

## LiFT Book Scan: Sarah Govett, *The Territory*

The teenage novel *The Territory*, a dystopian thriller, was first published in May 2015 by Firefly Press. *The Territory* was shortlisted for “*The Times Children’s Fiction Prize*” in 2014 and has been included in the list of *The Telegraph’s* list of the 21 “Best young adult books of 2015”. The novel is the first in a dystopian trilogy. Part two (Working title: *Into the Wetlands*) will possibly be published in 2016 or 2017.

The author Sarah Govett read law at Trinity College, Oxford. After qualifying as a solicitor, she set up her own tutoring agency, which specializes in helping children from all backgrounds. She has also written for children’s television. She has two young children, and lives in London with her husband Spencer Brown, a TV presenter and stand-up comedian.

- The novel is available in a paperback edition and as an e-book.
- Approximate level of literary complexity: Level 3
- Reading Age: 14-16 (ab dt. Jahrgangsstufe 9)

In the year 2059, earth’s surface has been drastically reduced. Following an environmental disaster, rising sea levels encroach on the land. The 15-year old female protagonist Noa Blake lives in a place named the “Territory”, the only remaining dry living space in the country that in the past used to be called Great Britain.

The totalitarian government of the “Territory” has decided that “Limited Space requires Limited Numbers” and takes control of population growth by means of a newly invented type of final school exam, the TAA, which all teenagers have to sit at the age of fifteen. As global resources have dwindled, the precious gift of life in the Territory becomes a privilege which has to be earned by passing the TAA. Anybody who fails will be banned from the “Territory” forever and shipped off to the disease-ridden Wetlands, to a life of misery, if not certain death.

The protagonist Noa Blake is bright and talented girl but, like her best friends Daisy and Jack, she belongs to the social class of “Norms”, people with conventional intellectual abilities. Preparing for the TAA exam and thus fighting for their rights to live, they will have to compete with the socially privileged “Childe” or “freakoids”. Those genetically engineered children of wealthy and influential parents do not have to study because they have a node on their neck that allows them to simply download all the factual knowledge that is required directly into their brains.

Daisy’s parents decide to pay for a dangerous brain surgery, a so-called “enhancement programme”, to turn their daughter into a “Childe” shortly before the exam. When they learn that the surgery has left Daisy mentally deranged and thus sentenced to certain death, Noa and Jack are devastated. They try to come to terms with the loss of their friend and with the enormous psychological pressure put on them by the system by relying on their natural intellectual qualities, their creativity and their mutual friendship.

However, with the exams looming, Noa meets Raf, allegedly a “Childe”. When realizing that unlike other loathed “freakoids”, Raf does not behave in a robotic nor arrogant and cruel way, but can think in a creative and emotional way, Noa falls in love with him and finds herself in a love triangle, torn between her former best friend Jack and Raf.

Both Raf and Noa successively find out that their parents have secretly supported inhuman political decisions (medical experiments on humans) by working as scientists for the government. Being shocked and disillusioned by the discovery of their own parents’ moral misconduct, the two teenagers cling to each other. Noa learns that Raf is a rebellious “Childe”, secretly refusing to upload information for the exam because he has found out about the behavioral changes that the government’s brainwashing strategy triggers.

Rejected by his first love Noa and abandoned to his fate by his art tutor at school, who was supposed to help him pass the TAA, Jack cannot stand the system’s pressure any longer. His own emotional discomposure finally leads him to break the official rules and publicly oppose the system by running away from the exam. The climatic ending of the novel (“cliffhanger”) reveals the consequences of Jack’s dissident behaviour: In spite of his sufficient exam results, Jack is sent off to the Wetlands. Noa and Raf, who have passed the TAA, are determined to save him. To be continued...

