



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN
Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo Fin de Grado

**Using literature in the
primary school EFL
classroom: E.B. White's
Charlotte's Web (1952)**

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Abstract

This End of Degree Dissertation consists firstly of a theoretical introduction about the usefulness of literary sources in the teaching of English in the primary school foreign language classroom and how literature has been employed throughout History as a methodological resource. The second part of the project presents a didactic unit which has been created and elaborated by using this theoretical introduction. In this didactic unit, there are six lessons which are composed of different activities based on one of the classics of children's literature, *Charlotte's Web*, by the American author E. B. White.

Key words: children's literature, primary school teaching, , English as a foreign language, literature in the classroom, E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Resumen

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado consiste en primer lugar en una introducción teórica sobre la utilidad de la literatura en la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en la etapa de educación primaria y el empleo de esta a lo largo de la historia como recurso metodológico. La segunda parte incluye una unidad didáctica propuesta y elaborada con la ayuda de la teoría en cuestión. En ella se proponen seis sesiones, las cuales constan de diferentes actividades basadas en un clásico de la literatura infantil, el libro *La telaraña de Carlota* del autor americano E. B. White.

Palabras clave: literatura infantil, educación primaria, inglés como lengua extranjera, la literatura en el aula, E.B. White, *La telaraña de Carlota*.

1. Introduction

The methodology used for teaching English as a foreign language has undergone numerous changes and has followed different fashions in the last decades. Nowadays we know that using drills of grammar exercises and telling students to memorise long lists of vocabulary are not the most appealing, nor the most effective ways of teaching a foreign language. The more passive types of learning methodologies of the past have been replaced with a more communicative approach to teaching the skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing in order to fulfil the objectives that learning a language implies. Indeed, nowadays, the fact that we live in a globalised world makes it important for all non-native child speakers of English to acquire different competences in order to learn and use a language efficiently.

It is my opinion that one of the most effective and interesting ways of learning English should include different ways of exploiting literature in the classroom. This approach allows students to realise that all that they have learnt can be used in real situations, as they are provided with authentic texts and contexts of the English language. It is also a means for them to learn the language in an unconscious way. Furthermore, as they surely enjoy learning in this way, they could develop a love for reading and of course for literature. Although reading can be a very enriching experience it seems to be an activity that has fallen into oblivion with the advance in technologies (internet, smartphones, digital games etc.) which children appear to prefer to the pastime of reading.

This End of Degree Dissertation will therefore attempt to explain why and how I would use literature in the foreign language classroom. It is divided into two parts and the first of these consists of a theoretical background about the concept of what children's literature is. It also explains the evolution of how literature has been used through the History of language teaching. Indeed, the use of literature when teaching languages is not a new concept. However, the ways in which it has been used has changed greatly. I will then go on to explain the benefits of integrating children's literature in the English as a Foreign Language classroom.

The second part of this End of Degree Dissertation revolves around a Didactic Unit based on the classic children's book by the American writer E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web*, with the objective of presenting a model of how to exploit children's

literature in the EFL classroom. There are three reasons why I chose this book: the first reason is that each chapter contains a mix of all the worthy values of a human being, which seem to be disappearing in these difficult times that the whole world is experiencing; the second reason is based on all the resources that went through my mind to exploit the reading of this book and lastly, but not least, I chose it because it provides pleasant reading for both children and adults alike.

2. Justification of the project

The demand of high levels of English in the four essential skills (speaking, writing, listening and writing) is increasing in our society. English is used as a Lingua Franca in more and more situations nowadays and it is referred to nowadays as a Global Language by experts such as David Crystal (2003). For this reason, from a very early age, children should learn English as much as they can. However, referring to my previous point, the methodology of teaching English as a foreign language has not always been the most appealing and interesting for students. It is because of this that I have tried to focus this project to make this an enjoyable task. My aim is to present an approach to teaching English through literature which presents both children and teachers with a more natural didactic process where students should receive input based on real material, although adapted to the students level. It provides the student with a learning process much closer to reality, as it offers an authentic context of the language to the learner.

3. Objectives

This End of Degree Dissertation has been prepared with the intention of trying to adhere to the following objectives in relation to the teaching and learning process of a foreign language:

- To explain the positive facts that children's literature brings to the teaching and learning of a foreign language.
- To clarify the different characteristics and meanings of children's literature.
- To make it easier to get to know and use a different view of teaching a second language.

- To get to know from a retrospective point of view about the History of using children's literature as a resource for teaching a foreign language.
- To be aware of the significance and the possibilities of exploitation of resources that children's literature brings to the teacher.
- To present how teachers can create and adapt children's literature resources and even create their own material.
- To show not only the academic value that children's literature can have, but also human values.

4. Theoretical background

4.1 What is children's literature?

Children's literature is a difficult term to define and this is because it implies so many things. First of all, it is important to know what the meaning of "child" is from a literary point of view. As Demetriou & Ruiz Mas (2009: 9) state, "children" can be defined as all young people who are able to leaf through a picture book and enjoy it or listen to a story read aloud, up until the age of fourteen or fifteen. However, focusing more on the meaning of the full concept, "children's literature", also known as "kiddie lit", we can say that it refers to books that are read by children as well as the books selected by children or by adults as being appropriate for children (who are traditionally considered to be immature readers) (Demetriou & Ruiz Mas, 2009: 9-10).

4.2 Children's literature characteristics

As Demetriou & Ruiz Mas (2009: 10-12) posit, there are different characteristics which are common to both adult's literature and children's literature. Nevertheless, the following only pertain to children's literature. They are related to the physical aspect and contents of children's books :

- The topics of children's literature are related to children's interests and needs.
- Children's literature normally integrates words and pictures. Illustrations play a relevant role; they are mostly coloured with primary colours. This is for the purpose of making books more attractive, to offer children visual support or even to cover page space to avoid overloading the books with

words, which for children can make the task of reading more difficult or boring.

