Achieve the course goals for English A by reading literature

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May 2010

C-Essay, 15 credits
English C

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Table of contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 3
   Background .................................................................................................................. 3
   What do the course goals tell us? .................................................................................. 5

2. Teaching literature ........................................................................................................ 8

3. The book ....................................................................................................................... 16
   Summary ...................................................................................................................... 16

4. Working with the book ............................................................................................... 18
   First encounters – exercises ....................................................................................... 19
   While reading – exercises .......................................................................................... 21
   Ending – exercises ...................................................................................................... 26

5. Discussion ..................................................................................................................... 29

6. Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 33
   Bibliography ................................................................................................................. 34
   Primary sources .......................................................................................................... 34
   Secondary sources ....................................................................................................... 34
   Electronic Publications ............................................................................................... 34

Appendix 1 ....................................................................................................................... 35
Appendix 2 ....................................................................................................................... 36
Appendix 3 ....................................................................................................................... 37
Appendix 4 ....................................................................................................................... 38
1. Introduction

We live in a society where reading abilities are valued. Education is crucial to get ahead and every teacher’s mission is to make sure that every student is given the opportunity to maximize their abilities. I like to read literature but for my students this is not always the case. Their reactions are often negative when a reading theme is introduced. Why is this? The students’ inexperience in reading could be a contributing factor. My task is to awaken students to the satisfaction of reading and bring out positive aspects of that process. I believe that students can be introduced to a new world where reading and learning go hand in hand and where the reading process is enjoyable instead of tedious.

The aim of this essay is to develop a method for using the novel *Go Ask Alice* in the English second language classroom. By doing this, my goal is to examine and create a way to use literary texts as a teaching tool with students in the upper grades of secondary school. The base of my research is:

- How can the novel *Go Ask Alice* be used when teaching literature in the classroom and what methods can be utilized?

The connections between activities and course goals will also be examined. “There ought to be a definite educational justification for every activity” (Showalter, 2003, p. 25). The method can be applied on other literary texts as well. The examination will be based on theoretical sources.

Collie and Slater (2006) present a number of activities that can be used in literary language teaching. They point out the importance in developing the students “in the four basic areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing.” (p. 2). The approach is suited for learners in the upper grades of secondary school. Furthermore, the authors mention that the approach “can be successfully adapted across different levels of language proficiency” (Collie and Slater, 2006, p. 2).

Background

My experience regarding students and literature is the foundation of this essay topic. Students are rarely exited about reading and it might be because of the texts they have been introduced to. Textbooks are often boring and it is hard to encourage students to read texts they find uninteresting. That is true for me also; it is hard to find the motivation to read a
book or text that is uninteresting. We read because we want to be entertained and if that is missing the thrill of reading will be gone.

In the essay *The Use of Literature as a Tool for English Language Acquisition in Swedish Upper Secondary School*, Åsa Lundgren discusses how to use literature in the second language classroom. Her main question was to examine how teachers can help students to appreciate literature and if literature will be useful in second language acquisition. However I want to develop her angle further by creating a method of how to use literature in the classroom. Pernilla Byström also discusses the subject of literature in the second language classroom in her essay *English Literature in the Classroom – An Archetypal Analysis of Dance on My Grave*. By reading these essays, this essay can be taken further by showing how it is possible to develop Lundgren’s and Byström’s perspectives.

In *Literature in the Language Classroom – A resource book of ideas and activities* Collie and Slater speculate about the place of literature in the foreign language classroom. The authors state that classroom reading is a learning situation where time is mostly spent on individual reading which makes students miss opportunities of discussion. I can agree that if students are inexperienced in reading more lesson time is needed for them to practice their reading skills. However, when students are more familiar with reading, lesson time can be used primarily for literature discussions or discussing upcoming assignments. Additionally Collie and Slater (2006) emphasize that a novel can be the starting point of many activities and that it can lead to important learning situations where listening, speaking and writing are practiced.

A frequently asked question by students is what they should do to expand their vocabulary and my most recurrent answer is to read more. By reading literature your vocabulary will increase automatically. Thus, it is important to make sure that students are given literature that will be of interest. Harmer (2001) points out that it is important for teachers to give students options when telling them to read. When the teacher suggests different genres of literature students are more likely to find one that suits them. The reading process needs to be seen as something rewarding and useful.

The reason behind the uncertainty of teaching literature is based on the fact that literature does not show language of everyday use, according to Collie and Slater (2006). An important matter to consider is that most literature is not created for teaching situations. It is up to teachers to use literature and make it useful in learning situations. Consider the positive aspects of using literature:
In reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration and so on. (4)

Alderson (1984) states that the reason behind teachers’ unwillingness to use literature in the classroom is that “most students fail to learn to read adequately in the foreign language (Alderson and Urquhart, 1984, p.1).” Alderson continues by stating that insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary are the key reasons behind students’ lack in reading skills in the foreign language. However, according to many teachers the reason for limited reading skills in a foreign language is often based on insufficient reading skills in their native language. Alderson refers to a study where children were taught to read in their first language before learning to read in a foreign language. Results showed that those children got better results than children who were taught in their second language first. That study shows that reading skills in the native language make a difference when students read in a second language.

What do the course goals tell us?
The National Swedish Agency for Education is responsible for creating general guidelines within the Swedish educational system. It is our mission as teachers to help and support students to acquire the knowledge that the course goals demand.

In the course goals for English A (EN1201), at upper secondary school, we can read that after having completed the course students should have achieved these goals:

Pupils should:

desire, have the confidence and be able without preparation to take part in discussions on familiar subjects and exchange information, personal views and experiences
be able with preparation to verbally provide
information about or describe a subject or area of
interest, and show evidence of adapting their
language to the requirements of the situation
be able to read and understand texts with varying
factual contents, especially texts linked to their
study orientation or their own areas of interest
be able to read and understand simple literature
and through literature acquire a knowledge of
cultural traditions in English-speaking countries
be able to formulate themselves in writing in order
to inform, instruct, argue and express feelings and
values, as well as have the ability to work through
and improve their own written production. (1)

The syllabus for English A does not specifically state that students should read and analyze
literature to develop their language skills. It states that the student should read and
understand simple literature and I cannot help but wonder: what is considered simple
literature? The syllabus also states that the student should, through language, acquire
knowledge of English culture.

