



**IBSC**

International Boys'  
Schools Coalition



***Reinvigorating English Literature  
in the Education of Boys***

**Dr Challoner's Grammar School  
Tuesday, 25 June, 2013  
10.00 am to 3.20 pm**

**Purpose**

Once again, the teaching of English Literature is at a turning point: imminent reforms to GCSE and a new National Curriculum will inevitably set the tone for much teaching of the subject across schools of every hue.

Innovations in the teaching of the subject have not always nurtured boys' interest. Outside of single-sex education, uptake amongst boys of A level English Literature has all but collapsed. Text choices, examination changes, teaching approaches – all have played a part in turning many boys off the subject.

So just what is the role of English Literature in our schools today? Does English have a place beyond the teaching of literacy? How does the subject contribute to boys' broader development? How can we rescue English Literature to make it a subject which once again contributes to the development of humane, intelligent young men? How can we move beyond the 'cram for exam' approach which has suffocated much teaching, yet also maintain a sense of rigour? What can be done to make English a genuinely engaging subject for all boys? What about the needs of our most able students? And if English is such an important subject, how do we establish a place for it at the heart of every school?

This is a conference that will challenge you in your teaching of English Literature. There will be input on an academic level, and from schools with a history of success in the teaching of English Literature, but there will also be opportunity for input from delegates through a series of workshops where – it is hoped – we will be able to draw on the shared expertise of IBSC schools from across the country and from state as well as independent schools.

Combining the theoretical with the practical, you will leave with ideas on how to raise the profile of English within your school, and how to engage boys of all ages, perhaps even with a fresh vision for what English Literature can be.

## Programme

### Conference Speakers

- **Professor Nicholas Roe (University of St Andrews)**

We begin with a talk to inspire and a chance to renew some of your thinking on one of the most widely studied poets, John Keats. Nicholas Roe is the author of the critically acclaimed biographies and studies including *Fiery Heart: the First Life of Leigh Hunt*; *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, and *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*. *John Keats: A New Life* was published to critical acclaim in 2012. Educated at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe and Trinity College, he is now Professor of English Literature at the University of St Andrews, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Chair of The Keats Foundation. Professor Roe will explore the appeal of Keats to the reader, and especially the student of English Literature. Just why is Keats so popular with students who study English at Sixth Form level, and what is it that makes him click with so many boys particularly?

- **Dr Gabrielle Cliff-Hodges (Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Cambridge)**

We continue with a talk from Gabrielle Cliff Hodges drawing on her recent research on why reading literature matters and drawing on her recent research into the development of students as readers. She has an interest in what motivates students and supports them in their development as committed, habitual readers, who read both within and beyond the context of school. Gabrielle was a Head of English, before moving into teacher education at Homerton College in 1993 and subsequently the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education in 2001 where she is University Senior Lecturer in Education and Director of Initial Teacher Training and Undergraduate programmes. She also co-ordinates the Secondary English PGCE course and teaches on the MPhil Critical Approaches to Children's Literature.

### Workshops

Led by staff at Dr Challoner's Grammar School and the City of London Schools, workshops focus on our key questions and themes.

1. **Raising the Flag for English Literature**

**Andrew Millar, Dr Challoner's Grammar School**

This practical session will explore how our host school raised the status of English within their school, both through curriculum change and through extra-curricular innovation. With a renewed focus on drama, a rediscovery of competition and just about everything possible under the sun done to make English an appealing subject to boys, the school has seen significant improvements in pupils' examination results and approach to the subject.

2. **Teaching Literature beyond the exam: English and Male Identity**

**Josh Norman, Head of Year, City of London Boys School**

Much is spoken of the functional aspects of English teaching, and the necessity for students to leave school with sound skills in reading and writing. But an over-emphasis on such skills can leave students with an impoverished experience of the transformative power of literature teaching. This session will explore how the teaching of Literature can contribute to pupils' broader

development, and particularly as our students pass through adolescence, can play a key role in shaping a sense of self-identity.

**3. Fresh Approaches to Boy Friendly Texts**

**City of London Boys School**

*Of Mice and Men, An Inspector Calls, Romeo and Juliet...* In their own way, all are excellent texts with much to offer the class teacher. Yet the truth is that many of us end up plummeting for safe choices when it comes to selecting class readers. This session will inspire you with a number of unusual but engaging texts, and all offering challenge and those extra-dimensions for which English teachers look: richness of language and thought-provoking content.

**4. English 11-14: Engaging Boys**

**Brigitte Gallagher**

**Chesham Grammar School (Formerly Dr Challoner's)**

Despite government initiatives, research and experience shows that many boys stop reading by the age of fourteen. Some will never rediscover reading. How can teachers ignite the interest of younger boys of English so that students learn with a sense of rigour, develop their creativity and also ignite an interest in the subject?

**5. Extending the Able: Maximising Boys' Achievement 14-16**

**Felicity Adi**

**Dr Challoner's Grammar School**

What strategies can a school use to raise pupil achievement at GCSE *and* encourage students to develop deeper learning habits that will stand them well for A level study and beyond? What approaches can be adopted to meet the challenge of high achieving students at GCSE in English Literature? What is proven to work in the classroom, without reducing our subject to an exercise in spoon feeding?

**6. Creating a Culture of Reading**

**Dr Challoner's Grammar School**

What can a school do to create a culture of reading? From the role of parents and the school library to the form tutor and the English teacher, this workshop will focus on sharing good practice, as well as offering strategies which are proven to work when it comes to engaging boys in reading. What about the role of e-readers, Kindles and iPads? How far should teachers encourage boys with reading? What about reading lists?