



Course Concepts Reading and Vocabulary Skills

All the Course Concepts are based on general principles set out in the introduction to the series. One of these principles is that skills are not acquired by the learner being told about them, but rather by actually doing things themselves. To put it another way: we learn by actively engaging in a learning process. The teacher's job is to provide suitable and sufficient support.

What follows here are the specifics for Reading and Vocabulary Skills.

Course Concepts Reading and Vocabulary Skills aims at encouraging students to take a new perspective on learning vocabulary, away from lists of unrelated words taken completely out of context towards seeking meaning in context, and hence learning words in context. Another way of expressing this is to say that the focus is on linking, not listing. Linking words, and linking ideas.

There are three separate Concepts here: **Dealing with Texts**; **Variety in English**; **Vocabulary in Current Affairs**. Two of them focus more on close reading and interpretation of texts; one also provides opportunities for active use of specific topic vocabulary in discussions. In all three most of the time in class is spent in interaction with classmates and teacher, within an English-language atmosphere and context.

The macro-skills of reading i.e. how to tackle long texts in English are taught as part of Course Concepts Study Skills, using the example of a whole textbook.

The three slightly different concepts have at least three things in common:

- they all involve the students in interaction
- they all teach basic vocabulary acquisition skills, moving from guessing meaning from the co-text and context, through using monolingual dictionaries, to reflecting on possibilities of long-term learning
- they all teach vocabulary through context.

Even if the target group specified below may be students of English, the courses work equally well with any students who are interested.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Reading and Vocabulary Skills: Dealing with Texts

Below is the description of a typical course, in the format required by the university, as handed out to students at the first meeting of class and discussed with them in detail:

Target Group: Students of English in all semesters, though priority is given to lower semesters.

Course Aims: This class will offer a wide variety of reading activities all related to understanding short extracts from contemporary writing, primarily fiction. (There are lots and lots of wonderful books, just waiting to be read!)

There will be a strong focus on vocabulary acquisition, including strategies for using the Cobuild dictionary well and for the long-term learning of words.

Materials: Participants will be expected to bring a copy of a good advanced level learners dictionary, if possible the Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary, to class every week.

Please bring next week from [www.FindYourFeet.de]: Tasks to help you use Cobuild well.

All other materials will be made available.

Requirements: To obtain credits for this course, students are required to participate regularly, complete all assignments as a portfolio, and sit a final written test.

To this I added:

Contact details of classmates: Please get the contact details of neighbours so that you can contact them if you are off sick, or would like to work with them outside of class.

Some comments on the course description:

1) **Dictionary:** Please note that for many years the final exams for students majoring in English included an essay and a translation from German into English. The English dictionary for use in these exams was specified. For that reason it made sense to encourage students from the very start to learn how to use it. Copies were available in the library but having their own was better.

2) As in all classes, encouraging students to talk to the people around them from the very start is an integral part of the course. They get to know each other and exchange contact details. I also ask them to write their first name on a card, large enough to be read across the room. I always did the same, except that I offered them my first and second name, so they could address me with either, whatever they felt comfortable with.

We also look at a Handout with some Help Expressions:

HELP Expressions

Here are some useful expressions for you in class – when things aren't going so well. They are the basics of (classroom) communication.

(zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz) Sorry, I haven't quite wakened up yet. (Ask my neighbour.)

Sorry, I didn't quite get that. Could you say it again please / Could you say it more slowly.

What did you want us to do?

[...]

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_helpexpressions.pdf].

The materials:

I had a long list of books, mainly fiction, which I had read and appreciated greatly; all of them were examples of great story telling and excellent sources of extracts. All were available in the library. From these I could choose.

In a Literature seminar, materials can be made available as a Reader; students read the texts at home in preparation for class. Since this is a practical language class, however, not a seminar, the situation is very different. Scripts handed out in advance would rather defeat the purpose. Ideally, if possible, each extract when they see it in class is completely new for them, a challenge to be faced on the spot, as a group. They will be guessing, interpreting, illustrating, creating, puzzling, explaining and discussing.

For this to work well, the extracts chosen should be written in such a way that the reader is invited to enter the story, with just enough clues to pique curiosity, set their minds to work and gradually become involved with the characters. So involved, that they will want to read the complete book later, just for pleasure.

Step by step through the course

Imagining a story:

First, just for fun, the students are asked simply to choose a title from a list given and imagine a story around it. This is a chance for them to give their imagination free rein. Usually they work together with a neighbour; sometimes a different pair of students may choose the same title, but create a totally different story. They tell each other their stories, with no comment from me on whether their ideas have any relationship to the actual story or not.

Green Man
Clara
Damage
Dead Air

English Patient
Another Time, Another Place
Whale Rider
Sins of the Father

My Revolutions	Perfect Spy
Nightingale	Way to Go
Human Traces	Red Book
Kids Downstairs	White Earth
Girl in a Swing	Secret River
Lullabies for Little Criminals	Hideous Kinky
Being Emily	Pickup
Naming of the Dead	Shining Hero
Constant Gardener	Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox
Witness	Unknown Terrorist

I liked this list of titles! The class did too. Later in the term, they got the complete list, with author and publication date.

Learning vocabulary:

Before starting work on the texts, the focus is on thinking about learning vocabulary.

First we look at some words out of context. I put a list of nine or ten words on the board e.g. salvage, pounced, egret, pelt, flush, lure, kinesthetic, and ask them simply to say how many they know. The answer is usually between none and three. Sometimes someone will ask: Are they all really English??

We take a look at German, and think about clues as to parts of speech, for example in “macht” (3rd person singular verb), “Macht” (noun), and “machte” (3rd person singular past tense verb). The students are then asked to make guesses about the part of speech of the English words on the board. I enter everything they offer with a question mark beside it. “Egret”, for example is usually seen as a verb or a noun, by analogy with “regret”.

Next we look at these words in context, e.g.

In spite of the fact that the beautiful egret is in danger of dying out completely, many clothing manufacturers still offer handsome prices for the long, elegant tail feathers, which are used as decorations on ladies' hats.

In this way they can see that if given a context, they can use their knowledge of the world, plus their knowledge of English word order, grammar and basic vocabulary, to guess the meaning, perhaps not exactly, but more or less, which is enough for our purposes here.

However, what I found interesting was that with the proper noun “egret” some seemed to have the feeling that if they didn't find out the German name of the bird, they hadn't really got the meaning. Given the German name “Reiher”, however, they realised that they were not familiar with it either. In the end, knowing more or less what “egret” means was sufficient.

This idea was gratefully taken and adapted from:

Baudoin, E. Margaret, Silberstein, Sandra et al. (1977). *Reader's Choice. A Reading Skills Textbook for Students of English as a Second Language*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 5.

The next step is working through the 'Vocabulary Using Cobuild Handout' with the overall aim of helping them to see the value of learning how to use an excellent tool effectively.

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_voc_usingcobuild.pdf].

The tasks reinforce awareness of the necessity to look carefully at the co-text and context of a word before they look it up in the dictionary. For example, they show that the verb and the noun “sanction” have opposite meanings, as do the constructions “stop to do something” and “stop doing something”, or that “a game” (count noun) and “game” (uncount noun) are completely different things.

The first task is done quickly, quietly, individually.

Part (1) Choose what you think is the right answer – quite spontaneously – without a dictionary.

(1) A friend told me that when she heard she had won a free flight to Sydney she

passed out? fainted? swooned? lost consciousness?

[...]

(14) Which is/are correct? When I was in Wales I experienced that .../I made the experience that .../I found that ...

Part (2) is done with neighbours. I have deliberately used the word neighbours here rather than partners to stress the fact that students are encouraged from the very start to simply talk to the people sitting next to them – preferably about the topics in hand, and soon become familiar with this natural form of interaction.

Part (2) Which of the above questions would you expect to be able to solve with the help of an English-English dictionary?

[...]

Here they take time to talk to each other about their expectations, based on their experience (or lack of it) with monolingual dictionaries.

Then I turn the question round. Which items do they not expect to find an answer to in the dictionary? They don't have to justify their answers, just give the number of the item. This gives an idea of the overall class confidence in the dictionary. At this point, if there are items no one mentions, I would say: Does that mean that everyone in the class is absolutely totally completely definitely 100% sure they will find a clear answer in the dictionary?? Hesitation and a little laughter, and before long someone will admit to perhaps maybe not being quite 100% sure. And so on, with more laughter. Since it is clear that they are not being tested, no one needs to feel shy or embarrassed, everyone contributes to the class picture of the dictionary. Usually class confidence in it is quite low.

The next task is for outside class:

Now use the Collins Cobuild. See if you can find a clear answer to the questions. If you haven't got a copy of the Cobuild yet, you can use the one in my Semesterapparat (on reserve in the library).

In the following session the students check what they found with their neighbours; some find more than others. (Checking their work with their neighbours is a good way to start a class as it gives them time to talk, and the time to settle down and tune in.) Next we go through each item, all of us together, each with their own dictionary, so that they see that all the answers can be found. This takes time, but is well worth it. Finally:

Part (3) So what kinds of information does the Cobuild give you?

Make a list here:

[...]

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_voc_usingcobuild.pdf].

We then make a combined list of the different kinds of information provided by the dictionary. There is a great deal of grammar, for example parts of speech, constructions, noun/uncount nouns, verb patterns; and a great deal about levels of formality, register, collocations, regional and national varieties and so on.

I also took time to point out the advantages of a print dictionary. I gave them tips on looking up words, and suggested they add their own comments, drawings, visual links. As they were expected to bring the dictionary to class every week, they soon got lots of practise in using it.

Once we have established that much can be guessed from the co-text and context, and that the monolingual dictionary is a necessary tool when reading (and learning English), we think about ways of learning vocabulary i.e. ways of getting words off the page and into long-term memory.

Ellis (1989) offers a good approach to this topic with a set of ways of noting down new vocabulary. There is an alphabetic list of words with a German translation; a list of words with definitions; words for a particular topic; words with illustrations; a mind map and so on. You can make your own set. The task for the class is to talk about them with their neighbours, and then each is asked to say something individually e.g. I like X because ...; I think X is hopeless because They can also suggest other ways.

Ellis, Gail & Sinclair, Barbara (1989). *Learning to Learn English. A course in Learner Training*. Cambridge: CUP, p. 43.

There are many different opinions on each of the ways, and what is most interesting is that usually there is at least one student who says: "X is not much good, but it is what I learned at school, so that is the way I do it."

I then talk through all the different ways on the page and comment on them from my experience as a life-long language learner, and also as a teacher. This included telling them about a lesson I once learned when a student explained how and why they had used, very effectively, a way of noting vocabulary that I had thought useless. And to someone who says: "I like the illustrations, but I can't draw a picture for every word!" I would comment that there is no need to illustrate every word, but there are many quick ways of representing something visually, and of connecting them. For example sea, puddle, lake, drop, ocean, pond, could be arranged vertically with an ever increasing or decreasing circle beside them. Or the consequences of something could be indicated with an arrow.

In sum, my object here was to make it clear that everyone has to find their own effective way or rather ways of noting and organising new vocabulary, depending on the purpose. You can also talk about the fact that some learn better by seeing something, others better by listening to it etc.

Having worked through the 'Using Cobuild Handout', however, they now understand why the co-text and the context are so important, and that listing words with no indication of part of speech or count/uncount noun does not make sense. I usually returned to some of the words listed on the board at the beginning. Using the dictionary they can see that pelt (verb) and pelt (noun) have very different meanings, as do flush (verb) and flush (adjective), and salvage (verb) and salvage (noun).

To reinforce the message that their work on vocabulary has to be meaningful in order to be effective I gave the students an extract from a very interesting newspaper article 'Total Recall'. Although it centres on exceptionally gifted people, it "looks at what the human brain is capable of."

As far back as ancient Greece, it was understood even people with no special powers of recall could develop strategies to help them to learn long lists of information. [...] Various studies have shown that the human brain is capable of remembering only a limited number of arbitrary items in working memory; grouping these items into chunks permits the brain to retain them more easily in our minds [...].

