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Professional Development
Workshop Materials

Special Focus:
Scaffolding Student Interaction with
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Introduction

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College Board
New York, NY

One of the most challenging tasks for us as teachers of advanced language learners is to raise the achievement level of our students in reading comprehension. In this Special Focus we look to our colleagues from Teaching English Language Learners for a collection of articles on Interpretive Communication: Reading.

Pauline Gibbons reminds us of the importance of background knowledge and helps us understand readers as code breakers, text participants, text users and texts analysts. She provides numerous examples of pre-reading, reading and post-reading activities for language learners along with insight into considerations when selecting reading materials for use in the classroom.

Farin Houk provides us with guidance in scaffolding language and learning with strategies for embedding language development in content learning, differentiating learning, and enhancing the comprehensibility of texts. Lastly, Gillian Lazar provides guidance in designing lessons and materials using short stories and novels.

5 Materials design and lesson planning: Novels and short stories

In this chapter we explore some of the distinctive features of the short story and novel. Examining these features will enable us to develop ways of using short stories and novels with our students.

5.1 Writing your own story

We begin this chapter by inventing our own story based on the boxed paragraphs below. Before reading any further, cover all of the boxed paragraphs with a piece of paper. You are going to read these paragraphs, which are extracts from a short story, one at a time. At each stage of the reading ask yourself the following questions as a guide to making links between the separate paragraphs:

Who?

Why?

What?

How?

Begin by moving your sheet of paper to the end of the first box and reading the first paragraph. Then ask yourself the questions above, using your imagination to answer them. Move your sheet of paper down to the next paragraph, and ask yourself the same questions. Do this until you have read all the paragraphs and completed the activity.

She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains, and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired.

She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question.

She was about to explore another life with Frank.

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The white of two letters in her lap grew indistinct. One was to Harry; the other was to her father.

Task 1

How do you think the story is going to end?

Task 2

The story we have just been speculating about is called 'Eveline' and comes from *Dubliners* by James Joyce. Imagine that you were using this story with a class of students at upper intermediate level and that you decided to use the activity above with them. At what stage of the lesson would you use it, and what would be your aims in doing so? If you were to use a similar activity with another short story, what would you need to consider when selecting the paragraphs you want students to speculate about? Rather than giving students a worksheet with the paragraphs on them, in what other ways could you present the paragraphs?

It is unlikely that the story you conjured up in your imagination while reading the extracts would be identical to that of another teacher or student. On the other hand, you would have probably shaped it according to an implicit understanding or intuition of what elements make up a short story. In the next section, we try to pinpoint some of these distinctive elements of a short story, many of which can be found in novels as well. We do this for one important reason – by focussing on some of the unique characteristics of this genre we may also be able to anticipate some of the difficulties our students have when reading or studying a short story. And this will be of help when designing materials for exploiting the story successfully.

5.2 Distinctive features of a short story

The activities in Section 5.1 involved using your intuitive knowledge of the elements of a short story. In this section we go through some more activities in order to exploit this intuitive response and to pinpoint the unique elements of the short story.

Distinctive features of a short story

Task 3

Imagine that you were asked to explain or define what a short story is, perhaps to a Martian. What would you say? Compare your answer with some of those given below by other teachers.

It's a work of fiction, so it involves the imagination.

A short story tells of one event in a very concentrated way.

It's about people who don't really exist.

It describes something at a moment of crisis.

It has a plot, and characters who are somehow connected with each other.¹

Task 4

Most people would agree that a short story, as the name suggests, involves the telling of a story. But what exactly is a story? Which of the following would you describe as a story? Which ones seem to you to be more 'storyish' than others?

- A. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet.
- B. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey.
- C. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey. Along came a spider, and sat down beside her.
- D. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey. Along came a spider, and sat down beside her, and ate its curds and whey.
- E. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey. Along came a spider, and sat down beside her, and frightened Miss Muffet away.
- F. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey. Little Jack Horner sat in a corner, eating his pudding and pie.

Task 5

- a) Once you have decided which of the one(s) above are stories, can you suggest why this is the case? What characteristics does a story have which makes it different from a 'non-story'?
- b) It has been mentioned that a typical story involves chronology, or a sequence of events, and causation – the fact that events are somehow connected with each other, and that one event may result from another.² Think about any short story or novel that you know well. Is the chronology of events clearly sequenced? Are the relationships of cause and effect clear to the reader? If not, then what kinds of problems might a foreign language student have when reading the story?

