

# A Framework for English Literature Teaching in Dutch Secondary Schools

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

When teaching literature in secondary school education, it is desirable for a teacher to be able to select works that correspond as much as possible with the competence of each individual student. With regard to Dutch literature, Theo Witte has published a proposal for a common framework in which he defines several different levels of literary competence, which can serve as a guideline for selecting the correct books for students. However, Witte's work is focussed on literature education in a first language. In order to be able to select works for second language literature education, a system is required which not only examines students' literary competence, but also their ability at understanding the second language. Learners' abilities at communicating in or understanding a second language are defined in the Common European Framework, or CEF. Consequently, a working arrangement for second language literature teaching would require a system in which literary competence is set against second language ability.

Such a setup, in which the levels of second language competence are combined with the levels of literary competence as defined by Theo Witte may facilitate the educational value of literature teaching for both student and teacher. In the Netherlands, literature may either be taught separately for each individual language, or it may be taught through a setup of integrated literature education, known as *Geïntegreerd Literatuur Onderwijs*, or GLO. However, particularly in the case of bilingual education, not only the students' literary abilities matter, but their capabilities at communication in and understanding of the second language are also very relevant. As a consequence, there may be students who have a very good understanding of literature and enjoy reading greatly, but who unfortunately lack the required knowledge of the foreign language to read much of its literature. Conversely, there may be students who have a very extensive grasp of the foreign language, but who either lack

the skill or the appetite for reading and understanding literature in general. Ideally, each of the aforementioned hypothetical students would receive literature education using books that fit their abilities at both literature and the second language in question, and it is for this reason that the abovementioned combined setup of both Theo Witte and the Common European Framework is useful.

When the framework of literary competence is set against that of second language ability it is possible to create a database of books in which both of these methods of classification are mixed in order to create a catalogue that allows both teachers of literature and their students to find the proper works matching the needs for each student speedily and accurately. The website *Lezen voor de Lijst* (“Reading for your Exams”) has already created a database of books for Dutch first language literature, according to Theo Witte’s levels of literary competence<sup>1</sup>. This list is still continually being updated and expanded. In this thesis, a basic example of a database for English second language literature teaching will be presented and elaborated upon. However, the entries for the books contained within the database of this paper will be more elaborate in terms of the features of the book discussed in each entry.

This paper will be focussed on forming a basic framework of literary works for Dutch secondary school foreign language literature teaching. For that reason, the research question is centred around how the levels of literary competence as set by Theo Witte and the levels of second language competence defined by the Common European Framework can be combined to form a successful basis for Dutch secondary education foreign language literature teaching.

The thesis will be divided into three parts. The first part will be the theoretical framework; it provides the theoretical background to the more practically oriented part of the paper. It will involve such aspects as an analysis of Witte’s work, the Common European Framework, and the problems involved in second language literature education. The second

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<sup>1</sup> See <[www.lezenvoordelijst.nl/documents/boekenlijst.pdf](http://www.lezenvoordelijst.nl/documents/boekenlijst.pdf)> for an example.

part of the paper will contain a database of books that may be used in English literature teaching in Dutch secondary schools, containing for each individual entry such information as title, year of publication, genre, theme, etc. Each of these entries will have an indication of its difficulty level according to both the CEF and Witte. The books in this database were found by visiting the libraries of a select number of secondary schools. The third part of the paper will be a practical proposal for how one might teach a selection of these books in class.

## Chapter 2: Combining literary and linguistic competence in literature teaching

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR, contains a set of characteristics and features of a total number of six different levels of linguistic competence. The CEFR was designed by the Council of Europe with the aim “to achieve greater unity among its members [...] by the adoption of common action in the cultural field” (*CEFR*, 2). In practice, it serves as a common reference point for defining language learners’ abilities at a second language, setting goals for their learning process, and measuring each learner’s progress at acquiring a second language.

According to the *CEFR*, a system of reference levels in a common framework would have to adhere to four essential criteria. These criteria consist of two which relate to description issues, and two which relate to measurement issues. Firstly, such a system would have to be context-free, i.e. it should be applicable in more than one context. However, the scale must also be context-relevant in that it can be translated into each and every appropriate context. Secondly, the description of the scale should be based on theories of language competence, and at the same time remain user-friendly and accessible to practitioners. As a third criterion, the different points on the scale of reference should be objectively determined, i.e. based on a certain theory of measurement. The final criterion has to do with the number of levels used in a scale of common reference levels. The number of levels used should be high enough in order to allow for a possibility of determining a learner’s progression across different sectors, yet at the same time should not exceed the scale between which one can be expected to make reasonably relevant distinctions (*CEFR*, 21-2).

In the CEFR, learners are separated into three broader groups, which are then divided into six different levels of linguistic competence. The groups are known as ‘A’ (Basic User), ‘B’ (Independent User), and ‘C’ (Proficient User). The six levels of linguistic competence

directly related to these groups are ‘A1’ (Breakthrough), ‘A2’ (Waystage), ‘B1’ (Threshold), ‘B2’ (Vantage), ‘C1’ (Effective Operational Proficiency), and ‘C2’ (Mastery). Such clearly distinguished levels of competence may seem very rigid, but they may be subdivided in order to pinpoint more accurately a certain learner’s proficiency; by using further numbering, the language abilities of one specific learner within a larger group can be more accurately identified. As such, a learner’s aptitude may be defined as ‘A2.1’ or perhaps even ‘A2.1.1’, for example.

The levels of proficiency defined by the CEFR are divided over a total of 3 different categories of language use, which in turn are split into several subcategories: understanding (listening, reading), speaking (spoken interaction, spoken production), and writing. Each of the CEFR-levels has its characteristics defined for each of these categories and subcategories.

The relation between the six levels of linguistic competence in the CEFR is such that if a learner has achieved a certain level of competence, he or she is expected also to have mastered the skills associated with all of the previous levels of competence. In other words, if a learner is considered to have a second language proficiency equal to that of a CEFR-level of B1 (Threshold), he or she is expected also to be able to do what is considered to be A1-level (Breakthrough) or A2-level (Waystage), but also to be better than what these levels refer to (*CEFR*, 21-37).

For analysing the difficulty levels of books in foreign language literature, the definitions of the CEFR-levels for the category of “reading” are particularly interesting. These describe learners’ proficiencies at reading anything from mere single sentences to complete works of literature. They range from “[...] can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues” (A1) to “[...] can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or

linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works” (C2). In the *CEFR*, these levels are specifically defined as follows:

	A1	A2	B1
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.

	B2	C1	C2
Reading	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.

*Table 1: CEFR Reading Levels (CEFR, 26-7)*

These classifications are by no means universal, however, and as such serve mainly as a point of reference rather than as a strict set of definitions. The Council of Europe also uses several different sets of features to describe the levels of proficiency; in a manual which is intended to



assist users in trying to situate their examinations in relation to the CEFR, the levels of reading proficiency are described as follows:

Overall Reading Comprehension	
C2	Can understand and interpret critically virtually all forms of the written language including abstract, structurally complex, or highly colloquial literary and non-literary writings. Can understand a wide range of long and complex texts, appreciating subtle distinctions of style and implicit as well as explicit meaning.
C1	Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/her own area of speciality, provided he/she can reread difficult sections.
B2	Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a broad active reading vocabulary, but may experience some difficulty with low-frequency idioms.
B1	Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension.
A2	Can understand short, simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consist of high frequency everyday or job-related language. Can understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, including a proportion of shared international vocabulary items.
A1	Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words and basic phrases and rereading as required.

*Table 2: CEFR Reading Levels (II) (Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) – A Manual, 134)*

Although the wording in these two sets of definitions may differ, the central facts on which they are based are essentially identical and, as such, these definitions of the six reference levels can be used interchangeably.

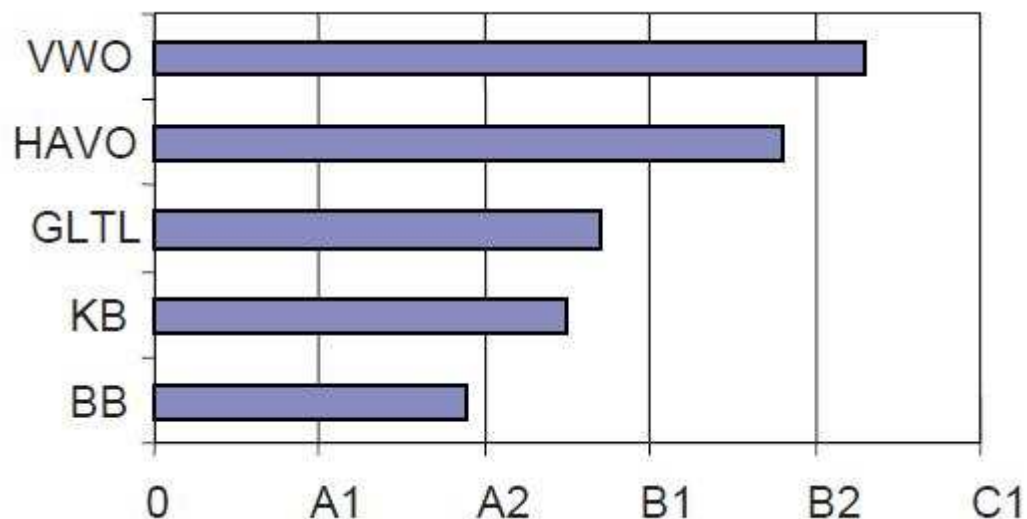
Apart from a general reading competence in a second language, the vocabulary range of a learner can also be considered important for determining their ability at reading foreign language literary works. The CEF also mentions a number of features for determining the vocabulary range of a second language learner; although these are mainly centred around the lexical *production*, they can also serve as an indicator for establishing a learner's lexical

comprehension. According to the CEF, the levels of competence for second language vocabulary range can be described as follows:

	Vocabulary Range
C2	Has a good command of a very broad lexical repertoire including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms; shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning.
C1	Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.
B2	Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution.
B1	Has a sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his/her everyday life such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.
A2	Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics. Has a sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs. Has a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs.
A1	Has a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases related to particular concrete situations.

