

How to deal with different types of texts – Characteristics of prose, drama, poetry, non-fiction and visuals

Facts

Students are constantly confronted with materials at school with the goal of turning them into competent and critical readers. But engaging with various materials involves a great number of subskills, such as reading between the lines, analysing the intention of a writer, denoting the message of a text, analysing literature, recognising rhymes in poetry and decoding the messages of a visual. In their near future, students will have to prove that they can successfully deal with all kinds of demanding texts. These skills represent the key to the A-level exams (*Abitur*) and later, to productive studies at university.

This unit offers students the opportunity to practise a whole range of text skills and to become familiar with very useful strategies when working with diverse genres. The main features of the genres are briefly presented in informative and concise texts. By working through this unit, students will learn that the way to tackle written materials depends on the kind of text itself. Analysing an excerpt from a fictional text requires other strategies than dealing with a newspaper article. At the end of the unit, students will have developed a good understanding of the relevant major strategies.

Notes on the material




The unit presented here consists of five topics. **Topic 1** serves both as an introduction to dealing with various text types and as a practice for analysing the extract from a novel. The questionnaire with eight questions about personal challenges makes students reflect on their possible strong and weak points when tackling different genres. An info text on prose provides an overview of the characteristic features of fictional texts. The reading text is an extract from Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005). The passage is used to practise students' competence to analyse the narrator's character, the choice of words and the atmosphere of the novel. **Topic 2** centres around drama as a challenging genre.

Topic 1: How to deal with prose

Questionnaire: How to deal with selected tasks and types of texts – My personal challenges

M1

Pre-reading activities

1. Look at the questionnaire about tasks and text types. Respond to the tasks and tick the answers that are relevant for you. 
2. Then, exchange your questionnaire with a partner and read through his/her responses on his/her questionnaire.
3. **Card survey:** With your partner, agree on three major challenges when dealing with different text types. Specify these challenges and make notes. 
4. In class, discuss the challenges one is confronted with when dealing with texts. 

Questionnaire

1. Which of the following text types do you consider most difficult to work with?
Tick your answer.
 novels plays poems non-fictional texts pictures, cartoons
2. Name your main problems when dealing with your most difficult text type.
3. What are the reasons for your specific problems?
4. Name the strategies that you use when dealing with different text types.

5. What kind of support do you expect from your teacher when dealing with different text types?
6. Write down what you yourself can do to improve your skills.
7. Where do you see the advantages of improving your text skills? Tick the relevant statements.
- I can get better grades in written assignments.
 - I feel more confident.
 - I will be able to use the skills when studying at university.
 - I will be able to use the skills in my future professional field.
 - Improved text skills are also useful in other subjects at school (German etc.).
 - I do not see any advantages for me at all.
8. Further comments or statements concerning working with texts in English.

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro (extract)

M3



The story takes places in England in the 1970s. Hailsham, a boarding school, educates young people for the simple reason to turn them into organ donors for rich people. The narrator Kathy H. describes her experiences.

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer¹ for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they
5 think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better
10 than expected. Their recovery times² have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated'³, even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I'm boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'. I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to
15 themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it⁴. [...]

And I'm a Hailsham student – which is enough by itself sometimes to get people's backs up. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the other privileged estates. No
20 wonder she has a great record. [...] I've done my share of looking after donors brought up in every kind of place. By the time I finish, remember, I'll have done twelve years of this, and it's only the last six they've let me choose.

And why shouldn't they? Carers aren't machines. You try and do your best for every donor, but in the end, it wears you down: You don't have unlimited patience
25 and energy. So when you get a chance to choose, of course, you choose your own kind. [...]

But these days, of course, there are fewer and fewer donors left who I remember, and so in practice, I haven't been choosing that much. As I say, the work gets a lot harder when you don't have that deeper link with the donor, and though I'll miss
30 being a carer, it feels just about right to be finishing at last come the end of the year.

- e) *Use all your notes and keywords to write an analysis of the narrator's character and the atmosphere.*

Individual results. The following ideas might be mentioned in the analysis:

- The narrator's character: Kathy H. is a very sensitive person trying to come to terms with her memories before becoming a donor herself; she is desperately focused on making sense of her memories of a possibly troubled childhood; this urge is so strong that she confides in the reader as if he/she were a very good friend; she gives the reader the impression of being a very modest young woman not willing to show off; Kathy can be characterised as a sympathetic person dealing with donors; all in all, the narrator might be a troubled mind.
- The atmosphere: The atmosphere in the extract can be called gloomy and very serious because patients, donations, pains and drugs are mentioned. The extract prepares the reader for a serious reading experience instead of superficial entertainment. Furthermore, the atmosphere can be rather puzzling for the reader because there are many allusions in the extract that he/she cannot understand. So, there is a kind of discrepancy between the colloquial English used by the narrator and the seriousness of the topic having an unsettling impact on the overall atmosphere.

VORSCHAU

Disguising what they are.

35 **Lady Macbeth:** You must leave this.

Macbeth: O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance lives.

Lady Macbeth: But in them Nature's copy's not eterne.

Macbeth: There's comfort yet, they are assailable.

40 Then be thou jocund; ere the bat has flown

His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons

The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums

Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done

A deed of dreadful note.

45 **Lady Macbeth:** What's to be done?

Macbeth: Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,

Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,

And with thy bloody and invisible hand,

50 Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond

Which keeps me pale! Light thickens; and the crow

Makes wing to th' rooky wood;

Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;

Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.

55 Thou marvell'st at my words, but hold these still:

Things had begun make strong themselves by ill.

So prithee go with me.

Exeunt

Source: William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*. Reclam. 1987. III, ii, v. 4–56.

Glossary for the analysis of stylistic/rhetorical devices and language

M15

register	slang, colloquial, everyday English, formal English, sophisticated, technical terms, scientific terms, metaphorical
choice of words	literal, figurative meaning of words, negative function of words, abstractions, synonyms, euphemisms, denotations, connotations
style	clear, precise, natural, sober, passionate, stilted, clumsy, lengthy, matter-of-fact, vigorous, concise
tone	aggressive, satirical, serious, ironical, humorous
rhetorical devices	alliteration, allusion, antithesis, irony, metaphor, understatement, exaggeration, employment of leitmotifs, repetition, rhetorical question, quotation, comparison, digressions from the main topic, illustration, symbol



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Glossary of rhetorical devices

M16

Expression	Definition, explanation
alliteration	the repetition of a sound, usually a consonant, at the beginning of neighbouring words
allusion	indirect reference to a famous event, person etc.
antithesis	contrast; opposing words, phrases, views, characters etc.
employment of leitmotifs	the use of a theme, expression or object recurring throughout a text; the leitmotif refers to a certain person, situation or atmosphere
metaphor	a poetic comparison without using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>
repetitions	deliberately using a word / phrase more than once in a text

