

- Practical ideas and activities
- Photocopiable worksheets
- Drama resources

READING MATTERS

The Guide to Using Graded Readers

Alan Pulverness

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HELBLING LANGUAGES

www.helblinglanguages.com

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by Alan Pulverness

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Contents

Helbling Readers Structures and Grades	5
Why reading matters	6
Reading skills	7
Intensive and extensive reading	8
What are graded readers?	8
Why use graded readers?	9
How to use graded readers	10
The class library	13
Monitoring students' reading	14
Using graded readers to strengthen language skills	16
Group reading	20
Evaluation	21
Where do graded readers fit in?	22
Holiday reading	22
Photocopiable Worksheets	23

HELBLING READERS STRUCTURES AND GRADES

Level	Title	Structures	Grading Standards
1	<p>The Happy Prince and The Nightingale and the Rose</p> <hr/> <p>David and the Great Detective</p> <hr/> <p>Fireball's Heart</p>	<p>A, an; adjectives; adverbs of frequency; can; countable and uncountable nouns; demonstrative adjectives and pronouns; have got; How much/many?; imperatives; like/love/hate/don't like doing; subject and object pronouns; plural nouns; possessive 's; possessive adjectives; present continuous; present simple; question words; short answers; some/any; the; there is/are;</p>	<p>CEF A1 Breakthrough Cambridge ESOL KET Trinity Levels 1, 2</p>
2	<p>The Red-headed League</p> <hr/> <p>Holly the Eco Warrior</p> <hr/> <p>The Surprise</p>	<p>a lot of, not much, not many; adverbs of manner; and, so, but, because; be going to; comparative; have to/must; mustn't; past continuous; past simple; past simple v. past continuous; possessive pronouns; superlative; to for purpose</p>	<p>CEF A1 /A2 Breakthrough / Waystage Cambridge ESOL KET Trinity Levels 2, 3</p>
3	<p>The Stolen White Elephant</p> <hr/> <p>Ricky and the American Girl</p> <hr/> <p>The Spring Cup</p>	<p>cardinal/ordinal numbers; ever/never; must/should need to/have to; one/ones; prepositions of time, place and movement; present perfect ; present perfect v past simple; present continuous for future; question tags; reflexive pronouns; relative pronouns who, which, that; so do I/neither do I; too plus adjective; indefinite pronouns; will; would like</p>	<p>CEF A2 Waystage Cambridge ESOL KET Trinity Levels 3, 4</p>
4	<p>The Garden Party and Sixpence</p> <hr/> <p>The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard</p> <hr/> <p>Operation Osprey</p>	<p>causative have; could/was able to/managed to; first conditional; futures together; had to/didn't have to; how long...?; make and let; may/can/could for permission; might for future possibility; present and past passive; present perfect plus yet, already, just; shall/could for offers; want / ask / tell someone to do something</p>	<p>CEF A2 / B1 Waystage / Threshold Cambridge ESOL PET Trinity Levels 4,5</p>
5	<p>The Canterville Ghost</p> <hr/> <p>Daisy Miller</p> <hr/> <p>Red Water</p>	<p>defining relative clauses; future continuous; modal verb would; non-defining relative clauses; past perfect; present perfect continuous; present perfect future; reported speech/verbs/questions; second conditional (wish); used to/used to doing; used to/would; second conditional</p>	<p>CEF B1 Threshold Cambridge ESOL PET Trinity Levels 5,6</p>

Why reading matters

Reading can be a source of information: we read to learn things about the world, to add to our store of knowledge. Reading can also be a source of pleasure: we read to be taken out of ourselves, to add to our awareness of things outside ourselves. Reading matters because it helps to develop students' awareness of other cultures, small (local) cultures as well as big (national) cultures. This increased awareness of others works on an interpersonal level as well. It helps to develop empathy – the ability to understand other people's experience.

For foreign language learners, however, extensive reading – reading for pleasure – is even more important, for a number of reasons.

MOTIVATION

When students are engaged as *readers*, their interest in the topic or the story is a powerful source of motivation. Like any reader, they want to read on, to find more information, or to find out what happens next, and this pure enjoyment of intellectual or emotional discovery can help them to overcome the perceived difficulty of reading in a foreign language.

REAL EXPERIENCE

Most classroom tasks and activities are highly artificial. At best, in a role play or discussion, for example, we may ask students to *pretend* they are doing things with language in the real world. But when they read for pleasure, students are using their knowledge of the language for a real-world purpose. Reading for pleasure is not just another classroom activity, but a real-life experience in which students can simply enjoy texts written for them as readers, not as language learners.

IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

Most of the reading material in textbooks is restricted to purely *referential* (factual/informative) uses of language. When learners are given the opportunity to read for pleasure, they experience language used in more *representational* ways, to stimulate their emotions and imagination.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

Having a real role as a reader, the learner becomes

personally involved in the text. Texts read for pleasure are no longer seen merely as vehicles for language learning. When they are drawn into a story and their emotions and imaginations are engaged, learners no longer see reading in the foreign language as something they have to do – it becomes something they want to do.

CONTEXT AND LEARNING

Research into memory and foreign language learning has shown that we are more likely to retain new language items when we encounter them in memorable contexts. Extensive reading of stories that are amusing, scary, exciting or romantic offers a wide range of contexts that will make new language easier for learners to recall – and to use.

LONGER TEXTS

Most reading done in classrooms is restricted to short or very short texts. Extensive reading provides the opportunity for learners to benefit from the experience of reading much longer stretches of text. Reading longer texts, they will begin to notice, for example, how some language items are repeated, how others are replaced, and how longer texts are organized.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In addition to focusing consciously on the forms and structures of the language, learners can make great progress through exposure to rich and comprehensible language input. Most teachers would agree that the more students read, the better they read. But numerous

research studies have shown that extensive reading can have a beneficial effect on students language skills – i.e. that more reading not only makes for better reading, but also for better writing, better listening and better speaking!

READING SKILLS

Extensive reading naturally develops key reading skills such as prediction and inferring meaning from context (see below). As learners get used to reading longer texts, their confidence grows and they are increasingly able to read for

meaning without feeling the need to look up every unfamiliar word.

For many learners one of the greatest obstacles to fluent reading in a foreign language is the painstaking effort to decode texts at sentence level, or even at word level. Lack of familiarity with the language often causes learners to lose control of reading skills they confidently employ in their first language. Extensive reading provides a natural and motivating way of encouraging learners to transfer their first language reading skills to foreign language texts, and to read fluently, with pleasure.

Reading skills

There are a number of key reading skills which can help learners to get the best out of the experience of extensive reading, and which can be developed with the teacher's guidance.

