A challenging middle school SOSE unit and a resource for teaching teachers explicit strategies to support literacy learning

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The unit presented here is a modified version of a unit written in consultation with Keith Pagel, Karen Swift (leaders in literacy teaching and learning) and Robyn Bowman (Head of Department, Social Science) from James Nash State High School, Queensland. The modified version is printed here with permission.

This unit is presented in a serialised form, with Episode 1 in this issue. Episode 2 will be included in the next issue. The two episodes will be as follows:

Episode 1:   Introduction to the resource
Overview of the ERICA Model for literacy learning
Objectives of the unit
Stage 1 of the unit

Episode 2:   Stages 2, 3 and 4
Conclusion

Introduction
In 2008 while working as a literacy consultant, I developed a double-purpose resource in response to a request from teachers at James Nash State High School in Queensland. The brief was for a two-hour literacy strategies workshop for 21 teachers, applicable to all subjects and levels. What you have here is a modification of the middle school unit and teacher notes that supported that workshop. Modification has been necessary because the resource was originally customised to suit the school and the Queensland context with a focus on Essential Learnings. It is now applicable to schools in all states.

The concept of a double-purpose resource needs some explanation. On the one hand, this resource is a curriculum unit that a workshop leader utilises to show teachers how literacy strategies can support effective learning by students. It enables the leader to engage teachers on two levels. The first level is where teachers are students, using strategies to understand text. The second is where teachers are curriculum designers, improving their knowledge about unit design. On the other hand, the resource is also a model of a *coherent* curriculum unit detailing stages of learning. It is one that meets syllabus requirements while incorporating effective literacy strategies. Teachers consequently are more likely to be convinced that (a) a strong structure can improve the unit coherence, and (b) the extra work in planning and designing a unit is worth it.

What teachers learn from this double-purpose resource is how to use a framework for

planning and developing a literacy-focussed curriculum unit. The Literacy Learning Model that provides this framework in the given unit is the Effective Reading in Content Areas Model (ERICA Model), which was developed by Morris and Stewart-Dore in 1984. The model has been used effectively in middle and secondary school contexts over more than two decades, as well as in tertiary contexts and, most recently, in an industry context. Currently, the model and associated strategies are being revised by one of the original authors, Nea Stewart-Dore.

The ERICA Model was originally a reading to learn model strongly influenced by schema theory. This is very evident in the way its four stages of learning (with purposeful strategies) support the learner in altering or building on the meaning he/she has made of the world and the way it works. Thus his/her body of knowledge is organised in a schema.

The unit detailed here is an application of the ERICA Model, with each stage contributing to the body of knowledge and the organisation of the knowledge by the learner. The program's deliberate stages of thinking and meaning-making and purposeful strategies are the result of careful curriculum design and application of appropriate theories. Table 1 provides a summary of the model and the strategies and describes each stage. Figure 1 represents the cyclical nature of the stages. Both representations (adapted from Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1984) suggest the way the writer, as curriculum designer, utilised the model.

The unit follows the outline provided in each of these graphic texts. Each stage includes:

- a brief description of the context and purpose for each strategy;
- the purpose of the strategy;
- suggestions for implementation of the strategy; and
- the strategy with instructions for students if necessary.

