



Reading *that* Matters

Teaching for Connection and Equity

Planning and Reflection Workbook





*To read without
reflecting is
like eating
without
digesting*

Edmund Burke

Why Reflection?



Reflection is a vital tool for teachers to evaluate their practices and ensure that their teaching approach aligns with the principles of culturally responsive language instruction.

Use this guide to think deeply about your current strategies, areas of growth, and opportunities to better meet the needs of your diverse learners.



The Purpose of this guide

This reflection guide and included planning templates are designed to empower you as an English teacher to create lessons that are not only inclusive but also transformative. As you use these tools, remember the ultimate goal: to build a classroom where every student feels valued, confident, and inspired to use language as a means of shaping their world.

You are in Charge

Please feel free to adapt any of these templates based on your teaching style and the specific needs of your students. Remember, teaching is a dynamic and ever-evolving process, and flexibility is key to success.

We have included templates that work for us, and we hope they can be helpful, but we are all different, and you need to do what works best for you.

Points to Ponder

■ **Understanding Students:**

How well do I know the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of my students?
In what ways do I incorporate this knowledge into my lesson planning?

■ **Inclusivity in Materials:**

Do the texts and resources I use reflect diverse voices and perspectives?
How can I make sure all students see themselves represented in my curriculum?
Where do I see gaps in representation or perspective?

■ **Engagement and Belonging:**

Do my teaching strategies actively encourage participation and make students feel their contributions are valued?

■ **Critical Thinking:**

Am I challenging my students to interrogate texts and ideas critically?
Are they developing the tools to discern information and express their thoughts effectively?

■ **Confidence Building:**

How do I foster confidence in my students, especially those who may feel marginalized or hesitant to use their voice in class?

■ **Balancing Challenge and Support:**

Am I providing enough scaffolding to help my students succeed while encouraging them to stretch their skills?

■ **Adaptability:**

Have I tried new strategies or interventions when a particular approach hasn't worked?
How do I respond when equity work feels uncomfortable?

■ **How do I evaluate the success of my teaching methods?**



Chapter 1

Making Meaning Across Cultures

Building Cultural Accessibility in Literature Teaching



Reflection Activity

Take a moment to write down three specific examples of how you've implemented **culturally responsive teaching** strategies in your classroom. Then, identify one area where you'd like to improve or experiment with a new strategy.

What steps will you take to address this goal?

Strategies I have used.



I would like to experiment with....

I will make this happen by.....



REFLECTION GUIDE

Use these prompts to reflect on your awareness of cultural accessibility in your teaching practice and identify areas for growth.

1

How confident do you feel in recognising cultural signifiers in the texts you teach?

2

What proportion of your current text list reflects the lived experiences or cultures of your students?

3

Where do you think your own cultural background most influences your text selection or teaching approach?

4

Can you recall a time when a cultural gap between a text and your students created disengagement? What happened?

5

What support, resources, or changes could make it easier for you to teach culturally diverse or unfamiliar texts?

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

This planning template is designed to help language and literature teachers map out culturally responsive lessons step by step, ensuring that they align with the needs of their students and the themes of the chapter. Use it as a flexible framework to plan lessons in advance or adapt existing ones.

Specific to Chapter 1

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Know Your Students	What cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds do my students bring to the classroom? How can I leverage these as assets?	Survey students or engage in informal conversations to learn more about their backgrounds. Research cultural contexts relevant to the lesson's themes.
2. Select Inclusive Materials	Do the texts and activities represent diverse voices? Are they relevant to my students' lives and experiences?	Include texts written by authors from underrepresented communities. Choose themes that connect to real-world issues or student interests.
3. Prepare Pre-Lesson Activities	What scaffolding do my students need to understand this text? How can I set them up for success?	Pre-teach vocabulary, historical context, or challenging concepts. Use visuals or collaborative activities to introduce the text's themes.
4. Foster Reflection and Growth	How will I help students connect the text to their own lives and experiences?	Design writing prompts that encourage personal reflection, such as "How does this story relate to your own experiences or your community?"

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

Steps and questions that are consistent across all chapters.

This page is repeated so you don't have to go back and look for it.

