

MATERIALS SPOT

Skills for Life: 'Beyond to be or not to be'

Mongi Gaja and Abdessamad Hammami

Introduction

Nowadays, a well-rounded education should ensure not only the ability to read, write and calculate but also to empower learners with a set of psychosocial abilities to enable them to gain self-awareness, cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life, make sense of their own world and explore the world around them. Many learners may graduate from school without necessarily being able to engage easily with their next project as active citizens. So, to help them maintain their mental and emotional well-being and use that in positive and adaptive behaviour, it is incumbent upon passionate and innovative educators to promote life skills and highlight their importance in encouraging the development of higher order thinking and deep learning.

Life skills model

Life skills fall under four main dimensions of learning (cognitive, instrumental, individual and social), to use the UNICEF MENA Life Skills and Citizenship Framework.¹ This work is an attempt to embed some of the skills that are subsumed under those dimensions into learning English through world literary works because within the sphere of interculturality, world English literature can be one of the effective resources to learn about oneself and others.

Marrying literature and life skills

The rationale behind choosing literature as a vehicle to hone core life skills stems from a steadfast belief that people have always acquired these naturally. Our endeavour, hence, consists mainly in helping learners become conscious of their own life skills and be able to

acquire new ones so that they can make more informed decisions when dealing with new life experiences and challenges. Furthermore, apart from the sheer pleasure that they can derive from reading about captivating adventures and events in literary works, students enjoy reading about believable characters who they can relate to and identify with. This hopefully will encourage the students to rethink their views, assumptions and attitudes, and subsequently help them enjoy a positive social, emotional and mental well-being.

Key considerations for text choice

The reading passages presented in this piece of material are excerpted from different literary works written by American and English writers. Though there is a use of authentic texts; i.e., texts which are not written for learning purposes, they are all abridged and adapted to make them suitable for the learners' language proficiency levels and be commensurate with CEFR² scales. In fact, as the module content is benchmarked at B1⁺ level, we put in place a set of scaffolding strategies to support students' learning and help teachers with instruction. For example, we supplemented picture describing activities with a box listing words and expressions, and students can choose the appropriate ones to carry out the description task. As well as this, we have provided each grammar task with an example to serve as a model for students to follow.

Lesson structure

All the lessons open with a 'lead-in' activity meant to prepare the learners and motivate them to effectively engage with the remaining learning activities in each

1. UNICEF MENA, *Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa*, Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, December 2017

<https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/reimagining-life-skills-and-citizenship-education-middle-east-and-north-africa>

2. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for teaching and learning languages.

lesson, and to offer a foretaste for subsequent in-depth exploration of the lesson topic. Each lesson is wrapped up with a self-assessment chart, a sort of exit ticket, to assess how well students understand the materials presented and to promote their autonomy and sense of responsibility towards their own learning. The target language, on the other hand, is introduced and practised in a graded, meaningful, contextualized and communicative way through both controlled and free practice activities. With respect to the estimated time that should be allocated to each activity in a given lesson, we believe that it should be left to the teacher's discretion. Some of the lessons may also require more time than others. That is contingent on a confluence of factors including the learners' language proficiency and motivation levels, their interests, and their needs as well as the availability of the teaching and learning resources in the different classroom environments. Regarding lesson layout, certain formats and tasks are repeated throughout the module in order to help learners and give them the confidence that flows from familiarity. For instance, in almost all lessons, learners work on flowchart completion, picture-based discussions, grammar-rule completion and self-assessment forms.

Skills for Life

Mongi Gaja and Abdessamad Hammami

Lesson 1

Overview

In this lesson students will be able to firstly identify the processes needed to reach a decision to solve a problem and then to map them out for themselves to make a quick and informed decision in a challenging real-life situation.

Learning objectives: By the end of the lesson learners will be able to:

- read a text and identify problem-solving processes.
- apply steps needed to solve a problem.
- make a sound decision under pressure.

Language skills in focus: Reading into speaking

Target function: Expressing opinion, agreement and disagreement; Sequencing

Language: Repeated comparative

Target vocabulary: *inspiration, burst, contemplate, alter, daintily, alacrity*

Life skills in focus: problem solving, critical thinking, decision making

Materials: a text (adapted from *The adventures of*

Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain) + a flowchart template + envelope containing bubbles and boxes.

