

Importance of Evaluative Reading for the Development of Critical Thinking

Michio Mineshima

University of Niigata Prefecture

Rie Imai

Niigata University of Health and Welfare

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Critical thinking is widely recognized as important in Japanese education including English teaching, as is stipulated, for instance, in MEXT's Course of Study. However, there is no clear indication that students are successfully learning this generic higher-order thinking skill in secondary- or tertiary-level education. One way to enhance critical thinking is Level 3 reading instruction. This paper shows how Level 3, or evaluative, reading instruction in EFL classrooms can foster learners' critical reading and by extension critical thinking skills. The other two levels of reading are factual (Level 1) and interpretive/inferential (Level 2). By comparing two different versions of an interpretation of the same text, one using Level 2 reading and the other using Level 3 reading, the authors demonstrate the crucial importance of Level 3 evaluative reading for the development of learners' critical reading skills.

日本の教育における批判的思考力の重要性は、文科省の学習指導要領の規定にみられるように、広く認められている。しかし、この汎用的高次思考力が高等教育や大学教育において十分に習得されているようには思われない。批判的思考力を伸ばす一つの方法がレベル3の読みである。本稿は、英語の授業においてレベル3の読み、すなわち評価読みの指導が学習者の批判的読みを、ひいては批判的思考力を伸ばす可能性について論じる。他の二つの読みは、レベル1の事実読みとレベル2の解釈・推論読みである。同一テキストをレベル2とレベル3の2つの読みで解釈し、両者の違いを比較することで、レベル3の読みが学習者の批判的読みの技能の伸長にいかにかに重要であるかを論証する。

The importance of critical thinking in Japanese education has been widely recognized. For instance, the School Education Law stipulates that senior high school education should be conducted to develop learners' sound criticism of society (MEXT, 1947). The Teaching Guide issued in 2009 by the Education Ministry (MEXT, 2009) states that *eigo hyogen*, English expression—one of the senior high school English language subjects, should be organized in such a way that learners can develop critical thinking skills. Moreover, the Course of Study published in March 2018 specified that teaching materials should help deepen students' understanding of diverse ways of thinking, develop their ability to make fair judgments, and nurture fertile minds. Though not explicitly mentioned, these objectives could be interpreted as referring to critical thinking skills. In fact, Ennis (1987) defined critical thinking as “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (p. 10) and regarded the ability to consider alternatives as one of the critical thinking skills. Paul and Elder (2006) considered intellectual fair-mindedness an essential characteristic of critical thinkers (p. 5), and Brookfield (2010) stated that the ability to be critically analytical is personally liberating (p. 43).

The attempt on the part of the Ministry of Education to foster learners' critical thinking was probably motivated partly by unsatisfactory performances of Japanese learners who participated in OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) reading literacy tests. Japan ranked a disappointing 14th out of 41 nations in 2003, and 15th out of 57 nations in 2006. What was especially worrisome to Japanese educators was the fact that the rate of nonresponse to free descriptive test items in 2003 was 23.7% whereas the overall average was 15.6%. (Note that a lower rate means a higher ranking.) Furthermore, of those free descriptive questions, the nonresponse rate with reflect-and-evaluate questions was 17.3% whereas the overall average was 12.0%. These results suggest that Japanese students had difficulty expressing their own opinions based on critical evaluation of the text (Arimoto, 2005).

Deficiency of critical thinking skills can pose potentially more serious problems than just poor academic performance. Arguing for the necessity of teaching critical reading, Maggart and Zintz (1992) expressed a concern that “too much time is spent in traditional schools making children’s minds act like sponges that will accept authority of parents, teachers, and textbooks without question” (p. 357). A similar concern is shared by Silberstein (1994), who stated that “it is possible to be overly impressed by the authority of written text, particularly in a second language” (p. 85). This in fact may be an accurate description of the current situation in Japan. If this is the case, it is the very opposite of what we as educators should expect of our students. We bear the responsibility to teach our students the danger of blind acceptance of authority, which would be detrimental not only to the development of their individual minds but also, eventually, to the maintenance of a democratic society.

Currently, there seems to be little clear indication of Japanese learners successfully acquiring critical thinking skills. Among many possible reasons for this might be junior and senior high school teachers’ general lack of understanding of the crucial importance of evaluative reading to develop critical reading and by extension critical thinking skills of their learners. In the following literature review, the close connection between evaluative and critical reading will be explained; then a comparative analysis of inferential (Level 2) and evaluative (Level 3) reading will be conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of the latter and the inadequacy of the former in developing critical reading skills.

