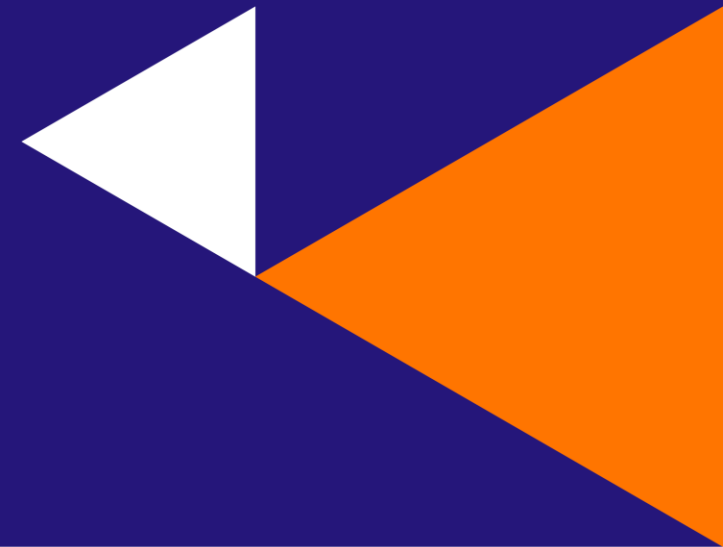


From the real world to fiction...and back

Using fiction
to develop citizenship competencies

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What do you mean when you say ‘I teach literature’?

What do you want to do?

To guide learners towards the essential meaning of a text – what the text is *really* about

To help learners understand what the author meant with their text

To discuss the plot and characters in relation to the story.

Literary history (*e.g. the canon of English/American Lit., with main authors, works and periods*)

To show how to analyse a text with e.g. literary theory, terminology and analytical methods: the text is central but as an end in itself – the text is the object of study (=what does the text mean?)

Language development (*e.g. grammar, vocab, expression,, skills*)

To make my learners read, as otherwise they don’t read on their own

To stimulate interest and love for reading in my learners

To use a text to discuss topical subjects (*e.g. bullying, homosexuality*) – the text is secondary to the discussion of that one topic, which is the focus.

To use a text as an instrument to develop e.g. critical thinking, citizenship debates: the text *is a means to an end*, and the end is relatively open-ended, student-dependent and teacher-led.

In this approach, as a teacher I focus on using the text as an instrument to focus on elements of citizenship:

- The first and crucial step is to identify clearly **what your aims are**: what exactly do you want to achieve in this and other lessons?
- I want to develop **critical thinking**
- I want to develop **social awareness**
- I want to multiply **perspectives** and ways to look and think
- I want to make students **aware** of their **own** thinking
- I want to have students **reflect** on their own thinking, opinions, behaviours, habits etc.
- **All these are my aims: *not literary history, not terminology, not language etc...***
- I want to be able to **step in and out** of a story: fiction as a safe place

The material (text, images etc.) I use is...

- Preferably short fiction that can be read in class without preparation from learners (e.g. from 300-700 words)
- Fiction that helps teachers reach their **aims: the text as instrument, not as end in itself**
- The text serves **my** purposes: its nature/genre is secondary
- Text is selected in relation to level (cognitive, linguistic) and purpose
- Texts with a strong narrative engine (*e.g. science fiction, detectives*) or surprising twist/ending (if possible: all sorts of texts are possible)
- Striking images (but not necessarily controversial as such)
- [of course, all this is applicable to **novels** too]

Three steps towards interpretation

- **Observation**
 - Collect information from the text to have something to think about
 - Close-reading, attention, facts
- **Interpretation (and discussion)**
 - Give possible meaning(s) to the elements taken in their relationships
 - Generate alternative explanations for behaviours, thoughts, feelings etc.
 - Open-ended: it is about justifying those interpretations, not ranking them – no right or wrong in theory
- **Evaluation and discussion**
 - What can we make of those interpretations, from a social, intellectual, societal point of view?
 - From a moral point of view?
 - How does each feel about them, and how does that fit with other views?

Approaching a text or an image: 3 types of questions, plus one



FACTUAL

Who's the narrator of The Hunger Games? Where does Katniss live?

Crucial step; objective (*what is there?*): yes/no; information is needed to think with

Helps to slow down the urge to interpret and evaluate right away

INTERPRETIVE

What could be a reason for Katniss to kill John?