STUDENTS Indikatoren fremdsprachlicher literarischer Kompetenz beim Schüler		L E V E L	<i>Indicators of literary competence</i>
A F F E K T I V	Willingness	3	The novel comprises 202 pages. It falls into several chapters but might be read in only a few sittings (reading time: approximately 3 hours) by more experienced foreign language students. The plot is captivating and - apart from the very beginning of the novel – predominantly pacy, easily gripping young adult readers’ attention. Since this novel is the first in a dystopian trilogy, the ending is particularly climatic.
	Interests	3	Due to its language, literary themes and popular literary genre (dystopian fantasy thriller), the novel appeals to both teenagers and young adults. The protagonist of the novel is a 15-year-old and thus, the plot mainly revolves around the universe of a teenage world: <b><i>school routines, having to pass exams, true friendship, bullying, rebellious teen spirit, and first love.</i></b> Although the protagonist is a girl (at some point caught in a love triangle between two boys), the ideas revealed in the novel are universal and therefore relevant to teenagers of both sexes. The text touches on universal literary themes that are closely linked to the experience of adolescents, for example: <b><i>Coming of Age (Pain of Discovery and Disillusionment), Convention and Rebellion, Companionship as Salvation, The Family as a Blessing or Curse</i></b> etc. Younger teenagers are likely to accept the humorous tone and colloquial language of the novel and feel emotionally involved with the characters, whereas young adults are able to fully grasp the dystopian elements and political implications of the plot.
R E F L E X I V	Intercultural empathy	3	The literary complexity of all dystopian novels results from the fact that the fictional world described in the text(s) is not only <b><i>culturally different</i></b> , but also <b><i>historically remote</i></b> – in fact, it is only a theoretical, pessimistic <b><i>vision of the future</i></b> . As a result, socio-cultural information about Britain that is given in the text cannot always be taken for granted by students. <sup>1</sup> Although the state of the world which is described in the novel seems remote at first sight ( <i>environmental meltdown, totalitarian government</i> ), most situations described in the text are related to the students’ own age group and to familiar, real life experiences ( <i>school routines, exams, friendship, first love</i> ). Even less experienced students can gain some psychological insight into the inner life of Noa, her culture-specific attitudes and values (importance of family and friendship/companionship, idea of loyalty etc.) and should be able to reflect critically on them. Advanced students, who are able to recognize the scary and strange attitudes and values promoted by the government of the fictional future world, will draw more complex conclusions. They can reflect critically on political, psychological and moral issues raised by the text (see: <i>literary themes and interpretation</i> ).

<sup>1</sup> One example is the totalitarian political system depicted in the novel, which does not have a real-life counterpart but alludes to some culture-specific issues like fear of police authority and surveillance.

K O G N I T I V	General knowledge of the world	3	<p>For a broad and global understanding of the text, no deeper social, historical or geographical knowledge is required. To understand the environmental situation after the “meltdown” described in the novel, students should be aware of basic geographical facts (map of Great Britain), of the problem of population growth and control as well as the impact of climatic change (melting of polar caps, rising sea levels).</p> <p>Some critical knowledge about the British educational system (elitism and social barriers, PROS and CONS of GCSE exams) will allow students to develop a more sustained opinion on the “TAA exam” and other educational routines described in the text and enable them to discuss the psychological impact of final exams on young people.</p> <p>Teachers who want students to fully grasp the text’s warning of dictatorship and totalitarianism should make them understand the different allusions to the structure of totalitarian states (ideology, lack of human rights, general public interest versus individual interests, surveillance, propaganda, punishment of dissidents etc.) To understand the moral implications of the totalitarian state (experiments on human beings etc.), some knowledge about human rights and psychology might be helpful.</p>
	Literary knowledge	3	<p><i>The Territory</i> is a dystopian novel.<sup>2</sup> No specific fiction experience is required but some genre knowledge and expectations will enable students to understand the deeper meaning of the text. Like <i>The Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins, one of its famous genre predecessors, <i>The Territory</i> is the first novel in a trilogy and closely follows the rules of this genre, such as the description of an exaggerated worst-case scenario and the criticism of current social and political developments. Students should be aware of those genre features to grasp the full meaning of the novel. Students can also be introduced to the terminology of other well-known literary features, which are less important for reading comprehension: Having an exciting and suspenseful plot with cinematic qualities and a climatic ending (“cliffhanger”), the novel is also a <i>thriller</i>. It also makes use of some features of the <i>fantasy</i> genre (e.g. super-powered human characters: “freakoids”). Due to the recent popularity of the dystopian genre among teenagers, students might easily be motivated to read <i>The Territory</i>.</p>

<sup>2</sup> Critics claim *The Territory* is a teenage and contemporary version of George Orwell’s famous genre classic “1984” and have called it the “1984 of our time” (*The Guardian*).

