

# Images

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### Jamie Keddie covers a visual corpus.

Here are 12 book titles which use *could have*, *should have* and *would have*:

- How Hitler **could have won** World War II
- It **could have been worse**
- I **could have danced** all night
- All the ways we **could have met**
- The man I **should have married**
- 10 things my mother **should have told me**
- The manual that **should have come** with your body
- Wrong: The biggest mistakes and miscalculations ever made by people who **should have known** better
- The Christian president: What Jesus **would have done**

- I **would have loved** him if I had not killed him
- Someone **would have talked**
- Rembrandt **would have loved** you

These book titles (which are all real) could be very useful for a learner of English. Each contains an example of a notoriously problematic structure: modal auxiliary + *have* auxiliary + past participle.

### The visual aspect

A book title can almost be regarded as a free-standing mini text – short, succinct and autonomous in meaning. The reason I use the word *almost* is that in order for it to be appreciated to the

full, it should be observed in its natural habitat: on the book cover itself.

A book or film cover has an important job. It should advertise the product within and communicate a basic idea of what it is about, what genre it belongs to and who it is aimed at. A good cover may stand alone as a piece of design and can be appreciated even when the book has not been read or the film has not been seen. Although we may not know specifically what the title refers to, elements of colour, design, image, graphics and font will allow the imagination to take over and come to its own decision.

### Classroom activities

If you go to my blog ([jamiokeddie.com](http://jamiokeddie.com)), you will be able to download the 12 book covers shown here as a pdf slideshow. Here are four different ways in which this slideshow could be used in class:

#### Idea 1: Dictation

Dictate the book titles to your learners and then allow them to correct what they have written by showing them the slideshow.

#### Idea 2: Guess about the book

Give out the list of book titles but don't let your students see the covers at this stage. For each one they should guess:

- What genre the book belongs to (fiction, non-fiction, romance novel, self-help, etc);
- What the book is about;
- Who it is aimed at.

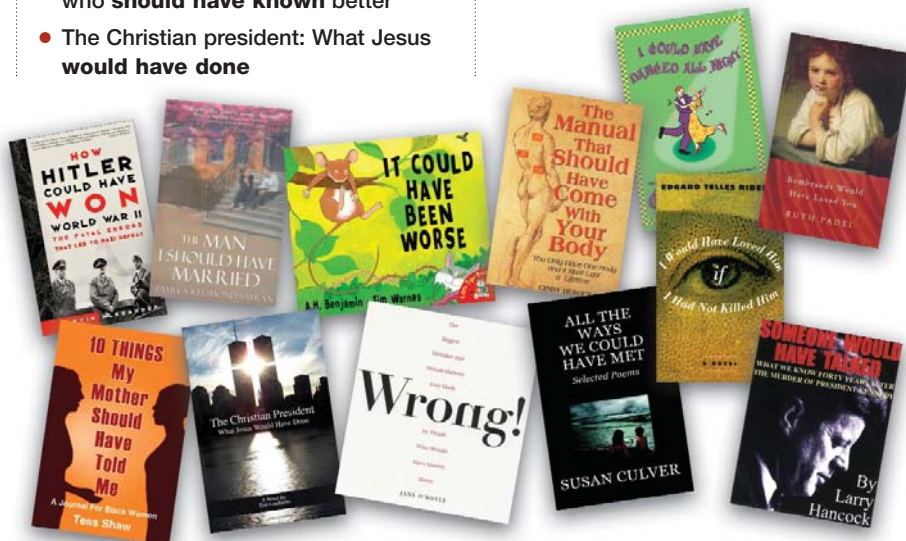
Once their decisions have been made, allow your students to see the images. The covers themselves will usually give away the information they have been looking for.

#### Idea 3: Consensus translations

With monolingual classes, show your students the slideshow and get them to come to a consensus translation for each title. All 12 titles should be written down in their own language (no English should be written at this stage). Then, in the absence of the slideshow, your learners should attempt to translate the titles back into English.