Lead-in

Discuss:



Photos by Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

- a. Circle the words or expressions you can use to talk about the pictures. The first one is just an example done for you.

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| car boot | van | truck |
| pleasure | good day | rent |
| easy | take away | tired |
| on top | upset | heavy |
| load | stuff | net |
| happy | goods | extra |
| moving house | back seat | cardboard box |

- b. Look again at the pictures. What problem do the couple have?
- c. What can they plan to solve the problem?

Reading

1. Look at the picture. What do you think this text is about?



Image by Pixabay from Pexels

Tom was whitewashing the fence. But his energy did not last. He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. He got out his worldly wealth and examined it—bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he gave up the idea of trying to buy his friends. At this dark moment an **inspiration** burst upon him! He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently. He was eating an apple.

Tom went on whitewashing—paid no attention to him. As Ben drew closer, Tom’s mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said: “Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?”

Tom wheeled suddenly and said: “Why, it’s you, Ben! I wasn’t noticing.”

- “I’m going in a-swimming, Don’t you wish you could? You’d rather work, wouldn’t you?” said Ben.

Tom **contemplated** the boy a bit, and said: “What do you call work?”

- “Why, isn’t *that* work?”

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

“Well, all I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer.”

“Oh come, now, you don’t mean that you *like* it?”

The brush continued to move.

“I don’t see why I oughtn’t to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush **daintily** back and forth—stepped back to note the effect and added a touch here and there.

Ben was watching every move and getting more and more interested. Presently he said:

“Say, Tom, let *me* whitewash a little.”

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he **altered** his mind:

“No—no—I reckon it wouldn’t hardly do, Ben. You see, if it was the back fence I wouldn’t mind.

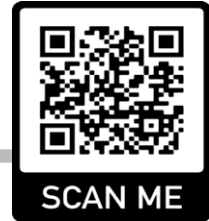
“Oh come, now—let me just try. Only just a little. I’ll give you the core of my apple.”

“No, Ben, I’m afraid—”

“I’ll give you *all* of it!”

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but **alacrity** in his heart. And while Ben worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel munching his apple.

Adapted from *The adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain



2. Read the text quickly (skim). Check (✓) the statement that best sums up the main idea of the text.

- a. People enjoy the work when they love doing it.
- b. People value things that seem difficult to attain.
- c. Friends lend a helping hand when we need them.

Check with a partner.

3. Find the words in bold in the text. What do they mean? Write the words next to the correct definition.

- a. cheerfulness
- b. in an attractive, careful way
- c. changed
- d. looked at somebody in a careful way for a long time
- e. a sudden good idea

Check with a partner.

Group work

1. What steps did Tom go through to solve his problem?

Complete the flowchart below with the appropriate word and sentence strips.

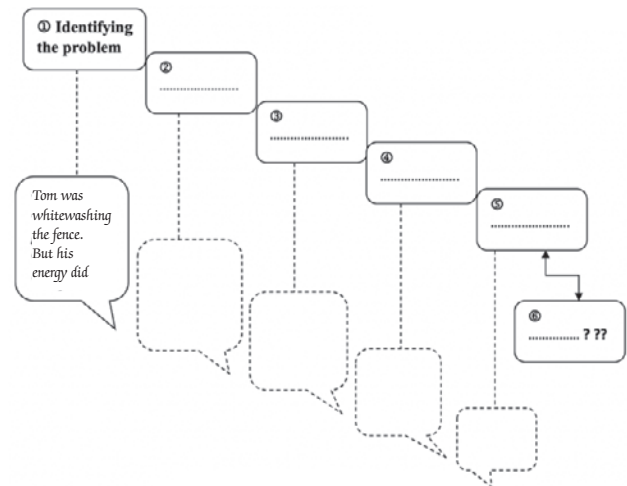
Tip for Teachers

Print all the boxes and bubbles on laminated paper. Cut them up into separate pieces. Put the students into groups of three or four, provide

them with a flowchart template (Flowchart 1) and ask them to piece the chart back together according to the example provided.