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Task 6

Look at paragraphs A. to D. below. Which one do you think you are most likely to find in a short story or novel? Why do you think this is the case?

- A. The train was about three-quarters of an hour from its destination and was travelling at a good sixty miles an hour when Mr Harraby-Ribston, a prosperous businessman, rose from his seat, lifted his suitcase down from the rack and threw it out of the window. The only other occupant of the carriage, a small, thin man, a Mr Crowther, had raised his eyes from his book when his travelling-companion stirred from his seat and had noticed the occurrence. Then the two men exchanged a sharp glance and immediately Mr Crowther continued his reading, while Mr Harraby-Ribston resumed his seat and sat for a while puffing a little and with a heightened colour as a result of his exertion.
- B. Suddenly this business-looking man just stands up and chucks his suitcase out of the window just like that. And this other bloke in the train doesn't say anything – just carries on, you know, reading his book. Can you believe it?
- C. A businessman on a train threw his suitcase out of the window. The only other passenger in his compartment carried on reading, and did not say anything.
- D. A businessman, Mr J. Harraby-Ribston of Slough, recently threw a suitcase weighing about twenty pounds out of the window of a train. The only witness to the event was Mr P. Crowther of Swindon, the other occupant of the railway carriage. The train, which was due to arrive at Bristol Temple Meads within three-quarters of an hour, was travelling at approximately sixty miles an hour.

Task 7

It has just been suggested that much of the meaning of a short story is communicated by the kind of language used and the style of the delivery. What kinds of problems do you think students learning English are likely to have with the language and style of a short story or a novel?

Task 8

- a) Look at the following paragraphs from two short stories. Try to decide who is telling the story in each one.
- b) How important is it for students to understand who is narrating the story they are reading? Why?

Anticipating student problems when using a short story

TEXT A

I took the house of Brentwood on my return from India in 18—, for the temporary accommodation of my family, until I could find a permanent home for them. It had many advantages which made it peculiarly appropriate. It was within reach of Edinburgh, and my boy Roland,
5 whose education had been considerably neglected, could go in and out to school, which was thought to be better for him than leaving home altogether or staying there always with a tutor. The first of these expedients would have seemed preferable to me, the second commended itself to his mother.

(from Margaret Oliphant, 'The Open Door' in R. Dalby (ed.) (1988) *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, p. 150.)

TEXT B

... Mrs Kearney has finished wedging her parcels between her hip and the side of the tram and is intending to look at her magazine when she stares hard ahead and shows interest in someone's back. She moves herself and everything three seats up, leans forward and gives a poke at
5 the back. 'Isn't that you?' she says.

Miss Kevin jumps round so wholeheartedly that the brims of the two hats almost clash. 'Why, for goodness sake! ... Are you on the tram?' She settled round in her seat with her elbow hooked over the back – it is bare and sharp, with a rubbed joint: she and Mrs Kearney are of an
10 age, and the age is about thirty-five. They both wear printed dresses that in this weather stick to their backs; they are enthusiastic, not close friends but as close as they are ever likely to be. They both have high, fresh, pink colouring: Mrs Kearney could do with a little less weight and Miss Kevin could do with a little more.

(from Elizabeth Bowen, 'Unwelcome Idea' in Janet Madden-Simpson (ed.) (1984) *Women's Part*, Arlen House, p. 155.)

5.3 Anticipating student problems when using a short story

In the previous section we examined three problems students might have when reading or studying a short story: understanding the plot; understanding the language in which the story is written; and understanding how the type of narrator who tells the story can shape or influence the way the story is told. Obviously, students may also have other kinds of problems when reading or studying a short story.

Task 9

Think about a group of students you are teaching or have taught. Have you ever used a short story with them? Did they have any difficulties

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with it? What were they? If you haven't used a short story with them, what kind of problems do you think they would be likely to have?

Figure 5.1 summarises some of the problems that a group of teachers believed their students to have when reading a short story.

