

# Treading the Poetic Path

Volume II

**The ELT Online Reading Group**

**Foreword: Alan Maley**

**Editor: Chris Lima**

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A poem begins as a lump in the throat.

*Robert Frost*



# Acknowledgements

To celebrate the fourth anniversary of the ELT e-Reading Group, we have invited English Language teachers worldwide to use their imagination and become short story writers and poets themselves. Participants were asked to submit short stories and poems inspired by one of the texts read in the Group. This volume is the result of their imagination and writing skills.

This publication would have never been possible without the generosity of the authors of these texts who agreed to contribute to this collection without any financial reward.

Heartfelt thanks to the British Council (BC) and to Rob Lewis, manager of the TeachingEnglish website, for hosting the Group, providing technical support, and helping to spread the word about this initiative through various BC channels.

Very special thanks to Alan Maley, who took his precious and highly demanded time to write the foreword to this publication. Thanks a lot Alan!!

Thanks, above all, to the all our Group members who have been posting to the discussion board and also following the exchanges there with interest.

Thanks to everybody who has submitted a piece, it was a hard task for the judges to select just a few. Congratulations to the ones who have been chosen.

We hope you enjoy the stories and poems.

Chris Lima  
Project Coordinator / Editor  
Leicester, March 2012

## To the reader

At the touch of love everyone becomes a poet. *Plato*



## Foreword

First I must say how delighted I was to be invited to contribute the Foreword to this amazing collection of work. My congratulations go to Chris Lima for her inspiration and support, and to all of the teacher-writers who contributed their work. I have immensely enjoyed reading the present selection. I should also congratulate the British Council for setting up and supporting the ELT Online Reading Group.

I am particularly pleased because I am a staunch believer in the power of reading, both for students and for teachers. I know from my own experience as a language learner how motivating it can be when we realise that we can read a whole book in the new language. It is a quantum leap. And I think it is particularly important that we read literary, not just professional texts. Literature touches the places in the heart and mind that other texts cannot reach.

But the idea of creating new literary texts in the foreign language goes one step further. How much more motivating it is to realise that we have it in us to make texts for ourselves, not simply to consume them. What is more, the texts we write may be more accessible to our students than those sometimes culturally and linguistically-remote texts we are asked to teach.. And how inspiring for our students to know that these texts were written by their own teacher!

I have been working with a group very like yours in the Asia region for the past 10 years. The only difference is that we actually meet from time to time in each other's' countries to write and discuss our work. Like you, we also publish but in book form rather than on- line. It has been a great stimulus to me in my own work as a writer and teacher trainer to watch our group members grow, linguistically, professionally but above all personally. This is empowerment in a very real sense. To conclude, here are two reflections from our group members. I think they say it all.

Writing is to relive your life  
Writing is to share your emotions  
Writing is to sharpen your mind  
Writing is to release your tensions.  
(Vishnu, Nepal)

'I have learned that writing is a very important skill not only for study but also for life and that writing is not only for communication but also for creativity (to sharpen our creative senses). Writing creatively is not only for specialists (or famous creative writers) but for everybody. It is very empowering to know that I can write creatively (it was an amazing feeling when I finished writing my first short story in English). I have never written a story even in Burmese, although I have written lots of academic essays.' (Tan Bee, Burma)

I wish you every success in future. Keep writing! Keep learning! Keep developing!

*Alan Maley*

## The Poems



## The Solitary Reader

*Mostafa Mouhibe*

*Morocco*

Behold her single in the text,  
Young solitary reading lady;  
Reading and dreaming by herself,  
Stopping here, or gently passing!  
Alone she smiles but often cries,  
And talks to the imaginary skies:  
Oh! Look how beautiful  
And charming...

When she turns the page,  
With anxious and exciting rage.  
Her face would blossom  
Like an early spring bud,  
But would faint when summer blows  
its cruel breath.  
For she is at the mercy  
Of the magic but unsure rhymes.

