

Section B: Reading

Time: Approx. 2hrs worth of material.

Purpose: To enable learners to tackle experientially an extended extract from a literary text on the theme of education, to encourage meaningful use of language, to encourage noticing of the style and language of the text.

Preparation: Familiarise yourself with the background information about Frank McCourt, author of the literary text from which the extract was taken, provided below. You might like to use the internet to find and print a picture of him to show the learners.

Frank McCourt

Frank McCourt was born August 19, 1930 in Brooklyn, NY. He died on July 19, 2009.

Regarding his childhood, McCourt wrote, "People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and all the terrible things they did to us for 800 long years."

At the age of thirteen, Frank quit school and attempted to support the family between odd jobs and petty larceny before being drafted into the U.S. Army at the start of the Korean War. Upon returning from war Frank, with the help of the G.I. Bill, enrolled at New York University. When he graduated, he entered the New York City Public School System as a creative writing teacher and taught for 27 years, an experience chronicled in his 2005 memoir, *Teacher Man*. This final memoir, from which the extract is taken, is a memoir of the author's years as a teacher at Stuyvesant High School and his reflections upon the teaching life.

Adapted from <http://contemporarylit.about.com/od/authorprofiles/p/frank-mccourt.htm>

1. Imagine. Background:

You may notice the lack of traditional "comprehension questions" in the sequence as a whole. This is because learners' understanding is being checked in other more meaningful ways. Likewise, there are no vocabulary pre-teaching activities, another common feature of traditional reading lessons. Some theorists suggest that pre-teaching vocabulary may a) not be helpful in the long run and b) draw excess attention to the presented words within the text, distorting the reading of it. When reading a book in L1, a common response is to imagine oneself into the action. This opening question reflects that and gives learners an authentic purpose for reading. Using a question like this, which encourages visualisation, is typical of the experiential approach.

(You can find more information about this approach on page i-iv)

1. Imagine. Procedure:

- Introduce *Teacher Man*, the book from which the extract is taken, and the author.
- Explain that it is set in an American high school called Stuyvesant.

- Encourage the learners to take the time to imagine what's happening in the classroom, as they read, and to imagine how they would feel if they were a student in that class.

2. Role play. Background:

The mini-sequence 2a-c is a meaning-checking sequence.

- *In **question a**, learners must recount what happened in the depicted class as though they were in it, thus drawing on their response to 1. Imagine. Due to the narrative style of the extract, they are unable to lift descriptions directly off the page but instead will have to interpret what is happening and paraphrase it in descriptive terms, pushing the action into the past. This will enable you to gauge their understanding of the text.*
- *In **question b**, learners must synthesise their two interpretations of the text and agree on the three best and three worst things about being in McCourt's class.*
- ***Question c** encourages them to justify their decisions by requiring reasons in a whole-class reporting phase. This will necessitate revisiting the text to find justifications.*

2. Role play. Procedure:

Question a

- Put the learners in pairs
- Ask them to read through the role play instructions and then check they have understood. (E.g. Who describes the class? Student A. Who wants to know about the class? Student B. What do you when you have finished for the first time? Swap roles.)
- Cue them to start and then monitor as they carry out the activity. Make a note of any possible misunderstandings of the text.
- Once the learners have finished, share your observations with them and encourage them to comment.
- (E.g. There were some interesting interpretations. Learner A said that Mr McCourt was angry with them. Did anyone else feel the same? What made you think he was angry? etc)
- In this way, you probe their interpretations and check their understanding.

Question b

- Tell the learners to discuss and agree on the three best and three worst things about being in McCourt's class.
- Emphasise that they will need to be able to justify their answers by drawing their attention to **question c** as well. Encourage them to use the text to help them back up their reasons.

Question c

- Give each pair an opportunity to share their three best and three worst things.
- After each pair finishes, give the other learners the opportunity to respond to what they have said, whether to agree or to disagree.
- If a pair gives an unusual interpretation of the text, when they use it to justify their response, open it up for discussion. Remind them that literary texts *are* very open to interpretation.

