

Primary Subject Resources

Literacy

Module 1 Reading and writing for a range of purposes

Section 1 Supporting and assessing reading and writing

Section 2 Stimulating interest in reading stories

Section 3 Ways of reading and responding to information texts

Section 4 Ways of presenting your point of view

Section 5 Ways of becoming a critical reader and writer



TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) aims to improve the classroom practices of primary teachers and secondary science teachers in Africa through the provision of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The TESSA OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school

textbook. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic, and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.

TESSA OERs have been collaboratively written by African and international authors to address the curriculum and contexts. They are available for online and print use (<http://www.tessafrica.net>). The Primary OERs are available in several versions and languages (English, French, Arabic and Swahili). Initially, the OER were produced in English and made relevant across Africa. These OER have been versioned by TESSA partners for Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, and translated by partners in Sudan (Arabic), Togo (French) and Tanzania (Swahili) Secondary Science OER are available in English and have been versioned for Zambia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We welcome feedback from those who read and make use of these resources. The Creative Commons License enables users to adapt and localise the OERs further to meet local needs and contexts.

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As well as the main body of pedagogic resources to support teaching in particular subject areas, there are a selection of additional resources including audio, key resources which describe specific practices, handbooks and toolkits.



**TESSA Programme
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA
United Kingdom**

tessa@open.ac.uk

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Contents

- Section 1: Supporting and assessing reading and writing
 - 1. Using songs and rhymes
 - 2. Using packaging to help reading
 - 3. Motivating pupils to read
 - Resource 1: What successful readers and writers need to know
 - Resource 2: Examples of songs and rhymes
 - Resource 3: Example questions to ask about a grocery item
 - Resource 4: Preparing for a community walk – during which pupils will notice environmental print
 - Acknowledgements
- Section 2: Stimulating interest in reading stories
 - 1. Reading aloud
 - 2. Using writing to encourage reading
 - 3. Encouraging individual reading
 - Resources 1: Preparation for shared reading
 - Resource 2: Questions to use with book readings – first, second and third readings
 - Resource 3: A story
 - Resource 4: Sustained silent reading
 - Acknowledgements
- Section 3: Ways of reading and responding to information texts
 - 1. Reading for understanding
 - 2. Reading charts and diagrams
 - 3. Learning how to summarise
 - Resources 1: Text on litter
 - Resource 2: Introductory questions
 - Resource 3: Good posters
 - Resource 4: A pie chart
 - Resource 5: Text on the baobab
 - Resource 6: The kapok tree
 - Acknowledgements
- Section 4: Ways of presenting your point of view
 - 1. Using writing to elicit children's feelings
 - 2. Organising a debate

- 3. Writing letters
- Resources 1: Child who is 'left out'
- Resource 2: Games that promote understanding of physical disability
- Resource 3: Structure of debating speeches
- Resource 4: Rules and procedures for debating
- Resource 5: Example letter – written by Vivian's class
- Resource 6: 'Argument' phrases
- Acknowledgements
- Section 5: Ways of becoming a critical reader and writer
 - 1. Developing thinking skills through reading
 - 2. Writing from different perspectives
 - 3. Using adverts to encourage critical thinking
 - Resources 1: Asking questions – to encourage pupils to think critically about a story
 - Resource 2: Outline of a letter to an author
 - Resource 3: Critical reading of advertisements
 - Resource 4: Designing advertisements
 - Acknowledgements

Section 1: Supporting and assessing reading and writing

Key Focus Question: How can you support learning to read and write and assess progress?

Keywords: early literacy; songs; rhymes; environmental print; assessment; group work; shared reading

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will have:

- used songs and rhymes to teach beginners to read;
- used 'environmental print' and grocery packaging to teach reading, writing and design;
- explored ways of supporting learning with group work;
- developed your ability to assess learning.

Introduction

What should a successful reader and writer know and be able to do? As a teacher, you need to be able to answer this question so that you can guide your pupils. Learning to read and write successfully takes practice. Therefore, it is important to use a variety of approaches and activities that will keep pupils interested. It is also important to assess pupils' progress and to ask yourself whether you are meeting their needs. This section explores these ideas as it looks at early literacy.

1. Using songs and rhymes

Learning to read and write is hard work! Because you want pupils to look forward to reading and writing lessons, it is very important that you make your classroom – and the activities that support learning to read and write – as stimulating as possible.

Resource 1: What successful readers and writers need to know explains that pupils need to learn how to connect sounds and letters, letters and words, words and sentences. Songs and rhymes that pupils know well – and to which they can perform actions – help them to make these connections. So does shared reading, in which you read a big print storybook, with pictures, to your pupils. While you are reading, stop to show them each picture and to ask what they think will happen next. When you have finished, use the book for letter and word recognition activities in which you ask individual pupils to point to and read particular letters and words. Remember to give pupils plenty of opportunities to talk about the story – the characters, what happened, how they feel about the story, etc.

Case Study 1: Introducing pupils to reading

Mrs Nomsa Dlamini teaches pupils to read and write in isiZulu in her Grade 1 class in Nkandla, South Africa. Nomsa reads storybooks to them, including some that she has written and illustrated herself because there are few books available in isiZulu.

At the beginning of the year, she makes sure that all pupils understand how a book works – cover, title, illustrations, development of the story – because she knows that some of them have never held a book before starting school. She has found that prediction activities, in which pupils suggest what will happen next in the story, are useful and stimulating for her pupils.

Nomsa realises that pupils need a lot of practice to give them confidence in reading. She makes big print copies of Zulu rhymes or songs that they know well and also ones that she knows are particularly useful for teaching letter-sound recognition. Pupils say or sing them and perform actions to them (see **Resource 2: Examples of songs and rhymes**). Most importantly, she asks individual pupils to point out and read letters and words. Some pupils find this difficult so she notes their names and the letters or words they have trouble with. She prepares cards with pictures, letters and words to use in different ways with these pupils, either individually or in small groups, while the rest of the class are doing other activities. Nomsa is pleased to find that this helps the confidence and progress of these pupils.

Activity 1: Using songs and rhymes to teach reading

Ask pupils to:

- choose a favourite song/rhyme;
- sing/say it;
- watch carefully, while you say the words as you write them on your chalkboard (or a big piece of paper/cardboard so you can use it again);
- read the song/rhyme with you (do this several times);
- point out (individually) particular letters or words or punctuation (capital letters, full stops, question marks);
- decide on actions to do while singing the song/saying the rhyme;
- perform these actions while singing the song/saying the rhyme again;
- sit in groups of four and take turns reading the song/rhyme to each other.

Move round the class, noting pupils who find reading difficult.

End by asking the whole class to sing the song/say the rhyme, with actions, again.

2. Using packaging to help reading

Some pupils grow up in homes that are rich in print and visual images: grocery boxes, packets and tins, books for children and adults, newspapers, magazines and even computers. Others have few of these items in their homes. Your challenge as a teacher is to provide a print-rich environment in your classroom. One way of doing this is to collect free materials wherever possible. Packaging materials (cardboard boxes, packets and tins) often have a great deal of writing on them and even very young pupils often recognise key words for widely used grocery items. For more experienced readers, magazines and newspapers that community members have finished with can be used for many classroom activities.

This part explores ways to use such print to support learning to read.

Case Study 2: Using grocery packaging for reading and writing activities

Mrs Bakoru teaches English to 54 Primary 4 pupils in Koboko, Arua District. They are not very familiar with English but they recognise letters and some English words on grocery packaging.

Mrs Bakoru asked her neighbours for empty boxes, packets and tins. She brought these to school to use for reading and writing activities.

Her pupils' favourite game is 'word detective'. Mrs Bakoru organised the class into nine groups of five and gave each group the same box, packet or tin. She asked pupils to write down numbers from 1 to 5 and then asked five questions (see [Resource 3: Example questions to ask about a grocery item](#)). Pupils compared individual answers and decided on a group answer. Mrs Bakoru discussed the answers with the whole class. The 'winner' was the group that finished first with most correct answers.

Sometimes Mrs Bakoru invited each group to ask a word detective question.

To encourage pupils to think critically, she sometimes asked questions about the design of the packaging and the messages in the advertising.

Mrs Bakoru noticed that some pupils didn't participate, so the next time they played, she asked every pupil to write down four words from the grocery 'container' before they returned to their usual seats. Back at their seats she asked each one to read their list to a partner. She discovered six pupils who needed extra help and worked with them after school for an hour, using the same grocery items and giving time to practise identifying letters and words.

Mrs Bakoru realised becoming familiar with letters and words on packages helps pupils to identify these letters and words in other texts they read, such as stories. By copying words from packages, pupils also learn to write letters and words more confidently and accurately.

Activity 2: Using groceries for reading and writing activities

Bring to class enough tins, packets or boxes for each group of four or five pupils to have one item to work with or ask your class to help you collect these items.

Write questions on the chalkboard about the words and images on the packet, tin or box (see [Resource 3](#)). Either ask your pupils to read them or do it for them.

Either play the word detective game in groups (see **Case Study 2**) or ask pupils to write individual answers, which you assess. Arrange to give extra practice time and support to pupils who could not manage this activity.

In the next lesson, ask pupils to work in the same groups to design the print and visual information for the packaging of a real or imaginary grocery item.

Ask each group to display and talk about their design to the rest of the class.

What have pupils learned by reading the packages of grocery items and by designing and displaying their own? Compare your ideas with the suggestions in [Resource 3](#).

3. Motivating pupils to read

Reading and writing can be very exciting and stimulating, but some pupils develop a negative attitude to these activities. This might be because they find reading and writing very difficult, perhaps because they are bored by reading and writing tasks that always follow the same pattern, or perhaps they don't see much value in reading and writing. One of your challenges as a teacher is to stimulate pupils' interest in reading and writing and keep them interested.

Case Study 3 and the **Key Activity** suggest activities that may help pupils to become more interested and confident in reading and writing.

Case Study 3: Reading neighbourhood signs and writing about them

Mr Sam Kawanga teaches English to a Primary 5 class in St John Primary School, Kampala. The area around Kampala is a densely populated area with many examples of environmental print around the school – mainly in English but also in several local languages.

To generate income, people have set up 'backyard businesses' such as grocery shops, barber shops, panel beaters and phone booths. These all have homemade signs and some also have commercial advertisements for various products. There are schools, clinics, places of worship and halls, most of which have signs and noticeboards. On the main road, there are signs to many places, including the respected Makerere University.

Mr Kawanga planned a route around Kampala that would give pupils opportunities to read and make notes and drawings about different examples of print and visual images. He also prepared a list of questions to guide their observations.

Mr Kawanga has 58 pupils in his class, including ten who have recently arrived from Tanzania. He decided to ask two retired multilingual friends to assist him with this activity. One speaks Kiswahili, the language of the Tanzanian pupils. The class went out in three groups.

Mr Kawanga's friends participated in the classroom discussion and the writing and drawing activity that followed. By the end of the week, the three men agreed that pupils had become more aware of how information can be presented in different ways and in different languages and some seemed more interested in reading and writing than before.

Key Activity: Reading signs

Before the lesson, read [Resource 4: Preparing for a community walk](#) to plan the walk and prepare your questions. Write the questions on the chalkboard.

To begin the lesson, tell pupils about the walk and, if they are able, ask them to copy the questions from your chalkboard. If not, have the list of questions ready for each group leader to ask on the walk.

Take them for the planned walk through your local community.

While walking, they must give or write answers to the questions and draw examples of the print and visual images they see.

