

BritLit:

USING LITERATURE IN EFL CLASSROOMS



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Introduction to this edition (2009)

This e-book was originally published in print form by the Catalan Teachers of English Association, Associació de Professors d'Anglès de Catalunya (APAC) to help launch the BritLit initiative at the APAC Congress in February 2009. It coincided with a visit to schools in the city of author Louise Cooper, who also contributes to this book, and a short series of workshops for teachers about the project.

This slightly revised version has been produced because it was recognised that teachers worldwide would be interested in the contents, not just those fortunate enough to live in Catalonia. The contents cover the whole range of BritLit activity in that the voices of teachers and authors are heard along with some comments from students, as well as more detailed studies from the project team and academics.

The BritLit project has produced numerous resources for teachers and students, which can be found on the British Council Teaching English website <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit>. These include the complete versions of the sample kits to be found in this book as well as nearly 40 other resource packs or kits, ranging from stories for primary school learners of English to those studying at tertiary level.

We welcome feedback from teachers and others about the content of this book and the resource materials provided on-line. Please contact us by writing to brit.lit@pt.britishcouncil.org

Fitch O'Connell
Porto
August 2009

Introduction to Original APAC Monograph (2009)

If you really want
to succeed
choose the right BOOK
and start to read
REACH FOR THE STARS.
and you'll discover
now digest that BOOK
FROM COVER TO COVER

Extract from REACH FOR THE STARS by Levi Tafari 2006: From The Page to The Stage (page 11)

This is part of a poem that Levi Tafari read on his BritLit 'meet the author' trip to Catalunya in 2007 when he visited two secondary schools to give performances. When he read his poems out loud each person listening created a world of their own in their imagination. Just like the poetry of songs, the poems opened up a different world for each of us and inspired us and give us energy.

The contributors to this monograph are all believers in the power of the word. Choose the right book if you want to succeed and start to read. The written word inspires, teaches, questions, confirms, creates, challenges and opens up your mind. So please join us, APAC and The British Council, in the launch of this jointly edited Special Monograph which aims to introduce you, or make you more familiar with, the BritLit project. BritLit has already earned itself a reputation in classrooms and amongst teachers in a number of countries, within and outside Europe. It has helped teachers from around the world to exploit English literature in the ELT classroom as a language tool. Consequently, APAC gladly accepted the British Council's offer to sponsor a Special monograph focusing on BritLit.

But BritLit can represent much more than it has been reported to do, especially in Spain. In the era of CLIL, when there is an agreed promotion of English being used naturally in the classroom, a project which promotes talking about authentic, unabridged, manageable literature is a very attractive one. It is made even more attractive by the 'meet the author' activity when the writer comes to read their work and talk to us and our students. For those of us teachers who started to love the English Language through literature, this project helps us to pass on our love of words to our students!

The contributions in this volume have been carefully chosen and been organised into three parts. In Part I you will find a very informative introductory chapter on BritLit by Fitch O'Connell, followed by methodological texts for primary and secondary by Sandie Mourao and Claudia Ferradas respectively. With the voices on BritLit section in Part II, the BritLit spirit comes alive through the accounts of two Catalan teachers who have already used BritLit in their classrooms and of three BritLit authors on their visits to schools. Part III is aimed at those who are willing to give BritLit a try and contains sample materials for the classroom. These BritLit kits have been created, used and exploited by teachers from APAC's sister association in Portugal (APPI). We hope these materials work as well in your classrooms as they have in other countries before.

We hope that this Monograph is a good starting point for the involvement of many teachers in this project, either by using BritLit in the classroom, by engaging in the BritLit discussion forum or by becoming a convinced disseminator. Whichever the case.... happy reading!

Lesley Denham
British Council

Neus Figueras
APAC

www.apac.es
www.britishcouncil.es
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit>

The BritLit Story

A brief history and theory

Fitch O'Connell

Preliminary Impetus

The role of the language teacher as a carrier of cultural messages is central to certain understandings of language teaching. Implicit in the concept is that the culture and values that underpin a language cannot be divorced from the language itself, and that an appreciation of certain key cultural concepts are required for a true understanding of the language being learnt. It may be that this idea, especially when related to English, has a limited life span. It has been argued that English as an international language is becoming divorced from its cultural context, and that native-speaker teachers of English will soon become an endangered species and that with the rise of a new international English or new Englishes becoming the dominant strain, a whole variety of other cultures are being reflected¹. However, this is not yet the case, and there is still room to make the claim for cultural context being one of the cornerstones for language development, though it might be argued that the starting point should also reflect the multi-cultural aspirations of contemporary Britain.

One issue that is worth tackling from the outset is to challenge certain stereotypes about Britain that are too often encouraged by even the most well meaning course book (bowler hats, afternoon tea, red buses and stiff upper lips) and supplant them with more realistic images of modern Britain. A focus of this concern at a British Council weekend seminar in Krakow in 2002 called 'Now Open Your Course Books', was to examine the content of many available course books, used either extensively and globally, or locally, and to comment on their usefulness as cultural learning tools. While some, it might be said, hardly passed muster as useful language learning tools, many either tended to ignore cultural content altogether or to reinforce false stereotypes. On the other hand, the best example of a language learning course book set in a viable cultural context came from a group of Eastern European teachers who had spent some time in the UK with the overt intention of writing just such a course book.

The prospect of mugging up on contemporary British cultural ways and turning this research into useable classroom materials to supplement text books is somewhat daunting for many teachers, especially those with little or no knowledge of these matters. There was one source of instant help available, however, revealed at a further seminar, this time held in London early in 2003, which looked at the prospect of providing 'animated literature' in the form of British authors working in language learning settings. It didn't take long for the two ideas – cultural content and British literature – to coalesce and from this was hatched a project, literally on the back of an envelope. BritLit was conceived in the heart of a British cultural institution – in a pub.

Working with a Partner

The idea of using British literature as a window into British culture had to be refined to exclude literature which didn't present a relatively contemporary view of the UK and its citizens, so the choice of contemporary literature appeared to be an easy one to make. However, defining 'contemporary' was as easy as it might appear. Many anthologies of 'contemporary' short stories include tales first published in the early part of the 20th century, and clearly academia was playing its part in the definition of 'contemporary' and that style as much as content was helping to define this. It was felt that a more literal definition of the word was required, and the guiding principle of choosing authors who were still living was adopted.

A second reason for choosing works by living authors was the chance that we might be able to use the authors themselves to be part of the project. After all, seed money was being offered for the promotion of 'animated literature' and the example of performance poets performing and authors readings from their books was presented as a desirable and obtainable goal.

The choice was also for short stories, it being realised that short literature has a greater chance of being used in its entirety in a *non-literary* language classroom than a full novel. There was also the importance of recognising that the purpose of the entire exercise was not to introduce students to literature per se (though this would be a very desirable by-product) but to encourage more thoughtful and purposeful language learning. The choice of contemporary literature was, therefore, important in this respect as exposure to contemporary use of language

(note the frequently substantial use of dialogue in short stories) was likely to be less confusing than exposure to a more archaic form of language, as might be found in even early 20th century literature (Agatha Christie, for example, provides many examples of language which a 21st native language reader might find quaint and which might be all but incomprehensible to the non-native language learner.)

There was a second compelling reason to choose short stories, and this was the national syllabus for Portuguese state schools which was where the project was going to be trialled. We were keen to work with the Portuguese teachers' association (APPI), not least because they were able to provide unrivalled access to schools, teachers and trainers otherwise unavailable to us. It was this access that gave us insight into the kinds of problems that school teachers were having with the compulsory 'extensive reading' element of the national syllabus for years 10, 11 and 12 (15-18 year olds), and the suggested reading list contains mainly short stories, at least for years 10 and 11. With this revelation, the impetus for creating a project which looked at the potential for producing classroom materials that exploited the language and content of contemporary literature became overwhelming. A final decision had to be made about what was considered 'British' literature, and we settled on a path already beaten by the Arts Council and adopted by the British Council that meant that writers from countries that were members of the Commonwealth were the acknowledged representatives. So far, our choice has also veered towards those who either live in the UK now or those who were born in the UK and have moved away. But, like all good rules, it can be broken, should the need arise.

Producing the first materials

Having chosen the general source of the texts, how they were organised and presented became the next task, and the nature of the material on the suggested reading list gave us our first clue. Many of the contemporary short stories were neither contemporary nor short, and most had the unenviable demeanour of appearing deadly dull to the average teenage reader. It appeared that many of the books from the British options in the extensive reading section came from a kind of stock set of collections of short stories which had been fairly standard reading for University students in a number of countries in southern Europe and, while these might be useful for studying aspects of literature, they appeared to make little compromise with the interests of younger teenagers, whose interest in literature was slight.

Accepting that we had to start with texts from the reading list, we chose one of the later offerings – Fay Weldon's 'Weekend' – which although set nearly thirty years in the past, contained a fairly timeless subject: family relationships. Our target students were mixed ability 15 and 16 year olds, many of whom might not have read a book in their own language, let alone one in a foreign language. The task we faced was how to make the story accessible, as a minimum requirement, and enjoyable as an ambitious aim. Because the 5000 word story was full of lexical and cultural references that would trip up even the more confident student, we needed to find devices that made the reading journey less hazardous, and the first thing we decided on was what we called the stepping-stones reading approach. In this, the text was introduced in bite sized chunks, with key vocabulary and local references explained in this micro-context. This pre-reading chunking of the text needed 'permission' for it to be an acceptable approach, and the permission we found was by discovering the key characters in the text before the task of reading was undertaken. Quotes of between 20 and 60 words were employed, frequently describing the main characters, or using their own speech to reveal themselves. The idea was that having got to 'know' the characters in this way, the students would then be able to read the whole story, discovering that there were whole parts that they were already familiar with – hence the stepping stones concept.

At first our proposition to teachers was as follows: first introduce the story by using the pre-reading or 'characterisation' section, after which give students the whole story to read. This was followed by an in-depth exploration of the general context of the tale – not detailed examination of the minutiae of the storyline, but a broad brush approach, providing further resources sparked by ideas from the text.

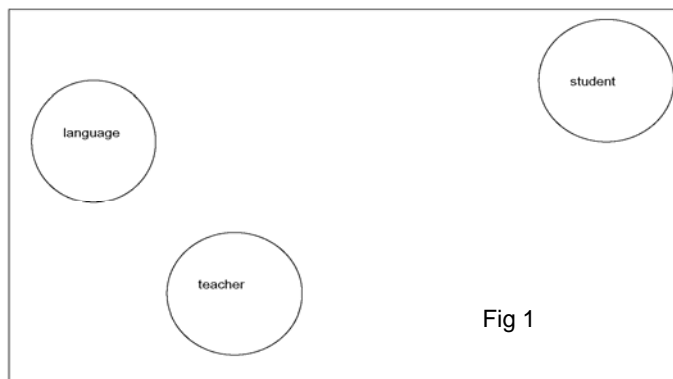
A further development was one demanded by a number of teachers – otherwise we would have ignored it – and this was to explore the grammar of the story. We felt somewhat uneasy about exploiting this aspect of the text, given that one of our aims was to encourage enjoyment of reading, even if a small minority of students thoroughly enjoy the challenge of grammar. However, one section included here proved very popular to everyone, and that was a small glossary of words and expressions within the context given, obviating the need for tricky trawls through dictionaries with multiple meanings given. We even included an English-Portuguese version for teachers who felt their charges would survive better with such a tool.

Finally, we added an 'after reading' section, which aimed not just to tie up the activity and wrap it up, but to lead onto other possible activities if the student or the teacher felt so inclined. In other words, after providing some kind of summarising activity, we added other texts or poetry that linked to a general theme found in the original story.

Objective and Subjective Measures

The method of achieving a full range of activities for mixed ability classes was further achieved by presenting the majority of materials within a far more subjective context than is usual in language classroom settings. Traditionally, most intensive reading activities can be assessed using multiple choice questions, and indeed the majority of the Cambridge main suite ESOL exams do precisely this. This implies that there is an objective and measurable response to reading activities. This is in spite of many academic studies questioning the validity of this measuring response beyond measuring decoding abilities or general comprehension, and skills such as skimming or scanning for specific information. Once we engage the student in a text and treat them as readers, where the reading in itself is a creative act, forming a potentially dynamic partnership with the writer, then the individual, personal and subjective nature of the activity transcends any glib approach to assessment, such as right/wrong answers.

Some observers have commented that they were surprised to hear that the project was adopting an approach that concentrated on the subjective nature of reading and they had presumably assumed that the project would use literature merely as a tool for language learning much as one would use a text book or course book. We argue that it is a matter of ownership of language, and that greater ownership will provide a greater motivation for success in learning than a sense of alienation; hence instrumental rationality is transformed into subjective rationality, a far more powerful driver. We can simplify a complex social model of language classroom relationships graphically thus:



The main point being suggested here is that the teacher has a relationship with the language which is closer than that of the student, or certainly this is how it is perceived by the student. This is partly to do with the fact that the teacher has 'the answers' and is the source of most of the knowledge that unlocks the language to the student. However, we might consider a student who is transformed into a reader, someone who forms their own, personal relationship with the text, and therefore the language that the text is presented in. The relationship between the reader and the language is closer than that of the student and the language, though not necessarily closer to the teacher. (Fig 2) In social theory terms, there is a stronger bond due to the mixture of social action, and is not limited to instrumental rational action, but is value-rational as well. For this to be most effective, the text should be narrative fiction or poetry for this allows the reader to bring their own experiences, memories and interpretation into the equation, and it is this positive and essential cultural investment that allows the reader to take ownership. For this very reason, then, there cannot be clear right or wrong answers to interpreting texts, rather a range of greys will be introduced. Assessment through multiple choice questions, therefore, is unlikely to provide anything except argument and contention.

As a result of this thinking, a lot of the material produced was in the form of interpretive answers or project work, allowing plenty of scope for personal expression. This has its problems, of course, as the medium for expression would normally be a foreign language for the reader, inhibiting easy or free expression. The project designers, however, in workshops and training sessions, emphasise the need not to be prescriptive about the method of feedback at certain stages of encouraging the

readers' – or students' - responses. Indeed one of the most effective methods used was to encourage students to design their own dust cover for the book, thereby combining design with description in the form of blurb, and expanding on their value-rational motivation.

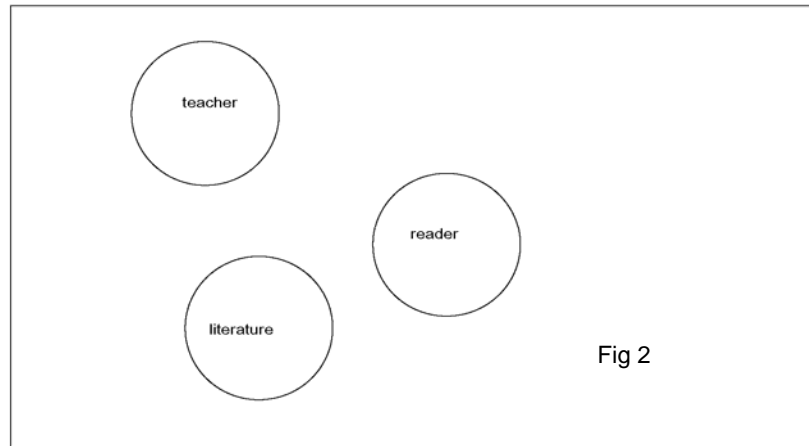


Fig 2

Animating Literature

Another important part of the project was to enhance the sense of ownership and 'specialness' of what the students were doing by developing the 'animating literature' programme, whereby the authors themselves visited the schools and worked with teachers and students. This, clearly, was another advantage in using contemporary literature by living authors and helped break through the fog of unreal experience that so often surrounds school activities. A second option is for the students to engage the authors on-line after the event and authors have generally been sympathetic to this aim.

