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 HELP & FAQs

Classroom Fictions: Teachers and Students Writing

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Considerable support exists for teachers writing in the classroom and modeling, brainstorming and composing to assist their students in learning how more skilled writers approach writing tasks. Stories written by teachers and students can be used to teach English syntax, cross-cultural differences and literary appreciation. A story grammar of problem-resolution, as well as graphic organizers and listening-summarizing techniques, can assist students learning how to write fiction.

Two sample lessons are outlined. The first lesson explains how to use a memoir to teach

traditional literary terms such as theme, irony and conflict, in addition to points of grammar such as modal auxiliaries, the present perfect and contractions. In the second lesson, suggestions are made for contextualizing a story for students through the use of contemporary issues and timing the delivery of stories with the anniversaries of significant historical events. Finally, techniques are described for teaching narrative structure through listening and discussion activities.

教師たちにとって、ブレインストーミングや作文を行うことに関してどのように熟練した書き手がライティングタスクに取り組むかを学ぶための多くのサポートが存在する。教師や生徒によって書かれたストーリーは、統語規則や異文化の違い、文学鑑賞を教える際に使用することが可能である。”problem-resolution,” “graphic organizers,” “listening-summarizing”などの“story grammar”はフィクションを書くやりかたを学習者が学ぶ手助けをすることができる。

この稿では2つのサンプルレッスンをとりあげる。1つ目のレッスンでは自叙伝を使ってテーマ、皮肉、矛盾などの伝統的な文学的項目や助動詞、現在完了、短縮系などの文法項目を学ぶ方法を説明する。そして2つ目のレッスンでは“topical dates”や“contemporary issues”を使用した学習者たちにその話を”文脈化”するための提案を行う。さらにリスニングやディスカッションを通した“narrative structure”を教える技術に関してもとりあげる。

Introduction

Considerable support exists for teachers writing in the classroom. In a summary of research on academic writing, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) advise teachers to model brainstorming and composing to help their students learn how more skilled writers approach writing tasks. There is also a substantial body of anecdotal testimony by professional writers suggesting that one learns how to write by the act of writing (Gardner, 1985; Hodgins, 1993). Writer-educators such as Murray (1987) in *Write to Learn* claim that the practice of writing stories provides both teachers and students with insights into the creative process that are unavailable to most readers. Collie and Slater (1987) explain how fiction can be used to teach English syntax, cross-cultural differences and the appreciation of literature. The activities and tasks described in this paper show how teachers can use story grammar and prewriting activities to help students at the intermediate level of language ability or higher generate and develop their stories.

Story grammars consist of a problem and its resolution or some combination of basic literary terms, such as setting, character, conflict, plot and theme (see Barton, 1999 for definitions of terms). They have been suggested as an aid in reading comprehension, especially for elementary students who are poor readers, have learning disabilities, or who speak English as a second language (Hartman, 1986; Amer, 1992; Dimino, Taylor, & Gersten, 1995). Stahl-Gemake and Guastella (1984) describe how story grammar was used to analyze a folktale with second language students in the sixth grade. That analysis and the use of focus questions—that students in peer groups ask one another about the main characters, the setting, the problem, and the characters' actions in a story—enabled the students to revise their stories effectively.

In addition, there are a variety of possible prewriting activities that can be used to help students write stories. These include guided reading and the contextualizing and summarizing of existing stories. Ideally, the teacher's role in using them is in providing a supportive environment for students' creative self-expression. The premise behind the activities is that thinking precedes writing and that pre-writing tasks stimulate the students' ideas and, in turn, encourage originality and self-discovery in their writing (Moffet, 1982; Elbow, 1998).

The authors of this paper will explain how teachers can exploit story grammar using stories of their own making. These stories can provide opportunities for learning grammar, syntax and vocabulary, while serving as models and inspiration for student-authored fiction. Furthermore, the authors will demonstrate approaches to story writing through prewriting, contextualizing, and the use of graphic organizers.

Lesson One summary

For the first sample lesson, one on writing a short memoir, students read a story written by their teacher and analyze it in terms of a story grammar of problem-resolution. They list plot developments through a flowchart. They learn about the use of modal auxiliaries and the present perfect in the story and how these aspects of the language might be employed to develop a sense of irony. They also learn contractions through observing their use in the story. Next, they brainstorm lists of experiences that they might have had where their cultural values conflicted with those of others. Finally, with a partner, and using a story grammar, students develop a rough draft of their stories.