Words are her yachts  
Flirting with the fluid like world  
Haunted by the tantalizing  
And protean spectres of sense.  
Yearning for a volatile meaning,  
She could embrace or touch  
With her mortal and lovely soft hands.

In vain she dreams  
Of freezing up or catching  
The fleeing notions of time and lands.

Reading is but a daydreaming,  
Overstepping the limits  
Of this indifferent earthly life.  
Full of deceit and angelic lies.  
Sacred is her fictive world,  
When space and time  
Are not real but as sweet  
As my solitary sugary lime.

Inspired by Wordsworth's *The Solitary  
Reaper*

**If...**

*Marcos Nhapulo*

*Mozambique*

if love is something lost somewhere we all don't know,  
then it is everywhere we go!

if love has something to do with feelings,  
then you know my feelings,

if love is found somewhere we don't expect it to be,  
then I have found it in your eyes!

if love can be felt twice,  
then we will meet again...

## A Poet's Journey

*Marcos Nhapulo*

*Mozambique*

No false dear, no true fear...

No need to beg for nature,

Because it's for good and bad

It's for deaf and blind and for all the  
corners

It's for animals and trees and clouds and  
the empty sky...

No need to bend the tail you don't have

No need to cry where you can fly

No need to shout where you can smile

No need shame where there is no blame

No, no, no...

No human has twenty-one fingers,

No need to go back and forth

As humans will always drive you,

No, don't listen when they shout

That's not what this life is about.

And don't listen again,

When they try to put you down

When it's time to get up and stand for  
your life

No need to call God to humans,

No need to love or hate these words,

No need to know about all meanings,

No need to lie when it's time to tell the  
truth;

No need to beg for your own life

No need to beg,

No need...

No.

## A Rainbow Of Stories

*Maria do Céu Pires Costa*

*Portugal*

A rainbow of stories  
Unfolded with emotion,  
Determination, great passion,  
Even compassion, care,  
And true love so rare!

Friendly people welcomed us  
Gently offering their smile  
We never doubted a while  
It was genuine, sincere,  
Causing joy, well-being near.

Legendary venues indeed  
Captured our attention  
For their colours, sweet flavours,  
Hot fragrances all around  
That atmosphere- a busy crowd.

Beyond strolls, stunning views  
Invited us to a quiet reflection  
Of a real thankfulness  
For the experience lived  
And divinely blessed!

## Love And Philosophy

*Maria do Céu Pires Costa*

*Portugal*

The girl born to a father-Professor  
And a mother of noble virtues  
A couple truly industrious  
Who raised their daughter dear.

They inculcated the girl  
With principles to succeed  
But she didn't heed  
Her parents call.

In the presence of a young Student  
Who fell in love passionately  
For her, she replied arrogantly  
Rather than being pleasant.

"I might well trust you  
Only if you handed me  
A red rose in much glee  
Fully scented, too."

He got desperate, sorrowful  
Lying on the grass, weeping  
For no red rose was he finding  
But his heart beating painful.

As the Nightingale saw him  
Devastated by his grief  
She quickly thought of his relief  
And pursued her noble dream.

Her quest – a case of true love  
Was followed in music by moonlight  
And blood from her heart  
To flow into the Tree with love.

Fainter and fainter grew  
The Nightingale's sweet song  
She had joyfully sung for long  
To see the Tree red rose fresh like dew.

The girl challenged that young lad  
Who again approached her charmingly  
Offering the red rose romantically:  
"Please, accept it with my love – red..."

Lured by jewels glittering  
The girl didn't appreciate the rose  
Saying with unnatural pose:  
"I'd rather have a diamond ring."

"Oh, let me find a book  
Where I can learn lessons of love  
To feel more passionate than a dove  
And by both be eternally hooked!"