Table 1: Stages of the ERICA Model and supporting strategies used in this unit

| Stage	Strategies
1. Preparation for learning – gives learners a logical framework into which they fit information they are going to be reading or viewing. It allows them to access their prior knowledge and sets up a 'readiness' for tackling new language and content.	Word Map, Graphic Outline, Vocabulary Chart, Structured Overview, Retrieval Chart
2. Thinking Through – engages learners in processes of interpreting and justifying meaning from text. It assists them in interrogating texts and in making judgements. The learners work with small groups or in pairs so that learning is enhanced by purposeful social situations.	Structured overview, Graphic Outline, Retrieval Chart, Word Map, Cloze Exercise, Three Level Guide.
3. Extracting and Organising – helps learners to collate, sort and categorise information. It gives order and pattern to the body of knowledge. It also supports initial synthesis.	Retrieval Chart, Venn Diagram
4. Translating – supports learner to construct a representation of meaning and understanding. This could be in the form of an artifact, a performance (oral or work-based behaviour), a piece of writing or a combination of forms.	Concept Map, Retrieval Charts showing Top level Structure – no detail. (Assessment Task with suggested strategies for scaffolding task and descriptors of standards are included.)
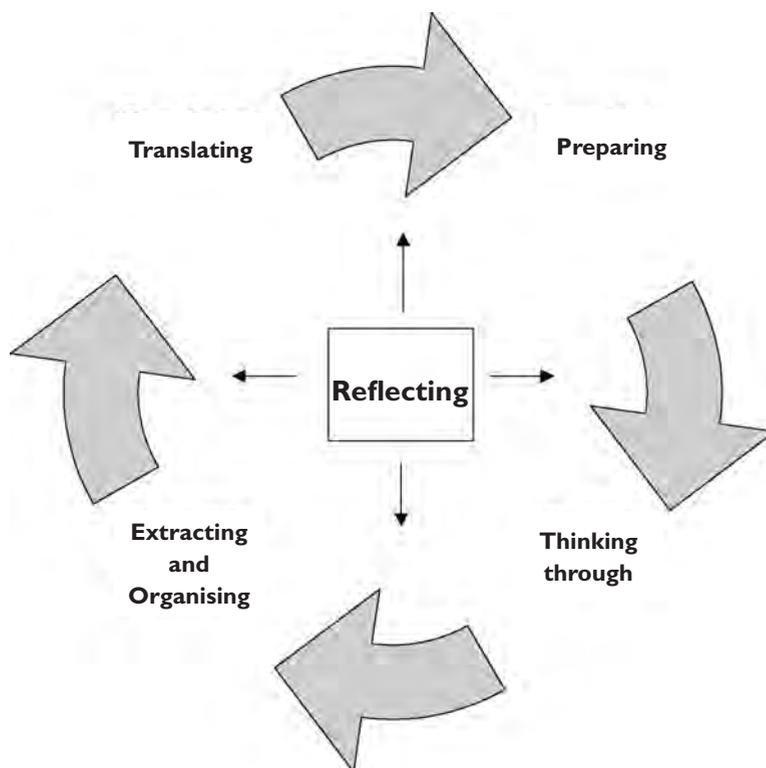
Figure 1: The cyclical nature of the stages of the ERICA model of curriculum planning

The serialised resource: Episode 1

This episode of the serialised unit includes four sections, as follows:

1. How to use this unit;
2. The unit objectives,
3. Stage 1 – Preparation for learning, and
4. Resources for Episode 1, giving website references and titles of texts to be used.

Section 1: How to use this unit

The unit is a middle school Study of Society unit with a focus on History. It fits into the general context of a study of Ancient Rome, but does not cover all aspects commonly detailed in textbooks. There is a deliberate intent to meet what are commonly called the Essential Learnings of History within state syllabuses for middle school. Hence the unit presents a narrow but rigorous approach to the concepts of:

Democracy,
Government, and
The complexity of human interaction within and across societies and centuries.

Teachers using the unit should adapt the unit to meet their needs and those of their students.

Section 2: The unit objectives

Objectives are expressed using the categories identified in the Essential Learnings for Study of Society within the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework (http://

www.qsa.qld.edu.au/assessment/qcar.html). However, the core History concepts targeted are applicable to syllabus content in all states.

Deep learning

Students develop a sense of history as a narrative told from different points of view for different reasons in different contexts. i.e. the difference between historical facts and written history.
Students develop an appreciation of the influence of the past on the present.

Knowledge and understanding

Through a focus on Ancient Rome and Julius Caesar as a famous historical leader, students develop basic but important ideas about:

Democracy,
The republic as a form of constitutional government,
Citizenship,
The complexity of human interaction in places and spaces (such as within societies and across centuries of human development).

Ways of working

Students are able to:

Analyse both primary and secondary sources for information about government and politics in Ancient Rome.
Evaluate both primary and secondary historical sources for relevance, reliability, authenticity, purpose, bias and perspective.
Identify main ideas related to concepts of government, democracy, republic and citizenship.
Draw conclusions from a sequence of events and interpretations of data about an historical figure (Julius Caesar).
Reflect on the influence of Ancient Rome on Australian government and politics

Student explanation of unit and objectives

Introduce students to the purpose of the unit by simplifying and/or explaining its curriculum objectives as detailed. Note the importance of individuals or 'historical personalities', such as Julius Caesar, Elizabeth I or Hitler, in the recording of history, the way history is told, as well as on our association of events with individuals. The unit utilises the appeal of Julius Caesar to make the study of history more interesting. That is, looking at a famous individual can be a 'way in' to a time in history.

