



English Key Stage 4 (GCSE English language)

'The Hole in the Wall': Responses to Technology



The following activities can form a unit on signals or be used separately. They address National Curriculum statutory requirements:

read and appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage through:

- reading a wide range of high-quality, challenging, classic literature and extended literary non-fiction, such as essays, reviews and journalism including works from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries

understand and critically evaluate texts through:

- seeking evidence in the text to support a point of view, including justifying inferences with evidence
- analysing a writer's choice of vocabulary, form, grammatical and structural features, and evaluating their effectiveness and impact



They address GCSE English language assessment objectives:

AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views

AO3: Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts

AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references



Suggested activities:

The materials provided here allow students to explore responses to technology found in the nineteenth-century press.

The **first activity** is intended to familiarise students with the historical and technical context, using images and the opening of the text to imagine what it would have been like to be a signal-man responsible for ensuring trains travel along the rails safely. This could be a speaking and listening activity. They could think of dangers, problems, noises, what the work would be like physically.

The **second activity** encourages students to analyse longer passages from 'The Hole in the Wall'. All the passages are from the reporter's initial visit to the signal-box. The extracts are provided in three parts so this could be undertaken in groups. We also provide the three extracts as one, for more able students who are comfortable reading nineteenth-century texts (two pages). Finally there are shortened versions for those who are just getting used to reading writing from the nineteenth century. You might want to draw students' attention to the fact that All the Year round was not illustrated, so the writing needs to provide all the description. Students could draw what is described and label with selected quotation, or they could practice annotating a passage.

The **third activity** asks students to explain if they would have liked to be a signal-man in the nineteenth century using evidence from the text to support their point of view. We provide here an example of analysing Parkinson's



language. There are three examples of varying levels of sophistication advancing in difficulty numbered 1, 2, 3. Students might want to practice this orally first before attempting the writing.

To extend this unit to incorporate AO3, students could find examples of newspaper opinion pieces which respond to new or unknown technologies and compare the language used by the writers.

If you would like your students to read the whole of 'The Hole in the Wall', it is available open access via Dickens Journals Online <http://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xvi/page-325.html>

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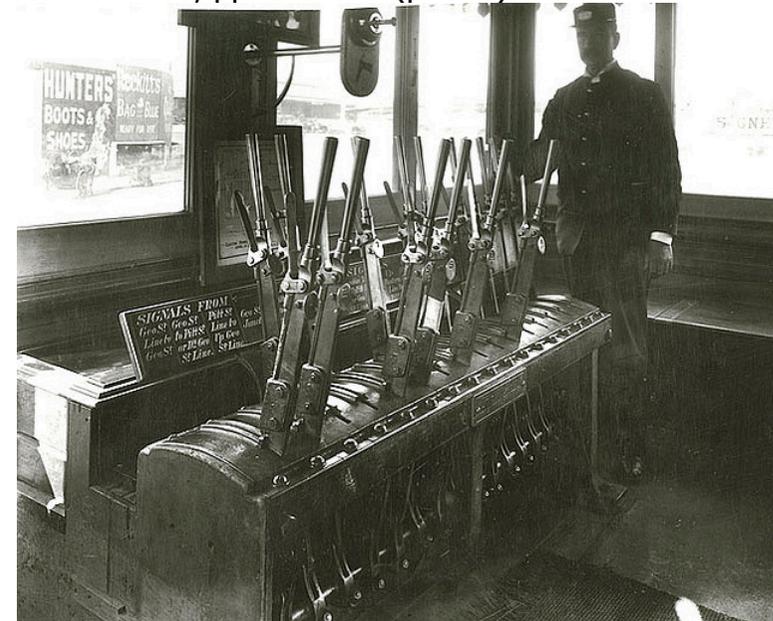


Activity One

What might it have been like to be responsible for preventing railway accidents in the nineteenth century?

'THE Hole is within shouting distance of Victoria station, Belgravia, and the Wall is in the midst of the labyrinth of rails leading to and from that mighty maze. Its title and use are as well known in the official railway world as the station itself is to the world of travellers, and from it are issued daily and nightly signals of safety, by means of which the lives of thousands are secured.'