Prediction 1

As soon as we have some kind of clue about a text (e.g. a title, a publisher's description or 'blurb', a cover illustration), we naturally start to make predictions about the kind of text we are about to read. We automatically activate whatever knowledge we already have about the subject, so that we are ready to receive new information from the text when we read it, and then we add this new knowledge to our existing knowledge. This is the way we make sense of texts, and it is a key reading skill.

Prediction 2

Prediction is important not just before we read, but *while* we read, too. The process of reading involves constant prediction, from word to word, from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. At every stage, we use what we know so far to predict how the text is going to develop. As we read on, we build up more information (either confirming or diverging from our predictions), which then forms the basis for our next prediction.

Skimming

Skimming simply means looking quickly through a text to find out the gist (what it is about) or

what it contains. For example, we often skim through a newspaper until we find a particular article that we want to read.

Scanning

Like skimming, this also involves looking quickly through a text, but with a more definite purpose, e.g. to see if it is the kind of text we are looking for, or to find a particular piece of information. For example, we scan timetables, telephone directories etc. to find specific pieces of information.

Inferring meaning

When we meet unfamiliar words or phrases in a foreign language text, we can of course look them up in a dictionary. Knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of a bilingual dictionary and how to get the best out of a monolingual dictionary are themselves important support skills for reading in a foreign language. But our enjoyment of a text can easily be lost if we read with a text in one hand and a dictionary in the other. Reading for pleasure will be more rewarding if we can use what we know to make inferences about what we do not know. Good readers – in their first language as well as in a foreign language – are good guessers. Extensive reading can help

learners develop the confidence sometimes to ignore unknown words that are not essential to understanding, or at least to guess the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary items. This is not just wild guessing, however, but a process of 'intelligent' guesswork. The reader uses knowledge of grammar (e.g. verb tenses, agreement, sentence

structure), knowledge of vocabulary (e.g. word formation, synonyms, collocations), knowledge of the text (e.g. information given before and after the unknown item) and knowledge of the world (i.e. what the reader knows about the topic or the setting) to make connections and to make informed guesses about meaning.

Intensive and extensive reading

Most – if not all – of the reading that goes on in EFL classrooms is intensive. That is to say, it is more concerned with form than with content. Texts are typically used for language-learning purposes rather than for any of the reasons that learners might actually want to read in the real world, the world outside the classroom. Texts are chosen (or specially written) to contextualize new language, to exemplify the use of particular grammatical structures, to introduce new vocabulary. Hopefully, learners will find these texts interesting and useful, but they are not primarily designed to be read for the intrinsic appeal of their content. Intensive reading may also be concerned with developing specific reading skills (like those listed in Reading Skills on page 5), in other words with the techniques that readers need to acquire. And intensive reading is usually a classroom activity.

Extensive reading, on the other hand, has much more to do with content than with form. As we have seen, extensive reading is likely to produce dramatic improvements in learners' language ability in terms of both receptive and productive skills, but this is a positive by-product rather than a primary objective. Instead of developing particular reading skills (though again this may well occur), the purpose of extensive reading is to develop the *habit* of reading and thus to build up learners' confidence about reading as something they *can* do.

What are graded readers?

Graded readers are books specially written at different levels for learners at different stages of learning a language. They may be original stories written specifically for learners, or they may be adaptations of well-known books originally written for a general readership. (**Helbling Readers** include both types.) The texts are controlled in various ways, so as to ensure a satisfying, motivating and enjoyable reading experience.

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary is perhaps the most obvious source of difficulty for learners. Some publishers insist on their graded readers being written according to very tightly controlled word lists, with a limited number of words allowed outside the list and simple definitions given in footnotes. **Helbling Languages** believes that their authors will produce better stories if they are not restricted to a specific list of words, as long as it is always possible for the reader to retrieve the meaning from context. Surrounding context that helps learners to guess meanings, explanations within the text, and illustrations are all ways in which new vocabulary can be introduced without impeding the flow of learners' comprehension and without spoiling their enjoyment of the

text. Feedback from teachers and students has shown that this approach to vocabulary can be very successful as long as the density of new items is not too great and unfamiliar items are well supported by context.

GRAMMAR

Another major factor affecting readability is grammatical complexity. **Helbling Readers**, like those of most other ELT publishers, are controlled by a list of structures appropriate to each level. These lists are based on the publishers' awareness of the structures that learners can reasonably be expected to know at various levels. Closely connected to grammar is another element that can help to make a text more or less difficult – sentence length. The

simpler the grammar, the shorter and simpler sentences are likely to be.

CONTENT

In addition to lexical density and grammatical complexity, the third factor affecting readability has to do with content rather than language. First, the topic needs to be one that will be interesting or relevant to the reader. Learners are simply more likely to read – and to read well – if they can make some connection between the text and their own lives.

Here is the view of one Helbling author on her attitude to writing readers:

“When I write readers, I don’t think: ‘I am writing for language learners and therefore I need to write something specifically aimed at that market’. I write stories. I write the stories that I want to read. Often they are issue-based and relate to issues that concern

me and I hope will concern others. I never write down. I only simplify the words and grammar, never the content.”

(Antoinette Moses, author of *Red Water*)

One element of content that can be controlled at different levels is the amount of information in a text and the ways in which that information is conveyed to the reader. Graded readers tend to avoid those features which make texts more challenging for readers in their first language, e.g. multiple narrative voices, complicated subplots, unfamiliar (and unexplained) cultural details.

In short, in graded readers all aspects of the text – language, content, context – are selected or modified so as to ensure that the foreign language learner has a smooth and enjoyable reading experience, without any uncertainty about what the text is saying, and without the need for frequent reference to the dictionary.

Why use graded readers?

Graded readers might seem to be a luxury, an additional resource for learners who have the time for some extra material. In fact, they can have such a positive effect on overall progress that they should occupy a central place in every language-learning programme.

CONSOLIDATION AND EXTENSION

Graded readers offer learners excellent opportunities to consolidate their experience of the language they know and to extend that experience, as they meet known items in new contexts. Learners often feel uncertain about the limits of the language they know, about whether and how vocabulary and grammatical structures they have encountered in their textbooks can be transferred to other contexts. Inhibited by this uncertainty, they may lack the confidence to experiment and take risks with the language they are learning. By providing exposure to language at an appropriate level, used naturally in vivid contexts, graded readers can add depth and breadth to learners’ awareness of language and increase their confidence about using what they know.

NEW LANGUAGE

Graded readers also provide opportunities for learners to expand their knowledge of the language, as some of the vocabulary items they meet will be new to them. But since great care is taken to make the meanings of such items quite transparent, with the help of illustrations, supporting context etc., this new language can easily be absorbed in the process of reading without learners feeling any sense of difficulty or lack of comprehension.