Inspired by Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose*

## Reading Poems

*Francisco Langa (Tanguene)*

*Mozambique*

When you believe  
and suddenly they tell you  
and you ask  
and they tell you again

but why not believe then  
you ask, right!  
Imagine a book with its cover  
then the book lost the cover  
how can you read it?

If it's a poetry book,  
poems don't come on covers  
look inside the poem  
find on the pages inside  
and believe you found them  
and their meaning.

## Waiting For The Train

*Francisco Langa (Tanguene)*

*Mozambique*

raising eyes

looked at those sitting there

across the road

when they stood up

one by one

it was coming

thought it was coming

the whistle, oh! Heard it

looked at the horizon

saw nothing but the empty

motionless blue sky

it's coming

really it's coming

the train is coming.

## I Apologise

*Francisco Langa (Tanguene)*

*Mozambique*

I apologise for being the road

Where carts, cars and people tread on  
my backs

And go about their business

I apologise for being the day

...

I apologise for being the night

All people masked

And all become worst

I apologise for being the sun

The sunrays heating the air

Making rain comes

I apologise for being the rain

The crops grow by my strength

And I have no mouth to eat a single  
grain

I apologise for being the rain

Watering people who have no blame

In the streets where live makers

I apologise for being the maker

Of these lines that will tell you nothing

Even if they were all but a poem

I apologise for being poems

That you read and found out

they have lost sense.

I apologise for being this poem

Reading me,

Exploring me

For your pleasure

Then guess I mean nothing!

## **We Want Peace**

*Heba Abdel Azim*

*Egypt*

It is our duty to struggle for the return of our land  
It is our duty to cooperate and be one hand  
It is our duty to spread peace in our nation  
And stop the violence and avoid the separation

It is our duty to fight our enemy  
And beat the arrogance and the hegemony  
We should prove that we are not a scapegoat  
And that we have a great cultural thought

It is our duty to prove our existence  
Even if it is by defence and resistance  
It is our duty to return the civilians' rights  
Even if it requires entering in wars or fights

We seek peace and security  
But defending our land is a priority

## She Looks At The Sky

*Heba Abdel Azim*

*Egypt*

She looks at the sky  
To see the moon  
Then she remembers  
That her lover is returning soon.

She looks at the sky  
To see the sun  
Then cries  
“My lover is gone”

She looks at the sky  
To see the stars  
Then shout out loudly  
“My lover is far”

She looks at the sky  
Hoping that her lover might come back  
But then she realises  
That what goes will never return

## The Wrong Way

*Dírio Rodrigues Dambile*

*Mozambique*

A single day  
I saw her in my way  
So beautiful in tidy smiles

She walked carefully  
In the red and white striped skirt  
That matched with her shirt.

She got into my heart  
Nothing I had to start  
Unless just to say  
I like you in my way.

It was all the same  
She found no fun in the game  
That was a wrong aim  
Because like me  
She had her own aim.

## Time Never Dies

*Dírio Rodrigues Dambile*

*Mozambique*

Like fools  
Chasing the wind  
Aimlessly to no direction - we chase  
The watch never stops  
Tick, tick, tick, tick  
Time runs  
But we chase

I chase  
You chase  
He, she, it chases  
We, you, they chase  
Humans chase  
Animals chase  
Every creature chases

We live in dreams  
In unfulfilled goals  
Chasing hopefully  
The Time never found

We find alive, it lives?  
We survive and die  
We are passers-by  
Life time goes  
Tock, tock, tock, tock

## A Poem Without Any Name

*Sanghita Sen*

*India*

Breaking the bleak beaks of barrenness  
life unleashes itself.

Sun still shined  
Earth spun  
Water flowed  
Birds chirped.

But moon marooned  
And stars stopped shivering from afar.

I waited for a glimpse of the known world  
of the imagined world  
of the world to be.

Existence passes away  
Words remain.

The ownership of my words  
I bestow upon you.  
If they remain  
They'll tell you

Once upon a time there was a woman  
Who day-dreamt...