There have been many examples of extraordinarily positive student (and teacher) response to this activity, and not infrequently whole schools devote considerable time and energy to preparing themselves for visits. The anticipation of a visiting author or poet can send some schools into storms of creative endeavour, frequently bringing about inter-departmental cooperation and project work previously untried, and not infrequently the author will arrive at the school to be met with extravagant exhibitions about their work or their backgrounds, carefully arranged interviews, whole school reading sessions and workshops with a select bunch of students. There have been a number of examples of interactions between students, authors and teachers that have exceeded the organisers' expectations where, most significantly, levels of creativity have risen by all those involved in the project, and where roles have clearly changed, teachers, students and authors all changing places more than once, creating a greater sense of involvement in the process by students, a greater sense of achievement by teachers and, in many cases, even more creative output by authors. The model shown above has changed to something akin to the following (fig 3):

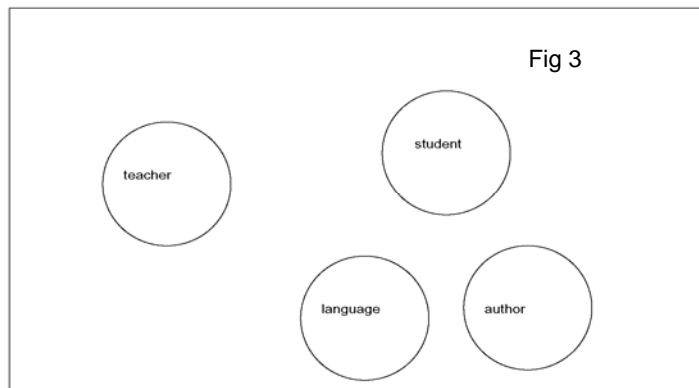


Fig 3

One of the issues in this model is that the roles of readers (or students), author, literature (or creative industry) and teacher became interchangeable, and at times it was difficult to see exactly who was playing which role. What was always clear, though, was that the erstwhile students, now mysteriously transformed into readers, were totally engaged in the language – value rational choices again being evident. Their comments afterwards

were testament to this, and probably the most common written comment was how this experience had opened up new avenues. Many students commented that this interaction had been the most significant and important single event of their school careers to date.

The Problems of Assessment

With this experience in mind, we had an even bigger problem with coping with assessment processes. While it was gratifyingly easy to acknowledge the effect of linkage between language through literature to students and teachers (and, when possible, authors) and to register the enormous impact this was having on their studies in language learning, transferring this to the exam-orientated public education system was another matter altogether. This is the point at which we find ourselves – recognising the issues, perceiving solutions but yet to achieve our objectives. It is largely accepted that assessing reading can be assessed at the most basic levels only, namely:

- Accuracy (decoding texts)
- Automaticity (quick and automatic recognition of words in a connected text)
- Prosody (expressive and meaningful interpretation of text)

The latter presents the hardest task in assessment, though the difficulty is further compounded when we use W.S Gray's² explanation that reading consists of three activities – reading the lines; reading between the lines; reading beyond the lines. Even more so, according to Jane Soars, who claims that

“When the purpose of reading is enjoyment, comprehension questions are beside the point.”³

While some killjoys might claim that the purpose of reading literature for language learning is essentially functional, we might equally respond that if we insist on assessing the reading of literary texts and demanding a response to comprehension questions as part of the process, are we therefore tacitly agreeing that the reading we ask our students to do is **not** for pleasure? I would certainly hope not, though the rejection of reading as a pleasurable activity by many students today might be the result of such a policy, where reading is simply a functional means of collecting information. We would do well to remember Alderson's words when he tells us

“.....text does not 'contain' a meaning waiting to be discovered by an able reader. Rather meaning is created in the interaction between a reader and the text.....the text has potential, and the potential is realised only by readers reading.”⁴

Expansion

The Portuguese experiment has been startlingly successful. Since 2004 over 1000 schools have taken part in the project in one way or another. While prompted by the demands of a part of the national syllabus for that country, the project has shown that the use of literature has an application across the whole range of language learning. If this is true in Portugal, then surely this must also be true in other countries? Indeed, since the BritLit project was launched teachers from many countries across the world have accessed the materials on line (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit>) with some 150,000 visitors downloading up to a quarter of a million worksheets each month. Some fairly intensive work has gone on in Hungary, where teachers have produced kits (also available on line) based on the work of poets from two British cities, Liverpool and Edinburgh, and teachers in Romania and the Czech Republic have been engaged in some intensive work on the project. In 2006 the project formally broadened to include Spain and Italy in a regional partnership of British Council offices. The three countries shared enough similarities in school syllabus design to make the joint project viable and sufficient differences to make the project challenging, and each had identifiable partners (teachers' associations and organisers of post-graduate University courses) which was a key part of the success of the Portuguese project.

Prior to Spain and Italy joining the project there had been an arrangement with NILE (Norwich Institute of Language Education) to work with groups of English language teachers from Portuguese schools on a two week intensive materials writing course. Three successful Comenius funded programmes had resulted in the production of new kits and had also helped to pave the way to developing new materials for younger learners. Partly this latter move had been prompted by the decision of the Portuguese government to introduce English into primary level education, though it didn't necessarily provide all the resources or training required to make

this work successfully. The British Council saw this as an opportunity and BritLit was one of the programmes re-tooled to help meet the challenge. By the time the Spanish and Italian teachers joined the project, therefore, a full range of materials for students from 7 to 17 was available, and a regular summer training course was taking place to train BritLit teachers. One of the key tasks in the first year of the regional project was to set up a training programme for teachers from all three countries, and in the summer of 2007 the first international group of BritLit teachers went to work in Norwich, and they included some Catalan teachers.

One of the results of the years of intensive training coupled with feedback from the use of the kits from teachers worldwide was a continual development in the way the materials were produced. One important feedback was that the kits appeared too long – contained too much material – for many teachers (no doubt those for whom every page of the course book was unmissable). It was clear that our suggestions and guidance to teachers to be highly selective in the materials they chose to use was being ignored. Hence the kits started to become shorter, and so did the stories. By 2008 there was a clear shift towards very short stories and materials that could be accessed in one or two lessons. Another of the results of the feedback was of a different pedagogical nature, and it led the project to place more and more emphasis on the pre-reading activities and to reduce the significance of the 'context' section. By 2008 the word 'Characterisation' had been replaced as a section header by 'Pre-reading' and the plea was that if only one section was to be tackled, then this was it. In many cases the supplementary 'After Reading' activities were left out altogether, or absorbed into the 'Context' section. The 'Word Work or grammar section got shorter and shorter, but was always present.

In 2006 two notable academic successes were recorded when two Universities took BritLit on board within their MA programmes for teachers. York University adopted a paper as part of its distance MA for YL Teachers while Universidad de Alcalá, Madrid, went further and used the BritLit model as a full strand in their new MA for in-service teachers. As a result of this focus more attention was given to the pedagogical underpinning of the whole project, and a number of distinguished academics became involved, helping to shape the model as it evolved.

By late in 2008 it was clear that BritLit materials were being used by teachers and students across the world. The list of authors who not only worked with the project but had become firm supporters and even ambassadors for the project was beginning to look like a short list for a literature prize and the project was making headway in its primary purpose – to bring literature as a language learning tool to every classroom in the world.

Bibliography

¹David Graddol '*English Next*' published by British Council, 2006

²W.S. Gray '*The Teaching of Reading*' Harvard University Press

³Jane Soars '*Assessing Reading Proficiency*' National Capital Language Resource Center, Washington

⁴J Charles Alderson "*Assessing Reading*" CUP

Using stories in the primary classroom

Sandie Mourão

'In using stories in language teaching we are using something much bigger and more important than language teaching itself.'

Wright (2003:7)

Storytelling is an accepted and widely used approach in the teaching of English language classroom. It represents a holistic approach to language teaching and learning founded on the understanding that learners need to interact with rich, authentic examples of the foreign language. The communicative approach enabled story to take its place in our English classrooms, bringing the following to language learning, all of which are supported by the use of stories:

- A focus on meaning rather than medium, with an emphasis on fluency;
- The information gap, where students are encouraged to use their learning to understand authentic texts;
- A focus on process rather than product;
- An emphasis on negotiation rather than pre-determination;
- A teacher who acts as facilitator not just instructor.

Garvie (1990) describes *story as a vehicle* for all that is language learning, which includes the cognitive and affective factors. She proposes that language learning be led by story and claims that it has an advantage over topics as it is structured. The magical thing about stories is that they can feature in many different ways in your classrooms. They can play a major role in your planning, as in Garvie's *vehicle*, or they can appear occasionally, to bring a bit of spice and excitement to a classroom, a change of routine, a new recipe. What's important is that they do appear in your classes! Stories are considered essential in learning our first language: they can also play an important role in learning another language.

1. Why use stories?

Many authors have made excellent arguments for the inclusion of stories in our English classrooms. These arguments are not just linguistic ones, but include socio-emotional, cognitive, cultural and aesthetic ones. Here is a list of 30 excellent reasons for using stories in your classrooms!

Socio-affective

Children love stories!

Children are familiar with narrative conventions and listening to stories is something they are used to doing at home and in other school contexts

Stories help children understand their world and share it with others, often forging links between home and school.

Story telling has predictable routines with predictable formats providing children with pointers, which encourage participation. This promotes a positive attitude towards the language that they are learning and enhances their motivation.

Stories provide for shared social experiences. Children laugh together, are happy and sad together, shout and sing together. This helps build children's confidence and encourages social and emotional development.

Cognitive

Stories link with other curriculum areas, providing for continuity in learning.

English is seen as a medium for language learning, stories support this by focussing on content not language.

Stories in L1 or L2 are processed using the same cognitive strategies. Picture books are particularly helpful, as the illustrations support these cognitive processes.

Stories develop children's learning strategies: listening for general meaning; predicting; guessing meaning; hypothesising.

Stories develop different types of intelligences that contribute to language learning, in particular emotional intelligence.

Stories exercise the imagination! Children become involved in the story, identifying with the characters, interpreting the narrative and illustrations. This imaginative experience helps develop their personal creative powers.

Stories develop higher level thinking skills, as children are encouraged to verbalise thought when discussing the stories.

Picture books in particular stimulate children to create meaning using the two forms of text, the visual and the verbal.

Linguistic

Stories provide a natural and relevant context for exposure to language.

Reading picture books to children has been investigated in positively promoting vocabulary development in children.

Picture books expose children to rich, authentic language, which they otherwise would not encounter.

The story visuals, the storyteller's voice, mime and gesture all support meaning, and enable children to develop their listening and concentration skills.

Children listen with purpose to find meaning. In doing so, they are motivated to listen for more and understand more.

Listening to stories helps children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of the language.

Many stories naturally provide for repetition and cumulative activities. This allows children to participate by repeating large sections of narrative to join in as they are repeated in the story.

Children enjoy listening and re-listening to stories. This recurring activity also allows for children to participate in the storytelling activity by repeating large sections of narrative. This is essentially a drill / pattern practice but in a meaningful context.

Stories provide opportunities for integrating the four language skills, listening and reading, followed by speaking and writing.

If selected appropriately, the language in stories should be a little above the level of normal production/understanding, which allows for Krashen's acquisition-based methodology (input +1 theory).

Stories add variety to a language course and can be used to create whole units of work that constitute mini-syllabuses.

Listening to stories helps children become storytellers. By exposing children to different types of story they are able to recreate their own stories using ideas and formats they have heard and seen in class.

Cultural

Stories often address universal themes, which allow children to think about issues that are important to them, playing with ideas and feelings and promoting empathy.

Stories reflect the culture of their authors and illustrators, this allows for opportunities for presenting cultural information and cross-cultural comparison. This is particularly true for picture books.

Traditional stories, which the children are already familiar with, can be enjoyed with ease in English. In some cases the stories might vary slightly and a teacher can discuss the cultural aspects of traditional stories in both languages.

Aesthetic

Picture books promote visual literacy: children develop skills in picture reading, decoding the visuals and not just the words.

Picture books expose children to diverse styles of design and illustration, which contribute to developing their understanding and appreciation of art.

2. The stories used in BritLit for Primary

Stories come in many shapes and sizes, and have different reasons for existing. BritLit uses two types of story for the primary level, traditional tales and picture books.

A. Traditional Tales

Traditional tales belong to the oral tradition of storytelling, passed from generation to generation, often crossing cultures. These tales continue to entertain and delight children, embodying both the emotional and spiritual truths of mankind. Fairy tales, folk tales, myths, legends and fables can be included in this category. Many have changed over the years, almost unrecognizable from their original versions and adaptations have been published in all forms, many of which are used for language learning purposes.

Fairy tales are folk narratives, they often include magic and a little of the supernatural. Examples would be tales recorded by the Brother's Grimm (*Little Red Riding Hood*) and Hans Christian Anderson (*The Tin Soldier*). *Jack and the Beanstalk* is an example of a traditional British fairy tale, originally retold at the beginning of the nineteenth century

Folk tales often feature animals, demonstrating the wisdom, or not, of ordinary folk, a good example would be *Ananse the spider* a folk tale from Ghana.

Myths look to explain the origins of phenomena, both natural and supernatural. Alongside the Greek and Norse myths there are multicultural ones like *How the giraffe got his long neck*.

Legends usually focus on individual characters, great heroes and kings. The legend of *King Arthur* would be an excellent example.

Fables are short stories, once again using animals. They usually contain overt morals. Fables by La Fontaine or Aesop are the most famous, *The Ant and the Grasshopper* and the *City Rat and the Country Rat* are good examples.

Structure and organisation

Traditional stories usually have very distinctive story patterns and narrative elements, this is because they needed to be easily memorised by the teller and the told. European traditional stories frequently use the number three, the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and *Gollocks and the Three Bears* are good examples. They contain repetitive, sequential and cumulating patterns, which make them an excellent medium for the language class, easy to imitate and repeat.

Themes

Traditional stories contain communal themes, representative of issues surrounding the human condition. Contrasts are present such as: good and evil; rich and poor; old and young; beauty and ugliness; meanness and generosity. I'm sure you can all come up with story titles following these themes.

B. Picture books

Picture books are very special objects. The criteria for the Caldecott Award, the annual award distributed by the American Library Association for most distinguished contribution in illustration, provides us with an excellent definition, "*A picture book for children as distinguished from other books with illustrations is one that essentially provides the child with a visual experience. A picture book has a collective unity of story-line, theme, or concept, developed through the series of pictures of which the book is comprised.*"

The picture book, as we know it in the 21st century, has been made possible due to advances in printing technology, allowing illustrator's drawings to be faithfully reproduced and sit alongside words on the same page. This did not happen until the 1960's, and since then the world of the picture book has evolved beyond all expectations. Social and cultural approaches to the image have also affected its production. We live in an increasingly multimodal world, where word and image constantly work together to give meaning: this is seen in everything we are expected to read, from newspapers to computer screens. This too has helped picture books become increasingly more sophisticated.

Picture books come in many shapes and sizes and include ABC and counting books, board books for babies, wordless books, pop-up and moveable books, poetry and rhyme books, as well as information books. For our purposes we shall focus on picture books that present a narrative. However, there are three types of narrative books with pictures, and sometimes they are easily confused with picture books.

Picture storybooks.

Tell a narrative story which is conveyed through both illustrations and text. Pictures and text work together to produce the story.

Illustrated books

Include pictures as extensions of the text. The pictures may enrich the story but are not necessary for its interpretation.

Decorated books

Include small pictures or designs, often at the beginning or end of a chapter, which act as decoration. These decorations may have some connection with the story, but they simply serve to make the book more appealing. They do not usually enrich or extend the story.

