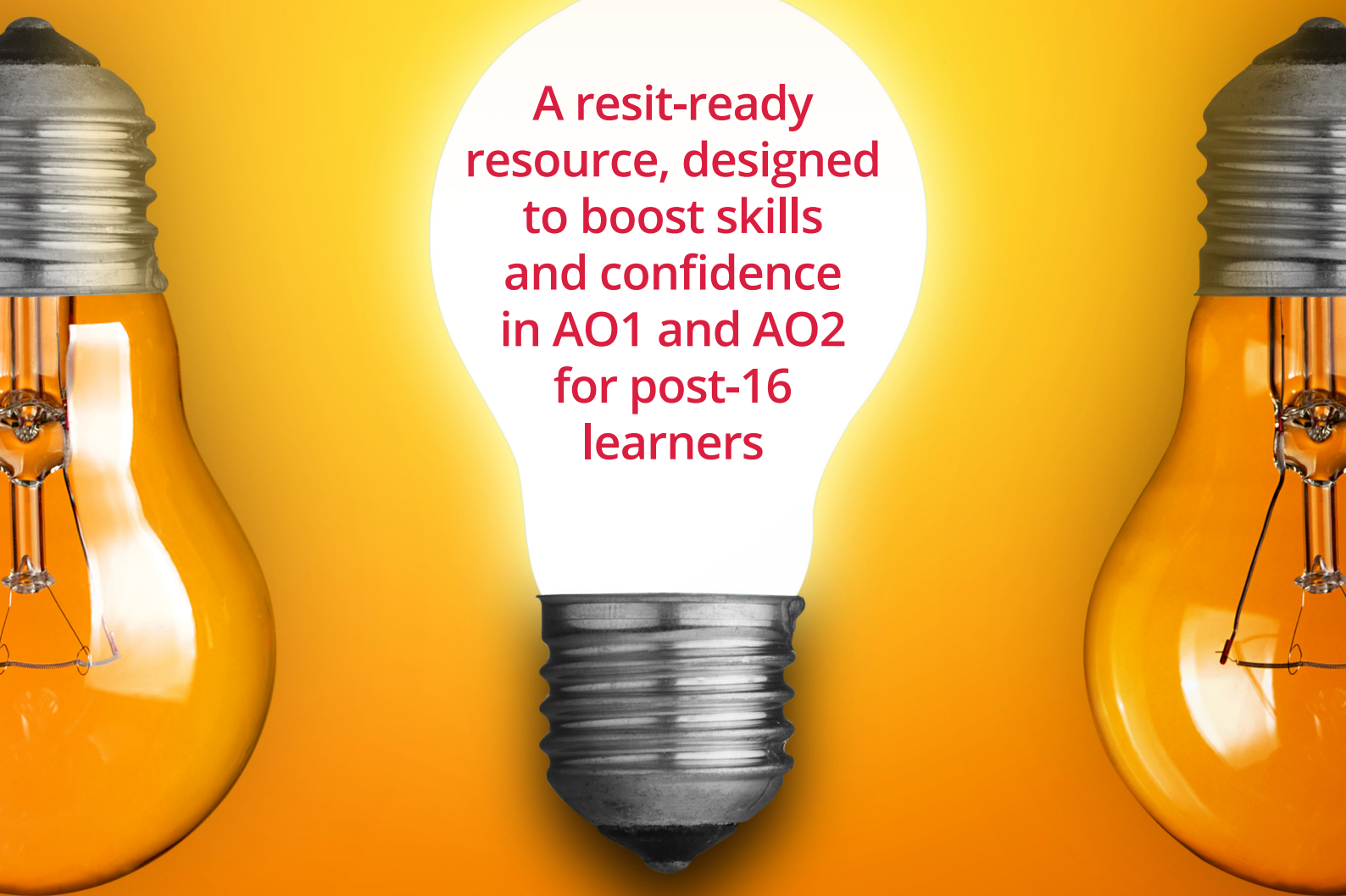


In partnership with



Building Reader Confidence for GCSE English Language

Three glowing lightbulbs are arranged horizontally across the middle of the page. The central lightbulb is the largest and is the brightest, with a white glow emanating from its glass. The two lightbulbs on either side are smaller and have a warm orange glow. The background is a gradient of yellow and orange, matching the lightbulbs' glow.

A resit-ready
resource, designed
to boost skills
and confidence
in AO1 and AO2
for post-16
learners

OXFORD

Introduction 3

Unit 1: Creating confidence 4

Develop confidence through scaffolded and guided reading activities that encourage learners to build fluency, identify key ideas and information, and make simple inferences.

- Overview
- Activities
- Guidance and rationale
- Resources (including the main text: *My Name is Why* by Lemn Sissay)

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Develop knowledge of effective reading strategies to enable learners to form initial opinions, inferences and hypotheses and to find evidence to support their ideas.

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- Activities
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- Resources (including the main text: *Becoming Dinah* by Kit de Waal)

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Develop learners' problem-solving skills: encouraging them to ask questions, clarify meaning, make inferences and predictions and to find evidence from the text to support their assertions.

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Unit 4: Reading holistically 32

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- Activities
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Introduction

About this resource

This resource focuses predominantly on **AO1** and **AO2**, recognising that, for many resit learners, confidence grows when core reading skills are clearly taught, practised and embedded. The activities support learners likely to be working at Levels 1 or 2 of the AQA GCSE Language mark scheme to develop their ability to read for meaning, make inferences and analyse writers' choices.

As teachers of resit learners know, activities which build from basic decoding, comprehension and reading for meaning, enable learners to make inferences, connections and form a personal point of view. Explicitly modelling how to approach texts and narrating the process can support throughout these activities.

The selected text extracts follow a thematic thread of resilience and empowerment, around which a structured sequence of activities have been designed to build confident, curious and critical readers ready to progress in the AQA GCSE English Language examination. Assessment objectives are embedded implicitly throughout, rather than foregrounded.

The resource is also designed to encourage collaborative work and oracy, supporting learners to become more confident, independent readers.

While the activities can be followed as a teaching sequence, professional judgement remains central. Teachers may adapt, omit or reorder activities to suit their learners' needs, and can be adapted and applied to other texts beyond this resource.

AQA and Oxford University Press have worked together to create this resit-ready teaching resource for AQA GCSE English Language. The materials are shaped by an understanding of the challenges resit learners may face and they offer an accessible, supportive route into reading and engaging with unseen texts.

Author Claire Callow has applied her years of experience in the FE sector to model how to build reader confidence for learners resitting the AQA specification. This booklet is designed to be a flexible and inclusive springboard for approaches to GCSE English Language.

When using this resource, remember to refer to AQA's specification as your definitive source of information. Further support resources can be found via [English | Subjects | AQA](#).

About the author

Claire Callow is an experienced English educator and teacher trainer with over 30 years' experience across secondary, post-16 and higher education.

Since 2004, Claire has worked extensively in national consultancy and professional development work, specialising in English pedagogy, literacy development and GCSE English. She has designed and delivered professional development programmes for teachers of GCSE and Functional Skills English, including Level 5 courses and national enhancement projects. Her work supports teachers to strengthen curriculum design, assessment practice and approaches to behaviour, resilience and learner confidence.

Claire has also contributed to assessment development and research, writing English test materials and specifications and supporting national projects focused on raising standards in English. She is committed to equipping teachers with practical, evidence-informed strategies that help learners become confident, capable readers.



Unit 1: Overview

Unit 1: Creating confidence	
Summary of learning outcomes	To develop learners' confidence in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• responding to a text• using inference• forming a personal response.
Text	<p><i>My Name is Why</i> by Lemn Sissay (2019)</p> <p><i>My Name is Why</i> is Lemn Sissay's powerful memoir about his childhood in the British care system, exploring how his identity was withheld from him and how he reclaimed his name and sense of self. It's a story of resilience, injustice and the search for belonging.</p> <p>Note that this extract (and the wider text) deals with themes of rejection and displacement within the care system so teachers should consider any potential sensitivities or classroom management issues resulting from the use of these materials.</p>
Genre	Memoir
Themes	Resilience, survival, loyalty
Resources	Unit 1: Resource 1.1 Text extract
Teaching and learning strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modelling fluent reading• Interactive reading• Echo reading• Echoing and interpreting• Treasure hunt
Linked GCSE English Language AOs	AO1: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.• Select and synthesise evidence from different texts. AO2: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views. AO4: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
Links to other texts	<p><i>Looked After</i> by Ashley Jean Baptiste: a memoir about growing up in the British care system.</p> <p><i>My Name is Leon</i> by Kit de Waal: a novel about Leon and his brother Jake, who are taken into foster care when their mother is unwell. Note that this is an AQA English Literature text. See My Name is Leon by Kit de Waal.</p> <p><i>Just Sayin'</i> by Malorie Blackman: a memoir that reflects the resilience and determination of the author despite facing huge challenges in her life.</p>

Unit 1: Activities

Activity 1.1 Reading aloud to learners

- Read the source text extract aloud to learners (see **Unit 1: Resource 1.1 Text extract**). The aim is to model fluent reading: good pace, expression, appropriate emphasis, syntax and punctuation.
- Ask learners to relax and listen carefully. Don't give them the extract to follow the first time you read it aloud as this risks cognitive overload because learners will be trying to process spoken language and decode printed words at the same time. Similarly, ask learners not to make any notes as you read.

