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DETSKÁ LITERATÚRA V ROZVOJI INTERKULTÚRNEJ  
KOMPETENCIE U MLADŠÍCH ŽIAKOV

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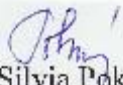
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## ZADANIE ZÁVEREČNEJ PRÁCE

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of work is to highlight the importance of culture in a society and the significance of interconnection between foreign language teaching and providing information about culture of a particular country through literature. The work is aimed at primary children, examining aspects such as familiarity of children with different cultures, the importance of using authentic literary texts on English language lessons in the development of intercultural competence with young learners, opportunities for working with the text by increasing children's motivation and arousing interest in books, the selection of a literary text with regard to children's interests, their language level and knowledge of culture. Based on information from many sources, we concluded that authentic literature plays an important role in foreign language teaching because it provides students more information than a textbook, it helps them understand another cultures and it develops students' skills such as language awareness and ability to express their own feelings and opinions. It is necessary to familiarize children with books since childhood, so that later in the school age, they could be more open to work with literature. Adequate motivation of children is also essential to gain their interest and acquire the knowledge that what they do in the classroom, is really important.

Key words: culture, authentic literature, books, motivation

## **Abstrakt**

Cieľom práce je poukázať na význam kultúry v spoločnosti a na dôležitosť vzájomného prepojenia výučby cudzieho jazyka s poskytovaním informácií o kultúre danej krajiny prostredníctvom literatúry. Práca je zameraná na deti prvého stupňa základnej školy, pričom skúma aspekty, ako napríklad oboznamovanie detí s odlišnými kultúrami, význam používania autentických literárnych textov na hodinách anglického jazyka pre rozvoj interkultúrnej kompetencie u mladších žiakov, možnosti práce s textom v dôsledku zvyšovania motivácie u detí a vzbudenia záujmu o knihy, výber literárneho textu s prihliadnutím na záujmy detí, ich jazykovú úroveň a vedomosti o kultúre. Na základe informácií z mnohých zdrojov sme v práci dospeli k záveru, že autentická literatúra zohráva významnú úlohu pri výučbe cudzieho jazyka, pretože poskytuje žiakom širšie informácie ako učebnica, pomáha im porozumieť odlišným kultúram a zároveň rozvíja schopnosti žiakov, napríklad ich jazykové povedomie a schopnosť vyjadrovať vlastné pocity a názory. Je nevyhnutné oboznamovať deti s knihami už od detstva, aby tak neskôr v školskom veku, boli viac otvorené práci s literatúrou. Vhodná motivácia detí je takisto dôležitá pre získanie ich záujmu a nadobudnutie vedomia, že to, čo robia na hodinách, má naozaj význam.

**Kľúčové slová:** kultúra, autentická literatúra, knihy, motivácia

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## **Introduction**

Culture is an inseparable part of every society. It represents set of values, traditions, social heritage and human behaviour. Culture is necessary for the existence of a society, because it binds people together. In today's global world, people travel to another countries, communicate and cooperate with each other. If they want to achieve successful and tolerant collaboration and eliminate misunderstandings, they must be aware that studying foreign cultures is as essential as learning foreign languages. Study of language and culture is closely linked because both of these aspects represent a particular large group of people. Knowledge of culture allows us to see foreigners from a different angle and helps us to extend our horizon in language.

Besides mass media, literature is a great source of cultural information that is very helpful in development of intercultural competence with foreign language learners. Studies have shown that literary texts should be used on lessons together with textbooks to provide students depth information when learning a target language. Literature is an authentic and motivating material which develops learners' imagination, values and attitudes and encourages them to express their own ideas. Children are familiar with books since childhood and this love towards books should be instilled in them also at school. Teachers and educators are responsible persons who lead their students and learn them how to work with literary texts.

Children's interest in reading literature increases when the teacher chooses an appropriate and interesting literary text. Literature used on English lessons must be in accordance with children's interests, skills and cultural knowledge. For this reason, it is necessary to recognize various genres of children's literature to be able to offer students different possibilities as well as to achieve their motivation in reading.

The goals of this thesis are to emphasize the importance of learning culture and cultural background simultaneously with learning foreign languages and to specify reasons for using authentic literature on English lessons in connection with cultural teaching. Additionally to this, the thesis indicates how to work with literary texts on lessons and offers possibilities how the teacher can arouse children's interest in reading, developing new knowledge and understanding.



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# 1 The Connection between Language and Culture

Interest in other cultures is not just a phenomenon of our days. Byram (1997) states that person's ability of being in touch with people who live in different cultural conditions and who speak different language is as old as civilization itself. Communication is a connection between people of a different culture and different social identities. We also present our country and our language everywhere because we want other people to know about us.

Nowadays, we are not isolated from the outside world. We are in contact with foreigners all the time. If we want to be successful in communication with strangers, we should know their culture and their language, as an essential part of the culture. According to Sercu (2005), employers look for inter-culturally competent people who speak fluently more than one foreign language, to integrate in the international market.

## 1.1 Culture and Cultural Aspects

According to Blurttit (2006), culture says a lot of about the lifestyle of a large group of people. It is a set of values, ideas and codes of behaviour. Culture exists thanks to human capacity to preserve and pass acquired knowledge to others. This process is called "enculturation".

Vestergaard-Poulsen (2010) defined culture as follows: "Culture gives people a sense of who they are, where they belong, how they should behave, what they should be doing, and which values and behaviour should be praised and encouraged."

Nevertheless, it is not easy to define culture in one sentence. It can be understood in several ways, as presented by Bodley (1994):

- Topical: Culture consists of everything on a list of topics, or categories, such as social organization, religion or economy;
- Historical: Culture is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations;
- Behavioral: Culture is shared, learned human behavior, a way of life;
- Normative: Culture is ideals, values, or rules for living;
- Functional: Culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together;

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- Mental: Culture is a complex of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals;
  - Structural: Culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviors;
  - Symbolic: Culture is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society.