Afterwards, ask pupils in groups to share what they saw, wrote and drew. Ask the whole class to report back and record key points on the chalkboard.

Ask each group to design, write and draw a name, sign, notice or advertisement they think would be helpful to have in their community. Help them with any difficult words. Younger children may need to work in small groups with an adult to help them.

Ask each group to show their design to the whole class and explain the choice of language, visual images and information.

Display these designs in the classroom for all pupils to read.

Resource 1: What successful readers and writers need to know



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

The language in which they are expected to read and write

If pupils have to learn to read and write in a language that is not their home language, this makes the task much more difficult. In this situation, teachers need to start with oral work and vocabulary building in this additional language, using actions and pictures. Only when pupils have some oral understanding of the additional language can they be expected to use it for reading and writing.

The written code

Pupils need to understand how the letters on the page represent particular sounds and how they combine to communicate meaning in the form of words. This is why it is important for teachers to give some attention to 'phonics' – the letters that represent particular sounds – when working with beginner readers. To take an example from English, as a teacher you could use a picture of a dog, with the separate letters **d o g** and then the word **dog** underneath it. First ask pupils what they see in the picture (a dog), then point to each letter and pronounce it; then pronounce the whole word. Then check pupils' understanding by pointing to the separate letters and asking them to make each sound. Next, ask them to tell you other words beginning with the **d** sound. Also give them some examples of your own.

The rules of writing

Pupils need to understand how words combine to make meaning in sentences, paragraphs and longer texts (e.g. a whole storybook) and how texts are written in different ways for different purposes (e.g. a recipe for cooking a meal is written differently from a story). In the early years, pupils begin learning about how writing is organised, but this is something that they learn more about all the way through their studies. Pupils need to work with whole texts so that they can see how words connect with one another and how a story or an argument develops. This is why phonics work alone is not sufficient.

How to read drawings, photographs and diagrams and how to make connections between these visual images and written words

Pupils need to be taught to notice details in drawings, photographs and diagrams. You can help them by asking questions such as 'What is the old man holding?' 'What does the hippopotamus have on his back?'

About the world and how it works

The more that teachers help pupils to expand their general knowledge of the world and how it works, the easier it is for pupils to read about what is new and unfamiliar because they can make connections between what they have already experienced or learned and this new information.

Above all, it is important that pupils enjoy reading and writing – even when they find it challenging.

Resource 2: Examples of songs and rhymes



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Example of a Luganda song with an English translation

This is a lullaby – a song sung to help children to stop crying. Notice the frequent repetition of the same letters and sounds – particularly in the Luganda version.

Luganda	English
Mwana wa nnyabo, weesirikire	My dear mother's child, keep quiet
Kye nnaalyako nja kuterekera	I will keep for you whatever I will happen to eat

Mwana wa nnyabo

Traditional Ugandan

Voice



Mwa-na wa nnya-bo, wee-si-ri-ki-re; Kye-nnaa-lya-ko -

nja ku-te-re-ke-ra: Baa baa, a-ka-li-ga. kaa-nywa taa-ba: Baa.

baa, a - ka - li - ga kaa - nywa taa - ba.

A traditional lullaby from Buganda – central Uganda – as collected by music teacher Robinah Nazziwa

Mwana wa nnyabo

A rhyme in English that is fun to say quickly Yellow butter by Mary Ann Hoberman

Yellow butter purple jelly red jam black bread

Spread it thick

Say it quick

Yellow butter purple jelly red jam black bread

Spread it thicker

Say it quicker

Yellow butter purple jelly red jam black bread

Now repeat it

While you eat it

Yellow butter purple jelly red jam black bread

Don't talk with your mouth full!

An action rhyme

I'm a little teapot, short and stout

Here is my handle, here is my spout

When I get my steam up

Then I shout

Tip me over

Pour me out.

Song of the animal world – a song from the Congo

Note: This song is about movement and the sounds of the chorus represent the movement of the creatures.

NARRATOR: The fish goes

CHORUS: Hip!

NARRATOR: The bird goes

CHORUS: Viss!

NARRATOR: The monkey goes

CHORUS: Gnan!

FISH: I start to left,

I twist to the right.

I am the fish

That slips through the water,

That slides,

That twists,

That leaps!

NARRATOR: Everything lives,

Everything dances,

Everything sings.

CHORUS: Hip!

Viss!

Gnan!

BIRD: The bird flies away,

Flies, flies, flies,

Goes, returns, passes,

Climbs, floats, swoops.

I am the bird!

NARRATOR: Everything lives,

Everything dances,

Everything sings.

CHORUS: Hip!

Viss!

Gnan!

MONKEY: The monkey! From branch

to branch

Runs, hops, jumps,

With his wife and baby,

Mouth stuffed full, tail in air,

Here's the monkey!

Here's the monkey!

NARRATOR: Everything lives,

Everything dances,

Everything sings.

CHORUS: Hip!

Viss!

Gnan!

Original sources:

Yellow butter – Traditional rhymes/songs; New Successful English, Grade 6, Reading Book, Oxford University Press
Song of the animal world – Traditional song from the Congo, African Poetry for Schools, Longman

Resource 3: Example questions to ask about a grocery item



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Questions about grocery items

1. What is in this tin/packet/box?
2. How do you know this?
3. Which word or words are in the biggest letters?
4. Why do you think this word or these words are in the biggest letters?
5. How many words begin with capital letters?
6. Which words are written more than once on the package?
7. Which word is used the most?
8. What is the weight of this product (grammes/kilogrammes)?
9. What do all the words and pictures tell you about this product?

Questions to encourage critical thinking

- Do you agree or disagree with what these words and pictures tell you?
- If you had the money, would you like to buy this product? Why, or why not?

Note 1: Some products have words in more than one language. If this is the case for some of the items that you are using, you could ask pupils which languages have been used and why they think these have been used.

Note 2: These example questions are quite general. There are many other questions you could ask. For example, if there are pictures of people on the product, are they male or female, young or old? Why are these particular people on the packet/tin/box?

What pupils could learn from working with grocery packaging

1. Beginner readers could use the words on the grocery package to gain confidence and skill in recognising the shape of upper and lower case (capital and small) letters of the alphabet and in linking the letter shapes to sounds.
2. By copying letters and words from the packaging, beginner writers could gain confidence and skill in writing these letters and words accurately.
3. More advanced readers could read the 'messages' on the packaging and think about what these mean. They could begin to become critical readers.
4. By working in groups to design some grocery packaging, pupils could benefit from each other's ideas, learn what is involved in package design, use their imaginations and practise some writing and reading.
5. Some pupils find it difficult to speak to the class because they don't know what to talk about. Having a design for a package to explain to the class gives pupils a subject to speak about.
6. Each group's design gives the rest of the class some additional material to read.
7. You could make reading cards with letters/words that some pupils found difficult to read. Put a helpful picture on each card. Use these for individual or small group reading practice with these pupils at a suitable time.

Resource 4: Preparing for a community walk – during which pupils will notice environmental print



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Step 1

If your class is very large, you could ask some adults from the community to help you in walking with groups of pupils. If you do this, meet with these adults before the walk to explain what you would like them to do. They should know what questions you will be asking pupils and what examples of environmental print you want pupils to notice. They may also have some suggestions to give you.

Step 2

Plan the activity by walking through the area around your school. For some of you this may be a village, for others part of a busy city. (Note: If your school is in a very isolated place, you may need to work with community members to arrange transport for pupils to a place where they can see a range of environmental print.) Notice every example of environmental print you can draw pupils' attention to and plan a route for you and the pupils to walk. The kinds of print and visual images will, of course, vary greatly from one neighbourhood to another but may include names (e.g. school, clinic, mosque, church, community hall, shop, river, street); signs (e.g. a STOP sign); advertisements on billboards or the walls of shops; community notices (e.g. election posters or notices about meetings or social or sports events).

Step 3

Prepare a list of questions for pupils to answer. These could include:

- What does this sign or name tell us?
- Why do you think it has been placed here?
- What language is it written in?
- Why do you think it has been written in this language?
- What information do you get from the drawings or photographs that you see?
- Which signs are easy to read? Why?
- Which signs do you like? Why?
- How could you improve some of the signs?
- What other names, signs, advertisements, posters, notices would you like to have in this neighbourhood? Why would you like to have these?

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Other

A traditional lullaby from Buganda – central Uganda – as collected by music teacher Robinah Nazziwa

Yellow butter – Traditional rhymes/songs; New Successful English, Grade 6, Reading Book, Oxford University Press

Song of the animal world – Traditional song from the Congo, African Poetry for Schools, Longman

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Return to Literacy (primary) page

Section 2: Stimulating interest in reading stories

Key Focus Question: How can you stimulate pupils to want to read stories and books?

Keywords: shared reading; creative responses; silent reading; beginnings and endings; stimulating interest

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will have:

- used shared reading of stories in your teaching to support developing readers;
- used activities that focus on alternative beginnings and endings to stimulate interest in reading;
- explored different ways to promote sustained silent reading (SSR) in your classroom.

Introduction

Pupils are more likely to learn how to read successfully if they enjoy reading and read as often as possible. If you asked your friends what they enjoy reading, their answers might vary from newspaper sports pages to recipes, romantic novels, detective stories or biographies – or they might not read much at all! Like your friends, different pupils may enjoy reading different kinds of texts. They will respond to what they read in different ways. Your task is to motivate all the pupils in your class to read successfully and to enjoy reading.

This section focuses on helping pupils to find pleasure in reading and responding to stories.

1. Reading aloud

The kinds of stories and story-reading activities that pupils enjoy are likely to vary according to their age and their knowledge of the language in which the stories are written. Younger pupils and pupils who are just beginning to learn an additional language enjoy having a good story read to them several times – particularly if they have opportunities to participate in the reading. By reading a story several times and by encouraging pupils to read parts of the story with you, you are helping them to become familiar with new words and to gain confidence as readers.

The focus of **Activity 1** is preparing and teaching a shared reading lesson. The aims of this activity are to increase your confidence and skills as a reader and to get pupils ‘hooked on books’.

Case Study 1: Using childhood experiences of stories to prepare classroom activities

When Jane Dlomo thought about her childhood in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, she remembered how much she had enjoyed her grandmother’s stories. Two things stood out in her memory: firstly, how much she enjoyed hearing the same stories over and over again and secondly, how much she and her brothers and sisters enjoyed joining in with the stories. Sometimes her grandmother asked, ‘What do you think happened next?’ Sometimes she asked the children to perform actions.

Jane decided to make her reading lessons with Grade 4 pupils more like her grandmother’s story performances. She also decided to experiment with activities that would involve pupils in sharing the reading with her and with one another. When she told her colleague Thandi about her decision, Thandi suggested that they work together to find suitable storybooks, practise reading the stories aloud to each other and think of ways of involving the pupils in the reading. Both teachers found that sharing the preparation helped them to be more confident in the classroom (see [Resource 1: Preparation for shared reading](#)).

Key Resource: [Using storytelling in the classroom](#) gives further ideas.

Activity 1: Sharing the pleasures of a good storybook

Read [Resource 1](#) and follow the steps below.

- Prepare work on other tasks for some pupils to do while you do shared reading with a group of 15 to 20.
- Establish any background knowledge about the topic of the story before reading it.
- As you read, show pupils the illustrations and ask questions about them. Use your voice and actions to hold pupils’ attention.
- Invite pupils to join in the reading by repeating particular words or sentences that you have written on the chalkboard and by performing actions.
- At the end, discuss the story with your pupils. (See [Resource 2: Questions to use with book readings](#).)

How did you feel about your reading of the story?

