

Issue No 8: Spring 2025

Abbey Multi Academy Trust **Oracy Newsletter**



In Partnership to **Educate, Nurture, Empower**

Welcome

It's hard to believe that it was back in 2017-18 when Bishop Young Academy embarked on its journey to advance an innovative pedagogy centred around oracy, in collaboration with Voice 21. This initiative gained national recognition in 2022 when the academy proudly became one of only two Centres of Oracy Excellence.

This term is particularly exciting as two other schools from within our Trust are in the accreditation window. In the Summer term, Bishop Young Academy will welcome back Voice 21, as they have been chosen to feature in the organisation's 10-year impact report. Amidst the ongoing curriculum review at the national level, we remain hopeful that oracy will be highlighted as a crucial component in the final report. At a recent Speaking Summit in London, the mantra was on creating an 'Oracy Generation'.

This term has been busy and exciting for oracy with each school implementing the third research project which focuses upon 'feedback on talk'. We are excited to hear the impact of this in the oracy presentations to our network next half-term.

In this newsletter, we are honoured to feature a piece by Tia Sutherland, showcasing the transformative power of a talk-rich education. Her article exemplifies how oracy can truly change lives, making a profound difference in education.



Recommended Read this Month

How Should We Teach Presentational Talk?

Why my voice matters: Tia Sutherland

Former pupil at Bishop Young



Now, I see how my Oracy skills have shaped my journey. Growing up in a socioeconomically deprived neighbourhood and facing systemic barriers meant navigating environments where students, like me, are less likely to progress to higher education. A pivotal factor in my success has been Oracy education. Through spoken language, it enhances learning by encouraging critical thinking, active listening, and clearly articulated thoughts. Cultivating thoughtful communication has been invaluable in my academic and personal growth.

Allowing me to pursue opportunities I once thought were unreachable. Those who confidently communicate are more understanding of themselves and their environments. It is a key driver of social equity, giving all students the support needed to grow mindfully. If education is truly about opportunity, then Oracy must be a priority. In secondary school, my communication struggles were compounded by identity issues, undiagnosed disabilities, and difficult home circumstances. I felt disconnected. My inability to express my emotions led to periods of misbehaving and failing a third of my subjects in Year 9. I did not desire defiance—I was just trying to fit in with whoever made me feel heard and seen. In Year 10, I started to ask for help. Reassured by foundational Oracy principles, I began rebuilding my academic performance. My GCSE speaking exam was particularly

unnerving. Frankly, terrifying. However, my teacher, seeing my distress, adapted the exam so I could present more comfortably. I earned a distinction and saw what could happen when my challenges were acknowledged and accommodated. Despite these perceived setbacks, I was a part of SSLT and earned several awards. Including the Young Leaders Award and a special commendation from the Archbishop of York for charity fundraising. I finished Year 11 with one of the highest averages of my cohort, 7.0.

What my voice being valued means to me is simple: it means being heard. I want to listen and feel listened to. To feel understood—not just to hear a response. It means being respected and given a safe space to freely be myself, without fear of judgement. In school, it meant having patient teachers, who nurtured open-minded, empathetic discussions. They made me feel secure enough to express myself, on my own terms—and it was heavily reflected in my grades. These skills allow me to encourage other non-traditional students to apply to universities and support vulnerable people in my community. Oracy education has changed my life. Beyond academic opportunities, it has given me the ability to drive change and uplift others. But no student should have to rely on chance encounters with understanding teachers to develop these essential skills. Every young person, regardless of background, deserves the same opportunity to find and use their voice. Investing in Oracy is not just an investment in education—it's an investment in social mobility, future careers, and leadership. If we want every student to succeed, we must start by ensuring they are heard and seen.

Abbey Grange Academy: A Snapshot

Last week we welcomed into school a team from the God and the Big Bang project. They worked with almost 100 year 10 students over a day with workshops exploring questions around medicine, climate change and curiosity and how we think. The level of response from students was stunning as they explored these ideas at an amazing depth and explored the interface between science and faith. It was oracy in action and as one student put it 'we learned how religion really does tie in with some of the greatest issues in today's society.'

This was a great day to get students thinking and talking about some of the bigger issues we don't always have time for and both underpins and develops our oracy focus. As one student said 'The debates each centred around the respective topics and that meant that all of the parts were equally important and interesting.' Another valued 'The debate about climate change, because I got to listen to other people's opinions and saw how my opinions may have been related or different in some way.'

