



Senior English

Sample Unit Overview for Semester One, Year 11

**Learning Context:** Getting personal with language

**Mini-Unit:** The business of reading – sell a book

**Length:** approximately 5 weeks

**Background:** This unit was designed for students in an all-boys' school.

## Rationale

Wide, regular reading is an essential activity in our world: it allows us to absorb the rhythms of written language and it exposes us to new worlds and ideas in a manner different from watching films and television, or surfing the world wide web. However, research also indicates that reading habits of boys diminish during the teenage years, with boys oft citing the lack of time and clashes with other activities (social and sporting). Already, we have in place a wide reading program in order to focus our students on the continuing value of reading and this unit should be seen as a supplement to that program. We also know (from research and experience) that boys are most likely to listen to their peers when it comes to reading recommendations. Thus, this unit is aimed at students sharing their positive experiences of reading with their peers.

Of course, the personal and individual activity of reading is also part of a business of selling reading, books, authors and brands. Thus, the unit also explores some of the commercial discourses surrounding reading and considers some of the consequences of these. According to John Eklund in 'Don't point that Ad at me: the business of books is bad for reading':

We are awash in great books, more than we could possibly read. I have to laugh when I hear people bemoan a lack of quality or say things like "What a lousy season for fiction". To access the literary wealth we have to step outside the paradigm of the Corporate New, where we are marketing targets, and instead create for ourselves a Personal New, a truly custom-designed inventory of the found, the overheard, the stumbled upon and the forgotten. Superb books are plentiful in every bookstore and library. While the commercial

publishing conglomerates chase the next mega-selling piece of fundamentalist pornography, literary treasure and surprises await those with open eyes and ears.

Through this unit, then, students will be encouraged to explore a range of the following questions (depending on student and teacher interests, as well as time constraints):

- How do books appear on the shelves of bookshops and libraries?
- How are they marketed and for what purposes? What discourses are evident in the marketing and selling of books?
- What part do the covers of books play in marketing?
- How do marketing programs tap into various values, attitudes, beliefs, values and assumptions of book buyers?
- Is the business of books bad for reading?
- What are some of the possible consequences of the business of books? Is “popular” necessarily in the best interests of society?
- What is an author: individual or collective; artist or brand; writer or reader?
- How can an individual start on a “truly custom-designed inventory of the found”?

The unit will culminate in students recording their own, spoken book promotion, employing some of the ideas, techniques and concepts developed through the unit. The opportunity to record their task will allow students to demonstrate their ability to speak under a range of condition – as required by the syllabus. (In Semester 2, students will perform live for an audience.) These recordings can then be used throughout the year during fortnightly reading lessons, and uploaded to the school's intranet. Student book recommendations will also be added to the annual Senior School Reading List published by the library, thus continuing the promotion of reading to future students.

## Objectives

*Note:* The following objectives are unit specific, but based on the syllabus General Objectives from page 8 of the 2008 Senior English Open Trail syllabus (Queensland). Those highlighted in blue are additional objectives that had to be added as the new syllabus does not take account of those areas.

### Attitudes and values

Students are encouraged to explore the life-enhancing possibilities that engaging with, responding to and producing texts can offer.

By the conclusion of this unit, through reading, viewing, writing, shaping, listening and speaking/signing, students should:

- experience pleasure in reading & express their thoughts and emotional responses to particular books
- participate effectively in interpreting texts that involve connecting with people, feelings, places, ideas, issues and events
- relate to & respect cultural similarities & differences

- value the world in which they live and, through reading, understand better the world of others
- values the aesthetic qualities of books
- experiment with promotional language, exploring its possibilities, and creating desired effects.

### **Understanding & responding to contexts**

Students examine how texts are structured and organized for particular purposes and then apply this knowledge to produce different types of texts for particular purposes.