Moreover, it is not possible to present clearly definition of culture because culture is not a static phenomenon. It fluctuates over time thanks to reciprocal influence of nations (Vestergaard-Poulsen, 2010). Culture is continuously changing because it exists only in our minds. Written languages, governments, buildings or other hand-made things are not culture in themselves. They are only the products of culture, something that represents culture. For this reason, archaeologists cannot uncover culture right in their excavations. They dig up only things and tools that were made and used through cultural knowledge (O'Neil, 2006).

Vestergaard-Poulsen (2010) states that culture is not inherited. It is acquired through life experience, training and education. Having knowledge of other cultures is a special human qualification. It can broaden our horizons in intercultural understanding and communication. According to Bodley (1994), learning culture involves specific symbolic meanings. For example, people are not born knowing that white colour represents purity. This is not a universal symbol of culture. It is a creative human ability to assign meaning to any object, behaviour or event.

There are many differences and typical features in culture that distinguish societies from one another. Some traditions may seem strange to us, maybe ridiculous or even rude. Inamura (2010) collected several unusual traditions around the world. For example, people from northern Borneo practice a typical wedding custom. Newlyweds are not allowed to use bathroom during three days and three nights after the wedding. That means that they cannot use the toilet and are unable to wash or bath. Therefore they eat and drink only very small amounts. These people believe that this wedding custom will guarantee long, happy and fertile marriage. Another uncommon tradition is practiced by women of Dani tribe in Indonesia. When a family member dies, female relatives must cut off a part of a finger in order to satisfy ghosts.

We can not judge the customs of other people. At first we have to know the origin of a particular tradition which is usually closely linked with the history

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of a specific country. According to Blurtit (2006), past events strongly influence and form our moods and opinions. Culture can develop when a society keeps and respects a package of traditions, social norms and ideas.

Blurtit (2006) states that thanks to globalization, the world does not seem to be so large. People from various countries communicate together and become familiar with other cultures. The international connection grows in many spheres – politics, economy, environment and culture as well. We can find useful and interesting information about other societies everywhere. Television, Internet, books, newspapers and radio are great information sources. Vestergaard-Poulsen (2010) also claims that world becomes more and more global. People cooperate and work with persons with another nationality and culture. Working effectively in a multicultural team necessitates some knowledge about other cultures to be able to collaborate in tolerance and avoid misunderstandings, confusions or irritations.

### 1.1.1 Aspects of Culture

Vestergaard-Poulsen (2010) specified following aspects of culture: **listening, knowledge of interpretation of body language, understanding of attitudes, use of body language, values, beliefs and foreign language skills.**

Some non-verbal gestures may have a different meaning depending on the culture. O’Neil (2009) states that, for example a smile may be the same gesture all over the world, but the meaning of spitting on another person is not the same in every culture. For European and North American it is a sign of utmost contempt while among the Masai of Kenya it is a kind of blessing if done in a certain way. Another example is provided in Reiman book, *The Power of Body Language* (2008): in the United States as well as in most other countries, nodding your head up and down means “yes.” In Bulgaria, the same gesture means “no.”

Turner (2004) describes values as ideals we hold and which are important to us. Values give the meaning to our lives and influence everything we make. The same source claims: “Values, beliefs and experiences are all constructs – values are constructs that we hold as important; beliefs are constructs that we hold to be true; and experiences are constructs of reality.”

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However, aspects which constitute culture are various depending on a particular point of view. Murphy (2010) distinguishes visible and hidden aspects of culture. Visible aspects are such elements of culture as fine arts, literature, cooking and lifestyle. Hidden aspects are those that are not principally conscious and determine our behaviour, thinking and emotions. Vestergaard-Poulsen (2010) shares the same opinion by describing culture as an iceberg: “Only a small part of the iceberg is visible – most of the iceberg is hidden bellow the water surface.” Comparable distribution of cultural aspects is provided by Hapgood and Fennes (1997), who distinguish conscious and unconscious aspects of culture:

Primarily conscious aspects of culture include:

- Fine arts, literature and drama;
- Classical music, popular music and folk dances;
- Games, cooking and attire.

Primarily unconscious aspects of culture include:

- Notions of modesty, concepts of beauty and courtship practices;
- Ideals governing child rearing and rules of descent;
- Cosmology, relationship to animals, attitudes toward the dependent and patterns of superior/subordinate relations;
- Definition of sin and conception of justice;
- Incentives to work, notions of leadership, tempo of work and patterns of group decision-making;
- Conception of cleanliness and theory of disease;
- Approaches to problem-solving, conceptions of status mobility and roles in relation to status by age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, etc.;
- Definition of insanity and conception of ‘self’;
- Patterns of visual perception, body language, eye behavior and facial expressions;
- Notions about logic and validity and patterns of handling emotions;
- Nature of friendship and conversational patterns in various social contexts;
- Conception of past and future and ordering of time;
- Preference for competition and co-operation, social interaction rate or notions of adolescence;

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- Arrangement of physical space.

## **1.2 Culture in Language Learning**

Language teaching is cultural teaching. Genc and Bada (2005) assert that this connection has always been teachers' and educators' interest. Language teaching is inexact and inadequate without the study of culture. Foreign culture can broaden our horizon in language. Studying a new language is not just a manipulation of words and pronunciation. Human being depends on culture. When we study second language, we try to figure the nature and the character of another human beings living in different cultural conditions.

Language is an extremely important part of the cultural heritage and the most significant identifier of a particular country. Halliwell (1992, p.11): "A language is not just a "subject" in the sense of a package of knowledge. It is not just a set of information and insights. It is a fundamental part of being human." We must know how people live, what are their habits and understand the way of their life to be able to study their language easily.

Sercu (2005) claims that when we teach a foreign language in the classroom, we connect learners with culture of a given country. For this reason, teachers are required to have socio-cultural knowledge, to teach intercultural communicative competence. It is impossible to teach foreign language without knowledge of the culture of a given country and without knowing the character and the customs of people who live there.

