

TEMA 15: *Épocas, autores géneros literarios más adecuados para su aplicación didáctica en clase de inglés. Tipologías de textos.*

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. More suitable periods, authors and genres to be used in the English class.
 - 2.1. Criteria for choosing texts.
 - 2.1.1. Learners' needs and abilities
 - 2.1.1.1. Learners' needs
 - 2.1.1.2. Learners' abilities
 - 2.1.2. The linguistic and stylistic level of the text.
 - 2.1.2.1. The linguistic level.
 - 2.1.2.2. The stylistic level.
 - 2.1.3. Amount of background information required.
 - 2.1.3.1. Problem features
 - 2.1.3.2. Positive features
 - 2.1.4. Other text-related factors
 - 2.1.4.1. Availability of texts
 - 2.1.4.2. Length of text and quality of illustrations
 - 2.1.4.3. Exploitability
 - 2.1.4.4. Adequacy to syllabus
 - 2.2. Periods, authors and genres
 - 2.2.1. Periods
 - 2.2.2. Authors
 - 2.2.3. Genres
 - 2.2.3.1. Plays
 - 2.2.3.2. Poems
 - 2.2.3.3. Short stories
3. Types of storybooks
 - 3.1. Authentic versus graded texts
 - 3.1.1. Graded texts
 - 3.1.2. Authentic texts
 - 3.1.2.1. Advantages
 - 3.1.2.2. Disadvantages
 - 3.1.2.3. Guidelines to make the story accessible in authentic texts
4. Conclusions
5. Bibliography

1. INTRODUCTION

Why should a language teacher use literary texts in Primary English classes?

Essentially, there are four types of reasons to use literary texts in ELT:

- Linguistic:

Literature offers a great variety of authentic written materials. Most works of literature are not written for the specific purpose of teaching a language. In reading texts students know the language intended for native speakers, so they gain familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode.

Literature study can provide a wide range of texts and an introduction to the different registers of English.

- Methodological:

It is a very important complement to other materials used in order to increase the learners' cultural information of the country whose language is being learnt.

The literary texts are open to multiple interpretation so one individual's interpretation and another's can be bridged by genuine interaction, providing communicative situations.

- Motivational:

Literary texts often touch on themes to which learners can bring a personal response from their own experience.

Literature incorporates a great deal of cultural information.

Jennifer Hill says: "Teaching literature contributes to the students' general knowledge and to their intellectual, social and moral development, as well as of its universal appeal to the emotions."

- Legal:

Finally, the Ministry of Education and its Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education (LOMCE) dating 9th December, 2013 and the Royal Decree 126/2014, 28th February 2014,

that establishes the curriculum for Primary Education, both provide guidelines to developed basic objectives, contents and methodological approaches for the teaching of English. Literature will help us teachers to reach these objectives and teach English successfully. Moreover, in the Royal Decree, Annex I, section e where the curriculum for the First Foreign Language is established, the first and third block of contents are related to understanding oral texts and written texts. Oral and written literature will provide this kind of texts.

According to the Law, children should develop a communicative competence in at least a foreign language at the end of their compulsory schooling. Therefore the principal aim of learning English is *to communicate* orally and in writing. This includes different aspects such as reading different texts and writing, understanding vocabulary related to the children's world, use of grammatical structures, etc. With literature we will work all these aspects.

Learning a foreign language also implies an important aim which is discovering *another culture* and developing a curiosity, understanding and respect about it. Using literature we will work on these objectives and help children to develop some of the seven competences described in LOMCE, such as the *linguistic competence, the social and citizen competence and the cultural awareness and expression*. We will also help them to develop the *digital competence* when using literary texts or writing poems, essays or short stories in the computer.

Educational Laws also ask teachers to take into account the different paces in children's development (*mixed ability*) not only in the Primary Stage, but also in the *Infant Stage* where English should be introduced. Literature will definitively help us teachers to cover different learning paces and interests.