Garavelli, Dani (2011, 9 October). Total Recall. *Scotland on Sunday*, p.15.

In the following week I ask them how they would fill in the gaps in the short extract below:

Learning words

"Various studies have shown that the human brain is capable of remembering only a _____ number of arbitrary items in working memory; _____ these items into _____ permits the brain to _____ them more easily in our minds."

So:

O _____ words in a way that is _____ for you.

Working with short texts:

Before starting work on fiction where the context has to be puzzled out, I liked to begin with a short **non-fiction** text with an obvious context and some specific terminology along with more general vocabulary. This gives an opportunity to focus on learning vocabulary. An example is the description of a well-known and much visited English castle and its gardens, with its specific terminology for architecture and plants.

The idea was taken gratefully, adapted and expanded from the Unit 'Sissinghurst Castle' in:

Greenall, Simon & Swann, Michael (1986). *Effective Reading: Reading skills for advanced students*. Cambridge: CUP, 40-43.

The unit, based on National Trust visitor information, has a map of the buildings and the gardens, the names of particular spots, and separate descriptions of them, all to be matched up. With their knowledge of the world, and the dictionary, this matching is not difficult. But adding questions is good, to take the words off the page and bring the text to life. Which part of the gardens would smell nicest? Which would be the most colourful? Which would be the quietest? Which room would be quietest? Questions like these ensure that the students actually understand the words in the text and can visualise them. The dictionary will help not only with meaning but also with the pronunciation, though you may have to help with reading the phonetic script. For example, "Yew" /ju:/ is often mispronounced as "Jew". The text also has the word "box", which is a good reminder to always note whether nouns are count or uncount.

I enjoyed making some rough symbolic sketches of words we found in the text, such as "a tapering tower", "a flagged path", and asked the students to match drawings and words. (Please, I would say, please recognise and understand my drawings:-))

I also added sketchy but recognisable drawings of leaves of some common (local) trees/shrubs: laurel, lime, yew, oak, box, beech, for example, and gave the students a list of possible names to choose from and asked: Which is it? This is fun, and quite a challenge as some do not recognise the leaves at all, even though they probably pass the trees on their way to the university every day; sometimes they don't know the name in their mother tongue either. Why bother with words like this? One answer is that it is not the word itself that matters but the visual image attached to it. A forest of firs is quite different from a beech wood.

As the words in any text of this kind are from two main word fields, architecture and plants, it is easy to visualise, and pleasant to think about. The National Trust website has many such sites, complete with text and illustrations, which can easily be adapted for use in class.

When we move to extracts from contemporary **fiction**, the opening paragraphs of the novel 'The Girl in a Swing' is a good starter. The students are not given the title, and can enjoy guessing it at the end. There is enough general vocabulary to make the setting clear, and the text begins:

All day it has been windy – strange weather for late July -, the wind swirling through the hedges like an invisible flood-tide among seaweed, tugging, compelling them in its own direction, dragging them one way until the patches of elder and privet sagged outward from the tougher stretches of blackthorn on either side [...].

Adams, Richard (1980). *The Girl in a Swing*. London: Allen Lane.

The students need the extract and a large sheet of paper to stick it on. Their task is to illustrate certain words underlined. These included: hedges, seaweed, privet, clematis, stakes, the downs, beeches, crickets, wheat, barley.

They do not need artistic talents to “illustrate”. After all, they have already seen my pretty primitive sketches. A few lines, or an indication of colour or relative size may be quite sufficient. One student who claimed not to be able to do this at all produced a few pencil lines which conveyed “like an invisible flood-tide among seaweed” in the most vivid way I had ever seen. Of course they could also cut and paste illustrations from elsewhere, but in general they did the job themselves, and did it very well. (One student even brought in dried leaves.) They discovered that this kind of activity was enjoyable and actually helped them to learn.

There are also many key words not underlined, such as the verbs of movement tug, compel, rip, tussle, sway, sag, rip, whirl away, which they have to understand. I encouraged them to collect and organise the verbs of movement on a separate sheet as they were sure to come across many others in later texts. A good example is the word “totter” in line 2 of the extract from 'Whale Rider', Chapter 21:

“Koro Apirana tottered to the bedside and looked down at the sleeping girl.” This one little word carries great meaning and gives the reader a key to the relationship between the characters.

This dictionary work pays off because they can now begin to think about the atmosphere conveyed, and ask themselves: why did the narrator tell us all this? Why bother with the details? What scene are they (presumably) setting?

The passage is heavily atmospheric; the ending of the novel is horrendous.

Milieu texts:

Apart from the work we do together on texts, the students are asked to choose a text to work on individually at home. For this, I made a collection of interesting passages which focus on a particular milieu. Milieu here included everything from horse racing to hospital, from parachute jumping to protest marches, from flat-hunting to film-making, from politics to prison and the pharmaceuticals industry; from aborigines and slavery to wartime, weather, radio shows and museums.

Collecting suitable passages was itself a never-ending and very enjoyable story. Below are only a few examples of the kind of milieu the students are usually interested in, and the texts which represent the milieu well:

Aboriginal peoples, apartheid, slavery:

White Earth (332-337) and *Secret River* (220-230) both provide insights into the lives of aboriginal people in Australia, and the injustices done to them; *White Earth* is contemporary; *Secret River* is set in the early 1800s.

Red Dust deals with the law in post-apartheid South Africa (36-43, 90-93, 280-284).

Joseph Knight links the issues of slavery (in the Caribbean) and the law (in Scotland). There are passages describing the Edinburgh Court House in 1778 and the actors in it (282-286); the court proceedings with all the legal arguments are reproduced (286-312), including the events in Joseph Knight's life (288-291), and a speech against slavery (296-297). Some of the text is in English, some in Scots, which is not difficult for German speakers [...].

Interesting locations:

The city of London is in focus in *Ordinary Thunderstorms* (1-3, 94-98) and in *Secret River* (9-19). Both depict London and the Thames, but several centuries apart.

Berlin 1946 in *New Confessions* (389-395)

A new town in *Missing* (57-69)

A South African small town in *Red Dust* (7-13).

Venice in the *Comfort of Strangers*, opening pages.

Marrakech in *Hideous Kinky* (12-18) [...]

Medicine and medical care:

Mental disorders are in focus in *Human Traces* (492-513); and *Angel at my Table* (105-110);

The pharmaceuticals industry in *Ordinary Thunderstorms* (260-266, 312-316); and in *The Constant Gardener* (427-430) [...].

They could also choose texts which do not fit readily into one category. One example is the opening of *'Wild Harbour'*. This relates the preparations made by a young couple in the Highlands of Scotland for living in a cave, as a refuge from the coming war. Preparations are detailed, and supplies are listed and commented, from the clothing and food to tools and equipment.

Books cited above are:

White Earth (McGahan 2004); Secret River (Grenville 2005); Red Dust (Slovo 2006); Joseph Knight (Robertson 2004); Ordinary thunderstorms (Boyd 2009); New Confessions (Boyd 1987); Missing (O'Hagan 1995); Comfort of Strangers (McEwan 1981); Hideous Kinky (Freud 1999); Human Traces (Faulks 2005); Angel at my Table (Frame 1993); Constant Gardener (Le Carré 2001); Wild Harbour (Macpherson 1936, 1989).

Making a portfolio:

Early in the term I explain to the students what I mean by a portfolio. Their portfolio will contain their work on all the texts we do together in class. This vocabulary work must be organised in a meaningful way i.e. no lists of words. Examples from previous students' work are given. The portfolio grows and develops as the weeks go by, and words from one text may be joined up with

words of the same word field from another text, so that they may have several large sheets of paper in their portfolio with words from particular topics e.g. clothing, accommodation or migration, taken from a variety of texts. Students commented that they found that writing everything by hand and making their own diagrams and illustrations helped them learn. “I avoided writing any text on my computer, plainly and simply because that way I can remember the words more easily.”

Their portfolio also has to contain their individual work on a 'milieu' text of their own choice, taken from the list given. In the end their portfolio is a treasure trove of English that they can keep and expand on for as long as they remain learners of the language. If they are studying another foreign language I encourage them to add notes in the other language too, if they wish.

As this kind of work is new to most of the students, I was always glad to invite a student from a previous class to come along and explain how they had gone about the job of making a portfolio, and bring their own as a good example. Towards the end of the term the students are asked to bring their portfolio-in-progress to class to share with their classmates, and also so that I can see whether they they have actually moved beyond just listing words.

If they work regularly on the texts, they have no difficulty with producing the portfolio, and none with the short end-of-term written test, which checks their recognition of words from the texts done together.

So that they know what to expect, they are given an example test with typical tasks such as linking up first and second parts of sentences, putting words into word fields, deciding whether certain words have positive or negative connotations.

An example end-of-term test, reduced to show only typical tasks:

READING: Dealing with Texts

What we have looked at this semester:

SKILLS: (1) Using the Collins Cobuild (2) Learning Vocabulary

TEXTS: a wide variety from contemporary fiction!

Task 1: Can you connect the following so that they make sense? Just write the number of the second part **after** the first part.

First parts i.e. the beginning:

A gleam of hope ()

He stomped off in the huff, ()

Mein Host the birthday boy, ()

Pressed about these statements, ()

[...]

Second parts:

- 1) the lucky one bound for America
 - 2) at ease in the intense and busy loneliness of the city.
 - 3) told me it was sacrilege, I had no respect.
 - 4) shone in his eyes
- [...]

Task 2: Where would you expect to see the following words? Can you sort them into word “fields”?

A basement, a beech, box, treads, mist, close-shaven [...]

Food and drink
Wildlife (animals, birds etc.)
In gardens
Weather
Architectural features (externals)
Person (appearance, clothing)
[...]

Task 3: Put a minus sign (-) beside all the adjectives which are commonly considered to be something **negative** or have negative connotations.

aromatic
awkward
ascetic
blissful
[...]

Task 4: Put a minus sign (-) beside all the verbs which are commonly considered to be something **negative** or have negative connotations.

ache
chuckle
crumple
curse
[...]

Task 5: Put a plus sign (+) beside all the “**positive**” nouns.

a coffin
a crook
a foe
hospitality
[...]

Task 6:

Link the following to make sense. Just write down the number:

To clench ()

To weigh ()

To commit

To conduct

[...]

1) a condition

2) a murder

3) your destiny

4) a tent

[...]

Task 7: Mark clearly **the** stressed syllable by underlining it, e.g.

teacher

category

protagonist

character

Arabic

abyss

bargaining [...]

Task 8: Count (C) or uncount (UC)?

access

information

funeral

vocabulary

homework

[...]

//Tasks 9, 10 and 11 were only in the final test, not in the example test.

Task 9: The following two passages are from 'The Kids Downstairs':

(1) Come and have a cup of coffee at least, Susan said to the girls. They giggled. *Coffee*. Then they said okay, but they wouldn't stay too long. They followed Rangi and Susan upstairs where Rangi excused himself to change out of his clothes. From the bedroom he could hear Rose and Thelma whispering about the flat. He found them in the sitting room, looking at the prints on the walls, gingerly touching the expensive ornaments and treading carefully on the carpets. [...]

Can you explain the word "gingerly", or give a synonym, or an appropriate German word?

(2) Well, that's it then, he answered. When will you be moving in?

This Saturday perhaps? Rangi asked.

The landlord nodded. Rangi duly paid him a week's rent plus one week in advance and he gave Rangi the keys to the flat. [...]

Susan and Rangi watched him as he walked down the road.

You drove him a bit hard, Rangi said. I think we're lucky to have gotten the place at all.

Can you explain the words “duly paid”, and “drove him hard” or give a synonym, or the German?

Task 10:

Which two characters, from all the books we looked at, would you like to meet, and what one question would you ask each of them?

Task 11:

What is your favourite word from your “milieu” text? //

Working on extracts from contemporary fiction:

How we read the texts.

Usually I would read the extract (without title) out aloud. The students then read it through themselves, share first impressions and vocabulary work with neighbours, and begin to answer the core questions:

Whose voice is this? Who are the characters, where are they and when? What is going on?