We are talking about the **Picture storybook**, a book in which the narrative is constructed by using two texts, the visual (illustrations) and the verbal (words). In language learning this is extremely useful. Input in the form of visual and verbal means that children are supported in their understanding of the story. They can hear (or read) the story and look at the illustrations. We need to keep this in mind when selecting picture books. Picture books are sometimes referred to as *Real Books* or *Real picture Books* in the ELT world and *Trade books* in the USA.

Picture books with one story

Most quality picture books on the market are made up of two texts, the visual and the verbal, both of which tell the same story. The illustrations mirror the words, occasionally giving the listener / reader an extra visual stimulus to notice, or talk about, but generally the illustrations are there to support and contextualise the language the children know and the story itself. The BritLit primary pack uses two such books, '*Down by the cool of the Pool*' by Tony Mitten and Guy Parker-Rees and '*Walking Through the Jungle*' by Debbie Harter.

Picture books with two stories

There are also a number of quality picture books in which the two texts, the visual and the verbal, do not support each other. Instead they tell different parts of the story or even contradict each other. The use of irony is often

prevalent in these picture books. A good example would be the classic picture book 'Rosie's Walk' by Pat Hutchins: the story of a hen taking a stroll around the farmyard. The verbal text describes her stroll, the visual text describes an accident-prone fox following her and getting into all sorts of difficulties.

Using these picture books provides the language student and the teacher with a challenge, but an interesting one. These picture books can be used to create discussion, as well as getting children to use their own words to retell parts of the story using the illustrations.

3. How to section

This section is divided into several parts, which will help you work with stories in your language classrooms.

Storytelling in your classroom

Creating a space conducive to storytelling is very important. It is not always possible to move chairs around, but if it is, have the children bring their chairs together at the front of class, or maybe sit on the floor. If you have a smaller number of students, create a storytelling corner, and sit the children on a rug or on cushions.

It is important that the children can see you, and anything you are showing them, especially if it is a book. Begin the storytelling session with a ritual expression / activity. For example: *It's story time, are you ready?* Perhaps you could play a certain piece of music, choose something calm and play it quietly, setting the scene.

Use a part of your classroom to display story related work. Have children write short story reports about favourite characters/stories, rewrite parts of stories, or make storyboards. Whatever story it is that you are working on, make this evident in your classroom by displaying what your children do that is related to the story.

If you have the resources, set up a classroom library. Encourage children to borrow books, write book reports and share their favourite books. Allow time for book browsing during your English lessons, maybe at the beginning / end of lessons.

Reading or telling a story?

There is a big difference between reading and telling stories. When you read a story, your eyes are fixed on the page; you concentrate on what you are saying and leave very little time or space for comments from and interaction with children.

When you tell a story, the book, the visual, your face and body are all visual aids for the children. Because you are telling the story from memory, you are looking at the children and using their reaction as feedback to what you are saying. Keep eye contact with children as often as possible, this brings them into the story and also helps you see if they are following. If necessary, we can allow them to interact with the story and extend it for their benefit. (See notes on children interacting with illustrations in the next section.)

Story telling implies knowing the story almost by heart. It also involves thinking about how you are going to say certain words and phrases, whether a character will have a certain voice and which gestures and movements you will use to accompany the words. We each tell a story using our personality and character, and more important than anything we have to feel comfortable with the story.

Try practicing a little at home with friends or loved ones. Use a mirror and rehearse your voice, gestures and facial expressions. It may sound silly but it really does help! But careful, don't get yourself worked up about storytelling: the children will sense you are nervous and that's not what you want!

What do you expect from the children during storytelling activities?

Children should be allowed to interact as you tell a story, and how they do this will vary from country to country, as it depends very much on cultural expectations.

For some English teachers it is not always easy to tell a story and cope with children's questions and comments, but this is an important part of storytelling, especially when using a picture book. The illustrations will entice children into predicting and commenting – this will be in English and in their first language. Your reactions

should be in English as much as possible, recasting and expanding what they have said and encouraging them to use their English as much as possible.

Encourage interaction, as it enables children to use their English to create meaning through the two picture book texts, the illustrations and the words.

Thoughts about progression

Observation is key in collecting evidence to demonstrate a child's progression and attitude towards storytelling.

Look for the following in your classrooms:

- Positive reactions during storytelling activities;
- Children using visual/ audio clues to get meaning;
- Children retelling the story with you;
- Children predicting what will come next;
- Children using story language in other activities;
- Children requesting stories again;
- Children independently browsing through picture books in the classroom;
- Children sharing stories with peers / families / friends

If you write reports for parents / schools, include a note about storytelling and the child's attitude towards the activity. Have children complete self assessment sheets related to storytelling and particular books.

4. Using traditional tales

Selecting traditional tales.

When selecting a story for your group bear in mind the following:

- **Theme**

The story will make more sense if it is connected to their present language-learning situation. For example, you may be doing the family with your children – *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is a good story for this, although it will also expose children to other language like adjectives and rooms in a house / furniture. Little Red Riding Hood would also be a good choice, and it is one of the stories in the BritLit primary collection.

- **Language structures / vocabulary**

Both these stories contain excellent examples of repetitive language that will enable children to repeat large sections of narrative in a meaningful context. Goldilocks and the Three Bears uses the following:

She tried the big bowl. Yuck, it was too hot.

She tried the medium bowl. Yuck, it was too cold.

She tried the small bowl. Umm, delicious it was just right.

These refrains are repeated three times as Goldilocks goes through the house sitting on chairs and sleeping in beds.

In Little Red Riding Hood we hear the following:

What big eyes you've got. All the better to see you.

What big ears you've got. All the better to hear you.

What big hands you've got. All the better to hug you.

What big teeth you've got. All the better to eat you!

Stories which include repeated refrains / cumulative sections and some rhyming are excellent for use in the language classroom. Jack and the Beanstalk has the wonderful rhyme:

Fee! Fi! Fo! Fum!

I smell the blood of an Englishman

Be he alive or be he dead.

I'll grind his bones to makes my bread!

These chunks of language are quickly memorised, and it is motivating for children to be able to retell the story with you.

Language should be accessible to your children, and where possible try to ensure that they are familiar with about 75% of the language in the story. The other 25% should be clear from your visual support, be it gesture or mime or through illustrations / pictures.

Stories work best if there are still some words / phrases which are new, but which will be acquired through listening to the story. This helps children to feel that they are progressing.

- **Visual support available**

Helping children understand a story using mime and gesture is very important, and illustrations are even better. If you have a book as support for the story use that, even if it is in the children's mother tongue. You could find pictures of key vocabulary items and use those, but also ensure you feel confident about miming anything that needs miming.

- **Do the children know the story already?**

If the children know the story already in their mother tongue you may want to compare the stories. Are they the same, or are there cultural differences? Do you want to focus on these differences if they exist?

If the story is the same it will give the children confidence while they are listening, as they won't be worried about not understanding everything.

Before/ during / after notes

Before the story

Because traditional stories are usually familiar to children the first thing to do is elicit whether they know the story and what it's about. Show visuals which represent the main characters / places, and elicit language from the children. If you wish you could give children collections of characters / object cards which appear in the story. Play with these cards, using the words / structures to give the children confidence with later listening to the story.

During the story.

Give children a reason to listen. Prepare a question or a riddle for them to listen for during the story.

If you have used any word or structure cards before the story, the children can hold these up when they appear or when they hear them in the story.

Have children act out words or parts of the story with you. When they hear the giant, they could pretend to be a giant stomping in their seat. When they hear the word hot or cold they could mime eating hot or cold porridge.

Encourage children's participation: look pleased when they begin to say parts of the story with you.

After the story

There are lots of different activities for after a story, and the BritLit site suggests many.

Alongside all the games and typical language activities, encourage the children to be creative, rewrite stories, make plays out of stories, film/record children retelling stories. But most of all, retell the stories - retell them again and again. It is through retelling that children are exposed to the story language and feel confident about using it.

5. Using picture books with one story

Selecting picture books

When selecting a picture book for your group bear in mind the following:

- **Theme**

Select a story, which deals with a theme you are using in English. There's a picture book for practically every theme possible, from fiction to non-fiction.

- **Language structures / vocabulary**

The language in a picture book needs to be accessible to your students. It should contain repetitive and predictable language and once again the children should be familiar with about 75% of the language.

Narrative is told in the past tense, so the past tense is likely to appear in most picture books. This is not a problem: children are being exposed to natural language. Picture books also tend to use more flowery language; this is not a problem either. Children will pick up these words, usually nice sounding words, and use them easily due to the context they have been presented in.

- **The Illustrations**

I have already mentioned that picture books contain two texts, a visual one, the illustrations, and a verbal one, the words. When the visual and the verbal tell the same story, we are providing a very supportive context for language learning. It is therefore important to bear this in mind when selecting a picture book. Look hard at the illustrations, do they really help understand the words. Is the red ball, really red, or does it look orange? Does the frog look happy or grumpy?

If you look at the book '*Down by the Cool of the Pool*', you will see that the illustrations match the words. The frog really is going 'Wheee!' The pool really does look cool as the illustrator has tinged the water in blue hues, and everything else is a hot yellow. The animals are flapping, wiggling, stamping and frisking, and the illustrations mirror these actions, providing clues to exactly what these less used verbs actually depict.

- **The Peritext**

Peritext may be a word you are unfamiliar with. The *peritext* of a picture book is everything except the actual story pages. Here is a list of possible *peritext*:

- The front and back covers;
- The end pages – these are the first and last pages of a book, rarely containing the story;
- The title page – a page which includes the title, the author, and the publisher;
- A dust jacket – in hard backed books, this is the thick paper wrapping protecting the book;

The peritext of a picture book often include a good deal of information, which can be used by the children to predict and discuss what will happen and generate language. When you select a picture book take into consideration how you can use these elements.

The peritext features in *Down by the cool of the pool* are excellent in helping children predict what will happen in the story. The front end pages show a cool, bluey pink watery scene, a deliciously cool pool! You can elicit what kind of animals would we find by a pool, in particular this pool, which has lily pads and reeds.

Selecting picture books - Using other people's advice

Selecting a picture book for your classroom can be problematic if you don't have the books at hand to browse through and look at. You can't see how well the illustrations mirror the words, and you can't check out the *peritext*. A visit to a local British Council library would be useful, they normally have an excellent selection of children's picture books you can browse through.

There are several publications listed in the reference section which provide you with picture book titles and activities: Ellis & Brewster 2002, Lambert & Choy 2000 and Mourão 2003. These stories and books have been tried and tested in the language classroom. So it's likely they will be suitable for your classroom too.

You can also look at the following website <http://www.realbooks.co.uk/> which was set up by Opal Dunn, but now hosted at the University of York. It contains lots of suggestions for selecting picture books as well as short articles and links.

Notes on the illustrations in the picture books on the BritLit page.

Down by the cool of the pool

This book is visually very attractive. If you flick through you will notice how the colours get hotter, they move from cool morning blues right through warm midday yellows to deep evening oranges. The colours change with the excitement of the story as well as with the day.

If you look at each page closely you will see there is always a caterpillar, a snail and a dragonfly. Children are very likely to notice these creatures and look out for them. In the last page, they are left alone watching the water as the sun goes down: the frog has gone, plop!

You will also notice how the animals who are going to dance with frog, always appear in the page before they are announced. Duck is hiding behind the milk churn, pig's tail is poking up next to the bull rushes, sheep is peeking out from behind the tree, cat's tail can be seen in the foreground - and then the animals come in groups and the forewarnings disappear. Children will notice these aspects of the illustrations and we can help them look for them.

Walking through the jungle

This picture book is beautifully illustrated with brightly coloured creatures and backgrounds which will motivate the children to look deeper into the illustrations. This picture book also forewarns children which animals will chase the little girl. The lion is hiding behind some leaves, the whale is blowing through his air pipe in the distance, the wolf is peeking up from the rocks, and it goes on. Help the children look for these clues, as predicting what will come next gives them confidence and a lot of enjoyment.

The illustrator uses a reoccurring black and white striped design in each page. Children are likely to notice this, and once again, be drawn into the picture book and encouraged to use more English to describe what they are seeing. Make the most of these opportunities.

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Enjoying literature with teens and young adults in the English language class

Claudia Ferradas

Literature in English Language Teaching

Why should ELT practitioners be concerned with literature if, as it is often claimed, it has little practical application, is often closely connected with a specific cultural context, and it can be idiosyncratic, even subversive? It is our contention that, although often considered drawbacks, these features of literary discourse can make valuable contributions to language acquisition.

Most textbooks aimed at the teaching of English for international communication prioritise **referential language**: *"language which communicates at only one level, usually in terms of information being sought or given, or of a social situation being handled"* (McRae, 1991: 3). Learners are taught how to communicate in international contexts through language meant to be as culturally *"neutral"* as possible. But once they have gone beyond that *"survival"* level, once they need to express their own meanings and interpret other people's beyond the merely instrumental, **representational language** is needed. By representational language we mean *"language which, in order that its meaning potential be decoded by a receiver, engages the imagination of that receiver... Where referential language informs, representational language involves"* (McRae, 1991: 3).

It is here that literature has an important role to play. As Henry Widdowson put it in an interview published by the ELT Journal in 1983: *"In conventional discourse you can anticipate, you can take shortcuts... Now you can't do that with literature... because you've got to find the evidence, as it were, which is representative of some new reality. So with literary discourse the actual procedures for making sense are much more in evidence. You've got to employ interpretation procedures in a way which isn't required of you in the normal reading process. If you want to develop these procedural abilities to make sense of discourse, then literature has a place..."* (in Brumfit and Carter, 1985).

Such training in deciphering discourse is a crucial factor in the development of language learning abilities. The use of texts characterised by their *"literariness"* or, to use McRae's terminology, by the use of representational language as opposed to a purely referential one, can help ELT students succeed in this respect: *"The idea that literature is not 'relevant' to learners is easily quashed. Natural curiosity about the world, and about any text to be read, means that a learner is always willing to make some attempt to bridge the relevance gap which the teacher may fear separates the learner and the text... The relevance gap is bridged by identification of (if not necessarily with) different ways of seeing the world, and the range of ways of expressing such a vision."* (McRae, 1991: 55)

In short, literature, whether canonical or not, can make positive contributions to the language class in that

- it can be motivating and thought-provoking
- it provides meaningful (and memorable) contexts for new vocabulary and structures, thus encouraging language acquisition and expanding students' language awareness
- it can help develop students' procedural abilities to interpret discourse
- it provides access to new socio-cultural meanings, offering opportunities for the development of cultural awareness
- it stimulates the imagination, as well as critical and personal response, thus contributing to the major aim of educating the whole person

However, teachers of teenagers and young adults often complain that their students read very little and reject literature both as class materials and entertainment. But while a long-established text-centered canon dominates the teaching of literature, a parallel system develops side-by-side with school literature and its restrictions and prejudices as to what can or should be read (Bombini, 1989). This literary system has its own laws of production, reception and distribution, its own criteria as to what should be included or excluded. In it, the concepts of "text" and "reading" are stretched to include not only texts of non-conventional circulation (underground magazines, the production of adolescent writers) but also graffiti, comics, computer games, blogs, V-logs, urban legends on the net, interactive hypertext novels...

So if young people do read, and they very often read in English, how can we take advantage of this world of texts to develop language awareness and reading strategies? And how can we motivate our young students to come into contact with a whole world of creative texts they may not even be aware of?

Materials selection

A good number of BritLit kits have been developed with teenage and young adult readers in mind. The texts selected are short, often have audio support (downloadable mp3's), can be read on screen if the reader does not want to read print and the range of topics and styles is wide enough to suit a variety of tastes and interests. Short stories are often linked to related texts, in several cases poems, so that these intertexts can be part of the class if the teacher has enough time -or students can find their way into the website to do more reading at their own pace. Alternatively, teachers may want to use the intertexts as class materials and then encourage students to read the base story as extensive reading at home.