In the model story, “My Sporting Career in Rural China,” the problem is that the narrator cannot play basketball very well yet has to play before a large crowd. The unfolding of the story couples the cross-cultural differences in how the Chinese and the narrator view the game with the narrator’s efforts to play basketball against his more skillful opponents. Incidents such as the narrator’s poor abilities – he’s penalized for kicking the ball at one point – are comic exaggerations. “My Sporting Career in Rural China” employs modal auxiliaries and the present perfect form, so the story can be used to teach these verb forms. For example, the narrator indicates that because Canadians are better at hockey than basketball, his team **should have declined** the match. (See Strong [online] for the complete version.)

“My sporting career in rural China”

Summary: The narrator, teaching English with a few other Canadians at a rural petroleum institute in Sichuan Province, China is asked to play basketball with the local team. Although they should have declined the game, they accept, and their pick-up match soon becomes an international tournament before a thousand people. In their confusion, the Canadian players who are better at hockey than basketball, keep making mistakes, shaking hands with the ref, traveling with the ball, even kicking it in the case of the narrator who plays so badly that the crowd cheers whenever he appears on the court. The teachers lose, but the narrator becomes a local celebrity. “I played so badly, he tells Professor Zeng who with sudden inspiration replies, “That may be, however, you played with great spirit.”

Directions:

Creating a timeline

Have the students read “My Sporting Career in Rural China.” In pairs, the students should draw a flowchart or timeline to note the 8 main incidents. They should compare their answers with other students. The literary term of theme might be introduced here in discussing the differences between the values of the Chinese and the narrator.

Problem-resolution formula introduced

Explain stories in terms of the story grammar of problem-resolution. Ask students in small groups to discuss the problem and its resolution in the story. This may be done through considering such questions as “What is the conflict in the story?” “Which characters are in conflict?” “How is the conflict resolved?”

Focusing on salient grammatical forms

Describe modal auxiliaries to students (should, might) and explain how these suggest the possibility of different outcomes for the subject of a sentence (I, you, he, she, we). The use of the present perfect tense describes action that has been finished before the simple present begins. The present perfect tense forms a key structure in the story. Put the forms on the board.

should have guessed
should have declined
should have known

should have suspected
might have invented
might have discovered

Ask students to scan the model story and circle the modal auxiliaries and present perfect forms. In pairs, they can better familiarize themselves with these grammatical structures by asking each other questions about the story such as “What should he have guessed?” and answering them with “He should

have guessed...” The literary term of irony should be introduced here as each of these phrases suggest how the narrator expected a different outcome than the one he experienced.

Next, put the students into groups. Each composes sentences with the “might have/should have” construction. A member of each group writes the group’s sentences on the blackboard for class examination.

Following this, describe contractions, explaining how they are used frequently in conversation and are commonly seen in the dialogue portions of stories. Ask students to scan the model story again and circle all contractions. Pair the students and have them play a timed game with their partners. Each person has 5 seconds to produce a sentence with a contraction or forfeit a round. The winner is the one with the most rounds.

wasn’t	he’d	he’s	couldn’t
shouldn’t	I’d	I’m	you’d
who’d	hadn’t	didn’t	aren’t

Personalizing themes

With partners or in small groups, ask students to brainstorm answers to the following question: “Have you ever had a cross-cultural experience where your reactions were different than those of people from another culture?”

Interviewing & note taking

In pairs, have students write down one another’s cross-cultural stories focusing on the use of modal auxiliaries and contractions. The first student asks the other questions and takes down notes on the replies. Each pair joins with another. In the new group, each student re-tells the story he has just heard. The other students gauge how accurately the story has been retold.

Expanding notes into a story

The original student pairs exchange their notes. These notes are then used to help each student prepare a first draft of their cross-cultural story. The teacher and other students help each writer to further revise the story and extend plot developments. As described previously, this can be done through asking questions related to story grammar or through using visual aids, such as flowcharts and timelines. Ultimately, the stories should form the basis for a class anthology.

Lesson Two summary

For the second sample lesson, one on writing science fiction, students are shown how they can develop their own ideas through analyzing a story. To start with, students may need to be reminded why stories are written in the first place. They should have no trouble coming up with “to entertain” and “because a teacher told me to do it,” but they may have trouble going further. Other purposes for writing might include: to provoke thought, to give meaning to experience, to allow the reader to see what might be below the surface of an issue, event or personality, to make the reader question his assumptions, or to move people emotionally.