By the conclusion of this unit, through reading, viewing, writing, shaping, listening and speaking/signing, students should:

- recognize & use patterns & conventions of the expository genre, and how it might be blended with other genres (e.g. narrative, recount or instruction)
- use and control the expository genre, making choices of register to achieve particular purposes in a particular cultural (book selling) and social (an audience of older adolescent males within a school) situation.
- interpret promotional and narrative texts, taking account of the influence of cultural purpose, genres and register
- select and sequence appropriate subject matter to organize a speech for maximum, persuasive impact
- identify, interpret and apply the roles and relationships between text producers and users, including the book promoter, older adolescent males, teachers and teacher-librarians
- Use modes (e.g. speaking, viewing, reading, writing) and media (e.g. video, radio, CD) to interpret and produce texts.

### **Understanding & controlling textual features**

Students understand and control textual features, including grammar, in a variety of contexts.

By the conclusion of the unit, through reading, viewing, writing, shaping, listening and speaking/signing, students should:

- Demonstrate their knowledge and understanding that written and spoken language features can be combined interactively to produce a persuasive, promotional speech
- Organize the speech appropriately
- use grammar appropriate to Standard Australian English and a persuasive speech for teenage boys, including well-formed clause and sentence structures (e.g. parallel, balanced, short and long sentences)
- use cohesive devices (e.g. repetition, use of related words) to link ideas in a speech
- select & use evaluative vocabulary in order to persuade, including vocabulary suitable for older adolescent males, and terminology associated with books and book selling
- use auditory, verbal and non-verbal features in a persuasive speech suitable for older adolescent males and to enhance the credibility, effectiveness and impact of their recorded speech

### **Making & evaluating meaning**

Students analyse, evaluate and produce texts to demonstrate how and why meaning is created.

By the conclusion of the unit, through reading, viewing, writing, shaping, listening and speaking/signing, students should:

- select, synthesise, analyse, infer from and evaluate narratives and texts (e.g. documentary, brochure, poster) related to book promotion, and substantiate their position on a book with judiciously chosen evidence (esp. brief extracts from the book).
- analyse the language that expresses the knowledge, ideas, values & practices that underpin books as well as those applicable to school and older adolescent males
- express & evaluate a positive attitude about books in a speech
- make and evaluate representations of books
- infer from, evaluate and use ideas, information and images that influence readers to sympathise with characters in books and their worlds
- experiment with and evaluate a range of aesthetic features in books and persuasive speeches

## Learning activities

### Orientating phase

Students understanding can be orientated by:

- sharing their favourite book (going back to childhood, if desired). These can be brought in and excerpts read aloud. They could also recall memories associated with reading the book - see Lynch, T. (2008). Rereadings and literacy: how students' second readings might open third spaces. in *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy*. 54:4. pages 334-341.
- discussing the objectives and key questions of the unit.
- reading and discussing the John Eklund quotation from the rationale, as well as Noonan, K. (2008) 'Why men don't flick'. in *The Courier Mail (etc section)*. December 13-14. pages 20-21. [The Noonan article explores why men avoid reading and ways to encourage them into the practice.]
- find websites devoted to promoting reading.
- Choosing a book to be read and promoted. This should be an independent choice (i.e. not a common book for all students in a class), although teachers may wish to focus the choice of students, e.g. towards inspirational biography, popular fiction, speculative fiction, historical fiction. The books read can be fiction or non-fiction. A library lesson would be valuable at this point. In addition, books could be drawn from the English Faculty collection.

### Enhancing phase

#### *Book publishing*

- viewing and discussing the video 'Published by Penguin' (21 minutes long; teacher notes available). Also see 'The making of a bestseller' (<http://video.google.com.au/videosearch?client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&channel=s&hl=en&q=insde%20the%20book%20publishing%20industry&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=ww#>.)
- visiting bookshops or libraries (in own time) and collecting samples of techniques used to promote books. These can be brought to class and evaluated, in terms of their effectiveness and discursive consequences.
- comparing and contrasting author bios in the front (or on the back cover) of books. It might be worth examining, for example, the information emphasised for: male v female authors;

- action v literary authors; contemporary v canonical authors. A discussion could ensue of the author as 'brand'.
- analyzing and evaluating book posters and brochures. This could be supplemented by reading and analyzing Sheahan-Bright, R. (1999). Publishing insights: cover art design: interview with Julie Watts. in *Magpies*. 14:5. page 16. Also peruse websites devoted to cover design such as <http://covers.fwis.com/>.