Generate interpretations – no absolute meaning; shift perspective; explore possible alternatives

EVALUATIVE

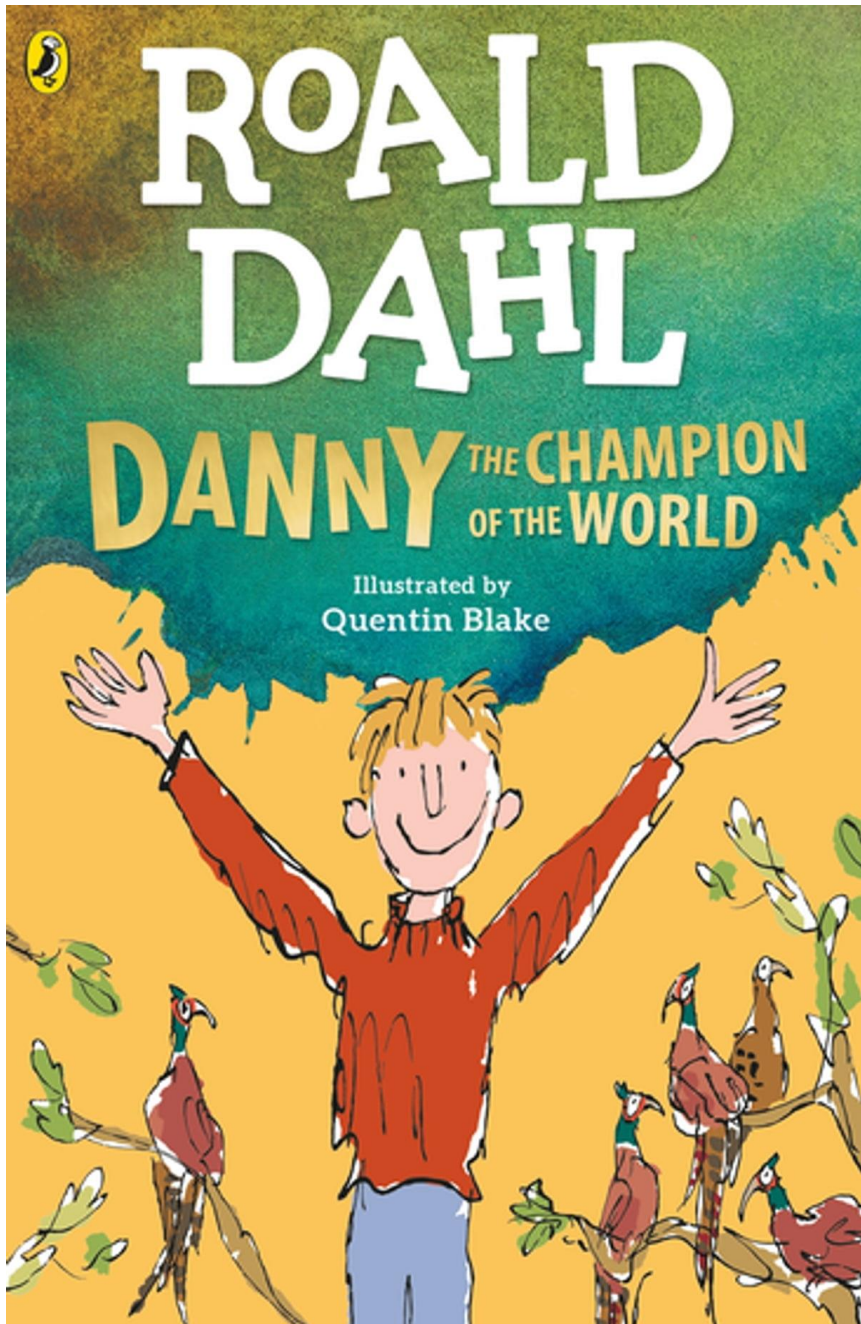
Do you think she was right to do that? Why? Isn't killing bad?

Brings in the reader's judgement, after consideration of other possible views (interpretations)

Evaluation of that event can be linked to other, comparable situations, which can lead to re-evaluation

At each step, you need **follow-up questions**: *'How do you know?'; 'Where do you see that in the text?'; 'How can you tell this is how she feels?'; 'Why do you think this?'*

Follow-up questions require **reasoning and justifying** from the learner, and emphasize that there's no right or wrong interpretation as such, as long as it can be justified and substantiated



Danny lives with his father, and they're quite poor; they live in a caravan and the father does odd jobs.

In this scene, Danny is out poaching with his father when the gamekeeper of the estate finds them.

Remember: the father is *poaching*, i.e. doing something **illegal**

The gamekeeper is just doing his job of stopping criminal activities

Factual Question:

How is the gamekeeper described?