"Foreign language study expands the linguistic area of experience by affording interesting linguistic comparisons. It also offers insight into another culture and as such is concerned with the human and social area of experience. Throughout the course pupils can be encouraged to view the familiar from a different angle, not least in terms of people's behavior, and thereby widen horizons and break down feelings of insularity." (H. M. I., 1985)

Genc and Bada (2005) mention that one of the greatest problems for language learners is to imagine the native speaker of the language they study as a real person. They study language from books, exercises and CD recordings without background knowledge of the real situations. The connection between reality and the picture in their heads is missing. Learning culture could help to solve this problem. We can increase

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their motivation, practicing culturally based activities, for example singing, dialogs, role playing, doing research and talking about other countries and people. This all will increase learners' curiosity and they will find studying language and culture more enjoyable and useful.

There are many valuable reasons for teaching culture. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) defined seven of them:

- To help students develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours;
- To help students develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave;
- To help students become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture;
- To help students increase their awareness of cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language;
- To help students develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence;
- To help students develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture;
- To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture and to encourage empathy towards its people.

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## **2 Introducing Culture to Children through Literature**

Sometimes it is much easier to work with children than with adults. Halliwell (1992) says that children have a great fantasy and a special ability to interpret the meaning, without understanding every word. They come to the language classroom already prepared – they bring their skills and instincts with them and they commonly learn the target language indirectly because they find it funny!

It must be in teacher's competence to form children's cultural understanding simultaneously with studying language. Math and Reading Help for Kids (2011) states that children need to be aware that there are many differences in the world. They should feel free in the presence of cultural, racial or religious varieties that should be presented as a positive thing in their lives to be able to socialize and live in tolerance. According to the same source, parents and teachers have a big influence in children's lives and play an important role in their cultural development, especially when children encounter something new. For example, when a child meets a person with different skin colour, children are curious and ask many questions. It is very important how parents answer them because this way, parents are also forming children's impressions. Parents are models for their children and children always believe in what their parents say. Teachers also have to think about how and what they are teaching to form the correct children's attitudes and opinions.

Math and Reading Help for Kids (2011) adds that children usually choose their friends according to demographic, behavioural and psychological resemblances. For older children, the same interests and hobbies can play a major role in choosing friends. Other important factors are cultural and racial differences. Several studies of school children determine that a friendship between children of a different race, nation and gender can be easily formed, however the same-race and same-gender friendship among children are still the most common of all.

Teaching children culture and developing students' skills in intercultural communication is not at all an easy task. Seelye (1993) defined five most substantial problems involved in teaching culture:

The first problem: Overcrowded curriculum - many teachers do not know how to save time in already overcrowded curriculum and they believe that their students will meet cultural materials later, after they have acquired the basic skills of the target language.

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The second problem: Fear of not knowing enough – teachers are afraid that they do not have required knowledge about culture and they often think mistakenly that their only duty is to submit facts.

The third problem: Dealing with students' negative attitudes – students often respond negatively when cultural phenomena are different from their expectations.

The fourth problem: Lack of adequate training – teachers are not able to form strategies and goals for teaching culture because they may not have been trained for it.

The fifth problem: How to measure cross-cultural awareness and change in attitudes – measuring cross-cultural awareness and change in attitudes is not simple but teachers should do it in order to see whether the students have profited or not.

Teaching culture and intercultural competence is essential for majority educators however it is still rare in most foreign language classrooms because of many reasons, especially because of lack of time, practical experience of teachers or doubt about which fields of culture to teach (Omaggio, 1993).

## **2.1 Introducing Books to Children**

Vonta and Balic (2004) claim that reading is one of the most important parts of our lives. Young children become familiar with books long before they know how to read. Children like looking at illustrations and parents read to them from a book. This is the way how to teach children and develop reading abilities and love towards books. Children will love books if they are in contact with them every day.

According to the same source, there are several reasons why to introduce books to children:

- Developing and reinforcing love for books;
- Developing and reinforcing culture of reading;
- Developing, reinforcing and enriching speech, thinking, imagination and creativity;
- Developing, reinforcing and enriching emotions (recognition and expression of his/her own emotions and feelings, recognition of someone else's emotions and feelings);
- Developing values and attitudes;



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- Developing skills in how to use books and other printed materials as a source of information;
  - Developing and encouraging freedom of expression, choice, independence and autonomy;
  - Enabling and encouraging communication;
  - Encouraging and developing literacy;
  - Preparing a child for school and life.

Gargus (2010): “Reading to a child can promote a child’s cerebral and emotional development. While any positive interaction between parent and child is helpful, reading is always a sure fire way to gain a positive foothold into a child’s life. Books open doors to new ideas, cultures and concepts. By reading to young children a parent helps instill a love of books in children and helps them want to read more.”

According to Steele (1998), introducing books to children and developing their own attitudes contains several steps:

1. *Evocation* – in this phase a child needs to be actively engaged in reading to interpret what he/she already knows about a topic. Educators introduce the cover of the book, the title and author of the text. A child can know the author from previous reading, for instance and connect this old experience with the new one. Another step is predicting the content, especially according to illustrations. Teachers ask questions like “What is a book about?” “Who is the main character?” “How will the story finish?”
2. *Realisation of meaning* – a child acquaint with new ideas and knowledge from the text. The primary importance is to retain an interest established in evocation phase. Furthermore, a child is developing new knowledge and creating new understanding. The teacher must arouse children’s interest, for example by reading a book with a sense of the dramatic or by establishing a pleasant atmosphere like listening a silent music as background or using some visual tools.
3. *Reflection* – this phase contains an after reading discussion that can be connected with other activities. Children express in their own words their opinion and answer questions like “How did you like the book and why?”

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“Which character did you like the most and why?” “What did you find surprising?” Exchanging views among children evolves their vocabulary and verbal skills.

Pokrivčáková (2010) offers the following structure of lesson for teaching foreign language through literature:

1. *Pre-reading/Pre-listening* – thinking about the topic of the story or poem; encouraging students to say their opinions, experiences and expectations; discussion in the class; trying to divine the message from the title or pictures; brainstorming of vocabulary; checking resources about a text; talking about the author and about the times when he/she was living and writing, looking for some language deformities.
2. *Reading/Listening* – direct processing and perception of a literary text
3. *After-reading/After-listening* – reading the text aloud – individually or all together (checking pronunciation and rhythm); outlining; retelling or rewriting the text; summarizing the story; discussing about how the poem or story relates to real life; personalizing the story; finishing the story; playing a role play; dramatization and modernization of a text.

