

The Diary of Sarah Forbes Bonetta: A Novel by Victoria Princewill

KS3 Lesson Plan

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Objectives

- To show an understanding of a fictional character.
- To make clear notes and plan effectively for an interview writing task.
- To learn new vocabulary, including some words from the 19th century.

Outcomes

Students will explore the character of Sarah and re-create her voice in a fictional interview. They will also explore some 19th century vocabulary and use some of these words to give an authentic tone to the interview answers.

Resources

Resource sheet 1: Extract from *The Diary of Sarah Forbes Bonetta: A Novel by Victoria Princewill*

Resource Sheet 2 - Word table

Resource Sheet 3 – Sample questions and answers

Resource Sheet 4 - Planning sheet for the interview

Lead in

- Read the extract from the diary aloud to the class and ask the students to highlight any unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Discuss with the students what we have learned about Sarah Bonetta and ask them for words to describe her character (for example: intelligent, proud, dignified, educated, articulate). Give them some more brief background information about Sarah's life and explain that this is a fictional diary based on a real person.
- Give the students resource sheet 2. Ask the students to pick six unfamiliar words they have highlighted and record them in the table in resource 2. Students can then use a dictionary to look up the unfamiliar vocabulary and record the definitions (an example has been completed for students on the resource sheet). You may also want to make an online dictionary available to students for this task. Explain that we will use some of these words in the main writing task of the lesson.

Task 1

- Explain to students that they will be writing interview questions and answers for Sarah Bonetta. They can imagine that they have travelled back in time, to the 19th century, to interview Sarah about her life.
- Remind them to ask open questions that will encourage a more detailed answer (for example, a closed question would be 'How old are you?'. An open question would be 'What do you remember about your childhood?')
- Ask the students to complete the planning interview sheet (resource 3). They can work in pairs to discuss ideas for possible questions.

Task 2

- Model how to write the interview questions and answers, using the sample provided (resource 4).
- Remind the students to use some of the unfamiliar vocabulary in their questions and answers (using some of the vocab from resource 2)
- Then ask each student to write the six questions and answers for their interview.



Extension ideas

Students could use role play and hot seating to develop their interviews. The teacher or a confident student could take on the role of Sarah and the other students could pick one of their interview questions to ask. They could then make notes on the answers and use these to develop their written responses.

Working in pairs, students could swap interviews and give each other feedback. They could use the following questions to focus their feedback:

- Does each question encourage a detailed enough answer?
- Does each answer capture Sarah's voice? (for example, her pride, intelligence and dignity?)
- Do any of the answers use 19th century vocabulary?
- Which is your favourite question/answer?
- How could the interview be improved?

CURRICULUM LINKS

KS3 English – pupils should be taught to:

Reading

- Read a wide range of fiction with a wide coverage of genres, historical periods, forms and authors.
- Learn new vocabulary, relating it explicitly to known vocabulary and understanding it with the help of context and dictionaries.

Writing

- Write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information.
- Write for a wide range of purposes and audiences.
- Apply their growing knowledge of vocabulary to their writing.

Speaking

- Speak confidently and effectively.
- Participate in structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said.



Resource 1: Extract from the diary

17 August 1860

The Rectory, Palm Cottage

Gillingham, England

I do not like surprises.

There is not a lot that is known about me. When I was born. Who was there. How many siblings I may or may not have had.

Learning about myself is a constant surprise.

Often there is nothing new to learn. No insight to be found. A few days ago, it was my birthday. Or rather, it was the day my first caretaker, Mrs Phipps, a member of the Queen's household, had chosen to celebrate annually as my birthday. How was it chosen? Well, in England, we do as the Englishman would. Where there is no truth, we invent a story!

And four days on from my invented birthday, I am here, curled in my bed at close to midnight, scribbling in this little diary all that happened that day. How shall I address those moments I cannot remember? As the Englishman would?

Let us begin with what I know about myself. The question of invention need not arise just yet.


My name is Forbes.

Sarah Forbes Bonetta. I was born in West Africa and later kidnapped by King Ghezo of Dahomey, who murdered the rest of my family and kept me alive to be a human sacrifice. I was rescued by the Royal Navy captain Frederick Forbes, who persuaded the king to present me as a gift to the Queen of the British Empire. Forbes is the one who named me. 'Sarah Forbes Bonetta' is entirely his creation. He gave me his surname, and then the surname of his ship ... he had me Baptised as Sarah when we arrived in England. As to what alchemy led him to name me thus, the mystery died with the man. I was Etta to the girls in Sierra Leone, Sally to the Queen, Sarah Bonetta to the reverend and his family, and — whether it was four days ago, or in fact today, or some day in the future or the distant past — I will at some point be or have turned seventeen. And today is the day I have chosen to write about it, as the day comes to an end.

