

The Use of Short Story in TEFL: An Integrated and Communicative Sample Study: “The Third Wish”, By Joan Aiken

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Abstract: Short story teaching is really a dynamic and integrated task in communicative language teaching. Simple class-lecture may not be fruitful if it is not penetrated into the mind of the students. The teacher has to remember not only how effective the way teaching is, but also how interesting the classroom teaching could be. Traditional approaches in which the teacher, like the protagonist in a “monologue” is the only speaker and the students, being silent listeners, have got nothing to do other than listen to what the teacher says, no matter whether they enjoy it or not. Mere teacher-centered approaches of teaching the short story neither can arouse students’ interest in the content, nor do they directly involve the students in the learning process beyond the surface meaning of the short story. Thus, a careful selection of in-class activities appropriate to students’ language requirements and level should be incorporated into the short story teaching, which would help students consolidate their language knowledge and get involved into a short story through deeper analysis by offering many wide-ranging activities. The present paper, in the light of the views above, intends to show how integrated and communicative approach enables a teacher in the classroom to teach more effectively by directly involving students in the classroom activities. To illustrate this, Joan Aiken’s widely-known short story “The Third Wish” is selected as it allows for a variety of activities.

Keywords: Integrated, learner involvement, communicative approach, literary interpretation

1. Introduction

1.1. *The Role of Short Stories in EFL*

If we are asked what is meant by a short story we need only say it is very short. It can be anything that the author decides it will be. The shortest of short stories may be no more than a page or two in length; the longest may run to over a hundred pages. Obviously, there comes a point at which it is possible to draw a line between the long short story and the short novel.

Maley (1989: 11) says that a short story is a simple narration; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to attend closely therefore set a limit to it: it must explode and finish before fatigue sets in. Although the short story did not reach the height of its popularity until the beginning of the present century it is, as McKay suggests, one of the oldest types of literature (1982: 529).

“Short stories are often an ideal way of introducing students to literature in the foreign language classroom”, say Collie & Slater (1990: 196). For a teacher, they offer various immediate and effective advantages. First of all, their practical length means they can usually be read entirely within one or two class lessons. As Collie and Slater say “[...] students get that feeling of achievement [at having come to the end of a whole work, much sooner]” (1990: 196).

When we pick up a book of short stories we understand that we face a structure we must enter quickly and exit soon. Nevertheless, a story may remain with us just as powerfully as a novel. The short story is short

enough to possess completely. Moody agrees with Collie and Slater and says that short stories have practical advantage of being more manageable: that is, a story can often be read to a class at a single sitting, or studied as a single assignment, whether in or out of class (1990: 14). The teacher has the advantage that the whole story can be experienced simultaneously by the whole of his class, which often makes discussion easier. The short story also invites comparison and imitation, and is easily connected with the kinds of written assignments that students themselves can be expected to do.

Short stories also offer a greater variety than longer texts. A teacher can teach very different short stories so that there is a greater chance of finding something to appeal to individual tastes and interests. Yorke mentions that she often uses short stories to develop students' awareness of the way in which language is used in literature and, at the same time, to improve their ability to discuss human and social problems, and summarize in English, as well as to provide opportunities for vocabulary expansion and meeting grammar in use (1986: 313). She explains why she selects short stories by saying that they are short enough to be tackled as a complete text, and which display a variety of narrative techniques, themes, and styles (1986: 314).

Short stories are also compressed, and this makes them such a delight: when a short story writer is successful, he or she presents an experience with a masterly economy of language and imagery. This compression can make it difficult for foreign readers to appreciate the quality of the work. For this reason, care and preparation are needed for a successful presentation of short stories (Yorke, 1986: 315). The short story has special qualities which can help us to answer the question which asks about the difference that literature makes. The answer to this question lies in the fact that the short story is immediately interesting. It is "realistic", and usually its setting is the modern world which a student knows. Teachers have an advantage of teaching short story because it has no strict conventions and it is short enough to be talked about in terms of its organic, natural and formal principles. Its special economy also assures that every nuance and detail has been calculated to establish that central pattern of meaning which will expand the limited subject in our imaginations.

Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1983: 26) mention that stories can provide a highly motivating, engaging and realistic source of genuine language interaction in the classroom. They underline that they are 'living language' in which the teacher becomes the source of language, and the listeners are actively involved in understanding. In their book, *Once Upon a Time*, Morgan and Rinvoluceri argue from experience that almost everyone can tell stories convincingly, especially given an outline to work.

2. Activities

As regards the need of teaching English, we can state "the integration of language and literature in English is a must (Carter, 1986: 12). In the design of the integrated method, the teacher must be careful to choose the items which both spark interest and reveal the literary aspects of the text. After the selection, both students and teacher progress in the journey to get involved in the text in variable ways.

Joan Aiken's "The Third Wish" contains the elements of fairy tale which are familiar with the traditional ones. It has mysterious and fantastic events, magic, wishes and animals with unusual abilities. As a modern fairy tale, it also includes details about contemporary life that reflect the modern world. "The Third Wish" is a fantasy set in the imaginary forest of Savernake. Mr. Peters' life is miraculously altered when he rescues a swan entangled in thorns. The swan who is really "the King of the Forest" grants him three wishes. The swan scornfully notes that humans generally use the last wish to undo the disastrous work of the first two. Lonely,

Mr. Peters wishes for and is granted a beautiful wife. Although Leita is a good wife, Mr. Peters is troubled because she does not seem happy.

Soon he discovers that she is actually a swan who has been transformed into a human and grieves because she misses her sister and the life they led. When Mr. Peters offers to use his second wish to turn her back into a swan, she refuses. She becomes thin and pale, and therefore, he soon makes the second wish. She joins her sister, and the two swans become his faithful companions. Then one day they are heard singing mournfully, for Mr. Peters has died. He is found holding a dried leaf and a feather in his hands—his third wish was never made.

2.1. First Encounters

2.1.1. Activity 1: Title and visual prompts

The title indicates the subject and the theme of the text. The teacher can begin with closed questions and then move on to more open ones that demand inference:

- a) Is the title a phrase or a clause?
- b) What is the common point in the three visuals?
- c) What does “make a wish” mean?
- d) Is the story going to describe some incident that take place as a result of wish?
- e) What is the importance of “penny-throwing” into the pool? What is the symbol of “shooting in the sky”?

In this way, students can be encouraged to discuss in groups or pairs so that they can arrive at some tentative conclusions. Such questions bring students one step closer to the story and encourage them to be more specific about the theme. Warmers create open discussion and help elicit predictions of what the text is going to be about. Thus, they activate personal involvement with the topic and provide livelier discussions on a more concentrated level about the themes of the story.

2.1.2 Activity 2: Key Words and Phrases

One of the main difficulties learners complain about when using a story is to be able to understand unknown vocabulary. In the lesson plan for “The Third Wish”, students are asked to look up the meanings of certain words in the story:

The words included should be crucial for understanding of the gist of the story.

The words should be hard for students to guess from the context.

The words would be useful for students in writing exam essays, and would be those that students should be able to use actively.

The story provides clues for prediction of its theme and content from the vocabulary used. It is helpful to get into the structure, selection and collocation of lexical items in the story. The teacher presents a list of lexical items and can ask students to create a mental picture of the fictional world of the story from the implications:

- a) What impression of the swan do you get from the following words or phrases?
“a faint cry”, “thorn bushes”, “something white”, “great dignity”, “presumptuous” (Aiken 1989: 3-9).
- b) What idea of the plot progress do you gather from the following words or phrases?
“fabulous reward”, “to end up worse off”, “undoing the wish”, “in case of emergency”, “darkening woods” (Aiken, 1989: 3-9). Predicting “on the basis of the key words is important in sensitizing students as they can create an awareness of the content of the story” (Dutta, 2001: 529).