Explain to the students that the unit will progress in four stages, as follows:

Preparation:

- General investigation of leaders, individuals who 'stand out' in stories of history, types of leaders, and leadership.
- Introduction of key technical terms to be used in the unit study.
- Use of research skills and evaluation of primary and secondary sources.

Thinking through:
- Research into the Roman Republic and its legacy.
- Research into Julius Caesar.

Extracting and organising:
- The influence of the Roman system on the Australian system of government.
- The pros and cons of Caesar the Dictator.
- The use and abuse of power.

Translating:

So what? Written assessment to show what you know and understand.

Section 3: Stage 1 – Preparation for learning

Step One

Context: Emphasise the purpose of the word map and encourage free discussion and approximations.

Strategy: Word map. This strategy supports vocabulary development, retrieval of prior knowledge and collective brainstorming, as well as visual representation of thinking.

Purpose: To brainstorm ideas about leaders (countries and governments) and perspectives on those leaders. e.g. Caesar, Hitler, Menzies, Kennedy, Thatcher, Howard, Rudd, Bush, Chairman Mao, Napoleon, Mugabe.

Suggestions re implementation: Start a discussion with the students by questioning them about their knowledge of leaders: 'Who' and 'what' can be a way to start. A number of word maps could be developed to emphasise factors that frame this kind of discussion, including perspectives on leaders:

(a)   broad definition of the term 'leader';
(b)   experiences;
(c)   places and spaces;
(d)   written history (including media reports);
(e)   historical facts.

These factors do not need to be made explicit in the discussion.

Construct the word maps on the white board. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show what they might look like. Students may not know much about Mugabe or Julius Caesar, but the joint construction of discussion points will allow them to contribute. Acknowledge their experiences at school or community level with different types of leaders.

Figure 2:   Word map number 1
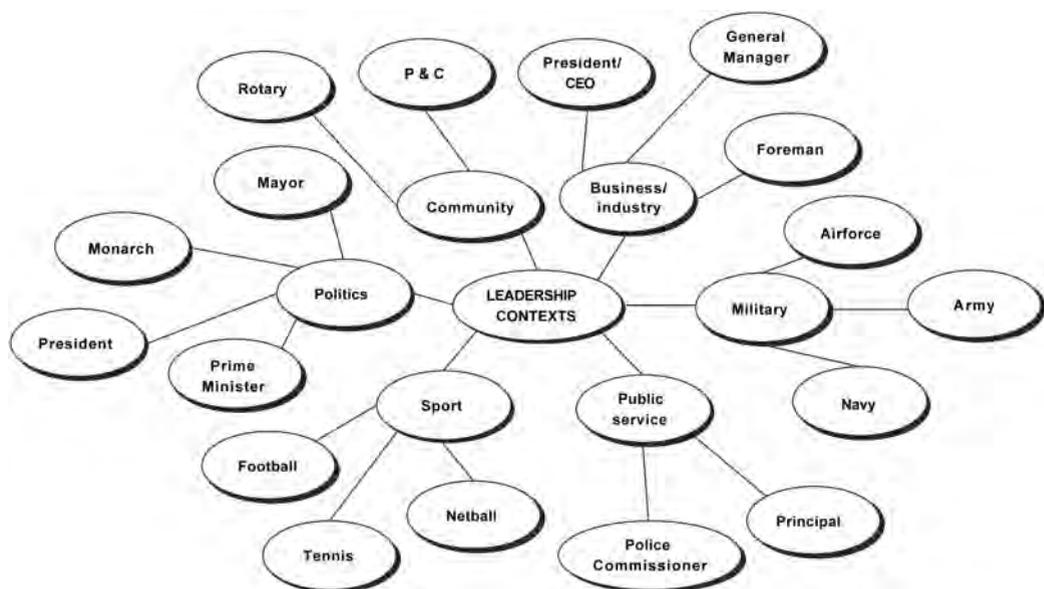

Figure 3:   Word map number 2

Figure 4:   Word map number 3

Step Two

Context: Previous discussion should have elicited some important and key terms regarding leadership and government. There needs to be more clarity regarding vocabulary to be used in the unit and the complex meanings of some terms. In this unit, the words or terms generally also represent key concepts.

