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Auszug aus: *Practising speaking skills*

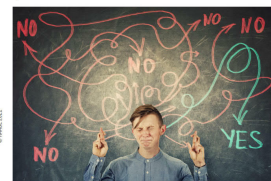
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Practising speaking skills – A literary approach to human dilemmas

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf



Viele Menschen stehen mindestens einmal im Leben vor einer Entscheidung, bei der es notwendig ist, zwischen Optionen wählen zu müssen, die alle keine erfreulichen Ergebnisse bieten. Da so ein Dilemma eine große moralische Herausforderung darstellen kann, ist es ein oft behandeltes Thema in der Philosophie und Literatur. Für den fortgeschrittenen Englischunterricht sind Dilemmas hervorragende Möglichkeiten für Lernende, ihre Sprachkompetenzen in glaubwürdigen Kontexten anzuwenden. Verwenden Sie diese Unterrichtsmaterialien zur methodischen Förderung der Sprechkompetenz und als Vorbereitung für mündliche Abitur-Prüfungen.

RAABE
LEARNING ACADEMY

Practising speaking skills – A literary approach to human dilemmas

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Competences and skills:

By working with the material, students generally enhance their **reading comprehension**. Furthermore, they improve their **viewing skills** by watching a *YouTube* video. Finally, and most importantly, students practise their **speaking skills** by carrying out interviews, giving presentations and adopting different roles in group discussions with their peers.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

| | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| A | Analysis | RC | Reading comprehension |
| CH | Characterisation | SP | Speaking |
| D | Discussion | SV | Survey |
| I | Interview | T | Working with the text |
| LVC | Listening/Viewing comprehension | V | Vocabulary |
| M | Mind Map/Visualising | W | Writing |
| PR | Presentation | | |

| Topic | Material | Methods/Skills |
|---|----------|---------------------|
| 1: The different faces of dilemmas | M1–M4 | LVC, PR, SP, V |
| 2: When identity and family trigger a dilemma | M5–M6 | D, I, M, RC, SP, T |
| 3: When discrimination triggers a dilemma | M7–M8 | D, PR, RC, SP, T, W |
| 4: When technological progress triggers a dilemma | M9–M10 | A, D, RC, SP, SV, T |
| 5: Delivering a speech on dilemmas | M11 | A, CH, RC, SP, T, W |

Practising speaking skills – A literary approach to human dilemmas

Facts

Human dilemmas as a universal topic have always been at the centre of interest for psychologists, philosophers, artists and writers of fictional works. On the one hand, it might well be considered a theoretical topic and, consequently, a subject for discussions among experts. On the other hand, a dilemma can be encountered in everyday life and in every social stratum at any time. A dilemma comes to life when an individual must make vital decisions that all might result in undesirable outcomes. Among others, examples of such a crisis are the following situations: a young person is not able to develop his/her true self because he/she is expected to meet his/her family's expectations; a young man in love with a girl is betrayed by her with a new generation of robots – a synthetic human.

Notes on the material

The material presented is divided into five topics. Watching a *YouTube* video is a starting point for a number of tasks. The three excerpts of novels dealing with various facets of human dilemmas differ greatly in content, language and style. This fact offers the teacher the opportunity either to select only one extract in this unit or to cover all the excerpts. In each topic, students are encouraged to work with the literary material by carrying out a survey, an interview, a group discussion or by making a speech. The focus of the students' activities is clearly on oral tasks in this material.

Topic 1 deals with a personality test on *YouTube*. In a pre-viewing activity, students will give German translations of vocabulary from the video (M1). Students demonstrate their viewing comprehension by taking the test while watching the video. In the next step, they discuss their results of the personality test in small groups. After this, they focus on the most intriguing dilemma from the video and work on it in a placemat activity. Finally, students are asked to read the short text Human dilemmas (M3) as an additional basis

for a presentation they will give before a small group of classmates. Guidelines serve as a useful support.

Topic 2 centres on a chapter from Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* (M5) and brings up the themes "Finding one's own identity" and "Expectations within a family as a dilemma". After completing sentences about the content of the extract, students in pairs prepare an interview with the young female narrator from *The Joy Luck Club*. Then, the interviews are presented to the class. Afterwards, a group discussion with five participants rounds off the topic. The general question, "What can be done if the expectations in your family or social environment trigger an existential dilemma?" aims at both integrating students' own experiences or conflicts and the dilemma of the fictional character from the excerpt. By focusing on the general descriptions on the role cards, students are asked to represent the characters in a convincing way in the course of the discussion.

Topic 3 concentrates on a key scene in Tom Franklin's novel *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* (M7). Franklin's novel revolves around themes such as memory, past, secrets, among many others; but the protagonist's dilemma is the most intriguing one. Containing autobiographical elements, it delineates the life and emotional suffering of the main character named Larry Ott who is the son of a garage owner in rural and racially segregated Mississippi. Due to his physical features, health problems and his strange hobby of adoring horror stories, he is an outsider as a schoolboy and adolescent. His life is marked by an acute loneliness. The extract – just as the complete novel by Franklin – is characterised by the local dialect of the Deep South at the time. Thus, reading the extract might represent a challenge for some students with regard to vocabulary and syntax. After having dealt with the question "How does an individual become an outsider?" in a placemat activity, learners orally sum up the main content in a Touch-Turn-Talk activity. Students enhance their skills dealing with literature by defining the general topics covered in the extract. Then, teamwork and speaking skills are practised by preparing a visual presentation for a Gallery Walk about the solution to Larry Ott's dilemma. Finally, students practise their oral skills by preparing a short speech in the role of the Larry's principal.

Topic 4 provides a thought-provoking excerpt from English author Ian McEwan's latest novel *Machines Like Me* (M9). It is set in the 1980s in an alternative history timeline. The plot revolves around the impact the synthetic human Adam has on its owner Charlie and his relationship with his girlfriend Miranda who lives in the same house in London. As the android Adam is programmed to have an emotional life and characteristic features, a dilemma in form of a complicated love triangle develops. With regard to semantics, style and implications, the excerpt from McEwan's novel is the most challenging one of the materials. Therefore, a great number of annotations support the students' reading comprehension.

By carrying out a survey about the classmates' attitudes towards robots in daily life, the learners are offered the possibility to approach the topic in a personal and general way. In a next step, reading comprehension is checked by four questions on the referential level of the novel. Then, learners analyse the material by explaining the general dilemma illustrated in the extract. The unit is rounded off by preparing a discussion on the question, "Machines with an inner life – A blessing or a curse?" In this way, speaking skills are practised on an advanced level due to the complexity of the topic.

Topic 5 concludes the unit by giving students the opportunity to deal with the fictional characters' dilemmas once more. As the focus of this unit consists of speaking skills, an oral task (speech) is at the centre. A character chart with the following criteria: general information on the character, socioeconomic status, his/her actions, his/her opinions and attitudes, his/her emotions, his/her specific dilemmas will help with the preparation for the speech. Students train writing skills and analytical skills by completing the character chart. Next, learners will choose the protagonist with whom they can identify best. Finally, students write a speech based on two points: the essential components of the chosen fictitious character's life and its message for the student's own life.

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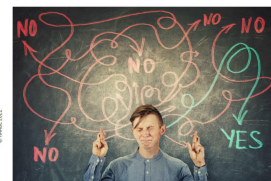
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