Brumfit and Carter (1986) show problems with teaching literature in the foreign
language classroom. A work of literature is not written to be used as study materials for
different linguistic rules which can be seen as a problem since literature often is used to
develop students’ language and linguistic knowledge. Literature is also used to teach the
students culture. According to Brumfit and Carter (1986) studying literature is helpful when
trying to understand a foreign culture. However, the writers detect a problem in using
literary text to develop the students cultural and linguistic knowledge. “The problem with
using literary texts for non-literary purposes is that the status of the texts themselves is very
difficult to define for most non-native speaking teachers, as well as for learners” (Brumfit
and Carter, 1986, p. 25). It can be difficult to define the texts’ overall context when the linguistic aspect is focused on. The solution to this is to bring more literature into the classroom and to let the students discuss and analyze the texts, not just for its linguistic aspects. If students are inexperienced readers much time will be spent on the language aspect to make sure that students understand what they are reading. It is important to stress the fact that not every single word has to be understood to grasp the context of the text. “Pinpointing what individual words or phrases may mean becomes less important than pursuing the development of the story (Collie and Slater, 2006, p. 6).” The more students are taught reading literary texts, the easier it will be for them to understand and work with literature. I believe that if teaching literature becomes a greater part of teaching English as a second language, students will have a more natural way of acquiring second language knowledge. The students need to be comfortable with literature and “[...] constant exposure and re-reading is felt to deliver to students the necessary intuitive awareness (Brumfit and Carter, 1986, p. 3).
2. Teaching literature

The ambition of every teacher that teaches English A is that all students achieve the knowledge level set by the course goals. The hypothesis is whether the students can reach the course goals by reading and working with works of literature? Sandra McKay states that “literature has traditionally been used to teach language usage, rarely has it been used to develop language use (Brumfit and Carter, 1986, p. 191).” The differences are that language usage is when the focus is on the awareness of linguistic rules while language use rather focuses on how to use those rules in conversation (Widdowson, 1978). Both usage and use are important parts in every student’s second language learning but I would state that language use is the most important part since the students need to be able to use their language skills actively when they are in contact with it in real life situations.

We need to remember that it is ESL students that we are talking about and McKay states that language in literature is too complex for them. Collie and Slater (2006) on the other hand believe that the language complexity of literature could be seen as an advantage. The authors mean that students will benefit from reading a literary text because they get to be a part of a text intended for native speakers. The text will also be able to provide students with examples of a varying language usage. It is important for students to take part in an awkward language usage since that is what they will experience when they come in contact with English in real life situations. By only subjecting students to simplified English the students will not be fully prepared to use their language actively. Furthermore, Collie and Slater mean that literature is best used as a complement when it comes to developing students’ language knowledge. It is important that students are introduced to language of and for a native speaker but it is important to also realize that it is ESL students we are talking about. Texts from a text book are made for ESL students as a way to help them acquire the language skills needed to fulfill the coarse goals. By subjecting students to both text books and works of literature, the best results will be reached.

To continue with language complexity McKay states the importance in choosing a text with right level of complexity. Since she believes that the language in literature is too complex her solution is to choose a simplified text. Though, that solution offers its own problems. According to McKay, the simplified texts often lack in cohesion and readability which is an important part for students with limited reading experience. Additionally, a
simplified text is not the solution to developing students’ reading skills. McKay’s next suggestion is to offer books for young adults instead. This gives them the opportunity to be introduced to literature without scaring them with a language they cannot handle. This can be seen as a good start for inexperienced readers. It is a way that will make it possible for the students to develop within their own knowledge level. It is the same thing the students do in their native language Swedish. Students without reading experience will begin with a book intended for young adults to further along increase their reading skills and move on to more advanced literature. This works just fine in their native language and I do believe it would have the same results when it comes to literature in a second language.

It is important to remember that the selection process is a crucial part in getting students to read. Brumfit and Carter (1986) emphasize the importance in how to help students find the motivation to read and we do that when we consider what influences us when we choose a book. The language, authorial intention, critics’ point of view in journals and what category a text is assigned are all aspects that influence us as teachers and students in our choice of book. The students’ motivation is the most important aspect and that needs to be closely considered when an assignment is presented. “If it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect [...] (Collie and Slater, 2006, p.6). If students are not shown the potential that literature brings, it does not matter how creative and rewarding the assignment is.

Brumfit and Carter (1986) emphasize the teacher’s role in choosing the right literature for the students. The teacher can assist students in their reading enjoyment by helping them understand the story and by choosing a literary text that is suited to their knowledge level. The authors also focus on the importance in selecting literature with themes that the students can relate to.

Three important aspects to consider while selecting literary texts for students are their interests as well as their development and knowledge of literary reading. Beach and Marshall (1991) list aspects that the teacher may consider when selecting the appropriate literature for students:

- **Subject** – the story or the topic is important and interesting to young learners.

- **Storyline** – the students often prefer a storyline containing action and preferably a happy ending.
- **Escape/fantasy** – many students enjoy reading about an imaginary world where they are able to escape their own reality for a while.

- **Perspective or point of view** – students prefer reading texts written from a first person perspective which makes it easier for them to relate to the main character.

- **Stance or attitude** – students may dislike texts written to send a message about what is seen as bad behavior.

- **Physical properties of the book** – it is important to consider that students are influenced by the look of the book and how the cover is designed.

- **Movies and television** – students can be enticed if the book has been turned into a movie or TV-series.

- **Previous experiences with a book, author or genre** – if students earlier have had a good experience with a special book it is likely that they would seek the same kind of book the second time.

- **Sex roles** – the sex of the main character is a contributing factor when students choose a book. Boys are more likely to read about boys and girls about girls. When it comes to interests, boys are more likely to read about adventure, sports and science fiction while girls prefer romance, relationship and fantasy. The term “sex roles” is a dated expression and it is important to consider that today’s expression “gender roles” offers a wider view.

By considering these aspects we will see more successful reading projects with students and that their knowledge levels will increase by working with works of literature.

The obvious goal with reading literature is that students will develop their reading skills. Though, students will develop their writing and speaking skills as well. Collie and Slater (2006) write that by frequent contact with written language the students will be shown a variety of linguistic structures and that will hopefully develop their own written language. It is important to acknowledge the opportunities literature brings to the table. We are missing out on a lot if we just focus on reading skills as the only skills literature will develop. The activities concerning a work of literature is so much more than to just read it. The discussion after finishing a work of literature is just as important as the reading itself. By discussing a work of literature that students have read we can find a fruitful speaking exercise. This is a
way for students to share their own thoughts and feelings about the text and to take part in someone else’s perspective on the text.

The most important thing is to be able to teach students with literature in a way that they will understand and acquire language skills. Otherwise it does not matter how much time teachers spend on choosing the right literature. Theories on how to teach literature are endless. Showalter (2003) writes that there is no point in sticking to just one theory and it is also emphasized that few teachers do that. Theories can be a source of inspiration on how to introduce literature to students. With this in mind it is important to use all the influence we can get to make literature as appealing as possible for students. Showalter (2003) presents three interesting theories on how to teach literature: subject-centered, teacher-centered and student-centered.

Subject-centered theories focus on the contents of, in this case, literature. The teacher’s duty is to share his or her knowledge of the book to the students. The teacher’s own interest in the book will color the way it is presented to the students. Though, it is important to remember that it is on the students own interpretations the focus should lie and that the teacher should try to suppress his or her own feelings for the book. It can be difficult for teachers to step out of their own relation to the book and instead center the students’ thoughts and feelings concerning it. Showalter (2003) emphasizes that it can be a disadvantage when the teacher is too familiar with the work. It may be hard to imagine how students will interpret the text as first time readers. Showalter (2003) cites David Richter (a teacher from Queens college): “the best way to teach students to think for themselves – and to get them engaged in our conversation – is to be forthright about the irreconcilable differences within the profession over the interpretation and evaluation of texts, and to highlight in our teaching precisely these differences” (Showalter, 2003, p. 31).

On the other hand, teacher-centered theories concentrate on what the teacher is doing and how he or she shares knowledge. The most important quality in a teacher is not technique but integrity. Showalter (2003) writes about performance teaching that focus on the teacher’s ability to perform in front of the students. The classroom can be seen as a place of performance and “[...] performance teaching allows the classroom to become a truly dynamic and dramatic space, a living theatre in which there will be intellectual eruptions” (Showalter, 2003, p. 33). According to this theory, in order to be a good teacher you need to be a good performer. By using emotions and experiences in the teaching process the teacher enhances the learning process for the students. The main focus is on the teacher and his or
her performance. This can be seen as a negative thing since the focus should be on the students. It is their knowledge that should be focused on, not how good a performer the teacher is. With that in mind, the student-centered theory has a better focus. It focuses on what the student will gain from the teaching process and how the teacher will make the learning process fruitful for students. “[…] student-centered teaching makes the teacher a facilitator rather than a star” (Showalter, 2003, p.36). Research has shown that student-centered theories are getting more popular. It is a more active approach where the students need to be dynamic participants. How efficient the teacher may believe himself or herself to be, it does not matter if the students does not understand. The most important thing is that the students are active listeners. Additionally, it is important to consider that active participation does not need to be students writing or speaking. The most important part is that the students participate actively in the classroom activity. The main goal is the knowledge gained. “In short, if students are not learning, no matter how brilliantly we perform or indoctrinate, we are not teaching” (Showalter, 2003, p. 36).

The teacher’s job is to find a way that works for him/her and to make sure that the students will get the best teaching possible. Showalter (2003) emphasizes that the most important thing is to find a way of teaching that works for both teacher and student and not to follow a specific theory.

The next part in teaching literature is to make sure that the lessons are well prepared and that students will get the most out of the time spent in the classroom. Showalter (2003) writes that many teachers try to plan their courses ahead of time. The downside to this is that when the material is brought into the classroom, it is not fresh in the teacher’s mind. He or she still needs to prepare every lesson just before it is held and it can be regarded as unnecessary work. It is important that the teacher is up to date with the material that is taught. In the end it does not matters if you plan long-term or short-term. The most important aspect is that the teacher is up to date with the plan before stepping in the classroom. I believe that every teacher needs to find the method best suited for him/her and every person needs different structure. It is also up to every teacher how precise a lesson plan needs to be. Some teachers need to plan every minute of the lesson while others are more spontaneous. However, with a careful lesson plan there is not much room for spontaneity. “A teacher who sticks too closely to some remembered script may find little attention to spare for what’s really going on in the room (Showalter, 2003, p. 45).” It can be hard to factor in students if the lesson plan is too detailed. After all, it is the students that
should be in focus. A problem teachers have to deal with when they create a lesson plan is how to keep the students motivated throughout the lesson. It does not matter how motivated the students are, there is still a problem with attaining their attention. It is during the first ten minutes, of every lesson, that students’ attention span is high. After that it will rapidly decline. This can be dealt with by taking regular breaks or maybe changing the task every 15 minutes. By making the lesson memorable it is easier to maintain the students’ interest. Showalter (2003) lists advice on how to do just that:

- a clear structure and outline
- a statement of objectives
- frequent signposts
- handouts, especially with spaces for students to answer questions, solve problems, or add their own notes
- a shift of material or approach every fifteen minutes
- strategies for student participation […]
- use of audio-visual materials, with instructions about what to look for (51)

By using these points the lesson will be more memorable and it will also make the students active participants in line with the student-centered theories.

It is important to change how the classroom is arranged during the exercises. Richard and Lockhart (1996) write concerning advantages and disadvantages with different classroom arrangements like whole-class teaching, individual work, pair work and group work.

Whole-class teaching mainly consists of the teacher talking and is furthermore, the most commonly used teaching method. Studies have shown that in whole-class activities,
the teacher talks 70% of the time. This tells us that students’ participation is minimal and this is a disadvantage with this method since only a few students get to be heard. On the other hand, this method makes it possible for the teacher to inform a large group of students at the same time and that time can be used to prepare the students before continuing on with individual or group work. Many teachers find the time in the classroom as several times stressful since there are a lot of assignments and exercises to be done during a limited amount of time. A wish is that we had more classroom time. Whole-class teaching can save time, regarding the limited amount of time in the classroom, since we can instruct all the students at once.

The second most common is individual work which has several advantages. One of them is that every student can work according to his or her individual ability. The teacher is also able to help students individually which will benefit students with learning difficulties. However, the disadvantage is the lack of interaction both between teacher – student and student – student. Additionally, a problem with this method can be the difficulty of keeping track of every individual student and what they are working with. An important aspect to consider when letting students work individually is that the assignment is clear and that everyone knows how to complete it. A disadvantage not to be forgotten is that it can be hard to have time to help every student individually. Since classes often contain between 20-30 students, it is hard for one teacher to be able to help each and every one during the limited amount of time we have.

