

Macmillan Readers: Teaching with *Goldfinger*

By Matthew Broadbent

Goldfinger is a classic spy novel with all the themes and elements anyone could wish for in an action adventure. There is the ever-resourceful secret agent James Bond and his usual bag of secret tricks and gadgets. There is the uber-villain and his evil plot to steal billions / rule the world. His villainous henchman who throws a razor sharp bowler hat with deadly accuracy accompanies him. Throw in a few fight scenes, a card cheat with an insatiable appetite for gold bars, a council of mafia bosses, a car chase and some beautiful women and you have the makings of one of the classic James Bond tales.

Students will love the suave Bond, his cool charm, and the fast pace of the story. They tend to get the most out of a reading or listening exercise when they have a familiarity with the topic involved. Not only is James Bond fairly well known worldwide, but also as with all readers, students will come into each lesson with knowledge of the characters and plot from previous lessons on earlier chapters. A simple warmer exercise to recap the story so far, or to make predictions about what is to come, and students will be primed for the chapter and exercises which follow.

One of the interesting things about reading James Bond novels is discovering how different they are to the film versions. Apart from basic plot elements being left out in the interests of producing a two-hour tale, there are some more subtle character differences.

Most people would have seen at least one James Bond movie, and would have an image of Bond as an infallible, indestructible, super-cool agent who has no fear. The novels portray quite a different Bond. He has self doubts, suffers serious injuries that take time to recover from, and is desperate to remain at the top of his field and retain his “double 0 license to kill” rating. Failure on a mission could involve M, his superior, removing him from his position to a far less glamorous, pen-pushing support role. In addition, whilst his liaisons with beautiful women are numerous, the novels show a Bond that might like to pursue some of these relationships on a longer-term, less superficial level. He has regrets that his job, which he obviously feels is so vital to his country, prevents him from anything other than short-term relationships. Reading Ian Fleming’s novels and the readers they are based upon show a far more interesting James Bond, with a greater depth and range of emotions. Although some students – and indeed teachers – may have already seen a particular Bond film, they will be able to get something extra from the original written story.

Teachers can choose from a great selection of support materials for the Macmillan Readers. For *Goldfinger* this includes a set of exercises at the back of the reader, a couple of pages of more visual / creative exercises on the Internet, and a CD recording of the entire reader. There is a portrait gallery at the beginning of the book students can refer to, and a word glossary at the back of the book which gives definitions of words students may not have come across before. For many of the novels Macmillan Readers

are based on, film versions are readily available. This is certainly the case for all of the James Bond readers. All of these resources form a fantastic base from which teachers can plan lessons, and then expand upon using their own lesson ideas.

The reading exercises at the back of the reader are in two sections. The first is a set of basic questions that cover the main points from each chapter – ensuring students understand the gist of the story and the characters. The second is a set of more detailed exercises that teach students to read for more specific information, often involving the practice of a certain grammatical structure.

Whilst the exercises in the book are more focused on reading and grammar, the worksheet on the Internet contains a set of more visual / creative tasks. Students might start with a crossword or find a word, then draw on a map where the action in the reader takes place. They might be asked to fill in imagined speech or thought bubbles, or number a series of pictures in the sequence they occur. They might finish off by designing a movie poster, acting out a scene, or writing a different ending to the story.

The CD recording of the reader gives teachers a chance to test listening skills along with reading skills. A first listen of the recording could be used in conjunction with a gist exercise, then a second listen for a more detailed set of questions. Some of the exercises at the back of the book and on the Internet worksheet can be used as listening tasks as they are. Others can easily be adapted. In addition there is a whole host of listening exercises that teachers will be familiar with, that they can easily create for use with the readers. Some simple ones are:

- Jumbling up the main events in each chapter and getting students to place them in the correct sequence
- True / False exercises
- Charts to fill in such as “who said what, where and to whom”
- Gap fill
- Basic “who, what, where” questions
- Multiple choice questions

The story gives students an excellent opportunity to practice written skills. Their interest and motivation will be fuelled by the action-packed nature of this particular story, and their natural interest in following the plot and characters to the end. Some possible exercises might include:

- Summarizing a chapter or the story so far
- Writing a diary entry from one of the characters
- Writing a letter from one character to another
- Writing a different ending to the story
- Writing a book or film review
- Rewriting a chapter from one of the secondary characters’ points of view

Endless opportunities present themselves for students to practice oral skills. Some possible activities include:

- One student reading a part of the story to another student who must complete a set of exercises
- Pair or group discussion of character motivations, plots, alternative scenarios, etc
- Pair or group correction / discussion of answers
- Students could write out chapters as plays, then act them out

The film of the story is also a fantastic resource that can be used in a myriad of ways:

- Students could review the film
- Comparisons could be made with the book
- Students could discuss / critique the actors, direction, etc
- Students could design a movie poster
- A sequel could be plotted
- Alternative actors could be discussed. In the case of James Bond, who should be the next James Bond? Who has been the best James Bond?

Alternatively the film could just be shown as a reward to students for all their work with the reader, and to round off the whole exercise.

There are dozens and dozens of ways readers can be used for reading, listening, writing and speech practice. The existing exercises are just the beginning and are a useful base for teachers and students to begin with. Teachers can explore their own methods of utilizing the text as creatively as they like. The possibilities are endless.

Students and teachers alike will love not only the fantastic support materials for this reader, but also the classic spy thriller tale that is *Goldfinger*. The action is fast, the villains suitably villainous, and Bond is shown at his charming and resourceful best. Will Goldfinger's evil plot unravel just as it is about to come to fruition? Will Bond survive several obscure, convoluted attempts on his life that leave you wondering, "Why don't they just shoot him?" Will Oddjob's deadly bowler hat be put to grisly use? Will Bond's suave charm endear him to any of the beautiful women he meets? Will his cool and calculating methods save the day? We all know the answers to these questions but it's the telling of the tale that counts.

Happy reading!

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