Did pupils enjoy the story? How do you know?

What can you do to develop your story reading skills?

2. Using writing to encourage reading

The child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1976) believes that if children find ‘magic’ in stories, they will really want to learn to read. He argues that if a child believes strongly that being able to read will open up a world of wonderful experiences and understanding, they will make a greater effort to learn to read and will keep on reading.

Sharing interesting stories with pupils is one way for a teacher to make reading a magical experience. Stimulating curiosity and imagination by encouraging them to create alternative endings (and sometimes beginnings) to stories and to share these with their classmates is another. **Case Study 2** and **Activity 2** describe how you can help your pupils to become story makers for one another.

Case Study 2: Reading stories; writing new story endings

Mrs Miriam Muwai teaches English to Standard 6 in a Nairobi school. One day, she asked her pupils to think about the stories they had read with her and to tell her which story ending they liked best and which they found disappointing or unsatisfactory. She found they had different favourite stories. However, there was one story that most pupils didn’t like because they didn’t know what happened to three characters that ‘disappeared’ from it. Miriam asked them to suggest what could have happened to these characters and wrote their ideas on the chalkboard. Then she asked pupils to choose one of the three characters and to write an ending to this character’s part in the story. She encouraged pupils to use their own ideas, as well as those from the chalkboard, and to include drawings with their writing. Then she reread the story to remind them of the setting, the characters and the main events.

Although Miriam asked pupils to write individually, she also encouraged them to help each other with ideas, vocabulary and spelling. She moved around the room while pupils were writing and drawing, helping where needed. She was very pleased to find that most of her pupils really liked the idea of being authors and of writing for a real audience (their classmates). She noticed that they were taking a great deal of care with their work because their classmates would be reading it.

In the next lesson, when they read each other’s story endings, she observed that most of her ‘reluctant readers’ were keen to read what their classmates had written and see what they had drawn.

Activity 2: Writing new beginnings and endings to stories

Write on your chalkboard the short story in [Resource 3: A story](#). Omit the title and the last two sentences.

- Read the story with your pupils. Discuss any new words.
- Ask them to answer questions such as those in [Resource 3](#).
- Organise the class to work in fours – two to write a beginning to the story and two to write an ending. Each pair does a drawing to illustrate their part of the story. (This may take more than one lesson.)
- Ask each group to read their whole story to the class and to display their drawings. Discuss with pupils what they like about each other's stories.
- Finally, read the title and the last two sentences of the original story to your class. (They are likely to be surprised that it's about soccer!)
- Find another story to repeat the exercise.

How well did this activity work?

How did the pupils respond to each other's stories?

3. Encouraging individual reading

Teachers should be good role models for pupils. Your pupils are likely to become more interested in reading if they see you reading. Try to make time each day (or at least three times a week if that is all you can manage) for you and your pupils to read silently in class. You can adapt this depending on the age and stage of your pupils. For example, young pupils could look at a picture book with a partner or listen to someone reading with them in small groups.

Extensive or sustained silent reading (SSR) helps pupils become used to reading independently and at their own pace (which may be faster or slower than some of their classmates). The focus is on the whole story (or on a whole chapter if the story is a very long one) and on pupils' personal responses to what they read. SSR can be done with a class reader, with a number of different books that pupils have chosen from a classroom or school library, or with newspapers and magazines (if pupils can manage these) – see [Resource 4: Sustained silent reading](#).

Case Study 3 and the **Key Activity** suggest ways to assess pupils' progress as readers. (See also [Key Resource: Assessing learning](#).)

Case Study 3: Teachers' experience of sustained silent reading

A workshop was held in Naivasha, Kenya, to introduce teachers to sustained silent reading (SSR). It was explained that one of the main aims of SSR is to create a 'culture of reading' among pupils.

Teachers were invited to participate in SSR and then to reflect on their experiences. Each teacher chose a book or magazine and read silently for 20 minutes. After this, they had ten minutes of discussion with three fellow readers about what they had read and how they responded to the text. When they returned their books and magazines, they signed their names in the book register and, next to their names, wrote a brief comment about the text.

These teachers decided that SSR is useful for developing concentration and self-discipline, for learning new vocabulary and new ideas and for providing content for discussions with other pupils. They thought their pupils would enjoy this activity and be proud when they finished reading a book. Some teachers decided to try this with a small group at a time and rotate around the class because they only had a few books in the class.

Key Activity: Sustained silent reading

- Collect interesting books, magazines and stories that are at an appropriate level for your pupils. Involve pupils and community in collecting suitable texts or use books your pupils have made in class (see [Resource 4](#)).
- Set aside 15–20 minutes every day or three times a week for sustained silent reading. Ask pupils to choose a text to read silently. Read yourself as they read.
- At the end, if they have not finished their books, ask them to use bookmarks so they can easily find their places next time.
- Ask each pupil to make or contribute to a reading record (see [Resource 4](#)).
- Every week, ask pupils, in small groups, to tell each other about what they have been reading.
- Move round the groups to listen to what pupils are saying. Check their reading records.

Do pupils enjoy this activity and are they making progress with their reading?

How can you help more?

Resources 1: Preparation for shared reading



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Choose a story with characters and events that you think will interest your pupils.

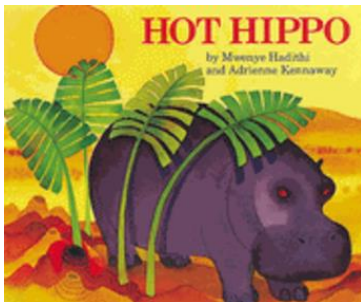
Think about any background knowledge that pupils will need in order to understand and enjoy the story. Decide how to provide this before you begin the story reading. For example, young pupils in some parts of Africa would be familiar with a hippopotamus, but in others they may not be, so before reading the story *Hot Hippo* you would need to find out what pupils know by asking questions like these:

Questions to establish background knowledge:

- What does a hippopotamus look like?
- Would you be frightened of a hippopotamus? Why, or why not?
- Where would you be likely to see one?
- What does a hippopotamus eat?

First prediction question

This story is called *Hot Hippo*. Look at the drawing on the cover. (The drawing shows a hippopotamus trying to shelter under some palm leaves.) What do you think the story will be about?



http://www.dixie.fcps.net/Book_Jackets/hothippo.gif (Accessed 2008)

Note: While these questions refer to the story Hot Hippo, similar questions could be asked about animals, people, places or activities in relation to any story.

Practise reading the story aloud before you use it in your classroom. Think about how to perform the voices of the characters and about the actions you can use to make the story come alive. If there are drawings with the story, decide how to use these when you read to your class.

Look for parts of the story where pupils can join in once they are familiar with the story. For example, in one story, Eddie the elephant tries to copy the actions of other animals or the actions of people and every time he fails he cries 'Wah! Wah! Wah! Boo! Hoo! Hoo! I wish I knew what I could do!' You could write a chorus like this on your chalkboard for pupils to follow.

Look out for places in the story where you could ask pupils some prediction questions, such as: 'What do you think Eddie will do next?' or 'How could the Hot Hippo solve his problem?'

Resource 2: Questions to use with book readings – first, second and third readings



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Here are a few questions you could ask before reading a story with pupils and then examples of questions to ask when the reading has been completed. There are also questions after they have read the book another time or more.

FIRST READING SESSION

Before reading

1. Does the cover make you want to read this book? Why, or why not? What does the cover make you think the book is going to be about? How does it do this?
2. Tell me about what you see on the first page of the story.

During reading

Ask questions about the development of the story and how the words and pictures contribute to this development.

After reading

1. What did you like or dislike about this book?
2. Is there anything that puzzled or surprised you about this book?
3. Are there any patterns you have noticed?
4. What is your favourite picture? Could you tell me what you see in this picture?
5. Do you think the cover was appropriate (the right kind of cover) for what happened in the story?
6. Do you find the words or the pictures more interesting? Do they tell the same story in different ways? Would the words still be good without the pictures? Would the pictures still be good without the words?
7. Is the story told through the words, the pictures or both? Is it the same all the way through the book?

SECOND AND THIRD READING SESSIONS

(Note: These should be some weeks apart.)

Before reading

1. Have you thought about the book since we last read it?
2. Would you like to read it again?
3. Tell me what you remember most about the book.

During reading

Again, ask questions about the development of the story and how the words and pictures contribute to this development.

After reading

1. Did you notice anything this time that you didn't notice before?
2. How do you feel about this story after reading it again?
3. When you think about the book now, what is the most important thing about it for you?

Having read the book more than once, would you recommend that other pupils read it more than once with their teacher?

Adapted from: Swain, C. The Primary English Magazine

Resource 3: A story



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

The Story

Write this story on the chalkboard, but do not write either the title or the last two sentences ('He shot – low to the right. What a goal!') on the board until the very last part of your lesson.

[Run for glory by Mark Northcroft (aged 12 years)]

On and on he ran. His legs felt like churning acid. He could hear his pursuers closing in on him. He felt he could not keep this up much longer but he knew he had to. The footsteps were gaining on him. 'Faster! Faster!' he cried. 'I can't! I can't!' he answered. Somewhere deep inside himself, he found a sudden surge of energy. Now he knew he could do it.

Suddenly a man approached him from out of nowhere. 'Now or never,' he thought.

[He shot – low to the right. What a goal!]

Notes

'His legs felt like churning acid' – This simile or comparison is not easy to explain but you could say that the man or boy felt pain in his legs as though he had a mixture of chemicals bubbling up in them.

'pursuers' – people who are following or chasing someone.

'surge' – a sudden, powerful movement.

'energy' – liveliness, capacity for activity.

Questions to ask pupils in preparation for writing an alternative beginning and ending to this story

1. Who do you think 'he' is?
2. Where do you think he is?
3. What do you think is happening to him?
4. Who is 'a man'?
5. What other people might be part of this story?
6. What might have happened before this part of the story?
7. What might happen next?

Resource 4: Sustained silent reading



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

Developing sustained silent reading (SSR) in your classroom is important in encouraging your pupils to want to read and developing their reading skills. For SSR to succeed requires some careful planning ahead. You will need to gather together resources for your class or a group to read. These could be articles from newspapers or magazines, books, etc. You need to be resourceful to gather these and also to store them so they are not lost or damaged.

If you have enough resources for your whole class, you could do SSR once a week at the start or end of the day. If you only have a limited number of resources, you could do it with one group each day and also work with your class to make more class books to read.

Questions to ask

These are examples of questions that could be asked about many different kinds and levels of storybooks, but you may prefer to ask pupils for just a brief comment.

1. What happens in the first part (introduction, beginning) of the story?
2. What happens in the middle part (where there are complications or conflicts in the story)?
3. What happens at the end (resolution)?
4. Is there a problem that needs to be solved?
5. What is the goal of the main character or characters?
6. What happens to the characters in the different parts of the story? What difficulties do they face?
7. Have similar things ever happened to you?
8. If their first attempt is unsuccessful, do the main characters get another chance to achieve their goal?
9. What happens to the characters at the end?
10. How do you feel about this story? Did it make you think about your own life or anyone else's? If so, in what way(s)?

Keeping a reading record

As pupils carry out SSR it is useful for them to keep records of the books they have read and to comment on what they did or did not like about them. It is also a way of seeing what breadth of material they are reading and the kinds of things that interest them. It tells you how much they are reading, especially if you encourage them to also include books, newspapers, magazines, etc. that they read at home or elsewhere. With newspapers and magazines, you may suggest they only add these when they read them regularly and say how often they read them. They may want to include articles from particular magazines.