Lack of interaction is one of the disadvantages with individual work. Without the possibility of interaction students will be deprived of their chance to develop spoken language. This is the advantage with pair work (Richards and Lockhart, 1996). However, it is important to mix up the pairs from time to time. It may be fruitful to work with different partners because of the different knowledge levels of each student. It is also important to really encourage the student to speak English with each other and put focus on the benefits of it. It can be hard for students to speak English with the classmates since they are used to talking Swedish to them. It is a problem that needs to be considered.

Group work is a method that is used more and more. It gives students an active part in their learning. The teacher steps back and lets the students work. Students’ ability to work in a group is also developed through this method. One important aspect to consider, though, is that group sizes are determined depending on assignment. If the groups are too large there
is a risk that some students do not participate. It is important to consider the purpose of each group activity and that it is well arranged and structured (Richard and Lockhart, 1996).

The most common way to share the talking time in the classroom is by using group activities. The teacher cannot be involved in every group’s discussion which may encourage students to discuss topics they would otherwise avoid (Beach and Marshall, 1991). This is a good thing but it would only work if the students are comfortable with speaking English to each other. Students can find it strange to speak English to friends that they most often speak Swedish to. If the situations of speaking English are played down, then it will feel more natural for them to use English in conversation.

According to Richards and Lockhart (1996) the most important aspect to consider when teaching a second language is interaction. They also point out that:

A common theme underlying different methods of language teaching is that second language learning is a highly interactive process. A great deal of time in teaching is devoted both to interaction between the teacher and the learners, and to interaction among the learners themselves. (138)
3. The book

The book I have chosen for this essay is *Go Ask Alice*, author Anonymous. It is based on a true story, a diary written by a teenage drug user. Names, places and dates are changed by the editors in agreement with the participants concerned. The editors also point out on the cover that this book “[...]does not offer any solutions. It is [...]a highly personal and specific chronicle.” The focus of the novel is on teenage drug use and on a young girl’s tragic destiny.

The reason behind my choice is that the book is both interesting and worth reading. A teacher at Polhemsskolan in Gävle has also used it in class with good results. Based on the knowledge that this book has worked in class before I was intrigued to take the reading further and explore different ways of working with it. The goal is to use reading as a starting point for many different exercises where the students will be able to develop their language skills.

Arnette Memory (1992) writes that the book shows an example of drug use and the fact that it could happen to anyone. It does not matter what background or upbringing you have because one wrong choice is all that is needed to change your life forever. “The experiences Alice goes through help educate young adults about the consequences of drugs (Memory, 1992, p 37).

Summary

In the beginning of the book Alice is a typical 15 year old teenager. Her focus is on boys, diets and school. Her father, a college professor, is offered a new job and Alice is excited about moving, this will be a start to her new more positive life. However, the new town made her feel even more isolated than before.

Her first contact with drugs was when she returned to her old hometown one summer and went to a party with old friends. Without her knowledge she is given a bottle of Coca Cola spiked with LSD. She found the experience pleasurable and continued using drugs.

After a pregnancy scare Alice stayed away from drugs, but not for very long. The acceptance she found with drug users is what she had been missing. She started dating a drug dealer and helped him by selling drugs. He used her and she turned him in to the police and then ran away with her friend Chris and they end up in San Francisco. Alice and Chris dreamt of opening a boutique together so they got jobs to make enough money to fulfill it. Alice and Chris are introduced to heroin by Chris’s boss Sheila and she and her boyfriend
raped them. Alice and Chris both gave up their jobs and started their own boutique. After a while, however, they became homesick and returned home.

Her family took her in with open arms but she struggled with the promise to herself to stay away from drugs. The pressure got to her and she relapsed and, while high, ran away again. Now she lived on the streets. The love for her family finally helped her to look for help to return home again.

When she returned home this time she ended her drug use completely and actually made it. However, she had problems with her former friends who still saw her as a sell out. She did not have any friends because the “square” kids, as they are called in the book, did not want to hang out with a former drug user.

Her drug-free life worked well and she met a guy. She was then drugged without her knowledge while babysitting, most likely by one of the other drug users in an attempt to get back at her. She had a bad trip and got violent and ended up hurting herself badly. She was admitted to a psychiatric facility which helped her to finally be free from drugs. Her life got back on track and she decided to stop keeping a journal.

In the end of the book there is an editorial note telling the reader that she died, three weeks after her last entry, by a drug overdose. If it was accidental or premeditated no one knows. The editor points out that she was only one of 50,000 drug users who died that year in the USA.
4. Working with the book

In this chapter exercises found in Collie and Slater (2006) will be applied on Go Ask Alice. The focus will be put on how the exercises can be used to fulfill the course goals of English A. The English A course goals do not focus on reading literature. The goals are for students to be able to read, write and speak. The goal for reading can be reached with texts from a textbook as well but it will be demonstrated how to reach all these goals by reading works of literature. The exercises will show how it is possible to achieve the course goals with literature and how they will develop the students’ skills in reading, speaking, listening and writing. To achieve the goal for listening it is important to emphasize that the students need to listen actively when classmates are speaking and use the opportunities to learn from each other. These exercises can also be used with other literary works even though my focus is on Go Ask Alice.

The chapter is divided into three parts; first encounters, while reading and endings. In first encounters exercises for students to work with before they begin to read the book will be presented. Collie and Slater (2006) point out how important it is to prepare students before they begin to read. We are then able to handle, in advance, difficulties that students might face during the reading process.

In the second part, while reading, the exercises that can be applied during the reading process will be introduced. It is important to let students work with the book also during the reading process. They can share and discuss topics presented in the book and by sharing thoughts with classmates they are able to develop their own perception of what happened.

The last part, endings, consists of exercises best used after students have finished the book. By taking time to work with ending exercises the teacher helps students to understand the importance of finishing the book. This may also encourage the students to continue reading literature.
First encounters – exercises

Discuss title and cover

There are two different cover designs of the book *Go Ask Alice*. Both covers can be transferred on to overhead sheets and shown the students. This can spark a discussion since the students now can look at differences and similarities between the two covers. Examples of questions to discuss are; why are there two different covers of the same book? Both of the covers are made with dark colors, mainly black. Why is that? They can also discuss the person illustrated on the covers, are they the same person? Who is that person?