For puzzling out the who, what, where, when, the opening can be good e.g. *Damage* (Hart 2003); *Way to Go* (Spence 1998). With some books using the ending is a real challenge e.g. *Little Drummer Girl* (Le Carré 1983); *Unknown Terrorist* (Flanagan 2006).

Discussing their ideas with their neighbours requires close and careful reading. The answers put forward were always fascinating and generated further discussion in the whole class. I found the students were good at voicing their opinions and pointing to a passage in the text to justify them. This is a very productive process, and shows up possible misunderstanding of words.

I also ask them if they can imagine which of the titles listed would fit. Finally the students are given the title, author, date of publication, and sometimes a little insight into the story.

Of course there are other ways of working with the texts:

If you would like to reduce the task to the simple question “whose voice is this?” here are some ideas for particularly useful passages, all openings unless otherwise indicated:

Clara (Galloway 2002); *Bridge* (Banks 1991); *Sins of the Father* (Massie 1991); *Snow falling on Cedars* (Guterson 1995).

Last King of Scotland (Foden 1999): the mad dictator Idi speaking (204-209); *Sputnik Caledonia* (Crume 2008): the rebellious kid talking (466-470).

Jigsaw reading: Pairs or small groups are given a jumbled set of cards to reassemble. Example: *The Remains of the Day* first chapter (Ishiguro 1989).

Oral Jigsaw reading: Here students are given only a short passage each, and have time to read it quietly, no interaction, and puzzle about who, where,

when, what; then they have to leave their text behind and move about the class telling each other about their passage and gradually filling out the picture. This takes time and concentration, and probably two or three returns to their table to read the passage again.

Example: Charlotte Gray first chapter (Faulks 1998) or The Witness first chapter (Jauncey 2007).

Oral matching of first and last paragraphs: a set of first and last paragraphs is jumbled up and the students assigned only one each. They have to try to find the matching paragraph, working as in Oral Jigsaw above.

Gap texts can be made. Example: Snow falling on Cedars (Guterson 1995) (war, racism, 138-139); Anil's Ghost (Ondaatje 2000) (war, protest, 41-43).

Creating a story from first lines: given only the first lines students have to do some guessing – and create their own story.

Given in advance some words from a text imagine a story around them. Example: My Revolutions (Kunzru 2007).

Towards the end of term: Talking about all the interesting characters met in the extracts. Is there anyone they like, can identify with, or would like to meet; or anyone they thoroughly dislike; are there any similar characters?

As said above the extracts taken from the books on my list are all interesting and challenging. I could pick and choose from the collection to suit each class. The selection below is only one possible choice to cover a range of topic and vocabulary for class work together in one semester. I found it particularly satisfying as it took us around the world, from Africa to New Zealand, and from the 18th century to the here and now; there are the voices of schoolchildren and the elderly; they touch on the criminal, the political, the public and global, and the private and intimate. They gave the students the opportunity to dip into a wide range of vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Girl in a Swing (Adams 1980); Way to Go (Spence 1998); The Constant Gardener (Le Carré 2001); The Pickup (Gordimer 2001, 2003); My Revolutions (Kunzru 2007); Nightingale (Dorward 2007); Being Emily (Donovan 2008); Whale Rider (Ihimaera 1987, 2005); Damage (Hart 2003); The Kids Downstairs (Ihimaera in The Flamingo Anthology of New Zealand Short Stories 2000); Lullabies for Little Criminals (O'Neill 2006).

The general task was to puzzle out the who, where, when, what. This required the students to engage in really close reading and then, on the basis of this close reading, read between the lines i.e. interpret. They are essentially playing detective: looking very closely and searching for clues. With some texts I gave them a little guidance. For example, some questions for The Pickup; an ad for a flat for The Kids downstairs; some vocabulary to check first before reading My Revolutions.

At home they continue their work on the vocabulary of the text, using meaningful ways of organising it. Each text becomes part of their portfolio.

Way to Go opening:

I sat up in the coffin, reading a comic and eating a sherbet fountain. Bit the tip off the licorice, sucked the sherbet through it. Mix of the two tastes, that was the thing. [...] My father had gone out to the pub, put me down here in the basement, among the coffins. Locked the door. Told me I had to learn. I was used to it now, the punishment. This time it was for losing my school cap [...].

The Constant Gardener:

(1) opening:

The news hit the British High Commission in Nairobi at nine-thirty on a Monday morning. Sandy Woodrow took it like a bullet, jaw rigid, chest out, smack through his divided English heart. He was standing. That much he afterwards remembered. He was standing and the internal phone was piping [...].

(2) (280-284)

Justin returns to the police file [...] We interviewed Subject on three occasions of nine minutes, fifty-four minutes and ninety minutes respectively [...] Our impression of her was that, in addition to being grief-stricken, she was in considerable fear. For instance, Subject made several statements which she then withdrew, e.g. 'Tessa was murdered to keep her quiet.' E.g.: 'Anybody who takes on the pharmaceutical industry is liable to get her throat cut.' [...].

The Pickup ending:

He got up dazed and dulled with the hangover of emotion and went to his brothers. She woke to their low voices behind the lean-to door. She left the bed, dizzied for a moment, and then collected the contents of her suitcase scattered everywhere [...]. Khadija put an arm round her conspiratorially, smiled intimately and held out the bunch of sweetness, smooth dark shiny dates. She spoke Arabic, the foreigner understands enough, now.

- He'll come back. -

But perhaps a reassurance offered for herself, Khadija thinking of her man at the oil fields.

For The Pickup, to the usual questions I added the following, not in any particular order:

Different meanings of “a garage”?

How do we know this is not Ibrahim’s first “emigration”?

What does “emigration” imply?

What does Khadija's husband do?
How does this link her to Julie?
Why is Julie not going with Ibrahim?
What do you understand by a "family version"?
Why is there a kind of family version for Julie not going with Ibrahim?
Why is Julie referred to as "the foreigner"?
Does Julie speak Arabic?

The effect of the changes in tense?
The effect of the semi-colons?

My Revolutions opening:

Outside in the garden, workmen from the marquee company are bolting together an aluminium frame on the lawn [...] Fuck. I can't do it. I can't face you, Sam. There's no way. Working quickly, I open cupboards and pull out a sports bag, start stuffing in socks, underwear, a couple of shirts. I need to move fast, before they get back from the shops. My passport is in the study, in a box file. At least, that's where I think it is. I check and find it isn't and for the first time since Miles left I lose control. When you panic you forget to breathe and your heart-rate rises.

Before we read this extract together I handed out a very unusual sheet of words without context (e.g. a spreadsheet, the media circus, squint (adj.), an abyss, a blossom), in bundles of five, so that each pair has one bundle to check. Their task is to use their dictionaries to find the meaning and then do some kind of illustration on the board. Everyone tries then to match words and illustrations.

Nightingale opening:

Rosie, this time I'll tell you everything: right to the end ...' I was barely conscious when he spoke. I was half-dead, on a ventilator in a hospital bed. [...] The images created by that voice, though, and the story it told, persist. They go round and around in my mind like a loop of film, and never stop [...] He looks around himself, peering through a world suddenly fogged.[...] He looks up at the roof of the station and finds it gone; sees instead the sky, full now of falling leaves, ash, fragments of paper.

Being Emily opening:

Through in the livin room Patrick was paintin the fireplace while Mona and Rona practised their line dancin. *Silver bells and golden needles they won't mend this heart of mind*. Step two three, cross two three, turn [...] . Mona and Rona are twins [...] See, she thinks the twins are wee angels and when Mammy's around they nearly always are, but the minute she's out of sight they turn intae

monsters.[...] The number of times she's come home to an upside down settee, earth fae a plant spilled all over the carpet, and turned to me and said, *Fiona*, in that voice. *How could you let the twins make such a mess?*

Whale Rider Chapter 21:

Nani Flowers gave an anguished sob and reached out to hold Kahu tightly. Koro Apirana tottered to the bedside and looked down at the sleeping girl. He began to say a prayer, and he asked the Gods to forgive him. He saw Kahu stir.[...] Kahu drew another breath. She opened her eyes. 'Is it time to wake up now?' Nani Flowers began to blubber [...] Kahu looked at Koro Apirana, her eyes shining. 'Oh, *Paka*, can't you hear them? I've been listening to them for ages now. Oh, *Paka*, and the whales are still singing,' she said. Haumi e, hui e, *taiki e*. Let it be done.

Damage opening:

There is an internal landscape, a geography of the soul; we search for its outlines all our lives. Those who are lucky enough to find it, ease like water over a stone, on to its fluid contours, and are home. [...] my funeral would have been well attended by those who had gone further in life than I, and who therefore honoured my memory by their presence. [...] A man who, at the comparatively early age of fifty, had ended his journey. A journey which would certainly have led to some greater honour and achievement had it continued.

//But I did not die in my fiftieth year. There are few who know me now who do not regard that as a tragedy.//”

I cut off the two final sentences, giving the students the task of thinking what these could be.

The Kids Downstairs opening:

This text was introduced by means of the ad on a separate sheet:

'one dbl bdrm, unfurn, sep. ent, 5 mins to city, suitable m.c., \$29pw'

There was a top flat and a bottom flat, an upstairs and a downstairs, and Rangi and Susan went to view the top one – 'one dbl bdrm, unfurn, sep. ent, 5 mins to city, suitable m.c., \$29pw'. - Is this really it? Susan asked as Rangi eased the car into the kerb outside the address given by the landlord. 'It' was an old dull-grey wooden house in a stretch of houses squashed like a concertina. [...] You drove him a bit hard, Rangi said. I think we're lucky to have gotten the place at all. - Huh, Susan answered. *He's* the lucky one. He knows good tenants when he sees them. He's lucky he's got us in at all.[...] - The first thing I'll have to do is make curtains, Susan said. And by the way, *his* attitude to you better improve. They moved in the next weekend.

Additional tasks on this text were to draw the house and the flat, and to act out the dialogue between Susan, Rangi and the landlord. That was fun!

Lullabies for Little Criminals opening:

Right before my twelfth birthday, my dad, Jules, and I moved into a two-room apartment in a building that we called the Ostrich Hotel. It was the first time I could remember taking a taxicab anywhere. It let us off in the alley behind the building, where all the walls had pretty graffiti painted on them [...] Jules was wearing a fur hat and a long leather jacket. He was all in a hurry to get our stuff out of the taxi because it was so cold. 'Stupid, lousy prick of a bastard, it's cold.' [...] Can't you buy back his guitars? I screamed, hopping from foot to foot on the couch cushions. 'They're worth like a thousand dollars. I only got fifty dollars for them. I'll never be able to get them back.'

Nearing the end of term:

By this time the class has read a lot, thought a lot, talked a lot, worked on a lot of vocabulary in context both in class and at home. They now have the chance to share their work on their milieu text, even though it was still work in progress.

A winter extra: The Gospel according to St Luke

In the winter term, just before Christmas, we always read a few verses from the Gospel according to St Luke, chapter 2.

9 And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The Holy Bible. Authorised King James Version (1953). William Collins Sons and Company Limited: Glasgow, 55-56. First published 1611.

The main reason for doing this is that over the years, students from many classes had brought me the text in their mother tongue or any other language they were learning: Latin, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Rumanian, Greek, Hungarian, Portuguese and so on, so I had a multi-lingual collection. They loved to read out their 'own' language, where they could be the expert. The collection originated in the Vocabulary and Reading Skills course Variety in English, below, as part of the unit on Biblical language.

Evaluation of the class:

To evaluate the class from their point of view the students had two different opportunities. One was to complete an evaluation and feedback sheet. It was short, uncomplicated, and gave the students the chance to offer their own ideas.

Some example questions are below; scales were provided from 'really interesting' to 'dead boring', or 'a lot' to 'very little', or 'Yes', 'Partially', 'No'. It is important to remember that the questions have to be chosen to suit the particular class, and to suit your interests as the teacher: what would be helpful for you to know?