Contextualization

To provide students with themes and to contextualize short fiction, some historical research may be helpful. It can provide vivid and believable backdrops to the plot of a story. Stories can be used in class that commemorate an event, a person, or a group of people related to the theme of a story. There may be a local angle as well. For example, Earth Day, held each year on April 22, is accompanied by clean-up campaigns, demonstrations, festivals showcasing the latest in eco-friendly technology and the activities of environment-

focused NGOs. The use of a story in class dealing in some way with environmental issues can precede or follow participation in these local events. To more fully contextualize a story used in class, it can be built around a course theme, delivered at a meaningful time (for example, temporally close to the anniversary of an historical event of significance), and linked to community activities.

The following chart shows examples of themes, times of the year when the story might be delivered, and genres that could be used in the story's creation.

Timing	Themes	Genres
Around "Earth Day" 22 April (1st held in 1970)	Environmental protection	Cautionary tales or utopic visions
Nelson Mandela's release from prison 11 February (1990)	Social/Racial Justice Perseverance in the face of difficulties	Inspirational
Remembrance Day 11 November (1918)	Recalling the past so as not to be doomed to repeat it	Simulated memoir or diary
Gandhi's Birthday 2 October (1869)	Facing oppression firmly but peacefully	Historical fiction: Key events seen from the eyes of a 'nobody'

HistoryChannel.com (1996-2003) and *Today in Radical History (2003)* are two excellent online sources to link historical events to themes for fiction and provide appropriate timing for the presentations of stories.

Working with a story

Students can be introduced to the products of pre-writing strategies (Reid, 1993, p. 5-6), mapping (Murray, 1987, p. 39), classifying through trees (Mohan, 1986, p. 34), and creating 'knowledge frameworks' (Mohan, 1986, pp. 35-46) by being asked to produce them as they listen to a story or have just heard one. In other words, they can be asked to work backwards from a complete story to its linguistic, ideational and stripped-down, sequential core. This gives students a preview of what sort of material their brainstorming, classifying and organizing might produce when they set out to write their own fiction. A science fiction story entitled "Earth Bound" is used as the text dealt with in the lesson plan described next. It is summarized as follows (See Dias [online] for the complete version).

"Earthbound"

Summary: Jason, a moonboy from birth, lives in a lunar colony. The elders are immigrants from earth. They were forced to flee after the biosphere ceased to support life of any kind. Lunar children are taught that the earth is a dead planet and will always be so. Jason will have none of it. Having secretly read banned earth literature, he becomes convinced that life will regenerate. He arranges to have himself exiled from the moon and sent on a spaceship to oblivion, which he manages to commandeer and steer to earth. After disappointing first impressions, he is thrilled to find that life is indeed returning. His joy is tinged with sorrow at the thought he will never be able to share his delight. But, at that moment, Gaia, a girl living in a colony on the dark side of the moon, opens a book about the Amazonian rain forest. She is struck by a dangerous, but delicious, idea.

In an article which investigates the organization of narratives, especially the concept of plot, Stubbs recommends a variety of guided reading activities that “force [students] to notice important characteristics, without simply telling them what to look for...” (1982, p. 73). Widdowson (1975, 1992) proposes that linguistic clues could aid literary interpretation and that focus on how a text is put together can lead to increased understanding of it. The following directions adapt some of these suggestions into classroom activities involving “Earth Bound.”

Directions

Reading the story aloud

Present the text orally to discourage students from dwelling on what they don’t know. This will force them to try to keep pace with the story line. It is useful to begin with cognitively less demanding tasks to help them prepare for more complex summary and analysis.

Jigsaw listening

On their first listening, students are randomly assigned to one of three task groups (A-C). A’s are asked to write down what they consider to be key words in the story; B’s must make sketches of characters and locations; and C’s note down words and phrases that mark time, its passage and corresponding events. After the teacher has told the story, students get together in groups of three, comprised of members from each of the task groups. They help each other give structure to their incomplete understandings of the story by graphically representing/re-representing their notes and sketches in their choice of pre-taught forms such as tree diagrams, timelines, maps. Group representatives present their collaborative understandings to the class.

Summary writing

On their second listening, students can be asked to write summaries of different lengths. They can try to produce increasingly abbreviated summaries, compare the versions, and discuss their equivalence or lack thereof. They can even try to write summaries in the form of newspaper headlines: for example, “Moonboy Vindicated—Earth Not as Dead as A Doorknob.” These summaries help to focus students on the essential parts of the story and can assist in identifying themes, ironies, symbols, climax and conflicts, traditional mainstays of literary analysis.