*Table 3: CEFR Vocabulary Range (CEFR, 112)*

Although there are no definitive minimum CEFR-levels for students at Dutch secondary schools that have to be met at the final exams, Noijons and Kuijper have conducted an investigation into the minimum required levels for foreign language examinations in the Netherlands. They have managed to determine the estimated minimum difficulty levels, in terms of the CEFR, for the English final exam for each of the standard Dutch school systems. Schematically, these can be presented as follows:



*Fig. 1: Required minimum level per examination for English (Noijons & Kuijper, 41)*

This means that, for example, students at the end of their vmbo basic vocational track (bb) require at least a linguistic competence of nearly A2, whereas students at the end of their vwo education require a competence of at least B2 in order to pass their exams.

Teachers can use the criteria from the CEFR in order to select reading material that is either at or perhaps just above a specific learner's second language competence. The CEFR can help both to recognise a non-native speaker's ability at a second language, and to identify proper materials to help them improve their competence and increase their CEF level.

In 2008, Theo Witte published a major contribution to the teaching of first language literature in Dutch secondary schools. His book is centred around the concept of charting the literary development of students and of identifying the different stages in their literary education. The practical objective of the study, according to Witte himself, is “to develop a teaching instrument that teachers can use to best encourage the literary development of students” (Witte, 523).

In order to achieve his goal, Witte selected a panel of a total number of six teachers who all differed in terms of their educational experience, age, their views on literature teaching, working environment and gender. The result of this is a scale of literary competence which indicates a learner’s literary development over a course of six levels, where level one is the lowest level of competence and six is the highest. With regard to the different levels of education in the Netherlands, the scale is divided in such a way that level 2 is the standard starting level for both HAVO and VWO 4, whereas level 3 is the standard for the HAVO exam and level 4 for the VWO exam (Witte, 526).

Each of the levels of literary competence has a set of parameters that more or less defines its features and boundaries. These identify some of the characteristics of the book, but also the competence of the reader at each respective level, and some of the tasks that learners should be able to perform at each particular stage in their development. The levels that Witte identifies are known as level 1 (very limited literary competence), level 2 (limited literary competence), level 3 (modest literary competence), level 4 (fairly broad literary competence), level 5 (broad literary competence), and level 6 (sophisticated literary competence). Directly related to these levels are certain different kinds of reading, which are known as experiential reading, identifying reading, reflective reading, interpretive reading, literate reading and intellectual reading respectively (Witte, 527-33).

Witte has used a number of different parameters to define each of the six levels of literary competence. Each of these parameters is related to a literary aspect of a novel divided over an ascending scale of the six levels, for instance the number of pages of the book in question, the required general, cultural and literary knowledge, and familiarity with certain literary conventions. For example, the estimated number of pages for a novel ranges from 75-150 pages for levels 1 and 2, to > 400 pages for level 6. The parameter “general knowledge and life experience” ranges from “knowledge of everyday situations – home, school and society” for level 1 to “ability to reflect on abstract, intellectualistic worldviews” for level 6. The literary conventions can range from “single perspective” for levels 1 and 2, to “unreliable and/or multiple perspectives with weakly marked changes” (Witte, 560, my own translation). In total there are six different categories, each with a set of parameters which in turn all have classifications for each of Witte’s six levels of literary competence.

Witte has also presented an overview of the features of the student as a reader and the relevant text and task for each level of literary competence. A general impression of this overview can be found below (quoting Witte, 527-33):

#### Level 1: Very limited literary competence

Student as Reader	Students with very limited literary competence have little experience of reading fiction. They have difficulty reading, understanding, interpreting and appreciating very simple literary texts, as well as communicating about their reading experiences and reading tastes. [...] The size of the book and the type of task are therefore factors that weigh heavily with these students. Their ideas about literature and their attitude to reading are characterized by a need for tension (action) and drama (emotion). Their kind of reading can be labelled <i>experiential</i> reading.
Text	The books suitable for these students are written in simple, everyday language and are closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace. [...]

Task	Students are able to summarize a key extract and identify basic structural elements needed to understand the text. [...] Their response to the text is subjective and non-reflective [...], and their main focus is sympathy or antipathy for the main character and his or her experiences. [...]
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### Level 2: Limited literary competence

Student as Reader	Students with limited literary competence have experience of reading fiction, but almost none of reading literary novels for adults. They are capable of reading, understanding and appreciating very simple literary texts and can report on their personal reading experience and tastes. [...] [T]he size of the book and the task continue to guide their choice of book. Their attitude to reading is characterized by an interest in recognizable situations, events and emotions. They believe that literature should be realistic. This kind of reading can be labelled <i>identifying</i> reading.
Text	The books suitable for these students are written in everyday language, have a simple structure and relate to their experiences. [...] There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.[...]
Task	Students are capable of reconstructing the events in the story, identifying the subject and describing the characters. They are able to apply elementary literary concepts relating to genre, chronology and characters. [...] Their response to the text is subjective and focuses primarily on sympathy for the characters and the credibility of events. Their own perception of reality dominates. [...]

### Level 3: Modest literary competence

Student as Reader	Students with modest literary competence have experience of reading simple literary texts. They are capable of understanding, interpreting and appreciating simple literary works and can discuss with classmates social, psychological and moral issues based on a book. [...] They are willing to invest in literature, but will not readily embark on a thick book or a more complex task. [...] For them, literature is a means of exploring the world and forming their own ideas on a wide range of issues. Reading at this level can be labelled <i>reflective</i> reading.
Text	The books suitable for these students are written in simple language and have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them. [...] Their preference is for texts dealing with social or political issues [...]

Task	Through analysis, these students are able to establish causal links at the levels of the story and the behaviour and development of the characters. They are able to differentiate between their own opinions and knowledge of reality, and the reality of the novel. They can also distinguish different storylines and recognize the effect of certain narrative techniques. [...] Social, psychological and moral issues in particular stimulate reflection and can lead to animated discussion with classmates.
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#### Level 4: Fairly broad literary competence

Student as Reader	Students with a fairly broad literary competence have experience of reading simple literary novels for adults. They are capable of reading, understanding, interpreting and appreciating literature that is not too complex and they can communicate effectively about their interpretations and tastes. [...] They are clearly willing to invest in literature. The number of pages and the size of the task are no longer so relevant. [...] They are interested in narrative technique and novel structure, and perhaps also in the author's intent. Reading at this level can be labelled <i>interpretive</i> reading.
Text	The books suitable for students at this level are written in a 'literary' style and are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. This makes the storyline and character development less predictable. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex. [...] These techniques encourage the reader to interpret the text. [...]
Task	These students are able to distinguish different layers of meaning, as well as to identify and interpret motifs and other significant elements of meaning. They are more or less able to identify empathically with the main character, but also to distance themselves, responding critically to the character's behaviour within the context of the story. They can reflect on the significance of the work and can identify the different themes. [...]

#### Level 5: Broad literary competence

Student as Reader	Students with broad literary competence have broad experience of reading novels. They are able to understand, interpret and appreciate complex works, including old literary texts written before 1880, as well as to exchange ideas with others about their reading experience, interpretation and tastes. [...] they are aware that texts operate within a cultural and historical context and that literature is a tool for learning about the past and about cultural identity. [...] This kind of reading can be labelled <i>literate</i> reading.
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Text	The books suitable for students at this level not only contain characters and themes that are far removed from their own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions. [...]
Task	The competence of these students can be characterized as follows. They can read an old text in a ‘historicizing’ way and place it in its literary, historical context. They are able to analyze and evaluate characters and complex events from different points of view. They can link various elements and layers of meaning in order to identify the central theme. [...]

#### Level 6: Sophisticated literary competence

Student as Reader	Students with a sophisticated literary competence have a wealth of experience of reading literary texts, including world literature. They are able to place books and literature in a broad context and to discuss their reading experience and interpretations with ‘experts’. [...] [T]hey are able to establish links and to generate meanings both within and beyond the text. [...] They have a critical approach to reading, characterized by versatility, passion and an interest in specialized literature on the subject. This kind of reading can be labelled <i>intellectual</i> reading.
Text	The texts suitable for these students are written in a fairly inaccessible style which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning. [...]
Task	These students are able to provide a comprehensive and sophisticated interpretation of the theme and to integrate this into their own view of reality. This enables them to extrapolate their reading experience and interpretations to other domains, phenomena and texts. [...] They have a personal view of the function of literature, are critical of literary style and find literature an extremely interesting topic of conversation. Because of their need for literary expertise, they make high demands on the teacher’s literary competence.

*Table 4: Theo Witte - Levels of Literary Competence*

This overview of the six different levels of literary competence can help to specify a student’s disposition towards reading, the texts which best correspond to this level of competence, and the tasks relevant to such literary works.



With this work on literary competence in first language literature education, Theo Witte has presented teachers of literature with a frame of reference not only for identifying a student's literary competence and progress, but also for using the correct books and creating accurate tasks that help learners to move from one stage in their literary development to the other.

