Using literary texts

Rationale

A requirement of the Modern foreign languages GCSE 2016 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 writing[iii]

We have provided French, German and Spanish literary texts booklets to help prepare your students for the new GCSE, each containing nine extracts with comprehension questions that can be used in class or for homework. 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	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	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	i. The teacher reads the text aloud and students follow along. and/or ii. Students read the text aloud, aiming for accurate pronunciation. and/or iii. 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	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	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 'ciudad' means 'city', find all the other words ending in –dad 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. Ellos leen un libro = They *?* a book. iv. Students are directed to specific unknown words in the text that are made up of familiar elements. E.g. pobreza. They are asked to identify familiar elements (i.e. pobre) 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

Prediction	What can you tell about the text from the **title**, the **exam rubric**, any **visuals**, the **layout**, the **punctuation**?
Anticipation	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.
Skim reading	Read the **whole text** once through to add to your gist understanding. Don't stop when there are unfamiliar words.
Scanning	**Go back to the questions**, one by one. Decide what information you need. **Who? What? Where? When? Why?** If the task is multiple choice, **scan the text** for those specific words. If not, scan for possible answers that fit, e.g. a person for 'Who?'.
Evaluation	**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).
Deduction 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, following by 'tick the 4 correct statements', such as below. Please note that these activities are based on the literary texts found in the Edexcel 2016 GCSE reading sample assessment papers. Please refer to the individual papers for the texts themselves.

French

Questions based on *Le temps des secrets* by Marcel Pagnol

Find the expressions for:

1 I met a girl

2 She is tall

3 So you like her?

4 I've seen her in the village

5 A famous poet

6 Has lots of money

Read the text again. Select the four correct statements:

1 Marcel met Isabelle in Rapon

2 Isabelle is 11 years old

3 Marcel is small

4 Marcel really doesn't like Isabelle

5 The aunt thinks she has brown hair

6 Her father is a famous poet

7 Her father is very rich

8 Isabelle's father has a piano

German

Questions based on *Dirk und ich* by Andreas Steinhöfel

Find the expressions for:
1 A birthday is almost like Christmas
2 The night before
3 I could not sleep
4 Open your present
5 Small gold guinea pig
6 Such a lovely present

Read the text again. Select the four correct statements:
1 It is going to be the girl's 8th birthday
2 She found it difficult to wake up
3 The family gave Erika her present in the kitchen
4 Her parents gave her a kiss
5 Her brother was very calm and quiet
6 Erika was given a guinea pig
7 The guinea pig had blue eyes
8 Erika loved her birthday present

Spanish

Questions based on *Manolito Gafotas: Un cumpleaños feliz* by Elvira Lindo

Find the expressions for:
1 He says no way.
2 You don't get to be 80 every day.
3 people give you
4 Say yes!
5 You will invite
6 My parents will buy

Read the text again. Select the four correct statements:
1 Manolito's grandfather is looking forward to celebrating his birthday.
2 He would like a new tie.
3 He doesn't want another scarf.
4 Manolito is very excited about the party.
5 Manolito wants to invite all his friends.
6 Manolito's grandfather doesn't have any friends.
7 His parents are going to provide the food.
8 Manolito's aunt is also going to be involved.

[i] *Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content* (DfE, 2014)
www.gov.uk/government/publications
Reference: DFE-00348-2014

[ii] *Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content* (DfE, 2014)
www.gov.uk/government/publications
Reference: DFE-00348-2014

[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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