According to this, it is clear that we need to use literature in our Primary English classes. In this theme I will explain which periods, authors and genres are more suitable for English learners and then what kind of texts suits better our purposes as English teachers.

2. MORE SUITABLE PERIODS, AUTHORS AND GENRES TO BE USED IN THE ENGLISH CLASS.

The criteria of suitability clearly depends ultimately of each particular group of students, their needs, interests, cultural background and language level.

2.1. Criteria for choosing texts.

Teachers need to keep the following criteria in mind when choosing texts:

- The needs and abilities of the students.
- The linguistic and stylistic level of the text.
- The amount of background information required for a true appreciation of the material.
- Other text-related factors

2.1.1. Learners' needs and abilities

2.1.1.1. Learners' needs

It does not matter how simple our chosen texts may be, they should always be appropriate to the age, interests and goals of our pupils. It is a big mistake to give our oldest pupils a book suitable to younger children simply because the linguistic level is simpler.

The primary factor to consider is whether a particular literary work is able to stimulate the learners by arousing their interest and provoking strong, positive reactions from them. Very young children prefer traditional tales but older children are fond of adventure stories, human interest works and so on.

It is therefore important to choose books, which are relevant to the life experiences, emotions or dreams of the learner.

2.1.1.2. Learners' abilities

Pupils need to be able to read fluently for extensive reading in order to understand literary texts overall. As *Hill* says: "*They must be able to see a passage as a complete unit, not just a collection of sentences with individual meanings.*"

The EFL Primary Learners read at a lower speed. Because of this low reading speed, it is better to start with very short texts, for example short stories.

2.1.2. The linguistic and stylistic level of the text.

We have to consider language difficulty, as well. Our pupils may not be able to enjoy a text that they perceive as very difficult to read.

2.1.2.1. The linguistic level.

Teachers must consider the following factors:

- Vocabulary and text structure within our pupils' cope.
- Slang, dialect and highly idiomatic language at a minimum.
- Students should be able to infer the meaning of most of the unknown words from the context.
- The vocabulary should not, in general, be archaic or technical.
- Sentence structure must be at a level students can handle.

2.1.2.2. The stylistic level.

It is useless to choose texts of great stylistic complexity for the early stages of language learning because children do not have a solid knowledge in the normative uses of English to perceive literary foregrounding.

Style analysis should be based on the linguistic feature with which our pupils are already familiar.

Therefore, we should choose simple texts, at this early stage of the foreign language learning, from the stylistic and linguistic point of view.

Hill suggests to use a *cloze test* to assess the linguistic difficulty of a text:

THE CLOZE TEST

We prepare a reasonably typical extract from the book and delete words from the passage on a regular basis (usually every sixth or seventh word). Then, we instruct our pupils to supply the missing vocabulary. There will need to be at least fifty deletions for the test to have validity so we cannot really use it with our youngest pupils (some of their story books do not have three hundred and fifty words!).

Average class results should yield the following information:

Below 44% correct	→	Our pupils cannot read the text on their own.
Between 44 and 57% correct	→	Our can read it with us or with dictionary help.
More than 57% correct	→	They can read the text.

We can also ask ourselves questions about this point:

- Linguistic level Does the text add to learning in the whole school curriculum?
Is the vocabulary appropriate? And the structures, functions, topics?
Is the language authentic?
- Stylistic level Does the text contain stylistic features that may hinder the understanding of the story?

2.1.3. Amount of background information required.

Our pupils' understanding of a text can also be hindered by their lack of background knowledge of English speaking countries culture. We should consider both problem and positive features.

Hill makes a list of these features:

2.1.3.1. Problem features

Problem features may include differences in:

- Social conventions and customs
- Attitude and values
- Social class distinctions
- Religious or political ideas
- Geographical features and climate
- Diet and dress
- Historical background

2.1.3.2. Positive features

Positive features may include enrichment by:

- Widening of horizons
- Knowledge of other ways of life
- Entrance to the world of imagination
- Appeal to universal emotions

It is important to bear in mind the amount of time we will need to explain background knowledge.