- Children's books are usually shorter than adult's books (to avoid tiring child readers/listeners) and they are also printed in big letter sizes. Furthermore, they have unconventional shapes (non-rectangular shapes) to attract the child's attention.
- Children's books are books either written or edited for children by adults, and chosen for children by adults too. Children's book writers have an extraordinary responsibility to transmit cultural values. The main reason for this is that children are readers who are still developing.
- There is a permanent didactic element in children's books. When they do not reflect an ideology, the adventure or the fantasy elements are predominant.
- Children's literature usually lends itself to the use of other audio-visual materials: DVD/video, oral story-telling, artistic illustrations, etc. When oral support accompanies the book, a woman's or a young man's voice is employed. Both two voices are considered more pleasant to a child's ear.
- Explicit sex, violence or deep human philosophical issues are non-existent in children's books.
- Children's literature lays more stress on action than reflection, and its protagonists are usually child figures. The antagonists are bigger children (bullies) or other bad-mannered children, or adults (witches, evil kings or queens, irresponsible parents, teachers or relatives), aggressive animals or monsters (dragons, wolves, trolls, etc.). Many children's books deal with themes of maturing, growing up, and joining the adults' world as a fully-fledged citizen.

4.3 How children's literature has been used in language teaching through History

Using literature for teaching English is not a novelty in teaching English as a foreign language. In the past different teachers of diverse languages have used literature as a methodological resource for teaching languages because of the great range of possibilities that it offers. Notwithstanding, the ways of using literature as a language teaching material have changed considerably through History.

Glancing at the beginning of the use of literature as a methodological resource we could go back as far as Marcus Fabius Quintilian (A.D. 35-95), one of the most famous language teachers of antiquity (Chen 2014: 233). He taught Latin as a foreign language and his teachings were based on reading Aesop fables¹ aloud and then asking his students to retell them in their own words. Next the students had to write down the fables and finally paraphrase them into prose (Darian 1972, in Chen 2014: 233). Another popular scholar who followed the tradition of Quintilian in methodology and language teaching was Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) (Chen, 2014: 233), according to whom, a hard instruction in grammatical skills was unnecessary. In fact he thought that the student should be exposed to historical and mythological stories, and descriptions of plant and animal life illustrated by pictures (Darian 1972, in Chen 2014: 233). After Erasmus, another important figure who employed literature in teaching languages was the Moravian Bishop Johannes Amos Comenius (1592-1670) (Chen, 2014: 233). He believed that experiences in the foreign languages should be related with the student's background knowledge. Moreover, he differed with his contemporaries in presenting not just one meaning, but also multiple common meanings (Darian 1972, in Chen 2014: 233).

After this short introduction about how literature was employed centuries before to teach foreign languages it is now necessary to focus on the language teaching methods that have used literature or literary resources in our more recent past:

a) Grammar-translation method

Well into the 20th century, the most used method was the *Grammar-translation method*. As Jáimez (2003: 34-35) states, it consisted of reading the best literary productions to learn grammatical structures and to be able to translate them. Through this process, students would learn the different tenses, the vocabulary of the foreign language and be able to use all these elements. However, this methodology was only focused on the linguistic aspect, without paying too much attention to the contents. The methodology was based on long lists of vocabulary (idioms and words) and their respective translation in their native language. Literature was used as a mere instrument for learning. It was not appreciated aesthetically.

¹ *Aesop fables* are a collection of short stories about animals which behave in a human way. Each story teaches a moral lesson. They are said to be by a Greek called Aesop who lived in the 6th century BC, but many of them are much older than this.

b) Direct Method

At the beginning of the 20th century the *Direct Method* appeared, an approach to the learning of a second language similar to the way of learning one's mother tongue. This process was based on the spontaneous interaction of the students without doing translations.

It worked in the following way (Jáimez, 2003: 36):

- All instructions are in the foreign language.
- The vocabulary is taught through real objects, pictures, association of ideas and daily grammar.
- Oral skills are developed through intense exchanges of questions and answers between teacher and students.
- Correctness is a fundamental pillar of the method.
- Grammar is taught in an inductive way.

According to these basic ideas, literature was totally exiled from the foreign language classrooms. Literary texts as they were used in the method before were now thought to be unnecessary for learning everyday language (which was the main objective of the direct method).

A quarter of a century later there was a return to the grammar-translation method because there were not enough high-skilled and fluent teachers of the foreign language (37) .

c) Reading Approach

A kind of evolution of the *Direct Method* was the *Reading Approach* which tried to resolve the limitations of the *Direct Method*. Therefore, during the first half of the 20th century, this new foreign language teaching methodology involved the skill of reading (37). However, the problem was that this new approach was not as efficient and fast as was wished –this is due to the fact that the Second World War was about to start and a proficient methodology was needed for men to learn as quickly as possible (38).

d) Audio-lingual Method

Jáimez (38) states that this method began to be used in the 1940s. It put more emphasis on the oral skills. The main objective of this method was based on

social function and meaning while using a language –depending on the context-.

Text books based on these methods were organised like this (Jáimez, 2003: 41):

1. Strict written order of the grammatical points.
2. Recorded dialogues and drills.

The problem came with the excessive used of drills as this method was based on the repetition of the activities. In addition, literature was not integrated in this method. It was not seen as an useful tool for beginners as it had a great variety of idioms that were considered inappropriate for them (41-42).

e) Humanistic and cognitive approaches

Jáimez (43) postulates that between the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s the school of thought at that time tried to make the teaching of foreign languages more human and less superficial linguistically speaking. Influenced by the linguistic theory of the linguist Noam Chomsky (1966) the way of conceiving the learning process changed, hence, the teaching of a foreign language began to involve mental and cognitive aspects which were said to aid in the development of meaningful learning (Ausubel 1963: 217-221, in Jáimez 2003: 43). As a consequence of this new view, these new approaches were specially influenced by affective factors and, as stated before, more attention was paid to cognitive factors. As a result, new methods arose, which Jáimez (44) has listed, and I have grouped as follows:

Affective methods

- ***Community Language Learning*** (Curran, 1976)
- ***Suggestopedia*** (Lozanov, 1978)

Cognitive Methods

- ***The Silent Way*** (Gattegno, 1972)
- ***The Natural Approach*** (Krashen and Terrell, 1983)
- ***Total Physical Response*** (Asher, 1977)

All of these methods had a common and special interest in:

- Oral skills (underlining oral comprehension).
- Reducing the anxiety of learning a new language.
- The acquisition of a second language with an inductive method.