After students have examined the covers the teacher can present the title along with the covers. The discussion can now focus on how the title and cover work together? What does the title tell us? Why is there more text on cover 2 and why is that text missing on cover 1? It is up to the students to decide how the discussion will proceed.

This exercise will fulfill the course goal that “pupils should desire, have the confidence and be able without preparation to take part in discussions [...] and exchange information, personal views and experiences” (Syllabus for EN1201 – English A). Since students have not seen the covers earlier and are directly put in the situation where they have to discuss the differences, the discussion is unprepared. This exercise will give students an opportunity to test their skills in improvised speaking.

The title and cover design are important when the book is discussed. It is through the cover and title that the reader chooses the book. The cover and title should give the reader an idea of what the book is about. With this in mind, it is important, as a teacher, to keep documentation of what the students’ thoughts and questions are concerning the book’s cover and title and refer back to when students are acquainted with the story and see if they still feel the same about the cover as they did before, without any previous knowledge concerning the book.

Using the theme

The major theme in *Go Ask Alice* is drugs and the reader is shown Alice’s struggle with drugs. The exercise begins by describing the theme so that the students understand the major issues in the book. Students reflect over the struggle a teenage drug user goes through. Students discuss the theme in groups and perhaps share if they have any experience concerning this topic. They do not have to have personal experience to have thoughts
regarding drug use. It is important for teachers to know that every class may have students that use drugs and be prepared if this will come up during the discussions.

Questions the students can think about and discuss:

- How easy would it be, for you, to get in contact with drugs?
- What would you do if you found out that someone close to you was using drugs?
- How do you believe that your parents and close ones would react if you started using drugs?

The point of this exercise is to let students consider how easy it would be to get in contact with drugs. It may give them a greater understanding of what the book is portraying. Drug use can be a good topic since it is something that everyone can relate to in some way, maybe on a more personal level or maybe just through the TV. I think that everyone gets an image of something when they start thinking about drug use.

Like the previous exercise this also focuses on students’ speaking skills. However, in this exercise students are able to prepare answers which will develop their skills to fulfill the course goal of prepared speech. If students are given the questions by the end of a lesson they have the opportunity to prepare answers before group discussion.

**Beginning vocabulary**

Let the students begin to read the first two pages. Then, let them individually write down words to put in two different categories; words they do not know and words that they think everyone should know. After the students have picked out their words, they are divided into groups where they can compare choices. Continue by discussing why words were picked and let the students explain their thoughts. This exercise is not about right and wrong, it is about teaching students to think about the text and the importance of the author’s word choices. What kind of image do the students get of the character when they read the first two pages and do they believe that the word choices matter?

The exercise will develop the students’ skills in using a dictionary to understand certain words. It will expand the students’ vocabulary skills. At the end of the course English A “pupils should be able to read and understand simple literature” and this exercise will help them achieve that goal. By developing the students’ vocabulary skills it will help them to achieve the course goal of understanding literature.
Time capsule
Students have all read the first 27 pages because that will give them a picture of the life Alice is living and her first introduction to drugs. It will present them to the drug issue that will be raised in the book. Then students can decide if they need to brainstorm as a group before writing their own contribution to the time capsule. Questions students can use while brainstorming are:

- What kind of life is Alice living?
- How did Alice react to her first drug experience?
- Will Alice continue using drugs?
- What will happen if she continues using drugs?

The aim of the assignment is for the students to think about what will happen to Alice in the future. When the students have written their personal beliefs on a card, these cards are gathered and put into an envelope where they will be kept until students finish the novel. By letting students predict upcoming events in the novel their interest to continue reading will presumably increase. If the teacher is able to motivate the students to read, course goals have a greater chance of being fulfilled.

While reading – exercises
Worksheets
Collie and Slater (2006) emphasize that their method for working with longer texts is based on students reading significant parts of the book by themselves. Worksheets are a way to help students understand the text they are reading. Worksheets may also be constructed to give as little follow-up time as possible if classroom time is limited. Below different worksheets will be presented and an explanation on how they can be used with Go Ask Alice.

When worksheets are used it is up to the teacher which course goals are targeted for that specific exercise. Every worksheet can in theory fulfill every course goal depending on how you chose to work with it.

- Question-and-answer

When the reading is introduced students are assigned to read up to p. 12. During those pages the reader is familiarized with Alice’s feelings about who she is, about
moving to a new town and about her friends and aspiring boyfriends. Examples for the students to think about while reading p. 1-12, see Appendix 2.

- **Questionnaires**

  This activity can be used whenever there is time to spare during a lesson. Focus is on the students and the assignment is for them to make the questionnaires. The main goal is to let students think about the section they have read and work with it. They should have been working with worksheets given by the teacher first so that they know and understand how to create one.

- **Compare summaries**

  The teacher writes two different summaries of the same section of text. They can be based on a longer or shorter part of the work. During p. 12-15 we get to follow Alice’s life when she has arrived to the new town and is starting school. Since this is just a couple of pages the students can read them in class. The two summaries (see Appendix 2) are pretty similar so it is important that the students can motivate their choice. Why have they chosen the one they did? What made them not choose the other one?

- **Summary points**

  After letting the students read up to p. 27, the assignment is to let students focus on Alice’s development leading up to that first introduction to drugs. The students are then to select points that they feel are important to the section they just read. The next step is to let the students compare their individual points with each other to see if they have chosen different points. Different people value different aspects in a text. An example of my summary points concerning this part, see Appendix 2.

- **Jumbled events**

  The selected section (p. 27-37) is read by the students and the events are placed into order. I have taken the events (see Appendix 3) from the text but also made up a couple to make it a bit harder for the students. As an extra assignment concerning this, the students may also add events to my list if they feel that some event, which is important for the story, is missing.

- **Choosing the message**
When we tell the students to find what they feel is the message of the book it means that they should look within the story and find the value of it. Dig deep in the idea of the author and find the center, the reason why this story is published. Why do you believe that this story was written?

This exercise is best used when the students reach the end of the book, I believe. They need to have a good knowledge of the story when they make their decision. The students are given the examples (see Appendix 3) and it is important to tell them that they can make up their own example if they do not feel that my examples are fitting. The students also have to justify why they chose the message that they did. It could be easy just to choose “do not use drugs” and say that it is wrong to use and that it will kill you as it did Alice. Examples are needed to show why it is wrong; like that it brings Alice away from her family and gives her trouble living a normal life after deciding to stay away from drugs. The students can use quotes to enhance their choice of message.