The texts have been written by contemporary authors: they are authentic (ungraded) and the language used presents a variety of "Englishes" that showcase the multicultural nature of present-day Britain. Access to the experience of living authors through "Meet the Author" kits allows readers to come into contact with writing from an experiential perspective. "Unconventional" writers like Benjamin Zephaniah, Levi Tafari and Francesca Beard, British performance poets of diverse origins, challenge stereotypes about Englishness and about the nature of poetry, which jumps out of the page to go on stage, into classrooms, squares, prisons... and plays with the rhythms of reggae and rap. The use of multi-media as a means of delivering narrative is also being explored. One of the newest kits is based on the short story 'Coming Home' by Melvin Burgess. Two of the characters introduce themselves by means of V-log, short clips of video in the form of a personal diary or monologue, and the central tension of the story, involving four characters, is offered as a podcast. These digital sections are connected by written text and students will need to access all three input resources to follow the narrative.

The approach

BritLit activities are based on the following methodological assumptions:

- The focus is on **what language can do**, on how language means, highlighting its expressive and poetic functions –not on literary analysis, which may be enlightening but is not necessarily an aim in the language class.
- The text is a stepping-stone for the learners to **develop responses** (which need not always be in writing or involve sophisticated language ability; just a laugh can signal comprehension and involvement).
- The teacher does not provide "model interpretations": s/he encourages **different responses and interpretations supported by reference to the text**.
- The text can simply be enjoyed and commented on, but **activities based on the text** are provided, aiming at language awareness as well as cultural awareness.
- The approach is **intertextual** and **intercultural**, aiming at a fluid dialogue between
 - each reader and the text (encouraging personal response and interpretation)
 - each reader and other readers (through group activities such as debates and collaborative tasks)
 - the text and other texts (by presenting intertexts which are related thematically and suggesting further reading)
 - the culture(s) represented in the text and the learners' culture(s) (by encouraging reflection on the customs and values presented in the texts and those of the readers)
 - the text used as stepping-stone and the text(s) produced in response to it (encouraging students to respond with their own productions and making sure these are made public for other readers to access, not considered just another instance of "writing for the teacher").

In short, BritLit kits **integrate the four macroskills** (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and **encourage critical thinking and cultural awareness** by

- inviting students to "repair" with their imagination the **gaps of indeterminacy** in the text (Iser 1971): those silences which are left for readers to fill in with their own interpretation.
- encouraging **textual intervention**: activities that invite students to adapt the text, change it and extend it creatively, such as:

- Writing a missing scene
- Changing the point of view
- Imagining a character's thoughts
- Dramatising what is told, narrating what is communicated through dialogue
- Illustrating
- Trying the “what if...?” question and so changing the story at crucial points
- Changing the ending

Components

Most kits offer several suggestions for pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activities. These are often more than any teacher can handle in the time available in a specific course. They are meant for teachers to choose from according to their needs and also for students to be able to expand upon class work if they are motivated to do so. Quick kits like the three “Hay Festival Segovia kits” only include one pre-reading and one post-reading activity.

Teachers will also find the key to activities useful in their class preparation, and students may want to use the glossaries provided in several kits.

Pre-reading activities (referred to as “characterization” in some kits)

This is an essential component, meant to motivate readers to read for pleasure. Pre-reading tasks generally consist of prediction activities (such as anticipating what the story will be about by reading the title or a few opening lines) and contextualization activities aimed at activating students' schemata (their knowledge of the world, their preconceptions) and so challenge stereotypes and facilitate an open-minded encounter with cultural diversity.

While reading activities

These are step-by-step activities to help students in their reading of an authentic text. Take for example, “Emergency Landing”, a story by Louise Cooper for younger teens. After working on the title and activating schemata on planes and emergency landing procedures in the “characterization” section, we pass on to the “context” section, where the very short story is “chunked” at a crucial point. This allows the teacher to check comprehension and predict how the story will go on, encouraging textual intervention. There are bound to be as many version of the story as there are students in the class, as their imaginations will have been kindled. And there will be quite a few surprised faces when they read the ending written by Louise Cooper, a typical “twist in the tale”:

Emergency Landing Louise Cooper

‘Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking,’ said the voice over the intercom. ‘I’m afraid we have engine trouble, so we’ll have to make an emergency landing. There’s no cause for alarm; we can get down quite safely. I apologize for the inconvenience.’

‘Bother!’ said one of the passengers. ‘I’ve got an important meeting, and I don’t want to be late.’

‘Where are we, anyway?’ said the passenger in the seat next to him. They both peered out of the porthole. ‘I suppose we’ll land down there,’ said the first passenger. ‘It looks like the only possible place. I don’t recognize it, though.’

The stewardess, who was coming down the aisle, overheard. ‘It is rather in the middle of nowhere, I’m afraid,’ she said ruefully. ‘We won’t find a qualified mechanic there. But don’t worry: the crew have been trained to do repairs, and they shouldn’t take very long.’

‘Hmm. Will we be able to make ourselves understood to the natives?’ the first passenger asked.

‘I shouldn’t think so, sir. I shouldn’t think anyone there can speak our language.’

The passengers didn’t like the sound of that. ‘What if they’re hostile?’ someone else wanted to know. ‘We could be in danger!’

After reading the first part of the short story:

- decide if the following sentences are True or False;
- correct the false ones.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. There is a problem with the engine. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| _____ | |
| 2. They immediately recognize the place for the emergency landing. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| _____ | |
| 3. A passenger is worried about his business. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| _____ | |
| 4. A team of qualified mechanics will repair the engine. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| _____ | |
| 5. One of the passengers believes the local people will understand their language. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| _____ | |

Imagine what happens next.

You are going to write a paragraph – between 40-60 words. Before you do that, discuss these questions with a partner. They may help you.

- Where will they land?
- What kind of place is it?
- Who will they meet?
- What do the local inhabitants look like?
- What language do the natives speak?
- How do they communicate?
- Will they be friendly?

The stewardess laughed. Or rather, she waggled four of her six antennae, which amounted to the same thing. ‘Don’t worry’, she chuckled. ‘We’ve got weapons that no one there has even dreamed of! So if there’s any trouble, we’ll just power them up and ----pffft!’

They all looked out of the portholes at the little blue-and-green world revolving against a background of deep-space stars. The people who lived on the little world called it Earth, though the passengers didn’t know that, and wouldn’t have cared if they had.

‘I expect,’ said the stewardess comfortably, ‘we’ll blow the planet up when we leave. We usually do.’ She waggled her antennae again. ‘It saves a lot of silly form-filling and questions when we get home. Now, ladies and gentlemen; if you would kindly fasten your seat belts as we go in to land...’

The whole experience will be fun, and students will have learnt vocabulary related to planes in a meaningful, memorable context. What is more, they will have become aware of what language can do, how it can delay information to create suspense and allow for a surprising ending, how a word like “porthole”, which is perhaps one of the few clues to realize that we are on a spaceship in the first part of the story, is often overlooked due to the reader’s eagerness to find out what will happen to the passengers.

There are also additional language activities for teachers and students who feel the text should be exploited with discreet language aims in mind, such as vocabulary expansion, comprehension check or the practice of structures which are recurrent in the text. They can of course be omitted if the aim is reading for pleasure and

global comprehension. On the other hand, these activities show how the teaching and revision of language objectives can be more self-explanatory and memorable within the context of a creative text. This is particularly clear in the case of adjectives showing the passengers' attitudes in "Emergency Landing". Adjectives are very hard to understand and memorize if explained in the abstract. In stories, the characters' attitudes exemplify the words taught and help the learner remember them by bringing back to mind the situation in the narrative.

Post-reading activities

Apart from the possibility of relating the text to other texts (in the case of "Emergency Landing" the poem "Alien" by Richard MacWilliam poses a very interesting textual intervention question: *what would you do if a spaceship landed in the playground?*) the kits provide suggestions for follow up. These may range from simple activities, such as changing the ending, to whole projects involving web quests. It's up to the teacher and the students to decide how much work to do on a particular story. Teachers should avoid "killing" a story by using it too much as an excuse for language practice; if the pleasure of reading is to be nourished, literary texts in the classroom should be more than purely instrumental passages for language teaching. On the other hand, tasks and projects focusing on content, cultural issues, values, exemplify the usefulness and versatility of language to express meanings, to invite us to use our imagination to build the world of the text anew in our minds –and it is probably awareness of that power that is the single most effective motivation to learn a language.

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Voices on BritLit:

Teachers' Voices

Experiencing BritLit in a Catalonian Secondary School

Isabel Maria Monte

IES Ramon Casas i Carbó Palau-solità i Plegamans (Barcelona)

When I attended Fitch O'Connell's informative session on the BritLit project, my attention was grabbed by the fact that it was something different from what I had seen so far, an original and refreshing approach to teaching English, not only for the student but also for the teacher. BritLit introduces literature as a motivating and practical tool for learning the language. I must admit that many times I have been envious of my colleagues teaching Spanish or Catalan because they have literature in their syllabi while we usually end up teaching mostly grammar and vocabulary which, if I may admit it, can be quite dull. This project gives us the opportunity of teaching in a far more entertaining way. One of its great advantages is that the texts are not the classics as one may think but present-day stories which are relevant to our students. As a consequence, the student benefits from creative and highly motivating practice of the different skills. My first experience, as usually happens, wasn't quite what I intended. As an inexperienced teacher as far as the project was concerned, and although my text choice was correct, I made two mistakes. I was carried away by the great quantity of activities offered on each kit. All of them seemed to me interesting and worth doing. However, my students didn't feel exactly the same way and, as a result, they were appalled by the numerous activities they had to do after working on what until that moment had been an interesting text. Another mistake was to read the texts aloud, either by me or a student, stopping very frequently whenever we came across a difficult word in order to help them with its meaning. Previous experience and good tuition are everything in life and the second session on BritLit that I attended, led on that occasion by Claudia Ferradas, opened my eyes. I realized what had gone wrong the first time and I drew some conclusions:

1st) Storytelling is everything. When the teacher presents the text using the storytelling technique he/she gets the pupils' attention immediately. They all love to be told stories. A previous introduction of the main characters to the students help them a great deal to understand the plot.

2nd) The story may be chunked, stopping at the most interesting moments. It's then when the teacher can make them participate actively, encouraging them to say what will happen next, what they would do in such a situation, etc.

3rd) Instead of a series of activities related to the text, choose only one or two. My experience tells me that those activities involving the students' creativity are the ones they enjoy best and produce the best results.

Having all these in mind, my second attempt at bringing the BritLit project to the classroom was very successful. Let me just give you an example. Last school year, I worked the text *Genie-us* by Louise Cooper with a group of mixed ability 4th ESO students. I used some flashcards that can be found in the kit to better illustrate my storytelling. They enjoyed the story and could follow it easily. Then I lent them the flashcards I had used and some others and told them to write their own fairy tales, choosing among the given cards the characters of their stories. They made up their own text in groups of 3 or 4 people and the results were absolutely great, full of imagination, even humorous in some cases. There was no doubt that these astonishing writings were a consequence of working with L. Cooper's story first. My students practiced the four skills and had fun at the same time! What a different outcome I would have obtained if, without any previous preparation, I had asked my students to write a fairy tale and an original one for the matter! (as sometimes we teachers tend to do). I can well imagine their faces looking at me as if I had gone "nuts" and feeling totally unable to write such a demanding text. Working on the literary texts first makes all the difference.

There is a still greater benefit concerning the BritLit project and this is the authors' visits to schools. We were privileged in having the dub poet Levi Tafari at our school two years ago. Those students who attended his performance still remember it. Previous to his visit, we all worked the poems from the kit in the classroom and when the moment came, we filled the gym eager to listen to him. From the very moment he stepped into the room, he caught the attention of all his audience and gave us all a wonderful time. During his performance students and teachers could sing, clap, laugh and at the end ask him questions. It is always a unique experience

to meet an author you like and you have been “studying”, but the pleasure is even greater if you are given the chance to participate actively.

By the end of the performance we were all in high spirits and, many weeks after Tafari’s departure, students still talked about him. During the feed-back sessions we had afterwards it was quite obvious that thanks to this experience they had learnt several things: they realized that they understood English better than they had imagined, that English is a language they can use effectively, that people from other cultures and origins have the same feelings and worries as we have and that literature, and poetry in particular, is not boring by definition. In fact, it can be very enjoyable.

From the Blank Page to the Poem: Levi Tafari's Poems As A Springboard For Poetry Writing In ESO

Laura Nogués,
IES Consell de Cent

BOOKS ARE COOL
BOOKS ARE FUN (CALL)
BOOKS SHOULD BE READ
BY EVERYONE (RESPONSE)
Levi Tafari

When I was asked to write about my experience of poetry performing, reading and writing in the English classroom using Levi Tafari's poems, I immediately thought about including the voices of my 2nd of ESO students. As far as their attitudes towards writing poems in English are concerned, most of the voices I collected were like the following,

"I freaked out, we had never done a poem in English before and I didn't have the slightest idea of how it would come up, well I thought it would be a flop" "The idea of writing a poem in English was not motivating, it was something unreachable at first"

"I was in love at the time and although at first I didn't want to write about it, I felt forced to...My poem was very personal and when I read it the whole class knew what I was talking about";

"I was quite happy with my poem at the end";

"it was not that difficult, poems are like songs, in a way, because most words already rhyme."

During the second and third terms of 2008 my 2nd of ESO students and I worked together in a series of literature workshops as an alternative to using readers. Once a week during two terms we would go to the school library and learn English through poetry. The idea came right after attending a workshop by Levi Tafari, one of the authors participating in the Britlit project who was invited to talk at the APAC's ELT Convention 2007. In his workshop, Tafari performed some poems from his book *From the Page to the Stage* and told teachers about his commitment to empower teenagers through poetry and about his school visits, some of them in Barcelona. I remember wishing my school would have participated in the project and seconds after thinking that if it was too late for the author to come, his poetry could still make it to the classroom. I got a copy of Tafari's book and took it to class. What came later is what follows.

At the beginning of the experience I had no idea it would last for so long. All I wanted at first was to give my students a Levi Tafari's poem as a model to get them writing their own poems for Sant Jordi and I thought a couple of lessons would do. However, we started off at the beginning of March 2008 and ended up at the beginning of June 2008. The project had three parts: the **performing stage**, the **writing stage** and the **reading stage**.

During the **performing stage** my students performed Tafari's poems and got used to their internal flow. I flipped through Tafari's book and chose a couple of poems to get started: "Reach for the stars" (or "Books are cool, books are fun" as my students renamed it) for 1st of ESO and "Plastic Fantastic" for 2nd of ESO. We worked on each of the poems rhythmically, splitting the class into groups that would read different lines together so that the outcome was a collage of voices speaking at once creating a similar effect to that of a choir. On other occasions, we performed the poem as a dialogue or ended up role-playing the most significant stanzas. Of course, not all teachers feel comfortable approaching poetry this way, but in the case of Tafari's poems performance came naturally. In fact, I believe Tafari's poems cannot be read, they are meant to be performed and this is why I call this part of the project the performing stage instead of the reading stage.

From performing the poems I had already proved to my students that poetry could be physical, motivating and fun, but I still needed to make them believe they could write a poem in English. Tafari's book *From the page to the stage* was a metaphor for action and I soon realized that if I wanted my students to end up writing poetry, that is, taking a form of action, I had to create the conditions for it.

But how could my 2nd of ESO students bridge the gap between the white page and the final poem? I had to find a poem my students could relate to and start from there. In the second part of the project, when getting ready for the **writing stage**, I browsed the Britlit website and downloaded a short kit with some ready to use materials and teacher's notes around Tafari's poem Celebr8. Tafari had written this poem about inclusion and diversity to encourage teenagers from a variety of backgrounds to promote diversity in schools. Since most of my IES Consell de Cent students come from different countries or have a migrant family background Celebrate was a meaningful poem to use as a springboard for their own writing. I wrote on the board: How many different types of diversity we can celebrate? How many does the poet celebrate? How many do you celebrate? At that point, content was my priority. To give you an idea of the poem I have included the first stanza.