We need to consider the cultural elements because as we see, they can be positive or negative in the understanding of a text. We should analyse if those features help or increase the difficulty to understand the story, and if they are relevant or not.

2.1.4. Other text-related factors

Teachers should consider the following factors that are also important for a text selection.

2.1.4.1. Availability of texts

We must consider how easily we can make the text available to our students, if they are easily available in our country, editorial or bookshops. The prize is also relevant.

2.1.4.2. Length of text and quality of illustrations

It is important to consider the length of text and the quality of the illustrations.

Firstly, we need to consider the time available to work in class. Short stories are very useful because of their length. This means that we can usually read them entirely within one or two class lessons.

Secondly, when we have children in the last levels of Primary, we should consider their available time to work the text at home. Short stories are very suitable because students get that feeling of achievement at having come to the end of a whole work, much sooner.

Finally, the quality of illustrations plays an important role in helping general comprehension.

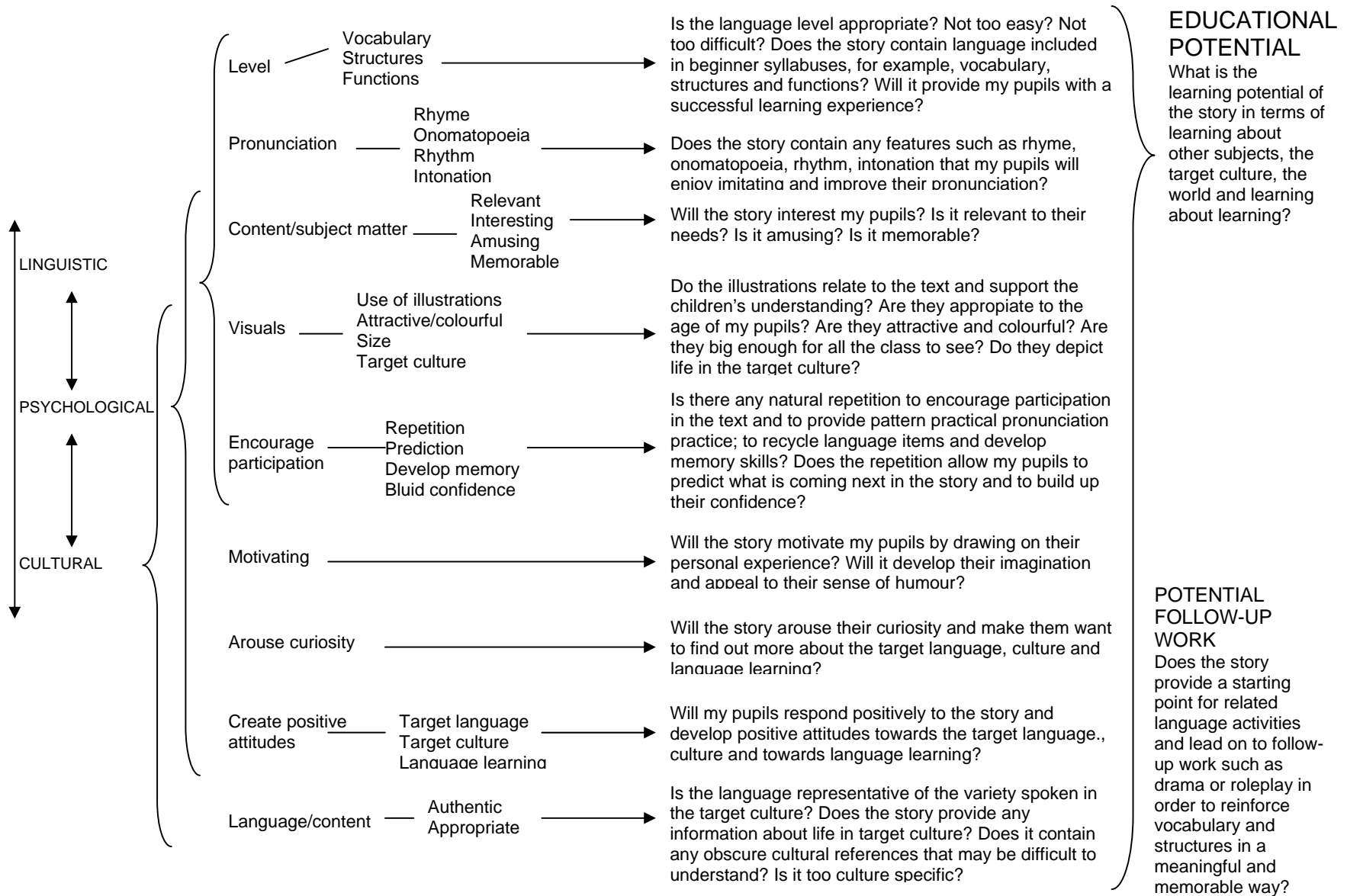
2.1.4.3. Exploitability

It is important to choose a text that provides tasks and activities that we can devise to exploit that text. Also, we need to analyse if the story provide follow-up work such as drama or roleplay in order to reinforce vocabulary and structures in a meaningful way.

Thus, we can consider, as well, whether there are resources available to help us to exploit the text as a film, recordings, pictures, etc.

2.1.4.4. Adequacy to syllabus

We can analyse how the texts link with the rest of the syllabus, for example in terms of vocabulary, grammar, discourse, themes or methodology. The following diagram by *Ellis* and *Brewster*, can help teachers to select texts that are accessible, useful and relevant for children learning English.



A book will be suitable to our pupils if we can answer 'yes' to the questions mentioned above.

Once we have analysed the different criteria for selecting texts, we need to decide the most suitable periods, authors and genres.

