

● Cloze Encounters

Paul Dufficy

- For many children, especially those in the process of learning
- English as an additional language, the language of written texts
- can be daunting. While preparing children for upcoming texts is
- crucial, it is also important for teachers to unpack the language in
- order to design language-focused tasks and activities that engage
- all children. This e-update looks at how we might adapt the idea of
- the cloze technique in order to re-cycle vocabulary and grammar for
- deeper understanding. Cloze activities encourage children to work
- collaboratively, as part of the process to reach common agreement.
- In **e:update 12** we will look at the following variations on the basic
- cloze idea:
 - – reverse cloze
 - – cluster cloze
 - – synonym cloze
 - – read-around cloze
 - – not needed cloze
 - – prediction cloze

Cloze as a teaching tool

Cloze (a shortened form of the word *closure*) was a technique originally designed to measure reading comprehension. Used for this purpose, every sixth or seventh word is deleted. This method means that a wide range of words will be omitted, including nouns, verbs, pronouns or prepositions. The passage is then given to individuals to complete by filling in the blank spaces, which are of uniform length. Because it was designed to assess and not teach, mechanisms to assist performance were not considered appropriate.

However, we can also use the general idea of cloze passages and adapt them so that we are better able to engage children with vocabulary, grammar and overall comprehension. On the following pages are some examples.

Reverse cloze

As the name implies, rather than delete words we can add words. For example, we might decide to focus on tense choice in a particular kind of newspaper article as in the following example.

Rabbits back to public enemy No. 3 as cats and foxes reign

Foxes and cats are nudging out
have nudged out the rabbit as Australia's most expensive feral animal
nudged out

pests. For the first time researchers have tallied
tallied the cost of damage caused by 11 types of
are tallying

feral animals. Foxes were found
are being found to cost the environment and economy \$227.5 million a year.¹
have been found

(The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 May 2004)

In this cloze task there is one consistent tense used in the original passage (leaving aside 'to cost' for the moment) – two in the active voice and one in the passive voice. In order to bring the issue to consciousness, take an example of the text, and rather than delete verb groups, add a couple more. Each space now has three tenses to choose from: present continuous (*are nudging out*); present perfect (*have nudged out*); and simple past (*nudged out*).

➤ This is a challenging task because all three tenses could be used here, so the differences are both subtle and interesting.

Once the children have worked together and circled or underlined the verb form they think is correct, the class can come back together, discuss reasons for the choices made, and then look at the original text to delve further into how the verb form is functioning in relation to the journalist's intended meaning.

Solution

Foxes and cats have nudged out the rabbit as Australia's most expensive feral animal pests. For the first time researchers have tallied the cost of damage caused by 11 types of feral animals. Foxes have been found to cost the environment and economy \$227.5 million a year.

Apart from verbs, you could target other grammatical items such as prepositions, connectives, nouns or adjectives. The following example is from a novel and the choice of correct word is best achieved by reading back and forth in the passage.

The constraint here is for each pair of students tackling the cloze to reach a

➤ consensus on the word that they think makes the most sense in the context. This short extract comes from the opening section of the novel *Artemis Fowl*, so the context is not yet strong in the minds of the children. It makes the task more difficult. However, an extract taken from a much later chapter, designed as a reverse cloze, is usually much easier to complete with the words chosen by the author.

Nguyen was late, and the pathetic
dark patch of shade provided by the umbrella was doing little
large

to improve Artemis's disposition
suntan . But this was just his daily routine
mood pessimism. Beneath the sulk was a spark of hope.²
sulk

(Colfer, 2001: 4)

Solution

Nguyen was late, and the pathetic patch of shade provided by the umbrella was doing little to improve Artemis's mood. But this was just his daily pessimism. Beneath the sulk was a spark of hope.

Here is another example of a reverse cloze where I have tried to share what I was thinking when I designed the passage.

