

Using 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”*¹, 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, real world knowledge and common sense to draw logical conclusions, as well as reading for gist and scanning for detail 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	<p>To familiarise themselves with a text, it is a good idea to make predictions by looking at pictures and headings before starting to read. Questions asked can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">What do the pictures show?What do the headings and subheadings say?What topic might the article be about?What does the candidate already know about this topic? <p>Before reading 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).</p> <p>Students suggest the theme of the text, based on the clues.</p> <p>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.</p>
2 Anticipation	<p>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.</p> <p>Based on all pre-reading tasks so far, students anticipate any target language words that might be in the text.</p>

¹ Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content (DfE, 2014) www.gov.uk/government/publications
Reference: DFE-00348-2014

3 Skimming

The teacher reads the text aloud and students follow along. And/or: Students read the text aloud, aiming for accurate pronunciation. And/or: Students skim read the text once without stopping for unfamiliar words, sounding out the words in their heads without vocalising

Students add to their overall gist understanding by answering the questions Who? When? Where? What? Why?

After skim reading, students match key words to paragraph headings or subtitles.

After skim reading, students complete sentences, fill gaps or tackle multiple choice questions designed to address the overall theme of the text.

4 Scanning

Scanning involves searching for numbers, symbols and long words in a text. This is a useful way of locating answers in reading exams. Candidates can scan the text for words or numbers from the question.

Students identify all known words in the text and highlight.

Students are directed to identify particular words (e.g. a number, a date, a time, a colour, a building).

Students scan the text for particular words within words or word families. They can be given a list of Swahili words to find.

5 Decoding

Use a short Swahili text with unknown target language words inserted. Students work out what they mean, and reflect on the strategies they used.

Students are given a particular pattern to look for. E.g. if 'mwimbaji' means 'singer', find all the other words ending in – ji and translate them.

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. 'Hiki ni kitabu' = 'This *?* a book'.

Students are directed to specific unknown words in the text that are made up of familiar elements. E.g. 'tengenezesha'. They are asked to identify familiar elements (i.e. 'tengeneza') and generate plausible Swahili translations for those words.

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
2. Multiple-choice questions

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**?

Read the **English questions** to add to your overall sense of what the text is about, and...

Anticipation

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.