- Continuing the time capsule

This is a continuing assignment based on the time capsule (p. 16). The cards can be looked at and the students are able to add to their prediction or maybe change it depending on their thoughts regarding the new information they gained by reading a bigger part of the novel.

- Write an ongoing diary

Since *Go Ask Alice* is a book written through a diary perspective the role of Alice is pretty much already taken. The students may then instead choose one of the supporting characters in the story. The assignment can put focus on Alice’s parents, siblings or friends. Maybe imagine they are Alice’s mother and write how it is to have a daughter on drugs. The students get the chance to consider and write down what they believe Alice’s mother was thinking or maybe what one of Chris and Alice’s friends was thinking. The possibilities are endless.
**Shorten a summary**

When applying this exercise on *Go Ask Alice* the students are put in groups of three. Each student writes a summary of 70 words and then they pass it around within the group. Then they shorten the summary to half, max 35 words before they pass in on once again. This last time the summary is reduced to half again, 17 words. For example, if this exercise would be applied on p. 49-52 the summaries could look something like this:

1. Alice and Chris ran away from home to San Francisco. They found a dirty small apartment where they stayed. Alice got a crappy job while Chris looked for something better. Their goal was to one day start their own boutique. Chris got a great job and her new boss was named Sheila. Alice was homesick but she couldn’t go home. She left her job to find something better. (68 words)

2. They ran away to San Francisco, lived in a small apartment. They wanted to start a boutique and got jobs that could teach them what they needed to know. Alice got homesick. (33 words)

3. Ran away and got job. Alice and Chris wanted to start a boutique. Alice was homesick. (16 words)

This exercise will develop the students’ skills in writing summaries and how to formulate themselves in writing using a limited amount of words. The most important thing in this exercise is not to formulate correct sentences since this might be impossible within this tight word limit. The most important thing is to bring the most important facts into the summary and to make it understandable to the reader.

**Create conversation**

In this assignment the students are asked to write dialogue between characters in the book. They can relate to a situation where there was nothing said or maybe between two characters that never met in the book but that students felt should have met. Since *Go Ask Alice* is written through just Alice’s perspective, with the diary angle, there are lots of different possibilities when writing dialogues. For example, students can write a dialogue between Alice’s parents after she ran away for the first time or maybe between her siblings discussing their sister’s drug use. There are several sections in the book where it is stated that two characters are talking to each other, for example the times Alice and Joel are walking together from the library to her father’s office. What did they talk about? How much
did Alice tell Joel about her past? The students’ imagination is the only thing that may hinder them.

The students are divided into groups of two because it will then be possible, after they finished the writing, to act out the dialogues in front of the class. This exercise will develop the students’ skills in both writing and oral presentation.

**Authentic formats**

Not only literary assignments can be used when working with a novel. By using the theme of the book the students can also create something “authentic”. Important, though, is that they are first shown a model so that they are familiar with the structure.

Both exercises below will let students practice how to formulate themselves in writing and how to bring out the most important facts so that it will be clear to the reader.

- **TV or movie guide**

  The students are first shown different types of TV and movie guides. A guide is a short summary of the TV program or movie. Students can also bring guides from their own favorite movie or TV program. Then they are assigned to pretend that *Go Ask Alice* is made into a movie or TV program and write the guide. When they finished the teacher can show the actual guide to the existing movie *Go Ask Alice*. A discussion can then be held concerning possible differences between the guides. This can also be a good time to look at parts of the movie and then discuss similarities and differences.

- **Missing person poster**

  In *Go Ask Alice* the missing person is pretty obvious since it is the main character. After being shown an example of a missing person poster (Appendix 4) the students can write the missing person poster for Alice when she runs away from home. The poster can be displayed in the classroom.

**Reading aloud**

The students are divided into groups of three and each group is responsible for a section of the text. The assignment is to practice how to read a text and how to put the right intonation and rhythm to it. By practicing intonation and rhythm the students’ awareness of spoken language will increase. Since *Go Ask Alice* is a diary, it is written with Alice’s voice and it is
important that students can put themselves into her situation when they read. One example is when Alice meets Joel and the excitement she is feeling about having met someone. When reading those parts the students have to consider her feelings and put the right emphasis to it.

According to the course goals the students have to be able to adapt their language to the situation which this exercise will teach them to do. By practicing intonation and group oriented reading the students will learn how to develop their language skills to fit their receivers. Students will also develop their pronunciation by practicing reading aloud.

**Oral summaries**

Earlier I have presented many exercises regarding summaries and also their importance in relation to the course goals. Summary oriented exercises can be done in many ways and here is another example. This is a type of exercise that can be applied anywhere in the book. It can also be used after or before another exercise as a complement. It can be used to make sure that the students have read the assigned passage. The exercise is for students to summarize the section they have read orally. It will develop the students’ pronunciation skills and oral presentations without preparation.

**Ending - exercises**

**Cover design**

This exercise will let the students use their artistic side. After the students have finished reading *Go Ask Alice* they are divided into groups. Now they have an overall knowledge of the story and their assignment is to create a new cover design. They must consider how the cover will speak to the reader and what first impression it gives. The existing cover has been discussed before the reading begun and this can be the time to reconnect to that discussion.

Not every student enjoys drawing and everybody may not have artistic tendencies so for them it can be useful to use a collage technique and cut from different magazines. After the covers are finished they are displayed in the classroom. The class moves around, looking at all the covers and each student presents their cover and their thoughts during the process.

According to the course goals the students should be able to speak, prepared as well as unprepared. In this exercise they are able to prepare their presentation of the cover and it is then important that they show how they can adapt their language to the situation at hand.
Unsealing the time capsule

Now it is time to unseal the time capsules that were created in the beginning of the reading process. The students can discuss their earlier predictions and why they made them and what the results were. Depending on whether the students have also done the exercise “continuing the time capsule” (p. 14), the students can discuss their own predictions from the beginning and possible changes they made in the mid-reading process. Were the changes viable and did they influence the way the students saw the outcome?

In this exercise it is important that the students have finished their reading. The discussion is based on different turning points in the book and the students need to know them. This is a good way of checking up on their reading at the same time as they are practicing their speaking during the discussion.

