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# **THE NEWSPAPER AS A SOURCE OF SUPPLEMENTARY LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIAL**

GOH SOO TIAN

The newspaper is by far the most common and accessible printed material today. The ability to read the newspaper has become the universal mark of a literate man and is, in fact, the basic aim of mass literacy programmes throughout the world. While newspaper distribution figures may be steadily climbing, there is ground for concern that the radio, television and other media are posing a real threat to the battle against illiteracy among the young.

## **Instructional Potential**

According to Theodore L Harris, President (1971-1972) of the International Reading Association, the overriding reason why people do not read the newspaper habitually and more effectively is that "the schools have underestimated its real instructional potential". His observation is certainly true not only of the situation in the United States, but especially so in countries where English is taught as a second language.

## **Functional Literacy**

Since functional literacy has to be the first objective of any language instruction programme in school – though it need not always be explicitly stated – can it be assumed that all pupils who come out of the school system at various points have somehow acquired, in varying degrees, the ability to read the newspapers, at least in the main language of their schooling? The answer, no matter how reading specialists will argue about the real problems involved in measuring this ability, remains at most a very qualified and even questionable "yes".

## Curriculum

The solution does not lie in introducing a course on how to read the newspapers into the school curriculum. However, the newspaper can definitely be brought more actively into classroom teaching, especially in language lessons. To begin with, the newspaper is a fascinating and ready source of material on a wide variety of subjects which can be used for teaching reading skills. Perhaps a few examples, drawn from our local newspapers, will serve to illustrate the point.

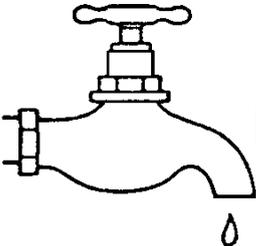
### EXAMPLE 1

General Aim: Functional Literacy.

Specific Skills Objective: Reading for specific details.



**PUBLIC UTILITIES  
BOARD**



**WATER  
INTERRUPTION**

**NOTICE TO CONSUMERS**

The Public Utilities Board will be laying a new water main along Lim Chu Kang Road. This extension of the water distribution network is to cater for a new housing estate at Lim Chu Kang.

To facilitate this work, it is necessary to shut down water supply to the following areas from 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 14 March 1979:-

- (1) Lim Chu Kang Road, 29 km  
House Nos 396A, 400, 402A, 404, 462 and 464;
- (2) Lim Chu Kang Road, 31 km to 32 km  
(Resettlement Areas 117 and 118)  
House Nos 2500 to 3591; 630M to 650M; 630M to 652M; 632F to 650F; 145-1 to 145-80.  
Even-numbered houses from House No 380 to House No 678
- (3) Neo Tiew Road (all houses);
- (4) Neo Tiew Lane (all houses);
- (5) Turut Track (all houses).

The Board regrets the inconvenience caused to consumers.

**Suggested Procedure:**

- 1 Pupils are given a few minutes to glance through the material.
- 2 Teacher asks a few general questions to establish what (a notice on shut down of water supply), by whom (PUB) and for whom (consumers). Explain these terms (in big print) if necessary.
- 3 Pupils are given more time to read the finer print (5-10 minutes).
- 4 Teacher then calls on pupils individually to answer questions on specific details as follows:
  - a Why is this water shut-down necessary?
  - b Where is the work going to be carried out?
  - c On what day is the water shut-down?
  - d What are the hours of the shut-down?
  - e Which area is affected by this shut-down?
- 5 To introduce a game element into the lesson, the teacher announces that he is going to draw out cards bearing various addresses from a box. (He will have prepared this before the lesson.) He will read out the address on each card he draws from the box and ask whether this house is affected by the shut-down. Pupils must respond quickly answering "Yes" or "No".

**Possible Addresses:**

- |   |                                    |                |
|---|------------------------------------|----------------|
| a | No 400, 29 km, Lim Chu Kang Rd.    | (Yes)          |
| b | No 2550, 30 km, Lim Chu Kang Rd.   | (No)           |
| c | No 635F, 32 km, Lim Chu Kang Rd.   | (Yes)          |
| d | No 145-72, 31 km, Lim Chu Kang Rd. | (Yes)          |
| e | No 677, 32 km, Lim Chu Kang Rd.    | (No)           |
| f | No 505, Neo Tiew Lane              | (Yes)          |
| g | No 13, Turut Track                 | (A catch here) |
| h | No 10, Neo Tiew Drive              | (No)           |
- 6 As a variation, this exercise can be set as written work which can be done in class.

## EXAMPLE 2

General Aim: General Knowledge.

