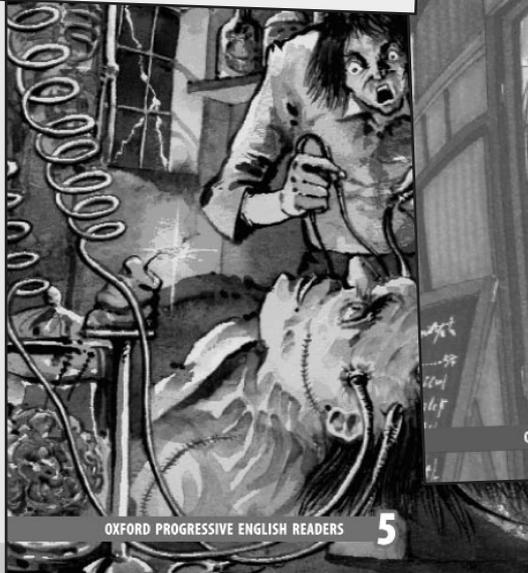
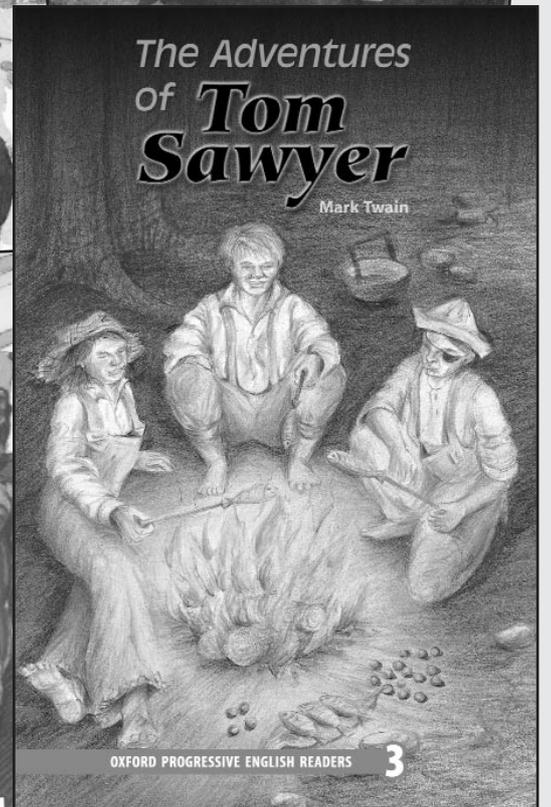
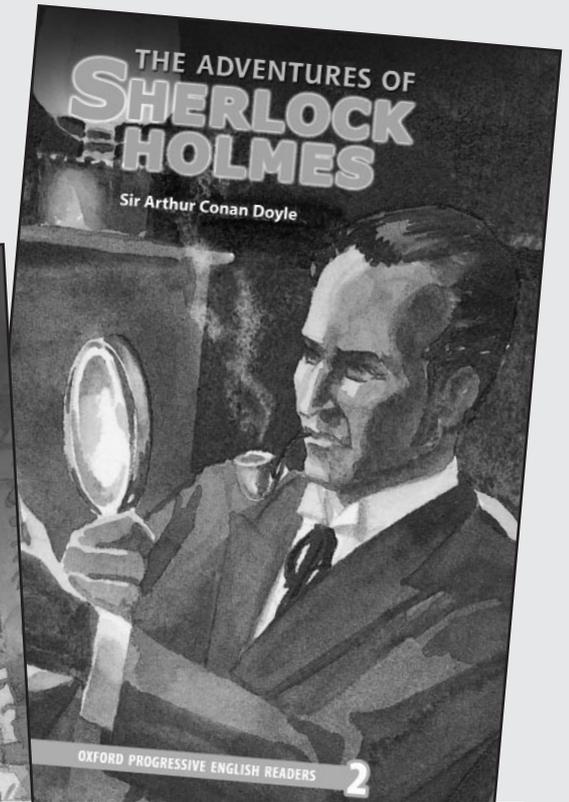
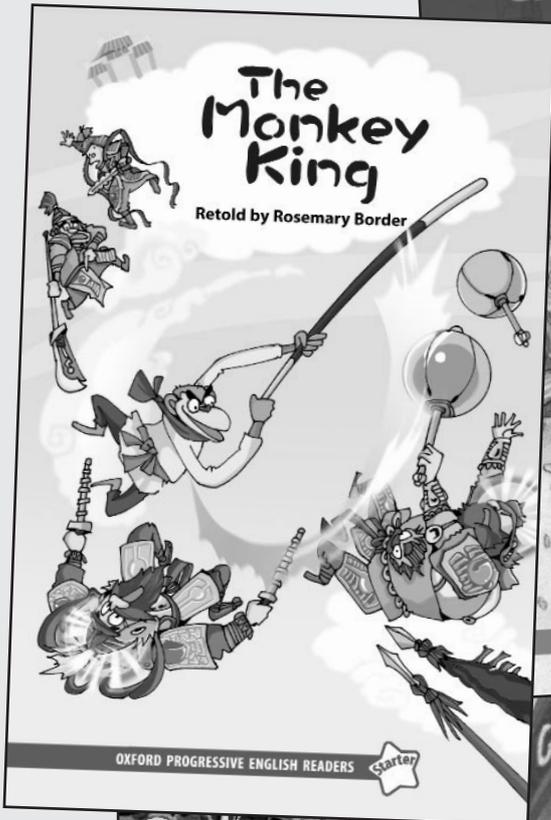