Monster rat found in 'lost world' jungle

December 17, 2007

'found' in title but introducing 'discovered' as synonym

Researchers in a remote jungle in Indonesia have **discovered / found / come across** a giant rat - five times the size of a **typical / everyday / ordinary** city rat - and a tiny possum that are apparently new to science.

because of the 'a' only typical can work

Finding / Digging up / Unearthing new species of mammals in the 21st century is very **common / unusual / rare**. The discoveries by a team of American and Indonesian scientists are being studied further to confirm their **status / truthfulness / honesty**.

The animals were found in the Foja mountains rainforest in eastern Papua province in a June **trip / journey / expedition**, said US-based Conservation International, which **got together / planned / organised** the trip along with the Indonesian Institute of Science.

"The **giant / big / pretty big** rat is about five times the size of a typical city rat," said Kristofer Helgen, a scientist with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

'typical' for a clue to the one in the first paragraph

"With no fear of humans, it apparently came into the camp **a couple of / a few / several** times during the trip."

bringing the Latin derived word 'several' to consciousness

The possum was described as "one of the world's smallest marsupials".

A 2006 expedition to the same stretch of jungle – dubbed by Conservation International as a "Lost World" because until then humans had **rarely / occasionally / never** visited it – unearthed scores of exotic new species of palms, butterflies and other plants.

raising 'degrees of frequency' to consciousness

Papua has some of the world's largest **tracts / areas / patches** of rainforest, but like elsewhere in Indonesia they are being **attacked / destroyed / ravaged** by illegal logging.

Scientists said last year that the Foja area was not under immediate threat, largely because it was so remote.³

Associated Press

When a reverse cloze is focused on content words such as nouns, adjectives and adverbs, rather than grammatical items such as prepositions, pronouns and verb forms, it becomes an important tool for teaching vocabulary. To stress the importance of vocabulary teaching and learning, the next example raises the issue of words likely to be unknown to many in the class and how we can deal with these using a cluster cloze.

Cluster cloze

You could do the next task, using a Stage 3 text in this case, with the whole class. First, select a word or two that you think has a

▶ fair chance of not being known by most of the class. Design a cloze that can be shown on an overhead projector, Smartboard or as a PowerPoint presentation.

Read the text together using the word 'something' when you encounter a blank space. Now, focusing on the first space, ask the children to offer suggestions for what the word might be. Record these words in the outer ovals of a word web.

Cluster cloze on Artemis Fowl

CHAPTER 1: THE BOOK

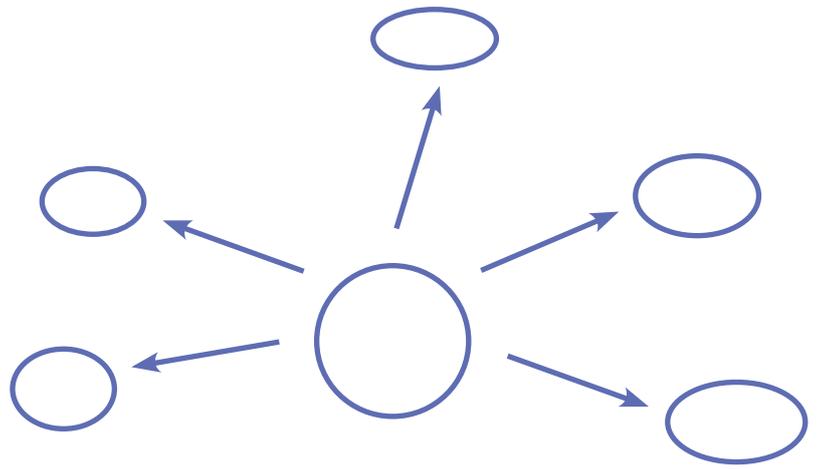
Ho Chi Minh City in the summer. _____ by anyone's standards. Needless to say, Artemis Fowl would not have been willing to put up with such discomfort if something extremely important had not been at stake. Important to the plan.

