

## How to work on books you read

by MF (2019)

First and most importantly, **reading a book** in the framework of a **language learning** course is about **working on the language and "travelling" to the world of the people who use it**. "Enjoying the book" meaning 'being entertained by a story' or 'being interested in the topic of the essay,' is not the key question. You may or may not like the story or topic, but **the book is there for you to work on**: focusing on learning the language (about the language, how to use it and communicate with it, about words, about how written texts are built...) and on learning about human and sociocultural matters presented in the book because we learn languages to communicate with people, and this means opening our minds to developing curiosity about other people and their worlds.

Incidentally, the same goes for your TV series project. You don't have to like the TV series. You simply use it to learn the language, how to use the language, and about the people who use the language, whether they are like you or different. That's the mission!

Enjoying a book as an EFL learner is usually a logical consequence happening as we make progress, after the first panicky attempt to start a book! Being engaged in this kind of learning process -- quite to different to using a textbook, for instance, particularly is you follow the methodology we use in this course -- is very rich in many ways: we have our brain using so many different parts and making all kinds of neural connections!! Plus, we find a treasure: we are lucky to have the time to learn, and we are lucky to be using original materials, in this case, learning English because we're reading a book, and taking notes and discussing it together in class. Lucky because as adults we seldom find time to do things this rich for our human minds in so many ways! As adults, we tend to repeat things we know, mostly against somebody in some way. However, when learning, we can simply share impressions, questions, opinions -- unconnected to the Identity Wars, as explorers! And we can experience how what we share, our first impressions, may or may not evolve or change as we listen and communicate with others -- including the teacher, of course, the one in charge of guiding you in your learning, to make the path smoother. When we read books in a learning context, we are lucky also because we are learning to notice things we don't usually pay attention to in our everyday lives, all kinds of things, regarding language matters and regarding topics or structures! This is healthy for our human minds. We are able to think about new things, or from different approaches or perspectives, we can even start to use different words, words we had not care to use before, creating sentences expressing thoughts by our Learning Self, not only by our Well-Known Self! (I hope you understand what I mean. Any questions?)

Your **key work** as a reader will not be to express judgment or opinion but to **learn the most you can from the book in terms of language and culture**. After all that learning through **paying attention and opening your mind to exploration**, you will be **better prepared to relate it to yourself**, and analyze what you think and feel, and find the best words to express it. As someone who needs to start doing something, trust your teacher. You can be critical of her words/work after the journey not before. Try what she says. It won't destroy your identity or lifestyle. It's a learning exercise. For extraordinary learning journeys, it's always positive to forget about your Well-known Self, and be generous to yourself and other people's existence by opening up to learning, moving away from the every present ills in adult life of judging and complaining. It's positive to sit with your book and all the innocence and intelligence you can spare for this exercise of reading. And it's important you schedule a time for you and your reading experience.

## Tips & How-to's

**BASICS** for your key work. Books we use when learning are underlined, scribbled all over and dog-eared. It's harder and more time consuming not to do this, so you need a **pencil, pen or highlighter(s)** (in different colors or using different kinds of symbols) to underline or highlight:

- **LANGUAGE:** words you need to look up + Useful Language: sentences or chunks of sentences showing you how to use words and structures, particularly those in your List of Mistakes; examples of kinds of texts (like descriptions, explanations, narratives); examples of opening/closing sentences, transitions; UL lists by language items...
- **TOPICS:** favorite passages, favorite quotes/lines/sentences.

**PROTECT YOUR FIRST READING** if possible: remember that even if we look up a word here or there, even if we don't understand it all, it's good to get a personal impression of the story before we learn about what everybody else interpreted. So, for instance, if you watched the movie version, forget it! Rub it out of your mind! If you haven't, don't watch it before reading the book (unless you can't read the book at all), but you are welcome to watch it once you've read it a first time. If you can't understand much, instead of using other people's work, read the book in Spanish and then try again. Don't read them at the same time, page by page, unless you don't mind risking never wanting to pick up the book again!

- **LOOKING UP WORDS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND:** This should be done cautiously, for you might end up being utterly unable to pick up the book and read!
- **IF YOU ARE GOING TO READ THE BOOK ONCE**, and you feel there are too many words you don't understand, I recommend you sit to work on the language in the first pages, until you are tired or realize it's impractical at this stage! (I have posted examples of this on my blog called Language Learning from Reading, e.g. on the Wangari Maathai autobio.) Then you can start again, and just look up the words you see that come up more often, the words you are curious about or the words you feel you need to look up. Remember you can always ask your classmates about meanings in class, or even use other people's work, yes, provided this is a way to start off conversations where you can practice your English for real communicative purposes!
- **IF YOU ARE GOING TO READ THE BOOK ONCE AND RE-READ** things you underlined and highlighted and selected passages: Congratulations!! <3 In this way, you will be creating your own notes and/or lists of UL, and thinking about what to share in class, for reading it out or for discussions. As you mull over those topics, take notes on your impressions and thoughts and be aware of your own learning as you move along.
- **IF YOU ARE GOING TO READ THE BOOK A FEW TIMES PLUS DO THE NOTE-TAKING WORK I MENTIONED BEFORE**, PLEASE, LET ME KNOW if you finally do so!! You would go first in any kind of booking for orals because you would be most well prepared and I bet you would be key for other people's learning, too, including myself.
- **EXPANDING OUR KNOWLEDGE.** There'll be a point where it is OK and very positive you read and listen to other people's work on this same book. You can also do some research on the author, topics raised in the book, whatever you are interested in!

**Whatever you do in the end**, don't use your little spare time to go on self-guilt-tripping journeys! They're always negative. It's not guilt that moves us to positive action -- guilt freezes us, blocks us, and pushes us to lying and harming ourselves or others! **What moves us to positive action is love:** curiosity, eagerness to learn, self-respect, eagerness to share, things like that!