

'Mrs Beast'

LO: To discuss the Duffy's interpretation of women who have been ignored and silenced through the ages.

LO: To take part in a critical discussion about Mrs Beast which will offer preparation for a summer essay.

The World's Wife

Male and female language

PADLET!

Brainstorm associations of the words:

- Beast
- Girls
- Ladies

On your handout is a selection of words and phrases from the poem.

In groups organise them into three groups:

1. Words with male associations
2. Words with female associations
3. Neutral words (with neither male or female associations)

Reading the poem

- Pay close attention to these words as you come across them in context.
- Does anything surprise you?
- To what extent does the effect of the poem rely on the reader having certain expectations of male and female relationships, behaviour and language?

Mrs Beast

- Discuss your impressions of Mrs Beast herself.
- Is she a character who challenges stereotypes- particularly those based on gender- or has she escaped the stereotype of 'Beauty' only to fall into the stereotype of dominatrix?

After reading

- At three points in the poem Mrs Beast lists famous women from literature, history, myth, music and popular culture. The list (produced out of context) are below:
- GROUP 1- Helen, Cleopatra, Queen of Sheba, Juliet, Neferiti, Mona Lisa, Garbo, Little Mermaid
- GROUP 2- Goldilocks, the Minotaur's wife. Frau Yellow Dwarf Bride of the Bearded Lesbian
- GROUP 3- Henry VIII's wives, Diana, Eve Ashputtel, Marilyn Monroe, Bluebeard's wives, Bessie Smith, Rapunzel, Snow White

Your task:

- In groups, take one of the lists and share what you know about the women – you may need to do some research into some of the characters. What do the women in your group have in common? How would you describe or classify them as a group?
- Now re-read 'Mrs Beast', paying particular attention to the role played in the poem by the women in your list. As a group, talk about the role these women play in the poem.
- Feedback- on what you have found out about your group of women and discuss the role each plays in the poem.

'I had the language'

- Mrs Beast herself claims ownership of language- 'I had the language, girls'- suggesting this is something desirable.
- What do you think Mrs Beast means: What language does she have here and throughout the poem? For example, why does she use the word 'girls'?
- Why do you think Duffy put this claim into the mouth of Mrs Beast?

Critics' forum- a simulation

- Imagine Duffy is the subject of a late night arts programme on BBC4. The focus of the programme is her collection 'The World's Wife'. The discussion has just moved on to consider 'Mrs Beast'- although of course it's bound to range across the collection.
- Work in pairs and pick a 'critic number' from your handout. You should prepare a written introductory statement and notes on points to support your critical position.
- Each critic will be invited to read out their introductory statement before the discussion is opened out.
- I will be the host!

Comparing poems- 'Mrs Beast' and 'Little Red Cap'

A manifesto?

- While some critics have called 'Little Red Cap' an agenda for the whole collection; others have described 'Mrs Beast' as its manifesto.
- **An agenda is defined as a 'list of matters to be discussed'**
- **A manifesto is defined as a 'a public declaration of policy and aims'**
- Q: In what ways might 'Little Red Cap' be interpreted as an agenda for the collection? Is 'Mrs Beast' a public declaration of aims?