2.1.3 Activity 3: Star Diagrams

As a warm-up activity prior to reading, the teacher can ask students to extract important words from the first page of the story (Collie & Slater, 1990: 28). In groups students can find the words about forest and natural beauty to indicate the connection of the story with “darkening” forest, such as: “dusk”, “forest of Savernake”, “mossy bank”, “beech trees”, “thorn bushes”, “gleam of water”, and “verge of the canal” (Aiken, 1989: 3-9).

2.1.4 Activity 4: Sentence whispers

It is good for large classes. The class is put into four lines of students. Each line is given a different sentence, and the first student whispers the sentence to the one behind. Then the student at the end of the line retells the sentence. Differences between the versions are discussed. The aim is to get them into the story, quickly and amusingly. The teacher can start by whispering the following sentence to the ear of the first student in each line:

“He left the car and climbed the mossy bank beside the road” (Aiken, 1989: 3).

“The bird struggled all the more frantically as he approached” (Aiken, 1989: 3).

“He had fierce glittering eyes and looked by no means friendly” (Aiken, 1989: 4).

“I have yet to hear of the human being who made and good use of his 3 wishes” (Aiken, 1989: 4).

2.1.5 Activity 5: Sealing the time capsule

Each student writes the predictions about likely events that will occur as the story goes on. The cards are put into a box and opened when the story is finished. It is a follow-up activity.

2.1.6 Activity 6: Writing Chapter 0

The students are asked to write the paragraphs that come before the first section of the work. This activity is beneficial as it leads students to write a paragraph by using their imagination, which is likely to be interesting for those who aspire to be a story writer. The clues of information are given in the reading of the first paragraphs of the text.

2.2. Maintaining Momentum

In this section of activities, a mixture of class and home readings can be used. This will introduce a variety into the classroom and personalize the students’ response (Collie and Slater, 1990: 36). ‘While-reading activities’ are designed with a view to making the story more accessible to the students by developing an interaction between the story and its readers. The aims could be to deepen understanding, to broaden and enrich writing skills, to make inferences and deduce meanings from the context and to enrich the vocabulary and insight in fundamental human issues.

2.2.1 Activity 7: “Do it yourself” questionnaires

The class is set the first three paragraphs of the story to read with the task of thinking up and writing questions on it. The idea is to maintain personal involvement and deeper analysis. In the next lesson, students are paired and ask each other their questions; or questions are drawn in a lottery. The questions to be prepared by students could be: a) Why does Mr. Peters stop by the canal? b) How does the swan react first when it is extracted from the bush? c) How does the old man speak to Mr. Peters? d) What is the strange and unique

about the noise that the swan makes? e) Who did Mr. Peters rescue? f) Why does Mr. Peters prick his tongue? What does this reveal about his character? g) Why do you suppose Leita is unhappy? Where do you think she disappears to every now and then? h) How does Mr. Peters use his second wish? What can you infer about him from this?

2.2.2 Activity 8: True or false

It is a reading activity. The aim is to foster deeper insight into the story.

- a) Mr. Peters rescues the bird to present it to his children. (T/F)
- b) The swan is thrown into the bushes by someone else. (T/F)
- c) Mr. Peters was jogging as usual when he heard a faint cry. (T/F)
- d) Mr. Peters uses his second wish to change Leita back into a swan. (T/F)
- e) Mr. Peters learned to be content with his life. (T/F)
- f) Leita is sacrificial. (T/F)

2.2.3 Activity 9: Summary with gaps

This activity can be useful in group works. It also facilitates home reading. Main points in chapter summary are provided, and some words and sentences are omitted. The gaps are often the key words or expressions. Mr. Peters is thru the forest one day and sees a swan, whom he helps from a thorn. The swan the king of the forest and Mr. Peters three in the form of leaves. Mr. Peters first wishes for a ; her name is They have a good marriage and love each other, but Leita becomes and quiet. Mr. Peters finds her by a lake with another that evening.

2.2.4 Activity 10: "Please interrupt me ..."

The teacher or a student chosen from the lottery tells the story with incorrect information in it. Students interrupt him. He stops and apologizes and corrects that part of his sentence. For example:

"Mr. Peters continued his way even after he heard the mourning from the thorns. (Students stop him.)