Activity 1.2 Interactive reading aloud

- Read the extract aloud, this time with learners following along on either a copy which is displayed and shared with the whole class or on individual copies given as handouts. Pause at the designated points below and pose the questions/discussion points.

You may need to model or scaffold some initial responses, depending on your learners' needs.

<p>Pause 1: Comprehension and inference</p> <p>Read from lines 1 to 7: "This was The Other World ... I didn't."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p><i>What does Lemn mean by "The Other World"?</i></p> <p><i>Why do you think he says "I didn't" so firmly?</i></p>	<p>Pause 2: Atmosphere and prediction</p> <p>Continue reading up to line 10: "All was silent."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p><i>What details tell us what kind of place this feels like?</i></p> <p><i>If you were Lemn, what would you expect might happen next?</i></p>
<p>Pause 3: Feelings and imagery</p> <p>Continue reading up to line 23: "... tell them all about it."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p><i>How is Lemn feeling at this moment?</i></p> <p><i>What words or images tell you that?</i></p> <p><i>What does he mean by wanting to "tell them all about it"?</i></p> <p><i>Who is "them"?</i></p>	<p>Pause 4: Character and identity</p> <p>Continue reading up to line 33: "It felt good so I did it again."</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p><i>Why do you think Lemn practises saying "How do you do?" and smiling?</i></p> <p><i>What does this tell us about how he wants to be seen by others?</i></p>
<p>Pause 5: Emotional climax</p> <p>Continue reading to the end of the extract.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p><i>What is Lemn trying to do with his smile and his breath-holding?</i></p> <p><i>How do you think it feels to look like you're smiling, but feel like you're screaming inside?</i></p>	



Plenary discussion

After reading the whole extract, ask learners to consider the following questions: What do we learn about Lemn's experience of moving into the home? How does the writing help us to understand what it might have felt like?

Activity 1.3 Echo reading

- Ask learners to 'echo' the reading they have just heard by reading aloud from the same text while trying to emulate the teacher's tone, rhythm and emphasis. There are a number of ways to do this:
 - ★ Learners work in pairs with the whole extract and take turns to read aloud, alternating at each paragraph break.
 - ★ Allocate sentences of the text to different learners to read after the teacher; specific learners repeat their allocated sentence after hearing it read again by the teacher.

As learners grow in confidence, gradually increase the length of the 'echo'. For instance, you could move from echoing single sentences to two sentences, to three sentences, to progressively larger chunks such as paragraphs.

Activity 1.4 Echo and interpret

- Invite learners to add their own interpretations by changing emphasis, tone, pronunciation or by over-emphasising punctuation. Encourage variation with the aim of evaluating each interpretation and then making a small or whole class decision about which might be 'best' in the context of the whole extract and its meaning. Here is one way you might want to do this:
 - ★ Put learners in pairs or small groups and give each a sentence to work with.
 - ★ Ask learners to practise reading their allocated sentence in a variety of ways to emphasise:
 - ★ panic and fear
 - ★ excitement and joy
 - ★ anger and frustration.

Suitable sentences might be:

"This was The Other World."
(lines 5-6)

"My heart wanted to jump out of my chest and run away back to the Greenwoods so that I could tell them all about it."
(lines 22-23)

"I stood like I'd been taught a good boy should stand."
(line 25)

"To make a good impression I would shake hands and say, 'How do you do?'"
(lines 26-28)

"Mum and Dad are never coming back; no one is coming back; you've lost everyone."
(lines 43-44)

"I was a boy in a hallway, smiling, who looked like he was screaming."
(lines 49-50)

Plenary discussion

Once learners have tried out the variations, ask them to decide which one works best within the extract and to gather evidence to support their opinions.

Activity 1.5: Treasure hunt

- Release the clues and questions (below) to learners sequentially in order to discover specific information or ideas from a text. The releasing of clues can be done in a variety of ways such as:
 - ★ hiding clues around the room
 - ★ creating a sequential puzzle by releasing the next clue to separate groups of learners once they have solved the previous one.
- The teacher travels the room as the groups of learners work, prompting them to justify their ideas and responses with evidence from the text.

Clue 1: The first impression	Clue 2: The silent house	Clue 3: The adventure reference
Find the description of the driveway and garden at Woodfields. What impression of the children’s home might this create?	“Most of the children were away with their families. All was silent.” What might this detail suggest about Lemn’s situation?	Lemn compares himself to the Famous Five. What might this clue suggest about how he tries to make sense of his new surroundings?
Clue 4: Lemn’s body language	Clue 5: Smiling practice	Clue 6: The breath-holding test
Find the description of Lemn’s posture. What might this show about his hopes and fears?	Find the description of Lemn practising smiling. Why do you think he rehearses this? What might this reveal about his relationship with his foster parents?	Find the moment when Lemn realises “Mum and Dad are never coming back.” Why is this a powerful clue about his emotional state?
Clue 7: The final discovery		
At the end, Lemn looks like a boy who is smiling. What do you think is the hidden truth behind his smile?		

Plenary discussion

Ask groups to share their final discovery. Prompt learners to consider how close reading revealed both how Lemn appeared and what he felt beneath the surface.

Reflecting on Unit 1: Creating confidence

Encourage learners to reflect on the skills they have developed in this unit. Ask them to rate their confidence, on a scale of 1 to 3, in:

- reading aloud
- identifying key ideas
- making simple inferences.

Guidance and rationale

Activity 1.1 Reading aloud to learners

Developing readers can find it a powerful experience listening to an experienced reader bring a text to life, using punctuation, rhythm, and tone to shape the meaning. It allows learners to move past the struggle of reading fluently and instead immerse themselves in different times and places, seeing new perspectives and exploring ideas beyond their own experience.

Studies have shown that reading aloud boosts comprehension, vocabulary, engagement and well-being.

Activity 1.2 Interactive reading aloud

The STOP! method involves reading a text aloud to learners and then stopping to ask questions, notice details and clarify meaning and events at predetermined points.

There are a variety of ways teachers could pose these questions, including:

- whole class discussion
- paired discussion leading to whole class
- pair and share discussions.

Each stage or STOP! needs to be short and speedy so as not to lose momentum with the reading of the text.

Activity 1.3 Echo reading

The benefits of this approach are detailed below.

Models fluent reading:

- Learners hear correct pronunciation, pacing, phrasing, and intonation from a fluent reader (usually the teacher) and immediately practise imitating it.
- Builds prosody (expression and rhythm), which supports comprehension.
- Improves oral reading fluency by giving learners repeated, guided practice, particularly those struggling with automaticity.

Supports vocabulary and comprehension:

- By hearing fluent reading first, learners can focus on meaning rather than decoding alone.
- It helps link spoken language to text, aiding vocabulary growth and understanding.

Reduces performance anxiety:

- Because the teacher goes first, learners feel less pressure.
- It creates a safe scaffold for emerging readers: they don't have to decode independently right away.

Boosts confidence and engagement:

- It provides immediate success experiences, which can motivate reluctant or struggling readers.
- Echo reading makes reading feel collaborative rather than isolating.

Helps second language learners:

- It is effective in ESOL/EAL contexts: modelling pronunciation, stress patterns, and sentence intonation.
- It gives extra oral practice in a supportive structure.

Echo reading is a technique used more widely with much younger learners but is still something to consider with resit learners who are developing and emerging readers.

Teachers might also want to find or create recordings of the extract being read aloud.

Activity 1.4 Echo and interpret

Teachers might want to model this activity in the first instance.

The aim is to give learners licence to play around with a text and to find their 'reader voice' and begin forming personal responses to text. In doing so, they will be using inference and analysis skills, especially as they are expected to provide some evidence from the extract on which to base their interpretations.

Activity 1.5 Treasure hunt

Throughout this activity, learners will practise reading for detail, inference and language analysis.

Teachers can travel the room as the groups of learners work and prompt them to justify their ideas and responses with evidence from the text.