BOOKS Indikatoren für die Komplexität der Lektüre		L E V E L	<i>Indicators of literary complexity</i>
L I T E R A R Y  C O M P L E X I T Y	PLOT/ pace of action	2	<p><i>The Territory</i> provides a dramatic storyline. The pace of action is rarely interrupted by longer reflections or elaborate descriptions. Although the text sometimes reads like the protagonist's journal, it is mainly descriptive, not clearly written in the reflective style of a diary novel.</p> <p>The sequence and the intensity of dramatical events create suspense and make it easy to hold the reader's attention as the thriller plot evolves towards a climax. Literary devices such as red herrings, plot twists, and cliffhangers are used. The plot mainly consists of recognizable situations, events and emotions that students can identify with. The information given by the narrator is abundant, not forcing the reader to fill many information gaps.</p>
	CHRONOLOGY	1-2	The action's chronology is linear. There are no time shifts or anticipations. Flashbacks into Noa's childhood are provided when Noa talks about her childhood and the earlier days of history of the Territory. Those reflections do not result in a more complex storyline but are meant to illustrate the historical origin of the totalitarian system depicted in the novel and help students to understand the development of its ideology and its psychological impact on younger children as well as on adolescents.
	STORYLINE(S)	2	Noa's and Jack's preparation for the TAA exams and the final accomplishment of the tests during the procedures of the final exam are the background story which forms the framework of the novel ( <i>Rahmenhandlung</i> ). The different minor storylines (Noa's friendships with Daisy and Jack, her relationship to her family, her discovery and disillusionment, Jack's devotion to art) are clearly interconnected. Exciting plot twists occur when Noa learns about Daisy's surgery, her deranged mental status following the "enhancement programme", her own parents' moral misconduct, and Raf's rebellious spirit.
	POINT OF VIEW	1	The story is told by a first person narrator. The events are related only from the protagonist's perspective. This makes the text more accessible for unexperienced readers, because there is only one centre of orientation within the fictional world. The reader can gain insight into Noa's thoughts and feelings, which makes it easier to understand her attitudes and values. However, as a result, the information given is limited to Noa's perspective and therefore not always reliable: <i>The Territory</i> is a <i>Coming of Age</i> story of discovery and disillusionment. When Noa learns about the moral failures of the system, is alienated from her parents and surprised by Raf's true identity, the reader feels shocked and startled, too. Thus, suspense is created.
	LITERARY THEMES and INTERPRETATION	3	The main literary themes of the novel are <b><i>Coming of Age (Pain of discovery and disillusionment), Convention and Rebellion,</i></b>

		<p><b>Companionship as Salvation, The Family as a Blessing or Curse.</b></p> <p>The complexity of meaning within the novel is due to the fact that it deals with <i>multiple</i> issues: philosophical, psychological, moral and political ones. On a philosophical level, the text discusses the uncomfortable question: <b>Who deserves to live when resources and space are limited?</b> Students are invited to question the “simple” solutions provided by the system depicted in the text: <b>How can a society survive if a generation of “freakoids”, who excel in factual knowledge but lack empathy and the ability of creative thinking eventually takes charge?</b> On a social and political level, the text raises more tangible issues: If the individual’s welfare depends on natural ability as well as on social status, on the type of school and on the quality of teaching - <b>How can social barriers be overcome and elitism be eliminated in the political, social and educational systems?</b> Surveillance and control are important aspects: <b>What happens to a society if the Government cannot just censor what you read, watch, learn, but control your very thoughts?</b> The novel also deals with complex moral dilemmas regarding <b>loyalty</b> towards family and friends and the <b>urge of self-preservation</b>. Most issues are tangible even for less advanced students because they are always connected to familiar situations of teenage life (school, friendship, bullying etc.).</p>
	<p>Intercultural learning potential</p>	<p>3-4</p> <p>Teachers who want to unlock the full intercultural learning potential of <i>The Territory</i> must try to create awareness of the fact that it is <b>dystopian fiction</b>, a piece of literature which speculates on the future development of the target culture, presenting some sceptical views on the direction British society is currently heading. To recognize real-life problems that are reflected in the fictional world, foreign language students previously need some socio-cultural knowledge about the British target culture as it appears to be today. Sarah Govett offers a glimpse of the British educational system, focusing on the problems she has experienced in her own professional life as a tutor, namely a significant level of competitiveness and the unfairness caused by social barriers. Realizing that academic success is as much dependent on the type of school and the quality of teaching as it is on natural ability, Govett criticizes a system which forces children who attend low performing schools to compete with children attending “<i>exam-factory style schools</i>” in a nationwide assessment. The real-life situation is heightened to a shocking life-or-death situation in the novel: In the year 2059, “Norms” have to compete with genetically enhanced “Childes”, knowing that failing the Territory Allotment Assessment will mean being banned from the safety of the Territory - which is in fact a death sentence. Noa Blake and her friends Daisy and Jack have to keep pace with their privileged peers, experiencing the same “horrific stress of exams, the elevation of maths and science above more creative subjects and the focus on regurgitation of fact rather than application of knowledge” that Govett has observed during her</p>

