Teacher’s Notes

At the core of this moving poem is a concern about how we speak truthfully in the face of life’s most difficult moments.

Lesson plan:

1. Show the images on slides 2 - 18 without any introduction or reference to the poem. I wouldn’t talk about them at all, just flick through them relatively quickly.

2. Then present the question on slide 19 and ask students to share their thinking in reference to the images shown. You can then show the last three images.

3. Again without any reference to the poem, give out the 4 quotations shown on slide 23 and ask students to annotate them for their thoughts and ideas. Particularly in reference to the question posed earlier.

4. As a small break introduce UA Fanthorpe – her career as an English teacher and then a receptionist in a psychiatric hospital.

5. Read the whole poem through. Look at the analysis of verse one as a class discussion.

6. Then in pairs or groups hand out the themes and ask students to find evidence of these in the poem (see instructions).

7. Students should then feedback – everyone should have a mind-map with all the themes together.

HWK task is then to create a detailed analysis of the poem using the questions on the worksheet (in folder). If there is time this could be started in the lesson!
How can we speak truthfully about life’s most difficult moments?
JENNIFER
12-6-1971
12-22-2011
"I LOVED IT ALL"
Given what we have thought about so far, consider the quotes you have been given:

“pretend all is well, admit it’s not.”

“I am hear to make you believe in life.”

“my heart is in the unobtrusive”

“Learn to conjugate all genres of misery”
A Minor Role
By U A Fanthorpe

AO1 - Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2 - Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts

AO4 - Explore connections across literary texts
Poems of the Decade

Cheltenham Ladies College
(one of the highest ranking private secondary schools in England)

A Psychiatric Hospital

What do these two places have in common?
The answer?

U A Fanthorpe

Carol Ann Duffy who described her as ‘an unofficial, deeply loved laureate’.

Ursula Askham Fanthorpe
U A Fanthorpe (22 July 1929 – 28 April 2009)

• U.A. Fanthorpe (b. 1929) spent her earliest years in Kent.

• She attended St Anne’s College Oxford, afterwards becoming a teacher and ultimately head of English at Cheltenham Ladies’ College.

• However, she only began writing when she turned her back on her teaching career to become a receptionist at a psychiatric hospital, where her observation of the ‘strange specialness’ of the patients provided the inspiration for her first book, Side Effects (Peterloo Poets, 1978).

• Following that relatively late start, Fanthorpe was prolific, producing nine full-length collections, including the Forward Prize-nominated Safe as Houses (Peterloo Poets, 1995) and the Poetry Book Society Recommendation Consequences (Peterloo Poets, 2000).

• She was awarded a CBE in 2001 and the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry in 2003.
U A Fanthorpe

- Talking of her war-time childhood, Fanthorpe said, ‘I think it's important not to run away’,

- On the surface her poetry seems to encapsulate those traditional, stoic English values we associate with the period.

- Certainly England and Englishness are central themes in her work, but such a reading misses the wit and sly debunking of national myth which mark Fanthorpe's sensibility.

‘I think it's important not to run away’,
First impressions: As we read A Minor Role, how does UA Fanthorpe answer this question?

How can we speak truthfully about life’s most difficult moments?
A Minor Role

The metaphor of the stage and the narrator’s minor role within a play is used to explore ideas of social pretence.

What is the significance of the poetic first person voice?

I’m best observed on stage, Propping a spear, or making endless Exits and entrances with my servant’s platter, Yes sir. O no, sir. If I get These midget moments wrong, the monstrous fabric Shrinks to unwanted sniggers.

What’s the effect of the dialogue (in italics) here?

Fanthorpe creates a spiral of empathy – the audience watching centre stage; the minor characters watching centre stage.
Team Work:

In your pair/team, you have been given a theme or idea to analyse in this poem.

You need to:

1. Consider what Fanthorpe’s specific presentation of this idea is? (They could ambiguity or inconsistency in that presentation).
2. Find 2 (or 3) key quotes that link to your idea. Write up a variety of interpretations of these quotes. What are all the different layers of meanings?
3. Consider what techniques (poetic, linguistic, literary) are being used – and how these shape meaning.

Be ready to present your ideas to the whole class in 10 mins.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Concept</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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OK:
Let’s hear what you’ve got.
Homework:
See the sheet of questions to help you create a detailed analysis of the poem.
But my heart’s in the unobtrusive,
The waiting-room roles: driving to hospitals,
Parking at hospitals. Holding hands under
Veteran magazines; making sense
Of consultants’ monologues; asking pointed
Questions politely; checking dosages,
Dates; getting on terms with receptionists;
Sustaining the background music of civility.
At home in my street you may see me
Walking fast in case anyone stops:
*O, getting on, getting better* my formula
For well-meant intrusiveness.

At home,

Thinking ahead: Bed? A good idea!
(Bed solves a lot); answer the phone,
Be wary what I say to it, but grateful always;
Contrive meals for a hunger-striker; track down
Whimsical soft-centred happy-all-the-way-through novels;
Find the cat (mysteriously reassuring);
Cancel things, tidy things; pretend all’s well,
Admit it’s not.
Learn to conjugate all the genres of misery:
Tears, torpor, boredom, lassitude, yearnings
For a simpler illness, like a broken leg.

Enduing ceremonial delay. Being referred
Somewhere else. Consultant’s holiday. Saying Thank you
For anything to everyone.

Not the star part
And who would want it? I jettison the spear
The servant’s tray, the terrible drone of Chorus:
Yet to my thinking this act was ill-advised
It would have been better to die. No it wouldn’t!
I am here to make you believe in life.