Sun did not suit Artemis. He did not look well in it. Long hours indoors in front of the monitor had bleached the glow from his skin. He was white as a vampire and almost as _____ in the light of day.⁴

(Colfer, 2001: 1)

Don't allow the children to guess the central word until either all the outer ovals have a word or they can't supply any more words. The trick here is to pick a word that will generally bring out appropriate synonyms, or you can write the first synonym in to start the ball rolling. In this case, the first deletion is usually okay, but for the second deletion I would write the word '*cranky*' in one of the outer ovals to start the class off.

Having five likely synonyms around the centre hub will not usually offer up the deleted word. Instead now, we can tell the class the word and write it in. The point here is that the new word now has found a home among other words and, like the verb forms in the reverse cloze, it has been 'raised to consciousness'.



Format for word web

Solution

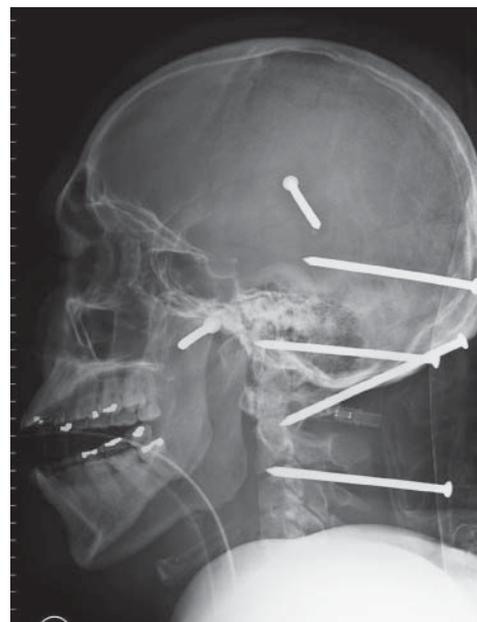
Ho Chi Minh City in the summer. Sweltering by anyone's standards. Needless to say, Artemis Fowl would not have been willing to put up with such discomfort if something extremely important had not been at stake. Important to the plan. Sun did not suit Artemis. He did not look well in it. Long hours indoors in front of the monitor had bleached the glow from his skin. He was white as a vampire and almost as testy in the light of day.

Synonym cloze

Once children reach the last few years of primary school, the vocabulary demand across the curriculum increases dramatically. One reason for this is the increased scope of the curriculum, but a second reason is that as children engage with the various disciplines such as history, science or literature, they begin to encounter words that increasingly are derived from Latin and Greek. This is not a difficulty in itself when we consider how easily preschool children use dinosaur names or the names of toys such as 'Transformers'. But, in general, Latin- and Greek-derived words found throughout the curriculum are not heard in the everyday social world of children. In this world, Anglo-Saxon still holds sway. So when lift doors open, we ask '*Is this going down?*' rather than '*Is this descending?*' In a synonym cloze, you delete words that are probably new to most children (they are frequently, though not always, words derived from Latin and Greek) and insert in their place a synonym that is more likely to be known by the children.

▶ The image below appeared in the *The Sydney Morning Herald* a couple of years ago. The man in question had tumbled off a roof with a co-worker who was holding a nail-gun. The nail-gun discharged, but amazingly the nails missed the man's brain stem and the spinal cord.

The photo was accompanied by an article with the headline '**Modern accidents**' and a short recount of what had happened. This is real believe-it-or-not material, and many learning activities could be based on it, including using the short text for a synonym cloze.



(*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7/5/04, Photo: AP)

We have seen a picture of Isidro Mejia's X-ray and talked about safety with tools and also lucky escapes. Here is the short recount that goes with the picture, but five words have been taken out and replaced by more common words that have a similar meaning. The words taken out are at the bottom of the recount. Work with your partner and see if you can put them back into their right position by matching each with the more common word.

A Los Angeles _____ worker who had six nails driven into his head in an accident with a high-powered nail gun is expected to make a
building

full recovery, doctors said.