How would you rate this course from really interesting to dead boring?
How much do you feel you learnt?
Be honest! How much effort did you put into this course?
How motivated do you feel to go on learning English?
Given the aims of this course (Please read the course description carefully!): Do you think we/you reached them?
What would you definitely have liked more/less of?
Any other comments on this course?
Would you recommend this course to other students?
If you could give first year students of English some advice, what would it be?

The other is to write, quickly and spontaneously, with a partner or in a group, a short poem on their experience of the course. This is definitely more fun, and is shared, as I get the students to put their poems on an overhead and 'present' them. I also write them up and distribute them later. Many of the comments can only be understood by the insider; the sample poems here are only intended to give an idea of the fun or the humorously voiced frustration.

Reading: Dealing with Texts Your end-of-term poems

Let's begin with the beginning
And say something about reading
Words and lines – curious thoughts
Let's see how it all sums up.
The answer is in your hands,
This class gives you the chance –
Take your time and say your say
Then Mrs ... will lead the way.

We started the course in spring
With reading Girl in the Swing.
We read a lot of stories
Which made us lots of worries.
Charlotte Gray was totally okay
But we looked up a lot of vocabulary
Which was very necessary

At the end we read Being Emily
And now we are like a family.

In the summer of 2010,
Armed with Cobuild, papers, pens,
We got ready for some stories
Without having any worries.
We enjoyed some super books,
Into which we'll have some further looks.

And one from me:

Read and interpret
Analyse and create
Inspired
Enthusiastic
You were all a great "date".

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Reading and Vocabulary Skills: Variety in English

Below is the description of a typical course, as handed out to students at the first meeting of class and discussed with them in detail.

Reading: Variety in English

Target Group: Students of English in all semesters. Priority will be given to lower semesters.

Course Aims: The main aim of this course is to give some insight into different kinds of English (register rather than regional varieties) and thus expand vocabulary, a good preparation for reading and enjoying literature. We will be taking a close look at a wide variety of texts, from descriptions of landscape, fairy tales, government documents and political speeches to ads and a TV comedy. An important element of the class is learning how to use a good learners dictionary (the Collins Cobuild Advanced Learners Dictionary) and how to learn vocabulary.

Materials: Students will be expected to bring a copy of the dictionary to class each week. All other materials will be provided.

Course requirements: Regular participation, and a final written test. Students in higher semesters will be required to complete an extra assignment. Details in class.

Some comments on the description above:

1) The reason for giving priority to students in lower semesters is that for first-year students of English it can be very daunting to be expected to understand everything from Jane Austen to Toni Morrison in Literature seminars. This class aims to show them not only how rich the tapestry of English is, but also to give them a key to understanding it. Through working on the texts in this course they begin to see the typical features of each kind of English covered here, and begin to hear “echoes” or recognise similarities e.g. between bureaucratic language and the language of 18th or 19th century novelists, or between fairy tales, the Bible and Shakespeare.

2) Dictionary: Please note that for many years the degree exams for students majoring in English included an essay and a translation from German into English. The English dictionary for use in these exams was specified. For that reason it made sense to encourage students from the very start to learn how to use it.

They could borrow one from the library but better still was having their own.

3) Course requirements: Having the students create a portfolio of their work, as in the course 'Dealing with texts' is also an option to be considered. The additional task for higher-semesters was to prepare a unit based on some kind of English of their choice.

Please note that encouraging students to talk to the people around them from the very start is an integral part of all the courses. They get to know each other and exchange contact details. I also ask them to write their first name on a card, large enough to be read across the room. I always did the same, except that I offered them my first and second name, so they could address me with either, whatever they felt comfortable with.

We also look at the Handout with some Help Expressions:

HELP Expressions

Here are some useful expressions for you in class – when things aren't going so well. They are the basics of (classroom) communication.

(zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz) Sorry, I haven't quite wakened up yet. (Ask my neighbour.)

Sorry, I didn't quite get that. Could you say it again please / Could you say it more slowly.

What did you want us to do?

[...]

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_helpexpressions.pdf].

Step by step through the course

Learning vocabulary:

During the first weeks of term the same ground is covered as in the other Reading and Vocabulary Skills classes: guessing meaning, dictionary work, ways of learning vocabulary, and of course the Help Expressions sheet, as all courses thrive on interaction and communication. This dictionary and vocabulary learning work is not an optional extra. It is an integral part of the course, absolutely necessary. Without it, the course would make no sense. Please see the course 'Dealing with texts' for a detailed step-by-step description.

Working with texts:

A good starting point for the text work in this class is to give the students a set of snippets from a wide variety of texts (recipe, horoscope, fairy tale, legal contract, 19th century novel, personal ad etc.) and ask if they can guess the text type and perhaps give a reason for their guess. Text layout can be a good clue, but they may also be aware of some lexical or grammatical features of different text types. Students soon realise that although they may not understand every single word, they still know a great deal.

Landscape and the language of the late 1800s

Something really challenging would be a passage of landscape description from Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'. Why choose Thomas Hardy for this class? Why this particular text?

The idea came from a colleague and it turned out to be very good. One of the great novelists of the late 1800s, Hardy's language could be described as typical of the age, slightly strange for contemporary readers, and definitely challenging for non-native speakers. What students learn from working on this text will help them read other great writers of the time.

His novels were set in the south west of England and he is well known for his detailed representation of landscape. The setting is essential for the story, and Hardy went to some pains to describe it.

There are some long, convoluted sentences in this passage, which gives an impression that everything is slow and placid. In terms of plot, however, his novels were dramatic and his ideas very 'modern'.

The village of Marlott lay amid the north-eastern undulations of the beautiful vale of Blakemore or Blackmoor aforesaid, an engirdled and secluded region, for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape-painter, though within a four hours' journey from London.

It is a vale whose acquaintance is best made by viewing it from the summits of the hills that surround it – except perhaps during the droughts of summer. An unguided ramble into its recesses in bad weather is apt to engender dissatisfaction with its narrow, tortuous, and miry ways.

[...] The atmosphere beneath is languorous, and is so tinged with azure that what artists call the middle distance partakes also of that hue, while the horizon beyond is of the deepest ultramarine. Arable lands are few and limited; with but slight exceptions the prospect is a broad rich mass of grass and trees, mantling minor hills and dales within the major. Such is the Vale of Blackmoor.

Hardy, Thomas (1963). *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Oxford: OUP, p.18. First published 1891.

At first sight the text looks daunting, with vale, aforesaid, engirdled, secluded, untrodden, all occurring in the first few lines. However, if the students are given some guidance with the reading, and the work is shared out, the difficulties become resolvable. The words on the page become colourful images and the students can in the end produce a drawing of the topography described.

First of all, the topic could be introduced by collecting words they know for describing any kind of landscape. When they read the text through, they should first concentrate on the words that they do know, before puzzling about the unfamiliar. This is really important. They could also begin to group them in categories. You could offer some categories if needed, such as:

Words connected with art: tinged, azure, middle distance [...]

Natural phenomena and country places: undulations, a vale, summits [...]
paler green,

Adjectives describing the nature of the ground or vegetation: miry, fertile,
calcareous [...]

Each group of students works on only one set, using their English-English dictionary, so that they can organise the words in some way, perhaps create subcategories, and explain to the others. For instance, within in the category art, colours could be grouped together. They may be able to sketch some of the things, or colour them appropriately and so on, to visualise them better.

The real task is to draw a topographical map of the region described. They can later compare their understanding of the text to photographs of the area and films of Hardy's novels.

Although the focus appears to be on the vocabulary of landscape, for this class it is important to draw attention to expressions such as “to behold”, “with but slight exceptions”, “from that which”, “apt to engender dissatisfaction”, “amid the undulations”, “partakes also of”, which are not technical terms but strike the contemporary reader as strange, rather formal. They may be able through intelligent guessing to translate these into contemporary English, and they will see some of them again in the units on Bureaucratic language, Biblical language and Fairy Tales.

In fact, puzzling out a text which is at first sight so daunting can give the students a boost in confidence.

Some students (much to my surprise) chose to create an additional worksheet on this text, including their own drawings and a crossword puzzle. Finding out more about the writer himself, the novel and its reception at the time, as well as about film versions of many of his novels, is another good optional task.

(Although it doesn't pose the same language difficulties as Hardy, if anyone is particularly interested in landscape description, I would recommend a contemporary non-fiction text which is truly dramatic and would lend itself well to being illustrated in a large poster. It is from the Chapter 'The Flyer to Cape Wrath' in 'The Kingdom by the Sea'. Here Theroux describes the landscape of the far north west of Scotland and the impression it made on him.

Some fantasies prepare us for reality. The sharp steep Cuillins were like mountains from a story-book - they had a dramatic, fairy-tale strangeness. But Cape Wrath was unimaginable [...].

Theroux, Paul (1983). *The Kingdom by the Sea: a journey around the coast of Great Britain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 284-286.)

Bureaucratic language

The main focus here is on the kind of formal language which some institutions and authorities use in communications with the general public, and which even native speakers tend to find obscure. The first text is from an old set of guidelines for applying for a British passport, still in use in the late 70s, early 80s.

HOME OFFICE FORM R2A
BRITISH NATIONALITY ACT 1948. Section 6(2)
APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION AS A CITIZEN OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIES MADE BY A WOMAN WHO
HAS BEEN MARRIED TO A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
AND COLONIES

[...]

3. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

[...]

4. OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

A successful applicant who is not already a citizen of a country of Her Majesty is Queen, nor a British subject by virtue of section 1 of the British Nationality Act 1965, will be required to take an oath of allegiance before a certificate of registration is issued. Further information about the taking of the oath will be sent to her if and when registration is effected.

[...]

NOTES FOR GUIDANCE

Please retain these Notes until you receive your passport (see Note 19)

United Kingdom Passport Application Form "A"

[...]

2. SECTION 2 should be completed in block capitals if you require a family passport, that is one granted to the husband or wife in which the wife or husband respectively is to be included.

[...]

16. DECLARATION

THIS MUST BE SIGNED IN THE PRESENCE OF ONE OF THE PERSONS INDICATED IN PARAGRAPH 2(1) OF THE LEAFLET

I (full name) do solemnly and sincerely declare that the foregoing particulars in this application relate to me and are true, and I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true.

[...]

Unfortunately I cannot trace the original, but similar language can be found here:

[<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/11-12/56/enacted?view=plain>].

[<http://www.uniset.ca/naty/BNA1965.htm>].

The tasks have to do with matching up this formal bureaucratic language with less formal equivalents, and taking a close look at how the two differ e.g. heavy use of nouns vs. verbs; Latin vs. English; single word verbs vs. phrasal verbs; passive vs. active; may, must vs. can, have to.

Formal, official, bureaucratic language.

(1) Can you find the English equivalent of 'Innenministerium'?

(2) In the texts the formal equivalents of the following words have been underlined. Can you find them?

husband or wife
people
to want, to need
to have (a passport)
personal details
under (preposition)
right (adjective)
[...]

(3) Can you find the formal, bureaucratic equivalent for the following:

1. You don't need to send the certificate of naturalisation or registration as long as you write down the number of the certificate.

2. You'll be told more about how to take the oath once you've been registered.

3. If you or your husband (or wife) were married before, you have

to prove that you really were married and really were divorced.

4. You can't have your husband (or your wife) on a family passport if they've got their own passport already.

5. If you got married on 1st January, 1949 or any day after that, and your wife isn't British, then she can't be put in a family passport.

6. Don't forget to sign your name where it tells you to on Page 1, at number 9.

7. One of the people it tells you in paragraph 2(1) in the leaflet has to watch you signing your name.

8. All the things it says here are about me and they're really true.

The answer to (3) 3 is:

If, therefore, either party to the marriage has or had been previously married, acceptable evidence of the solemnisation and termination of each of those marriages must be seen.

The answer to (3) 8 is:

I (full name) do solemnly and sincerely declare that the foregoing particulars in this application relate to me and are true, and I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true.

