Engaging Learners with Reading: The Role of Literary Texts

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As you get the handout, please read the poem below and write or scribble your reactions to it on the handout. Then feel free to read the poems on the following pages.

Fire and Ice
Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Robert Frost

Day of Atonement
London, Sep. 23rd

Everything is here and led here.

We are sitting, father, mother, daughter,
closely around the top corner of the table
formally dressed for the new year,
its candles lit and ready with its bowls
anticipating soup, for the breaking
of the fast.

It is the first year you have been
too short of breath to join the congregation
so we are watching the service,
beamed onto a tablet propped against a plate,

and it takes us right onto the platform,
the rabbi in white shawl singing
for the end of day. The shofar moans
its last held breath that marks
the closure of prayers, and the last signing
in the book of life.

You listen to it, with your ear
pressed against the tablet,
and sometimes you fall asleep, your chin
dropped down into your chest,
your eyelids flickering

and I sit beside you, as I never could before,
and stroke your hair, your soft silver hair,
waiting for you to wake up.

Jane Spiro

Team Spirit
Oh no, not him, sir. He's no good.
I didn't ask to join their team.
I try, but I run out of steam
And let them down again. Dead wood.

The joys of sporting brotherhood
Are not for me. I spoil their scheme.
Oh no, not him, sir. He's no good.
I didn't ask to join their team.

How many afternoons I've stood
And heard the P.E. master scream
What's up, lad! Are you in a dream?

I wish I was. I wish I could.
But this is real and I'm no good
And Hell is being in a team.

Wendy Cope
In: John Foster, (ed). 1997 *Excuses, excuses. Poems about school*. Oxford: OUP. p. 37.

Returning, We Hear the Larks
Sombre the night is:
And, though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lurks there.

Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
This poison-blasted track opens on our camp –
On a little safe sleep.

Bur hark! Joy–joy–strange joy.
Lo! Heights of night ringing with unseen larks;
Music showering on our upturned listening faces.

Death could drop from the dark
As easily as song –
But song only dropped,
Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
By dangerous tides;
Like a girl's dark hair, for she dreams no ruin lies there,
Or her kisses where a serpent hides.

Isaac Rosenberg

The Look

Strephon kissed me in the spring,
Robin in the fall,
But Colin only looked at me
And never kissed at all.

Strephon's kiss was lost in jest,
Robin's lost in play,
But the kiss in Colin's eyes
Haunts me night and day.

Sara Teasdale

Lonely Hearts

Can someone make my simple wish come true?
Male biker seeks female for touring fun.
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Gay vegetarian whose friends are few,
I'm into music, Shakespeare and the sun.
Can someone make my simple wish come true?

Executive in search of something new –
Perhaps bisexual woman, arty, young.
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Successful, straight and solvent? I am too –
Attractive Jewish lady with a son.
Can someone make my simple wish come true?

I'm Libran, inexperienced and blue –
Need slim non-smoker, under twenty-one.
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Please write (with photo) to Box 152.
Who knows where it may lead once we've begun?
Can someone make my simple wish come true?
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Wendy Cope
In: *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis.* London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

Below are the beginnings of four novels. Read these beginnings and:

a. **Give yourself an account of your reaction to each one. Do you like it? Do you not like it? Would you want to read this novel.**
b. **Would you consider this novel for reading with your pupils?**

1

So things were ticking along quite nicely. In fact, I'd say that good stuff had been happening pretty solidly for about six months.

- For example: Mum got rid of Steve, her rubbish boyfriend.
- For example: Mrs Gillett, my art and design teacher, took me to one side after a lesson and asked whether I'd thought of doing art at college.
- For example: I'd learned two skating tricks, suddenly, after weeks of making an idiot of myself in public. (I'm guessing that not all of you are skaters, so I should say something straight away, just so there are no terrible misunderstandings. Skating = skateboarding. We never say skateboarding, usually, so this is the only time I'll use the word in this whole story. And if you keep thinking of me messing around on ice, then it's your own stupid fault.)

All that, and I'd met Alicia too.

(Nick Hornby, *Slam)*

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Chapter 1 *Only me, Jojo*

It's dark again. So it's evening. It's the third evening. No, I'm wrong. It's the fourth evening.

It's … Tuesday… Wednesday… Thursday. Yes, it's Thursday. Why do I count the days? Why do I say it's Thursday? There aren't any more days. There's just time. Time when it's dark, and time when it's light

Everything is dead, so why not days, too? Yes. No more days. No more Thursdays. There's only now.

And there's only me. Why? Why aren't I dead, too?

That's a stupid question, Jojo, I say to myself. You know why you aren't dead. You aren't dead because you weren't in the house. You were in the fields when the men came. But that's not my question. I want to know why I was in the fields. Why wasn't I in the house with my family?

(Antoinette Moses, *Jojo's Story)*

2

It was 7 minutes after midnight. The dog was lying on the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of Mrs Shears' house. Its eyes were closed. It looked as it if was running on its side, the way dogs run when they think they are chasing a cat in a dream. But the dog was not running or asleep. The dog was dead. There was a garden fork sticking out of the god. The points of the fork must have gone all the way through the dog and into the ground because the fork had not fallen over. I decided that the dog was probably killed with the fork because I could not see any other wounds in the dog and I do not think you would stick a garden fork into a dog after it had died for some other reason, like cancer for example, or a road accident. But I could not be certain about this.