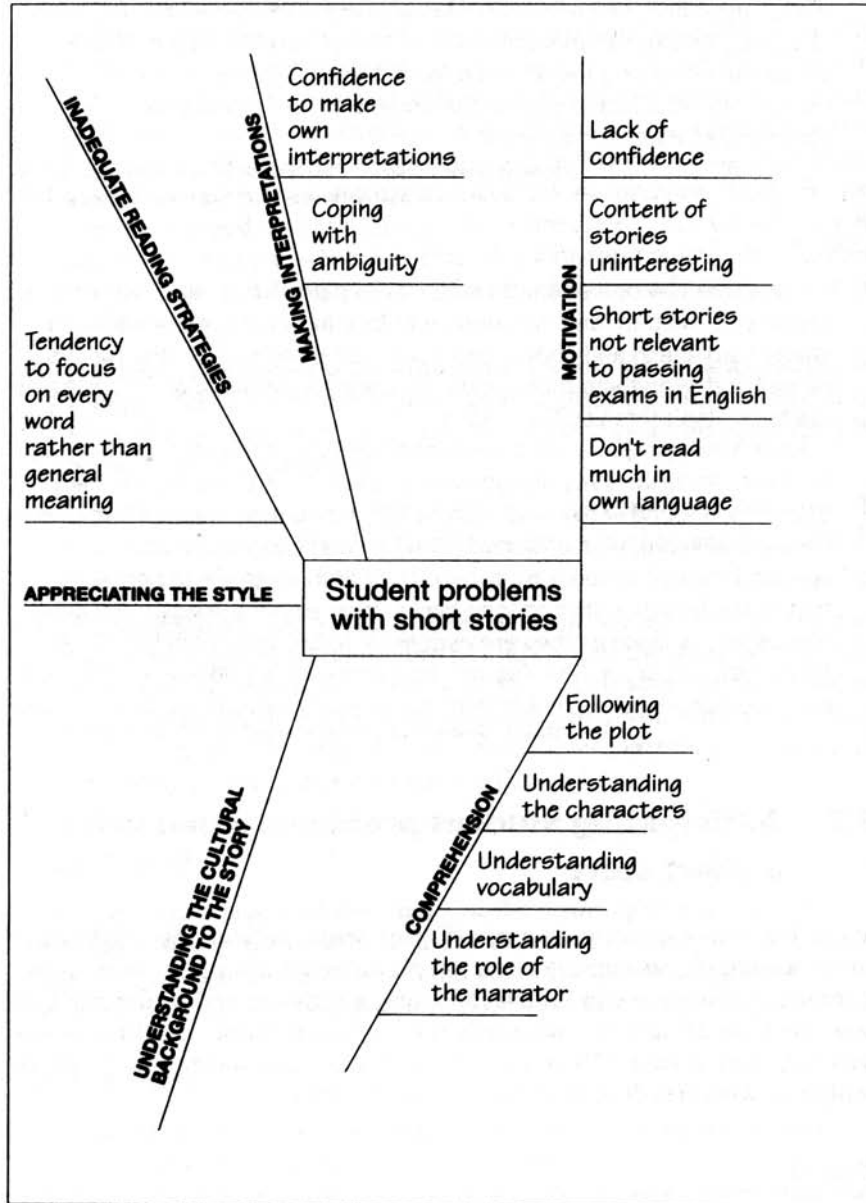


Figure 5.1 Anticipating student problems with short stories

Planning a lesson for use with a short story

Task 10

How many of these problems did you mention in Task 9? How many do you think are applicable to a class you have taught or are teaching at the moment? What others would you add to the diagram?

5.4 Planning a lesson for use with a short story ☆

In the next two sections, we go on to consider the kinds of activities and tasks you can draw on when designing materials to use with a short story. It is worth bearing in mind that many of these tasks and activities are designed to help students overcome the difficulties highlighted in Figure 5.1.

In Section 5.1 we built up a story based on some paragraphs from James Joyce's *Eveline*. The complete story can be found in the Appendix. Read it, and then look through the tasks and activities below which are designed to be used with the story with a group of learners at late intermediate level.

Task 11

While you look at the activities and tasks, think about these two questions:

- What is the aim of using each activity?
- What would be a good order for using the activities in a lesson?

ACTIVITY 1

Divide into two groups. Group A look at Word List 1, Group B look at Word List 2. Discuss what the words on your list mean in the context of the story. You can use your dictionaries to help you. When you have finished, explain the meaning of the words to the students in the other group.

Word List 1
clacking (line 5)
palpitations (line 50)
the air (line 111)
sacrifice (line 120)
impulse (line 124)

Word List 2
squander (line 60)
squabble (line 56)
elated (line 81)
to court (line 84)
fervent (line 141)

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ACTIVITY 2

In *Eveline*, Joyce describes one character who is experiencing a crisis or conflict in their family.