Teaching resources



Choosing the right level

The OPER levels

Introductory note

The books in the *Oxford Progressive English Readers* (OPER) series are arranged in six levels: a Starter level and five progressively more advanced levels. The levels correspond approximately to the secondary school form designations. Text lengths increase at each level, from 8,000 words at the Starter level to about 35,000 words at Level 5. The hardest titles, at Level 5, are quite challenging, and a student who can read these texts reasonably well should, with a little help, soon be able to move on to unadapted English texts.

How is the text grading done?

The language is carefully controlled at each level and graded progressively. This is achieved by ensuring that the language used in OPER stories falls within the controls of the appropriate OPER graded lists (vocabulary and grammar). There is a different list for each level.

How do we decide which words go into these lists?

Familiar words

The words in the lists are words that we think most students will know from their normal experience of learning English at school. First, we consult the textbooks that most students use and the syllabuses issued by government departments and education ministries. Then we judge which words are most widely taught, and, as best possible, where in a six-level learning experience, they are likely to be first encountered by most students.

Special words

Every story uses special words and expressions that are important to the stories being told. For example, if a story requires the use of words like 'workhouse' or 'pickpocket' or 'burglar' and if those words are not in the appropriate list and it is impossible to tell the story well without them, then the author may use them. However, the

number of special words in any one title is restricted. We ask authors to make use of roughly five special words for every 1,000 words of text, on average. So, for example, in Starter level titles, which are 8,000 words long, there may be between 40 and 50 words that students will find unfamiliar.

Is any help given with the meaning of these special words?

A list of the words that we think might prove difficult, with definitions, is given in the teaching resources. In the actual book itself the meanings of the special words are indicated by illustration, or can be picked up from context. If necessary, a special 'gloss' (extra details giving the meaning) is written into the text to say what the word means.

What about familiar words that have unfamiliar meanings?

The authors use a defined word list. If a meaning is not given in the list, then that usage is regarded as 'likely to be unfamiliar'.

How do we check that the texts follow the rules?

Every word in every text is compared to the appropriate level list. Text analysis is done with the help of specially designed software. This is followed by thorough editing and adjustment.

How do I know which levels will suit my students?

Work out the answers to a few questions, then check your answers against the table; after that get your students to try a few little tests.

- Roughly how much time have my students already spent learning English?
- On an A-B-C scale, A=highest, how do you rate your students' English ability?
- Do you intend to teach reading intensively (I)*, or extensively (E)**?

* intensive reading: student requires teacher-help to understand the text

** extensive reading: student can read the text without teacher-help

Number of hours	Extensive reading (E)			Intensive reading (I)		
	A	B	C	A	B	C
1,000	Level 1	Starter	—	Level 2	Level 1	Starter
1,500	Level 2	Level 1	Starter	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
2,000	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2
3,000	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 5	Level 4	Level 3
4,000	Level 5	Level 4	Level 3	—	Level 5	Level 4
5,000	—	Level 5	Level 4	—	—	Level 5

For example: Students who have been studying English for, in total, approximately 2,000 hours. Their ability is about average (B); they need materials for extensive reading (E). Taking the left-hand half of the table (for extensive reading), move down the 'B' column to the 2,000 hour mark; OPER Level 2 would be about right for these students.

Common sense

After all that, if a book still seems too easy for a given student, try a title from the next level up; conversely, go down a level for students who find a text too hard.

Level-checking tests

- (a) Give your students a small 100-word OPER extract to read (or use the pre-selected extracts, available to download from the website) and ask them to count the words they do not understand. If none, then the text is probably too easy; if more than two or three the text should not be used for extensive reading; if more than five or six, the text is really too hard for learning to read at all (though it may be useful for learning vocabulary).
- (b) Take one of the vocabulary gap-filler exercises from the back of any OPER title. If your students can get the answers right without referring to the book, then the text is probably too easy for use in teaching reading (though your students may enjoy the story all the same and get some value from that); if students can understand the exercise but mistakes are made (because they do not have the information from the book) then the book is probably about right for them; if they make many mistakes because they cannot understand the exercise, then the book will probably be too hard.