However, none of these methods used to pay attention to the use of literature. Only at advanced levels of *Suggestopedia* were literary texts introduced because they were seen as attractive and stimulating materials. *The Natural Approach* based on Krashen's ideas of meaningful input and the affective filter (1982) is considered one of the forefathers of the integration of literature in the EFL classroom (Jáimez, 2003: 44).

f) Communicative Approach

Simultaneously to the *Humanistic and Cognitive methods* between the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s emerged a particular interest in the ideas of Firth about the functionalism of a language as a communicative and interactive instrument with people and the environment. They were extended greatly by Halliday (Halliday 1973, 1978, 1979 in Jáimez 2003: 45). Again, as we saw before, literature was completely ignored and until the 1980s-1990s the importance of reading is not given significance in the language learning process (Jáimez 2003: 46).

Current situation

As mentioned above, the use of literature in foreign language teaching has evolved and has had different levels of importance throughout History. Now it is not just a mere resource for learning, it is a tool for developing different skills and to improve the students' abilities in the foreign language classroom in the same way that they have been learning their L1.

So, after too many years of not having a place in the EFL classroom, children's literature now seems to be gaining momentum. Although it does not yet appear in the Spanish syllabus (LOMCE, 2014); we can see a special reference to the use of literature in the learning of a foreign language made by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)², which states:

Literary studies serve many more educational purposes – intellectual, moral and emotional, linguistic and cultural – than the purely aesthetic. It is much to be hoped that teachers of literature at all levels may find many sections of the Framework relevant to their concerns and useful in making their aims and methods more

² This is a framework of reference. It was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency.

4.4 Why it is important to use children's literature in the EFL classroom

There are many different reasons why it is important to use children's literature in the classroom nowadays. The following sections are proposed by Tekenaga (2012: 9). However, I myself have extended this list with items I deem to be significant: a), c), e), f) :

a) Mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors

Bishop (1990) used a very pertinent metaphor to explain how children's literature can bring us a whole world of resources and possibilities :

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (Bishop, 1990: ix)

b) Different perspectives

As mentioned previously when listing the characteristics of children's literature, there are no explicit elements of sex, violence or deep human philosophical issues in children's books. However, these elements usually are implicit in a way that only adults can understand and interpret them. Hence *kiddie lit* can be approached from different outlooks. For instance, Tekenaga (2012: 9) states that children's literature can function as a window or door providing entry to many different worlds such as in *Alice in Wonderland*, when the protagonist falls down a rabbit hole and enters Wonderland. Besides, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie siblings pass through a wardrobe to enter Narnia. In these stories, the protagonists have many strange experiences that differ greatly from their familiar ones. A typical example cited by Tekenaga in relation to *Alice in Wonderland* is when the Mock Turtle tells Alice the name of the subjects he studies in his school. He states that he studies "Reeling", "Writhing", "Ambition", "Distraction", "Uglification" and "Derision". These subjects correspond respectively to the subjects Alice studies in her school: "Reading",

“Writing”, “Addition”, “Subtraction”, “Multiplication”, and “Division”. The names of the subjects the Mock Turtle studies sound humorous as well as ridiculous. It is a clear example of implicit criticism, from a child’s perspective, of the educational system during that time in England (Tekenaga, 2012: 9-10).

c) Diversity

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the friendship between Lucy and a faun becomes particularly interesting when it is viewed from a multicultural perspective, considering that these two characters are from different worlds (Tekenaga, 2012: 10). Using an example closer to this project, in E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* the element of diversity is also present because the first moment that the pig Wilbur arrives home nobody wants him because he is different from the other pigs. Then, Fern –his lovely owner- persuades their family to keep him in spite of him being different.

d) Understanding of other cultures

Sometimes it is difficult to understand cultures different from ours. Because of that Tekenaga (2012: 10) explains how children’s literature can be useful to help us understand different cultures. This author illustrates this idea with the following example: for Japanese EFL learners, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* serves as a way to understand Christianity. Japanese students can experience basic Christian worldviews as they read this children’s classic. This happens when one of the characters, Edmund, first enters Narnia and he eats a cake enchanted by the White Witch. This alludes to the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate from the Forbidden Tree. The Witch represents a symbolic servant of Satan. However, the lion, Aslan, dies to save Edmund’s life. The lion, Aslan, represents Jesus Christ. Aslan’s death on the Stone Table and his later revival parallel Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection. This part of the story which alludes to the miracle of the Christian legend, can sometimes appear rather incomprehensible to many Japanese students. Hence, this type of representation makes it easier for students from other cultures to understand what is not common to them (Tekenaga, 2012: 10-11).

e) Love and respect for small living things

Children’s literature sometimes has different objectives, such as didactic or instructive purposes, entertainment and fun elements, etc. At other times it has the main purpose of transmitting human values. This time I would like to

mention E. B. White again. This is because this author has shown himself to be one of the best examples of a writer displaying love and respect for small living things. As DiCamillo in the foreword to *Charlotte's Web* wrote:

Every word of *Charlotte's Web* bears the full weight of White's love for people, seasons, animals, and arachnids of this world. And every word of the book shows us how we can bear the triumphs and despairs, the wonders and the heartbreaks, the small and large glories and tragedies of being here. (DiCamillo, in White, 2012: n.p. "Foreword").

f) Messages of Hope

It is not a novelty that our world has experienced difficult times throughout History. It was during the Interwar Period (1920-1939) that children's literature started to have characteristics to entertain children against these moments (Wolfreys, 2011: 232). It was an escape from the trauma of World War I and because of that it stressed the fantasy element. Characters such as Mary Poppins by P. L Travers³ or Bilbo Baggins by J. R. R. Tolkien⁴ were created during this period. Thanks to literature we know that even in the hardest times there are traces of hope and that everything can be possible if we believe.

4.5 Children's literature as a tool for language teaching

As mentioned previously, literature, if used properly, can be a powerful tool when teaching a foreign language. This resource allows the teaching and learning process to be carried out in a less unnatural way (although it has to be correctly adapted taking into account the level and age of the students). On the other hand, although literature has not been used and exploited as I believe it should have been, it does seem that it is becoming increasingly recognised as a useful tool in the foreign language classroom .