## **2.2 Using Literary Texts on English Lessons**

Buss and Karnowski (2000) claim that many teachers are now using authentic literature on their lessons instead of using published basal reading series and workbooks. The same source presents a special reading program in their publication *Reading and Writing Literary Genres*. It is a literature-based reading program, where “students read authentic literature, have some ownership over the books read, and make choices in the way they will respond to their reading.” Students are organized into groups such as reading workshop, literature response groups and literature circles in order to achieve interactive process and socially oriented reading. Teachers can make reading more attractive by offering activities that stimulate learners to go beyond the basic story line of the text they read, such as using drama for retelling, using art for addressing the story elements of setting and characters, using writing to extend the story line by writing another ending or rewriting scenes or using research strategies to find out more about a story’s time period and character.

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According to Harris and Sipay (1985), a good reading program should meet the following aims: “first, to build a favourable attitude towards reading; second, to develop a lasting interest in reading; and third, to improve reading tastes.” A quality reading program should also help students to learn about the world, people and society and to be interested in reading for personal development (Harris and Sipay, 1985).

Lazar (1993) states that literary texts are always rich and fascinating because they are written by authors who live in different conditions and are inspired by varied cultures. Studying literature in English does stimulate students to gain deeper insight into historical, political, social and cultural events which formed the background to a particular English text.

Literature plays an important role in today’s classrooms and it should be used together with textbooks as a source for learning and developing skills (Oden, 1995). Literature motivates and encourages learners to become more active and engaged in learning (Smith and Johnson, 1995). Beck and McKeown (1991) add that textbooks do not provide sufficient depth of the content and information. Adding literature to the curriculum enables the examination of an issue from different perspectives, collects information from various sources and meets students’ interests (Smith and Johnson, 1995).

Lazar (1993) specified several reasons for using literature on English lessons:

- It is very motivating;
- It is authentic material;
- It has general educational value;
- It is found in many syllabuses;
- It helps students to understand another culture;
- It is a stimulus for language acquisition;
- It develops students’ interpretative abilities;
- Students enjoy it and it is fun;
- It is highly valued and has a high status;
- It expands students’ language awareness;
- It encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings.

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### 2.2.1 Choosing an Appropriate Literary Text

Teachers should think about what kind of literature is suitable for young language learners. Colie and Slater (1987) say that the criteria of suitability depend on many factors. We should take into account **student's age, language level, student's characters and interests**, their **cultural background** and **cultural knowledge**. It is necessary to choose literature which is appropriate to their skills and emotions, to make reading more substantial and enjoyable.

Kennedy and Falvey (1998) name several sorts of literary texts appropriate for primary schoolchildren in their book *Learning Language Through Literature in Primary Schools*. Such genres as folk tales, animal fables or nursery rhymes attract children's interest, encourage their imagination and allows them understand how stories work. Stories are used for storytelling which is much more attractive and convincing than listening to story on a tape. Poems, songs, rhymes and drama are also popular with young learners because children can join in and increase self confidence in using the target language.

In terms of children's cultural background and cultural knowledge, Hollins (1996) claims that children enter school with skills obtained in the home-culture. Their cultural background is closely related to what will be learned on lessons. Hollins (1996): "Where school learning builds on and extends what has been learned in the home-culture, children grow academically and do well in school."

Colie and Slater (1987) state that if the teacher cannot decide which text to use, he/she gives learners short summary of several possibilities and allows them to choose one text they find the most interesting. Open communication with students can be very useful as well when choosing an appropriate literary text to be used on English lessons. The teacher can ask students for example, what sort of literature they like, what is their favourite book or story and whether they want to try to read it in English. This way, the teacher increases their interest in reading literature (Colie and Slater, 1987).

Lazar (1993) warns that teachers must be careful when choosing and explaining literature because students often think mistakenly in pursuance of one novel or story that what is written in, represents whole society and its culture, while the story can actually talk about very atypical feature of a society during a historical development. He says: "The relationship between a culture and its literature is not at all simple, since few novels or poems could claim to be a purely factual documentation of their society."

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Some novels, short stories and plays may achieve the illusion of representing reality, but they are, in the end, works of fiction.”

Good books help us discover other literatures, often forgotten branch of literature, like ancient or classic literary works (Alcott, 2010). Most authors do not live in isolation and they usually write about what they like which is often affected by past cultures, characters and events. The same source states that classic literature influences many writers. Reading modern literature which refers to classic works gives us the opportunity to see what influenced the author and helps us meet the culture of people from the past times. Children love reading old-new stories, for example *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter series*. Studying these background materials helps them learn a lot about other works and about ancient world.

### **2.2.2 Working with the Text**

Lazar (1993) asserts that if students like reading literature in their mother tongue, they find interesting to study literature in English. They can compare English literature with the literature of their own language and also pick up new experience. This idea can be realized on English lessons. We can ask students to retell some tradition, story or event from the culture of their country or town and then we give them to read a literary text on the same theme. This way we encourage their motivation to read foreign literature. The same source states that if the teacher chooses the literary materials carefully, students believe that what they do on lesson is effective and useful for their lives. For example, play can help students understand adults’ problems or a good poem may influence their emotional feelings.

We cannot determine only one correct way of teaching or using literature because every situation in the class is different as well as every literary text is different. Every reader understands the text in his/her own way so it can never be fixed. According to Selden (1989, p. 79), people are usually influenced by many factors when reading a particular literary text, for example by readers’ religion, social standing or society and period they live in.

Reader’s experience has an effect on how the text will be understood. In *Cultural Knowledge and Reading* by M. S. Steffensen and C. Joag-Dev (Alderson and Urquhart, 1984, p. 53) a study carried out at University of Wisconsin is described.

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Research focused on how the readers work with the text and how the text is interpreted. Persons from two different countries, from India and the United States, were given two texts in which Indian and American weddings were described. Then the researchers analyzed what was recalled and what kinds of mistakes these people made, to know whether cultural background influenced them or not. It was confirmed that our cultural background has an impact on comprehension of the text we are reading. If reader has the same schemata as writer, he/she can simply understand what is in the text. Schemata means the abstract cognitive structures which include general knowledge about objects or events. Concerning a wedding, the schemata can be a knowledge about wedding rituals, wedding guests, role of bride and groom and so on. Of course, the schemata depends on the culture.