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Establish a Community of Respect	How can I create a safe space for students to share their ideas openly?	Set classroom norms that value all voices. Encourage students to listen actively and respond thoughtfully during discussions.
2. Design Interactive Strategies	What activities will help students engage with the text deeply? How can I make learning collaborative and inclusive?	Incorporate storytelling circles, call-and-response exercises, or peer-to-peer teaching. Encourage critical thinking through open-ended questions.
3. Assess Understanding	Are students developing confidence and critical-thinking skills? How will I measure their progress?	Use formative assessments like group discussions, annotated texts, or creative projects to gauge comprehension and growth.
4. Reflect and Adjust	What worked well in this lesson? What can be improved for next time?	Keep a journal of reflections after each lesson. Seek feedback from students about their learning experience.





PLANNING

Strategies in Action

Use this space to plan how you could apply each of the chapter's strategies in your classroom.

Strategy

How I could use it.

1. Pre-Reading Cultural Immersion

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2. Collaborative Cultural Exploration

--

3. Multiple Text Formats and Modalities

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4. Choice and Differentiated Engagement

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PLANNING

Strategies in Action

5. Leveraging Technology for Clarification

6. Mapping Meaning with Visual Organizers

7. Explicitly Address the Author's Context

8. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)

9. Promote Listening Comprehension and Oral Storytelling

10. Prioritize Authentic Writing with Cultural Connection

CHAPTER 1

Checklist

MAKING MEANING ACROSS CULTURES

- ☐ Choose texts that reflect your students' lived experiences
- ☐ Build cultural context before diving into the story
- ☐ Use visuals, music, or media to bridge understanding
- ☐ Invite students to share personal connections to themes
- ☐ Make space for multiple interpretations and voices
- ☐ Reflect on whose stories are missing—and why





Chapter 2

Navigating the Unknown:

Text Selection Before Student Connection



Reflection Activity

Take a moment to write down three specific examples of how you've adapted mandated texts in your classroom.

Then, identify one area where you'd like to improve or experiment with a new strategy.

What steps will you take to address this goal?

Strategies I have used.



I would like to experiment with....

I will make this happen by.....



REFLECTION GUIDE

Use these prompts to reflect on how you usually plan ahead for units of work when you haven't met your class. Are there areas that you would like to improve on?

1

How do I gather student insights early in the term?

2

What assumptions do I make when selecting texts in advance?

3

How can I adapt a pre-chosen text to better suit my current class?

4

Where can I build in space for student voice and choice?

5

Have I worked with this year level before? What did I learn from that?

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

This chapter explores the challenge of selecting texts before meeting your students. It offers strategies for adapting mandated texts to student needs, building flexibility into planning, and using student insight to bridge gaps.

Specific to Chapter 2

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Start with Student Insight	What do I already know about my incoming students? What can I learn quickly in the first week?	Use surveys, informal conversations, and observation to gather insights. Create a class profile to guide text adaptation.
2. Build Flexibility into Planning	How can I leave room to adjust once I meet my students?	Plan the first few lessons to be exploratory. Choose flexible activities that allow you to pivot based on student engagement.
3. Bridge Gaps with Supplementary Material	What scaffolds or supports might help students access the text?	Identify key challenges (e.g. vocabulary, context, themes) and prepare short supplementary texts, visuals, or background activities.
4. Reframe the Text Through Student Experience	How can I connect the text to students' lives and interests?	Use student-generated topics or current events to build connection Highlight themes that resonate with their lived experience.

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

Steps and questions that are consistent across all chapters.

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Establish a Community of Respect	How can I create a safe space for students to share their ideas openly?	Set classroom norms that value all voices. Encourage students to listen actively and respond thoughtfully during discussions.
2. Design Interactive Strategies	What activities will help students engage with the text deeply? How can I make learning collaborative and inclusive?	Incorporate storytelling circles, call-and-response exercises, or peer-to-peer teaching. Encourage critical thinking through open-ended questions.
3. Assess Understanding	Are students developing confidence and critical-thinking skills? How will I measure their progress?	Use formative assessments like group discussions, annotated texts, or creative projects to gauge comprehension and growth.
4. Reflect and Adjust	What worked well in this lesson? What can be improved for next time?	Keep a journal of reflections after each lesson. Seek feedback from students about their learning experience.





PLANNING

Strategies in Action

Use this space to plan how you could apply each of the chapter's strategies in your classroom.

Strategy

How I could use it.

1. Getting to Know You Surveys

2. Observe and Listen

3. Co-Discover the Text

4. Use Diagnostic Tools Thoughtfully



PLANNING

Strategies in Action

5. Make Space for Student Voice

6: Student-Led Entry Points

7. Focus on Small, Powerful Passages

8. Micro-Connections Through Excerpts

9. Introduce with Enthusiasm

10. Thematic Connections to Real Life

Reflection Template

Student Insight Map

Every student brings a unique story into the classroom. Use this map to capture early insights and guide your teaching decisions.