## The Short Stories



## The Ogre on the Pavement

*Bartolome Tscherner*

*Switzerland*

It happens from time to time that I'm strolling along the streets as if they didn't exist or if they had even been built only a moment ago. Something of this sort happened to me the other day. As I went daydreaming through the streets of Norwich with all those marvellously crammed shop windows, my strolling view was attracted here by an Indian Buddha and there by a pierced British belly. It was like walking through paradise, slumbered by this drowning lullaby coming up from the streets. My thoughts hopped from the flavour of Australian wine to the smell of English cookies. They ran past cars, overtook pedestrians and barked silently at dogs.

Then they were suddenly attracted by this two and half year-old boy hopping and pouncing in front of me, some steps behind a long-haired lady, obviously his mother, although very young herself. She prodded a pram in front of her. I kept paying attention to the boy because he apparently didn't want to obey his mother. That's why she shrieked out orders to behave, to follow her, to sit in the pram, to ...and to ... and to ... But all these orders bounced like sparkles bouncing out of a chimney to splash on the pavement and fizzle out. The boy ran here and there and everywhere. His mother was trying in vain to tame her whirlwind.

'Come here, naughty boy, come here sweetheart', she squeaked again and again. 'Otherwise you'll be caught by this ogre that follows us. You see him? There he is!' And the boy's lovely mother pointed at me if I were an antlered or fire-spitting monster intending to devour all misbehaving children. The boy was puzzled, maybe by my

friendliness or by his mother's warning. He sometimes ran towards her; sometimes waited for me to approach him. I enjoyed the game and wrinkled my forehead making squeaking noises too, just for fun. But then, at a certain moment the boy couldn't laugh at my frowns anymore. He seemed to be scared – I don't know, either of the dreadful story his mother had told him before or of my grimaces. He began to flee, but staggered and tripped over his feet. He fell over the kerb into the busy street. I needn't tell you that my legs and my heart turned to jelly.

The boy cried, the mother in despair yelled and let go of the pram. There was the rumbling of approaching cars. The baby was creeping in the road; the pram was rolling there too. Then the squealing of brakes suffocated the shouts of the mother and the cries of her child. The first car to pass skidded. The driver was about to lose control. It crossed the central line and finished up in the bonnet of an on-coming van. A terrible bang blared through the street and echoed from the nearby churchyard walls.

The baby was safe. The cars were wrecks. The pram smashed in between. The outraged mother was banging on me with her shopping bag full of jars of marmalade. The furious drivers were blaming the thoughtless mother. The mother was still hitting me with a now torn bag and the pavement became unnecessarily sticky with lumps of marmalade and pieces of shattered glass, whereas the boy was saved and comforted by a passing old man.

'It was just for fun', I chipped between the incoming whips.

And I will give you a piece of advice – never make fun with an unruly boy on a foreign pavement if his mother is carrying jars of marmalade in her shopping bag.

## The Grandma's Story

*Francisco Langa (Tanguene)*

*Mozambique*

The young priest stood up, opened the book and quickly closed without reading it, then said, 'There's time for everything.' He scrutinised the old book and held one end of the red string that was tied at one end of the book - the red silk thread cutting through the pages. He kept looking at the open page as he was to decipher the letters on and then closed the book, whispered some unintelligible words sounds of a prayer and carefully put the book on the table in front of him. 'A time to weep, a time to laugh', he said looking at the crowd that gathered around. He looked away, pulled the red string and went back to the same page he had opened before, looked without reading, then read in a loud voice, 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.' He clasped his hands. "For the living knows that they shall die, but the dead know not..." Before silence came, a chant broke out. Women at the top of their voices brought about harmonious sounds mingled with tears which engulfed the scene, some voices were chirping like cold sparrows twittering on the ground early in a misty morning, waiting for the sunbeam to dry their feathers, waiting for their time to fly.

This is the grandma's story.