Students at Abbey Grange also battled it out for the title of Debating Matters House of Lords Champions 2025 on Friday 21 March. Debate is one of the main ways the House of Lords holds the government to account. Members of the Lords use their knowledge and experience during debates to discuss current issues and draw the government's attention to concerns.

Finally, we have completed a second round of our MFL and SEND department's collaborative 'Speak for Yourself' oracy intervention group for Y7 and 8 students who can find it difficult to speak out in class. Our focus is on physical oracy - building knowledge of how the voice and speech work, and developing confidence in achieving appropriate volume and clarity for classroom talk, particularly speaking out in front of the class when called on by the teacher. Our Speak for Yourself graduates can confidently explain and demonstrate how to use calming breath and relaxation exercises to achieve greater volume, and that the key to clear speech is to "slow down" and "move your mouth more". One of our student experts shows this well in a poster she made for staff:

Oracy Equations

Clarity + Volume = Good Oracy

Move your mouth more = Clarity

Take a breath before speaking
= Volume

Oracy Scenarios.

Problems		Answers
1 Student isn't answering	1	Tell them to take a breath
2 Student is mumbling and not speaking properly	2	Tell them to move their mouth more
3 Student is startled	3	Tell them to calm down and take a breath
4 Class is too loud and students can't hear	4	Tell the class to be quiet and breathe
5 One student is talking and the other one can't say anything	5	Remind the talking student to let others talk too

Bishop Young Academy: Collaborative Excellence with Halifax Academy

Over the last few weeks, we have been involved in a peer review with Halifax Academy as part of our re-accreditation as an Oracy Centre of Excellence. Last week, several colleagues from Halifax visited our academy and observed a variety of oracy activities within the classroom. They engaged with students in a Harkness discussion and bullseye activity. Our visitors commented on how articulate and confident our students were in communicating their thoughts and opinions. They also noted how well embedded oracy is into the classroom, being used as a strategy to drive retention and progress. It was a great learning opportunity and we are looking forward to our next steps as an accredited school.

Christ Church Upper Armley: Taking the time to reflect

As we come to the end of the Spring term, we have now completed a whole year of the weekly Abbey Trust Primary 100 words. It is a good time to reflect on how far we have come, what works well and how we are going to move this initiative on, knowing how important the explicit teaching of vocabulary is (using oracy) to our young people.

Our weekly assemblies are met with enthusiasm with children taking an active part in thinking of their own sentences using our words of the week, paired work using talk tactics and finally developing clear speaking voices to share ideas with the whole school. On review week we have our own 'university challenge' with pupils sitting at the front with a bell, challenging each other with their knowledge of the vocabulary taught.

Pupils are engaged and this activity spills over into classrooms with pupils challenging each other and staff on their knowledge. The 100 words are displayed all around school to remind both pupils and staff of the words and to encourage the use of the words, where appropriate, to be used. They are added to our weekly newsletter.

Moving forward as we begin our second round of the words the aim is that pupils now begin to use the vocabulary within their writing and in their spoken language in discussion, debate and balanced argument.

All in all we think 100 words is a great success!!

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Process

. He explained the process of building a boat.

Can you use this word in a sentence?



Lightcliffe Academy: Empowering Voices Through Oracy



As part of a talk-rich Trust, we are passionate about providing our students with the opportunities to learn to talk and learn through talk. During the Spring Term, we are undertaking an exciting Research Project, along with the other academies in the Abbey MAT, focused on Oracy feedback using the Voice 21 Oracy Framework. This project aims to improve talk outcomes for our students, ensure teachers become better oracy practitioners, and build students' confidence to use their voices in class and beyond. This half-term, our student leaders have had opportunities to use their voices in presenting their ideas to our leadership team on their areas of focus: sustainability, health, transition, attendance, diversity, and community. They were passionate and compelling advocates on behalf of the student body.

Lightcliffe Primary: Year 2's Traditional Tales Adventure

Year 2 have been learning about traditional tales in English this half-term. They have used their presentational talk skills to present a puppet show of the story to the rest of the class. As a class, we generated success criteria and gave each other feedback on our talk. We then used this story language in our writing and produced some fantastic written stories!



Manston St James: Oracy Showcase Success

Manston St James recently held an oracy showcase that previewed the impact of the research project in the school. Pupils reflected on their understanding of oracy to form their own listening ladder at Manston St James. As a result, pupils already feel that their voices are valued. They are more confident speaking in front of the class and are better at providing feedback on talk to their peers, highlighting the positive impact of the oracy initiatives.