Insight Source	What I Learned	How I'll Adapt the Text
Survey		
Observation		
Discussion.		

Which quadrant reveals the most surprising or useful information about your students?
How might this insight shape your approach to the pre-selected text?

CHAPTER 2

Checklist

NAVIGATING THE UNKNOWN

- ☐ Start with student surveys or informal conversations
- ☐ Observe reactions and adjust your approach early
- ☐ Use flexible strategies to adapt pre-chosen texts
- ☐ Choose a few nuggets from the text to explore in depth
- ☐ Connect themes to real-life issues students care about
- ☐ Focus on building trust before diving deep





Chapter 3

Elevating the Literary Landscape

*Fostering Growth Through
Expectation and Engagement*



Reflection Activity

Do your students know what you expect of them? Take a moment to write down three specific examples of expectations you have of your classes. Reflect particularly on the times those expectations have led to increased engagement.

Expectations my students know about.



I would like to experiment with....

I will make this happen by.....



REFLECTION GUIDE

Use these prompts to reflect on how your expectations are formed in your teaching practice and identify areas for growth.

1

Do my expectations reflect what my students are capable of—or what I assume they're capable of?

2

How do I scaffold complex texts without oversimplifying them?

3

What messages do my text choices send about student potential?

4

Does my language during instruction affirm growth and potential?

5

Do I celebrate my students' small wins?

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

This chapter focuses on the power of high expectations. It explores how thoughtful scaffolding, growth mindset language, and strategic text selection can help students rise to meet academic challenges.

Specific to Chapter 3

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Set High Expectations with Purpose	What expectations do I communicate—explicitly or implicitly—about my students’ capabilities? How do I ensure those expectations are ambitious yet achievable?	Use growth mindset phrases like “You haven’t mastered this yet” to encourage persistence. Design tasks that stretch thinking while offering scaffolded support.
2. Choose Texts That Challenge and Inspire	Do my texts offer intellectual nourishment and emotional depth? How do I balance accessibility with complexity?	Select texts with rich language, layered themes, and diverse perspectives. Pair challenging texts with visual aids, context-building activities, or thematic bridges.
3. Scaffold for Success	What supports do students need to access complex material? How can I differentiate without lowering expectations?	Use tiered tasks, visual organizers, and collaborative analysis. Avoid oversimplification—scaffold instead of dilute.
4. Design Interactive Strategies	What activities will help students engage with the text deeply? How can I make learning collaborative and inclusive?	Incorporate storytelling circles, call-and-response exercises, or peer teaching. Use role-play, debates, or creative reinterpretations. Encourage critical thinking through open-ended questions.

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

Steps and questions that are consistent across all chapters.

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Establish a Community of Respect	How can I create a safe space for students to share their ideas openly?	Set classroom norms that value all voices. Encourage students to listen actively and respond thoughtfully during discussions.
2. Design Interactive Strategies	What activities will help students engage with the text deeply? How can I make learning collaborative and inclusive?	Incorporate storytelling circles, call-and-response exercises, or peer-to-peer teaching. Encourage critical thinking through open-ended questions.
3. Assess Understanding	Are students developing confidence and critical-thinking skills? How will I measure their progress?	Use formative assessments like group discussions, annotated texts, or creative projects to gauge comprehension and growth.
4. Reflect and Adjust	What worked well in this lesson? What can be improved for next time?	Keep a journal of reflections after each lesson. Seek feedback from students about their learning experience.





PLANNING

Strategies in Action

Use this space to plan how you could apply each of the chapter's strategies in your classroom.

Strategy

How I could use it.

1. Expect Complexity—But Scaffold the Path

--

2. Growth Mindset Language

--

3. High-Level Questions for All

--

4. Alternative Assessments

--



PLANNING

Strategies in Action

5. Collaborative Learning Activities

6. Intertextual Connections

7. Celebrate Progress Publicly

8. Questioning the Text and Connecting to Life

9. Connect with Colleagues and Librarians

10. Emphasize Process Over Product

CHAPTER 3

Checklist

ELEVATING THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE

- ☐ Choose texts that challenge and inspire
- ☐ Scaffold complexity without simplifying meaning
- ☐ Use growth mindset language in feedback
- ☐ Ask big questions—even with short texts
- ☐ Celebrate effort and progress, not just mastery
- ☐ Believe in your students' capacity to grow





Chapter 4

Finding a Way In *Embracing Unloved Texts*



Reflection Activity

Take a moment to write down three specific examples of how you have presented texts that you are not a fan of.