Evaluative Reading as a Crucial Means of Developing Critical Reading Skills

Dallmann, Rouch, Char, and DeBoer (1982) classified reading comprehension skills into three categories: reading at the factual level (Level 1), the interpretive/inferential level (Level 2), and the evaluative level (Level 3). Level 1 reading is for understanding what is stated in the text; Level 2 reading is for understanding what is implied in the text; and Level 3 reading is for evaluating or analyzing the text critically. Dallmann et al. (1982) stated that “one of the most significant comprehension skills is that of making evaluations of what is read” and cited some examples of evaluative questions: “Does the author draw valid conclusions from the facts? Does the material contain any unstated assumptions?” (p. 163). These Level 3 questions can be easily recognized as questions for critical reading.

Nuttall (1996) listed six types of questions that require different reading skills. They are questions of literal comprehension (Type 1), questions involving reorganization or

reinterpretation (Type 2), questions of inference (Type 3), questions of evaluation (Type 4), questions of personal response (Type 5), and questions concerned with how writers say what they mean (Type 6). Nuttall elaborated on Type 4 evaluative questions: “The reader may be asked to judge, for example, . . . the effectiveness of her narrative power (eg [sic] in a novel)” (p. 188). Also a Type 5 personal response question elicits this example answer: “I’m not prepared to accept the position the writer expects me to adopt” (p. 189), possibly responding to a question such as, *Do you agree with the writer’s opinion?* Type 6 questions are mainly strategies for handling texts in general covering such elements as syntax, cohesion, and text organization. Here, correspondence can be easily found between Type 1 questions and the Level 1 reading mentioned earlier, between Types 2 and 3 questions and Level 2 reading, and between Types 4 and 5 questions and Level 3 reading. Types 4 and 5 questions can be classified as critical reading questions.

Similar to Dallmann et al. (1982), distinguishing three different levels of reading comprehension can be identified in the reading literacy framework of PISA. Since 2003, this international test has been evaluating three aspects of students’ reading comprehension abilities: (a) retrieving information, (b) interpreting texts, and (c) reflecting and evaluating. (The PISA 2018 also presented more detailed subordinate aspects.) The following is one of the reflection/evaluation type of questions from PISA 2009: “Do you agree with the final judgement of the people of Macondo about the value of the movies? Explain your answer by comparing your attitude to the movies with theirs.” This question requires learners to use their own value judgments based on a critical analysis of the text (PISA, 2018).

Discussing the problem of the reader’s identification with and detachment from the narrator of the story, Ikeda (1986) suggested that the notion of the reader be divided into two, Reader 1 and Reader 2, and explained that Reader 1 represents readers who are assumed by the work (or the author) and who read the text submissively in total agreement with the demand of the work. Reader 2, on the other hand, represents real-life readers who are independent of Reader 1, have their own areas of interest, can think on their own, and have the freedom and right to that status (pp. 327-328).

By extending this idea of Ikeda’s (1986), Mineshima and Imai (2018) offered a model of the tripartite relationship of Reader 1, Reader 2, and Author (see Figure 1) and explained as follows. (The text type intended here is narration.)

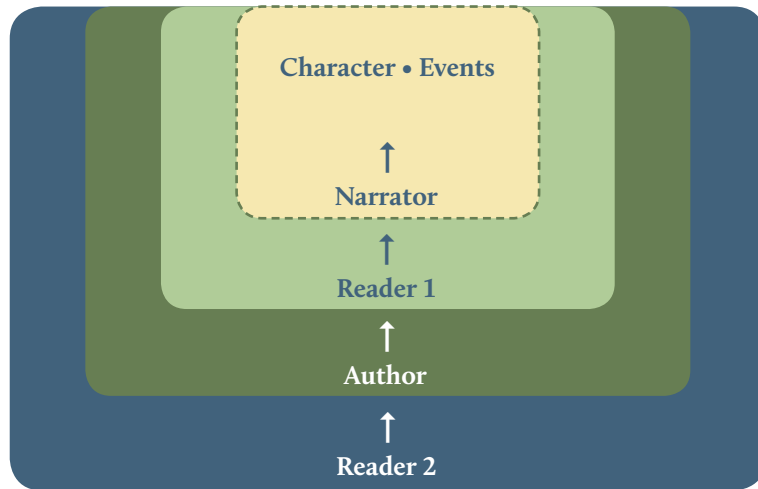


Figure 1. Tripartite relationship of Readers 1 and 2 and Author.