Strategy: Vocabulary chart – The Roman Empire:
This strategy introduces and supports usage of vocabulary. It provides access to prior knowledge and opens up discussion. It is particularly useful in promoting acceptance of different meanings in different contexts, or in persuading the learner to accept a changed meaning. Note the movement from left to right of the table in this process. The visual shift in meanings across the columns of Table 2 helps the learner in both constructing and accepting the appropriate meaning for the unit context.

Purpose: To construct joint understandings of the meanings of key terms to be used in the unit and an understanding that contexts change meanings. e.g. the use of 'dictator' in the *Parade* article (Resource 1) implies that all dictators were/are evil individuals.

Suggestions re implementation: Avoid categorising answers or suggestions as right or wrong. Encourage risk-taking and sharing. Place emphasis in this discussion on the *connotations* of terms in different societies. e.g. Citizenship is about rights and responsibilities. Roman society also encouraged civic virtue and participation in public affairs.

Directions for Students: These are terms you will be using in this unit. Complete the first two columns by yourself and the last with your partner. Make any changes you wish to the last column after a full class discussion.

Table 2. Student vocabulary chart handout

Word/Term	Your meaning	Website or dictionary meaning	After discussion
citizen			
constitution			
republic			
democracy			
empire			
absolute power			
dictator			
Monarch			

Step Three

Context: The resources for this step have been chosen deliberately to generate reactions, discussion and questioning about key issues. They are also used as a way of introducing students to source analysis and evaluation. Questions that could/should be asked are:

- What is a dictator? What is a monarch?
- What controls or time limits can be put on what leaders do?
- Can you trust what you read?

Strategy: Structured overview. The strategy shows hierarchical relationships. It supports more organised forms of brainstorming than the word map, given the categorisation. Thinking is therefore more 'controlled' and focused.

Purpose: To identify and sort the characteristics of contemporary and historical leaders from given texts.

Resources:

Resource No. 1: Descriptions of Ten Worst Dictators

Resource No. 2: Accomplishments of Queen Elizabeth I

Resource No. 3: Descriptions of Julius Caesar (a great personality of Roman history, general, victorious leader)

Suggestions re implementation: The difficulty with suggesting that students read to gain general understanding is complicated by the level of challenge of the reading. The whole exercise could be counter-productive. At the same time, tentative exploration need not be daunting if mixed ability groups are used. A capable reader could read aloud to a group. This would be better than telling students about content, given that one objective of the reading is to stimulate thinking about whether you can believe everything that you read.

Other approaches: Appoint a small group of investigators/good readers to read and summarise the texts on Queen Elizabeth I and Julius Caesar, while you as teacher read and discuss the media article on the ten worst dictators. If each group constructs a structured overview to summarise interpretations, these can then be compared on the white board or on chart paper. One notable difference between the two dictators Elizabeth I and Julius Caesar is that Caesar's role as dictator/head of country lasted from only 45 BC to 44BC. The length of time someone such as Mugabe has been in power is worth noting. Figures 5 to 7 provide examples of summative structured overviews.
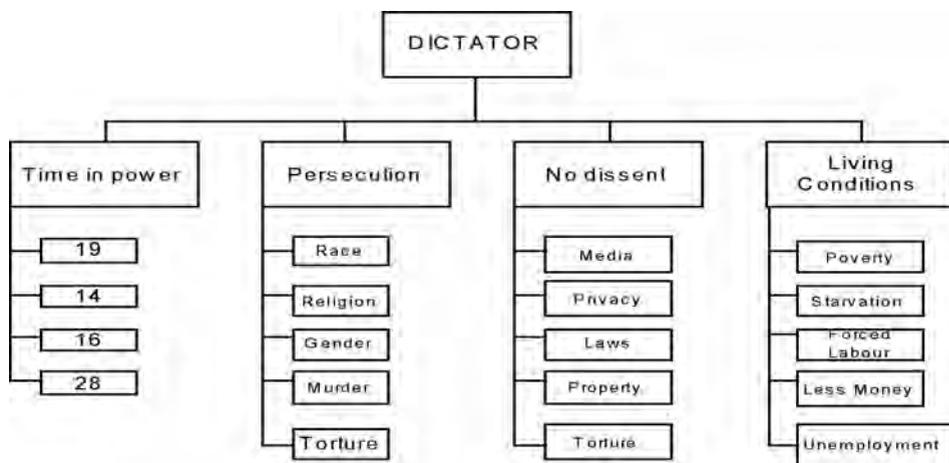