Keeping a record must not become a bore, as this will put pupils off reading. Each record should only include the title and author and maybe publisher if you wish to add the book to the class collection (if you have a budget). The pupil could say if they liked the book and why, and if they'd recommend it to others to read.

The record could be a class one, where the title of each book in the library is on the top of a sheet of paper and every time someone reads this book they sign the list and put in a short comment. Another way is for each pupil to have a page at the back of an exercise book where they keep a list of the books they have read and every time they finish a book or give up on a book they make a comment next to the title and author. It would be useful if these entries are dated, so you can see how often they are finishing a book etc.

Collecting and displaying materials for SSR

If you need to start your own classroom library, the first requirement is to collect books and magazines. There are organisations that can help schools obtain books. Here are some useful contacts.

Africa Book Centre
Website: <http://www.africabookcentre.com>
Kenya Publishers Association
P O Box 42767
00100 Nairobi

Longhorn Publishers
Website: <http://www.longhornbooks.co.ke>

East African Educational Publishers
Tel: +254 4451530/1/3
Email: sales@eastafricanpublishers.com
Website: <http://www.eastafricanpublishers.com>

Macmillan Kenya Publishers Ltd
Kijabe Street
P O Box 30797
00100 Nairobi
Tel: +254 0 220012
Website: <http://www.macmillan.com>

Kenya Literature Bureau
P O Box 30022
000100 Nairobi
Tel: +254 244847
Email: customer@kenyaliteraturebureau.com
Website: <http://www.kenyaliteraturebureau.com>

Jomo Kenyatta Foundation
P O Box 30533
00100 Nairobi

For more information on SSR, the following website is also useful: <http://www.trelease-on-reading.com>

Sometimes the embassies of foreign countries or organisations linked to embassies, such as the British Council, are able to make donations of books. Service organisations such as Rotary Clubs also collect and donate books. If you cannot contact any organisation for assistance, then try asking colleagues and friends to donate books and magazines that their children or

other family members have finished with. Some schools ask parents to help teachers to organise fundraising events and then they use the money that is raised to buy books. **Key Resource: Being a resourceful teacher in challenging conditions** explores this further.

Once you have enough books and magazines for all the pupils in your class to read individually, you need to think about how to look after these precious materials. If you have, or could make (or get someone else to make), some shelves for one side or the back of your classroom, you could then display the books and magazines in order to attract pupils' interest. In an exercise book, write down the titles of the books and magazines so that you can keep track of them. At the end of each SSR period, watch carefully to check that pupils return the books to the shelf.

If you do not have shelves, then pack the books and magazines carefully into boxes. You may like to choose some pupils to be book monitors to help you distribute books from the boxes at the beginning of the reading period and to pack them away at the end.

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

Other

Resource 1 : Hot Hippo http://www.dixie.fcps.net/Book_Jackets/hothippo.gif (Accessed 2008)

Resource 2 : Adapted from: Swain, C. The Primary English Magazine

For more information on SSR, the following website is also useful: <http://www.trelease-on-reading.com>

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Return to Literacy (primary) page

Section 3: Ways of reading and responding to information texts

Key Focus Question: How can you develop your questioning skills to help pupils use information texts effectively?

Keywords: information texts; comprehension; summary; questions; assessment

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will have:

- developed your ability to create questions and tasks that encourage close reading of texts and personal responses;
- explored ways to teach pupils how to read and write about information presented in different forms;
- helped your pupils develop the skills needed to summarise texts;
- used these strategies to assess learning.

Introduction

In ‘the information age’ we all need to be able to read and respond to information presented in many different forms. Reading information from a chart or diagram requires different skills from reading a story.

As a teacher, your role is to help pupils understand what they read, summarise the main ideas in a text and respond with their own ideas. While it is important for pupils to be able to write answers to questions on what they have read, some will produce better work if they have opportunities to demonstrate what they understand through other activities, e.g. making posters or pie charts.

This section suggests ways to help pupils develop their comprehension and summarising skills.

1. Reading for understanding

Comprehension exercises are very common, but how well do they extend pupils' reading skills?

Case Study 1 demonstrates that you need to think very carefully about whether the 'reading comprehension' questions in textbooks really help you to know what pupils have understood from their reading. You need to create questions or activities that require pupils to read information texts carefully. **Activity 1** gives you some examples to try out and use as models when designing your own questions and activities. [Key Resource: Using questioning to promote thinking](#) gives further ideas.

Case Study 1: Rethinking 'reading comprehension'

At a workshop in Lusaka, Zambia, teachers of English as an additional language read a nonsense text and answered questions on it. The first sentence in this text was: 'Some glibbericks were ogging blops onto a mung' and the first 'comprehension' question was 'Who were ogging blops onto a mung?' Every teacher knew that the answer was 'some glibbericks'. In their discussion, they realised they could give the 'correct' answer because they knew that in English, 'some glibbericks' was the subject of this sentence. They didn't need to know who or what a glibberick was, in order to give the answer!

After the discussion, they worked in small groups to design questions and tasks that would show them whether or not pupils had understood the texts on which these questions and tasks were based. They learned that questions should not allow pupils to just copy information from one sentence in the text. They designed tasks in which pupils had to complete a table, design a poster or make notes to use in a debate as ways of showing what they had learned from reading a text.

They reflected that the questions they asked and the tasks they set meant they could better assess their pupils' understanding.

Activity 1: Comprehending and responding to information texts

- Read [Resource 1: Text on litter](#). Make copies of the article and tasks or write the paragraphs and tasks on your chalkboard.
- Cover them over.
- Before pupils read the article, ask some introductory questions. Your questions should help pupils to connect what they already know to the new information in the article (see [Resource 2: Introductory questions](#)). If your pupils are young or you need to read the text to them, you could write their answers on the board.
- Next, uncover the article and tasks, and ask pupils to read the article in silence and write answers to the tasks. When they have finished, collect their books and assess their answers.
- Return the books and/or give the whole class oral feedback on what they did well and discuss any difficulties they experienced. (See [Resource 1](#) for suggested answers to the tasks.)

In the next lesson, ask pupils to work in small groups to design an 'anti-litter' poster and display it in class (see [Resource 3: Good posters](#)).

2. Reading charts and diagrams

Think about all the kinds of information texts that you read. Whether these are in the pages of textbooks, in advertising leaflets or on computer screens, they frequently include diagrams, charts, graphs, drawings, photographs or maps. To be successful as readers, you and your pupils need to understand how words, figures and visual images (such as photographs or drawings) work together to present information. Many writers on education now stress the importance of visual literacy. Learning how to read and respond to photographs and drawings is one part of becoming visually literate. Reading and responding to charts, graphs and diagrams is another. Bar and pie charts are some of the easier charts to understand and to make in order to summarise information.

Case Study 2: Making a pie chart to represent the number of pupil birthdays in each month of the year

Miss Maria Bako likes to make each pupil in her Primary 6 class of 60 pupils feel special. In her classroom she has a large sheet of paper with the month and day of each pupil's birthday. On each birthday, the pupils sing Happy Birthday to their classmate. One day, a pupil commented that in some months they sing the birthday song much more often than others. Maria decided to use this comment to do some numeracy and some visual literacy work on pie charts.

First, she wrote the names of the months on her chalkboard and then she asked pupils to tell her how many of them had birthdays in each month. She wrote the number next to the month (e.g. January 5; February 3, and so on).

Then she drew a large circle on the board and told pupils to imagine that this was a pie and that as there were 60 in the class there would be 60 sections in the pie, one for each pupil. The sections would join to make slices. There would be 12 slices, because there are 12 months in a year. Each slice would represent the number of pupils who had their birthday in a particular month, but each slice would be a different size. She began with the month with most birthdays – September. In September, 12 pupils had birthdays.

Pupils quickly got the idea of making 12 slices of different sizes within the circle to represent the number of birthdays in each month as a percentage of the class. They copied the birthday pie chart into their books and made each slice a different colour.

The class talked about other information they could put into a pie chart and decided to explore how many pupils played different sports, how many supported each team in the national soccer league and how many pupils spoke the different languages used in their area.

Activity 2: Comprehending and making a pie chart

Copy the pie chart in [Resource 4: A pie chart](#) onto your chalkboard.

Ask pupils to suggest why this is called a pie chart.

Write out the questions (part b) about the pie chart on your chalkboard and ask pupils to work in pairs to answer them.

Discuss the answers with the class.

Use your chalkboard to show pupils how to turn these answers into a paragraph about Iredia's

weekend. Ask pupils to draw the pie chart.

For homework, ask pupils to draw their own pie charts to show how they usually spend their time at weekends.

After checking the homework, ask pupils to exchange their chart with a partner and to write a paragraph about their partner's weekend.

What have you learned from these activities?

What relevant activity could you do next? (Look at [Resource 4](#) for some ideas.)

3. Learning how to summarise

Learning to find and summarise the main ideas in the chapters of textbooks and other study materials becomes increasingly important as pupils move up through the school. These skills take practice to acquire.

The **Key Activity** and **Resource 5: Text on the baobab** give examples of ways to help pupils learn how to summarise information texts. You will need to do such activities many times. For older pupils, you could ask colleagues to show you what the pupils you teach are required to read in other subjects such as social studies or science. You could then use passages from social studies or science textbooks for summary work in the language classroom by following the steps in the **Key Activity**.

Case Study 3: Summarising key points from textbook chapters

The pupils in Mal Adamu Jibo's Primary 6 class were anxious about the forthcoming examinations. They told him they didn't really understand what their teachers meant when they told the pupils to 'revise' the chapters in their textbooks. Adamu decided to use an information text from their English textbook to give his class some ideas about how to find and write down the main points in a text.

He asked his pupils to tell him the purpose of the table of contents, chapter headings and sub-headings in their textbooks. It was clear from their silence that many pupils had not thought about this. A few were able to say that these give readers clues about the main topics in the book. Adamu told the pupils that in order to revise a chapter, they should write the sub-headings on paper, leaving several lines between each one. Then they should read what was written in the textbook under one sub-heading, close their books and try to write down the key points of what they had just read.

Next, they should check their written notes against the book and make changes to their notes by adding anything important they had left out or crossing out anything they had written incorrectly. Adamu said that some pupils prefer to make notes in the form of a mind map in which there are connections between important points. (See **Resource 5** and **Key Resource: Using mind maps and brainstorming to explore ideas.**) He showed them how to do this.

Finally, he reminded them to ask their teachers to explain anything they had not understood. Adamu also told them how he made notes of what he found out about his pupils and their learning to help him plan more lessons.

Key Activity: Developing summarising skills

Before the lesson, copy the text from **Resource 5** on the baobab tree or write it on your chalkboard. Try out the activities yourself first.

- Showing pupils some newspaper and magazine pages, ask why the articles have headlines and what they tell the reader. Ask them to suggest why their textbooks have headings and sub-headings.
- Ask pupils to read the information text about the baobab tree and to work in pairs to decide which paragraphs are on the same topic.
- Ask them to write a heading that summarises the paragraph(s) on each topic.
- Ask some pupils to read out their headings and write these on the chalkboard.
- Agree which are the best headings for each set of paragraphs on the same topic.

- Leave the 'best' headings on the board with some space under each one. Ask pupils to suggest key points from the paragraphs and record these.
- Show pupils how to link headings and key points in a mind map to help them remember about baobab trees.

If you have time or prefer to use a shorter text, you do the same activities with your pupils using the text in **Resource 6: On the Kapok tree.**

Think about what pupils did well and what they found difficult and plan another session to deal with these.

