

THE BOOK THIEF

Film-based learning project • English – Grade 12 / Γ' Λυκείου

**6 teaching periods • selected film extracts • reading/listening/speaking/writing • vocabulary • film literacy
• critical thinking**

Teacher overview

This unit treats the film as a multimodal text rather than as a reward or a passive viewing activity. Students watch carefully selected extracts, make predictions, collect evidence, analyse characters and cinematic choices, develop vocabulary in context, and produce spoken and written English. The film should be divided into extracts; the exact time codes may vary between versions, so the plan identifies scenes rather than fixed minutes.

Area	Main outcomes
Language	Vocabulary in context; inference; modal verbs; conditionals; hedging; evidence-based speaking/writing
Skills	Listening, reading, speaking, writing, visual literacy, note-taking, collaboration
Higher-order thinking	Predicting, interpreting, comparing, justifying, evaluating, connecting evidence
Film literacy	Soundtrack, silence, close-up, colour/light, framing, pacing, symbolism, narration
Social-emotional / civic	Empathy, moral choices, courage, trust, discrimination, freedom of expression

Essential question

How can words change a person's life in times of war?

Supporting questions: What makes someone brave? How is trust built? Can books be a form of resistance? How does a film make us feel rather than simply tell us what happens?

Recommended sequence

Period	Core extract / focus	Main technique	Product
1	Before viewing + opening	Prediction / Think-Pair-Share	Film Detective notes
2	Train, Liesel's arrival, school	Pause & predict / silent viewing	Evidence chart
3	Hans teaches Liesel + book burning/library	Close reading of film / vocabulary map	Claim–Evidence–Explanation
4	Max arrives + relationship develops	Character arc / trust scale	Relationship analysis
5	Lehman/Hans + Max leaves + marching scene	Ethical dilemma / conditionals	Structured discussion
6	Bombing + ending + Death	Prediction, narrative analysis, evaluation	60-second review / final response

Teaching principles and differentiation

- Use English as the main classroom language, but allow brief Greek clarification when it removes a genuine barrier rather than replacing inference.
- For strong students, avoid factual comprehension questions as the main task. Use WHAT → HOW → WHY and require evidence.
- Use mixed-ability pairs/groups for collaborative tasks, with rotating roles: Evidence Finder, Vocabulary Detective, Discussion Leader, Reporter.
- Offer extension prompts: 'What makes you think so?', 'What evidence contradicts this?', 'How would the scene change if...?', 'What does the director make us notice?'
- Do not show the whole film in one sitting. Stop at carefully chosen narrative turning points and make students predict before revealing consequences.

PERIOD 1

Before the film + opening scene

Learning objectives

- Activate prior knowledge and formulate hypotheses.
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary from context.
- Use prediction language accurately.
- Identify the difference between factual observation and interpretation.

Procedure (45–50 minutes)

Time	Stage	Teacher action	Student action
0–5	Hook	Display THE BOOK THIEF. Ask: 'Who/what might a book thief be?'	Think individually; write 3 hypotheses.
5–12	Think-Pair-Share	Reveal: Germany / 1938 / young girl / books / Jewish refugee.	Discuss how clues change predictions.
12–22	Vocabulary Detective	Give Worksheet 1A.	Infer and classify vocabulary.
22–30	Historical framing	Give only essential context: Nazi Germany, censorship/book burning, persecution of Jews, war.	Build a 4-box concept map.
30–48	Opening extract	Show opening through Liesel's arrival / early introduction; pause at 2–3 points.	Complete Film Detective notes and predictions.

Teacher note

Avoid explaining every historical detail. The aim is enough context to understand the scene and enough uncertainty to make prediction meaningful.

WORKSHEET 1

Before the Film • Prediction & Vocabulary

A. The title

THE BOOK THIEF

1. Who do you think the book thief is?

2. Why might someone steal a book?

3. Is stealing always wrong? Give one possible exception.

4. What might a book represent during a dictatorship?

B. Vocabulary Detective

Without translating the words first, infer their meaning from the clues. Then classify them.

Word	My guess	Category
foster parents		
graveside		
taunt		
bonfire		
refugee		
shelter		
basement		
conscripted		
rubble		
overhear		
recover		
trust		

C. Prediction language

Complete using: might / may / is likely to / I suspect that / If..., ...