In fact, if we take a look at teaching nowadays, which relies on more communicative methodologies, the main objectives are to develop the basic language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Therefore, EFL teachers should try to integrate these skills in the work they set their students.

The following classification based on Hişmanoğlu (2005: 57-60) tries to show how the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills can be used when teaching languages through literature:

³ *Mary Poppins* is not just the character of the story; it is the title of an English series of eight books that were published from 1934 to 1988.

⁴ Bilbo Baggins is a character who can be found in the different novels of J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Literature and Reading skills

When one wishes to include reading exercises in the classroom there are different ways to develop the reading skill. It can be introduced while discussing the plot or talking about the characters' personalities. The questions that appear can be looked up in the text or discussed in the classroom. At advanced levels, students can infer different topics and aspects about the text and the author's point of view and not establish limits on the possible sharing of ideas.

Literature and Writing skills

There are different ways to exploit the writing skill::

a) Literature as a Model for Writing

When a student is told to write something using an original work to imitate its content, theme, organization, and /or style Hişmanoğlu (58) highlights three different forms of writing in this category:

- Controlled Writing: mostly used for beginner-level students who usually need instructions with the grammar, vocabulary, word accuracy, etc. for their written productions.
- Guided Writing: this activity is for intermediate-level students who have to respond to questions which, when put together, retell or sum up the model.
- Reproducing the Model: in this activity students are required to paraphrase, to summarise and to adapt. This is why this type of writing exercise is recommended for more advanced students.

b) Literature as Subject Matter for Writing

In a composition course whose reading content is literature, students make inferences, formulate their own ideas, and look closely at a text for evidence to support generalizations. Thus, they learn how to think creatively, freely and critically. Such training helps them in other courses which require logical reasoning, independent thinking, and careful analysis of the text (Spack, 1985: 719 in Hişmanoğlu, 2005: 58)

c) Writing “On or About” Literature

This type of writing implies the traditional assignments of written responses to questions, paragraph writing, in-class essays and take-home compositions. Writing “on or about” can take place before the reading of the selected work. Students can infer about what they are about to read and on the other hand, if

they read it first they can relate it to their own personal life or knowledge and then start to write.

d) Writing “Out of” Literature

As Hişmanoğlu (2005: 59) states, writing “out of” literature is like a springboard for compositions. This is why we can find different approaches to starting compositions:

- Adding to the Work: this consists of adding more parts to the story created by the students.
- Changing the Work: this involves changing the endings of the stories or even retelling the story from a different point of view; so the story would be rewritten from the point of view of a different character or narrator.
- Drama-Inspired Writing: drama-inspired activities can be based on plays, short stories, novels and poetry. The student has to know about the character of a literary piece and then write about their attitudes and feelings.
- A Letter Addressed to Another Character: this time, the student writes a letter to one of the characters in which they give advice to one of the characters or some type of message.

Literature, Speaking and Listening skills

The speaking and listening skills are as important as the writing and reading skills. Therefore, it is important to work on them. This can be done through oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, pantomime, reenactment, discussion and group activities based on the literature text.

4.6 Advantages of using children’s literature in the EFL classroom

As Demetriou & Ruiz Mas (2009: 91-92) argue, the introduction of literature in the foreign language classroom presents several advantages :

- It is a way of using authentic sources of oral and written texts.
- On a daily basis of a classroom it would be difficult to introduce different contexts and situations which can in fact be introduced by literary texts.
- Children are exposed to a great variety of different types of language, from dialogues to descriptions of varied degrees of difficulty, depending on their linguistic level and maturity.

- Literature stimulates the student's imagination. The student's imagination can be improved by encouraging him/her to make a comic, dramatise the action in front of other children, changing roles, reading and repeating aloud, etc.
- Literature motivates the student to practise the skill of reading mainly, but the skills that can be practised with the different literary genres are the following:
 - a) Speaking: reciting poems (especially when dealing with specific sounds and stress, rhythm and intonation), drama, singing songs.
 - b) Listening: drama (listening to a play), the oral narration of fairy tales or poem recitations, songs.
 - c) Writing: fiction (writing short stories, descriptions, dialogues, etc.).
 - d) Reading: fiction (especially novels and short stories).
- Literature makes good readers of our students and reduces their dependence on TV and computers and other technological distractions such as mobiles etc.
- Literature broadens the student's mind. Children learn to respect other cultures. Knowing a little about the literature of English-speaking countries helps students to understand their culture and idiosyncrasy and therefore respect it.

4.7 Creation and adaptation of materials to exploit children's literature in the EFL classroom

Sandra McKay (1982: 531) points out that, “the key to success in using literature in the ESL class seems to me to rest in the literary works that are selected”. Therefore, if we teachers decide to use literature in the EFL primary school classroom, materials have to be very carefully selected in order to successfully implement this way of teaching.

As a way to show how materials can be created or adapted for their use in teaching English as a foreign language and also in order to clarify how I have decided to create them for the next section of this End of Degree Dissertation, the “Didactic Unit” I have considered it necessary to show the steps that a teacher can follow. These 6 steps are all illustrated with examples, and here I show the examples using the children's book which my didactic unit revolves around, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*:

1- Deciding on the level of the students to be taught.

I have chosen to teach the students of the sixth year of primary school education in Spain.

2- Choosing the literary resource that we wish to work with. (Comics, stories, books, songs, etc.)

This time I have chosen the book Charlotte's Web.

3- Thinking about how I wish to focus on the work. (Activities, reinforcement activities, didactic unit, project, etc.)

It will be focused on a didactic unit with different tasks and activities.

4- To establish realistic objectives to fulfil what I wish to achieve.

I will try to set-up a maximum of five sensible objectives. They do not have to be either too difficult or too easy.

5- To start to adapt and create my material (that I will use later as the basis for my activities).