Resources 1: Text on litter



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Litter

Litter is any kind of 'left-over' or waste product that people do not put in its proper place, such as a rubbish bin. People who simply drop waste such as fruit peel or empty cans on the ground are guilty of littering. We sometimes call these people litter bugs.

Litter does not just happen

People are responsible for litter. An item of waste, such as the wrapping from a bar of chocolate, is not litter if it has been placed in a rubbish bin. It becomes litter when someone drops it on the ground, leaves it lying on the ground where he or she has been sitting or throws it out of a window.

Litter can be dangerous to people

Broken glass and sharp rusty cans that are left in places where people walk – and especially where young children play – can cut them. These cuts can lead to serious infections. Fruit and vegetable waste is sometimes slippery and if people step on it they may fall and break an arm or a leg. Litter can be a cause of road accidents when drivers try to move their cars or trucks out of the way of sharp objects that could cut their tyres. Plastic bags and pieces of cardboard sometimes blow onto the windscreens of vehicles and stop drivers from seeing clearly.

Litter can be dangerous to animals and birds

Glass and cans may also cut the feet or mouths of domestic or wild animals while they are grazing. Nylon fishing line that is thrown on the ground or into water can get wrapped around the beaks or legs of birds and cause them to die because they can no longer move or eat. Sea creatures, such as seals and sharks, may get caught up in old fishing nets. If they cannot free themselves they will also die.

The dangers of plastic

Plastic litter causes problems for fish, birds and people. In rivers and the sea it can be harmful to fish because they can get caught up in it and not break free. Plastic bags on beaches have led to the deaths of many seagulls. Even loosely woven bags, which vegetables and fruit are sometimes packaged in, can be harmful to birds. They get inside these and cannot find a way out, as the material is very tough. Pieces of plastic or plastic bags can get caught in the outboard motors of boats and can cause the motor to stop working.

If we want to keep our country clean and beautiful and to protect our people and our wildlife, we must not throw litter. It is not difficult to throw a can, bottle, plastic bag or piece of paper into a bin rather than on to the ground.

Writing tasks based on litter

1. **List seven kinds of litter that are mentioned in the article.** (To answer this question successfully pupils need to find information in several different paragraphs, so they have to read carefully.)
2. **Explain what the word litter means.** (Pupils could copy an answer from the first paragraph of the text without really understanding what the word means but the next question can help you to check their understanding because you are asking them to use a word or words from other languages that they know – for many pupils their home language.)
3. **What is the word (or words) for litter in any other languages that you know?**
4. **List three kinds of litter that are harmful to birds.** (Birds are mentioned several times in the passage, not just in the paragraph with the heading that includes birds. Pupils need to find each reference to birds and then link this to different types of litter and the problems these cause.)
5. **In your own words, describe three of the ways in which people can be harmed by litter.** (Pupils should use the sub-heading to guide them and then try to express the content of the paragraph in their own words rather than just copying from the paragraph. This will help you to see if they have understood what they have read.)
6. **Do you agree with the writer that it is not difficult to throw waste into a rubbish bin? Give a reason for your answer.** (This is a personal response question that encourages pupils to think critically and express their own ideas.)
7. **Suggest what else can be done with waste products such as glass, paper, plastic, fruit and vegetable peels.** (This is also a personal response question and encourages class discussion about the environmental topic of recycling.)

Notice that the answers to questions 1 to 5 require pupils to read the text carefully whereas questions 6 and 7 require them to use their own ideas.

Answers to the writing tasks

1. Fruit and vegetable peel, glass, cans, plastic, fishing line, paper, cardboard.
2. Litter is waste material that people do not put in its proper place (such as a rubbish bin).
3. Words from languages used in your class.
4. Nylon fishing line, plastic bags, woven fruit and vegetable bags.
5. People can cut themselves on broken glass or sharp cans. People can slip on fruit or vegetable waste and break an arm or leg. People can be involved in road accidents when drivers try to avoid litter in the road or when they can't see because of litter blown onto the windscreen. People on water in motorboats may not be able to safely reach land if the motor of the boat is damaged by plastic. (Four ways are mentioned here.)
6. This is a question to which pupils should be encouraged to give a variety of responses. For example, it is not possible to put waste in a rubbish bin if there are no bins in the school grounds or in the streets.
7. This task gives you and the pupils an opportunity to discuss various forms of recycling. For example, vegetable and fruit peels can be put into a compost heap or dug straight into garden soil in order to enrich the soil. Plastic strips can be woven into useful mats for the floor. In some towns and cities, glass, cans and paper or cardboard can be taken to recycling facilities and people can even be paid for what they collect and bring to these places.

Resource 2: Introductory questions



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Ask these questions before reading starts in order to help pupils make connections between what they already know and what they are going to read about in the information text on litter.

- Are there any kinds of rubbish in our school grounds or around our homes? If there are, what kinds?
- How did the rubbish get there?
- If there is no rubbish, what is the reason for the clean areas around our school grounds or homes?
- What is another word for rubbish that lies on the ground in our school yard or street? (If pupils don't know, point to 'Litter' on the chalkboard or in their copy of the article.)
- What are some of the problems that litter can cause?

Resource 3: Good posters



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

Features of good posters

1. The whole sheet of paper is used.
2. Words are in large print.
3. Often the words are not whole sentences.
4. Pictures should be simple, clear and powerful.
5. The colour of the words and pictures should attract attention.
6. The position of the words and the pictures on the sheet of paper should attract attention. (This is called the 'layout' of the poster.)

Steps to follow for lessons on designing and presenting posters and what pupils can learn from this activity

1. Tell pupils that they are going to work in groups to design an 'anti-litter' poster.
2. Begin with a whole-class discussion. What makes a good poster? What messages would be suitable for posters that encourage people to stop littering?
3. Give each group a large sheet of paper or card and make sure they have pencils and pens.
4. While the groups are working, move round the class to help where necessary and to take note of what pupils are learning.
5. When groups have finished, ask each group to show their poster to the class and to talk about why they designed it in a particular way.
6. Display the posters in your classroom or elsewhere in the school.

Pupils can demonstrate that they are learning:

- how to work cooperatively in a small group;
- how to design a poster;
- new vocabulary;
- what kinds of litter there are (by understanding information from the passage and by using their own experience);
- what can be done to prevent littering;
- how to talk about their posters.

Which kinds of learning have your pupils demonstrated?

How do you know this?

Where do they still need to improve?

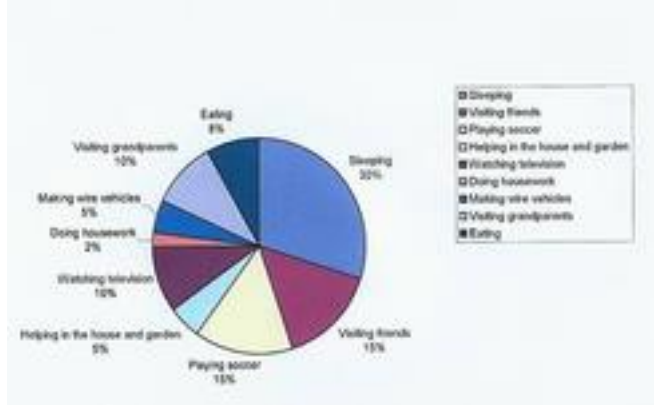
How will you help them?

Resource 4: A pie chart



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

a) A pie chart: How Iredia spends his time at weekends



Basic information

- 30% sleeping;
- 15% visiting friends;
- 15% playing soccer;
- 5% helping in the house and garden;
- 10% watching television;
- 2% doing homework;
- 5% making wire vehicles;
- 10% visiting grandparents;
- 8% eating.

b) Questions on the pie chart

1. What does the pie chart tell us? (How Iredia spends his time at weekends.)
2. What does Iredia spend the most time doing? (Sleeping.)
3. What does he spend the least time doing? (Homework.)
4. What does he do for the same amount of time as he watches television? (Visits grandparents.)
5. What does he do for the same amount of time as helping in the house and garden? (Making wire vehicles.)
6. When he is awake, what two things does Iredia spend the most time doing? (Visiting friends and playing soccer.)
7. If you made a pie chart to show how you spend your weekend, would it be similar to Iredia's or different? (Many possible answers.)

You could help pupils write about their partner's weekend by designing a writing frame with them, or by agreeing an example paragraph together. Here are examples for use to use or adapt.

Writing frame for describing a partner's weekend

X's weekends

X likes/doesn't like weekends...

He/she spends the greatest part of the weekend...

He/she usually... and sometimes...

On Saturday mornings...

On Saturday afternoons...

On Saturday evenings...

On Sunday mornings...

On Sunday afternoons...

On Sunday evenings...

c) Paragraph about Iredia's weekends

Iredia loves weekends. He enjoys staying in his warm bed much later than on school mornings and taking his time over meals with the family. He spends the biggest part of his weekend visiting friends and playing soccer. He usually watches television with his family in the evenings and sometimes stays up very late to do this. On Saturday mornings he and his sisters help their parents with cleaning the house or working in the garden. After they have finished, his sisters like to go to the shops but Iredia either goes to his friends or spends some time making wire cars and trucks that he and his friends can race. Sometimes he takes his cars and trucks to show his grandparents when he visits them on Sundays. Usually he needs to find some time on Sunday evening to do his homework for Monday.

Some of the information in this paragraph cannot be gleaned from the chart. The author has made up bits based on their experience and the data given. You may wish to explore this with your pupils. Ask them what they can say from the chart and which parts are made up.

d) What you and your pupils can learn from these activities

- To read information on a pie chart.
- To compare one item of information on the chart with another.
- To make a pie chart in order to summarise information.
- To understand that the same information can be presented in different ways.
- To use information from a pie chart to write a paragraph.
- To learn 'time expressions' (e.g. 'usually', 'sometimes').

e) Ideas for further activities

To consolidate pupils' learning about pie charts, they could make another one – perhaps about class birthdays or about sports teams they support or languages they speak. You could also decide to show them other ways of representing information such as a bar graph or a table if you have information about these. Your colleagues may be able to assist you here.

Resource 5: Text on the baobab



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Before starting the **Key Activity**, you may wish to use **Resource 1** as an example and discuss with your pupils how sub-headings can summarise key points.



The Baobab

The baobab is a very unusual tree. Some people think it is ugly because it is fat and for much of the year it has no leaves. It does not even seem to grow the right way up. In fact, some people who live in the land of the baobab say that it grows upside down with its branches in the earth and its roots in the air.

The baobab does things differently from other trees. Most trees use bees and birds to carry pollen grains from one tree to another so that the trees can be fertilised and make new flowers, fruit or nuts. The baobab uses bats. In early summer this tree produces big flowers with white petals. The flowers only open at night when the bats appear. The bats suck the nectar and transport the pollen from one tree to another on their wings and bodies.

Baobabs live for a very long time. Some of the largest baobabs may be over 3,000 years old.

The tree has many uses. In the past, some of the Khoi and San people of southern Africa used baobabs for their homes. They set fire to the soft insides of the trunk, making a hole big enough to live in. Even with this big hole in the trunk, the tree continued to live.

The bark of the tree has a number of uses. It can be used for making soft floor mats, paper and thread. The fibres of the bark make very strong rope.

Other parts of the tree also have their uses. If the roots are mashed, they make a soft porridge. The soft insides of the tree provide moisture for thirsty animals during the dry season. If the seeds are soaked in water for a few days, they produce a medicine that is very good for fevers. If the seeds are dried and ground up, they make a good but rather bitter coffee. If the leaves are boiled they become like cabbage and can be eaten.