"Sorry, I meant, he had to stop to extricate the swan from the lake".(Students stop him).

"I actually meant, he saved the swan from the thorns ..."

Other expressions that the narrator could use:

- Sorry, did I say
- Actually, I meant
- Well, not really, I wanted to say

2.2.5 Activity 11: Chessboard

It is a means of getting students to consider the implications of given elements in the text and separate them as "good or bad" elements as they write them on black and white squares on the chessboard-shaped grid (Collie and Slater, 1990: 49).

- a) Mr. Peters is helpful.
- b) The swan is hateful against him.
- c) The bird hissed at and pecked him.
- d) Mr. Peters is a calculating man.

2.2.6 Activity 11: Choosing a moral

It is a traditional way of drawing out the ideas from the text. It is better than simply asking “What do you think is the moral to this story?” A worksheet to be done at home while they read the given section of the text ensures better discussion in class.

The moral of the story could be:

- a) Don't give the ordinary man power; he can't use it sensibly.
- b) Leave miracles to God
- c) Be happy with what in your hand.
- d) You must make others happy for your own happiness.
- e) Your own: “.....”

2.3. Exploiting Highlights

As Collie and Slater state, this is the second phase of activities that focus the attention of further involvement of students in an integrated manner (1990: 57). These activities further encourage students to explore and express their own response to the literary work and integrate several language skills and reflect the idea to use literature as a stimulus to oral work in groups. In this way, they can employ their all round ability in an enjoyable discourse.

2.3.1. Activity 12: Thought Bubbles

Learners express their thoughts with the help of thought bubbles. They make their assumptions explicit; so, they get inner even further understanding of the imaginary world itself and understand the dramatic codes by what the author creates the complex world of imagination. The rationale is to ask students to write their inner thoughts.

Mr. Peters: “I should turn her into swan again” (Aiken, 1989: 9).

Leita: “I long for my old days, but he is a good husband and I should do my best to make him happy”.
(Sacrificial swan)

2.3.2. Activity 13: Cries for Help

Students are asked to write the note of a short letter that Leita dashes off as a plea for help. In a state of anguish, communication is superb; no one is worried unduly about the odd speaking or syntax mistakes as long as it doesn't impede the comprehension of the message. The context can be liberating for Leita whom students compose a message and put it into a bottle and throw it into the river.

Dear Reia,

It has been 3 months since I got parted with you and the forest I love and miss so much. You can't guess how difficult it is to be a human being still with the heart of a swan. I miss very much the good old days we floated together in the lake and far distant places we flew. Mr. Peters, my husband, is a very affectionate man and cares for me very much; nevertheless, I desire to turn back into a swan. Please come and visit me more often, which is the only consolidation for me.

2.3.3. Activity 14: An “Agony Aunt”

Examples of group writing the activity based upon the idea of seeking advice of an agony aunt column in a

newspaper. One of the students is asked to take the role of the agony aunt and other students, in the role of Leita, Mr. Peters and Reia direct their questions in a forum. Questions and the answer may vary. The aim is to invoke us into the flow of the plot and characterization. The questions for the discussion could be as follows:

- a) My dear Agony Aunt, I am a swan in the body of a woman; I can't forget my past life. What do you suggest for me? (Code: weeping swan)
- b) Dear Agony Aunt, my husband loves me very much but I cannot return his feelings, as I am lonely and miss my swan family very much. What do you suggest?
- c) Dear Agony Aunt, I love my wife and do my best to make her happy. However, she is still very quiet; I am lonely even with her presence. How can I change her? Shall I make another wish? (Code: "Loneliness is my destiny!")

2.3.4. Activity 15: Epitaph

It is a comment on a deceased character. This is an excellent pretext for brief appreciation of a character (Collie and Slater, 1990: 63). After the death of Mr. Peters, swans can write words on a gravestone reflecting their feelings:

"Here lies Mr. Peters, a husband, savior, and a true friend. A lonely heart in quest of a wife. Selfless, and sacrificial man who put others' happiness before his own. He will be remembered as a kind and genial friend ever ready to relieve the tension. He died after a life of loneliness for 40 years, remarkable for its generous and hardworking service".

