HOW TO LIVE FOREVER

by Colin Thompson

A Critical Literacy Lesson Sequence for Year 5/6

Prepared by Marg Duncan [Lennox Head NSW Australia]

Lesson Sequence Outcomes: Students will

- Critically analyse techniques used by writers to create certain effects, to use language creatively, to position the reader in various ways and to construct different interpretations of experience
- Critically evaluate how own texts have been structured to achieve their purpose and discuss ways of using related grammatical features and conventions of written language to shape readers' and viewers' understanding of texts
- Identify the text structure of a wider range of more complex text types and discuss how the characteristic grammatical features work to influence readers' and viewers' understanding of texts
- Understand how language is used to include and exclude others
- Critically reflect on and share experience of texts

Prior Knowledge/Classroom Organisation

This lesson sequence recognises that critical thinking skills are a prerequisite for developing critical literacy abilities. Thus a range of thinking strategies, cognitive organisers and thinking processes underpin the lesson sequence.

Aspects associated with the expectations of students in respect of the content and processes involved in these activities will depend upon how much exposure students have already experienced in analysing texts critically. For instance, there is quite a lot for students to consider in the second part of Activity I. For students with less experience:

- Split the activity into two, or
- Allocate a specific consideration to focus groups, eg jigsaw

Activity II could also be modified with jigsaw groups or by reducing the range of focus questions.

Note: Teachers should familiarise themselves with the central issues/ideas inherent in the story (illustrations and text).

Resources/Preparation

1. Text: 'How To Live Forever' by Colin Thompson (multiple copies)
2. Image viewer (for whole class/shared book activities)
3. Magnifying glasses for individual viewing of text
4. Internet – Colin Thompson's website: www.colinthompson.com/

5. Excursion to largest library possible
6. Many good quality dictionaries, quotation dictionaries and reference books
7. Movie lists, book titles, song titles (access to Internet – Amazon.com etc)
8. Audience for debate or recital of poetry
9. Access to community readers, other adults, especially elderly

ACTIVITY I: Social semiotic analysis [meaning through viewing]

Lead-in: Introduce text [initial observation- cover only]

Focus Questions (interpretation):

- What general observations about the cover can you make? Focus on something and try to interpret how its presence supports what you understand about the title
- What clues are you left with as to what the text might be about? Consider components: medium, colour, images and their size and arrangement.

Whole class response of predictions, supported by perceived clues from text cover.

Analysis of Visuals within the Text

Read text, reminding students to continue to think about the components, but having them also consider:

- The setting, where characters are shown and what this implies about the characters
- Characters' clothing, especially in relation to colour and style
- Position and angle of representation, especially in relation to each other
- Light source: how the light source and level shape the mood of the story
- Objects and how these are shown with different characters and what this implies about them and their personalities

Personal Response: Students list symbols they felt were significant to their understanding of the text. In small groups discuss how these various for each person.

Focus Questions

- Why isn't you list of symbols identical?
- What knowledge, understandings or experiences did you draw on to give the meaning for the symbols you chose?
- Identify symbols that you have in common, but have given different meanings to. Why do you think this happened?

Reflective Journal response: Ponder what it means to understand many cultural symbols we 'see' around use every day?

ACTIVITY II: Text Analysis questions [critical reading]

Note: In the lead up to this activity, students will have had the opportunity to read the text for themselves.

Focus Questions:

- What is the subject matter or topic?
- Why do you think Thompson has written this text?
- Who is the intended audience? How do you know?
  Think Pair Share

- What knowledge of the world does the reader need to bring to this text in order to understand it? How do you know?
  Small Group Investigation: Web/ T Chart

- Who would feel left out in this text, and why? Does it matter? Do any of the claims made in this text clash with your values, beliefs, or experiences?
- How is the reader positioned in relation to the author (eg as a friend, opponent, someone to persuade, invisible or someone who agrees with the author's views)?
  DOVE technique/reasons chart

- Are there 'gaps' or 'absences' or 'silences' in this text? If so, what are they? Is there a group of people missing who logically should be included? Are different groups talked about as though they belong to the same, seamless group? Does the author write about a group without including their perspective on things or events?
  Class critique/rating

Personal response: Reflective journal, appropriate to critique (eg stem statements like: if I was …. I would feel …; or What about animals? They ….).