This time, I will take an extract from the book and simplify the language:

Original extract

About half an hour before dawn. Wilbur woke and listened. The barn was still dark. The sheep lay motionless. Even the goose was quiet. Overhead, on the main floor, nothing stirred: the cows were resting, the horses dozed. Templeton had quit work and gone off somewhere on an errand. The only sound was a slight scraping noise from the rooftop, where the weather-vane swung back and forth. Wilbur loved the barn when it was like this - calm and quiet, waiting for light. (White, 2012: 33)

Adapted extract

In the morning, Wilbur the pig wakes up. The farm is dark because the sun has not come up yet. The sheep, the goose, the cows and the horses are sleeping. There is complete silence. The only sound that they can hear is the little weather-vane on the rooftop. Wilbur loves the silence and calmness of the place.

Predicted difficult words

come up: salir

dark: oscuro

yet: todavía

weather-vane: veleta

roof: tejado

calmness: calma

6- **To design the activities** with the material previously created and adapted.

Once I have adapted the extract that I wish to work on I can create the activities.

For example:

Imagine you are Wilbur. You are very relaxed on that calm morning. What are you thinking about?

Use the correct words and complete the sentences.

Happy – sad – hungry – thirsty – calm – excited – dizzy – relaxed – tired

I'm very _____ in the morning. The farm is very _____. My friends are sleeping. I can see them sleeping _____. I love it!

(Answers: happy, calm, relaxed)

5. Didactic Unit

5.1 Context and justification

This Didactic Unit is aimed at students in the sixth year of Primary Education (11-12 year olds) in Spain. It is created with the purpose of putting it into practice at the end of the academic year before the summer holidays when students have assimilated the learning objectives that correspond to their age. Another important reason to use this didactic unit at this time of the year is that students are tired of going to class the whole year and the exercises provided serve as a ludic way to revise the knowledge acquired during the whole year. It is also important to highlight that the development of this unit can be useful for the final grading of the students, because depending on how they carry out the proposed activities, it will be clear which students have passed the objectives of the course.

This Unit revolves around the book *Charlotte's Web* by E. B White. White was an American essayist and author of popular children's books such as *Stuart Little* (1945), *The Wild Flag* (1946) as well as *Charlotte's Web* (1952). My main reason for choosing *Charlotte's Web* instead of *Stuart Little* is simple. After reading about *Charlotte's Web*, I realized that the book is very popular around the world, but curiously in Spain or maybe around me, people do not seem to know much about it compared to *Stuart Little*. This is probably because the film version of *Stuart Little*, directed by Rob Minkoff in 2000, has been very popular, much more so than the 2006 film version of *Charlotte's Web* directed by Gary Winick

Charlotte's Web is a story about a pig named Wilbur whose owner wishes to kill it when it is just born because he is weaker than the rest of his siblings. However, the daughter of the pig's owner stops her father and Wilbur has a new opportunity to live in a barn where he lives together with more animals and where he meets his loyal friend, the spider Charlotte. Their friendship is based on love, loyalty and respect for each other, which will last until the end of their days.

As a future teacher, I believe that the process of teaching and learning English through literature is a very enriching way of learning a language. In fact, it does not provide just advantages when teaching and learning; literature provides a new world for students which in this special case will teach certain human values too.

5.2 Scheduling

As previously stated, this didactic unit should be taught at the end of the academic year., It has 6 sessions, which means that according to the Spanish syllabus which has 3 sessions of English classes of 45 minutes per week - it will last two weeks.

5.3 Objectives

Based on the Spanish syllabus the contents of a foreign language are divided into 4 groups of contents:

- Comprehension of oral texts
- Production of oral texts: expression and interaction
- Comprehension of written texts
- Production of written texts: expression and interaction

Consequently I have taken into account these groups and the purpose of the present didactic unit is to revise the contents of the whole year. I have considered the following objectives as the most relevant:

- To know how to use the grammar and vocabulary correctly.
- To learn how to express opinions and thoughts in English.
- To be able to follow instructions in English.
- To write short written productions

5.4 Competences

This didactic unit will help to instill the development of the key competences established by the Spanish syllabus (LOMCE, 2013):

- Linguistic competence: writing and reading tasks, talking to an audience (their classmates) in little discussions, idea-sharing or expositions.
- Learn to learn: learning to be autonomous while working, to have a good time control while doing the activities.
- Civic and social competence: thanks to the message of *Charlotte's Web*, human values such as friendship, loyalty and love are highlighted and taught.

- Initiative and enterprising spirit: debates, idea-sharing and short-expositions help to stimulate and to improve the students sense of initiative and an enterprising spirit. Most of the activities are based on oral participation. Therefore, students are constantly encouraged to participate.

5.5 Methodology

As the European Council says, one of the most important objectives in teaching a foreign language nowadays is that students improve their communicative competence progressively. This enables them to understand, speak, read and write fluently. Therefore, the methodology employed during the development of the unit will be focused on the aforementioned communicative skills but related to the literature resources employed. The tasks used will be familiar to the students, such as brainstorming, short expositions, discussions, arguing ideas, etc. so they should feel comfortable with the material.

5.6 Resources

There are not specific materials required for the development of the didactic unit. However, it will be necessary to have a computer and an Internet connection. Besides, each student will need to have a copy of the literary text created, the drawings used for the activities and the tables.

5.7 Lesson Plans

The activities that form the didactic unit are developed below. Firstly they are presented in the following table, with the purpose of giving a general view of the whole unit.

LESSON	TIME	TASKS	
Getting to know the story	5 minutes	1 st Warm up	HOMEWORK To colour the cover of the portfolio for all the tasks of the unit.
	5 minutes	2 nd To show Wilbur's drawing and to talk about it.	
	15 minutes	3 rd To write a brief description about the picture they have seen	
	5 minutes	4 th Brainstorming of the description	
	10 minutes	5 th To introduce the story	
Going deeper	5 minutes	1 st Warm up/ To review the homework/ Brainstorming about yesterday	
	5 minutes	2 nd To show Charlotte's drawing and to talk about it.	
	10 minutes	3 rd Second part of the story.	
	10 minutes	4 th Friendship spider webs	
	10 minutes	5 th Brainstorming	
The lovely Charlotte	5 minutes	1 st Warm up	
	15 minutes	2 nd Third part of the story, Charlotte's lullaby.	
	25 minutes	3 rd Listen to the lullaby, translate it and later to sing it.	
The end comes	5 minutes	1 st Warm up	
	25 minutes	2 nd The end of the story	
	15 minutes	3 rd Round table discussion	
Preparing a message	5 minutes	1 st Warm up	To finish the letter started in class
	15 minutes	2 nd Guided writing: a letter to one of the characters	
A message for the characters	5 minutes	1 st Warm up	To hand over the complete portfolio.
	35 minutes	2 nd Reading the letters	
	5 minutes	3 rd General opinions of the story/ Complete the self-assessment	

Table 1. Didactic unit activities' presentation.

