

## Language Acquisition Through Short Stories for Second Language Learners

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### Abstract

The objective of teaching a language is to make the learners learn the language and use it infallibly. This is done best when the learners are involved actively in the learning process. Involvement comes only if sufficient interest is aroused and sustained in the classroom. Considered as one of the most resilient forms of edutainment, a short story always augments intellectual stimulation and definitely has a great impact on human mind. It has linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social and cultural relevance as well. Catering to the needs of the second language learners, the syllabus should be revised and the curriculum should include short stories which will evince keen interest among the second language learners. This paper adopts a stylistic approach and seeks to focus on the possibility of using short stories as a pedagogical tool to develop language skills thereby fortifying professional advancement and career growth.

**Key words:** Short stories; Critical thinking skills; Multiple intelligences

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### INTRODUCTION

Majority of English language teachers think that literature

and language are poles apart. But the truth is that literature teaches us how to use language. The prime motive of a language teacher is not to teach about the language, but to foster the learners' abilities so that he is capable of using the language for a variety of communicative purposes. This is done best when the learners are involved actively in the learning process. Involvement comes only if sufficient interest is aroused and sustained in the classroom. The most fascinating and pleasurable of the literary genres is the short story. Considered as one of the most resilient forms of edutainment a short story always augments intellectual stimulation and definitely has a great impact on human psychology/mind. In addition to it has linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social and cultural relevance as well. Catering to the needs of the second language learners, the syllabus should be revised and the curriculum should include short stories which will evince keen interest among the second language learners.

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess how literature especially short stories can be used effectively in an ESL class and explore its effect on student's communication skills. W. Somerset Maugham's short story "The Luncheon" is taken for analysis.

### 2. WHY LITERATURE?

Literature is a reflection of life. By reading great literary works one can understand life, its intricacies and intrigues. Examination and exercises which encourages mere memory work hamper critical thinking thereby defeating one of the main purposes of education. One has to be very clear that the function of education is, not to train a student for a job but to produce better human beings. Reading literature leads one to personal illumination. It is through reading great literary and poetic works, that one

understands life. They help a person take a closer look at the different facets of life. Kay (1982) argues that

Literature does indeed have a place in ESL curriculum. For many students, literature can provide a key to motivate them to read in English. For all students, literature is an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use and for introducing cultural assumptions (p.536).

There are four main reasons for a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. They are valuable authentic material. They offer cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal development. (Collie & Slater, 1990, p.3).

### 3. WHY SHORT STORIES?

Short stories are interesting and the learners are bound emotionally to the text and the amount of distraction is minimal. Short stories provide ample opportunities for focused attention and the functions of lexical congruities and language structure can be comprehended effectively in the use of interactive tasks. A student can learn and use words effectively in different contexts through literary texts. Students also become more prolific and exploratory (critical evaluation) when they begin to identify the copiousness of the language they are trying to learn so as to make use of some of them with efficacy. This really improves their communicative competence.

### 4. CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

At present students are expected to have creative and critical thinking skills. Many students lack these skills. It is the role of the English language teacher to develop the three C's in the students: creativity, critical thinking and communication skills.

Welker (1999) affirms

Students often lack the critical thinking skills necessary to pass judgment on what they read. Critical Reading Instruction that Improves Comprehension Skills (CRITICS) helps students to develop into thinkers, not just readers (p.188).

Rick Rylance, a Professor of English at the University of Exeter, points out that teaching literature includes three central activities. According to him, it is a three-legged stool and all three legs are indispensable to bear any weight. Rick comments that the first facet is the cultural aspect, in which the literary text is used to enable discussion of social issues and values of life. Second, there is the functional aspect enhances modes of communication and finally the creative aspect that facilitates intellectual and aesthetic creativity and originality.

For example, a short story can be given to students for analysis. Students are stimulated to analyze a text, unravel the possible meanings of a literary work, form ideas and make inferences; all these activities hone their critical faculty.