1. Liesel might _____.

2. I suspect that the first book will _____.

3. If Liesel cannot read, _____.

4. The fact that Death narrates the story may _____.

PERIOD 2

Liesel at school • learning to read

Target extract

Use the sequence from Liesel's arrival at school through the humiliation over reading and the beginning of Hans's teaching. The exact time code depends on the version of the film.

Learning objectives

- Identify emotions and infer character traits from behaviour.
- Support interpretations with visual/dialogue evidence.
- Practise adjectives and collocations for emotions and relationships.
- Notice how sound, close-ups and body language shape audience response.

Procedure

Stage	Technique	Task
1	Silent viewing	Play a short bullying/classroom section without sound. Students infer emotions and intentions.
2	Second viewing	Replay with sound. Students identify what sound/dialogue adds.
3	Evidence ladder	Students complete: Claim → Evidence → Explanation.
4	Vocabulary	Build a word family around: humiliate, isolate, encourage, defend, trust.
5	Hans	Analyse how Hans changes Liesel's situation through teaching.

WORKSHEET 2

Film Detective • Observation, inference & evidence

A. Silent scene challenge

What I SEE	What I THINK it means	How certain am I?
		low / medium / high
		low / medium / high
		low / medium / high

B. Claim – Evidence – Explanation

Claim 1: _____

Evidence from the film: _____

This suggests that: _____

Claim 2: _____

Evidence from the film: _____

This suggests that: _____

Claim 3: _____

Evidence from the film: _____

This suggests that: _____

C. Character vocabulary

Choose precise words for Liesel at this stage and justify two of them.

Word	Why does it fit?
insecure	
isolated	
defiant	
curious	
determined	
vulnerable	

D. Sound matters

What did the soundtrack, voices or silence make you notice that images alone did not?

PERIOD 3

Books, censorship & the power of words

Target extracts

Book-burning ceremony → Liesel takes the book → Ilsa's library. Stop before major consequences when useful for prediction.

Learning objectives

- Develop a semantic field around books, power and freedom.
- Interpret symbolism and explain it with evidence.
- Distinguish description from interpretation.
- Use abstract nouns and academic sentence frames.

Core activity: WORDS ↔ POWER

Write WORDS in the centre of the board. Students add: reading, censorship, propaganda, freedom, expression, control, resistance, memory, identity, authority.

Then ask: Which connections are explicitly shown in the film? Which are interpretations? Students must mark E = evidence / I = interpretation.

Advanced discussion

Can books be dangerous to a dictatorship? Students choose two statements and defend them with film evidence. Require the frame: 'The scene in which... suggests that... because...'

Film technique

Ask groups to identify how the director creates tension or symbolism using music, colour/light, framing, silence, pacing or close-up.

WORKSHEET 3

Books, power & symbolism

A. Complete the semantic field

BOOKS / WORDS

B. Evidence or interpretation?

Statement	E / I	Evidence / justification
Books give Liesel a sense of identity.		
The book burning represents control.		
Ilsa's library represents freedom.		
Reading becomes a form of resistance.		

C. Build an academic response

Complete:

The scene in which _____ shows that...

The director uses _____ to make the audience...

This may symbolise _____.

A different interpretation could be _____.

PERIOD 4

Max & Liesel • trust, friendship & risk

Target extracts

Max arrives → stays in Liesel's room → friendship develops → Max becomes ill → Liesel reads to him.

Learning objectives

- Track character development and relationships.
- Use nuanced vocabulary for trust and friendship.
- Infer motivation and emotional change.
- Speak using evidence rather than unsupported opinion.

Procedure

Stage	Task
1	Sequence events from Max's arrival to Liesel reading to him.
2	Trust scale: place Liesel/Max from 0–10 at different points and justify.
3	Relationship graph: strangers → cautious → curious → trusting → close friends.
4	Vocabulary upgrade: friend → companion → confidant; afraid → frightened → terrified; kind → compassionate.
5	Hot-seat: one student is Max or Liesel; classmates ask evidence-based questions.

WORKSHEET 4

Max & Liesel • The trust scale

A. Relationship timeline

Moment	Liesel's feelings	Max's feelings	Evidence
Max arrives			
They begin talking			
Max becomes ill			
Liesel reads to Max			
They trust each other			

B. Trust scale

Liesel's trust in Max: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why? _____

Max's trust in Liesel: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why? _____

C. Hot-seat questions

Ask questions that cannot be answered with yes/no.