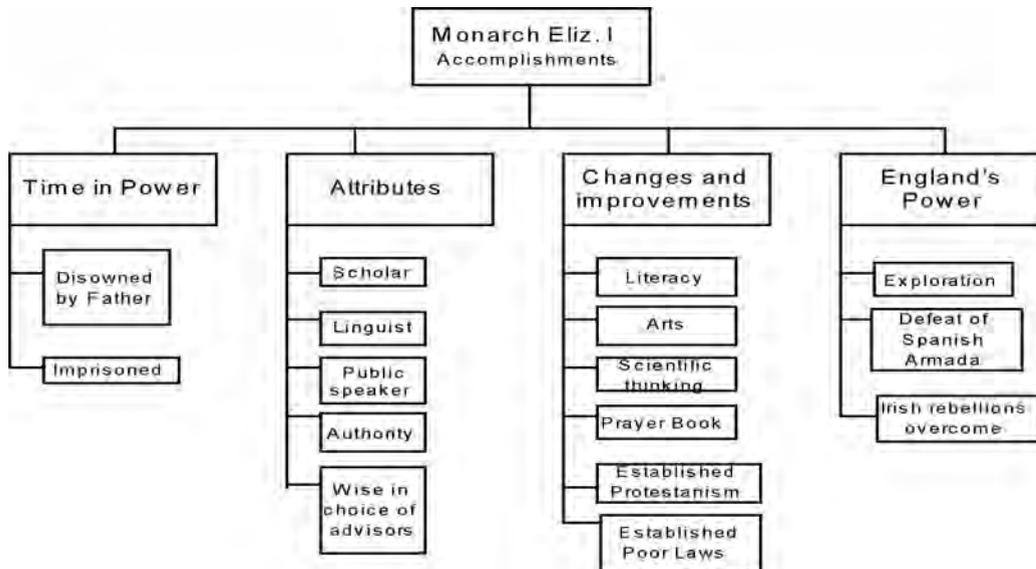**Figure 6. Structured overview re dictator**
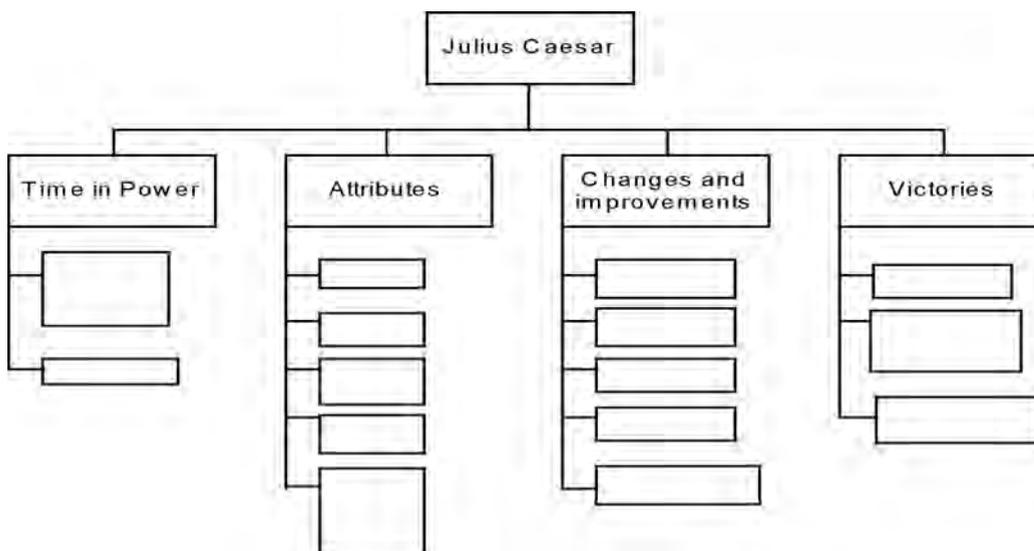
Figure 6. Structured overview re monarch

Figure 7. Structured overview re Julius Caesar

Step Four

Context: Broad general discussions of leaders and leadership should have introduced vocabulary and recognition of different types of leaders who have varying impact on their societies.