2.3.5 Activity 16: "Screwed up paper"

It is a comprehension activity and should be done after students have acquired some information from the reading. Teacher should divide the class into four groups. He chooses and writes parts of the story and crumples the pages into balls so that students may just make out some words and sentences without opening the balls up. In this way, learners make a list of words in groups and also try to brainstorm ideas about what the next part may be about and which part of the story. Using the vocabulary they have figured out, they also try to build up some sentences in a paragraph.

2.3.6. Activity 17: Friendly Persuasion

In this activity, pairs of students take on prescribed roles (Collie and Slater, 1990: 75). One tries to motivate the other of the merits or drawbacks of a course of action. In the class, one learner is given the role of Leita. Her task is to persuade the other player of the necessity of staying as wife, whereas the other justifies the thoughts about accepting Mr. Peters' offer to return Leita to the forest as swan.

Helpful expressions for persuaders and those rejecting persuasion could be as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| -She's /He's ever so | That's all very well, but |
| - He is the most | He isn't really what I'm after |
| - Go on, give him a chance to | He sounds a bit |
| - She will not disappoint you | He isn't quite what I have in mind ... |

2.4. Endings

The activities here have the aim that students should keep their sense of literary interest and work alive and that they should get involved in sharing views and reviews (Collie and Slater, 1990: 79).

2.4.1. Activity 18: *Unsealing the time capsule*

When predictions about the development of the plot or character have been put into a sealed “time capsule” at the beginning, “now is the time to open it (Collie and Slater, 1990: 82). The teacher focuses questions on the cause – effect connection, and on the justification of the previous predictions. The idea is to conduct follow-up activity and illicit students’ responses about character analysis.

2.4.2. Activity 19: *“Point of no return”*

Class is divided into groups. Students are expected to decide upon the “point of no return” in the progress of the story. The idea is to deepen insight and understanding. In this way, the story has a strong pull on the reader into the plot of the story. Answers may vary; but the crucial point is to urge learners to prove their thoughts. A pyramiding technique can be used; learners should decide upon their point in pairs, then in groups, and so on. This generates lively discussions and provides a complete revision of the story. In the story, point of returns could lead to;

- a) When Mr. Peters decides to make the 2nd wish
- b) It is when Leita is discovered crying for her beloveds and old days in the forest.
- c) It is when the old man warns Mr. Peters about the logical use of the wishes.

2.4.3. Activity 20: *“What if ...”*

The teacher should stimulate a variety in the classroom. Thus, a large number of classroom homework activities must be included in the syllabus. The balance of activities and exercises should be maintained. Thus, “what if ...” is a useful language work? The topic requires past conditionals. Questions could be:

- a) What is Mr. Peters had not made the 2nd wish?
- b) What alternative choices could Mr. Peters could have made to reduce Leita’s sorrow?
- c) What effects upon the townspeople could have been attained by Mr. Peters, if he had made the 3rd wish?

In addition, through the uses of implied contrasts story’s special configuration may be achieved.

2.4.4. Activity 21: *Last page plus one*

Writing activities may be free or controlled. In the former students enjoy the freedom of expressing what they have made out of the story. It requires learner’s involvement, analysis and insight into the story as well as structural and lexical competence. It is a valuable practice as it allows for the progression of the story in which student applies imagination and creativity.

3. Conclusion

After the completion of the sets of activities, students are expected to gain a fuller understanding of the story and to prepare for interpretation and evaluation. They have practiced how to make predictions and check them against the actual story. With the awakened language sensitivity and improved literary insight, they have gained a competence to look at a literary text as a work of creative self-expression with deeper intent.

The key word is “creativity”. Teachers cannot afford not to be creative. By using the creativity in classroom, teachers should develop students through their strengths; they should not only stimulate students’ development, but also make them happy. By creativity in the classroom students also grow their confidence in involvement because they see their progress, and they get told they do well, too.

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