I have been told many times that I am a girl with too many opinions. But I am not interested in limiting my own voice. Today is the day I decide that I shall be the one to write the story of my life, so I can recall who I am, who I have been and how I have grown, simply by returning to my very own words. And they will not be frivolous. I shall write who I am, how I lived, what took place. This will be a sphere of history as much as memory — a gift to myself, to honour that which I lost and cannot replace.


On the subject of that which I have lost, I should tell how I came to be here, living with the Reverend Schoen and his wife, Elizabeth, in Kent, following the captain's death. It was the captain's wife, dear Mary Forbes, who informed the Queen of my cough. At the time, the Queen became convinced this rather awful weather was the cause. While other Africans have apparently moved to England and thrived, I had this persistent cough that all the fires in Windsor Castle could not abate. Poor Mary was opposed to my leaving and, alas, I have not seen her since I returned. Still, her concerns about my health were acted upon. And like a parcel being returned, back to Africa I was shipped.

I was sent to the Female Institution, a school for African girls in Freetown, Sierra Leone, run by missionaries in the region. I boarded the ship some months after Captain Forbes's passing. It was summer in England, which does not mean all that much, but it was a beautiful June day that I stepped onto the HMS Bathurst. I did not wish to go to Africa and did not enjoy myself much there, but this is by the bye. I was favoured by the missionaries and teachers, and I did well, because work is a useful distraction from grief. I learned that the previous year, as I settled in the Forbeses' home. Although, with the captain's family, play proved as glorious a distraction from grief or pain as work itself. I was in Sierra Leone for four years. In 1855 I was returned here, to England. I do not know what the reasoning was for my being placed with the Schoens, as opposed to the Forbes family once more, but I



suspect that the Queen wanted me to stay in England, and Mrs Forbes had retired to Scotland. The Schoens live in Gillingham, Kent, and have seven children. The Forbeses' home was grand, and with the children there was always merriment to be had. The Schoens' home is comparatively modest, unfit for a family of nine. My presence makes ten, and I have not counted the cook or the nursemaid.

I am not unhappy here. The Reverend James Schoen is studious; he speaks many African languages and likes to read. He talks to me at length about any new scholarly book he purchases, and I do not resent these conversations, nor that he expects me to have a certain level of aptitude. I seem to not only match his requirement but surpass it too. His eldest children Frederick and Annie have different, if amusing, relationships with me. Frederick, when younger, would follow me around incessantly. It was tiresome from the beginning; I suspect he was my first admirer! Annie was quite the opposite. Her manner to me is cool. I am not concerned, as Mrs Schoen's manner is so emotive and engaged that after a single conversation, I find myself yearning for Annie's cool indifference, just as I might seek some extended alone time. One might assume that such a maternal woman would have taken great pains to craft the optimal birthday but, alas, it was not to be. Each year I have found it disappointing, but this year, with promises mounted high and seventeen being such a profound age, so close to responsibility and adulthood, I was excited for it.



I was a fool, of course.

But what better way to mark turning seventeen than to bury your childhood self?

Let me tell you what I was expecting: I would rise early and feel the warm sunlight on my face. I would open the large, beautiful box that held the taffeta-and-silk gown that the Queen had had made for me, the one with the delicate lace around the neck. I would put it on and appraise myself in my gilded mirror, amusing myself by flicking through an old book while awaiting breakfast in my room. At midday the longcase clock would chime a twelfth time, and then the soft click of the wheels and hooves of a brougham, sent by the Queen, would follow, coming to a discreet but firm stop outside the Schoens' front door.



Resource 2: Word table

Unfamiliar word	Definition	An example sentence using the word.
brougham	A type of horse-drawn carriage from the 19th century	The Queen sent a brougham to bring me to the place.



Resource 3: Sample questions and answers

Thank for agreeing to be interviewed. Our readers will be very interested in a real-life African Princess. Can you tell me about your childhood in Africa?

My birth name was Omo'ba Aina. Omo'ba means 'child of the monarch' and Aina is the name my family gave me. The name Sally was given to me later, by Captain Forbes.

Can you remember much about your family?

I can remember very little about my family. I know that my parents were the Egbado king and queen. All of my family were killed and I became a child slave at the court of King Ghezo of Dahomey.



Resource 4: Planning sheet for the Interview

Year of interview:	Name of interviewer:	Name of interviewee:
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Ideas for Questions

New vocabulary to use:

Key characters from the diary:

- Queen Victoria
- Captain Forbes
- Mary Forbes
- Elizabeth Schoen
- Annie Schoen
- Reverend Schoen
- James Pinson Labulo Davies
- Princess Alice