Both the system used by the CEFR and the setup used by Theo Witte use an arrangement containing a scale of a total of six levels to distinguish between the different stages of proficiency, and both frameworks can be used independently to determine the difficulty level for books in second language literature education. However, one focuses specifically on linguistic difficulty while the other focuses on the literary complexity of books. The problem with using these frameworks is that the six levels used by the first cannot be automatically transferred to the six levels used by the other:

<b>CEFR</b>	<b>← X →</b>	<b>Witte</b>
A1	← X →	Level 1
A2	← X →	Level 2
B1	← X →	Level 3
B2	← X →	Level 4
C1	← X →	Level 5
C2	← X →	Level 6

This means that students who are at a CEFR-level of A2, for instance, do not necessarily have to be at level 2 for literary competence. After all, linguistic proficiency is an ability that is almost completely independent from literary competence. The aforementioned hypothetical students at A2 proficiency may very well be able to read advanced literary works that are beyond level 2 in their native language but, due to their lack of linguistic proficiency in the second language may be unable to read such complex books in second language literature

education. On the other hand, these same students could perhaps have a literary competence comparable to level 1 and as such, despite their reasonable command of the second language, may still only be able to read very simple works of literature. Because of this discrepancy between the CEFR and Witte, it is preferable to select books not on the basis of only one of these systems, but to determine each work's suitability according to both of these scales of reference levels combined. In practice this means that there are in fact 36 different levels that can be distinguished, which can be deduced by combining the definitions set by Witte with those of the CEFR. It should be noted, however, that many of these 36 levels can in fact be considered highly hypothetical; for instance it can be very difficult to find a work which can be regarded as level 6 in literary terms and level A1 in terms of linguistic difficulty, or level C2 linguistically and level 1 with regard to literary difficulty. The 36 levels of foreign language literary difficulty, then, may be similar to this:

	A1	A2	B1
Level 1	Short, simple books using familiar names, words and very simple sentences, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace.	Books using texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace.	Books written in a text that consists mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace.
Level 2	Books using familiar names, words and very simple sentences, which have a simple structure and relate to their experiences.	Books using texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, which have a simple structure and relate to their experiences.	Books that use text that consists mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language, which have a simple structure and relate to

	A1	A2	B1
	There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.	There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.	their experiences. There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.
Level 3	Books using familiar names, words and very simple sentences, but which have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them.	Books using texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, but which have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them.	Books written in a text that consists mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language, and have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them.
Level 4	Books that contain familiar names, words and very simple sentences, written in a 'literary' style, and which are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex.	Books using texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, written in a 'literary' style. The books are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex.	Books written in a text that consists mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language, written in a 'literary' style. These books are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex.
Level 5	Books using familiar names, words and very simple sentences. These books not only contain characters and themes that are	Books using texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, which in their storylines not only contain characters and	Books written in a text that consists mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language, which not only contain

	A1	A2	B1
	far removed from students' own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions.	themes that are far removed from students' own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions.	characters and themes that are far removed from students' own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions.
Level 6	Works of literature which make use of familiar names, words and very simple sentences in the language, but which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning.	Books that use language containing the highest frequency vocabulary, but which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning.	Books that use text that consists mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language, which may also include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning.

	B2	C1	C2
Level 1	Books written in a style of contemporary literary prose, using a broad vocabulary, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace.	Books using long and complex literary texts containing a broad vocabulary, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace.	Books written in a structurally or linguistically complex language, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace.
Level 2	Books written in a style of	Books using long and complex literary texts	Books written in a structurally or

	B2	C1	C2
	contemporary literary prose, using a broad vocabulary, which have a simple structure and relate to their experiences. There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.	containing a broad vocabulary, which have a simple structure and relate to their experiences. There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.	linguistically complex language, which have a simple structure and relate to their experiences. There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace.
Level 3	Books written in a style of contemporary literary prose, using a broad vocabulary, and which have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them.	Books using long and complex literary texts containing a broad vocabulary, which have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them.	Books written in a structurally or linguistically complex language, which have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them.
Level 4	Books written in a style of contemporary literary prose, using a broad vocabulary, and which are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex.	Books using long and complex literary texts containing a broad vocabulary. These books are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex.	Books written in a structurally or linguistically complex language, which are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex.
Level 5	Books written in a style of contemporary literary prose, using a broad	Books using long and complex literary texts containing a broad vocabulary, which	Books written in a structurally or linguistically complex language,

	B2	C1	C2
	vocabulary. These books not only contain characters and themes that are far removed from students' own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions.	not only contain characters and themes that are far removed from students' own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions.	which not only contain characters and themes that are far removed from students' own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions.
Level 6	Books written in a style of contemporary literary prose, using a broad vocabulary, but which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning.	Books using long and complex literary texts containing a broad vocabulary, but which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning.	Books written in a structurally or linguistically complex language, which may also include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning.

*Table 5: CEFR & Witte – Linguistic and Literary Competence*

The website *Lezen voor de Lijst* currently uses a database of books for Dutch first language literature education, which adheres to Theo Witte's scale of reference levels for literary competence. In order to create a similar list for second language education this would need to be combined with the levels set by the CEFR, to account for the additional factor of linguistic difficulty. For this reason, this thesis contains a database for English second language literature education which is divided according to Theo Witte's levels of literary complexity, but also according to the levels set by the CEFR.

### **Chapter 3: A Database of books for English literature education**

The following section contains a database of books, arranged by their respective levels of literary difficulty as classified by Theo Witte, subdivided by their degree of linguistic complexity as defined by the Common European Framework. Each entry will also contain some extra information on the relevant book, i.e. the author, its year of publication, the number of pages, the genre, the main theme, a short plot summary, the publisher, its ISBN, and any possible miscellaneous comments, such as the availability of film adaptations, audio books or annotated or educational versions of the book. These versions may include, but are not necessarily restricted to, such editions as the Penguin Books or Noordhoff's Blackbirds.

The setup is chosen in such a way that a teacher may find an appropriate work not only by looking at its level of literary or linguistic competence, but also by searching for appropriate headwords under genre, theme or plot summary for example, when perhaps trying to plan a literature lesson which adheres to one specific theme. The information contained under year of publication, publisher and ISBN will help teachers to check the current availability of the book and its suitability for being taught to an entire class. Mentioning the availability of film adaptations and audio books may help teachers to adapt a suitable approach to teaching the book in question. Seeing as the standard entry level for HAVO and VWO 4 is considered to be a literary competence level of level 2, and the standard for the exams for HAVO and VWO are regarded as level 3 and 4, respectively, the main emphasis in this database will be on literary levels 2 to 4.

In theory it is possible to have a work of literature which can be regarded as level 6 in literary terms and level A1 in terms of linguistic difficulty, or level C2 linguistically and level 1 with regard to literary difficulty, but in practice such works hardly exist. For this reason, books of this kind do not appear in the following database.

Level 1

Title: *Bend it like Beckham*

Author: Narinder Dhani

CEF level: A1

Year of publication: 2002

No. of pages: 176

Genre: comedy

Main theme(s): sports, culture clashes

Plot summary: Jessminder Bhamra, or Jess for short, is a girl living in Southall, London, with her family, who are of Indian origin. Her parents want her to grow up according to conventional Indian standards, and hope that she will go to law school, learn to cook traditional Indian dishes and ultimately also get married to an Indian man. Unfortunately for them, Jess has very different plans. She has always loved football, and is especially fond of her hero, David Beckham; consequently, she is also very good at playing the game. Against the wishes of her parents, she joins the local women's team, the Hounslow Harriers, and as such has to keep this a secret from her family. On the day of the league final, Jess's father is at first reluctant to let her participate, but in the end he concedes, after which Jess and her team proceed to win the title. Both Jess and her friend Jules are offered a football scholarship in America.

Publisher: Hodder Children's Books

ISBN: 978-0-340-86094-6

Comments: This is the novel adaptation of the popular film *Bend it Like Beckham* starring Keira Knightley and Parminder Nagra, directed by Gurinder Chadha and released in 2002.

The book also has a vocabulary at the end, listing the more difficult words.



Title: *Tiger, Tiger*

Author: Melvin Burgess

CEF level: A2

Year of publication: 1996

No. of pages: 153

Genre: thriller

Main theme(s): crime

Plot summary: Steve Hattersly is a 12-year-old boy living in Malham, England. He often visits the nearby Tiger Park with his father, and is especially interested in one particular tiger named Lila. What he does not know, is that Lila is in fact a 'Spirit Tiger', with the power to transform into a girl. The Chinese crime lord known as Lee Yung has terminal cancer, and needs Lila's bones and organs to cure his disease. When Lee Yung sends his thugs after Lila to capture and kill her, she seeks out Steve in order to get his help in escaping the Chinese Mafia and take her revenge on them.

Publisher: Andersen Press Ltd

ISBN: 9001-55366-4

Comments: The book is also part of Noordhoff's 2001 Young Blackbirds series, which at the back of the book contains a vocabulary of difficult words and their meanings. A penguin Books Puffin edition of the book is also available (ISBN: 9780140383393).

Title: *Judith and Spider*

Author: Michael Scott

CEF level: A2

Year of publication: 1992

No. of pages: 138

Genre: thriller

Main theme(s): crime, escape

Plot summary: *Judith and Spider* tells the story of Sean ‘Spider’ O’Brien and Judith. Six months ago they used a van owned by the Ryan brothers to break through a roadblock set up by the police. Judith ended up in hospital, Spider managed to escape. After not having seen him for six months, she now meets him again in the streets of Dublin. During a short encounter in a nearby restaurant, Spider tells Judith that he is being chased both by the police and the Ryan brothers. Judith then decides to help Spider clear his name and avoid being caught by the dangerous Ryan brothers.

Publisher: Wolfhound Press

ISBN: 9001-55368-0

Comments: The book is also part of Noordhoff’s 2001 Young Blackbirds series, which at the back of the book contains a vocabulary of difficult words and their meanings.

Level 2

Title: *The Fifth Child*

Author: Doris Lessing

CEF level: A2

Year of publication: 1988

No. of pages: 159

Genre: horror thriller

Main theme(s): family, children, demons

Plot summary: Harriet and David Lovatt are a married couple living in England in the 1960s, with a happy family of four children. This idyllic family situation becomes endangered, however, when Harriet becomes pregnant again. She feels that the child will be a savage thing, a demon, and after Ben is born he turns out as an anti-Christ. When his brutal behaviour over the next years produces several terrible incidents, his parents come to realise that they may have produced a horrible creature that has destroyed their happy family life.

Publisher: Jonathan Cape Ltd.

