



TRANSLATION EXCHANGE

This guide is designed to help sixth-formers and/or teachers set up an international book club at your school. It includes advice on how to plan and structure a meeting, and some ideas of questions to ask about the books you choose. We hope that this will be a passion-project for students that love reading literature in translation! However, we also hope it will be useful to you. For those of you studying literature or languages at A-Level, it will help you better articulate your ideas and develop your knowledge and interests outside the classroom. Experience of planning and coordinating events would also be a good CV-booster.

The Translation Exchange

The Queen's College Translation Exchange brings together students, school pupils, teachers and members of the public for inspiring translation and literary experiences. Our mission is to bring multilingual creativity and culture to people of all ages, in particular to inspire young language-learners to continue with their studies through their time at school and beyond.

We train students to deliver translation workshops to young people, develop virtual resources for learners across the UK, and run a major competition for pupils aged 11-18. With an emphasis on translation as a creative, inspiring, and aspiration-raising activity, these programmes channel the university students' expertise in translation and their enthusiasm for language-learning and literature into enriching experiences for young people.

The Exchange has partnered with literary charity the [Stephen Spender Trust](#) and its ground-breaking 'Translators in Schools' education programmes to develop a unique training programme for students. The Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators is open to all aged 11-18, and includes teaching packs as well as a national competition.

Exchange events include an international literature book club, regular translation workshops, and a residency for an international writer. All of our events are open to everybody and are free of charge.

The Book Clubs

The International Book Club, open to anyone interested in reading more fiction in translation, meets once a term to discuss a book translated into English. The International Book Club for Schools emerged in July 2020 to provide pupils aged 15-18 with their own space to discuss foreign literature in English translation amongst like-minded, literature-loving peers. The club aims to foster a familiarity with and enjoyment of translated fiction amongst our attendees, and encourages them to think about questions of linguistic creativity and cross-cultural exchange.

No knowledge of the original language is required to attend, and any students who enjoy reading and discussing books are welcome and encouraged to take part, regardless of how languages fit into their school lives and future plans. Participants regularly join from all over the country! However, for those students who are planning to study languages at university, the Book Club also supports them in extending their reading and thinking beyond the school curriculum, and helps them feel comfortable with talking through texts, as they might be asked to do at interview. Each book club meeting closes with a Q&A with student ambassadors and Queen's outreach officer about applying for and studying languages at university.



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PLANNING A MEETING

Key Questions

- How do we choose a book?

At the end of this guide, you will find a list of award-winning recent translations to choose from. Each of these books has a resource sheet from us which includes a blurb, some background information, and materials such as translator interviews. We've included most of the major languages studied at UK Universities, but we will be expanding the guide as we go, and we always welcome recommendations!

- How do we get copies of the book?

As it stands, you will have to source your own copies of the books. In future, we hope to partner with publishers to offer free and/or highly discounted copies, so do please get in touch if you'd be interested in exploring this option.

- How often should we meet?

It's important to give everyone enough time to read the book and prepare for the meeting. This is why our book club meets once a term, which might be a good starting point for you too. If you did want to meet more often you could think about holding extra sessions where you explore some of the resources together, look closely at one section of the books together, or have some less-structured chats about your progress with the book.

- How should attendees prepare for the meeting?

The most important thing, of course, is to have read the book! Ideally, attendees should also have taken a look at the resources provided with the book, and thought about the targeted questions. Jotting down key passages in response to them is also a good idea, as it makes it easier to include some close-reading work in the session.

Other things to consider

Provided that your book club is being held in person, remember that you will need to find somewhere to hold your meeting. You might also want to organise drinks and snacks - if you are feeling inspired, you could even try and match them to the country your book was written in or about.



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SESSION OUTLINE

This is one example of how you might want to structure your book club session. It's only a suggestion which you can adapt to suit your own group. Don't feel obliged to stick too closely to a Q&A format; our targeted questions provide good jumping-off points, but the best discussions often happen when you follow up on people's ideas in the moment by extending them or questioning them.

1. First Impressions (up to 5 minutes)

Start off by going round the group. Ask each person to summarise their first impression of the book in a sentence or two.

2. General Discussion (up to 20 minutes)

Move on to asking questions about the book but start off with more general ones; you'll find a list of ideas overleaf.

