

LiFT Book Scan: Benjamin Zephaniah, *Terror Kid*

Rico is a teenage boy with a passion for computers. He assembles them at home and fixes them at the computer shop where he works. His parents are Spanish Romany. Together they live in debt-ridden London, which, at the time, is shaken up by riots after several documented cases of police brutality. Even though he is a peaceful boy who wants nothing more but to stay out of trouble, his ethnic background always seems to make him a suspect. As a consequence, he has been picked up and interrogated by the police numerous times. While his friends, including his best friend Karima, run rampant through the streets, he is arrested once again. That is when he finally decides to try and find a way to take action himself.

He participates in a demonstration when a man approaches him who introduces himself as Speech. He does not give away anything else about himself then or later but asks Rico to create a website as a birthday present for Ana, a girl who has supposedly done Speech a big favor and who works at the same computer store as Rico. Rico agrees and starts on his new project right away.

A few days later Rico finally sees his chance to meaningfully participate in the protest against police brutality and ethnic profiling, when Speech asks him to shut down the police network in an organized event for a mere ten minutes. After having carried out the cyber attack, he learns that in the same time frame a bomb has gone off at the police station. Many people have died in the attack including a class mate's father. The police are after him from then on, issuing public warnings of Rico Federico, the dangerous terror kid.

He runs away and visits his sister Lola, who lets him stay for a while, purchases some new clothes for him and warns him when her roommate Kim rats Rico out to the police. Back on the streets he manages on his own for a day until he meets the brothers Rohan and Dean who recognize him from the wanted pictures on TV. Claiming that they hate the police, they take Rico to their parents' place and host him. However, Rico soon learns that they want him to bomb a cash machine at a bank. He escapes once again.

Lola contacts him again and together they check in to a hotel. On TV, Rico sees that Karima has been arrested because of him. He now feels convinced that he needs to turn himself in, so his sister takes him to Summerfield Police Station where Rico is arrested. During the interrogation he explains – contrary to his lawyer's advice – that he is guilty of digital trespass and hacktivism, but not murder and terrorism. Nevertheless, the latter is exactly what he is eventually charged with.

During the hearing both Karima and Rico plead not guilty to the major charges. The country's best known human rights barrister Michael Fieldsman defends Rico. When the jury gives their verdict, Karima is set free immediately and Rico is sentenced to twelve months in youth custody for unlawful use of a computer and unauthorized computer access. As he is driven to jail in a secure van, Rico sees Speech standing impassively by the road, watching him being taken away into custody.

STUDENTS indicators		L E V E L	<i>Indicators of literary competence</i>
A F F E C T I V E	Willingness	2-3	The novel comprises 197 pages. It falls into several chapters provided with individual headlines that hint at the following plot. The plot is captivating and - apart from some extensive descriptions – predominantly pacy, easily gripping young adult readers’ attention.
	Interests	2	Due to its simple sentence structures and vocabulary, the novel appeals to teenagers who would like to broaden their scope of reading from familiar topics to others such as hacktivism and social injustice. The protagonist of the novel is a teenager himself and thus, the plot mainly revolves around the universe of a teenage world: coming of age, emotions, convention and rebellion, digital age, friendship and family. Although the protagonist is a boy, the ideas revealed in the novel are universal and therefore relevant to teenagers of both sexes. Additionally, the protagonist’s best friend and his sister play an essential role as well. Younger teenagers are likely to accept the colloquial language of the novel and feel emotionally involved with the characters. Therefore, the novel offers different ways of identification.
R E F L E X I V E	Intercultural empathy	3-4	The students are likely to understand the social and moral issues implied in the plot of the story even though they will not have any prior experience with profound social injustice, riots as well as terrorism in particular. They should be able to identify possible prejudices against immigrants and teenagers after the 2005 bombings and the London riots in 2011. They will be able to recognize these intercultural prejudices and stereotypes.

C O G N I T I V E	General knowledge of the world	2-3	For a broad and global understanding of the text, no deeper social, historical or geographical knowledge is required. In order to understand the social context of the riots described in the novel and the social and economic situation of Rico’s family, students should be aware of the situation of ethnic minorities in Britain and the British class system and its implications on British society. Furthermore, some geographical knowledge about Birmingham being an industrial city and its implications on its diverse population and their economic and social situation and the injustice that many youths experience, especially when they come from an immigrant background, enables students to discuss reasons for the rage that many young people feel and that result in the riot that is described at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, it helps students to understand Rico’s strong sense for injustice that explains his political engagement and his willingness to help Speech.
	Literary knowledge	2-3	<i>Terror Kid</i> is a coming of age story. No specific fiction experience is required but some genre knowledge and expectations will enable students to understand the deeper meaning of the text. With its exciting and suspenseful plot the novel also shows some features of a political thriller that criticizes some current social and political developments.