Isidro Mejia, 39, does not remember much about the accident which left him with nails _____ in his face, neck and skull.
stuck

Mejia was building a home when he fell from the roof onto a co-worker using the nail gun, police told Associated Press. The two men tried to keep from falling, but both _____ to the ground from the second floor. The gun _____ and drove the nails into Mejia's head.
went off

Doctors said the nails _____ missed his brain stem and spinal cord, which saved him from paralysis or death.
just

discharged tumbled barely construction embedded

Solution

A Los Angeles construction worker who had six nails driven into his head in an accident with a high-powered nail gun is expected to make a full recovery, doctors said. Isidro Mejia, 39, does not remember much about the accident which left him with nails embedded in his face, neck and skull. Mejia was building a home when he fell from the roof onto a co-worker using the nail gun, police told Associated Press. The two men tried to keep from falling, but both tumbled to the ground from the second floor. The gun discharged and drove the nails into Mejia's head. Doctors said the nails barely missed his brain stem and spinal cord, which saved him from paralysis or death.

Words and their origins (two examples)

Word – in this context	Part of speech in context	Synonym in context	Etymology
tumbled (to tumble)	verb	fell	From Old English (before 1100) 'tumbian' meaning 'dance'
construction	adjective classifying 'worker'	building (worker)	From Latin 'construere' meaning 'pile up or put together'

Once pairs have selected what they think is the correct synonym, the class can come together, share selections, and then read the real recount. It might be that the next step is to find the etymology of the new words, as can be below.

Using cloze in this way is particularly useful when it comes to teaching vocabulary while reading a novel. Language in novels can be demanding, so it is important to look carefully at the vocabulary that is being encountered – sometimes for the first time. The following short synonym cloze is drawn from the novel *The Running Man* by Michael Gerard Bauer.

Here is a brief extract from *The Running Man*. Four words have been taken out and replaced with everyday words that are synonyms for the missing words. The synonyms are in italics. The words that have been taken out are mixed up at the bottom of the page. In pairs, see if you can select the word the author used.

The mid-morning sun _____ the long stained glass windows down the side of St Jude's Church and threw a smudged
lit up

_____ of colours on to the opposite wall. For the past three days Joseph's life had been as blurred as that _____ jumble of
pattern *mixed-up*

colours, and he hoped _____ that somewhere behind it all, if he knew where to look, he would find a pattern and shape that made sense.⁶
like mad

chaotic illuminated desperately kaleidoscope

Solution

The mid-morning sun illuminated the long stained glass windows down the side of St Jude's Church and threw a smudged kaleidoscope of colours on to the opposite wall. For the past three days Joseph's life had been as blurred as that chaotic jumble of colours, and he hoped desperately that somewhere behind it all, if he knew where to look, he would find a pattern and shape that made sense.

Read-around cloze

We can design cloze passages that help children to learn to 'read around' a text. For example, take the following excerpt from a longer passage.

Mexico: Mexico City

Two stupendous earthquakes, the first registering 8.1, the second registering 7.5 on the Richter scale, tore through Mexico City on two successive days, September 18 and 19, 1985, killing 5526, injuring 40 000 and leaving 31 000 citizens of that city homeless.⁷

(Davis, 1993: 61)

To design a cloze to help children read around a text, select words for deletion that have a clue either preceding or following the deletion. Using our short text above, you might delete the following:

Mexico: Mexico City

Two stupendous earthquakes, the first registering 8.1, the second _____ 7.5 on the Richter scale, tore through Mexico City on two successive _____, September 18 and 19, 1985, killing 5526, injuring 40 000 and leaving 31 000 citizens of that city homeless.

In this kind of cloze the title, or first sentence, is often a good place to delete (or locate) a clue, especially when first showing children how to complete the task. After using a model to show how the cloze is completed, children in pairs receive their passage. It is crucial to remind them that there are clues – either before or after. Even better, when first doing these read-around cloze passages, assist their performance by using arrows to indicate where a clue might be found.

► Our model text might now look like this:

Mexico: Mexico City

Two stupendous earthquakes, the first registering 8.1, the second _____ 7.5



on the Richter scale, tore through Mexico City on two successive _____, September 18 and 19, 1985, killing 5526, injuring 40 000 and leaving 31 000 citizens of that city homeless.

