Better
Learning

# UNL⚭CK

Second Edition

## Critical Thinking Impact Study

Get your students thinking critically.

UNL⚭CK YOUR ACADEMIC POTENTIAL          cambridge.org/unlock

# INTRODUCTION

Schools and higher education institutions need to show that they are evaluating their language programmes and using an effective language course. An impact study by Cambridge University Press can help demonstrate the value of a course to both students and teachers. This is done by analysing data from a mixture of: language test results before, during and after the course, administering pre- and post-course questionnaires to both teachers and students and by using in-depth focus groups.
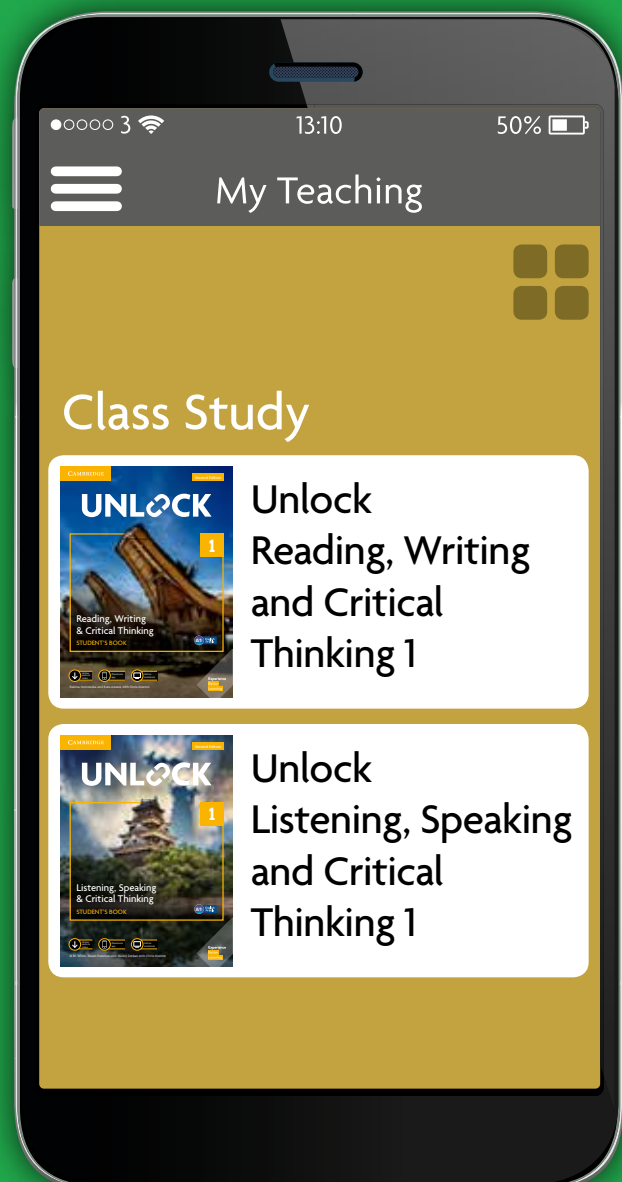
*Unlock* is a six-level, academic-light English course created to build the skills and language students need for their studies (CEFR Pre-A1 to C1). One of the key aspects of *Unlock* is the development of students' ability to think critically in an academic context.

# WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Academic success depends on a student's ability to question statements made by others, make connections, derive knowledge from collected data, make educated judgements, synthesise information from various sources, and deliver insightful presentations. In essence, this requires the development of critical thinking skills which research shows has a positive impact on broader language learning skills; this is especially true for academic contexts.

**FIND FURTHER INFORMATION ON CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS HERE:**

13:10
My Teaching

Class Study

Unlock Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking 1

Unlock Listening, Speaking and Critical Thinking 1

# THE STUDY

An impact study was carried out with teachers and students using *Unlock* with a focus on critical thinking to see if this aspect of the course improved. This in-depth study, built upon previous research conducted by Cambridge University Press in the *Critical Thinking Teacher Survey*, shows what critical thinking means to teachers and the challenges they face trying to teach it.