Finding themes

The guided reading described above can lead to a rich variety of interpretations, many of which will likely surprise the teacher-author. This is a list of themes from students assigned to “Earth Bound”:

- * Opposing or neglecting minorities is not good.
- * To believe is not useless.
- * People can make their forbidden dreams come true.
- * If you have something that you feel very strongly about, then that’s something that makes you special. Not strange or weird.
- * To make your dream come true always takes risk.
- * If you show interest in a new and weird and odd world, you’ll get to know a big surprise!!!
- * A good thing will be wasted if you don’t have anyone to tell it to.
- * There is always someone who thinks the same as you.
- * Plants are difficult to eradicate owing to their strong hold on life.
- * The Earth is in real danger now and if we won’t do anything about it, this story might change into reality. Take good care of the earth!!

Collaging

Show students photos of possible futures – some of them utopias; others, dystopias. *National Geographic Magazine* is a good source. Ask the following questions: “Which of these pictures most closely matches your view of the future?” “What do you think is missing from them?” Next, assign photos to pairs or groups of students and ask them to imagine that they are living in these realities 100 years in the future. They should consider what it would have been like to live in the 21st century and what people could have done differently to create a better future. Sentences should be written on the board that express hypothetical situations using “if” and the modal auxiliaries (would, could, should) that were introduced in the first lesson.

Plenary

A class plenary for exchanging ideas can be arranged after the pairs/groups have completed their discussions. A variety of story beginnings can be composed from these sentence prompts. In addition, the ideas generated by discussion can form the basis for student-generated stories showcasing their views of the future and the flawed past. An example of a science fiction story composed by a student who went through this process can be seen in the appendix. Her story—and those of others in the class—was sent to a class mailing list where classmates read each others’ stories and tried to identify themes, ironies, conflicts, symbols, etc. The message that follows the story was written by a student who read the story and commented on its ironies and symbolism.

Extensions

To stimulate further reading, students can use Amazon.com to search for reader reviews of science fiction books that offer bright or dark views of the future. They can report on these opinions in subsequent classes.

Conclusion

Teachers and students in the classroom can promote an alternative to the more conventional analyses of literature where the teacher interprets the text for students. In that approach, both are consumers instead of creators of text. Story grammar, prewriting, the use of graphic organizers, and listening-summarizing techniques can all be employed to assist students in writing stories. When teachers and students create stories, there are rich opportunities for the development of reading and writing schema through story grammar and for a more intuitive understanding of literature by practicing it. Furthermore, by contextualizing a theme, as discussed in this article, students can be helped to see links between their course work and contemporary and historic events. Even points of grammar, new vocabulary, and pronunciation can be introduced into lessons using fiction created by teachers and students.

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Appendix

Hiroko I's "The time machine"

It is the year 3000. Science has improved but humans have destroyed the nature. Mike has never seen a tree, a flower, or even clean, clear water. He has only seen them in holography. In the holography, the world looked so beautiful. Unlike the world where Mike lives, there was blue sky and big trees. Mike always wanted to go back to the year 2000 and see the rain forest.

Mike worked very hard to earn money to buy a time machine. He worked 8 straight hours everyday. After 3 months, he finally earned enough money to buy an old cheap used time machine. Most of the paint had come off and some parts were covered with rust. The shop owner said to Mike, "I'm warning you, Mike. It might not work correctly. You should work a little more and buy a better one." But Mike was too excited and didn't listen to him.

Next morning, as soon as he got up he prepared for the trip. Mike set the place to the rain forest in South America and the timer to the year 2000. He was ready for the journey. He

pushed the start button. With a large sound like an explosion and a gray smoke, the machine started to work. Suddenly, it went black and then bright again. Few seconds later, he noticed everything around him was totally different. There were tall trees, blue sky, many many wild animals, and the steaming sun that he had never seen before.

He opened up the hatch and dashed into the forest. He ran around with joy and stepped on something. It was an enormous egg. Mike wanted to run away, but just when he was about to do so the ground shook so badly that he couldn't stand up. Mike looked around and found out what it was.

He couldn't believe his eyes. It was a dinosaur! Mike remembered what the owner said. The machine was not working right!! But he ran into the machine anyway. He set the timer to year 3000 and pushed the start button. Nothing happened. He tried again. This time he punched the button, and just when the dinosaur was about to step on it, the machine disappeared. After few seconds, Mike was back at home. Mike was a little depressed because his time machine is completely broken now.

THE END

“The Time Machine”において、

“<aXXXXXX@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>”さんは書きました:

We all wish to look at the past and redo things, and this desire is probably symbolized as the time machine. It's ironic because even though Mike did so much to earn the machine, he ended up not being able to go and see the place he really wished to see.

Cheers,

Ruri