- a) Think of a situation in which a family is experiencing a crisis or conflict. Perhaps it is something that has happened in your family. Or perhaps it is something that has happened in a family you know.
- b) Imagine that you are one of the members of the family. Where are you? What kinds of sounds can you hear in the background? What kinds of noises and smells are you aware of? Are you looking at anything in particular?
- c) What kinds of thoughts and feelings are you experiencing?
- d) Now write two or three paragraphs based on your thoughts about (a) to (c). Try to make your description as 'vivid' as possible. When you have finished read your description to the other students. Get them to guess what situation is being described.

ACTIVITY 3

Think about the following situations, and discuss them with your partner. Give reasons for the advice you would give each person in that situation.

- a) Tom is nineteen years old and lives with his invalid mother. They have no other relatives living nearby and Tom is responsible for looking after her. When he was at school he would come home every day and do all the housework as well as nursing her. Now he has been offered a place to study architecture at a university a three hour train trip from his home. What should he do?
- b) Jessie has three young children to support since her husband was injured in a mine accident. She works at a local hospital as a cleaner. She has heard that it is possible to get a job for triple her annual salary if she goes to work and live in a neighbouring country. But she would not be allowed to take her family with her. What should she do?
- c) Agnes, who is French, has recently fallen in love with an American called Jeff. He runs his own company in New York, while she runs her own business in Lyons. They would like to get married and be together, but neither one wants to give up their business. Each of them would prefer to live in their own country. What should they do?
- d) Cynthia is a sixteen-year-old who quarrels all the time with her parents. She finds living with them depressing and difficult, and wants to move out. The only problem is that she has no job and no money, and her parents believe she should stay on at school until she has more qualifications. What should she do?

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- e) Peter is strongly opposed to the government of his country, and worries that his political activities could cause problems for his family. He sometimes thinks it would be better to leave and try to carry on his activities from abroad. What should he do?

ACTIVITY 4

- a) Think about events in your own country at the beginning of the century. What was daily life like for most people?
- b) Your teacher is going to tell you a little about life in Ireland at the same time. If necessary, take a few notes about what he or she says.

ACTIVITY 5

Now read the text again. This time take notes summarising the main point of each paragraph in the story. For example:

Paragraph 1: Setting the scene – Eveline at the window.

Paragraph 2: Eveline’s childhood memories of the street and her neighbours.

Paragraph 3:

Then discuss these questions in pairs or groups:

- a) Is there any logical sequence to Eveline’s thoughts?
- b) What kind of connections can you find between the different paragraphs? What effect does this have?

ACTIVITY 6

Read the story and answer these questions:

- a) Who is Eveline?
- b) What is her dilemma?
- c) What do you think is her final decision?

ACTIVITY 7

- a) In the story, Eveline is in the middle of an emotional crisis. In groups, note down the reasons she has for staying and the reasons she has for leaving, both conscious and possibly unconscious. For example:

Reason for leaving

Frank– he is manly and attractive

Reason for staying

Her father doesn’t like sailors – can she trust Frank?

- b) What decision does Eveline finally make?
- c) In her position, would you have made the same decision? Why or why not?

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ACTIVITY 8

Look at the last few paragraphs in the story. In pairs or groups discuss the questions below:

- a) What is a *maze*? What is it usually used to describe? What is the effect of the phrase 'a maze of distress' in line 135?
- b) Look at the sentence in line 139: 'Could she still draw back after all he had done for her?'
Rewrite this sentence as if it was:
 - i) direct speech
 - ii) reported speech
- c) The sentence in the story is an example of what is called 'free indirect speech'. Can you find any other examples of it in the text? What effect do you think they have?
- d) Look at line 134: 'She answered nothing.'
Is this usually grammatically correct?
What effect does this have?
What is a more usual way of saying this?
- e) Look at the order of the sentences from lines 129 to 138. Do they seem to be organised in any particular way? What effect does this have?

ACTIVITY 9

Divide into two groups. Group A read Extract A and Group B read Extract B. Then answer these questions:

Group A

What are Joyce's main themes in *Dubliners*? How far do you see these reflected in *Eveline*?

Group B

What is 'stream of consciousness' technique? How far do you think Joyce uses it in *Eveline*?

Groups A and B

- a) When you have finished discussing your extract tell the other group what you have discovered in your reading.
- b) Can you think of any writers in your own language who may have used similar techniques to Joyce?