			professional tutoring career. Jack, who is devoted to Art, is in constant danger of failing. The Childes, who are unable of creative thinking and cannot apply their knowledge, always excel. The system also puts less privileged children and their parents under tremendous pressure: In the fictional world of the novel, parents are forced to pay enormous sums for risky brain surgeries, constantly fearing the loss of their child or its mental sanity. Noa's aunt, who is not able to afford a "high performance" school like <i>Hollets</i> , knows that she, too, is sending her daughter off to certain death in the Wetlands.
	PRESENTATION OF CHARACTERS	2-3	The protagonist is a 15 year old girl named Noa Blake. The story is told from her perspective, so the readers are expected to draw conclusions about the protagonist by studying her behaviour, her opinions and her way of talking ( <i>implicit characterization</i> ). Other characters are seen through Noa's eyes only ( <i>explicit characterization</i> ). Noa is a relatable protagonist, sometimes as much absorbed in her own little trivial teenage world as the readers of her own age group. Some <b>distance</b> (of the reader) to her morals and behaviour might be created by that fact that Noa finds herself in an unbearable life-or-death situation. As a result, her attitude is utterly sarcastic and her language sometimes offensive and condescending. Although Noa's loyalty to her friends and parents is strong, her determination to survive is even stronger. She accepts that this means betraying or even sacrificing others and admits that she is not a heroine but terribly weak: " <i>I would have killed Anne Frank</i> ". All in all, her behaviour is <b>realistic</b> , but not always likeable, which might be a complicating factor only for younger readers who aim at straight identification with a literary hero(ine.) The <b>level of unpredictability</b> in the behaviour of the main characters is a complicating factor which also accounts for the creation of suspense. Govett points out that most of us are prejudiced and people may not be what they seem. Raf is not just another robotic, arrogant Freakoid, but turns out to be funny, emotional and compassionate. The reader also learns that it's impossible to know who we really are until faced with an unbearable situation: Jack, who is usually gentle and meek, eventually freaks out and tries to break free from the system.
	Number of characters	1-2	There is one protagonist and there are some minor characters. In the beginning of the novel, Noa feels closest to her parents as well as to her friends Daisy and Jack. Later, she falls in love with Raf and successively learns more about him and about his parents. The reader also learns about the fate of Noa's aunt and cousin. Other peers are minor and more conventional, stereotypical characters which mainly serve to illustrate the contrast between Norms and Freakoids.
	RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHARACTERS	2-3	The relationships between all the characters are clearly defined. However, relationships are dynamic and there are some surprising developments that create suspense.
	LEXICAL DEMANDS and SENTENCE	2-3	Students reading the novel should have sufficient vocabulary to express themselves with some circumlocutions on most topics