ISBN: 0-586-08903-9

Comments: There are also educational versions of the book available. One example (ISBN 3-425-04847-3) contains an exclusive introduction by Doris Lessing herself, describing among other things what made her write this particular book. It also contains comments and footnotes on each page for the more difficult words. There is also a Longman students edition available, edited by Celeste Flower and published by Addison Wesley Longman, containing extra comments, a vocabulary list and additional assignments (ISBN: 0 582 06021 4). The book *The Fifth Child* was followed by *Ben, in the World*, which describes Ben's life after he has left his family.

Title: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull - A Story*

Author: Richard Bach

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1973

No. of pages: 127

Genre: fable

Main theme(s): freedom, learning, life lessons

Plot summary: The book is a fable which tells the story of the protagonist Jonathan Livingston Seagull, a seagull who is tired of the tedious life in his seagull clan. Because he is unwilling to conform to the rules of the rest of his flock, he is thrown out. One day, he meets two other seagulls who teach him to transcend to a higher plane of existence. Here, he encounters many other gulls, including the wise gull named Chiang, who becomes his friend and starts to teach him. Because he is not entirely satisfied with his new life, Jonathan returns to Earth and starts to spread his new learning and his love for flight. In the end, his very first student, Fletcher Lynd Seagull, becomes a teacher himself and Jonathan leaves to continue his learning.

Publisher: Pan Books Ltd

ISBN: 0-330-23647-4

Comments: This edition of the book contains illustrative photographs taken by Russell Munson. The novella was adapted to a film version in 1973, directed by Hall Bartlett, but this version received very negative reviews. This film is also available on DVD. There is also a Grammy-award winning audio book available, recorded in 1973 and narrated by Irish actor Richard Harris.

Title: *High Fidelity*

Author: Nick Hornby

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1995

No. of pages: 253

Genre: coming-of-age story

Main theme(s): relationships, commitment, loneliness, love

Plot summary: The book is written from the perspective of Rob Fleming, a man in his thirties who is the owner of a failing record shop. At the start of the novel, his girlfriend has just left him. He first describes his past relationships and why these have all ended; the rest of the book tells the story of how Rob deals with his loneliness and his apparent fear of commitment, and how he slowly learns to more or less overcome both. Eventually he returns to Laura and learns to fill the emptiness in his life. Throughout the book, Rob mentions several 'Top Five' lists which he has produced (e.g. Most memorable split-ups, Top Five Films, Five Dream Jobs).

Publisher: Victor Gollancz Ltd

ISBN: 0-575-05748-3

Comments: There is also a movie adaptation available, made in 2000 and directed by Stephen Frears. It stars John Cusack and Jack Black, among others. In 2006, the novel was also adapted as a Broadway musical.

Title: *The Bridges of Madison County*

Author: Robert James Waller

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1992

No. of pages: 90

Genre: romance drama

Main theme(s): relationships, infidelity

Plot summary: *The Bridges of Madison County* is the story of the American free-lance photographer Robert Kincaid and his affair with the Italian farm wife Francesca Johnson in Madison County, Iowa in the 1960s. Kincaid is on location in Madison County in order to shoot the covered bridges in the area on film. He meets Francesca Johnson, whose husband and children are away at the time. They have a short love affair, which changes both their lives considerably. Francesca writes a diary on the events which is found by her children after both of them have passed away.

Publisher: Warner Books, Inc.

ISBN: 044651652X

Comments: The book was also part of Noordhoff's 1997 Blackbirds series (ISBN 9001-54998-5). The book was adapted to film in 1995. This film version was directed by Clint Eastwood and starred Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood.

Title: *The Tenth Man*

Author: Graham Greene

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1985

No. of pages: 158

Genre: thriller

Main theme(s): war, death, deceit

Plot summary: *The Tenth Man* starts off in a prison in Occupied France during the Second World War. When a certain number of the inmates are to be executed, it is decided that each of the thirty prisoners will draw a lot in order to decide who is to die. One of the three inmates who are selected for execution through this method is a rich lawyer by the name of Chavel. In desperation, he offers his entire wealth to the person who is willing to die for him. This offer is accepted by a young man named Janvier, who is consequently executed. After the war, Chavel returns to his former house, which he finds to be occupied by Janvier's mother and his sister Thérèse. He then pretends to be a commoner named Charlot, and becomes their servant. However, after a while an impostor visits the house, who claims to be Chavel and wants to claim the property for his own.

Publisher: The Bodley Head and Anthony Blond

ISBN: 0-14-018529-1

Comments: The book was turned into a film in 1988, directed by Jack Gold and starring Anthony Hopkins as Chavel and Kristin Scott Thomas as Thérèse.

Title: *The Lake of Darkness*

Author: Ruth Rendell

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1980

No. of pages: 201

Genre: crime, mystery thriller

Main theme(s): charity, wealth, insanity

Plot summary: When Martin Urban, a young, bachelor accountant unexpectedly comes into a small fortune of 40.000 pounds by betting money in a football pool, he decides to give the money away to the poor. During this time, Martin meets Francesca, a mysterious young woman whom he falls in love with. His counterpart Finn, the son of his mother's cleaning lady, also comes into some money of his own. Through Martin's newfound charitable work their paths cross, which, because of Finn's insane nature, has fatal results for both Martin and Francesca. The book ends with a hint that Finn will be arrested for his crimes.

Publisher: Kingsmarkham Enterprises Ltd.

ISBN: 0091408105

Comments: The book was also part of Noordhoff's 2008 Blackbirds series (ISBN 9789-001-5616-11). Teachers of English may find supplementary materials and assignments by visiting [lijstersdocentenservice.nl](http://lijstersdocentenservice.nl), and selecting the blackbirds series. This also requires signing up for the service, however.



Title: *The Time Machine*

Author: H. G. Wells

CEF level: C1

Year of publication: 1895

No. of pages: 128

Genre: science fiction

Main theme(s): time travel

Plot summary: The protagonist of *The Time Machine* is a British scientist, whose name is never mentioned but who is always referred to as the Time Traveller. He has built a time machine which allows him to travel through the fourth dimension. He travels into the future and ends up in the year 802,701, where he finds two distinct species of humans: the Eloi and the Morlocks. After having witnessed their different lifestyles and having fought a group of Morlocks in order to keep hold of his time machine, the Time Traveller travels even further into the future, approximately 30 million years from his own time. There, he witnesses the death of the Earth, with the sun growing redder and dimmer and all life going extinct. He then returns to his own time and recounts his experiences to his friends. At the end of the novel, the Time Traveller leaves for another journey through time. Even though he has promised to return within half an hour, he still remains missing after three years. It is unknown where he has gone or what has happened to him.

Publisher: William Heinemann

ISBN: 0-435-12009-3

Comments: In 1960 a film adaptation was made by George Pál, starring Rod Taylor. Another film adaptation was made in 2002 directed by Simon Wells, the great grandson of H. G. Wells. An audio drama was released on CD in 1994 by Alien Voices, which starred the voice of Leonard Nimoy. BBC radio 3 broadcast a version of the story in 2009.

Level 3

Title: *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*

Author: Roddy Doyle

CEF level: A2

Year of publication: 1996

No. of pages: 240

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): abuse, family, relationships

Plot summary: *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* tells the story of the 39-year-old Paula Spencer. She is the mother of four children, which she had with her husband Charlo, with whom she had been married for eighteen years. Two years ago, she threw out her husband after having been physically abused by him for several years. Paula tells the story of her own youth, and how she met Charlo. Although he was very charming at first, it was not long after they got married that he started beating her. Paula then had to suffer seventeen years of both physical and mental abuse, while at the same time trying to cope with a drinking problem and having to care for her four children.

Publisher: Jonathan Cape

ISBN: 9001 55271 4

Comments: The book is also part of Noordhoff's 2000 Blackbirds series. It was also adapted to the stage in 2003 and played in Dublin. ISIS Publishing published an audio book version of the novel in 2007 (ISBN: 9780753126622).

Title: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Author: Mark Haddon

CEF level: A2

Year of publication: 2003

No. of pages: 224

Genre: murder mystery

Main theme(s): autism, family

Plot summary: The protagonist and narrator of the story is an autistic and mathematically gifted teenager called Christopher Boone. He lives in Swindon with his father, Ed; his mother died of a heart attack two years before. When at one night he discovers the dead body of his neighbour's dog, he decides to investigate the murder. During his investigation he learns that, in fact, his mother has not died, and is living in London. When he learns that it was actually his father who killed his neighbour's dog, Christopher decides to flee to London to look for his mother. However, this journey is made much more difficult for him because of his autistic nature. Christopher's autism is reflected in his writing; he writes in a rather peculiar language, and the chapters are filled with mathematical references and puzzles.

Publisher: Jonathan Cape

ISBN: 0-224-06378-2

Comments: An audio book version of the book is available through Random House

Audiobooks (ISBN: 1856867889). Cambridge University Press has published a study guide to the book which contains notes by the author, a short summary, character analyses, and more (ISBN: 0521613795).

Title: *The Boys from Brazil*

Author: Ira Levin

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1976

No. of pages: 312

Genre: mystery thriller

Main theme(s): conspiracies, cloning

Plot summary: This book tells the story of Yakov Liebermann, an elderly Nazi hunter working in Vienna in the 1970s. He receives a phone call of a man who claims to have heard Dr. Josef Mengele, the so-called 'Angel of Death', talking about a network of Nazis being assigned to kill 94 men with a few common traits, who all have to be killed before a specific date. Then, the telephone line goes dead. When Liebermann decides to investigate, he manages to discover a plot which has the intention of creating a new Adolf Hitler, by using his genes and recreating his life story. In order to prevent the rise of a new Third Reich, Liebermann tries everything in his power to stop the Nazis' plans from succeeding.