CONFIDENCE

One major obstacle to progress in learning a foreign language is lack of confidence and lack of confidence leads to underperforming, which in turn reinforces lack of confidence. Because graded readers are designed to give learners

a successful experience of reading, they can increase learners' confidence. So, as well as the language benefits, graded readers can play an important part in enhancing learners' image of themselves as successful language users, and thus create the ground for further success that will boost their confidence, transforming negative feelings about themselves as language learners into positive feelings of 'can do'.

CONVENIENCE

As well as being accessible and learner-friendly, graded readers have all the advantages of popular paperbacks: they are compact and handy to carry around, good to look at, with attractive cover illustrations, and comparatively cheap. These 'real book' features all help to

differentiate them from the textbooks used in class, make them appealing to learners and should help to establish a reading habit.

STEPPING STONES

Graded readers are designed to make the experience of reading as fluent and natural as it would be in a first-language situation. Language, content and text organization are controlled in such a way that learners should be able to read with pleasure, without the sense of frustration that arises when a text is too difficult. Graded readers thus provide excellent support for language learning and are an invaluable motivational tool. But graded readers should also be regarded as stepping stones, a bridge to real, ungraded fiction and non-fiction.

How to use graded readers

There are two main ways of using graded readers – as class readers and as part of a class library. It is important to understand the differences between these two approaches.

THE CLASS READER

A class reader is a book that is read by the whole class. The book is probably chosen by the teacher and read in lockstep (i.e. at the same pace) by all the students in the class over a period of time. As students may not be habitual readers in their own language, this can be an effective way of introducing the idea of extensive reading.

Before choosing your reader, give your students the questionnaire on reading habits to fill in (see page 23).

Below are some ideas for getting started, maintaining students' interest and encouraging response.

STARTERS

The purpose of these activities is to get students to the point where they are ready – and eager – to read. By giving them a little information, the teacher can make students

want to read, to find out if the book coincides with or diverges from the mental picture they are beginning to build up.

Arousing curiosity

Use cover illustrations, titles, blurbs to get students anticipating the kind of text they are going to read.

PREDICTION

Use openings, illustrations, chapter titles, key words or quotations from the text for students to make predictions about characters, setting and plot.

USING ILLUSTRATIONS

*** Guess the genre**

- Give students a photocopy of the cover illustrations of five titles and ask them to match them with the genres.

Example:

<i>The Red-headed League</i>	Morality tale
<i>The Canterville Ghost</i>	Thriller
<i>Ricky and the American Girl</i>	Detective story
<i>Red Water</i>	Ghost story
<i>Fireball's Heart</i>	Romance

* What do the illustrations tell us about the characters?

- Put the students into groups.
- Tell the students to look at the illustrations in the book and pick out the main characters.
- Ask the students to discuss and write down what the illustrations tell them about each character.
- Ask them to write a description of each character's appearance and personality.
- Discuss as a class.
- Tell them to keep their descriptions. After they have read the book, they can check how accurate their descriptions were.

* What is happening in the picture?

- Put the students into groups.
- Give each group a different illustration.
- Ask them to think about what is happening in the picture and to write a dialogue.
- Ask the groups to act out their dialogues for the class.

* Telling the story

- Photocopy the illustrations from the book.
- Ask students to order the pictures and then tell the story. The story they tell may be similar to or different from that of the book.
- After they have read the book, they can check how accurate their version of the story was.

Tasters

Give students a small chunk of the text, either printed or read aloud by the teacher, to take them far enough into the text for them to want to continue reading by themselves.

While reading

These activities have several different objectives:

- to make sure that students have understood what they have read
- to get students to review, and if necessary to revise, their original predictions
- to monitor students' developing understanding of plot and character
- to get students to make further predictions about how the text is going to develop
- to maintain students' interest in the text and to make them want to continue reading

* Summarizing and retelling

- Give students jumbled summaries – or jumbled illustrations – to reorder.
- Ask students to build up a visual record of the plot (e.g. in the form of a graph or mind map) as they read. They can compare these graphic representations with other students in the class and use them as a basis for retelling the story so far.
- Get students to summarize events by retelling the story so far from the point of view of one of the characters. Give them a maximum number of sentences to use.

Using speech bubbles

Use the Speech Bubbles [worksheet](#) on page 25.

* Who said it?

Give students lines of dialogue and ask them to identify the speaker, the situation and what happened next.

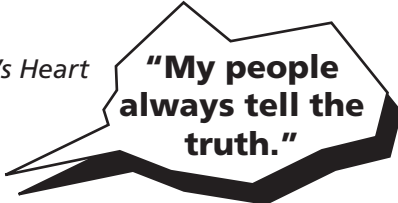
* Match

Fill in the speech bubbles on the [worksheet](#) with speech from the story.

Students decide which character said what and write the character's name next to the speech bubble.

Example:

From *Fireball's Heart*



**"My people
always tell the
truth."**

Answer:

Strong Buffalo

*** Everyday language**

- Fill in the speech bubbles with everyday language from the story and make cards.
- Put 2 chairs at the front of the class.
- Invite 2 students to the front.
- Tell them that they are two strangers sitting on a park bench and that they will have a conversation.
- Give one of the everyday language cards to one of the students.
- Tell him/her that s/he should try to include this everyday language in his/her conversation with the other student.
- The student with the card starts the conversation.

*** Writing dialogues**

- Fill in the speech bubbles with speech from the story.
- Put the students into teams.
- Give each team a speech bubble with text.
- Ask them to write the dialogue that comes before or after that speech bubble. Students should try and remember what was said.

Example:

From *Ricky and the American Girl*



Then ask them to act out the dialogue for the class.

*** Write speech bubbles for the illustrations**

- Put the students into pairs.
- Ask the students to write speech bubbles for 2 or 3 of the illustrations in the book.
- You should give them different illustrations from their partners.
- The students then ask their partners to match their speech bubbles with the illustrations.

*** Putting the speech bubbles in order**

- Put the students into pairs.
- Ask them each to choose a dialogue from the story and write it randomly in the speech bubbles.
- They should then ask their partners to put the dialogue in the correct order and number the speech bubbles.

Example:

From *The Spring Cup*



*** Find the mistakes**

Give students a summary of the story so far, containing a number of errors which they have to correct with the right information.

Response

The purpose of these activities is to enable students to respond to what they have read without the need for any specialized critical vocabulary. Tasks that call for creative or imaginative variations or extensions to a text can provide an indirect means of response for students who would find it impossible, or at least difficult, to give their opinions directly.