Extract A

Dubliners (1914)

A volume of short stories by James Joyce. Joyce later wrote: 'My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. I have tried to present it . . . under four of its aspects:

- s childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. The stories are

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arranged in this order.' He adds that he has used in them 'a style of scrupulous meanness', by which he is evidently referring to the bare realism of the stories, and the moral and spiritual poverty which they present. This poverty of spirit is no doubt what Joyce means by speaking of the 'paralysis' of Dublin, the capital city of Ireland. The stories are based on Joyce's theory of the 'epiphanies', by which he meant that deep insights might be gained through incidents and circumstances which seem outwardly insignificant. Their effect is thus often through delicate implication, like the stories of Chekhov. Some of them have sharp humour, however, notably 'Grace', and more have very sensitive poignance, especially the last and longest, 'The Dead', which is often regarded as a masterpiece.

(C. Gillic (1977) *Longman Companion to English Literature*, Longman, p. 489.)

Extract B

stream of consciousness A technique used by novelists to represent a character's thoughts and sense impressions without syntax or logical sequence. Four main types have been identified: soliloquy, omniscient narration of mental processes, and both direct and indirect interior monologue.

The phrase 'stream of consciousness' was first used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the random flux of conscious and sub-conscious thoughts and impressions in the mind. A parallel description can be found in Bergson's account (1889) of the 'élan vital', popularized in England by George Bernard Shaw. Literature can show many examples before both James and Bergson of the attempt to capture inner consciousness, notably Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767). But stream of consciousness becomes important as a technique with the rise of modernism in the 20th century. It can be seen in the works of Joyce (who claimed to have inherited it from Edouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers Sont Coupés*, 1888), Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and, among Americans, William Faulkner . . .

(I. Ousby (ed.) (1988) *Cambridge Guide to Literature*, CUP, p. 956.)

ACTIVITY 10

- At what age is it common for people in your country to leave home?
- What are their reasons for doing so?
- How do you think most people feel when they leave home? How did you feel when you left home?

ACTIVITY 11

Here are some statements which describe the main characters in the story. Read the statements and check the meanings of any words you don't know in your dictionary. Then decide whether you agree or

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disagree with the statement. Give some examples from the text to support your opinion.

- a) Frank is a warm-hearted, kind and extrovert person with a zest for life.
- b) Eveline is a timid, passive person with very little sense of adventure.
- c) Eveline's father is a selfish bully, who behaves in an authoritarian way to his children.
- d) Eveline is a sensitive, conscientious person with a strong sense of responsibility.
- e) Frank is an easygoing, superficial person who is unable to form close ties with anyone.
- f) Eveline's father is an affectionate, humorous man worn down by poverty and drink.

Task 12**Assessment of the lesson plan for *Eveline***

After you have considered the aim of each activity in the lesson plan and a logical order for them, think about these more detailed questions:

- a) One of the main difficulties learners complain about when using a story is understanding the vocabulary. In the lesson plan for *Eveline* students were asked to look up the meaning of certain words in the story (Activity 1). If you were designing an exercise of this type, which of the following criteria would you bear in mind, and why?
 - The words included should be crucial for the students' understanding of the gist of the story.
 - The words included should be impossible for students to guess from the context.
 - The words included would be those you are certain the students did not know.
 - The words included would be useful for students in writing exam essays.
 - The words included would be those you think students should be able to use actively.
 What other factors would you need to think about when designing materials to help students with the vocabulary in a short story?
- b) In at least two activities in the lesson plan, students were asked to respond personally to the themes of the story, or think about their own feelings and experiences. Which ones? Why do you think this is important?
- c) In Activity 4, students are given a brief lecture on events in Ireland at the time that the story is set. Do you think that this lecture is necessary for their understanding of the story? Why/Why not? If you were to give them the lecture, what information would you want to

Further tasks and activities for use with a short story

- include in it? Is there any other cultural information that you think students should be given in order to understand the story?
- d) Activities 5, 6 and 7 are all designed to practise some kind of reading skill with students. Which skills are being practised? In what order? Do you think it is necessary to provide students with all three activities when doing the story with them?
 - e) Which activity do you think would be suitable for a class with strong literary interests? What could be the result of using it with a class who do not have a strong interest in literature?
 - f) Are there any activities in the lesson plan that you would not use? Why? Can you suggest any activities that you might wish to add to the plan?

5.5 Further tasks and activities for use with a short story

In the previous section we looked at some activities and tasks for exploiting a short story. In this section we look at some other ways of doing this and classify them into three groups: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. Before reading through the activities listed below, you are invited to recall your own experience of activities for exploiting a text by completing Task 13.

Task 13

Before you read the list of suggested activities, write down your own ideas for tasks and activities to use with a short story. The following headings will help you to organise your ideas.