Before starting with the development of the activities, I have considered a few considerations that the teacher should take into account:

- All the lessons start with a warm up with a duration of 5 minutes approximately, for the greetings or in which the teacher can prepare the materials, control the homework, etc.

- The lessons should take place in English. However, it is necessary to be sure that all students have understood the tasks. Therefore, some considerations may need to be explained in Spanish.
- It is important to exercise appropriate time control because with these types of activities it is easy to exceed the established time.
- As regards the evaluation, the teacher should have controlled the participation and the activities of each students with direct observation, due to the fact that he/she has to complete a table at the end of the didactic unit to evaluate the students.
- In square brackets next to the activities' title, the interaction between teacher and student or vice versa is written with the following code: "T", teacher, "S" student and "SS" students. Individual and group work is highlighted too.

5.7.1 Lesson Plan 1: Getting to know the story

Activity 1: Warm up (5 mins.) [T-S]

The teacher has to explain that in the following lessons, the students will do a different activity based on the reading of a story. Moreover, he/she has to tell them that they will get to know the story little by little and they should not investigate about it because if they did, the mystery will be lost.

Activity 2: (5 mins.) [T-S, S-T]

The students will be shown the following drawing of Wilbur the pig⁵:



⁵ All the drawings in this didactic unit are my own.

The students will be asked in a loud voice:

What do they think about the drawing?.

What does the pig look like?

What is wrong with the pig's face?

What could happen to the pig?

Activity 3 (15 mins.) [Individual work]

The students will be told to write a brief description about the picture they have seen. After answering the oral questions, they have to write down the reasons for the pig's sad face. They should be advised to use all the adjectives about feelings, emotions, etc. that they know. The description should not have more than 50-80 words.

Activity 4. (5 mins.)[T-S, S-T]

The students will be asked through a brainstorming activity to tell the teacher what they have written. The teacher will write them on the board.

Activity 5. (10 mins.) [Group reading]

The teacher will give a copy of the first part of the story to each student. Then they will read it in a loud voice in turns at least twice (depending on the level of comprehension that they have). Once they have finished reading it once, doubts and vocabulary that they do not understand will to be resolved by the teacher.

The text they must read⁶ will be the following:

⁶ The text based on *Charlotte's Web* is adapted by myself. However, whenever I present the original words the book is cited.

Once upon a time, there was a little pig who born smaller and weaker than his siblings. For this reason, his owner, Mr. Arable wanted to kill him. However, when his little daughter, Fern heard this, she got angry and told her father that if she had been born little and weak, would her parents have abandoned her? These words made him think about it. Then, he gave the little pig a chance to live if Fern took care of him.

From this moment, a wooden box started to be Wilbur's home. Every day, Fern fed and pampered him. However, he soon had a new house: the Zuckerman's barn. This barn was very big, it had horses, sheep, cows, goose, a rooster and even a rat. Fern went almost every day to visit him to the barn. All the animals trusted her because she was quiet and friendly.

But Wilbur wasn't very happy because he was bored of being in the pig pen. He felt lonely. Nobody wanted to play with him and he thought that every day was the same. In fact, he tried to make a new friend, the rat Templeton, although this rat was very rude and unkind.

One day Wilbur was in his pig pen when suddenly he heard a sweet voice talking to him...

HOMEWORK: Students are told to colour the cover for the portfolio of the unit:



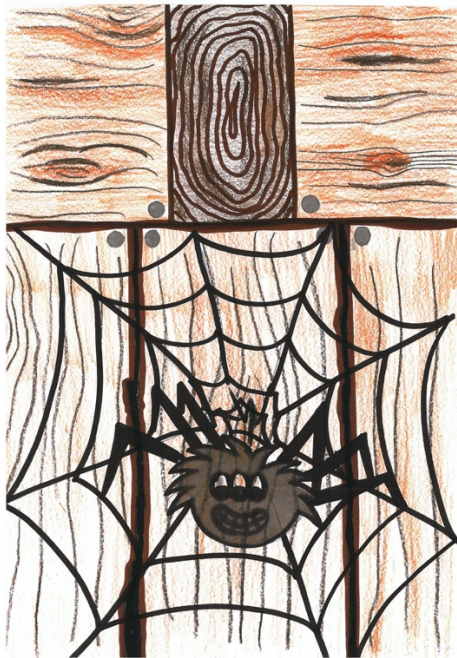
5.7.2 Lesson 2: Going deeper

Activity 1. (5 mins.) Warm up/ To review the homework/ Brainstorming about yesterday [T-S]

To start the class, after the daily routine of salutations, the teacher and the students will have a short conversation about the last lesson and the teacher will take a quick look at their homework.

Activity 2. (5 mins.) [T-S, S-T]

The following drawing will be presented to the students:



Firstly the students will be asked if they think that the pig and the spider can have some type of relationship.

After the discussion they will read the second part of the story

Activity 3. (10 mins.) [Group reading]

The teacher will give a copy of the second part of the story to each student. The students will be told to read the text at least twice, using the same procedure as in the first lesson (reading it in a loud voice at least twice). Once they have finished the teacher will resolve their doubts and vocabulary that they have not understood.

The night was very long for Wilbur. He was anxious to meet the sweet voice that wanted to be his friend. In fact Wilbur woke up such a great number of times that night. Once, he saw the unfriendly rat, Templeton gnawing a hole in the grain bin. Wilbur didn't understand Templeton's attitude; the rat broke everything and he didn't mind not having any friends.

When there was a small light very early in the morning Wilbur was awake and really excited. Finally the unknown voice started to speak again.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Salutations!

WILBUR: Salu-what?

UNKNOWN VOICE: Salutations are greetings.

WILBUR: Oh! Salutations! How are you? What's your name?