Point of no return

When applying this exercise on Go Ask Alice, I believe that the discussion can be pretty lively since the outcome itself can be discussed. In the end of the book Alice has straightened up her life and given up drugs. The reader is then informed that Alice died three weeks after her last entry. Here we have a first discussion point. How did she die? Was she using again or did something else cause her death? What events lead up to it? It is a complicated question since everything leads back to what the reader sees as the outcome. I believe this could turn out to be a quite fruitful discussion between the students.

Divide the students into groups where they are to discuss what they think is the point of no return. Examples need to be written down, preferably with quotes from the text to strengthen their argument. New groups are then formed to widen the discussion. In this exercise the students will practice both their writing and speaking skills.

What if...?

This exercise should be used before “Point of no return”. Here students think about the situations prior to the point of no return and by discussing it with each other wonder about what could have been different. What could Alice have done differently to not end up the way she did? I believe that this exercise could be incorporated with “Point of no return”.

Considering the course goals, this exercise can fulfill either the writing or speaking goal. Let the students either write or discuss depending on what will best fit the lesson.
Continuing the last page

After the end of *Go Ask Alice*, there is an epilogue explaining that Alice died three weeks after her last entry. The assignment for the students is to write another entry following her last one. In the last entry Alice thinks about her new life and how the journal no longer fills a place in her life. If she would have continued her journal anyway, what would she have written? Maybe the reader would get an explanation to her death?

This exercise will let the students practice their writing skills. This is an exercise where students can rewrite and work with their text with the purpose of learning from their own mistakes. By helping each other the students can also detect many of the errors without the teacher’s involvement.

Dramatic adaptations

My experience is that the students learn a lot from acting out scenes because it is something that needs practical work, not just theoretical. This can also be used as an assignment to end the project. However, it is important to keep in mind that not every student enjoys theatrical assignments so it would be best to let this assignment be voluntary. Students who choose not to do this can carry out a different exercise. In *Go Ask Alice* there are many events that can be interesting for the students to act out. One example is the scene where Alice and her mother are interacting with each other. Another is the scene between Alice and Chris when they choose to run away from home. Because *Go Ask Alice* is written like a diary it is hard to find events that are closely described since it is just Alice’s thoughts and point of view. This can be seen as a good thing since it gives the students a greater chance of putting their own thoughts into the scene and to create something based on their own imaginations. This assignment can also be used together with “Create conversation”.

If this assignment is incorporated with “Create conversation” the students will both practice their writing skills when they write their dialogues as well as their speaking skills when they perform.

These are a varied collection of exercises to be used when working with literature. They are applied to the novel *Go Ask Alice* but can just as well be applied to any work of literature. It is then up to the teacher to choose which exercise they want to use during a reading project. You can use them all or just a selection depending on how much time there is to spend on the project.
5. Discussion

Literature is a source of knowledge too little used in the ESL classroom. Through literature students are given a piece of English from a native source. That will prepare them for real life situations involving English. By using the exercises mentioned in this essay, literature will be a great complement for achieving every course goal. Literature will give students a possibility to take charge in the classroom, as the student-centered theories enhances, with a natural source of conversation. The classroom can also become a dynamic place with literature, a place where everyone can make intellectual interruptions, like the teacher-centered theories recommend.

One argument against teaching literature in the ESL classroom, as McKay stated, is that literature is not appropriate because of its complex language. I disagree since while reading literature you will learn the language skills needed to fulfill the course goals. The argument that language is too complex is not true for all texts either. I agree with the fact that language in literary work sometimes can be quite complex but if students are trained in literature reading, this will not be an issue. The complexity in teaching literature to students without previous experience with reading can be understood but reading is a craft and the more you read the better you will master it. It is also important that reading is introduced in the students first language for them to learn to appreciate literature. If we use literature regularly in the language classroom, students will master the craft of reading. Language that was considered too complex will then not be a problem. Collie and Slater (2006) write that when using literary texts students will be challenged with a variety of linguistic differences. When students are challenged with a text intended for native speakers they will have the opportunity to gain greater second language skills. This will not be possible, to the same extent, with texts from a text book intended for the ESL classroom.

Collie and Slater (2006) also state that vocabulary skills will be increased by reading literature but that those skills will not develop the students’ overall language skills. I disagree since it is vocabulary skills that are the foundation when increasing overall language skills. With a broad vocabulary students will feel more secure when using their second language since they have the ability to put their thoughts into words and express themselves. Students will not be able to develop language skills just by studying vocabulary but it is a contributing factor when expanding the skills. By studying vocabulary at the same time as oral exercises are practiced, students will understand the importance in learning vocabulary.
because it will help them with their oral exercises. Since literature is a starting point to many different language assignments, reading will help students to be able to develop their language skills. Students’ textbooks can be regarded as misleading when it comes to introducing students to language used by native speakers. The language is often simplified which will give the students a misleading picture of how native speakers use English. This is easily managed by using literature as a complement to textbooks. When literature is used in the ESL classroom students are introduced to language intended for a native speaker which will enhance their language skills. Just by looking at the exercises Collie and Slater (2006) created, we are shown the possibilities a work of literature can give when teaching English as a second language. The exercises I have presented show that literature will develop other areas of language acquisition than just reading. By using literature in the language classroom we give the students a way of acquiring more than just reading skills, we give them the opportunity to acquire overall language skills.

The issue on whether literature should be taught to ESL students has already been discussed. Of course it should. Now let’s focus on the issue how it should be done. The exercises presented will show a variety of ways to work with literature, in this case *Go Ask Alice*. All the exercises can be done in different ways and the theories Showalter (2003) presented can be used as a starting point in figuring out what theory suites your teaching best. The student-centered theory has the best focus since it focuses on the students’ learning. The most important aspect in teaching is that students assimilate what we as teachers are teaching them. Students need to practice active learning in order to reach the best results. With active learning the students need to take an active part in the teaching. Let the students help each other and by doing this they will feel good about their own knowledge. The exercises will give them the opportunity to feel just that. The classroom will then be a much more inviting space if both students and teacher take an active part in what is going on there. This is a contrast to the teacher-centered theories where the classroom is an arena for the teacher’s one man show. By making the teacher the center of all attention you will lose the goal that teaching is meant to fulfill, that students develop their English skills. The subject-centered theory focuses on the work of literature that is taught. The teacher should be well acquainted with the work that is taught but it is up to the teacher to transfer his or her knowledge to the students. The students should, on their own, approach the text so that they have the opportunity to apply their own thought at it. By transferring the teachers’ knowledge to the students you will lose students’ ability to think for
themselves. They will just learn how the teacher interprets the text. To achieve greater knowledge of the target language students need to work with the text.