*** Rewriting tasks**

Ask students to provide alternative endings, to rewrite parts of the text from a different point of view, to change reported speech to direct speech or vice versa.

*** Creative additions**

Get students to add to the text, providing sequels describing what happened next, 'prequels' narrating the events that took place before the beginning of the story, or interludes filling gaps in the narrative.

*** Creative summaries**

Invite students to produce very short texts, such as blurbs or mini-reviews. Although they involve minimal output, these tiny summaries can only be produced after very thorough processing and consideration of the whole text. The same principle can be extended to the production of non-verbal 'texts' such as cover designs and movie posters, which call for a similar ability to identify and select key features.

The class library

Once students have become accustomed to extensive reading, the class library offers a freer and more individualized approach, where students can choose their own books and read at their own pace, with minimal intervention from the teacher. With the class library, it is no longer possible – or necessary – for the teacher to control and direct students' reading with various classroom activities. The teacher's role becomes more organizational, as a provider of resources, a guide and a monitor.

SETTING UP A CLASS LIBRARY

The greater the potential choice of books in the class library, the more enthusiastic students will be about using it. How to achieve this breadth of choice will depend on local circumstances. It might be possible, for example, for the class to borrow a selection of books from the school library if there is one. Or parents might be asked to support the project by supplying books. Another way to get started might be for each student in the class to buy a different reader, which would instantly create a wide choice of books for the whole class. However it is done, the important thing is to provide an experience of browsing and choosing books similar to the experience of scanning the shelves in a bookshop or public library.

STOCKING THE LIBRARY

Graded readers are published at different language levels according to size of vocabulary and range of grammatical features. Some series are also designed for different age groups. The best guide to the right levels for a particular group of learners is probably a combination of teacher's awareness of students' abilities

and the students' own experience of books at different levels. Since there is bound to be a range of motivation and language ability in any group of learners, the class library should include more than one level of readers, so that students have the freedom to select easier or more challenging texts.

Of course, students also vary in their tastes and interests. For example, some students will enjoy thrillers or adventure stories, while some will prefer historical fiction or love stories. Others may not enjoy reading fiction at all, but may be motivated to read about their hobbies or other interests. To enable students to make real reading choices, a class library needs as much variety as possible in terms of genre and subject matter.

CHOOSING WHAT TO READ

In order to make appropriate choices, students need to develop 'browsing skills', so that they can make the best use of the information provided on the book covers. They may also need some guidance on choosing the best level for their stage of language development.

Here are some ideas for supporting students' book choices:

Identifying genre

* **Matching**

Ask students to match a selection of titles, blurbs, cover illustrations, chapter headings, representing a variety of genres.

* **Categorising**

Give students short extracts from a range of different books. They have to decide which genre each extract belongs to.

Sampling

* **Snippets**

Distribute mini-extracts from different books to all the students in the class. In groups students choose the most interesting extract(s) to tell the class about.

Scanning

* **Book rush**

Invite students to pick a book from the class library. Give them a strict time limit (say, 5 minutes) to find out as much as they can about the book and tell the class about it.

Choosing the level

* **Blackout**

Give students a long-ish extract (say, a couple of pages) from a reader a little beyond their current level. Ask them to black out (like this ■■■) any unknown words and then to see if they can work out the meaning of the blacked-out word and how much of the whole text they can understand. This should help to give them the confidence they need to choose books that are linguistically a little more challenging rather than always choosing ones that are easy for them to read.

Monitoring students' reading

Students can be encouraged to develop the habit of reading if they are made to feel part of a reading community. One way to achieve this is to ask them to keep a record of what they have read and how they have responded to different texts. These records can be shared with other members of the class, to help them make their own choices. Here are some ideas for monitoring students' reading and sharing their reactions to what they read.

Reports and reviews

* **Book report forms**

Use a standard book report form (see page 26) for students to record information about books and make recommendations to other readers.

* **In-book reaction forms**

This is a simple form to be filled in by each student who reads the book. As more students read the book, the form builds up into a record of all their reactions.

Star rating	Comment	Reader

***** = a 'must-read'

**** = highly recommended

*** = recommended

** = not bad

* = not very good

* **Reviews**

Give students examples of 'capsule' reviews (like the one below). They can use these examples as models for writing their own reviews in, say, 150-200 words, of books they borrow from the class library.

Red Water is an exciting new thriller by Antoinette Moses. The story is about two teen hackers Tricia and Daniel who discover that a local company could be involved in a sinister plot to trade carbon. To Tricia's horror, she also finds out that her father is

involved in the plot and that their lives are in danger. Tricia must now do everything she can to protect her family and Daniel. The story is beautifully written and the plot is fast moving and keeps you on the edge of your seat throughout. As well as being a really enjoyable story, *Red Water* has taught me a lot about carbon trading and has also made me think more about where the food in our supermarkets comes from. Brilliant! I thoroughly recommend it.

Summaries

* Quotable quotes

Give students examples of quotations from book reviews used on the front covers

of paperbacks (e.g. "The characters are brilliant, the dialogue sparkles...and it's hilarious"; "Brings the past to life"; "A highly original thriller with one of the cleverest detectives in crime fiction"). Again these examples can be used as models for students' own 'rave review' quotations, and can be stuck on the covers of books in the class library.

* Blurbs

Some readers may not include back cover blurbs, while others may not give very much information about the book. Ask students to supply their own blurbs for books they have read to help their classmates decide whether or not the books might interest them.

Posters

Ask students to design posters for their favourite books in the class library. These posters may be based on a very simple design representing a key element of the book. Or they may be more complicated collages, combining many different ideas from the text. In both cases students can be asked to explain their choice of design and to answer questions about it from other members of the class.

(Samples poster)

The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard



WIDER READING COMMUNITIES

Reading groups

A reading group is a small group of people who meet regularly, usually in each other's houses, to discuss a book that they have all agreed to read. Reading groups (sometimes called book clubs) have become very popular in many

different countries. Students can be encouraged to form their own local reading groups, or to visit the websites of other EFL reading groups for example <http://www.encompassculture.com>. Some research into reading groups on the Internet will help students to set up their own reading group.

Using graded readers to strengthen language skills

The primary objective of an extensive reading programme should remain reading for pleasure, and language learning benefits, though significant, will tend to be incidental. It would certainly detract from this objective if texts were to be used like other classroom texts, for language practice. However, this is not to say that we should ignore the part that can be played by extensive reading texts in terms of language acquisition.

VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT

Recording new vocabulary

Encourage students to keep vocabulary notebooks, recording not just words and definitions, but examples from the text and a note of the context in which a word or phrase is used. Vocabulary learnt in this way is likely to be recalled more effectively if it is encountered in the vivid and memorable context of a story.