**WE SHOULD CELEBR8
NOT DISCRIMINATE
LEARN TO APPRECIATE
DON'T PLAY HATE
BECAUSE THERE'S ROOM FOR YOU
AND THERE'S SPACE FOR ME
LIVING IN A WORLD OF DIVERSITY
LET'S CELEBR8 DIVERSITY**

As pre and while reading activities, I provided students with Levi Tafari's biography, and they listened to a podcast interview with the author and answered questions about him. They also listened to the audio of Celebr8 and, while listening, students focused on form, underlined the words that rhymed and worked on their pronunciation. Most of them also learnt the poem by heart.

The post-reading activity was the actual writing of my students' poems. When I informally talked to my students about their writing process most told me they thought of the topic first and wrote some ideas in English and then they brainstormed some words in English and they finally tried to find the relation between the words. Others, who could not think in English preferred to write down the topic and the main ideas in Catalan/Spanish and then brainstorm the words in English and write the poem in English. Still others, the weaker ones, felt safer writing down the poem in Catalan first and after translating it into a simplified English version with the teacher's help. Although I was not completely satisfied with the procedure used by the weaker students, I had to compromise and accept a final version in English, since it was the first time they written a poem in English.

If I am to reflect now on how my 2nd of ESO students bridged the gap between the white page and the final poem I honestly think it works different for each student. I remember telling them to think of a topic, write down some ideas in English and then brainstorm words in English that would rhyme and find the relation between them. However, each student approached it in their own way. The third part of the project was the **reading stage**. Before working with Tafari's poems, getting my students to write their own poems was my final task. However, once they had finished their poems I realized my students' poems could become a student-made reader. I grouped the poems according to the topic and level of difficulty and wrote reading activities for each of them focusing both on content and on form. I tried to avoid asking them questions that could be answered by reading the poem and instead I asked them subjective questions that encouraged creativity and thinking skills. In this way, their own poems and those of their classmates were the starting point for them to think about different issues such as inequality, love, war or friendship among other topics.

As the reading assignment for the third term, each student had to read all the poems written by their classmates and complete the reading activities written by the teacher for each of the poems. This is how on the Tuesday afternoons of the third term I ended up taking my students to the library again, but this time, the aim of each session was to work on two of the poems written by their classmates. We would have the classmate/author read the poem first and then their classmates would complete the reading assignments. If I were to do it again, I would ask each student to reflect on their own poem individually and come up with some questions for their classmates as an extension of their writing process. I would also set some time aside for interviewing the student/author and I would also play more with the idea that each day two students would turn into teenage literary guests.

To put it in a nutshell, what I learnt from this experience is that to work with poetry effectively in the English class, students need to make different kinds of connections. The first one must be facilitated by the teacher when presenting something apparently unfamiliar for the students (poems) as something students are already

familiar with (songs), for that rhythmic poems are a good start because they can be easily performed. The second connection needs to be done by the students when 'linking' their inner self and the outer world, which is definitely a challenge for teenagers is definitely a challenge. Last but not least, teaching English through writing poetry is not risk-free, both in terms of personal disclosure and in terms of language, and therefore teachers must be flexible as far as the procedure is concerned, specially when students work with poetry in the English classroom for the first time.

I would like to finish with a poem written by Sandra Loká, the 2nd of ESO student from IES Consell de Cent who won the first prize for Sant Jordi. For those of you who are familiar with Tafari's poems, I believe you will appreciate his influence. It may also remind you of a very popular song by the Black Eyed Peas called 'Where's the love?'. The rest of the poems will be sent to APAC so that they can be downloaded. Also, in March 2009 I'm planning on using the poems written by my 2008 2nd of ESO students as a reader for my 2009 2nd of ESO students. I may also invite some of my last year students to class to read their own poems. I guess once you start using Britlit it's a never ending project so I do encourage English teachers to join in because it ultimately helps empowering students. I'd like to thank my 2nd of ESO students, now in 3rd of ESO, from IES Consell de Cent (Barcelona) for their good work and enthusiasm.

What's love?

***I'd like to eat a cake!
Wait a minute...
It's a mistake!
Because I'll have stomachache!
I think I've to take a break!
Because this poem will be fool!
If I go on this way,
it won't be cool!***

***I went out and I saw a tramp
sitting near a bank.
Everyone is talking about solidarity.
But what's happening in society?
Everyone is in their own story...
and in each situation
you can see the lack of communication
of the population***

***And then I ask myself...
Why is everybody only thinking about oneself?
And where is love when someone screams?
"I love my boyfriend! I love my girlfriend!"
But don't you think that before even feeling
You have to be a good friend and don't offend
your exboyfriend, your exgirlfriend...
I mean everyone is talking about love...
But what's going on when love is gone?
Well all I have to say
is that friends stay by your side
when you feel sad inside
and loves sometimes
goes away...***

***Sandra Loká
2nd of ESO student - IES Consell de Cent***

Voices on BritLit:

Authors' Voices

On Writing Stories

Louise Cooper

I love writing stories. In fact since I was about 8 years old I haven't been able to stop myself from doing it. Awake or asleep, it makes no difference; if I'm not consciously creating a new tale in my mind, then I'm dreaming about one, to be hastily noted on paper or computer as soon as I wake. At school I was often in trouble with my teachers for gazing out of the window when I should have been concentrating on maths or geography or science. I wasn't daydreaming; I was mentally working on new ideas, new plots, new characters, and I haven't changed a bit in all the years since then. Just ask my husband!

Now, of course, I'm allowed to daydream as much as I like—if I didn't, I couldn't earn my living by writing fiction! But though my school days are long past, I still vividly remember the fun and fantasy and flights of imagination that were the essence of those years for me. It's the reason, I think, why I especially love writing for young readers, for it enables me to immerse myself again in the fantasy world of my childhood and really have *fun*. It's a world where anything can happen, where rules are turned upside-down and there are new surprises round every corner.

One thing which never ceases to amaze me is that, though I've been writing for more than 30 years now, there are still surprises to be had, and many more stories waiting to be written. Now that I've joined the BritLit family and am having increasing contact with students from other countries, "many" is rapidly becoming "myriad". Yet though I'm discovering a wonderful diversity of cultures, views and ideas, I'm also finding as many similarities as there are differences. There's a maxim in English that "It's a small world". Usually, people say it when they encounter something familiar in an unfamiliar setting, such as visiting a distant place and bumping into a friend from one's home town or village (which has happened to me more than once!). As a writer, though, I've discovered that it has an additional meaning. I write what is known as "fantasy" fiction, in its widest sense—in other words, stories that take a step or two away from the everyday, familiar reality we all know, and move into the realm of legends. That's where the "small world" comes in. Everywhere in the world has legends. Fairy tales, ghost stories, mythical creatures, mystery and magic: in our modern age we might pretend not to believe in them any more, but they are still *there*, part of our heritage and part of us. And even if the settings and characters change depending on where we are in the world, those old tales all touch on common themes that link us together. Whether they are stories of good defeating evil, love winning against the odds or rags-to-riches triumphs, they touch the same chord in us all, and make the world *wonderfully* small.

The tales of my own childhood were populated by everything from feisty princes (usually in disguise), beautiful princesses (usually under an enchantment), ghosts (vengeful or unhappy or both), clever animals (usually able to talk), and lost treasures that *must* be found (always magically guarded!). I sometimes give talks and writing workshops at primary schools in Cornwall, where I live, and I'm delighted to say that nothing has changed. Children still love the old favourites—my house is opposite a small village playground, and I often hear young voices saying things like, "No, *I'm* the princess, and *you've* got to rescue me!" These days the princess is more likely to have been captured by evil aliens, and her rescuer is probably an inter-galactic spaceship pilot armed to the teeth with lasers, phasers and lots of other things that go *zap—keeoww!* Or as often as not, it's the princess who is doing the rescuing. And the dark and malevolent forest has been replaced by an equally dangerous asteroid belt with a black hole or two lurking nearby. But the basic story is much the same as a Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

Another thing that hasn't changed is children's ability to *be* the characters in stories they read or games they play. They live those characters' lives, think their thoughts, take on their personalities. When I was young, I had an imaginary *alter ego*. I can't remember her name now, or even if she had one, but she rode out at night on a black horse that could fly, and she used her magical powers to solve mysteries and right wrongs. A far cry indeed from the unassertive and utterly un-athletic real me! But even as an adult I often find when writing that the long-ago child in me surfaces and in my mind I become one or more of my characters. It can be an unnerving experience, especially when the character I choose is beset by intense emotions or terrible problems and choices. But it's exciting, too, because it enables me to get *involved* in the fictional worlds and situations I create, instead of being merely a detached observer chronicling the unfolding events. It's exactly what I used to do when I was much younger, and exactly what my young readers do now. So it allows me to enjoy again

childhood's unfettered imagination and flights of fancy—and as far as I'm concerned, that can only be a very good thing indeed!

Children's imagination knows no bounds. Or almost no bounds. Very occasionally they are defeated by a concept in a story, but when that happens, they always seem to find a way round the problem. On a school visit a little while ago I was shown a display of work by 6- and 7-year-olds, who had been asked to re-write a favourite fairy tale in their own words. One little girl had chosen "Sleeping Beauty", and when it came to relating the birth of Princess Aurora, she took a straightforward, no-nonsense approach. She wrote: "One day, the Queen decided to have a baby, so she did." I *loved* that! And it taught me a valuable lesson—keep it simple! It's the simple tales that survive the longest. Ask any child, on any continent, and I think they will agree.

Mind you, giving school talks has its hazards, too. Another class I visited listened while I read them a story, then their teacher invited them to ask me questions. I was delighted when a forest of hands went up, and for my first questioner chose a lively-looking little boy who had seemed engrossed in the story. He grinned at me, and said, "How much do you earn?" Taken aback (with the exception of the tax-man, adults are *never* that blunt!), I opened and shut my mouth a few times like a stranded fish, and finally replied, "Well... enough to pay the bills." "OK," persisted my interrogator, "so how much is that?" The teacher, embarrassed, told him that it was a rude question and he shouldn't have asked it. He turned utterly guileless eyes on her and said, "Why is it rude? I want to know." Luckily, by then I had had a chance to muster my thoughts, and for my final answer I said, "A lot less than J.K. Rowling!" And thought with an inward sigh: *How true!*

Ah, well. I didn't write the Harry Potter books, and I'm sure that there isn't a writer in the world who doesn't occasionally (and grumpily) mutter: "I wish I'd thought of that!" I'm not complaining, though. I love what I do, and wouldn't change it for anything. It allows me to imagine, to pretend, to explore, to visit fascinating places that no aeroplane, ship or even spaceship could reach. Above all—and, now, thanks in no small part to the work of BritLit—it gives me an abundance of friends all over the *real* world. I'll probably never meet many of them face to face, but I feel I know them all, as they know me through my writing. I can't begin to describe how important that is to me and how much it means on so many levels. Friends, the spread of communication and understanding through shared experiences... yes, it really is a small world. And I couldn't ask for more than that.

Louise Cooper



A BritLit Experience

Ron Butlin

Another day, another country, another gig? Perhaps – but it turned out to be a day I'll never forget. The assembly hall was packed with around 150 teenage students. Every seat taken, latecomers lounged on the floor in the middle aisle or leant against the walls. The room was very hot and getting hotter by the minute. Full-length, dark-blue blinds had been pulled to shut out the bright December sun.

In the middle of the cascade of melodic Portuguese that made up Carmo Marques's welcoming address I recognised the sound of my name – and at once 150 faces were panned in my direction. There were friendly nods and smiles – much more than usual. Next up was Fitch O'Connell from the British Council in Porto. He spoke in English – even more nods and smiles, and one girl in the front row actually caught my eye and winked at me. I grinned back, Scottish-awkwardly. Well, the atmosphere was certainly supportive – and, believe me, when you're about to launch into a public reading of your own poetry, you need all the support you can get.

I walked up to the mike, cleared my throat. Some jokes, some anecdotes, some poems and some serious asides – a few laughs and a few tears, the usual – but this time the effect was unexpectedly electric. For nearly an hour this hallful of teenagers paid me the closest attention. They listened, they laughed, they nodded, they looked suitably serious and deeply moved in turn - and all at the appropriate moments. Then the questions started. Not the customary 'Do you write with a pen or on the computer?', but well-thought questions that challenged me to come up with well-thought out answers. If only. 'Does writing in Scots bring out a different aspect of your creativity than when you write in English, and if so, why?' *Gulp!* Instead of neatly closing any topic with a pat answer, my responses generally had the effect of provoking further questions seeking further elucidation. Brisk exchanges ensued – I struggled to keep up.

Under the auspices of the British Council and others, I've given hundreds of readings and talks all over the world, from speaking in vast, mausoleum-heavy amphitheatres of Soviet Russia to intimate gatherings under palm trees in Nigeria, but never had I been so stretched as I was that morning in Funchal, Madeira.

Of course, I knew fine who was to blame.

Thanks to BritLit the students had not only already studied some of my work, and studied it in depth, but had used some of the poems and short stories as part of their English language course. Fair enough. Result – we ran well over time and Carmo had to intervene and bring the event to a halt.

Time for a breather, a spot of lunch, perhaps? No chance. Rather than making a mad scramble for the doors and out into the sunlit court, a score or more BritLit students now lined up to ask me more thought-provoking questions. And they wanted answers.

Finally, wiping the sweat from my brow, I was escorted from the hall.

Lunch?

Not yet. Not for quite a while, in fact – for between the end of my talk and the grilled seafood I was given one of the most unforgettable moments of my life.

Despite what is claimed by politicians and other self-styled pedagogic experts situated far from the trenches of the front line, education is not simply a matter of throwing information at classes and checking back later to see how much of it has stuck. Only at its most basic level, when the students learn new names for things, is language teaching concerned merely with information. Wittgenstein observed somewhere that the world is constructed according to the grammar of the language we use to describe it. Quite simply, a different language gives us a different world. In fact, we ourselves become different. For many years I lived off and on in Paris and – hand on heart! – my 'Parisian' me felt very different to my 'Edinburgh' me. Thanks to the switch in language, my speech-rhythms soon took on a cautious vibrancy, the images I employed in conversation became livelier and my body-language and gestures took on a distinctly non-Scottish extravagance. Not that I shrugged and eye-twinkled like a sad Charles Boyer pastiche, but I definitely *changed*. Even now when I have occasion to speak French in Edinburgh, there's no doubt that I feel a certain dour and Calvinist burden slip from my shoulders.

Language is inextricably bound up with the person speaking it. Hence the magic of BritLit. Whether I was speaking in cavernous Moscow halls or in the palm-fronded shades of Lagos, the fact is I was little more than an interesting audio-visual aid, a visiting poet who was there one moment and gone the next. In Funchal, however, thanks to Fitch's excellent BritLit pack, the teachers had prepared their students well in advance. My work was used as a basis for their language lessons, not merely as 'literature', another scuttleful of 'contemporary texts' to be got through. They had even heard recordings of me reading some poems and short stories. This, I am certain, gave the students the confidence to want to be such active listeners and participants. Without confidence very little happens in life – with it, the sky's the limit.

Having left the hall I was now invited to follow some of the teachers to view a school art show. Fine. Lunch would have been even finer, but I can wear the polite mask as well as anyone. As it turned out, the drawings and paintings were exceptionally good and really enjoyable. The perfect appetiser for the *Ementa do Dia*. I was given a souvenir brochure. Art tour finished we retraced our steps and were now headed towards the knives and forks. Weren't we?