Joseph Charles Parkinson, 'The Hole in the Wall', *All the Year Round*, 13 October 1866, pp. 325-329 (p. 325)





Activity Two

Visiting the signal box

No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately, and who with one telegraph clerk are its sole occupants. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains, a stray engine or two, and a long batch of returning "empties" from the Crystal Palace, reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. (p. 325)

sentinel: One who or something which keeps guard

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another



Inside the signal-box

It is very like an unfurnished private box at the theatre, into which some of the mechanist's properties have been put by mistake. Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again, a vivid experience of the sensation known as "pins and needles," a half involuntary guarding of the face as if to ward off an impending blow, are the first results of the experiment. For the mechanist's properties are of the most impulsively practicable kind, and bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord, and certainly by agencies which are invisible. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other, as if satisfying the wants of each. Beyond them is a small wooden desk and an open book, in which from time to time their utterances are recorded, much as if they were oracles whose sayings would be afterwards interpreted by the high priests. (pp. 325-326)

mechanist: one who constructs or uses machinery

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

eloquence: expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness

spasmodic: marked by jerkiness or suddenness of muscular movement



Looking out of the signal-box

Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, the rude chasms formed by the excavators, the premature ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture which racked the limbs of schismatics in the bad old times, it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently, [and] the speaking faces of the shut-up cases tingle in unison. (p. 326)

rude: Unformed; unfinished; not given shape, order, or regularity

harrow: A heavy frame of timber (or iron) set with iron teeth, which is dragged over ploughed land to pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed

schismatics: those who promote or encourage a breaking of unity in the Church

cumbrous: Troublesome from bulk or heaviness; clumsy



Three extracts in one

Visiting the signal-box

No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately, and who with one telegraph clerk are its sole occupants. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains, a stray engine or two, and a long batch of returning "empties" from the Crystal Palace, reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. It is very like an unfurnished private box at the theatre, into which some of the mechanist's properties have been put by mistake. Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again, a vivid experience of the sensation known as "pins and needles," a half involuntary guarding of the face as if to ward off an impending blow, are the first results of the experiment. For the mechanist's properties are of the most impulsively practicable kind, and bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord, and certainly by agencies which are invisible. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other, as if satisfying the wants of each. Beyond them is a small wooden



desk and an open book, in which from time to time their utterances are recorded, much as if they were oracles whose sayings would be afterwards interpreted by the high priests.



Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, the rude chasms formed by the excavators, the premature ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture which racked the limbs of schismatics in the bad old times, it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of



its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently, [and] the speaking faces of the shut-up cases tingle in unison.

sentinel: One who or something which keeps guard

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

mechanist: one who constructs or uses machinery

eloquence: expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness

spasmodic: marked by jerkiness or suddenness of muscular movement

rude: Unformed; unfinished; not given shape, order, or regularity

harrow: A heavy frame of timber (or iron) set with iron teeth, which is dragged over ploughed land to pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed

schismatics: those who promote or encourage a breaking of unity in the Church

cumbrous: Troublesome from bulk or heaviness; clumsy



Shorter Extracts

Visiting the signal box

No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria [station] depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately [...]. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains [...] reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. (p. 325)

vigilance: watchfulness against danger

sentinel: One who or something which keeps guard

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another



Inside the signal-box

[...] Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again [...] are the first results of the experiment. [...] Bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord[...]. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other[...]. (pp. 325-326)

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

eloquence: expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness

spasmodic: marked by jerkiness or suddenness of muscular movement



Looking out of the signal-box

Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, [...] ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture [...], it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently [...]. (p. 326)

apparatus: equipments, material, mechanism, machinery

harrow: A heavy frame of timber (or iron) set with iron teeth, which is dragged over ploughed land to pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed

schismatics: those who promote or encourage a breaking of unity in the Church

cumbrous: Troublesome from bulk or heaviness; clumsy



Activity Three

**I would/ wouldn't want to be a
nineteenth-century signal-man
because...**





Writing about the language used in 'Hole in the Wall': Paragraph parts v.1

1. The noise in the signal-box would make it very hard to concentrate.

2. Parkinson writes 'shriek', 'creak', 'groan' and 'bangs'.

Here we have quoted words from the text in a list and put each one in quotation marks

3. **These are all loud noises.** This sentence says something about the quotations which shows how they are evidence for our point.



Writing about the language used in 'Hole in the Wall': Paragraph parts v.2

1. The noise in the signal-box would make it very hard to concentrate.
2. Parkinson uses **onomatopoeia** such as 'shriek', 'creak', 'groan' and 'bangs'. Here we have named the technique used as well as including quotations.
3. These are all loud noises which would ~~would make it very hard to concentrate~~ **be extremely distracting.**



Writing about the language used in 'Hole in the Wall': Paragraph parts v.3

1. The noise in the signal-box would make it very hard to concentrate.
2. This is suggested when Parkinson uses onomatopoeia such as 'shriek', 'creak', 'groan' and 'bangs'.
3. These loud noises are ones which we would associate with fear and shock. ~~This would be extremely distracting.~~ Thus Parkinson suggests that the disruption would be unexpected, meaning you would always be on edge waiting for your work to be interrupted and whilst you were on edge there was also an air of fear around you. These are not conditions under which you could focus on your job.