Then, identify one area where you'd like to improve or experiment with a new strategy.

What steps will you take to address this goal?

Strategies I have used.

A white rectangular sticky note with rounded corners and a purple border, intended for writing a strategy.A white rectangular sticky note with rounded corners and a yellow border, intended for writing a strategy.A white rectangular sticky note with rounded corners and a purple border, intended for writing a strategy.

I would like to experiment with....

A white rectangular sticky note with rounded corners and a purple border, featuring a purple tab at the top for easy removal.

I will make this happen by.....

A large, light purple spiral-bound notebook page with a black border. At the bottom-left corner, there is a small icon consisting of two pink hearts, a crossed-out pencil, and a grey arrow pointing right.



REFLECTION GUIDE

Use these prompts to reflect on the times you have had to teach texts you did not enjoy, and identify opportunities for growth.

1

How do I currently feel about the texts I'm required to teach?

2

What elements of the text can I present positively to my class?

3

What strategies help students connect with texts I find uninspiring?

4

How do I model critical engagement with texts I don't love?

5

How can I use my literary expertise to open up the text?

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

This chapter offers strategies for authentically teaching texts you don't personally enjoy. It emphasizes honesty, intertextuality, and reframing the focus toward literary craft and student ownership.

Specific to Chapter 4

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Be Honest and Reflective	How do I model authentic engagement with texts I don't personally enjoy? What message does my attitude send to students?	Acknowledge your reservations while affirming the text's value. Invite students to form their own opinions and challenge yours with evidence.
2. Reframe the Focus	What literary elements can I spotlight to build interest? How can I shift from personal taste to intellectual inquiry?	Focus on authorial craft, symbolism, or historical context. Use critical lenses (e.g.feminist, ecocritical, postcolonial) to reframe the text.
3. Build Bridges with Intertextuality	What connections can I make between this text and others? How can I use multimedia to enhance engagement?	Pair scenes with film clips, songs, or visual motifs. Use graphic novels, short stories, or poetry to supplement and enrich.
4. Empower Student Voice and Choice	How can I give students agency in how they engage with the text? What alternative assessments foster ownership?	Offer creative projects, genre shifts, or multimedia responses. Let students choose between thematically linked texts or tasks. Use one powerful scene as a focal point for deep analysis.

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

Steps and questions that are consistent across all chapters.

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Establish a Community of Respect	How can I create a safe space for students to share their ideas openly?	Set classroom norms that value all voices. Encourage students to listen actively and respond thoughtfully during discussions.
2. Design Interactive Strategies	What activities will help students engage with the text deeply? How can I make learning collaborative and inclusive?	Incorporate storytelling circles, call-and-response exercises, or peer-to-peer teaching. Encourage critical thinking through open-ended questions.
3. Assess Understanding	Are students developing confidence and critical-thinking skills? How will I measure their progress?	Use formative assessments like group discussions, annotated texts, or creative projects to gauge comprehension and growth.
4. Reflect and Adjust	What worked well in this lesson? What can be improved for next time?	Keep a journal of reflections after each lesson. Seek feedback from students about their learning experience.





PLANNING

Strategies in Action

Use this space to plan how you could apply each of the chapter's strategies in your classroom.

Strategy

How I could use it.

1. Be Upfront—Within Reason

--

2. Shift the Focus to Craft

--

3. Introduce Intertextuality

--

4. Find a New Lens

--



PLANNING

Strategies in Action

5. Use Multimedia Bridges

6. Supplement with Shorter Texts

7. Empower Students with Choice

8. Focus on One Great Scene

9. Collaborate with Colleagues

10. Use It as a Springboard

Reframe & Connect

Reflection Prompt

Teaching a text you don't connect with can feel like a creative challenge—but it's also an opportunity to model curiosity, adaptability, and empathy.

TEXT	STUDENT VOICE	SKILLS	YOU
A text I don't particularly enjoy or connect with	What themes or ideas do my students care about?	What skills or outcomes should I emphasize?	One thing I still value or respect about this text...

Use the chart above to reframe your approach and reflect on one strategy you'll use to build meaningful engagement with your students despite your own reservations.

What will you do to make this text matter—for them and for you?

CHAPTER 4

Checklist

FINDING A WAY IN

- ☐ Be honest—without undermining the text
- ☐ Focus on literary craft and technique
- ☐ Use one great scene to anchor the unit
- ☐ Connect the text to other works, genres, or media
- ☐ Invite students to challenge your perspective
- ☐ Reframe the unit as shared exploration





Chapter 5

Teaching the Text You Want *(and the Curriculum You Have)*



Reflection Activity

Take a moment to write down three specific examples of times you have needed to adapt a text to meet particular curriculum descriptors.

