

Intertextuality and the context of reception: *The Latest Decalogue* by Arthur Hugh Clough

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Lesson plan

Resources

- ❖ **Resource A** – copy of the poem *The Latest Decalogue*
- ❖ **Resource B** – film clip of *The Latest Decalogue*
- ❖ Highlighters/felt tips

Learning objectives

- ❖ To learn and apply the concepts of satire and parody
- ❖ To consider Clough's use of biblical reference
- ❖ To study the poem and its message

Starter activity – understanding satire

- ❖ Teacher writes the word 'satire' on the board and asks class to try to suggest a definition. One example might be 'a text which ridicules prevalent vices or follies' or 'the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise society's stupidity'.
 - As a class, contribute examples of texts, films, TV programmes, etc. where society is made fun of (e.g. political cartoons, *Austin Powers* films, *South Park*, most books by Terry Pratchett, *Mock the Week*).
 - Discuss what makes satire successful in those examples (i.e. by revealing something as laughable, the writer/producer devalues it; an entertaining way of expressing views; makes the reader/viewer think about an issue without being too serious; etc.).

Intro – introducing the ten commandments and making predictions about the poem

- ❖ Write the poem's title and publication date (1862) on the board and consider interpretations of the title and predictions

- ❖ about this satirical poem. Explain that 'decalogue' means ten rules (i.e. the ten commandments).
 - How many of the commandments can the students name and record on the board?
 - [Students might find it helpful to be taught the acronym 'GIVS FM KAS FC'. The first four commandments 'GIVS' are about how people should relate to God:
 - G: Thou shalt have no other **g**ods before me
 - I: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven **i**mage (or **i**dol)
 - V: Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in **v**ain
 - S: Remember the **s**abbath day, to keep it holy
 - The next six commandments 'FM KAS FC' are about how people are to relate to each other:
 - FM: Honour thy **f**ather and thy **m**other
 - K: Thou shalt not **k**ill
 - A: Thou shalt not commit **a**dultery
 - S: Thou shalt not **s**teal
 - F: Thou shalt not bear **f**alse witness against thy neighbour
 - C: Thou shalt not **c**ovet... anything that is thy neighbour's
 - Or you could watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2q32Q9dtOM&feature=related> for a giggle!]
 - However the title *The Latest Decalogue* suggests not the original ten commandments but Clough's own version - perhaps a more recent or latest version, or a definitive or final version, that Clough uses to satirise (or ridicule) society.
- ❖ Explain parody: the imitation of a style exaggerated for humorous effect.

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Clough parodies (or mimics) the ten commandments in order to satirise (or mock) society as he sees it.

- Make predictions about the poem: Clough was writing in the Victorian era.
 - What might Clough want to satirise (criticise) about society by using the ten commandments? (Try to make links to students' prior knowledge about Victorian religiosity and hypocrisy; some students might be aware of the start of disillusionment with the established church, corruption, etc.)

Main activity 1 – the structure of the poem/highlighting tasks

- ❖ Read the poem [**Resource A**] and establish the basic structure and meaning (i.e. the poem is based on the ten commandments, but adds Clough's own satirical comments on society to each commandment)
 - Watch the film clip [**Resource B**] and ask students to highlight in different colours the original commandment basis and then Clough's additions
 - Consider and highlight/annotate the poem's rhythm and rhyme and the effects created (e.g. bouncy iambic tetrameter and masculine rhyming couplets create a quick pace suitable for comic effect. The impact is fast and punchy and funny).

Main activity 2 – paired work on the meaning of the poem

- ❖ Allocate a commandment to pairs of students. For their commandment, students complete the following tasks:
 - Draw an image
 - Note what criticism Clough is making about society

- Try to explain how this is presented in a humorous way
 - Feed back and all students annotate poems.

Plenary – summing up learning/Clough's message

- ❖ Divide class into three groups to complete one of the following tasks:
 - Mind map all the problems Clough highlights in society
 - Brainstorm how Clough makes his poem humorous
 - Sum up Clough's point/message through his poem
 - Feed back.
- ❖ Discuss: In what sense is the poem as relevant for a twenty-first century reader as for a nineteenth century reader?
 - Is there any sense in which Clough's message is more relevant today i.e. is society getting worse? (E.g. prevalence of adultery, debate over switching off life support machines, etc.)
 - Who can remember the meaning of the words 'satire' and 'parody'?

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Resources

Resource A

The Latest Decalogue

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?

No graven images may be
Worshipp'd, except the currency:

Swear not at all; for, for thy curse
Thine enemy is none the worse:

At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend:

Honour thy parents; that is, all
From whom advancement may befall:

Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive:

Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it:

Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat:

Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly:

Thou shalt not covet; but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.

Resource B – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/469/The-Latest-Decalogue>