**Cambridge University Press carried out impact studies with two institutions:**

The Institute of Continuing & TESOL Education at the University of Queensland, Australia

The Division of English Studies at Sahmyook University, South Korea

These institutions used *Unlock* on a 10-week programme.

The institutions used the Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking, and Listening, Speaking and Critical Thinking student's books for levels 2-5 (CEFR A2 to C1).

This study aimed to understand:

1  how students engaged with texts critically, and

2  how teachers improve their teaching of critical thinking.

**CRITICAL THINKING TEACHER SURVEY:**

## THIS STUDY WAS GUIDED BY THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

**1** How do students feel about the use of critical thinking and English language? How does this impact on their motivation and general behaviours?

**2** Which facets of Bloom's Taxonomy are learners able to do?

**3** What are teachers' perceptions of their students' critical thinking skills and does *Unlock* help?

**4** How do teachers develop their teaching of critical thinking skills using the help provided in the Teacher's Manual and Development Pack?

## THIS STUDY EMPLOYED THREE DIFFERENT DATA COLLECTION TOOLS:

### ONLINE SURVEYS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Pre- and post-study surveys were distributed to teachers and students. The surveys aimed to address motivations and behaviours of learners and teachers with regard to critical thinking, and were based on Bloom's Taxonomy.

### FOCUS GROUPS

Students and teachers were interviewed where possible in order to understand the survey data better and gain more in-depth insight into their perceptions of the Teacher's Manual and Development Pack.

### LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

Students were asked to complete some language tasks as part of the study to identify the linguistic features associated with critical thinking. This shows both how they use language and how their language has changed.
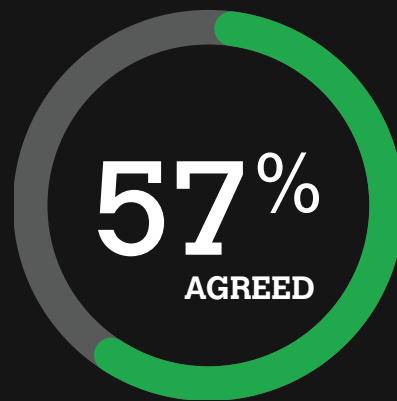
## "I can compare and contrast items as a means of DEMONSTRATING CRITICALITY."

**BEFORE** using *Unlock*

**41%**
AGREED

**AFTER** using *Unlock*

**57%**
AGREED
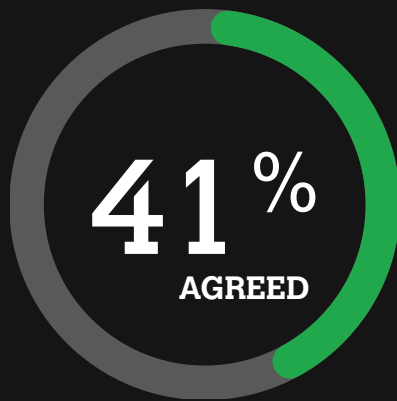
There was a 9% increase in students who agreed that they could find advantages and disadvantages in given information which requires higher-order thinking skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy.

## "I can demonstrate critical thinking skills in my SPEAKING."

**BEFORE** using *Unlock*

**40%** AGREED

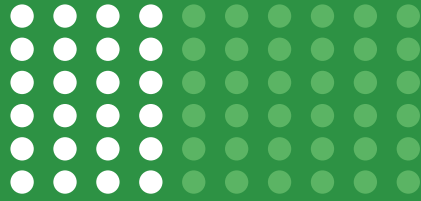**AFTER** using *Unlock*

**60%** AGREED

20% more students agreed that they could show their critical thinking when speaking after using *Unlock*, indicating the value of the course for developing critical thinking skills.

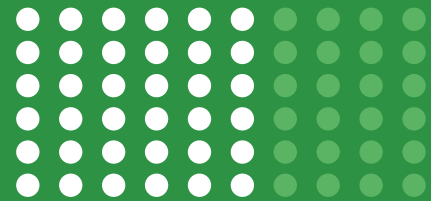# "I can demonstrate critical thinking skills in my WRITING."