Clues can be made easy or hard to find. The easy clues usually repeat a word in close proximity to the deletion, whereas more difficult clues require children to go either a long way forward or back in the passage, or are more subtle and require the children to make inferences. This is where a partner is so valuable. If we look at the next passage, where I have made three deletions, we can see that there are no word repetitions.

Lan's _____ had escaped from Vietnam with her younger sister and brother. With about fifty other people, they had sailed in a small _____ to Indonesia. It had taken seven days to get there and there was little food or _____. They had spent over a year in a refugee camp, where she had met Lan's father. Then they had all come to Australia.⁸

(Starke, 2000: 47)

In effect, what makes these approaches to cloze interactive is the constraint that a consensus should be reached. Like other kinds of tasks, children are much more likely to engage in whole-class talk later on if they come to that conversation with something to suggest. One further use to which this task might be put is to organise pairs of children to take turns in designing this kind of read-around cloze for the class each week.

Not-needed cloze

This technique involves removing chunks of a text (often prepositional phrases or minor clauses) that do not alter the essential meaning of the text. These 'not needed' pieces of text are jumbled below the original. The text is numbered where each piece of text has been removed. Children try to match text with number.

Here is the newspaper report of the giant rat. Seven pieces of the text have been left out. There are brackets, e.g. (1), in the text to show where they have been removed. The seven pieces of text are listed below the newspaper report. See if you and your partner can match the right piece of text to each number by writing the correct letter in the space provided.

Monster rat found in 'lost world' jungle

December 17, 2007 - 4:08PM

Researchers in a remote jungle in Indonesia have discovered a giant rat – (1) – and a tiny possum that are apparently new to science.

Unearthing new species of mammals (2) is very rare. The discoveries (3) are being studied further to confirm their status.

The animals were found in the Foja mountains rainforest in eastern Papua province in a June expedition, said US-based Conservation International, which organised the trip along with the Indonesian Institute of Science.

"The giant rat is about five times the size of a typical city rat," said Kristofer Helgen, (4).

"(5), it apparently came into the camp several times during the trip."

The possum was described as "one of the world's smallest marsupials".

A 2006 expedition to the same stretch of jungle - dubbed by Conservation International as a "Lost World" (6) - unearthed scores of exotic new species of palms, butterflies and palms.

Papua has some of the world's largest tracts of rainforest, but like elsewhere in Indonesia they are being ravaged by illegal logging.

Scientists said (7) that the Foja area was not under immediate threat, largely because it was so remote.⁹

Associated Press

- | | |
|---|---|
| (a) last year | (e) because until then humans had rarely visited it |
| (b) by a team of American and Indonesian scientists | (f) five times the size of a typical city rat |
| (c) With no fear of humans | (g) in the 21st century |
| (d) a scientist with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. | |

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (4) _____ (5) _____ (6) _____ (7) _____

Prediction cloze

Cloze can also be a useful tool when we want to focus children's attention on a particular aspect of language (vocabulary or grammar), or when you want to raise an issue prior to reading, so that we can revisit it once a text has been read. In other words, you hand it over for the children to deal with in some way before they have to respond. For example a middle school class is reading *Hiroshima* by John Hersey and, as part of the novel study, you introduce the poem *ground zero* by the Australian poet Michael Dransfield.

The first step is to organise the class into pairs. Each pair receives a copy of the poem, which has had a number of words

Here is a poem by the Australian poet Michael Dransfield. There are six words missing. With your partner, try to predict the word that Dransfield has used and write it in the space provided. To help you do this, read the poem through first. There is only one word missing in each space. When we have finished, we will collate our predictions.

ground zero

wake up

look around

(1) _____ what you see

it may be gone (2) _____

everything changes. Someday

there will be (3) _____ but what is remembered

there may be no-one to (4) _____ it.

Keep moving

wherever you (5) _____ is ground zero

a moving (6) _____ is harder to hit.¹⁰

Michael Dransfield

▶ deleted. For later class reference, each deletion has been numbered.