Publisher: Random House

ISBN: 978-0394402673

Comments: The book is also part of Noordhoff's 1998 Blackbirds series (ISBN 9001-55040-1), which contains extra comments by Ton Heuvelmans. *The Boys from Brazil* was made into a film in 1978, directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, and starring Gregory Peck, Laurence Olivier and James Mason. Penguin Books has released teacher's notes on the book which also include extra activities and assignments; which can be downloaded for free<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See <[www.penguinreaders.com/downloads/058241699X.pdf](http://www.penguinreaders.com/downloads/058241699X.pdf)>

Title: *Rosemary's Baby*

Author: Ira Levin

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1967

No. of pages: 308

Genre: horror

Main theme(s): pregnancy, demons

Plot summary: Rosemary Woodhouse is a young woman who has just moved into a new apartment in New York City, together with her husband Guy, who is an actor. Whilst living in their new apartment, they meet two of their new neighbours, Minnie and Roman Castavet. Although Rosemary has her doubts about them, her husband actually seems to have warmed to them. Guy then suddenly manages to land a Broadway role and Rosemary becomes pregnant. When the Castavets start to take an unusual interest in Rosemary's wellbeing, she suspects them of wanting her child to use it as a sacrifice. Through her pregnancy and her ideas about her neighbours, Rosemary becomes increasingly isolated, only to find out a horrible truth about her own child in the end.

Publisher: Random House

ISBN: 0-451-19400-4

Comments: Ira Levin wrote a sequel to the book, called *Son of Rosemary*, which was published in 1997. *Rosemary's Baby* was made into a world-famous film adaptation in 1968, which was directed by Roman Polanski and starred Mia Farrow in the role of Rosemary. A 2005 audio book version is available through HarperAudio (ISBN: 064191802X).

Title: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Author: George Orwell

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1949

No. of pages: 326

Genre: dystopian novel

Main theme(s): politics, privacy, censorship

Plot summary: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is George Orwell's famous novel which is set in a fictional totalitarian society in which all people are subject to the 'Party', which is led by 'Big Brother'. The society is constructed around a political system which is known as the English Socialism Movement, or Ingsoc. The protagonist of the book is Winston Smith, a member of the so-called 'Outer Party' who is discontented and grows to disagree with the ways of the Party. One day he meets Julia, with whom he falls in love and subsequently starts an illegitimate romance. Over time, Winston increasingly starts to question Ingsoc. He is then arrested by the secret police, interrogated and tortured by the novel's main antagonist, who is known as O'Brien. Winston Smith is sent to a room called 'Room 101', where people are confronted with their greatest fear. After this experience, Winston is broken and brainwashed, and consequently released. The book ends with Winston finally really loving Big Brother: a completion of his inner transformation.

Publisher: Secker and Warburg

ISBN: 9001-55030-4

Comments: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been made into two films: one in 1956 and one in 1984. There have also been several radio adaptations, the most recent of which was a reading of the novel in eight weekly parts in April and May 2005, on BBC2. An operatic adaptation has also been made, which premiered on 3 May 2005.

Title: *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

Author: Douglas Adams

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1979

No. of pages: 160

Genre: comedy, science fiction

Main theme(s): space travel

Plot summary: *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is a comedy science fiction novel written by Douglas Adams, which follows the main character Arthur Dent in his involuntary journey across space. The book begins with Arthur Dent lying in front of his house in a town in the West Country of England, in order to prevent it from being demolished. At this point his friend Ford Prefect arrives, who tells him that he is in fact an extraterrestrial being, and that the Earth is about to be destroyed by an alien race in order to create a hyperspace bypass. Ford and Arthur manage to escape the destruction of Earth by hitching a lift on one of the Vogon's ships, which is the start of an adventure that takes Arthur on a long trip through the universe.

Publisher: Pan Books

ISBN: 0-330-25864-8

Comments: The novel is the first in a series of five books all written by Douglas Adams, which were based on a radio series with the same name. Apart from the original radio series, the story was also adapted as a TV series in 1981, directed and produced by Alan J. W. Bell. A film adaptation was released in 2005, directed by Garth Jennings. A sixth instalment of the novel series will be released in October 2009, written by Eoin Colfer. An audio book version is available from Random House Audio, narrated by Stephen Fry (ISBN: 0739322206).

Title: *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings*

Author: Maya Angelou

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1969

No. of pages: 304

Genre: autobiography

Main theme(s): racism, oppression, rape, coming of age

Plot summary: In her book *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* Maya Angelou describes her life as a young black girl growing up in the southern United States in the 1930s and 1940s. She describes the difficulties of growing up in a society where one is considered inferior or a nuisance, and how this has affected her behaviour and character while growing up. One of the most significant events from her childhood is her being molested and raped by her mother's boyfriend which has a great mental impact on her. Throughout the book, Maya moves to different houses and families, but it is only when she arrives in San Francisco that she actually feels at home for the first time. Despite all her misfortunes, Maya manages to graduate from high school, hiding the fact that she is pregnant from her mother and stepfather for eight months. The book ends with Maya displaying confidence at being a mother to her new son.

Publisher: Random House Inc.

ISBN: 9780553279375

Comments: The book is also part of Noordhoff's 1998 Blackbirds series (ISBN 9001-55038-X). In 1979, a TV-film adaptation was made, directed by Fielder Cook. Random House Audio has published an audio book of *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings*, narrated by Maya Angelou herself (ISBN: 0679451730).



Title: *The Sun also Rises*

Author: Ernest Hemingway

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1927

No. of pages: 217

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): war, hedonism

Plot summary: *The Sun also Rises* is set in Europe, shortly after the First World War. The story is centred around an American World War I veteran known as Jake Barn, who is part of the so-called “Lost Generation”, and who has become impotent due to an injury he sustained during the war. Jake spends his time in Europe accompanied by his friend Robert Cohn, a rich Jewish writer, and Bill Gorton, another veteran of the war. Jake is in love with Lady Brett Ashley, but she is unwilling to commit to a relationship in which she would have to give up sex. The story follows these characters across France and Spain, during which their respective relationships with one another are explored and deepened, with an ultimate culmination during their visit to the Running of the Bulls at Pamplona.

Publisher: Jonathan Cape

ISBN: 0099285037

Comments: The book is part of Noordhoff’s 1996 Blackbirds series. A film adaptation of the novel was made in 1957 by director Henry King, starring Tyrone Power, Ava Gardner and Errol Flynn, among others. A 7 disc audio book version is available via Simon & Schuster Audio, narrated by William Hurt (ISBN: 0743564413). Extra notes on the story are available through Barron's Educational Series (ISBN: 0764191268).

Title: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer & Huckleberry Finn*

Author: Mark Twain

CEF level: C1

Year of publication: 1876; 1884

No. of pages: 275; 366

Genre: satire

Main theme(s): coming of age, racism

Plot summary: Although *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* were in fact written as two separate stories, they can also be regarded as two parts of one greater story. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* follows the two boys Tom Sawyer and his friend Huck Finn on their adventures around the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The boys accidentally witness a murder, and manage to determine the innocence of a wrongfully accused man. They are then hunted by the true murderer, Injun Joe, but manage to escape and uncover the treasure that he has buried. In *Huckleberry Finn* their story continues, following Huck's journey down the river Mississippi on a raft with his new-found friend Jim, where, along the way, they meet and participate in the lives of several peculiar and eccentric characters.

Publisher: American Publishing Company, Charles L. Webster And Company (published as one combined edition by Wordsworth Editions in 1992)

ISBN: 1-85536-011-8 (Combined Wordsworth Classics Edition)

Comments: Both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* have been adapted to film several times. These include the 1938 film version of *Tom Sawyer*, directed by Norman Taurog, and the most recent film version of *Huckleberry Finn*, a 1993 film directed by Stephen Sommers starring Elijah Wood, among others. Bloom's Guides has published a study guide to *Huckleberry Finn*, with notes, critical extracts and extra information on the characters and the author (ISBN: 0791082415).

Level 4

Title: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Author: Harper Lee

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1960

No. of pages: 281

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): racism, coming of age

Plot summary: The protagonist and also narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Scout Finch, looking back on her youth when she used to live together with her father Atticus and her brother Jem in Maycomb, Alabama during the Great Depression. Her father is a lawyer, who at one point starts defending a black man named Tom Robinson, who has been accused of rape. Jem and Scout suffer the consequences of their family siding with the black minority in the American South when they are taunted at school. Even though there is strong evidence that Tom Robinson did in fact not commit the rape, the all-white jury finds him guilty of the crime, after which he is sent to prison. What follows is a number of fatal incidents through which Scout learns the effects of prejudice and discrimination, and the opposition of good and evil.

Publisher: J. B. Lippincott & Co.

ISBN: 0 446 31078 6

Comments: *To Kill a Mockingbird* was adapted to film in 1962. This version was directed by Robert Mulligan, and starred Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch. An audio book version of the novel is available from Caedmon Audio, narrated by Sissy Spacek (ISBN: 0060888695).

Title: *Lord of the Flies*

Author: William Golding

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1954

No. of pages: 248

Genre: adventure

Main theme(s): coming of age, savagery

Plot summary: *Lord of the Flies* is set on a desert island, where a plane has crashed and apparently, all the adult passengers have died; all the survivors are English boys. The protagonist is Ralph, who, after the plane crash, has used a white conch shell to assemble all the boys on the island. The group, then, elect Ralph as their leader. The boys start out well, with plans of lighting a fire to attract the attention of passing ships, and the intention of providing food through hunting. The mood soon darkens however, and the relationship between Ralph and Jack, the leader of the hunters, quickly becomes increasingly tense. The boys' fear of a supposed monster living on the island, and the rivalry between Ralph and Jack culminates in a number of savage murders. Even Ralph is nearly killed after a manhunt at the end of the book, only to be saved by a British naval officer who has landed on the island.

Publisher: Faber & Faber

ISBN: 0571 056865

Comments: Two movie adaptations of the novel have been made, in 1963 and in 1990, respectively. The 1963 version was directed by Peter Brook, the 1990 version by Harry Hook. An audio book version of the book was published by Listening Library in 2005, narrated by William Golding himself (ISBN: 0-307-28170-1).