Clues can be adapted to develop more or less inference and analysis skills.

Unit 1: Resource 1.1 | Text extract

In this memoir, Lemn Sissay describes his experience within the English care system. He spent much of his early childhood with foster parents, who he knew as Mum and Dad.

In this extract, Lemn describes arriving at Woodfields Children's Home, after he has been rejected by his foster family.

***My Name is Why* by Lemn Sissay**

I put my hands on the dashboard and looked up at the giant trees as we turned into the driveway of Woodfields Children's Home. Chrysanthemum bushes clambered on either side beneath sycamores and beech trees. I saw a dirty-faced boy through the bushes staring at the car then darting away. This was The Other World. This was the outside world that Mum had said I desperately wanted. I didn't. 5

We carried on around the front of the building to a fan of steps sweeping up to the door facing a huge garden. It was 3 January. Most of the children were away with their families. All was silent. 10

The smell hit me first. It was the smell of **Winnick**. I stood in the hallway, with my back against the wall. Norman Mills disappeared with a man into an office. I listened to muffled noises from the giant house. This was an adventure for the **Famous Five**.

My twelve-year-old self stood still between two doors in the hall. One led to what looked like a playroom. I sneaked a look. Sniffed once. Sniffed twice. Further down the hall to my left, a thin corridor made its way to a kitchen and the dining room and the back door and the cellar door beneath the stairs. To the right were the front door and the tiled porch. Two feet in front of me lay the clenched fists of the grand staircase's bannisters, bigger than I'd ever seen. My heart wanted to jump out of my chest and run away back to the Greenwoods so that I could tell them all about it. 15
20

I didn't lean on the wall. My arms were by my side. My shoulders back. I stood like I'd been taught a good boy should stand. Hands 25



out of pockets. Best behaviour. I looked left. I looked right. To make a good impression I would shake hands and say, 'How do you do?' I practised, 'How do you do? How do *you* do? How *do* you do?'

I'd practised it at home with my foster dad in the front room. The posh room. Then I'd go to church and do just as I was taught. I looked left and right again. And then I smiled a big 'hello' smile. Nobody there. Just a practice. It felt good so I did it again. **30**

Mum said it was deceitful. But it wasn't. I held it as long as I could and it felt good. I got a feeling in my tummy when I did it. Butterflies. Then I asked myself whether I could hold my breath and hold my smile at the same time. I tried until there was no air in me. Then I asked myself if I could hold my breath, hold my smile *and* think of something really, really sad at the same time but keep smiling. There was nothing sad to think about. Not really. **35**
Okay, I said to myself, think of something that's always there and then imagine it's not. Got it. Right, 1 – 2 – deep breath – 3. **40**

I smiled, held my breath and then thought, *Mum and Dad are never coming back; no one is coming back; you've lost everyone. Everyone! It's your fault.* Hold the smile. I held my breath. Held the smile. Your fault. I held my breath. Held the smile. Shoulders back. *Your fault.* Held the smile. Held my breath. My eyes widened till they were about to pop. I watched the second hand on the clock. *Hold hold hold.* I was a boy in a hallway, smiling, who looked like he was screaming. With a gasp I sucked in as much air as I could to replace what had left my body. **45** **50**

Glossary

Famous Five characters in a series of children's novels who often went on adventures

Winnick a nurse who Lemn met during his early life in care

Unit 2: Overview

Unit 2: Building reading strategies	
Summary of learning outcomes	To develop learners' confidence in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exploring and demonstrating the processes which underpin active reading • reading comprehension • minimising cognitive overload and preparing ideas for writing.
Text	<i>Becoming Dinah</i> by Kit de Waal (1989) <i>Becoming Dinah</i> is a novel set in modern-day England. It centres around a young woman, Dinah, who decides to plan an escape from her life and family after the separation of her parents and a traumatic incident which occurs at school. Teachers should consider whether the themes and events of the extract (and wider text) may cause potential sensitivities or classroom management issues.
Genre	Novel
Themes	Resilience, agency, identity, grief
Resources	Unit 2: Resource 2.1 Text extract Unit 2: Resource 2.2 Guided learner reading prompts Unit 2: Resource 2.3 Annotated extract
Teaching and learning strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher modelling of a first reading • Guided learner reading • Developing annotation skills
Linked GCSE English Language AOs	<p>AO1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. • Select and synthesise evidence from different texts. <p>AO2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views. <p>AO4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
Links to other texts	<p><i>Without Warning and Only Sometimes</i> by Kit de Waal: a memoir about a childhood of extremes, where Kit and her brothers and sisters grew up caught between three worlds (Irish, Caribbean and British) in the 1960s.</p> <p><i>Diverse Words and Voices</i> edited by Bennie Kara: a collection of fiction and non-fiction extracts designed to support teachers diversifying their English curriculum and preparing learners for unseen texts.</p> <p><i>Orangeboy</i> by Patrice Lawrence: a powerful coming of age thriller in an urban setting, with a strong male protagonist faced with difficult choices.</p>

Unit 2: Activities

Activity 2.1 Teacher modelling a first reading

- Display the first few paragraphs of the extract (**Unit 2: Resource 2.1 Text extract**) for everyone to see. Read it aloud to learners, modelling the thinking processes a reader might have. See below for some suggestions.

“Cut your hair off? Not as easy as you think. You need the right stuff for a start.”

Huh – right away the line sounds like instruction, but it’s a question then an answer. Who is speaking? Is the narrator talking to themselves, or are they giving advice to someone else? I’m not sure. Also, the phrase “the right stuff” is vague – does that mean actual equipment or something else like courage, planning, time? I’ll flag “right stuff” as a phrase to come back to.

I’m noticing the voice is informal, almost like a how-to. I’ll ask: *Is this instructional writing or a personal recollection disguised as instructions?* I don’t know yet.

First thing, get rid of the weight, get it from long to short. And if your hair lies the whole length of your back, as thick and heavy as a blanket, this could take forever. So make a start.”

This is practical, step-by-step. “Get rid of the weight” – is that literal (heavy hair) or figurative (a burden)? Could be both. The simile “as thick and heavy as a blanket” gives a strong physical image. I’m not sure whether the hair is being used to symbolise something the character wants to shed. I’ll note that as an interpretive question: *Might the haircut represent an escape or a fresh start?* – it’s possible but not confirmed.

Electric shaver? No. Proper scissors? No. If you haven’t got them, you’d better think hard. Think fast.”

Okay – they list possible tools and immediately reject them. That surprises me: why say “electric shaver? No” and then “Proper scissors? No”? My first thought is maybe the narrator doesn’t have those items, or maybe they aren’t appropriate; they might only have paper scissors, for instance.

The tone “think hard. Think fast.” adds urgency. I’m wondering: *Why must it happen quickly?* Is there a risk or a deadline? The text hasn’t told us yet.

Grab a great big hank of hair, wind it around your hand and pull it upwards, away from your scalp.”

“Hank” – not a word you hear that often; I think it means a large bundle or bunch. I’ll plan to check that. “Scalp” is another word to make sure I understand (I think it refers to the skin on your head under the hair).

Questions and things I don’t know:

- ★ Why is the person doing this themselves?
- ★ Is there no one to help?
- ★ Is it something that must be hidden? Why?

- Talk to learners about the process of reading and thinking that has been modelled. Use the questions below to prompt discussion.

1 What did you notice about how the extract was read aloud?

Possible learner responses:

The reading wasn’t smooth or rushed.

The reader paused often.

Questions were asked out loud.

Confusion was acknowledged.

Some parts were re-read.

2 Did the reader understand everything straight away?

Possible learner responses:

No – some things were unclear.

We didn’t know who was speaking at first.

We didn’t yet know why the haircut was urgent.



3 What kinds of questions did the reader ask?

Possible learner responses:

Who is the narrator speaking to?

Why is this happening now?

Why is the character doing this alone?

What happened before this moment?

5 Why did the reader stop to think about specific words?

Possible learner responses:

Some words aren't used often.

Understanding them helps us picture the scene.

Small details add meaning.

4 What predictions or ideas started to form?

Possible learner responses:

The haircut might symbolise change or escape.

The character might be leaving.

Something serious happened earlier.

6 How would you describe the narrator's voice?

Possible learner responses:

Instructional / like a how-to guide.

Urgent and pressured.

Calm on the surface but emotional underneath.

7 Do these thoughts happen in your head when you read?

Possible learner responses:

Yes, but we don't usually notice them.

We often skip things which confuse us.

We don't always question words.