Pre-reading activities

1. Helping students with cultural background
2. Stimulating student interest in the story
3. Pre-teaching vocabulary

While-reading activities

1. Helping students to understand the plot
2. Helping students to understand the characters
3. Helping students with difficult vocabulary
4. Helping students with style and language

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Post-reading activities

1. Helping students to make interpretations of the text
2. Understanding narrative point of view
3. Follow-up writing activities
4. Follow-up fluency practice

Task 14

As you read about the tasks and activities below, think about these questions:

- a) Are many of the activities similar to the ones you mentioned in Task 13? Do you think any might work particularly well with your own students?
- b) Think back to the kinds of student problems mentioned in Section 5.3. Which ones do you think could be successfully overcome by using the kinds of tasks and activities suggested on the list?

List of suggested tasks and activities

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *Helping students with cultural background*
 - a) Reading or listening comprehension about the author's life or the historical and cultural background to the story.
 - b) If library facilities are available, students do a mini-project on the social or historical background to the story (e.g. life in Ireland at the turn of the century for *Eveline*). Projects presented as a talk, essay or poster.
 - c) Predictions about the genre of the short story (e.g. What would students expect of a story entitled *Murder in a Country House?*).
 - d) Discussion about events in students' own country during the period of the story. How do they compare and contrast with the historical or cultural background in the story?
2. *Creating student interest in the story*
 - a) Students make very general predictions about the story, using pictures or the dustjacket on the cover of the book from which it is taken.
 - b) Group discussion about what the title of the story suggests.
 - c) Prediction about the story based on reading the first paragraph only.
 - d) Prediction about the story based on three or four words or on phrases which the teacher selects from the story.
 - e) General discussion questions about some of the themes which occur in the story.

Further tasks and activities for use with a short story

3. *Pre-teaching vocabulary*

- a) Students brainstorm a lexical set which is important in the story, for example legal vocabulary in a story about crime.
- b) Matching important words in the story with their dictionary definitions.

WHILE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *Helping students to understand the plot*

- a) Providing students with two or three overall questions to check they have understood the gist of the story.
- b) Students write a brief summary of the plot in 50 words. They then write another summary in 100 words and see what they have added.
- c) Students provide 'titles' for each paragraph.
- d) Students are given a series of 'jumbled' sentences which summarise the plot. They have to re-order them.
- e) Sentence completion activities (i.e. students are given the beginning of a sentence about the story which they then complete). This is a way of helping them to understand 'cause-effect' relationships within the story.
- f) Students are given three slightly different summaries. They have to decide which is the best one.

2. *Helping students to understand the characters*

- a) Students choose from a list of adjectives which ones are most appropriate for describing a particular character.
- b) Students rank the characters in the story according to certain traits; for example which character is the most or least active, passive, aggressive, gentle, decisive, etc.
- c) Students write 'references' for different characters as if they were applying for a particular job.

3. *Helping students with difficult vocabulary*

- a) Give the text to one student or group of students in advance. Let them look up any difficult words in a dictionary and prepare a glossary for the others.
- b) Provide multiple choice questions to encourage the guessing of meaning from context.
- c) Provide definitions for certain words in the text – students match word to definition.

4. *Helping students with language and style*

- a) Close textual analysis of a section of the text.
- b) Using a section of the text to focus on a particular grammatical problem that students may have; for example blanking out all

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verb forms in a section of the text and asking students to supply the correct tenses. The 'student version' is then compared with the original, and their stylistic differences discussed.

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *Interpretation of the main themes of the story*
 - a) Providing students with different critical interpretations of the story which they then discuss.
 - b) Providing general questions to 'debate', focussing on any contentious points in the story.
 - c) Asking students to note down any lexical areas which might take on a symbolic meaning in the story (e.g. darkness might be a kind of metaphor for death in a particular story). Students then speculate about possible symbolic associations for these sets.
2. *Helping students to understand narrative point of view*
 - a) Students write diary entries or a letter describing the events of the story, as if they were one of the characters in the story.
 - b) If the story is told by a first person narrator, then students write a brief character description of the narrator based on the evidence in the text.
3. *Writing activities*
 - a) Writing a few paragraphs using certain stylistic features of the story.
 - b) Writing a review of the story.
4. *Discussion*
 - a) Reading and discussion of critical literary writings about the author of the story or his or her works in general.
 - b) Roleplay or acting out of a scene from the story.
 - c) Critical discussion or debate about the world-view of values which seem to be depicted in the text.