This is followed by having a look at the Plain English Campaign, where "Plain English" is defined as "language that the intended audience can understand and act upon from a single reading" and examples are given of "translating" into plain English.

[www.plainenglish.co.uk].

Here it is also interesting to look at attempts made in Germany to turn bureaucratic non-sense into comprehensible reader-friendly language.

Examples:

Beger, Julian (2010, 9 February). Schluss mit Beamtendeutsch. *Südkurier*.

Bebber, Frank von (2008, 28 May). Jetzt heißt's Amtsdeutsch a.D. *Badische Zeitung*.

An interesting contemporary text, with much more reader-friendly English, is the information on becoming a British citizen (naturalisation), available from the UK government website. For the students this is a really interesting topic as they now have the knowledge and the vocabulary to compare the process of naturalisation with the equivalent in Germany (Einbürgerung). One student took passages from the official texts for both countries and made a matching exercise, which of course led to a good discussion. Students can also print off the current British application forms and fill them in.

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-to-naturalise-as-a-british-citizen-form-an>].

The next step is to look at how bureaucratic language can be used to mystify people. An appropriate way of doing this in a vocabulary class is by working on the episode 'The Right to Know' from the British satirical sitcom 'Yes Minister', first shown on BBC TV between 1980 and 1984.

Jay, Antony & Lynn, Jonathan BBC Yes Minister, Series 1, Episode 6, The Right to Know, first broadcast 31.03.1980. The complete series of 44 episodes is currently showing on the German TV channel ARD-Alpha (2019). (By the way, Episode 5, The Writing on the Wall, is concerned with Britain's relationship with Europe. It could not be more timely.)

As the title indicates, the main topic is the right to know, and involves issues such as the manipulation of people, withholding of information and spreading of disinformation. This is a topic which is as important today as it was when this series was first made. Here it is embedded in a power struggle between high-ranking Civil Servant (appointed) and Cabinet Minister (elected). But what makes it particularly useful in this class is the part that language plays in this power struggle. In one key scene the Minister himself does not understand what the Civil Servant, Sir Humphrey, is saying to him. It is one single sentence, with sixty-five words, most of them nouns. Sir Humphrey:

The traditional allocation of executive responsibilities has always been so determined as to liberate the ministerial incumbent from the administrative minutiae, by devolving the managerial functions to those whose experience and qualifications have better formed them for the performance of such humble offices, thereby releasing their political overlords for the more onerous duties and profound deliberations which are the inevitable concomitant of their exalted position.

The whole film is clever, with a great deal of play on words such as: the trots/the Trots; a wide-angle lens/what angle will they take; a lie in/a sit in; a loss/a significant loss. Through guided work on the language students are in the end able to understand the message and appreciate the humour, and also comment on the film's relevance for their own time.

First there is a Vocabulary check sheet to work on at home, with vocabulary organised according to the topic in each scene, i.e. more or less in chronological order.

Vocabulary check

(1) an underling
to be subjected to outside scrutiny
red boxes
[...]

(2) badgers
bodgers
a vital part of Britain's heritage
a threatened species [...]

(3) back-biting
buck-passing
to badger someone
to withhold information
[...]

(4) a lie in
a sit in
the trots
the Trots
to kowtow
[...]

(5) to swamp someone with useless information
to repeal an Act
a shocking indictment
when the chips are down
[...]

In class we listened to the opening scene with Sir Humphrey, the Minister's Permanent Under-Secretary of State, and Bernard, the Minister's Private Secretary. First there is silence, then laughter from the studio audience, and then the dialogue begins.

The students then get the script of the opening scene, with blanks, to read through, and perhaps even begin to imagine what words could be missing. This scene is the key to the whole episode.

Yes Minister. The Right to Know. Listening task. Script of the opening scene with gaps.

Sir Humphrey: Bernard, Minister not in yet?

Bernard: Oh eh yes, he's in his office, having a meeting.

: What about?

: Eh nothing very important.

: I see. And what was that meeting in there yesterday?

: Eh the minister was just _____ procedures for _____ him on answers to parliamentary questions.

: But there were principals present and assistant secretaries and other assorted _____

: Eh just the ones who actually supply him with the actual information actually, Sir Humphrey.

: Bernard, this has to be stopped at once.

: Why?

[...]

: Would you say that the minister is starting to run the department?

: Oh yes indeed. Actually things are going pretty well actually.

: No Bernard, when a minister actually starts to run his department things are not going pretty well actually. They're actually going pretty badly.

[...].

Then there is a listening task, to try to fill the blanks in the script. Usually two or three listenings are needed. In between each one the students can consult with their neighbours and then concentrate their listening on specific blanks.

Missing words are: reviewing; briefing; underlings; undermined; folly; innovations; scrutiny; advocate; plausible; relations man; steering; breadwinner; review; procedures.

Before we watch the whole film the students are asked to read through the quote from Sir Humphrey again so that they will recognise it when they hear it. They will see the expression on the Minister's face, and hear the translation into Plain English. In fact, the sixty-five words of Sir Humphrey are reduced to eight, all of which are clearly understandable. There is now a clear subject and a clear predicate:

/You /are not here to run the Department/.

A rather surprising and upsetting message for the Minister.

After the film the students enjoyed doing a dramatic reading of the parts of Sir Humphrey and Bernard from the script.

As back-up for the whole unit there is the text of the film in diary form:

Jay, Antony & Lynn, Jonathan (1983). *The complete Yes Minister: the diaries of a cabinet minister by the Right Hon. James Hacker MP*. London: BBC Books, 124-148.

Another excellent source of strange, stilted language is the film 'The Hotel Inspectors' from the 'Fawlty Towers' TV series, as most of the humour comes from the hotel owner, Basil Fawlty, mocking the totally inappropriate formal and sometimes antiquated English (Fear not, kind sir, it matters not one whit) of one of the hotel guests. Although this film can be criticised for some of its content, its strength for the advanced level language class is the way the language carries the story. It became one of the classics of sitcom, and is available on DVD.

Cleese, John & Booth, Connie (1975). *Fawlty Towers: the Hotel Inspectors*. Season 1, episode 4.

Cleese, John & Booth, Connie (1989). *The Complete Fawlty Towers*. London: Methuen Mandarin.

Some language preparation work

“The 'eminently certifiable' Basil Fawlty and his wife, Sybil, run the Fawlty Towers Hotel. In this episode Basil is terrified by the news that hotel inspectors are in the area - and well he might be. The awful probability occurs to him that the eccentric guest to whom he has been so appallingly offensive may be one of the officials. His ranting turns to a pathetic fawning - but has he got the right man?”

Given the above outline of the episode from the video cover from 1983, students can talk about the words below with their neighbours and do some dictionary work.

Could you (.....), if it won't put you out
I hate to trespass further on your valuable time
my little nest of vipers
P.O.
P.off.
my psychic powers must be below par this morning
[...]

Extracts:

1) Guest: This afternoon I have to visit the town for sundry purposes which would be of no interest to you, I'm quite sure, but nevertheless I shall require your aid in getting for me some sort of transport, some hired vehicle that is, to get me to my first port of call.

Basil: Are you all right?

2) Guest: (...) In a nutshell.

Basil: Case, more likely

[...].

With all this preparation they can now enjoy the video.

Biblical Language

As most students are familiar with the language of the German Bible with regard to the celebration of Christmas, we first collect words and phrases in German. They are then given a short passage from the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter 2, taken from the Authorised Version, published in 1611, which I read aloud for them so that they can hear the rhythms of it. It is interesting for the students when they realise that this version was written at the time Shakespeare was writing.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

[...]

9 And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger [...].

The Holy Bible. Authorised King James Version (1953). William Collins Sons and Company Limited: Glasgow, 55-56. First published 1611.

They have a worksheet to point their attention to some typical features of “biblical” or religious language. It is not so easy for German speakers to see the differences between this and contemporary English as some of the language is very close to contemporary German e.g “and all came to be taxed”, “fear not”.

Biblical Language worksheet

St Luke, 2

- (1) Look for pronouns which are different from contemporary English.
- (2) Look for prepositions which are different:
e.g. "everyone into his own city".
- (3) The most common conjunction is clearly "and". Can you find a conjunction which is not so commonly used today.
- (4) Verb conjugations: find the third person singular of "have".
- (5) Some words are still used today, but with a different meaning. Can you find them? e.g. "great" (with child).
- (6) The structure "being great with child" (verb "to be" in a participial clause) still exists today, but it has a different meaning. What is the contemporary meaning?
- (7) Some words, like "lo", "behold" are hardly used at all today.
- (8) There are several structures in here which probably sound familiar to your (German) ears, but sound old-fashioned to an English ear. Can you identify them??? That's hard!
- (9) There are two places where the simple past is used, but today we would use the past perfect

The text from the Authorized Version can also be compared to a more contemporary version as in 'Good News for Modern Man'.

Bratcher, R. G. (1966). *Good News for Modern Man*. Collins.

At that time Emperor Augustus sent out an order for all the citizens of the Empire to register themselves for the census.

2 When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria.

3 Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own town.

[...]

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid,

10 but the angel said to them: “Don't be afraid! For I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people.”

[...].

To help the students understand “Shakespearean” English, there are also passages from the wedding of Charles and Diana in 1981, which used the traditional ceremony of matrimony of the Church of England. For example:

The Archbishop of Canterbury:

I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful.

Charles Philip Arthur George, wilt thou have this woman to they wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

[<http://www.researchhistory.org/2011/04/28/read-the-entire-royal-wedding-program-from-charles-and-dianas-nuptials/>].

The first paragraph above can be found in the 19th century novel *Jane Eyre*, where it is used to great effect, as in this case the response of a witness was:

The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment.

Brontë, Charlotte, (1979). *Jane Eyre*. London: Heron Books. Chapter XXVI. First Published 1846.

In linguistic contrast, a more recent royal wedding, Harry and Meghan in 2018:

The declarations

FIRST, I am required to ask anyone present who knows a reason why these persons may not lawfully marry, to declare it now.

The Archbishop says to the Couple

THE vows you are about to take are to be made in the presence of God, who is judge of all and knows all the secrets of our hearts; therefore if either of you knows a reason why you may not lawfully marry, you must declare it now.

The Archbishop says to the Bridegroom

HARRY, will you take MEGHAN to be your wife?

Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

[www.express.co.uk/news/royal/961837/Royal-wedding-order-of-service-in-full].

Out of this unit on biblical language grew a multi-lingual collection of verses taken from the Gospel according to St Luke, chapter 2. Students brought me the text in their mother tongue or any other language they were learning including Latin, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Rumanian, Greek, Hungarian, Portuguese, as well as English.

Thus each student could read out their 'own' language, a very positive experience for them.

Fairy Tales

First we considered the typical elements of fairy tales, and the typical language. I encouraged them to do this in their mother tongue, and then perhaps add anything they know in English.

Next they have the task of re-assembling a fairy tale, giving it a title, reading through the complete text and talking about the language, with the help of a worksheet. Here they will discover some similarities to the language of the Bible. I chose to use *The Frog Prince*, one of Grimms' fairy tales.

In the old days when wishing could still cast a spell, there lived a King whose daughters were all beautiful, but the youngest was so lovely that the sun itself, which had looked on so many things, was amazed whenever it shone on her face. Near the King's castle was a large dark forest, and in that forest there was a well under an old lime-tree. When the day was very warm, the King's youngest child would go out into the forest and sit down on the edge of the cool fountain [...].

Vařecha, Vladimir (Translator) (1979), *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. London: Cathay Books.

Fairy Tales worksheet Characteristic language

"*Once upon a time there was*" - everyone recognises this immediately as typical fairy tale language, but there are many other interesting characteristics in terms of language. Remember that these tales were written down at least a hundred years ago, and probably came into existence long before then, and that the language has changed since then, and many different translations have been made.

(1) Individual words (lexical items): some words look familiar but have a different meaning

e.g. *to deliver*, (noun) *deliverance*. We know "*have your pizza delivered to your door*" and the noun "*delivery*" in "*pizza delivery service*", but the old meaning of *deliver* is to *free from*, to *save from*, and the noun is *deliverance*.

e.g. *thus*, which we know as a formal word for *so*, *therefore* is used here with the meaning of *in such a way*.

