



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 many 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 promotes:

- 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.

Classroom strategies

Working with any text (literary, authentic or text book) provides opportunities to develop reading skills. Students should be encouraged to practise prediction and anticipation strategies, using context, world knowledge and common sense to draw logical conclusions, as well as reading for gist and scanning for detail approaches to draw meaning and answer comprehension questions. Importantly, they should become comfortable with the notion that they don't need to understand every word of a text to complete a task.

The following strategies can be used with any text to develop reading skills. There is a logical sequence to them, although not every strategy may be required each time.



Reading strategy	Classroom activities
1 Prediction	<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Before seeing the whole text, students receive only specific clues (title, subtitles, picture, symbols, the outline layout of the text (e.g. text box to show lengths, format in columns), specific individual lines / extracts).ii. Students suggest the theme of the text, based on the clues.iii. Students complete simple multiple choice questions to elicit general information. E.g. The text is a) an email b) an article c) a fictional extract. The text is about a) a crime b) an accident c) a competition.
2 Anticipation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Students receive the questions (multiple-choice, true / false, gap-fill, sentence completion, or grid completion) that accompany the text before they see the whole text. They decide for each question what sort of information they are looking for, e.g. a person, place, reason, opinion.ii. Based on all pre-reading tasks so far, students anticipate any target language words that might be in the text.
3 Skimming	<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. The teacher reads the text aloud and students follow along. and/orii. Students read the text aloud, aiming for accurate pronunciation. and/oriii. Students skim read the text once without stopping for unfamiliar words, sounding out the words in their heads without vocalising.iv. Students add to their overall gist understanding, by answering the questions Who? When? Where? What? Why?v. After skim reading, students match key words to paragraph headings or subtitles.vi. After skim reading, students complete sentences, fill gaps or tackle multiple choice questions designed to address the overall theme of the text.
4 Scanning	<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Students identify all known words in the text and highlight.ii. Students are directed to identify particular words (e.g. a number, a date, a time, a colour, a building)iii. Students scan the text for cognates.iv. Students scan the text for particular words within words or word families. They can be given a list of English words to find.
5 Decoding	<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Use a short English text with unknown target language words inserted. Students work out what they mean, and reflect on the strategies they used.ii. Students are given a particular pattern to look for. E.g. If <i>coraggio</i> means 'courage', find all the other words ending in <i>-aggio</i> and translate them.iii. Students identify a specific number of unknown words for themselves and try to decode them, using the rest of the words in the sentence: E.g. <i>Loro leggono un libro</i> = They *?* a book.iv. Students are directed to specific unknown words in the text that are made up of familiar elements. E.g. <i>povertà</i>. They are asked to identify familiar elements (i.e. <i>povero</i>) and generate plausible English translations for those words.



In the classroom, in addition to the development of reading strategies the following activities may be used to further exploit literary texts^v.

Activity 1:

Read aloud for pronunciation / fluency

- i. In pairs. One student reads the text aloud and the other places corresponding pictures down in order.
- ii. Jigsaw reading. Students have different versions of the text with different parts missing. They sit back to back and read aloud, producing a complete version.

Activity 2:

Decoding of words / idiom / 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. verbs and tenses.

- i. Students allocate time frames to sections of text.
- ii. Students identify specific verb forms within the text and work out the infinitive forms.
- iii. Students change the person or tense of the verbs.
- iv. Work from verb forms to create related nouns, adjectives or adverbs, based on known language patterns.

Activity 4:

Comparison of two texts or parts of text – sounds / words / imagery / rhymes / rhythm / style

Students analyse aspects such as rhyming couplets, use of tenses, descriptors.

Activity 5:

Comprehension tasks

- i. In pairs or working alone, students find the expressions in the target language for given English phrases.
- ii. In pairs or working alone, students read statements and work out which are true.

Activity 6:

Use of reference resources

Identify a limited number of unknown words. Use decoding strategies to deduce their meaning, and then check word meanings in a dictionary. Record new words for use in own speaking and writing.

Activity 7:

Creative Production

- i. Students re-write the text in a different genre (e.g. prose --> dialogue)
- ii. Students write target language questions (which could be also multiple-choice, true/false, gap-fill, sentence completion, or grid completion) on the text.
- iii. Students generate clues / definitions for the new words they have encountered in the text. They use them in a game (e.g. Taboo).



Exam strategies

At GCSE, literary texts are part of the reading examination and the focus is on comprehension. Comprehension questions based on literary texts are either:

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

Students need to establish routines for tackling specific reading questions independently and with confidence. They may find it useful to use this formula for questions based on literary texts, with questions in English:

Reading formula for exam questions

P rediction	What can you tell about the text from the title , the exam rubric , any visuals , the layout , the punctuation ?
A nticipation	Read the English questions to add to your overall sense of what the text is about, and anticipate possible answers based on real world logic and probability.
S kim reading	Read the whole text once through to add to your gist understanding. Don't stop when there are unfamiliar words.
S canning	Go back to the questions , one by one. Decide what information you need. Who? What? Where? When? Why? If the task is multiple choice, correct statements or sentence completion scan the text for those specific words. Try to come up with possible TL synonyms to look for, too. If not, scan for possible answers that fit, e.g. a person for 'Who?'.
E valuation	Keep the overall text and context in mind. Ensure that answers don't contradict each other (use in-text logic) and are not impossible or unlikely (use real world logic).
D eduction and inference	In more challenging questions, the answers are not directly given but are built-up by piecing together hints from the text. Where the answer is not immediately clear, look at the sentence before and after the keyword to get more information.

NB: Adapted versions of this basic formula work with all GCSE reading question types.

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. Please note that these activities are based on the literary text found in the Edexcel 2017 GCSE reading sample assessment paper. Please refer to the paper for the text itself.

Questions based on *Marcovaldo* by Italo Calvino.

Find the expressions for:

- 1 a large industrial city
- 2 his passion is
- 3 something unusual
- 4 very distracted
- 5 He wants to return to pick them
- 6 get bigger

**Read the text again. Select the four correct statements:**

- 1 Marcovaldo is a factory worker.
- 2 Marcovaldo is waiting for the train.
- 3 The mushrooms are growing in the city.
- 4 At work Marcovaldo is distracted by an accident.
- 5 Marcovaldo likes to eat mushrooms.
- 6 During the night it is very cold.
- 7 His colleagues pick mushrooms too.
- 8 Marcovaldo ends up in hospital.

ⁱ *Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content* (DfE, 2014)

www.gov.uk/government/publications

Reference: DFE-00348-2014

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