	CONSTRUCTION		pertinent to their everyday lives, such as family, friendship, leisure time, school etc. Although Noa's language is colloquial, students do not necessarily need a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. Most meanings can be guessed from the context. Some words and phrases that are used by Noa might be challenging for foreign language learners because they cannot be looked up in any dictionary: To make the future world appear more realistic and to account for the fact that language evolves, Govett has coined some new words. Discussing the novel, students can learn to express some thoughts and opinions on more abstract topics such as simple political, moral or psychological issues. The structure of the sentences used is simple and clear.
	LITERARY DEVICES and LAYERS OF MEANING <sup>3</sup>	2	<i>The Territory</i> operates on an accessible, literal level of meaning. This means that the author communicates with the reader in a realistic, non-symbolic way: Students are required to understand the basic denotations of the terms employed in the text, but they do not have to transfer them to a non-literal, symbolical or allegorical level. One slight exception is the use of irony: Noa sometimes copies the official, euphemistic language that is used to describe the "blessings" of the political system, but at the same time makes clear that she does not appreciate it at all. Her use of irony can be traced even by less advanced students because in other passages of the text, Noa openly criticizes the system.
	Kompetenzstufe gemäß Allg. Europäischem Referenzrahmen für das Lernen und Lehren von Sprachen		B1

<sup>3</sup> When you read certain texts, it becomes clear that there are meanings there that seem to lie 'deeper' than 'on the surface'. Deeper **layers of meaning** occur when the writer has used words and phrases that develop connotations, for example imagery like metaphors or symbols. Deeper layers of meaning can also be created in a text by the use of other literary devices, such as irony, when one thing is said but the readers are aware that something rather different is meant. To uncover and appreciate a text's deeper **levels of meaning** (e.g. political, psychological, moral or philosophical levels of meaning) students have to reflect and interpret what they read and notice when language creates emotion. Creating this kind of emotion in the reader by means of literary devices helps the writer develop persuasive **literary themes or messages**.



## Learning potential of *The Territory*

<p>Transitions between different learning levels/ levels of competence</p>	<p>Reading <i>The Territory</i> can help students <b>to extend their reading interests</b>, i.e. to broaden their scope of reading from novels about familiar topics (level 2) to novels which help them explore people's behaviour in unfamiliar worlds: other cultures, fantastic worlds, borderline situations, stories of initiation (level 3). Teachers can also help students who are still exploratory readers (level 3) to become <b>more focused, purposeful readers</b> who are able to analyse the text (level 4). This means, reading <i>The Territory</i>, students can learn to <b>reflect on text views on psychological and social issues</b> and compare them to their own attitudes and values (level 3 → level 4) and they can develop <b>awareness of the functions of literary structures</b> (e.g. narrative structures, presentation of characters)</p>
<p>Suggestions for tasks and activities around this book (optional)</p>	<p>To broaden students' general knowledge and understanding of the world and to foster intercultural learning processes, teachers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-encourage students to read non-fiction on the same subject(s) as well, for example on population growth and control, the impact of climatic change, the British educational system etc.</li> <li>-ask students to present and to discuss different views on the subjects mentioned above</li> <li>-try to co-operate with other teachers in order to integrate reading with other subjects such as geography, history, social studies etc.</li> </ul> <p>To explore and reflect upon ethical and moral issues that arise from the text, teachers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-select suitable extracts from the text and promote debates or discussions in class about the moral dilemmas the protagonist and other characters find themselves in</li> <li>-offer creative tasks like simulations or role-plays to explore character behaviour and moral dilemmas</li> </ul> <p>To make students recognize different functions of the use of narrative features (from implicit knowledge to awareness of the function of structure, level 3 → level 4), teachers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- offer creative tasks that provide an understanding of important narrative techniques, e.g. open versus closed ending, narrative perspective and diary style, flashback, etc. Creative tasks could be re-writing selected passages of the text or possibly adapting them to other media (e.g. films, comic strips) to see the effects.</li> <li>- provide different text passages that explicitly illustrate the effect of narrative techniques in the text and ask students to compare the narrative features and their effects.</li> <li>- ask students to propose alternatives to role and behaviour of characters and try to figure out how that would change the development of the story.</li> </ul> <p>To teach students how to value literary texts (from a non-informed</p>

	<p>choice to a explicit selective one, level 3→ level 4), teachers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- provide examples of popular and canonical texts of the same genre (e.g. <i>1984/ The Hunger Games</i> ) to identify characteristics and differences.</li><li>- help students discuss press articles about literary prizes or publishing choices</li><li>-ask students to use valid arguments to defend their preferences regarding popular or canonical texts.</li></ul>
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