### *Analysing books*

The emphasis in this unit is on broad interpretations of character, plot, setting, discourses and readings. (In Semester 2, students will undertake a much deeper study of a common novel.) Teachers will need to use extracts from novels and short stories in order to develop students' ability to identify the techniques writers employ to draw readers into the world of their novel, how plot structure and character constructs are used to invite readers to feel sympathy for or identify with some characters and not others. Students may need to be reminded that people in "factual" texts are still, in essence, character constructs, as was made clear in the previous unit. Ensure you work on students providing specific textual evidence to substantiate opinions. In addition, students will read a range of other texts (literary and non-literary) which offer different perspectives on the subject matter/issues of the core narratives being studied.

### *Spoken skills and speech writing*

- examining and experimenting with various persuasive and rhetorical techniques, both in terms of written script and vocal delivery. (An introduction to elements of the Appraisal system might be useful here.)
- Modelling persuasive expository speeches, especially ones designed to promote a book. In addition, use:
  - models of public speeches from *The Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches*
  - the video, *Peter Thompson's The Secrets of the Great Communicators* or the audiobook *The Best-Kept Secrets of Great Communicators* by Peter Thomson.
  - Barack Obama's victory speech: video (<http://theybf.com/index.php/2008/11/05/the-speech-barack-obamas-winners-speech-for-the-2008-presidential-election/>) or transcript and video (<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=6181477&page=1>)
- Brainstorming and discussing the values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions etc of teenage boys, and the implications of these for the promotional speech (in terms of language, spoken delivery and persuasive techniques employed). Note: Impress on students the importance of avoiding stereotypical attitudes towards older adolescent boys, and the immediate context of the speech (school classrooms where teachers and librarians will be gatekeepers). They must craft a speech that will appeal to a varied audience (in terms of values and beliefs, assumptions, interests, reading preferences, level of engagement with reading etc), and to take into account the constraints of the context (i.e. choosing books with pornographic, ultraviolent content, or extensive bad language would not be appropriate).
- participating in activities designed to improve various areas of spoken delivery, e.g. fluency, enunciation and pronunciation, clarity and articulation, breathing, effective

recording. Activities provided by the drama department are available, as is an information sheet on effective recording techniques.

### **Synthesising activities**

- Reading and coming to an understanding of the task sheet
- Writing and recording of a book promotion. Essentially, this will be a speech in which students will 'sell' a particular book they have enjoyed to other teenage boys. (See Appendix One for details.)
- Revisiting key questions posed at the beginning of the unit.
- Listening to recordings made by other students. This can be done gradually throughout the year during library reading lessons or could be an anticipatory set activity in regular English lessons. A selection will also be made available on the school's intranet.
- Communicating book recommendations to library staff – for purchasing and adding to reading lists.
- student goal setting for the next unit/s.
- With students, critically evaluating the mini-unit and associated teaching.

## Appendix One: Subject Matter for Sell-a-Book Spoken Task

You are to promote an inspirational book of your choice, emphasizing why a teenager would want to read it. In your speech, you must include information on each of the following:

The book's **subject matter (plot, character and setting)** and its relevance to a variety of teenagers, e.g. why would someone who despises football still read a biographer of a footballer? Include some details on how the main character and his/her story is constructed to encourage readers to sympathise and/or identify with that character. In other words, how does the author draw the reader into the character's world?

The **'messages' (i.e. readings, ideologies)** of the book and why they are positive and attractive. When selecting a book for this task, you will need to consider carefully whether or not the underlying Discourses (and associated ideologies) are appropriate to promote in a school context. For example, a pro-drug book like *Ecstasy* by Irvine Walsh may not be, but *10 000 days*, about a western drug smuggler's horrific experiences in a Thai jail, probably would be.

**Recommendations (with brief explanations) for further explorations.** In particular, you will be required to recommend at least two other texts (at least one must be another book, but the second could be a website, film, documentary, podcast etc) that would provide readers with a different perspective on the subject matter, Discourses etc of the primary book. For example, if you recommend a biography which represented a pro-American view of the Iraqi War, you could recommend that readers visit a particular Arab news website or read an account of the war by the American academic, Noam Chomsky.

Ensure that you **include judiciously chosen extracts** from your book to bolster your argument.