To choose literary work is a complex matter. It is important to choose a book that will interest the students and that will get their interest. As McKay states it is important not to choose a text that is too difficult for the students. This will make their interest fade since they will have difficulties with understanding it. McKay also stresses that the book should be chosen out of the perspective that the learners can relate to what they are reading about. *Go Ask Alice* is a book that will interest students since it is about a young girl struggling with drugs. Students can probably relate to the drug issue since it is a common topic of discussion in society today. All students will probably have an opinion on drug use, either by own experience or hearing and reading about it. Since the book is written like a diary it may have an impact on the way students will connect with it. Alice’s personal notes and reflections can make the story feel more real to the reader.

Beach and Marshall (1991) emphasize that it is important to take into consideration these issues (see p. 9-10) when you choose a book. They state, for example, that young learners do not want to read texts sending a message, that is suppose to teach them something. *Go Ask Alice* is a book about drugs and will probably send the message, do not use drugs, but since this is a common topic in society today it may still spark an interest with the students. The students would also probably have an interest in this book since it is a true story. It is not a story made up by an author to educate students about the dangers of using drugs. It is a true story about a young girl and her tragic destiny and it can have an impact on students and that it will play a big part if they will find the book interesting or not. Beach and Marshall (1991) also state that the storyline is an important issue to consider and that the students prefer a story with action and a happy ending. *Go Ask Alice* may contain some action but the end is not what we can call a happy ending. Since the reader is informed that Alice died three weeks after her last diary entry it can be hard to look at that from a positive point of view. Though, since the book is about drug use the end might give the story a greater impact on the readers.

Beach and Marshall (1991) and Richards and Lockhart (1996) emphasize the importance in varying the methods of teaching. By using whole class teaching, group work, pair work and individual work all students will have the opportunity to work in the way best suited for them. Different students work best under different conditions and it is important to make sure that everyone has the chance to study in the way they find most rewarding.
The teaching methods need to be varied and everyone can agree on that. This will give the students the ability to blossom and to keep them focused during the lesson. As Showalter (2003) wrote, the attention span is the highest the first 15 minutes and after that it will decline rapidly. By using different methods the teacher is able to avoid that the students lose concentration. The lessons will then be used efficiently. This does not mean that the exercise should be changed every 15 minutes, rather that, when planning the lesson, you consider how the exercise is presented and dealt with. Many of the exercises presented can be used in different ways and why not try more than one way during the lesson. The most important aspect to consider is what is best for the students. Let them take part in the lesson planning so that they have the opportunity to influence what is going on in the classroom.
6. Conclusion

With a work of literature students can achieve many of the course goals for English A. That is what this essay is about. By working with the novel *Go Ask Alice* and a selection of activities from Collie and Slater (2006) the students will enhance their knowledge level in consensus with the course goals.

We can all agree that literature is a good complement in the ESL classroom. It can be used together with text books as a way to show students language of and for a native speaker.

In the beginning of this paper a question was presented, a base that focused on how the novel *Go Ask Alice* best can be used in classroom and what methods that can be used. In this paper a variety of activities have been presented which will help students reach the course goals for English A. The activities will show the students that literature can achieve so much more than just improved reading skills. Every activity is closely adapted to *Go Ask Alice* and to the course goals that the activity is targeting.

When it comes to teaching literature in the classroom it is important to consider that no group of students is the other one alike. The method utilized for *Go Ask Alice* can easily be applied to any work of literature. This makes it possible for teachers to use the method no matter what group of students they teach. Throughout my teacher training education it has been a focus on that every student and group is unique. This method makes it possible to adjust the choice of literature so that the uniqueness of every group is maintained.
Bibliography

Primary sources

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Electronic Publications
Syllabus for EN1201 – English A course at upper secondary school
Appendix 1

Cover 1:

Go Ask Alice
Anonymous

Cover 2:

A lot of teenagers take drugs and run away – some never make it back. This is Alice’s true story.

go ask ALICE
Anonymous
Appendix 2

Question – and – answer (p. 1-12)
- How does Alice feel about herself and do the feeling change?
- How does Alice feel about the move? Do her feelings change?
- How does Alice feel about boys?

Comparing summaries (p. 12-15)
1. The family has moved and the new house is great. However, Alice has a hard time settling into her new school and making new friends. Her siblings, Alex and Tim, instantly made new friends in the neighborhood. A week has gone by and no one is even talking to Alice in school. She finds comfort in food and gains the pounds she lost before the move.

2. Alice has started school in the new town but friends are hard to come by. She does not dress the same way and the other kids just stare at her. Tim and Alexandria has no problems finding new friends since there are kids the same age as them in the neighborhood. Alice stops her diet and gains the pounds she lost. The food becomes as her new friend.

Summary points (p. 15-27)
- Alice is spending the summer at Gran’s
- Alice meets a friend, Beth
- The importance of a best friend
- Mixed feelings about school ending
- Heartbroken over Beth leaving for summer camp
- Homosexual feelings?
- Summer spent at Gran’s
- Alice is invited to a party
- Playing the game Button, Button, Who’s got the Button?
- New feelings
Appendix 3

Jumbled events (p. 27-37)

- Alice is wondering about life and death
- Alice is introduced to torpedos and speed
- Alice meets Roger again
- Gramps dies
- Alice visits the doctor
- Alice loses her virginity
- Gramps had a heart attack
- Alice feels confused about the drug experience
- Alice goes back home again
- Alice takes a trip on acid
- Alice finds out she is pregnant

Choosing a message
Choose one of the following messages that you think is right for the book. If you do not find anyone suitable, make up your own.

1. Do not use drugs
2. Appreciate your family for who they are
3. Your friends define who you are
4. You have to live with the consequences of your choices
5. Make up your own...
MISSING

Have you seen this man?

Steve Cook disappeared in Crete at around 1am Thursday 1st Sept 2005. Last seen outside Mike’s Bar at the top of Beach Street asking for directions to the hotel Frixos and then turning left towards Sissi, wearing pink t-shirt with the word ‘CROSSHATCH’ written on it, black combat trousers and white Adidas trainers. He is of medium build, 5ft 9” - 5ft 10”, with brown spikey hair.

If you have any information please call the
British Consulate
(0030) 2810 224 012
or MISSING PERSONS 0500 700 700
or www.malia.co.uk