Lesson plan: Hot Seat

What resources do I need?
Audio Notetaker Software (download free 30 day trial at http://www.sonocent.com/download/)
Portable recording device or PC with inbuilt or external microphone

Objectives
• Assessment focus (Reading: AF6  S&L AF 1 2 3 & 4)
• GCSE assessment objectives (AO1:ii; AO2:ii & iv)

Overview
Hot-seating is a drama technique where one pupil takes on a particular role and other pupils ask questions. Usually, these exchanges are then lost and the class moves on. Audio Notetaker enables the exchange not only to be recorded but to be interrogated, with pupils picking out key statements, transcribing them and using them in their accompanying essays or as a basis for class discussion.
To take an example, which we will unpack in more detail below, if the class is studying Macbeth, one pupil might agree to take on the role of Lady Macbeth after the banquet scene. The rest of the class prepare questions and then interrogate her. The pupil in role will do her or his best to respond as Lady Macbeth might, allowing the class to explore the character and the situation in more depth than they would otherwise do. More than one pupil might take on the role and afterwards all pupils would be able to listen to the exchanges and use the material as a basis for a character study or an answer to a specific question relating to the play.

The software would encourage pupils to look for the most significant questions and answers and would also enable them to gather these into a separate file for transcription before beginning their personal interpretation in writing or, of course, in an oral presentation.

Preparation
Choose a text with which the class is fairly familiar and whose characters give plenty of opportunity for those taking the hot-seat to elaborate or improvise. Select your volunteers beforehand and give them time, perhaps a homework, to prepare. The rest of the class can be preparing questions.
Discuss or revise the kinds of question that provoke lengthy or interesting answers, emphasising the difference between open and closed questions.
If the class is unfamiliar with hot-seating, practise the technique in a small way, perhaps by using a traditional tale and having the wolf from Red Riding Hood in the hot seat. If pupils need encouragement, take the hot-seat yourself for a while.
Make sure you have a microphone capable of picking up both questions from the class and the responses of the hot-seat character. If you lack this, position the mic near to the hot seat and act as hot-seat host, repeating the questions before they are answered. This also serves to give the pupil in role a little more time to think.
Hot Seat cont.

The Lesson

1. A Play - Macbeth

Revisit the banquet scene by reading through it again and, if possible, watch a video clip. Invite the first volunteer to the hot-seat and start the recorder. It is a good idea to prime the first two or three questioners so that the interrogation will get off to a good start. If there are some less fruitful questions later, it will not impact on the pace of the lesson so much.

Questions might include:
• What do you think the thanes will be saying now?
• If your husband is going mad, what are you going to do?
• What has brought on this outburst? (This will cause pupils to think about how much Lady Macbeth knows at this stage and what she suspects.)
• Which of the thanes is the most suspicious, do you think?

If a question begins by being closed, e.g. ‘Were you surprised by your husband’s sudden outburst?’ they can be followed by supplementaries such as (if yes) ‘How then did you manage to come up with such a swift explanation?’ or (if no) ‘When has something like this happened before?’

When questions run out, thank the volunteer(s) and play back the recording. You may wish, of course, to interview other characters, including Banquo’s ghost. Whatever you do, you will have some material to discuss and refer back to.

One topic of discussion could be how plausible Lady Macbeth was. Did her answers seem in character? Did they seem to reflect the ‘off-stage’ life of herself and Macbeth? Were there answers which are directly contradicted in the text, either before or after?

After some discussion, set the class the task of listening to the recording, individually or in groups, depending on the classroom practicalities and availability of kit. They should select the parts which they find most illuminating, copy them to a separate file and transcribe them. The transcription can then be copied and pasted into their own word processed documents as the basis for a report on the interview, a short piece for a newspaper or the answer to an essay-type question. In each of these cases, you will need to revise the conventions appropriate to each form.
2. A Poem – My Last Duchess

The procedure will be similar to the interview with Lady Macbeth but here we are taking as the text a dramatic monologue, the poem My Last Duchess by Robert Browning. As well as questioning the Duke, the class could consider questioning the servants, the Envoy and the Duchess herself, making a guest appearance as a ghost. All of these would make interesting subjects for the hot seat. Would the Duke deny his actions, bluster, be proud and dismissive…?

The Envoy is the listener in the monologue and will certainly have opinions, especially as his master is considering giving his daughter in marriage to this murderer:

\[I\ \text{repeat,}\]
\[
\text{The Count your master’s known munificence}\]
\[
\text{Is ample warrant that no just pretence}\]
\[
\text{Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;}\]
\[
\text{Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed}\]
\[
\text{At starting, is my object.}\]

And the servants, how do they react – or are they too frightened to speak? Again, revisiting the poem and discussing some of these points beforehand will make for a more fruitful and revealing dialogue when the hot-seating begins.

Pupils can use the recording and resultant transcripts as a basis for their own writing from the point of view of some of the other participants: servant, Envoy or the Duchess.

3. A Novel – Holes

The hot-seating activity is best carried out when the novel has been completed. However, having a substantial narrative means that pupils can interrogate a character over time. There could be three separate interviews, one hot-seating Stanley after he has been at Camp Green Lake for a short time, another during his escape with Zero and a final one at the time of the denouement back at the Camp.

The resulting recordings can be used as material for a discussion and/or written piece on the changes in Stanley’s character and the development of the plot. They will also be useful when reading the book with subsequent classes and will be a valuable and unusual resource as new readers come across these moments in their reading of the story.
Finally

You, together with the class if feasible, might like to create a collage of some of the responses to whichever text you investigate by this method. Both audio-collage and transcribed-text wall display will celebrate the class’s achievements and inspire others.

Differentiation

Less able pupils will need help in formulating questions but should be encouraged to ask them and to listen carefully to the answers. If less able pupils wish to take on hot-seat roles, some coaching beforehand will help them to respond effectively.
More able pupils should be encouraged to formulate more subtle questions, investigating the psychology behind the actions of the hot-seated protagonists.

Learning Outcomes

- **All pupils** will gain a greater understanding of the text under discussion and be able to speak or write about the character(s) more effectively than previously.
- **Most pupils** will have a much greater understanding of the characters and their place in the text and be able to speak and write about them with greater confidence. They will have also gained confidence in their speaking and listening capabilities.
- **Some pupils** will have a rounded appreciation of the character(s) under scrutiny and be able to speak and write about them with confidence and fluency. Their speaking and listening will be considerably enhanced.