Specific Skills Objective: Scanning, skimming, improving reading speed.



<p><b>A.</b> Treaty signing tomorrow</p>	<p><b>B.</b> Rallies ban lifted</p>	<p><b>C.</b> Less crime in Manila</p>
<p><b>D.</b> 'Sharks ate 31 seamen'</p>	<p><b>E.</b> More aid for refugees</p>	<p><b>F.</b> Supertanker ordered off</p>
<p><b>1.</b> TOKYO, Tues. — The Japanese Government today decided to double its financial contribution to a United Nations programme for Indochinese refugees, the Foreign Ministry announced today. The ministry said Japan would give an additional US\$2.5 million (S\$5.4 million) in the current fiscal year ending next March, and another US\$11.5 million in the next fiscal year, to the UN Special Programme for Indochinese Refugees. — Reuter.</p>	<p><b>2.</b> MANILA, Wed. — Philippine police today reported a sharp decline in crime incidents in Metropolitan Manila — from 75.9 per cent of the national total in 1971 to 29.7 per cent last year. Major-General Fidel Ramos who is director-general of the national police, reported that the 1978 figures compared favourably with the figures in 1971, a year before President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. — Reuter.</p>	<p><b>3.</b> LISBON, Thurs. — Portugal last night ordered the crippled Greek supertanker Andros Patria to be towed out of the country's 320 km economic zone as quickly as possible. The 218,000-tonne tanker was being towed towards Lisbon by two tugs. The Dutch salvage firm in charge of the operation wants to be drylocked there for repairs to a gash in the hull through which oil is leaking. — Reuter.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> BANGKOK, Fri. — The Thai National Legislative Assembly today unanimously revoked two laws banning political gatherings in public places, opening the way for political campaigning for the forthcoming general elections here, due on April 22. The laws have been in effect since the military coup in October, 1976. — Reuter.</p>	<p><b>5.</b> CARACAS, Fri. — Sharks ate 31 seamen when a Greek-owned freighter, Master Michael, sank in the Caribbean earlier this week, four survivors said. The 5,700-tonne ship, carrying 33,000 barrels of fuel oil, caught fire on Monday and sank the next day, according to a Haiti-based oil company executive. — AFP.</p>	<p><b>6.</b> MIRI, Fri. — Brunei will sign a treaty with Britain at the palace in Bandar Seri Begawan on Sunday, granting the Sultanate full independence by the end of 1983, the weekly Borneo Bulletin reported today. Sultan Sir Muda Hassanal Bolkiah will sign for his country while Britain will be represented by Lord Goronwy-Roberts, Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. — AP.</p>

**Preparation:**

The teacher cuts out short news briefs on a wide variety of interesting subjects. The headlines and the reports are separated and these are jumbled up and pasted on two different sheets of paper or cardboard (as shown). A theme can be used, e.g., "Around The World", "ASEAN Happenings", "Across the Causeway" or "Local Events", etc.

**Procedure:**

- 1 Teacher distributes sheet 1 containing the headlines.
- 2 He next distributes sheet 2 containing the reports.
- 3 He then instructs the pupils to match the headlines and the reports. (Answers: A6, B4, C2, D5, E1, F3). Here, pupils practise *scanning*.
- 4 Teacher then asks six questions, one on each report, eg:
  - a How many seamen were eaten by the sharks?
  - b How much aid will the Japanese government be giving in the current fiscal year?
  - c Which two countries will sign the treaty?
  - d What is the name of the supertanker?
  - e Who is Major-General Fidel Ramos?
  - f When was the ban on political rallies in Bangkok imposed?

Pupils practise *skimming* here.

- 5 This lesson can be conducted as a quiz, with points awarded for correct answers. Pupils can work individually, in pairs or in groups of three.

**Conclusion**

The above are only two examples of how the newspaper can be used as a source of supplementary materials for practice in the learning of reading skills. In fact, the instructional potential of the newspaper is not restricted to the teaching of reading but is extended to all the skills and content areas in English Language instruction. Teachers who have made use of the newspaper in this way in their classrooms will confirm that the little extra effort put into the planning and developing of such materials is always more than repaid in the greater attention and interest shown by pupils in their learning.

Teachers who have yet to introduce newspaper material into their classroom teaching will find many useful and practical hints in a handbook published by the International Reading Association entitled *Teaching Reading Skills Through the Newspaper* by Arnold B. Cheyney. Others who have successfully tried out their own newspaper-based supplementary instructional materials may wish to share their ideas and experiences with their colleagues by writing to the Editor of *Teaching and Learning*, Institute of Education.

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