		Students can also be introduced to the terminology of other well-known literary features, which are less important for reading comprehension. Due to the recent social and political developments, topics such as hacktivism, friendship and terrorism, students might easily be motivated to read <i>Terror Kid</i> .
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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	<i>Terror Kid</i> follows a dramatic storyline consisting of a build-up that creates tension by making the mysterious Speech appear in Rico's life without identifying him as the villain yet. In the climax the police station constitutes the setting of a bomb attack being allegedly conducted by Rico. In the resolution Rico is able to escape the police at first but at the end he gives himself up. The pace of action is fostered by a sentence structure that mainly puts short parataxis to use, which pushes the action further along. Zephania's style of writing is precise and accurate. The pace of action is rarely interrupted by longer reflections or elaborate descriptions. The sequence and the intensity of dramatic events create suspense and draw the reader's attention to Rico's fate, eventually evolving from some twists and turns towards an unexpected climax. The students will easily identify with a large number of depicted teenage problems (i.e. relationship towards friends, peer pressure, family, digital age, hacktivism, ...) as well as the emotions of anger, frustration, fear or even isolation. However, the plot is quite explicit most of the time, which leaves less space for creativity on the part of the reader. Literary devices such as red herrings (Rico's best friend is not a terrorist) and plot twists (Speech is a terrorist) are used. The plot mainly consists of recognizable situations, events and emotions that students can (mostly) identify with. The information given by the narrator is abundant, not forcing the reader to fill many information gaps. The plot has a closed and realistic ending.
	CHRONOLOGY	1-2	The action can be described as linear , especially when it comes to the major storylines such as the meetings between Rico and Speech as well as the planning of the cyber-attack with the resulting consequences. There are a couple of flashbacks to give a broader understanding of the complex relationship of Rico and his sister Lola. There are references to former unjust encounters with the police and there are short passages that give information on Rico's family's Romany background. There are also hints about family crises that cause a break between Rico's sister Lola and their parents. These references do not result in a more complex storyline but are meant to illustrate Rico's family background and the origin of his political views. They help students to understand Rico's skepticism towards the police, why he joins demonstrations, why he

		hacks computers and why he is finally willing to work for and to trust Speech.
STORYLINE(S)	2	<p>The mysterious meetings with Speech initiate steadily advancing storylines and result in Rico's risky actions. Karima and Rico's friendship as well as the London riots merely serve as background information to provide the reasons why Rico has to be on the alert to the injustice of the police. Even so, their relationship constitutes the framework of the whole novel. It is interesting to see how Lola and Rico's actions add to the suspense of the storylines.</p> <p>The story focuses on Rico who hates injustice and who has a strong passion for computers. Set in London where riots occur as a result of unfair treatment by the police, Rico wants to take action and protest in a peaceful manner. He wants to use his computer and hacking skills to help the oppressed but is noticed by a mysterious man called Speech who wants to work with Rico to engage in – as Rico believes – some peaceful protest. But Rico unwittingly becomes part of a plot to bomb a police station. Several people die and Rico finds himself on the run accused of murder and terrorism. Rico's involvement in the terrorist attack and the resulting escape from the police form the framework of the novel.</p> <p>The different minor storylines (Rico's friendship with Karima a Somali refugee, the unfair treatment Rico experiences from the police during the riots, Rico's job at the computer store, Rico's hacking activities in order to help his mother, Rico's stay with two strangers who hide him while he is on the run) are clearly interconnected. Plot twists occur when Rico realises that Speech is a terrorist who has tricked Rico into committing a terrorist crime.</p>
POINT OF VIEW	1-2	<p>The story is mainly told by a third-person limited narrator who is very able to profoundly describe Rico's thoughts, emotions and explain his actions to the reader which makes it easier to understand his attitudes and values. Moreover, the reader quickly identifies with Rico. This makes the text an easy read: The applied narrative enables the reader to fully grasp Rico's real intentions which is necessary to get the message of the novel across and there is only one centre of orientation within the fictional world.</p> <p>However, as a result, the information given is limited to Rico's perspective and therefore not always reliable. <i>Terror Kid</i> is a <i>Coming of Age</i> story of disillusionment in a digital world.</p> <p>When Rico learns about his unwitting part of plot in an act of terror he has to leave his family and friends and finds himself on the run accused of murder and terrorism. Rico is shocked and startled when he realizes that he was set-up and used in a terror plot. The reader feels shocked and startled, too. Thus, suspense is created.</p>
LITERARY THEMES and INTERPRETATION	3	<p>The main literary themes of the novel are Coming of Age (developing new values and visions as a teenager and coming to terms with conflicting emotions), Pain of Disillusionment, Convention and Rebellion, Digital Age, Terrorism, Life-Changing Choices, Friendship and Trust and Family.</p> <p>Psychological, moral and political issues are cleverly mingled and hence the novel prompts the following questions in the aforementioned fields: How can the individual find a way of meaningful and peaceful protest against societal</p>