Plenary discussion

Discuss the key messages drawn from each question:

- Q1** Good readers slow down and think while reading.
- Q2** Not understanding everything immediately is normal and expected.
- Q3** Strong readers ask questions and hold onto them as they read on.
- Q4** Predictions are possibilities, not final answers.
- Q5** Close reading often starts with individual words.
- Q6** Writers make deliberate choices about voice to shape how we feel.
- Q7** Becoming aware of your thinking makes you a stronger reader.

Emphasise that reading is not about instant understanding. It involves questioning, predicting, clarifying and sometimes being unsure. (Teachers may also want to point out how this compares with other media, e.g. TV, film or even song lyrics.) Good readers make connections, for example between different characters or events in the plot.

Activity 2.2 Guided learner reading

- Display or hand out **Unit 2: Resource 2.2 Guided learner reading prompts**. Explain that these questions will help learners to focus on what they know for certain (explicit ideas) in the text, what they are wondering (questions) and what they can infer and predict.
- Pairs of learners work through the questions, based on the text. Teachers may want to ‘chunk’ the text into paragraphs and allocate sections of it to different pairs, depending on the needs of their learners.

Some sample answers are given below.

1 What I know for sure... (explicit ideas)

I know for sure that the process of cutting her hair is painful and difficult. I know this because there are references to aching arms, scratched skin, stinging soap and blood in the suds.

I know for sure that Dinah feels uncertain and afraid while she is cutting her hair. I know this because the text mentions her trembling fingers, racing heart and almost crying.

I know for sure that cutting her hair represents a significant change in her life. I know this because she says it is the biggest thing she’s done so far and that she is someone completely new.

2 What I’m wondering... (questions)

I’m wondering why Dinah feels the need to change her appearance so dramatically.

I’m wondering what happened yesterday that she doesn’t want to think about.

A question I still have is why she keeps her cut hair instead of throwing it away.

3 My early inferences and predictions

Maybe Dinah cuts her hair to reject her old identity. I think this because she says she is not boring old Dinah any more and wants to become someone new.

Maybe the pain of cutting her hair reflects emotional pain. I think this because the physical pain mirrors her fear, doubt and near tears throughout the extract.

It could be that Dinah feels conflicted about her identity. I think this because she both dislikes her reflection and mourns the beauty and weight of her old hair.

Plenary discussion

Talk about the processes of reading, such as:

- What the learners noticed, questioned and inferred.
- Whether their thinking changed as they read. Why? How?
- Whether uncertainty is useful in reading. (Who is it useful for?)

Reiterate the ‘messiness’ of reading – the questions, predictions, the hypotheses we make and the clarifications we need. Draw out how uncertainty is normal and even intentional on the part of writers sometimes if they want to create mystery.

Activity 2.3 Developing annotation skills

- Display or give pairs or groups of learners **Unit 2: Resource 2.3 Annotated extract**. These annotations demonstrate AO1, AO2 and AO4 skills.
- Ask the learners to consider the questions below.
 - 1 What kinds of features has the annotator commented on? (language devices, tone, explicit facts?)
 - 2 Which annotations show:
 - ☆ literal meaning, explicit points or simple inferences? (AO1)
 - ☆ how language is working (methods, connotations, structure? (AO2)
 - ☆ the effect and impression on the reader? (AO4)
 - 3 How do the annotations help with understanding what is happening or how the writer uses language?
 - 4 What isn't annotated yet that you think might be important? Why?

Note that some teachers may prefer to avoid explicit references to the AOs, depending on the needs of their learners.

Some sample responses to Question 2 are given below.

AO1 annotations look for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is definitely happening • key factual details • explicit information and simple inferences. 	
Annotation	What this tells us
'She doesn't have the tools.'	<i>The annotator is identifying clear, explicit information: Dinah lacks proper equipment and must improvise.</i>
'Maybe she doesn't really want to lose it?'	<i>An inference drawn from the image created by the simile and comparison of the hair to a blanket (warm/cosy)</i>

AO2 annotations focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • word choices, figurative language, tone, structure • repetition, sentence types, imagery • how the writer shapes meaning. 	
Annotation	What this tells us
'The question creates a sense of her uncertainty or maybe frustration?'	<i>Shows awareness of the effect of a rhetorical question on tone and portrayal of character.</i>
'Short sentences – like the flow of her thoughts as she's trying to work it out.'	<i>The annotator notices how short, clipped sentences reflect Dinah's agitated mental state and the idea that her brain is darting around, trying to work things out.</i>
'hair is like a blanket... the simile suggests it is heavy and comforting.'	<i>Annotator draws an inference from the imagery (see notes above).</i>
'It's like she's giving herself instructions – trying to give herself courage to get it done.'	<i>Annotator sees how language reveals inner conflict, tone, and symbolic meaning.</i>



AO4 annotations consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the text positions the reader • what we feel/think about the narrator or situation • how convincing or effective the writing is. 	
Annotation	What this tells us
'Who is the 'you' here? Dinah? Talking to herself?'	The annotator is responding to narrative point of view and how it shapes reader involvement.
'Trying to work out what to do and how to do it.'	These comments show an evaluative response: readers interpret Dinah as stressed, conflicted, under pressure.
'Short sentences. Like the flow of her thoughts; her mind darts around...'	This evaluates how well the fragmented writing captures Dinah's confused mental state, praising its effectiveness.

Plenary discussion

Take feedback from learners about their observations of the annotations. Draw out the following points:

- Annotation is **active thinking on the page**.
- It should not highlight everything; it is selective and purposeful.
- Good annotators use **short, precise comments**.
- Uncertainty is acceptable – annotations can express **possibilities**, not just facts.

Activity 2.4 Learner group work: continue annotation

- Groups of learners continue annotating more of the extract. Teachers might want to give different groups different aspects to focus on. This would allow teachers to serve the needs and abilities of individual learners. For instance:

AO1 Detectives – What's happening?	AO2 Language Analysts – How does the writer create meaning?	AO4 Evaluators – What is the effect on the reader?
Annotate for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key facts the reader can be sure of • what we learn about the narrator's situation • simple inferences based on evidence. Examples of prompts: <i>What does the text definitely tell us?</i> <i>What can we infer about place, time, or motivation?</i>	Annotate for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • methods (imagery, tone, repetition) • language that builds tension or urgency • interesting or unusual word choices. Prompts: <i>What techniques do you notice?</i> <i>How do the examples you find create a feeling or idea?</i>	Annotate for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional response (sympathy, curiosity, anxiety, confusion) • how the narrator is being presented. Prompts: <i>How do I feel at this moment? Why?</i> <i>What impression is being created of the narrator?</i>

- Each group shares some of their annotations with the class, with the teacher annotating the text on a smart board or on a paper copy under a visualiser. Encourage the groups of learners to:
 - ★ Share two or three of their strongest annotations.
 - ★ Explain why those comments are useful or meaningful.
 - ★ Identify overlaps between AO1, AO2, AO4/annotations made by other groups.



Plenary discussion

Talk about the value of the activity, drawing out that:

- Real GCSE responses blend the skills of the different AOs.
- Good reading moves fluidly between noticing, analysing and evaluating.
- Annotation becomes a springboard for responses to exam questions.

Activity 2.5 Independent learner annotation

Learners annotate a fresh paragraph of the extract independently.

Ask them to:

- Underline or highlight key words or phrases.
- Add notes to the margin that identify:
 - ★ what is happening (AO1)
 - ★ how language creates meaning (AO2)
 - ★ the effect on the reader (AO4).

Activity 2.6 Optional extension task

Ask learners to use their independent annotations to write one short analytical paragraph in response to one of the questions below.

How does the writer use language to show Dinah's determination in this paragraph?

What do you learn about Dinah's physical and emotional struggle in this paragraph?

How does the writer's choice of language show Dinah's attitude toward herself or her situation?

Reflecting on Unit 2: Building reading strategies

Encourage learners to reflect on the skills they have developed in this unit. Ask them to rate their confidence, on a scale of 1 to 3, in:

- using a variety of reading strategies
- forming opinions and finding supporting evidence.

Guidance and rationale

Activity 2.1 Teacher modelling a first reading

Many learners assume that strong readers understand everything immediately; this task shows that uncertainty, questioning and provisional thinking are normal, and essential, parts of reading.

Activity 2.2 Guided learner reading

This activity helps learners to practise the cognitive processes that proficient readers use automatically by encouraging them to tolerate uncertainty, remain curious and build evidence-based interpretations.

Activity 2.3 Developing annotation skills

The extract from *Becoming Dinah* offers ambiguity, withheld information and hints of urgency, so it provides an ideal stimulus for practising annotation skills. This not only supports part of AO1 (identifying and interpreting explicit and implicit information and ideas) but also builds metacognitive awareness.