Title: *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Author: Ken Kesey

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1962

No. of pages: 272

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): oppression, freedom, insanity

Plot summary: The narrator in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is the inmate of an American asylum, who calls himself "Chief" Bromden, who pretends to be deaf-mute. He tells the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy, another inmate at the asylum, who was transferred there from state prison after faking insanity. The patients at the ward in which both the Chief and McMurphy are being treated, are terrorised daily by the tyrannical Nurse Ratched and her orderlies. However, McMurphy refuses to abide by her rules, and rebels against her authority. Ultimately, this rebellion escalates into a fatal accident, for which McMurphy is consequently blamed. He is taken away from the ward and given a lobotomy, which leaves him in a vegetative state. In order to ensure that none of the other patients can see him in this condition, and to allow him to keep his dignity, the Chief smothers McMurphy with a pillow. He then eventually escapes the hospital through a window, and returns to his native lands.

Publisher: Viking Press

ISBN: 0451163966

Comments: *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* was famously adapted to film in 1975. This film was directed by Miloš Forman and starred Jack Nicholson in the role of Randle Patrick McMurphy. An Audio book version of the novel is also available, published by Blackstone Audio in 1997 (ISBN: 0786180471).

Title: *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Author: D. H. Lawrence

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1928

No. of pages: 384

Genre: romance

Main theme(s): sexuality, love, infidelity

Plot summary: Connie Reid is the protagonist of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. She is married to Clifford Chatterley, an aristocrat who is paralysed from the waist down, after having been wounded in the war. Clifford has become a successful writer, but this has also created a greater distance between him and his wife. While Connie becomes more and more isolated, she meets the gamekeeper on the estate, Oliver Mellors. She starts a sexual affair with him, and although Connie at first feels that they do not connect on a profound level she starts to adore him increasingly as their affair progresses. She becomes pregnant with Mellors' child and goes on a holiday to Venice. While she is away, Mellors' wife returns and discredits her husband with his employer, after which he is fired. Upon returning to the estate, Connie admits to her husband that she is pregnant with Mellors' child, but Clifford refuses to agree with a divorce. The novel ends with both Mellors and Connie waiting and hoping for their divorce, so that they can finally be together.

Publisher: Amereon

ISBN: 0-8021-3068-2

Comments: A film adaptation of the book was made in 1981, directed by Just Jaeckin, starring Sylvia Kristel. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is available as an audio book from CSA WORD (ISBN: 190176897X).

Title: *Angela's Ashes*

Author: Frank McCourt

CEF level: C1

Year of publication: 1996

No. of pages: 368

Genre: autobiography

Main theme(s): family, poverty

Plot summary: In *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt recounts the events from his youth in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s. Although Frank was born to Malachy and Angela McCourt in New York in 1930, his Irish family moves back to Ireland when he is four. Here, in the city of Limerick, Frank grows up in a run-down house in extreme poverty. His father is unemployed most of the time, and any money he earns he spends on drinking in bars. During World War II, Frank's father gains employment at a defence plant in England; however, he never returns to his family, and only once sends them any money back. Frank, then, has to start providing for himself and his family at an early age. His family's struggles continue but eventually, through the money Frank manages to save from his earnings, he is able to fulfil his dream of returning to the United States. The novel ends with Frank arriving in New York, ready to start a new life.

Publisher: Harper Collins Publishers

ISBN: 0684874350

Comments: The book was turned into a film in 1999, directed by Alan Parker, and starring Robert Carlyle and Emily Watson, among others. An audio book version of the novel, narrated by Frank McCourt himself, was published by Simon & Schuster Audio (ISBN: 0743550927). After *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt wrote two more autobiographical books, *'Tis* and *Teacher Man*.

Title: *Oliver Twist*

Author: Charles Dickens

CEF level: C2

Year of publication: 1838

No. of pages: 528

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): poverty, abandonment, family, crime

Plot summary: *Oliver Twist* is the story of a young orphan, who goes by the name of Oliver Twist. After having spent the first nine years of his life at an orphanage, he is sent to a workhouse, from which he is sent away in order to be apprenticed to a local undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry. The undertaker's other apprentice, Noah Claypole, insults Oliver's mother, because of which Oliver attacks him and as a result has to run away, towards London.

In London, Oliver is taken in by the criminal Fagin, who trains him to become a pickpocket.

When Oliver is caught during his first crime, he is taken in by a Mr. Brownlow who is kind to him and takes care of him. Oliver now has to try and stay out of the hands of Fagin and his gang, and in the process learns more about his own identity and his family.

Publisher: Richard Bentley

ISBN: 014062046X

Comments: There have been numerous film adaptations of Charles Dickens's famous novel. Some of the more recent ones include a TV miniseries from 1999 starring Robert Lindsay, Andy Serkis and Keira Knightley, among others, and a 2005 film directed by Roman Polanski, starring Ben Kingsley as Fagin. Blackstone Audio has released an audio book of *Oliver Twist*, narrated by Nadia May (ISBN: 0786142774).



Title: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

Author: Thomas Hardy

CEF level: C2

Year of publication: 1886

No. of pages: 316

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): family, relationships, loss, happiness

Plot summary: The novel is set around the fictional late-19<sup>th</sup> century town of Casterbridge in Dorset. At the start of the book, the young hay-trusser Michael Henchard, under the influence of liquor, has sold his wife and child to a fisherman. After the fisherman's death 18 years later, they start looking for Henchard again, and find out that he has become the mayor of the town of Casterbridge. Henchard and his wife remarry, soon after which she dies, leaving Henchard alone with whom he believes to be his own daughter. At the same time, he has grown a personal vendetta against his newest employee, the Scotsman Donald Farfrae. In the ensuing story, Henchard is drawn into a turn of events that eventually cause his own downfall and a lonely death.

Publisher: Harper & Brothers Publishers

ISBN: 1419172107

Comments: The book has been adapted as an opera by the British composer Peter Tranchell in 1951. In 2008 it was adapted into a three-episode radio play for BBC Radio 4 by Helen Edmundson. There have also been two television adaptations, both as a miniseries; the first was in 1978 by Dennis Potter for the BBC, starring Alan Bates. The second was in 2003 by Ted Whitehead for the A&E Television Networks, starring Ciarán Hinds.

Level 5

Title: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Author: J.D. Salinger

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1951

No. of pages: 276

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): coming of age, insanity

Plot summary: *The Catcher in the Rye* is the story of Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old boy living in a 1950s America. He is currently a patient at some kind of mental hospital, but it is unknown why exactly he is there. Holden then starts to tell his story of the time he has spent in New York City. Having been expelled from his previous three schools, Holden goes to Pencey prep school in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. However, because he has failed most of his classes, Holden receives notice that he will be expelled from Pencey as well. He then decides to visit his parents' home town of New York City, without telling them that he is back. What follows is an adventure in New York that is full of a search for sex and violence, which illustrates Holden's difficulty of crossing the line from adolescence into adulthood. Holden ends his story without mentioning how he got sick and ended up in a mental hospital, but claims that he will go to a new school in autumn.

Publisher: Little, Brown and Company

ISBN: 0-316-76953-3

Comments: An educational guide on the book has been published by York Notes, which contains an introduction, extra comments, a map of New York, extra assignments and summaries of each separate chapter (York Press, 1997, ISBN: 0-582-31330-9).

Title: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Author: Jean Rhys

CEF level: B1

Year of publication: 1966

No. of pages: 160

Genre: prequel

Main theme(s): colonialism, marriage, insanity

Plot summary: This book was written as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. The story focuses on the first Mrs. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason (or Antoinette Cosway), and describes the events that turned her into the madwoman in Rochester's attic. The perspective in the narrative switches between Antoinette, Rochester and Grace Poole, a servant at Rochester's estate. *Wide Sargasso Sea* tells the story of how Antoinette Cosway grew up in Jamaica in the early nineteenth century, as the daughter of former slave owners. A tradition of madness runs in her family, and some of the hostilities that have occurred because of her white slave-owner heritage have made Antoinette slightly mentally unstable. This mental state is reinforced when an Englishman, Mr Rochester, arrives at the island and is bribed into marrying her. When Mr Rochester starts to detect signs of Antoinette's insanity, he returns to England where he locks up Antoinette in the attic.

Publisher: André Deutsch

ISBN: 0-14-027421-9

Comments: The novel was adapted as a film in 1993, directed by John Duigan, starring Karina Lombard and Nathaniel Parker. The BBC released a TV-adaptation in 2006, directed by Brendan Maher. ISIS Audio Books published an audio book of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 2007 (ISBN: 0753127520).

Title: *Love Medicine*

Author: Louise Erdrich

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1993

No. of pages: 367

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): love, homecoming, identity

Plot summary: In her novel *Love Medicine* Louise Erdrich tells the story of several successive generations of Chippewa Native Americans living on a fictional reservation in North Dakota in the United States. The storyline is centred around two families inhabiting the reservation, the Lamartines and the Kashpaws. Each of the novel's chapters is narrated by a different character, and as such these give the impression of a collection of different stories which serve as a subtext to a much greater story. Some of the characters include June Kashpaw, who freezes to death in a snowstorm at the beginning of the novel after having left her husband and her son; Lulu Lamartine who after many years still feels intensely in love with her first love, Nector Kashpaw; and Lipsha Morrissey, the son that June abandoned who now wants to make a love medicine in order to try to keep his grandparents together.

Publisher: HarperCollins

ISBN: 0-06-097554-7

Comments: The book was originally published in 1984, but Louise Erdrich expanded the novel and re-released it in 1993 as a longer revised edition.

Level 6

Title: *In the Heart of the Country*

Author: J. M. Coetzee

CEF level: B2

Year of publication: 1977

No. of pages: 160

Genre: drama

Main theme(s): insanity, loneliness, relationships

Plot summary: *In the Heart of the Country* is the story of a lonely daughter of a sheep farmer of European descent on a desolate farm in South Africa. The book is presented in the form of a total of 265 numbered diary entries written by the protagonist, Magda. Her father has countered the loneliness on the farm by seeking comfort in the arms of a black concubine. Magda, a spinster herself, feels ashamed because of this, and starts to dream of revenge; throughout the book, she slips off into dreams and fantasies, and the line between reality and imagination becomes more and more blurred to the reader.

