# The coronavirus – A literary approach

by Carmen Müntzenberg

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Seit Anfang des Jahres 2020 beschäftigt das Coronavirus die ganze Welt und beein-flusst zahlreiche Lebensbereiche. Durch die zeitweise Schließung der Schulen und die Veränderungen in der Unterrichtsgestaltung waren auch Schülerinnen und Schüler von den Auswirkungen des Virus betroffen. In dieser Unterrichtseinheit setzen sich die Lernenden mit dem Phänomen „Corona" auf vielfältige Weise auseinander. Der Fokus liegt hierbei auf der literarischen Annäherung an das Thema mithilfe von Gedichten, Bezügen zu Romanen und einer Kurzgeschichte. Dabei schulen die Lernenden insbe-sondere ihre Lese-, Schreib- und Medienkompetenzen.

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**Facts** 1

**Notes on the material** 1

**Topic 1:** Facts about the coronavirus 3

**Topic 2:** How to cure patients 10

**Topic 3:** Surveillance as a means of protection? 21

**Topic 4:** What will a future with the coronavirus be like? 28

**Topic 5:** Viruses in science fiction and music 37

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## Competences and skills:

By working with the material, students enhance various competences and skills. As they are dealing with such a current topic as the coronavirus, students especially practise their **research skills**. They also train their **reading comprehension** competence by working with fictional as well as non-fictional texts. Furthermore, students develop their **writing skills** by writing summaries and producing creative texts. Students also engage in discussions and, thus, improve their **speaking skills**. By working with several songs, their **listening comprehension** competence is trained.

## Overview:

### List of abbreviations:

**A** Analysis      **CT** Creative Task      **D** Discussion/debate
**G** Group work      **LC** Listening comprehension
**M** Mind map/visualising      **P** Working with a picture/cartoon
**R** Research      **RC** Reading comprehension      **T** Working with a text
**VI** Working with a video      **W** Writing

| Topic | Material | Methods/Skills |
|---|---|---|
| 1: Facts about the coronavirus | M1–M2 | A, CT, P, R, T, W |
| 2: How to cure patients | M3–M | CT, D, G, P, R, RC, T, VI, W |
| 3: Surveillance as a means of protection? | M6–M | A, D, G, P, R, RC, T, W |
| 4: What will a future with the coronavirus be like? | M9–M10 | CT, P, RC, T, W |
| 5: Viruses in science fiction and music | M–M15 | A, CT, D, LC, T |

## Topic 1: Facts about the coronavirus

**M1  Poems about pandemics**

**Philip Freneau:**[1] *Pestilence*[2] **(1793)**

Hot, dry winds forever blowing,                Priests retreating from their pulpits![4] –
Dead men to the grave-yards going:                Some in hot, and some in cold,
Constant hearses,                                In bad temper,
Funeral verses;                                Off they scamper,[5]
5  Oh! what plagues – there is no knowing!   10   Leaving us – unholy culprits![6]

*Source: https://interestingliterature.com/2020/04/poems-plague-pandemic-lockdown/*
*[last access: 11/09/2020]*

**Shalom Freedman: *There Is So Much Else In Life Besides The Coronavirus* (2020)**

There is so much else in life beside the coronavirus
Why do I give it so much time and thought?
Because it keeps me inside
Because it has changed nearly everyone's life
5                Because it threatens us
Because new cases are still coming in large numbers
Because unless we can stop it
We cannot go back to do the ordinary things we sometimes love to do
Still I don't want to think about so much anymore
10        And if I had better powers of escape, I might be happier
Let the coronavirus disappear as quickly as possible
And let us all kept back
To being fully alive.

*Source: https://raabe.click/um_poem_shalom_freedman [last access: 07/08/2020]*

**Annotations**

1 **Philip Morin Freneau**: 1752–1832; American poet, polemicist, sea captain and newspaper editor; has been dubbed "The Poet of the American Revolution"; this poem, however, is about the plague: specifically, the "pestilence" of yellow fever which killed 5,000 citizens of Philadelphia in 1793. – 2 **pestilence**: epidemic disease like the plague – 3 **hearse**: funeral carriage – 4 **pulpit**: place from which the priest usually speaks his sermon – 5 **to scamper**: to rush – 6 **culprits**: sinners

8. Most of Geoff Ryman's sentences are very short. Describe his style and explain why he chooses it for the opening of his novel.

## Working with the video

9. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* every woman who committed adultery had to wear a red letter "A" on her clothes for everyone to see.
   a) Watch the summary of the novel:
   *https://raabe.click/en_um_scarlet_letter* [last access: 11/09/2020].
   Describe the function and effect of this form of branding a person.
   b) Discuss whether publicly marking infected or even recovered people offers a way of curing and fighting the coronavirus.