Unit 2: Resource 2.1 | Text extract

In the novel *Becoming Dinah* by Kit de Waal, published in 2019, 17-year-old Dinah struggles with her sense of identity. She is mixed race, but feels neither Black nor white, and she's attracted to both boys and girls.

This extract from the opening of the novel is a powerful moment of personal resilience and self-determination. Dinah uses blunt scissors and a razor to shave off her hair, before leaving the commune where she's grown up to set out on an epic journey.

***Becoming Dinah* by Kit de Waal**

Cut your hair off? Not as easy as you think. You need the right stuff for a start.

Electric shaver? No. Proper scissors? No. If you haven't got them, you'd better think hard. Think fast.

First thing, get rid of the weight, get it from long to short. And if your hair lies the whole length of your back, as thick and heavy as a blanket, this could take forever. So make a start. **5**

Grab a great big hank of hair, wind it around your hand and pull it upwards, away from your scalp. Go carefully with the red handled scissors, the ones that you took out of the kitchen drawer that your mum uses for cutting coupons out of newspapers or cutting the string off a parcel. They're not sharp and the blades are bent but it's all you've got. **10**

So get in as close as you can. If you'd thought about it you might have bought a hair cutting kit from somewhere but you didn't think and anyway the nearest shop is seven miles away and this is happening right here, right now, and it's too late for wishing what you might have done... **15**

You cut. And you cut. You have to do this over and over again, cut and cut and cut, hair on the left, hair on the right. Chop into the top sections, pulling and cutting and trying not to leave any long bits as you go. Ignore the tremble of your fingers and the bump of your heart asking over and over if this is the right thing to do. Because you know it is. You know it is. **20**



The back of the head is the hardest because you can't see. **25**

Balance a mirror behind you, hang it off the hook on the bathroom door. Try not to block out your own reflection or get in your own way as you snip and cut and scratch. It's hard to make your hands do the right thing when you can only see them in reverse and it takes forever and the muscles in your arms ache **30** and the muscles in your shoulders ache and it's the biggest thing you've done so far in your whole life. Well, it was until yesterday. But you don't want to think about yesterday so you carry on.

Then when it's as short as you can get it, you stare at the new you in the mirror and you see yourself for the first time. You look like **35** someone you don't recognise. And it's not good. But you look different and that was the point, wasn't it? [...]

So you fill the sink, bend over and dip your head in the water. Add a squeeze of shampoo. Make a lather on the tufts, all white and soft as a cloud, and you look like an advert on the telly for **40** someone having a really good time in the shower, except you're not having a really good time. [...]

You get your mum's razor [...]. You start by making long tracks along the great curve of your head and the razor keeps snagging and getting clogged up with your tufty hair. The soap stings and **45** the blood turns the suds to pink like no advert you've ever seen.

And you really know now, you're more certain than ever that you should have had a better plan.

You rinse the razor under the tap to make it clean again and you keep going even though it hurts with all the tangles and pulls **50** and you feel like you're on the verge of tears but you choke them down. It wouldn't take much more to make you cry. Not today.

It seems to take forever. Your arms hurt even more than before. As the suds and the lather disappear you see that your scalp isn't as brown as your face. It's not even brown at all, it's the same colour **55** as your mum's face in winter, white and pale. [...]



You rinse your head under the tap and feel the tickle of the water like cold fingers dancing on your new skin. Then you stand up and dry your face. Then you look. Look again. Look again and keep looking because it's worked. There you are. You're not boring old Dinah any more. You're someone completely new. Or you will be. **60**

But there's no time to stand admiring your new self in the mirror. You have to clean the silky, black, wet tufts out of the plughole, pick the long tresses up off the bathroom floor, and make sure you don't look too hard because you'll wonder at the colour of your hair, like the bark of a tree, and the shine of your hair, like the sleek coat of a cat, and you'll remember the weight of your hair and the feel of it, soft and heavy against your skin, warm on your back. And you might remember all the times people said they loved it and how they wanted to touch it and how it made you beautiful and how it made you feel. **70**

And you think about putting your hair in the bin, but you realise you can't and you don't know why so you bundle the tresses into a small, soft pillow and you take it downstairs with you and put it in a carrier bag. And you put the carrier bag in your rucksack and you put your coat on and say goodbye to the only life you've ever known. **75**

Unit 2: Resource 2.2 | Guided learner reading prompts

1 What I know for sure... (explicit ideas)

List three details you can be certain about based only on the extract. Use the sentence starters to help you.

I know for sure that...

I know this because...

2 What I'm wondering... (questions)

Write four questions you have while reading. Use the sentence starters to help you.

I'm wondering why ...

A question I still have is ...

3 My early inferences and predictions

Use clues from the text to begin forming some ideas. These may change later. Use the sentence starters to help you.

Maybe... I think this because...

It could be that... I think this because...

Unit 2: Resource 2.3 | Annotated extract

This question shows her uncertainty. She doesn't expect an answer (it is rhetorical).

The question shows she is trying to work out what to do/how to do it.

It's like she's giving herself instructions. Perhaps trying to give herself the courage to get it done? Also a sense of urgency?

Becoming Dinah by Kit de Waal

Cut your hair off? Not as easy as you think. You need the right stuff for a start.

Electric shaver? No. Proper scissors? No. If you haven't got them, you'd better think hard. Think fast.

First thing, get rid of the weight, get it from long to short. And if your hair lies the whole length of your back, as thick and heavy as a blanket, this could take 5 forever. So make a start.

Grab a great big hank of hair, wind it around your hand and pull it upwards, away from your scalp. Go carefully with the red handled scissors, the ones that you took out of the kitchen drawer that your mum uses for cutting coupons out of newspapers or cutting the string off a parcel. They're not sharp 10 and the blades are bent but it's all you've got.

So get in close as you can. If you'd thought about it you might have bought a hair cutting kit from somewhere but you didn't think and anyway the nearest shop is seven miles away and this is happening right here, right now, and it's too late for wishing what you might have done... 15

Who is the 'you' here? Dinah? Talking to herself?

She doesn't have the right tools for the task, so has to improvise.

Short sentences. Like the flow of her thoughts; her mind darts around as she's trying to work out what to do.

Comparing her hair to a blanket is a simile. It conveys a sense that her hair is cosy, warm and comforting. Maybe she doesn't really want to lose it?

Unit 3: Overview

Unit 3: Solving problems	
Summary of learning outcomes	Develop learners' problem-solving skills, encouraging them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask questions • clarify meaning • make inferences and predictions • find evidence to support their assertions.
Text	<p><i>Memory of Water</i> by Emmi Itäranta (2014)</p> <p><i>Memory of Water</i> follows Noria, a young tea master's apprentice in a drought-stricken future where water is tightly controlled by an oppressive regime. When she inherits knowledge of a hidden spring, she must decide whether to protect her family's legacy or risk everything to help others.</p> <p>Teachers should consider whether the themes and events of the extract (and wider text) may trigger sensitivities or other issues.</p>
Genre	Novel
Themes	Endurance, self-discipline, moral courage
Resources	Unit 3: Resource 3.1 Text extract Unit 3: Resource 3.5 Reciprocal reading prompts
Teaching and learning strategies	Reciprocal reading techniques: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • predicting • clarifying • questioning • summarising.
Linked GCSE English Language AOs	<p>AO1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. • Select and synthesise evidence from different texts. <p>AO2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views. <p>AO4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
Links to other texts	<p><i>The City of Woven Streets</i> by Emmi Itäranta: a fantasy novel about Eliana, a weaver living in a tightly controlled society on an island, who has a dangerous secret – she dreams, which is against the law.</p> <p><i>Utopias and Dystopias</i>: futuristic short stories edited by Christopher Edge, which focus on the consequences of climate change and the power of technology, among other things.</p> <p><i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Margaret Atwood: a dystopian novel about a patriarchal, totalitarian regime, in which the central character, Offred, is a 'handmaid' forced to produce children for the ruling class.</p>

Unit 3: Activities

Activity 3.1 Using prediction and inference

- Before reading the extract on **Unit 3: Resource 3.1 Text extract**, show learners a few key words and phrases from the extract (e.g. “plastic grave”, “junk pile”, “loudspeakers”, “craggy, pulpy”). In reading groups, learners predict:
 - ★ what kind of environment the characters are in
 - ★ what challenges they might face
 - ★ what the characters might be searching for.
- Take feedback from the groups and then read the extract aloud to the whole class.
- After listening to the reading, groups revisit their predictions and identify any new evidence which either confirms or changes their ideas.
- Take feedback from the groups and model annotating a class copy of the extract for the predictions and inferences they have suggested and the accompanying evidence. For example, annotations on the first sentence might include:

“plastic grave” – suggests death and burial, implying that plastic is no longer useful but still present, creating a disturbing image of waste that will not disappear.