There are many stories about the baobab. The people in Venda in southern Africa say that the trees were once the hiding place for evil spirits. Then a kind god came and tore the trees out of the ground and replanted them upside down. As a result, the evil spirits could no longer hide in the trees.

Other people believe that if you suck the seeds you will be safe from crocodiles, and if you drink a drink made from the bark you will grow to be big and powerful.

The baobab is a truly amazing tree. It is one of the marvels of Africa.

Suggested sub-headings for The Baobab text

- Paragraph 1: What a baobab looks like
- Paragraph 2: How pollen is transported between baobab trees
- Paragraph 3: Lifespan
- Paragraphs 4, 5, 6: Uses of the baobab
- Paragraphs 7, 8: Stories and beliefs about baobabs

Note: There is no new information in the final paragraph. It provides a comment from the author, giving his or her opinion of this tree.

A mind map summary of The Baobab



Adapted from: Ellis, R. & Murray, S. *Let's Use English, Learners' Book 5*

Resource 6: The kapok tree



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils



The kapok tree is a tropical tree which is common in parts of South America, the Caribbean, and tropical West Africa. You can find the kapok in the Capital Territory region around Abuja.

The tree can grow up to 70 metres (230 feet) tall, and the trunk can be up to 3 metres (10 feet) in diameter. The trunk and many of the larger branches have large, strong thorns on them. The leaves come in groups of 5 to 9 at a time, and they can be up to 20 centimetres long. The flowers on the leaves can produce well over 200 litres of nectar per tree in a season. This is why bats like the tree so much. They sometimes travel as much as 12 miles between trees to drink the sweet nectar. The adult trees produce several hundred 15 centimetre seed pods. A fluffy yellow or white fibre surrounds the seeds. This fibre is also called kapok.

The kapok fibre is light, burns easily, but does not absorb water easily. It is used as filling for mattresses, pillows and cushions. The seeds can be used to make soap or fertiliser for crops.



Kapok seed pod

Kapok fibre

Text adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceiba_pentandra (Accessed 2008)

Picture of kapok tree from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceiba_pentandra (Accessed 2008)

Pictures of kapok seed pod and fibre from

<http://www.thailex.info/THAILEX/THAILEXENG/LEXICON/kapok.htm> (Accessed 2008)

Both sites accessed on 23/06/07

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

Other

Resource 1 : Text on litter : Adapted from Taitz, L. et al, New Successful English, Learner's Book, Oxford University Press

Resource 5 : Text on the baobab : Adapted from: Ellis, R. & Murray, S. Let's Use English, Learners' Book 5

The kapok tree : Text adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceiba_pentandra

Picture of kapok tree from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceiba_pentandra

Pictures of kapok seed pod and fibre from
<http://www.thailex.info/THAILEX/THAILEXENG/LEXICON/kapok.htm>

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[Return to Literacy \(primary\) page](#)

Section 4: Ways of presenting your point of view

Key Focus Question: How can you help pupils become confident and thoughtful presenters of ideas?

Keywords: own feelings; viewpoints; debate; letter; newspaper; inclusion

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will have:

- supported pupils in expressing their points of view in speech and in writing;
- developed your ability to help pupils understand other people's situations, feelings and points of view;
- used discussion to explore inclusion issues.

Introduction

This section focuses on ways we express feelings and present points of view. It is important that teachers and pupils are able to do this with confidence, both in speech and in writing, in order to participate in decision-making in the family, school and wider community. As a teacher, you have an important role to play. You need to be able to argue your case within the school for such things as resources and ways of working, and also you need to support your pupils as they develop these skills.

It is important that all pupils feel included in the classroom and community, regardless of their state of health, home circumstances or any disability.

1. Using writing to elicit children's feelings

This part explores ways of working that will allow pupils to express their feelings and explore ideas about many things, including their personal lives. It looks at how to manage conflicts and frustrations more effectively.

Often, when starting topics that touch on sensitive issues, it is helpful to let pupils explore their ideas privately first. Writing thoughts down around an issue can help to stimulate thinking. This is a technique that can also be applied to other topics to find out what pupils already know.

Case Study 1: Writing to express feelings and point of view

Vivian in Accra, Ghana, discussed with her junior secondary pupils the kinds of things that make children feel different and/or left out.

Next, she asked them to look at a picture of a child sitting alone while others played ([Resource 1: Child who is 'left out'](#)), and asked them to write about this child. She also asked them if they had ever felt left out or different from others in the past, or if they were feeling this way at present. She asked them to write about these feelings.

Then they played games that helped them to experience what it was like to have a physical disability (see [Resource 2: Games that promote understanding of physical disability](#)). Afterwards, they talked about how such disabilities may make children feel different and sometimes cause them to be rejected by their classmates. They also talked about children who suffered from HIV/AIDS, or whose parents had died from that disease. Vivian asked them to write about their experiences during the games. What did it feel like to have a disability?

After this, before starting a sensitive topic, Vivian often asked her pupils to write or talk in pairs or small groups to explore their own ideas first.

Activity 1: Writing to express ideas and feelings

When starting a sensitive topic with pupils it is useful to explore their ideas and feelings first.

Select a picture, poem or story to stimulate their thinking (see [Resource 1](#) for one example).

Show the picture/read the poem or story and ask them to think about what it means to them.

Ask them to write or talk with their partner about their thoughts and include their feelings as well.

Remind them that no one will mark this or judge what they say to each other. It is for them to think about what they think and feel at that moment.

Next, discuss with the class what they think the messages are in the picture.

2. Organising a debate

Learning how to participate in a debate helps pupils (and adults) to express their points of view, listen to the views of others and think critically. When you choose topics for debate in your classroom, make sure you choose topics that are important to your pupils so they will really want to express their points of view.

In **Activity 2** you will introduce your pupils to the rules and procedures for debating and support them as they prepare for a formal debate. In **Case Study 2**, the debate is on inclusion in the classroom. With younger children, you could hold very simple discussions or debates about issues such as not hitting each other.

Resource 3: Structure of debating speeches and **Resource 4: Rules and procedures for debating** will give you guidance. You may also find these rules and procedures useful if you belong to organisations that need to conduct debates.

Case Study 2: Preparing for and conducting a debate

After Vivian and her pupils had written about being 'left out', they discussed specific children who were not in school for some reason. Some of these children were disabled, some had no parents and were heading households and some did not come to school because they were too poor to buy uniform.

Vivian introduced the idea of debating to the class, and presented the motion: 'This class moves that all "out-of-school" youngsters, isolated because of barriers to learning, should be brought to school.'

She grouped the 36 pupils into groups of six, and asked half the groups to discuss points in favour of the motion and half to discuss points against.

Then she gave them a framework for preparing their speeches (see **Resource 3**). Each group drafted a speech, either in favour or against the motion, and chose a speaker from among their number. Vivian looked at the speeches at lunchtime, and gave speakers advice on how to improve them. They did more work on their speeches at home.

The debate was held the next day. Vivian was very pleased with the high level of participation from all class members. The motion was carried, and pupils started making contact with out-of-school children, and working with their teacher and head teacher to bring them back to school. Vivian realised that the debate had provided an excellent opportunity for pupils to develop and express their points of view and for addressing an important community issue.

Activity 2: Debating a motion; expressing points of view

Explain to pupils about participating in a debate.

Brainstorm debating topics that interest them and help them to express these in the form of a motion. Decide on the motion for debate (see [Resource 3](#)).

Explain the rules and procedures for debating, using the information in [Resource 4](#).

Write the key rules and procedures on your chalkboard so that pupils can make a copy to refer to in future.

Ask pupils to prepare the debate speech in groups and choose one speaker to present their arguments.

You may have to help by providing background information for them to use in their speeches. You could also ask them to look for information from home for their speeches.

Check if the groups are ready to start the debate (perhaps later in the week) and then follow the rules and procedures.

Ask pupils to tell you what they have learned from the experience and use this information to plan future lessons and opportunities to discuss ideas.

With younger pupils, you could debate topics that relate to school, such as whether they should have class rules. You may have to help them learn to take turns to speak and listen to others' ideas.

3. Writing letters

It is important to learn how to express a point of view clearly, with supporting arguments. This is a useful skill when writing student essays, but also, when older, if debating a community or national issue in a letter, particularly a letter to a newspaper.

A letter to a newspaper can be compared to the first half of a debate. Often another person will respond to a published letter and will present alternative arguments. In [Resource 5: Example letter](#) there is a letter to a newspaper in which pupils write about the important issue of including all pupils in schools.

Case Study 3 and the **Key Activity** offer you guidance for working with pupils to present arguments in the form of a letter.

Case Study 3: Learning to write a letter to the head teacher or a newspaper

A few months after Vivian first introduced the idea of inclusion to her pupils, there were two new pupils in her class. One was deaf, and the other had only one arm. She and her pupils were gradually learning to include them in their class, to communicate with them, and to support them without making them feel too 'different'.

She now suggested the pupils write a letter to the head teacher or a newspaper on the topic of the importance of including all pupils in school. They could send their letter to the head teacher or to The Daily Graphic in Accra. They would have to write in English.

Pupils liked this idea and brainstormed what they could say. They produced an outline for the letter.

1. Theme: Schools should make efforts to bring in 'out-of-school' youngsters.
2. Reasons.
3. 'Ways to counter the possible arguments against.
4. Our experience.
5. Successes and challenges.
6. Repeat theme.

Vivian gave pupils guidance on the kinds of phrases to use, especially for 2 and 3, where they were presenting the argument. They asked a teacher who had access to a computer to type it, and sent copies to the newspapers (see the letter in [Resource 5](#)).

Key Activity: A letter to the head teacher or a newspaper to express a point of view

- Take a topic your pupils have debated and introduce the idea of presenting their arguments in a letter to the head teacher or, if you have one locally, to a newspaper.
- Ask them to brainstorm, in groups, what they wish to write.
- Next, write the structure for the letter on the chalkboard using the outline in Case Study 3 (although your theme may be different).
- Pupils may need to write this letter in an additional language (e.g. English) so give them some guidance on phrases to use for introducing and presenting arguments (see [Resource 6](#): 'Argument' phrases).
- Ask the groups to assess their own and each other's letters, and decide which is the best one to send to the head teacher or newspaper (see [Resource 6](#) for guidance).
- You may need to do some editing before sending the letter, but try to keep the pupils' words.

Think what your pupils have learned from turning debate arguments into a letter.

With younger pupils or those less confident and competent at writing, you could do this as a class exercise where you write down their ideas. Use the activity to develop their vocabulary in the additional language.