Have you come across any strategies used by colleagues that you would like to try?

I have used

An empty white rectangular box with rounded corners and a green border, intended for writing a reflection.An empty white rectangular box with rounded corners and a yellow border, intended for writing a reflection.An empty white rectangular box with rounded corners and a purple border, intended for writing a reflection.

I would like to try....

A white rectangular sticky note with a purple tab at the top, intended for writing a reflection.

I will make this happen by.....

A large, light purple rectangular box with a black border and a spiral binding at the top. In the bottom-left corner, there are small pink heart and star icons, intended for writing a reflection.



REFLECTION GUIDE

Use these prompts to reflect on how you see the relationship between the curriculum and the literature in your teaching practice and identify areas that could be more seamless.

1

Do I start with the curriculum or the text—and why?

2

How do I ensure my passion for literature doesn't get lost in compliance?

3

Do I view the curriculum as supportive or restrictive?

4

Do the activities I set help students meet curriculum goals through authentic engagement?

5

Do I celebrate my students' small wins?

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

This chapter reframes the tension between curriculum compliance and literary engagement. It offers strategies for translating curriculum into plain language, letting texts lead, and designing assessments that honor both.

Specific to Chapter 5

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Translate Curriculum into Clear Language	How do I make curriculum outcomes understandable for students? What does this outcome look like in practice?	Rewrite curriculum descriptors in student-friendly terms. Frame tasks around real-world questions and literary themes.
2. Let the Text Lead	How can I use the text to naturally meet curriculum goals? What big ideas emerge from the literature?	Start with the text's themes, characters, and conflicts. Map curriculum outcomes to existing literary activities.
3. Use Literature to Build Transferable Skills	What skills do students develop through deep engagement with texts? How do I make those skills visible?	Highlight connections between literary analysis and broader competencies (e.g., argumentation, empathy, synthesis) Track skill development across units.
4. Reimagine Assessment	How can I assess understanding beyond traditional essays and tests? What formats allow students to demonstrate learning authentically?	Offer podcasts, monologues, visual essays, or character journals. Use reflection pieces to connect text analysis to personal growth. Align creative assessments with curriculum goals.

Planning Template: Step-by-Step

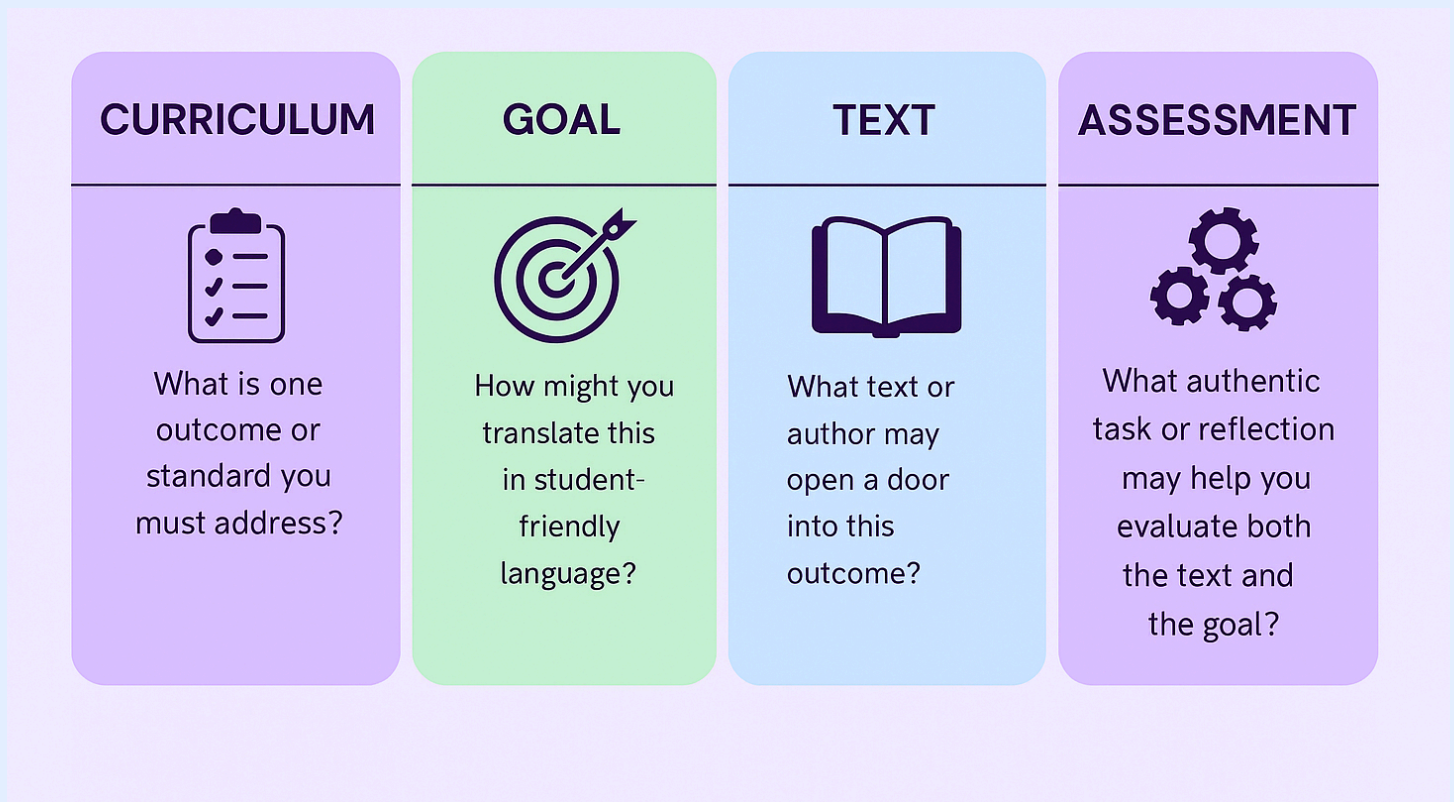
Steps and questions that are consistent across all chapters.