“craggy, pulpy” – adjectives mix solid and decaying textures, which feels unnatural and reinforces the idea that this landscape is unstable and damaged.

Plenary discussion

Discuss the process skills learners have been practising and developing, such as:

- inferring or predicting from partial information
- forming ideas/opinions/hypotheses and reading on to test these with more evidence from a text
- self-monitoring and adjusting viewpoints based on evidence.

Activity 3.2 Clarification challenge

- In groups, learners highlight unfamiliar or ambiguous words and phrases. These might include:

“The plastic grave”

“Dead plastic crunched under the weight of our steps”

“Past tech”

“Their past world bleeds into our present world”

- Each group chooses three unfamiliar words and phrases and works collaboratively to clarify meaning using a variety of strategies, such as using context clues or prior knowledge. If necessary, prompt learners with questions such as:
 - ★ What exactly is confusing here?
 - ★ What can you use to make sense of it?

While learners work in their groups, the teacher should observe the strategies they use.



- Groups then consider **how** they tackled each ‘problem’ (What strategies did they use? What evidence did they draw upon?) Teachers may need to help learners recognise the problem-solving strategies they used, using questions such as:
 - ★ How did you test whether your meaning worked?
 - ★ Did anyone change their interpretation after discussion? Why?

See below for some examples of tracking the process of problem-solving strategies. Teachers may choose to model one or more example, depending on the needs of their learners.

Example 1: “The plastic grave”

The challenge: Learners may interpret this literally or be unsure why plastic is described as a grave.

Problem-solving strategies used:

1. Learners notice an unusual combination of words: plastic/grave.
2. They test interpretations:
 - ★ a place where plastic is buried?
 - ★ a symbol of death?
 - ★ a grave made of plastic?
3. They return to context:
 - ★ waste, decay, scavenging, remnants of the past.

Possible conclusion: It’s a metaphor suggesting plastic is dead, but still present — like a corpse that hasn’t disappeared.

What the teacher highlights: The group didn’t look the word up; they constructed meaning using metaphor, context, and theme.

Example 2: “Dead plastic crunched under the weight of our steps”

The challenge: Plastic isn’t literally alive, so “dead” seems confusing.

Problem-solving strategies used:

1. Testing literal as opposed to figurative meaning
2. Substituting synonyms:
 - ★ “dead” could mean lifeless/useless/abandoned
3. Checking whether the meaning would fit:
 - ★ Does “useless plastic” make sense here?

Possible conclusion: “Dead plastic” suggests something no longer useful, but still physically present and harmful.

What the teacher highlights: Learners evaluated whether a meaning worked in context. This shows the process skills of reading being developed.

Example 3: “Past tech”

The challenge: The term is vague and unfamiliar.

Problem-solving strategies used:

1. Breaking down the phrase:
 - ★ “past” = previous world
 - ★ “tech” = technology
2. Use contextual clues:
 - ★ loudspeakers, machines, scavenging.

Possible conclusion: Technology from before the water crisis — advanced but now obsolete.

What the teacher highlights: Meaning is context-dependent (not dictionary-dependent). Readers have to use the text to infer meaning.

Example 4: “Their past world bleeds into our present world”

The challenge: Abstract, metaphorical, emotionally loaded

Problem-solving strategies used:

1. Identifying metaphor (“bleeds”)
2. Exploring metaphor: what does bleeding imply?
 - ★ damage
 - ★ pain/hurt
 - ★ spreading/out of control.
3. Apply to context:
 - ★ pollution
 - ★ environmental consequences.

Possible conclusion: The damage caused by the past world is still harming the present.

What the teacher highlights: Metaphors are not literal. They create ideas and images and need to be broken down into key words and explored.



Plenary discussion

Discuss and sum up the process and problem-solving skills the learners have used during this activity, such as:

- identifying what is only partially understood
- breaking phrases or words down to think about what is understood/known
- creating an idea/theory/hypothesis about the meaning
- testing whether this constructed meaning fits the context
- using context to decode meaning
- using context to explore imagery
- revising understanding, if needed
- breaking down thought processes into steps or manageable chunks.

Activity 3.3 Questions to deepen understanding

- Ask groups of learners to generate questions based on the extract. Teachers may want to scaffold this activity by:
 - ★ Giving different groups a different ‘type’ of question to come up with such as, why? what? where? who? questions.
 - ★ Chunking the extract so that different groups work on different sections/ paragraphs of the extract, e.g. lines 1–8, 9–13, 14–21.
 - ★ Asking some groups to come up with questions about Noria, other groups about Sanja and others about the world presented in the extract.

Encourage learners to note **any** questions the extract (or section) poses for them and to not feel foolish for not knowing. Emphasise that good readers always have questions about what they are reading; it is part of making sense of a text.

- Groups exchange questions and attempt to respond to each other’s questions using the text as evidence but keeping in mind that not all questions can be answered with absolute certainty. Remind learners that the answer may not be revealed in this extract; the writer may choose to never answer some questions. As such, some responses may be predictions or inferences. Remind learners of the Unit 2 activities about annotation skills and the discussions they had regarding uncertainty with text and how normal, and even useful, this is.

Plenary discussion

Ask each group to share one of the questions they were given and their answers/ predictions/inferences.

The teacher then sums up the process and problem-solving skills the learners used during this activity, such as:

- analytical thinking
- predicting
- inferring
- evidence-based reasoning
- collaborative problem-solving.

Activity 3.4 Summarising texts to aid understanding

- Groups create a 60-word summary of the extract or part of the extract (teachers can decide this based on the ability levels of their learners). Remind learners how to summarise, using questions such as:
 - ★ If you had to teach this section to someone else, what would they need to know?
 - ★ Which details are essential? Which can be removed?
- Ask groups to refine this summary to just 20 words. This reinforces decisions about what is essential for the reader to understand the text.
- Ask each group to read their summaries. Draw out:
 - ★ common information/themes/events
 - ★ differences between summaries (avoiding a sense of there being a ‘correct’ version but exploring why some groups might choose to focus on certain aspects whilst others haven’t).

Plenary discussion

Discuss how useful summarising can be to help understand a text, its main information, events and ideas, noting that it is a problem-solving skill and involves processes such as:

- reading for meaning
- re-reading to check understanding
- prioritising
- eliminating
- condensing.

Activity 3.5 Group reciprocal reading

Teacher modelling the first paragraph

Read the first paragraph aloud.

Display a copy of the paragraph (using a smart board, visualiser or similar) and model aloud how an expert reader might use the four strategies, such as:

- **Predict:** Point out words such as “sharp”, “coarse”, “jagged”, “unpredictable”, and remark on how the landscape sounds unstable – perhaps the setting is dangerous or post-apocalyptic.
- **Clarify:** Identify words such as “craggy”, “pulpy”, “splinters” and remind learners how to deduce meaning from context. (Learners may have focused on some of these words during Activity 3.2 so the teacher might remind learners of how they deduced meaning from context.)
- **Question:** Why is the narrator scavenging? What does this reveal about society?
- **Summarise:** The teacher gives a two-sentence summary of the paragraph.

Remind learners that each strategy is a problem-solving tool.

Learners work in groups of four to five

Each group member has a role: predictor, clarifier, questioner, summariser (double-up on roles if groups are larger than four).

Each group works through the next section of the extract or the rest of the extract. Each group should work through the following process:



- Read the extract, or section (or the teacher may choose to read aloud to the learners or ask a learner to volunteer).
- Group members work alone to annotate their copy of the extract (or section) from the perspective of their role, making predictions, clarifying, posing questions or summarising. See **Unit 3: Resource: 3.5 Reciprocal reading prompts** for reminders for each role.

Teachers can use their own knowledge and understanding of their learners to decide how to chunk the extract to help meet the individual needs of learners.

Further iterations of this process can be conducted to cover subsequent sections of the extract. Roles can be rotated before different iterations, if teachers choose.

During the group work, the teacher circulates, prompting deeper exploration and reasoning with questions such as:

- What evidence supports that idea?
- What strategy might help you solve this confusion?
- Has your prediction changed? Why?

Plenary discussion

After each iteration of group work, discuss the ideas formed by the different roles and highlight the process skills used. Start with the predictions from the various groups and consider similarities and differences amongst the groups and explore the evidence they used to formulate these ideas/predictions. Teachers can annotate a displayed copy of the extract during this time and/or ask learners to come to the front to annotate the extract with the suggestions they share.