Lazar (1993) says that the most of the students would prefer if the literary text had only one meaning. They would learn just one possible and correct interpretation of the text and they would not have to be forced to think about another possible meaning. Of course, a professional teacher should refuse to give only one fixed interpretation of a literary text to their students. However, another question rises. Which of the students' interpretations are acceptable? Students have their own visions, they are influenced by different factors and sometimes teacher has to accept any interpretation of a text even if it seems to be strange or improbable. Nevertheless, the teacher should specify some criteria to decide what is acceptable or not.

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### **3 Children's Literature for Teaching Culture**

Literature is one of the most significant sources of information about foreign cultures and customs. Collie and Slater (1987) state that foreign literary texts should be often presented to foreign learners because literature is a very useful material for language development, cultural enrichment and personal involvement.

#### **3.1 Children's Genres**

Before choosing a specific book or literary text to be used on English lesson in order to develop learners' intercultural competence, the teacher should recognize various genres of children's literature. Betts (1976) claims that literature is a significant motivator and the most appropriate way to achieve the students motivation is to choose genres and topics which are in accordance with their areas of interests.

Breitsprecher (2005) defines genres of children's literature written mainly for children from 0 to 12 years old:

- Picture books;
- Picture story books;
- Traditional literature – folktales, fairy tales, fables, legends, myths;
- Historical fiction;
- Modern fantasy,
- Realistic fiction;
- Non-fiction or Informational books;
- Biography;
- Poetry and Drama.

##### *Picture books*

Breitsprecher (2005) states that picture books are read especially visually, the text can be omitted. The story is either written or it can be explained by pictures. According to Smith (2011), the sense of picture books is to introduce young children to the idea of reading books. Children usually start looking at picture books at the age of two or three, and do not lost the contact with them for several years.

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### *Picture story books*

In this kind of books, pictures are eye-catching but the text is also necessary to make the story complete. As readers find the book enjoyable, they do not even think about if the text or pictures are more essential. Pictures help us to predict what we can expect further in the story (Breitsprecher, 2005).

### *Folktales*

A folktale is an old traditional story that represents values and culture of the society from which it originates. Children enjoy reading and listening to folktales because through their imagination, they can transport to distance countries and experience adventure (Solis, 2011). This genre talks about life, nature or human condition. The story is logical although there might be some “make-believe” elements, for example talking animals (Breitsprecher, 2005).

### *Fairy tales*

It is well known that fairy tales are stories intended mostly for children that have a moral or ethical undertone. Breitsprecher (2005) states that fairy tales are also called “magic stories” thanks to magical and supernatural powers. In fairy tales, there is a conflict between good and evil and they always have a happy ending.

### *Fables*

Fables are part of folklore. They are short stories transmitted orally from one generation to another. Fables serve mainly for entertainment and education and they have a hidden moral meaning, talking about human behaviour. The plot is simple and characters are usually animals, rarely objects or people. Some fables are written in prose while others are written in verse (Blow, 2011).

### *Legends*

Legendary stories are rooted in history and are always very enriching for people living in the present (Breitsprecher, 2005). Georges (1971) declared that “a legend is a story or narrative that may not be a story or narrative at all; it is set in a recent



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or historical past that may be conceived to be remote or antihistorical or not really past at all; it is believed to be true by some, false by others, and both or neither by most.”

### *Myths*

The word “myth” comes from Greek with original meaning “speech” or “discourse”. Later, this meaning changed into “fable” or “legend”. Myths have a legendary or historical origin, talking about gods or courageous heroes. They describe some historical event which may even be truth, but myths have been passed from one person to another and they have been embellished by various story tellers so it is not possible to prove what really happened. Regarding a particular society, we can talk about “Egyptian Mythology”, “Indian Mythology”, “Maori Mythology”, “Greek Mythology”, “Oriental Mythology” and many more (Doyle, 2004).

### *Historical fiction*

According to Breitsprecher (2005), historical fiction can be in many ways more meaningful tool for teaching. This genre presents history from the point of view of young readers and tries to help them to see how history influences people of the same age. Dalton (2006) states that historical fiction portrays historical characters in imaginative or documented historical situations, but in the context of a real historical period.

### *Modern fantasy*

This genre includes imaginative tales with untrue elements, like talking animals, elements of science fiction, supernatural or horror elements or combination of them. When books of this genre are written for young readers, they are called “chapter books”, because the story is divided into chapters. Examples of modern fantasy for young readers up to 12 are: “Winnie the Pooh”, “Alice in Wonderland”, “Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory” (Breitsprecher, 2005).

### *Realistic fiction*

The figures of realistic fiction do not have magical nor supernatural powers. Story is based on present, not on history and even if it is fiction, everything that is

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described in the story might happen to real people (Steele, 2007). Children's realistic fiction is positive and optimistic. It gives possibility to glimpse into situations, cultures and conditions which are different from current young readers' lifestyle. The story presents problems of real world and offers possibility how young people can tackle these problems (Breitsprecher, 2005).

### *Non-fiction or Informational books*

These books contain factual information and are written to learn more about real world and things. For example, children may be interested in rockets, but they lack sufficient knowledge to read "rocky science". Such books are used especially for academic purposes and projects. Non-fiction books correspond to reading levels and background knowledge of young readers. Nowadays, more and more specialists and librarians are discovering how it is important to provide both – fiction and non-fiction genres in order to motivate all readers (Breitsprecher, 2005).

### *Biography*

According to Hoover (2011), biographies of famous persons are non-fiction books which can get children more interesting in reading. Breitsprecher (2005) claims that these books are very motivating. Children love reading stories about other people because they allow them to dream about what they can be when they grow up.

### *Poetry and Drama*

Poetry and Drama are essential literary genres because they introduce children to various literary elements, such as verse, prose, rhythm, rhyme, writing styles, literary devices, symbolism, analogies or metaphors. Poetry and Drama are written at different reading levels, providing a possibility to teach variable language arts skills (Breitsprecher, 2005).