We returned to the hall.

Here, the house lights were now dimmed and the stage was in total darkness. I was shown to a seat. Not a word more was spoken to me. Around me I heard murmurs from the audience – many of them the same teenagers who had already taken part in more than an hour's hardcore education.

I sat, waited.

All at once a spotlight snapped on. On-stage we could see a table with a bottle and a glass. Next to it, a rather sad-looking old man sat staring out at the audience. Another spotlight - a girl dressed as a clown. Another – a white-faced Pierrot. There was something eerily familiar about this silent tableau, like I was in a dream where I felt certain I knew what was going to happen next, but couldn't put it into words. Then, from speakers set around and above the stage came some orchestral music. Quiet at first, then growing gradually louder. And that's when I got what was happening.

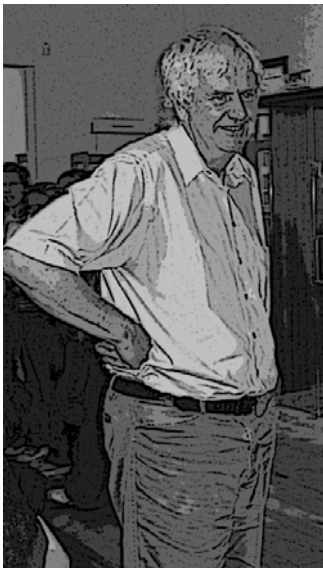
I was utterly gobsmacked!

I wrote the story 'Jean Sibelius is invited to run away and join the circus' several years ago and included it in my collection *Vivaldi and the Number 3* (Serpent's Tail, 2004). Never in my wildest dreams had I ever thought to see it being acted out on a school stage on an isolated island far to the west of Africa. I felt thrilled and humbled, both at the same time. Only a third of the story had been rehearsed so far, I was told, and so the actors (students and teachers) were eager for my comments and suggestions. I was so overwhelmed that at first that I found it difficult to satisfy their curiosity about a particular character's motivation, say, or assess whether they had got the balance of surreal and actual in a particular scene exactly right. But I did my best.

Then it was time for lunch. At first I hardly even noticed, but gradually the spell wore off and, in the convivial company of Carmo, Ana Maria Lomelino, a teacher called Tanya and the Minister for Education (who turned out to be a well-known children's author) among others, I began to put myself outside a most generous three-courser. All in all it was quite a day.

My truly enjoyable and fulfilling experience in Madeira was to be repeated in different forms during the rest of my BritLit tour of Portugal. Not only did the first-rate teaching staffs at the British Council centres in Coimbra and Oporto excel themselves, but the delightful and inspiring Teresa Pinto de Almeida and her staff had clearly done a truly superb job with the pack at the Escola Secundaria Carolina Michaelis in Porto; likewise Mark Weeks at the Oporto British School and Luisa Nora at the Colegio Teotonio. The result was everywhere plain to see - a heart-warming level of communication, a highly informed interest and quite extraordinary and genuine enthusiasm. All thanks to BritLit and the teachers involved.

I am sure that BritLit will continue to raise the prestige of the British Council across the world. This unique scheme is highly beneficial to the students, to the teachers and to the writers. Let's raise our glasses to that rarest of beasts – a win-win-win situation!



Ron Butlin

On Island to Island

Romesh Gunesequera

I first visited Portugal for a British Council reading tour in 2002. I did readings for ELT teachers and students at British Council offices and at universities in Oporto, Coimbra and other places. One story in particular, *Carapace*, seemed to go down well and was selected by Fitch O'Connell to be part of the new BritLit project, along with my longer story, *A House in the Country*. Following the production of teaching packs for these stories I was invited back to Portugal in 2004.

The purpose of this second visit was to perform a story so that pupils who had been using the BritLit packs could hear the spoken language in a live situation and interact with the author. Unlike conventional author visits, these visits allowed a much deeper level of engagement as the pupils already knew, from their studies, quite a lot of information about me and my writing. It was immediately apparent that a much more productive encounter was possible. The questions were more focused on the text itself, and there was always considerable excitement generated by the anticipation of the visit. In some cases I had some pre-visit contact through email and internet message boards. For me, having an informed group as an audience made for a much more satisfying schools event.

When I reached Madeira I was told that the programme there might be slightly different. The two schools I was visiting wanted to do a presentation and I was not required to do the usual reading and Q&A session.

I am very used to visiting schools all over the world and talking to students to show them the magic of what language and reading and stories can do. But this was the first time that they, my audience, would show me what language and stories could do for them, and what they could do for my stories. It was the most extraordinary experience I have had in a school.

At APEL I was taken to the school theatre where I joined an audience of APEL pupils, and ones invited from nearby schools, to watch a dramatization of my story *Carapace*. The main performer, Marta, had adapted the story for the stage using a different narrative convention very successfully. The actors were hugely enthusiastic and I found it a very moving experience. After the performance another group of pupils conducted an on-stage interview with me. The whole event was planned by the students and done with real flair and creativity.

The next school ESFF (Escola Secundaria Francisco Franco) also had something extraordinary to show me. I knew my story *Carapace* did connect with teenagers. I have read it in many countries and found that young people found an unexpected pleasure in it. But at ESFF I was told that they had not only worked on *Carapace* but they had decided to tackle one of my novels. The teachers had chosen *Heaven's Edge*, a dark and complex novel set in the near future. It is a story about war and pacifism, about violence and whether it is ever justified, about memory — whether it is good or bad — and about love. For me it also fundamentally about the journey we take when we read and when we live. Going from the place we know — our lives, our history, our world — into a place we don't know: the future.

The school had a scheme whereby they select an English language writer and focus projects from every discipline on that writer for the whole academic year. What it meant was that the language departments used the story for language teaching and for translation, the drama department produced a play out of it, the art department produced art work for the production and the music department created music for the play. The whole school was involved. I was able to see a part of a rehearsal and to have a session with the actors. It was a wonderful experience to see the play taking shape and to watch these young actors (some had never taken part in drama before) becoming so involved in the story.

This experience in Madeira made me feel very closely connected to the island. What impressed me was that the pupils here had spent so much time in my imagined world. As part of the BritLit project they designed book covers, written blurbs, made a synopsis, adapted the story into other forms ... The project made their involvement with texts a rich and rewarding experience that seemed to go beyond language learning. It made me want to spend some of my imaginative and creative life in their world. So I decided I would write some stories set on the island. As I explored this idea I discovered some surprising historical connections between Madeira, Sri Lanka and Britain. I learnt about a Portuguese captain who had lived in Sri Lanka in the seventeenth century

and then retired to Madeira where he wrote an account of his life abroad. I decided to write a series of stories set in this period, where I could use my imagination as well as the landscape, atmosphere and history of Madeira.

The first of these stories was completed in 2005. When I was invited to the APPI conference in Lisbon in 2005, I read the story (*Belladonna*) as an example of the unintended result of the BritLit project. I was particularly keen to find out the reaction of one of the teachers from Madeira who was in the audience. It was very favourable. I had the idea then that perhaps a small book of these stories might work well. I continued writing more stories. *Belladonna* was published in a magazine in England, a second story *Punch* was published in an European anthology in Lisbon.

In the meantime the BritLit Project had taken me to schools in Italy as well. There too the process of a class preparing for an author visit through the BritLit pack resulted in unexpected and exciting encounters e.g. a dance show based on a story, a deep discussion on firearms in a military school.

Then last year I heard that Funchal was due to celebrate its 500th anniversary. I discussed with the teachers from ESFF the possibility of publishing my collection of Madeira stories as a bilingual book to coincide with festivities. One of the teachers had been keen to translate one of my novels and also had experience of publishing school anthologies. They managed to interest the Funchal Municipality. By December we had an agreement for the publication and I completed the stories by January so that translation could begin. The book, *O Coleccionador de Especiarias (The Spice Collector)*, was published in May 2008 during the Book Festival in Funchal as part of the 500 Year Celebration. I visited Funchal again and read to a new generation of pupils neatly linking my Sri Lankan stories to my Madeiran ones.

For me, as an author, it has been enormously gratifying to be able to complete a narrative circle in this way, and find a book as a result. Even as I write this, I find more Madeiran stories coming to me, perhaps initiating yet another circle.

Romesh Gunsekera



Sample Teaching Resources from BritLit

For complete versions and other resources go to
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit>

Key

This is the key.
The mystery key.

The key to what?
I'm not
quite sure.
I wonder what
this key is for?

Let me see...
could it be:

The key to the door
of a treasure store?

The key to a lid
where things lie hid?

A secret box
with magic locks?

The key to a cupboard,
a closet, a drawer?

I wonder what
this key is for?

When I find it
I'll unlock it,

But meanwhile keep
this key
in my pocket.

Teacher's notes

Activity 1

Language: closet, cupboard, door, drawer, key, lid, magic locks, pocket, treasure store

Materials: magic box (see worksheet 1), folded printed sheets of the poem

1. Draw a simple picture on the board of 'a key' or use a flashcard instead or use a large, real key. Encourage the children to guess, e.g. 'what's this?' 'It's a key'. 'What can a key open? / What does a key open?' 'A door, a cupboard, a closet, a drawer. (use flashcards to help you).
2. Listen to other suggestions from the children and you can write them on the board.
3. Hand out worksheet 2 WORD MAZE and explain the children how to do the activity.
4. Ask them "Can a key open a secret box with magic locks?" (Use your voice and body language to create an atmosphere of mystery) Say e.g. "I have a key! Look! And a secret box with magic locks. Do you want to know what's inside the box?"
Suspense... "What are we going to find here?" Remind the children that it is a magic / secret box with magic locks. So, what can a secret / magic box have inside? Listen to the children's answers.
5. Try a guessing game with the children. They can ask "Is there a...?" The pupil that gets most correct guesses will help you opening the magic box.
6. Children try to guess what's inside the box by asking "Is there...?" The teacher will say "cold / warm/ hot..." according to the answers, till a pupil gets near the correct answer.
7. Tell the children that they now have to learn the magic words in order to open the box. Teach the magic words "This is the key / the mystery key / the key to what?" and practice them with the children.
8. Ask a pupil (the winner of the guessing game, for example) to help you. Give him/her the key and ask all children to say the magic words at the same time.
9. Open the magic box full of folded printed sheets of the poem "THE KEY"

Teacher's notes

Activity 2

1. The children listen to the poem read by Tony Mitton - or you can read it yourself and mime it.
2. The children listen again. Ask them to put their left arm up whenever they hear the words: *treasure, store, lid, secret box, cupboard, closet, and drawer.*
3. The children pick a sheet of paper with the poem from the magic box. Go over the poem and invite the children to read it with you miming some actions.

VARIATION 1 Give the class a copy of worksheet 3 with the big key on it and ask them to copy down the poem. They can colour the key and display their "keys" on the classroom walls/boards.

VARIATION 2 Explain to the class what a visual poem is and ask them to create their own visual poems, building up a key with the poem's words. Display them on the walls and ask the children to vote the best one. See example:

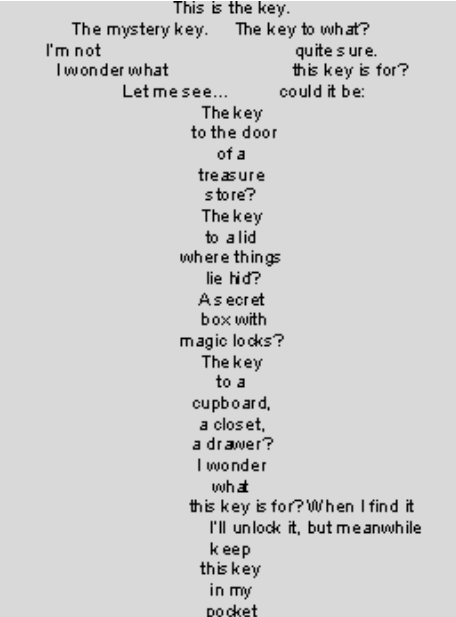
VARIATION 3 Divide the class in groups of two or three. Give them slips of paper with extracts from the poem. Ask them to stand up and read the poem in the correct order. Encourage them to perform it.

VARIATION 4 Work with the children to create rhyming pairs, e.g. book/cook;

house/mouse/blouse; coat/note/boat – don't worry about the pairs making sense.

Ask children to work in pairs and write their own sentences with internal rhyme e.g. "A key to open the house of a magic mouse?" or "A key to open the book of an old cook." Ask the students to come to the front and read their sentences.

Display the sentences on the walls of the classroom or ask them to illustrate their sentences and then compile them into a book.



This is the key.
The mystery key. The key to what?
I'm not quite sure.
I wonder what this key is for?
Let me see... could it be:
The key
to the door
of a
treasure
store?
The key
to a lid
where things
lie hid?
A secret
box with
magic locks?
The key
to a
cupboard,
a closet,
a drawer?
I wonder
what
this key is for? When I find it
I'll unlock it, but meanwhile
keep
this key
in my
pocket

Worksheet 1



Worksheet 2

Word Maze


1. Follow the words related to **objects that can open with a key.**

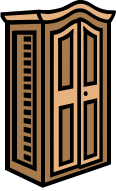
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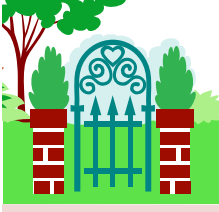
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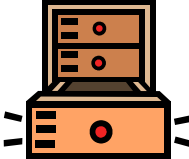
door	box	chimney	sweater	milk	attic	skirt
t-shirt	drawer	trousers	bathroom	dress	basement	kitchen
jacket	lid	closet	wardrobe	gate	living room	jeans
bedroom	hat	garden	cardigan	treasure store	shorts	roof
shoes	first floor	socks	garage	lid	suitcase	lock
ground floor	raincoat	balcony	scarf	study	frog	secret box


↓
Finish

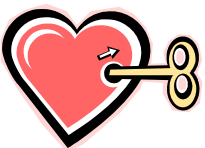









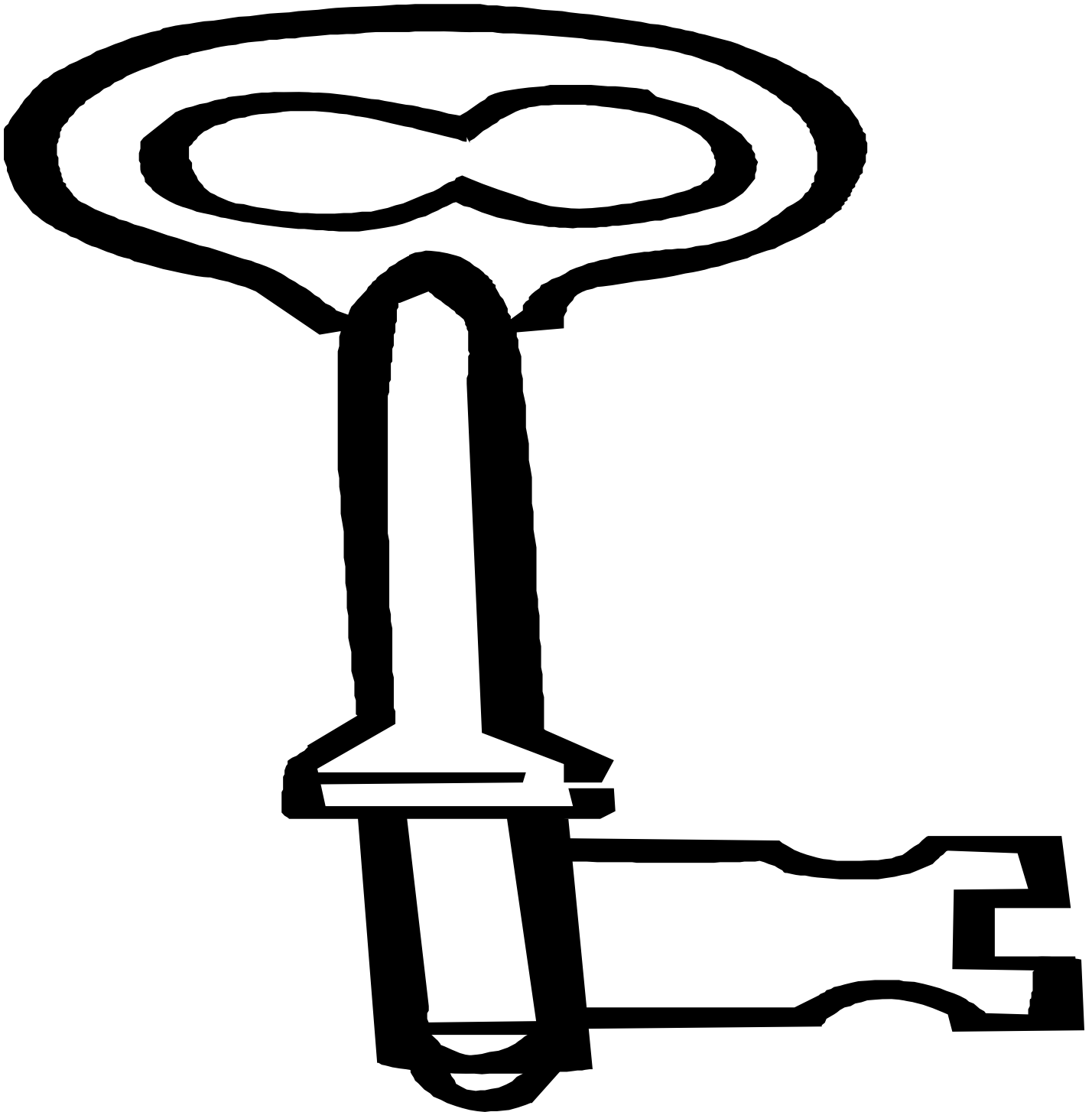






Worksheet 3

Copy down the poem *Key* into this picture.