Reflecting on Unit 3: Solving problems

Encourage learners to reflect on the skills they have developed in this unit. Ask them to rate their confidence, on a scale of 1 to 3, in their problem-solving skills, such as:

- asking questions
- clarifying meaning
- making inferences and predictions, using evidence from the text.

Guidance and rationale

Reciprocal reading, developed by Ann Brown and Annemarie Palincsar in the early 1980s as part of their research into metacognition and reading comprehension, is an approach designed to help learners become more confident, active, strategic readers. It teaches four key processes – **predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarising** – through guided dialogue between teacher and learners. The rationale is that by explicitly modelling these strategies and gradually handing control to learners, they internalise the thinking processes skilled readers use automatically. In doing so, it shifts reading from a passive act to an active problem-solving one.

Each of the first four activities in this unit, focuses on just one of these key processes at a time. The intention is to help learners develop each skill and explore its use in a more concentrated fashion before embarking upon a final reciprocal reading activity which combines all four of the process skills.

Unit 3: Resource 3.1 | Text extract

Memory of Water is a dystopian novel whose main character is a 17-year-old called Noria Kaitio. In Noria's futuristic world, global warming has caused water to be scarce. This valuable resource is restricted, rationed and controlled by the government and military.

In this extract, Noria and her friend Sanja scavenge through a harsh, insect-ridden landscape of plastic waste, uncovering fragments of forgotten technology that hint at a lost world. Their discovery of an old machine sparks reflection on the past.

***Memory of Water* by Emmi Itäranta**

The plastic grave was a large, craggy, pulpy landscape where sharp corners and coarse surfaces, straight edges and jagged splinters rode steep and unpredictable. Its strange, angular valleys of waves and mountain lines kept shifting their shape. People moved piles of rubbish from one place to the next, stomped the plains even more tightly packed, dug big holes and elevated hills next to them in search of serviceable plastic and wood that wasn't too bent, out of shape, under layers of garbage. [...]

Dead plastic crunched under the weight of our steps and horseflies and other insects were whirring loudly around our hooded heads. I had rolled my sleeves down and tied them tight at the wrists, knowing that any stretch of bare skin would attract more insects. My ankles would be red and swollen by evening.

I kept an eye on anything worth scavenging, but past only uninteresting items, crumbled dirty white plastic sheets, uncomfortable-looking shoes with broken, tall heels, a faded doll's head. I stopped and turned to look behind me, but Sanja wasn't there anymore. I saw her a few metres away where she had crouched to dig something out of a junk pile. I went closer when she pulled what looked like a lidded box out from the mishmash of split bowls and twisted hangers and long black splinters.

The box was the shape of a rectangle. I had never seen one like it before. The scratched black surface looked like it had been smooth and shiny once. At each end of the rectangle there was a round dent covered by a tight metal net.



“Loudspeakers,” Sanja said. “I’ve seen similar ones on other past-tech things. This was used for listening to something.”

Between the loudspeakers there was a rectangular dent, slightly wider than my hand. It had a broken lid that could be opened from the upper corner. [...] In the middle of the top panel there was a round indentation, slightly larger than the one in the front panel and covered by a partially transparent lid. **30**

I knew without asking that Sanja was going to take the machine home with her. Her face revealed that she was already picturing the inside hidden cover in her mind and seeing herself opening the machine.[...] **35**

I said to Sanja: “I wish I could dig all the way to the bottom. Perhaps then I’d understand the past world and the people who threw all of this away.”

“You spend too much time thinking about them,” Sanja said. **40**

“You think about them too,” I told her. “You wouldn’t come here otherwise.”

“It’s not them I think about,” Sanja said. “Only their machines, what they knew and what they left to us.” She stopped and placed her hand on my arm. [...] “It’s not worth thinking about them, Noria. They didn’t think about us either.” **45**

I have tried not to think about them, but their past world bleeds into our present world, into its sky, into its dust. Did the present world, the world that is, ever bleed into theirs, the world that was?

Unit 3: Resource 3.5 | Reciprocal reading prompts

Predicting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Based on this description, what do we think might happen next and why?● What clues hint at danger, tension or discovery?● Are there any other clues which hint at other ideas, themes or future events?
Clarifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Which words or phrases block our understanding?● What strategies could we try to make more sense of these words or phrases – context, word parts or substitution?● Does the sentence make more sense now?
Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What do we still not understand about:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ the characters' motives★ the world being described?● What deeper ideas might the text be nudging us towards?● What evidence might help us answer these questions?
Summarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Think about:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ what happens in this section★ who features in this section★ when this might be taking place★ where this might be taking place.● If you had to teach this section to someone else, what would they need to know?● Which details are essential? Which can be removed?

Unit 4: Overview

Unit 4: Reading holistically	
Summary of learning outcomes	Develop learners' confidence, encouraging them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use themes to access the ideas of a text and make a greater connection • understand how different ideas in a text fit together to create holistic meaning(s) • track ideas across a text and see how they are developed by a writer.
Text	'Tilly Two Rooms', <i>Home Truths</i> (BBC Radio 4, 2004) The BBC Radio 4 programme <i>Home Truths</i> gave ordinary people the chance to share stories about their lives. The extract is taken from an edition of the programme first broadcast in 2004 and tells the story of Tilly Aldridge, a teenage girl whose parents had divorced. Teachers should consider whether the themes and events of the extract (and wider text) may trigger sensitivities or classroom management issues.
Genre	Radio documentary
Themes	Emotional strength, independence, self-assurance
Resources	Unit 4: Resource 4.1 Text extract
Teaching and learning strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking ideas to learners' own experiences • Identifying themes and tracking them across a text • Understanding how language can link to themes
Linked GCSE English Language AOs	AO1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. • Select and synthesise evidence from different texts. AO2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views. AO4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
Links to other texts	<i>Educated</i> by Tara Westover: a memoir which describes how a young girl breaks free from an unconventional family life to pursue a life of her choice. <i>Bird Girl</i> by Maya-Rose Craig: a memoir about a family who travel the world searching for rare birds, instilling a deep love of nature in their daughter who becomes a world-renowned environmentalist. <i>My Name is Why</i> by Lemn Sissay: a memoir that explores growing up in the British care system.

Unit 4: Activities

Activity 4.1 Developing ideas through themes

Note that some sensitivity may be necessary when handling the topic of living between two homes.

- Before reading the extract, present learners with the following statements:
 - ★ You need your own space to feel safe.
 - ★ Parents should decide how a teenager's room looks.
 - ★ Growing up means leaving childish things behind.
 - ★ Living in two homes would feel confusing and unsettling.
- Ask learners to decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement and to explain why. Learners should discuss their responses in pairs before feeding back to the class. Suggest they use the sentence frames 'I agree ... because' or 'I disagree ... because'.

The aim of this activity is not to reach consensus but to acknowledge personal viewpoints and show learners that texts explore ideas they already think about. This activity encourages learners to think of themes as ideas about life, rather than as abstract literary concepts.

Activity 4.2 Identifying and tracking themes across a text

- Remind learners that a theme is a central idea or message that a text explores. Writers often weave a theme through a text, so there are many references and links to it. This helps to build up and develop ideas for the reader to think about.
 - ★ Read the extract aloud to learners from **Unit 4: Resource 4.1 Text extract**.
- Introduce and display the four key themes:
 - ★ personal space and security
 - ★ growing up and identity
 - ★ parent-child relationships and control
 - ★ life between two homes.
- Ask learners to work in pairs and highlight or underline words or phrases in the extract that link to any of these themes. See some example links below.

Personal space and security

"You have to have your own space, otherwise you're not comfortable."
"If anything is going wrong in the house, you will always be safe in your room."
"You always come up here knowing that no one can follow you."

Growing up and identity

"It makes me feel a little bit more grown up."
"Sort of adds to the effect that I'm still a child"
"I don't play with it often."

Parent-child relationships and control

"She chose most of the things that go in here."
"If mum saw the paint coming off the wall then she would go mad."
"Dad doesn't care one jot what she puts in it, as long as she's happy."

Life between two homes

"I've got two houses I can go to."
"Sometimes... I feel like I've been carted from one place to the other."
"It's not as bad as everyone thinks having your parents split up."



You may want to adapt the activity depending on the needs of your learners. For example:

- ★ Allocate **one of the key themes** to each pair and ask them to highlight or underline sections that link to this theme.
- ★ Chunk the extract and allocate different sections of text to different groups. Ask them to highlight or underline words or phrases that link to **any of the themes**.
- ★ Chunk the extract and allocate different sections of text to different groups. Ask them to highlight or underline words or phrases that link to **an allocated theme**.

