 5 examples of proper nouns?

- UCL definition:

2. 5 examples of common nouns?

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- UCL definition:

3. 5 examples of abstract nouns?

- UCL definition:

4. 5 examples of verbs in the text?

- UCL definition:

5. 5 examples of adjectives?

- UCL definition:

6. 3 examples of adverbs?

- UCL definition:

Now plan and then write up a short piece of writing about 300 words long, starting with the words: 'I come from...' (Use techniques like Bryson's when you write this up and do ensure the work you bring in is a second draft, which is thoroughly checked for accuracy and neatness, by both you and another pair of eyes.)

PLANNING

- Describe your hometown?
- Use your senses: What does it look like/ sound like/ smell like etc.?
- What are the people like there? (*Any interesting characters?*)
- Any interesting buildings or landmarks?
- Is it busy/slow/noisy/quiet/attractive/ugly/clean/dirty/ friendly/hostile etc.?
- How does your town make you feel?
- What do you like about your town? / What do you dislike about it?