Students can also be asked to look out for and keep notes on different uses of familiar vocabulary items. To take a simple example, the word 'head' in its most literal sense will probably have been learnt at a fairly early stage, while its more metaphorical uses (as in 'head of the company' or 'head of the queue') may not be quite so well-known.

Meeting metaphors and identifying idioms

Learners are likely to encounter far more examples of idiomatic and non-literal uses of language in graded readers than in their language textbooks. As with other vocabulary items, these can be collected and stored with a note of the context in which they occur.

Collecting collocations

One of the most useful aspects of vocabulary for learners to be aware of is collocation. Knowledge of collocations is what enables us to speak and write fluently. But collocations cannot easily be learnt; they are acquired through experience of the language. And readers provide a great opportunity for learners to add to their store of collocations.

Ask students first to notice pairs and groups of words that commonly go together. Then they should decide on a way to record the collocations they collect, for example by topic or by key word.

ORAL FLUENCY

Oral book reports

Have a regular slot in the lesson where students simply tell each other about books they have been reading. To begin with, you can supply language support in the form of sentence frames and key words and phrases, but as students get used to the task, it should be possible for them to talk without this scaffolding.

Dramatic reading

Students prepare a dramatic reading of an extract from a book they are reading or have just read. Invite the rest of the class to ask questions for the reader to answer. The aim of the activity is to make other students want to read the book.

Role play

Students work in small groups. One student in each group is responsible for selecting a scene from a graded reader for the group to dramatize. Again, this should create interest in the book amongst the rest of the class.

DRAMATIZING THE TEXT

* Acting out scenes from the story

- Pick a scene from the book and dramatize it.
- Put students into groups.
 - Give them roles.
 - Let them rehearse the scene.
 - Ask them to act out their scenes.
 - Let them choose another scene and ask them to dramatize it and write the script.

Example:

Dramatized excerpt from *The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard*

The Room in the Castle (Pages 52–55)

(The man, Jake, pushes open a wooden door in front of them. The other man shines a torch in Tom's face. He can't see anything.)

Tom: What's happening?

(Jake pushes him into the room and then closes the heavy wooden door. Tom blinks and looks around him. He sees a man with a gun near the door and Mahir and Tara sitting on the floor in the far corner wearing their masks.)

Jake: *(He pulls off the golden dragon mask and laughs)* The perfect disguise. Only one person is allowed to wear the golden dragon mask.

Tom: It's you. We saw you outside the school gates and in the airport. You've been following Mahir.

Jake: Sit down and shut up.

Mahir: Do as he says, Tom.
(Tom looks from Mahir to the man. Then he goes and sits down. The other man comes and ties his arms behind his back and ties his feet together.)

Mahir: *(calmly)* What do you want from us?

Jake: I want the Shining Star.

(Tara draws in a sharp breath)

You and your father are the only two people in the world who know where it is.

Mahir: *(calmly)* Then you don't need Tom and Tara. Let them go and I will take you to the Shining Star.

Jake: *(He laughs loudly)* Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I don't know your powers? I've been watching you for months. With one tiny flick of your wrist you can paralyze me. These two are staying here. I know you

won't try to escape if they are here. You won't put their lives in danger. If I don't return with the Shining Star, my friend here will shoot them. Two silenced shots and your precious sister and your best friend will be dead.
(There is a silence.)

Mahir: I will take you to the Shining Star. But I warn you now, it is a dangerous journey. Are you prepared to face the dangers ahead?

Jake: I am prepared to face anything for the Shining Star.

Original excerpt from *The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard* (Pages 52–55)

Eventually, Mahir stopped and he pushed open a wooden door in front of them. Somebody shone a torch in Tom's face. He couldn't see anything. "What's happening?" he called out. Mahir pushed him into the room and then closed the heavy wooden door.

When his eyes got used to the light, Tom saw that there were three other people in the room. Near the doorway, there was a man with a gun and sitting on the floor in the far corner were two people in masks. Tom recognized the masks immediately – the golden dragon and Princess Kia.

Tom turned round to face the masked man behind him. The man pulled off the golden dragon mask and laughed. "The perfect disguise," said the man. "Only one person is allowed to wear the golden dragon mask."

"It's you," said Tom. "We saw you outside the school gates and in the airport. You've been following Mahir."

"Sit down and shut up," said the man.

"Do as he says, Tom," said Mahir from the corner. Tom looked from Mahir to the man. Then he saw the gun pointed at him and he

went to sit down. The other man came and tied his arms behind his back and tied his feet together. The thick rope cut into his wrists.

“What do you want from us?” asked Mahir. There was no anger or fear in his voice.

“I want the Shining Star,” said the man. Tara drew in a sharp breath but Mahir remained calm. “You and your father are the only two people in the world who know where it is.”

“Then you don’t need Tom and Tara,” said Mahir calmly. “Let them go and I will take you to the Shining Star.”

The man laughed loudly. “Do you think I’m stupid? Do you think I don’t know your powers? I’ve been watching you for months. With one tiny flick of your wrist you can paralyze me,” he said.

“These two are staying here. I know you won’t try to escape if they are here. You won’t put their lives in danger. If I don’t return with the Shining Star, my friend here will shoot them. Two silenced shots and your precious sister and your best friend will be dead.”

There was a silence. “I will take you to the Shining Star,” said Mahir. “But I warn you now, it is a dangerous journey. Are you prepared to face the dangers ahead?”

“I am prepared to face anything for the Shining Star,” said the man.

* Script writing

- Put the students into teams.
- Each team chooses an incident from the story.
- Each team writes a short script and acts it out.
- The other teams must act out what happens before or what happens next.
- They must write the script from memory. It doesn’t need to be completely accurate but it should be based on the text and it need only be very short.

* Building a character

- Put students into small groups.
- Give them an everyday situation.
- Tell them to think what that character would do in that situation and to write a short dialogue. This will help them to think more about the characters.

Examples:

Holly the Eco Warrior – Holly goes to the supermarket.

The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard – Mahir stops a fight at school.

Red Water – Tricia stands outside a supermarket handing out leaflets.

The Spring Cup – Caroline wins another show jumping competition.

* The character’s life outside the book

This activity will encourage students to think more about the characters in the story.

- Put students into pairs.
- Tell them that they will write an interview between a TV presenter and a character from the book. They can choose the character.
- Tell them that they can expand on the information already there in the book. They should think about what films, books or sports the characters would like.

Example:

What’s Mahir’s favourite film? (*The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard*)

Maybe he would like a martial arts film.