- Combine pairs into small groups of four and ask learners to compare their choices and justify them using evidence from the extract. Teachers might need to reassure learners that a quotation can link to **more than one** theme in order to guard against feature spotting and to encourage holistic reading and understanding of the text.
- Learners choose (or are allocated) one theme and work individually to complete a tracking grid like the one below. The grid asks learners to identify evidence of a theme at different stages of the text and explain what it shows about the theme at that point.
- Teachers should model one example first, emphasising that writers **return to and develop ideas**, rather than only stating them once.

Theme: Living between two homes	
Quotations	What this shows or suggests/How the idea has developed
<p>(beginning of extract) “I spend most of my time up here. I love it in my room.”</p>	<p><i>This establishes the importance of separate spaces early on and introduces the idea that Tilly’s life is shaped by where she is living.</i></p>
<p>(middle of extract) “A very different room to the one at her Dad’s house, because dad doesn’t care one jot what she puts in it, as long as she’s happy.”</p>	<p><i>This contrasts the two homes and shows how different rules and attitudes define each space.</i></p>
<p>(end of extract) “I think I probably prefer it to having one life at one house.”</p>	<p><i>This concludes the extract with a reflective judgement, showing Tilly’s acceptance and positive perspective on living between two homes.</i></p>

Plenary discussion

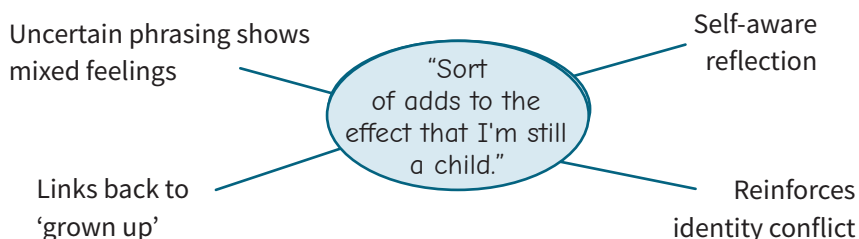
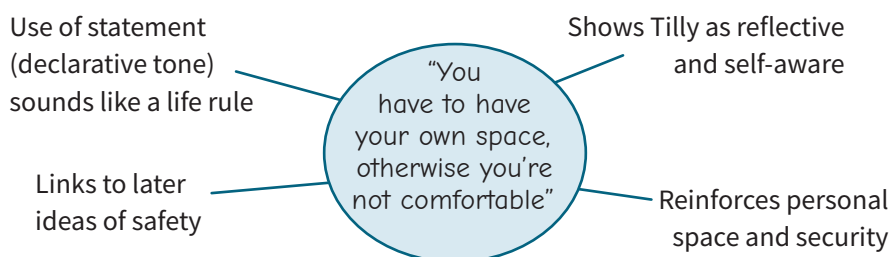
Discuss and draw together key points of evidence for each of the themes across the text, annotating a class copy of the extract (using a smartboard, visualiser or similar). Emphasise how each theme develops across the extract.

Activity 4.3 Language and themes

- Ask learners to work in pairs to select one key quotation for each theme and discuss:
 - ★ Why has the writer chosen this word or phrase (and have they used a particular technique)?
 - ★ How does it shape our view of Tilly?
 - ★ How does it reinforce a theme (or themes)?
 - ★ Does this link in any way to another part of the text?

Encourage learners to focus on meaning and effect. Avoid over-emphasis on feature spotting but encourage learners to use the subject terminology, where appropriate, reinforcing that AO2 is about how language creates meaning.

The example quotations and annotation ideas below are prompts rather than model answers and can be adapted to suit learner needs.



- Take some general feedback from pairs and encourage the class to reach an agreement about four key quotations to focus on.
- The teacher annotates a class copy of the extract by leading a discussion around each of these four quotations in turn, using the bulleted prompts above from the original activity.



Plenary discussion

Discuss how the class annotations have focused on **how** language creates meaning, rather than feature spotting. The last bullet point was preparing learners for making a higher-level response by encouraging them to link together ideas and words in a text. This is very different to writing about a piece of language, then moving on to write about another piece of language without making any connection or recognising that ideas are developed by a writer throughout a text.

Activity 4.4 Extension: Bringing ideas together

See below for some examination-style questions which could be used with learners to write about the themes they have explored within the framework of the AQA GCSE English Language papers.

How does the writer use language to describe Tilly's bedroom?

To what extent do you agree that Tilly feels confident and secure?

Reflecting on Unit 4: Reading holistically

Encourage learners to reflect on the skills they have developed in this unit. Ask them to rate their confidence, on a scale of 1 to 3, in:

- using themes to find connections in a text
- track ideas across a text and understand how they are developed.

Guidance and rationale

The purpose of the activities in this unit is to use themes as an accessible way into text, thinking about text and analysing text. To do this, the activities start by encouraging learners to connect ideas in the extract to their own experiences. The activities then move on to develop learners' ability to track how a writer develops an idea across a text, helping them to recognise how ideas appear across a whole GCSE style extract and avoid the focus on isolated quotations.

The teaching sequence culminates in activities which use and develop learners' critical analysis skills whilst avoiding feature spotting approaches to text; the use of subject terminology is encouraged during the final activities (where appropriate) but not over-emphasised, reinforcing the notion that AO2 is about **how language creates meaning**. The thematic approach helps here to connect language analysis to core ideas in a text rather than be presented as a series of isolated techniques.

Unit 4: Resource 4.1 | Text extract

This is an extract from a 2004 radio broadcast which told the story of Tilly Aldridge, a teenage girl whose parents had divorced.

In this extract, Tilly explains how she spends weekdays at her mother's house and weekends at her father's and so has two very different bedrooms

'Tilly Two Rooms', *Home Truths* (BBC Radio 4)

'I spend most of my time up here. I love it in my room. You have to have your own space, otherwise you're not comfortable,' Tilly explains. 'If anything's going wrong in the house, you'll always be safe in your room – you always come up here knowing that no one can follow you. I think every teenage girl now goes through the phase where they just don't want to go out of their room because everything is in here that entertains them.'

5

Tilly describes her room at her mother's house as 'tasteful, modern and comfortable'. The house itself is a vision of gorgeous, white loveliness. Apart, that is, from the finger marks on the walls [...]

10

She keeps her room pretty tidy – for a teenager – admitting that when she's in a bad mood and has nothing better to do she'll tidy it up. 'A teenager in a bad mood?' I hear you say. 'That room must be spotless.'

15

On the subject of moods, it appears that Tilly and her mother, Maddie, have come to a somewhat unusual **entente** on how Tilly's room is decorated.

'Well, we never argued about it,' Tilly says. 'She chose most of the things that go in here, but I don't mind it at all. It makes me feel a little bit more grown up. Also, my mum picks out things and says, 'This doesn't work,' and so she says, 'Take it over to Dad's house,' and I go on over there and just dump it there.'

20

Just dump it there – a novel solution. What Tilly dumps are all things that clash with Maddie's white walls and tasteful décor. Posters for a start – unless they're on the specially mounted board. 'If Mum saw the paint coming off the wall then she'd

25



go mad.’ And Tilly admits that given half a chance she’d splash around some colour too.

The other thing that Maddie can’t stand is stuffed animals. They go straight round to Dad’s. However, in the corner of the room there’s a doll’s house. Not your average, common-or-garden doll’s house, but a very modern one: from **Bauhaus** to doll’s house, so to speak. ‘Yeah, it’s quite different,’ Tilly says coolly. ‘Sort of adds to the effect that I’m still a child. I don’t play with it often. 30 35

‘When I go round to friends’ houses their rooms are always really messy,’ Tilly continues. ‘It’s a really nice room. I love it, but I know my friends think it’s actually quite a boring bedroom.’

A bedroom that Tilly cleans herself. A very different room to the one at her dad’s house, because Dad doesn’t care one jot what she puts in it, as long as she’s happy. 40

Maddie, it won’t surprise you to learn, hopes with a passion that Tilly will take after her: ‘I would be absolutely devastated I think if she did do that sort of chintzy, big-sofas, big-curtain thing.’

You might expect a child to dislike commuting between two parents – the **transience** of it. But Tilly sees only advantages. 45

‘I think I probably prefer it to having one life at one house, because I reckon that’s pretty boring. But I’ve got two houses I can go to, and there’s always going to be a charge in the atmosphere between brothers and me and parents, and in the end it’s quite nice. 50

‘Sometimes,’ she continues, ‘I feel like I’ve been carted from one place to the other. It’s not bad that feeling – it’s not as bad as everyone thinks having your parents split up. In the end it’s sort of for the best, so it doesn’t really bother you in the end.’ 55

Glossary

Bauhaus	a German art school famous for a new type of design and architecture
entente	(French word) agreement
transience	movement from one place to another

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