Also, many words are used in fairy tales which, if used in everyday language today, would strike us as very formal e.g. *to hasten* (to hurry), *to descend* (to go down), *lest* (in case).

(2) Whole expressions: "*it came to pass that the queen fell ill*"
Contemporary narrative would be "*The queen fell ill.*"

"*made a hearty meal*" (*ate hungrily, had a good meal*).

"*What ails you?*" (Today *what's the matter, what's wrong*).

figurative language e.g.: and threw him *with all her might and main* (*with all her strength*)

(3) Word order: Normal English word order is subject then predicate. Here you will find things like "*And behind stood faithful Henry.*" Why?

(4) Prepositions, relative pronouns, conjunctions: e.g. "she looked round to see *whence* the voice came." (Today it would be *from where* or *where* the voice came *from*.)
e.g. "*whereupon* the King said" would be "*after this* the King said...."

(5) The present simple is frequently used to express something ongoing whereas today we would use present progressive e.g. Faithful Henry: "The wheel *does not break*. It is the bands round my heart."

(6) The coordinating conjunction *and* seems to be used a lot. The subordinating conjunction *for* is used where today we would use *as* or *because*.

(7) Modal verbs are used differently
e.g. "I promised him he should be my companion" (Today: I promised him he *would be* my companion)
e.g. "Move your little golden plate nearer *that we may eat together*" (Today: *so that we can eat*).
e.g. "*He who* helped you when you were in need *shall not* later be despised" (Today: Whoever helped you when you were in need *should not be/must not be* despised).
e.g. "Now you *shall* be quiet, you hideous frog" (Today: Now you *will be* quiet).

(8) Negation: "It *is no* giant, but an ugly frog." (Today this would be It *isn't a* giant).

(9) Look and see how "would (do)" is used – what does it mean here?

As fairy tales also lend themselves well to being turned into gap texts, this could be an additional task, with a different fairy tale.

Political speeches

The two speeches here, one by the then UK PM Tony Blair, the other by US President W. Bush, both on the same day, December 14, 2003, with respect to the same event, were ideal for the course at that particular time.

And for some years after. The students knew about the event, and they had some idea of the characteristics of the two speakers.

PM Blair

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3319097.stm].

[<https://www.c-span.org/video/?179054-1/saddam-husseini-capture>].

President Bush

[<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/12/14/sprj.irq.bush.transcript/>].

[<https://www.c-span.org/video/?179571-1/presidential-address>].

First we talked about the event and about their expectations as to content and language of each speech. Then they were given the transcripts of the speeches to re-assemble. This brought some surprises e.g. the lack of overtly religious language in Bush's speech.

Next they were asked to read carefully and make notes for each speech separately of instances of political, military, religious, economic language and so on, and also to collect words in bundles of negative/positive. Then they compared: Who used more political language, who used more military, more religious and so on. Who focused more on the positive. Who did Blair thank but Bush did not.

To the surprise of the students this task uncovered the amount of religious language in Blair's speech. Through focussing on the vocabulary first, the students came to understand the differences between Blair and Bush in terms of their values, beliefs and policy.

Campus life

This is obviously a topic in which the students are always interested, and if they learn some vocabulary for it, they can talk about their own experience better. For the purposes of this class print information is most suitable, nowadays readily available in the form of glossy brochures attracting international students.

The example given here is the first brochure I ever used, but not the last. No matter what brochure you use, the approach can remain the same. It was from a partner university, the University of East Anglia in England, published in the early 80s. The UEA was similar in size, location and age to Konstanz. I selected only the part which has to do with 'Life at UEA', which is after all the closest to the students' hearts.

First the students are given a list of headings from the section 'Life at UEA' so that they can begin to imagine what they will read, and note down expectations. Later they will be able to note relevant vocabulary here.

Life at UEA: Norwich and East Anglia; Student housing; Sport; Leisure; Welfare; Counselling; University chaplains; Health; Student parents; Students' Union.

Next there is the text. Students don't have to read from start to finish, but can begin by choosing the topics they are most interested in.

Life at UEA

The University of East Anglia is a lively academic town and, at the same time, an outstanding work of architecture. It is built on over 270 acres of beautiful parkland on the south-facing slopes of the

Yare Valley, on the western outskirts of Norwich. [...] so how do I get involved? Every student is able to join any society, stand for office and vote in elections, and help determine policy. You can't help but be involved in some way with the SU - it could be playing sport, joining a society, going to a concert, shopping in the supermarket, or attending a demo.

And a worksheet:

University Campus life Language Focus

1) Can you list the different kinds of accommodation mentioned in this text, then categorise them. Which would you personally prefer?

2) Prepositions: to be concerned students` welfare; to have responsibility educational standards [...].

3) What is the meaning of "overseas" as used here?

4) Choose a word from the list below which means more or less the opposite of:

ample/ appointed/ busy/ indoor/ married/ on campus/ permanent/
postgraduate/ remedial/ supply/ unique

demand (noun)

elected

external

preventive

[...]

5) Who helps the UEA students with the following problems:

social; personal; emotional; educational; medical; financial; legal.

The students are not initially given the date of publication. Although there are one or two tell-tale signs of its age, they are usually quite surprised to hear that it was published in the early 1980s, mainly because of the range of facilities and support already available to students.

Apart from comparing what they have found out about the UEA at that time to their own university now, they can also look at the websites of both. This is a good way of recycling vocabulary. They can also talk about how information technology has meantime changed some aspects of student life.

Another good source of general university vocabulary is the article 'Another country', written by a young student from Edinburgh on an exchange programme in Berlin. The vocabulary is useful e.g. getting a degree; is in his sixth year of a journalism degree; distance between students and teaching staff; a pastoral system; to cram. As it is embedded in a comparison of two systems, it lends itself well to mind-mapping. Since it was published in 2003 it is clear that some things have meantime changed in Germany, which students can comment on and discuss.

To your everyday undergraduate Brit, university in Germany sounds like the ultimate higher education dream. For the sometime slacker, periodically panicking over the doom of impending deadlines, the promise of a life without tuition fees and compulsory end of year exams is pure academic nirvana. Especially with no danger of ever being kicked out for not handing in work on time and next to no pressure from on high to finish a degree within an allotted time period [...].

Pidd, Helen (2003, 17 June). Another Country. As Berlin's universities reach crisis point, Helen Pidd describes her German education experience. *The Guardian*.

[<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/jun/17/highereducation.internationalstudents>]

Vulgar language

'The Burn' is a short story by Ian Kelman. It begins "Fucking bogging mud man a swamp, an actual swamp, it was fucking a joke."

Kelman, Ian (1991). *The Burn*. London: Secker & Warburg, p.239 - 244.

For the students it is a rather strange experience being expected to take a serious look at a piece of contemporary fiction which uses a great deal of vulgar language.

With the help of a worksheet they can gradually find out what the story is about, and then comment on the effect of the language used. This is quite an enlightening experience, especially for those who, at the beginning, are unwilling to accept a text written in "bad language".

Vulgar language James Kelman: The Burn.

Some words to help you:

Some of the words are standard Scottish English words e.g a burn, a bog;

some reflect regional/city dialect pronunciation e.g. "the polis" (stress on the first syllable)

some are regional/city dialect grammar e.g. "firemen done it", "nobody telt them" (told)

A burn: a stream

A bog: soft marshy land

Wee: small

They cut off but,: But they cut off

The polis: the police

A lassie: a young girl

Aye being warned: always being warned

To greet: to cry (weinen)

No just her: not just her

Some folk: some people

Nobody telt them: nobody told them

Aye he could do with a drink: Yes he could [...]

Your first task is to read through quickly (without worrying about understanding every single word) and see if you can find out the following:

Where is this person?

Where is he going?

What is it that happened before and that he remembers now?

Can you read it again and try to find out more about this person:

e.g. why is he going where he's going?

What are the circumstances of his life?

Now read again and find the following:

Fucking bogging mud man (p239)

It was fucking a joke

fucking hopeless

Imagine if he had lost the fucking boot

[...]

Send for the fucking polis (242)

The suit all fucking mud

No fucking chance

Going for a fucking job

You just couldn't fucking win

[...]

The wee fucking lassie (243)

So fucking awful hard

He needed his fucking wife

He needed her so fucking close he felt so fucking Christ man the sandpit

For ages, fucking ages

He just could never fucking handle it

[...]

All this rain and he was dying of fucking thirst (244)

He was going to be fucking alone

He fucking knew it

It was a fucking racing certainty

Try to decide how the word "fucking" is used in the phrases above, or rather its grammatical functions. Make five columns Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Other, and list all the examples in the appropriate column.

Remember that adverb means how you do something e.g. do it carefully: he thought carefully before he spoke; he thought very carefully.

Adjective means how you are e.g. be CLEAR: he is a clear speaker; he is a very clear speaker.

What feelings is this person expressing?

Finally, ask yourselves what effect the use of the word "fucking" in this story now has on you. There is no right answer.

Clothing and appearance

The texts are all taken from fiction and the main task is to draw the characters described. One really interesting text is the description of a late Victorian woman in outdoor clothing. It is in the opening pages of 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'.

The young lady was dressed in the height of fashion, for another wind was blowing in 1867: the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet [...]. The colours of the young lady's clothes would strike us today as distinctly strident; but the world was then in the first fine throes of the discovery of aniline dyes.

Fowles, John (1971). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. London: Panther.
The students' drawings can be compared to the film director's interpretation:
Reisz, Karel (Dir.) (2009). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Examples of short passages from literature chosen by students themselves are from Bram Stoker's 'Dracula', and Charlotte Brontë's 'Jane Eyre'. The other students are not given the titles of these two texts before they start work, but they might be able to guess. If students work on their illustrations in small groups, they can later enjoy comparing and judging the efforts of the others, using the vocabulary given. Avid readers enjoy looking for more passages of this type, so it easy to build up a collection.

(1) Within, stood a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere [...] His face was a strong - a very strong - aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere [...]. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extreme pallor.

Stoker, Bram (2011). *Dracula*. Oxford: OUP, 18-20. First published 1901.

(2) Two young ladies appeared before me; one very tall, very thin too, with a sallow face and severe mien. There was something ascetic in her look, which was augmented by the extreme plainness of a straight-skirted, black, stuff dress, a starched linen collar, hair combed away from the temples, and the nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix [...]. The other was [...] a full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as waxwork; with handsome and regular features, languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair [...].

Brontë, Charlotte (1979). *Jane Eyre*. London: Heron Books. Chapter XXI. First published 1846.

The language of advertising

I chose two texts for skin care, one contemporary and one from 1900. Of course the whole presentation of the products was very different and an automatic trigger for discussion, but here we concentrated on the language used. In each, we studied the sentence structure then collected nouns, verbs and adjectives, marking them for positive or negative. On the basis of this the students can comment on the overall approach of each ad and how each tried to attract the potential customer. It was a really interesting topic that could be expanded into a discussion of advertising.

Any contemporary ad can be used. The old one was a facsimile:

Face Humours
Pimples, Blackheads, Red Rough, Oily Skin
prevented by
CUTICURA SOAP

Millions of Women Use CUTICURA SOAP, exclusively for preserving, purifying and beautifying the skin, for cleansing the scalp of crusts, scales and dandruff, and the stopping of falling hair, for softening, whitening and soothing red, rough and sore hands, in the form of baths for annoying irritations, inflammations and chafings [...]

Daily Mail (1900, 4 July), a facsimile in a special edition of the paper in 2000.

Mixed

The Life of Brian

Having looked at a wide variety of “Englishes” the students are now in a position to understand and appreciate the wit and intelligence of the language in the film.

Jones, Terry (Dir.) (2003). *The Life of Brian*.

Chapman, Graham, Cleese, John, Gilliam Terry, et al, (1979). *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. London: Eyre Methuen.

The Life of Brian - a worksheet.