2.2. Periods, authors and genres

The analysis of the previous sections enables us to the following conclusions about the most suitable periods, authors and genres.

2.2.1. Periods

Following our official curriculum, as we quoted in the Introduction and according to our pupils' interests, needs and abilities and moreover the linguistic, stylistic and background knowledge required for a fully understanding of a text, it seems obvious that *the literature of our times* is more accessible to our pupils.

So, mostly nowadays literary works are the most suitable; although it is recommended, as well, especially for our youngest pupils to use classical literature as traditional tales, For example: *Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Little Red Riding Hood, The Enormous Turnip* fairy tales as *The Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella* and so on. Children are already familiar with them in their mother tongue, so they can infer the meaning of the unknown words and understand the story.

We can also use specific resources for the teaching/learning of reading listening and comprehension of texts proposed by the Ministry of Education (M.E.C.) as *Ladybird, Read with me, Little Owl* or *Once Upon a Time*.

2.2.2. Authors

We can choose from a wide range of suitable authentic storybooks written by traditional storytellers as Perrault and modern writers, as those authors on the *Puffin* or *Early Bird* series such as:

- Jack Kent ... *The Fat Cat*
- Raymond Briggs ... *The Snowman; The Mother Goose Treasury* (nursery rhymes) especially very suitable for the 1st and 2nd graders.
- John Burningham ... *My Gumpy's Motor Car*
- Colin and Jacqui Hawkins ... *Pat the Cat*
- Eric Hill ... *Where's Spot?*
- Helen Nicoll ... *Meg and Mog*

For 5th and 6th graders, we can select literary works from different collections of texts for foreign learners, edited in different editorials as Oxford, Cambridge or Heinemann, for example:

- Jones, E ... British Short Stories of Today (Penguin Books)
- Swam, M ... Zero Hour and Other Modern Stories (Cambridge)
- Taylor, P ... Modern Short Stories for Students of English (*)
- Milue, J ... Heinemann Guided Readers (*)

(*) Both of them are graded text, and only if we decide to use them in class we can recommend them (see last section).