- What are you most afraid of?
- Why do you trust / not trust this person?
- What do you need but cannot ask for?
- What does reading mean to you now?

PERIOD 5

Moral choices • Hans, Lehman & the consequences of speaking out

Target extracts

Hans sees Lehman being taken away and intervenes → consequences → Max decides he must leave → Liesel believes she sees Max among the Jews being marched through town.

Learning objectives

- Discuss a dilemma using modal verbs and conditionals.
- Distinguish risk, consequence, responsibility and intention.
- Listen for details and infer unstated consequences.
- Participate in structured discussion.

Ethical dilemma

Question: What can Hans do when helping another person may endanger his family?

Options: A Say nothing. B Help openly. C Help secretly. D Another strategy.

Rule: students must explain what the choice protects and what it risks.

Language frames

- If Hans helps Lehman, he may...
- If he remains silent, he risks...
- He is likely to... because...
- He cannot know whether..., but...
- From Hans's perspective,...
- The consequence of this decision is...

WORKSHEET 5

Ethical dilemma & conditional language

A. Complete the consequence chain

IF HANS SPEAKS...

Immediate consequence: _____

Possible consequence for his family: _____

Possible consequence for Lehman: _____

Long-term consequence: _____

B. Structured discussion

Speaker role	Your job
Evidence Finder	Use one concrete scene.
Risk Analyst	Explain what could be lost.
Perspective Speaker	Speak from Hans's point of view.
Challenger	Ask: 'What evidence supports that?'

C. Mini response

Write 80–100 words answering: Was Hans's decision understandable given the circumstances? Use at least two conditionals and three target words.

PERIOD 6

The ending • Death as narrator • final film response

Target extracts

Stop before the bombing if possible. Students predict the ending. Then show the final sequence including Rudy, the aftermath, Max's return and Death's closing narration.

Learning objectives

- Use clues to predict and revise hypotheses.
- Analyse the effect of a non-human narrator.
- Identify foreshadowing and symbolism.
- Deliver a concise evidence-based oral review.

Before the ending

100-word prediction. Requirements: 2 conditionals, 3 target vocabulary items, 1 modal verb, 1 sentence beginning 'Perhaps...', 1 beginning 'I suspect that...'.

Death as narrator

Compare Liesel as narrator with Death as narrator. Ask: What can Death know that Liesel cannot? How does this change the audience's relationship with the story?

If Liesel narrated...	Because Death narrates...

Final speaking task: The 60-second review

- The film is about...
- One important relationship is...
- One central theme is...
- This is particularly clear when...
- The director uses _____ to...
- What makes the film memorable is...

FINAL WORKSHEET

Critical Film Response

A. Film language checklist

Technique	Where did you notice it?	Effect on audience
Close-up		
Music / soundtrack		
Silence		
Colour / lighting		
Framing / camera angle		
Pacing		

B. Death as narrator

1. Why might the filmmakers have chosen Death as narrator?

2. What is the effect of knowing that Liesel will survive while others will not?

3. Does Death seem distant, compassionate, factual, or something else? Support your interpretation.

C. Final written response

Write 180–220 words: 'The Book Thief shows that words can be powerful even when people have very little power.'
Discuss.

Requirements: clear thesis; 2 pieces of evidence; 3 target vocabulary items; 1 film technique; concluding sentence.

TEACHER KEY

Suggested answers and acceptable responses

Worksheet 1 – vocabulary

Word	Suggested meaning
foster parents	adults who care for a child who is not their biological child
graveside	the place beside a grave
taunt	to mock or provoke someone repeatedly
bonfire	a large outdoor fire
refugee	a person forced to leave their country/place for safety
shelter	a safe place/protection from danger
basement	the part of a building below ground level
conscripted	officially forced/recruited into military service
rubble	broken remains after destruction
overhear	hear something unintentionally
recover	return to health / get better
trust	believe someone is reliable or safe

Categories will vary where justified. Accept inferential answers if students explain the clue that led them there.

Worksheet 2 – possible evidence

- Liesel may be described as vulnerable/insecure because she cannot read, is mocked, and is visibly uncomfortable.
- Defiance is supported by her physical response to the boy who challenges her.
- Hans is compassionate and patient; his teaching turns reading into a relationship of care.
- Sound and silence can intensify humiliation, tension or tenderness depending on the exact scene.