#### Idea 4: Drilling and gap fill

Use the slideshow to drill the target language. In other words, get your students to repeat the book titles after you. Follow this up with the following gap-fill exercise:



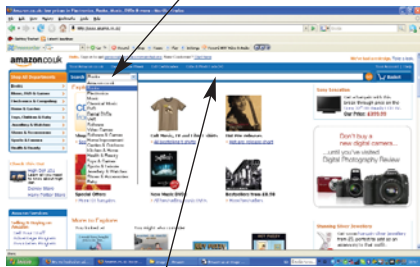
- I \_\_\_\_\_ him if I had not killed him
- It \_\_\_\_\_ worse
- All the ways we \_\_\_\_\_
- The man I \_\_\_\_\_
- Rembrandt \_\_\_\_\_ you
- 10 things my mother \_\_\_\_\_ me
- The manual that \_\_\_\_\_ with your body
- How Hitler \_\_\_\_\_ World War II
- Wrong: The biggest mistakes and miscalculations ever made by people who \_\_\_\_\_ better
- I \_\_\_\_\_ all night
- The Christian president: What Jesus \_\_\_\_\_
- Someone \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding the titles

Ten years ago, a lesson plan involving this many book titles would have required a week in a book shop browsing and scanning the shelves for suitable titles. Fortunately, technology makes things easier for us. It took me approximately 40 minutes to find and download the 12 book cover images mentioned above. Here is how it is done:

**1** Go to [www.Amazon.co.uk](http://www.Amazon.co.uk).

**2** Click on the drop down menu on the top left-hand side of the screen and select 'Books' (or 'DVD' if you want to find film titles).



**3** In the search window on the top right-hand side, type in the item or structure that you would like to look for. Phrases should be typed in inverted commas ('could have', 'should have' or 'would have', for example).

**4** Click on 'Go'.

**5** You will be given a list of book (or film) titles which will contain the structure that you are looking for. Most of these will be accompanied by a small image of the cover.

**6** When you see an image that you like, click on it. You will then be given the option to 'See larger image'. Once you have selected this, you will be able to download the full-sized image onto your hard drive by right clicking on it and choosing 'Save image as ...'.

(**Note:** When browsing for books on Amazon, some titles offer the user a Search Inside!™ function. Please note that in these cases, cover images cannot be downloaded in the way outlined above.)

## Finding other possible titles

Here are a few other slideshows I have created using the same technique. Many of these can be seen at my blog ([jamiokeddie.com](http://jamiokeddie.com)), along with accompanying lesson plans.

### Can and could DVD titles

- It could happen to you
- Catch me if you can
- The boy who could fly
- White men can't jump etc

### How to books

- How to improve your memory
- How to talk about books you haven't read
- How to think like a horse
- How not to look old etc

### 'Present perfect continuous' books

- How to have that difficult conversation you've been avoiding
- Who's been eating my porridge?
- The nurse he's been waiting for
- There's something I've been meaning to tell you etc

### Books containing some and any

- Is anybody out there?
- How to stop looking for someone perfect and find someone to love
- The little old lady who was not afraid of anything
- What do you do when something wants to eat you? etc

### Film and book titles containing seem

- It seemed like a good idea at the time
- Seems like yesterday
- When all seems lost
- The moon seems to change etc

## Finding language

The Amazon website may be regarded as a database of language that can be used to obtain examples for study. In other words, it is a corpus.

Unlike conventional corpora, which are created specifically for linguistic investigation (the British National Corpus, for example), the examples of language that are obtained from the Amazon website are visually supported, making it learner-friendly.

## Finding advantages

Book and film covers combine words with pictures and this may enhance a learner's experience of a target structure or piece of vocabulary. And since the language of book and film titles is diverse, *Amazon.co.uk* can prove to be a very effective tool for both teachers and learners alike. In my experience, students enjoy and learn from the type of activities that have been mentioned in this article.

In many cases, the titles that appear on book covers or film posters are easy for a learner to understand, even when they contain language that has never been met or studied. This comes down to the fact that they are short, potentially autonomous in meaning and visually supported.

An approach that starts with learners' reinforced comprehension of the target language (ie meaning first) can be effective for eliminating or at least cutting down on lengthy grammar explanations.



On the down side, as a result of your search, *Amazon.co.uk* will start recommending products to you based on your browsing history. Every time I log onto the site, I am directed to religious self-help books and instructional DVDs that aim to teach me how to talk to my cat. You have been warned! **ET7**



**Jamie Keddie** is a Barcelona-based teacher and teacher trainer. He blogs at [jamiokeddie.com](http://jamiokeddie.com) and also runs [teflclips.com](http://teflclips.com), a site dedicated to the possibilities of YouTube in language teaching.

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