Grandma always told stories and when she was telling stories we all kept quiet and listened, for she had wisdom and knew almost everything about life. And the things she did not know she did not tell, she only told what she knew about and would not accept objections at all. She said, 'For educated people to disagree with the elderly means lack of respect for people who brought you in the world.' She felt sad about the youngsters who do not respect anymore the old who know almost everything and lived when family education was at the core of all societies. Before the twist of morals seen today, there were good times, before all societies of the world grew sick in a social miscarriage. She told of the time sanity was all over the world, not today that all the people sound maladjusted. This story has to be believed and to object it was to risk not hearing a word from her mouth anymore until her death, she promised. She swore that, at any sign of disbelief, all the told stories of the world would become untold. She read our faces and asked, 'Do you believe it?' All in unison, 'Yes!' 'If you don't believe it,

so don't believe all that I told you before, and I'm no longer your grandma, is it that you want?' 'No grandma, we believe in all you say, grandma.' She nodded, waited for a while, and as she kept silent. The voices in unison came again before the worst 'Yes, Grandma, you've always told us the truth, tell us this story.' She adjusted her headscarf. Her *vemba*<sup>1</sup>'s knot was a bit loose and she tightened it with both her hands. When she stood up the voices in unison came again, 'Please grandma, tell us the story. We believe it.' She got ready to speak again.

The young priest asked, 'Is there anyone who wants to say a word?' A gentleman in a white shirt with red small dots raised his hand and stood up. 'What we know is that our daughter has left something that would break our hearts if not cared for. She leaves behind two children in your hands. We ask our son-in-law to pay due respect to that and not do what he has done to our daughter.' The gentleman sat down as people looked at one another and whispered about the meaning of the gentleman's words. We did not understand, confessed Grandma, what he meant or what he was trying to tell. His daughter left the world of the living and he only knew about it the very day of the funeral. He was divorced and left the children with his ex-wife, went to live with another wife, and did not know his daughter was ill. He only knew she was dead, when from work he received a call on his cell phone. 'What?', he asked. 'That is true,' said the caller. And Grandma looked at our faces and searched for any sign of disbelief. She looked at her snuff tin, but as she saw we all agreed, she gave up from taking some tobacco to her nose. She kept silent for some seconds - her eyes smiling - and showed she was ready to continue telling the story.

'I have left my daughter with her mother and now you tell me she was living with a man and has got children, things I don't know about. How did that happen?' The gentleman with a white shirt with red small dots raised his voice from where he sat without standing now. A small delegation was asked to advise him to go aside and have a brief private talk with his ex-wife as they saw he was nervous, said Grandma. Some whispered that the man was very annoyed at this, for he did not wear the suit that a father should rightfully wear at the *lobola*<sup>2</sup> of his daughter. He was heard asking his ex-wife, 'If you have put on such *mukume*<sup>3</sup> for my child to go and live with her husband, who did put on the jacket that was rightfully for her father?' Silence. 'Who?' Silence. The priest approached them, raised his hand and asked for silence. 'This is not the time

to argue. ‘The sun rises and sets. We should be happy and enjoy life for the living knows they shall pass away, but... We’re told here your daughter fell ill and we should not look for witches. If we’ll be digging a pit, we’ll soon fall in it.’

Grandma stopped and read on our faces to find out if there was any sign of disbelief. We all nodded. By looking at her smile we knew she would continue. Whatever it was, it was a hard story to tell. Grandma did not say so, but we knew it. We read her wrinkles and they told us a lot without telling. We knew this was not a pleasant story for Grandma to tell. She did not show us but her heart was bleeding for we saw the red stains on the right side of her blouse. They were really red.