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### 3.2 Recommended Literature for Developing Cultural Competence

Abisamra (2009) mentioned several useful books on her web page that can be used by teachers to diversify their lessons. A brief description of this suggested literature is given as well. We have chosen some of these books which we find the most interesting:

*Plays for the Holidays by Anne Siebert & Raimond C. Clark*

This book is available for students of all ages. It will help them discover and understand American holidays from Labor Day at the beginning of the school year to Independence Day during the summer vacation. We can find here plays like: Peter Maguire organizes immigrant workers, Columbus discovers the Indies, Ninety Indians show up for the Pilgrim's feast, Eisenhower orders the soldiers (now WW II veterans) to the Normandy Beaches, Scrooge "humbugs" Christmas, Rosa Parks refuses to sit in the back of the bus, Love triumphs in Virginia with Pocahontas, Franklin urges the patriots to hang together or hang separately. Most of the plays have historical background concerning traditions. Students get information in advance about each play and they learn playfully about how holidays are celebrated nowadays.

*The Dragons without Eyes by Phebe Xu Gray, Ph.D.*

This amusing book consists of 25 tales from ancient China based on cultural background of this interesting nation. Instructive and entertaining stories talk about poets, artists, military leaders, clever children, wise old man, wise woman bringing up her child to become a great teacher, foolish men lacking in common sense, silly monkeys, friendly dragons and obviously about dragons without eyes. These tales are not very exhaustive for young learners because each story is on one page. The book has three other parts with activities that can be practiced in the classroom for language development. In the second part, there are ten sentences for each story which summarize its content serving for dictation. Part three is aimed at discussion. The teacher can check the comprehension and invite learners to discuss about the intention or moral of the story. In the last part, there are short readings that offer historical and cultural information concerning the story.

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*LEGENDS – 52 People Who Made a Difference by Michael Ryall*

The book consists of 13 groups of legendary persons: folk heroes, Civil War / Anti-Slavery Heroes, Native Americans, inventors / scientists, educators / reformers, adventurers, human rights leaders, business / labor leaders, presidents, military leaders / heroes, writers, entertainers, sports heroes. Biographies of famous legends have a different range. They are 100 words long, 150 words long, 200 words long or 250 words long to be manageable for each student. These biographies can be used for practicing speaking and listening or for a role play. Each child will choose one legend and he/she will obtain this new identity. For example: “I am Cesar Chavez. Who are you?” Children will certainly enjoy this new way of learning about legendary persons in American history.

*Where in the World by Anne Siebert & Raimond C. Clark*

Thanks to this book, teachers can travel around the world with their pupils. The adventurer Igor visits 30 amazing places and accompanies readers to get insight into different cultures. The first unit contains short and simple sentences, it is about 100 words long. The opening conversation uses about 30 different words and a central reading passage is about 50 words long. By the time the readers come to Washington, DC which is the final destination, they have become friendly with more than 300 new words. The book also includes CD's with dramatic dialogues, short readings, chants and dictations.

*Pearls of Wisdom: African and Caribbean Folktales by Raouf Mama and Mary Romney*

Pearls of Wisdom is a glamorous collection of joyful stories from Africa and the Caribbean collected by Dr. Raouf Mama, a West African Griot (master story teller). The book contains twelve stories like: How Chameleon Became a Teacher (Benin), Why Hawk Preys on Chicks (Nigeria), Pearl of Wisdom (Gabon), Anancy and the Guinea Bird (Antigua), How Goat Moved to the City (Haiti), Why Cat and Dog Are Always Fighting (Cape Verde), A Fisherman and His Dog (Puerto Rico), Monkey's Argument with Leopard (Congo), and four other classic tales. Reading is enriched by Dr. Mama's authentic and dramatic recordings. Many exercises help to develop students' vocabulary and language learning. The recordings make stories alive and give

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the possibility to listeners to be involved in oral tradition which is as old as civilization itself.

*The “Living In” Series*

This series consist of books like: Living in China, Living in France, Living in Greece, Living in Italy, Living in Mexico and many more. It is an introduction to culture for students, visitors and business travelers. This guide includes also historical facts and a lot of practical advice for strangers that will help them to get a real insight into traditions and customs.

*Celebrating American Heroes by Anne Siebert*

Celebrating American Heroes consists of 13 dramatic plays about historical persons which serve for reading aloud in the class. In each play, there are main characters and a chorus. Students will love these plays because they do not have to worry about long preparation. Stories are optimistic and inspiring and students get the opportunity to learn language, American history and culture at the same time. The plays are excellent for holiday or multicultural celebrations. They are also appropriate for practicing conversation, pronunciation, rhythm, stress and intonation.

On the online book search Google Books (n.d.), we discovered many other interesting titles which are recommended as literature appropriate for cultural teaching. We provide a list of some of them bellow:

- Children just like me by Barnabas Kindersley and Anabel Kindersley;
- A life like mine – How children live around the world (edition of Unicef);
- Wake up, world! by Beatrice Hollyer;
- Children around the world by Donata Montanari;
- Our favorite stories by Jamila Gavin, Barnabas Kindersley and Amanda Hall;
- Houses and Homes by Ann Morris and Ken Heyman;
- If the World Were a Village by David Julian Smith and Shelagh Armstrong;
- Children from Australia to Zimbabwe by Maya Ajmera, Anna Rhesa Versola and Marian Wright Edelman;

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- To Be a Kid by Maya Ajmera, John Duane Ivanko and Shakti for Children (Organization);
  - Be My Neighbor by Maya Ajmera, John Duane Ivanko and Fred Rogers;
  - Come Out and Play by Maya Ajmera, John Duane Ivanko, Kermit the Frog and Shakti for Children (Organization).

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## Conclusion

Every human being depends on culture because culture is a phenomenon which exists in people's mind and which helps them understand who they are, where they belong and what values and codes of behaviour they should be familiar with. Culture affects all spheres of social life, such as education, politics or religion and it consists of many aspects. Several sources state that some of these aspects are visible or conscious, for example music, literature, fine arts, cooking and some of them are hidden or unconscious, for example values, emotions, social interaction, visual perception and many more. Language is also one of cultural aspects and communication is understood as connection between people living in different cultural conditions. For this reason, language teaching should always be connected with cultural teaching. Foreign language study offers insight into another culture and provides knowledge of character of people living in a particular society. Studying culture also helps students understand that social variables influence the way in which people speak and behave, it also stimulates learners' curiosity about another culture and encourages empathy towards foreigners.