Go and watch it sometime, in English, for pleasure! The opening scenes are brilliant, particularly enjoyable if you have a feeling for different registers of English. You will find:

Religious language

A housewife talking

An academic

The language of mother and child

Vulgar language

A member of a political grouping talking.

[...]

Here are some quotes as examples of the above. Which is which?

If you're dropping by again do pop in.
... out of their bloody minds ...
How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail.
Will you be quiet?
Stop picking your nose.
It's not meant to be taken literally. Obviously it refers to any
manufacturers of dairy products.
I'll take you to the fucking cleaners.
That's nice. I'm glad they're getting something 'cos they have had a
hell of a time.
Silly bitch.
Blessed is just about everyone with a vested interest in the status
quo.
What he blatantly fails to appreciate is that it is the Meek who are
the problem.
It's tea time.
Praise unto you.
[...]

When you watch it, see who actually says these things and in
which context!

Others

Depending on the interests of the students we also looked at an extract from a Shakespeare play (linked to Fairy Tales and Biblical language); and regional varieties in novels e.g. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Lawrence 1928, 1960); *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell 1936, 1960); *The Color Purple* (Walker 1982); *Being Emily* (Donovan 2008).

If students from higher semesters attended the course their additional task was to prepare a unit for the class based on some kind of English of their choice. Topics chosen included the language of literary and film criticism, the language of racism in the media, the language of love songs and poems across the centuries.

End-of-term

The end of term is unfortunately usually associated with tests. Here is an example of an end-of-term test for this course. It involves recognition of vocabulary.

READING: Variety in English

What we've looked at this semester:
Skills: Using the Collins Cobuild; Learning Vocabulary.

Texts:

- (1) Description of landscape: Thomas Hardy
 - (2) "Officialese" Bureaucratic language:
 - (a) Passport application forms etc.
 - (b) Yes, Minister: The Right to Know
 - (3) Religious language:
 - (a) The Gospel according to St. Luke
 - (b) The Wedding Ceremony
 - (4) Fairy tales: The Frog Prince
 - (5) Political speeches: Tony Blair and George Bush
 - (6) University life: Another Country and UEA Campus
 - (7) Personal description: extracts from literature
 - (8) Cosmetics ads
- [...]

Task 1. The following phrases have been taken from the texts we looked at this semester. Can you trace them from memory? All you need to do is write the number of the unit that they came from e.g. number 8 or 5 or 3b.

- (1) a noon deadline means exactly that (...)
 - (2) and all they that heard it wondered at those things
 - (3) before the status of the subsequent marriage can be considered
 - (4) however hard you cram
 - (5) lest it should burst with grief
 - (6) the giving of false information ... can lead to imprisonment
 - (7) the great central arch and gateway were inserted
- [...]

Task 2. Where would you expect to see the following words? Can you sort them into word "fields" (registers)?

a briefing	the rule of law
sovereignty	thee
sallow	the Union
servicemen	whereupon
societies and clubs	[...]

Religious language

Architecture

University life

Fairy tales

Gardens/Plants/Landscape

Legal/official/bureaucratic language

Political

[...]

Task 3. Which of these words are commonly considered to be something positive or have positive connotations (+); which are considered negative (-)?

ample God Almighty a lie in appalling futile
casualties to mock to nurture Almighty God [...]

Task 4. Verbs and nouns. Link up the following verbs and nouns/noun phrases. Choose a suitable verb from the list below and write it beside the noun phrase.

Verbs:

cast
cater for
fulfil
commit
undermine
[...]

Noun (phrases):

a certificate of registration
a crime
a spell
an oath
someone's authority
[...]

Task 5. Mark clearly the stressed syllable by underlining it, e.g.

teacher
category informal sovereignty appropriate (adj.) casualties
analysis [...]

Evaluation of the class

The end of term is also the time when students can sum up their experience of the course, usually in the form of an evaluation sheet, but also by writing a short poem.

The evaluation and feedback sheet was short, uncomplicated, and gave the students the chance to offer their own ideas. Some of the questions are below; scales were provided from 'really interesting' to 'dead boring', or 'a lot' to 'very little', or 'Yes', 'Partially', 'No'.

Please note that the questions have to be chosen to suit the particular class, and to suit your interests as the teacher: what would be helpful for you to know?

How would you rate this course from really interesting to dead boring?

How much do you feel you learnt?

Be honest! How much effort did you put into this course?

How motivated do you feel to go on learning English?

Given the aims of this course (Please read the course description carefully!): Do you think we/you reached them?
What would you definitely have liked more/less of?
Any other comments on this course?
Would you recommend this course to other students?
If you could give first year students of English some advice, what would it be?

The other way is to write – quickly and spontaneously – with a partner or in a group, a short poem on their experience of the course. This is definitely more fun, and is shared, as I get the students to put their poems on an overhead and 'present' them. I also write them up and distribute them later. In general this kind of poem can only be fully appreciated by the insider. The sample poems below, though very short and simple in style, are really very clever. They may at least give an idea of the fun or the humorously voiced frustration.

Variety in English

Waking up Wednesday morning
Staggering into class
Nice weather outside
But we have to pass
A final exam
With the help of Cobuild
What a mess!

To clap or to get the clap,
That's the variety rap.
Learning words from step to step
By drawing and collecting.

Wednesday morning, 10 am,
English variety is on the plan
The English language has so many words
That it sometimes hurts
So now we have the clue
On how to do.
Political speeches or Biblical language are now easy to tell apart,
We even learnt how to draw some art.

WHERE: E719
WHEN: Whenever the sun decides
To shine and the
Workers start making noise.
WHAT: Look it up in a dictionary!
WHO: Look at our name cards.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Reading and Vocabulary Skills: Vocabulary in Current Affairs

This course concept shares the same starting point with the others, namely guessing meaning, learning how to use the dictionary effectively, and learning how to learn vocabulary for the long term. The special feature of this course is that students get the chance to choose a topic and prepare it for discussion in class.

The Course description as handed out to the students at the first meeting and discussed in detail:

Target Group: All students who are interested in talking about current affairs in English.

Course Aims: This class has two main aspects, closely combined. At the beginning participants will learn how to use dictionaries effectively and consider strategies for effective long-term learning of vocabulary. Building on this, the focus will then be on discussing topics of genuine current interest, which gives participants the chance to acquire and use vocabulary in context.

After the first introductory weeks the topics for discussion will be chosen by the participants, working outside class in small groups. Each group will decide not just on the topic but also on ways of 'teaching' the vocabulary needed and setting off a good discussion. They will plan, organise and run a whole session of the class. The planning and organising have to be discussed in a tutorial.

Materials: Participants will be expected to bring a copy of a good English-English dictionary to class each week, if possible the Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary. All other materials are freely available, on the Internet, in the library (newspapers, journals, magazines) or in the Self-Access centre, including TV in English and collections of BBC and ITN news broadcasts. There is also my archive.

Course requirements: Regular active participation, organising and running of one session, final test.

'Rules of the Game' for running a session of the class

I suggest we organise the class on the basis of small group preparation. Each group has the task of planning, preparing and running one session of the class.

1) Team members should meet together outside class to brainstorm, collect information and ideas, and decide on a current topic of real interest for you.

- 2) You should choose a topic
 - you know a little about already
 - you want to find out more about
 - you want to learn the English vocabulary for
 - you want to exchange opinions on in English

- 3) Find an interesting way of
 - 'presenting' some background information to the class
 - 'presenting' some relevant vocabulary
 - stimulating a discussion on it, e.g. by asking good questions.

Some notes on the course description.

1) Why this dictionary? For many years the degree exams for students majoring in English included an essay and a translation German-English. The English dictionary for use in these exams was specified. For that reason it made sense to encourage students from the very start to learn how to use it. They could borrow one from the library but better still was having their own.

2) Encouraging students to talk to the people around them from the very start is an integral part of all the courses. They get to know each other and exchange contact details. I also ask them to write their first name on a card, large enough to be read across the room. I always did the same, except that I offered them my first and second name, so they could address me with either, whatever they felt comfortable with.

Learning vocabulary:

During the first weeks of term the same ground is covered as in the other Reading and Vocabulary Skills classes: guessing meaning, dictionary work, ways of learning vocabulary, and of course the 'Help Expressions' sheet as all courses thrive on interaction and communication. This work is absolutely essential for the students' progress in English; it helps them to learn vocabulary effectively themselves and it helps them to understand how they can run a session of the class effectively. Starting work on topics without this preparation makes no sense.

Please see the course 'Dealing with texts' for a detailed step-by-step description.

Working on a topic:

Before the students start work on a topic of their own choice, I choose a topic which I am sure they will be interested in. I organise it in such a way that they can see what interesting things can be done in class apart from discussing, and certainly not spending ninety minutes reading a text. It also gives them some ideas of how to focus on vocabulary in context, not in lists.

The following is an example of a topic that worked very well:

Family values

'Family – Love – Morality', these were the words on a car sticker. It really caught my attention and I wondered what it meant to the car owner, and to me, and how other people would interpret it. How would my students interpret it?

One way of approaching the topic is via a quiz e.g. 'Your Childhood' (Ladousse 1983). This is a multiple choice, based on people's experience of their childhood. It touches on the general conditions at home, watching tv, leisure activities, pocket money, bedtime, eating habits, housework, punishment, communication with parents, inviting friends. I adapted this and added one or two points e.g.

- Did you have a Mum and Dad?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Sometimes/ For a while

Although the original quiz was intended for partner work in class, I preferred to let students look at it at home. It tunes them in to the topic of the family, without obliging them to talk about something which might be uncomfortable. Ladousse, Gillian(1983). *Speaking personally: quizzes and questionnaires for fluency practice*. Cambridge: CUP.

I put the words of the sticker on the board: 'Family – Love – Morality' so that it was always present. At some stage I added the following:

The family's apparent breakdown has been blamed for everything from rising crime to the erosion of morality and the murder of [...]

Source: *Scotland on Sunday*, date unknown. This referred to the much discussed case in England of a toddler murdered by two young boys in 1993.

The Family is an interesting and productive topic, always. Or rather, it is a big issue. Everybody knows something about it, has their own usually strong opinions on it, but they do not know how to define it. When a politician, or a judge or a civil rights activist or an ordinary citizen talk about the family and family values it is not at all clear what they mean; family and family values may mean very different things to each person.

The students' first task in class is to puzzle and argue in small groups until they have a definition of family that their group is happy with. Collected on the board these gave rise to further discussion.

The first text we used was 'Family values a year in the spotlight' (with the year deleted, to be guessed), to re-assemble.

It is not going to go away. The family, even for those think it is disintegrating, will still be one of the hot issues of (1994). It is the

United National International Year of the Family, and already the arguments have started.

Attention is likely to be unprecedented because it's one of the most politically sensitive, and unresolved, subjects of last year [...] Sex researcher Shere Hite says the family is the issue of the decade. We must stop forcing people to live in nuclear families: "It never worked anyway," she said yesterday [...].

Kinnes, Sally & Clancy, Ray (1994). Family values a year in the spotlight. *Scotland on Sunday*. (Exact date unknown)

This was followed by a language focus task which included items such as:

Can you find in the text another word for:
manipulated; a problematic and really important topic; falling apart;
argue, contend; there's-never-been-anything-like-it-before; a period
of ten years; someone belonging to the British Conservative Party
[...].

And can you find in the text the English for:
Notar; Stadtrat; den Rücktritt fordern; ein vorbereitender Ausschuss
[...].

(The occasional use of German for particular terminology was welcomed.)

The article above was in fact part of a larger feature on the family:

Your chance to vote. Is the family under threat? Are your children getting a better upbringing than you? Inside, we pose four key questions on the issue which will continue to dominate debate this year [...].

Other texts were added to expand the ideas and vocabulary e.g. Innes (1993). This put the focus on single mothers and added vocabulary such as social stigma, a backlash against single parents, to be penalised for something, women bringing up children on their own, no other close family, to face discrimination, to devalue successful one-parent families. It, too, was done as a jumbled text to be re-assembled. This is the kind of task that the students always enjoyed.