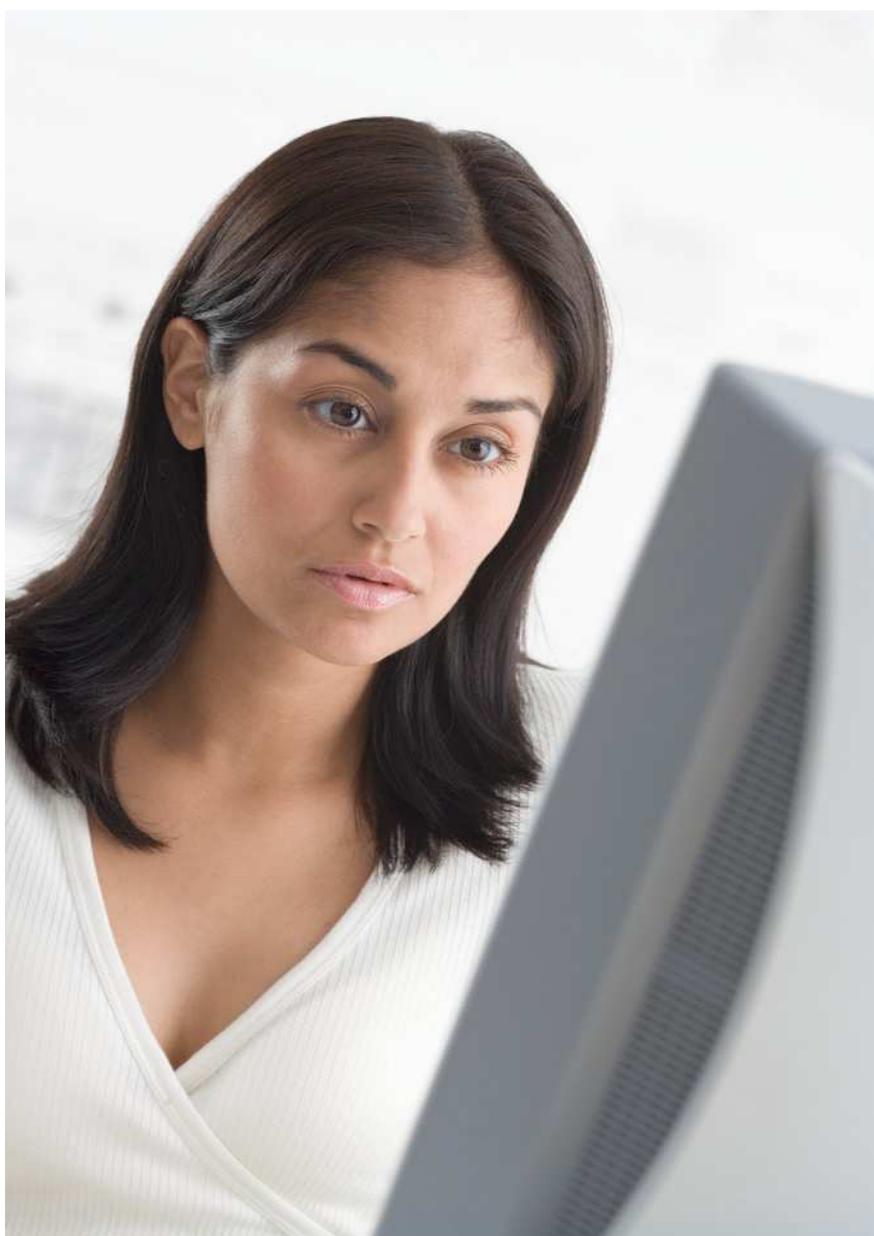
The in-laws said the girl’s father-in-law had once visited the deceased years before she had children, but it was just once. She was living with her partner who told the father-in-law they were young but wanted to build a family. They wanted to own a house and they wanted to live like husband and wife. They wanted to get a proper *lobola* and live the way the grown-ups live but it was just too difficult. There was no work like it used to be before. What is the value of ceremony in poor livelihoods when you only get by pushing a cart along the streets? As for *lobola*, he would pay if he had money. ‘Not easy, everything difficult’, the young widower said. They needed a house, clothes and food for themselves and the children. The *lobola* would come one day. ‘Time for everything,’ Grandmother took a deep breath.