**BEFORE** using *Unlock*

**40**%
**AGREED**

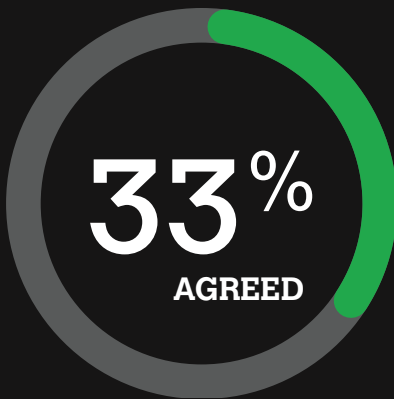**AFTER** using *Unlock*

**60**%
**AGREED**

This indicates that more students feel they can show their critical thinking through their writing.
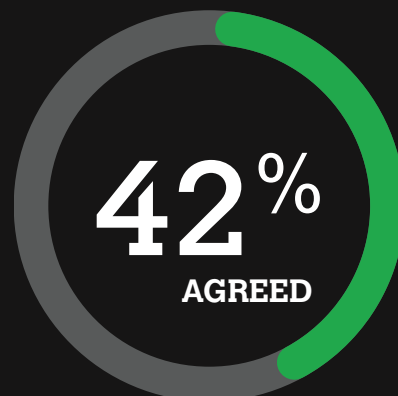
# "I can CREATE information."

**BEFORE** using *Unlock*

**33**%
**AGREED**

**AFTER** using *Unlock*

**42**%
**AGREED**

Students who used *Unlock* demonstrated an increased perception of their ability to create information, which is another higher-order thinking skill.

# STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Students see critical thinking as a means to access multiple perspectives and use logic, and they see their role as one to question things and dig deeper into those perspectives. The students recognised the importance of this, arguing that there is always information available in the *Unlock* course to help them agree or disagree.

"Every section begins with a few questions that we can discuss which uses our imagination. The book introduces very valuable information and vocabulary"

Student

"I think I learned a lot of useful strategies from the book, such as ways to make a strong opinion and express myself confidently"

Student

"It's got practical knowledge and a strong basis for future study"

Student

"I will always brainstorm, use searching skills, and find relevant words when starting projects in my future studies"

Student

# TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

> When focusing on the content of the Teacher Manual and Development Pack and its collaborative nature, the value of the content was very apparent: "you said the magic word there, collaborative. When teachers can collaborate, they can do great things."
>
> Teacher

From the teachers' perspective, after using the teacher support in *Unlock* the key improvements were:

**1** Teachers had **increased confidence** in their ability to develop their students' critical thinking skills.

**2** Their students were **better at remembering**, completing tables and diagrams with information from elsewhere, and had **better analytical skills**, which enabled them to make comparisons, identify advantages and disadvantages, and understand cause and effect.

**3** An **increase in students' language use**, where more students had useful language to demonstrate their analytical skills.

**4** A greater number of students were **good at evaluating** what they read or heard and were **able to express** their own judgement and interpretation of it.

**5** Their students were **better at analysing information**, and identifying trends and facts.

# UNLOCK 2ND EDITION:
# TEACHER DEVELOPMENT FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Ahead of *Unlock* Second Edition, and as part of the course research we undertake at Cambridge University Press, we looked at how we can understand and better meet teachers' needs. This resulted in the development of the *Teacher's Manual and Development Pack*.

Our research tells us that 93% of teachers believe their students want to develop their critical thinking skills, yet only 18% of teachers have had specific training on how to support their students with this.

Part of the Teacher's Manual and Development Pack, *Developing critical thinking skills in your students,* has specific support to help with teaching critical thinking. Content is integrated into the manual and available in every unit. This includes teacher development objectives, in-practice activities and opportunities for review and self-evaluation as well as peer-to-peer exchange opportunities.

"As the teachers' book incorporates training, I will definitely make use of it"
Teacher

The teachers who took part in the survey had until this point received no explicit training in teaching critical thinking skills and reported that their development had largely been informal and based on experience. As such, they have no formal focus on critical thinking or dedicated training sessions on its development.