Innes, Sue (1993, 20 June). The folly of singling out single mothers. *Scotland on Sunday*.

Another kind of task is where students are given only the opening paragraphs of an article, which are enough to give a good idea of the topic and the arguments. In the example below (Fraser 2000) the last of the paragraphs given is cut off abruptly, not only mid-sentence, but also mid-word. The question is: How do you think this sentence continues, and the whole text goes on? Can you give the article a good title?

Students definitely want to read on later to find out more!

GAY fathers are better parents than heterosexual fathers, according to the findings of the first UK research into male homosexuals and their children.

Dr Gill Dunne, a senior research fellow at the London School of Economics, has completed a study into 100 gay fathers and believes they are more compassionate, nurturing, understanding and better able to create lasting relationships with their children [...] She said: "This is a group of people who have been vilified by society but on the basis of my research we have a great deal to learn from them." Dunne dismissed fears that gay men were likely in some way to "pass on" or promote homosexuality in their children, saying there was no ev-

Fraser, Stephen (2000, 9 January). Gay men make better fathers, claims research. *Scotland on Sunday*.

'Simpsons keeping family values alive. American academic defends dysfunctional cartoon characters as an example to us all.' This is an article with a provocative message and a great deal of useful vocabulary. *Scotland on Sunday* (2000, 2 April). p. 3. Writer's name unknown.

Please note that the texts given here as examples are ones I chose for class when doing this topic in the mid-nineties, early 2000 i.e. they were up-to-date at the time. I would like to add that they have lost nothing of their relevance. Although I would always look for up-to-date texts for a course of this kind, I found that a mix of past and present can be very useful as it gives the students different perspectives. Using an older text can be a great motivator for the students to find out themselves about the current situation from the English-language press of today. Sometimes it can be a shock for them to discover that nothing has changed.

After working our way through one or two texts on the topic of family and morality I collected some useful vocabulary in bundles e.g. caring, neglect, the law, vulnerable groups, financial support, on a large sheet, but deleted some of the items in each bundle e.g. deleting 'child abuse' from 'neglect', or 'child benefit' from 'financial support'. The words and expressions deleted can be listed on a separate sheet for the students to enter correctly. The collection is not intended to be exhaustive and students are encouraged to add more expressions themselves as they come across them in other texts.

The students are now ready and well equipped for a discussion on the topic, in groups. Below are some ideas of points for discussion. Depending on the students' interests, many others could be added; I found, however, that it was wise to leave some interesting paths open so that the students could use them as topics for their own unit.

Family values

Some points for discussion:

Single/lone parents are a threat to society
A single-parent “family” is not a real family
The state should support the family
Our society and civilisation are based on family values
“Simpsons keeping family values alive”
Single sex parents are not real parents
"The bourgeois family unit is the ultimate and most lethal gas chamber in our society. [...] Within the family, covert violence takes the form of deforming children by the parents enforcement of their own roles." (Source unknown)
[...]

NB: A single parent tended to mean one who is unmarried;
“Lone parents” covers the unmarried, separated, divorced, widowed - anyone who brings up a child without a partner.

And now the big question:

If this were the United Nations International Year of the Family, what would you do in Germany to make it meaningful?

Language work. In general I kept intrusive correction of their English to an absolute minimum, believing that providing students with correct English to use is better. If I heard any major problems I wrote up some language notes, either private and personal for the one speaker, or more general for all the class to profit from, as a **Language Focus sheet**. This was useful follow-up to the student-run sessions where everyone was involved and talking, and the range of language required was wide.

These Language Focus sheets were structured, with headings such as Word stress; Pronunciation; Count/uncount nouns; Generic/Specific reference; False friends, as in the example below. For more detailed information on Language Focus sheets please see Course Concepts Oral Skills.

Turkey and the EU

Are you **for** Turkey **joining** the EU or against?

For economic reasons

Membership of the EU **is restricted to** countries **which** ...

[...]

Word stress:

SECular ecoNOMic exECutive eCONomy ALLy (noun)

[...]

Pronunciation:

Check the pronunciation of the letters in bold type
strategic **c**urrency **p**riority **P**arliament **p**ri**v**ate [...]

Count/uncount nouns:

information (UC) [...]

Generic reference: talking about something in general. No 'the'.

(Uncount nouns) defence policy, life expectancy, citizenship

(Count nouns plural) human rights, civil liberties [...]

Specific reference: talking about something specific. With 'the'.

The European Union

the rule of law

the death penalty

the Kurds [...]

Names of countries: Turkey, Syria, Greece [...]

Names of languages: Turkish, Arabic, English, French e.g. She speaks French [...]

False friends:

kontrollieren is NOT = control

eventuell is NOT = eventually

[...]

Student-run sessions:

The next step is students running a session themselves. To help them do this they have a group preparation sheet and tutorials.

Vocabulary in Current Affairs Group preparation sheet

Your topic / your plans

Your topic:

Your activities:

Your materials:

Your sources:

My experience with this is that the students do an excellent job, provided that they take the preparation tutorials seriously, with the result that the class is enabled to talk seriously and in an informed way about topics of genuine interest at the time. Another reason why it works is that students can form work groups themselves according to affinities and ability to talk to each other. As the first few weeks of class are spent in constant interaction with each other they are no longer strangers.

Over a period of roughly twenty years, between 1988 and 2009, among the topics students chose were:

Turkey and the EU, Aids, eating disorders, consumerism, euthanasia, how Germany is viewed from the outside, smoking, tuition fees, NATO, the Internet, genetic engineering, terrorism, UN intervention, immigration and nationality, asylum in Germany, corporal punishment and capital punishment, Anthrax, the sensible use of energy, single-sex partnerships, tourism, the Millennium bug, alternative medicine, sex education, aliens, religious sects, prejudices, UFOs, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, EU expansion, the media and manipulation, fantasy films, globalisation, Columbus 1492, consumerism and poverty.

The students were really committed to dealing with their topic in an interesting and intelligent way. Instead of just printing off the next best article from the internet, they searched for and found their information in a wide variety of sources, mostly print. They used newspapers and magazines e.g. The Sunday Times supplement; brochures e.g. a government brochure offering the public facts not fiction on the Millennium bug; an open letter from Oxfam; a WHO booklet on the facts of HIV transmission and Aids; extracts from handbooks on the Law. Texts such as these have the added benefit that they were written for a particular readership. The language was clear and the layout was good i.e. attractive and effective, so that the reader felt personally addressed. Sometimes the material they found was addressed to young students like themselves e.g. an article on healthy nutrition:

Christie, Janet (2009, 10 May). Use your loaf. Keep your brain exam-fit by feeding it healthy, inexpensive treats. *Scotland on Sunday*.

They also had access to my large archive of materials on all kinds of topics. I was constantly finding interesting material and made this available. One good example for this class was a little column, or rather strip, in the newspaper Scotland on Sunday called 'Question of the week'. Every week a question of current interest and controversy was asked and several prominent people invited to answer. On 25.10.1998 the question was: Do you agree with Thatcher that General Pinochet should be freed to return to Chile? The responses were from a criminal lawyer, a peer, a Falklands veteran, a playwright and poet, and a novelist. The answers were short, roughly 60 words, and covered Yes, No, Don't know.

The organisers found many clever ways of activating the class (literally) and involving them in the topic: they made quizzes and questionnaires, selected short passages for reading, found effective ways of introducing or checking vocabulary, and thought out interesting tasks and questions.

One way to round off the class, as a kind of revision or re-cycling, is to hand out a set of headings with only a couple of paragraphs from articles on issues closely related to those covered by the students in their group sessions. They can choose themselves which ones they would like to talk about.

End-of-term:

At the end of the term the students are given a test, which obviously varied

from term to term, to give them an opportunity to show that they got more out of the class than just what they prepared themselves. They were given a copy of an example test very early in the semester, so that they knew what to expect. Students' comments on the end-of-term test were that they found it fair. Where German is included it was because the students wanted to have the English and German terminology linked.

Vocabulary in Current Affairs. Example of an end-of-term test, with tasks but only some items.

There are two parts to this test. The first part focuses on vocabulary. The second focuses on your ability to write briefly about a topic, outlining the problem and presenting your opinion on it.

Part 1

(1) Words and expressions (English/German)

Match the English word(s) with the correct German. Just write in the **number**. There are more German words in the list than you need.

A shortage
a syringe
actually
adequate
[...]
scaremongering
signatory
trigger (vb)
unprecedented
vice-versa

The German expressions:

1. Absolvent
2. aktuell
3. Analphabetismus
4. auslösen
[...]
12.gastfreundlich
13.feindlich
14.kontrollieren
15.Mangel
16.Panikmache

(2) Synonyms

Match up each word below with a numbered word which has the same meaning (in the contexts we used them in). Just write in the **number**. There are more numbered words than you need.

a bias
force (vb)
curb
endorse
key (adj)
shield (vb)
devastating
dire
perceive [...]

1. crucial
2. compel
3. catastrophic
4. extreme
5. food and drink
6. following that
7. tendency
8. make worse
9. limit [...]

(3) Stress

Mark CLEARLY the stressed syllable e.g. teacher – teacher
although executive area competitive ally also [...]

(4) Prepositions

Fill in the gaps with the correct preposition (in, on, for etc.) or no preposition \emptyset

To impose a ban public smoking.
I would like to say something that point.
Charging tuition fees would discriminate less
wealthy students.
To comply the laws on human rights.
To have access good health care.
Public reactionmedia coverage of the tsunami.
[...]

(5) Opposites

Choose the word on the right which is the **opposite** of that on the left. Just write in the **number**.

an advocate	1.actual
greedy	2.binge
secular	3.boom
growing	4.on the wane
skinny	5.opponent
soar	6.obese
[...]	[...]

(6) The words on the left commonly occur with the words on the right. Can you link them?
Just write in the number.

to make	1) the alarm
to raise	2) from doing something
to take	3) the effects
to deter	4) public opinion
to mitigate	5) the first step
[...]	[...]

Part 2

(8) Here is a list of the topics we covered this semester:

Family values
Aids
Eating disorders
Tsunami donations
Euthanasia
Consumerism
[...]

Choose 2 **topics** from the list and write **2 paragraphs about each** of them. (More advanced students can be asked to write on three topics.)

The first paragraph should present the issues involved. Try to make at least three points.

In the second paragraph you give your own opinion about them.

Here is some language you can use to help you express your ideas.

Paragraph one (outlining the problem, presenting the issues involved):

X is a topical issue at the moment because .../ X is a matter of public debate at the moment because/ X is in the news because

The main problem is

One argument is

A factor related to this/connected with this/linked to this/ is

Another thing involved is

This leads to/causes

Some people think/A common opinion is

Advocates claim that

Paragraph two (presenting your own opinion)

In my opinion/ the way I see it/I think/I feel/ As far as I'm concerned

Evaluation of the class:

As in the other classes, the end of term is also the time when students can sum up their experience of the course, in two different ways. One way is to complete an evaluation and feedback sheet. It was short, uncomplicated, and gave them the chance to offer their own ideas. Some of the questions are below; scales were provided from 'really interesting' to 'dead boring', or 'a lot' to 'very little', or 'Yes', 'Partially', 'No'. The questions have to be chosen to suit the particular class, and to suit your interests as the teacher: what would be helpful for you to know? Example questions:

How would you rate this course from really interesting to dead boring?
How much do you feel you learnt?
Be honest! How much effort did you put into this course?
How motivated do you feel to go on learning English?
Given the aims of this course (Please read the course description carefully!): Do you think we/you reached them?
What would you definitely have liked more/less of?
Any other comments on this course?
Would you recommend this course to other students?
If you could give first year students of English some advice, what would it be?

The other is to write, quickly and spontaneously, with a partner or in a group, a short poem on their experience of the course. This is definitely more fun, and is shared, as I got the students to put their poems on an overhead and 'present' them. I also wrote them up and distributed them later. They are a valuable part of the course for everyone; I still enjoy them years later:-)

This space is for your own students' poems:

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