Wilbur was really really excited.

UNKNOWN VOICE: My name is Charlotte.

WILBUR: Pleased to meet you Charlotte, but why can't I see you?

CHARLOTTE: Look up! I'm right here!

WILBUR: Are you a spider?

CHARLOTTE: Yes I am!

WILBUR: Oh...I understand. Are you eating a fly?

CHARLOTTE: Actually I just drink its blood.

WILBUR: Ew...

Wilbur didn't understand why Charlotte could eat flies and all other insects. He thought it was disgusting. However, Charlotte seemed someone lovely. And she was.

CHARLOTTE: Why are you always so sad?

WILBUR: Because I do not have friends. Besides Mr. Arable and Mr. Zuckerman want to kill me. And I don't want to die! I'm very young!!

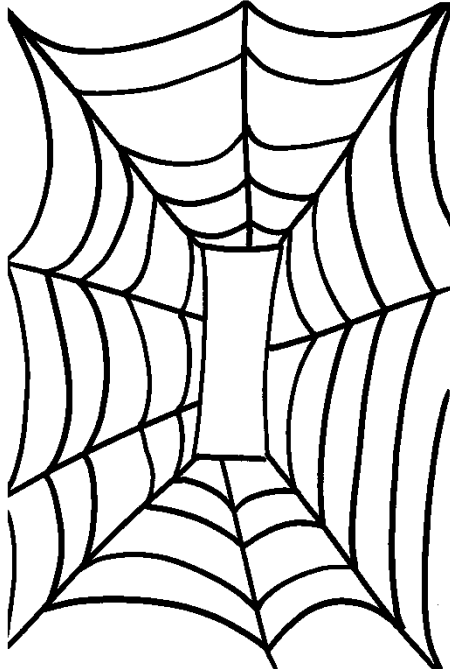
CHARLOTTE: You don't have to be worried. I'll help you.

Charlotte was a really clever spider. She thought that she had to do something to avoid Wilbur's death. So, she decided to weave a spider's web with a message to make people believe that Wilbur was magic. In the spider-web everyone could read: SOME PIG. And Wilbur started to act like "some pig".

When the owners saw that, they couldn't believe it. They thought that it was miracle, but the most incredible thing happened a few days later. It was because Charlotte made a spider's web with the word TERRIFIC in the middle. So, Wilbur started to act "terrific"; he did strange acrobatics. Then Mr. Arable and Mr. Zuckerman changed their minds completely. Now they didn't want to kill Wilbur, they wanted to...

Activity 4. (10 mins.) [In pairs]

After the reading of the second part of the story, the teacher will give a copy of the following drawing of a spider's web for each student:



Students have to write words related with the meaning of the friendship for them in the middle of the web. They can use the dictionary if necessary.

Activity 5. (10 minutes) Brainstorming [Pair work– S/T]

Each student will quickly tell the rest of the classroom what he/she has written.

5.7.3 Lesson 3: The lovely Charlotte

Activity 1. (5 minutes) Warm up [T-S]

Students should provide feedback about the last lesson to revise what has happened so far in the story.

Activity 2. (15 mins.) Third part of the story.

The students will be told to read the third part of the story at least twice for the whole comprehension of the text:

Having changed their minds, Mr. Arable and Mr. Zuckerman wanted Wilbur to become famous, and he did! Wilbur even appeared in the newspaper thanks to Charlotte's Web. There were too many feelings in Wilbur's mind and body.

At night, he couldn't sleep. He was very nervous at every moment because of all the attention he was receiving, but there was something that always helped him to sleep, it was that Charlotte told him stories. She was a really good storyteller. However, Wilbur loved one thing even more: Charlotte's lullaby.

Activity 3. (25 mins.) Listen to the lullaby⁷, translate it and later sing it. [T-S]

Before listening to the song, students will be asked about the meaning of the word lullaby. They must participate by raising their hands.

Then, the students will be told to first listen to Charlotte's lullaby.

Then, every student will be given a copy of the lyrics of the song and they will read it and try to understand it.

After that, the whole class will participate, and the teacher will have to encourage them to be volunteers to translate each sentence in the song.

Then they can start to sing it.

⁷ Music and lyrics from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7y9iV-9llg>

Deep in the dark

Now is the hour
When frogs and thrushes
Praise the world
From the woods and rushes
Sleep, my love
Sleep, my only
Deep in the dark...

Fragile and magical shadows
Silently start to appear
Lovely and lyrical
Silvery miracle
Charlotte's web.

Carefully spinning her tracings
Lacy and gracefully sheer
Over and under the infinite wonder of
Charlotte's web.

Why is she spinning and weaving away all night long?
What is she trying so hard to convey with her silent song?

Sometimes when somebody loves you
Miracles somehow appear
And there in the warp and the woof is the proof of it
Charlotte's web.

5.7.4 Lesson 4: The end comes

Activity 1 Warm up (5 mins) [S-T]

Students should provide feedback about the last lesson to revise what has happened so far in the story.

Activity 2. The end of the story (25 mins) [Group reading]

The students will be given the end of the story and they will have to read it at least twice using the same procedure as before for the other sections of the story

Wilbur became so popular that everyone wanted to go to the barn and see him.

One day, a fair arrived at the village and there was a pig's competition. Of course they would participate. For everyone, Wilbur was unique. However, he didn't want to go alone and Charlotte wasn't feeling very well, but finally she made an effort and went. The other companion was Templeton, but he just went because he noticed that at the fair there was lots of food to eat.

There at the fair, there were another pig bigger than Wilbur and he was so sad because he imagined that he wasn't going to win anything.

It was then when Charlotte told Wilbur that she was each time weaker, but even at that moment she continued to support Wilbur.

When Wilbur realised that Charlotte was really feeble, he asked her what was happening. Charlotte said that she was dying.

Wilbur burst into tears.

But Charlotte hid two things that Wilbur didn't know.

The first was another spider's web with a message: HUMBLE. As Charlotte said, Wilbur was very humble in spite of becoming popular. He had his legs on the ground. And that was when a magical conversation took place:

"Why did you do all this for me?" he asked. "I don't deserve it. I've never done anything for you."
"You have been my friend," replied Charlotte. "That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that." (White, 2012: 164)

The second thing was that she had laid five hundred and fourteen eggs that she wasn't going to take care of because she was going to die.