Reader 1 reads the text (indicated by the innermost square in Figure 1) through the eye of the narrator, sometimes emotionally identifying him/herself with the characters. Reader 1 is confined in Author's world because his/her objective of reading the text is to infer and reconstruct Author's intentions and does not go beyond the Author boundary. In turn, Author is within Reader 2's world in the sense that Author is subjected to Reader 2's critical analysis and examination. In other words, Reader 1 is a noncritical reader whereas Reader 2 is a critical reader (p. 275).

A summary of the three levels of reading of Dallmann et al. (1982), the six types of questions of Nuttall (1996), the three aspects of reading comprehension of PISA, and the two kinds of readers of Ikeda (1986) is provided in Appendix A. Conceptualizing reading comprehension in the framework of a progressively deepening three-tier process with the final (i.e., Level 3) stage intended for the critical analysis and evaluation of the text provides Japanese teachers of English with a useful guiding principle not only for effective reading instruction in general but also for much needed critical reading instruction. As Adler and Doren (1972) observed, "The activity of reading does not stop with the work of understanding what a book says. *It must be completed by the work of criticism, the work of judging*" (p. 137; italics in original).

To demonstrate the effectiveness of Level 3 evaluative reading as opposed to Level 2 inferential reading to promote learners' critical reading skills through a concrete example, the same text was interpreted according to these two different levels of reading. Level 2 reading was provided by one of the EFL reading instructional books whereas Level 3 reading was represented by a fictional Reader 2. Although a similar comparative analysis was conducted in Mineshima and Imai (2018), the following sections specifically focused on some points the previous study failed to address or only briefly mentioned.

Comparisons of Level 2 and Level 3 Readings

Narrative Text, Teacher's Manual, and Reference Book

The text analyzed was a narration titled "I Have Never Seen You Before." See Appendix B for a brief summary and Appendix C for the full text. This story was used in one of the former MEXT-approved high school English textbooks, *Orbit English Reading* (Takanashi, Saito, Watanabe, & Leonard, 2008a).

There was a teacher's manual for this textbook, and an abridged version of the evaluation standards of this text is provided in Appendix D (Takanashi, Saito, Watanabe, & Leonard, 2008b, p. 223). It seems that much emphasis is placed on "understanding characters' feelings," and students are to express their impressions of the story. Impressions, unlike evaluations, are acceptable without any supporting details. Though they can be elaborate, they can also be as simple as "I was touched" or "The police officer was nice." Students do not seem to be expected to read the text at Level 3.

Examples of a Level 2 reading of this text were quoted from the book, 推論発問を取り入れた英語リーディング指導 [English Reading Instruction Using Inferential Questions] (Tanaka, Shimada, & Kondo, 2011), one of the commercially published reference books written by experts in EFL reading and aimed mainly at high school English teachers in Japan. As is indicated by the book's title, it emphasizes the importance of inferential—and hence Level 2—questions in teaching reading comprehension. The analysis of the Level 2 reading of this story was conducted from three perspectives: the main characters, the story, and the theme. This is because in these three dimensions the reference book writers' interpretations of the text appeared most clearly.

Interpretations of the Story at Level 2 Reading

The Main Characters

(In the following, "the reference book" and page numbers refer to Tanaka et al., 2011.) There are two main characters in this story: Jimmy/Ralph and the police officer. A model

conversation for discussing the story in the reference book shows how it interprets these characters (numbers and underlines are added for referential use):

- S1: What did Jimmy think when the policeman told him that he had never seen him before?
- S2: [...] (1) he thanked him from the bottom of his heart.
(omitted)
- S1: What do you think of this story?
- S2: (2) This is a touching story and (3) it teaches us an important lesson.
- S1: What is it?
- S2: (4) It is that nothing is worthier than selfless love.
- S1: (5) I was deeply moved by the story, too. [...]
- S2: (6) Jimmy sacrificed himself to save the little girl. It is because he loved Annabel profoundly. (7) He is a nice person.
- S1: (8) The policeman is a sensible man. (9) I like his generous character. (pp. 128-129)

Jimmy/Ralph is considered a “nice person” (7) who “sacrificed himself” (6) and showed “selfless love” (4) to save the girl. In a different part of the reference book, there is another comment from which it can be inferred that the police officer forgave Jimmy because he had made a painful choice of sacrificing everything he had to save a precious life (p. 63).