Resources 1: Child who is 'left out'



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils



Original source: Umthamo 6, University of Fort Hare Distance Education Project

Resource 2: Games that promote understanding of physical disability



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

You can help pupils to understand some of the difficulties that children with physical disabilities face by playing games like those below:

1. Bring to school some old stockings or pieces of rope or wool. Give these to pupils and ask them to tie behind their back the arm and hand they usually use to write with. Give each pupil a piece of paper. Explain that the game is to find out who can write the sentence that you are about to read to them in the fastest time, with the neatest handwriting. Read the sentence and then watch what happens! After you have chosen the winner, discuss with pupils how they felt while playing this game and what it must be like for pupils who have a disabled or missing arm/hand. If they are not able to write, ask them to draw a tree.
2. Bring to school some pieces of cloth or scarves (or ask pupils to do so) so that half the pupils are able to tie cloth over their eyes. Take the class outside. Tell pupils to work in pairs. The one who has been blindfolded has to walk around a number of obstacles that you have set up – you could use desks and chairs for this – being guided by their partner. Time each pair. If your class is not too large, ask the pairs to swop roles and then time each pair again. The winner is the pair that completes the task in the shortest time, without knocking over any of the obstacles. Afterwards, ask pupils how it felt to be blindfolded and to have to rely on a partner.
3. Bring to school enough cotton wool for each pupil to be able to put cotton wool into their ears to prevent them from hearing clearly. Then ask pupils to listen while you give the class a message to write down. The winner is the first pupil to complete writing the message without mistakes. Afterwards ask pupils how they felt when they could not hear clearly and what they could do to help someone with hearing problems.
4. If your school can afford to do this, buy a large number of marshmallow sweets. Give enough to each pupil so that his or her mouth is full. Tell them not to chew or swallow any of the marshmallows but to tell a partner the message you have written on the chalkboard. This is very difficult to do and they will realise what it is like to have a speech defect that prevents a person from speaking clearly. At the end, they eat the marshmallows!

Resource 3: Structure of debating speeches



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

Explanation of a motion

In parliament, or on important committees, when the members are making decisions, someone may introduce a motion to debate. A motion is a statement about something that needs to be done or discussed. A debate explores all sides of the argument. For example, if a member of parliament stands up and says: 'I move that capital punishment be abolished,' this idea is discussed formally and a decision is reached, which results in the desired action being carried out or not.

The following motions are examples of issues you could use in schools. You may have to adapt these depending on the size of your class and the age of your pupils.

- Parents should not use corporal punishment to discipline children.
- What we learn at home and in the community is more important than what we learn at school.

a) Supporting the motion

- State the motion: *I move OR I support the motion that all 'out-of-school' youngsters, isolated because of barriers to learning, should be brought to school.*
- Define your terms. In this case, you will need to say what you mean by 'out-of-school' youngsters, and barriers to learning. (This need only be done by the first speaker.)
- Give your reasons in support of the motion: e.g. *My first reason for supporting this motion is ...*
- *Secondly, ...*
- *Thirdly, ...*
- Sum up your reasons for supporting the motion: *In summary, OR To sum up, ...*
- Restate the motion: *I therefore repeat OR I therefore urge you all to support the motion that ...*

b) Opposing the motion

- State your opposition to the motion: *I oppose the motion that ... OR I support those who oppose the motion that ...*
- Define your terms. In this case, you will need to say what you mean by 'out-of-school' youngsters, and barriers to learning. (This need only be done by the first speaker.) All those involved need to agree on their definition of terms.
- Give your reasons for opposing the motion: e.g. *My first reason for opposing this motion is ...*
- *Secondly, ...*
- *Thirdly, ...*
- Sum up your reasons for opposing the motion: *In summary, OR To sum up, ...*
- Restate your opposition to the motion: *I therefore repeat OR I therefore urge you all NOT to support the motion that ...*

Resource 4: Rules and procedures for debating



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

A debate is a contest, or, perhaps, like a game, where two or more speakers present their arguments intent on persuading one another ...

Why debate?

By preparing for and participating in debates, pupils learn to find and use information to support their arguments. They also learn how to present their ideas clearly and persuasively.

Through debating, they learn to understand views that are different from their own because, when debating, they may have to argue a case that they don't fully agree with, and they have to become very familiar with the view of the opposing team.

Preparation

Good debaters are very well prepared. The debate you conduct in your class may be an informal one, but could build towards a situation where your pupils debate seriously in competitions.

Before constructing a speech, debaters collect as much information on the topic as possible, from libraries, newspapers, magazines and discussion with people.

They think of all the points in support of the motion, and against the motion. In other words, they become familiar with the opposition's case as well as their own. They prepare themselves for all possible questions that might be asked by the opposition, and all possible challenges they might offer.

Good debaters structure their arguments very persuasively. They listen to other people debating, so that they learn the art and the skill of debating. They join debating societies, and debate as often as possible.

The process

There are two teams, each consisting of two or three speakers. One team (the affirmative) supports the motion, and the other (the negative) opposes the motion.

There is a chairperson, who controls the proceedings.

The speeches and speaking time are divided equally between the two teams.

Each speaker makes a speech they have prepared to argue their case. The sides speak in turn, starting with the proposer of the motion (affirmative, negative, affirmative, negative). Each speaker has a specified amount of time to speak (e.g. three minutes or five minutes).

Then the debate can be opened to the floor, with speakers standing up to offer points supporting or opposing the motion. Each speaker from the floor is allowed a specified amount of time (e.g. one minute or three minutes).

Each team may then speak in 'rebuttal', after a short period has been allowed for the teams to consult. This means that they have a chance to argue against points raised by the opposition. Each team may have one rebuttal speech each, or more. The first rebuttal speech is made by the negative side and the final rebuttal speech is made by the affirmative.

Important rules

- The team supporting the motion must not shift its point of view. The same goes for the opposition, who must oppose the motion completely (whatever their private opinions may be).
- If a speaker makes a statement, they must be able to provide evidence or reasons to support the statement.
- Facts presented in a debate must be accurate.
- Speakers may not bring up new points in a rebuttal speech.

Points of order and points of information

Members of the house (anyone involved in the debate) may interrupt a speaker by raising their hands and indicating that they have a 'point of order'. This means that they wish to point out that one of the rules of debate is being broken (e.g. the speaker is speaking overtime, or does not have evidence to support his or her point).

Members may also raise their hands with a 'point of information' (a question or some information they have to offer). The speaker may choose to allow the member to speak, but does not have to.

Judging

The winning team in a debate is usually decided on the basis of the quality of the debating, by a judge, or judges.

However, it may also be decided by a vote.

Adapted from: http://www.triviumpursuit.com/speech_debate/what_is_debate.htm (Accessed 2008)

Resource 5: Example letter – written by Vivian’s class



Example of pupils' work

This letter is to a newspaper, but you could write your letter to the head teacher about another issue if you prefer.

The Editor
The Daily Graphic
Graphic Corporation
Accra

Sir,

Schools must bring in children who are sitting at home

In our new Ghana, education is free. It is for all children. But there are still children sitting at home, without education. Some have disabilities, some have HIV positive parents, some are too poor to buy uniform.

Schools must bring these children in, to share education with other children. Why do we say this?

Firstly, it is their democratic right to be educated. The Minister of Education says all children must be included in classes.

Secondly and most importantly, they need to have friends and be part of life.

Some say that teachers do not know how to teach children with disabilities. Some say that parents don't want their children to be friends with 'cripples'. But we don't want our society to be one that chooses. Everyone must be treated the same. Children can help those with disabilities, and make it easier for the teacher.

Our class at Aburi Presbyterian Primary School, found two children sitting alone at home. We persuaded them to come to school. Adwubi has only one arm. We are helping her to learn writing and to play games. She is very clever and learns fast. Asiedu is deaf, but if he looks at your lips, he can hear. He is getting better at it. He is also becoming good at reading. We can write messages to him. We are learning many things from these children, and they are our friends.

It is still difficult for them, and the teacher is giving them extra help after school. The School Management Committee is also helping them to get school uniforms. They don't have uniforms yet.

We are pleased that they have come into our class, and we want to tell other schools to do the same.

Sincerely,
Class 5
Aburi Presbyterian Primary School

Resource 6: 'Argument' phrases



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

Argument phrases

We maintain that ...

Our reasons for saying this are as follows: Firstly, ... Secondly, ... Finally and most importantly, ...

In the (newspaper name), of (date), (name of person) writes ... OR (name of author), in his book (name of book), says ... This shows that ... OR This proves that ...

Some say that ... But we believe ...

Our experience has shown ...

Assessment questions

- Does the letter start by stating the case, or argument, clearly?
- Does it present arguments supporting this statement?
- Does it include some information that relates it to local circumstances or events and gives it a human touch?
- Does it present the case once more, conclusively, in the last paragraph?
- Is it well structured, divided into paragraphs, each with a main idea?
- Is it accurate, with no grammar, spelling or punctuation errors?

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

Other

Resource 1 : Child who is 'left out' Original source: Umthamo 6, University of Fort Hare Distance Education Project

Resource 4 : Rules and procedures for debating : Adapted from:
http://www.triviumpursuit.com/speech_debate/what_is_debate.htm (Accessed 2008)

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Return to Literacy (primary) page

Section 5: Ways of becoming a critical reader and writer

Key Focus Question: How can you develop pupils' critical thinking skills when reading and writing?

Keywords: critical reading; critical writing; point of view; questioning; assessment

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will have:

- used questioning to help your pupils become critical readers of a range of texts;
- assisted your pupils to design and write stories, information texts and letters that 'write back' to the texts they have read critically and so develop thinking skills;
- used different ways of assessing learning.

Introduction

All writers – whether of political speeches, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles, school or university textbooks, stories for children, or any other kind of text – write from a particular point of view and for particular reasons. It is important to be able to identify the point of view of a writer and to decide whether or not you agree with it.

Thinking about your own experiences and beliefs, and about what you have learned from your studies, can help you to ask critical questions about anything you read. It will help you as a teacher to remember that your pupils may have different ideas that are just as valid as yours. If you teach your pupils to ask questions about what they read and to consider different points of view, you will be helping them to become critically informed citizens. You can start this even when they are very young. As you read stories to them, encourage them to discuss what they agree or disagree with.

The three activities in this section are all examples of ways to help your pupils become critical readers and writers of texts.

1. Developing thinking skills through reading

When you and your pupils are reading stories, you can help them to notice who is included in stories and how they are included, and also who is excluded. You can help them to notice how the settings of stories (a school, a village, a town, etc.) are described. You can also help pupils to understand the attitude or point of view of the writer, to consider whether there could be other points of view and, if so, what these might be.

When you do this with pupils, you are helping them develop their thinking skills and their skills as critical questioners. You will also learn what pupils are interested in and what their points of view are. You can use this to plan to meet their needs more.

Case Study 1: Telling a story from a different point of view

Mrs Pinkie Motau in Soweto, South Africa, has three boxes of storybooks in her classroom. Sometimes she reads these books to her Grade 4 class and sometimes they read by themselves. The stories are about children and families, about animals or about imaginary creatures such as dragons.

One day, when she was reading a story about a crocodile, Sizwe said he felt sorry for the crocodile because he was always the 'bad' one in the stories. Mrs Motau asked the class whether they agreed. Most agreed that the crocodile was always 'bad'. Some said this was fine because crocodiles are dangerous, but others said this wasn't fair because crocodiles have to look after themselves just like other animals do. This gave Mrs Motau an idea. She asked the class to suggest how the story could be told from the crocodile's point of view. The pupils were quite puzzled, so she said, 'Imagine that you are the crocodile in this story. What would you like to tell the other animals about yourself?' This question helped pupils to make suggestions. After some class discussion, Mrs Motau asked pupils to work in groups of five to write and draw a story in which the crocodile is a 'good' character. By sharing ideas they wrote and illustrated some very imaginative stories.

While Mrs Motau was reading the stories, she thought about what the words and the drawings told her about her pupils' abilities to imagine a story from the crocodile's point of view. The next day, she read each group's story aloud and showed the illustrations. After reading each story, she told the whole class what she thought the group had achieved and she also asked pupils to comment on each other's writing and drawing.

Finally, the stories were made into a book for the class library.