3. Create. Background:

Now that the learners have had time to respond to the text, it is time for them to use it as a stimulus for creation. You will notice the choice of activities the learners are given at this point. This allows the learners to choose the activity which best suits their learning style and creative leanings, which should increase motivation and investment in the activity.

- **Learner Choice a.**

This activity changes the mode from speaking to writing, which may appeal to some learners. It also provides the opportunity for learners to further develop the initial experiential activity (1. *Imagine*) as well as the *role play* activity, by allowing them to communicate with the teacher of the class they have imagined themselves into.

- **Learner Choice b.**

This activity gives the learners the opportunity to choose whether they will do it alone or with a partner, and again develops the previous two activities: By answering the questions within the text, learners are expanding on the experience of being part of that class.

- **Learner Choice c.**

This activity encourages learners to think about and discuss how they would represent the poem within the extract and the extract itself in a different format - i.e. as films. It also develops the initial experiential activity, as learners are asked to interact with a portion of the questions in the extract - those that a student in the class puts forward as important to consider if a film is to be made of the poem. Subsequent discussion of how they would film the extract itself is another avenue of exploration of their feelings towards the depicted class. (E.g. If they felt it was a horrible class, they would represent the learners as unhappy or bored or annoyed.)

3. Create. Procedure:

- Present each of the three choices to the learners.
- Give them a couple of minutes to discuss the options with a neighbour
- Assign a third of the classroom to each activity and ask learners to go to the portion representing the activity they wish to do.
 - > For **activity a**, allow the learners to discuss and then start writing
 - > For **activity b**, ask the learners to decide if they want to work alone or in pairs and sit accordingly. If an uneven number of learners want to work together, have a group of three and pair up the rest.
 - > For **activity c**, ask the learners to group themselves in 3s or 4s.
- Monitor and allow as much time as is necessary for the learners to complete these activities. If the letter writers finish earlier than the rest, encourage them to swap letters and reply to the letter as though they were Mr McCourt - this will encourage them to think more deeply about the reasoning behind McCourt's particular teaching style.

4. Share. Background:

The purpose of the activity is to allow each learner, or pairs/groups of learners, to see what all the other learners have produced. This is important because as well as being interesting and motivating, it provides opportunity for critical reflection and evaluation of what has been produced. After each individual, pair or group presents, the rest of the class have the opportunity to respond to it - to question what was done, to say what they think was done well and what they would have added if they had done that activity.

4. Share. Procedure:

- Give each individual, pair or group of learners a chance to explain what they have done.
- After each presentation, encourage the rest of the class to respond by asking questions or sharing opinions regarding what was shared. You could model this yourself initially. You might also like to write up a couple of core questions on the board. E.g. What did you think about this? What would you have done differently?

5. Language 1 - i. Narrative style. Background:

Now that the learners have experientially explored the meaning of the text, the focus turns to the language used.

- *The purpose of the first **Language** sequence is to encourage learners to explore the unusual narrative style of this extract and to develop their critical thinking skills, one of the skills requirements at B2 of the CEFR. This is done by providing the learners with an extract from the text rewritten in a more traditional style. In this way, the noticing process is scaffolded by providing a tangible point of comparison, which learners use to help them notice unusual features of the reading text.*
- *Having identified these features, learners are encouraged to respond to this style of writing, giving reasons for their answers. This requirement for reasons encourages greater criticality as learners must consider their response to the style of the text more deeply, in order to justify this to a partner.*
- *Then, learners choose a different section of the text to rewrite in the style of the rewritten extract in question a. Manipulating text in this way requires deeper understanding of the differences in narrative style, so this activity enables you to check this, through monitoring, and give extra help where needed. It also enables experimentation with narrative style.*
- *Finally, sharing the product of question c with a partner and discussing the changes made gives learners the opportunity to see and question somebody else's approach to the activity, comparing this with their own. Learners are given the choice of working with a partner or alone, thus catering to different preferences.*

5. Language 1 - i. Narrative style. Procedure:

- Tell learners they are going to answer some questions about the style of the text and give them the option of working alone or in pairs. Seat those who want to work alone on one side of the room and the pairs on the other side. This minimises disturbance for the those wanting to work alone, as well as providing them with the possibility of discussing their answers subsequently.
- Let the learners work through the questions. Monitor and where there is confusion, use guiding questions (e.g. asking learners to notice differences between the rewritten text and the original) to scaffold them.