Oracy: What we are already noticing...

Our children are already more confident when speaking aloud. Not only in class but in front of an audience.

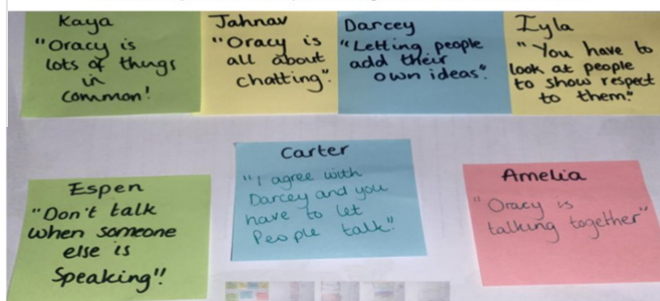
Children are able to assess their own talk and talk of others and give feedback on how it could be improved.

Children feel valued and know that their voice is valued.

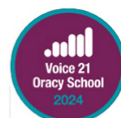


Oracy: Non negotiables within the classroom The listening ladder

Year 2 students explored their understanding of Oracy in the classroom and began thinking about what they wanted their bespoke listening ladders to look like for their class.



The students collaborated and adapted the current practise of using the 'giving proof of listening poster' to create a class listening ladder.

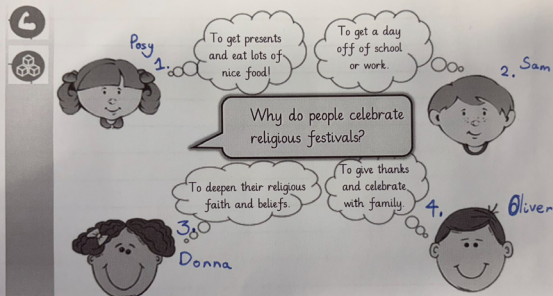


St Chad's: Oracy and RE

Year 3 and Year 4 have taken part in an exciting RE project which has had an oracy focus. It has been so lovely to see the children develop in their confidence of using oracy sentence stems and groupings to help them to develop their confidence with explaining their understanding as well as exploring any new concepts. It has resulted in some wonderful discussions all about different faiths and their festivals, and it's been brilliant hearing the children "building on" each other's ideas as well as beginning to challenge each other's thoughts too!

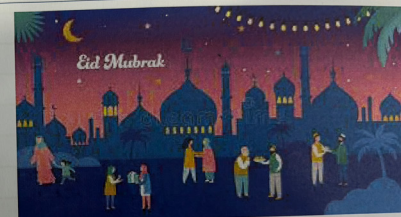


EO: Which festivals, both religious and non-religious, are important to me?	Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I understand festivals are a type of celebration. ✓ I know that some festivals are religious and others are not. ✓ I can name at least two different religious festivals. 	Guided
Challenge: What do Christians do during Christmas to deepen their faith?	Independent
	Paired/Group



1. I like it with Posy, because you don't just celebrate something really important just to get presents and eat nice food. I like it for an idea by saying 'At Christmas, you celebrate the birth of Jesus because you want to give him praise, not just for Christmas dinner'.

EO: What is the deeper meaning and message behind Ramadan and Eid?	Independent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I understand that Eid and Ramadan is a special time for Muslims, as it is a time to celebrate, encourage joy, togetherness and community. ✓ I can think of probing questions that deepen my understanding of Muslim festivals. 	Paired/Group



What was the original story - is in Diwali it's Rama & Sita?
 Why do they fast? (They is the people!)
 Where did they - the celebrations - originate?

EO: What are the main Christian festivals?	Independent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I can identify two main Christian festivals. ✓ I understand and can give examples of the symbols, actions, stories and rituals that Christians explore during this time. 	Paired/Group

1. What is a celebration?
 2. Can you give an example of a religious festival?
 3. Can you give an example of a non-religious celebration or festival?



Festival	Symbol	Actions	Stories	Rituals
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Easter	Cross	Remember that Church Jesus died	Jesus's death	Church
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Holy Trinity: Speak like a Mathematician

At Holy Trinity we have been exploring how children approach oracy-based maths activities. We have used this approach to create a shared success criteria for children to work together and guide one another through deeper mathematical reasoning as well as providing a structure to evaluate against.

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