Activity 1: Becoming a critical reader of stories

- Find a story in which the characters, setting and events are written and illustrated from a particular point of view (e.g. the 'good' animals; the parents of a naughty child).
- Read this story to the class, making sure to show pupils the illustrations.
- Ask some questions that encourage them to think critically about how the story has been written and illustrated. (See [Resource 1: Asking questions](#) for examples of questions you could use.)
- Next, help your pupils work in pairs to write a letter to the author, in which they explain what they like/do not like about the way the story they have just read is written and illustrated. Write an outline of the letter on the chalkboard and

discuss ideas with the class before the pairs begin to write (See **Resource 2: Outline of a letter to an author**) or with younger pupils finish the draft together.

What did pupils achieve in these critical reading and writing lessons? How do you know this?
What evidence do you have?

Did they do anything that surprised you, pleased you or disappointed you?

Is there anything you would do differently if you were teaching these lessons again?

2. Writing from different perspectives

All stories are told from a particular point of view. Our views as writers and readers may be influenced by whether we are young or old, male or female, belong to a particular political party, practise a particular religion, enjoy particular activities, have good or poor health, are employed or unemployed, etc. It is important for pupils to learn that stories can be told in different ways to include or exclude different points of view. It is also true in real life that there is more than one way to view an issue and lots of ways to solve problems.

You can help pupils to learn this by giving them opportunities to tell the same or similar story from different points of view or by modifying the story.

Case Study 2: Turning an ‘outsider’ into a main character in a story

James, one of the pupils in Mrs Fortunate Mabuso’s Standard 6 class, had been badly injured in a car accident and could only walk with crutches. One day, he told Mrs Mabuso that he felt sad because all the stories about boys in their English textbook described how these boys enjoyed doing things that he couldn’t do. Mrs Mabuso felt very upset because she had not thought about this. She asked James what he did when he was at home and found out that he was a skilled musician who played both drums and a tin flute. She asked him if he would play his instruments for the class. He was a bit shy about this but finally said he would.

In their next English lesson, Mrs Mabuso told the class that she wanted to give them some ideas for writing a story. She asked James to play some music for them. The pupils were surprised and delighted by James’s skills. Mrs Mabuso asked them to imagine a story in which James, the musician, was the main character. They shared ideas as a whole class and then worked in pairs to begin writing and/or drawing a story.

During the lesson, some pupils went to James and his partner to ask advice on details for their stories. In the next lesson, the pairs continued their discussion and wrote and drew their individual stories.

While Mrs Mabuso was reading the stories, she realised that there were other pupils in the class who probably felt ‘left out’ of the stories in the textbooks and the class storybooks. She started to plan ways of giving recognition to these pupils, too.

Activity 2: Writing a story from different points of view

- Use the same story as in **Activity 1** or another one you have selected.
- Read it with pupils and discuss how it could be told in a different way. For example, new characters could be added or some existing characters could behave in different ways. In a family story, a father could stay at home and cook while the mother works at a garage. The family could include a child or adult with a physical or mental disability.
- Ask pupils to work in small groups to write and/or draw different versions of the story you have just read with them. Move round the class, noticing what pupils are enjoying. If any group is having problems, give suggestions.
- When the groups have finished, ask one pupil from each group to read the new story to the class and to show the drawings. Collect the stories for assessment.
- You could 'publish' the stories in a book for the class library or display them in the classroom.

What do the stories tell you about pupils' ideas and about their stages of writing development?

3. Using adverts to encourage critical thinking

Advertisements on billboards, radio, television and computer screens, in newspapers and magazines, at the supermarket or in 'junk mail' in our letter boxes, try to get us to act in particular ways – usually to spend money. It is important for you and your pupils to understand how advertisements try to do this so that you and your pupils read them critically and also appreciate how clever some advertisements are.

Pupils' responses to the **Key Activity** will show you whether or not they have begun to understand how to read advertisements critically.

Case Study 3: Learning to read advertisements critically

When Mrs Stella Mapuga participated in a teacher development programme, she was fascinated by the programme's critical literacy activities. She and her colleagues compared advertisements for the same product in magazines for different readerships (younger or older, or from different 'racial' or socio-economic groups). They discovered that the pictures and words used to advertise a product were different in different magazines and that some products were advertised in only one of the magazines. The teachers looked at the language used by the advertisers. They also looked at photographs or drawings in advertisements. A friend of Stella's complained that all the women were young and had perfect figures! Finally, they discussed how the advertisers combined words and pictures on the page and what they (the teachers) noticed first when they looked at the advertisements.

When their lecturer asked what they had learned, the teachers said they would look at advertisements much more critically in future. They had learned that designers of advertisements choose words and pictures to encourage readers to buy the product. These designers also choose different sizes of words and pictures and place them on the page in ways that encourage readers to notice some words or pictures more than others. Some teachers said they looked forward to showing their pupils how advertisements try to persuade readers to take some action – very often the action of buying – and encouraging them to be selective.

Key Activity: Reading advertisements critically

Prepare for this activity and introduce it to pupils by following the steps in [Resource 3: Critical reading of advertisements](#). You need to collect together advertisements or write out some that you have seen in the local shop or market.

Give the advertisements to the groups and ask them to discuss the following questions:

- what is being advertised?
- who do the advertisers hope will buy this product or service?
- how do they try to 'sell' the product or service? Refer to the list on the chalkboard for ideas.
- who is being left out of this advertisement?
- what questions would you like to ask the advertisers?

After 15 minutes or so, ask a few groups to feed back their answers.

For homework, ask pupils to find an advertisement, place it in their exercise books and write answers to the same questions (1–5) about it.

After you have assessed their homework, plan and teach another lesson in which pupils design and make their own advertisements. See [Resource 4: Designing advertisements](#) for suggestions about how to do the assessment and planning.

Resource 1: Asking questions – to encourage pupils to think critically about a story



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Example A: A story about a family

You could ask questions such as:

- Which family members are included in this story?
- Which of them seem to be the most important? How can you tell?
- Is your family similar to this? If so, in what ways? If not, how is it different?
- What do the family members do in this story? Would people in your family behave like this?
- What do you think the writer wants readers to believe about families?

Example B: A story set in a school

You could ask questions such as:

- Is the school in the story like our school?
- In what ways is the building similar? In what ways is it different?
- In what ways are the people – head teacher, teachers, pupils – similar to those in our school? In what ways are they different?
- Do the people in the story behave or act like people in our school or do they behave or act differently? Give examples to support your answer.
- What do you think the writer wants readers to believe about the school in the story?

Note: You could ask questions like these about a village, town or city in which a story takes place. The idea is to get pupils to make comparisons between what they know and what they are reading about.

Resource 2: Outline of a letter to an author



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

The author could be a pupil in your class. If you have shared books with another class, the author could be that class or a pupil in that class.

Dear,

We have just read (title of story) in our class. We thought you might like to know what we think about this story.

Firstly, we like (one or two sentences here). We like this because (pupils write their reason).

We also like (one or two sentences here). We enjoyed this because (pupils write their reason).

However, we did not like (one or two sentences here). We did not like this because (pupils write their reason).

When you write another story we hope you will (pupils make suggestions).

Yours sincerely,

(Name of the class)

Resource 3: Critical reading of advertisements



Background information / subject knowledge for teacher

This list below is directed at reading advertisements more critically but can be adapted to be used to read other kinds of texts like poetry, pictures or letters from people with an interest in the school e.g. district education office.

The criteria and questions you ask might be adapted because of this to suit the context more but will still help pupils read for deeper meaning.

- Collect or write out enough advertisements from magazines, newspapers, supermarket flyers, local markets etc. for each group of four pupils in your class to have at least one example to work with.
- Before giving these to the groups, ask pupils to talk to a partner about what it means to advertise something and how they would advertise their school to families who might wish to enrol their children at the school.
- Ask a few pupils to tell the whole class what they have discussed. Then ask pupils to suggest what advertisers do to make their product attractive to customers.
- Write their suggestions on the chalkboard.

Here are some examples of what advertisers do:

- Use eye-catching photographs or drawings.
- Use colour effectively.
- Place the words and photos or drawings on the page in positions that attract attention.
- Try to appeal to readers who value one or more of the following:
 - Affordability – this product is inexpensive or is a good deal.
 - Convenience – this product makes life easier.
 - Beauty/strength – this product gives you beauty/strength.
 - Wealth – this product will make you rich.
 - Health – this product will keep you healthy.
 - Pleasure – this product makes you feel good.
 - Quality – this product is the best of its kind.
 - Status – having this product shows that you are superior/the best.
 - Security – this product keeps you safe.
 - Popularity – this product will make people like you.
 - Appetite – this product tastes good.

Adapted from: Focus on English, Grade 10

Examples of advertisements from Tanzania

Mwanza / Nairobi
High-speed jet flights, every day!

As part of an exciting new range of product offerings, we now provide Mwanza residents the opportunity to celebrate the advent of a common customs area with Kenya, by connecting them with the bustling capital of our EAU neighbour via Dar es Salaam, seven days a week. Register now and earn FREE miles with our Voyager programme, EVERY TIME YOU FLY!

- All-new product offering
- Speed and comfort of all-jet flights
- Earn FREE miles with ~~Voyager~~

Now you can choose to fly any day of the week, at these convenient times:

Mwanza	Nairobi	09:10	12:35
Nairobi	Mwanza	13:30	16:55

For further information, please contact your nearest Air Tanzania office or travel agent, or call:
+255 22 211 8411 (Reservations) +255 28 2500368 (Mwanza) 00520 24552011 (Nairobi)

AIR TANZANIA
THE WINGS OF KILIMANJARO

Original source: <http://www.pieterfourie.com/portfolioItems/media/print/print-ad.jpg> (Accessed 2008)

Lion's nightmare

We've got him talking

© 2005 Lee Ryan Miller, LeeRyanMiller.com

Original source: <http://www.leeryanmiller.com/semester-at-sea/photos/tanzania-billboard3.jpg> (Accessed 2008)



Original source: http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/39910000/jpg/_39910693_tanzania_web203.jpg (Accessed 2008)

Resource 4: Designing advertisements



Teacher resource for planning or adapting to use with pupils

Assessment of pupils' responses to questions on an advertisement

Use these questions to respond to each pupil's work:

1. Is there evidence that the pupil understood the task? For example, the pupil has/has not chosen an advertisement; the pupil has/has not attempted to answer the questions.
2. Which question(s) has the pupil answered most successfully? What is the evidence that the answer(s) is/are successful?
3. Which question(s) has the pupil answered inadequately or incorrectly? What is missing from the answer(s) or what is incorrect in the answer(s)?

The follow-up lessons

- Return pupils' homework and make some general comments on what they did well and where they could improve.
- Ask pupils to work in the same groups as in the lesson on answering questions about advertisements.
- Give each group a large sheet of paper and, if possible, some coloured crayons or paint and brushes.
- Ask them to imagine a new product (e.g. a kind of food, vehicle, household appliance, item of clothing) and to plan how they could draw and write an advertisement for it. They should think about the questions they answered in the previous activity.
- Tell them to design and make an advertisement for this new product.

This activity may take more than one lesson. When the groups have completed their advertisements, display them and have a discussion about what the pupils think is well done and what could be improved in each one. (When you assess these group advertisements, look for evidence of creativity/imagination, ability to combine words and images in interesting ways and ability to persuade a reader to buy the product.)

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

Other

Resource 3 : Critical reading of advertisements :

Original source: <http://www.pieterfourie.com/portfolioItems/media/print/print-ad.jpg> (Accessed 2008)

Original source: <http://www.leeryanmiller.com/semester-at-sea/photos/tanzania-billboard3.jpg> (Accessed 2008)

Original source:
http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/39910000/jpg/39910693_tanzania_web203.jpg
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