As groups finish, ask them to move around the room and observe other groups and compare answers. Your feedback could be done via putting on the wall four sheets featuring the flowchart with the right answers (Flowchart 2 in the Appendix), inviting students to look and compare their answers. For the sake of variety and to save time you could either project the finished flowchart using a video projector or hand out each group a copy of the finished flowchart (Flowchart 2). As a follow-up activity, ask students to think of another item (the missing step) to include in the empty box (step 6) on flowchart 2.

Flowchart 1 - Tom's problem-solving plan



Check your answers with other groups.

Taking a decision

"He got out his worldly wealth and examined it—bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom."

Considering some possible strategies

"At this dark moment an inspiration burst upon him! He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work."

Setting the end-goal

"So he gave up the idea of trying to buy his friends."

Considering the limits of some solutions

"Tom was whitewashing the fence. But his energy did not last. "

Identifying the problem

"He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day."

2. What step could Tom add at the end of his plan? Check (✓) the right option.

- a. Think of another trick to play
- b. Move forward and forget all that happened
- c. Look back at what he did

Think - Pair - Share

1. Think individually about the statements below, then discuss your thoughts in pairs and finally share them with the whole class.

- a. Tom is a good actor.
- b. Tom's response to the problem is appropriate.
- c. The fence scene reflects Tom's cunning.

2. Check (✓) the adjectives that best describe Tom. JUSTIFY your answer.

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| honest | <input type="checkbox"/> | mischievous | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| unimaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> | crafty | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Grammar

Repeated comparatives

Study the following sentences:

- a. Ben was watching every move and getting more and more interested.
 - Is Ben's interest changing continuously?
 - Is Ben's interest increasing or decreasing?
 - Is 'interested' a short or long adjective?

- b. Watching Tom's movements, Ben's desire to whitewash the wall grew stronger and stronger.
 - Is 'strong' a short or long adjective?

Complete the rules

- When we want to emphasise continuous change, we use two _____ separated by _____.
- We use '_____ and _____' for long adjectives.

Pair work

Fill in the blanks with the right comparative form of the words between brackets. Then complete Tom's plan.

Number 1 is done for you.

Tom grew 1 (bored) more and more bored at the prospect of spending the rest of the day whitewashing the fence. With the passing of time, his muscles got 2 (weak) _____ and _____. Suddenly, he saw in the distance his friend Ben. While he was getting 3 (close) _____ and _____, Tom was thinking of a plan...

Writing

All things considered !

Apply the problem-solving process to solve ONE of the problems below. Write your answers on a flowchart.

1. In a math exam, you had difficulty finding the product of some complex mathematical operations. The calculator was not allowed, let alone a mobile phone. Time is running out. What should you do?
2. It's Wednesday afternoon, while you're really pressed for time studying for tomorrow's math exam, a friend calls and offers you a free ticket to an early evening derby match involving your team. The stadium is just a half-hour drive from home. What decision would you make? Why?

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation form

- Rate your decision-making skills. (1 is unsatisfactory and 5 is excellent)

1 2 3 4 5

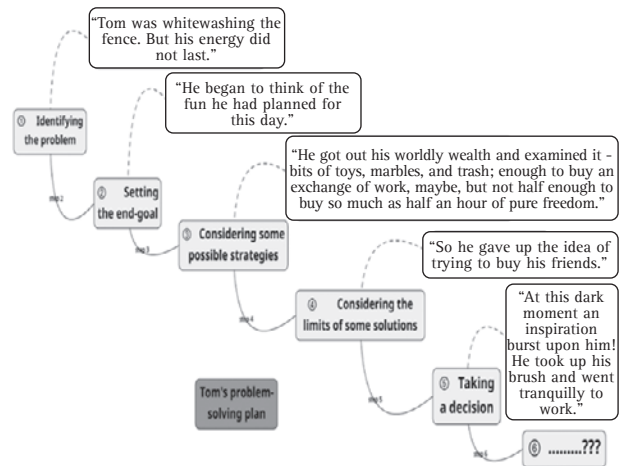
- Which problem-solving step you think is most important for you?

- Describe one way you can further improve your real-life decision-making skills.

Appendix

Reading: Group work activity

Flowchart 2



Sources

Pictures:

- Grabowska, K. "Couple putting carton boxes in car trunk". Pexels.com. Pexels.com, 09 May 2020, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/couple-putting-carton-boxes-in-car-trunk-4506207/>
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Reading Text:

- Twain, M. "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer". Project Gutenberg, Publication. 01 July 2004. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/74>

Lesson 2

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about communication and persuasion techniques with a view to raising their awareness of misinformation and manipulation.

