

TEACHING-LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITH STORY

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Abstract

Language teaching through storytelling is not only a technique to reach a student easily but also a motivating formula. Language learning through storytelling is a holistic approach from times immemorial. Using short stories makes the teaching more effective and short stories can be read in a single sitting. Usually, a short story focuses on one incident; a single plot, a single setting, and a handful of characters and covers in a short period. Among other forms of literature, short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for a student to enhance his/her ability in LSRW. The element of realities in the short story creates interest in the mind of a reader and makes the reader cross the boundaries of the language. This paper tries to focus on how literature can be utilized for language teaching in the classroom at the basic level. The predominance of technical education all over India gave room to the popularity of technical English at the classroom level. This paper also tries to focus on whether the English Language is feasible through storytelling methods which are part and parcel of literature.

Keywords: Language, Teaching, short story, students, Literature, English

INTRODUCTION

Apart from modern techniques and innovative methods, literature has become part and parcel of classroom teaching and an important phenomenon of English in the current global scenario. Literature provides a broad variety of vocabulary and different expressions with a combination of old and new English. Literature enriches our language and creates interest in language. Literature is a reliable material. It is good to expose the students to this source of the unmodified language in the classroom because they can make use of the same expressions outside the classroom. Literature is motivating. Literature holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement in understanding a piece of work.

With the end of colonization in the late 1940s and 1950 literature of different countries ushered up to entertain readers of various classes at different levels. Literature of British and America and the literature of the remaining countries of the world captured the readers' imagination. Short fiction influenced the entire world irrespective of generations and classes. A short story is a brief fictional prose narrative that is shorter than a novel and that usually deals with a limited number of characters. The short story genre is treated as distinct before the 19th century itself. From early humans to modern man this genre of art form had been universally and continued to the next generations. Focus on a creation of a mood rather than narration is important in the short story genre which is unique and not found in other forms.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

The appeal of short stories is universal. Stories are a fabulous tool for communicating different cultures, different opinions, different ways of lifestyle, transporting from one place to another place, from one generation to another generation, from one country to another country irrespective of barriers and borders. Great stories connect with us, we try to introspect ourselves without being egoistic.

THE SHORT STORY IS THE MOST SUITABLE TOOL

Stories are as old as mankind itself. People read short stories extensively for a variety of benefits in their real life. Fairy tales, fables, short stories, and folk tales have always been to develop an understanding of centuries-old wisdom hidden in books, for entertaining and instructing the people because of their distinctive style and narrative techniques. It is the right time to recollect Edgar Allan Poe's definition of the short story, he defines it "as a narrative that can be read as at one sitting of one-half hour or two hours, and is limited to a certain unique or single effect, to which every detail is subordinate" (Abrahams 1970).

In general short story has a single plot with little description of the setting and aims at giving a single effect. Following the story is easy for any foreign language learner. The moment students start reading the story, they show curiosity to continue up to the end of the story with a zeal to know what happens next. They develop to show affinity with some characters and share their feelings with their friends. A short story initiates an inner monologue in students. Students try to analyze stories within themselves and predict the outcome of the story in different ways according to their thinking. In this way, a short story ignites the mind of the student and provokes them to read stories, collect various stories and preserve them in their library.

SELECT A STORY TEXT

The use of short-story in English teaching should be aimed to encourage the students to use what they have learned. With this technique, the learning process will be student-centered. Undoubtedly teacher plays a pivotal role. The teacher must select a suitable story, which serves the purpose and should help the students understand the story with various activities.

While using short stories to teach English, story selection indeed plays a prominent role for the teacher. Since the lengths of short stories vary, choose a story short enough to handle within the class duration. The shortness of the text is an important factor for the students because they will see that students can follow, understand and express in English whether it is correct or incorrect and it gives the feeling of achievement and boosts the confidence of students. Apart from the length of the story, there are three other basic criteria for choosing the text; (1) the needs and abilities of the students; (2) the linguistic and stylistic level of the text; (3) the amount of background information required for a true appreciation of the material according to Hill (1994, 15)

The importance of considering these criteria could be perceived by realizing that vocabulary and sentence structure of the short story are to be studied as per the level of the student, otherwise, the effort doesn't fetch results at the maximum level. The stories with more foreign words, slang and too many difficult allusions especially referring to a particular locality should be ignored if the story is meant for students below the intermediate level. It becomes difficult for a student to understand long sentences and he gets bored continuing the story. Therefore before providing a short story text, the teacher should provide the readability of the text.

To meet the readability criterion, using graded or simplified stories is possibly the most practical way. According to Ur (1996, 150), "the use of authentic text with less proficient learners is often frustrating and counterproductive". Therefore the use of abridged text with less proficient readers is highly suggested for the sake of suiting the texts with the level of the students.

Relating to the above criteria Spack (1985) suggests the aspect of interest to be considered. According to Spack story should create some interest in the reader to go forward and read the story up to the end stopping in middle instead, students read and enjoy a text if the subject matter of the text is relevant to their real-life experience and interests.

LSRW AND SHORT STORY

Short stories provide space for teachers to teach four skills of language at the maximum level. Murdoch (2002,9) indicates that "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency", according to him, short stories contribute to the maximum level of benefit for a student. The short story can be learned through discussion, writing, narrating, and enacting dialogues.

A. READING

Reading is the initial practice for a student before going to learn the remaining skills of the language. It helps the student to comprehend at least an outline of each sentence. According to the survey made by Lao and Kristen's (2000), the reading achievement between a group of students that read literary texts and a second that read non-literary texts at a university in Hong Kong revealed that the group who read literary texts mastered vocabulary and reading.