Visual poem

Key

This is the key.
The mystery key. The key to what?
I'm not quite sure.
I wonder what this key is for?
Let me see... could it be:

The key
to the door
of a
treasure
store?
The key
to a lid
where things
lie hid?
A secret
box with
magic locks?
The key
to a
cupboard,
a closet,
a drawer?
I wonder
what
this key is for? When I find it
I'll unlock it, but meanwhile
keep
this key
in my
pocket.

Sample Kit: Secondary (1)

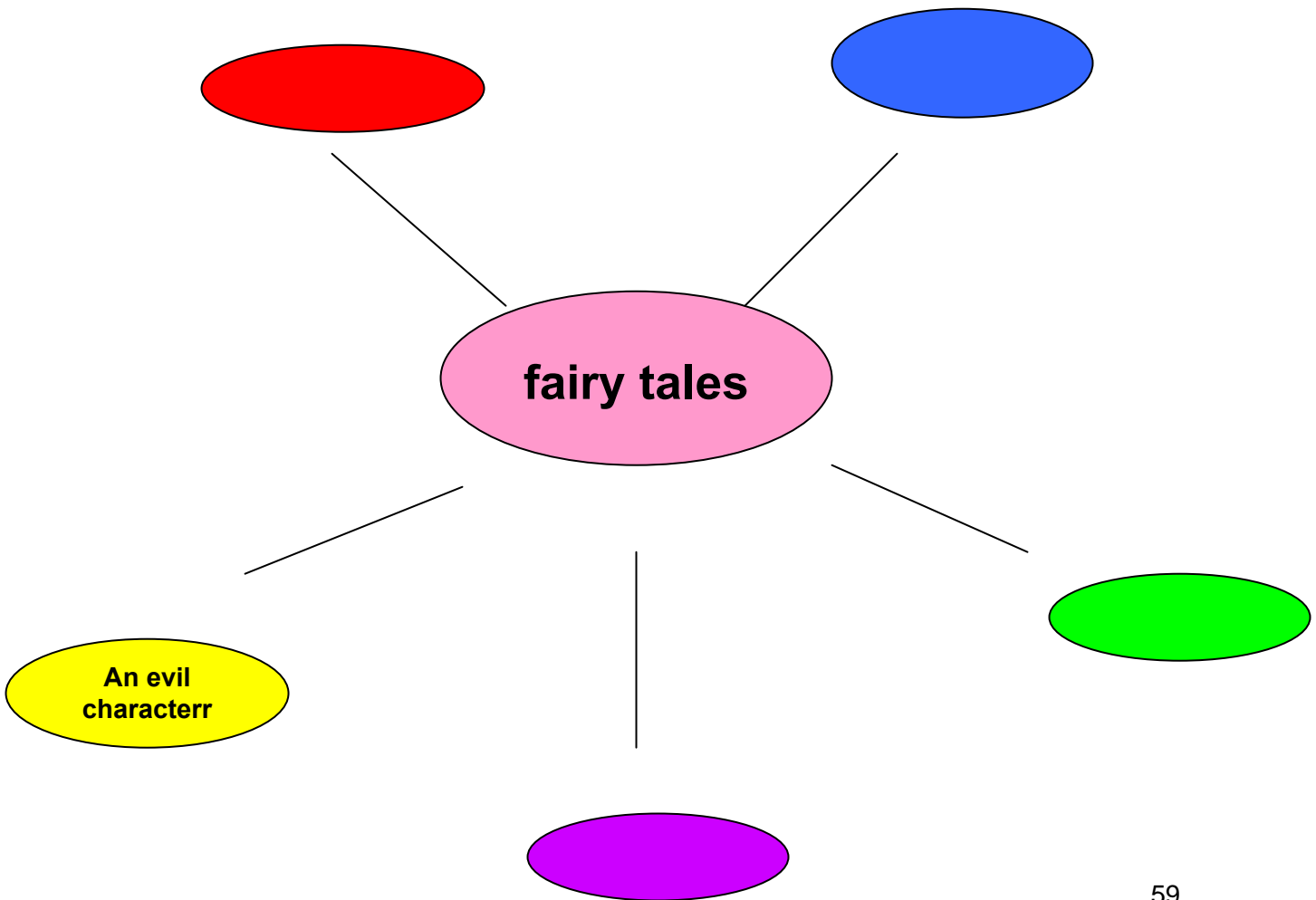
The Wolf's Tale Louise Cooper Pre-Reading Activities

1. Fairy Tales

What is a fairy tale?
Do you know any?
.....

Here is a definition of “**fairy tale**” taken from the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*: “a story about magic or fairies, usually for children”.
Is that your definition or are there any differences?
.....
.....

2. What are the ingredients of a good fairy tale? Complete with your ideas:



3. Think of “Little Red Riding Hood”. Who are the characters in the tale? Find the characters from the tale in the box and put them in the basket. Put the wrong ones in the dustbin!

a woodsman	a hunter	a fox	Little Red Riding Hood
a mother	Sleeping Beauty	a fairy	a godmother
a wolf	a fireman	a dwarf	a granny
	two wicked stepsisters		a werewolf
			a stepmother



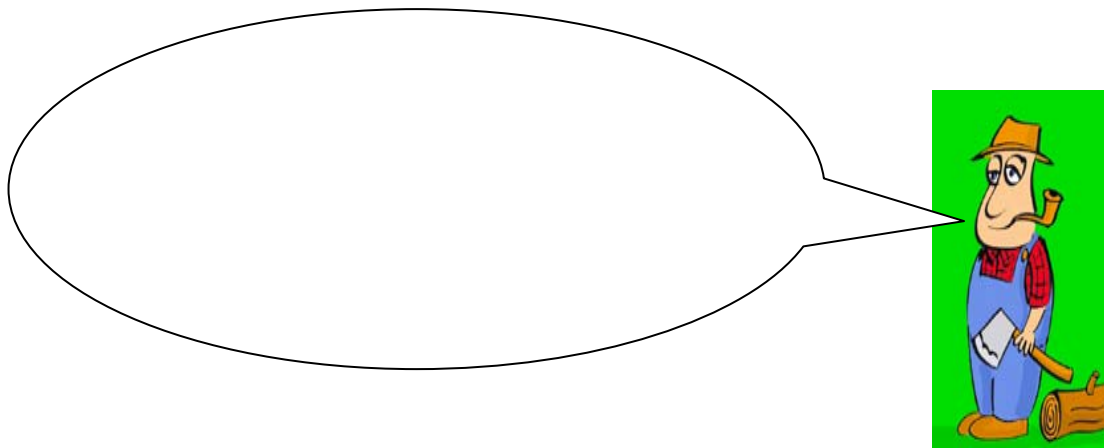
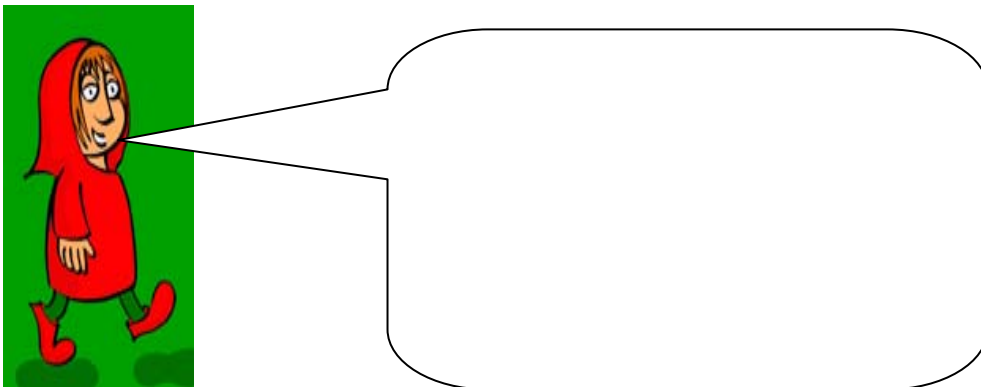
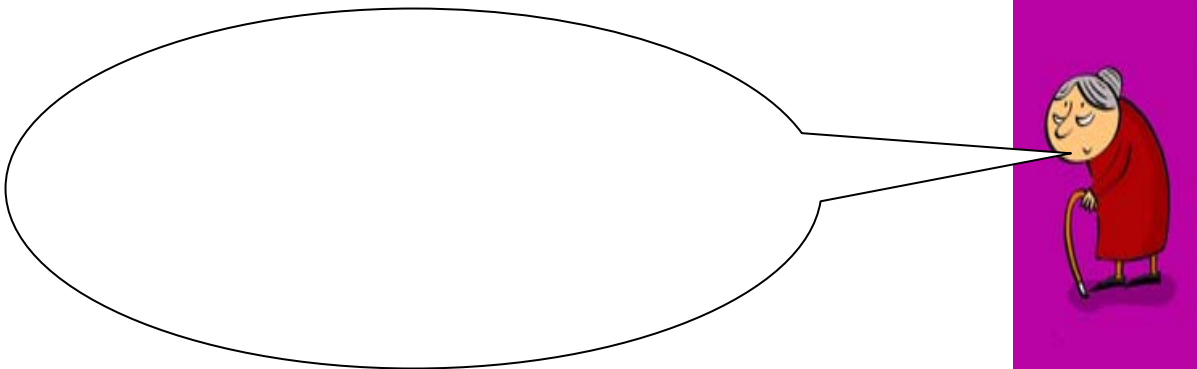
4. Do you remember the story well? . Match a – f with 1 – 6 to write sentences about “Little Red Riding Hood”.

- a. Little Red Riding Hood wore....
 - b. Her grandmother lived...
 - c. She was ill and needed...
 - d. Little Red Riding Hood’s mother told her...
 - e. Little Red Riding hood carried...
 - f. As she set out on her way through the woods, the girl met...
-
- 1. far away in the woods.
 - 2. some care and attention.
 - 3. a beautiful red velvet cap which her granny had given her as a gift.
 - 4. a basket with some cakes which Little Red’s mother had baked.
 - 5. a wicked wolf.
 - 6. never to leave the path to avoid the dangers of the woods.

5. Now write what happened next:

6. Now compare the ending you wrote to what your friends have written. Do you know the same ending?

7. Imagine you were interviewing Little Red Riding Hood, Granny and the woodsman at the end of the story. What would they say about the wolf?



The Wolf's Tale

Text presentation and reading activities



1. Read this extract from a story

You all know the story of Little Red Riding Hood, right? Well, I'm sure of one thing. You don't know what *really* happened. No one does, except me. I know people don't believe in fairy tales these days, but the Riding Hood story happens to be true.

2. Now answer the following questions:

- a. What do you think the story is about?
- b. Who do you think is going to tell it?

Do you need any suggestions? Read these:

I can remember the pain

I wouldn't have harmed a hair of her head

So the woodsman cut me open



3. Here's the title of the story:

The Wolf's Tale

Were you right?

4. Now read the next paragraph in the story.

I should know. You see, I'm the wolf. And the rest of them—the girl, the woodsman, all the other people—they got it wrong. *All* wrong.

Well, in what way do you think they got it wrong? What do you think is the wolf's version of the story? Work in groups and write your ideas. Then compare them with the rest of the class.

.....

.....

5. Now read a few more sentences. Were you right? Do you believe in the wolf's story?

They think I killed and ate old Granny. I didn't. I wouldn't have harmed a hair of her head, but when I tried to tell them so, of course they couldn't understand me. So the woodsman cut me open. Oh, how that *hurt*. I can remember the pain; it was horrible. Even now I have nightmares about it, and I shudder and cry out in my sleep, until I wake up screaming. They didn't kill me, you see. They thought they did, but they didn't. I can't be killed that way. It has to be something else.

Discuss:

1. Why couldn't they kill the wolf?
2. How do you think a wolf can be killed?

6. Writing activity – group work: Create your own ending.

Think of a possible conclusion to this story. You can write your suggestions (in no more than 3 – 4 lines) or draw a comic strip.

7. Now read the ending of the story as the author imagined it. Was this what you expected?

A silver bullet, that's the only thing that will work. A silver bullet, for a werewolf.

Because that's what I really am. I was attacked by a werewolf one night, years ago. It bit me, and infected me with its curse. I'd give anything to be free. I'd rather die than live like this, changing every full moon into a monster that no one can control. I'd give anything to be what I used to be. A harmless human being. A little old lady, who was kind to everyone.

Red Riding Hood thought she knew all about her dear granny.

But she didn't. No one does.

Only me . . . and, now, you.

8. Now listen to the author's voice narrating the story as you read.

**The Wolf's Tale
by Louise Cooper**

You all know the story of Little Red Riding Hood, right? Well, I'm sure of one thing. You don't know what *really* happened. No one does, except me. I know people don't believe in fairy tales these days, but the Riding Hood story happens to be true. I should know. You see, I'm the wolf. And the rest of them—the girl, the woodsman, all the other people—they got it wrong. *All* wrong.

They think I killed and ate old Granny. I didn't. I wouldn't have harmed a hair of her head, but when I tried to tell them so, of course they couldn't understand me. So the woodsman cut me open. Oh, how that *hurt*. I can remember the pain; it was horrible. Even now I have nightmares about it, and I shudder and cry out in my sleep, until I wake up screaming.

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Red Riding Hood thought she knew all about her dear granny.

But she didn't. No one does.

Only me . . . and, now, you.

Recording available from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/resources/britlit>

9. Read the following statements about the tale and decide if they are right or wrong.

Tick **A (YES = right)** or **B (NO = wrong)**.

	A YES	B NO
1. The narrator of the story is Little Red Riding Hood.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The wolf knows the real story of Riding Hood.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The wolf in the story is in fact a werewolf.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The werewolf killed and ate old Granny.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The werewolf was killed by the woodsman.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Only a silver bullet can kill a werewolf.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Little Red Riding Hood was attacked by a werewolf.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. A curse is something that may change your life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The werewolf is very happy with its life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Little Red Riding Hood knows her granny very well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Now answer the following questions.