Learning objectives: By the end of the lesson learners will be able to:

- define persuasion techniques.
- identify persuasion techniques used in a speech.
- produce and deliver a coherent speech in the context of persuasion.

Language skills in focus: Reading into speaking

Target function: persuading others

Language: second conditional

Target vocabulary: *demonize, preserve, welfare, plead, murmur, privilege*

Life skills in focus: communication and persuasion skills

Materials: text (adapted from *Animal Farm* by *George Orwell*) + a flowchart template

Lead-in

Discuss

- Do you remember times when you picked a proposition or adopted a view that not everyone would agree with?
- What sort of persuasion strategies did you use to win them over to your side?
- Did you try to appeal to their hearts or minds?

Here are some hints to start you off:

- Use facts and sound arguments
- Give false information
- Make up stories and tell lies

Reading

1. Look at the picture.
What do you think this text is about?

*Photo by Alexas
Fotos from Pexels*



(These extracts are from *Animal Farm*, an allegorical novel by George Orwell, first published in England in 1945. The book tells the story of a group of farm animals who get fed up with their cruel and oppressive human master, Farmer Jones, so they kick him out. Life on the farm is good for a while and there is hope for a happier future of less work, better education and more food. However, trouble starts as the pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, fight for the hearts and minds of the other animals on the farm. Napoleon seizes power by force and ends up exploiting the animals just as Farmer Jones did.)

The mystery of where the milk went to was soon cleared up. It was mixed every day into the pigs' mash. The early apples were now ripening, and the grass was covered with windfalls. The animals had assumed that these would be shared out equally. However, the order went forth that all the windfalls were to be collected for the use of the pigs. At this some of the other animals **murmured**. All the pigs were in full agreement on this point. Squealer, a small fat pig, was sent to make the necessary explanations to the others.

"**Comrades!**" he cried. "You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and **privilege**? Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples, (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig. We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organization of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your **welfare**. It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! Yes, Jones would come back! Surely, comrades," cried Squealer almost **pleadingly**, skipping from side to side and whisking his tail, "surely there is no one among you who wants to see Jones come back?"

Now if there was one thing that the animals were completely certain of, it was that they did not want Jones back. So it was agreed without further argument that the milk and the apples should be reserved for the pigs alone.

Adapted from *Animal Farm*, George Orwell.



2. Read the text quickly (skim). Check (✓) the best title.

- a. Doing the donkey's work
- b. Selling ice to Eskimos
- c. With one voice
- d. Tomorrow's another day

Check with a partner.

3. Look at the underlined words in the text and match them with their meanings. Then check your answers in a dictionary.

- 1. murmur
- 2. comrade
- 3. privilege
- 4. welfare
- 5. plead

- a. an advantage
- b. health and happiness
- c. complain but not in a public way
- d. a friend
- e. ask for something in a strong and an emotional way

4. Read Squealer's speech (para. 2) and pick out expressions that match the following persuasion strategies. Then compare with a partner. Number 1 is done for you.

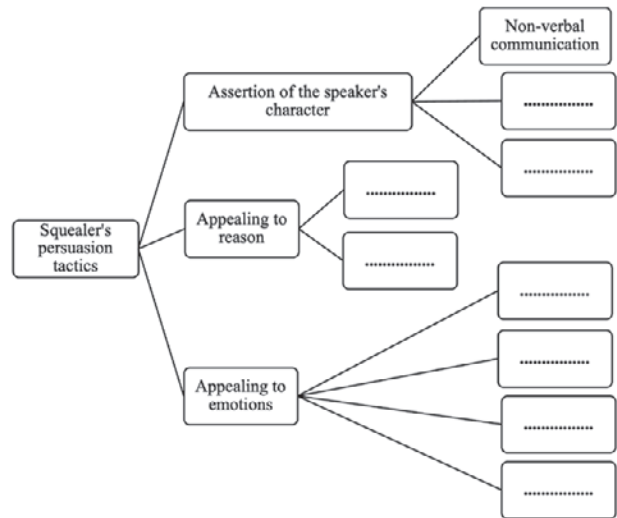
Persuasion strategies	utterances
1. Mind reading	"You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege?"
2. 'What if' scenario	
3. Using rhetorical questions	
4. Using metaphors	
5. Repetition	
6. Using terms of endearment (friendly and sympathy terms)	
7. Demonization (completely evil) of the enemy	
8. Using facts and evidence	
9. Non-verbal communication	

5. Group work

Use the persuasion strategies in Q.4 to complete the chart below.

