

**ADVANCED CURRICULUM FROM THE
CENTER FOR GIFTED EDUCATION AT WILLIAM & MARY**

Challenging Australian Curriculum: English Lessons

**Activities and Extensions for Gifted and Advanced Learners in
YEAR 4**

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UNIT I

The Impact of Inventions on Our Lives

This unit centres on the theme of improving quality of life through inventions of new ideas and improvements upon old ideas. Within the unit, students will explore inventions and advances in technology that have affected and improved our quality of life through informative texts. Students will consider people's wants and desires in order to determine what people look for when they identify something as having an impact or an improvement on their quality of life. Students will demonstrate their growing understanding of this theme through various projects, research, informative writing, persuasive writing and presentations.

LESSON 1.1

Conducting Research

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- research by asking appropriate questions to focus on a general concept within a specific, self-selected topic
- read and comprehend informative texts.

Estimated Time

- 90 minutes (with additional time set aside for research)

Australian Curriculum: English Content Descriptions

See Australian Curriculum: English Alignment, p. 143

Materials

- Lesson 1.1 Exploring Nonfiction Text Features
- Lesson 1.1 Writing Research Questions
- Student copies of texts about inventions, such as:
 - *Toys! Amazing Stories Behind Some Great Inventions* by Don Wulffson
 - *About Time: A First Look at Time and Clocks* by Bruce Koscielniak
 - *Australia's Greatest Inventions and Innovations* by Christopher Cheng and Linsay Knight
 - *100 Inventions That Made History* by DK Publishing
 - *An Illustrated Timeline of Inventions and Inventors* by Kremena T. Spengler
- Computer and internet access
- Various websites about inventors, such as:
 - “The LEGO Group History” by LEGO (http://www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/lego-group/the_lego_history)
 - “The History of Cameras” by Science Kids (<http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/photography/historyofcameras.html>)

Content

Students will acquire information about inventions to prove that they improved people’s quality of life and complete a series of questions exploring nonfiction text features. Then they will develop their own research questions and research a topic.

Extension Activities

Students may

- create a magazine page advertisement on their invention, using their notes on how it improves quality of life; or
- write a news article informing people of their invention as though it was brand new, including a mock interview with the inventor about how and why they developed the product or idea.

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UNIT IV

Overcoming Struggles

This unit centres on characters and people who have overcome hardships and become inspirations to others. Within the unit, students will read, analyse, evaluate, and interpret novels and nonfiction texts with themes related to how the characters inspired others through perseverance. They will examine characters and historical figures and identify their individual hardships, their hopes and dreams, and how they handled their roadblocks to success. Students will demonstrate their understanding of this theme through various projects, narrative writing, informative writing, persuasive writing and poetry.

LESSON 4.1

Interview With a Character

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- ask and answer questions using text-based evidence to support choices.

Estimated Time

- 100 minutes

Australian Curriculum: English Content Descriptions

See Australian Curriculum: English Alignment, p. 147

Materials

- Lesson 4.1 Questions for Li Cunxin
- Lesson 4.1 Peer Feedback
- Lesson 4.1 Rubric: Interview
- Student copies of *Mao's Last Dancer, Young Reader's Edition* by Li Cunxin

Content

Students will work in pairs as part of an interview scenario. One student will pose as Li Cunxin from *Mao's Last Dancer, Young Readers Edition* and another will take on a role as interviewer. Students will determine both the questions they would ask the character about his struggles, causes and dreams and how Cunxin would most likely answer those questions, based on his words and actions as presented in the text.

Prior Knowledge

Students will need to have read *Mao's Last Dancer, Young Reader's Edition*, or teacher-selected excerpts that highlight the theme of overcoming struggles. Students should be familiar with the different themes and events contributing to the character's development and have an understanding of the different character's traits, motives and behaviours.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

1. Introduce students to the saying, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger”. Ask them to discuss this idea and how it relates to *Mao’s Last Dancer*. Guide the discussion in the direction of the circumstances that could have kept Li Cunxin down, yet he continued on.
2. Have students work in pairs, with one student in the role of Li Cunxin and one as an interviewer. Assign each pair two chapters or excerpts from the text. Ask students to complete Lesson 4.1 Questions for Li Cunxin, which asks them to generate a list of ten questions they would like to ask about his journey, hardships, dreams and goals within their assigned chapters.
3. Encourage higher-order thinking questions, challenging students to infer Li Cunxin’s answers and draw from the text-based evidence instead of looking up actual answers straight from the text. Students can use questions that start with how, why or what if and pose questions that analyses his thoughts and feelings. They can also use “Do you think/feel” as a springboard. Examples may include:
 - What was going through your mind when ... ?
 - Do you think you had luck on your side?
 - What did you think the future would hold when ... ?
4. Have students work together to devise questions and answers for the interview.
5. As students are working, they should carefully consider how Li Cunxin would speak, gesture and interpret each question being asked. They will need to go back into the text to get clues on his speech and gestures and can draw from events that happened to him to develop his most likely responses to the questions.
6. Have students present their interviews to the class; this need not be a memorised presentation, but more to share ideas and provide opportunities for discussion and feedback. Students should consult Lesson 4.1 Rubric: Interview before presenting. If possible, film the interviews to play back for students. Distribute Lesson 4.1 Peer Feedback form for students to provide feedback to each pair after they have presented.

Extension Activities

Students may

- write a speech as though they are introducing an Li Cunxin to a crowd after he has won an award, discussing his life and what he has overcome; or
- complete a “documentary style” interview that encompasses information from several chapters, or even the entire text.