The other main character, the police officer, is depicted as a “sensible man” (8) with “generous character” (9). The reference book says that it can be inferred that this police officer is a person full of human empathy (p. 63) and that it is necessary to devise some ways to have students understand the humane conduct of the police officer who lets Jimmy go (p. 120).

The Story

In the model conversation cited above, the story is described as “touching” (2) and deeply moving (5), and it “teaches us an important lesson” (3). Sentence (1) also provides another clue as to how the story is interpreted by the reference book. It says that Jimmy thanked the policeman from the bottom of his heart. This shows the book’s assumption that Jimmy/Ralph should feel elated when the police officer did not arrest him and that the story has a happy ending.

The Theme

The reference book’s interpretation of the story’s theme can be found in line (4) in the dialogue: “[The important lesson] is that nothing is worthier than selfless love.” It is also reflected in the assessment of students’ interpretations, which are presented on a 3-level scale: full, partial, and no understanding. Here are some examples:

1. Even after you have committed a crime, you can make a fresh start.
2. It is more important how you live now than how you lived in the past. You can’t undo your crime, but you can live a better life from now on.
3. In order to make a fresh start in life, you must do more than just change your name; you must atone for your every bad deed in the past.
4. You do everything you can for your loved one even if it puts you in a difficult position. And nobody can blame you for your action. (pp. 153-154)

The evaluations are: 1, 2, and 3 show “no understanding” and 4 “full understanding” (pp. 153-154).

If, however, a theme is defined as the creation of meaning out of the text by the reader (Tajika, 1993, p. 29), there would be no single correct theme, and the themes above could be assessed differently. For example, Themes 1 and 2 can be focusing on the central message of the story manifested in the forgiving act of the police officer. Theme 3 can be read as a critique, if not a theme, of the story. It may be an expression of disagreement with the presupposition of the story that Jimmy/Ralph can elude his past crimes and win happiness at the same time, an issue the reference book does not address. Theme 4, which is rated as “full understanding,” seems correct as far as the story is concerned; however, it is open to argument as to whether it is qualified as a valid generalization. People sometimes commit crimes for loved ones such as family and partners, but of course they should be blamed and punished for their actions.

In sum, the reference book seems to suggest that both characters are admirable, that the story is touching and has a happy ending, and that the theme of the story is selfless, sacrificial love. In order to show the limitations of these interpretations by Level 2 inferential reading for the purpose of critical evaluation of the text, interpretations of the same text through Level 3 reading is presented next.

Interpretations of the Story at Level 3 Reading

The Main Characters

Reader 2, a critical reader, would not hesitate to praise Ralph's decision to save the girl with a full understanding of its disastrous consequences for him. He prioritizes the life of the little girl over his future, which could be described as "selfless," as the reference book suggests. However, Reader 2 would also point out that Jimmy/Ralph had had no intention of voluntarily revealing his past until the incident forced him to do. Had his love for his fiancée been really true and sincere, at least he would have confessed to her before his marriage proposal. Furthermore, soon after his release from prison he broke into another bank, a crime he has not yet atoned for. He is selfless in saving the girl but selfish in deceiving people who trusted him.

The reference book also describes Ralph's actions as "sacrificial." It can be argued, however, that he has not sacrificed anything because all his material and social possessions have been gained by hiding his crime and deceiving innocent people. In other words, he does not sacrifice anything but reaps his just reward; this is retributive justice. This line of reasoning can lead to Theme 3 discussed earlier.

Reader 2 would also question the legality of the arbitrary decisions of the police officer, an issue the reference book does not seem to heed. Despite the police officer's first priority to represent, without bias or favor, the interests of all citizens, he ignored that of the owner of the bank that Jimmy robbed soon after his discharge from the prison. The officer must have been well informed of the robbery case because even the other townsfolk "suspected [Ralph] might be the bank robber of the bank in Jefferson City" (Appendix C, Part 3, Para. 4). He neglected his duty to investigate criminal acts and overstepped his authority by delivering Jimmy/Ralph a not-guilty verdict, which is the responsibility of the judge. His conduct (or the lack thereof) can constitute a crime in and of itself.