2.2.3. Genres

We can use different genres: Plays, small poems, but especially, short stories.

2.2.3.1. Plays

Many students love planning costumes, sets, masks, etc. With groups who like drama activities, put-on one scene or a short play, can be both enjoyable and rewarding.

It is very useful because children have to act and this means that they must learn a few lines by heart. They have to repeat the words or sentences very often, so the particular words and structures become more assimilated.

Saying their lines gives the children a chance to use English interactively.

They need to work together co-operatively.

Acting in a play can help shy children gain self-confidence.

But a play reading is not really easy and we need much time available if we want to perform it.

It would be suitable for shows to put on at the end of the academic year.

2.2.3.2. Poems

Small poems are ideal because:

- They offer a rich, varied repertoire and are a source of much enjoyment.
- Also, they have the advantage of length. They are well suited to a single classroom lesson.
- We can work the stress, rhythm, onomatopoeia and intonation.

2.2.3.3. Short stories

We think this genre is the most suitable for our pupils. Very young children enjoy listening stories. Oldest children enjoy both listening and reading stories.

Short stories are often an ideal way of introducing students to literature in the foreign language classroom. They offer many advantages:

- They are very motivating; children like stories.
- They exercise the imagination, link fantasy with the child's real world.
- Teacher can revise or introduce new vocabulary and sentence structures in a varied and familiar context.
- Listening to stories develops the child's listening and concentrating skills via:
 - Visual aids (pictures, illustrations)
 - Their prior knowledge of how language works
 - Their general knowledge

Help to understand the overall meaning of the story and relate it to their personal experience.

- They are chosen to consolidate learning in other school subjects across the curriculum.
- Learning English through stories can prepare students for Secondary School in terms of basic language functions, structures, vocabulary and language learning skills.

Teachers need to plan carefully the introduction and exploitation of storybooks. And one of the most relevant question is: What types of storybooks can we choose, authentic or adapted stories?.

3. TYPES OF STORYBOOKS

There are a wide range of storybooks: traditional and fairy tales, picture stories, rhyming stories, everyday stories, etc..

Ellis and *Brewster* classify the storybooks under the following three headings:

□ Narrative features

- Rhyming words
- Repeating structures
- Isolated words which rhyme
- Some structures are repeated once and again

- Cumulative content and language
 - Interactive
 - Humorous
 - Different characters do the same action at different times
 - Children have to help to construct the story choosing different possibilities
 - Comic situations
- Content
- Everyday life stories
 - Animal stories
 - Traditional/folk/fairy stories
 - Fantasy stories
- Layout
- Flap
 - Cut-away pages
 - Minimal text
 - No text
 - Speech bubbles
 - There is something hidden. Children have to discover it
 - Something has to be stuck on the story
 - Words or simple structures and illustrations
 - It's a picture storybook. No sentences or words
 - It's like a cartoon. There are dialogues

Notice that the stories can belong to different groups. They are not exclusive.

For instance *Where's Spot?* It is a humorous interactive animal story with repeating structures with flap, a minimal text and speech bubbles. All these books can be read with pupils of different ages and levels, depending on the way they are used, the amount of detail we wish to go into and the time we have available. As *Ellis* and *Brewster* say: “*The overall aim of using storybooks with young beginners is to encourage general comprehension that can trigger a wealth of purposeful language learning activities.*”

For instance, *Little Red Riding Hood* can be worked on the 2nd Cycle because of the language level, but it can be used in the 1st cycle if we adapt the story and the activities for beginners.

But perhaps, most important is to distinguish between authentic and graded or adapted texts and to decide what to choose.

3.1. Authentic versus graded texts

There are different opinions about the convenience of using authentic versus graded texts.

Jennifer Hill gives reasons to use graded texts in the Primary classes.