VERB ADVERB PARTICIPLE NOUN ADJECTIVE

Bury __ burying bury __
Engulf __ engulfing engulfment __
Rattle __ rattling rattle __
Swing __ swinging __
Grabbed __ grabbing __

The teacher can give as many words as possible if he feels it necessary. In general, stories are selected according to grades. Through this activity, students can improve their vocabulary as per the situation in the story and students will try to refer to the dictionary for different shades of meaning.

2. Write the letter of the definition/synonym in column B that most closely matches each word/phrase in column A.

A	B
a. retreat	1. Quickly
b. self-possessed	2. Confusion
c. collide	3. Pulling back
d. delusion	4. Confident
e. briskly	5. Dashing

In this activity, the words/phrases in column A words are provided from the story students are reading. The definitions and /or synonyms provided in column B must match the meaning of the words/phrases in the same context.

3. Choose the word/phrase from column A in the previous activity that best fits each of the following sentences. You may need to change the verb according to the sentence tense form.

- Early in the morning I take _____ walk.
- An auto - _____ with a bus.
- By seeing the question paper I was under _____.
- Geeta is a self _____ woman.
- One should feel _____.

In activity 3 students repeat the word they have already come from activity 2, it is easy for them to remember if they practice the same word several times. Since the story does not list out glossary at end of the story teachers should ask the students to do that work. The teacher can motivate the students to refer to either dictionary or thesaurus to know the vocabulary.

These activities are not only useful to high school students but also helped to high intermediate and advanced students. Reading literary texts allows them to come up with their thoughts and helps them speak the language of their imagination. Their creative levels are better when they discuss the story with their friends. Short story reading allows students to think and rethink the plot, characters, and technique. As per the views of Oster (1989: 85), this process leads to critical thinking. He confirms, "Focusing on point of view in literature enhances student's insight and nurtures critical thinking by exploring various ways a situation can be seen". This could happen only if students read the text, and interact with their peer group on the text. By interacting with the text, they interpret what they read. With this basic activity, they can speak confidently and creatively. By using the short story 'The open Window' (see the appendix) three activities can be conducted to help students to acquire more vocabulary. These activities are related to form, meaning, and use respectively.

B. WRITING

The short story can be used as a motivating and strong source for writing in ESL/EFL, both as a subject matter and ready model for a student. Short takes the shape of a model when students 'writing comes closer to the original work or resembles the original work as far as its content and theme and organization and style of writing. If exhibits his creativity in thinking about a new subject or style we can use the story text as stimulation. Following this, Oster (1989: 85) confirms that students' creativity comes through literature reading only.

Teachers can innovate a variety of writing techniques and activities to develop students' writing skills. They can ask students to develop their writing skills. Teachers can pursue students to go for different types of writing activities like writing dialogues or more complex writing activities if students reach the level of language proficiency. For example, the teacher brings the story of 'The Open Window'; he can assign the following writing activities.

- Why was Mr. Nuttel focused to go on formal visits to a succession of total strangers?
- Who gave Mr. Nuttel a letter of introduction to Mrs. Sappleton?
- What was Mr. Sappleton's tragedy, according to Vera?
- How, according to Vera, did Mrs. Sappleton's husband and brothers die?
- Why did Mrs. Sappleton keep the window open?
- What did Nuttel talk to Mrs. Sappleton about?
- How did Nuttel know that Mrs. Sappleton was not paying him full attention?
- Why did Mrs. Sappleton suddenly brighten up?
- How did Vera react when Mrs. Sappleton's husband and brothers were approaching the house?
- What made Nuttel run off?

This activity suits all levels of students including advanced learners.

C. SPEAKING AND LISTENING

The short story can also be used as a power source and motivating technique for teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, re-enactment, and discussion are some

effective learning activities that center on a short story in language teaching classes for students who learning English as a second language. Centers can make use of these two skills effectively. Loud reading practice can benefit students to enhance their speaking and listening skills, it develops the correct pronunciation also.

The following are some activities teachers can assign to develop students speaking skills by using short stories.

1. Students read the story aloud one after another consecutively. The first student starts reading some lines again second takes the next turn, in the same way, the remaining students follow up on the reading. With this activity, students will enhance their skill of pronunciation and fluency interestingly. This type of activity is suitable for lower classes.

2. The same activity will be covered in a different way for intermediate students with small changes. Here this activity will allow practicing and learning different relevant connectors or other discourse markers in a meaningful context.

3. How did Vera make sure that Nuttel did not know anything about them?

4. What are the realistic touches Vera added to make her story natural?

5. What did Nuttel see when he followed Vera's staring at the window?

Listening skills can be developed by using a short story; teachers can do the following activity.

1. Read out the story loudly so students have the opportunity to listen to a native speaker of English.

2. Play the story through audio if the record is available.

The activity can be carried out for fun or for students to find answers to questions given and explained to them before the listening activity starts. For students to understand the story when they listen to it for the first time, the questions should be based story not on language.

1. What was the delusion Nuttel suffered from?

2. How did Vera explain his strange behavior?

3. Is Vera a clever girl?

4. Who is Mrs. Sappleton?

CONCLUSION

Though there are different methods and techniques to teach and learn the language, all short story plays a vital role in developing the vocabulary of the students at the classroom level. Students acquire vocabulary through the story is an easy method. Language in a short story is lucid; students can comprehend and predict the meaning without any difficulty. It is a known fact that the themes in short stories are lively, interesting, and very near to real-life situations. Short stories cover a wide range of areas like language, arts, social studies day to events of life, technology, plants, and animals. Short stories promote individual personality in students and higher order of thinking which is important for any student to be a good citizen. There is a lot of scope for language acquisition. So, the incorporation of short stories as part of the literature in the school curriculum is thought-provoking and has to be focused on. So ESL teachers should select authentic material graded wise according to the standards of the students. If this effort is successful language learning becomes student-centered.

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