The Story

By the police officer willfully setting a bank robber free, this story seems to assume that justice does not necessarily have to prevail, a hidden assumption Reader 2 would naturally question. The story is written in such a way that readers are unaware of the fact that, as was mentioned earlier, all of Ralph's accomplishments in Elmore have been made possible by falsifying his true identity without paying his debt to society. All his expenses for things such as his business have probably been financed with money he has stolen.

Another assumption of this story is that saving the life of a girl can somehow compensate for Jimmy's past crime, which, according to the reference book, doubles

as the story's justification for the police officer's "sensible" and "generous" actions. However, if we accept this assumption, we would have to guarantee an equal chance as Jimmy/Ralph had to all the criminals on the run to prove themselves worthy of having their crimes forgiven. No one would have the legitimate means or authority to judge someone's worthiness.

Reader 2 would also likely question the ending of the story. Although the reference book seems to assume a happy ending, this would be very unlikely. One of the eight elements of thought is implications and consequences (Elder & Paul, 2008), and inference about the situation after the departure of the police officer would find Jimmy/Ralph in an inescapable predicament. First, his incriminating safe cracking tools are still plainly visible on the table. Second, not all eye-witnesses would be as sympathetic (or irresponsible) as the police officer. Third and most important, Jimmy/Ralph now has no choice but to confess everything to the Adams family. Mr. Adams would no doubt thank Jimmy/Ralph for saving his grandchild, but it would be highly unlikely that even after this incident the bank owner would accept a fugitive bank robber with a criminal record who had been deceiving everyone as his future son-in-law.

More than its implausibility, the happy ending scenario inferred by the reference book would defeat the very purpose of Jimmy/Ralph's confession of past crime, which was symbolically manifested in his act of opening the safe in public. He was ready to abandon his life of deception for his fiancée, ready to receive the punishment he deserved. If Jimmy/Ralph feels delighted at his newfound freedom so freely offered by the police officer, as is suggested by the reference book (see utterance 1 in the model conversation), that would only make him look shallow and his repentance untrustworthy. At the same time, the actions of the police officer, which are praised as "generous," "sensible," and empathetic in the book, cannot help but appear short-sighted and thoughtless.

As the analysis revealed, Level 3 reading is quite different from Level 2 reading. Level 3 reading detected many problems in the story, none of which Level 2 reading presented. The crucial difference between the two may result from the difference in their purpose of reading: Level 2 reading seeks for as accurate representations of the text as possible including the writer's hidden assumptions whereas Level 3 reading further evaluates and judges those representations critically based on criteria outside of the text.

Conclusion

Although Level 1 and 2 readings are important as the foundation of accurate understanding of the text, they alone cannot sufficiently develop learners' critical reading skills as was demonstrated by the comparative analyses of Level 2 and 3 readings. As

Tsuruta (1999) stated, when the teacher teaches only the text, students understand no more than the text itself (p. 44). Level 3 reading can teach learners to evaluate the text critically and reflect on their own value system as opposed to that of the author. It would equip them with a basic competency of critical thinking to become responsible citizens.

Finally, it is worthwhile to emphasize the significance of the role of teachers in fostering learners' critical reading skills. If their reading instruction is confined only to Level 1 or 2 without reaching Level 3, learners may remain uncritical readers no matter how many pages they read or how many textbooks they finish. The first step teachers need to take is to have the courage to break free from the confinement of the text and the author and become critical thinkers themselves.

Bio Data

Michio Mineshima holds an MA in TESL/TEFL from the University of Birmingham, UK, and currently teaches at the University of Niigata Prefecture. His research interests are reading comprehension, critical reading and thinking, and translation.
<mineshim@unii.ac.jp>

Rie Imai received an MA in Education from the University of Niigata and has been teaching English at Niigata University of Health and Welfare since 2015. She won the 2017 Best Practical Report Award from the Japan Society of English Language Education (JASELE). Her research interests include genre-based pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, and critical thinking. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Niigata. <rie-imai@nuhw.ac.jp>

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Appendix A

A Summary Table of Reading Levels, Question Types, Reading Literacy Aspects/Processes, and Readers