3.1.1. Graded texts

They can be fiction and non-fiction.

Hill distinguishes two kind of graded texts:

- New texts written to strictly controlled language specifications.
- Existing texts that have been altered or modified in some way to conform the same specifications as the newly written text. They include works by famous author, may be abridged, simplified or totally rewritten.

For *Hill*, such texts very often solve the problem of linguistic difficulty and provide extensive reading at a level at which students can cope.

It is important to choose those kind of abridged versions of famous novel or plays which retains enough of the original to preserve the flavour of the work.

Hill thinks that graded readers are a very useful introduction to extensive reading and should help students to improve their fluency and accuracy in the understanding of a written text.

Grading material allows learners progress in small, regular steps and students are not exposed to cope with too much new material at any one time.

On the contrary, *Ellis* and *Brewster* analyse the advantages of the authentic texts.

3.1.2. Authentic texts

Authentic texts are those texts that have not been written specifically for the teaching of English as a foreign language, and so, the language is not selected or graded.

Ellis and *Brewster* say that there are many authentic storybooks written for English-speaking children which are also suitable for those learning English because many of these storybooks contain language traditionally found in most beginner syllabuses.

3.1.2.1. Advantages

- Authentic texts provide examples of real language and help to bring the real world into the classroom.
- Generally, the quality of illustrations is of a high standard, aiding general comprehension.
- Furthermore, if we simplify or modify stories too much there is a danger of losing some of their magic.

2.1.2.2. Disadvantages

But, at the same time this magic can also be lost if the language is too advanced for children to follow. In this case *Ellis* and *Brewster* suggest guidelines to make the story more accessible.

3.1.2.3. Guidelines to make the story accessible in authentic texts

- Check vocabulary and general meaning
 - Unfamiliar words (but keep certain keywords)
 - Idioms → Rephrase
 - Clarity → Give more examples
- Check grammar
 - Tenses → Simplify
 - Structures → Reduce the number of structures
 - Word order
- Check organisation of ideas
 - Times references → Reinforce time makers
 - The linking of ideas
 - The explanation of ideas
- Check story length
 - Number of ideas in the story → Leave out some of characters or events to reduce the length of the story

The main aim of all our teaching is to enable our pupils to reach communicative competence. As the focus will be on assisting our pupils to do in class what they will need outside, the materials we use should reflect the world outside.

We mean, all the materials need to be authentic. Not only the fact but also the activities and tasks must be relevant.

Moreover, the general aim of our approach to the teaching/learning of literature, following *Collie and Slater* is *“to let our pupils derive the benefits of communicative activities for language improvement within the context of suitable works of literature. If we make a balanced selection of activities and present them with confidence, our pupils will advance in the mastery of the four skills, and will be nearer the communicative competence”*.

We can therefore conclude that whenever we need to choose a storybook, and if it is possible, we must use authentic material. And only with beginners, who are not able to handle authentic texts, we will be able to use an adapted story in order to help them to progress in small regular steps, to acquire the necessary skills they will need in a future to handle authentic material.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study of literature and the study of language can be mutually supportive. A literature study can contribute to the students' command of the language, as well as to their personal, social and moral development. Students themselves with the right method can get the most out of the materials.

Such methods might involve activities such as:

- Defining the theme, the main characters, the framework...in a text.
- Writing activities : rewrite the story, make a summary
- Orally: retelling the story, taking part in a role-play ...
- Playing games with the text (for example, 20 questions, draw a picture, invent a new setting,)

Literature will help students to develop a variety of language skills such as prediction or inference of meaning from the linguistic or situational context. As they relate their reading to their own knowledge of the world and experience they will internalise the structures and lexis to the point where language recognition becomes automatic and the material will become a stimulus to their own language production.

As Hill says “*literature, carefully chosen, can open up and enrich the language lesson, provide students with a window to new worlds and engage their intellect and emotions in a way that study of the language alone cannot*”.

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