



Literacy: Comprehension/Writing: Life of A Convict

Purpose of Activity:

- To introduce various forms of comprehension
- To provide opportunities for engaging in higher order thinking through interview technique

Materials:

- Life of a Convict – pack of text segments for sequencing
- Framework card for sequencing text
- Double-sided work-card with comprehension exercises and interview exercises

Procedure:

1. Text Shuffle
Assemble the text of Life of a Convict on the Framework card sequencing the segments correctly.
2. Comprehension Exercises
Complete the literal, deductive and evaluative comprehension questions on the work-card.
3. Using Interview/Interrogation to develop Comprehension
Class is divided into pairs – A and B in each pair.
A is a news reporter researching for a newspaper and B is a former inmate of the prison camp at point Puer. A interviews B using questions 1 to 17 on the card, recording responses on a notepad.
Additional ideas for a Newspaper Article are available on the work-card.

Q:1. Discuss which targets this activity supports.

Q:2. How would you use this activity?

In class? Small group? One to one? Home?



Story: Life of a Convict

I was born in London, England in 1826. My life as a young child was extremely unhappy. My mother was the only member of the family I knew and she died when I was nine years old. I then lived on the streets and had to steal so I could live. When I was 13 years old, I was caught picking pockets.

I thought I would be sent straight to prison, but instead I was sentenced to transportation. This meant I would have to take a long sea voyage to a place called Van Diemen's Land – now known as Tasmania. Although I was frightened by this, I couldn't help feeling faintly hopeful. At least I wouldn't be on the streets anymore. Nothing could be worse than that. Or could it?

With hundreds of other convicts, I spent about five months on the ship that travelled to Australia. I was miserable – it was cramped, dirty and uncomfortable and I was seasick a lot of the time. When we arrived in Van Diemen's Land, I was taken to a place called Point Puer. This was a prison for boys aged between 9 and 17. It was across the bay from the men's prison called Port Arthur and consisted of a group of dilapidated buildings.

Soon after I arrived, I was assigned to a labouring gang, which meant physical work like cutting firewood and making bricks. After a few months, I was among a group of boys who were chosen to learn trades. My chosen trade was shoemaking. To my surprise, I quite enjoyed it. What I didn't enjoy was the harsh conditions at Point Puer. Life was an endless cycle of prayers, church, work and school. The only free time we had was on Saturday afternoons. There was also a constant threat of punishment. Any boy who misbehaved could suffer solitary confinement, reduced rations or beatings.

Not long after I arrived at Point Puer, I spent 10 days in solitary confinement for fighting with another boy. It was so terrifying that from then on I was mostly well behaved. However, like many of the other boys, I stole food and tools to trade with the men who arrived each day from Port Arthur to bring us water and food. I was never caught, although some of the other boys were.

Finally after two years at Port Puer, I was given my ticket-of-leave. I went to live in nearby Hobart and soon found work with a shoemaker. When I was 20, I married a young woman named Mary Clifton and we had a son called Matthew. Life became much better. I eventually bought my own shoe shop.

I now have a happy life living in Hobart. I have no wish to go back to England. Matthew doesn't know about my former life yet, but one day I plan to tell him. He is now exactly the same age I was when I left England. I know that his life will be better than mine.



Assemble the story Life of a Convict sequencing the paragraphs correctly

Title: