

Using literary texts

Rationale

A requirement of the Modern foreign languages GCSE 2017 is for students to “*recognise and respond to key information, important themes and ideas in more extended written text and authentic sources, including some extracts from relevant abridged or adapted literary texts*”.ⁱ

The inclusion of literary text extracts at GCSE not only offers opportunity for transition and progression between key stages, but also many more pedagogical benefits to the learner, as well as supporting the development of intercultural understanding that runs through the new Modern Languages curriculum: “*through studying a GCSE in a modern foreign language, students should ... develop awareness and understanding of the culture and identity of the countries and communities where the language is spoken.*”ⁱⁱ

The use of literary texts in the classroom can be seen to provide:

- a coherence in learning across key stages 2, 3 and 4 (and into key stage 5)
- a higher level of intercultural appreciation
- the development of reading skills through detailed reading of a text
- a better conscious understanding of linguistic structures (grammar) in use
- improved pronunciation and intonation
- the opportunity to memorise and perform
- the development of analytical skills – exploring language for patterns, rhymes, alliteration, etc.
- greater variety of written output, including more creative writingⁱⁱⁱ

This document suggests some strategies that can be used with students when reading literary texts.

Strategies

For the purposes of the new GCSE, “*literary texts can include extracts and excerpts, adapted and abridged as appropriate, from poems, letters, short stories, essays, novels or plays from contemporary and historical sources, subject to copyright*”^{iv}, and this definition should be borne in mind when selecting text extracts for use with students. For classroom practice, you may wish to work with literary texts that provide links with the topic or grammar being covered at the time.

Comprehension questions in the reading papers based on literary texts are either:

- 1 Open-response questions in English
- 2 Multiple-choice questions in English

As exam preparation, students should be encouraged to **read for gist** and **read for detail** to draw meaning and answer comprehension questions, as well as to use context and existing knowledge to help them draw logical conclusions. They should be aware that they do not need to understand every single word of the text in order to complete the question.

In the classroom, in addition to **reading for gist** and **reading for detail** to draw meaning and answer comprehension questions, the following activities may be used to further exploit literary texts^v.

Activity 1:

Read aloud for pronunciation / fluency

In pairs. One student reads the text aloud and the other places corresponding pictures down in order.

Activity 2:

De-coding of words / meaning behind the word

Students read descriptors relating to different sections of the text and assign them appropriately.

Activity 3:

Grammatical focus

Focus on an aspect of grammar – e.g. word order. Students allocate time frames to sections of text.

Activity 4:

Comparison of two texts or parts of text – sounds / words

Students analyse aspects such as use of time phrases, descriptors.

Activity 5:

Find the expressions for

In pairs or working alone, students find the expressions in the target language for given English phrases.

Activity 6:

Find the four true statements in the text

In pairs or working alone, students read statements and work out which are true.

Practice

To get students used to working with literary texts, they could do activities such as 'find the expression for ...' in the text, followed by 'tick the four correct statements', such as below.

Simplified Version

春节是中国人最大的节日，每家都会有很多好吃的东西。春节前，每个人都要回家，和家人一起吃饭。北方人吃饺子，南方人吃汤圆。家家的饭桌上还要有鱼，因为要“年年有余”。中国人也吃年糕，因为要“一年比一年高”。中国人见面的时候还要说“过年好”。春节的时候有舞狮、舞龙表演，很热闹。

Traditional Version

春節是中國人最大的節日，每家都會有很多好吃的東西。春節前，每個人都要回家，和家人一起吃飯。北方人吃餃子，南方人吃湯圓。家家的飯桌上還要有魚，因為要“年年有餘”。中國人也吃年糕，因為要“一年比一年高”。中國人見面的時候還要說“過年好”。春節的時候有舞獅、舞龍表演，很熱鬧。

Find the expressions for:

- 1 The most important festival
- 2 Delicious food
- 3 Have dinner with all family members
- 4 People from Northern China
- 5 Have more than enough year after year
- 6 Happy New Year

Read the text again. Select the four correct statements:

- 1 Chinese people celebrate Spring Festival with friends.
- 2 Chinese people go home before Chinese New Year.
- 3 Chinese people eat fish at Chinese New Year.
- 4 People from Southern Chinese eat dumplings at Chinese New Year.
- 5 The symbolic meaning of rice cakes is 'grow taller year after year'.
- 6 Chinese people don't go out to celebrate New Year.
- 7 There is Lion Dance performance at Chinese New Year.
- 8 Chinese New Year celebration is nice and quiet.

ⁱModern foreign languages GCSE subject content (DfE, 2014)

www.gov.uk/government/publications

Reference: DFE-00348-2014

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ⁱⁱⁱTranslation, Literary Texts and Classroom Talk toolkit for Studio KS3 French, Stimmt KS3 German and Viva KS3 Spanish by Rachel Hawkes (Pearson, 2015)

^{iv}Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content (DfE, 2014)

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^vAdapted from Translation, Literary Texts and Classroom Talk toolkit for Studio KS3 French, Stimmt KS3 German and Viva KS3 Spanish by Rachel Hawkes (Pearson, 2015)