Note: Final reflections/responses can be used with questions like: What would happen if people and/or pets lived forever? Much will depend upon how students have critically interrogated the text at the closure of each learning session. This question can be dealt with at any time by having students use reflective journals. Thus they can draw on these developing thoughts when they make their final evaluation following the week's activities.

ACTIVITY III: Linguistic analysis

Discuss with students text type (asking how they know?) and as a group identify participants. Revisit metaphor and discuss mixed metaphors, taking an example from the text. For instance, one title reads, "Back to the Fuscia" and sits on a shelf with other titles such as "The Taming of the Yew". It is very important that each student's questions be encouraged and valued here.

- **Small groups:** analyse various devices that Thompson has used to develop characters by deconstructing the functional aspects of grammar from the narrative: 'Character Analysis' [appendix 1]. Students will build on aspects of previous lesson – who is left out, minor characters and the lack of significance they are given.

- **Whole class literature circle:** critically analyse literary devices within the text. For instance, the use of italics and the placement of Latin scripts, metaphors and mixed metaphors on titles. Select five titles each and write in journals what they understand these to mean. Discuss responses with two others.

Focus Questions
- Has Thompson's choice of grammar influenced your view of certain characters? Why?
- Who in our society is best positioned to understand this text? Why?
- What groups will have the most difficulty? Why?
- What sort of ideas/knowledge does Thompson weave into his metaphors?

This activity should highlight how we are influenced by different historical knowledge and social and cultural practices. This connection will foreshadow the relevance of developing a critical approach to historical knowledge.

Recommended Activity: Community readers, who participate in many schools these days could be invited to share their understanding of the text with students. In sharing with older people, students will realise that there is shared knowledge and knowledge that is not always shared. **Evaluation** can be facilitated through reflecting on how their understanding changed as a result of conferring with different adults.

Integration Activities

ITC: Internet searches by title
Music: Student choices from linguistic analysis of text

ACTIVITY IV: Using historical information to critique social practices

Group Activity: This activity will help students understand that particular ways of thinking and social practices that are taken for granted in a society, occur as a result of historical forces, often over many years. Students will, therefore assume the role of history detectives (emphasis on teamwork) so as to ascertain the historical forces that have influenced this text and those who read it. For example, one title "Hubble Bubble Toil and Trouble" requires familiarity with the witches in Shakespear's Macbeth, as well as an understanding of 'Hubble', the Astronomer.

Focus Questions *(prior to investigation)*
- What clues do I have already?
- What subject area is this knowledge about?
- Who can I talk to?
- What sources do I need? Where will I find them?

Note: Planning and facilitating resources will largely determine the success of this activity. Additional time can be facilitated through the HSIE. Greater support may be needed or the activity could be considered for an enrichment group.

Personal Response: As a closure for this activity students will select an area of interest/knowledge that they are familiar with, to create a shelf of titles, a divergent path in the story, or an alternative ending.

Focus questions (prior to writing)

- What histories can I exploit to show my particular ideas/view of the world?
- What sources will I use? Why do these sources make sense to me?

Evaluation
Students will reflect in their journals on their writing by asking: Whose social practices does the author seem to value and whose social practices do I value? Why? Are they similar or different?

ACTIVITY V: Response to social inequities and/or promoting social action by means of writing literary texts

The social implications associated with living forever have, to this point not been specifically targeted. This activity will allow students to respond to the central issue raised in the text.

- **Group Activity:** deBono's Six Thinking Hats will facilitate student views on this issue and others implicated. Thus six groups will explore the pluses and minuses of Peter's decision.

- **Whole Class Activity:** Polarised Debate [Horseshoe debate] to provide an opportunity for students to debate the central issue as determined by the author.

- **Personal Response:** Colin Thompsons's web page invites children to submit various responses, stories and drawings, either through e-mail or post. As ICT is becoming increasingly important as a medium of communication, students will be encouraged to promote social action by furnishing a literature response using a genre of their choice, eg –

  i) Poetry, short story, narrative (eg sci-fi), play
  ii) Letter, e-mail, feature article for a newspaper
  iii) Personal response, eg diary

Note: Invite audience for student responses, eg Parents invited into classroom sharing time, School Assembly or Open Day

Appendix 1

CHARACTER ANALYSIS CHART

Character	Gender	Racial Background	Age	Participant's attitudes, values and opinions	Actions involved in: initiated Verbs & Adverbs	Actions directed towards them Verbs and Adverbs