Publisher: Vintage Press

ISBN: 0-09-946594-9

Comments: *In the Heart of the Country* has been published as an audio book by Isis Audio Books (ISBN: 1856955133).

Title: *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

Author: William Shakespeare

CEF level: C2

Year of publication: 1603-4

No. of pages: 132

Genre: tragedy

Main theme(s): revenge, death, incest, insanity

Plot summary: On of the most well-known works in the English language, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* tells the story of the Danish prince Hamlet, whose father, the King, has died. One night while walking along the ramparts of the castle, he meets the ghost of his father, from whom he learns that his father has been killed by Claudius, his uncle. Hamlet's only possible course of action seems to be to take revenge, but he is hindered by his incapacity to act which ultimately causes his own downfall.

Publisher: several

ISBN: 0-14-062058-3

Comments: Many annotated versions of the story have been published, for instance by Penguin Books, Longman and Cambridge University Press. Apart from the many stage productions of the play, *Hamlet* has also been adapted to the screen many times; several notable adaptations include Laurence Olivier's 1948 film, Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film starring Mel Gibson as Hamlet, and Kenneth Branagh's adaptation in 1996. A number of unabridged audio editions of the play have been published, including one by Naxos Audiobooks (ISBN: 2000003458271). Study guides to the play include the *Cambridge Student Guide to Hamlet* from Cambridge University Press (ISBN: 0521008158) and the *Shakespeare Handbook* from Palgrave Macmillan (ISBN: 9781403933874).

In order to illustrate the choice of difficulty level for the books within this database, the following section will contain a select number of examples from the database, giving a more elaborate motivation for their selected linguistic and literary difficulty level.

The book *Bend it like Beckham* by Narinder Dhami for example, is defined as level 1 for literary and A1 for linguistic difficulty. In Table 5 in Chapter 2 books belonging to a difficulty of level 1, A1 are defined as “short, simple books using familiar names, words and very simple sentences, with events closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace”. *Bend it like Beckham* is written as a novel aimed specifically at an adolescent audience, and the storyline revolves around themes which can be very familiar to younger readers. The emphasis on such aspects of youth culture as sports, school and parental control, as well as the presence of an adolescent protagonist, contribute to a reading atmosphere which is familiar and easy to relate to for young, beginning readers. The only storyline the book contains is very linear and told from a single perspective. There are no deeper layers of meaning or implicit motives. The language used in the novel is mainly very literal and everyday language, written in short and simple sentences. The vocabulary range used in the book is very select and basic. There is even an elaborate vocabulary list for some of the harder words at the very end of the book. With 176 pages this is not a very long novel, which can help early readers in their motivation to read.

*In the Heart of the Country* by J. M. Coetzee is classified as level 6 in terms of literary difficulty and B2 in terms of linguistic complexity. According to Table 5, books belonging to a category of such difficulty can be described as “books written in a style of contemporary literary prose, using a broad vocabulary, but which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning”. *In the Heart of the Country* can be very difficult for

youthful readers. It is in many ways a very abstract novel, dealing with issues and set in environments which are not at all familiar to Dutch secondary school students. The novel leaves room for many different interpretations in its analysis and has several layers of meaning. It is written in a somewhat experimental structure, as it is presented in the form of several numbered diary entries written by the protagonist. However, as this protagonist seems to be suffering from a mental illness, the reliability of her story is very much in question, and the division between reality and fantasy in her story is very blurred. The language in the novel is of a straightforward contemporary literary style, using a broad vocabulary, and sometimes containing longer, structurally rather more complex sentences. Although it is not a very long novel at 160 pages, its literary complexity will certainly deter less experienced readers. It should be noted that the novel can indeed be extremely difficult, and may be hard to read even at an academic level. As such, the book may in fact be considered to be even higher than level 6, and actually be part of an outside category. Any secondary school student attempting to read this book would have to be prepared to be challenged, and should probably be guided along carefully in the reading process.

Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is classified as level 4 in literary terms and C2 linguistically. Table 5 in Chapter 2 defines books in this category as "books written in a structurally or linguistically complex language, which are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex". The novel is set in a very different time and place than the world which adolescents are familiar with, and as such students reading this book may have problems relating the events to their own experiences. The book has several different intertwining storylines and many different characters between which the mutual relations alter constantly. However, the story itself is rather straightforward, without many layers of meaning. The language in the novel is rather complex in the sense that it is not written in contemporary



English and uses highly literary language structures in its sentences. The author often uses phonetic spelling in the dialogues to indicate the regional accents of the speakers which can be difficult to understand to a non-native reader. With 316 pages the book is reasonably long, which may be discouraging to unmotivated readers.

Opinions may vary on the literary and linguistic difficulty levels of the books within this database, not only between students, but between teachers as well. The difficulty levels as defined in Chapter 2 serve as a point of reference, which, as illustrated in the examples above, can help to provide a weighed assessment of each individual book's complexity. Once the difficulty level of a work has been established, it can help to improve students' abilities from one level to the next. Exactly how this may work in a classroom environment will be illustrated in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Practical application of the database

This chapter will focus on the practical use of the database of books in a classroom environment and in which way it can help to facilitate both literature learning and teaching. For this purpose, a number of hypothetical students will be presented who will serve as an example to illustrate how both teachers and students can make a motivated selection for the books used in literature education, based on the levels of literary and linguistic competence and any other practical information contained within the database. The examples will demonstrate how a book may be selected on the basis of the knowledge of a student's literary and linguistic abilities, but also their personal preference and reading experience, their motivation and their familiarity with certain themes and topics.

The teacher can also make a choice on any tasks and assignments suitable for a specific student and/or a particular book based on the information within the database. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to present an elaborate example of a complete lesson series, for reasons of practicality; the way in which literature education is structured can differ profoundly from school to school in the Netherlands, including the number of hours of literature taught each week. For this reason, such an example will not be presented in this chapter. However, this does not mean that it is not possible to give an indication of what kind of assignments may be suitable for a specific student, or what sort of task will help them improve their linguistic and/or literary competence from one level to the next.

What follows is a number of examples in the form of hypothetical students of English literature in Dutch secondary schools, with each example containing the book(s) suitable for the students in question, a motivation for why this particular work may be suitable, and how the database can help in making a selection in this respect.

Student A is a 14-year-old student in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of his VWO educational track at a Dutch secondary school. He has had some experience at reading literature, but has a short attention span when it comes to reading. He likes his books to be short and packed with rising action, and detests having to work through longer books with elaborate characters and deeper layers of meaning. He has a reasonable command of the English language, and has a good vocabulary of the most common, everyday language. However, for the less ordinary, low-frequency words Student A requires a dictionary. Because he has never been encouraged to read by his parents, he is in possession of only a few books of his own at home.

Based on this student's age, grade and reading experience and preference, he can be ranked at level 2 with respect to literary competence. Any books selected for this student should not be too difficult or too long, so as not to discourage him from finishing or perhaps even starting the book. However, his reading of the novel should also prepare him for more complex works in the future, and make him more enthusiastic about reading in general. Raising students' awareness of and interest in literature can be particularly effective, as a motivated student is more willing and consequently also more able to learn, it has been suggested (Bolscher et al., 169).

A possibly suitable work for Student A might be *The Fifth Child* by Doris Lessing. According to the database, it is ranked at a literary difficulty of level 2. The story is rather straightforward and exciting. With a length of 159 pages it is relatively short, and is part of the horror genre; these aspects can help Student A overcome his lack of enthusiasm for reading. *The Fifth Child* is ranked at a linguistic difficulty of CEFR level A2, which means that the language used is rather simple and idiomatically not very complex; the vocabulary is rather common and basic. In order to ensure that the student has no difficulty understanding some of the more difficult words, the teacher may advise him to use one of the

aforementioned student editions of the book, which both include vocabulary assistance for the harder, less common words.

Once the student has started reading the book the teacher may assign some extra tasks in order to facilitate reading, but also to prepare the student for future reading of increasingly complex books by focussing on improving linguistic and literary competence, and by stimulating taste and enthusiasm for reading. The student could for instance be given the task of making a list of a number of words which he looked up in the dictionary or in the vocabulary list of the book. Afterwards, he might be asked to find a different context for a number of these words, for instance on the Internet or in newspapers. Or, in order to stimulate the literary competence and develop a taste in reading, the student might be given an assignment to write a report on the book after finishing it and perhaps compare it to previously read works.

If Student A improves sufficiently with regard to linguistic competence, he may be given a book which is linguistically slightly more complex, such as *The Tenth Man* by Graham Greene ranked at CEF level B1. This decision should be made very carefully though; if the student has to look up too many words, he may become bored and discouraged to read. A subsequent book in literary terms might be *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* by Roddy Doyle. Though structurally somewhat more complex and slightly longer, it still uses relatively easy and everyday language.

Student B is a 15-year-old student from an immigrant family, in the 4<sup>th</sup> of her HAVO educational track at a Dutch secondary school. She has had virtually no experience at reading literature, and as such may be lagging slightly behind her peers in this respect. She still has to develop a taste in reading and cannot define any definite preference for a specific genre, topic or theme. Student B does not have a natural talent for learning and acquiring foreign

languages and is much more apt at mathematics and physics. As a consequence, her command of the English language is rather poor, and she has rather small vocabulary.

Student B's literary competence can be ranked at level 1; she is in many ways a starting reader, and will have to learn reading literature from the very beginning. A suitable book for this student will have to be short and simple, and preferably deal with a subject matter which is close to her own experience. The novel in question should serve as a starting point for reading literature and prepare her for more difficult works in the future, but also assist her in developing her own taste in literature.

An appropriate work for Student B might be *Bend it like Beckham* by Narinder Dhami. In the Database, this book is classified as level 1 in terms of literary complexity. It is not a very long work at 176 pages, and has a subject matter which is close to the experience of the average adolescent. Moreover, the recurring theme of intercultural clashes and the problems of growing up in an immigrant family can stimulate Student B in her reading motivation, as studies have pointed out that many immigrant children are more motivated and interested in reading intercultural literature (Hermans, 156-172). *Bend it like Beckham* is given a CEFR level of A1, which should make it understandable to someone with a rather limited competence at reading English. The vocabulary list at the end of the novel can be particularly helpful to a somewhat less competent reader.