3. Guide Questions (up to 25 minutes)

Now discuss the questions on the book club guide sheet for your chosen book. This is your opportunity to make more specific points, and perhaps do some close reading of key passages in the text.

4. Summary (up to 10 minutes)

To wrap up, go round the group again. Has anyone's opinion changed? What will everyone take away from the discussion / what did they most enjoy discussing?

For your first meeting, it would be a good idea to spend ten minutes or so introducing yourselves and getting to know one another before you get started. You could try a translation-related ice-breaker: have everyone choose a foreign-language adjective to describe themselves and see who else can translate it for the rest of the group.

The **Translation Exchange** is an outreach initiative promoting modern languages through creative translation. To find out more about our events, including the International Book Club, go to our website (<https://www.queens.ox.ac.uk/translation-exchange>) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#), or [sign up to our newsletter](#).



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GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

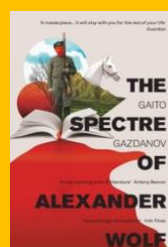
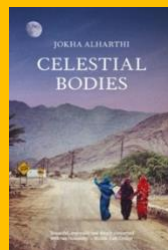
1. Did you enjoy the book? Why/why not?
2. How did you find reading it? Was it easy or difficult to get into?
3. Was it fast-paced or a slow read?
4. What genre would you say the book belongs to?
5. How did you feel towards the characters? Were some of them more sympathetic than others?
6. From whose perspective was the story being told? How do you think this influenced the way you responded to it?
7. Did the opening catch your interest? Did the ending feel satisfying? How did they relate to the rest of the text?
8. How would you describe the book's style? Was it lyrical or pared back? How was the book structured? Was it linear, or more unusually told?
9. Was there a passage that you particularly enjoyed, or one that you think was at the heart of the novel?
10. Did the book make a particular impression on you? Has it made you question any of your own attitudes or assumptions?

Content Notes

We hope that you enjoy these books! A lot of them are concerned with identity in one way or another, and they sometimes touch on challenging questions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. We encourage you to ask questions and think critically about these issues, provided you are comfortable doing so. How do the authors address these issues, and what are they silent about? Have certain scenes or words been included to tell us something about the characters, or are they reflective of the author's own assumptions, or the context in which they were writing?

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A WHOLE LIFE

Written by Robert Seethaler and translated from German by Charlotte Collins

The story of a life lived quietly yet fully in the Austrian Alps; a gracefully understated meditation on the many moments that add up to a life.

CELESTIAL BODIES

Written by Jokha Alharthi and translated from Arabic by Marilyn Booth

Three sisters and their intertwined lives bear witness to the evolution of Oman; a complex cast of multidimensional characters are explored in lyrical but unromantic prose.

THAT HAIR

Written by Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida and translated from Portuguese by Eric M. B. Becker

A tragicomedy innovatively told through the lens of the narrator's hair, plaiting together themes of family, race, and belonging. Emotionally and intellectually charged.

THE ISLAND

Written by Ana María Matute and translated from Spanish by Laura Lonsdale

Sent to live with her domineering Grandmother in Mallorca, rebellious teenager Matia comes of age amidst the Spanish Civil War. Biblical allusion is merged with myth and folklore in this atmospheric evocation of a particular time and place.

THE SPECTRE OF ALEXANDER WOLF

Written by Gaito Gazdanov and translated from Russian by Bryan Karetnyk

A Russian émigré stumbles across an account of a murder he once committed, told from the victim's point of view. Marrying psychological thriller and philosophical enquiry, this book's taut, rhythmic prose ties questions of fate and death into those of plotting and narrative.

TRICK

Written by Domenico Starnone and translated from Italian by Jhumpa Lahiri

Daniele struggles not to be outwitted by his four-year-old grandson; *Trick* paints a vivid picture of his rage and despair in the face of old age and of the destructive, claustrophobic potential of family ties.

UNDER THE TRIPOLI SKY

Written by Kamal Ben Hameda and translated from French by Adriana Hunter

In a society on the threshold of change, Hadachinou occupies the liminal space between child and adult, eavesdropping on the stories women tell one another in their closed-off worlds.

WHITE HORSE

Written by Yan Ge and translated from Chinese by Nicky Harman

This novella tells a coming-of-age story that is darker than it first appears; as Yun Yun grows up, fragments of the adult world become visible to her and become entwined with her own mythologizing as the family relationships around her begin to fray.

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