Foreign language teachers are required to have an adequate socio-cultural knowledge for teaching intercultural communicative competence. It is teachers' task to form cultural awareness in children and provide them information about cultural, racial or religious differences. One of the ways how teachers can develop students' knowledge of culture is using authentic literature on English lessons. Literary texts are inspired by various cultures, cultural events and traditions. Literature is a motivating tool that encourages students to be more active and to be able to express their own feelings and ideas. Authentic literary texts help students to glimpse into another culture, to extend their language awareness and develop their interpretative abilities. Teachers and parents should encourage children in reading since childhood. If children become familiar with books in their mother tongue, they will enjoy reading books in foreign language as well. Books are essential for development such skills as speech, thinking, imagination, creativity, values, attitudes, communication or literacy. Besides these abilities, regularly reading and working with books develops children's skills in how to use books, literary texts and other materials for being able to search for useful information.

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The primary importance is to arouse an interest, when using authentic literature on English lessons. Teachers achieve students' interest by applying methods, such as introducing the cover of the book, the title and the author, predicting the content of the book or the continuation of the story according to pictures, reading in a dramatic way, applying an after reading discussion that can be connected with other activities, for example role playing, singing, retelling or rewriting the story. There exist many ways how to motivate students in reading. Some teachers prepare a special reading program for their students where children are organized into groups and read authentic literature. Reading is accompanied by many activities that make reading more interesting, for instance using drama, art, dictation, rewriting the end of the story or doing research to find more information about a time period of the story.

Nowadays, there are many available books which have been designed specifically for such purposes as reading in the classroom and practicing various activities. We mentioned some of them in the last chapter or the work. Literary texts used on English lessons should be short in order not to exhaust young readers, they must be attractive, amusing, informative and instructive. Stories and literary texts in such books as *The Dragons without eyes*, *Legends* or *Pearls of Wisdom* are usable not only for developing reading skills and intercultural competence, but also for practicing conversation, listening, writing, providing information about famous people and historical facts.

Teachers and children choose an appropriate literary text from a wide range of literary genres. Some students may be interested in fairy tales, fables or legends, while others prefer drama or fiction. Teachers can achieve students' satisfaction by occasional alternating of literary genres. Open communication with students can uncover their interests and it is very helpful in choosing literary texts. Besides children's interest, teachers must take into account also other elements when choosing a suitable literature, specifically students' age, language level, characters, cultural background and cultural knowledge.

Every teacher must be aware that language teaching is not just a subject where he/she has to teach basic language skills and submit facts. It is a fundamental part of culture and when we teach a foreign language, we connect learners with culture of a target country. This connection can be realised through authentic literature which



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provides additional information, broaden students' horizon in learning language and develops intercultural competence.

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## Summary

Kultúra je úzko spätá s existenciou každej spoločnosti. Tvoria ju samotní ľudia patriaci do určitej skupiny a zastávajúci špecifický súbor hodnôt, postojov a spôsobov správania. Ich zvyky, tradície a spôsob myslenia tvoria kultúru ako takú. Tá sa odráža vo všetkých oblastiach spoločenského života, napríklad v náboženstve, v školstve, v politike a je badateľná vo všetkých ľudských výtvoroch – v literatúre, v hudbe, v staviteľstve, aj v kuchyni. V dnešnom globálnom svete, kedy ľudia často cestujú a spolupracujú navzájom, narastá aj ich záujem o poznávanie iných kultúr. Pre to, aby ľudia dokázali efektívne spolupracovať a vyhli sa rôznym nedorozumeniam, je potrebné, aby okrem jazykových zručností mali vedomosti aj o kultúre, hodnotách a tradíciách danej krajiny.

Jednoznačná definícia kultúry neexistuje, pretože kultúra sa mení v závislosti od toho, ako sa mení aj zmýšľanie ľudí. Doba napreduje a prináša so sebou zmenu v tradíciách, v spôsobe života, názoroch a postojoch ľudí. Každá kultúra je špecifická. Mnohé tradície pramenia v histórii danej krajiny a predstavujú tak jej kultúrne dedičstvo. Aj keď sa nám niekedy zvyky cudzincov zdajú čudné, možno smiešne alebo dokonca hrubé, nemôžeme ich odsudzovať bez dostatočnej znalosti o ich pôvode a význame. Z tohto, aj z mnohých iných dôvodov je prehľbovanie vedomostí o kultúrach naozaj opodstatnené. Štúdium zamerané na rozvoj interkultúrnej kompetencie pomáha ľuďom lepšie porozumieť spoločenským rozdielom, odlišnému zmýšľaniu a správaniu ľudí žijúcich v rôznych kultúrnych podmienkach. Pomáha rozšíriť obzory v jazyku, napríklad pre lepšie pochopenie slovných spojení a fráz, uspokojuje zvedavosť ľudí v dozvedaní sa nových skutočností a podporuje rozvoj empatického myslenia.

Od vzdelávacích inštitúcií, aj od samotných učiteľov sa vyžaduje, aby štúdium cudzích jazykov bolo vždy prepojené s rozvíjaním interkultúrnej kompetencie u žiakov. Rozdiely medzi jednotlivými kultúrami by mali byť žiakom prezentované ako pozitívum, aby boli deti schopné socializovať sa a nažívať v tolerancii s ľuďmi odlišných kultúr. Učitelia, ale aj rodičia zohrávajú v tejto oblasti dôležitú úlohu. Deti sú zvedavé a zaujímajú sa o veci, ktoré ich obklopujú. Keď sa stretnú s niečím novým, kladú svojim rodičom a učiteľom otázky, na ktoré je potrebné odpovedať zmysluplne, pretože týmto spôsobom dokážeme formovať ich správne postoje a názory.