Any tasks given to this student should focus on creating a general appreciation of literature. Student B has had practically no experience at reading novels, and would have to be given an insight into the significance of literature. She could for instance be given the task of providing an analysis of some of the events in the novel, and be asked to compare the occurrence of cultural differences and clashes in the book to events from her own life. She might also be asked to write down some of her own experiences which she would find somehow similar to the events portrayed in the book. An assignment involving the

improvement of her ability at reading English could involve her writing down some of the words of which she does not know the meaning while reading, and guessing the correct meaning before looking up the words in question.

Before Student B can start reading more advanced literature, she will most likely first have to focus on improving her English language competence, as a limited ability at understanding the language can genuinely hinder progress in literary terms. If sufficient progress at linguistic abilities has been achieved, Student B might perhaps try *Tiger, Tiger* or *Judith and Spider*, which are both slightly more complex linguistically.

Student C is a 17-year-old student in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of her VWO educational track at a Dutch secondary school. She has been an avid reader, albeit one of mostly children's and youth literature, for much of her life. However, over recent years she has started to read more adult literature and has tried to work on increasingly difficult books. Because reading is one of her hobbies, she possesses many books, although most of these are written in her mother tongue. She has a relatively good grasp of the English language compared to her classmates, and can use and understand a broad vocabulary of words.

The literary abilities of Student C can be considered to be equal to those associated with level 4. Her previous experience with reading has prepared her for works which are more difficult to comprehend, particularly since she has moved on to reading adult literature. A suitable book for Student C would have to be structurally more complex, and any novel selected would have to keep her challenged and interested, as a work below her abilities might make her bored or unmotivated.

An appropriate work for Student C might be *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D. H. Lawrence. The subject matter of the book is not directly related to the world familiar to a present-day adolescent, and this disconnection may discourage a less experienced reader. However, to a reader who needs to be challenged, a work that is more complex and relatively

long at 384 pages can be appropriate. The difficulty level of B2 at which the book is ranked will require a rather broader vocabulary in order for a reader to be able to understand it to its fullest extent.

Seeing as Student C has a good literary competence, an assignment after reading this book can involve having to give a deeper analysis of some aspects of the book. The student could for instance be asked to provide an analysis of some of the main characters and their motives for behaving the way they do. The student could also be asked to work with the film adaptation of the book, for instance by letting her point out the differences between novel and film and analyse why certain adaptations may have been made.

If the student makes enough progress, she could be given a subsequent book that is more complex linguistically and comparable with regard to literary difficulty (e.g. *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt), or more difficult in literary terms and slightly less challenging in terms of linguistic difficulty (e.g. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger).

Although the above list of students is purely hypothetical, they serve as an illustration of how a database of books may be used in a practical context. They serve as an indication of the benefits of such a database; the teacher or student can find books that are more or less comparable with the student's own abilities, select works which are part of a genre or deal with a subject matter which interests the student, and the teacher is able to use the information to give the student assignments without even having to have read the book in question. Perhaps the teacher can also distribute parts of the database among his or her students, so that they can make a personal selection of the books they wish to read, based on their knowledge of their own abilities and preferences.

A select number of problems still remain when using a combined system of the CEFR and Witte as a framework for a database of books for English literature education. Firstly, determining an accurate literary difficulty level for each book can be very subjective; some

teachers may perhaps find certain books mentioned in the database to be of a higher or lower difficulty level than has been suggested here. Different teachers have different backgrounds and experiences, and as such may emphasise different aspects of the parameters that determine a book's literary difficulty. Perhaps the opinion of the literary complexity is even determined by the standards set by each individual school. This problem is not merely restricted to the literary difficulty, however. The CEFR in fact uses much fewer parameters to indicate the differences between the levels of complexity than Theo Witte, and as such is also very much dependent on subjectivity. Moreover, as times and cultures change the database may ultimately become outdated. In order to counter these problems such a list would need to be updated and expanded frequently, preferably by a number of specialist teachers, in order to keep it both as objective and as up to date as possible. Perhaps even students could be asked which books they prefer, or which ones they would like to see added to the list.

Secondly, it may be questioned whether the database should in fact be divided along exactly six different levels of literary difficulty. As was illustrated in the examples in Chapter 3, there are books which can in fact be considered to be part of a higher, outside category. This would indicate that there may be a need either for an extra level of difficulty or for a reclassification of the six current levels. On the other hand, it is questionable whether any students ever achieve this level of competence during their time at secondary school. In this case it is more desirable to set some sort of standard level for literary competence which students of each different educational track would have to have achieved when passing their exams.

A third problem exists when trying to find an appropriate work of literature for the right student. It may be difficult to pinpoint a student's literary and linguistic abilities accurately, both for the teacher and the student, and as such it may be desirable to use a method which can help estimate the competence of students individually or as a group.



Perhaps it may be possible to use a small number of short stories in this respect, and to use a questionnaire in order to establish what students have managed to pick up from each story. Nonetheless, once the abilities of a student have been more or less established, the database can give an indication of suitable works of literature.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to provide a basic framework for Dutch secondary school foreign language literature teaching, by combining the levels of literary competence as set by Theo Witte and the levels of second language competence defined by the Common European Framework. The database provided within this thesis was used to present a basis for Dutch secondary education English foreign language literature teaching.

However, in order for this new combined framework to work properly a number of adjustments would have to be made. Schools would have to maintain a basic set of rules defining the minimum levels of competence required at each different level of education. Future research should focus on providing teachers of second language literature with a system for more accurately determining students' literary and linguistic competence, for instance through the use of assignments or tasks and standard scores for each level of competence. By facilitating the process of determining the competence levels of students, teachers can more readily select appropriate works from the second language literature database and thereby improve the quality of literature education.

Overall, the second language literature database can provide both teachers and students of literature with a number of benefits. For instance, it can help them find works which are relatively in line with each student's own competence, select books which are both interesting and relevant to the student, and it provides them with a list which can aid them in mapping each student's progress through his or her literary and linguistic levels of competence.

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## Appendix A: Overview of Database ordered according to Witte levels

### Level 1

A1

*Bend it like Beckham* - Narinder Dhami

A2

*Tiger, Tiger* - Melvin Burgess

*Judith and Spider* - Michael Scott

### Level 2

A2

*The Fifth Child* - Doris Lessing

B1

*Jonathan Livingston Seagull - A Story* - Richard Bach

*High Fidelity* - Nick Hornby

*The Bridges of Madison County* - Robert James Waller

*The Tenth Man* - Graham Greene

B2

*The Lake of Darkness* - Ruth Rendell

C1

*The Time Machine* - H. G. Wells

### Level 3

A2

*The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* - Roddy Doyle

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* - Mark Haddon

B1

*The Boys from Brazil* – Ira Levin

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* - George Orwell

*Rosemary's Baby* - Ira Levin

*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* - Douglas Adams

B2

*I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* - Maya Angelou

*The Sun also Rises* - Ernest Hemingway

C1

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer & Huckleberry Finn* - Mark Twain

#### Level 4

B1

*To Kill a Mockingbird* - Harper Lee

*Lord of the Flies*- William Golding

B2

*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* - Ken Kesey

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* - D. H. Lawrence

C1

*Angela's Ashes* - Frank McCourt

C2

*Oliver Twist* - Charles Dickens

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* - Thomas Hardy

Level 5

B1

*The Catcher in the Rye* - J.D. Salinger*Wide Sargasso Sea* - Jean Rhys

B2

*Love Medicine* - Louise ErdrichLevel 6

B2

*In the Heart of the Country* - J. M. Coetzee

C2

*Hamlet* - William Shakespeare

**Appendix B: Overview of Database ordered according to CEFR levels**A1

## Level 1

*Bend it like Beckham* - Narinder Dhami

A2

## Level 1

*Tiger, Tiger* - Melvin Burgess

*Judith and Spider* - Michael Scott

## Level 2

*The Fifth Child* - Doris Lessing

## Level 3

*The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* - Roddy Doyle

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* - Mark Haddon

B1

## Level 2

*Jonathan Livingston Seagull - A Story* - Richard Bach

*High Fidelity* - Nick Hornby

*The Bridges of Madison County* - Robert James Waller

*The Tenth Man* - Graham Greene

## Level 3

*The Boys from Brazil* – Ira Levin

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* - George Orwell

*Rosemary's Baby* - Ira Levin

*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* - Douglas Adams

Level 4

*To Kill a Mockingbird* - Harper Lee

*Lord of the Flies* - William Golding

Level 5

*The Catcher in the Rye* - J.D. Salinger

*Wide Sargasso Sea* - Jean Rhys

B2

Level 2

*The Lake of Darkness* - Ruth Rendell

Level 3

*I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* - Maya Angelou

*The Sun also Rises* - Ernest Hemingway

Level 4

*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* - Ken Kesey

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* - D. H. Lawrence

Level 5

*Love Medicine* - Louise Erdrich

Level 6

*In the Heart of the Country* - J. M. Coetzee



C1

## Level 2

*The Time Machine* - H. G. Wells

## Level 3

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer & Huckleberry Finn* - Mark Twain

## Level 4

*Angela's Ashes* - Frank McCourt

C2

## Level 4

*Oliver Twist* - Charles Dickens

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* - Thomas Hardy

## Level 6

*Hamlet* - William Shakespeare

## **Appendix C: The general Dutch secondary school system**

### VWO

- pre-university secondary education
- highest form of secondary education
- 6 years
- ages 12-18

### HAVO

- “higher general continued education”
- intermediate form of secondary education
- 5 years
- ages 12-17

### VMBO

- “preparatory middle-level vocational education”
- lower form of secondary education
- 4 years
- ages 12-16
- variants:
  - theoretical track (tl)
  - combined track (gl/tl)
  - advanced vocational track (kb)
  - basic vocational track (bb)