This one was a tall bony man with a hard eye and a hard cheek and hard dangerous hands.

'I know you,' he said, coming closer, 'I know the both of you.'

My father didn't answer this.

'You're from the fillin' station. Right?'

His lips were thin and dry with some sort of a brownish crust over them.

'You're from the fillin' station and that's your boy and you live in that filthy old caravan. Right?'

'What are we playing?' my father said. 'Twenty Questions?'

The keeper spat out a big gob of spit and I saw it go sailing through the air and land with a plop on a patch of dry dust six inches from my father's plaster foot. It looked like a little baby oyster lying there.

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Interpretive questions:

Why is the gamekeeper described that way?

What kind of man does he seem to be?

What does that convey of his occupation, and therefore of what Danny's father is doing?

Reading (and thinking) critically helps us realise that words can manipulate our perceptions

Contemporary examples for discussion could be adverts on screens, on the side of the road, in magazines; propaganda (political and otherwise); influencers; any non-fiction text (from wikipedia to newspapers); fiction

Evaluative question, and themes for discussion

What do you make of that negative portrayal?

Do you feel that the gamekeeper shouldn't bother Danny and his father? That he should let them go on poaching?

Does it make a difference that they steal food, and not, say, a car or jewellery?

What kind of difference?

Do you think there are moments when what is right is not exactly legal?

Or moments when what is legal is not quite right?

What do we mean by 'right' here?

Etc.

Discussing citizenship-related issues

The text still offers a refuge you can go back to at any time

The new kid on the block (J. Paretsky)

There's a new kid on the block
and boy, that kid is tough,
that new kid punches hard
that new kid plays real rough,
that new kid's big and strong,
with muscles everywhere,
that new kid tweaked my arm,
that new kid pulled my hair,
that new kid likes to fight,
and picks on all the guys,
that new kid scares me some,
(that new kid's twice my size)
that new kid stomped my toes,
that new kid swiped my ball,
that new kid's really bad,
I don't care for her at all

Stevie Scared (R. Edwards)

Stevie Scared, scared of the dark,
Scared of rats, of dogs that bark,
Scared of his fat dad, scared of his mother,
Scared of his sis and his tattooed brother,
Scared of tall girls, scared of boys,
Scared of ghosts and sudden noise,
Scared of spiders, scared of bees,
Scared of standing under trees,
Scared of shadows, scared of adders,
Scared of the devil, scared of ladders,
Scared of hailstones, scared of rain.
Scared of falling down the drain,
Stevie Scared, scared of showing
He's so scared of people knowing,
Spends his whole time kicking, fighting,
Shoving, pinching, butting, biting,
Bashing little kids about
(just in case they find him out).



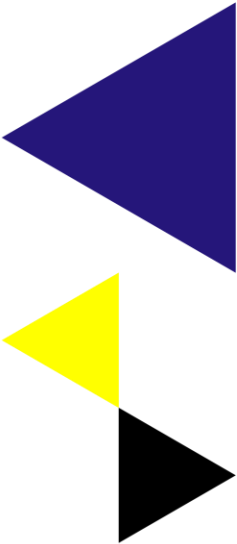
One poem has a **topic** (*bullying*),
a possible **theme** (*gender, stereotypes*) but no **argument**
about it; open-ended, trick

One poem has **the same topic**, a
different theme (*psychological*)
and an **argument** (*victim*); close-
ended: delivers a message

Which one is easiest to work
with?

Observing or reflecting on a literature lesson

What to look out for	Comments/Examples
What were the aims of the lesson, and were they realistic (i.e. achievable)?	
Was the material (=text(s)) adequate for that class, and for those aims?	
Was there a <i>theme</i> (s) running through the lesson, and linking text(s) and activities (and which), or was it a <i>general topic</i> ? (Topic : War and conflicts; Themes : Patriotism; Sacrifice; Pains and suffering)	
What type of questions were there, and in which proportion? Factual? (e.g. <i>Who's Mary's husband?</i>); Interpretative? (e.g. <i>Why would Mary marry him? What could be the reasons?</i>); Evaluative? (<i>Do you think she should have married him? Why, why not?</i>)	
Did the teacher ask follow-up questions consistently?	
Did the teacher encourage making connections between the text, its topic and theme, and social issues?	
Was there space for exchanging and discussing different (justified) interpretations?	
Are there activities (e.g. Language, Culture) that could be added to that lesson to complement it?	
Which texts done previously in class could be linked to this lesson?	



Literature and Citizenship (*Literatuur en burgerschap*)

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