Do not just provide the answers, as the purpose of this activity is allow the learners to discover these for themselves.

- Once learners have finished **question a**, have a whole class feedback session for learners to check their answers and add to them as desired. This will ensure that learners have the necessary information and understanding to successfully tackle the remaining questions. You can also remind them that there is a Language Reference at the end of the unit, which they can refer to for extra information and support.

Language 1 - ii. Articles. Background:

This sequence focuses learners on the use of articles with abstract nouns, which is one of the CEFR B2 language requirements.

- **Question a** gives the learners an example sentence taken from the text, asking them to compare it with another sentence using the abstract noun "education".
- Once they have noticed the difference and identified the reason for it, they are given a box of 12 nouns and asked to underline those that are abstract.
- Learners then complete the set of sentences that follows by deciding whether or not the article is required. This sequence scaffolds learners' noticing of the way abstract nouns work.

Language 2 - ii Articles. Procedure:

- Learners may again work alone or in pairs, according to preference.
- Ask them to look at **question a**. Give them time to compare and formulate a hypothesis.
- Once each individual or pair has done this bring the learners together for a feedback session to share these. Ask them to vote on which one they think is the most likely. Then reveal the answer.
- Ask the learners to do **question b**, by identifying and underlining all of the abstract nouns in the box.
- Once they have finished, get learners to check their answers with another individual or pair. Monitor and check all learners have underlined only abstract nouns. They should underline: **information; happiness; betrayal; history; jealousy; ignorance**
- Now learners are going to complete sentences, by adding "the" or "zero article ('x')" which are based on the box of nouns from the previous question. This requires them to reprocess what they have discovered. An example is given to help them. They should complete as follows: **i. the ii. x iii. x iv. the v. x**
- When learners have finished, do a whole class feedback session to round this section off. You may like to use some Demand High techniques. *For more information on Jim Scrivener's Demand High approach, see page vi.*

6. Respond. Background:

This is the final set of activities in the overall reading sequence. The purpose of this set is to encourage personal response to and evaluation of an issue from the text. In **question a**, learners are asked how far they agree or disagree with McCourt's view, which is printed alongside. They are encouraged to revisit the answers they gave in Speaking 2c, and compare them with McCourt's views. In **question b**, they discuss the implication of McCourt's words - i.e. that education can lead to freedom. In discussing education in these terms, they are also

given the opportunity to use the awareness raised in [Language 1.ii](#) but the emphasis is on critical discussion rather than language practice, so they are not obliged or prompted in this direction. In [question C](#), they are asked to speculate on what "fear" McCourt is referring to and relate it to their own personal experience of education. Finally, in question D, they are asked to reconsider the question of what education means to them. They may want to add to their answers from [Speaking 2c](#). This opportunity will arise again later in the unit too.

6. Respond. Practicalities:

- Put the learners in groups of three or four.
- Give them plenty of time to discuss each of the questions.
- Bring the class together again and let each group share their responses to the questions.
[Questions b and c](#) could be particularly interesting to open up to the whole class.

7. Review. Background:

The reading section ends with a set of questions which encourage learners to reflect on and discuss what they have learnt thus far in the unit. The purpose of this is to help learners develop metacognitive awareness through critical evaluation of the questions they have answered and the discussions they have had. If this takes place at the end of a lesson, it may be worth revisiting it at the beginning of the next, to remind learners of their learning thus far and prepare them for the listening section that follows.

7. Review. Procedure:

- Give learners a few minutes of silent reflection time.
- Once learners have had time to think, put them in pairs to discuss their reflections. Remind them that they are likely to have different answers to some of the questions, and that this is ok.
- Once learners have had time to talk, ask each pair to share what they think is the most important thing they have learnt so far in this unit. Give them a couple of minutes to decide what it is before expecting them to talk.