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Deti sa môžu o iných kultúrach dozvedieť nielen z vlastných skúseností, ale aj prostredníctvom kníh, pretože čítanie predstavuje dôležitú súčasť vzdelávania. Deti sa stretávajú s knižkami už od útleho detstva, dokonca skôr, ako sa naučia čítať. Prezerajú si obrázky v knižkách a rodičia im z nich čítajú a odpovedajú na ich zvedavé otázky. Láska ku knihám by mala byť deťom vštepovaná už od malička, aby si tak aj neskôr, v školskom veku, dokázali zachovať pozitívny vzťah k literatúre. Knihy podporujú u detí ich intelektuálny a emocionálny rozvoj, otvárajú im možnosti k novým nápadom, myšlienkam, formujú ich postoje, jazykové zručnosti, predstavivosť a schopnosť ich vyjadrovania. Okrem toho, sú knihy bohatým zdrojom informácií o kultúrach, tradíciách a spôsobe života ostatných ľudí.

Niektorí učitelia cudzích jazykov sa chybne domnievajú, že jedinou ich úlohou je naučiť žiakov základným jazykovým zručnostiam, ako je gramatika, výslovnosť, čítanie, písanie a schopnosť dorozumieť sa. Zabúdajú pri tom na dôležitý fakt, že jazykové vzdelávanie by malo byť úzko späté s kultúrnym vzdelávaním. Bez znalostí o kultúre krajiny, ktorej jazyk sa deti učia, si veľakrát žiaci nedokážu predstaviť cudzincov ako reálne osoby. Poskytovanie informácií o kultúre napomáha žiakom vytvoriť si širší obzor a lepšie pochopiť jednotlivé súvislosti medzi jazykom a kultúrou.

Kultúrne vzdelávanie nie je jednoduchou záležitosťou. Učitelia sa môžu vo svojej praxi stretávať s rôznymi problémami, ako sú napríklad preplnené učebné osnovy, nedostatok vlastných vedomostí o kultúre alebo nezáujem a negatívny postoj študentov. Ďalším dôležitým faktom je, že samotné učebnice neposkytujú dostatočné informácie o kultúrach, a preto sa na hodinách cudzieho jazyka vyžaduje používanie aj iných, doplnujúcich materiálov, akými sú autentické literárne texty.

Deti na hodinách alebo na literárnych krúžkoch pracujú s literatúrou a praktizujú rozličné aktivity spojené s prečítaným textom. Podstatné je žiakov motivovať a vzbudiť u nich záujem o prácu s literatúrou. Existuje veľa spôsobov, ako sa dá efektívne pracovať s knihami. Prvoradý je správny výber literatúry, s prihliadnutím na záľuby žiakov, ich jazykovú úroveň a doterajšie vedomosti. K dispozícii majú viacero literárnych žánrov. Deti na prvom stupni základnej školy radi čítajú napríklad rozprávky, bájky, legendy, niektorých žiakov môžu dokonca zaujať fiktívne príbehy alebo dramatické texty. Ak učiteľ sám nevie vybrať vhodnú literatúru, ktorá by mohla zaujímať jeho žiakov, môže sa o tom s nimi otvorene porozprávať, spýtať sa ich, čo najradšej čítajú, aký je ich obľúbený príbeh alebo knižka a či by si ju chceli prečítať aj

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v angličtine. Ďalším spôsobom je, že učiteľ spíše kratší zoznam literatúry, z ktorého si žiaci vyberú to, čo ich zaujíma najviac. Pre uspokojenie záujmov všetkých žiakov môže učiteľ jednotlivé literárne žánre na hodinách striedať. Pri samotnej práci s literatúrou je potrebné navodiť príjemnú atmosféru, napríklad počúvaním príjemnej hudby v pozadí alebo prostredníctvom používania vizuálnych materiálov, napríklad obrázkov. Deti môžeme zaujať predstavením samotnej knihy a autora a rozvinutím debaty o tom, či sa už s touto alebo s podobnou literatúrou stretli, či poznajú autora z niektorých iných diel alebo môžeme s deťmi na základe nadpisu alebo obrázkov diskutovať, o čom príbeh je a ako asi skončí. Deti majú veľkú predstavivosť a takýmto spôsobom ju dokážu ešte viac rozvíjať. Po prečítaní textu sa znova so žiakmi rozprávame o tom, ako sa im príbeh páčil a prečo, ktoré postavy ich zaujali najviac, čo ich v texte prekvapilo a podobne. Takáto debata so žiakmi môže byť veľmi zaujímavá, pretože každý z nich môže chápať text z iného uhla pohľadu. Žiaci, ako čitatelia sú pri čítaní textu a vysvetľovaní si jednotlivých súvislostí ovplyvňovaní viacerými faktormi, napríklad svojím pôvodom a spoločenským zaradením alebo náboženstvom. Keď sa pozeráme na literatúru z tohto hľadiska, dospejeme k názoru, že literárny text môže mať viacero významov a môže byť interpretovaný rôznymi spôsobmi. Existuje veľa aktivít, ktoré môžu učitelia v triede aplikovať a rozvíjať tak kreativitu žiakov, napríklad prerozprávanie príbehu vlastnými slovami, vymýšľanie iného záveru príbehu, dialógy a dramatizácia, spievanie alebo hranie rôznych hier.

V dnešnej dobe majú učitelia k dispozícii množstvo praktických kníh, ktoré môžu využívať na hodinách anglického jazyka. V knižkách sú kratšie texty vhodné pre žiakov mladšieho školského veku a zároveň sú v nich rôzne cvičenia a aktivity viažuce sa k jednotlivým textom, CD nahrávky alebo diktáty, ktoré ušetria učiteľom veľa času na prípravu.

Literatúra používaná ako doplnujúci materiál na hodinách anglického jazyka dokáže byť veľmi motivujúcim nástrojom, ktorý povzbudzuje deti v tom, aby boli aktívnejšie zapojené do vyučovania a poskytuje im doplnujúce informácie, ktoré sa často v jazykových učebniciach nenachádzajú. Literárne texty zabezpečujú žiakom možnosti rozvoja ich interkultúrnej kompetencie a formovania pozitívnych hodnôt a názorov, aby si tak dokázali vytvoriť kladný vzťah k iným kultúram.

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## List of Resources

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