The Guardian

onestopenglish

'Beowulf is lit' – could ChatGPT really write good book blurbs?

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate – Teacher's notes

Article summary: Bookwire has included ChatGPT on their book platform to write blurbs and endorsements. The author experimented with the chatbot to see what it could do, creating some entertaining (but cliché) texts.

Time: 60–90 minutes (depending on the time to use a chatbot in class)

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Phrasal verbs

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

1. Warmer

a. This activity aims to introduce the books/texts mentioned in the article and engage students in the topic.

Key:
1. *b*
2. *d*
3. *a*
4. *c*

b. You can note down emergent language related to the theme on the board. Ask students to reflect on what they know about these books and ChatGPT. Then get them to predict the answer to the question in the article title.

2. Key words

a. Divide the class into two groups and ask each group to complete half of the items (1–5 or 6–10). Students can do this individually or in pairs and then compare their answers in different pairs before regrouping and sharing their answers with someone who completed the other items.

To help students learn the pronunciation of the new words, ask them to identify words with the same stressed syllables.

E.g.,

ex**per**iment, re**spon**sible

cre**a**tive, im**pre**ssive

industry, **pub**lisher, **mar**keting

Key:
1. *experiment*
2. *publisher*
3. *Marketing*
4. *responsible*
5. *industry*
6. *Creative*
7. *Gossip*
8. *divine*
9. *impressive*
10. *cliché*

b. Ask students to complete the sentences in pairs. Check answers with the whole class. As an extension, you can ask students to give their own examples of ideas containing these words.

Key:
1. *impressive*
2. *divine*
3. *gossip*
4. *experimented*
5. *publishers*
6. *responsible*
7. *cliché*
8. *creative*
9. *industry*
10. *marketing*

3. Comprehension check

a. Ask students to work individually to answer the questions and then compare their answers in pairs or small groups.

Key:
1. *True*
2. *True*
3. *False. They will probably be angry.*
4. *False. It is more exciting.*
5. *False. It is a very old poem.*
6. *False. Beowulf is a hero who kills monsters.*
7. *True*
8. *True*
9. *False. They are usually correct.*

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4. Key language

a. Ask students to work in pairs. They can check their answers in the text after completing the exercise.

    Key:
    1. deal with
    2. keep up with
    3. check out
    4. look for
    5. compete with
    6. miss out on

b. Ask students to work in pairs to complete the questions. Check answers with the whole class. Then ask students to discuss the questions in small groups.

    Key:
    1. look for
    2. compete with
    3. deal with
    4. check out
    5. miss out on
    6. keep up with

5. Discussion

a. Allow students time to note their ideas and encourage them to explain their answers. Ask them to discuss the questions in small groups. Elicit ideas from the whole class.

6. In your own words

a. If students cannot do this in class, set this for homework. If students cannot access a chatbot site, ask them to write their own blurb. Remind students that they need to keep the instructions they gave the chatbot, the generated text (or their first draft), and their final edited version.

b. Low-tech version: put students into groups and ask them to read their blurbs and guess the book titles.

    Higher-tech version: get students to share their blurbs on an online board such as Jamboard.