1. Who is the narrator of the story?
2. Why does the wolf have nightmares?
3. How did old Granny become a werewolf?
4. What secret do you share with the narrator?
5. Do you sympathise with the wolf/werewolf? Why?

Teachers' Key

Text presentation and reading activities

9.

1. The narrator of the story is Little Red Riding Hood. NO
2. The wolf knows the real story of Riding Hood. YES
3. The wolf in the story is in fact a werewolf. YES
4. The werewolf killed and ate old Granny. NO
5. The werewolf was killed by the woodsman. NO
6. Only a silver bullet can kill a werewolf. YES
7. Little Red Riding Hood was attacked by a werewolf. NO
8. A curse is something that may change your life. YES
9. The werewolf is very happy with its life. NO
10. Little Red Riding Hood knows her granny very well. NO

- 10.
1. The wolf, who is a werewolf who is in fact the Granny!
 2. Because the woodsman cut him open and it hurt, but it did not die.
 3. A werewolf bit her.
 4. We know the real story.

Sample Kit: Secondary (2).

The Colourful World of Calum McCall

Ron Butlin

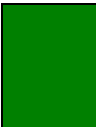
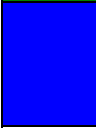



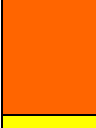
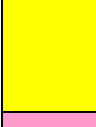
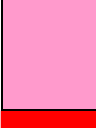

Pre-reading

The Meaning of Colours

“For most of us, a rainbow of colours envelopes our lives. Over 80% of visual information is related to colour. What colours and combinations of colours stimulate people to be interested in different things? What colours make us feel pleasure or disapproval, hot or cold, to be attracted or repelled, our appetite stimulated or suppressed? Many reactions to colour are instinctual, universal and cross cultural boundaries.” *Where do you think this text comes from?*



1. Look at the descriptions below and match them to the colour you think is being described.

	Colour A symbolizes energy, passion, strength, courage, physical activity, creativity, warmth, and security. It is also associated with aggression. In healing, use red to bring warmth and burn out disease. It is a powerful colour and should be used in moderation. It signifies materialism, materialistic ambition, a focus on sensual pleasures and a quick temper
	Colour B symbolizes the individual's relationship to the external world, the needs and wants of the physical body and the ways in which these are satisfied, the world of work. In healing it may increase immunity and sexual energy. It signifies thoughtfulness and creativity.
	Colour C symbolizes intellect, creativity, happiness and the power of persuasion. It is also associated with cowardice. In healing use it to promote clarity of thought. In some cultures it is the colour for weddings. It keeps evil away. This colour signifies intellectual development, for either material or spiritual ends.
	Colour D symbolizes money, luck, prosperity, vitality and fertility. It is also associated with envy. It is the colour of healing; it is beneficial in all healing situations. It signifies balance and peace
	Colour E is the colour of spirituality, intuition, inspiration and inner peace. It is also associated with sadness and depression. In healing it is used for cooling and calming, both physically and mentally. It indicates serenity, contentment and spiritual development.
	Colour F is associated with truth, purity, tranquillity, cleansing, healing and protection. It is a good general healing colour for the removal of pain and suffering. In some cultures it is associated with death and rebirth.
	Colour G represents unconditional love, love requiring nothing in return. It is also the colour of friendship and conviviality.
	Colour H is the colour of the earth and represents practicality, material success, concentration and study. It indicates "down to earth-ness" and common sense.
	Colour I is the absence of colour. It represents the unconscious and mystery. Its visualization can help promote deep meditation.

Note: Teachers key available on http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/calum_key.pdf

2. The story goes that a child, looking at her parents old photograph album that contained black and white pictures from long ago, asked “Mummy, when did the world get colour?”

Show Desktop.scf

Imagine a world without colour, just various shades of grey, white or black. What would the effect be on you personally? How would you feel? Imagine waking up to world without colour. Calum McCall did.

During the early years of his life, Calum McCall was surprised to find himself waking up every morning in a winter country of darkened tenements, black railings and streets of pitiless traffic.

He wanted to know what had happened to all the colours he had known as a small child.

Every so often he tried asking his parents: 'What has happened to the multicoloured suns that used to bounce across the sky, and to the colours that trailed after like rain?'



Answer these questions (without reading the rest of the text!)



1. What do you think his parents said to him in reply to his question?
2. What event when he was a young man caused the colours to temporarily come back?
3. What was his reaction to his own son looking with pleasure at the sky?
4. Why did the doctor prescribe him multi-coloured pills?



3. Vocabulary

These words (on the left) appear in the story. Match them with their correct meanings (on the right)

tenements	1	completely, totally
railings	2	noise, usually of contentment; associated with babies
pitiless	3	house containing many apartments
trailed after	4	OK; sure (perhaps ironically)
Aye right	5	followed
gurgled	6	fence made of metal posts
dishevelled	7	without mercy
utterly	8	untidy (clothes) disordered (hair)

The Colourful Life of Calum McCall

During the early years of his life, Calum McCall was surprised to find himself waking up every morning in a winter country of darkened tenements, black railings and streets of pitiless traffic. There seemed to be only one sun in the Scottish sky, and it wasn't even striped - which perhaps explained the look of perpetual disappointment he could see in the faces of the men and women who lived there.

Every so often he tried asking his parents: 'What has happened to the multicoloured suns that used to bounce across the sky, and to the colours that trailed after like rain?'

'Aye right' said his dad.

'Elbows off the table,' said his mother.

At school his teacher told him to sit up straight and pay attention — that way he would get ahead.

When he fell in love for the first time he told the girl — she was called Alice — that her kisses brought back all the colours he had known so early on, and which were now faded almost to nothing in his memory. Alice said he was sweet, and a few months later she got engaged to an up-and-coming dentist.

Years later, Calum married and had children of his own. One day his baby son pointed at the sky and gurgled with pleasure. Calum followed the pointing finger, but could see nothing particularly special up there - nothing that was visible to him, anyway.

That night he slept badly for the first time.

Now that he was in a position of responsibility, he could not afford to turn up at his office dishevelled with lack of sleep, not among his ambitious colleagues. His doctor gave him a packet of brightly coloured pills.

Every morning now, Calum is up early, ready for the day ahead. Every night, he slips from one utterly dreamless world into the next.

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The Colourful Life of Calum McCall

Context

1. Visual Prompt



Photograph © Sayan Chakrabarti

Xidan Market, Beijing



Describe this photograph. How does it relate to the story 'Calum MacCall'? In what way is it different? Does it make any difference to your interpretation of the photograph when you learn that the musician is blind?



2. Colours

In the Pre-reading section we looked at some of the widely accepted “meanings” of colours recognised by many cultures. Now look at this poem by John Agard and consider the different interpretation he gives it. Before you read it, you should know that it comes from his collection of poems called ‘From the Devil’s Pulpit’ and all the poems are spoken, as it were, by the devil!



Put these colours into the appropriate gaps in the poem as you read.

White	Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Brown	Black
-------	-----	--------	-------	------	-------	-------

Colour of Evil

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___1___
who led me past Wordsworth's daffodils and
Van Gogh's sunflowers
till we came to flashbacks of Vietnam
where the sun's rays were ___1___ robes of
mourning.

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___2___
who showed me the springtime hills that held
a child's scream
and the grass lost its innocence
to the god of forensic evidence.

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___3___
who spoke of the romance of autumn leaves
but I saw baked earth writing its own epitaph
and empty bowls reaching for the world's charity.

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___4___
who said blood speaks your language as well
as mine
but take comfort from the rose
and the anonymous heart of a Valentine.

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___5___
who led me through the archives of the skies
where birds of death fashioned by the hands of men
circled in the dazzling air.

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___6___
who guided me through galleries and museums
where the dark was equated with the beast
of fear.

Then stepping through doorways of ancient lore I
found darkest

chaos was a mothering force that sat upon a
brood of stars.

What is the colour of evil I asked of ___7___
who walked with me across the fugitive snow
that covered a city's scars
under an angelic apron. So I walked on in the
light.

And grinned to see the pureness of a page
reflecting
my own chameleon grin.

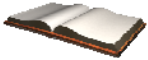
© John Agard

Why does the poet have his ‘own chameleon grin’?

3. Loss of Innocence

1. Many people would interpret the story of Calum McCall of one of a loss of innocence, where the young's atonement with nature gets less and less, perhaps as we get caught up in our commercial and industrialised worlds. Many poets have commented on this, not least some Romantic poets from the age of the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain at the ends of the eighteenth Century and beginning of the nineteenth.

Here is the beginning of a famous poem by the English poet William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. Some of the language is poetic and might be difficult to understand, but you are only required to understand the gist of the first two stanzas.



THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose;
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth

Now have a look at what the twentieth century Welsh poet had to say. Here is the last verse of the poem 'Fern Hill' by Dylan Thomas

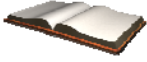
Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying



What do the two poems have in common? How might they be related to the story of 'Calum McCall'?

If you want to read the whole of these two poems, go to: <http://www.bartleby.com/101/536.html>
and <http://www.bigeye.com/fernhill.htm>

4. The Rat Race



..... a winter country of darkened tenements, black railings and streets of pitiless traffic

..... he could not afford to turn up at his office dishevelled with lack of sleep, not among his ambitious colleagues

(from 'The Colourful Life of Calum McCall')

In the story, there is a strong feeling that Calum McCall has simply conformed to contemporary life, submerging his dreams into the routine of his life and 'the rat race'.



Rat race

A **rat race** is a term used for an endless, self-defeating or pointless pursuit. It conjures up the image of the futile efforts of a [lab rat](#) trying to escape whilst running around a maze or in a wheel. In an [analogy](#) to the [modern city](#), many rats in a single maze run around making a lot of noise bumping into each other, but ultimately *achieve nothing (meaningful) either collectively or individually*.

The rat race is a term often used to describe [work](#), particularly excessive work; in general terms, if one works too much, one is *in the rat race*. This terminology contains implications that many people see work as a seemingly endless pursuit with little reward or purpose. Not all workers feel like this. It is the perceived [Conventional Wisdom](#), for example, that those who work for themselves are generally [happier](#) at work.

The increased image of work as a "rat race" in modern times has led many to question their own attitudes to work and seek a better alternative; a more harmonious [Work-life balance](#). Many believe that long work hours, unpaid [overtime](#), [stressful jobs](#), time spent [commuting](#), less time for [traditional family life](#), has led to a generally [unhappier workforce/population](#) unable to enjoy the benefits of increased economic prosperity and a higher [standard of living](#).

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Tick as many of the following list that you think contribute to 'the rat race' in contemporary society. Be prepared to justify the ones you **didn't** tick.










	√ or x
working longer hours;	
sleeping less;	
playing less (or not at all);	
driving larger vehicles;	
building houses that are too large to be "homes";	
consuming more goods;	
taking on huge amounts of debt;	
lavishing our children with things but not with time;	
spending less time with our partners;	
abusing our health;	
passing children on to paid caregivers for 50-60 hours a week;	
drugging ourselves so we can keep up;	
drugging our children to ensure they fit the social mould;	
pushing our kids into activities designed to "seal" their futures;	
polluting our environment;	
convincing ourselves that we're living the good life	

<http://www.ratracerebellion.com/>



5. Facing the future

Children often dream about the kind of job or lifestyle they are going to have. The reality usually turns out very different. Decide which ideal jobs the children below might dream of, and then plot the course to a possible reality. Make sure that you fill in some details in the 'reality strikes' column which turn the dream into another reality. One has been done for you.

Dreams	Kids	Reality Strikes	Resulting Jobs
Football player			
Ballet dancer		Kept	Delivering
Pop singer		"forgetting	pizza
Film star		to go to	
Engine driver		school"	
Fashion model		and didn't	
Astronaut		get	
Soldier		good	
Explorer		grades	
Scientist			
Doctor			
Nurse			
Actor			
TV Personality			
Teacher			
Pilot			
Racing driver			
Hairdresser			
Gardener			
Farmer			



6. The final questions

1. Why is the story called 'The Colourful Life of Calum McCall'?
2. What will happen to Calum's son? Unless?



Follow up

Have a look on-line



Colourless World *Anita Kelsey*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48DVHa-pWAw&feature=related>

Step outside
That comfort zone
Wanna take you
To a place youve never known

Dont you worry bout falling
Falling
Wont you play this game with me

At the end of the line
Oh yeah
Dont you worry bout falling
Falling
Wont you play this game with me

I dreamed there will always be
Someone that never leaves me
Hear in this darkness i need to feel free
From this colourless world

I dreamed there will always be
Someone that never leaves me
Hear in this darkness i need to feel free
From this colourless world
Free from this colourless world

Free from this colourless world

Step into
This solitude
Nothings quiet
What it seems from the start

At the end of the line
Oh yeah



Biodata of Contributors

Ron Butlin was born in Edinburgh, where he now lives. Having worked variously as a footman, a male model and a barnacle scraper on Thames barges, he has become one of Scotland's most acclaimed writers. In 2008 he became the Makar, or Poet Laureate, of Edinburgh.

Fitch O'Connell has worked in education longer than he cares to remember. He first became involved in curriculum development and materials writing with the National Curriculum in England and Wales in the 1980s. Later he found himself in Portugal with the British Council where he set up the BritLit project, and now works as the ELT Projects Manager for the British Council in Portugal.

Louise Cooper began writing stories when she was at school to entertain her friends. She continued to write and her first full-length novel was published when she was only twenty years old. Since then she has become a prolific writer of fantasy, renowned for her bestselling Time Master trilogy. Her other interests include music, folklore, mythology and comparative religion. She lives in Cornwall.

Claudia Ferradas travels the world as a presenter and teacher trainer and often works as a consultant and materials designer for the British Council. She has co-chaired the *Oxford Conference on the Teaching of Literature* on five occasions and has done extensive work as a teacher trainer for the BritLit programme.

In the UK, Claudia is a Visiting Fellow at the School of Languages, Leeds Metropolitan University, and an Associate Trainer with NILE (Norwich Institute for Language Education). She is also a university lecturer and teacher trainer in Argentina, where she is based, and in the MA programme in TEFL at the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Spain.

Romesh Gunsekera was born Colombo, Sri Lanka. He grew up in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, moving to England in 1971 and he now lives in London. His first book, *Monkfish Moon*, a collection of short stories reflecting the ethnic and political tensions that have threatened Sri Lanka since independence in 1948, a number of which have formed the basis of BritLit kits. In addition to short stories and poetry, Romesh has written four novels (*Reef*, *The Sandglass*, *Heaven's Edge* and *The Match*). He has travelled widely with the British Council, none more so than with the BritLit project, a collaboration which has led to the writing of a new set of short stories, *The Spice Collector*.

Isabel Maria Monte has a degree in teacher training and English language and literature. She was a primary teacher for 6 years and then became a secondary school teacher in 1994. Since then she has been working in IES Ramon Casas i Carbó in Palau-solità i Plegamans.

Sandie Mourão is a freelance teacher and teacher trainer based in Portugal. She works with preschool and primary children and their teachers. Sandie has collaborated on writing projects with Scholastic USA, Oxford University Press, Macmillan and Mary Glasgow Scholastic, as well as local projects in Portugal. Her interests lie in teaching very young learners, using picture books, assessment and materials writing. She is presently enrolled on a research degree investigating picture books and language acquisition.

Laura Nogués Inglés is a state secondary school teacher at IES Consell de Cent in Barcelona. She holds a degree in English from the University of Barcelona. She is currently researching for her phd on CLIL at Pompeu Fabra University and she is a member of the research grup ALLENCAM (UPF).

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