

# Working with key passages from the novel – a methodological approach in keywords

Working with key passages or excerpts is an important way of teaching novels and other long literary text including films in the FL classroom. The following is a systematic, criteria-based approach to identifying and selecting key passages and excerpts in literary texts.

## 1 Key passages: selection criteria

The passage that is selected should

- represent an important experience in the fictional world
- narrate an important sequence in the story (e.g. turning point)
- address a pivotal issue (category)
- work as a pathway into the interpretation of the novel
- be a key to apprehending a character, the plot, the context
- lend itself to generalizations in terms of core categories or concepts in the novel (e.g. family roles, loss, language, identity etc.)

## 2 Features of a key passage

The selected passage

- should be a more or less coherent narrative unit of its own (a situation, an episode, a reflection, a dialogic sequence) that can be read and made sense of quite independently
- shows a narrative structure of its own (e.g. opening part, main part, conclusion, sequence of actions and plot)
- should have a clear focus (one of the characters, a core experience, an event etc.)
- can be studied in depth, i.e. make it possible to engage in higher order (categorical, conceptual, abstract) thinking
- should lead to more abstract categories or concepts that can be used to study other (related, similar, contrasting) passages

## 3 Working with a key passage: the paradigmatic dimension

The key passage

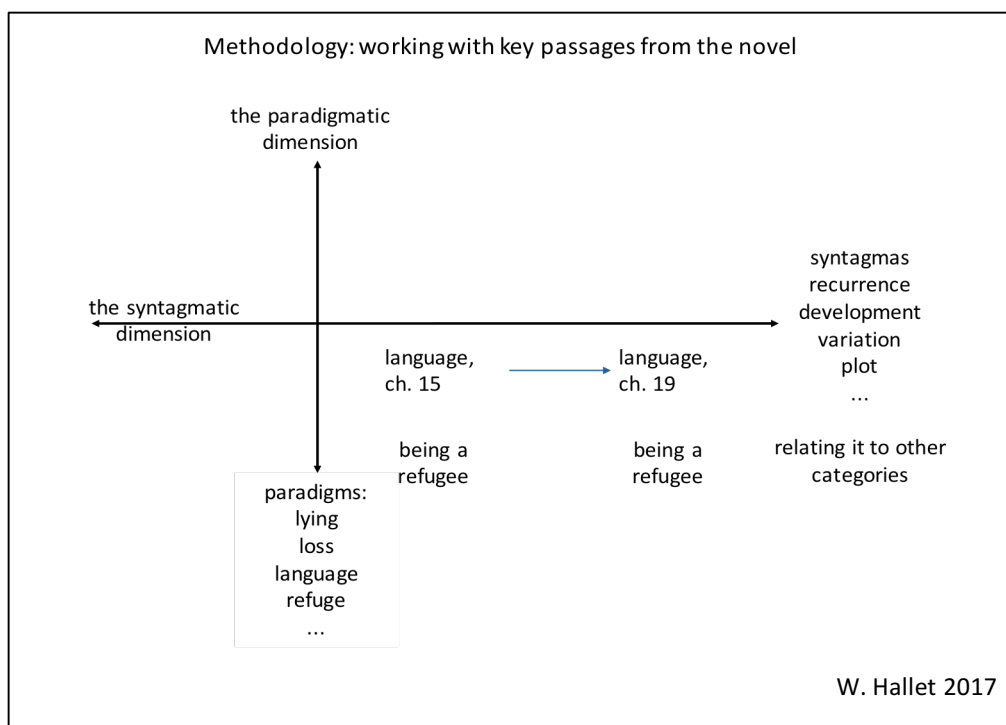
- is read and studied closely in order to understand its meaning in depth
- and to identify a particular issue or experience that is addressed in this part of the novel (explicitly or implicitly)
- is fully explored in all directions, i.e. in terms of the story and the storyworld (e.g. the experience of war) and in terms of the narrative discourse (narrator, focalizer, narrative organization, reported thought, dialogic composition etc.)

- is used to generalize, i.e. as a point of reference for the reading and interpretation of other passages
- can be explored with the help of guided reading assignments, focus questions, systematizing categories etc.

## 4 Working with a key passage: the syntagmatic dimension

The selected passage

- can be internally contextualized, i.e. its place in the plot (e.g. turning point), its relevance for the development of a character or action or a facet that it adds to the storyworld is identified and described
- is connected or compared to other parts, passages, episodes or elements of the novel in terms of comparison, analogies, parallelisms, contrast, differences, thus making use of the productivity of the comparative approach, making visible developments, change, dynamics, contrast between places and agents etc.
- is externally contextualized, i.e. it is related to historical, political or cultural developments of the time that is represented in the novel so that the reader can identify how the novel relates to extratextual experiences.



*Fig. 1: Selecting and working with key passages from the novel*

## 5 Working with a key passage: the combinatory method

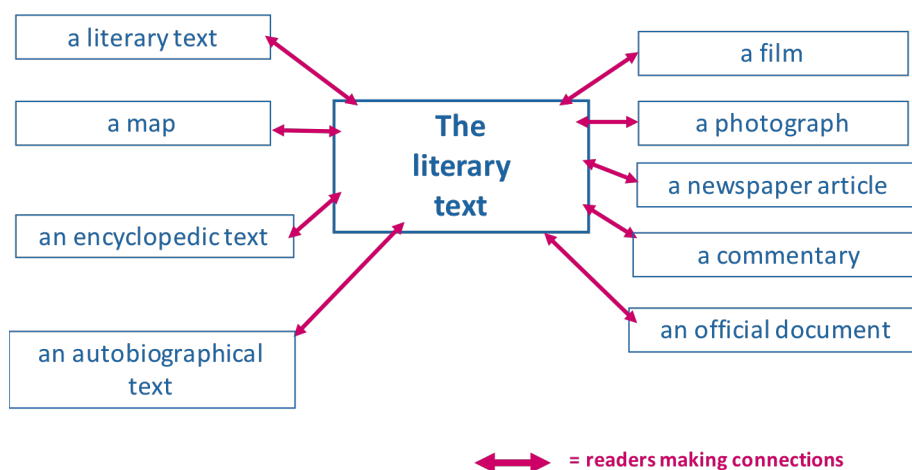
It may be very productive to combine the reading of one passage with the reading of one or several others. A selected passage may be combined with

- another passage from the same novel to identify analogies, contrasts or developments (e.g. a character trait at the beginning and towards the end of the novel)
- various passages from different stages of the same novel in chronological order to explore dynamics, change and development from one stage to the next (e.g. adolescence)
- passages from other novels (or picture books!) in order to identify analogies, similar experiences, but also differences in terms of attitudes or approaching an issue and developments (e.g. for a trilogy or sequels of the *Harry Potter* type)

## 6 Working with a key passage: contextualization

In order to enhance cultural or historical (contextual) reading, the key passage

- maybe combined with non-fictional texts that make it possible to identify analogies, parallels, recurrences, corresponding themes and issues
- may be part of a combination of a larger number of texts and materials (a textual network; Abb. 2) that represent discourses of the time to which the literary text responds or contributes
- may be combined with intertextual (intermedial) assignments that make it possible to identify intertextual recurrences and connections (connective intertextual tasks)
- or with research tasks so that the students themselves find sources and materials that open up contextual content in the key passage (constructive intertextual tasks).



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Fig. 2: The textual network of contextualization