Step	Guiding Questions	Actions
1. Establish a Community of Respect	How can I create a safe space for students to share their ideas openly?	Set classroom norms that value all voices. Encourage students to listen actively and respond thoughtfully during discussions.
2. Design Interactive Strategies	What activities will help students engage with the text deeply? How can I make learning collaborative and inclusive?	Incorporate storytelling circles, call-and-response exercises, or peer-to-peer teaching. Encourage critical thinking through open-ended questions.
3. Assess Understanding	Are students developing confidence and critical-thinking skills? How will I measure their progress?	Use formative assessments like group discussions, annotated texts, or creative projects to gauge comprehension and growth.
4. Reflect and Adjust	What worked well in this lesson? What can be improved for next time?	Keep a journal of reflections after each lesson. Seek feedback from students about their learning experience.



Curriculum-to-Text Map

This chapter reframes the tension between curriculum compliance and literary engagement. It offers strategies for translating curriculum into plain language, letting texts lead, and designing assessments that honor both.



Choose one curriculum outcome you're required to teach.

Use the map above to translate it into student-friendly language and pair it with a strategy that feels authentic to your classroom.

How might this shift your planning mindset?



PLANNING

Strategies in Action

Use this space to plan how you could apply each of the chapter's strategies in your classroom.

Strategy

How I could use it.

1. Translate the Curriculum into Plain English

2. Let the Text Lead

3. Use Texts to Build Transferable Skills

4. Treat the Curriculum as a Checklist, Not a Script



PLANNING

Strategies in Action

5. Preload Curriculum Connections When Choosing Texts

6. Embrace Inquiry-Based Learning

7. Use Literature to Teach Context and Perspective

8. Reimagine Assessment to Highlight Understanding

9. Encourage Student-Led Discussion and Debate

10. Highlight Your Passion—It's Contagious

CHAPTER 5

Checklist

CURRICULUM-ALIGNED CREATIVITY

- ☐ Translate curriculum outcomes into student-friendly language
- ☐ Let the text lead—then map outcomes to it
- ☐ Use literature to build transferable skills
- ☐ Design assessments that reflect real understanding
- ☐ Encourage student-led discussion and inquiry
- ☐ Keep your passion visible—it's contagious



Meet the team



Judy Hefferan



Carolyn Newall

We hope you have found this guide helpful.

The scope of content in language and literature teaching is constantly growing and evolving and is much more complex than many believe. As English language and literature specialists we are constantly on the lookout for new ideas, new texts, new theories and new ways of connecting students with rich and layered literature.

We may not be in the classroom every day now, so we are committed to providing high quality support and resources for the hardworking teachers who are.

You can find us in a few places, but these are the two main ones:

www.weteachwell.com

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/we-teach-well>