			problems/restrictions? What problems are teenagers exposed to who want to make a difference ? Which lures are they easily susceptible to ? The novel also deals with complex moral dilemmas regarding loyalty towards family and friends and the urge of self-preservation .
	Intercultural learning potential	2-3	<p>In order to fully grasp the different levels of the novel it is necessary to have intercultural knowledge of ethnic minorities living in multicultural London and the everyday problems especially teenagers belonging to these societal groups have to face. Moreover, students reading this novel should be aware of the potential threat of terrorist attacks in Britain. The novel therefore digs deep into the societal problems inherent in Britain. Hence, the reader attains a comprehensive view of problems and fears of the target culture and society. It is the teacher's task to refer to recent riots in today's British society and to detect parallels to the novel. What adds potential to the novel is the psychological insight that helps to understand Rico, Lola and even Karima's intentions as well as their inner lives: They all attempt to find their place in the present youth culture against all odds embodied in the face of the police and other authorities.</p> <p>The book provides some basic psychological insight into the inner lives of people from the target culture: Rico: Lifestyles, attitudes and values: interested in politics, engages in demonstrations, uses his computer and hacking skills to protest/attempt social change.</p> <p>The novel provides a glimpse of political and social life in the target culture: prejudice against people from a Romany background; social injustice: workers in the union are treated unfairly, suspicion, terrorism, social problems: riots because of unjust police treatment</p>
	PRESENTATION Of CHARACTERS	2-3	<p>The protagonist is a 15-year-old boy named Rico Frederico who is of Spanish-Romany descent. The story is told from a third person narrator but from Rico's perspective, so the readers are expected to draw conclusions about the protagonist by studying his behaviour, his opinions and his way of talking (<i>implicit characterization</i>). Other characters are seen from Rico's perspective (<i>explicit characterization</i>).</p> <p>Rico is a real computer freak and waits for his chance to make a difference in a system of authorities. They in turn find themselves in an almost permanent conflict with him (i.e. the police, his family). Rico is loyal to his family his friends, very mature for his age and can be described as very principled. When Rico meets Speech he is drawn to him and trusts him although Speech remains a rather vague figure that does not get the punishment the reader expects him to have. There is no backstory of Speech other than the most likely made up story that Speech tells Rico to gain his trust.</p> <p>Lola is one of the real heroines who stands up for her brother. Like her brother, she has a strong sense for injustice and is politically engaged. However, the reader very often asks himself whether she should have acted differently at some instances.</p>
	Number of characters	1-2	There is one protagonist and there are some minor characters . In the beginning of the novel, Rico feels closest to his parents and his

			best friend Karima . Later, he meets Speech but Speech remains mysterious. Although Speech appears suspicious Rico finally decides to accept Speech's offer. Later, the reader also learns about Rico's sister Lola who does not live with the family any longer. While Rico is on the run from the police he meets various characters that remain episodic.
	RELATION-SHIPS BETWEEN CHARACTERS	2-3	The relationships between all the characters are clearly defined. However, some relationships are dynamic and there are some surprising developments that create suspense (especially between Rico and Speech as well as Rico and Karima).
	LEXICAL DEMANDS and SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION	2-3	Students reading the novel should have sufficient vocabulary to express themselves on most topics that are connected with their everyday lives such as family, friendship, peer pressure, injustice, digital age, ethnic minorities etc. Foreign language learners should be introduced to some vocabulary from a social-political context (e.g. riot, trade union). Sometimes colloquial language is used in the dialogues, however, the colloquialisms have an adequate level for the given target group. Most meanings can be guessed from the context. The sentence patterns are simple and clear and therefore easy to understand . Discussing the novel, students can learn to express some thoughts and opinions on more abstract topics such as simple political, moral or psychological issues.
	LITERARY DEVICES and LAYERS OF MEANING ¹	2	<i>Terror Kid</i> operates on an accessible, literal level of meaning . This means that the author communicates with the reader in a realistic, non-symbolic way. The language is vivid and evocative.
	Target Group	intermediate students (grade 8-10)	