## Working with the cartoon

10. Analyse the cartoon and its suggestions on how to control the coronavirus by keeping social distance.
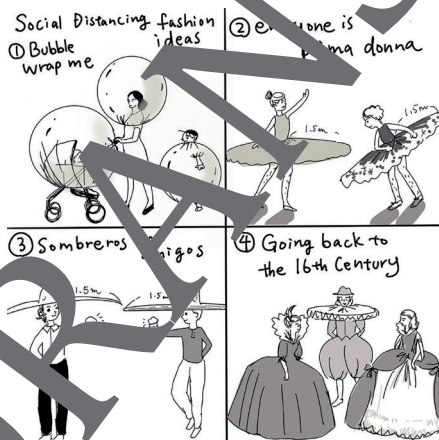


*© Atelier Emi Lou*

## Further activity

11. Write an email to a friend in another country in which you discuss the measures taken against the spread of the coronavirus in your country.

## M7  Worksheet – Surveillance as a means of protection?

### Working with the cartoon

1. Look at the ad promoting a tracking app. Describe the ad by summarising the story.
2. Explain the function of this cartoon.
3. Do an online research on how different countries work with tracking apps. You may use the following website: *https://raabe.click/en_um_corona_tracking_apps* [last access: 11/09/2020].
4. Make a list of pros and cons of tracking apps and surveillance in general. Then draw a line across the classroom and physically express your opinion by standing on one side of that line that is either the pro or the con side. Talk to a person on the other side to find out about their motives.

### Reading comprehension

5. Read the short story *The Perfect Match* by Ken Liu: *https://raabe.click/en_um_perfect_match* [last access: 11/09/2020]. Write a short summary of the plot.

### Working with the text

6. The story is utopian. Nevertheless, some parts of the story would seem possible even today. Make a list of realistic elements embedded in that story.
7. Characterise Sai and Jenny by writing down what you would say about them when introducing them to a friend.

### Discussion

Get together in groups of six and discuss whether Sai should agree on working for Centillion. Use these role cards to start your discussion, but also add your personal opinion to come to a conclusion.
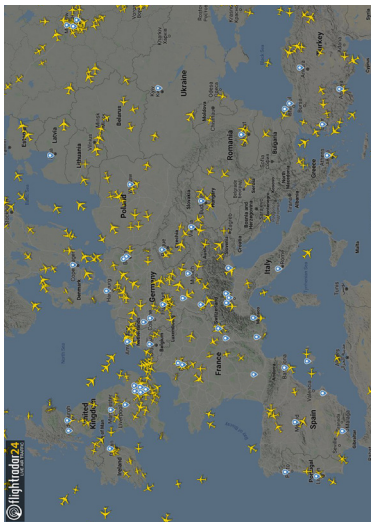
Picture B.2



Picture C.2



Picture B.1



Picture C.1

*Sources: Pictures B.1/B.2: Screenshot: Flightradar24 found at https://www.severe-weather.eu/recent-events/significant-decline-global-air-traffic-mk/; Picture C.1: ©Boggy/Adobe Stock; Picture C.2: Illustration Group 2 found at https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/panorama/id_87708524/coronavirus-italienisches-unternehmen-entwirft-modell-fuer-plexiglaskaesten-am-strand.html*

## Topic 5: Viruses in science fiction and music

## M11 Worksheet – Viruses in science fiction and music

### Working with the texts

| 🔲 | You can find a review of Stephen King's *The Stand* here*: https://raabe.click/en_um_the_stand* [last access: 11/09/2020] |

| 🔲 | You can find two reviews on the film *The Outbreak* here: https://raabe.click/en_um_the_outbreak [last access: 11/09/2020] (review 1 by rcs0411@yahoo.com, review 2 by Dennis O'Cain) |

Work with the review on *The Stand* by Stephen King or the film reviews on *The Outbreak*. Split the class into two groups (Group 1: *The Stand*, Group 2: *The Outbreak*). In these groups, get together in pairs. Each pair should then work on these tasks.

1. Describe the plot and the setting of the story.
2. Elaborate on the role of the virus in the storyline.
3. Choose suitable songs/music to accompany the scenes written about in the review. Then read the review to your class using these songs as background music. Give reasons why you have chosen the songs.
4. Discuss the effect of the music.

### Working with "coronavirus songs"

The following songs were written or re-written during the coronavirus period. Use your mobile phone or the school tablet and headphones to listen to them. Work on the contents and music with the help of the questions. Move from one station to the next. You will find background information at each station.

### Creative activity

In case you finish early, come up with lyrics for your own coronavirus song.