What’s Holly’s favourite TV programme? (*Holly the Eco Warrior*)

Maybe she would like documentaries about the environment.

- They should not mention the character’s name in their scripts.
- Then they act out their dialogues for the class.
- The other students must try and guess who the character is.

* **Guess the character**

- Give each student a character role card.
- Ask them to write notes about their characters and be ready to answer questions about them.
- Ask students to sit in a circle with 2 chairs in the centre or put 2 chairs at the front of the class.
- Invite 2 students to sit on the chairs.
- Tell them to ask each other questions to find out who their characters are.
- The other students should guess who the 2 characters are.

* **Character conflicts**

- Put the students into pairs.
- Give each pair two characters and tell them that they are stuck in a lift together. They must decide what will they talk about.
- What questions will they ask each other?
- Tell them to write a dialogue.

Examples:

Red Water – Tricia's father + Daniel Marsh or Winston's Wife + the Sweeper

The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard – The King + Jake

The Spring Cup – Mr Morley + Mr Winterbottom

Holly the Eco Warrior – Holly + her father, Alan

Note: You should try and choose 2 characters with a conflict to make it more interesting.

* **Miming actions 1**

- Pick out some verbs from the story. Choose verbs that can be mimed.
- Write them on cards.
- Put the students into teams.
- Hand a verb card to each team.
- One student from the first team mimes the verb.
- The other teams must guess what the verb is and then describe an incident in the story using the verb.
- Award points to the successful team.
- Then the next team mimes their verb.

* **Miming actions 2**

Students mime an incident/action from the story. The other students must guess who the characters are and what they are doing.

Examples:

Holly the Eco Warrior - Holly climbing up into the tree house.

The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard – Tom trying to eat the hot spicy food.

The Surprise – Dacty breaking out of the egg.

* **Happy endings**

- Put the students into groups.
- Ask students to write an alternative ending for the story.
- Ask them to write a dialogue and act it out for the class.
- Then ask the class to choose the best alternative ending.

Props, sets and costumes

* **Thinking about settings**

Design sets, props and costumes for the story.

* **Thinking about atmosphere**

Create sound effects to accompany scenes from the story.

* **Working with props**

- Put the students into small groups.
- Give each group a prop from the story.

Examples:

Ricky and the American Girl - a firework

The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard – Tara's silver and sapphire earring or a mask

Holly the Eco Warrior - a mobile phone

Red Water – a leaflet

The Spring Cup – a cup

Ask students to write and act out a scene from the story using the prop.

* **Movie pitch**

A 'pitch' is the attempt by a screenwriter to sell an idea for a film to a producer or a studio boss. It has to convince the listener that the story would make a good film. In groups, students take it in turns to pitch a book they have read. After they have heard all the pitches, the group decides which idea will be 'greenlit' (i.e. given the studio's approval).

CREATIVE WRITING

Haikus and mini-sagas

Students compress the plot of a book they have read into a haiku (a seventeen-syllable poem) or a mini-saga (a fifty-word narrative).

This extreme compression forces them to consider what features of the original are absolutely essential to any retelling, and the creative task is also a great deal of fun in itself.

Q & A

Students prepare a set of 10-15 questions about a book they have read to be answered by other students who have *not* read the book. In order to answer the questions, the other students in the group will be forced to imagine what happens in the story. Their answers will create a parallel plot which may be quite close to the original, or may tell a very different story. In either case, the activity should create interest in reading the book.

Group reading

So far we have assumed that there are enough different titles available for each student in the class to choose a book to read individually. Ideally this is the way a class library should work. But there may be occasions when there simply aren't enough books for the library to work like this. It may sometimes be more practical for groups of learners to read the same book. This will create a situation a little more like using a class reader than a class library. The essential difference, however, is that the learners will still have chosen to read the book (albeit from a narrower selection) and they will still be reading at their own pace. Activities to support group reading should therefore encourage learners in the same way as individual reading tasks. The only difference is that the teacher can make use of the fact that a group of individuals happen to be reading the same book.

BEFORE READING

Gist tasks

Give students a list of things to find out / key questions to answer when they read. If your students enjoy competition, this might be arranged a reading race.

Prediction tasks

Give students some snippets of information from the book (e.g. chapter headings or lines of dialogue) and ask them to predict how these fragments might be connected. As this task will be highly speculative, it should provide a good basis for group discussion.

WHILE READING

Collecting information

Ask each student in the group to collect information about different aspects of the book (e.g. different characters, settings, situations). At certain stages of their reading groups can come together and share the information they have collected.

Preparing questions

While they read, students prepare questions for the other members of the group, to test their recall and their understanding. At lower levels these questions can be purely factual, while more advanced students may ask about characters' motivations, cause and effects, etc.

AFTER READING

Role-based discussion

Groups discuss the book they have read with students in role, either as characters from the book or as people who might have a special interest in the story (e.g. parents, teachers, police officers, friends)

Analysing the characters

Get students to complete the Character Worksheets on pages 29 and 30.

Adaptation

Students plan a film adaptation. Each member of the group has a different role in the film crew – writer(s), director, producer, casting director, camera operator, composer etc.

Evaluation

In a sense, reading should be its own reward, but the school or parents, or the students themselves, may demand some way of evaluating the effectiveness of an extensive reading programme. Here are some suggestions.

'Can do' statements

Take the objectives of the reading programme and simply re-cast them as 'can do' statements. For example, if a student is able to say "I can read a 60-page book at a 1500-word level with the occasional help of a dictionary" – and if the teacher is able to verify this – the evidence of what the learner *can* actually do should be more convincing than the results of a conventional test.

Questionnaires

Another, less direct means of evaluation is to use a questionnaire to gather data from students about their reading habits. Finding out what they read, how often they read and for how long, what they find easier and what they still find difficult, what strategies they use to overcome those difficulties – again, all this 'soft' qualitative data will give us a much more reliable reading profile of the class than the results of a test.

Scales

Ask students to self-evaluate on a number of scales describing different reading sub-skills. For example, in response to the statement "I can work out the meaning of unknown vocabulary", students could be asked to locate themselves on a line:

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Often | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometimes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rarely | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

The results obtained from the whole class using scales like this will give the teacher a clear picture of what skills need to be developed in future reading classes. (See also the self-assessment record on page 31)

Where do graded readers fit in?

An 'extensive reading programme' sounds as though it is a stand-alone course. It may be possible to organize a separate reading programme like this, with lessons set aside for activities to support students' reading, separate materials, a separate programme of homework, etc. But in most schools time is limited, language classes are only allocated a few hours a week and there are too many other demands (curriculum, textbook, exams) to be able to afford the time for extensive reading to have its own separate programme.