The gentleman in the white shirt, the father of the late girl, was given time for final remarks before the funeral preceded as it was right. He asked his relatives and companions to stand up and then, to the surprise of all, dismissed them, ‘We will come for the funeral after we get her *lobola*; otherwise it will be a curse on us and our descendents - we will never be forgiven.’ They left the graveyard, and a loud cry broke out. Grandma read the expressions on our faces and didn’t find any sign of disbelief. We all nodded, ‘Yes.’ ‘The girl’, said Grandma, ‘not buried yet, is still waiting for *lobola*.’

## Glossary

1. Vemba – Capulana
2. Lobola – (traditional) marriage, it traditionally legitimates marriage
3. Mukume –bigger cloth made of 4 capulanas that women dress or take to ceremonies and special events

## The ELT Online Reading Group



## The ELT Online Reading Group

The Group was created by a collective of English language educators from all over the world with the technical support of the British Council. It aims at encouraging ELT professionals to read literature in English, helping to build bridges between cultures and contributing to build tolerance and intercultural competence through the discussion of works literature.

The group meets online and participants post their comments to a discussion board, sharing their points of view on short stories and poems written in English.

The ELT Online Reading Group was launched in August 2007, being originally hosted at the British Council enCompass website and moved into TeachingEnglish in August 2010. It was created having especially in mind those English language professionals who work in special conditions; teachers who have little access to libraries and books in English; who work in remote areas or conflict zones where it is almost impossible to guarantee safety and the right to public gatherings and/or who count on little support to start a reading group in their workplaces.

## About the project

Over the past few years the popularity of Reading Groups has dramatically increased in the UK and around the world, becoming a place to cultivate dialogue and discussion along distinct themes. The *enCompass* website, the British Council worldwide reading group, provided the main inspiration for this project; however, the difficult access to reading material faced by some English language teachers and educators working in different countries prompted us to create an online reading group instead of a group meeting in a specific place or time.

The group for is open to all ELT professionals who want to join it. A text, usually a short story or poem, is chosen each month and participants are invited to post their comments to the group discussion board.

## Our objectives

- To encourage English language teachers to read literature in English, creating opportunities to get in contact with texts from different countries, periods and authors;
- To promote debate and an in-depth engagement with relevant issues through the discussion of works literature;
- To provide opportunities for teachers to talk to each other online underpinning the reading habit and building an ELT community of readers;

- To help English language educators to see other points of view connecting them to a wider world, other philosophies and new ideas building bridges between, and insight into, other cultures thus contributing to build tolerance and intercultural competence;
- To create opportunities for English Language teachers to develop their own language skills, increasing vocabulary, improving pronunciation and increasing their understanding of idiom and expressions as well as their command of the language as a whole.

## **Our resources**

To make the reading material widely accessible, the texts are chosen from free online sources. A link to the text of the month is posted to the group discussion board and participants can download it. Texts are chosen based on their accessibility, interest and potential to raise debate on complex and relevant issues.

## **Join the debate**

To become a member of the ELT Online Reading Group, you first need to register or log in on *TeachingEnglish*. You can then join in and talk to other readers around the world. It's easy to do. Read the postings, then choose which to post to and click on reply.

**BBC/ British Council TeachingEnglish**

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>

**The ELT Online Reading Group**

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/group/elt-online-reading-group>

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# Useful Links

## **BritLit**

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/britlit>

## **WordPowered**

<http://www.wordpowered.org/>

## **British Council. Arts – Literature**

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature>

## **IATEFL Literature Media and Cultural Studies Special Interest Group**

<http://lmcs.iatefl.org/>

## **The Extensive Reading Foundation**

<http://www.erfoundation.org/erf/>

For further links on literature, online reading sources, and literary criticism also visit

<http://thebookworms.wordpress.com/>

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**<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/group/elt-online-reading-group>**