### 5. ANALYSIS OF A SHORT STORY

The short story "The Luncheon" by W. Somerset Maugham is taken for pragmatic contextualization of linguistic expression. The story is about the narrator, a writer, who recounts the incident of having lunch with a woman, years ago. He starts remembering the unforgettable evening. He was young, living in Paris, and could barely make both ends meet. She had read one of his books and wrote to congratulate him on his work. He invited her for lunch and to his horror she chose an expensive restaurant. He had only eighty francs to last him the rest of the month. She ordered expensive dishes one after another. The woman said repeatedly that she preferred simple and light meal, "I never eat anything for luncheon." "I never eat more than one thing." "I never drink anything for luncheon." but turned out to have a very good appetite, especially for most expensive things. She comfortably consumes caviar, salmon, white wine, asparagus, ice-cream coffee, and a peach and talked in an exalted mood about art, literature and music. The narrator, on the other hand, ate only a "miserable little chop". When the bill came he paid and was left with no money at all. However, in the end, the narrator feels that he has finally had his revenge when he sees that the woman now weighs twenty-one stone (approximately 300 pounds).

The reading and interpreting of this short story will help the learners to integrate language skills such as listening and reading as receptive skills and speaking and writing as productive skills. To test the listening skill of the students the teacher can ask open questions and give a cloze test. Open questions encourage the speaker. And they elicit a more detailed response than closed questions. "What" and "Why" are usually helpful starter to open questions. For example, Why did the author say no to the woman? What do you understand about the character of the lady? Why does the phrase

"I never eat more than one thing" often repeated?

Students can be asked to script the conversation between the narrator and the lady wherein a student's ability to use the direct speech can be tested. To enhance the lexical congruity the students can be asked to identify the words and phrases related to food and explain the contextual meaning of it. Text like this enhances the reading aptitude. Reading encourages individual interpretation and independent thinking. Ask the students to read the text silently and make five points on the personality of the author and the lady. Make them distinguish between fact and opinion. This helps them in developing critical thinking skills. A general discussion or a group discussion can be conducted on the topic "A friendly intention of taking an acquaintance out to lunch can result in important revelations about oneself". By doing this a student tries to analyze the topic of discussion and brings forward his thoughts on the matter. He makes an attempt to communicate effectively. As groups students

can be asked to make a presentation demonstrating textual analysis. A role play also serves good.

Writing effectively, is a skill that also should be learned. So you can ask the students to write about their experience (either humorous or grieving) of having food outside in a restaurant with their friends. It develops their capacity of expressing their personal opinion. Short stories, extracts from novels and one act plays provide a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. Most importantly it is a source of rich vocabulary which enables the students to make use of relevant vocabulary for social communication and to facilitate effective communication.

## 6. ROLE OF A TEACHER

The teacher should act as a facilitator in such a classroom ambience actively participating with the learning community rather than acting as an expert passing on knowledge. No longer the traditional teacher with chalk and board but one performing multi tasking role as curriculum developers and innovators which includes loads of language activities keeping in mind the constraints of time, space and resources of the classroom. Gardner (1983) brought out the “Multiple Intelligences Model” in contrast to the traditional model which tests only the IQ. Multiple Intelligences includes linguistic, logical, spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. Teachers play a vital role in not only improving the second language abilities of their students but also promoting multiple intelligences by imposing greater challenges.

## CONCLUSION

Variety is the spice of life. By adding creative and communicative activities through short stories a language classroom can become an interesting, lively, interactive and effective class to look forward to. Hence, this approach helps students develop knowledge of ideas and language through different themes and topics. It is left to the discretion of the teacher to decide what kind of literature is appropriate. The teacher therefore becomes a kind of leader. It is imperative that a teacher should unearth innovative ways to stimulate the interest of the students to learn a particular language by introducing topics and activities in the class. The learners should infer meaning through different language clues. By constantly listening, reading, speaking and writing about the literary works they can master a language. This kind of learning will definitely help the students to relate what they learn in their classroom to the issues and challenges in the out-of-class world.

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