This difficult moment stopped when the judges arrived. They gave Wilbur a big medal, but it was insignificant for him at that moment. He only had Charlotte's eggs on his mind.

The competition ended and at the moment of returning home. Charlotte said to Wilbur that she would stay there because she couldn't move.

But what about the eggs? They were in a little bag made by Charlotte, but Wilbur couldn't take it because it was in the corner of the roof. Only one animal could take it: Templeton. Wilbur asked him to do it, although he didn't want to. Finally, Wilbur told him that if he took the bag, he would give to him a part of his food every day, Templeton didn't doubt in taking this offer.

Charlotte died alone, but her eggs were safe from harm.

The next spring, Charlotte's baby spiders were born. Most of them left the barn quickly and Wilbur was so sad because he thought that he was going to be alone again his life had been really difficult without Charlotte. He missed her a lot. However, three of Charlotte's baby spiders stayed there. Thanks to them, every spring lots of little baby spiders were born. Most of them left but two or three always stayed in the barn with Wilbur. That made him so happy. Although...

Wilbur never forgot Charlotte. Although he loved her children and grandchildren dearly, none of the new spiders ever quite took her place in his heart. She was in a class by herself. It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.

(White, 2012: 184)

THE END

Activity 3. (15 mins.) “Round table discussion” [S-T, T-S, SS-SS]

To close the story the whole class will start a debate to share their opinions and thoughts about it.

5.7.5 Lesson 5: Preparing a message

Activity 1. (5 mins.) Warm up [T-S]

These 5 minutes will be used to revise the whole story by speaking about it.

Activity 2. (35 mins.) Guided writing: a letter to one of the characters [Individual]

Students will be told how to write a letter. Each step will be explained clearly by the teacher and the students will be given this copy:

How to write a letter

You have to write a letter in 80-100 words for one of the *Charlotte's Web* characters. Before starting to write, you have to follow the following steps.

- 1) SELECT THE CHARACTER: Who is your letter addressed to?
- 2) PURPOSE: What do you want to tell him/her?
- 3) ORGANISE THE TEXT: write a short draft to organise your ideas.
- 4) REMEMBER THE PARTS OF THE LETTER (it must have):
 - a. Place and date
 - b. Salutations
 - c. Content
 - d. Goodbyes
 - e. Signature

HOMEWORK: If they have not finished the task in the classroom, they should finish it at home. They will be told that they will have to read these letters out to the class the following day.

5.7.6 Lesson 6: A message for the characters

Activity 1. (5 mins.) [Individual]

The students will be told to prepare their letters for the expositions.

Activity 2. (35 mins.) Reading the letters [S-SS/T]

Each student should read his/her letter to their classmates.

Activity 3. (5mins.) General opinions of the story[SS-T] and to complete the self-assessment [individual work]

Once the whole didactic unit is finished, the teacher will provide the students with the table below for self-assessment. The students have to be advised that they must be completely honest and responsible in writing their marks.

Meanwhile the students can talk about *Charlotte's Web*.

Once they have finished the self-assessment they have to return it to the teacher.

Self-assessment (for students)

Name:				
	Always	Often	Hardly ever	Never
I have listened to the teacher or to my classmates when he/she were talking.				
I have followed the instructions given by the teacher.				
I have been polite with my classmates and with the teacher.				
I have asked for help when I haven't understood something.				
I have done my best.				
I have participated in classroom activities.				
Observations:				

5.8 Evaluation

The present didactic unit will not have the traditional exam form of evaluation, . In its place, as evaluation instruments, I propose two tables with the evaluation criteria on it which the teacher will have to complete throughout the didactic unit with direct observation. One table is for the students daily work and the other is for the written letter. The scales for completing the tables are from 1 to 3. 1 is the lowest mark and 3 the highest mark. These two tables will be 90% percent of the final mark.

On the other hand, the students will have to complete the table about self-assessment which can be seen above, writing a cross where they consider it necessary. This self-evaluation will constitute 10% of the mark.

STUDENT:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
He/she makes the tasks in class																									
He/she shows interest in the activities																									
He/she participates voluntarily in the activities																									
He/she makes his/her homework																									
He/she learns the importance of values (empathy, loyalty, solidarity)																									
He/she inferences correctly on the proposed activities																									
He/she follows the instructions given by the teacher																									
He/she learns how to express his/her opinion																									
He/she respects the teacher																									
He/she respects his/her classmates																									

Daily work evaluation

STUDENT:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
He/she has followed the rules correctly																									
He/she has been able to work alone																									
He/she has a good language use																									
He/she has written an original letter																									
He/she has finished the letter on time																									
He/she has listened to their classmates during the expositions																									
He/she has a well-presented letter																									
He/she learns how to express his/her opinion																									

Letter evaluation

6. Conclusion

The main purpose of this project has been to show and to exemplify how literature can be useful in teaching languages because of the great number of resources and advantages that it has. This is the reason why I wanted to show how easy it can be to take literary resources and create different types of activities.

Besides, I have realized that both literature in general and children's literature especially, are not used widely in teaching languages. However, nowadays I think that it is becoming more and more popular even though it is put into practice with just a few activities.

In my case, I decided to use a book that at the beginning seemed to me much more difficult than a short story or other literary resources. I have summarized the complete book in short adaptations and I believe that with the didactic unit presented I have proved that with the necessary adaptation it can be just as usable as a rhyme, tongue-twister or a comic.

On the other hand, literature does not only provide us with linguistic benefits as it also gives us social facts that help students to grow as people and to mature. It is very enriching to read or to use books or stories such as *Charlotte's Web* in which friendship and discrimination problems are perfectly reflected by E. B. White. In fact incidents can be explained to students naturally.

To conclude, I would like to say that during the process of this project I have realised how useful literature can be in teaching languages. I am conscious that in this project this only shows a little Due to the limitations of space.

This End of Degree Dissertation has been for me a personal challenge both for doing it in English and for the process of creation. Above all , and what I like the most about this experience is that I know that all this knowledge that I have been learning will have a positive influence in my future as a teacher.

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