"The more I do [the teacher development activities], the more it becomes a part of my regular methodology. I always point out why we are doing an activity and how it can be applied to other areas of their learning, because I understand it"
Teacher
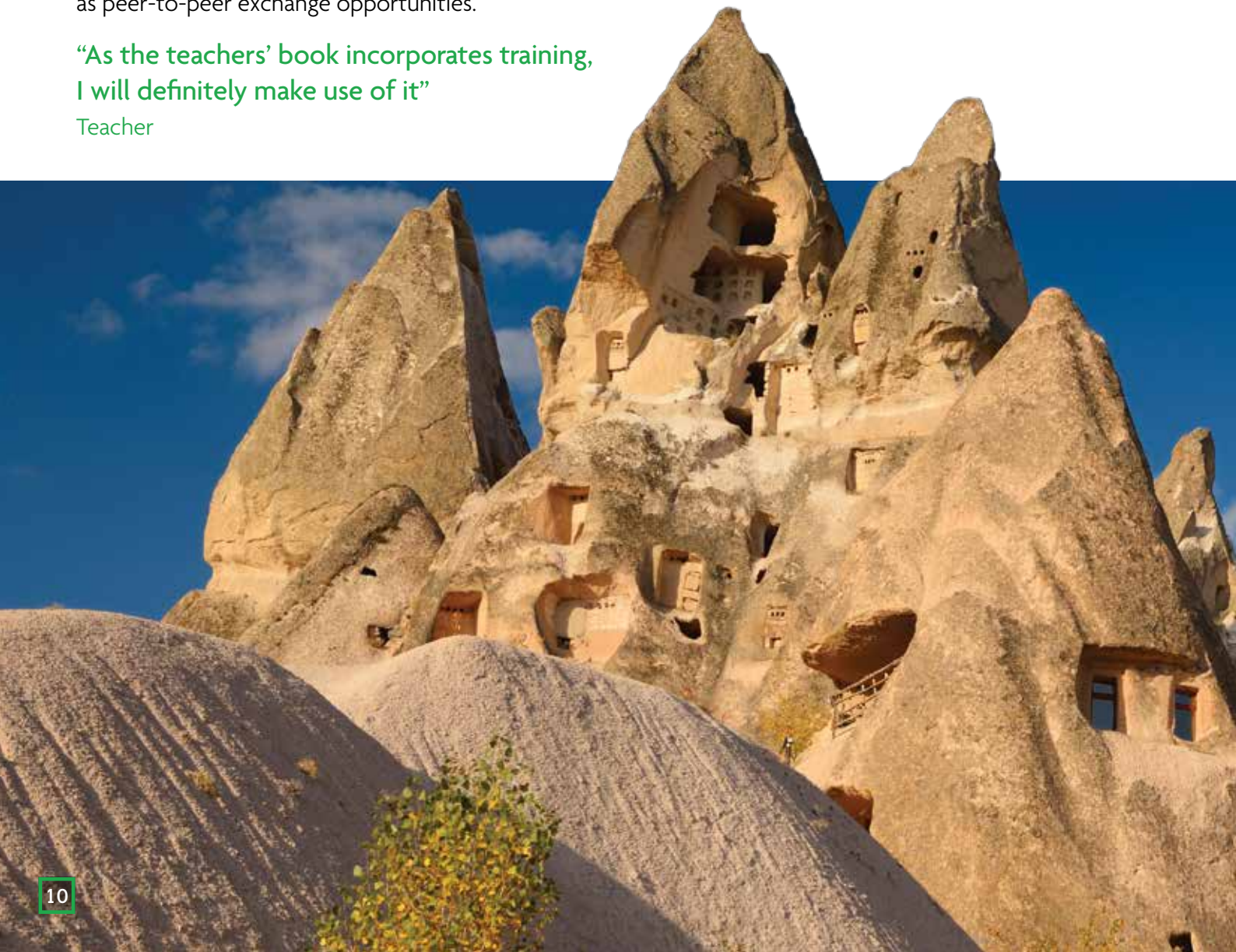
# PEER-COLLABORATIVE MATERIAL AVAILABLE IN UNLOCK SECOND EDITION
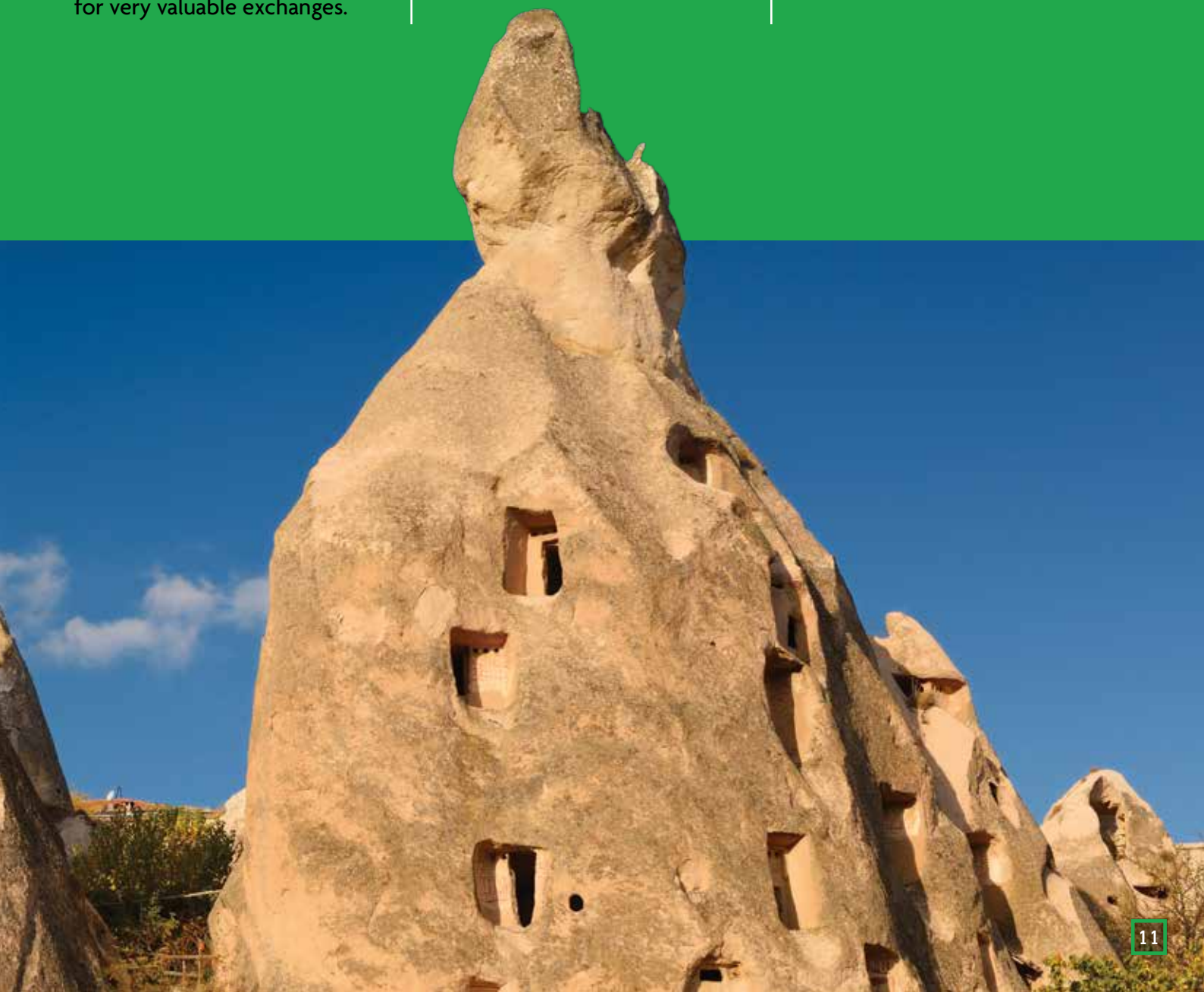
Peer-to-peer downloadable teacher training material has been developed so that teachers can develop together and share ideas. This proves for very valuable exchanges.

Lesson observation templates have been developed so teachers can get feedback from colleagues.

Further ideas to peer-collaborate in the *Unlock* Second Edition Teacher's Manual and Development Pack are available.