As the pairs are completing the cloze, write the numbers 1 to 6 down the left-hand side of an overhead transparency or on the whiteboard. Once the pairs have completed the cloze, go around the class and get all the predictions for number 1 and write them up. Do the same for the remaining deletions. I have used this poem quite a few times now, and the most common prediction for (1) is 'remember'. The other observation that would be interesting to discuss with older students is the fact that nearly all those proficient in English get number (6) correct. Once all the words are written up, you can show or distribute the original version. As one example of where the class conversation might go based on the predictions, you could look at the fact that the poet has used 'memorise' rather than 'remember' in (1). It would be a fruitful discussion for the class to articulate the difference between these two words. You could also throw in 'recall' and 'recollect'. The point here is that such a discussion and exploration of word meanings takes the class closer to

Solution

ground zero
wake up
look around
memorise what you see
it may be gone tomorrow
everything changes. Someday
there will be nothing but what is remembered
there may be no-one to remember it.
Keep moving
wherever you stand is ground zero
a moving target is harder to hit.

the poet's intention, as well as continuing to build interactive relationships so vital to substantive classroom talk.

Reverse cloze can also be used as a predictive tool. The following is a prediction (reverse) cloze from the first chapter of the

▶ Australian writer D.M. Cornish's *Foundling*. Before reading the first chapter and generally after some substantial front-loading activities, children are given the collaborative prediction sheet to see if they can predict the answer to each statement. Once the prediction is completed the children listen to the chapter. Afterwards they can check their original predictions.

IT BEGAN WITH A FIGHT

1. Rossamünd was a boy with (a) girl's name (b) an attitude (c) a job in the city (d) a bad reputation.
2. Both boys wore (a) padded sacks of dirty white cotton (b) frilly bows and ribbons (c) mean looks on their faces (d) their favourite clothes
3. The Hundred Rules of Harundo made (a) Rossamünd feel hopeless (b) perfect sense (c) the fights silly (d) made the spectators bored.
4. Gosling called Rossamünd 'Rosy Posy' because he (a) liked nursery rhymes (b) was a bully (c) couldn't spell (d) gave everyone nicknames.
5. Gosling strutted into the ring and said "Time to get your (a) present (b) scourging (c) breakfast (d) homework, Missy!"¹¹

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the way the traditional cloze activity can be redesigned to promote expanded talk opportunities and, in collaboration with a partner, children can be assisted to think deeply about both content and language. Tasks like these all play a part in assisting children and young people to engage with texts. They provide realistic opportunities for teachers to unpack and re-cycle academic language so that words and language are continually raised to consciousness and used in productive ways.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Richard, N. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 2004
- ^{2,4} Colfer, E. (2001) *Artemis Fowl*, Middlesex, Penguin
- ^{3,9} *Associated Press*, 17 December 2007
- ⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 2004
- ⁶ Bauer, M.G. (2004) *The Running Man*, Malvern, SA, Omnibus Books
- ⁷ Davis, L. (1993) *Encyclopaedia of Natural Disasters*, London, Headline
- ⁸ Starke, R. (2000) *Nips XI*, Melbourne, Lothian Books
- ¹⁰ Dransfield, M. (1972) 'ground zero' in *The inspector of tides*, St Lucia, QLD, University of Queensland Press
- ¹¹ Cornish, D.M. (2007) *Foundling*, Malvern SA, Omnibus Books

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Dufficy has worked as a primary school teacher and ESL teacher both in Australia and overseas. He has taught in Pakistan, Thailand, Japan and most recently Indonesia. Paul is currently a teacher educator in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney. His interests include task-based learning, vocabulary development, and classroom interaction in the context of multilingual classrooms.

This e:update was sourced from the author's original e:lit publication **Designing Learning**.

This book explores some practical teaching principles that can guide our work in relation to our learning design processes. It focuses on the important role of whole-class talk and how it might be used to assist children in engaging with intellectually challenging activity. The book offers a wide range of interactive tasks that we can draw upon when it comes to designing individual learning sequences that provide expanding opportunities for classroom talk.