Dallmann et al. (1982)	Nuttall (1996)	PISA 2003-2015 Reading literacy aspect	PISA 2018 Reading Literacy process		Ikeda (1986)
			Cognitive processes		
			Superordinate	Subordinate	
Level 1: factual	Type 1	Access and retrieve	Locate information	Access and retrieve information within a text Search and select relevant text	Reader 1 (noncritical reader)
Level 2: interpretive/inferential	Type 2, 3	Integrate and interpret	Understand	Represent literal meaning Integrate and generate inferences	
Level 3: evaluative	Type 4, 5	Reflect and evaluate	Evaluate and reflect	Assess quality and credibility Reflect on content and form	Reader 2 (critical reader)

Appendix B

A Summary of the Story “I Have Never Seen You Before”

Jimmy had been in prison for cracking bank safes. After his release, he soon robbed a bank again and moved to a small town, hiding his identity. He changed his name to Ralph, started a successful business, made many friends, and became engaged to a woman named Annabel. One day, Mr. Adams, Annabel’s father, invited his customers and Ralph to his bank to show his proud safe. But one of his grandchildren was accidentally locked inside the safe, and even Mr. Adams couldn’t open it. Seeing the grief of his fiancée and realizing that the girl would soon die without his intervention, Ralph decided to open the safe with his old tools and eventually rescued her. But everyone became suspicious that he might be a bank robber. There happened to be a police officer among the people and Ralph told the officer to take him to the police. However, the officer replied, “I don’t know what you are talking about . . . I have never seen you before” and walked out of the bank.

Appendix C

The Full Text

<Part 1>

“Valentine, you’re not a bad fellow at heart. Stop breaking safes open and live a better life.” That is what the prison officer said when Jimmy Valentine left the prison.

Jimmy went back to his house to get his tools for breaking safes open. Two weeks after that, a safe in Jefferson City was robbed.

Jimmy then moved to a small town named Elmore. He was walking down the street when he noticed a young lady across the street. He was fascinated by her beauty and fell deeply in love with her. Jimmy decided to live in the town. He started a shoe store. He changed his name to Ralph D. Spencer.

His shoe store business did very well. He also made a lot of friends. One of these friends introduced him to the lady, Annabel Adams. Her father owned the Elmore Bank. Ralph and Annabel gradually became friendly and eventually were engaged. He had firmly resolved to give up his old business of crime. He never touched his tools after starting his shoe store.

<Part 2>

The Elmore Bank was being modernized and had a new type of safe. Mr. Adams, Annabel’s father, was very proud of it, and he invited many customers to come and see

it. Ralph was also invited. The door of the safe was controlled by a timer. After the timer was set, no one, not even the banker himself, could open it.

Suddenly there was a cry from a woman. May, Mr. Adams' granddaughter, had playfully closed the door of the safe. Her younger sister Agatha, a nine-year-old girl, was inside.

The old banker said in a panicked voice, "The door can't be opened because of the timer." The mother of the daughter cried, "Open the door! Break it open! Can't anyone do anything? There isn't enough air inside. She won't be able to survive." Annabel turned to Ralph, her large eyes full of tears, and pleaded, "Will you please do something, Ralph?"

<Part 3>

Ralph took a deep breath and suddenly stood up. He brought his old tools from his room and pulled off his coat. With this act, Ralph D. Spencer moved aside and Jimmy Valentine took his place.

"Stand away from the door, all of you," he commanded in a loud voice. He put his tools on the table. From this point on, he seemed not to notice that anyone else was near. The others watched as if they had lost the power to move.

Immediately, Jimmy went to work on opening the safe. In twenty minutes—faster than he had ever done it before—he opened the safe's door. Agatha ran into her mother's arms.

Actually, this caused Jimmy a lot of problems. Watching his skill in opening the safe, everyone suspected he might be the bank robber of the bank in Jefferson City. It just so happened that a police officer was among the people present. Knowing this, Jimmy said, "Take me to the police." The officer said, "I don't know what you are talking about. . . . I have never seen you before." He then slowly walked away, out into the street.

Appendix D

Evaluation Standards of the Teacher's Manual (Takanashi et al., 2008b, p. 223)

Interest/Motivation/Attitude		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Students] Try to understand the characters' feelings.
Abilities of expression	Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the characters' feelings and express them in Japanese. Can express their impressions of the story in Japanese.
	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can copy the lines in the story that have left the deepest impression on them.
Abilities of understanding	Listening	(omitted)
	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the feelings of the characters in each scene.
Knowledge and understanding about the language and culture		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the historical and social backgrounds of the story.