Ideas for working with literary and other authentic texts

Selecting texts (written or spoken)

Texts should ideally have:

a) the potential to engage learners affectively and/or be intrinsically interesting,

b) identified scope for knowledge development in terms of **phonics, vocabulary and/or grammar**; there would likely be an opportunity to bring back and/or bring together previously taught language and/or structures or SSCs in a new context (together, of course, with some unknown vocabulary),

c) scope to be a springboard for a variety of interesting production activities (preferably with some choice),

d) multi-modal presentation potential; many written texts have audio versions (e.g., on YouTube etc..).

Lesson outline principles

1. Pre-reading or listening activities: to create a sense of anticipation and re-activate prior knowledge of concepts and language relevant to the text.

For example, learners consider what the text might be about, who the main characters might be, what its atmosphere might be like, based on some of the following or similar tasks:

- Ask learners to read aloud selected words from the poem (i.e. words that they already know and/or cognates containing previously learnt SSC) and to suggest what type of text it will be or what themes it may have
- Present the 'shape' of the text (e.g. poem) and ask learners to anticipate what kind of text they will be reading
- Play YouTube musical/video rendition of the text or part of it - i.e. no words at this stage
- Present images relating to emotions / metaphors / ideas in the text
- Present key vocabulary relating to the tone, emotions and/or metaphors and ask learners to discuss which might apply to the text
- Present key information about the text authors and ask learners to suggest what the text might be about, based on that information (i.e. based on what values and principles seem important to the author(s))

NB: Depending on the text, age and learning experience of the class, some of the activities above can be included later in the learning sequence.

2. Text comprehension: move from broad to more detailed understanding.

NB: Depending on the text, teachers might present the meaning of difficult but important words early on in this phase, e.g. before learners hear or read the text for the first time. The activities suggested below are sub-divided into those that generate a global understanding of the main content of the text and those that focus on sentence and word level

comprehension.

i. Broad understanding

Present the text (or part of it) and ask learners to *verify what they predicted* – is the theme as they expected? Is the mood / tone similar or different etc? How does the text make them feel/think at this stage?

Other activities to establish broad understanding of the text could include:

- one-sentence summaries of the text to match to the correct verse / paragraph / section of the text;
- one-sentence summaries of what the text is about, and learners choose all those that apply;
- sections of the text (e.g. verses, paragraphs) in the wrong order for learners to re-order;
- a pictorial version of the text for learners to order correctly as they listen.

Teachers choose whether to present the text (and whole or part thereof) in spoken modality only; bi-modally in speech and writing; or in written form only. The theme, language, learners and overall learning objectives will guide the teacher's choice, here.

ii. Understanding of words and sentences

Such activities are essential if students are reliably to deepen their existing vocabulary knowledge and/or to learn new vocabulary as they engage with authentic texts, and may include:

Gap-fill activities

Select as gapped items those words you want to pick up later on for further work (e.g. because they are central to the text's meaning/message; they represent grammatical / SSC / vocabulary items that you are recycling). Gap-fill tasks can involve transcription (then comprehension), or comprehension (and then decoding).

Translation activities

Translation can:

- be negotiated orally, as a whole class teacher-fronted activity; this is one way to enable students to weigh up different possible translations for particular words.
- focus on evaluating different possibilities, e.g. present alternative translations for certain lines of the text and ask learners to select which best convey the original meaning. This can include translation of items that you are recycling and which have a slightly different meaning within the context of the text you are presenting.
- be an individual or pair task, with varying levels of support. It is important to consider the depth of thinking that each task implies, and choose those which challenge students to engage optimally with the language of the text. If too much support is

required in the task, it may be an indication that the text is better suited to a different class.

- be aural to written (i.e. students listen to extracts (even individual words) from the text and write down the English translation). This can also be an aural gap-fill translation, whereby students have an English translation of the text, with gaps. Listening to the original text, they complete the English translation.

Spot the difference

Students can listen and read different versions of the same text, identify the differences and then focus on the significance of the differences.

Comprehension questions (multiple choice, open questions, true/false)

Variations on a theme

Students focus on one extract from the text that has an example or examples of a particular structure, and generate their own examples, integrating new language from the poem and previously learnt language.

3. Stylistic analysis

Literary (but also other authentic) texts often offer particular opportunities to engage with writers' techniques and use of language to convey ideas and emotions. Suitable tasks may include:

- Multiple choice questions on themes and feelings expressed that require learners to identify the section of the text where they occur
- Identification of literary techniques and their effect – e.g. assonance, alliteration; rhyme (link to SSC); this can be done while re-playing / re-reading aloud the text. Following some input from the teacher on how such techniques contribute to the text's meaning, learners then find further examples in the text. Learners can then try to reproduce the same effect with their own reading aloud.
- Identification of words and phrases that convey central themes and feelings. This can and ideally should involve some kind of choice – for example, can learners identify a line/section of the text which, in their view, is the most important/moving/striking one.

4. Responding to the text

Responses to the text typically include production activities that involve, where possible, an element of choice, for example:

- Questions on what is unknown (emotional focus), e.g. What would we need to ask the protagonist to fully understand their feelings? Or more simply, questions that students would like to ask the writer.
- Performance of the text (e.g. focus on SSC, confident pronunciation and conveying mood of text)
- Expressing views on the text with a reason and exemplification

- Choosing a favourite line from the text and justifying its choice
- Writing a script based on the text: acting out roles
- Writing a continuation / end of the story
- Writing / recording a diary entry / letter / facebook post from protagonist's perspective
- Writing and recording a similar poem / text
- Reading aloud the text (perhaps as spoken, recorded homework), portraying different emotional states (angry, sad, etc.), which demonstrates how stress change alters emotional content
- Changing perspective; re-write the text from the perspective of a man / a woman / the modern day / a future world
- Interviewing the protagonist / author about his/her rationale for writing
- Drawing a mind-map or living graph of the text identifying key turning points, mood changes, etc.
- Researching the writer's life and produce a summary
- Finding a similar text and comparing / contrasting it with the original
- Transforming the original text into a different genre (e.g. from poem to dialogue)

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