I went through Mrs Shears' gate, closing it behind me. I walked onto her lawn and knelt beside the dog. I put my hand on the muzzle of the dog. It was still warm.

The dog was called Wellington. It belonged to Mrs Shears who was our friend. She lived on the opposite side of the road, two houses to the left.

Wellington was a poodle. Not one of the small poodles that have hairstyles, but a big poodle. It had curly black fur, but when you got close you could see that the skin underneath the fur was a very pale yellow, like chicken.

I stroked Wellington and wondered who had killed him, and why.

(Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time)*

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CHAPTER 1

LAGOS, NIGERIA

SURVIVORS

SADE IS SLIPPING HER ENGLISH BOOK into her schoolbag when Mama screams. Two sharp cracks splinter the air. She hears her father's fierce cry, rising, falling.

"No! No!"

The revving of a car and skidding of tires smother his voice.

Her bag topples from the bed, spilling books, pen and pencil onto the floor. She races to the verandah, pushing past Femi in the doorway. His body is wooden with fright.

"Mama mi?" she whispers?

Papa is kneeling in the driveway. Mama partly curled up against him. One bare leg stretches out in front of her. His strong hands grip her, trying to halt the growing scarlet monster. But it has already spread down her bright white nurse's uniform. It stains the earth around them.

A few seconds, that is all. Later it will always seem much longer.

A small gathering began to swell the house, tense and hushed. Sade stared numbly out of the sitting room window to where Joseph stood nervously on guard.

(Beverley Naidoo, *The Other Side of Truth)*

Hanif Kureishi, The Body

a. Individually, make a list of the parts of the body that you know that have been successfully transplanted.

_____

_____

Now share this list with your neighbour/the class.

b. Individually, write down two **ethical or moral** reasons to support transplants, and two **ethical or moral** reasons against transplants.

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c. Discussion

d. Lead into the text

1

He said, 'Listen: you say you can't hear well and your back hurts. Your body won't stop reminding you of your ailing existence. Would you like to do something about it?'

'This half-dead old carcass?' I said. 'Sure. What?'

'How about trading it in and getting something new?'

It was an invitation I couldn't say no to, or yes, for that matter. There was certainly nothing simple or straightforward about it. When I had heard the man's proposal, although I wanted to dismiss it as madness, I couldn't stop considering it. All that night I was excited by an idea that was – and had been for a while, now I was forced to confront it – inevitable.

(Hanif Kureishi, *The Body)*

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Morris … How about the games we played? Think, Zach. Think carefully! There was one special one. Just me and you. I'll give you a clue. Toot-toot. Toot-toot.
Zachariah *(thinking)* Wasn't there an old car?
Morris Where would it be?
Zachariah Rusting by the side of the road.
Morris Could it be the ruins of an old Chevy, Zach?
Zachariah Yes, it could.
Morris And can we say without tyres and wires and things?
Zachariah We may.
Morris … and all the glass blown away by the wind?
Zachariah Dusty.
Morris Deserted.
Zachariah Sting bees on the bonnet.
Morris Webs in the windscreen.
Zachariah Nothing in the boot.
Morris And us?
Zachariah In it.
Morris We are? How?
Zachariah Side by side.
Morris Like this?
(He sits beside Zachariah.)
Zachariah Uh-huh.
Morris Doing what?
Zachariah Staring.
Morris Not both of us!
Zachariah Me at the wheel, you at the window.
Morris Okay. Now what?
Zachariah Now, I got this gear here and I'm going to go.
Morris Where?
Zachariah To hell and gone, and we aren't coming back.
Morris What will I do while you drive?
Zachariah You must tell me what we pass. Are you ready? Here we go!
(Zachariah goes through the motion of driving a car. Morris looks eagerly out of the window.)
Morris We're slipping through the streets, passing houses and people on the pavements who are quite friendly and wave as we drive by. It's a fine, sunny sort of day. What are we doing?
Zachariah Twenty-four.
Morris Do you see that bus ahead of us?
(They lean over to one side as Zachariah swings the wheel. Morris looks back.)
Chock-a-block with early morning workers. Shame. And what about those children over there, going to school? Shame again. On such a nice day. What are we doing?
Zachariah Thirty-four.
Morris That means we're coming to open country. The houses have given way to patches of green and animals and not so many people anymore. But they still wave … with their spades.
Zachariah Fifty.
Morris You're going quite fast. You've killed a cat, flattened a frog, frightened a dog … who jumped!
[…]

Morris We played our games, Zach.
Zachariah And now?
Morris See for yourself, Zach. Here we are, later, and now there is Ethel as well and that makes me frightened.
Zachariah Sounds like another game.
Morris Yes … but not ours this time. Hell, man, I often wonder.
Zachariah Same here.
Morris I mean, where do they go, the good times, in a man's life?
Zachariah And the bad ones?
Morris That's a thought. Where do *they* come from?
Zachariah Oudtshoorn.*

Athol Fugard, *Blood Knot*

* A town in the Western Cape province of South Africa

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