It is probably more realistic in most school situations, therefore, to integrate extensive reading into the language programme. Since most, if not all the reading will be done at home, this need not take up a great deal of class time, but it is important to create space in the timetable for the kind of extensive reading activities described earlier in this guide. The reading programme is like a plant that does not require daily attention, but that will wither if it is not fed at all.

Holiday reading

Many people look forward to holidays as an opportunity to do some reading. Students can be given longer reading assignments for the holidays, and it should not be unreasonable to expect them to read two or three books during a long summer break.

Without the support of regular classroom checks, however, they will need some kind of task framework from the teacher to encourage them to keep up their reading. They can be asked to keep a reading diary, keeping a day-to-day record of their reading and their thoughts and feelings about the books they have chosen. The holidays also provide an opportunity for the kind of tasks that can be undertaken over a longer timescale, such as compiling character profiles, building up plot graphs and diagrams, and comparing and contrasting whole books.

The most important principle when designing tasks for holiday reading is for the tasks to support the students' reading and not to become an obstacle that gets in the way of their reading.

READING HABITS WORKSHEET

1 Which do you prefer?

- a Watching a film
- b Reading on the Internet
- c Reading a book

2 How often do you read a book?

- a Once or twice a year.
- b Only if I have to for school.
- c I read all the time.

3 How do you choose books to read?

- a My friends recommend them to me.
- b I read the blurbs on the back covers.
- c I look at the illustration on the cover. If I like it, I buy it.

4 What kind of books do you like reading? Tick (✓).

- Mysteries
- Thrillers
- Science Fiction
- Detective Stories
- Romances
- Horror Stories
- Adventure stories

5 What was the last book you read?

6 What kind of book was it?

7 Write a brief summary of the plot.

8 Who was your favourite character in the book and why? Describe him/her.

9 Did you enjoy the book? Why/Why not?

10 What is your favourite book? Why is it your favourite book?

PLOT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET

Write two or three sentences in each box.

INTRODUCTION

How does the story start?



BUILD-UP / DEVELOPMENT

What happens next?



CLIMAX

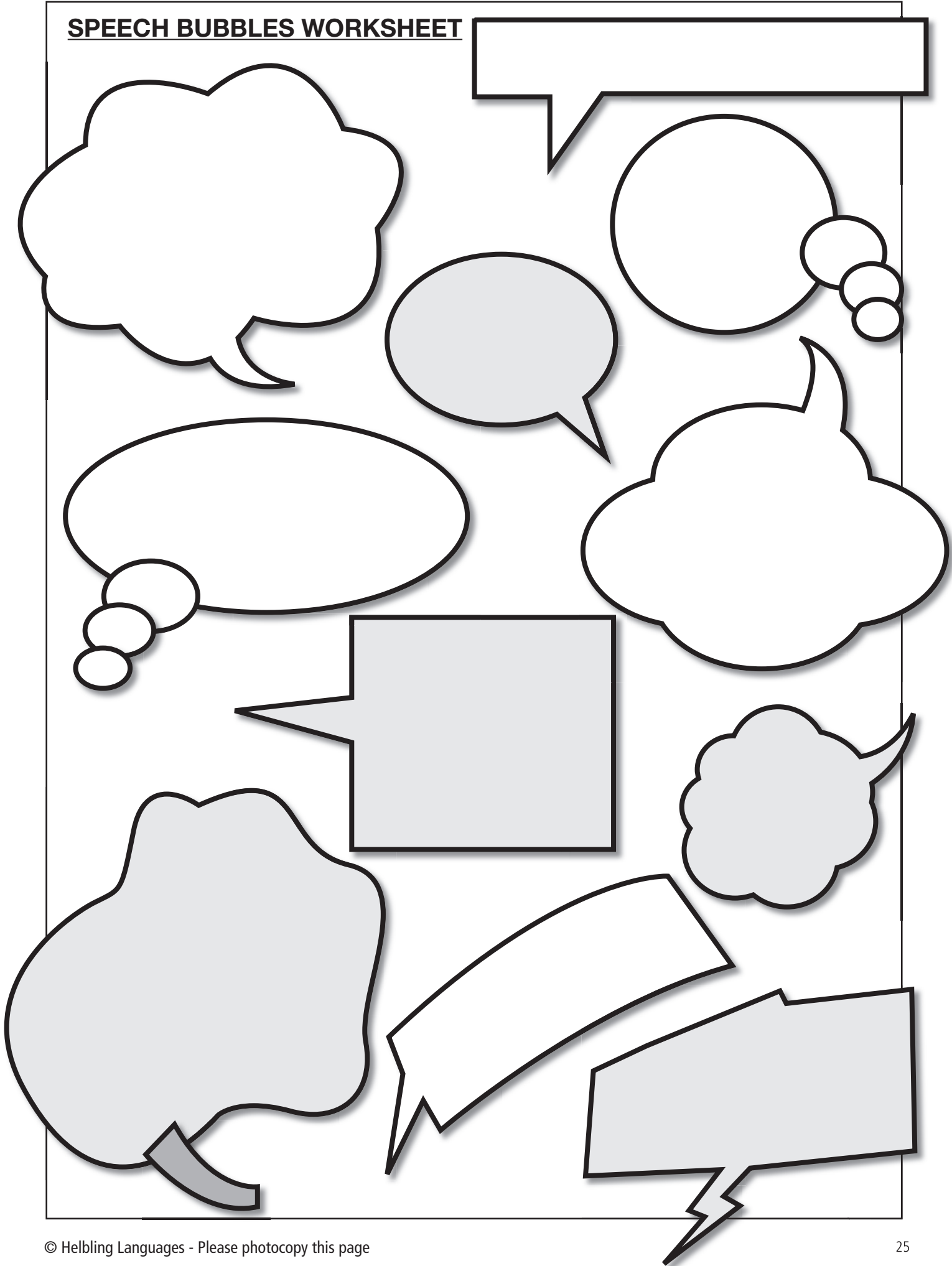
What's the most exciting or important part of the story?



CONCLUSION / RESOLUTION

What happens in the end?

SPEECH BUBBLES WORKSHEET



BOOK REPORT

Title.....

Level.....

Author.....

Publisher.....

**Describe the book in one or two sentences. What type of story is it?
Where / When does it take place? Who are the main characters?**


.....

**Write a few sentences saying why you liked (or didn't like) the book.
E.g. What were the best things about the book? What other books did it
remind you of? What kind of reader do you think would enjoy this book?**

.....

Would you recommend this book to other readers? (Tick (✓) one.)

Strongly recommended 

OK, but not very exciting 

Not recommended 

Level (Tick (✓) one.)