5.6 Designing your own materials for use with a short story

When you start working on the design of your own materials, you need, first, to try to pinpoint any problems you think your students may have when reading and studying the story. Your tasks and activities should then be designed to help students through these difficulties. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 are examples of lesson plans designed by two groups of teachers in a seminar.³ The story they are based on is by Graham Greene and is entitled *The Case for the Defence* (from *Collected Stories*).

Designing your own materials for use with a short story

Preactivities

- List of crimes - which punishments fit?
- Vocabulary of crime - trial, witness, etc.

Creating anticipation

- either
 - some words from text – predict plot
- or
 - stop in the middle of story just before we see other twin – what now?

During reading

- 1 Help students with difficult first paragraph: write it all on board - students come up and eliminate all the unnecessary words until they get to the nitty gritty
- 2 Timed reading in class up to a certain point - we would not give them the last section

predict in groups → predictions correct?

Follow-up activities in class

- 1 Students write comprehension questions for each other
- 2 Grammar – play alibi to practise past tenses
- 3 Court role plays

Written homework

- Mrs Salmon's next few weeks
- Her letter to a member of her family

Figure 5.2 'The Case for the Defence' – Lesson Plan A

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1 BRAINSTORM for LEGAL VOCABULARY

2 Short DISCUSSION: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

3 Read FIRST SENTENCE: predict

Who's talking?

4 Read to "but the hanging"

Overhead projector – students sequence events leading to murder

5 Read to "a face one forgets"

Teacher tells class – accused was acquitted

Group discussion – Why?

6 Read to "an extraordinary end"

Students predict end

Read to end

7 FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

a) Writing a newspaper article based on the story

b) Conducting interviews with characters, eg Mrs Salmon

Figure 5.3 'The Case for the Defence' – Lesson Plan B

Task 15

Using a short story of your own choosing, and suitable for a class you are teaching, design a lesson plan incorporating some of the ideas and activities that have been mentioned in this chapter.

Using novels in the language classroom

5.7 Using novels in the language classroom

In the previous sections we identified some of the characteristic features of the short story and novel. We focussed on some of the typical problems students experience when reading a short story and suggested some techniques and activities to help them overcome these problems. In this section we think about using a novel with the language learner. In fact, a great many of the ideas discussed in Sections 5.1 to 5.6 are as relevant to the novel as to the short story, but in this section we aim to pinpoint any problems specific to using a novel in the language classroom.

What are the differences between the novel and the short story?

We have already said that novels and short stories share a great many features in common. Like the short story, the traditional novel involves a chronological sequence of events, linked by relations of cause and effect. The description of events in a novel is shaped by a narrator, and the language of the novel is used in a highly self-conscious way to convey particular effects. Nevertheless, there are a few generic features which we are more likely to find in a novel than in a short story, although we cannot say rigidly that these features are exclusive to the novel rather than the short story. As in all literary texts there may be considerable overlap between the characteristics of one genre and another.

Task 16

Look at the following list of features. Write N next to those you think are more *likely* to be found in the novel and S next to those that are more *likely* to be found in the short story:

- focusses on a moment of crisis
- narrative told from different perspectives
- mood and tone fairly unified throughout the text
- large cast of characters
- numerous flashbacks to past events
- highly complicated plot
- very economic, suggestive use of language

Can you think of any other differences between the novel and the short story?

We have seen that in a novel there is likely to be a larger cast of characters than in a short story, the plot may be more complicated and methods of narration can sometimes be more complex. (For example, in a novel like John Fowles' *The Collector* the same events are related by

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two different narrators who are themselves the main characters in the novel. On the whole, short stories tend to rely on a single narrative voice.)

If the novel you were intending to use with your students demonstrated any of these features, then you would need to account for them in the tasks and activities you devised to use with the novel. For example, if the plot of the novel is very complicated then you may need to do quite a few activities with students which help them to follow the sequence of events (such as writing summaries, providing sentence-completion exercises, reordering jumbled sentences, etc. – see Section 5.5 for activities which help students to understand plot). Similarly, if the same events are described by two different narrators in the novel you will use, you could devise a jigsaw reading activity in which groups of students read the two different descriptions and then compare notes. In fact, many of the tasks and activities listed in Section 5.5 could be used to guide your students in their reading of the novel. However, while these activities can help students with the more specifically literary problems of reading the novel, a number of practical problems remain. Among those which teachers commonly mention are:

1. Coping with the length of many novels.
2. Helping students to cope with the volume of unfamiliar vocabulary in the novel.
3. How to adapt activities which work well for short stories (like those listed in Section 5.5) to use with a novel rather than a short story.