Strategy: Retrieval chart. This strategy presents a visual detailing of similarities and differences. The trick is not just to show three tables of A, B and C to be compared, but also to provide for young learners the *terms of comparison* in the left column.

Purpose:
- To make comparisons between 3 personalities – Elizabeth. I, Mugabe, Julius Caesar
- To use the particular examples to develop more general understanding.

Suggestions re implementation:
Develop a table as in Table 3 below with the group, working from the structured overviews displayed. Students will find it difficult to select categories for comparison, so these are given in the left column of the retrieval chart. Complete the first row across with the class, then encourage students to complete their own notes (in pairs) on the remaining rows. Again, summarise on the white board after the students have completed their paired work and encourage more note making.

Table 3: Retrieval chart

Directions: Complete the rows by working with a partner.

Bases of Comparison	Mugabe	Elizabeth I	Julius Caesar
Role			
Personal qualities			
Performance or legacy (good and bad)			
Time in power			

Step Five

Context: The three sources used need to be approached in terms of the question 'Can you trust what you read?' A systematic approach to analysing and evaluating sources, merits particular focus in this unit. The research skills (History skills) will support the investigation in Stage Two of the unit.

Enlarge and photocopy Table 4 below, then display it prominently in the classroom and library. Introduce students to this table. It can be used as a means of identifying primary and secondary sources.

Table 4: Primary and secondary sources in the discipline of history

Questions to ask	Primary Source	Secondary Source
When?	At the time of the event or action, or very soon after.	At a much later time, even centuries after the event
Who?	A person who saw or experienced the event	The writer refers to other sources, often primary sources
Why?	To record or reflect	To inform, express opinion, persuade others
What?	e.g. Photograph, diary, email, interview, eye-witness account or account given to a writer by an eyewitness	Media article, text book, biography, film
Where?	Museum, library, database, not always published, or not intended for publication	Usually published

Strategy: Retrieval chart

Purpose:

- To analyse and evaluate the sources used in Step Two using appropriate skills that support research in the discipline History.
- To demonstrate for students a means of collating ongoing use of sources of information in the unit.
- To record details of sources using Harvard style.

Suggestions:

Analyse and evaluate Resources 1, 2 and 3, in discussion with the students, to show how the table and this retrieval chart can support good research skills. The modeling is critical so that students can use the chart later for their own research in Stage 2 of the unit. An example is provided in the first row of Table 5.

Table 5: Retrieval chart: Primary and secondary sources

Source Reference (Harvard style)	Type P/S	Reliable /Unreliable	Reasons and Action Taken	Key Words
http://www.echeat.com/ essay.php?t=29961	S	Unreliable	Student essay /cheat essay with no references. Cross check facts with other sources, such as published History text.	Julius Caesar Accomplishments Reforms

Resources for Episode 1

Resource No. 1: Dictators of the 21ˢᵗ Century:

Available from
http://www.parade.com/articles/editions/2006/edition_01-222006/Dictators
PARADE's *Annual List of ... The World's 10 Worst Dictators*. Written by David Wallechinsky,
Published January 22, 2006.

Note: *Parade* is a national Sunday newspaper magazine, distributed in the United States. It
is similar to the *Weekend Australian* magazine in its means of distribution.

Resource No. 2: Accomplishments of Queen Elizabeth I:

Available from
http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/accomplishments-of-queen-elizabeth-i.htm

Resource No. 3: Accomplishments of Julius Caesar:

Available from http://www.echeat.com/essay.php?t=29961
This source is a typical 'cheat essay' that appears to have been written by a student:
Life and accomplishments of Gaius Julius Caesar, uploaded by Kenny Barron on July 3,
2006.

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The next issue of *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years* view will contain the second episode
of this unit.

Episode Two: Stages 2 and 3 of the unit
                 Stage 4 with assessment task and criteria
                 Conclusion

Reference

Morris, B. & Stewart-Dore, N. (1984). *Learning to learn from text: Effective reading in the content areas*. North Ryde, NSW: Addison-Wesley.