This book is:

quite difficult to read

just about right

really easy to read

What question(s) would you like to ask the author?

.....

VOCABULARY WORKSHEET

TITLE: **CHAPTER:**

NOUNS

Write below. Use them in sentences.

Noun	Sentence

ADJECTIVES

Write new adjectives below.

Decide if they have a positive (☺), negative (☹) or neutral (☺) meaning.

ADJECTIVES

Write the adjectives in sentences.

Story Sentence

My New Sentence

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

VERBS + PREPOSITIONS

Write the Verbs + Prepositions in sentences.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

NEW IDIOMS

Idiom

Meaning

I'm on top of the world.

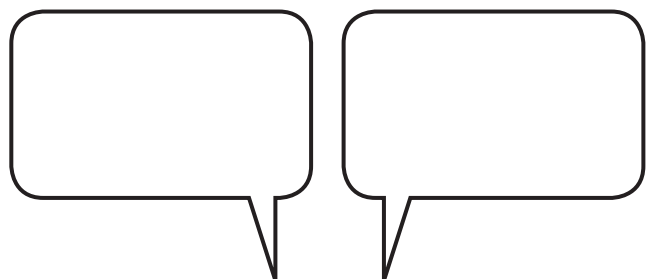
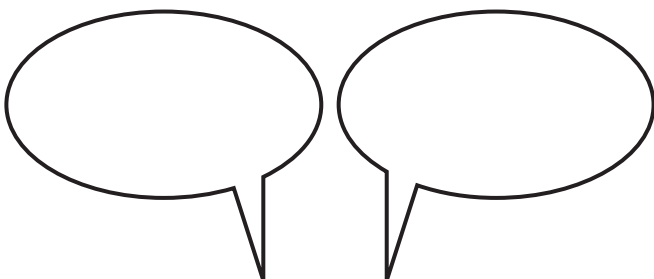
I'm very happy.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

USEFUL EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

Fill in the speech bubbles.



CHARACTER WORKSHEET 1

- 1 Who are the main characters in the story? Write their names below.**
- 2 What are their functions in the story? Write sentences about each character. The questions below will help you.**

Does s/he save somebody's life?
 Does s/he make a protest?
 Does s/he make an important decision?
 Does s/he discover something?
 Does s/he change his/her opinion?

- 3 Choose 4 characters and write character profiles as below.**

CHARACTER PROFILE	
Name:	
Nationality:	
Profession:	
Appearance:	
Personality:	
Likes/Dislikes:	

- 4 Which characters do these adjectives describe? Write the adjectives in the boxes. Add some more of your own.**

cowardly brave honest dishonest clever stupid kind
 unkind calm wise good evil bad cruel

- 5 Write the adjectives in the table below. Do they describe the hero or the villain of the story?**

POSITIVE (HERO)	NEGATIVE (VILLAIN)

CHARACTER WORKSHEET 2



In pairs:

Student A: Choose a character.

Student B: Ask questions to find out who the character is.

- What colour hair has s/he got?
- Where is s/he from?
- What is his/her job?
- Which adjectives best describe his/her personality?
- What does s/he like doing?
- Add extra questions:

1 Which is your favourite character? Why do you like this character?

Give reasons.

2 Which is your favourite incident in the story? What does it show about your favourite character?

3 Create your own new characters.

HERO	VILLAIN
Name:	Name:
Nationality:	Nationality:
Job:	Job:
Appearance:	Appearance:
Personality:	Personality:
Good Deeds:	Bad Deeds:

READING SELF-ASSESSMENT RECORD

TITLE:

DATE:

1 Tick (✓) the phrase which is true for you.

At the end of this book I feel	more confident	the same	less confident	
				talking about characters
				understanding the plot of a story
				working out the meaning of unknown words
				understanding idioms
				about reading a story in English

2 Tick (✓) the phrase which is true for you. Then give examples from the story.

I have learnt	some	a lot of	
			new words
			useful expressions
			new idioms

3 The most exciting thing that happened in the story was:

.....

4 Circle the word that best describes the ending.

The story had a happy / sad / exciting / interesting / satisfying / unsatisfying / good / bad ending.

5 What did you think of the book? Circle a, b or c.

- a It wasn't bad.
- b I enjoyed it.
- c It was brilliant. You must read it.

Reading Matters is for teachers who want to incorporate reading into the language classroom. It explores different approaches to reading and identifies the distinctive features of graded readers.

Reading Matters is packed with practical activities to make the most of your **Helbling Readers**. It also includes photocopiable worksheets and lots of ideas for dramatizing the texts.

HELBLING READERS

A whole new world of reading!

For young teenagers

For teenagers

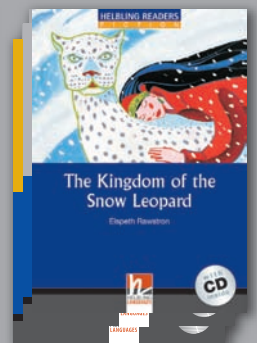
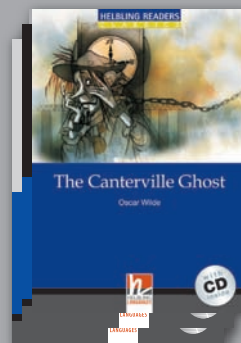
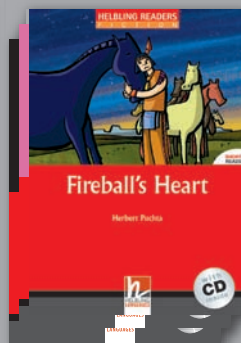
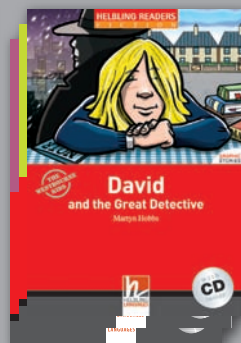
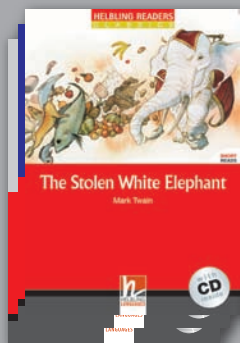
Classics

Graphic Stories

Short Reads

Classics

Fiction



- The Stolen White Elephant
- The Red-headed League
- The Happy Prince and The Nightingale and the Rose

- David and the Great Detective
- Ricky and the American Girl
- Holly the Eco Warrior

- Fireball's Heart
- The Surprise
- The Spring Cup

- The Canterville Ghost
- The Garden Party and Sixpence
- Daisy Miller

- The Kingdom of the Snow Leopard
- Operation Osprey
- Red Water

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