Before reading the text that follows think of some ideas for helping to overcome these three problems. Then compare your ideas with those in the text.

COPING WITH THE LENGTH OF THE NOVEL

Obviously the amount of time you spend in class reading the novel depends on your syllabus. Generally speaking, it is best to choose a novel that is fairly short. You might get students to do most of the reading of the novel at home – for example, a chapter every fortnight if the novel is to be used over a year. Class time could then be spent on activities (such as those described in Section 5.5) which help the students explore the text further. If time is short, or the novel is very long, you could think about dividing the class into groups. Over a period of a few weeks, each group could then be responsible for reading a different chapter and summarising the contents for the whole class, either verbally or in writing. Selected chapters could be read by the whole class. Students usually take great pains to produce good summaries if they know that their classmates' understanding of the novel depends on them.

Using novels in the language classroom

HELPING STUDENTS TO COPE WITH THE VOLUME OF UNFAMILIAR VOCABULARY

Clearly the amount of unfamiliar vocabulary in a novel should be a prime factor in determining whether or not the novel is selected for classroom use. Students should be able to extend their vocabulary while reading without feeling the need to look up the meaning of every second word on the page. It is best to choose a text where students will not feel overwhelmed by unfamiliar language. Two strategies can be useful in helping students with any vocabulary they don't know. The first is to encourage students to read for gist rather than detail. This can be done by setting homework tasks which demand an overall comprehension of the chapter, for example, summary writing. You might even accustom inexperienced readers to this way of reading by asking them to read a chapter for homework, underlining only those unfamiliar words which they feel are crucial to their basic comprehension of the chapter. Which words they chose and the reasons for choosing them could then be discussed in class.

A second strategy for helping students with vocabulary is to give students some kind of glossary to use while reading. This could provide the meaning of important words in the text, either in English or in the mother tongue. You could provide this yourself, or you could make groups of students responsible for compiling a glossary for different chapters. These glossaries could then be distributed among the whole class before the chapter is read.

ADAPTING ACTIVITIES TO USE WITH THE NOVEL

You would be unlikely to use the activities listed in Section 5.5 with a novel in the concentrated way that they can be used with a short story (as in Section 5.4). Since a novel will probably be used in class over a period of a few weeks or months, you could select two or three activities from Section 5.5 to use each week in class. Which activities you chose to use with each chapter of the novel would depend on the difficulties students might be having with a particular chapter and/or your syllabus for that week. For example, if students are having difficulties with a chapter because of its complex presentation of different characters then you might wish to provide activities which help students with this (as in *Helping students to understand the characters* in the 'While-reading activities'). If, on the other hand, a section of the chapter that students are reading is very rich in its use of tenses, and you happen to be revising tenses in class that week, you could use that section for a close stylistic analysis to review the way in which different tenses can be used.

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Task 17

Are there any other problems that you or your students might have when reading or studying a novel? What could you do to overcome these problems?

Task 18

Think of a novel that you would like to use with your students. Plan:

- what pre-reading activities you would use to stimulate student interest in the text;
- how much of the novel would be read at home and how much in class;
- how you would help students with any difficult vocabulary;
- what tasks and activities you could use in class to exploit the first two chapters of the novel with students (use the suggestions in Section 5.5 to help you).

Endnotes

1. With thanks to the teachers attending the summer courses in using literature at International House, London, in 1989 and 1990.
2. For a detailed discussion of these elements see Rimmon-Kenan (1983) Chapter 2.
3. With thanks to the teachers who attended the seminar on *Using Literature in the EFL Classroom* at the Teachers' Centre, International House, London in October 1989.

Suggestions for further reading

On narrative/linguistic theory

Fowler, R. (1977) *Linguistics and the Novel*.

Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1983) *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*.

Practical classroom ideas

Collie, J. and Slater, S. (1987) *Literature in the Language Classroom*.

Greenwood, J. (1988) *Class Readers*.

Lazar, G. (1990) *Using novels in the language-learning classroom*, *ELT Journal*, 44, 3.

Using novels in the language classroom

Anthologies of short stories with accompanying classroom materials

Adkins, A. and Shackleton, M. (eds.) (1980) *Recollections*.

Pierce, T. and Cochrane, E. (eds.) (1979) *Twentieth Century English Short Stories*.

Pervan-Plavec, M. (1990) *Reading for Study and Pleasure*.

Rossner, R. (1988) *The Whole Story*.

For a list of possible novels and short stories to use in the classroom see J. Collie and S. Slater (1987) *Literature in the Language Classroom*, p. 260.