Worksheet 3 – interpretation

There is no single correct symbolic interpretation. High-quality answers distinguish evidence from inference and cite a concrete scene. For example, the book burning can be interpreted as censorship/control; the library as access, freedom, refuge or knowledge. Reward nuanced alternatives supported by evidence.

Worksheet 4 – Max & Liesel

Trust ratings are deliberately open. Assess the quality of justification, not the number selected. Strong responses identify turning points and explain how behaviour changes.

Worksheet 5 – ethical dilemma

Do not grade students on which option they choose. Grade the reasoning: recognition of competing consequences, accurate conditional language, evidence from the film, and ability to respond to another viewpoint.

Final task

Strong responses should connect words/books with identity, memory, comfort, resistance, education or human connection, while using specific film evidence. Students should analyse at least one cinematic technique rather than only summarising the plot.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Final 60-second review + written response

Criterion	4 – Excellent	3 – Good	2 – Developing	1 – Limited
Content & interpretation	Insightful interpretation; goes beyond plot summary.	Clear interpretation with some analysis.	Mostly summary; limited interpretation.	Very little relevant content.
Evidence	Specific, well-integrated film evidence.	Relevant evidence with minor gaps.	General references; weak support.	Little/no evidence.
Language	Accurate, varied vocabulary and structures; precise expression.	Generally accurate and varied.	Some errors/limited range.	Frequent errors impede meaning.
Speaking / organisation	Fluent, coherent, well structured; confident delivery.	Clear and organised with some hesitation.	Uneven organisation or fluency.	Difficult to follow.
Film literacy	Analyses techniques and explains effects.	Identifies techniques and some effects.	Identifies techniques but little explanation.	Does not meaningfully analyse film form.
Interaction / justification	Responds, challenges and justifies ideas with evidence.	Participates and justifies ideas.	Participation is uneven.	Rarely contributes or justifies.

Suggested scoring

Use 1–4 per criterion. For a 20-point task, multiply by 5 if a /100 scale is needed. For classroom formative assessment, teacher comments may be more useful than a numerical grade.

EXTENSION & DIFFERENTIATION

For very strong students

- Narrative experiment: rewrite 120–150 words of a scene from Death's perspective, then from Liesel's perspective. Explain what changes.
- Cinematic redesign: choose one scene and propose different music, lighting or camera framing. Explain how the emotional effect would change.
- Lexical precision: replace basic words (sad, scared, good, bad, friend) with more precise alternatives and justify register.
- Counter-reading: identify one interpretation of a scene and construct a plausible alternative using different evidence.
- Debate: 'Reading is a form of resistance.' Prepare a 2-minute argument with a counterargument and rebuttal.
- Creative production: create a one-page 'museum label' for an object in the film (book, accordion, basement, chalkboard, journal). Include historical and symbolic significance.

Fast-finisher vocabulary challenge

Students create five original sentences using: censorship, compassion, defiance, refuge, persecution, resilience, propaganda, sacrifice, concealment, solidarity. At least two sentences must contain a subordinate clause.

Suggested teacher language

- What makes you say that?
- Which exact moment supports your interpretation?
- Is that an observation or an inference?
- Can you make your answer more precise?
- What changes if we remove the soundtrack?
- What does the character know at this point?
- What does the audience know that the character does not?
- Can anyone offer a different interpretation?

TEACHER PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Have the film available and preview the selected scenes in your specific copy/version.
- Bookmark/mark the scenes rather than relying on exact time codes, because editions can differ.
- Prepare Worksheets 1–5 and the Final Critical Film Response.
- Prepare the interactive board with the central questions and vocabulary word maps.
- Decide in advance where to pause. Do not announce what happens next.
- For sensitive scenes, frame discussion around evidence, historical context and character choices rather than graphic detail.
- Collect students' worksheets into a small portfolio. This provides evidence of learning across the unit.

Optional homework

- Watch the full film outside class if possible, but ask students not to read a detailed plot summary beforehand.
- Keep a 6-entry 'Film Journal': one important moment, one new word, one question, one emotion, one technique, one interpretation.
- Bring one quotation/line from the film that they think captures a major theme; students paraphrase it rather than memorising long passages.