Tip for Teachers

Put the students into small groups and hand each group the below template of the flowchart and a set of cut-up strips. Each strip details one strategy. Groups work together to place the strategies in order on the chart. Check the correct order as a class.



6. Read paragraph 3 and find out which strategy is most effective in making the animals change their minds. Then check with a partner.

Tip for Teachers

After answering this question the teacher should draw the students' attention to the fact that great speeches are always remembered for just one great line or an expression like "I have a dream" speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.

7. According to you, which persuasion strategy is most effective? Why?

Rate the following persuasion tactics on a scale of 1 - 9; '1' being 'the least convincing' and '9' 'the most convincing' in winning the animals over. Then compare with a partner.

- a. Mind reading
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- b. Demonization of the enemy
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

- c. Using rhetorical questions
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- d. Developing 'what if' scenarios
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- e. Using metaphors and analogies
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- f. Repetition of main arguments
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- g. Using facts and evidence
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- h. Using terms of endearment
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- i. Nonverbal communication
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Grammar

A/ Study the following sentence.

If we pigs failed in our duty, Jones would come back.

Tip for Teachers

Teacher writes the above sentence, highlights the words 'failed' and 'would come' and asks students the following concept checking questions to elicit the meaning of conditional type 2

- Are we talking about the past, present or future? (present or future)
- Is it about a real or an imagined situation? (imagined)
- Is it possible for pigs to fail in their duty? (yes)
- Is it likely that they could fail in their duty? (no, very unlikely)
- Are they really going to fail in their duty? (no)
- Will Jones come? (no, probably not)

Complete the rule

	If clause			Main clause	
Second conditional	If	noun/ pronoun	verb form 1	noun/ pronoun	verb form 2

C/ Now just imagine what would happen to the animals if Farmer Jones came back. Make a chain of conditionals.

- Student 1: 'If Farmer Jones came back, ...'
- Student 2: _____
- Student 3: _____
- Student 4: _____

Speaking

The silver-tongued devil!



Image by GLady from Pixabay

Group work

Choose one of the topics below and make a 3-minute speech.

Tip for Teachers

Tell students that they're going to produce a speech in small groups. Each group chooses ONE of the two topics suggested by the teacher, and their task is to discuss and generate ideas to persuade their peers. Explain the procedures of the task:

- Each group will have a scribe and a spokesperson. The scribe will write down the group's supporting arguments and the spokesperson will present the speech in order to win the audience over.
- They are expected to work together as a team to produce the best ideas for their speech. Remind students to give due importance to non-verbal communication.
- They will have 8 minutes to work together. Each spokesperson will have 3 minutes to present.
- Ask students what they have learned while listening to each speech and whether or not they sided with the speaker's perspective. Why or why not?

Topic 1:

You try to persuade your classmates that the vape (e-cigarette) can help students addicted to regular cigarettes quit smoking altogether very quickly.

Topic 2:

You try to persuade your classmates into quitting school and joining a vocational training centre by telling them that school qualifications do not necessarily guarantee a good future.

Homework

Think about these two pieces of information:

1. Read the following statements:
 - Each generation should be better off than their parents.
 - Immigrants take away jobs of the local population.
 - a. Which information did you find surprising? Why?
 - b. Which information did you find troubling/confusing? Why?
2. Google the following hashtag on Twitter (#questioneverything) and take note of the information that grabs your attention most, and that you want to question. Share your findings with your classmates.

Self- evaluation

Self-evaluation form

- List three persuasion strategies you learned in today's lesson.

- I need more practice with ...

- What I learnt today is important to my everyday life because

Sources

Pictures:

- Alexas Fotos. "White Horse Wearing Black Leather Zip-up Jacket". Pexels.com. Pexels.com, 14 May 2019, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/white-horse-wearing-black-leather-zip-up-jacket-2315712/>
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